

[View in browser](#)GRASS
REFORMANDA

ISSUE 5

GEORGIA WATCH BRIEFING

JULY 1 - 14, 2020

TOPICS OF THIS ISSUE

- **Georgian Public Broadcaster and its new anti-western member**
- **Mtavari Arkhi TV in the center of disinformation investigation**
- **Georgian March is officially a pro-Russian nationalist party**

RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

The Editor-in-Chief of the Openly pro-Russian/anti-western TV Obieqtivi has been elected as a member of the board of trustees of the Georgian Public Broadcaster

On July 1, the Parliament of Georgia voted for three candidates to fill the vacant places on the board of trustees of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB), a state-financed media outlet. One candidate had to be selected by a parliament majority quota, and two candidates by the opposition.

Before voting in the parliament, an ad hoc commission staffed by journalists and media experts selected eight candidates from a pool of ten. The list was then submitted to the legislative body for consideration and nomination, with the candidates requiring signed support from at least 14 MPs for them to be voted by the parliament.

Bondo Mdzinarashvili's candidacy nominated and backed by the Alliance of Patriots (3), Social Democrats (3) and several independent MPs (8) - some of which position themselves as pro-Western (including former GD members Giorgi Mosidze, Mariam Jashi, David Tchitchinadze) - was subsequently endorsed by the parliament. **Mdzinarashvili's bid was supported by 95 MPs, all of them from the ruling GD, Social-Democrats and pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots. Mdzinarashvili is a TV host and the editor-in-chief of the anti-Western media-union "Obiektivi". He is notorious for anti-Western and pro-Russian statements, he opposes Georgia's Euro-Atlantic path and publicly spreads disinformation/fake news about Georgia's Western allies.** Mdzinarashvili has stated on multiple occasions that the creeping annexation of Georgian territories has never happened. During the pandemic, Mdzinarashvili has also spread fake news about COVID-19 vaccines, declaring that the West is planning to run tests in third world countries like Georgia.

It is alarming that the state-funded GPB will now have an anti-Western and pro-Russian board member, who was endorsed by the ruling majority of the parliament.

The Georgian government attempts to attack critical media outlets



The parliamentary elections are looming, and the Government of Georgia declared a ferocious fight against disinformation. However, rather than exposing Russian or other malign actors' hostile disinformation, the authorities have been targeting nationwide TV outlets critical of the government.

Kakha Kaladze, the Tbilisi Mayor and Secretary General of the ruling Georgian Dream party, announced a campaign to fight the spread of disinformation and fake news. On June 9, he had the first “debunk” Facebook live, followed by a second on June 25. In both live videos, the mayor targeted three opposition TV channels – Mtavari Arkhi, TV Pirveli and Formula TV, labelling them as fake news disseminators.

The Georgian State Security Service has launched an investigation into Mtavari TV's report under the sabotage article. The report aired by Mtavari Arkhi TV (the biggest opposition minded nationwide broadcaster) claimed that the Government of Georgia was offering money to the citizens of the Marneuli Municipality to register the passing of their family members as COVID-19 related deaths. Marneuli residents, journalists, civic activists, as well as the leader of the opposition Republican Party, Khatuna Samnidze, were summoned by the State Security Service for interrogation. The case is still active and decisions have yet to have been made. See the full story [here](#).

According to NGOs and media experts, this may be classed as pressure on critical media and an attempt to violate the independence of private TV channels. Notably, the pro-Russian media outlets in Georgia are spreading far more dangerous content on a daily basis, which according to the State Security

Service accusation of Mtavari Arkhi TV, would definitely fit into the sabotage category, however no cases have been registered against them.

Yet another sign of the authorities' increased appetite to pressure critical media ahead of the elections relates to the new law-project registered in the Georgian Parliament. The latter authorizes the Georgian National Communication Commission to appoint a special manager in any company with an electronic communications license. The initiative is largely criticized by media representatives and experts who see the adoption of the amendments as damaging to media freedom in Georgia.

MONITORING OF DISINFORMATION CASES

Anti-EU messages. Pro-Kremlin media outlets, including Sputnik Georgia and Georgia and the World published articles, are developing the following 4 myths:

- The European Union is creating a new political elite in Georgia in order to legitimize same-sex marriage;
- An Eastern Partnership has been created to stop the integration of post-Soviet countries with Russia;
- The Eastern Partnership does not benefit the participant countries in terms of addressing economic problems;
- The Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia contains 120 secret articles about social experiments.

Read Myth Detector's Debunking about the [above-mentioned myths](#).

Fake Story about mandatory Vaccination. A Facebook post by user Shore Shanidze was shared on a page "საქართველო უპირველეს ყოვლისა" (Georgia first of all) and in several Facebook groups including. The post was claiming that Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Gakharia reached an agreement with 60 countries during the Global Vaccine Summit about obligatory vaccination. As an evidence post referred to imedinews article. Myth Detector [revealed](#) that the summit, attended by Giorgi Gakharia, was not related to mandatory Covid-19 vaccination and Imedinews article was about a letter of appreciation sent by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to his Georgian counterpart for participating in the Global Vaccine Summit. The Summit focused on allocating funds to GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, for the next five years to immunize children against measles, polio and diphtheria.

Kremlin media outlet Sputnik Ossetia published an article claiming that the 2020 edition of Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" was released in Georgia and is available in bookstores. De-facto South Ossetian Security Committee stated that the

book was printed with the annotation, glorifying the Nazi dictator and instead of recognizing “1920 genocide of Ossetians”, Georgia is increasing the interest towards radical ideas. [Myth Detector](#) made a deep research of this case and found only one bookstore, who sells “Mein Kampf” and it is an old edition.



