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ANNUAL REPORT ON PRO-RUSSIAN AND ANTI-WESTERN DISINFORMATION

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MULTI PROFILE THINK TANK IN GEORGIA

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Contents

Key Definitions 3
Introduction 4
Methodology 5
Disinformation Against NATO 5
Disinformation Against the USA 8
Disinformation Against the EU 12
Russia-supporting Propaganda 18
Disinformation on International Issues 24
Disinformation Regarding Georgia's Internal Developments 30
Coronavirus-related Disinformation 33
Vaccination-related Disinformation 34
Other Coronavirus-related Disinformation Messages 36

Key Definitions[1]

Disinformation - false information spread deliberately and at times, in a hidden manner, to manipulate the public opinion and/or obscure the objective truth.

Propaganda - a form of communication, true or false information, which, by selective use of facts, fabrications and so-called half-truths, intends to mislead the public, influence people‟s consciousness and harm the state as a result.

Fake news – is a certain story (that in contrast to disinformation and propaganda that have much larger scale and are featured with continuity and campaign like trait) that contains misleading information. Fake news can be either entirely made up or can include some real facts which are taken out of context, exaggerated.

Anti-Western - a person, organization or policy intentionally discrediting Western values including democracy, human rights, rule of law and free market principles. Anti-Western actors frequently the United States, the EU, NATO and their allies.

Pro-Russian - a person, organization or political entity, interested or believing in Russia‟s superiority in cultural, domestic and foreign affairs; actively promotes and propagates the idea, often at the expense of discrediting Western values.

[1] Definitions are based on the report by Thematic Inquiry Group on Disinformation and Propaganda of the Parliament of Georgia "Strengthening State Policy to Address Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda in Georgia" and the manual developed by Georgia's Reforms Associates "Anti-Western Disinformation and way how to expose disinformation".
The Parliament's report is available at http://www.parliament.ge/ge/ajax/downloadFile/136132/Disinfo_Report_28.01_.2020_ENG
The manual by Georgia's Reforms Associates is available at https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-16/799.pdf

Introduction

Georgia was among the first proving grounds where Russia tested instruments of hybrid warfare. Disinformation and propaganda feature heavily in Russia's hybrid toolkit which the Kremlin uses to achieve a desirable political outcome in Georgia. Through taking advantage of different media or interest groups, Russia is particularly focused on the erosion of Georgia's declared European and Euro-Atlantic foreign policy orientation and democratic institutions. The overarching aim of these efforts is to install an openly pro-Russian (or at least not anti-Russian) government in power and bring Georgia back into the Russian sphere of influence.

Since 2020, Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) started publishing of bi-monthly Disinfometre reports. The goal of these reports is to analyse the anti-Western and the pro-Russian narratives in Georgia voiced by the Kremlin and its agents of influence and identify trends within those narratives. In total, five bi-monthly reports[2] were published in 2020. The annual Disinfometre report is based on these reports and illustrates the trends over the course of 2020. The report also includes disinformation messages promoted in November-December 2020.

The one-year-long monitoring showed that pro-Russian actors rigorously exploit Georgia's internal developments or international affairs in order to advance Russian interests and augment their strategic messages which have been cultivated and popularised over many years. Of Georgia's domestic political issues, the political crisis vis-à-vis electoral reform, the 8 March 2020 agreement and both the pre-election and the post-election periods were most rigorously targeted by the pro-Russian and anti-Western platforms in 2020. The Davit-Gareja issue was also high on the agenda of the pro-Russian media during the election campaign period. Azerbaijan was also portrayed as an "occupier" country and the United National Movement was blamed for selling the Davit-Gareja monastery complex in the period preceding the campaign (May-June 2020). The main targets of the pro-Russian and anti-Western mouthpieces are the West and the pro-Western opposition in terms of their commentaries on political issues. These groups have also attacked the Georgian Dream, although less enthusiastically as compared to the pro-Western opposition. Outside Georgia, unrest in Belarus and the US elections prompted the largest engagement from the pro-Russian and anti-Western media.

In the entire 2020 report period, the coronavirus featured prominently as part of the disinformation campaign conducted by the pro-Russian and the anti-Western media. They sought to exploit the worldwide pandemic in order to discredit the West and praise authoritarian regimes for their effective crisis management. On top of the openly pro-Russian actors, the coronavirus galvanised groups of anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theorists which participated in the disinformation campaign on the coronavirus

[2] The Disinfometre bimonthly reports are available here:

- Disinfometre December-February Report - https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf
- Disinfometre March-April Report - https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/745.pdf
- Disinfometre May-June Report - https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf
- Disinfometre July-August Report - https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf
- Disinfometre September-October Report - https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

and related issues. Of note is that the messages of the pro-Russian and anti-vaxxer groups were often in line with each other.

Methodology

This annual report is based on the bi-monthly Disinfometre reports produced by GRASS. Thirteen online media outlets,[3] four TV stations,[4] seven Facebook groups[5] and 22 Facebook pages[6] which are routinely included in Georgia's Reforms Associates FactCheck Georgia's regular online fact checking, TV and social media monitoring were selected for monitoring. Some political parties which traditionally promote pro-Russian and anti-Western messages, such as the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, Georgian March, Georgian Idea and Nino Burjanadze - Democratic Movement, were also monitored during the pre-election period.

In total, 3,751 items (articles, videos, photos, Facebook posts) were monitored for the report and 877 media products are included. This report overviews those materials which were most clear-cut within the pro-Russian and anti-Western media discourse and had a campaign-like dissemination. The anti-Western and pro-Russian disinformation identified as a result of the monitoring are divided into eight major clusters given their targets and the content of the messages.

Disinformation Against NATO

NATO membership is Georgia's declared foreign and security policy objective and is backed by the majority of Georgians. The main goal of the anti-Western and pro-Russian disinformation actors is to manipulate public opinion in order to put obstacles for Georgia's NATO membership and, in the long run, alter the country's foreign policy vector.

Of note is that the strategic messages against NATO voiced by the disinformation/propaganda mouthpieces are basically the same and repetitive over the years. However, the disinformation actors take efforts to tailor their messages to current issues. For instance, the monitoring in March-April 2020 identified that NATO was criticised largely within the coronavirus context whilst propaganda for Georgia's neutrality and military non-alignment was at the forefront of the disinformation campaign during the pre-election period which also aimed to discredit Georgia's potential membership in the Alliance.

The disinformation/propaganda against NATO mostly exploits fears on losing the occupied territories. The pro-Russian political parties as well as the media, celebrities and clergymen have been regularly promoting propaganda messages for years that NATO membership for Georgia means abandoning the

[3] News Front, Geworld.ge, Sputnik-South Ossetia, Saqinform, Viewpoint, Alt-info, hotnews.ge, tvm.ge, isari.ge, Alia, Resonance, EaDaily.com, religia.ge.
[4] TV Obiektivi, Mefe TV, Patrioti TV, TV Kartuli Azri.
[5] Facebook groups: Movement Against COVID-Fascism!!!, Anti-Masonry. Antichrist's New World Order (NOW), Anti-ecumenism, New World Order and Corona Scam, United Popular Movement for Rescuing the Georgian Nation, Corona-mafia and Georgia as an Experimental Playground, Corona Mafia, Stop 5G in Georgia.
[6] Facebook pages: Stalin, Politicano, Capital City, Cardhu, Anti-Paradox, Youthful, Miraculous Victory Movement, Alt-info, Ani-liberal League, Nationality Georgian, Free Spirit, Turkey is an Occupier, Georgia Above All, Anti-Liberal Doctrine, Spacenews.ge, Youth Unity, In the Middle of the Road, MNews, Common Newspaper, Bible-believing Christians.

occupied territories.[7] According to this disinformation narrative, Georgia cannot join NATO with the occupied territories since it would automatically lead to the invocation of Article 5 of the NATO charter and war with Russia which the West will never allow.[8] Therefore, the anti-Western actors pose a false dilemma to Georgian citizens and portray NATO integration as something incompatible with Georgia's territorial integrity. At the same time, the pro-Russian actors claimed that the keys for Georgia's territorial integrity are to be found in Moscow and sooner or later we will have to start a direct dialogue with the Kremlin.

The pro-Russian media was active throughout 2020 to promote propaganda messages on the weakening of NATO and the "inevitable" disintegration of the Alliance.[9] On the one hand, this narrative sought to portray NATO's identity crisis as an irreversible process - that the Alliance lost its functions after the Cold War and cannot fit in the new reality - and to manipulate opinion using NATO's internal political squabbles, on the other hand. The pro-Russian and the anti-Western sources argued that the confrontation between the Trump Administration and the European nations over NATO (on 2% defence spending) as well as Washington's decision to reduce the American military presence in Germany will cause the breakup of the Alliance. The pro-Russian media also actively exploited Turkey's decision to purchase Russian-made S-400 SAM missiles and the Turkish-Greek confrontation in the Eastern Mediterranean in order to promote propaganda messages on the weakening of NATO as well as on the internal split within the Alliance and its potential disintegration. Given all of these factors, the disinformation and the propaganda purveyors claimed that Georgia has to revise its foreign policy orientation and seek security guarantees elsewhere.

Simultaneously with the attempts to discredit cooperation with NATO and disparage Georgia's membership prospects, the pro-Russian actors propagated for a neutrality and non-alignment policy as a non-alternative mechanism for Georgia's development and settlement of the territorial conflicts.[10] The Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, together with its leaders Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi and Irma Inashvili, were the main purveyors and supporters of this idea. The neutrality policy featured heavily in the APG's pre-election platform and campaign. The Dossier Centre's reports also highlighted the APG's backing of neutrality and actively using it for campaign purposes. According to the second report of the Dossier Centre on the APG's Russian connections, the Russians provided the APG with communication instructions where party leaders were advised to suggest neutrality to the Georgian public as a means of conflict settlement and the avoidance of wars. According to the instructions, the APG leaders had to demand the including of neutrality in the Georgian constitution in order to make sure that no future government would be able to revise or alter that policy. The Georgia-based pro-Russian media also actively sought to

[7] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's December-February Report, p. 14. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf
[8] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's July-August Report, p. 10. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf
[9] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's September-October Report, p. 10. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf
[10] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's September-October Report, p. 13. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

encourage a support wave for military non-alignment in the pre-election period as their efforts peaked in July-August 2020.

In November 2020, the end of the second Karabakh war and the deployment of the Russian peacekeepers gave rise to a new narrative that Georgia's NATO membership prospects were reduced to a minimum given Russia's increased military presence and stronger regional positions. According to the same narrative, NATO integration policy contradicts Georgia's national interests and threatens Georgia's security against the backdrop of Russia's growing military presence in the South Caucasus and Russian troops being deployed 40 kilometres from Tbilisi.[11]

Of note is that the promotion of openly pro-Russian narratives in Georgia is not very popular in light of territorial conflicts and Russian occupation. Therefore, advocating neutrality or military non-alignment is a transitional and concealed tactic in order to shape public opinion and set the stage for gradual changes.

In sum, the principal objective of the anti-Western and the pro-Russian disinformation is to denunciate NATO membership and, generally, Euro-Atlantic orientation, on the one hand, and demonstrate the advantages of military non-alignment and cooperation with Russia, on the other hand. In this context, there were active and oft-repeated disinformation items and propaganda messages against NATO in 2020 which are divided into four major categories:

Exploiting the issue of the occupied territories, as a national trauma, against NATO

- Georgia's NATO membership means automatically abandoning the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region.
- Georgia will never be admitted into NATO since it is the Alliance's clear position that countries with conflicts cannot join NATO.
- NATO is unable to return Georgia's lost territories because Russia is militarily much stronger.

NATO membership contradicts Georgia's national interests – propaganda for false neutrality

- The North-Atlantic vector is a utopia imposed over Georgia by a small foreign policy elite. In fact, people do not back NATO membership and the surveys to measure the NATO support level are constantly rigged.
- We have been hearing false promises of Georgia's NATO membership since 1994 but the West always refers to different criteria to block Georgia's membership.
- The adoption of military neutrality is the only right solution for Georgia. Military non-alignment would allow Georgia to solve territorial problems and ensure rapid development.
- Cooperation with NATO impoverishes Georgia because the country has to take unnecessary military expenditures to meet the commitments.
- NATO is a weaker alliance as compared to Russia. Therefore, Georgia has to declare military non-alignment in order to ensure its own security.

