

Disinfometer



Anti-Western Disinformation During the
Pre-Election Period

September-October 2020

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Authors:

Iakob Lachashvili, Nika Mamuladze, David Naroushvili

Editors:

Paata Gaprindashvili, Mariam Tsitsikashvili

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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.

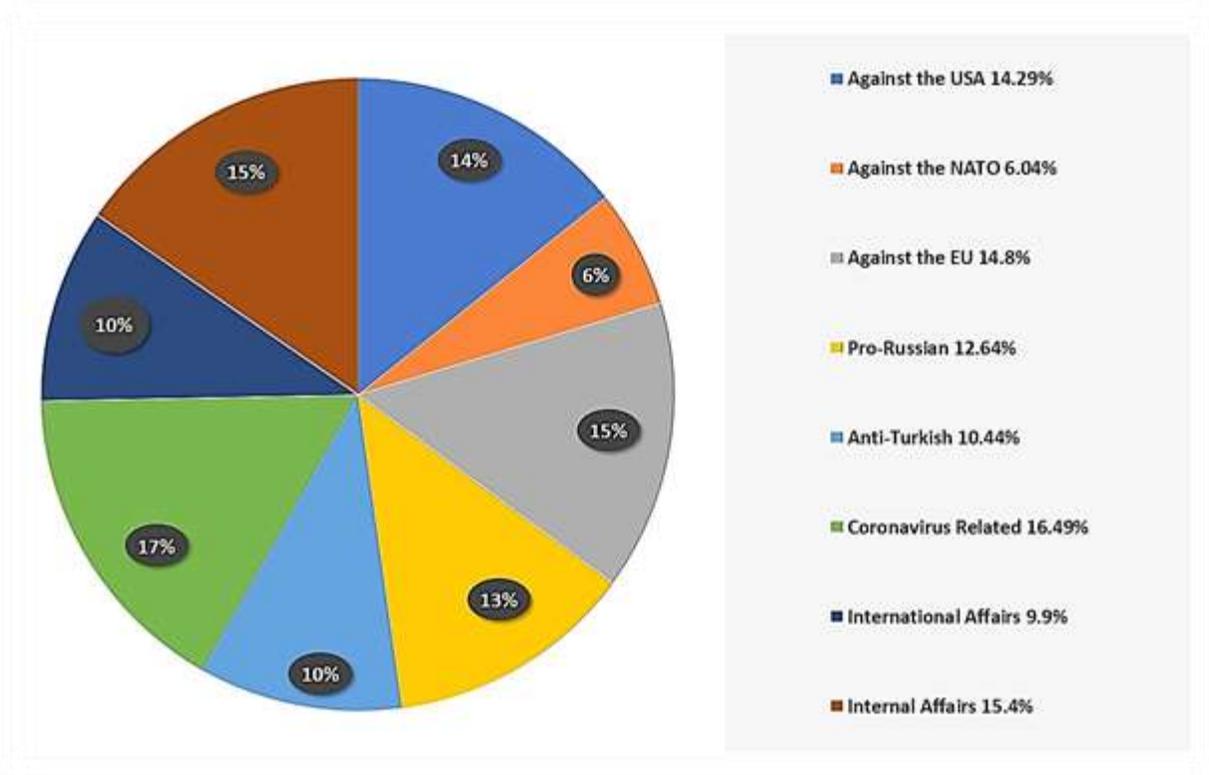
This report offers a review of the anti-Western and the pro-Russian messages between 1 September 2020 and 31 October 2020. Fourteen online media outlets, 11 Facebook pages, four TV channels and three political parties were selected for monitoring based on Georgia's Reform Associate's **FactCheck** Georgia's regular monitoring. In total, 457 items (articles, videos, photos, Facebook posts) were monitored and 187 media products¹ were included in the report. This publication overviews those materials which were the most clear-cut within the anti-Western and pro-Russian 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.

¹ Since Facebook removed many pages associated with Alt-Info, the eventual number of active links in the report is 182.

Main Findings

Disinformation by its targets



Disinformation Against the NATO

- The North-Atlantic vector will turn Georgia into a battleground between NATO and Russia.
- Georgia irritates Russia by having cooperation with NATO and prompts a response from the former.
- NATO cannot give Georgia back its lost territories.
- Georgia will not be admitted to NATO because NATO will be unable to defend it from Russian aggression in the case of Georgia's membership.
- Georgian people do not support NATO membership.
- The North-Atlantic vector chosen by Georgia's political elite is wrong and damaging.
- NATO is in a crisis and disagreement between its members and the US withdrawal will cause its disintegration.
- After the collapse of the USSR, NATO is useless and cannot handle modern security challenges.
- Turkey will be one of the reasons behind a split in NATO.
- NATO arranges provocations in the Black Sea, although Russia's navy in the Black Sea poses problems for NATO.
- NATO will not provide a guarantee of Georgia's security and besides the adoption of military neutrality, it would be better for Georgia to align with fellow Orthodox and nuclear Russia which is

feared by the West and remains the “only unconquered stronghold on way of the world’s global depravity” for the “liberast West” which fights against Orthodox Christianity.

Disinformation Against the USA

- Georgian politics is run by the US Department of State and they made the Georgian Dream’s party list for the parliament.
- Georgia is an American colony and Ambassador Kelly Degnan is an informal ruler of Georgia together with Bidzina Ivanishvili.
- Ambassador Degnan blatantly interferes in Georgia’s internal affairs and gives instructions to the political parties.
- The USA forces the Georgian Dream to have cooperation with Saakashvili’s “torturer party.”
- Georgia could not get anything tangible from a 30-year-long US protectorate, “except gay prides.”
- The USA has puppet governments in Georgia and Ukraine which are not allowed to pursue independent foreign policy.
- There is no such thing as Russian propaganda and the Americans are artificially shoving this problem down our throats to bolster a liberal core in Georgia.
- Unresolved conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are in US interests to disallow the improvement of Georgian-Russian relations.
- Americans foiled negotiations between Georgians and Abkhazians in 1997 and 2004.
- The weakness of the Armenian army in the Karabakh War is because of their American instructors.
- Most of the American population is illiterate whilst 40 million Americans live in absolute poverty.
- Georgia’s export income from the USA is negligible whilst billions come from Russia.
- Novichok was created in the West (USA) and Navalny was poisoned by the Americans to hinder the completion of the North Stream 2 construction.

Disinformation Against the EU

- Georgia is the EU’s colony and is enslaved by the West.
- The West hinders Georgia from normalizing relations with Russia.
- Europe seeks to foster political instability in Georgia to hinder foreign; in particular, Russian, investments from coming to Georgia. Europe made us adopt changes in the electoral system (120/30 and 1% threshold) aiming to form a coalition government precisely because coalition governments fail everywhere.
- Europe made Georgia set a low election threshold because Western-aided liberal parties would otherwise not have made it to the parliament.
- Gender quotas in the parliament were forced by Europe and quotas for ethnic, religious and sexual minorities may follow.
- The EU does not want to see Bidzina Ivanishvili and the Georgian Dream again at the helm of the government even if voters support them.
- A Western education system depraves children and the West may force the government to introduce studies on LGBT relations.
- The EU limits the sovereignty of its member states and aims to establish a unified superstrate.

- As a result of signing the Association Agreement with the EU, the Parliament of Georgia is now powerless.
- Europe made the Parliament of Georgia adopt the Code on the Rights of the Child which deprives families of their children and does not leave families any practical possibility to defend their interests in court. Therefore, this law is a manifestation of fascism.
- The problem of disinformation was brought upon by the West with promoting freedom of speech and the West itself actively circulates disinformation.
- “Market Islam” is being promoted in Europe.
- Migrants contribute to the dire criminal situation in the EU and pose a threat to European values and culture.
- There is an ideological split between Eastern and Western Europe and it would be a great victory of the US foreign policy to take advantage of that split and separate Central and Eastern Europe from the EU.
- The EU is on the verge of collapse – border changes may start in Europe and a coalition of anti-Western states encompassing Eastern and Central European nations may be formed around Poland and under the US protectorate.

Disinformation on International Issues

- Putin stopped the West’s “evil” plan to overthrow the legitimate government in Belarus.
- The West uses its puppets to blatantly interfere in the internal affairs of Belarus.
- Belarus is a bulwark of traditional values and Western liberals fight against it.
- Georgia openly supported Azerbaijan in the Karabakh conflict.
- Georgia does not allow humanitarian cargo transit to Armenia whilst Turkish weaponry headed to Azerbaijan uses Georgian territory without any problem.
- Soros and affiliated groups wage a coordinated battle against traditional values all across the world.
- There are special centers in the West where activists are trained to stage revolutions in different countries.
- The UN has a new plan which aims to establish a world government and an army as well as abolish private property and the institute of family.
- Western Europe eschewed Christianity and was subjugated by the LGBT diktat.
- The Church of England hides mass pedophilia within its ranks and tries to cover up offenders.

Disinformation Regarding the Georgia’s Internal Developmentx

- The UNM government sold Davit Gareji to Azerbaijan and Mikheil Saakashvili, Temur Alasania, Grigol Vashadze and Giga Bokeria were involved in the deal.
- Natalia Ilichova and Iveri Melashvili took money from SOCAR in exchange for betraying their own country.
- The “Dossier” reports are a libel targeting the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia.
- There is no Russian propaganda in Georgia.
- Robbing the Bank of Georgia office in Zugdidi was a performance staged by the UNM.
- A defeat of the Georgian Dream in the elections and Mikheil Saakashvili coming to power means losing Abkhazia and South Ossetia forever.

- In order to influence the political process in Georgia, George Soros funds the opposition parties through the budget of Transparency Internal Georgia.
- If the opposition does not win, they plan to start a revolution.
- There is a liberal censorship in social networks and different opinions are persecuted.

Russia Supporting Propaganda

- We are 70% to blame for the troubled relations with Russia.
- Georgia lost territories owing to Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Georgia nationalism.
- There is readiness in Russia to have cooperation with healthy political parties.
- The opposition's provocation at Gavrilov Night is not anti-Russian (anti-occupation) but anti-Georgian.
- We have to start large-scale asymmetric negotiations with Russia.
- Georgia has to declare military non-alignment or neutrality.
- The restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity and the further development of the country would be possible not by declaring neutrality but only in the case of forming a military-strategic union with Russia.
- Georgia is occupied by several countries simultaneously.
- Georgia depends on Russia and Moscow can make Georgians starve.
- Georgia has to make a choice between the "liberast, godless" West and the "coreligionist, Orthodox" Russia.
- Russia was forced to sign an act of Georgia's disintegration.
- In the 200 years when Georgia was part of the Russian Empire, Georgian was second to none.
- People lived better under the "infamous communism."
- Stalin was a great supreme commander and loyal to moral values.

Anti-Turkish Propaganda

- Turkey has occupied 33% of Georgia.
- Turkey openly presses claims on Ajara, Guria and Samtskhe-Javakheti.
- "Protect Your Share of Georgia... Do not Surrender Ajara to Tukey.
- Turkey will take Ajara away from us by the force of the Treaty of Kars.
- Ajara is being "Turkified" and "Islamised."
- Turkey is an enemy of Georgia.
- Turkey plans the resettlement of 100,000 Meskhetian Turks in Samtskhe-Javakheti which is part of Turkish Neo-Ottomanism and Pan-Turkism and in this manner Turkey will accomplish an ideational and material occupation of Samtskhe-Javakheti.
- Only Russia will defend the South Caucasus from Turkey.
- The EU and NATO will not be able to defend Georgia from Turkey's expansionist policy.
- "The Russian leadership decided they lack capacity to rule the Caucasus and again delegated it to Turkey" and as a result "war, slaughter, hunger, invasion and full occupation" await Georgia.

