



## ISSUE 9



**AUGUST 25 - SEPTEMBER 9, 2020**

### **TOPICS OF THIS ISSUE**

- **Dossier reports: Exposing Russian influence in Georgia**
- **On the spotlight of Alliance of Patriots**
- **Sputnik Audience in South Caucasus**
- **Chinese influence operations in Georgia - Academia, Media, and CSOs**

### **RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS**

**The Alliance of Patriots collaboration with the Kremlin - the Dossier Center reports**

Khodorkovsky's investigative platform, the [Dossier Center](#), published two reports regarding the Alliance of Patriots' (AoP) close links with the Kremlin. **The [first report](#) focused on financial issues, while the [second](#) exposed the details of the relationship of the Kremlin security services and the AoP.**

**The first report exposes the network handling the affairs with the AoP, with the key coordinating role allegedly being played by the head of the Presidential Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries - Vladimir Chernov, a close associate of President Vladimir Putin's friend, Sergey Ivanov.** According to the Dossier Center, in order to promote the AoP for Georgia's October parliamentary elections, Chernov's office reportedly hired Sergey Mikheev, a Kremlin-associated "election expert" sanctioned by the European Union in 2014. Apart from USD 700,000 requested by Mikheev for his services, the AoP reportedly handed Moscow a USD 8,430,625 budget proposal to cover campaign expenses, a list of which includes funds needed for central and regional offices, media-expenses, souvenirs, etc.

**The second report, among other things, includes tips the Russian instructors had reportedly given to the AoP leaders to justify their visit to occupied Abkhazia.** The alleged message box included the following: the visit had charity purposes; acting under "public diplomacy," as reflected in the surveys, is what the people support; and those against the "public diplomacy" are the real traitors of Georgia; neutrality should be enshrined in the constitution - this is to prevent another war; and track one diplomacy proved itself unsuccessful. Remarkably, according to the leaked documents, the AoP staff and their campaigners from Politsecrets have discussed the problems the party is facing when it comes to public support, as the current ratings are hardly achieving the 5% threshold. **Even more important is the Russian campaigners requesting data on Georgian voters from the AoP, including their addresses.**

The Dossier Center reports were followed with harsh political statements across the Georgian political spectrum. **Several MPs demanded the AoP to be removed from the elections, and the MP Elene Khoshtaria from the European Georgia, addressed the prosecutor's office requesting an investigation on possible funding of the AoP by the Kremlin.** The prosecutor's office redirected the appeal to the State Audit Service, claiming it is their responsibility to review the financial affairs of the political organizations. Meanwhile, the AoP leader Irma Inashvili called the materials published by the Dossier Center "absurd." However, it [confirmed](#) that Russian political strategists are indeed involved in the promotion of her party.

We call on the relevant bodies to exercise their authority and begin an investigation into the Dossier Center leaks, which indicate an alleged collaboration with a foreign power on election interference, undermining the very sovereignty of the state. The

negligence from the Prosecutor's Office to launch an investigation raises suspicions about its independence from the political influence. These suspicions are further reinforced by the [probe](#) against the opposition Mtavari Arkhi TV, launched under the sabotage article by the State Security Service.

---

## Measuring Sputnik's audience in the South Caucasus countries



The [DFRLab compared Sputnik's performance in the region](#) with the performance of three well-established and impartial local outlets: *CivilNet* in Armenia, *Oxy.az* in Azerbaijan, and *Netgazeti* in Georgia. The performance of these outlets was examined through three different metrics: (1) analyzing traffic volume on their websites; (2) measuring the social distribution network of each outlet based on the volume of their news content shared on Facebook and Twitter; and (3) analyzing the volume and nature of engagements generated by their Facebook pages. Content from local, impartial media outlets in three South Caucasus countries appears to be distributed by a broader network on social media than that of *Sputnik's* content focused on the region. People in the region engage with content generated by local outlets on social media more often than they do with *Sputnik's* content. This finding indicates that content from the local outlets is more popular among local audiences than *Sputnik's* content.

