Empowering Voices: Annual Report 2022





































MEDIA VOICE FROM GEORGIA









































Address by Chairwoman

Upholding Solidarity and Values

In these crucial times, as we witness global events reshaping our narratives and testing our principles, it becomes ever more vital to stand united in solidarity. Today, I emphasize the importance of extending our unwavering support towards Ukraine and its people, who are courageously facing the challenges brought about by external pressures. Our collective efforts can serve as a beacon of hope, reminding the world of our commitment to justice and human rights.

As the Chairwoman of MCERC – Media Voice¹, I am immensely proud of the partnerships we have fostered with the Media Freedom Coalition. Our collaborations underscore the significance of academia's role in shedding light on issues of disinformation, propaganda, and media manipulation. Through projects like "History Keepers," we recognize our responsibility to safeguard the accuracy and integrity of historical narratives, dispelling distortions that threaten to erode our shared memory.

The initiatives we champion, such as "Media Voice: Less Self-Censorship, More Freedom," are a testament to our dedication to nurturing a media landscape unafraid to speak truth to power. Our commitment to freedom of expression is interwoven with the principles of solidarity and human rights journalism, a powerful combination that empowers voices often marginalized or silenced.

In our pursuit of a just society, let us remember that children are not born with prejudices. As we stand against the divisive currents of misinformation and bias, we pave the way for a world where young minds are nurtured with tolerance and understanding. By investing in education and initiatives that promote empathy, we build bridges towards a brighter, more inclusive future.

In conclusion, the challenges we face underscore the interconnectedness of our global community. As we navigate these complexities, let our commitment to solidarity, cooperation, and the principles of freedom and justice guide our actions. It is through our collective efforts that we can create lasting positive change.

Prof. Mariam Gersamia Chairwoman



¹ In January, 2023, the organization underwent a name modification, incorporating name Media Voice into its identity. It now operates under the abbreviation MCERC and/or Media Voice.

Milestones: Shaping 2022

January 17th: Signed memorandum of cooperation with Grigol Robakidze University.

January 25th: Signed memorandum of cooperation with the University of Georgia.

■ February 11th: Organized a webinar titled "Careers of the Future and Digital Transformations" in collaboration with LAB Technologies and Forbes Women, celebrating UNESCO International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

February 18th: Conducted a mentoring session on "Identifying & Preparing Gender-Sensitive Stories" for 31 international fellows and journalists, partnering with Media Action Nepal.

- March 18th: Co-organized a webinar, "Ukraine Facing War and Crisis Communications," with the PR Association.
- → **April 8th:** Held workshops on "Public Relations and Communication Strategies," engaging the youth civil movement "Defenders of Democracy."
- **May 3rd:** Presented the study "Media Environment and Safety of Journalists during the Crisis in Georgia: Threats and Supportive Instruments" at the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day Global Conference.

May 3rd: Launched the "Media Voice" campaign on World Press Freedom Day, fostering solidarity and media engagement.

May 7th-8th: Conducted "Media Voice: More Freedom and Less Self-Censorship" training and a solidarity event at the University of Georgia.

May 23rd: Co-organized joint workshops with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation on image-building in politics.

June 18th-19th: Held "Media Voice: More Freedom and Less Self-Censorship" training and a solidarity event in Kutaisi.

June 29th: Hosted a webinar on the role of media in conflict resolution and war communications with Media Action Nepal.

- July 22nd: Joined the Media Freedom Coalition CN-list.
- August 6th-7th: Training and Solidarity event in Batumi
- **September 8th:** Organized the Media Solidarity Forum in Tbilisi.

September 15th: Hosted the webinar "Solidarity and Media in a Global Era."

September 25th: Conducted an online discussion and Awarded the "History Keepers" in Tsinandali, Kakheti.

September 26th: Held training and a solidarity event in Akhmeta.

September 30th: Conducted a solidarity event in Kakheti and signed a memorandum of cooperation with Kakheti Regional Development Center.

October 15th-16th: Conducted training and a solidarity event in Gori.

October 18th-28th: Launched and participated in a 2-week design sprint with "The Circle Tbilisi."

November 20th: Conducted training for journalists and students at the University of Georgia.

November 22nd: Organized a training with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

November 29th: Conducted training for journalists and students at Alterbridge University.

December 2nd: Contributed insights to the Roundtable discussion on "Strengthening the Media's Crisis Resilience in Georgia and Ukraine" at Chatham House.

December 18th: Conducted training for journalists and students at Alterbridge University in Tbilisi

In total:

- Organized 17 trainings and seminars;
- Conducted 7 solidarity events/Thinkathons;
- Organized 5 webinars and one Forum;
- Held an award ceremony of History Keepers;
- Signed 4 Memorandums of cooperation;
- Published 20 academic blogs and 8 podcasts;
- Successfully implemented an educational module/syllabus in academia.

Our Projects

Promoting Media Freedom and Solidarity Journalism: The "Media Voice" Initiative























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In an era where information and influence interweave, shaping societies and policies, the initiative "Media Voice: More Freedom, Less Self-censorship" emerged as a beacon of empowerment and resilience.

Supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Georgia, this project harnessed information's power to transcend boundaries and foster a robust media landscape. Let's delve into the achievements and profound impact of the "Media Voice" initiative in 2022.

At the project's core was an unwavering commitment to bolster media viability against the insidious influence of self-censorship. By emboldening media practitioners, fostering a supportive ecosystem, and amplifying solidarity and human rights journalism, authenticity and unadulterated truth infused journalistic endeavors.

The initiative unfolded on two fronts: evolving the media environment and enriching media workers' competencies. Objectives included strengthening the supportive media ambiance, engendering solidarity journalism, and diminishing polarization among media personnel. Expanding journalists' skills in addressing human rights topics without self-censorship was pivotal.

Nationwide Transformation Endeavors: The initiative's scope spanned Tbilisi and seven regions of Georgia, showcasing activities like training sessions, seminars, forums, solidarity events, thinkathons, discussions, and public awareness campaigns. Partnerships blossomed, uniting institutions and outlets in a collective mission.

