

# Disinfometer



## Report on Russian Disinformation

July-August 2020



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## Introduction

Georgia has been targeted by active anti-Western and pro-Russian disinformation for years. This report aims to study the messages of the disinformation mouthpieces and inform readers about trends in their discourse both in regard to Georgia's foreign and domestic political processes.

This report offers a review of the anti-Western and the pro-Russian messages between 1 July 2020 and 31 August 2020. Nine online media outlets and nine Facebook pages were selected for monitoring based on **FactCheck** Georgia's regular monitoring. In total, 1,372 items (articles, videos, photos, Facebook posts) were monitored and 253 media products<sup>1</sup> were included in the report. This publication overviews those materials which were most clear-cut within the pro-Russian and anti-Western media discourse and had a campaign-like dissemination. As a result of the monitoring, eight major clusters of anti-Western and pro-Russian disinformation have been identified.

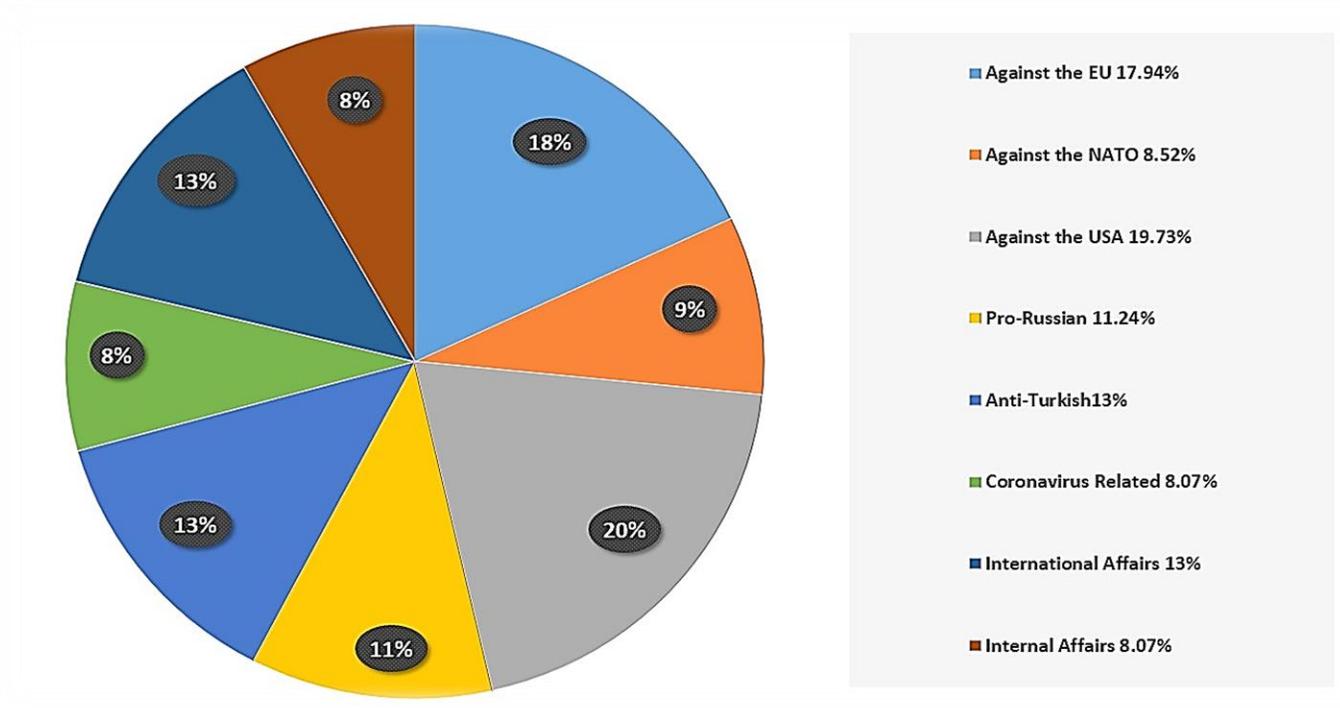
The Facebook social analytics tool CrowdTangle was used to measure the dissemination of disinformation within the social network.

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<sup>1</sup> Since Facebook removed many pages associated with Alt-Info, the eventual number of active links in the report is 223.

## Main Findings

### Disinformation by its targets



### Disinformation Against NATO

- NATO is a functionless organization on the verge of disintegration.
- Georgia will never be accepted into NATO since it is the Alliance's clear position that countries with unresolved conflicts cannot join.
- If Georgia joins NATO, Turkish military bases will be deployed on its territory.
- Georgia's NATO membership means abandoning its territories.
- NATO does not serve peaceful causes but aggressive and military ones instead.
- NATO membership is not the will of the Georgian people and the opinion polls are constantly rigged.
- Cooperation with NATO impoverishes Georgia since the country has to make unnecessary military expenses.
- NATO fears Russia since Russia fights to protect its own interests whilst NATO fights for the sake of money.

### Disinformation Against the USA

- The USA blatantly interferes in Georgia's domestic affairs.
- The US Embassy in Georgia governs Georgian politics.

- The US Embassy in Georgia is in conflict with the US government.
- The USA treats Georgia like a colony.
- The Lugar Centre serves American military interests and Georgia is being prepared for biological warfare.
- US assistance is nothing as compared the money coming from Russia.
- The USA is ruled by Satanists and paedophilia reigns supreme there.
- The USA needs Georgia to use as a military proving ground.
- The USA has become weakened and its global dominance in the military, financial and ideological realms is coming to an end.
- The USA has played and continues to play a negative role in solving the Abkhazia problem and holding negotiations with Russia.
- American interests are behind the processes in Belarus.

### **Disinformation Against the EU**

- The EU-Georgia Association Agreement is no help for settling relations with Russia which is key to take back the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia.
- Georgia has no place in the European economic space and the replacement of the Russian market with the European one is harmful.
- Western loans and investments pose a threat to Georgia.
- The West does not care about democracy.
- The Government of Georgia is an EU puppet and ruled by its resolutions and recommendations.
- The Baltic countries had a better quality of life under the USSR as compared to their EU-membership period.
- European orientation has harmed Moldova.
- A wave of migrants will “inundate” Europe and cause unrest there.
- The EU is on the verge of dissolution – Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and others may leave the union.
- EU countries only took care of themselves amid the pandemic and failed to show solidarity towards each other. They forsook Italy and Spain and, therefore, will also not help Georgia and so Georgia should not strive to move towards Europe.
- The ongoing rallies in Belarus are organized by the EU, Poland and Lithuania which want to disintegrate and carve up Belarus.
- EU-imposed juvenile justice takes children away from their families because of poverty.
- There is no freedom of speech in the West and people are being persecuted for telling the truth.
- EU values are unacceptable and Euro-Atlantic orientations have to be revised.

### **Disinformation regarding International Issues**

- The West fights traditional values.
- Liberals put restrictions on freedom of speech and an investigation will soon be launched against them.
- If not for the shortcomings of Western democracy, the Second World War would not have happened.
- American and European liberals are seeking to cause unrest in Belarus and topple the legitimate government.

- If the Government of Belarus is overthrown, the Ukraine scenario (unrest, confrontation with Russian, a stalled economy, etc.) will unfold there.
- There are EU interests behind processes in Belarus.
- The opposition in Belarus is funded by Soros.
- Lukashenko is the last stronghold of traditional values in Europe.
- If Georgia does not support Lukashenko, Belarus will recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
- Soros organizes revolutions and unrests in Eastern Europe and the Government of Georgia has also been bought off by him.

### **Disinformation regarding Georgia's Internal Developments**

- Reports published by the "Dossier" centre is a fabrication and there are no ties between the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia and the Kremlin.
- Liberal forces are fighting the Church and aim to undermine public confidence in the Church.
- NGOs act against the Georgian people.
- IRI and NDI polls are biased and do not reflect the reality.
- Media outlets which are critical to the authorities are covering the situation in the country in an excessively negative context.
- Opposition parties have no chance to come to power and because of that they will attempt to stage a revolution.
- The 2008 war was started by the UNM government and President Saakashvili.
- Saakashvili's every step during the war was following a script of the Russian intelligence.
- The USA would be comfortable with the victory of the opposition and the defeat of the Georgian Dream.