### Social distribution network on Facebook

To measure the social distribution network, the DFRLab collected posts on Facebook and Twitter that included news content linked to *Sputnik's* outlets in the South Caucasus countries. The DFRLab examined *Sputnik's* content shared on Facebook and Twitter between August 1, 2019, and August 1, 2020, and compared the results with three well-established and impartial local outlets in the region, as shown in the table below. **The results indicate that, although *Sputnik's* distribution network reached more than 25 million followers on both Facebook and Twitter, the local**

## impartial outlets have a broader distribution network of 40 million followers on both social media platforms combined.



Website	Language	Outlet	Country
armeniasputnik.am	Armenian	Sputnik Armenia	Armenia
ru.armeniasputnik.am	Russian	Sputnik Armenia	Armenia
sputnik.az	Azerbaijani	Sputnik Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan
az.sputniknews.ru	Russian	Sputnik Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan
sputnik-georgia.com	Georgian	Sputnik Georgia	Georgia
sputnik-georgia.ru	Russian	Sputnik Georgia	Georgia
civilnet.am	Armenian	CivilNet	Armenia
oxu.az	Azerbaijani	Azərbaycan Xəbərləri	Azerbaijan
ru.oxu.az	Russian	Новости Азербайджана	Azerbaijan
netgazeti.ge	Georgian	Netgazeti	Georgia

Diagram showing two categories of outlets in the South Caucasus region:

- Sputnik news websites in South Caucasus region:** Includes the first six rows of the table (armeniasputnik.am, ru.armeniasputnik.am, sputnik.az, az.sputniknews.ru, sputnik-georgia.com, sputnik-georgia.ru).
- Impartial local outlets in South Caucasus region:** Includes the last three rows of the table (civilnet.am, oxu.az, ru.oxu.az, netgazeti.ge).

Using the social media-monitoring tool CrowdTangle, the DFRLab tracked nearly 85,000 links shared on Facebook, of which 45 percent corresponded to *Sputnik's* news content in the South Caucasus countries, while 55 percent corresponded to the impartial local outlets.

Over the one-year period of analysis, 495 Facebook assets, including Facebook pages, groups, and profiles, shared at least one piece of content from these *Sputnik* outlets. In total, these Facebook assets amassed a social distribution network of nearly 18 million followers, based on the sum of follower counts of Facebook groups, pages, and public profiles.

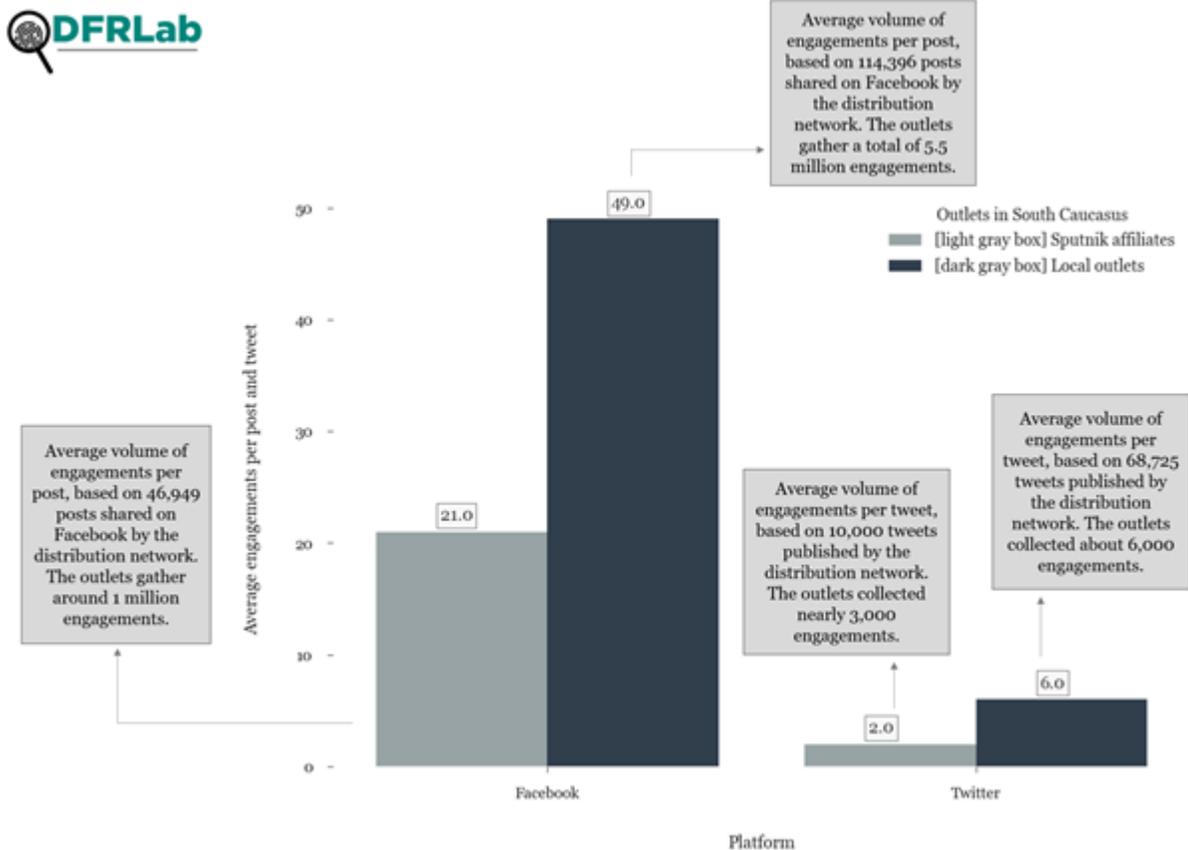
The local outlets in the region, on the other hand, gathered a social distribution network of nearly 35 million followers combined, based on 822 Facebook assets that shared their content at least once from August 1, 2019, to August 1, 2020. **This demonstrated that the social distribution network of these local outlets was almost twice the size of the *Sputnik* outlets on Facebook.**