Transformation through Collaboration: Integral to the success of the initiative were the partnerships that formed its foundation. The collaborative synergy between the project and institutions such as <u>Tbilisi State University</u>, <u>the International Law Institute</u>, the <u>University of Georgia</u>, and online media outlet <u>Publika.ge</u> underscored the widespread acceptance and commitment toward the cause. These collaborations enriched educational curricula, embedding principles of solidarity journalism and human rights context.



Implemented Activities in frame of this project in 2022:

- **Training Sessions:** Conducted 12 comprehensive training sessions engaging 100 participants across Tbilisi and 7 regions.
- **Solidarity Events/Thinkathons:** Organized 8 dynamic events with 75 participants in Tbilisi and 7 regions, fostering collaborative problem-solving.
- Podcasts on Human Rights Journalism: Published 3 podcasts, contributing to informed discussions.
- Solidarity Network Creation: Established a robust local and international network.
- **Public Awareness Campaign:** Engaged 50 media celebrities to raise awareness on freedom of expression and counter self-censorship.
- **Promotion of Solidarity Journalism:** Advocated unbiased and empathetic coverage of vulnerable groups.
- Educational Enrichment: Implemented modules on solidarity journalism and human rights at universities.
- **Media Solidarity Forum and Webinar:** Hosted a Media Solidarity Forum with 50+ participants, including international speakers like Anita Varma, showcasing solidarity journalism's impact.

Achievements reached beyond statistics:

- **Knowledge Enhancement:** A deeper understanding of freedom of expression and self-censorship's challenges pervaded the media landscape.
- **Empowerment through Awareness:** Media professionals gained knowledge of legal instruments and support mechanisms against interference.
- **Global Contextualization:** Awareness of international law and EU standards enriched practitioners' framework.
- Psychological Resilience: Overcoming fear and self-censorship emerged as a powerful tool.
- Professional Competence: Journalists gained competencies to cover sensitive issues without bias or fear.
- Solidarity Journalism: The concept flourished, fostering unbiased coverage of vulnerable groups.
- Network of Unity: A solidarity network fostered knowledge exchange among diverse interest groups.
- Curriculum Evolution: Partnered discussions aimed to revamp curricula, emphasizing human rights.

Expert-led training sessions, helmed by Irine Kurdadze, Teona Tskhomelidze, Zura Vardiashvili, and Tamar Aleksidze, delved into the dance between self-censorship and freedom. Insights fostered an atmosphere where journalists surpassed boundaries.

Solidarity events draped in "Freedom leads to freedom!" showcased unity. Expert dialogues and innovative ideas paved a media landscape championing diversity and authenticity.

The "Media Voice" initiative of 2022 exemplified the transformative power of media and solidarity journalism, charting a path towards a more informed, united, and resilient society.

"Media Voice" in Action: 2022's Highlights

Public Awareness Campaign: "Media Voice"

The symbolic launch of the "Media Voice" campaign on **May 3rd, World Press Freedom** Day, aimed to foster a supportive media environment and strengthen solidarity throughout Georgia. This multi-month campaign encompassed regional media outlets, inviting a collective engagement.

Prominent journalists played a pivotal role in the "Media Voice" project, crafting personalized campaign messages with the phrases "I am a journalist, therefore..." and "I am a journalist because..." This collaborative effort underscored the significance of their profession.















"Media Voice" from Tbilisi

The project's training phase, "Media Voice: More Freedom and Less Self-Censorship," commenced on May 7th in Tbilisi. With subsequent months seeing an extension of trainings across Georgia, media workers were actively engaged in honing their skills and knowledge.

Trainers and experts for the Center included:

Irine Kurdadze - Director of the Institute of International Law (TSU), Professor

Teona Tskhomelidze - Media expert and journalist

Zura Vardiashvili - Editor-in-Chief of Publika, Lecturer

Tamar Aleksidze - Expert and Lecturer in International Law (Institute of International Law)



















The project's inauguration featured a compelling address by the founder and chairman of MCERC, Prof. Mariam Gersamia. In her session, she delved into self-censorship, freedom of expression, and the intricacies that bind them. Topics explored included the relationship between self-censorship and freedom of speech, the emergence and causes of self-censorship, strategies to enhance journalist safety, reducing the impact of self-censorship on journalists, and the roles of various stakeholders in this process.



The project's significance was further elaborated upon by Prof. Irine Kurdadze, Director of the Institute of International Law (TSU), as she touched upon the legal aspects of freedom of expression.



In a session titled "Freedom of Expression and Media," Tamar Aleksidze, an international law expert, delineated the role of freedom of expression in international human rights law, the significance of European standards set by the ECHR court, and the media's role in shaping democratic states.

Associate Professor and MCERC Board Member Maia Toradze underscored the importance of media and solidarity. Topics included the essence of solidarity journalism, fostering unity between media organizations, and the vital role of public support for the media.



Media expert and journalist Teona Tskhomelidze emphasized the intricacies of covering vulnerable groups, prompting discussions on appropriate terminology while addressing minorities.



Zura Vardiashvili, an "Media Voice" expert and editor-in-chief of "Publica," examined the specifics of criminal coverage through real-life media cases.



Throughout the sessions, key insights emerged from discussions involving self-censorship, media standards, and the interplay between journalists and politicians.



Solidarity Event in Tbilisi.

Under the slogan "Freedom leads to freedom!", solidarity events and discussions kicked off in Tbilisi, with plans to extend throughout Georgia. The primary aim was to fortify the supportive media environment through the Solidarity Discussion.

The event saw participation from MCERC experts, journalists, and human rights defenders. Civil sector representatives, including Rafiel Kakabadze and Gvantsa Samkharadze, founders of the "Defenders of Democracy" organization, and Nino Kalandia, a member of the Georgian Down Syndrome Association board and activist, lent their perspectives.

Prof. Mariam Gersamia, MCERC Chairman, moderated the discussion, which revolved around solidarity journalism. Themes explored encompassed support for vulnerable groups, various forms of solidarity, building a robust solidarity network among journalists, mutual solidarity between the public and the media, and solutions to challenges faced by media outlets.