Coronavirus Related Disinformation

- The coronavirus is not a dangerous virus but is similar to the seasonal flu.

- The lethality of the coronavirus is similar or less as compared to the seasonal flu.
- There are plans to test experimental vaccines in developing countries like Georgia.
- Vaccines are approved without necessary testing and clinical trials in the West and there are plans to test them in third-world countries.
- UNICEF plans to test experimental vaccines in Georgia.
- In America, vaccines are directly administered to the people without first testing them on animals.
- There are plans to change human genetics by the vaccines.
- Bill Gates wants to destroy mankind with a genetically engineered vaccine.
- There are long queues of potential buyers for the Russian vaccine “Sputnik V,” including the US and EU member states.
- The Russian vaccine is 100% effective and has no side effects.
- People’s genetic samples are collected by PCR tests and used for trials afterwards.
- There are plans to implant microchips produced by Elon Mask in humans through the coronavirus vaccine.
- The numbers of infected and dead by the coronavirus are artificially bloated.
- Many elders who died in Italy were administered a special lethal injection to save pension and health expenses.
- Thermal screening damages health and wearing face masks is also a health hazard.
- Cocoa oil, water dissolved hydrogen peroxide and hot steam inhalation cure the coronavirus.

Disinformation Against NATO

The monitoring identified purveyors of anti-NATO propaganda disinformation: the social-political movement Georgian Idea, Patrioti TV, News Front, *Georgia and the World*, the Stalin Facebook page, the Antiliberal Doctrine Facebook page and Viewpoint.

One of the Kremlin’s chief objectives is to halt the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) internationally and undermine its unity. In the case of Georgia, pro-Russian propaganda aims to cultivate a negative attitude on the part of the Georgian people towards NATO and Georgia’s NATO integration.

The Pro-Russian outlet Patrioti TV [wrote](#) about the attempt to transform Georgia into a military proving ground, claiming that military exercises under the NATO aegis are held in Georgia to this end. According to the disinformation, this has a single aim – “to subjugate the Georgian nation and Georgians by fire and sword, by conflicts and waging wars, by a degradation of the public and undermining its faith.”

**NATO cannot and will not help
Georgia take back its lost
territories.**

According to the pro-Kremlin media News Front, Shevardnadze's decision at the end of 20th century to choose Georgia's NATO integration was wrong. News Front names the acquisition of low-quality tanks from the Czech Republic in 2000 as an example of irritating Russia whilst the actual damage was inflicted on Georgia. News Front claims that Shevardnadze believed Georgia would have knocked at NATO's door in 2005. However, this was a futile hope. Mikheil Saakashvili, whose hopes increased after George W. Bush proclaimed Georgia as a "beacon of democracy" in 2005, started "war games" with Russia, although NATO's door was still nowhere to be seen.

Georgia and the World sought to convince readers that the "North-Atlantic Alliance is currently undergoing its most serious crisis since the day of its creation" because the "alliance in fact lost the aims of its existence, manifested in a confrontation of US-aligned nations vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and its allies." As a result, some members of the Alliance cut defence spending which sparked disagreement and conflicts within NATO with the USA being the most vocal in criticising Europe in this regard. The Pro-Russian outlet also sought to portray the disagreement within NATO in such a way that it would cause the dissolution of the Alliance. For instance, *Georgia and the World* named disputes between the US and Europe on multiple issues (defence spending, the construction of the "North Stream 2"). Given these factors, *Georgia and the World* stated that after "tensions reach the tipping point," the US will announce its withdrawal from NATO whilst the "US withdrawal from NATO augurs war" and the US will provide only financial and not military assistance to Europe.

Georgia and the World also wrote that "NATO's long-term erosion process has started since there is no such thing as a perpetual alliance." *Georgia and the World* named the "unresolved" conflict between the West and Turkey as one of the reasons behind the split in the Alliance. According to the pro-Russian mouthpiece, NATO thinks that Turkey is a "potential traitor and collaborationist" which can betray in times of danger. For instance, the US thinks that Turkey will neither declare war on Russia nor help NATO in the Baltics and as a result "NATO's rear in the South is defenceless." *Georgia and the World* also listed the reasons behind the confrontation between NATO and Turkey:

- Erdogan "threatens NATO allies and European partners with war."
- Turkey has cooperation with Israel's enemy HAMAS in contradiction with US demands.
- Turkey breaches the UN arms trade embargo and goes into confrontation with French and Greek ships.
- Turkey contributes to the flames of war in Libya against the interests of the US strategic partner.

As a result, Turkey forces the USA to get actively involved in order to avoid a conflict in the Mediterranean. *Georgia and the World* also touched upon the history of NATO and promoted disinformation that because of the refusal to use USD in international trade, the US and its satellites mercilessly dealt with the North African and Middle Eastern countries.

Anti-western actors, speaking about NATO's engagement in Black Sea security, [noted](#) that the "Alliance continues provocations in the Black Sea that threatens regional security;" therefore, the non-NATO members of the Black Sea region should [demand](#) the withdrawal of the NATO fleet from the Black Sea since "it openly seeks to provoke Moscow and engage in naval battles." In regard to the confrontation between Russia and NATO in the Black Sea, they wrote that during the NATO military exercises in the Black Sea on 23 September 2020, the "American media was initially reporting the active patrols of British military aircraft and ships close to the borders of the Russian Federation" in order to "detect Russian weaknesses." However, according to the pro-Russian media, the appearance of three military vessels of NATO member countries in the Black Sea created big problems for NATO because the "Russian navy blocked NATO ships when they were trying to approach the Russian borders."

The Alliance is in a serious crisis since it lost the objectives of its existence and will soon disintegrate.

With the aim of discrediting NATO, pro-Russian networks were promoting [information](#) through social networks on anti-NATO posters placed in the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The posters had manipulative and propaganda captions: "NATO aircrafts took half a million coronavirus tests from Italy" and "Not in NATO." Pro-Russian sources claimed that the aim of the billboards was to call on the population "not to allow Bosnia-Herzegovina's rapprochement and integration with NATO under any condition" since NATO bombed the Republic of Serbia during the civil war (1992-1995). Therefore, "Bosnian Serbs stated many times that if the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina acts against the interests of the Serbian people, the Serbian Republic will press for a referendum to leave this country."

After criticizing the idea of Georgia's obtaining security guarantees through NATO membership, *Georgia and the World* also promoted the pro-Russian narrative of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia on adopting military non-alignment as an alternative. *Georgia and the World* [posed](#) the question: "Is the time ripe in Georgia for political alignment together with military non-alignment?" In terms of political alignment, *Georgia and the World* was referring to Georgia's alignment with Russia which is "corroborated" by the following arguments:

- 1) Russia is a nuclear superpower, feared even by the West, and Georgian politicians should not be speaking with Russia in the language of ultimatums but quite the opposite (Russian propaganda narratives also featured an emphasis on Russian power and NATO's weakness and fear towards Russia as illustrated in the previous reports of the Disinfometer).
- 2) We share the same faith with Russia which is the "only unconquered stronghold on the way of global depravity" countering the "liberast West" which is fighting against Orthodox Christianity (of note is that the pro-Russian political parties energetically advocate for a non-alignment policy for Georgia).

Of importance is that some political organisations promoted anti-NATO messages within the context of Georgia's 2020 parliamentary elections. The pro-Russian political party, the [Alliance of Patriots of Georgia](#), [promised military neutrality](#) to the voters and [stated](#) that Georgia has been long and unsuccessfully trying to join NATO and, therefore, the country has to abandon that course.

According to another political party, United Georgia – Democratic Movement, led by Nino Burjanadze, speaking on NATO membership is irrelevant and “if the UGDM comes to power they will not pursue the policy to join NATO” since under the presence of Russian troops in Georgia, NATO membership is very dangerous and will hinder the solving of Georgia’s territorial integrity whilst on the contrary, the non-block status will be a positive factor in dealing with this issue.

The social-political movement Georgian Idea and its leader, Levan Chachua, also claimed in the same context that Georgia was knocking on NATO’s door “like a beggar” whilst in fact talks about NATO membership are far-fetched because the West did not defend Georgia either in 1921 or in 2008 and it will not defend it in the future as well. Moreover, Mr Chachua claimed that the West ruined Ukraine and now they are ruining Georgia. As stated by the leader of the Georgian Idea, NATO is also unwilling to have Georgia as a member and promises only “something better than MAP.” Levan Chachua also argued that NATO cannot give back Georgia’s occupied territories which is attested by Ukraine’s example and territorial problems (Cyprus) within NATO itself. Of note is that the previous Disinformeter reports also encountered disinformation that in the case of NATO membership, Georgia would lose Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, although the example of Cyprus was used for the first time in 2020 monitoring.

According to Mr Chachua, NATO openly claims that Georgia will not be admitted with the lost territories because it will not be able to defend Georgia from Russian aggression. He further argued that the population is being deceived by being given false NATO membership prospects and people have lost faith in NATO, also asserting that the 2008 “referendum” (plebiscite) on NATO was rigged and if it were held today, most Georgians would refuse NATO membership even though the Alliance itself does not want to admit Georgia. In the case of winning seats in the parliament, Levan Chachua promised voters to “raise the referendum issue on Georgia’s NATO membership” in order to close this topic. Giving promises on holding a referendum on NATO membership in the pre-election period is a novelty on the part of anti-Western groups.

**The 2008 referendum
(plebiscite) on NATO
membership was rigged.**

Disinformation Against the USA

The United States of America has again been one of the prominent targets of disinformation and propaganda. Discrediting the USA as well as its international institutes and aid programs is usually high on the agenda of the anti-Western and pro-Russian groups in Georgia. *Georgia and the World* has been outstanding in displaying anti-American sentiments whilst the Stalin, Cardhu and Politicano Facebook pages, the online media Saqinform, News Front and isari.ge were also active.

According to *Georgia and the World*, the US Department of State is in complete charge of Georgia and even drafted the Georgian Dream’s parliamentary list. In his interview with *Georgia and the World*, the majoritarian MP candidate from the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, Viktor Tsaava, nominated in the Martvili-

Chkhorotsku-Tsalenjikha-Abasha district, stated that Georgia is a European and an American colony and a “slave of two masters.”

Similar to the previous months, anti-Western actors and media actively sought to discredit the US Embassy in Georgia and the American ambassador. Pages affiliated with Alt-Info were regularly attacking the US Embassy. [According](#) to Alt-Club, the US Ambassador Kelly Degnan drafts the agenda for Georgian political parties and it was her who “instructed” them to sign the pre-election “Code of Conduct.” Alt-Club also posted a humorous meme where the ambassador is blamed for the infringement of Georgian sovereignty. The Stalin Facebook page [referred](#) to Ambassador Degnan as an informal ruler of Georgia together with Bidzina Ivanishvili. [According](#) to Saqinform’s editor-in-chief, Arno Khidirbegishvili, projects implemented by US Embassy funds in Georgia, which aim to raise awareness among the people, in fact constitute a blatant interference in Georgia’s internal affairs. Saqinform also [argued](#) that Ambassador Degnan is constantly giving instructions to the authorities, the opposition and civil society.

