

COVID-19 DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES IN GEORGIA

OPEN INFORMATION PARTNERSHIP

COVID-19 WORKING GROUP

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Context

The Open Information Partnership (OIP) is a network of 55 organisations that exposes disinformation narratives, tactics, and actors across more than 20 countries in Europe.

As COVID-19 developed, OIP convened a Working Group to identify, understand, and monitor disinformation and misinformation narratives around the virus, and whether hostile states were using the crisis as an opportunity for information operations.

“Misinformation, for the purposes of this report, refers to information about COVID-19 which may or may not have been shared in good faith, but which has no medical or scientific justification. This includes hypothesised cures and remedies for the virus, its supposed link with 5G technology, and speculation that COVID-19 was either not a real disease, or that its effects had been greatly exaggerated.

‘Disinformation’, on the other hand, refers to material which is false or misleading and spread deliberately by hostile state actors or their allies; false or misleading information with unknown or unclear attribution, which fits with known hostile state narratives, aims or activities; or information that, while not necessarily false, is presented to achieve effects that are congruent with hostile state narratives, aims, or activities.”

This series of individual reports sets out the findings for each of the 18 countries monitored over the period from April to June 2020. Findings have also been compared to identify themes and patterns in narratives across regions (please see overarching report).

Methodology

Based on the network's experience of disinformation around crisis events, it was agreed from the outset that the Working Group should take an actor agnostic approach. This was, in part, because dis- and misinformation was seen to emanate from a very broad range of sources across the infosphere, from individuals to hostile states and across multiple platforms.

Thirteen OIP organisations, co-ordinated by Zinc Network, formed the Working Group. Each deployed a range of manual and automated tools to identify disinformation based on a range of keywords and other identifiers as defined by the individual organisations. From the outset this was a qualitative, rather than quantitative, exercise. The Working Group as a whole adhered to set definitions on terms such as 'disinformation', and submitted stories of interest from traditional, social and other media twice a week, based on their expert knowledge of the information ecosystem in their country.

Each organisation provided details of the stories, why they had been identified, and how they fit into the wider definitions of disinformation and misinformation as it relates to COVID-19. This includes, inter alia, disinformation emanating from both outlets and individuals of interest (examples below). Though methodologies differed between organisations, each was based on pre-existing expertise of disinformation in their country, from which outlets and actors are most prolific and impactful, to the likely relevance and resonance of any particular story to their domestic audience.

For some countries, Zinc Network's research team provided additional social media monitoring and analysis to determine reach and sentiment, as well as estimated impact, of key stories. Whilst on open sites such as Twitter this remains relatively simple, on more closed platforms such as Facebook this meant relying on Zinc's institutional knowledge of groups and platforms of interest to assess where narratives would likely develop.

Zinc's research team also focused on flagging content from outlets either directly owned, or with known links to, hostile states. In terms of other media, outlets such as Sputnik, Ukraina.ru and Baltnews make no secret of their connection to the Kremlin, and were therefore regularly monitored. Others, with less clear ownership, showed clear alignment to hostile state narratives, or were of interest to the Working Group due to their historic content – whether that be conspiracy theory, support for hostile states, or similar.

This data was then sifted and analysed by Zinc Network against key criteria and an agreed framework. This framework developed over the first four weeks of reporting, whereby Zinc Network was able to assess the common themes and break them down into 6 major and 22 sub narratives. The major narratives, which reflect broader elements of hostile state messaging, were Failing West, Conflict, Malign Global Elite, Moral Decline, Reframing Russia, and Misinformation (the latter not constituting a narrative in its own right, but containing the various manifestations of damaging false info surrounding the virus).

The 50-80 page bi-weekly report covered the key disinformation instances, narratives, and actors from the previous days. This was disseminated to the Working Group, the wider OIP network, and other key stakeholders.

By the end of the reporting period, the Working Group produced 22 of these reports covering 18 countries: Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

The organisations that have participated in the Working Group are: Analyses and Alternatives, Association of Independent Press, Center for European Policy Analysis, Debunk.EU, Global Focus, GRASS, KIPRED, Media Development Foundation, Media Initiatives Center, Citizens Initiative MOST, Political Capital, Slovak Security Policy Institute, Ukraine Crisis Media Center, and Zinc Network.