### **Russia-supporting Propaganda**

- The keys to all of Georgia's problems are in Russia.
- The West forces Georgia not to have dialogues with Russia.
- It is not in American interests that Georgia solves its conflicts because it obviously implies a normalization of Russia-Georgia relations.
- It was Russia again which threw a lifesaver into the Georgian economy.
- Georgia lives at the expense of Russia.
- In spite of the military stand-off, the Russian President has a special attitude towards the Georgian people.
- Russia is benevolent towards Georgia and the Kremlin only needed to occupy Georgia for geopolitical interests.
- In relations with Russia, the problem needs to be found within Georgia itself.
- The West behaves aggressively whilst Russia only defends itself. Alexey Navalny was poisoned by the West to cause unrest in Russia.
- Russia is the only true guardian of national and traditional values.
- Stalin was a genius leader whilst living in the USSR was much better as compared to the "independent and free" Georgia.

## Anti-Turkish Propaganda

- The threat of Ajara’s annexation comes from Turkey and Ajara needs to be defended from Turkey.
- If Georgia joins NATO, Turkey will be able to deploy troops in Georgia and occupy and annex the entire country.
- Apart from Russia, Turkey has also occupied Georgian lands and Turkey is also an occupier.
- Turkey is Georgia’s number-one enemy.
- Ajara’s “Islamisation” and “Turkisation” is in progress.
- Turkey carries out economic and cultural expansion in Georgia through investors.
- The Treaty of Kars expires in 2021 and Turkey may take Ajara.
- Turkey is a factor of instability in the South Caucasus and helping Azerbaijan in the case of a conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan means it may use Georgian territory without permission.

## Coronavirus-related Disinformation

- The coronavirus is man-made in a laboratory.
- There are global forces and Bill Gates-associated groups behind the pandemic.
- The coronavirus is similar to the seasonal flu and not that dangerous.
- Statistics regarding COVID-19 have been falsified.
- Testing is used to collect genetic information about humans which might be used to produce a genetic biological weapon.
- The real aim of vaccination is to reduce the number of the population.
- Vaccination would be mandatory for everyone and the government will make problems for everyone who refuses.

## Disinformation Against the NATO

There were four major narratives promoted against NATO: (1) NATO has a role fatigue and it will soon disintegrate, (2) In spite of false Western promises, Georgia will never join NATO, (3) Georgia’s NATO membership will cost the abandoning of Georgian territories and (4) The Georgian population in fact does not support the country’s NATO membership.

The Pro-Russian *Georgia and the World* has been especially vocal against NATO. As compared to others, this media outlet devoted much more time to the criticism of the North Atlantic Alliance and to the promotion of propaganda disinformation targeting NATO.

In light of the critical discussion between the current US Administration and European nations, on the one hand, and the current tensions between NATO and Turkey, on the other hand, the pro-Russian media sought to cultivate a new narrative, claiming there is large strife within NATO and it will soon disintegrate. In accordance with one of the main narratives of *Georgia and the World*, **NATO is a functionless organization on the verge of dissolution**, is dying and **cannot** make it until its 76<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In addition, *Georgia and the World* claims that if NATO continues its existence, it would be only on paper and will **vanish** in reality. The media maintains there is serious **strife** between the large NATO member states and all of this stems from the fact that the USA does not want to take the interests of its allies into account.

**Georgia will not be admitted to NATO because of the territorial conflicts whilst if Georgia gets a real chance of NATO membership, Russia will launch another military aggression.**

The Stalin Facebook page claimed that the Government of Georgia, instead of having a dialogue with Russia, was galloping towards NATO where nobody would **accept** us. The continuation of the same message is a claim that **we have been hearing false promises of NATO membership since 1994, although the West constantly refers to different criteria to block Georgia's membership**. According to the tv.m.ge website, the West stated multiple times that Georgia would not be **accepted** in NATO and the EU but despite this, the Government of Georgia stubbornly continues going in this direction. The same message was voiced by Alt-Info. In particular, it claimed that Georgia would not be accepted into NATO because of the territorial conflicts and if Georgia gets a real chance to join NATO, Russia will launch another military aggression (for instance, by fostering ethnic conflict in Georgia's Samtskhe-Javakheti region).

The pro-Russian media was also claiming that in the case of Georgia's NATO membership, if that ever happens, Turkish military bases will be **deployed** in Georgia, **paving** the way for Erdogan's **imperialist** ambitions. According to **Alt-Info**, Russia maintains an advantageous military posturing in the Caucasus and NATO will never be able to enter there. They also believe that the USA is unable to **deploy** military bases in Georgia since the regional situation is not favourable to the USA and the balance of power is tilted towards Russia. Alt-Info argues that Russia will never **allow** cannons from Georgia to be pointed at its cities and "if Georgia will persistently pose a problem in this regard, it is possible that the Russian Armed Forces will invade Georgia in the future for their own security."

Similar to the previous months, the narrative that **Georgia's NATO membership means abandoning its occupied territories** was also clear-cut in July-August. According to *Georgia and the World*, countries with conflicts cannot join the alliance, claiming that "this is the clear position of Germany and without solving its territorial conflicts first, Georgia cannot **become** a NATO member country."

According to *Tvalsazrasi*, NATO **serves war objectives instead of peace** and this is attested to by the involvement of its member states in the Middle Eastern conflicts. *Georgia and the World*, to underline NATO's aggressive nature, stated that NATO aimed to **turn** Bulgaria into a frontline in the fight with Russia. In order to highlight the alliances' weaknesses, *Tvalsazrasi* claimed that NATO member states (Greece and Turkey) are getting **prepared** to wage war against each other. Furthermore, *Georgia and the World* claimed that if Georgia joins NATO, the country will be **turned into** a US military proving ground. According to this conspiracy theory, the USA will use Georgia for expected conflict with both Russia and Iran and as a result, harm will be inflicted to Georgia's peaceful population and infrastructure.

Pro-Russian media and Facebook pages widely commented upon the so-called public opinion poll conducted by the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia. These agencies stated that **NATO membership is not the will of the Georgian people** and the new polls by the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia finally **debunked** that myth. They also argued that the 2008 plebiscite on Georgia's NATO membership was rigged and claimed that most Georgians do not wish to **join** NATO.

The messages of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia in regard to NATO expenses were reflected in the pro-Russian media, too. *News Front*, in fact, mirrored the message of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia that cooperation with NATO really **impoverishes** Georgia since Georgia has to make "senseless military expenses." The Eurasia – Information

Agency Facebook page, which is a page of the Eurasian Institute founded by Gulbaat Rtskhiladze and also used to share *News Front* articles, claimed that Georgia **spends** millions in some vague military exercises with the USA and other NATO member states.

**Georgia has to make senseless  
military expenses because of  
NATO.**

*Georgia and the World* also sought to show the superiority of the Russian army vis-à-vis NATO: "NATO **fears the Russian army** since Russian troops fight for the homeland and values whilst NATO troops fight for dollars."

## Disinformation Against the USA

Disinformation against the USA, revealed as part of the monitoring efforts, has been quite versatile and encompassed a full spectrum of anti-Western narratives. Pro-Russian media outlets, such *News Front*, *Georgia and the World*, *Saqinform* and *Sputnik* as well as the Alt-Info, Politicano and Stalin Facebook pages were particularly active as purveyors of anti-American disinformation and propaganda.

According to one of the major narratives, the USA **blatantly interferes in Georgia’s domestic affairs** and **forces** the country to act in line with American instructions. **According** to *Georgia and the World*, changes in election legislation (the adoption of the proportional model) were not a result of the demands of the Georgian people and voters but one “tiny woman, Kelly Degnan, outweighed the whole nation.”

Changes in election legislation (adoption of the proportional model) was not a demand of the Georgian people and voters, but one “tiny woman, Kelly Degnan, outweighed the whole nation.”

This narrative has been actively promoted in the previous months; in particular, during the period of electoral legislation changes. In addition, *Georgia and the World* sought to cultivate nihilism in regard to participation in elections among its readers and stated that everything will be fully in line with the advanced-prepared American **script** in the October 2020 elections.

According to *News Front*, the **US Embassy governs Georgian politics**, has the ruling party and the liberal opposition subordinated and “unless the US Embassy is padlocked, we **cannot have** freedom and deoccupation.” *Georgia and the World* went even further and issued a call to launch an investigation against Kelly Degnan and against the USA in general to investigate crimes committed in Georgia. The Politicano Facebook page also blamed the USA for blatant interference in Georgia’s domestic affairs and **called for** people to stage mass protests in front of the US Embassy.

The October 2020 parliamentary elections will be fully in line with the advance-prepared American script.