On top of the traditional features of Georgia being ruled by the USA and the Georgian government having a colonial obedience towards Washington narrative, a pre-election context was also introduced during the September-October reporting period. *Georgia and the World*, in its assessment of the upcoming parliamentary elections, [expressed](#) “concerns” that “at these critical times, Georgia is ruled by the liberal Sorosist GD-UNM people who are competing with each other as to who would execute US orders faster and without uttering a word.” The Viewpoint was also [emphasizing](#) US pressure on Georgian politics during the pre-election period, arguing that the result of such pressure was the cooperation between the Georgian Dream and Saakashvili’s “torturer” government against the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia and threatening that if the pressure were not stopped, the Georgian people would make the West a thing of the past. News Front published a post of one Facebook user as an [article](#) which sought to assess Georgia’s situation from the Russian “perspective,” claiming that Georgia let the USA “becoming its master” and continues to be under its protectorate for 30 years, although the country could not get anything tangible from this except for holding gay prides. News Front also [claimed](#) that the USA has its own puppet governments in Georgia and Ukraine which have no right to pursue independent foreign policy or even make statements. According to News Front, the USA uses these governments until it needs them and later “will throw them in garbage bin.” The Isari media outlet [argued](#) that the Georgian government put the American yoke over the Georgian people and nobody has asked whether or not we would like to live under a diktat from Brussels and the USA. The same article also refers to the USA as the most aggressive terrorist nation in the world.

**Georgia is an American colony
and the US Department of State
governs Georgian politics.**

According to another constantly repetitive disinformation narrative, keeping Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts unresolved is in the US interests to make sure Georgia and Russia cannot restore normal relations. *Georgia and the World* [argued](#) that “tearing Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia is much more in the interests of the USA and the collective West as compared to Russia’s.” TV Obiektivi anchor, Valeri Kvaratskhelia, also opined in the same article that Georgia’s current status-quo is favourable for the USA and

it hinders having a dialogue between Georgia and Russia which is the only way to solve Georgia's territorial integrity problem. Therefore, Mr Kvaratskhelia concluded that the USA (and not Russia) impedes the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity. He also argued that the US special services controlled Shamil Basayev and his group and it was the American scenario to get them involved in the war against Georgia since Georgia's defeat in the war in Abkhazia was exactly in American interests.

Dimitri Lortkipanidze, the Director of the Primakov Georgian-Russian Public Centre, founded by the Gorchakov Foundation (itself created by Dmitry Medvedev), also [promoted](#) the same narrative and blamed the Americans for foiling the 1997 Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue which was held under the plan of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Yevgeny Primakov. Mr Lortkipanidze also blamed the Americans for foiling the 2004 Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations (Sergey Shamba's visit to Tbilisi). Anti-western media and actors also promoted false information about Americans foiling the Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue in the previous reporting periods. Of note is that in the 2020 parliamentary elections, Dimitri Lortkipanidze was running as an independent majoritarian MP candidate in the Didube-Chughureti district.

The US hinders resolving the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts to disallow the normalization of relations between Georgia and Russia.

Georgia and the World asserted that the advantage of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces in the Karabakh conflict was [because](#) of the American instructors "working" in Armenia: "What did American instructors, generals and other commanders who are training and leading the Armenian Army do that resulted in draining power from the latter?"

In the 20th [edition](#) of TV Obiektivi's *Golden Mean* broadcast, Valeri Kvaratskhelia stated that American democracy brought forth poverty and ignorance. Mr Kvaratskhelia argued that 43% of the US population is illiterate whilst every eighth American, which constitutes nearly 40 million people, lives in absolute poverty. The Politico Facebook page [claimed](#) that food products were deliberately destroyed in the USA during the Great Depression in order to starve the population to death.

Georgia and the World sought to [denigrate](#) aid and economic income coming from the USA, advocating Russian finances instead. As stated by the aforementioned newspaper, export incomes from the USA cannot exceed 40 million whilst billions are coming from Russia. The article also manipulatively reported trade turnover figures and emphasized the US negative trade balance as something particularly bad whilst Georgia has a negative trade balance with almost every trade partner, including Russia.

The Stalin Facebook page published a [post](#) arguing that the USA fights to stop the North Stream 2 in order to keep influence over Europe and the events unfolding around Navalny and Belarus which are a part of this script. The Viewpoint also [promoted](#) the Kremlin-invented narrative that the nerve agent Novichok is a biological weapon created by the West (in particular, by the USA) and, therefore, indirectly sought to change the course of the allegations on the Navalny poisoning case. The Viewpoint went even further and openly blamed the US for the attempted assassination of Navalny in an [article](#) in which its editor, Irakli Jankarashvili,

stated that the Americans did that to stop the “North Stream 2.” *Georgia and the World* also [proclaimed](#) Navalny as an agent of the American special services and a servant of their interests, [claiming](#) that the Trump Administration tries to use Central and Eastern European countries against Germany and France as a way to hinder the completion of the North Stream 2. According to the newspaper, by supporting the UK’s leaving the EU, the USA seeks to sow discord within the EU and separate Central and Eastern Europe which would be a massive USA foreign policy success.

The Politico Facebook page published a [map](#) which ostensibly shows millions of leftists destroyed all across the world by the US-led capitalist West.



[According](#) to *Georgia and the World*, the “USA, which is formally a democracy, pursues expansionist policy, wages wars and organises colourful revolutions.” The same newspaper [argued](#) that the US continues using old methods to overthrow undesired governments in the world and predicted that Kyrgyzstan will be followed by Moldova and later by Georgia.

In the reporting period, *Georgia and the World* [blamed](#) the USA and the West for the development and promotion of the disinformation phenomenon. According to the newspaper, democratisation and freedom of speech constituted the bedrock of the promotion of disinformation which was actively used by the West to justify its own expansionist and militaristic policy in the eye of its population. In his [interview](#) with *Georgia and the World*, Dimitri Lortkipanidze stated that there is no Russian propaganda in Georgia and by producing a fake agenda for Georgia, the Americans are seeking to empower a liberal core here which fits their grand strategy vis-à-vis Russia.

There is no Russian propaganda and the Americans are artificially shoving this problem down our throats to empower a liberal core in Georgia.

Disinformation Against the European Union

Promoting disinformation targeting the EU and the West in general is one of the strategic tasks of Kremlin propaganda to undermine positive attitudes towards the EU/West among the population. The monitoring identified purveyors of propaganda and disinformation targeting the EU: *Georgia and the World* newspaper, Patrioti TV, the Politicano Facebook page, Viewpoint, News Front, Alt-Info, Alt-Club, isari.ge and Cardhu.

In the course of the monitoring period, pro-Russian propaganda sought to convince the public that “Georgia is a colony” and occupied by many countries since it signed the Association Agreement with the EU. *Georgia and the World*, through anti-Western “political commentators,” promoted [information](#) that the Georgian government is ostensibly “enslaved by Western political guarantors” and as a result Georgia released criminals under the status of political prisoners.

As a result of signing the Association Agreement, Georgia has become an EU colony.

[According](#) to the pro-Russian *Georgia and the World*, the West forbids us to talk with the Russians one-on-one and have cooperation with them whilst the Europeans are doing that. *Georgia and the World* argued that the West does not want to see Russian investors in Georgia because the people might like what they do and develop sympathies towards the Russian companies. In turn, European investors are not coming to Georgia because of the unstable political environment which is encouraged by the West itself. The newspaper opines that this was manifested in the West’s interference in Georgia’s constitutional amendments when the Georgian authorities were forced to adopt the 120/30 electoral model with a 40% closing mechanism which would make it difficult for the political parties to form a government single-handedly. *Georgia and the World*, therefore, claimed that the West is forcing Georgia to have a coalition government whilst coalition governments fail both in developed and half-developed countries. Given these arguments, *Georgia and the World* concluded that the electoral reform was carried out owing to Western pressure

The West forces Georgia to form a coalition government.

and the “voters were not asked anything” in order to create political instability in the country and hamper investment flow from the other countries except for Chinese, Iranian or Arab investors. *Georgia and the World* also [wrote](#) that in spite of the high election threshold in Europe and only a “handful” of political parties, Georgia is forced to have a zero threshold and hundreds of political parties because otherwise the parties advocating liberalism and getting support from the West will cease to exist.

Alt-Info [assessed](#) that the law on gender quotas in the parliament was running counter to the will of the majority and democracy, and insisted that the law was pushed by the West, cautioning the readers that Georgia may face demands for quotas of ethnic, religious and sexual minorities in the future. In addition, the [propaganda](#) message that all pro-Western parties “are thinking about their own dividends instead of the country’s well-being whilst any of their promises are futile and fake” was promoted during the pre-election period. According to the same propaganda, “nobody finances ethics, morals and patriotism but only betrayal, immorality and enmity of the country. The West is paying for degenerate representatives of the government...”.

Anti-Western sources [blamed](#) the EU and the West for acting against the Georgian Dream and wrote that the West does not want to see Bidzina Ivanishvili and the Georgian Dream again at the helm of the government even if voters vote for them.

The monitoring again identified the trend of [demonising](#) “Western values.” Anti-Western clergymen were promoting propaganda that a battle is being waged against Georgia and the Georgian people as well as against Orthodox nations in general using “Western values” and attempts are being made to implement “LGBT” depravity. According to these [propaganda](#) messages, “even atheist communists were not trying to take social and family traditions away from the Georgians” whilst under the guise of European programmes, such as the Eastern Partnership, a real assault is being made against the “centuries-long bedrock” of the Caucasian peoples. This disinformation also alleged that Georgian Orthodox believers are being offered the chance to refuse their ancestors’ traditions in exchange for material reward whilst because of “aggressive attempts” to introduce the values of homosexual relations as well as Western family and societal mentality, the majority of the Georgian people despise the pro-European political parties and these parties have no future. Therefore, calls were made for the EU to withdraw from the Caucasus. Pro-Russian sources also [noted](#) that Georgia’s Western allies will demand the teaching of “LGBT” relations and sexuality at schools which means “depraving children from school age” as well as eradicating sanctity and traditions.

There is an ongoing assault against the traditions of the Caucasian people under the guise of the Eastern Partnership.

In the course of the monitoring period, anti-Western disinformation also attacked Western education and [argued](#) that as a result of Western education, parents and teachers lost their functions and everything is decided by resource officers or NGOs. They argued that “the biggest tragedy is that most of those born after

the collapse of the Soviet Union believe that a resource officer and an NGO will take better care of them as compared to teachers and parents.”

In order to discredit EU membership, the anti-Western sources also [emphasised](#) that both the EU and other supranational entities limit national sovereignty and named the UK as an example. These sources were incompletely and manipulatively [reporting](#) Jean Monnet’s quote “Europe’s nations should be guided towards the superstate without their people understanding what is happening” within the context of the sovereignty issue and claimed that this quote reflected Monnet’s attitude towards the EU’s democracy and transparency.

Recently, anti-Western sources were actively focused on the Code of the Rights of the Child which they sought to manipulatively portray as something negative. Dimitri Lortkipanidze, Director of the Primakov Georgian-Russian Public Centre and independent majoritarian MP candidate for the Didube-Chughureti district, [stated](#) that the Code was “juvenile fascism.” Mr Lortkipanidze also argued that the Code limits family rights and basically deprives parents of the opportunity to defend their own interests in court. However, Mr Lortkipanidze added that the legislative body which is nearly powerless because of the Georgia-EU Association Agreement did not adopt a fairer code.

Georgia and the World, based on Russian sources, [blamed](#) the West for promoting disinformation in the media, alleging that the Western-sponsored freedom of speech enabled the spread of fake news. In addition, according to the newspaper, the West actively uses disinformation, for instance, to justify invasion of Iraq and discredit Russia by false broadcasts on empty shop shelves in Crimea in April 2014. BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera were also blamed for circulating false information in regard to developments in Syria. According to pro-Russian propaganda, Western journalists and bloggers are unmasking only that disinformation which is ascribed to Russian manipulators and, for instance, StopFake makes the impression that it is only Russia which wages information and psychological warfare.