The session underscored the significance of bridging the gap between NGOs and journalists in addressing human rights concerns, with Teona Tskhomelidze highlighting the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing.

This rich tapestry of perspectives and ideas, shared in a Thinkathon mode, set the tone for an ongoing dialogue on fostering a supportive media environment through solidarity.















"MediaVoice" from Kutaisi: Strengthening Solidarity and Ethical Journalism

Training for journalists and media managers was conducted on June 18th in Kutaisi. An enlightening discourse on the intricate interplay between self-censorship and ethics was convened, highlighting the pivotal role of ethical media in recognizing and minimizing self-censorship's impact.

Mariam Gersamia emphasized the equivalence of self-censorship and censorship, both stifling journalists and impeding information flow. Intriguingly, international law expert Tamar Aleksidze initiated the discussion by invoking Voltaire: "Maybe your thoughts are unacceptable to me, but I will sacrifice myself so that you have the right to express them." The discourse veered towards changes in illegal wiretapping laws and human rights from an international law perspective. [21]

Maia Toradze encapsulated the essence of solidarity journalism, emphasizing its role in presenting the truth about vulnerable groups. The conversation navigated through local cases, including Kutaisi's solidarity actions that amplify each other's voices and underscore the significance of community media development.

In the realm of LGBTQ+ issues, "MediaVoice" expert Teona Tskhomelidze underscored media's role in safeguarding the interests of this community through solidarity. Zura Vardiashvili, another expert, shed light on covering ethnic and religious minorities, cautioning against perpetuating negative views or stereotypes that could demean these groups.



Solidarity Event in Kutaisi: Nurturing a Supportive Media Ecosystem

On June 19, Kutaisi reverberated with the motto "Freedom leads to Freedom" during a solidarity meeting. Think-athon-style discussions convened representatives from regional media, NGOs, and civil society. The lively discourse aimed to forge solutions for dilemmas facing media in a supportive environment. Voices resonated on the need to curb hate speech, enhance legal protection for media, and counter disinformation that fuels aggression. The EU's role in promoting development and the importance of decentralized regional media emerged as key talking points.

Ethical boundaries and standards were deliberated, with the necessity for a feasible framework and standardized practices acknowledged. The significance of solidarity journalism and its role in covering vulnerable groups was reaffirmed. A plan to establish a social media group of solidarity journalists emerged from the meeting, fostering discussions on coverage of vulnerable groups, media solidarity, and the overarching importance of unity. This event echoed the ongoing commitment to bolstering a media landscape founded on solidarity and ethics.

"Media Voice" from Borjomi



In the serene backdrop of Borjomi, the Samtskhe-Javakheti Media Center hosted a series of seminars and solidarity events on July 23rd and 24th. The gathering welcomed journalists, local activists, and representatives from the non-governmental sector, fostering a platform for insightful discussions.

At this Borjomi gathering, notable media outlets such as "TV Borjomi," "Borjomi" newspaper, and "Samkhreti Karibche" newspapers were present. Regional journalists engaged in practical sessions to address common mistakes in femicide reporting. Notably, the sessions evolved through interactive question-answer exchanges.

Following this session, media experts and legal professionals delved into the legality of using sensitive and neutral language in minority coverage. Intriguing discussions unfolded concerning the interplay between politicians, journalists, and professional ethics. Attendees emphasized the necessity of formal distance from politicians during professional interactions.















"Media Voice" in Batumi



Batumi's Center for Civic Engagement witnessed workshops and solidarity discussions/events on August 6th and 7th. The event brought together journalists from Ajara Public Broadcaster, Radio Ajara, and Investigative Studio REC, as well as local activists and non-governmental representatives.

Public Broadcasting journalist Nino Zautashvili shared her insights during the Batumi workshop. The dialogue revolved around empathy and solidarity journalism, uniting under the motto: "Nothing about vulnerable groups without them!"

Certificates were awarded to discussion participants at the conclusion of the Batumi meeting.



"Media Voice" from Akhmeta

A dynamic solidarity meeting-discussion took place on September 26th within the premises of the Kakheti Regional Development Fund in Akhmeta. Participants from various organizations, including the Women's Council of Elders, Kakheti Regional Development Fund, Youth Union for Regional Development, the newspaper "Bakhtrioni," and the organization "Uketesi Momavali," engaged in an impactful dialogue.



The discussion emboldened solidarity across three pivotal dimensions:

- 1. Solidarity from the public towards the media.
- 2. Solidarity within the media.
- 3. Media solidarity in support of vulnerable groups.

Tamar Bekauri, from Kakheti Development Fund, underlined their work in Pankisi Gorge and the importance of media collaboration. She emphasized the role of trust and bridging journalists to vulnerable groups, ensuring their stories are heard accurately and empathetically.

A subsequent training occurred in Akhmeta on September 30, welcoming journalists and civic activists. During this event, MCERC and Kakheti Regional Development Center signed a significant memorandum of understanding.

"Media Voice" from Gori

A similar drive for media empowerment unfolded in Gori on October 15th. At the EECMD office, regional journalists, local NGOs, and civic activists engaged in a "Media Voice" training, solidarity event, and discussion.

The gathering commenced with a spotlight on the pivotal role of regional media in addressing local issues, especially in areas near Russia's occupied territories. Coordination between regional and mainstream media was underscored for its potency in strengthening solidarity and holding the government accountable.

In the training session, Professor Mariam Gersamia emphasized the susceptibility of our brains to disinformation, particularly in areas we are less familiar with. The session highlighted the significance of understanding human rights, freedom of expression, and the media's role in international law. The collective resilience to stress was identified as a key factor in addressing self-censorship, acknowledging it as a structural rather than an individual issue.

An enlightening discussion concerning international regulators of freedom of expression transpired, invoking Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The article emphasizes the right to freedom of expression without interference from public authorities, transcending borders.

The event culminated in a candid exchange between regional journalists and MCERC team members, focusing on human rights reporting, solidarity journalism, and effective coverage of vulnerable groups.