### Social distribution network on Twitter

An analysis performed by the DFRLab using the tool Brandwatch showed that, between August 1, 2019, and August 1, 2020, around 3,000 Twitter accounts shared at least 10,000 links belonging to *Sputnik's* websites in the South Caucasus countries, while more than 2,500 accounts shared almost 70,000 links from impartial local outlets in the region. Although Twitter accounts shared more news content from local outlets, *Sputnik's* content has a greater social distribution network in the South Caucasus countries: 8 million Twitter accounts compared to slightly more than 5 million for the local outlets.

### Engagement with content shared in social distribution networks

The DFRLab analyzed the levels of engagement with content belonging to *Sputnik's* news websites in the South Caucasus countries. The research measured the engagement by aggregating the sum of actions that users of both Facebook and Twitter took in response to the content shared by the distribution network. On Facebook, users' actions include shares, comments, likes, and reactions, while on Twitter, actions refer to replies, retweets, and favorite counts. Impartial local outlets generated more engagement than *Sputnik* in the region: around 5.5 million engagements to 1 million engagements, respectively, during the period of analysis.



As a Russian state-controlled media agency, Kremlin-funded Sputnik has prompted concerns that the Kremlin would use it as a tool for influencing public opinion in the countries in which it operates. Over the last five years, Sputnik has managed to build a sizeable social distribution network in the South Caucasus. However, its reach and influence appear limited in comparison to well-established, independent local outlets. Trusted local news outlets have wider social distribution networks and garner more engagement on social media. While the reason for the apparent preference for local, independent outlets in two of the three South Caucasus countries is not entirely clear, the Kremlin's continuous meddling in regional affairs likely has made local audiences skeptical of Russian state media.

Read DFRLab's article [here](#).

## MONITORING OF DISINFORMATION CASES

**Alliance of Patriots Party spreads anti-Turkish messages.** AoP's electoral campaign under the name "Protect Adjara! Protect your part of Georgia!" included disseminating an old map published by a Turkish newspaper in 2013, where Batumi is included in Turkey's borders. The party leader Irma Inashvili notes that the map has been recently published by Milliyet, and it proves Turkey's expansionist intentions in the Adjara region. The map was also shared in several Facebook groups by AoP activists with anti-Turkish narratives. Myth Detector [explained](#) the origins and the context of the map that was published in the light of a vague statement made by the leader of PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, back in 2013. Myth Detector also underlined that the Turkish government does not have any claims on the Adjara region, and the border demarcation has been long agreed.

