

SPIR: Support to the New Government of Georgia
Contract Number: AEP-I-00-00-00006

Conference for Government Press Officers

Bakuriani, Georgia

February 9 – 11, 2006

Joanne Adams
Media and Communications Specialist
ME&A/DAI

Report on Conference for Government Press Officers

From February 9th to 11th, 2006, USAID's Support to the New Government of Georgia project hosted a meeting for government press officers in Bakuriani, Georgia. Twenty-five press officers from different ministries and other state institutions attended the meeting which was facilitated by Marika Verulashvili, President Mikheil Saakashvili's Communications Advisor. The President, accompanied by nine ministers, two state ministers and the Governor of the Kakheti Region joined the conference in Bukuriani for an hour long session on the afternoon of February 10th.

During the conference, expert speakers led discussions on freedom of information legislation, public opinion research and statistics, integrated communication, public relations, and press office management. This report includes the agenda, a list of participants and a brief description of each session.

President's Session

At the session with the President, the President's Communications Advisor expressed appreciation to the President and ministers for attending the conference and provided an update on the group's activities. She discussed their recently instituted biweekly planning and coordination meetings established in cooperation with USAID. She explained that their coordination had enabled the government to respond more immediately and effectively to the recent energy crisis. The President agreed that the government press offices' work had noticeably improved; he mentioned that it is important for the public to see that the government cooperates as a unified team.

President Saakashvili opened the session, thanked USAID for organizing the event and highlighted the need to improve the government's ability to communicate with citizens. He presented an overview of his upcoming annual report to Parliament on February 14 and stated his intention to highlight Georgia's priorities for 2006 and to focus on three primary messages: freedom of country, freedom of the individual (or dignity), and economic freedom. He called on several ministers to describe their activities and formulate their messages in three minutes or less, and then requested that their respective press secretaries further elaborate on their ministry's activities. He emphasized that he wanted everyone's active participation in the discussion, and that this was to be a closed door, friendly and informal meeting.

The Minister of Energy reiterated the need to reduce Georgia's reliance on imported gas and electricity. His press secretary stressed the importance of their efforts to make people feel secure during the energy crisis, and to assure the public that the Ministry was doing everything it could to improve the situation.

The Minister of Education discussed their progress in rehabilitating and building schools (thirty new schools are planned for this year), and in installing computers as part of the "Deer Leap" project modeled after Estonia's program to supply all secondary schools with computers. The President expressed the need to teach the real history of Georgia in our schools, and to create special programs for the police to work with children in the schools, especially on drug abuse issues.

The Minister of Environment spoke about their efforts to promote tourism through the development of infrastructure. The President added that we need to stress that visas are not necessary to enter Georgia.

The Minister of Health spoke about their efforts to develop infrastructure in the cities as well as in the regions, to rehabilitate various medical centers and provide medical insurance.

In response to the ministers' presentations, the President emphasized several activities and messages that he believes are important for the government to both work on and communicate to strengthen Georgia as a country.

The President also stated that ministries need to inform the public of their activities in advance and that they should select each topic (or message) and then elaborate, before moving on to the second and third topics so that the public can understand the message. He also provided some suggestions to ministers to use when speaking with the media. He recommended that they:

- make brief statements, speak with simple sentence structure, and refrain from using technical or foreign language (speak Georgian);
- provide more factual information;
- do not say that you don't have an answer;
- focus on communicating messages;
- understand that you have to repeat yourself many times to communicate to the public;
- understand that you need to provide stories to journalists and that you need to make the topics interesting for them;
- pay particular attention to the regions and contribute to regional coverage; do not make regions feel that they are less important;
- consult with the public more frequently; and,
- participate in talk shows and use them as a forum to explain your activities to the public.

In conclusion, Minister Bendukidze suggested that the government should institute other programs on intergovernmental cooperation; not only should the press offices meet regularly, but other members of government also need to coordinate their activities and share information.

Opening Session of the Conference

Marika Verulashvili, Communications Advisor to the President opened the conference and thanked the group for their work during the recent energy crisis. She stated that due to their coordination, each ministry made similar statements to the public and that there appeared to be no misunderstanding or confusion among the public as to the government's position or the status of the situation.

Further, she explained how their calendar of events and planning of activities with the regions had contributed to issues being resolved by the press secretaries rather than among the ministers. Individual participants discussed their respective plans: representatives from the Ministries of Justice and Education in particular elaborated on current issues in their ministries and their plans to address them.