With the aim of discrediting the EU, the pro-Russian newspaper *Georgia and the World* still continued to [publish](#) a [series](#) of [articles](#) on the “Shady History of the EU” which offer an overview of the EU’s “plans, mechanisms and outcomes.” According to these articles, the struggle of minorities for autonomy enjoys strong support and is advanced through a well-managed and coordinated process which leads to the dismemberment of the European nations into ethnic-regions. This, in turn, will cause instability, local conflicts and, if needed, even chaos in order to establish a superpower networking cooperation. According to *Georgia and the World*, “market Islam” is being developed in Europe which means the encouragement of the spreading of Islam (by adopting migrants and advocating the granting of special legal and administrative status to Islam). These articles promoted a narrative that Europe will fail to keep the existing social cohesion because the birth rate and the working-age population are rapidly shrinking which causes a shortage of workforce, pushing EU nations to increase the retirement age and alter social security plans for pensioners. At the same time, Europe seeks to prevent the collapse of the existing high-level social security by taking in migrants.

Disinformation is a Western phenomenon and a product of the freedom of speech.

In order to portray the EU in a negative light, anti-Western propaganda again actively exploited the issue of migrants. [According](#) to *Georgia and the World*, migrants terrorise parts of Paris and, therefore, living there is becoming impossible which in turn sparked a protest campaign with the motto “Stop Defencelessness” to “draw the attention of the authorities and society to the problems of teenagers of Moroccan descent.” Anti-Western media wrote that apart from [France](#), migrants also [pose](#) problems in contributing to the rising [crime](#) in [Spain](#) and [Sweden](#) as well. Traditionally, anti-Western sources openly support Eurosceptic politicians and parties in Europe. The same trend was kept in the September-October reporting period which was manifested by publishing Victor Orban’s statement which [read](#): “By 2050, Muslims will constitute 20% of the European population but Central Europe chooses another way when it comes to migration.” Anti-Western mouthpieces also promoted another [statement](#) from Orban, saying: “George Soros leads the mafia-like network of NGOs” which endangers Europe’s peace and security since he “rules Brussels politics and seeks to bring one million migrants annually to Europe,” adding that if necessary Soros would do so forcefully and against the will of the European people. The anti-Western sources also [argued](#) that “the process of turning migrant Muslims into a significant element of European society” is a clear-cut trend which caused “serious social problems” and, therefore, work on “societal disintegration” has been started in Europe.

Georgia and the World [says](#) that adopting migrants is “Europe’s suicide” and writes that attempt to develop the economy by attracting cheap labour and implementing multiculturalism will create numerous problems. In particular, the pro-Russian newspaper frightens readers that 60-70 million migrants may settle in Europe which will cause the collapse of the social system, increase unemployment, create a lack of accommodation, increase crime and conflict, facilitate the spread of Islamisation, heighten the risks of terrorism and question the values of European civilization. To corroborate this narrative, *Georgia and the World* cited Marine Le Pen where she spoke about the “pact with devil” which would question the values of French civilization. However, *Georgia and the World* asserts that Marine Le Pen cautiously expressed her opinion since the reality is much graver.

Georgia and the World also highlighted the ideological split within the EU since Eastern Europe refused a leftist cultural agenda (“LGBT” and gender ideology). Anti-Western sources argued that the Council of Europe’s Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence [curtails](#) men’s masculinity and is disastrous for family, pointing out that Poland [stood up](#) against that convention. They also [quoted](#) Jaroslaw Kaczynski who stated: “Poland was freer under Soviet rule as compared to today in the EU” because the latter seeks to take away “cultural sovereignty.” They also [argued](#) that because of the North Stream and confrontation with Germany, “Trump can use Central and Eastern European countries against Germany and France” whilst Poland also pursues a pro-Trump policy, criticising Brussels and Berlin. Therefore, *Georgia and the World* concludes that after Brexit, the separation of “Central and Eastern Europe from the EU would be a massive foreign policy success for the USA.”

Taking in large numbers of Muslim migrants the caused disintegration of European society.

Similar to the previous report, the current reporting period also witnessed the propagation of groundless statements and sowing fear on the EU “being on the [verge](#) of collapse” because Europe is not united in the face of the pandemic. Anti-Western media claimed that political and economic cracks are becoming visible throughout the EU. Based on their arguments, if Greece and Turkey come closer to a military stand-off because of Cyprus, then another two NATO members, Slovenia and Croatia, may follow suit. According to them, Poland is able to muster 12 Central and Eastern European countries within the block of anti-Western countries and establish a union, similar to the Warsaw Pact, albeit under the US protectorate. Of note is that anti-Western sources also emphasised the looming disintegration of the EU in the previous monitoring period, although among other factors they accentuated the coronavirus pandemic-induced crisis as the chief reason behind the possible disintegration. However, as compared to the scale it was emphasised in the previous months, this factor has almost disappeared in the current monitoring period.

The EU is on the verge of collapse and border changes will soon start in Europe.

Disinformation on International Issues

One of the main objectives of the anti-Western disinformation is to discredit the West and Western institutions. In this manner, they seek to overshadow Russian actions or portray the latter in a positive light. In the reporting period, pro-Russian groups promoted false and groundless information on numerous important issues to blame the West and cover Russia’s guilt. This includes particular emphasis on such topics which are directly linked to Georgia’s foreign policy issues, such as Western values, EU immigration policy, Belarus events, Iraq and Afghanistan peacekeeping missions, the role of Russia and the West in the Georgian-Abkhaz Dialogue, the Karabakh conflict, etc. The most active purveyors of disinformation on international issues were News Front, Viewpoint, *Georgia and the World* and isari.ge as well as the Capital City, Antiliberal Doctrine, Alt-Info, Politicano and Spacenews Facebook pages.

The issue of Belarus was again very topical as a part of the disinformation and propaganda efforts on international issues. Viewpoint actively [covered](#) Russia and Putin’s personal role in calming the crisis in Belarus and propping up Lukashenko’s regime. News Front published an [article](#) to blame Belarusian liberals for spreading false allegations against the Belarusian police and committing acts against the state, allegorically referring to them as “exporters of the Rose Revolution.” According to News Front, keeping Lukashenko’s regime in Belarus was a [defeat](#) for liberalism. An article, published on Isari.ge, [argued](#) that the leader of the Belarusian opposition, Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya, was mocked and portrayed as the West’s puppet whilst the West was accused of blatant interference in the internal affairs of Belarus.

Western-encouraged liberals are fighting Lukashenko in Belarus to defeat the last bulwark of traditional values in Europe.

Georgia and the World actively reported on the events in Belarus. The newspaper emphasised the attitude of the leader of Belarus and his family towards traditional values and [compared](#) him to the President of Estonia who openly expresses her support towards various minority groups. The idea of this comparison was to

highlight Belarus as a bulwark of traditional, conservative and Orthodox values whilst showing the attitudes of the President of Estonia as an embodiment of the true face of European values. The Antiliberal Doctrine Facebook page also sought to look at the events unfolding in Belarus through the lenses of values and published a [post](#) with a distorted context to discredit the protest movement. *Georgia and the World* published another [article](#) where the famous “Stalin scholar,” Grigol Oniani, praised Lukashenko and called him a saviour of Belarus which should be emulated by Putin himself in the service of his country and people. The monitoring carried out in the previous periods also identified attempts to portray Lukashenko as a leader of traditional and conservative values.

Disinformation also targeted the regional conflict in the South Caucasus. A number of actors sought to discredit Georgia and instigate a conflict between Georgia’s ethnic minorities by manipulatively reporting fights around Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Eurasia Daily (EA Daily), based on the information of Vladimir Khomeriki, Director of the Unity Fund of Georgian and Russian People, [reported](#) that

Georgia declared open support to Azerbaijan during the Karabakh War and hindered humanitarian cargo transit destined to Armenia.

Georgia was not allowing humanitarian aid collected by the Armenian diaspora in Russia to pass from Russia to Armenia. In addition, [false information](#) was reported in social networks, alleging that Georgia’s patrol police were “escorting” cargo trucks from Turkey to Azerbaijan which carried Turkish-made fighter and strike UAVs. One Azerbaijani media outlet, oxu.az., reported [false information](#) that the “Peace Bridge” in Georgia was lit up with the colours of the Azerbaijani national flag to express open support to Azerbaijan in the conflict. This information was actively promoted by social network users. The Capital City Facebook page [posted](#) a fake quote of the Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, where he ostensibly condemned the atrocities committed by the Baghramyan Battalion during the war in Abkhazia and said it was a “fateful mistake” of Georgian-Armenian relations. The same Facebook page also posted a [forged photograph](#) showing George Soros and Nikol Pashinyan attempting to discredit the Armenian Prime Minister in this manner.

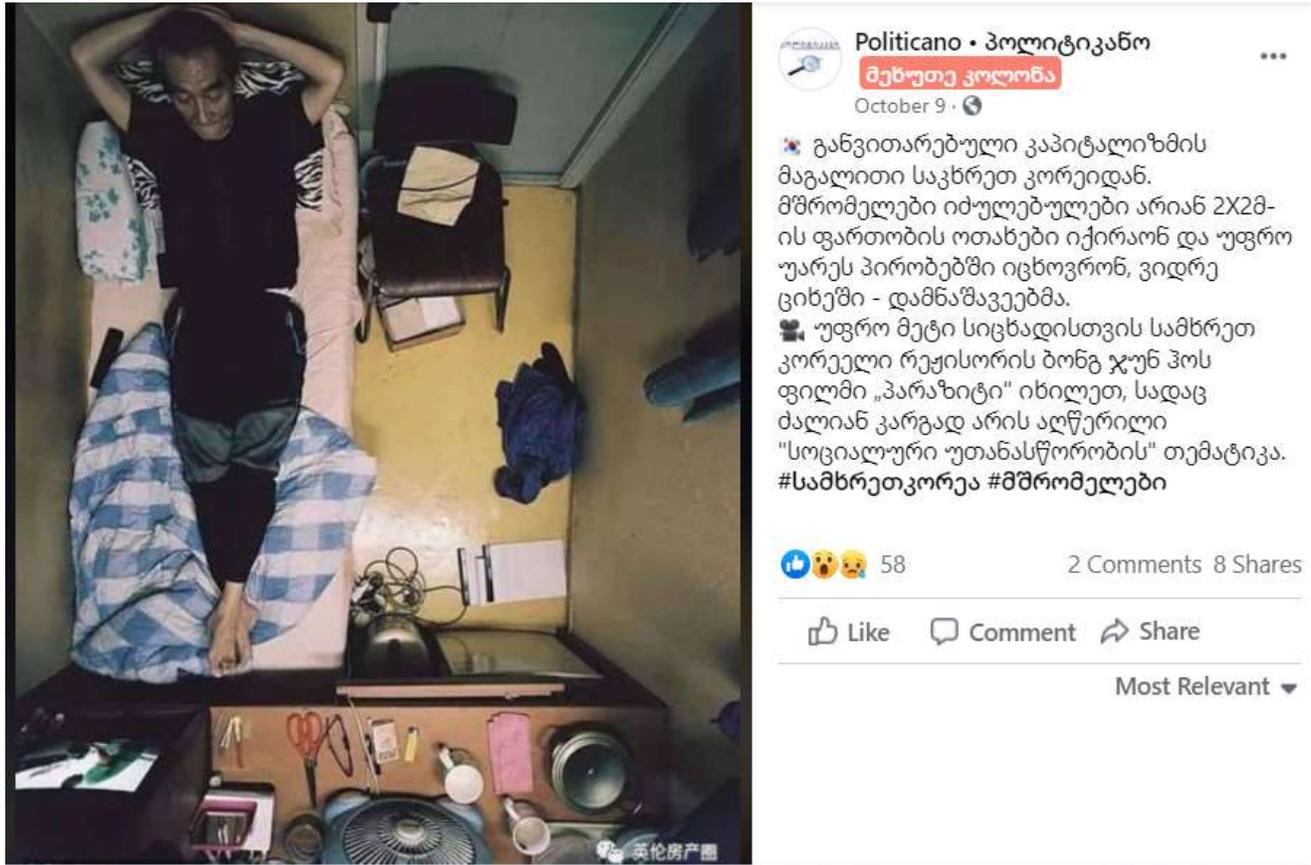
Conspiracy theories on George Soros and his affiliates, who are engaged in coordinated actions to stage “liberal revolutions” all across the world, have traditionally been topical. Online media Alt-Info [attacked](#) George Soros and the idea of the Soros-sponsored “Open Society” and blamed Soros for ripping traditional and nationalist society apart as well as for facilitating the dominance of the global elites. *Georgia and the World* published a [conspiracy](#)

Activists are trained in the West and they stage revolutions in different countries

[theory](#) based on which institutions and individuals act in concert in the world to stage liberal revolutions in different countries and topple legitimate governments. According to this theory, there are centres established by the funds provided by Soros and other globalists which train activists from different countries, including Georgians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, who later get involved in staging unrest and overthrowing governments. The groups pulling strings in these processes provide financial and consultative support to the opposition leaders and they are behind the events in Belarus. Facebook media Spacenews also promoted a

similar content, publishing a [video](#) on the colour revolutions and the groups behind them. According to another [article](#) of *Georgia and the World*, George Soros is behind the “mafia-like network of NGOs.”