---

**Russian experts accuse the US of violating the NATO-Russia agreement.** Last week Sputnik-Georgia published an article stating that the US continues to mobilize troops along the Russian border, moving the American military contingent from Germany to Poland. The author of the article claims that the Founding Act between NATO and Russia signed in 1997 prohibits NATO from increasing the number of troops in Eastern European countries that have joined NATO since 1997, and therefore claims that the US is violating the agreement. Myth Detector [debunked](#) the false claims, explaining that Russia itself has violated the basic principles of the Founding Act, which led to a change in the European security environment. Thus the commitments made by NATO in 1997 are no longer relevant in today's reality as a result of Russia's actions.

---

**Georgian March against Estonia.** Last week one of the leaders of the far-right group Georgian March, Sandro Bregadze, posted a photo depicting Estonia's president, Justice Minister, and a writer Mikk Pärnits that Sandro Bregadze falsely presented as a homosexual Intelligence Chief. Bregadze's photo [manipulation](#) was also published by News Front Georgia and disseminated in several Facebook groups. The context of Bregadze's Facebook post is in response to the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service 2020 report in which the Georgian March was mentioned as an example of a Russian propaganda weapon, referring to it as an extremist and aggressive movement.

## NAMING AND SHAMING

### **The election campaign of the "Alliance of Patriots" going ahead with the lies**

Several days ago, the "Alliance of Patriots" officially started their scandalous election

campaign in Georgia. As mentioned above, **their billboard placed in the Adjara region, which was later removed by the members of "Lelo for Georgia," carried anti-Turkish messages illustrating the map of Georgia and Adjara in red colors similar to Georgia's occupied regions. This is not the first time "The Alliance of Patriots" is trying to win the elections with these narratives. They have been actively promoting anti-Turkish sentiments even during the 2016 Parliamentary elections.** Irma Inashvili responded to the turmoil of the Georgian community, CSOs, and politicians regarding the controversial banner, blaming it on the provocation coming from the opposition leaders. **She claimed that Saakashvili and Bokeria paid 10 000 GEL to a person who colored the banner in incorrect colors and placed it in the wrong location. "They printed the banner in other colors, hung it in an inconsistent place, then removed it by themselves,"** Inashvili wrote on her Facebook platform. **Nevertheless, reality shows us a different scenario.** Recently, within the frames of their electoral campaign, the alliance started to distribute its newspaper to the various segments of the Georgian society, where the separate section is devoted to the anti-Turkish propaganda. They bring different historical facts to prove Turkey's current covert interests, in which they wise up Turkey's "desire" to spread their traditions and religion on the Georgian population. For this reason, they believe that the Turkish government gives financial support to the young Georgians coming from low-income families, who later stay in Turkey or return with foreign spiritual values.

## CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' INITIATIVES

On September 2, **Civic IDEA** released the 2<sup>nd</sup> [report on Georgian - Chinese Affairs](#). The report is about the CCP's influence operations in Academia, Media, and CSOs. Civic IDEA case studies Georgia; however, the report is written with a comparative perspective of similar practices in other countries. Before the end of the year, Civic IDEA will be sending several other reports and findings of Sino-Georgian relations, including corrupt practices, lack of due diligence on the side of the Georgian government, political influence operations, etc.

Civic IDEA remains grateful to donors who made the work possible, and Mr. Martin Hala for his continued expertise and support.



---

[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, and by the EMERGING DONORS CHALLENGE PROGRAM of the USAID.*

**TRANSITION**  
Transition Promotion Program



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

---



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

---

<b>Office</b>	+420 608 739 902
<b>E-mail</b>	<a href="mailto:info@europeanvalues.net">info@europeanvalues.net</a>
<b>Web</b>	<a href="http://www.europeanvalues.net">www.europeanvalues.net</a>

---

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



**European Values Center for Security Policy**

[info@europeanvalues.net](mailto:info@europeanvalues.net)

[Unsubscribe](#)