



ISSUE 30



JULY 18 - JULY 28 , 2021

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RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Online calls for attacks against Georgia's LGBTQ community result in offline violence

Georgian far-right and pro-Kremlin groups, as well as Georgia's Orthodox church, targeted the LGBTQ community, its supporters, and the West online prior to the "March for Dignity" — a [peaceful march](#) led by [Tbilisi Pride](#) originally scheduled for July 5, 2021.

Following calls for protests and widespread hateful rhetoric targeting the march online, [homophobic, violent, and pro-Kremlin](#) groups gathered at the location of the march on the day it was to be held. There, they **assaulted journalists and targeted supporters of the LGBTQ community**. Citing a lack of safety guarantees by the Georgian government, headed by the Georgian Dream party, **Tbilisi Pride ultimately canceled the march**.

Alt-Info, a Georgian far-right group that [camouflages itself](#) as a legitimate media entity and that has strong ties with pro-Kremlin Georgian tycoon [Levan Vasadze](#), **played a significant role mobilizing hate groups against the March for Dignity**.

Open source evidence, including links between the actors behind the July 5 violence and coordinated disinformation narratives, demonstrates that it was not simply the mobilization of domestic homophobic groups, but a well-organized action against the LGBTQ community, CSOs, Western embassies and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations in general. **See more [here](#)**.



The "KGB" of South Ossetia blames Tbilisi-based Lugar Lab for spreading African Swine Fever Virus (ASF) in the Tskhinvali/South Ossetia region

"The service of the veterinary and phytosanitary supervision" of South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region, "Yugosselkhoznadzor", recorded **cases of deaths of pigs from African Swine Fever (ASF) in some villages close to the Tskhinvali region**.

The de-facto government used this “opportunity” to accuse Georgia and the US-sponsored Lugar Lab of carrying out an act of “[bioterrorism](#)” by deliberately spreading infections within the Tskhinvali controlled territory. This is not the [first time](#) the Kremlin and its puppet regimes are attacking Lugar Lab in unison.

The so-called KGB of South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region made **absurd allegations: “The Georgian side is deliberately silent about the cases of this disease on its territory, while this disease - potential global infection - spreads very quickly,** including through insects. In this regard, the KGB does not exclude the possibility that the outbreak of the ASF epidemic in South Ossetia is associated with the work of the so-called “Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research” in Georgia, which conducts research in the field of atypical forms of plague, brucellosis, anthrax, dengue fever, Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever and uses pathogens through which the Tbilisi regime carries out acts of bioterrorism against South Ossetia”.

The head of the radiation, chemical and biological protection troops of the RF occupation Armed Forces in the Tskhinvali region, Igor Kirillov, voiced another conspiracy theory claiming that in 2007-2018 African Swine Fever spread to South Ossetia, Russia, European countries and China from the territory of Georgia

Russian MFA links the resumption of flights with the epidemiological situation in Georgia

In an interview to Russian state news agency Rossiya Segodnya, the Deputy **Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Andrey Rudenko** [talked](#) about the possibility of **resuming flights to and from with Georgia after the epidemiological situation there improves.** Rudenko called the ban on air traffic with Georgia a temporary and forced measure caused by an anti-Russian provocation, referring to the events of June 20, 2019, when Georgians took to the streets to [protest](#) against a visit to Tbilisi by Communist party member of the Russian Duma, Sergei Gavrillov who, in contradiction to the event agenda, chaired the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, held in the Parliament of Georgia. Throughout the event, Gavrillov had been occupying the Speaker's seat, causing anger and fury among the Georgians who spontaneously gathered in front of the parliament to protest. The protests later transformed into a general demonstration against the Russian occupation. In the evening of that day, tensions mounted and some of the protesters tried to enter the parliament building, a move met with riot police using what has been [widely believed](#) to be [disproportionate force](#) - tear gas and rubber bullets which injured hundreds of people, including [journalists](#).

On the next day, Vladimir Putin [signed](#) the decree banning Russia's airlines from flying to Georgia. The Kremlin has said that the suspension of flights was necessary to protect “the national security of the Russian Federation.” Since then, there have been no regular direct flights between the two countries, with Russian officials [stating](#) that along with the situation regarding the coronavirus pandemic, solving the issue depends on Tbilisi ensuring the safety of Russian nationals on its territory. From the recent statement of Rudenko, however, it now seems that Russian nationals are no

longer in danger (though they have actually never been threatened in Georgia at all). According to the Deputy Minister of the Russian MFA, the Kremlin hopes that the “Georgian authorities have learned the lessons from what happened.”

GEORGIA'S OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Russia leaves Abkhazia alone against the coronavirus pandemic

Occupied Abkhazia is experiencing a surge in COVID-19 infections and the epidemiological situation has become dire as the health system fails to meet demand - medical COVID-centres are almost at full capacity and much of the region's vital medical equipment is no longer operational, indicating that scarce medical equipment cannot keep up with raised numbers of infections. Meanwhile, Russia has refused to assist Abkhazia – the Russian defence ministry has withdrawn a mobile hospital from the occupied region and only infected tourists are undergoing a course of medical treatment in Russia, while the local population is being treated on Tbilisi-controlled territory. Furthermore, the so-called MP of Abkhazia and de facto head of the Social Policy, Labour and Health Committee, stated that Russia refused to provide Sokhumi with Sputnik V vaccines, despite Abkhazian de facto authorities requesting not only donations, but also offering to purchase vaccines from Russia on dozens of occasions. Several days ago, de facto president Bzhania expressed the hope that the issue of supplying additional doses of Sputnik V would be resolved soon, but this has been an empty promise voiced with the aim of avoiding panic. Up until now, Abkhazia has vaccinated 6,398 people, but only 4,047 managed to get the second shot before the doses ran out.