This report covers the period between 13 April and 26 June.*

** Please note that some recorded cases may fall outside these dates, as monitoring was ongoing before and after the official dates of this project. Note too that reporting began later in Belarus and Montenegro, on 29 May and 22 May respectively.*

Example outlets of interest

Amongst the platforms pushing the most problematic content were:

GeWorld.ge (Georgia and the World)

GeWorld is notorious for its openly pro-Russian editorial policy, as well as its homophobia and racism, especially towards Turkey. It was established in 2009, amid praise from the then-president of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev. It is owned by Historical Legacy, a pro-Russia organisation, and is closely associated with Alexander Chachia, a Russia-based ethnic Georgian political scientist, who in 2014 received Russia's Order of Honour from Vladimir Putin for his "great commitment to strengthening friendship and cooperation with the Russian Federation, and for making a great contribution to the improvement of scientific and cultural ties".

Together with Saqinform and News Front, GeWorld represents one of the most prominent parts of the pro-Russian media operating in Georgia. GeWorld has one of the highest readerships out of the big three and has close ties to Eurasian Institute, a Georgian partner of the "Russkiy Mir Foundation".

News Front Georgia

News Front Georgia is part of the News Front network operating in multiple languages worldwide. It was founded in 2014, and is believed to be supported by Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB). Its Georgian language edition was launched in October 2019. News Front's editorial policy is functionally identical to the Kremlin's agenda, and much of its content is reposted from Russian state-controlled media outlets, such as RT, Sputnik and RIA Novosti. News Front Georgia is edited by Shota Apkhaidze and Gulbaat Rtskhiladze. Gulbaat Rtskhiladze is one of the co-founders and chair of the Eurasian Institute. He opposes Georgia's course of NATO integration, which he believes will result in Georgia losing territory, and argues that it should pursue closer relations with Russia.

Shota Apkhaidze was arrested in 2010 and later imprisoned after storming a television station, TV Caucasus, together with other members of the Orthodox Parents Union and the Public Orthodox Movement. After his release from prison he became a project manager at the Eurasian Institute. He is notorious for his statements made in 2013, accusing former President Mikheil Saakashvili for committing genocide against the Ossetian people.

In April 2020, Facebook suspended News Front after suspected coordinated inauthentic behaviour and removed 46 associated pages, 91 Facebook accounts, two groups, and one Instagram account, including Georgian pages and groups.

Saqinform

Saqinform (Saqinform.ge) is owned by the pro-Russian organisation Historical Legacy, which also holds the ownership rights of GeWorld. The editor of Saqinform, Arno Khidirbegishvili, professes an openly pro-Russian policy, calling for Georgia to align more closely with Russia and to end its policy of European and EuroAtlantic integration. Khidirbegishvili's articles are regularly published in anti-Western Russian outlets such as Regnum.ru and Sputnik. During the pandemic, Saqinform claimed that COVID-19 is the product of western bio-laboratories.

Sputnik Georgia

Sputnik is a multimedia international project which is one of the main media platforms for Russian propaganda. Sputnik Georgia was launched in 2015 and is housed in the former RIA Novosti office, which is reportedly also used by other pro-Russia front groups such as the Antifascist Coalition of Multinational Georgia, the Eurasian Institute, the National Congress of Slav People of Georgia, Veterans of Law Enforcement Agencies, and Patriots of Georgia, among others.

Key findings

The pro-Russia media in Georgia was responsible for the majority of cases of disinformation and conspiracy theories. They used the COVID-19 pandemic to strengthen their existing strategic disinformation narratives, to attack and defame Western institutions and organisations, and to undermine liberal, democratic values. There appeared to be organised message co-ordination across social media as well as in pro-Russia news outlets.

Narratives observed included claims that the EU is collapsing or that it failed to help other states (including Georgia), that NATO is unable to respond to the crisis, that liberal regimes, unlike authoritarian ones, cannot handle the virus, and that God is punishing the West for its support for LGBTQ movements. Among the most active spreaders of conspiracy theories about COVID-19 was the clergy.

The pandemic has also showed that the Georgian public was particularly vulnerable to mis- and disinformation during the crisis.