Public Opinion Research/Statistics

Nino Danelia and Badri Koplatadze of GIPA began the session by identifying three types of influence on the formation of a person's opinion:

- certain attitudes, such as those about religion, culture, and stereotypes are gained from the environment in which people are raised and are not easily changed;
- the second group of attitudes are those opinions that are acquired with the changing environment; and finally,
- there are those opinions that are acquired from the media.

There are three theories concerning the media's effect on public opinion:

- The agenda setting theory when the media tell us *what to think* about according to the news agenda;
- The framing theory where the media tell the public *how to think*; this can be accomplished with both images and words; and,
- The index theory that occurs when the media refer directly to sources.

Danelia explained that the government needs to create the news. She stated that the reform message is new, that there are no preconceived attitudes and that the government can define the issue. She made the following suggestions concerning relations with the media:

- To tell the truth,
- To speak with short and grammatically correct sentence structures,
- To ask a journalist to give you some time before making a comment, rather than talking off the top of your head,
- To be polite toward journalists, and
- To be attentive to your appearance.

Koplatadze explained the distinction between qualitative and quantitative surveys of public opinion. He stated that each survey must have an objective. Quantitative surveys measure quantitative results; these surveys tell you what percentage of a population responded in a particular way to a question, i.e. 55% of those surveyed said they approved of the government's activities. Quantitative surveys do not provide analysis – they don't answer *why* the people think a certain way. Qualitative surveys, such as

focus groups are most useful to explain the thought or feelings underlying certain opinions.

Quantitative surveys require that a sampling method be defined so a representative subsection of the population can be surveyed – one that will fairly accurately reflect public opinion of the entire population.

Surveys are conducted either over the phone or face to face. The advantage of the telephone interview is that it is less expensive, however, you never know who you are speaking with as you do not contact face to face, you cannot judge a person's reaction well over the phone, and a conversation cannot last as long as one conducted in a face to face interview.

IRI Quarterly Opinion Polls

Dimitri Shashkin of the International Republican Institute discussed the Institute's quarterly polling of the Georgian public. Institutional ratings show that the church is the most popular institution in Georgia followed in order by the media, the police, the military, the President's administration, and the Ministry of Education.

The public can be divided into four types: leaders in society, the attentive public, the non-attentive public, and the masses of people. News typically flows from the leaders to the attentive, then to the non attentive, and then to the masses. News should be interesting for the leaders (elite), as information reflected by them can start people talking.

When the public receives information from the media, viewers perceive 55% of information visually, 38% orally or through the language, and only 7% through actual content. This highlights the need to provide stimulating visuals to capture the public's attention.

Shaskin said that polls in Georgia reveal that people vote according to their personal attitude toward a specific public figure. Georgians want a patriotic leader, a contributor to national security, one who is powerful and well known abroad. People react negatively when politicians make false promises or fight among one another in public.

Integrated Communication

Niko Nergadze of GIPA addressed the group on the issue of integrated communication. He explained that traditional marketing consists of the four Ps: place, product, price, promotion. Promotion includes both public relations and advertising, and unfortunately there's no comparable word in Georgian for "promotion."

A sender of information (a message) codes the information as sentences, music, colors, conversation, etc. through either advertising or public relations. Surveys and research are used to obtain feedback on whether the information was communicated successfully.

Nergadze then discussed management styles and how they apply to the operation of a press office. Management is defined as "getting things done through people", and a good manager does not do everything himself. Some managers have a more

authoritarian style and others are more democratic. The authoritarian style of management creates competition rather than cooperation and it is often accompanied by a situation of permanent crisis. For cooperation, employees need to understand *why* something is being done. Money can serve as a motivation to do a job but it does not work in the long term, as other issues, such as a good working environment and the opportunity to succeed can be more important values to employees.

System Management Theory was developed in the 1990s and affected the then current thinking about management structure. This theory distinguished organization components as inputs, process, outputs, outcome and feedback. A manager's responsibilities are to plan, organize what was planned, and to lead.

The group then discussed the distinction between a manager and a leader, and what motivates them to do their jobs.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

Maya Kopaleishvili, a judge in the Tblisi court system explained the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to the group. This regulation is included as Chapter 3 in the Georgian Administrative Code. FOIA regulates types of government information as either public or classified. She explained that all information received, processed, created or communicated by a government agency or its employees and related to their official duties, is public information.

Classified information includes commercial information, state secrets (which are regulated by separate legislation) and private or personal information. Personal data are data that would identify a person other than public figures or candidates. Specific categories of personal data that are not public information include: a person's nationality, ethnicity, religious affiliation, sexual orientation and personal health. Some information may be withheld citing executive privilege; this provision protects officials who take part in the decision making process.