*News Front* **blamed** Ambassador Degnan for the decision of the Government of Georgia to refrain from congratulating Lukashenko on winning the presidency and accused the Prime Minister of silent obedience. As **claimed** by *Saqinform*, Americans are threatening Georgian authorities that **if the new parliament (one elected after the October 2020 elections) does not have a multi-party representation, they will recognize the elections results as null and void and repeat the Belarus scenario.**

In the reporting period, a novelty within the context of anti-American disinformation was emphasizing a rift between the current US conservative administration and the “liberal US Embassy in Georgia.” There was an active information campaign that the **US Embassy is in confrontation with the American authorities** and the US Embassy’s policy does not reflect the **positions** of the Trump administration. **According** to *Tvalsazrishi*, the US Embassy in Georgia lobbies liberal positions, notwithstanding the current conservative authorities in the USA. It also claimed that the Trump administration supports the Georgian Dream whilst Ambassador Degnan acts in opposition and assists/supervises Saakashvili and Bokeria.

During the monitoring period, the pro-Russian media constantly sought to [marginalize](#) the US-Georgian strategic partnership and claimed that the USA [treats Georgia like a colony](#) instead of a partner and friend. *Tvalsazrisi* published an [article](#) where the USA is represented as an invading state. Alt-Info actively [promoted](#) a similar narrative that the USA [imposes](#) its own policy over Georgia and the latter's authorities are unable to resist. According to its narrative, the influential Western (American) elite [pursues](#) a colonial policy vis-à-vis small countries which takes place in Georgia [through](#) the US Embassy. These elites do not allow Georgia's national forces to succeed.

In addition, Dimitri Lortkipanidze (Director of the Primakov Russian-Georgian Public Centre and a current independent MP candidate for the Didube-Chughureti majoritarian constituency) [said](#) that Frontera and the Anaklia Seaport cases were 21<sup>st</sup> century colonialism. Mr Lortkipanidze opines that the US efforts not to allow Russian and Chinese investments in the Anaklia project

US efforts not to allow Russian and Chinese investments in the Anaklia project run counter to the practice of partner relations.

run counter to the practice of partner relations, claiming that "Washington's complete political monopoly in the country is nothing short of openly manifested colonialism which was demonstrated by the Frontera case once again."

During the monitoring, disinformation against the Lugar Centre was again promoted to discredit the USA. Some media outlets blamed the Lugar Centre for [serving](#) American military interests and preparing Georgia for biological warfare. The pro-Russian media sought to mystify biological laboratories in post-Soviet countries and [circulate](#) conspiracy theories about them. According to their messages, Americans are [collecting](#) biological samples in different countries in order to produce biological weapons targeting specific ethnicities.

"Americans torture toddlers because during torture, a toddler releases some liquid and famous stars and personalities use that liquid to stay young."

Robert Sturua, in his interview with Radio Utsnobi and which was later published as an [article](#) on *News Front*, talked about the morality of the American elite and regurgitated an absurd conspiracy theory, claiming: "Americans torture toddlers because during torture, a toddler releases some liquid and famous stars and personalities use that liquid to stay young." *Georgia and the World* [asserted](#) that the USA is governed by Satanists and paedophiles.

According to yet another narrative, **US assistance is nothing as compared to the money coming from Russia** and Georgia does not really [need](#) it. *Saqinform* claims that US aid to Georgia is mostly [used](#)

to bribe the “third sector” and fund the Russophobic media. In addition, US aid is a means to **bribe** the government and ensure unconditional obedience from them. The Kardhu Facebook page circulated a **disinformation** that “the USA threatened Georgia to cut aid unless we released Giorgi Rurua from prison.” Mr Rurua is a share-holder of the opposition-minded TV channel, Mtavari, and one of the supporters of the 2019 June protests.

In turn, *News Front* **cultivated** the idea that **Georgia does not the USA** and that it is the latter which needs Georgia “as America’s only military stronghold in the Caucasus and the Black Sea – Against Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey as well as a reserve corridor to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and vice-versa – as a transfer point in the case of attacking Iran.”

The propaganda campaign, emphasizing that the **USA is getting weakened** and its global dominance is coming to an end, was part of some anti-American hysteria. According to *Georgia and the World*, US foreign debt is rising catastrophically and the economy cannot **sustain** this much longer. As stated by the media outlet, USD is in **crisis** and will soon be **replaced** by CNY. According to *News Front*, the modernization of the US Air Force has been going **unsuccessfully** and it is outperformed by its rivals. The pro-Russian media also used coronavirus themes to highlight America’s weakness. According to their narrative, the coronavirus revealed the feebleness and the inability of the American system and, as a result, Western media also **relinquishes** influence and advantage. Moreover, the pro-Russian media claims that Washington’s positions are also being undermined in the Caucasus and it seeks to delegate responsibility to others. Americans **prefer** Turkish dominance in the Caucasus as compared to Russian and Iranian dominance and they are ready to sacrifice Georgia to achieve these goals.

Pro-Russian groups also sought to positively portray Russia within the context of the settling of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and, on the contrary, promoted negative propaganda targeting the USA. According to a *News Front* **article**, the **Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations which were successfully taking place in 1997 owing to Russian mediation, were foiled by the Americans.**

*Georgia and the World* also took aim at American liberalism and capitalism. According to the newspaper, liberalism **dragged** America into the swamp of unrest and chaos. This time, it were blacks who “**enslaved**” whites and soon “LGBT sect followers” will attempt to do the same vis-à-vis “normal people”. The same media outlet claimed **that Americans, in the name of liberalism, support** “**process of moral decay of public**” which is in progress in Europe. According to *Georgia and*

“Increased violence and homicides among Georgian adolescents is the result of liberalism and the American (Western) education system.”

*the World*, increased violence and homicides among Georgian adolescents is the **result** of liberalism and the American (Western) education system. Their authors claim that the US-imposed system **turned** Georgia into a criminal state. *Georgia and the World* maintains that the “Democrats and the Republicans are not in fact independent political parties but fractions of one large capitalist party” which aims to exploit people in the **interests** of the small financial elite. Valeri Kvaratskhelia, TV Obiektivi journalist, claimed in the same article that the incompatibility of social justice and capitalism will end in the total collapse of the latter, adding that **capitalist rules comes to an end and socialism will soon reign supreme in the USA.**

The anti-Western media also sought to blame the USA for **disseminating** Russophobic propaganda. *Saqinform* claimed that the American promote fake news in regard to Russian interference in other countries’ elections. According to the same claim, reports published by “Dossier” about the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia are a part of that process.

**Information** about American interests behind the processes in Belarus was also actively reported. **According** to *Georgia and the World*, “Americans cultivate this evil against Russia. In this particular case, they aim to tear Belarus away from Russia in the same way that they tore Ukraine away.” The USA **seeks** to “destroy Belarus – the last stronghold of the post-Soviet space – and have Orthodox Russia encircled by NATO.”

## Disinformation Against the European Union

July-August monitoring identified purveyors of EU-related propaganda and disinformation. These sources are: *Georgian and the World*, *News Front*, the Stalin Facebook page, *Tvalsazrisi*, Kardhu, Georgian Idea, *Saqinform*, the Politicano Facebook page, the Anti-Paradox Facebook page, Georgian Thought and Alt-Club.

In the monitoring period, pro-Russian propaganda sought to convince readers that the **EU and NATO are baiting Georgia with membership but, in fact, there are no such prospects.** Therefore, according to the disinformation “we are left dishonoured, on our knees, begging, hopeless and desperate instead of becoming a promised independent, democratic and rich NATO and EU member.”

On the other hand, Kremlin propaganda **sought** to **convince** readers that “in the modern Western economic space, there is no place for us [Georgia]” and “for the West, Georgia is merely a transit territory connecting Europe and Asia and nothing more.” In this manner, they sought to marginalize the need and benefit of Georgia’s EU membership. The pro-Russian media also circulated another item of disinformation of an **economic** nature according to which the **replacement of the Russian**

market with the European market brought Ajara on the verge of a heavy social and demographic catastrophe which, in turn, unleashed Turkey’s “cultural-economic expansion” in the region.

Propaganda purveyor pages manipulatively reported information about loans which Georgia received from European nations amid the pandemic-induced crisis. For instance, they [wrote](#) that “**grants and loans from Germany to Georgia are debts for generations.**” Moreover, [according](#) to *Georgia and the World*, **foreign direct investments are harmful and dangerous**, naming the case of Greece as an example. The newspaper also [wrote](#) that the West (the USA and Europe) demanded an “urgent and complete privatization of state-owned property” several years ago and sought to show that the privatization policy was harmful for the country.

“Reports published by the ‘Dossier’ against the Alliance of Georgia is another piece of American fake news to show Russian interference in other countries’ elections.”