[11] E. Naskidashvili, "Tamar Kiknadze: A Person Who Starts to Talk about NATO Now is an Enemy of the Country!" *Georgia and the World*, 24 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3pUQGgP

- NATO's attention toward Georgia amid the pandemic and the visit of NATO warships in Georgian ports indicate that it is not Georgia which needs NATO but it is NATO which uses Georgia for its own needs.

Attempt to portray cooperation with NATO as an inevitable military confrontation with Russia

- Georgia will not be admitted into NATO since Russian aggression is inevitable in the case of Georgia's NATO membership and the Alliance will not be able to defend the country.
- The North-Atlantic orientation will turn Georgia into a battleground for a NATO-Russia confrontation.
- Georgia "irritates" Russia by cooperation with NATO and incites a response from the Kremlin.
- NATO seeks to alter the balance of power in the Black Sea, although the dominance of Russia's military is undisputable.
- NATO's exercises/drills in Georgia are a "rehearsal of hostilities against Russia" and Russia is prompted to give an adequate military response.

Attempt to portray NATO as a weak and functionless organisation

- Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has become a functionless organisation and cannot handle modern security challenges.
- NATO experiences the most serious crisis in the history of its existence as the disagreement between the members and the ongoing crisis between NATO and the USA brings the Alliance closer to the real danger of disintegration.
- Georgia cannot guarantee its security through a weakened NATO. Therefore, it would be better if Georgia politically aligns with Russia, a nuclear power, which is feared by the West.
- NATO fears Russia since Russia stands ready to really protect its interests through force whilst NATO fights only for money.

Disinformation Against the USA

One of the cornerstones of the efforts taken by the anti-Western and the pro-Russian disinformation purveyors is to promote narratives discrediting the USA, Georgia's strategic partner. During the monitoring period, these actors sought to achieve their objectives by promoting messages based on different narratives and portraying the friendly relations between the USA and Georgia in an extremely negative context.

One of the notable and oft-repeated narratives says that Georgia's independence is a total sham since the country is in fact a US colony, controlled by American politicians whilst the American ambassador plays a special role in this process. According to the propaganda which was actively promoted in the beginning of 2020 amid the political crisis over the electoral system, Washington has Tbilisi subjugated, it blatantly interferes in Georgia's internal affairs and uses the country for its own purposes at the expense of Georgia's national interests. In addition, Russian propaganda argues that Georgia cannot understand that in fact it cannot get any benefit from Washington because it is in service to the US. Here, of note is the

Anaklia seaport which the Russian media claims the USA "imposed" on Georgia and is directed against Georgia's interests since it irritates Russia.[12]

As part of the anti-American campaign, the pro-Russian forces have made efforts throughout the entire 2020 to portray Washington as an aggressive international actor. This narrative is used to justice the Kremlin's hostile actions against the neighbour countries. According to this narrative, the US seeks to have Russia "encircled by NATO" whilst Georgia is needed in the process for provocation and military purposes which prompts Russia to respond. The pro-Russian media agencies have also emphasised Washington's "aggressive nature" multiple times within the pandemic context and promoted different disinformation pieces in 2020 in this regard. The pro-Russian propaganda started to become active in this direction in March-April 2020; that is, at the initial stage of the pandemic. According to the anti-American messages, America was responsible for the origination and the worldwide spread of the coronavirus whilst it was in Washington's interests to weaken adversary states in order to achieve geopolitical objectives.[13]

Similar to the beginning of the previous year, groups cultivating anti-American sentiments claimed in May-June 2020 that the USA is not at all Georgia's partner country and in fact Washington interferes in Georgia's politics in order to achieve its own goals. In particular, the pro-Russian media responded harshly to President Salome Zurabishvili's May 2020 decision to pardon political prisoners, Gigi Ugulava and Irakli Okruashvili, which was preceded by calls from Georgia's Western partners, including American politicians, to respect the 8 March agreement. The pro-Russian groups claimed that it was against the will of the Georgian people as the groups concluded that "American imperialism scored a victory over the Georgian people at the hand of the very president elected by the Georgian people." At the same time, Adam Kinzinger, a US Congressman and Co-chair of the Georgia Caucus who frequently made statements in regard to the ongoing political crisis in Georgia, was referred to as a "third-rate" ruler of Georgia or alternatively as the "de-facto ruler of Georgia, king and patriarch." Simultaneously, another narrative was promoted which claimed that the most important pretence of the American government vis-à-vis Georgian politicians is the insufficient obedience of Tbilisi towards Washington. Before the elections, the pro-Russian actors claimed that Washington wants to see a more "obedient" government in Georgia as compared to the current Georgian Dream's rule.[14]

As a part of the anti-American disinformation, the propaganda targeting the US embassy and the US Ambassador Kelly Degnan is of note in the July-August 2020 reporting period. According to the narrative, in spite of the fact that the Trump Administration; that is, a "conservative government," was still in power, the US embassy was lobbying the liberal opposition and Ambassador Degnan acted to benefit Saakashvili and Bokeria. At the same time, the anti-American actors promoted various disinformation narratives to discredit Washington. According to these narratives, the existence of the unresolved conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is in US interests in order to make sure that Georgia and Russia are unable to restore

[12] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's December-February Report, pp. 16-17. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf
[13] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's March-April Report, pp. 8-9. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/745.pdf
[14] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's May-June Report, pp. 7-9. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf

normal relations. These messages claim that the existing status-quo in terms of Georgia's territorial integrity is favourable for the USA since it makes Georgia dependent on the USA whilst Washington takes advantage of this and uses Tbilisi for its own purposes.

Together with portraying the USA as an actor having contradictory interests to Georgia, the anti-American media also emphasised Washington's declining role in international politics. In order to illustrate Washington's weaknesses, the pro-Russian media emphasised America's foreign debt and the crisis of the American dollar as well as the challenges associated with the US air force modernisation process. The pro-Russian media outlets also used the pandemic to this end. In particular, their narrative stated that the pandemic demonstrated the weakness and the feebleness of the American political system. As opposed to the attacks against the USA, they often highlighted the effectiveness of such totalitarian regimes as Russia and China in terms of handling the pandemic.[15]

Similar to the previous months, the campaign to discredit the US embassy and Ambassador Degnan was very active in the pre-election period. The pro-Russian groups claimed that the US Ambassador Degnan drafts the agenda for Georgian political parties and she "ordered" the parties to sign the pre-election "code of conduct." The messages promoted in that period portray both the government and the opposition as being subservient to the US and "competing with each other to execute US orders more rapidly and without uttering a word." The anti-American groups also made emphasis that the assistance from the US is negligible as compared to the money coming from Russia and it is mostly used in Georgia to buy the "third sector" as well as to fund the Russophobic media. On top of that, the pro-Russian agencies argued that the US supports liberal values which are incompatible with the Georgian people. According to the anti-American groups, Georgia did not get anything tangible from the 30-year-long US protectorate except for "gay prides."[16]

At the end of the year, Washington was mostly targeted by the anti-American groups because of the US presidential elections. According to the messages promoted as part of the anti-American campaign, the US elections results were rigged,[17] there were dead people in the voter lists[18] and the liberal media hastily announced the winner because of the partisan bias.[19]

The local anti-American groups usually rooted for Donald Trump in the US presidential elections, simultaneously portraying Joe Biden's potential victory as an undesirable occurrence, claiming that it would be followed by the globalists further "intensifying liberal propaganda which is harmful for the

[15] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's July-August Report, pp. 10-13. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf

[16] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's September-October Report, pp. 12-15. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

[17] I. Jankarashvili, "The US Army Conducted a Special Operation in Germany and Obtained a Server which was Used to Rig the Elections." Viewpoint, 14 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/2Pff5Ba

[18] E. Naskidashvili, "Election Fraud Happens in America Too. They Too, Have Dead Persons in the Voter Lists, There Too, TVs Announce the Winner…" TVM.GE. 12 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/37HeHSr

[19] A. Saneblidze, "Irakli Gogava: "Media's Announcement of Biden as the Winner is Only an Assumption, Congratulations are Early." *Georgia and the World*. 10 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3pRgN8v

country."[20] In addition, they argued that "under sleepy Joe's presidency, Russophobic sentiments will rise and a new wave of anti-Russian hysteria will engulf Georgia and Ukraine."[21] At the same time, the local satellites of the Kremlin stated that it was pointless for the opposition to wait for the US presidential election results since no one would find time for Georgia in the US amid the growing political chaos in the self-proclaimed beacon of democracy.[22] Against the backdrop of the armistice in Nagorno-Karabakh signed under Russian mediation, the pro-Kremlin forces highlighted the irreversible decline of the USA in the region as "polarised and on the verge of collapse" as opposed to Russia's growing influence.[23] The petition, signed by Georgian foreign and security policy professionals, asking the former US Secretary of State to deploy a US military base in Georgia,[24] did not go unnoticed by the pro-Russian groups. In particular, the Kremlin's local satellites disparaged the possibility of the deployment of a US military base in Georgia as hysteria on the part of the expert community affiliated with the opposition groups.[25] The oft-repeated disinformation and propaganda messages against the USA in 2020 are divided into four major categories:

Propaganda campaign on the alleged blatant US interference into Georgia's domestic politics

- Georgia's independence is a total sham since the country is a US colony.
- Georgian politics are governed by the US embassy – There are two women presidents in Georgia: Salome Zurabishvili and Kelly Degnan.
- Adam Kinzinger is the de-facto ruler, president, king and patriarch of Georgia.

Attempts to portray the US as an aggressive international actor

- The USA, together with NATO, is an aggressive international actor and an unreliably ally which motivates Georgia against Russia.
- The coronavirus is a man-made biological weapon created by the USA to win the trade war with China.
- The Lugar Centre serves US military interests whilst Georgia is being prepared for biological warfare.
- Novichok was created in the West (the USA) whilst Navalny was poisoned by the Americans in order to hinder the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

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[20] J. Zhvania, "Guram Nikolaishvili: "Victory of the Democrats in America Means they will Further Intensify the so called Liberal Propaganda." *Georgia and the World*. 17 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3klfptn

[21] I. Jankarashvili, "As Stated by Biden, Crimean Peninsula which was Under Ukraine's Control Before 2014, is in Their Sphere of Interest." Viewpoint. 10 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3aNCvWw

[22] I. Jankarashvili, "Playing Democracy and the USA as a "Dime-Lighted" Beacon of Democracy." Viewpoint. 6 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3uBkRgP

[23] E. Naskidashvili, "Giorgi Mdivani: "The World is being Changed Before Our Eyes. Americans Can No Longer be Absolute Gendarmes of the World, No Matter Whether Biden or Trump is Elected as a President." *Georgia and the World*. 16 November 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/37NyO18

[24] Radio Liberty. "Georgia's Expert Community Asks Michael Pompey for Permanent US troops Deployment in Georgia." 16 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/37NyO18

[25] I. Jankarashvili, "Eventually, American Military Bases will not be Deployed and the Hysteria of the UNM-affiliated Media and the UNM-affiliated Experts Will Disappear Like Many Others Before." Viewpoint. 17 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3pKeRys

Attempts to portray the US as a declining power

- The USA has become weakened and its global dominance is coming to an end militarily, financially and ideologically.
- Polarised and facing political chaos, the USA has no time for Georgia and its role in the region is steadily declining. Against this backdrop, Russia scored a big geopolitical success in the South Caucasus.

Portraying the US-Georgia partnership as something not beneficial for Tbilisi

- Washington does not care about Georgia's national interests as it protects liberal values – as a result, Georgia did not get anything tangible from the 30-year-long US protectorate except for "gay prides."
- Income from Georgian exports to the USA is marginal whilst billions are coming from Russia.
- As in previous times, the USA plays a negative role in solving the Abkhazian problem and does not allow Georgia to normalise relations with Russia. Americans foiled Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations both in 1997 and 2004.