Kopaleishvili explained that the state is exempt from the FOIA when requesting information for the following purposes: crime prevention, investigation purposes, state purposes, national security, economic interest of a country, and defense purposes.

All public information that exists in a public agency is to be recorded in the Public Register; the Register should list both open and closed public information. FOIA also regulates the time (ten days) within which government agencies must respond to an information request.

Each agency is responsible for appointing someone who is responsible for ensuring that public information is disclosed. On December 10 of each year, the government is obligated to report to Parliament and to the President on its activities concerning the administrative code (including the FOIA provision).

SPIR SNG distributed the Freedom of Information Guide prepared by the former IRIS project to all participants on diskette in Georgian.

Camera Exercises

Tiko Nachkebia of GIPA conducted camera exercises for the group. She offered some initial advice:

- Prepare press releases in advance;
- Use little make-up; and,
- Dress in business attire and wear minimal jewelry.

In advance of an interview, prepare yourself for negative questions and make sure you have the latest information on the topic of the interview.

The cameraman is the right hand of the journalist. The location of a camera plays an important role during the interview, and the camera should be focused at the eye level of the interviewee. Check how your background appears by looking through the camera lens.

When on camera:

- avoid a white background, especially when dressed in white;
- avoid a striped background;
- avoid wearing black/dark/vivid colors during an interview;
- Sit upright on the chair at a 90 degree angle from the table if there is one in front of you; and,
- speak briefly, with short grammatically correct sentences.

Nachkebia conducted a role playing exercise with volunteers from the group. The mock television interview was recorded on camera and played back for the group to review and critique.

Agenda
Inter governmental Coordination,
Ministry Press Secretaries

Wednesday, February 8

2 pm depart Tblisi

Evening arrive Bakuriani

Thursday, February 9

10 am **Introductions**, Joanne Adams USAID SNG and Marika Verulashvili, Communications Advisor to the President

10:30 am **Discussion** of biweekly planning process and communications strategy

11:30 am Break

11:45 am **Public Opinion Research/Statistics**, Badri Koplatadze and Nino Danelia (GIPA School of Journalism)

1:30 pm Lunch

2:30 pm **IRI Quarterly Opinion Polls**, Dimitri Shashkin, International Republican Institute

3:15 pm Break

3:30 pm **Integrated Communication – PR, marketing and advertising**, Niko Nergadze (GIPA School of Journalism)

Friday, February 10

10:30 am **Basics of Management**, Niko Nergadze (GIPA School of Journalism)

11:15 am Break

11:30 am **Georgian Administrative Code, Freedom of Information Act**, Maya Kopaleishvili, Judge, Tbilisi City Court

1 pm Lunch

2:00 pm **Web sites and government portal**, Sophia Chakvetadze and Maka Darsavelidze, President's Office

2:45 pm **Camera Exercises**, Tiko Nachkebia, InterNews (GIPA School of Journalism)

3:15 pm Break

3:30 pm **Camera Exercises**, Tiko Nachkebia, InterNews (GIPA School of Journalism)

5 pm **Discussion with President and Ministers**

Saturday, February 11

10 am	Working with the media
12	Conclusions
1 pm	Closing Lunch

**Participant List,
Bakuriani Conference, February 9 – 11, 2006**

1. Ketevan Kochorashvili	Mayor's office
2. Ketevan Akhalkatsi	Ministry of Finance
3. Marika Khoperia	Ministry of Finance
4. Natia Murachashvili	Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sport
5. Nino Kochorashvili	Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs
6. Teona Iashvili	Ministry of Justice
7. Nino Gabriadze	Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources
8. Nino Bubuteishvili	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
9. Mariam Gersamia	Ministry of Education and Science
10. Irma Kakhniashvili	Ministry of Economic Development
11. Bela Giorgadze	Ministry of Agriculture
12. Teona Doliashvili	Ministry of Energy
13. Eka Gabadadze	State Ministry for Coordinating Economic Reforms
14. Marina Salukvadze	State Ministry for Conflict Resolution
15. Natia Chikovani	State Ministry for Euro-Atlantic Integration
16. Maia Razmadze	Ministry of Refugees
17. Mako Bigvava	Parliament
18. Nana Vasadze	Supreme Court
19. Manana Kartoziya	Prime Minister
20. Koba Karchava	Prime Minister
21. Koba Arveladze	Prime Minister
22. Tea Tsetskhladze	Adjara
23. Eka Jojua	Administration of the President
24. Marika Verulashvili	Administration of the President
25. Vano Noniashvili	Administration of the President
26. Maka Darsavelidze	Administration of the President
27. Sophia Chakvetadze	Administration of the President