

Black PR Campaign VS Non-Governmental Organizations

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Our article was ready when newspaper “Versia” published an article – “Who Is Spy with Code Name “Shvartsika” and What Encoders Were Published on Internet Websites”. The article is about a member of the South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders, founder of the Multinational Georgia Arnold Stepanian. In fact, “Versia” confirms the statements spread by the Human Rights Center about the attempt of the government to discredit non-governmental organizations in the country. Thus, Counter-Intelligence Department and Defense and Security Committee of Parliament seem to be ordered to write Russian fairy-tales about spies who “comfortably work in NGOs.” Later, these fairy-tales are well-designed and spread by media sources.

Media PR Campaign has become an active tool for the government to discredit NGOs and human rights defenders in media outlets since December of 2009. National TV-Channels have released telecasts where human rights defenders were declared to be traitors.

How International Day of Human Rights is congratulated to human rights defenders?

1st Channel (Public Broadcasting) was the first to involve the information campaign. On December 10, 2009, Public Broadcasting blamed NGO Human Rights Priority in the activities against public interests. According to the telecast, the Human Rights Priority offers crushing terms to the victimized residents of Ergneti village. If the victimized people cease contract early in term, the NGO will extort 100 000 Euro from them.

The NGO prepares suits of victims of the war and IDPs for European Court of Human Rights. According to the telecast of the PB news program Moambe, the Human Rights Priority takes advantage of the war tragedy. The journalist pays particular attention to the contracts between the organization and their potential clients, based on which the Human Rights Priority provides the victims with free legal aid.

Lawyer Lia Mukhashavria blames the author of the telecast in breaching professional ethic norms. She thinks the PB tries to mislead the society.

Lia Mukhashavria: “The telecast spread false information. We have not signed crushing contracts with our clients. In fact, it was draft agreement which was not signed by the parties. We do not oblige anybody to sign the contract. Just the opposite, we do our best to enable the clients to read the contract carefully; to show it to others and sign them only after serious consideration. The contract becomes a legal document after it is signed by the parties. The most important fact is that the telecast was shown on the International Day of Human Rights.”

The author of the telecast Ketj Bojgva does not agree with the organization and claims she had not prepared the material under somebody’s order. Although, the journalist does not name the source of the information, she stated that the contract was sent to her from Ergneti village. Ketj

Bojgua also denies the connection between the telecast and the International Day of Human Rights.

Traitor Young Lawyers Association

When PB blamed the Human Rights Priority in extorting money from IDPs, TV-Company Rustavi 2 blamed the Young Lawyers Association in failing the exchange process of hostages between Georgian and Ossetian sides. Representatives of the GYLA state the reportage of the PS relied on false facts.

After the armed conflict of August 2008, GYLA sent 55 suits of more than 350 victimized people to the European Court of Human Rights. They stated GYLA does not differentiate clients based on their ethnicity; they paid attention to the violations of human rights.

On September 17, 2009, GYLA sent two suits to Strasbourg Court. One of them was against Russia and the second was against Georgian government. The first one was about four arbitrarily detained Georgian citizens in Tskhinvali and requested their release. The second was about three missing citizens of Georgia who were ethnic Ossetians. In the PS, the citizens released with the support of GYLA were mentioned to be Ossetian criminals who were arrested during August war. The government of Georgia kept them in prison in order to exchange them into Georgian hostages later.

According to the GYLA, Lavrenti Kaziev and Ibragim Laliev were detained in October of 2008 after the war for illegal possession of weapon. Vladimer Eloev was accused in illegal crossing of border in April of 2009, 8 months after the armed conflict. After plea-bargain, they were released from the court on August 4, 2009. However, after August 4, released Kaziev, Laliev and Eloev disappeared. Since the GYLA could not get information about their location from the MIA and Ministry of Justice for one and half month, they appealed to the European Court of Human Rights.