Empowering Journalism: "Media Voice" Training for Journalists and Media Psychologists

Continuing its impactful journey, the "Media Voice" project facilitated yet another enlightening training on November 20 and November 29 in Tbilisi, hosted by the University of Georgia and Alterbridge University. This event resonated within the theme of the project: "MediaVoice: less self-censorship, more freedom." The training drew the participation of entry-level journalists, communication specialists and media psychologists.



Media Solidarity Forum "Media Voice from Georgia".

On September 8th, in honor of the International Day of Journalists' Solidarity, Center orchestrated the Media Solidarity Forum under the slogan "Media Voice from Georgia."



This impactful forum, supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Georgia and nested within the "Media Voice: more freedom, less self-censorship in media" project, was a convergence of voices, insights, and solidarity.



Maaike van Koldam, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Georgia, inaugurated the Media Solidarity Forum, warmly welcoming participants from the "Media Voice" project, journalists, representatives of civil society, and academia. She underscored the pivotal role of media in Georgia's democratic evolution and pledged her support to the Georgian media landscape.



Notably, Professor Mariam Gersamia, the Chairperson of MCERC, and Professor Irine Kurdadze, Director of the Institute of International Law, extended gracious greetings to the attendees.

A session titled "Solidarity for a supportive media environment: freedom of expression and self-censorship in the media" was a cornerstone of the Media Solidarity Forum. Prof. Mariam Gersamia moderated the session, during which international law expert Tamar Aleksidze illuminated the facets of freedom of expression and self-censorship within the context of international law.

During this session, compelling discussions unfolded:

- Giorgi Targamadze, host of the TV program "Droeba," addressed the perceived weak public support for media and journalists in Georgia, calling for the institutionalization of solidarity and strategic thematic presentations for international partners and the government.
- Natia Gogsadze, journalist and presenter of "Mtavari" TV company, reflected on the challenges faced by media workers, particularly those persecuted for their work, and the essential need for media survival.
- Nino Zautashvili, Public Broadcasting journalist and host of "Real Space," underscored the importance of accurate coverage for vulnerable groups, advocating for change and enhanced protection of their rights.

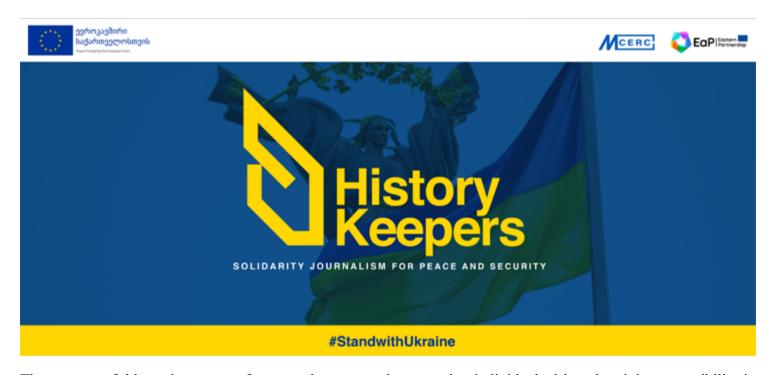
A session titled "Why Solidarity Journalism" resonated through the forum, featuring speakers such as Maya Toradze, TSU associate professor, who delved into integrating "solidarity journalism" and human rights into journalism education.

Additional contributors included Zura Vardiashvili, editor-in-chief of "Publika," Teona Tskhomelidze, journalist and media expert, Davit Kashiashvili from "Formula" TV, and Nino Arazashvili from "TV Pirveli."

This robust event paid homage to the International Day of Journalists' Solidarity, established in 1958 to honor Czech journalist Vilius Fučík. Amidst September, MCERC continues to channel solidarity through a series of activities, including webinars, discussions, and podcasts.

Forging Bonds Through Solidarity: "History Keepers" in Georgia and Ukraine

In a pursuit marked by camaraderie and a shared commitment to truth, the Center expanded its horizons with a fresh endeavor, "Solidarity Journalism for Peace and Security," an integral part of the "History Keepers" series. This venture materialized with the invaluable backing of the European Union through its Eastern Partnership Civil Society Fellowship Programme.



The essence of this project was to foster a robust network connecting individuals driven by civic responsibility in both Georgia and Ukraine. This connection aimed to not only elevate awareness concerning media portrayal of vulnerable groups within Ukraine but also to delve into the rich historical tapestry that defines the nation.

Amid an environment plagued by disinformation campaigns, this initiative stood as a staunch countermeasure against the calculated misuse of Ukrainian history. It recognized the grave violation of human rights and the deliberate targeting of vulnerable groups that had become hallmarks of these campaigns.

Central to this noble pursuit was the stimulation of solidarity journalism, a beacon of accurate representation for the often marginalized. The spotlight extended over Ukraine's internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, whose stories were woven into the broader narrative of this endeavor. The project aimed to arm journalists and civic activists alike with an enriched understanding of Ukrainian history, empowering them to confront disinformation head-on.

The year 2022 saw the realization of these goals through a series of impactful activities:

Five insightful <u>podcasts</u> emerged, each a chapter unraveling the history of Ukraine while deftly dissecting disinformation campaigns.

The digital realm played host to five <u>academic blogs</u> delving into Ukraine's history and the convoluted world of disinformation.

A significant milestone was reached through the "History Keepers" Seminar and Discussion. An assembly of eminent media managers and journalists from Georgian and Ukrainian television companies convened – 20 representatives strong. Alongside Georgian and Ukrainian media experts, they embarked on fervent dialogues about the intricacies of covering Ukraine's history, the battle against disinformation, and the media's role in mitigating these challenges.

