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Strategic Policy and Institutional Reform  
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**SUMMARY ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS:  
COMMUNICATION OFFICES  
IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S CHANCELLERY**

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## Summary Assessment and Recommendations: Communication Offices in the Prime Minister's Chancellery

As the prime minister is responsible for the administration of the government and for the implementation of policy reforms in cooperation with government ministries, his chancellery should provide leadership in the dissemination of information on these reforms to the public. Government has an obligation to inform and educate the public about its activities as part of the routine course of governing.

Much of the information disclosed from the prime minister's office has been announced directly by the Prime Minister. For the most part, the Prime Minister has operated as his own spokesperson (a staff spokesperson was hired in January). Little information is distributed in written form, and almost no information is communicated strategically (with the exception of recent efforts on tax reform and the anniversary of the Rose Revolution). Communication within the government has been predominantly top down and horizontal among the President, Prime Minister, ministers and a few senior staff.

Senior staff, for the most part, function as *aides*, taking and relaying instructions to lower level staff, rather than serving as *advisors*, or as *managers* of divisions or departments. Though eager and loyal, few staff appear to demonstrate initiative (at either senior or junior levels), or to actually manage lower level staff. It is unclear whether staff lack only management authority, or ability (which could possibly be addressed through training), or potential (which cannot be addressed through training). Currently, there are no structured or regularly scheduled staff meetings, few management systems, and little evidence of job descriptions.

There has been little communication and information sharing among units. Many staff have little knowledge of other staff's functions or of what other staff produce. Quite a number of staff interviewed claimed that information didn't need to be shared among staff – that they could learn of government activities on television. Almost all staff in the prime minister's office, when asked, saw no need to share or receive monitoring information, nor understood the function of monitoring as a tool of analysis, and analysis as a function of a strategic operation.

There is an uneven distribution of workload. Some of the junior staff have considerable idle time (or produce uninformative and unread reports), while upper level staff have been overworked, responding to the daily needs of the Prime Minister, who retained substantial and wide ranging decision making authority.

Considerable labor is expended to produce reports which are seen by few, that provide little useful information, and of which there is little evidence that those who receive the reports find them to be of value. The reports and analyses produced by the media analysis unit (of the information department) consisting of 11 staff, and the citizens' letters and information unit<sup>1</sup> (of the public affairs department) with eight staff are quite detailed and verbose, and contain little analysis. There is no evidence that these reports were seen by anyone other than the Prime Minister (with the exception of the monthly ministry reports, about which the staff admit they have received little acknowledgement) or that they were used to inform decision making in policy development or communication, other than what the Prime Minister himself might have consumed and analyzed. (See evaluations of these reports on pages six and seven).

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<sup>1</sup> This unit "analyses" but does not answer letters.

The public affairs and cultural events unit (of the public affairs department) with four staff, responsible for NGO relations and public outreach shows little evidence of activity. This may be due, in large part to a lack of leadership (there is currently no one occupying the position of head of public affairs) and to a perception among the staff that they must have funds to proceed with any outreach program, which is not necessarily true.

The five staff in the press center (of the information department) are responsible principally for arranging logistics with the media, and there is little evidence that staff do other than react to requests of the media or of the Prime Minister, and they do not appear to produce written news releases though that function is within their mandate.

**Recommendations:** Job descriptions should be developed for all staff, and staff should be evaluated to determine whether they actually possess the requisite skills and experience, and perform at a level appropriate to their current position. The public affairs division in the prime minister's office has already developed job descriptions for their positions.

Successful implementation of policy reforms requires a vigorous and strategic communication effort. Three of the government's major policy reform efforts to date: education, tax policy and privatization have lacked support or been criticized principally for failures in communication rather than for the substantive contents of the reforms.

Many of these criticisms can be avoided through the establishment of a strategic communication office (most likely involving a transformation of the current public affairs office), led by an experienced manager and communicator, who is involved in policy development and can integrate communication strategy into policy formation. The current information department and public affairs department should operate as a "government press office" with the stature and professional ability to manage communication of policy reforms in cooperation with government ministries. The lack of written information contributes to the confusion surrounding the reforms. Written communication is essential so that there is no question concerning the government's position on an issue or about the details of a reform.

The prime minister's communication staff should be restructured with the understanding that the dissemination of public information is a fundamental responsibility of government, and that this activity should be institutionalized within the chancellery. Many of the functions in these offices are routine: media monitoring, setting up news conferences, writing news releases, etc., and the majority of staff, once tested, should receive training to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations.

The most difficult tasks are those concerning crisis communication, strategic communication, and integrating communication into policy development and implementation – tasks which require a strong leader with experience in communication and/or strategic thinking. The prime minister's communication staff need guidance from a manager with these skills who will serve as the *prime minister's communication advisor* and oversee both the information and public affairs departments. The prime minister's communication advisor should also have a staff to coordinate media relations and public affairs with ministries.