Tamar Khidasheli, head of the Young Lawyers Association: “We were astonished by the fact that the people, who were released with the support of the Association, were called Ossetian Criminals in the weekly news program. This reportage was complete disinformation. The society was provided with fabricated and unchecked information.”

GYLA filed complaint to the ethic commission of the Rustavi 2. The parties have not reached agreement yet. According to the negotiations, the Rustavi 2 is going to give only 30 seconds to GYLA to prepare respond telecast about the accusation instead 90 seconds. Young lawyers cannot accept this proposal.

Hope Dies in “Imedi TV” (Hope TV)

Expert Paata Zakareishvili thinks the information campaign against human rights defenders and NGOs is sign of political crisis in the country. He thinks the information spread by the NGOs to foreign countries is not pleasant for the government.

Paata Zakareishvili: “Since NGOs spread information abroad, the government has to increase oppression on them. Their activities against GYLA were incredible. The GYLA sued the state in Strasbourg quite lawfully. We learned from them that the government was hiding 5 Ossetian people in police station illegally.”

Representative of the Alliance for Georgia Sozar Subari (former public defender of Georgia) stated that not only Georgian but foreign human rights defenders were also discredited.

Sozar Subari: “From the very beginning, chairpersons of the parliamentary committees of European integration and foreign relations made statements critical about the Human Rights Commissionaire of the Council of Europe Thomas Hammarberg. In fact, they declared him to be a Russian spy and person bribed by the Russian authority.

Sozar Subari has got used to the fact that information propaganda has started against everybody who opposes the government. Neither former public defender was an exception. TV-Company “Real-TV” prepared several telecasts about his activities as an ombudsman.

TV-Company “Real-TV” prepared telecasts about investigative journalist Vakho Komakhidze too. However, the most interesting fact is that the telecast was shown only after Komakhidze requested political asylum in foreign country.

“Imedi TV” did not stay back of the three TV-stations. Journalist Vakho Sanaia started 2010 season with the reportage “Georgians VS Georgia”.

The headline of the film tells about Georgian traitors. The lead of the film reminds the audience about historically famous renegades Sergo Orjonikidze and Pilipe Makharadze; alongside them the author of the reportage posted the photos of people who “negotiate with Russia” nowadays.

Despite similar visual parallels, journalist Vakho Sanaia stated that he has not accused anybody.

Conflict scientist Paata Zakareishvili assessed the reportage of the Imedi TV as “Nationalist TV-Program.” Zakareishvili does not see anything strange in the negotiations with Ossetian and Abkhazian peoples for conflict resolution. He smiles at the accusations on Russian espionage.

Paata Zakareishvili: “It is typical nationalist propaganda. In the announcement they equalized me with pro-Russian people. Let us say that I am a traitor. Why did not they mention it in the reportage? Why did not they show any evidence, photo or video-recording of my traitor activities? They have not shown a single text of mine which could prove my cooperation with Russian forces. I want to state publicly that I cannot see solution of our problems in Russia. I see the solution of our problems in the relations with Abkhaz and Ossetian peoples. I want Georgian people together with Abkhaz and Ossetian peoples to enter NATO and other western structures together.”

Journalist Vakho Sanaia does not agree with the accusation of Zakareishvili. He said only facts were mentioned in the program. “In the announcement we really showed only photos; everybody knows in Georgia that Zakareishvili visited Tskhinvali. There were no accusations mentioned in

the film. The film was divided in 2 parts. The first part was called Georgian People VS Georgia and it recalled the events of 1918-21. The second part was called “Visits in Russia” and it exposed current situation in the country.”

Journalist from “Imedi TV” thinks that he has not breached journalistic ethic by the film; if anybody has complaints about the film, he is ready to reply to their accusations.

Round Table organization in the hotel Ambassador on January 15 was dedicated to the creation of convenient environment for the activities of the human rights defenders and non-governmental organizations. Representatives of the diplomatic corps heard all the problems of the human rights defenders in Georgia. Information campaign continues successfully. The society, which does not believe evil fairy-tales, has one question – Who is the next?