Pro-Russian and anti-Western mouthpieces have traditionally sought to discredit the Western way of life. The Politicano Facebook page published a [post](#) showing a person living in a four-square metre room as a symbol of Western capitalism.



The Stalin Facebook page published a [post](#) on the UN’s plan to establish a new world order. According to the plan, the new world order programme covers 2021-2030 and includes such absurd elements as: the creation of a world government, assembling a world army, the abolition of private property and the institute of family, etc. The same Facebook page also published another [post](#) based on which the USA is fighting to halt the North Stream 2 since Washington will lose influence over Europe if it is implemented. The Navalny case and the events in Belarus were named as parts of US efforts to stop the construction of the North Stream 2 pipeline.

The UN’s new plan aims to establish a world government and an army as well as abolish private property and the institute of family.

Another narrative of the anti-Western media was to highlight the religious and moral degradation of the West. The Youth Unity Facebook page jubilantly published a [quote](#) by Victor Orban according to which:

“Western Europe eschewed Christian Europe and instead pursues an experiment with the godless cosmos, rainbow families, migration and open society.” *Georgia and the World* published an [interview](#) with priest Giorgi Razmadze where he says that the Papacy is an ideological-political instrument whilst the Pope himself is a bolt of Western neo-liberalism. In his interview, Mr Razmadze also says that “Catholics are not Christians, they do not represent a Christian church but are schismatic heretics instead who carry out a specific task.” *Georgia and the World* published another [article](#) which speaks about the ostensible uncovering of child abuse in the Church of England as a result of an investigation and the Church attempting to hide offenders (for the real investigation see [here](#)).

Disinformation Regarding Georgia’s Internal Developments

As part of the monitoring, a number of important domestic political affairs have been identified as targets of disinformation and propaganda. These issues were manipulatively reported by the following sources: *Georgia and the World* newspaper, Saqinform, Viewpoint, the Cardhu Facebook page, the Is a Nazi a Human? Facebook page, the Antiliberal Doctrine Facebook page, the Georgia Above All Facebook page, the Stalin Facebook page, the Common Newspaper Facebook page, the World Family Congress Facebook page, the MNews Facebook page, the Mikheil Daghmashenebeli Facebook page, the TV – Georgian Idea Facebook page and the Mefe TV Facebook page.

Disinformation Regarding the Davit-Gareji Monastery Complex

In the pre-election period, pro-Russian pages and anti-Western actors especially intensified their efforts towards the Davit-Gareji issue. In particular, the anti-liberal Cardhu Facebook page accused the UNM government of “[selling](#)” Davit Gareji and positively assessed the role of businessman Davit Khidasheli in the recent events around the Davit-Gareji case. In addition, the leader of the far-right political party Georgian March, Sandro Bregadze, said that Natalia Ilichova, arrested for the Davit-Gareji affair, was a “[Georgian-hating recruited agent](#)” who “supposedly took money from SOCAR.” According to Mr Bregadze, Ms Ilichova “hid” the existing maps and thereby “included Davit-Gareji within Azerbaijan’s borders.” The leader of the anti-Western political party also argued that Davit-Gareji “was sold” on the instruction of the third President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, whose uncle, Temur Alasania, as well as of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Grigol Vashadze, and the former National Security Council Secretary, Giga Bokeria. Another anti-Western Facebook page, Georgia Above All, also [accused](#) the UNM government of “gifting” the Davit-Gareji monastery complex to Azerbaijan and personally to President Ilham Aliyev.

**The United National
Movement government
sold Davit-Gareji to
Azerbaijan.**

Similar messages in regard to the Davit-Gareji issue were promoted by the pro-Russian [Viewpoint](#) and the [Common Newspaper](#), [World Family Congress](#) and [Antiliberal Doctrine](#) Facebook pages. Of note is that the positions of the pro-Russia/anti-Western actors and the Georgian Dream government were mostly in line

with each other. In particular, the former Georgian Prime Minister and incumbent Minister of Defence, Irakli Gharibashvili, speaking on air on the pro-government Imedi TV about border delimitation/demarcation near Davit-Gareji, [stated](#) that those who worked on the border issue in 2006-2007 committed treason and “they are collective Saakashvilis.” Of additional note is the fact that in the pre-election period and during the election day, TV Imedi’s livestream constantly [featured](#) the caption “Gareji is Georgia.”

Of note is that prior to the elections, disinformation within the Davit-Gareji context was also circulated against specific opposition politicians. In particular, [according](#) to the Is a Nazi a Human? Facebook page, one of the UNM leaders, Grigol Vashadze, stated that “Davit-Gareji is not a Georgian territory.” The Expose Facebook page also [promoted](#) disinformation of an identical content targeting Gubaz Sanikidze who was on the UNM party list.

Information in the Dossier reports about the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia is fabricated and Russian propaganda does not exist at all in Georgia

The pro-Russian forces claimed that the documents obtained by Dossier, an investigative journalist platform founded by the former Russian political prisoner Mikhail Khodorkovskiy, which showed that persons affiliated with the Russian government provided consultative services to the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG) during the pre-election period and reported back to Russian state agencies about the activities of the political party, were absurd. In particular, Saqinform [devoted](#) a [number](#) of [articles](#) to this issue where Saqinform’s editor-in-chief, Arno Khidirbegishvili, was defending the APG and [stated](#) that materials published by Khodorkovskiy’s website were “episodes of libel” against the political party. As stated by Mr Khidirbegishvili, the APG could not take money from the Russian Federation since the company POLITSECRETS indicated in the bank papers and which according to Dossier had cooperation with the APG “has been both legally and physically non-existent for three years already.”

Dossier reports were libel against the APG and aimed to harm the party for the upcoming elections.

In turn, the Director of the Primakov Georgian-Russian Public Centre and an independent MP candidate for the Didube-Chughureti district, Dimitri Lortkipanidze, [stated](#) that “there is no Russian propaganda whatsoever in Georgia” whilst the threat of Russian interference in Georgian elections “is trumped up to make sure that liberal forces win by as wide a spectrum as possible.” Of note is that the pro-Russian outlets offered their [commentary](#) on Dossier’s reports soon after their publication in August. In addition, after the joint statement of NGOs on 4 October 2020 where they called upon state bodies to have an adequate response to the information disclosed by Dossier, TV Obiektivi, which openly promotes pro-Russian propaganda, aired a 14-minute-long [broadcast](#) to discredit those NGOs, accusing Georgia’s Reform Associates, the Georgian Young Lawyer’s Association and other organisations of anti-Georgian activities.

Robbery of Bank of Georgia’s Zugdidi office was a performance staged by the UNM

Anti-Western actors commented upon the robbery of one of the Bank of Georgia’s offices in Zugdidi on 21 October 2020 shortly before the elections and detected the trace of the opposition in the incident. According to their statement, the robber demanded USD 500,000 as ransom for the hostages and the hostages themselves were in cooperation with the UNM. According to the disinformation, the robbery was in fact a staged performance which aimed to instil fear in the public. According to Viewpoint’s [report](#), “a terrorist breaking into the bank was agreed beforehand with the hostages.” This narrative was [promoted](#) by a member of the Board of Trustees of the Public Broadcaster of Georgia and the editor-in-chief of the pro-Russian TV Obiektivi, Bondo Mdzinarishvili. According to Mr Mdzinarishvili, the bank robbery was a performance staged by the UNM which served political objectives. Of note is that a [counter-narrative](#) was also promoted through social networks that the attack on the Bank of Georgia’s office was a performance staged by the Georgian Dream and not by the UNM.

The bank robbery in Zugdidi was staged by the opposition and aimed to instill fear in the public.

Campaign targeting opposition leaders in the pre-election period

Anti-western outlets and various Facebook pages orchestrated a wider campaign to discredit opposition leaders during the pre-election period. The Pro-Russian Saqinform [argued](#) that that in the case of the opposition’s victory in the parliamentary elections and Mikheil Saakashvili’s appointment as Prime Minister, the “existing transparent borders with Abkhazia and Tskhinvali will be completely shut, the protection of the already full-fledged borders will double, the Geneva Format will cease to exist – representatives of Tskhinvali and Sokhumi will never sit at the negotiation table together with Prime Minister Saakashvili’s representatives.” According to Saqinform, in the case of the Georgian Dream’s defeat in the elections and Mikheil Saakashvili’s return to power, “not only the hopes of reconciliation with Abkhazians and Ossetians and restoring relations with Russia will be buried but also the hopes of NATO and EU membership” because Georgia will be plagued with instability and everyone will try to keep distance from it as was claimed by Saqinform.

According to Saqinform’s editor-in-chief, Arno Khidirbegishvili, [George Soros](#) (who is a traditional target of the anti-Western media) acted against the Georgian Dream in Georgia’s parliamentary elections. In particular, Mr Khidirbegishvili argues that Soros funds the opposition parties to influence the political processes in the country and he does this through the budget of Transparency International Georgia. In the same article, Mr Khidirbegishvili insists that a person from the State Security Service of Georgia provided this information to Saqinform. According to the article, based on information from a confidential source, in the wake of 2019 summer’s “Gavrilov Night,” “the leaders of the opposition received large sums of money to organise protests.” Mr Khidirbegishvili also asserts that George Soros “massively provokes street protests.” In addition, he sees the trace of Soros in forming those youth movements (such as “Shame, “Dare” and “Change”) which often hold protest rallies against the Georgian Dream.

Several Facebook pages and media outlets were active in the process of discrediting politicians and multiple opposition members were targeted by these sources. Saqinform [argued](#) that the third President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, regularly takes drugs and the decision to record a video where he announced his return to Georgia was made “under a cocaine overdose.”

A few days before the elections, the MNews Facebook page posted a [video](#) on one of the leaders of the European Georgia – Movement for Freedom, Giga Bokeria, alleging that the “cruel, merciless and devoid of a sense of empathy” Bokeria is “aggressive” and “ruthless” towards the Georgian Church and together with journalist Davit Paichadze “participated in storming the parishioners of the Gldani church.” Furthermore, a concerted [campaign](#) through social networks was launched against Buba Kikabidze, the UNM’s party list’s number one, after he sang the song “Tbiliso” in Russian. Some sources denounced Buba Kikabidze as a “traitor” whilst one of the arguments they named was a non-existing comment of a Russian opposition politician, Sergey Gavrilov, which he ostensibly made when performing “Tbiliso” in Russian.