The propaganda campaign over the US presidential elections

- The USA, named as a beacon of democracy, had its elections rigged.
- Old faces, hawks and Russophobes are expected to take key positions in the Biden Administration.

Disinformation Against the EU

EU membership is one of Georgia's main foreign policy goals. The Russian propaganda in Georgia aims to cultivate a negative attitude towards the EU among Georgian people in order to eventually change Georgia's foreign policy and make Georgia abandon EU integration.

To shape anti-EU sentiments among Georgia's population, the propaganda mouthpieces seek to discredit the EU and sow groundless fears about the Union. The anti-Western propaganda makes particular emphasis on issues related to values and identity and argues that Georgian and European cultures are incompatible because the EU fights Orthodox Christianity and traditions in Georgia. The pro-Russian and the anti-Western disinformation rigorously seeks to convince people that the country will be asked to accept various conditions (depriving Georgianhood), including allowing LGBT propaganda, in exchange for Georgia's Western integration.[26] According to the anti-Western sources, the foreign-imposed Western type education system as well as the NGO sector[27] and the media[28] constitute one of the mechanisms to establish Western values which are "unacceptable" for Georgia.[29] In regard to other conditions, the propaganda blames the EU for imposing such "malicious" law on Georgia as the "anti-discrimination law,"

[26] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre: Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda. May-June Report, pp. 10-11. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf
[27] Valeri Kvaratskhelia (2020), "Golden Mean." *Georgia and the World*. Available at: https://bit.ly/3slyhv6
[28] Omar Gotsidze (2020). "Foreign Imposed Education System Stupefied, Spoiled and Turned Youth Impudent. *Georgia and the World*. Available at: https://bit.ly/2ZNqIkX
[29] M. Udzilauri (2020). "The West Established the so-called NGO Sector and Many from the Political Elites Made Their First Steps in Those Offices!" News Front. Available at: https://bit.ly/3qXW0l4

the "juvenile justice code" (the Code of Rights of the Child) which deprives families of their children and the law on women quotas in parliament, etc.[30] At the same time, the anti-Western sources praised Russia and the Russian president as champions of traditional values.[31] Therefore, they claimed that Georgia has to revise its Euro-Atlantic orientation due to its incompatibility with EU values.[32]

The anti-Western propaganda busily covered migration threats in Europe and Georgia in 2020.[33] In this regard, particular emphasis was made on the worsening criminogenic situation in Europe[34] and Western multiculturalism whilst the high numbers of migrants were named as the culprits.[35] The campaign to discredit the EU with the issue of the migrants was accompanied with messages that Georgia's EU membership will be followed by a mass influx of migrants into Georgia.[36]

On top of that, the pro-Russian propaganda sought to contrast Georgia's EU integration with taking back the occupied territories and posed a false dilemma. According to the disinformation, Abkhazians and Ossetians will not want to live in a European style Georgia and the EU.[37] Therefore, Georgia has to change its course on European integration and focus on settling relations with Russia. In this regard, the anti-Western sources stated[38] that it is the West that hinders[39] Georgia to normalise relations with Russia whilst the road to return Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region goes through Russia.[40]

The anti-Western propaganda also argued that the EU brings no benefits for Georgia. In particular, they sought to discredit the EU-Georgia Association Agreement and visa liberalisation, characterising both of them as useless, harmful and restricting of rights.[41] In addition, they highlighted Georgia's unfavourable

[30] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, pp. 17-18. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf
[31] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, p. 11. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf
[32] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, pp. 17-18. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf
[33] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, pp. 9-10. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf
[34] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, pp. 15-16. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf
[35] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, pp. 19-20. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf
[36] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre: Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda. May-June Report, pp. 10-11. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf
[37] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, pp. 14-15. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf
[38] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, pp. 16-17. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf
[39] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre: Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda. May-June Report, pp. 10-11. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf
[40] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, pp. 6, 15. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf
[41] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, pp. 11-12. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf

economic situation over 2020 and linked[42] this to the country's European orientation[43] and the EU-Georgia Association Agreement.[44] Furthermore, by providing different pieces of disinformation these sources sought to convince readers that EU membership or membership aspirations had harmed the economies of other countries whilst it was the opposite in case for the Eurasian Economic Union. They presented Armenia as an example and claimed that Armenia developed its economy by rejecting the EU and joining the Eurasian Economic Union. Therefore, they concluded that it would be detrimental[45] for Georgia to replace the Russian market with the European one. According to the pro-Russian disinformation, Georgia has not benefited from the Association Agreement with the EU, and free trade and the European open market are only fictional advantages as they don't bring any substantial gains. To provide argumentation to their claim, pro-Russian propaganda claimed that the West doesn't want to develop Georgia, because, in the case of economic development, Georgia would no longer be a "slave" of the West; Therefore, the EU doesn't support the development of Georgian exports, so the European market remains useless for Georgia. Consequently, the Eurasian Economic Union was, in fact, portrayed as a better alternative vis-à-vis the EU.

The pro-Russian propaganda also cultivated nihilism in regard to the EU and claimed Georgia's EU membership was unrealistic. According to the disinformation, striving towards the EU whilst having no real chances to join it made Georgia even weaker instead of developing the country. This was a particularly active narrative in light of Brexit in January-February 2020 as the Russian propaganda nurtured thoughts that Georgia's bid to join the EU, which the UK celebrates leaving, is fruitless.[46]

On top of the aforementioned oft-repeated narratives targeting the EU, disinformation messages were promoted on other issues as well during 2020. The Russian propaganda rigorously took advantage[47] of the issue of the pandemic in March-May (and later) to portray the EU as a weak and unreliable Union and on the contrary, underlined the effectiveness of Russia and China in their fight against the pandemic.[48] The message that the EU abandoned Italy and Spain and only Russia and China helped them was actively

[42] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre: Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda. May-June Report, pp. 10-11. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf

[43] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, p. 16-18. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

[44] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's March-April Report, pp. 10-11. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/745.pdf

[45] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, p. 14. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf

[46] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, p. 11. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf

[47] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre: Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda. May-June Report, p. 11. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf

[48] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's March-April Report, pp. 10-13. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/745.pdf

promoted.[49] The anti-Western sources, persisting in pushing the similar message, argued that the West did not help Georgia to handle the pandemic.[50]

The pro-Kremlin propaganda also exploited the pandemic to push the narrative that the EU is on the verge of collapse, predicting it would be unable to revive after the pandemic and would disintegrate.[51] The anti-Western sources also falsely reported the threats of different EU member states leaving the Union.[52] However, the principal message of the looming disintegration of the EU was changed in the second half of 2020 and a new message started to highlight the confrontation between Eastern and Western Europe. In particular, anti-Western propaganda claimed that there was an ideological confrontation between Western and Eastern Europe, that the US might exploit to separate Central and Eastern Europe from the EU and on the other hand, create a union of anti-Western Central and Eastern European states around Poland under the protectorate of the US.[53]

The pro-Russian media was active in November-December 2020 over the adoption of the budget and the COVID-19 damage relief plan. In particular, the target of the pro-Russian propaganda was the controversy between Poland and Hungary and the rest of the EU over linking receiving the EU funds to the rule of law in the member state. The anti-Western propaganda interpreted this as Poland and Hungary being punished for disobeying the EU's LGBT diktat and being targeted with financial sanctions.[54] It was also assessed as a refusal from Poland and Hungary to relinquish their independence, identity and national belonging even if threatened with being stripped of financial assistance.[55] This issue was also exploited to foster the narrative on the EU's disintegration[56] as the pro-Russian mouthpieces reported that the confrontation might lead to the dismemberment of the EU.[57]

Prior to the 8 March 2020 agreement[58] and later in the pre-election period (September-October), the narrative on the EU's interference in Georgia's domestic affairs was actively promoted. The anti-Western

[49] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, p. 6. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf

[50] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's March-April Report, pp. 17-18. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/745.pdf

[51] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's March-April Report, pp. 10-11. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/745.pdf

[52] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, p. 16. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf

[53] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, pp. 19-20. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

[54] D. Mkheidze (2020), "Are You a "Fag" – You Will Get the Money. Are You Not – You Will Get a Fig Sign." *Georgia and the World.* Available at: https://bit.ly/2P6sVFL

[55] A. Saneblidze (2020), "Through Denouncement of Being Georgian – Onwards to EU Membership!" *Georgia and the World.* Available at: https://bit.ly/3euWdsn

[56] L. Maisuradze (2020), "Poland Says the EU Faces Threat of Disintegration." *Georgia and the World*. Available at: https://bit.ly/3klFPLP

[57] L. Maisuradze (2020), "Prime Ministers of Poland and Hungary Start Talks on EU Disintegration." *Georgia and the World*. Available at: https://bit.ly/3qV3iG9

[58] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, pp. 13-14. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf

propaganda proclaimed Georgia as an EU colony[59] and the government as an EU puppet which is run by instructions from Europe.[60] Moreover, the anti-Western sources wrote that Europe no longer wanted to see the Georgian Dream and Bidzina Ivanishvili at the helm of the government, even if people voted for them. These sources claimed that Europe supports the opposition and the United National Movement and Brussels pushed Georgia to lower the election threshold for having the opposition in the parliament. According to the pro-Russian actors, Europe made Georgia make the electoral system more proportional (120-30) in order to ensure that there would be a need for a coalition government which would spark a political crisis.[61] The oft-repeated disinformation and propaganda messages against the EU in 2020 are divided into eight major categories:

Attempt to discredit EU values and sow fear on losing identity

- Western integration has its own terms and conditions which means agreeing to the LGBT propaganda.
- The EU fights Orthodox Christianity, traditions and traditional values in Georgia by promoting Western values.
- The EU forced Georgia to adopt such "inhumane laws" as the "Right of Residence for Foreigners," the "Anti-discrimination Law," "Juvenile Justice" and quotas for women in parliament, etc.
- The West is the fountainhead of the moral degradation and EU values are unacceptable whilst Russia is a champion of traditional values. Therefore, Georgia has to reject European integration.

Attempt to portray migration as the EU's main problem and threat for Georgia

- Given the high number of migrants in Europe, the demographic picture will be altered rapidly and waves of migrants will inundate Europe.
- As a result of crimes committed by migrants there is a serious criminogenic situation in Europe which is a result of Europe's multiculturalism.
- Georgia's EU membership will cause a massive influx of migrants or Turkey may steer migrant waves to Georgia instead of to Greece.

Attempt to discredit the EU as a negative actor on the world stage

- The EU is a non-democratic and unjust union without the freedom of speech.
- Disinformation problems were invented by the West itself and it is the West which actively promotes disinformation.
- EU member countries only took care of themselves amid the pandemic and did not show solidarity to each other.

[59] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre: Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda. May-June Report, p. 10-11. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf
[60] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, p. 15. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf
[61] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, pp. 16-17. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

- The EU did not help Italy and abandoned it whilst Russia and China turned out to be Italy's only true friends.
- The coronavirus pandemic proved that the EU is not the future for Europe, let alone for Georgia.

Attempt to portray the EU as a weak union on the verge of disintegration

- The EU still cannot handle the coronavirus which China beat in a matter of days. As a result, the attitude of most of Georgian people towards the EU is getting negative and the EU membership policy needs to be revised.
- The EU is on the verge of disintegration because Italy, Spain and the Netherlands, etc., may quit. The USA may take advantage of the confrontation between Eastern and Western Europe to dismember the EU.

Attempt to portray the EU as an imperialist organisation which unlawfully interferes in Georgia's domestic affairs

- Georgia is an EU colony and a puppet run by its resolutions and recommendations whilst the EU could not care less about Georgian democracy.
- The EU blackmails the Georgian government and supports the oppositions because it does not want to see the Georgian Dream and Bidzina Ivanishvili at the helm of the government even if people vote them in.
- Europe forced Georgia to lower the election threshold in order to make sure that the opposition parties they support will gain seats in the parliament.
- Europe pushed Georgia to adopt the 120/30 electoral model and the 1% threshold as it aims to have a coalition government. Coalition governments, however, are never successful and Europe seeks to foster instability in order to block the attraction of foreign; more precisely, Russian investments to Georgia.