Observations: Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) & Media Development Foundation (MDF)

- **Local narratives, Russian origins**

GRASS:

- As COVID-19 spread across the globe, the pandemic was followed by an 'infodemic', which did not spare Georgia. Many of the absurd and fake news stories identified by GRASS in Georgia are identical to ones detected throughout the world. However, country-specific content as well as established narratives have also been emerging.
- Apart from some fringe sources, disinformation in Georgia was mainly spread by pro-Russian media outlets. We also observed that some old and pre-existing narratives were modified and redirected to COVID-19.
- The Richard Lugar Public Health Research Centre (the Lugar Lab), which has been the target of Russian disinformation machine since 2011, was again attacked and accused of conducting covert research on dangerous pathogens, an allusion to the theory that COVID-19 originated in a laboratory.
- The textbook Russian narrative that the West is pulling the strings of Georgia was also quite visible during the pandemic. Some actors used fake video and photo materials to claim that the West was failing to combat the virus.

MDF:

- Based on the three months of monitoring, it is very easy to conclude that disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19 were spread in an organised manner involving a lot of actors, including Facebook pages, clergy, politicians and journalists.
- The first case of COVID-19 in Georgia was confirmed on 26 February but the disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories development began in January after the outbreak of the virus. Between January and June, Myth Detector identified 89 instances of fake or manipulated content.
- It is important to say that the majority of the articles and posts were disseminated by actors who are directly or indirectly linked to pro-Kremlin or Russian actors. Geworld.ge, Saqinform.ge, News Front and Sputnik were tremendously active in the pre-COVID-19 period and their popularity strongly increased during the pandemic.
- Statements, original articles and quotes by different authority figures (including doctors and analysts) were originally prepared in the Russian language and later translated into Georgian to deliver the messages directly.
- A new trend was the dissemination of COVID-19 conspiracies through different social media pages and groups, in some cases in an organised manner.

- **Lugar Lab as bio-weapon facility**

GRASS:

- In April and May 2020, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a comprehensive and tailored disinformation narrative, incorporating all aspects of Russia's disinformation campaign against the Lugar Lab, emphasizing that secret work on dangerous pathogens and infectious diseases was being carried out there. This narrative was also echoed by the Chinese foreign affairs spokesperson.
- The Lugar Lab has been a target of Russian disinformation since its opening in 2011. High-ranking Russian politicians (including Putin himself and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov) have accused the Lugar Lab of conducting illegal experiments and genetic research.
- During the pandemic, the pro-Russian media continued to claim that the Lugar Lab poses a threat to locals and it should be shut down. They went as far as stating that the US purposefully prevented the spread of COVID-19 in Georgia to cover their secret activities in the Lugar Lab. They also claimed that the directors of the laboratory, Paata Imnadze and Amiran Gamkrelidze, are US agents.
- Amid the increased number of COVID-19 cases in Russia, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova issued a statement suggesting that "secret work on dangerous pathogens and infectious diseases is being carried out in the Lugar Centre", implying COVID-19's laboratory origins. On 26 May, the Russian Foreign Ministry expressed its concern over the US-funded laboratory, noting that the Centre's compliance with the Biological Weapons Convention "raises questions." Criticising the U.S. for "not explaining what it is doing in the close vicinity of the Russian borders," Moscow demanded its specialists be granted access to the centre. Kremlin-led disinformation against the Lugar Lab was later supported by the Chinese foreign affairs spokesperson.

MDF:

- During the three-month reporting period (April-June), a majority of the cases were related to the Lugar laboratory and vaccinations. The Richard Lugar Public Health Research Center was built with the support of the US government in 2011 in Tbilisi. In 2013 the laboratory moved under the control of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) and from 2018 the Government of Georgia assumed responsibility for the full funding and operation of the 'Lugar Lab' and its laboratory network.
- From its foundation, the Lugar Lab was a target of pro-Kremlin actors and media outlets. The attention paid to it dramatically increased after the confirmation of the first COVID-19 case and new conspiracy theories and disinformation campaigns were launched. The Lugar Lab was accused of

creating biological weapons, as well as conducting dangerous experiments in order to spread the virus intentionally.

- **Elite conspiracies**

GRASS:

- One of the most widespread narratives was about global elites wanting to either control the world population, or decrease the number of the people living on the planet through compulsory vaccination, which for its part includes microchipping. Bill Gates and the Freemasons are accused of being key figures in this process.
- This anti-vaccination narrative sounds especially convincing in Georgia, as the country has seen fewer than one thousand confirmed infection cases and just 15 deaths, with the population extremely relaxed in face of the pandemic, all of which makes vaccination look unnecessary.