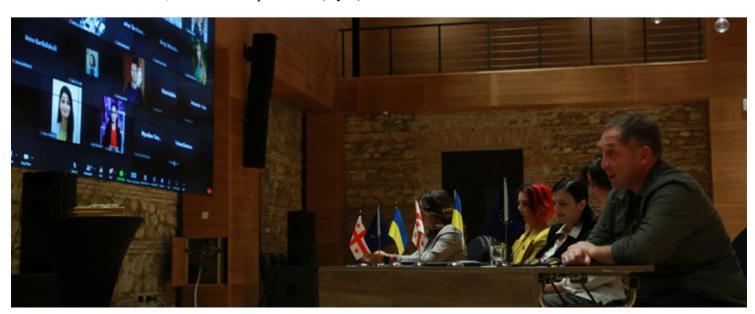
The project etched its legacy into academia by introducing an educational <u>module/syllabus</u> within the Higher Educational institution, specifically Tbilisi State University's Faculty of Social and Political Sciences. The module, <u>"Solidarity Journalism in a Global Era,"</u> offered an enriched perspective to Georgian and international students, led by the expert guidance of Associate Professor Olena Shevchenko from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.



• The digital realm again bore fruit as an online <u>discussion</u>, "Solidarity in the Disinformation Era," brought together more than 20 participants hailing from the media, academia, and civic societies of both Ukraine and Georgia. Amidst shared screens, heartfelt discussions ensued, tackling the labyrinthine challenges of countering disinformation in wartime, while underscoring solidarity and the indispensable role of media engagement in this worthy cause.

<u>The discussion</u> was opened by Mariam Khuroshvili, regional liaison for the EaP Fellowship Programme, the sessions were moderated by the EaP Fellow, Chairwoman of Media Voice, prof. Mariam Gersamia and prof. Olena Shevchenko from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. Special guests of the discussion were:

- Anatolii Yakovets, Associate Professor of the Department of International Media Communication and Communication Technologies, Educational and Scientific Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.
- Roman Dribnoi, TV host and presenter (Kyiv)



Speakers of the discussion were:

- **Serhiy Tomilenko**, the head of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, member of the European Federation of Journalists: "Safety of journalistic activities and the Center for Journalistic Solidarity"
- **Teona Tskhomelidze**, Journalist and media expert at media and Communication Educational and Research Center "Media Voice": "Why communication support and spread of true facts matter during the war in Ukraine?"
- **Tetyana Matychak**, media expert and media trainer: "Disinformation in Ukraine and media literacy in Ukraine";
- **Alex Petriashvili,** Senior Fellow at Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies: "Building sustainable solidarity and support via social media platforms during war in Ukraine";
- **Sofiia Kohut**, a journalist of the Espreso.tv. channel and the author of the English-language counter-propaganda Twitter channel: "Twitter and Russia's war in Ukraine: how to keep the world's attention".
- **Giorgi Mshvenieradze**, Civic Activist, Founder of the "Democracy Defenders": "Solidarity in Georgia during Russian-Ukrainian War";
- Anna Lugovaya, volunteer and civil activist: "Impartiality of Conflict-Sensitive Journalism;
- Oleksandra Kovalenko, content-manager of "EU-neighbors. Ukraine" Internet-project;

As part of the project, a distinguished event unfolded on September 25 the "History Keepers" **Award Ceremony**. The distinguished recipients of the "History Keepers" title for the year 2022 are:

- Alex (Buka) Petriashvili, Senior Fellow at Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies;
- Olena Shevchenko, Associated Professor of the Department of International Media Communication and Communication Technologies, Educational and Scientific Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv;
- Anatolii Yakovets, Associate Professor of the Department of International Media Communication and Communication Technologies, Educational and Scientific Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv;
- Roman Dribnoi, TV host and presenter (Kyiv);
- **Teona Tskhomelidze**, Journalist and media expert;
- Nun Sidonia, activist and artist, "Advocate of Tolerance"

Partners and supporters of the event were: Vazisubani Estate, Radisson Collection, Educational and Scientific Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. Our special thanks to Sidonia Nun for distinguished support, contribution and cooperation in organizing this event. The discussion and awarding ceremony followed the event - "Day of Tomorrow" - is a charity exhibition and auction organised and curated by an artist, civic activist and "Advocate of Tolerance" *Sodonia Nun*. The event was planned in collaboration with Ukrainian TV host Roman Dribnoi and presented Sidonia Nun's and Roman Dribnoi's latest artistic works/photos about Ukraine. The money raised from the auction will be donated to support the Ukrainian people.

The activities have been conducted in frame of the project "Solidarity Journalism for Peace and Security" under the series of "History Keepers", funded by the European Union within its Eastern partnership Civil Society Fellowship Programme.















Solidarity Journalism: Children Are Not Born with Prejudices!"

The resonance of the Swedish project "Children Are Not Born with Prejudices!" reverberated deeply within the hearts of the participants of the "Media Voice" initiative on a poignant day, December 18, hosted at Alterbridge University. At the core of this project lies a profound aspiration: to sculpt societal stereotypes, perceptions, and attitudes surrounding individuals with disabilities.

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Gathered at Alterbridge University were 35 students hailing from five diverse universities across Georgia. The event commenced with a screening of the emotionally evocative film titled "The Importance of Tying Your Own Shoes" (2011). The film's narrative is rooted in the real-life genesis of the Glada Hudik-teatern («Teatr Glady Hudik»), a venture uniting both typical and disabled actors.

Post the screening, a pivotal discussion ensued, during which the focal character of the film, Per Johansson, and Anuki Sturua, the visionary architect behind the Glada Hudik-teatern since its inception in 1996, lent their voices from Sweden. The attendees at Alterbridge University stood in resounding applause, their recognition a testament to the significance of such endeavors.



Following the discussion, a dedicated training session commenced for the students of the media school. The central theme: "What Should We Know About Media Coverage of People with Disabilities?" Expert voices took the floor, with Teona Tskhomelidze, the director of Radio "Commersant," Prof. Mariam Gersamia, Chairwoman of the MediaVoice/MCERC Center, and Mako Jaoshvili, Vice-Rector of Alterbridge University, guiding the participants. The culmination of this illuminating training saw the distribution of certificates, marking not just the conclusion of the event, but also the commencement of a new perspective.

The project "Children Are Not Born with Prejudices!" is a testament to the power of proactive change, carried forward by Glada Hudik-teatern (or the "Glady Hudik Theater") and generously funded by the "Swedish Institute."

