



Brussels, 7 March 2017

Dear Mr Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Prime Minister of Georgia,

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, would like to express our concern regarding the ongoing pressure on the private, independent TV channel Rustavi2 in Georgia. Rustavi2 is the most popular Georgian TV outlet, which has been the target of attempts of forceful change of its ownership for the past two years. The ongoing pressure on this independent TV channel has reached its most alarming stage on March 2, with the decision of the Georgian Supreme Court to transfer the ownership rights of Rustavi2 to former co-owner and government ally, Kibar Khalvashi.

Change of the channel's ownership rights and resulting change in its editorial policy, turning Rustavi2 into another government friendly media outlet, would seriously impede the quality of democracy and free media in Georgia. This would undermine Georgia's ability to comply with the obligations it has undertaken as a signatory country of the Association Agreement with the European Union.

It is particularly regretful that the decision of the Georgian Supreme Court, made against ongoing public protest, behind closed doors and in absentia of the parties concerned, was rendered one day after Georgia was granted visa free access to the Schengen Zone - an important landmark of the strengthened commitment of the European Union to its common future with Georgia.

We welcome the emergency measure applied by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on March 3, instructing the Georgian authorities to suspend enforcement of the decision of the Supreme Court of Georgia and calling on Georgian authorities to refrain from any interference with the editorial policy of Rustavi2.

Taking into consideration the decision of the ECHR, as well as the opinions regarding the case against Rustavi2 issued by Georgian and international non-governmental organizations, such as the Freedom House, we call on the Georgian authorities to refrain from using the judiciary system to achieve politically expedient outcome and impede the independent editorial policy of Rustavi2.

We call on the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to give a critical appraisal of the actions of the Georgian authorities and demand full compliance with the obligations the Georgian authorities have undertaken vis-à-vis the European Union.

The European Parliament will continue to support the ongoing efforts of Georgia to build a modern, democratic state, based on the principles of rule of law and respect of fundamental political and human rights.

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