



**PRIME MINISTER  
OF GEORGIA**

Tbilisi, 8 March 2017

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Thank you for your interest in Georgia and in its democratic and European future. With the support of our partners, including European political parties, Georgia has been making great progress in building a modern, democratic and resilient state. You have repeatedly demonstrated your support for Georgia's European agenda and have appreciated efforts Georgia made in the face of significant internal and external challenges. It is for this reason that I was taken aback by your letter dated March 7, 2017, which struck me by its heavy allegations.

Since the Georgian Dream came to power, we have spared no effort to fulfil the demand of our people and advance on the path of reforms that would turn Georgia into a European style institutional democracy based on the rule of law, respect of fundamental rights, freedom of speech and freedom from abuse, persecution and pressure from the authorities.

Media freedom is enshrined in our constitution and is a value to which both the government and society at large attach great importance. I am proud to say that at no other point in the Georgian history has there been such a diversity of views, plurality of opinions and unhindered contestation of political issues reflected in the media as it is today. Never before has Georgian media been so free from the government interference and so critical of the government.

The ownership dispute concerning Rustavi 2 TV station has been going on already for several years. At no time in this period, including throughout the election campaign, has there been any disruption of the broadcasting or any pressure on the company to change the editorial policy. You accuse us of a blatant attempt to turn Rustavi 2 into 'yet another government friendly TV company'. This is a serious accusation against the government which has prioritised media pluralism and against the country where in fact there are no pro- government TV channels.

If before 2012 only 3 TV channels had nationwide coverage, today the number has gone up to 13. With a digital switchover and greater deregulation since 2016, it is now possible to establish broadcasting company with a simple application and start operating in just 10 days. International rankings have shown year to year improvement in Georgia's freedom

of media and internet indicators. It is our achievement and it is in our interest to safeguard it. There is no evidence to the contrary.

The ownership dispute concerning Rustavi 2 is inheritance from the past, when property rights were repeatedly violated and fundamental rights and freedoms sacrificed for political expediency. It has been our most urgent and the most challenging task to rebuild judiciary in Georgia, to ensure independence of courts and to regain public trust in the functioning of the legal system. To this end, Georgia underwent far-reaching structural reforms, bringing Georgia's judiciary closer to European and international standards. I am fully aware that the process is not complete, given the legacy we had inherited, but courts today are no longer subject to political pressure and government control.

In order to get there, we implemented three waves of reforms in the judiciary with the goal of de-politicizing and strengthening the independence of the High Council of Justice and of other institutions of judicial authority; we increased the transparency of court and disciplinary proceedings, introducing life tenure for judges, elaborating a transparent mechanism for assessing the judicial performance, guaranteeing the independence of an individual judge, filling of judicial vacancies through competition, as opposed to direct appointment, introducing of the principle of automatic allocation of cases and streamlining the regulation of the transfer of judges to another court. We implemented reforms in the prosecution system, ensuring independence, de-politicization and accountability of this once notorious institution.

As a result, Georgia moved up significantly in all international rankings, related to the Rule of Law and human rights protection. There has been a dramatic decrease in the number of applications from Georgia to the European Court of Human Rights, which is a real indicator of the success of our government in human rights protection and growing trust to Georgian judiciary system. According to the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, we made a considerable improvement and today we are not only leaders in the region but are ahead of many EU member states.

Our record, including the signing and implementing of the Association Agreement and fulfilling the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan, leaves no doubt as of our government's strongest commitment to Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

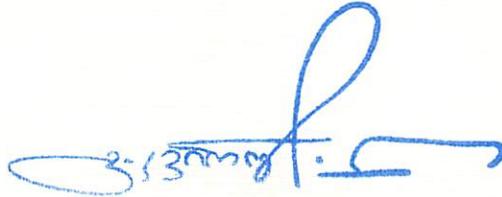
Given all the above and with full respect to the position and recommendations of partners and friends of Georgia like you, openly blaming the Government, contrary to the evidence, in ongoing pressure on the private channel, in the interest to forcefully change the ownership and editorial policy with the aim of impeding the quality of democracy and free media, and in an attempt to manipulate the judiciary for a specific political outcome, strikes me as both unfair and ungrounded.

We should all wait for the decision of the European Court of Human Rights and we believe that its decision will bring to the completion of the judicial process, ending the

disproportionate politicization of this case and proving the strength of the Georgian judiciary.

Rest assured that the Government is open to cooperation, is interested in protecting and empowering democratic institutions, ensuring property protection, strengthening independence of the judiciary and preserving open and pluralistic media environment. It will spare no effort to continue the country's development based on European and democratic values.

Yours Sincerely,



Giorgi Kvirikashvili

To: Mr. Gunnar Hökmark, MEP  
Mr. Christofer Fjellner, MEP  
Ms. Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, MEP  
Mr. Lars Adaktusson, MEP  
Ms. Birgit Collin-Langen, MEP  
Mr. Jaromír Štětina, MEP  
Mr. Tunne Kelam, MEP  
Ms. Sandra Kalniete, MEP  
Ms. Anna Fotyga, MEP  
Mr. Charles Tannock, MEP  
Mr. Javier Nart, MEP  
Ms. Cecilia Wikström, MEP  
Mr. Fredrick Federley, MEP  
Mr. Petras Auštrevičius, MEP  
Ms. Ana Gomes, MEP  
Mr. Olle Ludvigsson, MEP  
Mr. Indrek Tarand, MEP

cc: Ms. Federica Mogherini, High Representative/Vice President  
Mr. Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement  
Negotiations