Each department (information and public affairs) also requires strong leadership: the information department should be managed by a *government communications official with a background in*

*media relations, and the public affairs department by a government communications official, ideally with a background in public relations.*

A public affairs unit should know how to coordinate a public education campaign on tax reform with the Ministry of Finance and other inter governmental units, and how to communicate to specific target constituencies. Such an effort doesn't necessarily require a good deal of funding; it does require a good deal of thinking, hard work, and leadership.

A public relations firm could be hired to assist the public affairs department in its initial reorganization, and can help train staff who may not have a communication background, but display initiative, a willingness to learn and enthusiasm to communicate.

Greater involvement of senior staff in policy development, and delegation of responsibility to senior staff to manage and be accountable for specific operations could relieve the prime minister of much of the management burden and integrate staff so that they could take increased responsibility for policy implementation and the corresponding communication of policy reforms. Restructuring of the communication offices would allow the prime minister to focus on defining the overall vision and strategy, while relying on staff for implementation of day to day activities.

### **Specific Recommendations for Prime Minister's Office**

- Develop job descriptions, conduct assessment of existing staff;
- Hire communication advisor to prime minister;
- Create staff unit under communication advisor to coordinate media relations and public affairs with ministries;
- Hire head of public affairs department to coordinate strategic communication;
- Add staff in public affairs department and reduce staff in media monitoring unit;
- Create strategic communication function in public affairs department;
- Transfer "hotline" staff to a "reception" department to respond to citizen calls and reassign letters and information unit; those who respond to letters can also be responsible for analyzing letters;
- Reorganize media monitoring unit to produce relevant and timely analyses.

### **Overview of Current Staffing, Functions and Activities**

**Prime Minister's Communication Staff:** (31 staff, including press secretary and deputy head of administration in the prime minister's chancellery who oversees the department of information and the department of public affairs.); the position, head of public affairs department is vacant.

*Information Department: Media and Analysis (11 staff):*

- Daily news clippings from the 14 Georgian papers
- Daily synopsis of television coverage of four Georgian stations
- Weekly analysis of print media coverage
- Monthly analysis of print media coverage for each ministry

*Information Department: Press Center Branch (5 staff):*

- Annual issuance of press credentials
- Coordination of press conferences

- Preparation of press releases
- Staff photographer

*Department of Public Affairs: Citizens' Letters<sup>2</sup> and Information Unit (4 staff plus 4 on contract):*

- Operation of "hotline" (4 contract staff) to receive citizens' calls
- Weekly and monthly analysis of phone calls and letters received
- Occasional phone surveys of public opinion

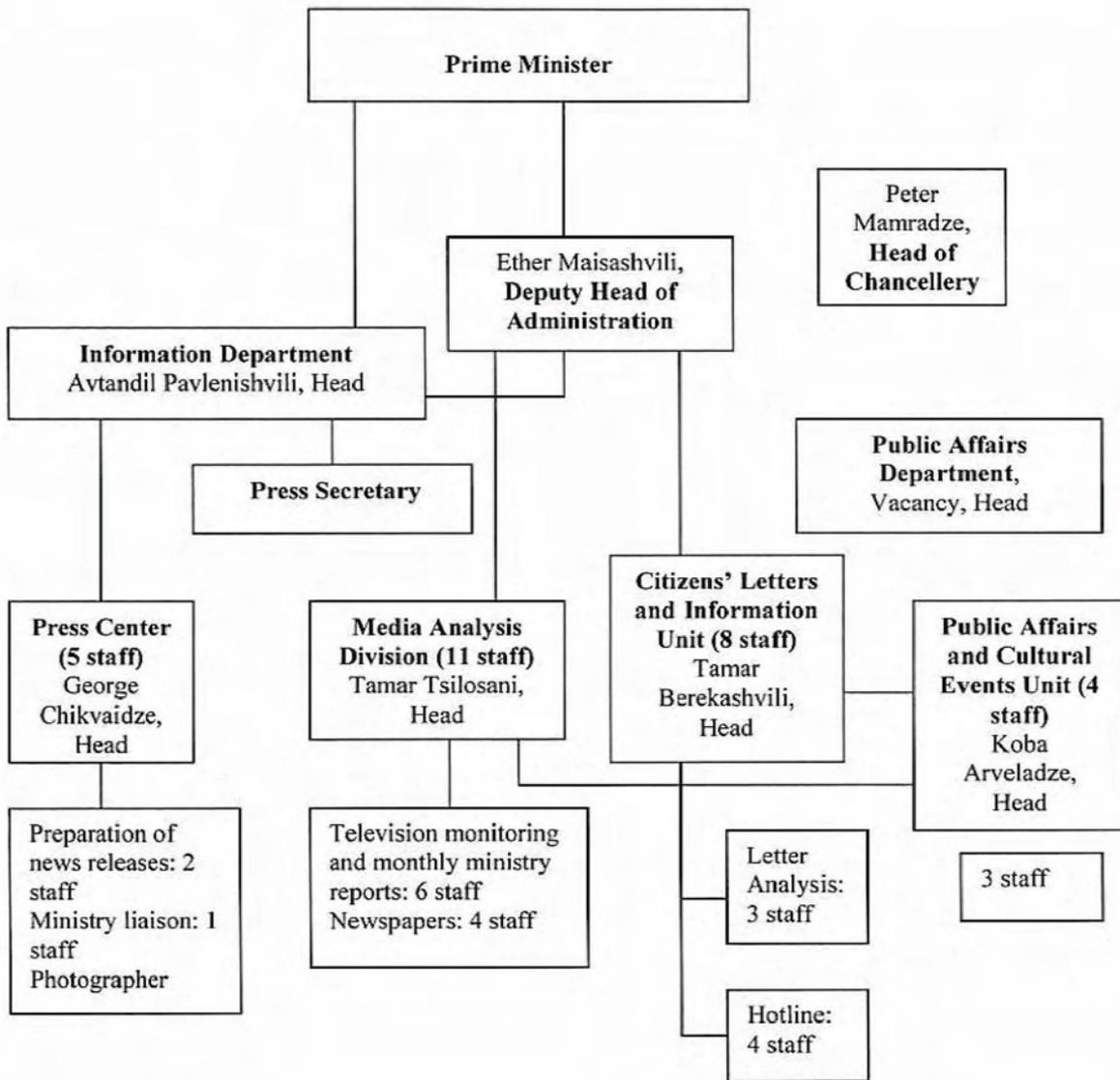
*Department of Public Affairs: The Public Affairs and Cultural Events Unit (4 staff):*