The EU brings damage to Georgia instead of benefit

- After signing the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, the Parliament of Georgia is powerless. The Association Agreement only imposes unilateral obligations over Georgia and brings no tangible benefits.
- Georgia has no room in the European economic space and as a result, Georgia's economy was stronger under the USSR as compared to having the Association Agreement with the EU. Therefore, the replacement of the Russian market with the European one is detrimental.
- Financial assistance, loans and investments from the West to Georgia are a threat.
- Visa liberalisation is meaningless and anti-Georgian.
- Amid the pandemic Georgia received medical assistance not from the West but from China. Georgia doctors have to count on their Russian colleagues, too.

Attempt to portray the EU as an actor opposing the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity

- Abkhazians and Ossetians will want to live with Georgians again in the case of building a "Georgian Georgia" and not a "European" one.

- The EU-Georgia Association Agreement does not help the normalisation of relations with Russia and instead the West hinders Georgia from having normal relations with Russia which is key to taking back the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia.
- Georgian and Ukrainian territories are occupied by the EU and the West seeks to artificially separate these two countries from Russia.

Attempts to foster nihilism over Georgia's EU membership

- The UK celebrates leaving the EU whilst Georgia seeks in vain to join.
- The Georgian government lies to the people because the country cannot join the EU.

Russia-supporting Propaganda

The main objective of the Russian propaganda in Georgia is manipulating public opinion in order to raise questions among the population about the country's declared pro-Western foreign policy or ideally to shape attitudes which are favourable for Russia. To this end, the pro-Russian actors disseminated messages of different respective narratives in 2020.

At the beginning of 2020 and at the start of the pandemic and before the epidemiological situation in Russia worsened sharply, the local pro-Russian groups took advantage of the spread of the coronavirus to idealise the USSR and portray modern Russia as a country which effectively deals with the crises. According to their messages, the difference in the confirmed cases between the West and Russia was because of the Soviet education system. This narrative claimed that the healthcare system in the USSR was so well-run that such diseases were simply not transmitted and that was why the spread of the coronavirus in Russia was of a limited nature. Of note is that in light of the mass spread of the coronavirus in Russia which sparked the country's health system crisis, the aforementioned propaganda narrative disappeared from the toolkit of the pro-Russian actors and was replaced by other messages which were more in line with the unfolding situation.[62]

During the May-June monitoring period, the local pro-Kremlin satellites were particularly active in promoting messages on the necessity of having negotiations with Russia. In particular, the pro-Russian sources commented on the idea voiced by Konstantin Kosachev, Chairperson of the International Affairs Committee of the Federation Council of Russia, about the restoration of a parliamentary dialogue with Georgia and Ukraine. These sources argued that Giorgi Volski, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, rejected this suggestion under Western pressure from the US and the EU. The pro-Russian actors claimed that Russia made the first steps several times whilst Georgia customarily rejected the dialogue and Georgia's Western "partners" are to blame for this. According to this oft-repeated narrative, the West deliberately hinders Georgia from having negotiations with Russia in order not to lose control over Tbilisi.[63]

[62] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's March-April Report, pp. 12-14. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/745.pdf

[63] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre: Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda. May-June Report, pp. 12-14. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf

The pro-Kremlin actors highlighted the necessity of the restoration relations with the Kremlin by portraying Russia as a powerful international actor which the West fails to influence by the imposition sanctions or any other measures. At the same time, these groups claimed that Moscow is the only power which is able to solve Georgia's territorial problems. Therefore, they insisted that that having relations with the Kremlin should be a priority for Georgia. According to the same narrative, apart from dealing with territorial integrity problems, the alliance with Russia is also important in order to neutralise the dangers coming Iran and Turkey.[64]

On top of the pro-Russian actor's propaganda on Russia being a glorious power, they also argued that the Kremlin is simply forced to respond to the Western aggression. During the July-August monitoring period, these groups made efforts to disregard Russia's aggression against Georgia and claimed that Georgians are largely to blame for ruining relations with Russia. In particular, they put the blame for the 2008 war on the previous government of Georgia. At the same time, the pro-Russian groups insisted that Russia needed the occupation of Georgia for geopolitical purposes only and in fact despite military confrontation, the Kremlin is very benevolent towards Georgia whilst the Russian President harbours a "special" attitude towards the Georgian people.

As a part of the pro-Russian campaign to bring further evidence about the necessity of restoring Georgian-Russian relations, the pro-Kremlin groups emphasised the dependence of the Georgian economy on Russian money and argued that the country's "lifeline goes through Russia." They also claimed that Western aid is negligible as compared to the money from Russia. According to this narrative, the Georgian economy is dependent on Russian money and that Moscow can make Georgians starve. The pro-Kremlin mouthpieces also named the cultural and religious proximity between Georgia and Russia as yet another reason for Tbilisi to be aspiring towards an alliance with Moscow instead of with the West. They never cease to argue that Russia is an Orthodox nation and the only power in the world defending traditional values.[65]

In addition, the local Kremlin satellites have constantly sought to convince the population that Georgia is currently occupied not only by Russia but by several countries simultaneously and Georgia should have partner relations only with Russia in the future because of the convergence of geopolitical interests. As a result, pro-Russian propaganda purveyors called for the adoption of neutrality or at best form a military and political alliance with Russia.[66]

During the November-December monitoring period at the end of 2020, the pro-Kremlin groups also highlighted the success of Russia's COVID-19 vaccine and Moscow's role in the peacekeeping process in

[64] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, pp. 16-19. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf
[65] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, pp. 23-25. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf
[66] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, pp. 27-30. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

the aftermath of the second Karabakh war in addition to the traditional and oft-repeated messages.[67] [68] [69] In particular, their narratives stated that the West's negative attitude vis-à-vis the Russian vaccine was a manifestation of Russophobia.[70] At the same time, the pro-Russian actors condemned the Georgian government and claimed that Tbilisi put Western goodwill above public interest and this is why Georgia is boycotting the Russian vaccine.[71]

On the issue of the second Karabakh war, the pro-Kremlin groups highlighted that the Russian president achieved the ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan without leaving his own study and this happened without the involvement of the EU and the USA.[72] Through the dissemination of such messages, the local pro-Russian groups emphasised that the alliance between Georgia and Russia had no alternative and sought to convince people of the necessity of restoring relations with Moscow. The oft-repeated Russia-supporting disinformation and propaganda messages are divided into four major categories:

Attempts to portray Russia as the political power defending traditional values and idolize the USSR

- Georgia has to make a choice between the "liberast and godless" West and the "Orthodox and coreligionist" Russia – Russia is the only true defender of national and traditional values.
- In the Soviet Union, personal hygiene was well observed and homosexuality was condemned which hindered the outbreak of pandemics.
- Given the weakness of the European education system, European countries cannot cope with the pandemic whilst Georgia and the post-Soviet countries, including Russia, successfully handle the coronavirus owing to Soviet medicine.
- The Soviet socialist Georgia did not have a territorial integrity problem and people lived better.

Advocacy for starting direct political dialogue with the Moscow on Kremlin's terms

- The Western sanctions and pressure on Russia are ineffective and the keys to all of Georgia's problems are in Moscow. Therefore, Georgia has no alternative except Russia and Georgia's development is implausible without the restoration of Georgian-Russian relations.
- Although Moscow made the first steps a number of times in order to start dialogue with Georgia, Tbilisi refuses to normalise relations with Russia under Western pressure.
- The restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity and the further development of the country is possible only after the adoption of neutrality or forming a military-strategic alliance with Russia.

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[67] D. Tskipurishvili, (2020). "Is Russia Our Enemy?! The Population of Georgia Was 800,000 Prior to the Treaty of Georgiyevsk and Five Million in 1991." News Front. 10 December 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/2O0nbwP

[68] D. Mkheidze (2020) "From Homo Sovieticus to Homo Faggotus". *Georgia and the World* 22 December 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3kpeV5H

[69] D. Mkheidze (2020) "Are You a "Fag" – You Will Get the Money. Are You Not – You Will Get a Fig Sign." *Georgia and the World*. Available at: https://bit.ly/2P6sVFL

[70] N. Korinteli, "The Russian Vaccine Broke the European Blockade." *Georgia and the World*. 10 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/37P683VL

[71] D. Mkheidze, "Race of the Two-legged Donkeys." *Georgia and the World*. 15 December 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3bIbuDi

[72] D. Mkheidze, "I am Neither Nikol Pashinyan's Eulogist nor Ilham Aliyev's Extoller." *Georgia and the World*. 17 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/37OXZ3y

- Russia halted the hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan without the involvement of the West.

Portraying Russia as being benevolent towards Georgia and using force only as a last resort vis-à-vis Russophobic actions and aggression

- Western neoliberalism declared an ideological-propaganda war against Russia and every other freedom-loving nation.
- The West shows aggressive behaviour whilst Russia defends itself. It was not Russia but the West which poisoned Alexey Navalny in order to spark unrest in Russia.
- Georgia-based NGOs, which aim to keep a constant confrontation with Russia, worsen Georgia's relations with Russia in combination with the West.
- Russia is benevolent towards Georgia whilst President Putin harbours a "special" attitude vis-à-vis the Georgian people.
- In spite of the efficacy of the Russian COVID-19 vaccine, Tbilisi rejects it under Western pressure.

Exaggerating the importance of Russain market for Georgia's economy

- Georgia's lifeline goes through Russia and, therefore, Russia can make Georgians starve.
- It was Russia again which threw a lifesaver into the Georgian economy amid the pandemic.

Anti-Turkish Disinformation

One of the strategic goals of Russia in Georgia is to marginalise the issue of the Russian occupation. To this end, Russian propaganda has been using the issue of Tao-Klarjeti, Georgia's historical province, for years in order to portray Turkey as an occupier. The spread of the anti-Turkish propaganda messages aims to shift people's focus from the Russian occupation and the threats coming from Moscow. Apart from the pro-Russia and anti-Western media, groups and sources, there are two political parties – the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia and the Georgian Idea – which were actively involved in the promotion of the anti-Turkish propaganda in 2020.[73] [74] [75] [76]

The narrative which argues that Turkey is also an occupier together with Russia serves the aim to shift the focus from Russian threats and Russian occupation. There were information campaigns in 2020 to regularly push forward this issue. According to the disinformation, if Russia has occupied 22% of Georgian territories, then Turkey has annexed 33-34% and even more. Therefore, if Georgia fights Russia it should also be fighting Turkey or if Georgia does not fight Turkey, it should also not be fighting Russia. The

[73] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, pp. 21-23. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf
[74] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre: Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda. May-June Report, p. 14. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf
[75] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, pp. 25-28. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf
[76] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, pp. 30-33. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

Georgian Idea openly claimed that Turkey is Georgia's main enemy. In addition, there were claims that considering Turkey as a friend and Russia as a historical enemy[77] is wrong since it was Russia which restored Georgia its Turkish-occupied territories and Russia which rescued Georgia from dismemberment and disappearance.[78]

The pro-Russian and anti-Western propaganda highlighted threats coming from Turkey and sowed fear among the public throughout the entire reporting period. To this end, disinformation purveyors have traditionally manipulated public opinion with the Treaty of Kars, making emphasis on the expiration of the Treaty in 2021 which would ostensibly give Turkey a legal ground to capture Ajara. The main message of the anti-Turkish propaganda is the threat of the potential Turkish occupation of Ajara (as well as Ozurgeti and Akhalkalaki). In addition, these sources reported false information that Erdogan referred to Batumi as a Turkish city.[79] In addition to drawing people's attention to the capturing (annexation or occupation) of Ajara by force, the anti-Turkish propaganda also highlighted soft power methods and promoted messages that Turkish investments in Ajara are an indicator of economic, educational and cultural expansion. On top of that, messages were spread in November that opposed the construction of hydropower plants in the Rioni Gorge and the municipality of Tskaltubo and at the same time portrayed Turkey as an occupant. The construction of the power plants was perceived as a part of the Turkish expansion and the "Great Turkish Invasion", whereas the government was described as a traitor for giving the construction permission.[80] The anti-western sources employed trolls to indicate an increased stream of Turkish narratives on the Georgian internet.[81] According to the pro-Russian sources, the pandemic slowed down Turkey's economic expansion in Georgia although it did not stop it.[82] The anti-Turkish propaganda also sought to cultivate public fears by the so-called "Meskhetian Turks" issue. The disinformation item stated that it was planned to resettle 100,000 Meskhetian Turks in Georgia's Samtskhe-Javakheti region which would become yet another mechanism of Turkish expansion. This was promoted throughout the entire 2020.[83]