Disinformation targeting the European Georgia’s Kutaisi majoritarian MP [candidate](#), Otar Kakhidze, and the UNM’s Gldani majoritarian MP [candidate](#), Nika Melia, was also promoted through social networks prior to the elections. In particular, according to the fake news, Mr Kakhidze continued campaigning even after testing positive for the coronavirus, thereby endangering the health of voters, whilst disinformation about Nika Melia insisted that his staff members tested positive and, therefore, the campaign office was closed.

The leaders of Lelo were also targeted by information attacks in the pre-election period. Viewpoint [dubbed](#) Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze as a “cluster of usurers” who “have committed no lesser crimes as compared to Bokeria-Saakashvili’s torturer cluster” because when “Misha dispersed, tortured, racketeered, persecuted and harassed, Khazaradze-Japaridze were evicting Georgian families from their homes and diligently contributing to their impoverishment.” In addition, the League of Usurers Facebook page [circulated](#) a fake quote of Lelo member, Grigol Gegelia, who ostensibly stated: “Georgian people have to adapt to same-sex marriage and Lelo will be a defender of the rights of sexual minorities.”

Another example of campaigning to discredit opposition politicians is a fake quote of Khatuna Samnidze, the Republican Party chairperson, which was [circulated](#) by the Antiliberal Doctrine Facebook page. According to the fake quote, Ms Samnidze says: “The only thing that the UNM lacked was our homosexual party and we joined them, now you can entrust the country to us” In addition, discrediting efforts also targeted Georgian Dream members, albeit on a relatively smaller scale. In particular, the publishers.ge website published an article entitled “Bidzina Ivanishvili blackmailing the Patriarch with kompromats” whilst according to an [article](#) of alia.ge, Ekaterine Tikaradze’s Ministry of Health was keeping the news of the Ministry’s two employees testing positive in “strict secrecy.”

Of additional note are the following stories which circulated through social networks prior to the elections:

- the Mefe TV Facebook page’s popular video, which was viewed by tens of thousands people and garnered over 3,600 reactions, was [calling on](#) people to boycott the elections.

- Union of Orthodox Parents member priests, who often [promote](#) anti-Western messages, [endorsed](#) the anti-Western Georgian Idea political party.
- The Pro-Russian newspaper *Georgia and the World* argued that the opposition was [planning](#) to topple the government by revolution.
- On 31 October 2020, during the election process, a UNM activist circulated an item of fake news that the opposition and, in particular, the UNM [won](#) in polling stations opened on Georgian military bases deployed in Afghanistan.
- Pro-Russian Saqinform openly expressed its desire to see the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia [finishing second](#) in the parliamentary elections after the Georgian Dream.
- Some [anti-Western](#) Facebook [pages](#) denounced both the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement as equally evil.

As a result of removing anti-Western pages and networks because of their violation of the code of conduct on Facebook's platform, these actors [blamed](#) the social network for persecuting different opinion and engaging in censorship. More generally, anti-Western actors were emphasising the domination of liberalism in Georgia. [According](#) to them, "all of the television stations are liberast-Sorosist and completely devoid of anything national." Their narrative [insisted](#) that "Georgian liberals very much resemble the Georgian Bolsheviks of the 1920s who expected help from Russia and "these people, who claim they are pro-Western, have a colonial attitude towards the USA." Of note is that when it comes to being loyal to liberalism, some far-right groups [see no difference](#) between the authorities and the opposition.

Liberal censorship is imposed on social networks and different opinion is being persecuted.

In the reporting period, anti-Western actors again [drew their attention](#) to the so-called Code on the Rights of the Child. The Miraculous Victory Movement [stated](#) in social networks that the Code on the Rights of the Child went into force from 1 September 2020. According this Facebook page, "owing to the efforts of the Georgian Dream, the UNM which has been divided into five parties and the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia which voted together for this terrible law in the Parliament, social workers are now allowed to take children away from their families and give them to other non-relatives who are in fact child traffickers involved in trading human organs and giving children to faggot-couples."

Russia Supporting Propaganda

The monitoring revealed dozens of cases of pro-Russian media and Facebook pages being involved in Russia-supporting propaganda. They were again focused on the importance of Georgia resuming relations with Russia, Russia's military-political and economic advantages vis-à-vis the West in the Georgian context and the benevolence of the Russians and the Georgians towards each other. Analogously to the previous reports, the pro-Russian mouthpieces sought to marginalise Russian occupation and equate Moscow with Georgia's Western partners in September and October while simultaneously incessantly campaigning to discredit Europe and the USA. The most active purveyors of Russia supporting propaganda were: the *Georgia and the*

World newspaper, Saqinform, News Front, Viewpoint, the Stalin Facebook page and the Georgia Above All Facebook page.

Local purveyors of pro-Russian propaganda continued to blame Georgia for the status of Russia-Georgia relations throughout September-October. According to Gulbaat Rtskhiladze, founder of the pro-Russian Eurasia Institute: “We are [70% to blame](#) for the troubled relations with Russia.” One of the examples of this narrative is to denigrate the opposition wave which followed after the Russian MP Sergey Gavrillov sat in the chair of the Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, arguing that the “opposition’s provocation during Gavrillov Night was not anti-Russian but anti-Georgian” because eventually the citizens of Georgia were the ones who [suffered](#). One of the [articles](#) published by News Front reads that Georgia’s successive governments pursued policies which were irritating for and the desire to join NATO as well as steps made to reduce Russia’s military presence in Georgia prior to the 2008 war are named as examples.

The Stalin Facebook page also blamed Georgia for Russia’s occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. According to the same Facebook page, Georgia [lost](#) its territory because of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Georgian nationalism. Of interest is that simultaneously, pro-Russian media and Facebook pages were emphasising the Kremlin’s positive attitude towards Georgia. According to these sources, Joseph Stalin wanted to enlarge Georgia’s territory by joining North Ossetia during the Soviet era, although local Georgian politicians hindered him from doing so.

Georgia is mostly to blame for the troubled relations with Russia.

In regard to recent events, of note is that the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, in his interview with Tina Kandelaki, stated that there are small political parties in Georgia favouring normalising relations with Russia and he is confident that “our [Russia’s and Georgia’s] traditional historic proximity and mutual attraction will eventually win.” Local pro-Russian outlets commented on Lavrov’s statement. In particular, News Front [wrote](#) that the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs was speaking about Georgia “naively and with little excitement” which indicates that “there is readiness in Russia to have cooperation with healthy Georgian political forces.” To this end, the author of the article, Gulbaat Rtskhiladze, opines that Georgia should renounce its “fruitless and counterproductive” foreign policy vector adopted since the 2008 war and refrain from referring to Russia as an occupier whilst “large-scale asymmetric talks” have to [start](#) on the restoration diplomatic relations with Russia. Mr Rtskhiladze believes that these negotiations should include Russian authorities and representatives of those parties mentioned by Lavrov together with “members of Georgian society who have favourable views of Russia.” Of note is that dialogue with Sokhumi and Tskhinvali is a [part](#) of the official campaign platform of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (the APG features heavily in Dossier reports) to which the latter refers as the restoration of “broken bridges” and actively lobbies the idea even in the present day.

Russia is ready to have cooperation with healthy political forces in Georgia.

According to *Georgia and the World*, Georgians approach everything related to Russia very impassioned and it names the football [match](#) in Tbilisi between Locomotive Tbilisi and Dynamo Moscow as an example. According to the pro-Russian newspaper, Georgian fans wanted to be spectators of the game to verbally assault Russian football players whilst on the contrary Russian fans “were complaining that if flights and stadium attendance had been allowed, we would have visited Georgia, to see Tbilisi, have a rest and hug old friends.”

Similar to the previous months, pro-Russian media and the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia political party promoted the narrative that if Georgia aspires to avoid being a military stronghold for other countries, it has to [declare](#) military non-alignment or neutrality. The pro-Russian media more energetically circulated a more radical message about maximum rapprochement with Russia. For instance, News Front claimed that the restoration of territorial integrity and the further development of the country would be possible not in the case of declaring neutrality but only in the case of forming a military-strategic [union](#) with Russia. According to the promoted messages, the “[key](#) of Georgia’s unification is in Moscow” and because of that “negotiations with Moscow have no alternative” and “speaking in the language of ultimatums with Moscow should [end](#).” Moreover, the Stalin Facebook page argued that even Muslim Syrians understood that only Christian Russia can [save](#) them.

The restoration of Georgia’s territorial integrity and the development of the country is only possible in the case of forming a military-strategic union with Russia.

Pro-Russian media sought to justify the necessity of starting “asymmetric talks” with Russia by providing various “arguments.” According to these arguments, Georgia is occupied indeed, albeit not only by Russia but by [several](#) countries. This message is an attempt to dismiss the Russian occupation and equates Russia with Georgia’s allies. Based on this narrative, Russia is the only one from among Georgia’s occupier countries which can solve the problems. To demonstrate this, local purveyors of Russian propaganda emphasise the military, political and economic might of the Kremlin and elevate Russia as a superpower. They argue that Russian actions in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan [illustrated](#) the extent of Russian influence over the region. The narrative on Russian “invincibility” included messages that Russia was not harmed by the Western sanctions and that the Kremlin in fact was [strengthened](#) after the imposition of the sanctions because of an increase in local production. According to the pro-Russian media, Russia remains an indispensable trade partner for Georgia as Russians constitute most of the tourists, Russia remains a major source of income and Moscow is able to [starve](#) the Georgians. This exemplifies the necessity of normalising relations with the Kremlin according to the narrative.

Whilst speaking about the necessity of normalising relations with Russia, pro-Russian groups traditionally portray the West as an immoral place and Russia as a bulwark of morality. Therefore, according to the anti-Western media, Georgia has to make a [choice](#) between the “liberast and godless” West and the “coreligionist and Orthodox” Russia. These media outlets claimed that the West does

The West does not allow Tbilisi to normalize relations with Moscow because it will relinquish control over Georgia.

not allow Tbilisi to alter the status-quo through one-on-one communication and approximation with Moscow because the West will [relinquish](#) its control over Georgia if Russia-Georgian relations are normalised. Naturally, the West was blamed for Russia's anti-Russian decisions. Journalist Valeri Kvaratskhelia, in his article in *Georgia and the World*, [claimed](#) that Saakashvili started the 2008 war under the direct instruction from the USA because Washington wanted to respond to Moscow in the harshest possible way which would have destroyed any bridges between the Georgians and the Russians. According to this narrative, "Russia was forced to take a step of catastrophic consequences for both Georgia and Russia but there was no other way. Russia crossed the red line and signed Georgia's disintegration act."

The nostalgia towards the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire was again prominent among the pro-Russian narratives identified during the monitoring period. According to the messages promoted by the pro-Russian media, Georgia was "number two" in the Soviet Union whilst it is currently "number two from the bottom" in Europe. In addition, it was emphasized that when Georgia was part of the Russian Empire "for 200 years, a Georgian was [second to none](#)." Pro-Russian media portrayed the dissolution of the Soviet Union as something negative because it was followed by backsliding in other directions. They claimed that together with destroying the Soviet Union "we destroyed the world's best education system which [raised](#) a number of Georgian scholars or academicians of world importance" whilst "under the infamous communism people [lived better](#)."