Yet another narrative which anti-Western propaganda sought to promote was the portrayal of the Government of Georgia as [puppet](#) of the Europeans. They claimed that Georgia is [governed](#) by Brussels-adopted resolutions and recommendations; that is, orders, although in contrast with the conquerors of the previous centuries, the chief value of the modern West is the “primate of LGBT sect followers.” The pro-Russian media claimed that the West did not care about Georgian democracy in the past and does not [care](#) about it now, emphasizing that when “over one-third of the Georgian population; that is, 1,360,000 people are starving, the main concern of the political elite is to how to please the [West](#).”

Georgia is governed by orders from Brussels although in contrast with the conquerors of the previous centuries, the chief value of the modern West is the “primate of LGBT sectarians.”

In order to marginalize the already reaped benefits from the EU and the expected benefits from EU membership, anti-Western sources promoted disinformation that “six years of relations with the EU only [harmed](#) Moldova.” To this end, they claimed that the Baltic countries lived better under the USSR as compared to current-day [Lithuania](#) since nothing has improved since joining the EU and NATO.

An important issue of EU-related disinformation concerned the EU-Georgia Association Agreement. *Georgia and the World* [claimed](#) that Georgia’s current foreign policy, which was reflected in signing the Association Agreement, impedes the country from settling the conflict with Russia.

Anti-Western sources have demonstrated their marked support toward the EU-based far-right groups which was manifested in the selective coverage of Eurosceptic and far-right news. For instance, it was reported in concert that discontent in the Czech Republic on EU membership **increased** by 10%. They also claimed that “many do not **share** the so-called European values” and named Hungary and Poland as an example, pointing out that under the pretext of “protect rights,” the EU may demand “lobbying the interests of sexual minorities and guarantees to accept migrants” in exchange for financial assistance.

The Baltic countries lived better under the USSR as compared to the present day.

Similar to the previous months, the migration issue was actively exploited to discredit the EU. According to anti-Western propaganda, “**the wave of migration nearly inundated Europe**” and migrants **cause** unrest in European cities. *Georgia and the World* **wrote** that many French, Belgian, German and Dutch nationals understand that millions of migrants are alien and hostile to European culture whilst European humanism resembles mental illness. *Georgia and the World* also stated that **Europe lives under the dictatorship of multiculturalism and political correctness**. The pro-Russian media also **noted** that because of migrants coming from North Africa and the Middle East, Italexit (Italy leaving the EU) may happen. Speaking of Italy, they also claimed that the EU superimposed the euro common currency over Italy, thereby harming the latter’s economy and its government had to follow the EU-dictated policy. This reason was named to illustrate the inevitability of Italexit.

Anti-EU propaganda was constantly touting that the EU is on the verge of disintegration. This message was identified in the monitoring of the previous months. For instance, the pro-Russian media wrote that the “only way for any state willing to keep its sovereignty and economy is to leave the EU.” Stemming from this assumption, they claimed that “the Netherlands may **leave** the EU” whilst Nexit (the Netherlands leaving the EU) was assessed as a reason for the eventual disintegration of the EU. France, Denmark, Sweden and Austria were also named as candidates for leaving the EU.

For any state willing to keep its sovereignty and economy, the only solution is to leave the EU.

Anti-Western propaganda also exploited the coronavirus-induced crisis and referred to it as yet another reason behind the future disintegration of the EU. In this regard, they **reiterated** the propaganda narrative promoted in March-April 2020: “**The pandemic has shown everyone that there is no shared political solidarity between the European nations.**” As stated by *Georgia and the World*, amid the pandemic “all EU countries became self-absorbed and **left** Spain and Italy to their death. The newspaper did not exclude Italy and Spain leaving the union because of the coronavirus-induced economic problems and **announced** the final dissolution of the EU afterwards.

On this topic, *Georgia and the World* [wrote](#) that the big European countries “always stick together, in the G8, the EU or in any other union or alliance but once it was needed, once Italy and Spain fell, all of the others started to overrun them. For any country willing to maintain its sovereignty and economy, the only solution is leaving the EU. They turned their backs on those countries in need and limited themselves with apologies alone, something similar when they want us to be content with their concern/indignation.” As claimed by the pro-Russian media, given the lack of solidarity within the EU, the latter will also not help Georgia and Georgia has to stop going towards Europe. The pro-Russian media also talked about Western impotence during the 2008 August war: “The West only became concerned and did not help and today there is even less chance of getting aid because there is no longer such a geopolitical conjuncture in the West as there was even 12-15 years [ago](#).”

In regard to the recent events in Belarus, pro-Russian sources were writing that “Europe [fears](#) Russia’s open interference and new conflict which is why Brussels is more tolerant of Lukashenko.” The pro-Russian media also claimed that the West is behind the ongoing processes in Belarus. According to *Tvalsazrasi*, even Macron [acknowledged](#) that “rallies in Belarus are [organized](#) by the EU.”

The European Union is behind the demonstrations in Belarus.

[According](#) to the Kremlin’s propaganda, “Europe and America do not recognize the expression of the will of the Belarusian people and, instead, make emphasis on those 10% who are active in the streets, seeking to provoke [Lukashenko’s] government and to have massive bloodshed similar to the Ukrainian Maidan and blame everything on the government and Lukashenko personally.” *News Front* also accused Poland and Lithuania of “wishing to, in fact, dismember and carve up Belarus.” In July-August, the Code of the Child was an active topic of discussion for anti-Western pages. Anti-Western sources claim that the juvenile justice, which was introduced in Georgia, is similar to the one in the EU. This code, they claim, implies the government taking children away from their families because of poverty and, as a result, poor families (more than 20% of the families in Georgia) are [facing](#) this danger. The media outlets maintain that the juvenile justice, imposed by the strategic partners, will [contribute](#) to disregarding traditions and family sanctity which are fundamental for Georgia.

Pro-Russian propaganda also [stated](#) that “freedom of speech in the West is in danger and this danger is growing daily.” [According](#) to them, “in the West, people are persecuted and harassed only because someone dares to say that morality, decency and family are good and promiscuity, immorality and depravity are bad.” They claim that people in the West are punished for protecting traditional values

and the West also seeks to implant the same in Georgia. These messages were actively promoted in the previous months.

In July-August, pro-Russian sources sought to discredit the EU by [referring](#) to its past. *Georgia and the World* even [dedicated](#) a [series of articles](#) to the “[shady history of the EU](#)” where the authors claimed that the European project is a “clandestine plan of transnational elites to implement a reliable system of control over the national governments.”

The main objective of the European Union is to uproot national sovereignty.

The newspaper claims that the main objective of the plan is to “uproot national sovereignty.”

Traditionally, manipulative messages in regard to the EU values were also actively promoted:

- The EU is a [Masonic-Satanist](#) organization.
- For the sake of experiment, “hundreds of children were deliberately [handed over](#) to paedophiles in Germany.”
- In most Western countries, propaganda of sexual depravity has [become](#) an integral part of public life.
- The “Liberalism-poisoned West” questions the existence of two sexes.
- The Berlin Film Festival symbolic bear “[lost](#)” its sex.
- In most Western countries, same-sex marriage is legal.
- In France, the words “mother” and “father” were replaced by “parent number one” and “parent number two.”

In contrast, pro-Russian sources are referring to the Russian legislation which [bans](#) same-sex marriage.

In order to portray the EU as a union which fights traditions, the anti-Western media was [talking](#) about a new [law](#) in the EU candidate state of Montenegro which was adopted after the EU called for it. According to these media reports, “the law allows the seizure of property from the Serbian Orthodox Church” and “legalizes sodomite unions.” By referring to these examples, the pro-Russian media sought to convince its readers that Georgia has to [abandon](#) Euro-Atlantic integration: “If hatred towards the church and disregarding family sanctity is a European value, we do not want such a Europe.”

## Disinformation on International Issues

During the monitoring period, propaganda information about international issues was almost fully overwhelmed by the events in Belarus. The pro-Russian media actively sought to accuse the West

of being behind the processes in Belarus and continued portraying Lukashenko's government and Russia in a positive light which was in line with the Kremlin's official position. The following sources were involved in manipulative reporting: the Politicano Facebook page, the Kardhu Facebook page, *Georgia and the World*, *Tvalsazrissi*, *News Front* and the tv.m.ge website.

The pro-Russian media made use of the unfolding events in **Belarus** to promote a disinformation narrative that the West is **fighting** against traditional **values** whilst Lukashenko is being **persecuted** for **defending** those values. *Georgia and the World*, Politicano and *Tvalsazrissi* **blamed** American and European **liberals** for **organizing** the unrest and the attempted overthrow of the legitimate government. According to Kardhu, Belarus is the first case when the West's scenario for revolution has **failed**.