- This unit is responsible for relations with NGOs and for the dissemination of public information.

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<sup>2</sup> Letters are analyzed, but not answered in this unit.

## Functional Organization Chart: Prime Minister's Communication Offices



### **Assessment: Work of the Media Analysis Department**

The monitoring conducted by the 11 staff in the media analysis department has been provided exclusively to the prime minister, with the exception of a monthly analysis of the Georgian print media coverage of each ministry that is provided to that ministry and to the entire cabinet. The analysis for each ministry each month contains the number of articles covering that ministry from each of the fourteen daily Georgian newspapers; an evaluation of those articles as factual, negative, neutral-positive, or positive; and the number of articles per newspaper. Additionally, the department makes recommendations to each ministry.

To date, there has been no substantial feedback from the ministries on the value of the information or of the recommendations provided by the department. Also, there is no evidence that the media reviews are analyzed or that inaccuracies are identified or corrected in the media. The reports to the ministries appear to provide them with little useful data. The following observations were made in an evaluation of a translation of a monitoring report for the Internal Affairs Ministry for the month of December 2004:

- The monthly report appeared to be the product principally of a clipping, counting and adding exercise;
- No distinction is made among the 14 daily newspapers in terms of circulation, influence, target audience, placement or size of article. All articles counted are of equal value; some media are more influential and have a larger audience than others, and this should be taken into consideration when analyzing articles;
- No distinction is made as to whether one newspaper or journalist is more factual, positive or negative. Documentation of a journalist who repeatedly reports non-factual information, especially in a large circulation newspaper, can be useful data for taking action against that reporter;
- In most areas of the world, having such a vast majority (609 of 778) of articles rated “factual” would be remarkable; an article that appears “factual” may, in fact, be totally misleading if the person reading it isn’t fully aware of the actual facts; with so little intergovernmental communication in the government, it is difficult to assume that the media monitoring and analysis staff could know that a “factual” article actually contains accurate facts; it is unlikely that they have access to information independent of what they read in the newspapers.
- In sum, there is no information to “act on”. A listing of positive and negative articles is principally of historical interest.

### **Assessment: Work of the Citizens’ Letters and Information Unit**

An evaluation was conducted of an English translation of the October 2004 monthly analyses of letters and calls received in the prime minister’s office. This report is produced by a staff of four (who answer the phones) and four (who analyze the letters).

The letters’ analysis also consists principally of a counting and adding exercise, and includes synopses from various letters. There appears to be little organization or format to the report and it consists of numerous pages of narratives and graphs, when a one page report should suffice. This “analysis” performed by four staff could easily be conducted by one staff member part time, and be part of the unit that also responds to the letters. All basic information about letters

received should be incorporated into a data base that produces a report on the various aspects of these letters and generates a form letter response for staff to review and send.

There does not appear to be any actual analysis of the letters, why the subject matter varies, or why the numbers by subject or region go up or down from month to month. And, there is no evidence that any of this information has been seen by anyone other than the prime minister or that this information is incorporated into any governmental decision making.

Many of the comments regarding letters also apply to phone calls. In the month of October, the hot line received 712 calls, a decrease from the month of September (1829 calls). Most of the calls concerned domestic issues: Electricity – 239, Gas problems – 196, Pension problems – 150, other issues – 127.

There is no explanation as to why phone calls dropped so precipitously from one month to the next (from 1829 calls to 712), and any “analysis” unit must be able to account for this.