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Internet in Georgia: No revolution needed

Current situation
Georgia is still at the first stage of Internet development, with only 3 to 5 percent of all population regular Internet users. Most of these users are located in Tbilisi, capital of the country and only in few other cities it is possible to get affordable connectivity.

Probably due to the liberal telecommunication regulation and tradition of having free mass media Georgian state has expressed little interest in controlling the Internet so far. There has been no real effort to pass legislation to set a stage for regulation of Internet and online communication.

Due to low Internet penetration rate, small country size and limited advertising budgets there are very few Georgian online information recourses, most of them supported by international donor funding. There are several online forums mostly used by Georgians abroad and chat rooms with predominantly teenager audience. These sites are regulated by their owners or are self regulated.
The banking sector in Georgia, though developed comparing other sectors of economy, is rather small with only fraction of population having bank accounts. This apparently hampers development of electronic payment systems and E-commerce business.

The main problem
The main obstacle in development of Internet in Georgia as an effective information medium is its very low penetration rate. There is a huge gap between capital, few large cities and the rest of the country in terms of access to Internet. With few businesses interested to develop connectivity in the regions and no state funding there is a little chance that Internet will soon be available to 2/3 of the population (unfortunately little can be done in breakaway Abkhazia and South Osetia either)

Recommendations
State, with support of international donor organizations, should provide funding for projects connecting schools, public libraries and state agencies in the regions. This can be organized via commercial tenders stimulating private companies to further develop there businesses in that regions. Providing access to the Internet in the regions will improve information flow and increase level of democracy, which usually is lower than in capital.

Government should make available more information online, increase its transparency allowing every citizen to get information for any computer connected to the Internet. To foster development of the e-commerce it can reduce taxes on e-business transactions and allow electronic signatures.

The is no need in revolution but hard work is necessary to improve economy and first of all significantly improve electric power supply in the country.

Little statistics:
Population: 4.5m
Cities connected: 15
Population of the regions with Internet available: 1.8m
Regular internet users: 100-150 thousand
Number of Internet providers: 10
Price of Internet access in Tbilisi: 1c per minute for dial-up, $50 for aDSL with up to 100 kbps
Laws regulating Internet, E-mail, domain name system: None
Price of domain with .ge top level domain: $15/ year
Intellectual property rights on Internet: Not working