The West persecutes Lukashenko because of his defending traditional values.

According to the pro-Russian media, if Lukashenko's regime falls, processes **similar** to Ukraine will be **unleashed** there and the country will be **impoverished**, **destroyed** and **depraved** in the **name** of democracy. Those media outlets point to the West as the provoker and planner of the Belarus events. They claim that the processes in Belarus are **orchestrated** from abroad and Soros-funded **groups** together with the EU are putting on the **pressure** there. *News Front* also **saw** the West behind the protests and claimed that the choice of the people of Belarus was **overrun** by the West. According to *News Front*, the Catholic world is **fighting** Orthodox Belarus.

Processes in Belarus are ruled from abroad and Soros-funded groups together with the EU are putting on the pressure there.

Those media outlets also actively sought to **portray Lukashenko as a strong ruler** and patriot. *Tvalsazrissi* stated that "Lukashenko is the last stronghold of traditional **values** in Europe". The tv.m.ge website said that Georgian "liberals" went to Belarus to cause **unrest**. Gulbaat Rtskhiladze even **drafted** a petition in the name of Georgia to congratulate Lukashenko on his election victory. *Georgia and the World* **reported** that most Georgian people, in fact, supported Lukashenko. *News Front* and *Tvalsazrissi* claimed that in the case of Georgia refraining from **supporting** Lukashenko's regime, he will **recognize** the independence of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, pushing other countries to follow suit.

Apart from Belarus, the **pro-Russian media traditionally assaulted liberalism and Western democratic systems**. According to *Tvalsazrissi*, liberals are fighting against the freedom of **speech** and announced an imminent investigation against them. *Tvalsazrissi* also sought to convince readers that "they do all the favours for blacks, Indians and Arabs whilst **mistreating** Georgians." George Soros, in line with the Kremlin's traditional message-box, was portrayed in Georgian pro-Russian media as

an [organizer](#) of unrest and revolutions in post-Soviet countries. George Soros was also blamed for the ongoing instability in Africa and for instigating the Arab Spring. He was proclaimed as a chief financier of the aforementioned revolutions. According to *Georgia and the World*, the Government of Georgia is similarly [bought off](#) by Soros and the Western capital which comes into the country in the form of assistance. *Georgia and the World* [asserts](#) that Georgia is under the West's domination: "Today, the geographic names of the conquerors have been changed – Karakorum is now Washington, Istanbul is Brussels, Isfahan is Strasbourg and Georgia is governed by resolutions and recommendations adopted there."

## Disinformation Regarding Georgia's Internal Developments

The monitoring identified a number of important domestic political issues targeted by disinformation and propaganda efforts. These issues were manipulatively reported by the following anti-Western and pro-Russian media: *Sputnik-Ossetia*, *Saqinform*, *News Front*, *Tvalsazrisi*, the Capital City Facebook page, the Anti-liberal Doctrine Facebook page, the Stalin Facebook page, the Alt-Club Facebook page, the Geo Pepe Facebook page and the Alto-Info Facebook page.

Several different directions can be identified in regard to the disinformation about Georgia's internal developments in July-August. In particular, [according](#) to some online media outlets identified as a part of the monitoring, **liberal forces keep fighting to make the Georgian Orthodox Church fall apart**. In this regard, of note is *Georgia and the World's* [article](#) of 29 July 2020 where Guram Gamtsemlidze, a priest, claimed that the CRRC (Caucasus Research Resource Centre) [survey](#), which said that number of parishioners attending the Easter service dropped by 91% as compared to the previous year and many Orthodox Christians disagreed with the use of a common spoon during communion, did not reflect the reality. As stated by the clergyman, the CRRC survey as well as the reports produced by the other "Soros-funded" organisations are, in fact, a declaration of the ideological desires and aspirations of those particular groups instead of the reality. According to this narrative, **NGOs want to turn the Georgian Orthodox Church into a "symbolic and exotic" institution** which would be unable to influence the country's public and political life as it is in the West.

Liberal forces are fighting to make the Georgian Orthodox Church fall apart.

Similar to the previous months, the propaganda campaign spearheaded by the anti-Western media against the NGO sector, the critically-minded media and opposition parties was also identified in July-August. This may have been more dangerous given the context of the October parliamentary elections in Georgia since the activity of the civic sector is the most important and relevant amid the election campaign period.

Numerous attempts to discredit the civic sector were identified as a part of the monitoring. In particular, similar to the priest Guram Gamtsemlidze, the leader of the Georgian March political party said that NGOs were beggars which “are on the Soros payroll” to act against the Church. On 31 July 2020, the Georgian March held a rally near the Open Society Foundation office. Activists of the pro-Russian party [set fire](#) to an effigy of George Soros and declared that the NGO sector was a foreign-funded force acting against the Georgian people.

NGOs are on the Soros payroll to act against the Church.

Simultaneously with the criticism against NGOs, anti-Western pages and the pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots of Georgia claimed that the International Republican Institute (IRI) survey figures, according to which only 3% of the population support the pro-Russian party, [are](#) inaccurate and biased. At a press conference dedicated to the so-called social survey conducted by the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, Irma Inashvili [stated](#) that apart from the IRI, the National Democratic Institute and the Edison Research were “liar organisations.”

In addition, monitoring also revealed the actions of the anti-Western news agencies and some of the Facebook pages targeting the opposition media and parties. In this regard, the propagandist media acted against the [Mtavari TV](#) channel, [Qronika+](#) and [TV Pirveli](#). According to the narrative, these opposition media outlets seek to portray the situation in the country in a negative light and to this end report fabricated or exaggerated stories. In addition, *Tvalsazrisi* claimed that the United National Movement government was the [regime](#) which “demolished churches” whilst in power. In addition, according to an [article](#) published by *Tvalsazrisi*, the UNM **plans to commit a series of murders prior to the election** because “murder is the UNM’s trademark” whilst the “corpse-collector Vano [meaning ex PM Vano Merabishvili]” and “bloodthirsty Giga [Giga Bokeria, UNM government high official, currently leader of European Georgia]” have no chance to come back to power without [bloodshed](#). Yet another pro-Russian media outlet, *Saqinform*, [referred](#) to the UNM’s supporters as a sect whilst [according](#) to *Georgia and the World*, the opposition parties have no chance to defeat the Georgian Dream and, therefore, they will resort to violence in order to change the government and will attempt to stage a revolution.

Another area of criticism voiced by anti-Western and pro-Russian Facebook pages and online media outlets to target the opposition was a propagandist campaign against the former government conducted in the context of the Russia-Georgia war anniversary in August. The monitoring revealed that the following media either blamed the UNM government for waging the Russia-Georgia war in 2008 or for falling into a Russian trap and succumbing to provocation: [Sputnik-Ossetia](#), [News Front](#),

*Georgia and the World*, *Tvalsazrisi*, *Capital City* and *Alt-Info*. In particular, *Sputnik-Ossetia*, *News Front* and *Georgia and the World* openly blamed Georgia and the third president of the country for starting the war. According to *Tvalsazrisi*, Saakashvili who is the “leader of the **co-occupier** party” together with Russia “unrolled the red carpet” for Russia and “led” its troops into Georgia. The Capital City Facebook page promoted Soso Manjavidze’s<sup>2</sup> viewpoint who claimed that each step of the Saakashvili government vis-à-vis Russia was made “in line with the script of Russia’s strategic intelligence.” *Alt-Info* blamed the wartime authorities for their failure to bring the issue of the forthcoming Russian aggression to the attention of international partners prior to the outbreak of the war and for a lack of harsh rhetoric against Russia from the very beginning.

Of note is that the anti-Western/pro-Russian media and political parties often **blame** the Georgian Dream for “excessive liberalism” and sometimes **refer** to it as an unacceptable political party as the UNM. However, in parallel, these media outlets sometimes express direct or indirect support to the Georgian Dream. For instance, Arno Khidirbegishvili, editor-in-chief of the pro-Russian *Saqinform*, **claimed** in his editorial of 2 August 2020 that the Georgian Dream’s victory and independently forming the government is not in US interests whilst the success of the opposition and forming a multi-party coalition government is “vitaly important” for Washington. According Mr Khidirbegishvili’s claim, this is stipulated by US belief that the Georgian Dream may not accede to Washington’s request to deploy American military bases in Georgia in the case of a potential military campaign against Iran. This, Arno Khidirbegishvili believes, would be less likely under a multi-party government.