Apart from making efforts to shift the focus away from Russia, the anti-Turkish propaganda also sought to discredit the EU and NATO among the Georgian people. After highlighting threats coming from Turkey, the propaganda purveyors claimed that the EU is unable to defend Georgia from Turkey, naming Cyprus as an example.[84] In addition, the anti-Western propaganda advanced an idea in July 2020 that Turkey

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[77] BS info Facebook page (2020), Available at: https://bit.ly/3rzfFYx

[78] News Front, tvm.ge, Stalin Facebook page (2020), Video: Turkey – Georgia's Historical Enemy or Friend: "Wilayat Gurjistan" (movie). Links: https://bit.ly/30u93ip; https://bit.ly/3v9EQ6r; https://bit.ly/30ukTch; https://bit.ly/30vAR64

[79] Turkey is an Occupier Facebook page (2020), Links: https://bit.ly/3epK1ch; https://bit.ly/3t74fM2 For more details, see here: https://factcheck.ge/ka/story/38683

[80] Turkey is an Occupier Facebook page (2020), Links: https://bit.ly/2OCig5y; https://bit.ly/3bzNq6s

[81] BS info Facebook page (2020), Link: https://bit.ly/3kZUhtg

[82] "The Great Turan Theory – Information Support for Imperial Plans." *Georgia and the World* (2020). Available at: https://bit.ly/3buKbfr

[83] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, p. 31. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

[84] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, pp. 31-32. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

would have a legal ground to deploy military on Georgian territory in the case of Georgia's NATO membership and, consequently, Turkish troops would enter and occupy/annex Georgia.[85]

The pro-Russian propaganda highlighted the Turkish-linked threats within the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In particular, they argued that Azerbaijan's victory in the conflict as well as the growing Turkish influence over Azerbaijan and the whole South Caucasus was a threat for Georgia. Further, they described Georgia as being encircled by the Turks as well as Turkish ambitions such as Pan-Turkism, neo-Osmanism and the Great Turan project. According to the disinformation purveyors, Euro-Atlantic integration and pro-Western values are not solutions in this situation.[86] [87] [88]

The anti-Turkish propaganda became increasingly active during the pre-election period in the July-August and the September-October reporting periods, respectively. After "revealing" threats coming from Turkey and cultivating idea of EU and NATO weakness/inactivity in the face of an assertive Turkey, the pro-Russian propaganda offered the Georgian population a solution. The Alliance of Patriots of Georgia urged the Georgian people to defend "their own share of Ajara."[89] The pro-Russian sources, however, were seeking to convince the people that Russian assistance is the only instrument for defence against Turkey and, therefore, Georgia has to normalise relations with Russia and abandon NATO aspirations. The propaganda also suggested deploying a Russian military base in order to neutralise threats from Turkey's sharp power as well as Russian investments as a counterbalance to Turkish investments in Ajara.[90] The oft-repeated anti-Turkish disinformation and propaganda messages are divided into eight major categories:

Attempt to portray Turkey as an occupier

- Apart from Russia's "temporary occupation," Turkey has also occupied Georgian lands (33%) for good and Turkey is also an occupier.
- Turkey is an occupier similar to Russia whilst Azerbaijan seeks to capture Davit-Gareja.[91] Therefore, we also have to draw our attention to these issues and promote messages – "Turkey is an occupier" and "Davit-Gareja is Georgia."
- Turkey is Georgia's number-one enemy.

Attempt to portray Turkey as an aggressor state

[85] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, p. 25-26. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf
[86] News Front (2020), "Georgia Encircled by the Turks – War is Not Over!" (Erdoghan). Available at: https://bit.ly/30o90og
[87] A. Saneblidze (2020), "Greater Turan' Project will End by Russian Bosphorus and Dardanelles." *Georgia and the World*. Available at: https://bit.ly/2NpEWpC
[88] D. Lortkipanidze (2020). "This is a Threat from Turkey which Georgia Will be Facing in the Nearest Future." Viewpoint. Available at: https://bit.ly/2OU1EpZ
[89] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, p. 25-26. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf
[90] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, p. 22. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf
[91] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre: Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda. May-June Report, p. 13-14. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf

- Turkey openly makes claims for Ajara, Guria and Samtskhe-Javakheti.
- Turkey pursues economic and cultural expansion in Georgia through investors.
- The Treaty of Kars will expire in 2021 and Turkey will try to take Ajara.
- The return of Meskhetian Turks to Georgia is a clandestine weapon to increase Turkish influence and occupy the Samtskhe-Javakheti region by the resettlement of 100,000 Meskhetian Turks.

Attempt to promote anti-NATO and anti-EU disinformation using Turkey

- Turkey will be able to deploy an army in Georgia and occupy/annex the entire country if Georgia joins NATO.
- The EU and NATO cannot defend Georgia from Turkish expansionism.

Attempt to portray Russia as an indispensable alternative to counter-balance threats from Turkey

- Russian military bases have to be deployed in Ajara to defend the region from Turkey.
- Turkish investments in Ajara are part of Turkish financial expansion and they should be counter-balanced by the Russian investments.
- Only Russia will protect the South Caucasus from Turkey.

Disinformation on International Issues

The pro-Russian propaganda in Georgia seeks to cover international news with a pro-Russian and anti-Western slant. The aim here is often to discredit the West, justify Russia's behaviour and provide a positive context to Russia's aggressive actions.

One of the main directions of the Russian propaganda in 2020 was the worldwide popularisation of the Soviet and Kremlin versions of World War Two history. This trend has also been detected in Georgia. Pro-Russian propaganda sought to justify the USSR invasion of Poland (September 17, 1939) by the arguments of Poland's alliance with Nazi Germany and Hitler and the will to return the territories lost in the war with Poland in 1919-1921. The propaganda echoed the Kremlin's messages - ignored the importance of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Soviet invasion of Poland in parallel with Germany and thus neglected the USSR's role in unleashing the war. On the other hand, Kremlin propaganda blamed the collective West for the outbreak of World War II and blamed the actions of Western democracies for the start of the war.[92] As a part of these efforts, the pro-Russian actors denounced the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as disinformation and an attempt to rewrite history.[93] The Russian propaganda praised only the USSR and its leader in ending World War Two whilst disregarding the role of other allies in the defeat of Nazi Germany. In addition, the pro-Russian

[92] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, p. 6. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf
[93] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, p. 24-25. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf

propaganda called for people to celebrate 9 May whilst Russia's agents of influence offered one-off financial assistance from the Russian government to Georgian World War Two veterans.[94]

The Russian propaganda argued that the West/USA are getting weaker, the world is becoming multi-polar and highlighted Russia's emergence in this light. According to the propaganda, because of the aforementioned circumstances countries opt to have cooperation with Russia instead of the USA which brings them economic benefit. They argue that countries which, on the contrary, are in confrontation with Moscow are doomed to suffer losses.[95] In this context, the pro-Russian disinformation views rapprochement and cooperation with Russia as the only solution for Georgia instead of the latter's openly declared pro-Western foreign policy orientation.

Apart from these oft-repeated narratives, the Russian propaganda has highlighted a number of issues throughout 2020 depending on their importance within a given period. At the beginning of 2020, the main focus of the propaganda was finding justification for Russia's aggressive actions. For instance, the pro-Russian sources claimed that blaming Russia for shooting down the Malaysian Boeing-777 in Ukraine and the Khangoshvili and Skripal cases as well as the chemical attack on the Syrian city, Douma, in 2018 was anti-Russian narrative and Russophobia. In addition, they repeated the Kremlin's message that Khangoshvili was a terrorist.[96]

The US killing the Iranian General Qasem Soleimani captured the media headlines in January 2020. The pro-Russian sources covered the issue with an anti-American slant and condemned Washington as a guilty party, the organiser of a terrorist attack and accused the USA of breaching international law.[97]

The pro-Russian propaganda was particularly focused on the events in Belarus.[98] The Kremlin's international propaganda in the aftermath of the Belarusian elections was also clear-cut in Georgia with the most intense phase obviously coinciding with the July-August period. According to the propaganda, the West, the EU and the USA (together with George Soros) are staging unrest by manipulating their puppets in Belarus to overthrow a legitimate government. The anti-Western sources insisted that Lukashenko was the last champion of traditional values in Europe. The pro-Russian propaganda called for supporting Lukashenko in Georgia (a petition was also drafted), naming fears that Belarus might have recognised Abkhazia and the so-called "South Ossetia" if Georgia did not support his victory. Keeping Lukashenko in power was assessed as the first failure of Western-plotted revolutions and a defeat for liberalism, prompting the pro-Russian media to express its gratitude to Lukashenko and Putin.[99]

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[94] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre: Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda. May-June Report, pp. 13-14. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf

[95] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, pp. 26-27. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf

[96] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, pp. 7, 26. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf

[97] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, pp. 27-28. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf

[98] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, pp. 18-20. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf

[99] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, pp. 20-21. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

The target of the pro-Russian propaganda during the November-December 2020 monitoring period was Moldova's presidential election where they supported Igor Dodon, a pro-Russian candidate, and discredited Maya Sandu, a pro-Western candidate and the West's puppet and being on Soros' payroll. [100] According to the propaganda, the West supported Sandu to separate Moldova from Russia and Moldova may eventually lose Transnistria in the case of Sandu's victory, ruining its economy and relinquishing its statehood (joining Romania). [101] The disinformation argued that the West's real interest was to ensure that these threats come true[102] whilst Russia was interested in supporting Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Russian propaganda also started to focus on the US elections in November-December 2020.[103] According to the disinformation, the elections were rigged against Trump and in favour of Biden. The pro-Russian sources claimed that the US 2020 presidential elections were the worst in US history and alleged that the elections may lead to a new American civil war.[104]

Amid the outbreak of the second Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, disinformation fostering ethnic hatred between Georgia's ethnic minorities was promoted in September-November. On the one hand, Georgia was blamed for supporting Azerbaijan, allowing the unrestricted passage of weaponry and Syrian fighters from Turkey to Azerbaijan and, on the other hand, blocking humanitarian cargo bound for Armenia.[105] The pro-Russian propaganda blamed Armenia's Soros-organised colourful revolution[106] as well as Nikol Pashinyan's liberal-democratic reforms, the country's pro-European orientation[107] and distancing Armenia from Russia for the country's defeat in the war. Moreover, the anti-Western sources indicated a pattern of losing territories after colourful revolutions (Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia).[108] Azerbaijan's victory, on the contrary, was "explained" on the ground of Baku being non-

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[100] Gulbaat Rtskhiladze (2020), "Preparations are Made for Soros-Oligarchy Coup D'état in Moldova." Saqinform: https://bit.ly/3t8e3Wl; Mediapress: https://bit.ly/3qtOzAT; News Front: https://bit.ly/38oLBrc; TVM: https://bit.ly/3qqYY05; *Georgia and the World*: https://bit.ly/3qKFkgF

[101] Gulbaat Rtskhiladze (2020), "The West Helps to Divide and Make Moldova Disappear – What are the Implications for Georgia?," Saqinform: https://bit.ly/2MlCf7V; *Georgia and the World* https://bit.ly/3qPrk5b; TVM: https://bit.ly/3sWZRzc; News Front: https://bit.ly/3ssEk1f; Viewpoint: https://bit.ly/3utU7hR; Mediapress: https://bit.ly/3rAMwwg