Collaboration with Media Freedom Coalition: Fostering Global Media Freedom

With great enthusiasm, we unveil our collaboration with the esteemed international organization, <u>Media Freedom Coalition's Consultative Network</u>. The Media and Communication Educational and Research Center (MCERC) embarks on this journey as a proud member of the organization's group of civil society entities, marking a remarkable milestone as the first civil organization from Georgia to engage with the Media Freedom Coalition in such a capacity.

Initiated in January 2020, the Media Freedom Coalition - Consultative Network (MFC-CN) stands as a dynamic amalgamation of national, regional, and international organizations. The esteemed roster includes Article 19, Media Action Nepal, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), DW Akademie, Free Press Unlimited (FPU), International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), International Press Institute (IPI), Internews, Public Media Alliance (PMA), Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF), The Guardian, and a total of 22 organizations.

Our collaboration with the MFC-CN transcends mere association, as it entails proactive engagement. Together with an expansive array of civil society groups, the MFC-CN assumes the role of advising the Media Freedom Coalition while identifying cases necessitating state intervention. This joint effort resonates through a vast list of organizations, including Alliance for Journalists' Freedom, Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), American Bar Association, Association of European Journalists (AEJ), BBC Media Action, Freedom House, International News Safety Institute (INSI), International Press Centre (IPC), International Women Media Foundation (IWMF), Journalists for Human Rights (JHR), Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), Global Voices, Open Society Foundations (OSF), PEN America, encompassing a total of 61 organizations. The inclusion of MCERC in this league is a moment of pride for us.

As part of the Consultative Network's pursuits, a multifaceted focus encompasses urgent cases, cases of concern, and the evaluation of global media environments. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Laxman Datt Pant, Co-chair of the Media Freedom Coalition Consultative Network, and all 22 network members for their unanimous endorsement and support. Our collaboration is a testament to the shared commitment towards upholding media freedom, fostering solidarity, and amplifying the voices that need to be heard.



Grigol Robakidze University



MCERC x Grigol Robakidze University



On 17 January a cooperation memorandum was <u>signed</u> between Media Voice and Grigol Robakidze University. MCERC's side in the memorandum was represented by the center's Chairwoman Mariam Gersamia, meanwhile the university's side was represented by the university Rector Mamuka Tavkhelidze. The sides have agreed to implement joint aimed programs/projects in the field of media and communications, to plan and carry out research activities, joint conferences and practical educational activities (student internships included).

University of Georgia



MEMORANDUM

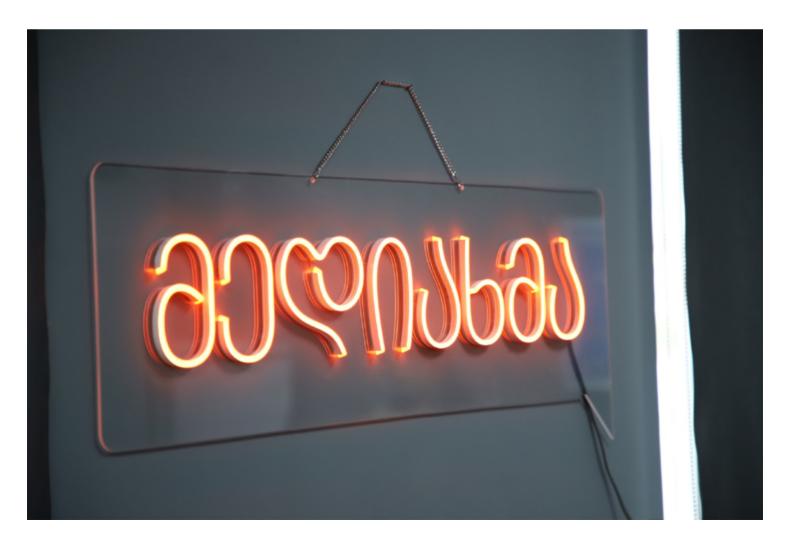
MCERC x The University of Georgia



On 25 January a cooperation memorandum was <u>signed</u> between Media Voice and University of Georgia. MCERC's side in the memorandum was represented by the center's Chairwoman Mariam Gersamia, meanwhile the university's side was represented by the university Rector Konstantine Topuria. The sides have agreed to implement joint aimed programs/projects in the field of media and communications, to plan and carry out research activities, joint conferences and practical educational activities (student internships included).

New Collaborations with local CSOs officially <u>launched</u> with Kakheti Regional Development Center on October 30, 2022, and with Samtskhe Javakheti Media Center <u>on July 24</u>, 2022.





Exploring the Future: Engaging Webinars



Webinar: "Careers of the Future and Digital Transformations"

On February 11, in celebration of the UNESCO International Day of Women and Girls in Science, the Media and Communication Education and Research Center (MCERC), in collaboration with LAB Technologies and Forbes Women, orchestrated a dynamic joint webinar named "Careers of the Future and Digital Transformations." The webinar was a significant step toward fostering equal participation of women and girls in science, technology, and innovation. The webinar, conducted in an online format, garnered participation from diverse attendees, including students, academia representatives, non-governmental organizations, and educators.



Webinar: Navigating Crisis - Ukraine's Struggle and Communication Strategies

In a fruitful collaboration with MCERC, the PR Association orchestrated a compelling webinar on March 18th, focusing on the pressing theme of "Ukraine Facing War and Crisis Communications". The event commenced with an introduction by Mako Jaoshvili, President of the PR Association and Vice-Rector of the International University of Management and Communication "Alterbridge". The outset featured a poignant moment of silence, paying tribute to the valiant heroes who lost their lives in the Ukrainian conflict. The webinar unfolded with four insightful speakers who delved into distinct dimensions of the topic:

Webinar: Harnessing Media for Conflict Resolution and War Communication

On June 29th, a thought-provoking webinar was hosted by Media Action Nepal in partnership with Media Voice and Tbilisi State University, centered around the role of media in conflict resolution and war communications. Integral to the module "Media Ethics and The Safety in the Global Digital Age" by Laxman Datt Pant, an invited lecturer at TSU, the webinar was expertly moderated by graduate students from TSU, Ekaterine Gigauri and Gvanca Bziava, both hailing from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (master program "Media Psychology and Communications"). Distinguished speakers graced the webinar with their insights:

- Laxman Datt Pant, Invited Lecturer at TSU and Chairperson of Media Action Nepal, provided comprehensive perspectives on conflict-sensitive reporting.
- Mariam Gersamia, Professor at Tbilisi State University and Chairwoman at MCERC, illuminated the intricate dimensions of war-related media coverage and its ethical considerations. Will Cathcart, an accomplished American journalist and lecturer at Tbilisi State University, shared his expertise on navigating the challenges of journalism in times of conflict.
- Olena Shevchenko, Associate Professor at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, contributed insights on the intersection of media and conflict in the context of Ukraine.

