

## **Transforming Georgia's State Broadcaster, Slowly**

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Behind the Headlines - 1

This programme, the first in a series called **Behind the Headlines**, looks at long-running efforts to create an independent Public Broadcaster for Georgia.

The decision to transform state TV and radio – a legacy of the Soviet era – into a modern entity free of commercial and government pressure was taken in 2004. Everyone agreed that the end goal was noble, but getting there has proved more difficult.

The Public Broadcaster was accused of continuing to serve the interests of the ruling party, at the time the United National Movement (UNM) under the then president, Mikheil Saakashvili.

This political controversy focused attention on the broadcaster's board and how it was selected. Changes to the law approved by the post-Saakashvili administration in 2013 shifted responsibility for approving the nine board members from the president to parliament. In October, all the jobs became vacant as two members stepped down and the others' terms expired. But an apparently simple selection process has proved tortuous. An independent selection commission produced a list of 27 candidates, but parliament managed to agree on only four, as those nominated by the ombudsman and the UNM – now in opposition – were rejected.

The delay has paralysed the operations of the Public Broadcaster at a time when it needs editorial guidance and financial management to win greater confidence from its viewers.

A fresh selection process for the remaining five seats is now planned, although that too will be complicated by a ongoing court challenges brought by would-be and past trustees.

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