MDF:

- The most widespread narratives after the Lugar Lab was the notion of obligatory vaccinations, which was allegedly devised by billionaire Bill Gates in order to reduce the world population.
- The fake news creators also accused Gates and other 'rulers of the world' (the Rockefeller family, George Soros, etc) of creating COVID-19 artificially in order to enrich themselves and to gain total control on the world population.

- **Anti-Western narratives**

GRASS:

- Pro-Russian groups in Georgia are spreading a narrative that the West abandoned Georgia during the crisis caused by the pandemic. The main sources disseminating this message are GeWorld, Saqinform, and News Front. They claim that "Georgia's vital artery runs through Russia", because of Georgia's dependence on imports of food, especially wheat, from its northern neighbour.
- The Russian propaganda narrative is that Europe and the US are not helping Georgia during the crisis, or are doing so only negligibly, while the US is providing other countries with finances to help them in the fight against the virus.¹

¹ Please see this article from FactCheck Georgia for a further explanation of this narrative and the facts about Western assistance to Georgia: [LINK](#)

- **Leverage with South Ossetia**

GRASS:

- The Russian Federation also used the de facto authorities in Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia for disseminating COVID-19 related disinformation. The so-called Security Committee of Tskhinvali region/ South Ossetia has accused Tbilisi of “deliberately spreading” the virus to the region.
- Going even further, the de facto government accused Georgia of aggression, claiming “Georgian drones violating the so-called border may point at bio-terrorism against South Ossetia.” This type of disinformation targeted the population living not only in the occupied regions, but also in Tbilisi-controlled territory.

MDF:

- The de facto security services of South Ossetia (Russian-occupied Georgian territory) accused the Lugar Lab and the Georgian government of collecting the biological information of its ‘citizens’ and intentionally spreading COVID-19 in the de facto republic.

- **Leverage with Georgian Orthodox Church**

GRASS:

- Orthodox clerics and groups play an important role in delivering anti-Western messages to the Georgian public and Orthodox values have also been widely misused for amplifying pro-Kremlin sentiments.
- This has also prevailed during the pandemic. The Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) strongly opposed the temporary closure of churches during the COVID-19 lockdown and has maintained the use of the shared communion spoon.
- Those who opposed the church’s decisions were called “liberal fascists” by the pro-Russian media, and a number of GOC representatives did not hesitate to join the trend.
- More worryingly, some high-ranking clerics also disseminated outright lies and disinformation on COVID-19 related issues. They publicly supported and amplified stories circulating on social media, including that the virus is a man-made bio-weapon and that the ‘real’ motives behind the pandemic are the depopulation of the world by microchipping humans and creating a new world government, which would eventually lead to the reign of the Antichrist.
- They also claimed that the virus itself is not that lethal, but the vaccine which will follow it will kill the majority of the population. Some Church representatives even urged the people to refuse the vaccination, if a vaccine (or “a devil’s weapon”) against COVID-19 is ever created.

- Notably, according to public opinion polls, the GOC still remains one of the most trusted institutions in Georgia, which might make the disinformation spread by them even more dangerous.

MDF:

- The three-month monitoring period and the rise of COVID-19 cases coincided with the largest and most important religious events, such as Annunciation (7 April), and Orthodox Easter (19 April). The Georgian Government announced a state of emergency on 21 March and imposed restrictions, including limiting social gatherings to 10 persons and imposing a curfew from 9pm to 6am. In response, Orthodox priests, as well as some media outlets, public figures and journalists, began spreading conspiracy theories and disinformation that the government was using the COVID-19 pandemic against the Church.

- **Social media as disinformation vector**

GRASS:

- One of the main platforms disseminating fake content on the COVID-19 was a Facebook group named 'STOP 5G GEORGIA!!!'. After being created in April, this Facebook group had more than 22,000 members by the end of May – a notable increase considering the size of the country. Although focused on 5G, the group members shared disinformation on various topics. The group was taken down in May. Only few days after being removed from Facebook, a replica group – 'STOP 5G GEORGIA' – had emerged and taken the lead in spreading disinformation once more.