The discussions encompassed conflict-sensitive reporting, the complexities of coverage of Russia's war in Ukrain, journalists' safety concerns, and responsible reporting on vulnerable groups like IDPs and refugees. The profound exchange of ideas flowed seamlessly into an engaging post-webinar discussion.

Webinar: "Solidarity and Media in a Global Era"

On September 15th, marking the International Day of Democracy, the Media and Communications Educational and Research Center orchestrated an enlightening webinar, titled "Solidarity and Media in a Global Era".

Mrs. Loes Lammerts, Deputy Head of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Georgia, inaugurated the event. Dr. Anita Varma, a prominent figure behind the Solidarity Journalism Initiative and Professor in the School of Journalism and Media at UT Austin, USA, delivered the keynote address. The insightful conversation was moderated by Prof. Mariam Gersamia, Chairwoman of MCERC.

Distinguished speakers included:

- Laxman D. Pant, Co-chair of the Media Freedom Coalition consultative network and Chairperson of Media Action Nepal (MAN), who brought his expertise to the dialogue.
- **Prof. Olena Shevchenko**, from the Educational and Scientific Institute of International Relations at Taras Shevchenko University (Ukraine, Kyiv), also an invited professor at Tbilisi State University.
- **Prof. Irine Kurdadze**, Director of the International Law Institute at Tbilisi State University and an expert at MCERC and the "Media Voice" project.
- Patrick Norén, Research Fellow at MCERC, who also serves as Research Associate and Deputy Editor at LINKS Europe.

The webinar was held with the support of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Georgia, within the framework of the project "Media Voice: more freedom, less self-censorship in media".

Other Activities

Mentoring Session Empowering Media and Gender Advocates



In a collaborative effort, MCERC Chairwoman Dr. Mariam Gersamia partnered with Media Action Nepal to conduct an enlightening mentoring session on February 18. The session catered to 31 international fellows and journalists, delving into the pertinent topic of "Identifying & Preparing Gender-Sensitive Stories." Dr. Gersamia adeptly guided the participants through strategies for reshaping gender stereotypes in media narratives, covering domestic violence with precision, and media's role in shaping gender norms. The interactive session was enriched with a O&A and discussion segment.

The Fellowship programme for journalists of Nepal is part of the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) supported 'Promoting gender sensitivity in the media content and newsroom operations through capacity building of journalists in Nepal' project.

Empowering "Democracy Defenders" through Communication Strategies



MCERC upheld its commitment to capacity-building by conducting workshops and training sessions on "Public Relations and Communication Strategies." Drawing participation from the youth civil movement "Defenders of Democracy," including students from the School of Law, an engaging session was held on April 8th in Tbilisi. Attendees comprised members of various organizations and represented diverse universities and high schools.

Participating individuals honed skills in crafting impactful public statements, perfecting camera presence, and engaging in mock briefings and debates. Rooted in the certified course "PR 101" designed by media psychologist Prof. Mariam Gersamia, these workshops covered a wide range of theoretical and practical modules, including communication models, body language, crisis response planning, media relations, and the dynamics of emotions in media.

Empowering Political Youth through Image-building Workshops

In a synergistic collaboration, MCERC partnered with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation South Caucasus Office to organize joint workshops under the project "Liberal Platform for Youth Organizations of Political Parties." On May 23, this initiative brought together 10 representatives from youth organizations of political parties to delve into the dynamics of image-building in politics.

Conducted by the founder of MCERC, Prof. Mariam Gersamia, the workshops navigated topics such as media perception, the construction and evolution of a politician's image, the role of media in shaping public perception, and the nuances of personal brand-building within the political sphere. With a focus on both theoretical insights and practical applications, the sessions aimed to equip young political leaders with communication strategies that resonate with constituents and uphold the principles of transparency and authenticity.

Counteracting Disinformation: Training with Friedrich Naumann Foundation

On November 22, Chairwoman of MCERC Mariam Gersamia took the reins in a pivotal training session, organized in collaboration with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in South Caucasus. The session, dedicated to countering disinformation, harnessed Gersamia's expertise to equip participants with essential tools to navigate and mitigate the far-reaching impacts of disinformation in contemporary media landscapes.

Media Voice's Global Presence: A Voice at International Conferences

Strengthening Media Resilience Discussion at Chatham House

On December 2, the MCERC Chairwoman, Prof. Mariam Gersamia, added her insights to the Roundtable discussion on "Strengthening the Media's Crisis Resilience in Georgia and Ukraine." Hosted by the Russia-Eurasia and International Security Programmes at Chatham House - International Affairs Think Tank, the dialogue navigated new challenges that independent media face in the aftermath of Russia's war on Ukraine. The event convened journalists, editors, technical experts, researchers, policy analysts, decision-makers, and representatives from NGOs. It provided a platform for the exchange of best practices, tools, and lessons learned, facilitating a united effort to ensure reliable communication during crises and counter disinformation.



MCERC Study at UNESCO Global Conference



MCERC left an indelible mark at the <u>UNESCO</u> World Press Freedom Day Global Conference on March 3. In alignment with the <u>conference</u> 's focus on "Journalism Under Digital Siege," MCERC presented a compelling study titled "Media Environment and Safety of Journalists during the Crisis in Georgia: Threats and Supportive Instruments." The study, authored by Mariam Gersamia and Maia Toradze, explored the challenging landscape of journalism during crises, addressing both threats and avenues of support. The study was made possible with support from the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom South Caucasus and the German Federal Foreign Office.