[102] Gulbaat Rtskhiladze (2020), "Sororist Forces Assault Moldova's Statehood!" Viewpoint: https://bit.ly/3by8ARj; News Front: https://bit.ly/30ud3zv

[103] *Georgia and the World* (2020): https://bit.ly/3smocOH; https://bit.ly/3ss9tBZ; https://bit.ly/3so43b3; https://bit.ly/3uppSc2; https://bit.ly/3usI5FH; https://bit.ly/3aOXrMZ; https://bit.ly/3smoIMD; TVM: https://bit.ly/2N19oGh; Viewpoint articles https://bit.ly/3qSHRFz; https://bit.ly/3khFw4F; Politicano: https://bit.ly/3dIheiQ; Isari.ge: https://bit.ly/3vb7Udw

[104] World Congress of Families X Tbilisi Facebook page (2020), USA on the Verge of Civil War. Available at: https://bit.ly/3v8wYC8

[105] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, p. 21. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

[106] B. Barbakadze (2020), "Politics – Money-making Instrument in Georgia." *Georgia and the World*. Available at: https://bit.ly/3ux3eP6

[107] I. Dochviri (2020), "I Call for the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia to Voice a Demand on Ceasing Political Persecution Against Igor Giorgadze!" Viewpoint. Available at: https://bit.ly/3qOW6eJ

[108] G. Kardava (2020), "As Expected, Yet Another Post-Soviet Liberal Project, Named Pashinyan's Colour Revolution, has Utterly Failed." Viewpoint. Available at: https://bit.ly/3pVscEo

democratic.[109] The pro-Russian groups also used the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to underscore Russia's invincibility and superiority by pointing out that Putin achieved a ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh without the US and the EU.[110]

The pro-Russian mouthpieces disseminated propaganda among the Georgian population on many international news items which are divided into nine major categories:

Attempt to justify Russia's aggressive actions

- Blaming Russia for shooting down the Malaysian Boeing-777 aircraft is a part of the anti-Russian hysteria.
- Blaming Russia for the Khangoshvili and Skripal cases are part of Russophobia and there is no real evidence.
- Zelimkhan Khangoshvili was a terrorist and one of the perpetrators of the Moscow terrorist attacks.
- The chemical attack on Syria's Douma is a falsification.

World War Two related propaganda and attempts to rewrite history

- The West seeks to rewrite World War Two history and denigrate the great leaders – Putin and Stalin.
- The Soviet invasion of Poland was justified and the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is a shameless lie.
- The West imposed two world wars over the world in the 20th century and the Second World War is a result of the shortcomings of the Western democracies.
- Instead of the USA and the UK, we have to thank the USSR, Stalin and the Red Army for the victory over Nazism and Fascism.
- Vladimir Putin seeks to make world aware of the real World War Two history whilst the West spreads false information.

Highlighting the necessity of cooperation with Russia

- Good relations with Russia will bring us big economic benefit (Mongolia's example) whilst confrontation with Russia will harm us (Latvia's example).
- Turkey does not care about the American sanctions and will have cooperation with Russia, for instance in the energy sector
- Georgia's support of Guaido in Venezuela (the candidate backed by the USA and the West) instead of Maduro (the Russia-backed incumbent president) is a defeat for Georgian diplomacy.

Attempt to blame the West for destabilizing the post-Soviet countries

[109] World Congress of Families X Tbilisi Facebook page, Levan Vasadze – TV address N68: "Utopia as a solution" (16.12.2020). Available at: https://bit.ly/3v1IsHs
[110] D. Mkheidze (2020), "I am Neither Nikol Pashinyan's Eulogist nor Ilham Aliyev's Extoller." *Georgia and the World*. 17 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/37OXZ3y

- Euromaidan was organized by Obama, Biden and Saakashvili whilst protesters were fired by snipers brought from Georgia by Saakashvili.
- American and European liberals seek to cause unrest in Belarus and topple a legitimate government.
- Soros organises revolutions and unrest in Eastern Europe and the Government of Georgia has also been bought by him.
- Soros and affiliated groups engage in a coordinated battled against traditional values all across the world.
- There are special centres in the West where activists are trained to stage revolutions in different countries.

US-Iran confrontation after the killing of Qasem Soleimani

- The USA, which plotted a terrorist attack against the Iranian general, is a guilty party in the USA-Iran confrontation.
- The USA breaches international law and is an occupier of Iraq.
- Iran's president considers Georgia as Iranian territory and plans to take it back.

Attempts to portray the Belarus elections as legitimate and the West as a source of instability

- There are EU interests behind the events in Belarus – the processes in Belarus are run from the outside. The West uses the Western puppets, such as Svetlana Tikhanouskaya as well as Soros-funded groups and the opposition, to blatantly interfere in Belarusian internal affairs and utterly disregards the choice of the Belarusian people.
- Poland and Lithuania want to dismember and distribute Belarus among themselves.
- If the Belarusian government is toppled, the Ukraine scenario (unrest, confrontation with Russia, economic stagnation) will unfold there.
- The Catholic world fights Orthodox Belarus.
- Lukashenko and Belarus are the last strongholds of traditional values in Europe and the Western liberals fight them for defending these values.
- If Georgia does not support Lukashenko, then Belarus will recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia which will push other countries to follow suit.
- Lukashenko is the saviour of Belarus and Putin has to emulate him in serving his nation and people.
- Putin halted the West's "evil" plot to topple the legitimate government in Belarus.
- Belarus is the first case when the West's revolutionary scenario has failed and propping up Lukashenko's regime is a defeat for liberalism.

Disinformation narratives over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

- Georgia expressed open support to Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- Georgia did not allow the passage of humanitarian cargo to Armenia when Azerbaijan-bound Turkish weaponry moves unhindered through Georgian territory.

- Azerbaijan would not have scored victory if it had had democracy admired by the Pollyanna-ish Europe.
- US liberal forces are giving orders to Pashinyan to cultivate Russophobia in Armenia and, therefore, take Armenia away from Russia's sphere of influence to benefit the USA.
- The Armenian revolution happened with Soros' assistance and Pashinyan does not keep his pro-Western orientation secret. Therefore, Russia punishes Armenia because of Pashinyan and that is why Moscow does not help Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- Armenia's defeat and failure is a failure of Pashinyan's colourful revolution and his pro-European views and democratic reforms have to be blamed.
- Putin easily pushed Pashinyan and Aliyev to an immediate ceasefire without the involvement of the EU and the USA.

Disinformation narratives over Moldova's presidential election

- The West and Soros, by giving money to Sandu, draw Moldova into anti-Russian adventures because the West wants to cause unrest in Moldova.
- Oligarchs bearing grudges against Igor Dodon as well as corrupt officials and criminals are supporting Sandu in her illegal actions.
- Sandu is connected with LGBT and feminist movements whilst Dodon is a "decent and honest" man.
- A Soros-oligarchic coup d'état is getting prepared in Moldova and the West plans to hold protests in the country to this end.
- The West aids the dismemberment and the disappearance of Moldova.
- Distancing from Moscow will cause the dismemberment of Moldova, an economic downturn and the loss of statehood as happened in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine.
- Soros-supporters assault Moldova's statehood to spark confrontation with Russia even at the expense of the country's dismemberment.
- In the case of Dodon's defeat and Sandu's victory, Transnistria will finally split from Moldova.
- Sandu will unify Moldova with Romania.
- Russia takes the interests of all ethnicities, including those of Moldovans, into account and calls for the West not to interfere in Moldova's internal affairs because it is a sovereign country.
- Against the popular belief that Russia supports separatism in Moldova, Russia in fact strives to keep Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- Russia offered to solve Moldova's territorial integrity problem in exchange for neutrality and not joining with Romania.
- Dodon would have scored victory in the first round had the votes been counted only in Moldova without diaspora votes. Dodon received support from every district in Moldova whilst people living abroad, who are less aware about what is happening in Moldova than those people who actually live there, voted for Sandu.[111]

[111] L. Maisuradze (2020), "Foreign Diaspora was Used to Hinder Dodon's Victory in Moldova's Elections." *Georgia and the World*. Available at: https://bit.ly/37Imdfw

Disinformation narratives over the US presidential elections

- It turned out that in America, too, in a "super democratic country," elections are also rigged by having dead people in voter lists and the TV also announcing the winner.
- A lot of illegals and dead people voted for Biden.
- Liberal forces dishonestly attacked Trump and their attacks had no resemblance to democracy.
- TV stations stopped giving air time to Trump whilst social media denied him a chance to manoeuver – his Twitter account was suspended or his information was flagged as not true.
- America's ostensible democracy, American glory built on false premises, the American myth of human rights as well as the American sham of a happy life and a four-century long talent show on the free world has been defeated and war may break out.
- Antifa intends to organise crackdowns and unrest to frighten the police, army, mass media and congress and force them to declared Biden as the winner.

Disinformation Regarding Georgia's Internal Developments

Georgia's domestic process often become the subject of interpretation from the anti-Western forces and the openly pro-Russian media for their own ends. The aim of such actors is to further polarise the public and undermine the trust in institutions, on the one hand, and empower their preferred groups, on the other hand. Of note is that the position of the authorities on certain issues in 2020 when the ruling party, far-right groups and the Kremlin-supported propaganda media voiced similar assessments on country's domestic process also contributed to the aforementioned objectives.

At the beginning of the reporting period during the anti-government protests sparked by the government's decision to renege on its promise to move to a fully proportional system, the pro-Russian media harshly criticised the united opposition and smeared them. These actors blamed Georgia's international partners for interference[112] in the country's internal affairs by adopting a critical stance vis-à-vis the Georgian government's decision. In this regard, the pro-Russian and anti-Western groups targeted both European Parliament MPs as well as US Congressmen in 2020, making particular emphasis on Rep. Adam Kinzinger, Co-chair of House Georgia Caucus. The same actors also blamed the US Ambassador, Kelly Degnan, in acting against the will of the Georgian people.

Since March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic was followed by the infodemic across the world and in Georgia. As a part of the infodemic, disinformation on a number of issues was disseminated through the internet. Of particular note are the efforts of Moscow and the Kremlin's local satellites which aimed to discredit the Lugar Laboratory which was built with US support. This campaign to discredit the Lugar Laboratory was regular throughout 2020.[113]

[112] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – December 2019 – February 2020, pp. 28-29. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/747.pdf
[113] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre's March-April Report, pp. 14-15. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-08-25/745.pdf

Starting from May-June 2020, efforts to portray Azerbaijan as an occupier country, very similar to Russia, became evident. These efforts were made in light of far-right groups taking advantage of the events around the issue of the statue of Nariman Narimanov, an Azerbaijani Bolshevik leader, in Marneuli to cultivate chauvinism and ethnic hatred. In particular, the pro-Russian actors exploited the fact that the two partner countries (Georgia and Azerbaijan) have not yet reached an agreement on the location of part of Davit-Gareja monastery complex and promoted the narrative that Azerbaijan is a hostile nation for Georgia as well as a occupier.[114]

Of note is that the anti-Azerbaijan campaign vastly expanded in September at the peak of the pre-election period when public discussions started on the Davit-Gareja problem with Georgia's law enforcement taking interest in the issue after Davit Khidasheli, a Russia-based Georgian businessman, brought a map of the Davit-Gareja monastery complex to Georgia from Russia. At the same time, the pro-Russian and the ultra-nationalist groups, simultaneously with ruling party members, campaigned to blame the previous government for inflicting damage to the interests of Georgia on the disputed border section.