MDF:

- The most active and effective spreaders of these narratives, apart from the above-mentioned websites, were the Facebook pages: "Georgia First", "Kardhu", and "Stalin", and Facebook groups like "Stop 5G in Georgia".

- **Impact and future**

GRASS:

- While we cannot precisely measure the impact of COVID-19 related mis/disinformation on society, it is safe to say that hundreds of thousands of Georgians have been exposed to COVID-19 related disinformation. Certain fake news stories have indeed had a negative impact on the people. Worth mentioning is the claim that "drinking hot water will heal you", as due to this fake advice several people were hospitalised.
- Another example of the malign impact of disinformation in Georgia was seen during the Easter celebrations, when thousands of parishioners participated in the church ceremonies and took communion from the shared spoon.

- Analysing the information collected during the monitoring period, it should be safe to say that the future trends of disinformation will centre around the concerns of vaccination, microchipping, 5G, and resisting restrictions such as wearing facemasks and maintaining social distancing. Also, some low-quality fringe media and clickbait webpages will continue trying to attract users by exploiting COVID-19 related issues.

Notable stories

COVID-19 is a distraction from the Starlink project

Source: Koba Kuprashvili, Facebook group – STOP 5G GEORGIA

Date: 26 April

Facebook influencer Koba Kuprashvili (see below) posted on his personal Facebook account that the virus is an instrument to divert people's attention, writing that "[while] we were discussing mortality and the harmfulness of the coronavirus, Elon [Musk] has placed a 5G chain around our Earth that nobody will be able to hide or escape from." Kuprashvili also linked the wildfires in Siberia, the Amazon rainforest and Australia to the Starlink project. (Note that Starlink and 5G are separate technologies.)²

This Facebook post spread virally and reached a wide audience. Kuprashvili posted the same text in the Facebook group 'STOP 5G GEORGIA!!!' and also published additional disinformation about the Starlink project on his personal page. In total, his posts received over 5,000 interactions. His posts were so popular that the Starlink project became a topic for other disinformation actors, among them Lali Moroshkina and other influencers in the Facebook group 'STOP 5G GEORGIA!!!'.

COVID-19 is used against the Church

Source: Geworld.ge

Date: 29 April

On 29 April, pro-Kremlin website GeWorld published an article by Davit Mkheidze, claiming that "neoliberal" movements have been fighting against the Orthodox Church ever since the Second World War. Mkheidze claimed that the novel coronavirus is being used against Georgian Orthodox Church, but the Church has resisted and survived. The Georgian Orthodox Church has a great influence on the population, so the narrative was widely spread.

Orthodox Parents Union's 'sermon' about the pandemic

Source: Orthodox Parents Union Facebook page

Date: 25 May

The Orthodox Parents Union (OPU) is a radical group within the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), famed for its rigid and ferocious postures on various topics and for its aggressive, often violent demonstrations against minorities. The leaders of the OPU, Archpriests Davit Isakadze, Davit Kvlividze and Davit Nozadze, surrounded by subservient clerics, posted a live 'video-sermon' on the OPU's Facebook page, where they revealed the 'truth' about the COVID-19 pandemic. The archpriests directly blamed Bill and Melinda Gates for funding the creation of the novel coronavirus and claimed that the real purpose behind the creation of the COVID-19, apart from causing depopulation, is to create a new world order by

² See FactCheck Georgia for a full debunk of this claim.

microchipping humans which would inevitably lead to the establishment of a world government and eventually to the reign of the Antichrist.

According to public opinion polls, the GOC represents the most trusted institution in Georgia. Therefore, whatever the GOC or their individual representatives say has a significant impact on public attitudes. Moreover, the video was quite successful on Facebook and YouTube. It was later taken down by Facebook for violating its community standards.

5G technology will reduce the world population

Source: Asaval-Dasavali

Date: 11 May

In the 11-17 May edition of the newspaper Asaval-Dasavali, Davit Isakadze, an archpriest of the Georgian Orthodox Church, stated that ten years ago, Bill Gates created a club with other super-rich financiers, including the Rockefeller family, the Morgan family, and George Soros. Isakadze claimed that these individuals are lobbying for 5G technology, which will allow them to gain total control over every person in the world. He also advanced the narrative that a massive programme of vaccination after the COVID-19 pandemic is aimed at reducing the global birth rate and lowering the world population from 7 billion to 1 billion.