Standing in Solidarity with Ukraine

Media Voice united with 120 organizations and individuals in the mental health sector in Georgia to convey solidarity with the Ukrainian people. The statement expressed deep concern over the tragic war Russia waged on Ukraine, highlighting the professional duty to support those experiencing mental health challenges due to political, economic, and social turmoil. The statement affirmed a commitment to stand with the Ukrainian people and colleagues, acknowledging the catastrophic impact of war on lives, cultural heritage, and civilization itself. The collective voice extended not only to Ukraine but also resonated with the dire experiences of displaced populations in Georgia due to Russian aggression.





Diverse Voices, Informed Insights: Reflecting on MCERC's 2022 Academic Blogs

The array of topics and authors showcased in MCERC's 2022 academic blogs underscore the richness of perspectives shaping today's media landscape. Throughout the year 2022, MCERC has been a hub for intellectual exchange, publishing over 20 thought-provoking academic blogs from various corners of the world.

With contributors hailing from various parts of the world and academic backgrounds, these blogs delve into vital issues such as disinformation's impact on international relations, the intricate dynamics of propaganda and fake news, and the psychological effects of misinformation. The authors represent a global spectrum, including M.A. candidates in Political Science from Berlin to Tbilisi, graduate students in Political Science from Potsdam, and master's students from Helsinki to Vilnius. Their research contributes nuanced understanding to subjects ranging from media manipulation to democracy's challenges, all united by a commitment to critical analysis and scholarly exploration.

MCERC's 2022 Academic Blogs: Diverse Topics and Perspectives

20 Blogs and its Authors:

- Disinformation as a weapon in IR? How Russia attempts to influence German public opinion? Author: Linus Siebert, M.A. candidate in Political Science at the University of Potsdam.
- Meeting the 'Conceptual Family': Propaganda, 'Fake News', Mis- and Disinformation Author: Florian Binder, graduate Political Science student at the University of Potsdam.
- From Abstract Words to Real Life Action? The Behavioural Effects of the Fake News Author: Petriina Matilainen, master's student in Social Sciences from the University of Helsinki.
- "Information" and Invasion in Neighbouring Countries Russia's Recent Attempts at Disruption Author: Anna Kananen, master's student at University of Helsinki.
- Is Democracy in Germany threatened by Social Networks? Author: Till Hartig, law and politics student from the European University Frankfurt Oder, Germany.
- A Mouse Under the Feet of a Fighting Elephant Author: Aleksandr Poniatajev, Master's student in Modern Asian Studies at Vilnius University.

- "Social Media and the Political Radicalisation of your Relatives" and "Disinformation Myths about Ukraine: The Kievan Rus' and the Alleged History" Author: Raphaëlle Lhuissier, MA in International Relations at the European School of Political and Social Sciences in Lille (France).
- Spreading Fake News Like the Virus and True Face of the Infodemic Author: Hoëlenn Ayoul, MA student of International Relations and Regional Studies at the University of Tartu.
- LOOK UP! Before it's Too Late to See the Manipulation Author: Tina Abashidze, Master's student in Media Psychology and Communications at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.
- Is It a "Gaslighting Effect" or Just a Lack of Knowledge? Author: Veronika Haluch, Master's Student from the Free University of Berlin.
- "Gone Girl": Lost and Found in Media Narratives Author: Irakli Gobronidze, graduate student at Tbilisi State University, program "Media psychology and communications".
- How Putin's military leadership is seen through a psychological lens?
 Author: Salome Mamasakhlisi, research assistant at MCERC, University of
 Westminster BSc Psychology graduate, also graduated master program "Psychology and Communications" at Tbilisi State University.

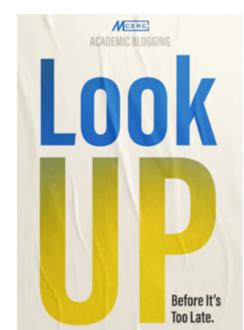




- Stop Wars: Analysing Four Funny Episodes from Russia-Ukraine War
- The State of Democracy and Orthodoxy in Georgia: Rights over Religion, or Tradition over Tolerance?
- Georgian Politics: A Timeline of a Whirlwind (from June 2019 to May 2022)
- The Three Pillars of Solidarity Journalism and Why It Is So Important
- Research Essay: "How Have Political Realities in Georgia Shaped the Country's Response to the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine?"
- Too Much Truth? The Limitations Facing Georgian Journalism and What Can Be Done About It Author:

Two Academic blogs by MCERC intern Wietse Zwart from Leiden University, the Netherlands, of the Russian and Eurasian Studies master programme.

- "What to Remember versus What to Forget"
- "Remembering Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Zugdidi: stories of dissidents, oppression, and proud Megrelians".



About the Center

Media and Communication Educational and Research Center "media Voice" was founded in 2015. The center aims to support the enhancement of a media and mass-communication field in the manner of creation of the new knowledge and through educational-research activities, raise awareness in media literacy and support introduction and strengthening democratic values in a civil society. The center aims advising in the fields of media psychology, public relations, media and mass-communication, media law, support to transfer interdisciplinary knowledge. Center collaborates with higher educational institutions, local and international organizations, companies, educational and research centers. In January, 2023, the organization underwent a name modification, incorporating name Media Voice into its identity. It now operates under the abbreviation MCERC and/or Media Voice.



Meet the MCERC team behind these achievements here

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the photographers and artists whose captivating visuals have enriched this report, and their credits are duly acknowledged alongside their contributions: Lisa Glonti, Merab Galashvili, Vakhtang Kuntsev-Gabashvili, Marina Karpiy & Evgeny Efanov, Tika Kharaishvili and Guranda Benidze.

For more information:

- www.mcerc.ge; www.mediavoice.ge
- https://www.facebook.com/mediavoice.ge
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<u>Ukraine</u>