Some of the messages were intended to [remind](#) readers that "Russia retained Ajara and Samtskhe for Georgia" and Joseph Stalin [wanted](#) to return Turkish regions back to Georgia. In addition, pro-Russian media argued that Stalin himself was loyal to [moral values](#) whilst Soviet "supremacy" over the West was [explained](#) by a fake quote of Henry Kissinger, ostensibly saying that a "Soviet person was one step ahead of us [Americans.]" The Stalin Facebook page [continued](#) the glorification of Stalin's talents as a military leader and the Georgia Above All Facebook page [claimed](#) that according to the "fundamental survey carried out by one of the most influential scientific-analytic centres" in the USA in 2014, Stalin was ranked as the second most influential individual in the world's history whilst Jesus Christ was named as the first.

Anti-Turkish Disinformation

Monitoring identified sources which promoted anti-Turkish propaganda and disinformation and these sources are as follows: News Front, the Stalin Facebook page, Alt-Club, Viewpoint, Cardhu, *Georgia and the World*, the Turkey is an Occupier Facebook page and Saqinform.

Russian propaganda in Georgia still continue to portray Turkey as an enemy and push forward "threats" at the forefront of the agenda in order to take attention away from the Russian occupation. As opposed to July-August, the issue of Meskhetian Turks was actively raised in September-October.

According to *Georgia and the World*, “Turkey openly presses a claim on Georgia’s territories whilst the Government of Georgia keeps silence.” The pro-Russian newspaper sought to convince readers that an “Erdogan-affiliated politician published a map of a ‘future Turkey’ where Georgian territories, as well as those of Turkey’s other neighbour states, are shown as part of Turkey” and the Justice and Development party member in fact was calling for Turkey to capture Greek territories. The information was reported as: “The map, which accompanies materials published by the Turkish politician, describes the so-called national oath territories of 1925 which, together with the legend of the Blue Homeland, has been transformed into a dogma of the Turkish hawk’s foreign political aspirations.” The information on Turkish influence was also circulated with particular emphasis on educational and cultural influence in Ajara. Saqinform, News Front and other pro-Russian sources promoted fake news that Turkey will ostensibly take Ajara away from Georgia by the force of the Treaty of Kars. Of note is that all monitoring periods have identified a similar manipulation around the Treaty of Kars.

Turkey has claims on Georgian territories and plans to capture Ajara based on the Treaty of Kars.

Anti-Western sources actively promoted the narrative that Turkey is not Georgia’s partner but an enemy as is Erdogan personally as the president of Turkey. However, these sources claimed that “the brains of Georgian liberals still believe that Turkey is the most reliable partner and everyone who speaks about the Turkish threat is a Russian agent.”

To highlight the threat coming from Turkey, News Front, Viewpoint and other sources energetically circulated Shota Apkhaidze’s disinformation article that ostensibly “on 8 September 2020, Ankara announced its readiness to launch the second wave of repatriation of the so-called Meskhetian Turks from post-Soviet countries to Turkey and Georgia.” According to the article, in a telephone conversation between Giorgi Gakharia and Erdogan, the latter offered Georgian authorities to resettle 100,000 Meskhetian Turks in Samtskhe-Javakheti with Turkey covering all of the expenses (funding repatriation, purchasing homes and land plots, opening educational and religious facilities and the setting up of infrastructure). Mr Apkhaidze argues that the return of “Meskhetian Turks” to Georgia is an implementation of Erdogan and Davutoglu’s Neo-Ottomanism and Pan-Turkism policy. They officially stated that “they desire to restore the Ottoman Empire and consider Samtskhe-Javakheti as an integral part of the Empire.”

According to the pro-Russian sources, Russia gave Georgia back those territories which were captured by Turkey. However, today Turkey is referred as a “friend” and a “brother,” although Russia did not harm Georgia more than did Turkey.

News Front pushed the narrative that the EU and NATO will not be able to defend Georgia from Turkey’s expansionist policy, Neo-Ottomanism and Pan-Turkism. It claimed that the “EU cannot and will not defend us from Turkish expansion” since the “EU itself needs defence.” News Front discussed the example of Cyprus and stated that “Cyprus is backed by the EU and the NATO member

Turkey plans the resettlement of 100,000 Meskhetian Turks in Samtskhe-Javakheti which would eventually lead to an

state Greece as well as the Greek diaspora in the USA whilst Cyprus is an EU member and Americans are inviting it to NATO but Cypriots still could not do anything against the Turks.” It was concluded that if Turkey develops expansionist aspirations vis-à-vis Georgia’s territorial waters or against Batumi and Akhaltsikhe, the EU and NATO cannot defend us, although none of the Georgian politicians in a pre-election period will state that only Russia will be able to defend Georgia in such a case.

Viewpoint sought to cultivate the anti-Turkish narrative using the NATO context, [noting](#) that “Turkey considers all of its neighbors as opponents and has good neighbourly relations with almost no one,” pursuing an aggressive and confrontational policy with all of the actors instead. According to Viewpoint, Georgia should change its positions towards Turkey and pragmatically analyse Erdogan’s aims and interests in the region which under no circumstances are favourable to Georgia. Therefore, judging from Turkey’s example, Georgia has to understand that the “North Atlantic Alliance is not an organisation which can guarantee security and stability” since NATO member states, the USA and Turkey are the main instigators of hotbeds of military confrontation in the region.

News Front emphasised Russia’s importance, seeking to [convince](#) readers that in the case of the disintegration of Russia, Georgia will be divided by the “historical friends” and the “crescent soon will be hoisted” over our territory. According to Saqinform’s [editor-in-chief](#), for various reasons “the Russian leadership decided that they lack the capacity to rule the Caucasus and again delegated it to Turkey” and as result, if history is the lesson, “war, slaughter, starvation, invasion and complete occupation” [await](#) Georgia.

Similar to July-August, the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia continued manipulations with the issue of Turkey during the pre-election campaign. Cardhu posted a [video](#) featuring Irma Inashvili and Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, leaders of the APG, speaking about the Turkish claims on Ajara, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Guria. Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi also emphasised the Treaty of Kars and stated that in spite of Turkey’s decision to hand over Ajara and Batumi to Georgia in 1921, “Turkey’s Grand National Assembly in fact retracted those words in 1923” and “again proclaimed Batumi and Ajara as an integral part of Turkey.” Mr Tarkhan-Mouravi also added that today “Turkey has captured 33% of Georgian territories” and “even today, Turkey also presses claims on Batumi, Ozurgeti and Akhaltsikhe.”

The election programme of the APG, published in the party’s own [newspaper](#), also includes a similar statement on Turkey capturing 33% of Georgian territories and Ankara’s further territorial claims. Hence, Irma Inashvili called upon people to protect their own share of Georgia, take action and not surrender Ajara to Turkey. The 1920 “national oath” of Turkey was also mentioned which “proclaimed the historical Georgian soil of Artaan, Artvin, Kars and Batumi as Turkey’s eternal parts.” The APG’s official [newspaper](#) released in the pre-election period reads that the “APG is the only party which is fighting Turkey’s national expansion in Georgia, first and foremost in Ajara.” The APG, by naming historical facts in the newspaper and providing arguments on Turkey’s influence in the economic, educational and cultural fields of Ajara, argued that the “Turkish problem in Georgia and particularly in Ajara has been for a century, not for decades.” Therefore, the party calls upon the population to “Protect Ajara from Turkish Expansion,” “Let’s Act – Do not Surrender Ajara to Turkey,” “Defend Ajara,” “Defend Your Own Share of Georgia – You Can Do It!” and “Don’t

Surrender Ajara to Turkey!” The APG election [advertisement](#) insists that the “Georgian Dream government turns a blind eye to and puts up with Turkish expansion.” The [second](#) and [third](#) editions of the APG newspaper include disinformation that Erdogan ostensibly stated in his speech delivered at Rise University in 2016 that Batumi, together with certain territories with other countries, should be incorporated within Turkey’s borders.

Apart from the APG, the Georgian Idea social-political movement also speculated on the issue of Turkey. [According](#) to Georgian Idea, the government “sold Ajara to Turkey” whilst besides Russia, Turkey (Ajara and Tao-Klarjeti), Azerbaijan (Davit-Gareji and Saingilo) and Armenia (Lore-Tashir) are also occupiers of Georgia. The party also [stated](#) that there is an ongoing “Turkisation” and “Islamisation” of Ajara.

Disinformation Regarding the Coronavirus

In light of the second wave of the coronavirus outbreak in September (which many believe is the first wave for Georgia), the disinformation flared up with new strength. As in previous months, the coronavirus-related disinformation was distinguished from other narratives with a diversity of sources and a broader scale of spread. Apart from media outlets, social network accounts were actively used to promote disinformation regarding the coronavirus and many well-known personalities have been involved in circulating disinformation.

The purveyors of the coronavirus-related disinformation were distinguished by their different methods of organizing and attracting an audience. At the very beginning of the pandemic (March 2020), groups promoting conspiracy theories were spawned where users were massively attracted. Given the rising spread of such groups and virus-related false information which frequently posed health hazards, Facebook applied a strict policy to remove such content from its platform. Therefore, Facebook did remove several such groups (Stop5GGeorgia!!!, No to Corona Scam!), although the administrators of these groups continued to create new groups of the same content and mobilised users anew. In addition, new types of so-called “corona influencers” have emerged ([Koba Kuprashvili](#), [Shorena Shanidze](#), [Nona Aghdgomelashvili](#), [Nina Marji](#), *etc.*) who attained popularity through social networks by promoting conspiracy theories and false information about the coronavirus. At the initial stage, such actors questioned the existence of the virus and sought to portray it as a less dangerous flu virus, although in light of the deteriorating epidemiological situation in Georgia this narrative was gradually replaced by an anti-vaccination narrative.

Apart from the aforementioned groups and actors, other sources were also active in promoting anti-Western and pro-Russian disinformation regarding the coronavirus. These sources are as follows: News Front, Alia, *Georgia and the World*, Viewpoint, Common Newspaper, Guriis Moambe, Sputnik, Saqinform, the Stalin, Liberalism Kills, Georgia Above All and TV Trialeti as well as the so-called influencers: Khatia Sichinava, Davit Giorgobiani, Lali Moroshkina, Lasha Modebadze and the aforementioned Facebook users.

Anti-Western actors were traditionally seeking to characterize the coronavirus as a less dangerous virus and equate it with the seasonal flu. A well-known TV anchor, Lali Moroshkina, [posted](#) on her Facebook account that “mostly those who were constantly wearing face masks were infected by this weakened, mutated, faltered seasonal flu named COVID.” News Front circulated [false information](#)

The coronavirus is one of the strains of the seasonal flu which is not at all dangerous

that Scott Atlas, US President Donald Trump’s new adviser on the coronavirus, had claimed that the coronavirus is less dangerous as compared to the seasonal flu. One of the Facebook influencers, Shorena Shanidze, who sought to attain popularity by promoting unfounded and mostly false information, was stating in her [interview](#) with Alia newspaper that the coronavirus is a weaker strain of the common flu and “fear and panic are deliberately sown among people to frighten and turn them into zombies.” The Stalin Facebook page also [insisted](#) that the coronavirus is not at all dangerous and a cure is also easy. The same Facebook page also promoted [information](#) that the coronavirus is less dangerous as compared to the flu. Viewpoint published an [interview](#) with Zurab Kumsiashvili where he argued that the coronavirus is not as dangerous as suggested by the WHO. The leader of Nation and State, Zviad Tomaradze, who was running in the 2020 parliamentary elections as a majoritarian MP candidate from the Political Movement of Law Enforcement and Armed Forces Veterans in the Gldani district, [posted](#) on his Facebook page that the coronavirus is not as lethal as asserted by health professionals and he provided doubtful research studies and clinical trial results to corroborate his argument. Another Facebook page, Georgia Above All, also [argued](#) that the coronavirus “is not a lethal virus! Corona does not kill!”