WHO's fabricated statement

Source: Hot News, Today in Politics, and others

Date: 15 June

On 15 June, www.hotnews.ge published an article headlined 'Shocking Admission of WHO Epidemiologist – Epidemic Does Not Exist!' It quotes a WHO epidemiologist as saying "There is no pandemic. The pandemic does not exist. No vaccine is needed. Healthy people do not need gloves, face masks and other protective equipment. There was no need for a lockdown and a curfew as well as the so-called contact tracing. The virus cannot survive on surfaces – such an isolation was only the demand of the governments. Each and every organisation, fitness clubs, theatres, restaurants, cafes and bars can work at full capacity."

This fabrication was also reported by other news outlets, spreading widely. This quote was purportedly based on a statement by the WHO's COVID-19 technical lead, Maria Van Kerkhove, who was answering questions about the asymptomatic transmission of the virus. In reality, the quote attributed to Van Kerkhove by the article completely differs from the video.³

The disinformation about the pandemic being a total hoax was quite popular in Georgia, and particularly dangerous since it may encourage citizens to disobey the rules preventing the spread of COVID-19. By fabricating a WHO official's statement, the perpetrators tried to further bolster and amplify the narrative in an effort to undermine the efforts of the public health authorities.

³ For more details and a full debunk, see this article by FactCheck Georgia.

This story spread virally via Facebook groups and was read hundreds of thousands of times. In total, it gathered almost 40,000 interactions on Facebook (including more than 10,000 shares), and the article on Today in Politics (tinp.ge) had more than 80,000 views alone.

The Lugar Laboratory is suspicious

Source: Tvalsazrisi

Date: 16 June

On 16 June, Georgian website Tvalsazrisi.ge published an interview with the military analyst Tristan Tselashvili, who during the 2008 Russia-Georgia war had been arrested and jailed on charges of espionage, only being released in 2013 by the ruling Georgian Dream party.

Tselashvili claimed that Russia suspects that the Americans are using the Tbilisi-based Lugar Laboratory to create biological weapons, and are considering taking measures in order to prevent it. He suggested letting Russian specialists enter the Lugar Lab and verify that it is not a bio-weapons facility.

Tselashvili also said that “strange things” were happening in the Lugar Lab during the government-imposed curfew and lockdown (imposed by the Georgian government as anti-coronavirus measure). For instance, on 22 May, the Lugar Lab staff, without wearing masks and without respecting social distancing, planted trees together and took a group photo.⁴

Notable actors

Stop 5G Georgia!!!

Facebook group “Stop 5G GEORGIA!!!” was created on April 7, 2020. By the end of May, the group had more than 21,000 members. Although the group now seems to have been taken down by the social network, it played a major role in disseminating COVID-19 related disinformation during its existence, especially about 5G, but also about the pandemic being a hoax, about George Soros exploiting the pandemic to lock down churches and attack the Georgian Orthodox Church, and about Bill Gates wanting to decrease the global population.

Lali Moroshkina

From 2001 to 2003 Lali Moroshkina served in the Georgian Government. She has been a critic of governments led by the pro-Western United National Movement (Ertiani Natsionaluri Modzraoba, ENM) and a vocal supporter of Bidzina Ivanishvili and his ruling Georgian Dream party. She has been a key figure in amplifying COVID-19 related disinformation and acting as a source for sensationalist media outlets.

⁴ Myth Detector has debunked several fake news stories spread by Tselashvili.

Moroshkina frequently features on political television programmes, including on the openly pro-Kremlin Obiektivi TV, and online media. She works as a talkshow host for the nationwide Radio Georgian Times, which is part of the Georgian Times media holding that also shares pro-Russian sentiments. Her Facebook follower count is hidden, but her posts regularly receive hundreds, if not thousands, of reactions.

During the pandemic, Moroshkina has suggested through her Facebook posts that 5G is helping to spread the virus. She has also claimed that the scope of the pandemic and its impact on society has been artificially exaggerated, allowing Elon Musk to launch dozens of satellites for his Starlink project. She has also claimed live on TV Pirveli that Bill Gates plans to use vaccines to “immunise” religious fundamentalists and eliminate the “God gene.”