Saakashvili unrolled the red carpet for Russia and led its troops into Georgia.

Furthermore, the pro-Russian media *Tvalsazrisi* offered its commentary on reports published by the “Dossier” Centre, founded by the Russian opposition figure and businessman, Mikhail Khodorkovskiy, on the Kremlin-provided funding for the election campaign of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia. In particular, as claimed by *Tvalsazrisi*, the reports published by the “Dossier” Centre are “**gibberish** produced by the IT guy clicking a keyboard” and, therefore, Elene Khoshtaria [opposition leader from European Georgia] reporting to the Prosecutor’s Office to launch an investigation on the issue of the funding of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia “had no legal ground” and this attempt of “MSIIR-educated Khoshtaria” turned out to be unsuccessful.

The defeat of the Georgian Dream, the opposition’s success in the elections and forming a multi-party coalition government is “vitaly important” for Washington.

<sup>2</sup> Soso Manjavidze was one of the leaders of the pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots of Georgia until 2014. Currently, he **leads** the political section of the Civic Alternative news portal.

## Russia Supporting Propaganda

Dozens of Russia-supporting propaganda items by the pro-Russian media and Facebook pages were identified as a part of the monitoring. They emphasize the importance of the resumption of Georgia-Russia relations, Russia's military and economic might and the benevolence of Russians and Georgians towards each other. At the same time, the Russian threat was written off or equalled to Georgia's Western partners in light of discrediting Europe and the USA. In terms of Russia-supporting propaganda, the following entities were the most active: *Georgia and the World*, *Saqinform*, *News Front*, *Tvalsazrissi* and the Stalin Facebook page.

During the monitoring period, the anti-Western and pro-Russian media were particularly active in advocating traditional topic of Russian propaganda which is the narrative of the restoration of relations with Russia. According to them, it will be foolish if Georgia does not start a dialogue with Russia because **“the key to all of Georgia’s problems is in Russia”** and **“without Russia nothing will work with Abkhazians and Ossetians.”** In turn, supporters of normalizing relations with Russia believe that Georgia cannot make a step towards the start of negotiations because of Western instructions and because **“it is not in the Western and foremost American interests that Georgia solves its conflicts peacefully since that will automatically lead to normalizing relations with Russia.”** Hence, according to local purveyors of Russian propaganda, the visit of the leaders of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia to the occupied Abkhazia, which took place with Moscow's blessing, was quite a positive thing. To corroborate this narrative, pro-Russian forces cite that part of the IRI survey, where 75% of the population supports a dialogue with Russia. However, based on the same survey, 78% of the population supports Georgia's NATO membership which is something with which the Kremlin's apologists are in disagreement. In addition, pro-Russian media makes emphasis on Russia's military and economic might which they claim attests to the necessity of Tbilisi and Moscow's establishing relations anew. According to this narrative, in spite of the conflict, it was Russia again who threw a lifesaver to Georgia amid the pandemic. The export of Georgian goods to Russia was named as proof. *Georgia and the World* together with *Saqinform* stated that “over 90% of the harvest is exported and sold in Russia” and in general “Georgia lives at the expense of Russia.”

“It is not in the Western and foremost American interests that Georgia solves its conflicts peacefully since that will automatically lead to normalizing relations with Russia.”

During the monitoring period, the pro-Russian media still continued efforts to overlook Russia's aggression against Georgia. According to *Georgia and the World*, although Georgia is no longer a CIS member state, the "Russian President still has a **special** attitude [towards Georgians.]" Pro-Russian sources highlighted that in spite of the "benevolence" of the Russian government towards Georgian people, "the Kremlin is obliged to protect its own national interests and people from threats." According to their view, "[by occupying Georgia] **Russia was forced to protect its own geopolitical interests which was stubbornly disregarded by Georgia which was turned into a puppet of aggressive Western circles.**" Local purveyors of Russian propaganda claimed that most of the Georgian **people**, who are sympathetic to Russia and who are **artificially** subjected to "Russophobic" sentiments, understand this very well. Furthermore, Russian propaganda even proclaimed that the problem in Russia-Georgia relations is in **Georgia** itself because the "[Georgian side] has breached every verbal, written and contractual agreement with Russia since the 1990s" whilst "with excessive nationalism, chauvinism and inconsistency, it destroyed relations which were built over years, as well as life, in an apple-pie order."

Russia was forced to protect its own geopolitical interests vis-à-vis the West by occupying Georgia.

Monitoring revealed that similar to the previous months, the pro-Russian media continued to portray the West as a global aggressor and Russia as acting in self-defence. For instance, *Georgia and the World* claimed that **in August 2008, the USA ordered Georgia to start the war against Russia** to which the latter responded and the results for Tbilisi were calamitous. According to *News Front*, Russian opposition politician Alexey Navalny was **poisoned** not by the Kremlin but by the West in order to cause political tensions or, in the best case, unrest in Russia. *Georgia and the World* wrote that the US instruction to Georgia is to commit **provocations** at Russia's southern borders; Russia has never been in such a hostile environment as it currently finds itself and therefore Moscow has to take relevant **measures** in response.

Alexey Navalny was poisoned not by the Kremlin, but by the West, to cause political tensions or unrest in Russia

Simultaneously with such narratives, pro-Russian media portrayed Kremlin as champion of the traditional values and proclaimed normalizing relations with Moscow as a priority for Georgia. In particular, according to *Georgia and the World* "global community understood that the only powerful protector of national and traditional values is Russia, stretched at 1/6 of the earth and its President Vladimir Putin, that is why simple people **count** on him". According to this narrative, in light of African and Asian migrants soon outnumbering local population in Europe, "Russian President takes **preventive** measures: he wants to attract people from neighbouring countries, who

culturally and mentally, or as in case with Georgia, religiously close to the Russians and provide them with better conditions than in USA or Europe.

Together with all the aforementioned, Russian propaganda continued to idealise the Soviet Union and cultivate nostalgia. According to the respective narrative, “[Georgia was flourishing](#)” in the Soviet era, “[genius](#)” leader Stalin, who “[brought the world to its knees](#)” was a huge [sponsor](#) of scientific and cultural advancement, whilst the USSR itself was “an union established as a result of [liberation](#) of workers in one big part of the earth”.

## Anti-Turkish Disinformation

The monitoring revealed sources which promoted anti-Turkish propaganda and disinformation: Georgia and the World, News Front, Tvalsazrishi, Facebook-page Stalin, Kardhu, Facebook-page Capital City, Facebook-page Turkey is an Occupier, Saqinform, Facebook-page Ani-liberal Doctrine, “Georgian Idea” and “Georgian March”.

In July-August monitoring period, anti-Western and pro-Russian propaganda mouthpieces, by referring to “threat” coming from Turkey, sought to portray Turkey as main enemy of Georgia and propagate necessity of Russian aid to Georgia to defend against Turkish threat. Of note is that disinformation/propaganda on this issue increased as compared to the previous period.

*Georgia and the World* has been outstanding in spreading propaganda in the aforementioned direction and sowing groundless fears in public. The newspaper claimed that “[Erdogan tries to revive the Ottoman Empire](#)” and [has](#) a chance of territorial expansion at Georgia’s expense. This narrative is in line with the years-long campaign of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia. In August, the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia erected a banner in Ajara, captioned as “Defend your own share of Ajara” and reiterated this narrative in campaign ads. This step of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia was followed by public outcry. Pro-Russian sources threw their [support](#) to the campaign of Alliance of Patriots of Georgia and concluded that public criticism [was](#) “another provocation against the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia”. Pro-Russian media also responded to the criticism in regard to banner and said it was an [attack](#) and “[campaign to discredit](#)” Alliance of Patriots of Georgia. [According](#) to the [News Front](#) editor, Shota Apkhaidze, Turkey has its own geopolitical interests in the Caucasus and these interests cover Georgia, since the latter was part of the Ottoman Empire. Shota Apkhaidze believes that within the context of neo-osmanism, pan-Turkism and Erdoghan’s foreign policy, Georgia and

Turkey would be able to conquer entire Georgian territory “under aegis of NATO” and deployment of Turkish military in Georgia will be “Turkish occupation of Georgian territory”.

foremost Ajara, is considered as an integral part of Turkey and joining Ajara is in progress through annexation, economic expansion and political reverences. Shota Apkhaidze also promoted disinformation narrative, according to which “if Georgia joins NATO, Ankara will really succeed in deploying its troops in the neighbour country and no legal aspect will be an impediment”. Therefore, Apkhaidze was claiming that Turkey “under NATO’s aegis” can occupy entire Georgian territory and deployment of Turkish military in Georgia will be “Turkish occupation of Georgian territory”. Moreover, he claimed that “America has negotiations with Turkey and if Georgia joins NATO, USA will hand over these territories first of all to Turkey”.

