

February 1, 2018

Thomas Kent, President, RFE/RL

Nenad Pejic, Vice President, RFE/RL

Mr. President,

Mr. Vice President,

We, the undersigned CSOs, have been watching closely recent developments around the Georgian Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Dismissal of David Kakabadze from the position of the Georgian Service Director has raised questions among Radio Liberty's devoted audience. Resignation of Marina Vashakmadze, the Head of the local Bureau, has raised further concerns that the conflict between the management and the Georgian Service staff goes beyond trivial internal dispute and may have some deeper roots.

RFE/RL management has not released official statement regarding Mr. Kakabadze's dismissal or the nature of the conflict. On January 25, Georgian citizens signed petition in support of the Georgian Service; Writers, musicians, publishers, artists and human rights activists addressed Broadcasting Board of Governors with an open letter. Obviously, public interest towards the issue is substantial.

We understand that Radio Liberty journalists abide by internal regulations of confidentiality and do not discuss internal matters publicly, but we urge RFE/RL management to shed the light to the issue and communicate with the interested public in an open and transparent way about the nature of the conflict and the future of RFE/RL Georgian Service.

Mr. President, in the earlier statement following the termination of two RFE/RL television programs by the Georgian Public Broadcaster, you asserted: "Both programs have made an important contribution to public discourse and political development in Georgia." We are now concerned about the future of these two highly-acclaimed programs. For us, the dedicated viewers, it is not certain whether Giorgi Gvakharia's *Anareklebi* will continue on Ajara Public Broadcaster or not. It is even more unclear why Salome Asatiani's show has not been launched, especially that donor funding is available and Ajara Public Broadcaster's is willing to air it.

In the era of fake news and hybrid wars good journalism faces serious challenges. For many of us the RFE/RL reporting in the Georgian language has been an example of the highest professional standards and journalistic ethics.

In many ways the Georgian Service and the local Bureau have been a trendsetter for journalism innovation in this country, be it publishing blogs, offering mobile reporting, or exploring multimedia formats.

We expect to be convinced by RFE/RL management that the journalism produced by this professional team is still in demand.

Sincerely,

Georgian Young Lawyers Association

Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics

Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center

Institute for Development of Freedom of Information

International Transparency Georgia

Journalism Resource Center

Liberal Academy-Tbilisi

Media Advocacy Coalition

Media Club

Open Society Georgia Foundation

Small and Medium Telecom Operators Association of Georgia

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