Repeated disinformation about Lugar lab. On the 4th of July the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia released a new statement on an old topic: accusations that the USA is conducting military and biological activities in Tbilisi-based Lugar Laboratory were voiced once again following the May 26 statement by Russian MFA of similar nature. Russian MFA claims that division of Georgian-American joint land forces is located in Lugar Laboratory thus violating the Convention on the Prohibition of Biological Weapons. Another recurring groundless accusation was about Tbilisi not allowing Russian experts to visit the Lab. Despite the fact that Georgian counterparts expressed willingness to host competent Russian experts multiple times and invited Russian journalists, Moscow still insists to discuss this issue only in the bilateral format, without the participation of International or regional organizations. Read more on [Myth Detector](#).

NAMING AND SHAMING

Georgia's former security minister bolstering pro-Russian sentiments

In early July, propagandists from the separatist Tskhinvali spread a ludicrous video regarding the US-financed Lugar Laboratory in Georgia. In the film, they record [three Georgian respondents](#) whose narratives are to discredit Georgia-US relations. It is exceptionally shameful that **Valeri Khaburdzania, who served as a Security Minister of Georgia during the Shevardnadze government, appeared among those respondents. Among his merits was the peaceful resolution of the Rose**

Revolution in November 2003. Apparently, Khaburdzania keeps changing sides, serving the Kremlin's interests in Georgia and arousing distrust towards the West. The other two respondents were Vladimir Khomeriki, a Russian-based businessman, and Alexander Chachia, the owner of the Kremlin newspaper "Georgia and the World" in Georgia.

Georgian March officially formed as an openly pro-Russian nationalist party

Meanwhile, the hero of our previous third and fourth issues, **Sandro Bregadze, caught attention again as, on July 2, he officially created a political party called "Georgian March - National Movement".** Mr. Bregadze noted that his party will participate in the 2020 parliamentary elections, in order to further continue the promotion of national values of the Georgian state. The party launch was accompanied by significant public outcry, as the ceremony was held at the Ilia Chavchavadze Museum. It is a public property named after the most important and significant Georgian Statesman from the end of the 19th Century, considered to be the biggest Georgian liberal name. Therefore, a ceremony of an ultra-right-wing party at this very museum angered many and raised complaints towards the policy of running state museums, once again blaming the ruling party of indirect support of nationalistic, anti-western forces.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' INITIATIVES

Georgian CSOs addressed Facebook, calling on it to safeguard information during parliamentary elections in Georgia. The CSOs urged the social media platform to introduce relevant tools (Political Ad Library, Political Ads API) into Georgia before the election; increase its efforts to identify CIB and remove the accounts involved in it. The full letter can be seen [here](#).

'Who is Who' (VIn Vin Aris) - a Shame Movement's web-platform created an automatic feature for identifying fake news - also available as an extension on Google Chrome which enables users to detect fake news across the whole web. The platform continues to identify propaganda or misinformation pages or accounts on Facebook (including so-called 'bots' and 'trolls'), and regularly updates its database in order for users to always get up-to-the-minute information. As of June 2020, the database hosts more than 2260 results.

The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) created the interactive platform '[Disinfoobserver](#)' to display information gathered through ISFED's social media monitoring. It identifies Facebook pages that are engaged in discrediting campaigns, spread disinformation and manipulated information, promote polarization through divisive narratives, resort to inauthentic behavior or other harmful information operations. The purpose of this initiative is to increase awareness in Georgia about inauthentic Facebook pages, their activities and tactics use and help users verify sources on Facebook. The platform is fully interactive and upgradeable, allowing users to submit links to suspicious pages and accounts for double-checking and reporting.

MDF's executive director, Tamar Kintsurashvili, [discussed](#) strengthening strategic communications and supporting media pluralism and independence at the presentation of the report - "[Georgia's implementation of Eastern Partnership Deliverables for 2020](#)", which was conducted by ISFED (International Society for Fair Elections And Democracy).

European Journalism Observatory published an article by the MDF's researcher Sopho Gelava, who, according to Myth Detector's fact-checking, classified coronavirus-related hoaxes in 2 [categories](#): on the one hand, newly emerging clickbait websites are seizing the opportunity to make a profit out of the Covid-19 pandemic by encouraging the dissemination of hoaxes about miracle cures. On the other hand, there are pro-Kremlin and anti-Western sources still operating to discredit the Georgian government's pro-Western foreign policy and sow doubts about the US-funded research laboratory in Tbilisi, popularly known as the Lugar Lab.

The Europe-Georgia Institute [conducted](#) a webinar about Russian propaganda and presented a comparative analysis of the disinformation spread in Georgia and around the world about the COVID-19. The researcher used articles from FactCheck Georgia and Poynter.

SUBSCRIBE HERE

*This newsletter is a part of the project „**Strengthening of the resilience of civil society organizations in Georgia against foreign malign influence**“, which is funded by the*

TRANSITION PROMOTION program of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

TRANSITION

Transition Promotion Program



*European Values Center for Security Policy
is a non-governmental, non-partisan institute
defending freedom and sovereignty*

Office	+420 608 739 902
E-mail	info@europeanvalues.net
Web	www.europeanvalues.net

[Facebook.com/evropskehodnoty](https://www.facebook.com/evropskehodnoty)



European Values Center for Security Policy

info@europeanvalues.net

[Unsubscribe](#)