In the monitoring period, pro-Russian sources actively sought to portray **Turkey as an occupier** and **demande**d that similar to the museum of Russian occupation, open museums for Turkish, Arabic and Persian occupation. According to Georgia and the World, if the Georgian Dream and United National Movement make emphasis on “Russian occupation of 22% (!) of the Georgian territories” then they should not forget “34% permanently occupied by Turkey”. In addition, Georgia and the World sought to justify Bolshevik Russia’s invasion of Georgia by a phony argument that ostensibly “Bolsheviks returned soil to Georgia sold by the Mensheviks for piles of cash”. Citing this example, Georgia and the World compared Bolshevik invasion of Georgia to Ottoman conquest of Georgia and concluded that the latter was much more damaging for the country.

Analogously to Georgia and the World, News Front also circulated **disinformation** that Russia has done nothing bad to Georgia (“Russia did not fight religion, Georgian consciousness, independent thinking and did not oppress us), whilst Turkey has never defended Georgia from the Russian aggression. A political entity, Georgian Idea published **video**, saying that similar to Russia Turkey is also an occupier (not a partner), who captured enormous Georgian territory and continues occupation and annexation of Ajara. Based on this, the Georgian Idea claimed that “Turkey is Georgia’s number one enemy”.

**According** to the anti-Western sources, it is true that Russia occupied Georgian territories, but **Turkey had already annexed the country’s territories**, which they claim is even worse. In addition, Facebook-page Kardhu claimed that Georgia refused to celebrate Didgori Day not to annoy Turkey and because of that, the page called for people to protest. In order to make image of the enemy from Turkey, anti-Western sources **circulated** a list of Turkey’s hostile actions against Georgia entitled as “What Turkey has Wronged Us”? To the same aim, **appeals** such as “Turkey is a physical occupier and spiritual aggressor” and “#Turkeyisanoccupier” were regularly **circulated** throughout the social networks.

According to *Georgia and the World*, historically speaking, **Turkish brutality ended only after Georgia joining Russia**, which was followed by driving out Turks and taking back Georgian territories. The newspaper claims that Turkish imperial policy still continues but not by sword and fire but at the hands of investors, whom Turkey uses to carry out economic and educational-cultural expansion, which constitutes Turkification and Islamisation process.

In the context of Turkish imperialism, pro-Russian sources linked demand of building mosques in Ajara to “re-Islamisation of Ajara”. According to them, next stages of “Turkish expansionist plan” imply settlement of ethnic Turks in Ajara and “joining Ajara to Turkey”. As per propaganda, “who believes that Turkey does not carry out Islamisation and Turkisation of Ajara is either a complete idiot or Turkey’s agent”.

**Turkish imperial policy still continues, but not by sword and fire but at the hands of investors**

According to News Front, Turkey pursues “soft power” policy in Georgia, which means acquisition of buildings in Batumi by Turkish businessmen. The media outlet claimed that Russia must get credit for getting Ajara back to Georgia from Turkey, whilst on the contrary, “Georgian people sold Ajara-Kobuleti and settled 40,000 Turks there”. *Georgia and the World* said normalizing relations with Russia and adopting military non-alignment was the solution of that problem. *Saqinform*’s editor-in-chief also concluded that “Turkish factor made the USA acknowledge that majority of the Georgian people strives towards Russia.” These messages are fully in line with the message-box of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia.

The monitoring also revealed an intensification of disinformation messages in regard to the Treaty of Kars. For instance, *Tvalsazrisi* and the Stalin Facebook page claimed that the **Treaty of Kars will expire in 2021** and “only Russia is able to defend against the expected Turkish aggression.” According to *Saqinform*, based on the Treaty of Kars, Ajara can soon be given to Turkey and only Russia “is the sole safeguard that Turkey will not occupy Georgia or at least part of it.”

The Georgian March made contradictory remarks regarding this topic. On the one hand, they stated that the expiration of the Treaty of Kars in 2021 was a myth but, on the other hand, said that based on Agreement Between the Republic of Georgia and the Republic of Turkey on Partnership, Cooperation and Good Neighbour Relations of 25 March 1993, it is possible that Turkey may take Ajara. According to the Georgian March, the reason behind this was part of the 1993 agreement where the parties committed to respect the Treaty of Kars which was signed on 13 October 1921.

According to *Georgian and the World*, Turkey is interested in aggravating the situation in the South Caucasus and Ankara is a factor in the instability of the region. In the context of the conflict between

Armenia and Azerbaijan, pro-Russian sources [indicated](#) an emerging threat that in order to help Azerbaijan, Turkey may use Georgia's territory as a military route and bridgehead without any prior permission or agreement, something which would be an infringement of Georgia's sovereignty. Pro-Russian sources also [blamed](#) the Embassy of Turkey in Georgia for moving the Armenia-Azerbaijan confrontation to Georgia's territory.

## Disinformation Regarding the Coronavirus

Although the epidemiologic situation was relatively stable in Georgia throughout July and August, coronavirus-related disinformation was still actively promoted. The major narratives were unchanged:

- The virus was man-made in a laboratory.
- The virus is followed by an enforced vaccination which aims to decrease and control the population.
- COVID-19 is not that dangerous and is a typical flu, or moreover – it does not exist at all.

In contrast with the other targets, the coronavirus-related disinformation had much more diverse sources and a larger scale of dissemination. Social network accounts (including fake accounts) were actively used to circulate disinformation. Many well-known public figures were also involved in promoting disinformation regarding the coronavirus.

According to one of the [claims](#), Chinese scientists who fled from China and found shelter in the USA acknowledged that the **virus was man-made in a laboratory**. The contrasting [information](#), that it was the Americans who created the virus for world hegemony, was also reported. A fake [photograph](#), showing former US President Barack Obama together with Anthony Fauci and Melinda Gates (Bill Gates' spouse) ostensibly visiting a Wuhan laboratory in 2016, was making the rounds as proof of the virus being man-made.

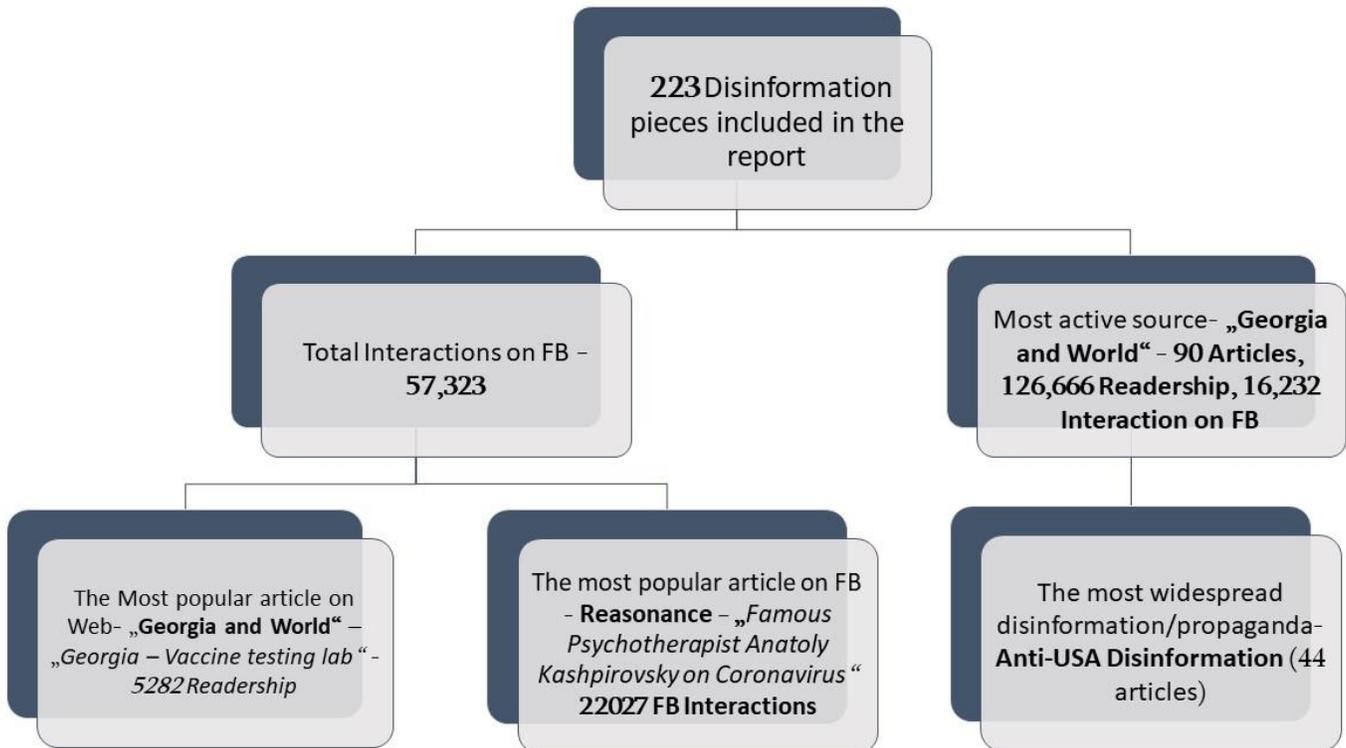
A [video](#), claiming that the coronavirus is not a [lethal](#) virus and myths and panic about it are artificially created, was actively circulated through Georgian social networks. The coronavirus was equalled to a seasonal [flu](#). In addition, it was reported that the pandemic statistics were falsified and the official data do not correspond to the reality. *Tvalsazrisi* reported that out of 1,000 coronavirus deaths in Italy, only 18, in fact, had died from the coronavirus. The Stalin Facebook page demanded that Georgia's relevant authorities published the full names of all of the infected individuals. In addition, the same Facebook page [claimed](#) there were simply no infected people in Georgia.