The campaign against the vaccines has been traditionally spirited and became even more active. *Georgia and the World* [argued](#) that the UK government approved the Oxford vaccine without due testing and clinical trials and it was planned to test it in Georgia and similar countries. The same newspaper sought to [convince](#) readers that UNICEF was planning to introduce an experimental vaccine in developing countries. Georgian Idea was also promoting the message and [called upon](#) people to rally against UNICEF. The Stalin Facebook page circulated [information](#) that the Americans ostensibly omitted the animal trial phase and started to test the vaccine on humans. Common Newspaper [posted](#) that it was planned to test a vaccine which kills humans or changes their genetics. One of the Facebook users [insisted](#) that Bill Gates questioned the method for Trump’s treatment since Gates is willing to destroy mankind by a genetically engineered vaccine.

It is planned to try-out untested vaccines on Georgian population

In parallel with constantly discrediting the Western-produced vaccines, pro-Russian sources offered different reports on the Russian vaccine. Saqinform [claimed](#) that there was a “long queue” of 50 countries for supplies of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine, including the USA and EU member states. In the same article, Saqinform’s editor-in-chief, Arno Khidirbegishvili, sought to convince readers that as opposed to the Western vaccines, the

The Russian vaccine is 100% effective and safe and the US and EU member countries are “standing in the queue” to buy it.

Russian vaccine is built on a human virus instead of a monkey's. Sputnik Georgia [reported](#) that according to an international scientific magazine, the Russian vaccine is not only 100% effective but also completely safe. Sputnik also [argued](#) that during the clinical trials, the Russian vaccine triggered an immune response among 100% of those vaccinated and at the same time no side effects were reported. Arno Khidirbegishvili also [insisted](#) that the USA forgot Georgia's occupied territories, the charter on strategic partnership and asked Russia for the coronavirus vaccine.

Conspiracy theories on collecting genetic samples through the coronavirus tests and “implanting people with microchips” by administering vaccines were still promoted. Koba Kuprashvili, a Facebook influencer, [argued](#) that PCR tests were used to collect genetic samples from humans which are later split, multiplied and used for trials. Davit Giorgobiani, a TV anchor, [shared](#) a YouTube video which argued that it was planned to “implant microchips” in humans by administering the coronavirus vaccines and using microchips produced by Elon Musk.

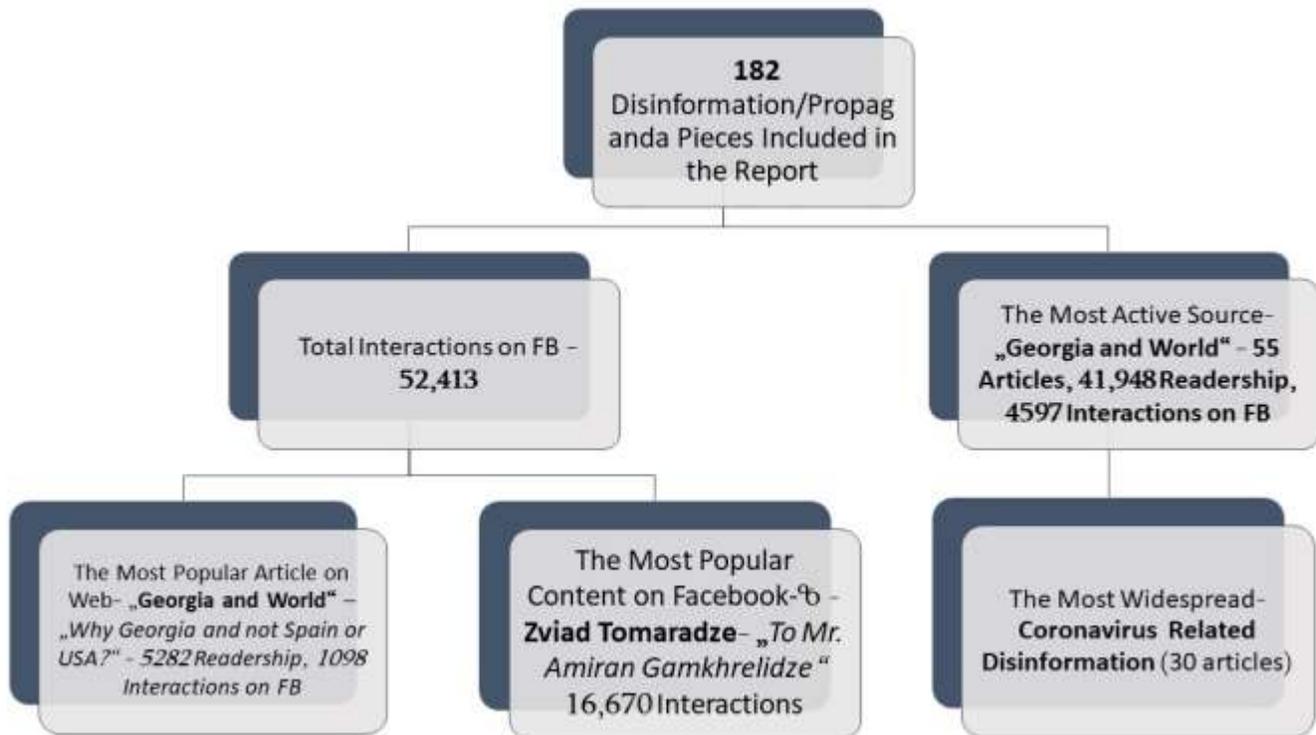
Promoting disinformation based on manipulated statistics and death tolls was again widespread. The Stalin Facebook page shared a [publication](#) stating that most of the elderly in Italy who died because of the coronavirus were in fact administered a special lethal injection to cleanse the country from elderly people and save pension and healthcare money. One Facebook user's [post](#), which argued that the coronavirus death toll was artificially bloated, has gone viral. Based on a Facebook user, Viewpoint [wrote](#) that people were paid GEL 3,000 in Batumi to falsely claim testing positive for the coronavirus and to be taken to hotels. Tvm.ge also [blamed](#) authorities and health workers for the coronavirus scam and manipulated statistics.

The monitoring in September-October again identified some information about the virus being man-made, albeit much limited in numbers and circulation as compared to the previous periods. Alia published an [article](#) on the coronavirus being man-made in a Chinese military laboratory as a result of mixing genetic material and two bats.

The Stalin Facebook page, relying on information of the controversial physician, Rashid Buttar, [wrote](#) that the Americans artificially made the coronavirus as early as in 2014-2015 and were hiding information about this. The Religia.ge Facebook page [argued](#) that the WHO had no grounds to declare the coronavirus as a pandemic and it was crime against humanity which would certainly be investigated.

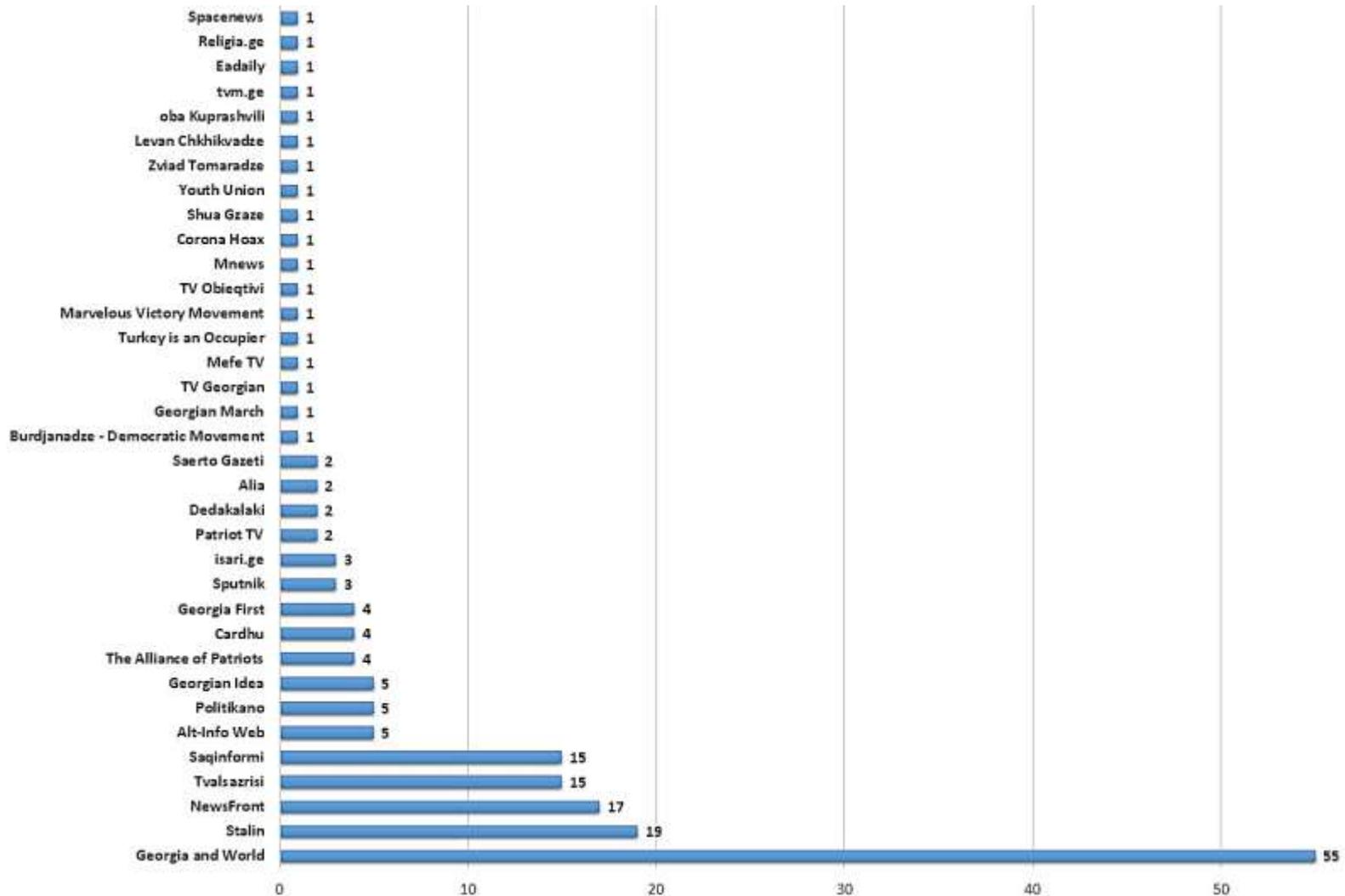
Numerous unfounded pieces of medical advice regarding the coronavirus were disseminated through social networks. Various users [insisted](#) that thermal screening caused health effects. Sputnik [published](#) a “sensational” research study which said that cocoa oil cured the coronavirus. The In the Middle of the Road Facebook page sought to [convince](#) users that hydrogen peroxide dissolved in water would protect someone from the coronavirus. [False information](#) that wearing face masks increases the coronavirus infection risks was promoted in the Corona Scam Facebook group. Davit Giorgobiani, a TV anchor, [posted](#) on Facebook that hot steam inhalation killed 100% of the coronavirus.

Statistics of the Main Actors



As part of the monitoring, a total of 457 items were studied and 187 of them were included in this report. However, since Facebook removed Alt-Info and related pages in October 2020, a total of 182 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 since launching Facebook's Third-Party Fact-Checking Programme in Georgia (21 September 2020), Facebook circulation of the sources included in the report sharply dropped which was reflected on the decline of website reads since most users were attracted to the websites through Facebook. For instance, 55 articles of *Georgia and the World* had nearly 42,000 reads whilst in the previous periods their website reads were three or four times as many. The total interactions of the Stalin Facebook page as the most active also declined substantially (five or six-fold) on the Facebook platform (notwithstanding the increased number of publications) which was affected by the launch of Facebook's Third-Party Fact-Checking Programme.

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.