In July-August 2020 before the elections, the openly pro-Russian media organised information attacks against the opposition parties. As a part of this campaign, the previous government was blamed for starting the 2008 Russia-Georgia war as well as in foolishly stepping into the Russian trap and succumbing to the provocation. At the same time, the pro-Russian media commented on the reports of the Dossier Centre, founded by Russian opposition figure and businessman Mikhail Khodorkovskiy, which revealed the Kremlin's finances to the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia and decried those reports as groundless allegations. In the same period, the far-right and its criticisms of the Georgian NGO sector again became quite vivid – at the rally outside of the Open Society Foundation on 30 July 2020, activists of the pro-Russian Georgian March political party burned an effigy of George Soros and stated that the NGO sector is a foreign-funded entity acting against the Georgian nation.[115]

In September-October 2020 in the pre-election period, the pro-Russian pages and the anti-Western actors started to step up their efforts over the Davit-Gareja issue. Importantly, the positions of the pro-Russian/anti-Western actors and the Georgian Dream government members were largely in line with each other. In particular, the then Minister of Defence (the current Prime Minister), Irakli Gharibashvili, speaking on air on TV Imedi on the border delimitation/demarcation near Davit-Gareja complex, stated that those working on the issue in 2006-2007 committed treason and "they are collective Saakashvilis." Of further note is that during the pre-election period and the voting day, TV Imedi's live broadcast constantly featured the caption "Gareji is Georgia."[116]

[114] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre: Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda. May-June Report, pp. 14-16. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf
[115] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – July-August 2020, pp. 20-22. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-11-06/797.pdf
[116] Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS) Disinfometre: Report on Russian Disinformation – September-October 2020, pp. 23-27. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-01-06/824.pdf

In the wake of the 2020 parliamentary elections and the opposition's questioning of the legitimacy of the election results, the pro-Russian media promoted pro-government messages in regard to the elections.[117] The anti-Western media outlets also covered the death of the head of Isani District Election Commission and blamed the opposition for being responsible for his death.[118] [119] In addition, these groups denounced a rally to demand the resignation of the CEC chairperson, Tamar Zhvania, and hold new elections as a provocation and since the "eventual aim of the rally was a coup d'état," they also justified the riot police using water cannons against the protesters as the only proper measure.[120] Of note is that the pro-Russian media also criticised the opposition's post-election rallies as irresponsible given the pandemic. In particular, the purveyors of the Russian narratives highlighted the possibility of a further aggravation of epidemiological situation as a result of the rallies.[121]

Some pro-Russian groups also even argued after the elections that they were indeed fraudulent, although the results were rigged not against the "liberal opposition" but against political parties such as the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, the Georgian March, the Georgian Group and the Georgian Idea.[122] Of note is that the pro-Russian actors sometimes portrayed the Georgian Dream as a similarly unacceptable political party[123] [124] as others, although in a choice between the "bad and worse," the worse[125] usually is the opposition; in particular, the UNM as well as other parties loyal to pro-Western and liberal values. The disinformation and propaganda messages on domestic politics disseminated in 2020 are divided into nine major categories:

Propaganda on reforming the electoral system and the 8 March agreement

- It is unacceptable that the American senators, ambassadors and European MPs interfere in Georgian domestic affairs.
- The opposition is to blame for the failure of the electoral changes and the majoritarian system is better as compared to the proportional system.

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[117] L. Bozhadze (2020). "None of the Mismatched Protocols Which They Are Posting on Facebook Walls Have Been Included in the Official Results." Viewpoint, 2 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3bwJ4vT

[118] G. Gabrichidze (2020). "I Was Not Acquainted With the Isani DEC Chairperson But He Was a Big-Hearted Man Indeed." Viewpoint, 7 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3snQit2

[119] L. Bozhadze (2020). "Isani DEC Chairperson Succumbed to UNM Bullying and Pressure." Viewpoint, 7 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/2ZME1Ca

[120] D. Mkheidze (2020). "You Are to Blame for Everything!" *Georgia and the World* 10 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3bCYmz0

[121] B. Barbakadze, "The government confused democracy with something easy-peasy." *Georgia and the World.*10 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3aM0Bkn

[122] Stalin Facebook page. "Elections were Rigged but not Against Liberasts. Other Parties had their Votes Stolen." 10 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3brQsII

[123] J. Zhvania and N. Kakabadze: "I'm sure They will Adopt a Number of anti-Georgian and anti-national Laws Before the Next Elections." *Georgia and the World*. 3 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3bBgXvs

[124] Stalin Facebook page. "Unless We Send Away this Garbage - The Government-Opposition and the Media Pricks – Together With Some of the Ambassadors, We Cannot Be Saved." 9 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3bxGLc2

[125] B. Barbakadze, "The Syndrome of Brooms and the Western Legitimacy of the Elections." *Georgia and the World.* 3 November 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3qQtsKa

- Georgia is the West's colony and Adam Kinzinger is Georgia's de-facto ruler, president, king and patriarch.

The opposition smearing campaign during the pre-election period using the Davit-Gareja issue

- The UNM government sold Davit-Gareja to Azerbaijan and Mikheil Saakashvili as well as Temur Alasania, Grigol Vashadze and Giga Bokeria were part of the deal.
- The people working on border issues during 2006-2007 committed state treason.
- Azerbaijanis seek to capture Gareja and Kvemo Kartli.

Other issues:

- The 2008 war was started by the UNM government and President Saakashvili.
- Each and every step made by Saakashvili during the war was part of the script of the Russian intelligence services.
- The Dossier Centre's reports are libellous against the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia and there are no ties between the latter and the Kremlin.
- The opposition plans to stage a revolution if it does not win.
- The opposition parties stand no chance to come to government and, therefore, they will try to stage a revolution.
- NGOs are funded from the globalists and they act against the Georgian nation.
- The Lugar Laboratory hosts a secret laboratory of the US Armed Forces which works on the invention of hazardous pathogens and biological weapons.
- The laboratory is involved in clandestine research and serves American interests.
- The protest's crackdown with water cannons was justified since the opposition's action was a deliberate provocation.

Coronavirus-related Disinformation

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the world has witnessed unending disinformation waves which were dubbed as infodemics given their vast area of dissemination and the scale of damage. The coronavirus-related disinformation almost fully dominates the media environment. Usually, people in crisis become more susceptible to fake news and conspiracy theories and, therefore, fear, confusion and uncertainty brought by the spread of the coronavirus provided a fertile ground for the dissemination of disinformation. Both authoritarian and totalitarian regimes (such as China and Russia) as well as some malicious public groups (such as anti-vaxxers) used COVID-19 to promote disinformation.

In light of the coronavirus pandemic, Russia actively used disinformation to confuse the Western democracies and mislead their populations. The EU[126] and the USA[127] officially blamed the Kremlin for

[126] R. Emmo, "Russia Deploying Coronavirus Disinformation to Sow Panic in the West, EU Document Says," *Reuters*, 18 March 2020. Available at: https://reut.rs/3sgDPHw
[127] J. Seldin, "US Accuses Russia of Spreading Fear, Panic on Coronavirus," *Voice of America*, 5 March 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/2NLzX2i

using disinformation to sow panic and mislead the public. The coronavirus-related disinformation was also actively disseminated in Georgia.

The coronavirus-related disinformation differs from other disinformation narratives given the versatility of its sources and the area of dissemination. Both traditional and online media as well as social network accounts (pages, groups and individual profiles), celebrities, clergymen and even doctors[128] were actively involved in the promotion of disinformation.

The coronavirus disinformation purveyors were distinguished by the distinct methods they used to organise and attract an audience. At the very beginning of the pandemic (in March 2020), groups for conspiracy theories were created where large number of users were added in order to manipulate the theories. Given the surge of such groups and the expanding spread of virus-related false information which often contained health risks, Facebook introduced a strict policy to remove such content from its platform.[129] Therefore, Facebook also removed number of such groups (Stop 5G Georgia!!!, No to Corona Scam!) in Georgia. In response, group administrators created new groups of the same content under different names and again mobilised users. In addition, new types of the so-called "corona influencers" also emerged (Koba Kuprashvili, Shorena Shanidze, Nona Aghdgomelashvili, Nina Marji, etc.) who gained fame by promoting conspiracy theories and false information about the coronavirus. Initially, such actors questioned the fact of the existence of the virus or claimed it was less dangerous as compared to the flu virus. Later on, in light of the deteriorating epidemiological situation in Georgia, this narrative was replaced by an anti-vaccine narrative which in turn coincided with the vaccine's approval process worldwide.

At the initial stage of the coronavirus outbreak, disinformation on its man-made origins were promoted. Disinformation actors claimed that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was a lab-made biological weapon invented by the Americans to win the trade-economic war against China. The pro-Russian sources, based on the press speaker of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, promoted baseless allegations that American soldiers brought the coronavirus to China in October 2019 during their drills in Wuhan. Yet another false version pushed by Russian sources argued that the coronavirus is a mutated virus which originated after the US-made synthetic bacterium, Synthia, intended to cleanse the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico ended up in the human body. At the initial stage of the pandemic, the coronavirus was also actively used by the pro-Russian groups to demonstrate that Western-model liberal democracies are ineffective in fighting the pandemic and pinpointed China and Russia as examples of a more effective fight against the pandemic-induced crisis.

Vaccination-related Disinformation

The major and most important target of the coronavirus-delated disinformation in 2020 was vaccination and other relevant issues. The disinformation purveyors started to promote false information and

[128] Georgia's Reforms Associates. Disinfometre: Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda. May-June Report, pp. 17-18. Available at: https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2021-02-10/837.pdf
[129] G. Rosen, "An Update on Our Work to Keep People Informed and Limit Misinformation About COVID-19," Facebook, 16 April 2020. Available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2020/04/covid-19-misinfo-update/

conspiracy theories in regard to the vaccines as early as the very beginning of the development of the COVID-19 vaccine when there were still no tangible results.

One of the first vaccine-related fake news items was disseminated in March, claiming that people who had the BCG vaccine administered were more resilient[130] vis-à-vis the coronavirus which was accompanied by propaganda actions in order to idealise Soviet medicine. Since April when several companies started phase-one of the COVID-19 vaccine's clinical trials and it became evident that mass vaccination would be the only way to end the pandemic, the disinformation mouthpieces started to attack COVID-19 vaccines. Some celebrities were actively involved in the process. For instance, Mikheil Tsagareli's video started to circulate on the internet at the beginning of May where he spoke about the plans of Bill Gates and affiliated groups to reduce the world's population to one billion and claimed that the future COVID-19 vaccination would be their main weapon. Mr Tsagareli continued to press the same claims[131] in the coming months and called for people to refuse vaccination. Given the popularity of the influencers and the trust they enjoy among the wider public, the disinformation they promote is certainly more dangerous.

During the summer months when Georgia's epidemiological situation was relatively stable, the pro-Russian sources mostly confined themselves with advocating the Russian vaccine. After Pfizer and Moderna published the results of the phase I/II clinical trials of the COVID-19 vaccine in July and August, the pro-Russian disinformation machine started to highlight the advantages and the efficacy of the Russian vaccine.[132] The pro-Russian media was involved in campaign-like efforts to argue that the Russian vaccine completed its testing regime and clinical trials and mass vaccination was scheduled to start in Russia in October.[133] The pro-Russian sources claimed that the Russian Sputnik - V vaccine was the world's first registered COVID-19 vaccine and 50 countries were standing in a long queue to purchase the Russian vaccine.[134]

The pro-Russian sources also attacked the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the WHO's COVAX platform (intended for the fair distribution of the vaccines) and denounced the WHO as a criminal organisation which ostensibly aimed to reduce the world's population.[135]

In light of Georgia's worsening epidemiological situation, a negative information campaign to attack EU and US vaccines started in September. The pro-Russian sources sought to convince their readers that the vaccine's development process in the West was conducted without undergoing the proper clinical trials

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130 I. Lachashvili, "Can the BCG Vaccine Provide Protection Against the Coronavirus?" FactCheck.ge, 3 April 2020. Available at: https://factcheck.ge/en/story/38413-can-the-bcg-vaccine-provide-protection-against-the-coronavirus-manipulations-that-should-not-mislead-us

131 I. Lachashvili, "Conspiracy Theories on Yet Undeveloped COVID-19 Vaccine Continue." FactCheck.ge, 5 August 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3ci7eL5

132 I. Lachashvili, "Russian COVID-19 Vaccine and Reaction of Georgian Pro-Russian Sources - Part I," FactCheck.ge, 10 September 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3kciE6E

133 I. Lachashvili, "Russian COVID-19 Vaccine and Reaction of Georgian Pro-Russian Sources – Part II," FactCheck.ge, 10 September 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/2NBZdrz

134 I. Lachashvili, "Russian COVID-19 Vaccine and Reaction of Georgian Pro-Russian Sources – Part III," FactCheck.ge, 10 September 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3dA3SFz

135 L. Khutsiberidze, "Disinformation: The Coronavirus and COVID-19 Vaccine Aim to Reduce Number of Population," FactCheck.ge 20 October 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3k5XHtY

and testing phases, in breach of international standards, and the West planned to test such dangerous vaccines in developing countries like Georgia.[136]

The opponents of the vaccines (anti-vaxxers) sought to convince the public on the negative effects of the vaccines and the existence of the absurd motives of the groups behind the vaccine's development process. The anti-vaxxers, capitalising on their large presence in social networks, claimed that the coronavirus is a staged scam and vaccines against it are a mechanism to "chip" and control people. Some health workers also promoted baseless allegations that the vaccine's development was happening without proper trials and procedures and such genetically engineered vaccines alter the human DNA and may even cause a lethal outcome.[137] In the process of disseminating the false information regarding the vaccination, anti-vaxxers often referred to the so-called "World Doctors Alliance" as group of reliable experts working on health problems. However, a number of influential media and fact-checking organisations unmasked[138] this group and exposed their disinformation.[139]

The disinformation purveyors also promoted the fake news that some officials in Western countries had received officially unapproved vaccines.[140] According to this narrative, these people in fact received other substances or video footage was doctored to deceive the public and force them to administer the COVID-19 vaccine.