**False information about testing** was also buzzing around in social networks. According to the Georgia Above All Facebook page, "[testing](#) can be used to collect the world's population's DNA

database and implanting nanochips and the so-called ‘sleeping’ viruses in the body.” In accordance with the same message, testing allowed the [collection](#) of biological samples of half of the Georgian population which were sent to the USA. It was claimed that the testing was used for genetic [mapping](#) to produce a targeted biological weapon. Some groups even asserted that testing is [dangerous](#) for human health and deeply inserting the testing swab into the cavity between nose and the mouth during a test might cause a brain [injury](#). The Stalin Facebook page [circulated](#) an allegation of the so-called South Ossetian security service that the Lugar Laboratory employees, acting in US interests, were catching bats in villages adjacent to the so-called border and this was supposedly related to the coronavirus. According to Tskhinvali-based office of *Sputnik*, the Lugar Laboratory [poses](#) a real life hazard not only for Georgian and South Ossetian peoples but for the whole Caucasus.

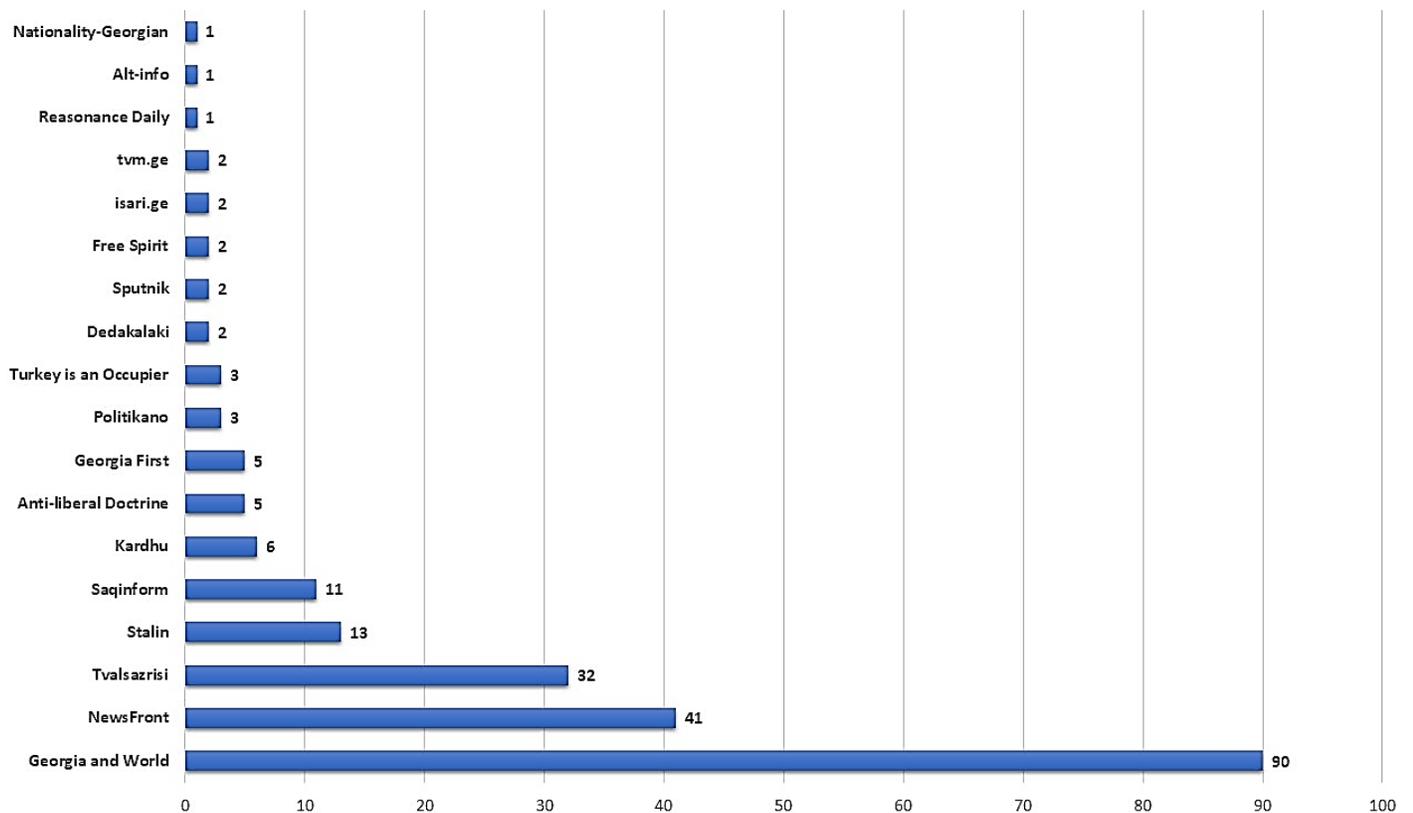
The primary target of the coronavirus-linked disinformation was **vaccination** and related issues. The Free Spirit Facebook page [claimed](#) that Masons plan to use the vaccination to degenerate mankind and decrease the population. The author of the post called for people to refuse vaccination. The same page [promoted](#) false information that the God of Death, Anubis, was depicted on the COVID-19 “vaccine equipment.” It was actively reported that an experimental vaccine, which would not be lab-approved, was to be [tested](#) on people. The *Resonance* newspaper [quoted](#) the Russian psychotherapist, Kashpirovsky, who claimed that Bill Gates and associated groups would use the coronavirus vaccine for the mass extinction of people. *News Front* was [writing](#) based on pseudo-scientific Global Research that the vaccination will become globally mandatory in the future and which might indicate threats and interests behind it. Georgia Above All [claimed](#) that if a mandatory covid-vaccine is not administered to children, the government will take children away from their families. *Georgia and the World* reported fake [information](#) that large coronavirus-affected countries refused the experimental vaccine and that it would be tested in Georgia and other similar countries. It was also [reported](#) that the vaccine will degrade and mutate human genetics.

## Statistics of the Main Actors



As part of the monitoring, a total of 1,372 items were studied and 253 of them were included in this report. However, since Facebook removed Alt-Info and related pages in October 2020, a total of 223 active links are included in the report. *Georgia and the World* was the most active as the leading media in terms of Facebook outreach, website reads and the number of articles. Of note is that *News Front*, which was the most widespread source in the first two reports (January-February and March-April), had its outreach decreased in the current monitoring period. Although *News Front* still ranks second in terms of the number of articles, its circulation (interactions) on Facebook is null. All *News Front* articles posted on Facebook were removed by *News Front* itself (because Facebook has not blocked pages promoting *News Front* content), supposedly to hide inauthentic behaviour and evade sanctions. There is a remarkable hike in the activity of *Tvalsazrasi* in the monitoring period. If previously *Tvalsazrasi* largely acted as a news agency, which relatively seldom promoted disinformation and propaganda, it became quite active in July-August in that regard and achieved the largest reach on Facebook after *Georgia and the World*.

## Statistics of the Sources Included in the Report



Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) is a non-partisan, non-governmental policy watchdog and multi-profile think-tank which was established in October 2012. GRASS conducts research and in-depth analysis of Georgia's foreign, security, disinformation/propaganda, public policy and public administration fields.