After the clinical trials for several Western vaccines were completed and the respective health regulatory bodies issued an authorisation, anti-vaxxers in Georgia became particularly active. A new wave of disinformation targeting the COVID-19 vaccines started in December with the main focus on the vaccine's side effects and adverse reactions. The fabricated photographs, showing vaccine-damaged human organs, flooded the internet. The anti-vaxxers claimed that the COVID-19 vaccines cause more severe diseases and complications as compared to the coronavirus itself such as autism and hand paralysis. The opinions based on the false facts that the COVID-19 vaccine alters the human DNA and causes infertility were also promoted. According to another disinformation narrative, the vaccine contains luciferase or luciferin (a biochemical substance), thereby indicating a disguised evil behind the vaccine. Some Georgian Orthodox Church clergymen even referred to the vaccine as part of the Antichrist's plan and a Satanic weapon.[141]

Other Coronavirus-related Disinformation Messages

The anti-Western and pro-Russian actors sought to use the coronavirus-related disinformation to discredit the West as well. In March, when the first wave of the virus was ravaging Europe, there was an information

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[136] I. Lachashvili, "Yet Another Manipulation of the Pro-Russian Media on COVID-19 Vaccine," FactCheck.ge, 3 September 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3s7AoTk

[137] I. Lachashvili, "Disinformation of Common Newspaper Regarding the COVID-19 Vaccine," FactCheck.ge, 23 September 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3qOymaF

[138] B. Dupuy and J. Joffe-block, "Video Contains a lLitany of False Claims about COVID-19 and Vaccines," *Associated Press*, 10 December 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/37zGKDi

[139] Health Feedback, "COVID-19 Vaccine Candidates Show High Efficacy and a Safe Profile in Clinical Trials, Contrary to Claims in Viral Video," 7 December 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3uoXWF2

[140] I. Lachashvili, "Disinformation: Mayors of Australian Cities and Mayor of London Have not Received COVID-19 Vaccines." FactCheck.ge, 6 October 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/2ZtyOyO

[141] N. Chokheli, "Disinformation: Vaccine with Nanochip and Luciferin." FactCheck.ge, 14 December 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3azZBQe

item in Georgia that the EU decided to abolish the Schengen zone amid the pandemic-induced crisis which is not going to be restored after the crisis and will lead to the disintegration of the EU. Together with criticising the EU, the pro-Russian actors also idealised Russia and the Soviet Union. They claimed that the Soviet healthcare system was much stronger as compared to ones in Europe and America. To corroborate their claims, the pro-Russian sources underscored the smaller number of confirmed cases in Russia and the post-Soviet countries (including Georgia) at the initial stage of the pandemic.

In addition, the anti-Western actors claimed that the Chinese and Russian political systems were handling the crisis much more effectively as compared to the Western nations. They argued that the reason behind this was the inherent weakness of democracy and capitalism. In this light, there were frequent calls for Georgia to halt the Euro-Atlantic integration process and revise its foreign policy orientation.

The Lugar Laboratory was also targeted by the disinformation purveyors in the wider coronavirus context. This laboratory has been targeted by the Russian government propaganda for years (even Vladimir Putin was involved in propaganda against the Lugar Laboratory[142]). The pro-Russian sources particularly stepped up efforts to promote conspiracy theories and fake news against the Lugar Laboratory amid the pandemic. The pro-Russian media argued that tests on the coronavirus have been carried out for years in the Lugar Laboratory. The so-called "security service" of Tskhinvali blamed the Lugar Laboratory employees for trying to artificially spread the coronavirus in Tskhinvali-controlled territory.[143]

Conspiracy theories have been spawned in particularly large numbers amid the pandemic. Of the most prominent conspiracy theories, there is the utterly baseless information that the Earth is ruled by dynasties of Jewish origin and one of their main goals is cutting the number of the world's population in half, inventing deadly diseases and viruses to this end. According to the messages promoted by the pro-Russian media, the coronavirus is man-made and it was invented for the depopulation of the world, establishing total control, sparking a world economic crisis, forming a world government, increasing debt for people and states, the abolition of cash, the manipulation of stock exchanges, sowing chaos and fear, reducing the number of the population to one billion by universal vaccination, subduing religions, "chipping" humans, etc. It was also reported that the coronavirus tests (meaning the PCR tests) were used to collect genetic samples of humans which were later tested to produce genetically targeted biological weapons.

Among the conspiracy theories of particular mention is the disinformation campaign targeting Bill Gates, an American billionaire and philanthropist. In different times, Bill Gates was blamed for inventing the coronavirus or funding the process of its invention as well as for being the author of a plan to cut the number of people through vaccination, "chipping" and total control. In addition, the WHO was proclaimed as a servant of Bill Gates and other of the richest elites.

Fake medical advice also made the rounds simultaneously with the coronavirus-related disinformation. Some of those items of advice were as follows: frequent consumption of hot water or alcohol protects

[142] Civil.ge, "Vladimir Putin Speaks Saakashvili, Lugar Lab." 19 October 2019. Available at: https://civil.ge/archives/259804

[143] A. Broladze, "Allegations Against the Lugar Laboratory." Georgia's Public Broadcaster. 17 July 2020. Available at: https://1tv.ge/video/braldebebi-lugaris-laboratoriis-winaaghmdeg/

people from the coronavirus, hydrogen peroxide dissolved in water would help us to quickly and easily beat the coronavirus as well as lemon and vinegar mixed with water, the Artemisia plant or garlic can treat the coronavirus, etc.

The major coronavirus-related messages in 2020 are as follows:

Attempt to portray the coronavirus as a US-made biological weapon

- Bill Gates funded the invention of the coronavirus in the Wuhan laboratory to reduce the world's population through mandatory vaccination.
- The coronavirus is a man-made biological weapon invented by the US to win a trade war with China and it was spread by American soldiers in Wuhan as early as in October 2019.
- The virus is a US-made "bacteriological weapon" and it was used against those countries which the Pentagon concludes pose a threat to the USA such as: Threat N1 – China, Threat N2 – Russia and Threat N3 – Iran.
- The coronavirus originated "thanks" to the US-made synthetic bacterium, Synthia, which was invented to cleanse the oil spill in the sea.

Disinformation against the vaccines

- Bill Gates, Elon Musk and Masonic groups plan to reduce the world's population to one billion. They will use Musk-invented microchips to this end which will be inserted into human bodies through the COVID-19 vaccines.
- Vaccination will be mandatory for everyone and the government will pose problems to anyone who refuses.
- Vaccines are approved without proper tests and clinical trials in the West and there are plans to test them in third world countries. Experimental vaccines will be tested in developing countries like Georgia.
- In the USA, the vaccines are tested directly on humans without undergoing animal testing phases.
- Human genetics will be altered by the COVID-19 vaccines – Bill Gates plan to destroy mankind through a genetically modified vaccine.
- The Russian Sputnik - V vaccine has a long queue of customers including the USA and EU member states – the efficacy of the Russian vaccine is 100% and it has to side effects.

Attempt to discredit the Lugar Laboratory

- A secret laboratory of the US Armed Forces is deployed at the Lugar Centre which carries out research on dangerous pathogens and the invention of biological weapons.
- The Georgian leadership of the Lugar Laboratory is incompetent and the Americans do not give them real information regarding the virus.
- Clandestine research on the coronavirus has been in progress since 2012 in the Lugar Laboratory and the Americans deliberately disallowed the spread of the coronavirus in Georgia to make sure that the Lugar Laboratory was not blamed (this was promoted at the initial stage of the pandemic when Georgia's coronavirus figures were low).

Attempt to highlight the flaws and the weaknesses of the Western political system

- The EU did not help Italy to fight the coronavirus and abandoned the country in need – only Russia and China turned out to be Italy's true friends.
- The coronavirus destroyed the Schengen area which means the collapse of the EU. The EU cannot restore itself after the pandemic and, therefore, Georgia should no longer strive towards EU and NATO membership.
- Given the EU's feebleness vis-à-vis the coronavirus, many Georgians start to show a negative attitude towards the EU.
- In the Soviet Union, personal hygiene was well observed and homosexuality was condemned which hindered the outbreak of pandemics.
- The Socialist and the Chinese models are effective to curb the pandemic whilst democratic and capitalist systems turned out to be unsuccessful.
- Given the weakness of the European educational system, European countries cannot cope with the pandemic whilst Georgia and post-Soviet countries, including Russia, are successfully handling the coronavirus.
- The EU, imposing sanctions against Russia and Iran, hinders these countries in fighting the pandemic.

Attempt to show Russia positively in light of discrediting the West

- The US assistance for Georgia amid the coronavirus pandemic is negligible.
- Amid the pandemic, Georgia received medical assistance not from the West but from China. Georgia doctors have to count on their Russian colleagues, too.
- Georgia does not need Europe and the USA because Georgia's "lifeline" goes through Russia and the coronavirus illustrates that Georgia cannot live without Russia.

Attempt to show COVID-19 as a less dangerous disease

- The coronavirus is similar to the seasonal flu and not that dangerous.
- COVID-19 statistics are forged and in fact there are not many who died.
- The coronavirus lethality is similar or lower as compared to the seasonal flu.

False medical advice and conspiracy theories

- Wearing facemasks is harmful for human health and they increase the risk of infection let alone protecting us from the coronavirus. Facemasks are an ideological weapon and by wearing them people are being trained into slavish obedience.
- Thermal screening causes health damage.
- Tests are used to collect human genetic material which is later tested and could be used for the production of biological weapons.
- Globalist forces and groups affiliated with Bill Gates are behind the pandemic.
- 5G towers help spread the coronavirus.

- Coconut oil, water dissolved in hydrogen peroxide, hot steam inhalation, the Artemisia plant and garlic cure the coronavirus.
- Many elderly people who died in Italy were in fact killed by a special injection to save pensions and healthcare money.

Attempt to portray the West and liberalism as enemies of the Church within the coronavirus context

- NGOs seek to use the coronavirus to ban church services and discredit the Georgian Patriarch.
- The Western liberal forces fight the Georgian Orthodox Church on the pretext of the coronavirus. The West helps Georgia in exchange for "fighting against the Church." The ruling liberal elites pursue an anti-Church vector and fight against the Church.
- The Government of Georgia planned mass testing after Easter to blame the Church for the rising number of confirmed cases.
- It was planned to test 5G towers during Easter night which would have harmed the health of people attending church services and the Church would be blamed for this.