The de facto head of the Social Policy, Labour and Health Committee argued that **Abkhazia should look for alternative sources of vaccines such as international organizations** which, according to him, provided medical supplies to Abkhazia last year. He is planning on addressing such organisations in this regard. Previously, Abkhazia refused Georgia's vaccine assistance, but after the epidemiological situation worsened, Sokhumi allowed ethnic Georgian residents of the occupied Gali district to receive their COVID-19 vaccine shots on the Tbilisi-controlled territory.

MONITORING OF DISINFORMATION CASES

Video manipulation of the EU flag. On July 11, the Facebook profile “Vamekh FUSDANI” published a video depicting a man throwing the EU flag from the roof of a building. The video had a misleading caption attributing the event to the Italian army. In fact, three members of the subordinate organization of the Italian Army intruded on the closed headquarters of the organization and dropped the EU flag from the roof. The director of the organization has condemned these actions. Similar videos destroying the EU flag were disseminated on social media after the events on July 5-6 when violent groups dropped and burnt the EU flag. The reason behind this tendency was to create the impression that negative attitudes towards the EU are predominant not only in Georgia but also across Europe.

Falsified quote of Ronal Reagan. Following the anti-LGBTQ+ protests, anti-liberal narratives and disinformation linked to sexual minority rights continued to proliferate on social and traditional media. In this context, a Facebook page called "[Modzraoba Dzlevai Sakvirveli](#)" [Movement Unexpected Victory] published a photo collage involving Ronald Reagan, the 40th president of the United States and a quote ascribed to him: "America stands on four main values: Faith in God, Freedom of Speech, Family and Economic Freedom. If fascism ever comes to America, it will come in the name of liberalism." The photo is accompanied by the declaration that Georgians will never allow the "propaganda" of homosexuality. Reagan's quote is fabricated and consists of two different statements with different contexts. The quote of Reagan about liberalism concerns his economic points of view and not the values of family and faith. More details are available [here](#).

Georgian PM spreads disinformation about western assessment of the judiciary system. Irakli Garibashvili, the Prime Minister of Georgia [responded](#) to the US reaction regarding the appointment of six Supreme Court judges. He stated that, before 2012, he had never heard criticism about the Georgian judiciary system, either from Europe or the United States. In fact, the Georgian judicial system was often underscored by different European bodies and by the US department of State before the Georgian Dream Party came into power.

Disinformation about the deceased cameramen. TV Pirveli cameraman Lekso [Lashkarava](#), who was severely beaten on July 5 and was later found dead in his apartment, has been the target of government propaganda. Hours before the statement of MIA, the death of Lashkarava was connected with opioid overdose by various actors, including the members of the same violent groups and governmental media outlets. In addition, some persons had access to state-owned databases spreading personal information regarding Lashkarava's death and the Inspector's Service has started an investigation to trace the potential ways of the information leak. On July 21, two pictures of Lekso Lashkarava appeared on social media followed by the description that "TV Formula" has added additional injuries to Lashkarava's face using Photoshop. Both images were authentic taken with different time intervals, therefore some bloodstains were already wiped out by the cameramen. The false information was spread in a [coordinated](#) manner by pro-governmental actors and later shared by pro-Russian TV channel Alt-Info and anti-liberal newspaper Asaval-Dasavali.

CHINA' S INFLUENCE

Government's dealings with the notorious Chinese company "Dongfang"

On July 14, the Minister of Economy of Georgia, **Natia Turnava, met with the President of the Chinese state-owned company "Dongfang Electric Corporation", Si Zefu, to discuss the future investment opportunities and further cooperation**

in Georgia's energy sector between the two sides. Si Zefu also showed interest in creating the company's regional branch in Georgia. It is highly notable that [back in 2015](#), also during Gharibashvili's administration, the government attempted to attract the same company for a coal-fired power plant project in Georgia which was valued at USD \$180-\$200 million.

The Chinese company "Dongfang" is a manufacturer of energy machinery under the auspices of the Chinese Communist Party. On June 12, 2019, the company [was sanctioned by the World Bank due to its fraudulent practices in Liberia](#) and was banned from participating in WB-funded projects for 15 months. Unfortunately, this is not the first time that the Georgian government has entered into similar agreements with Chinese companies exposed in international scandals. Similar companies include the 23rd Railway Bureau, Sinohydro, China Roads and Bridges Corporation, and others, which carry out large infrastructure projects in Georgia with numerous violations, including delayed completion, labor rights, or other breaches. Such cooperation is carried out for [two possible reasons](#). In one case, the government lacks due diligence and does not research the companies with which it concludes cooperation agreements. In principle, even a cursory Google search can find numerous scandals related to these companies. Secondly, the personal interests of specific individuals may be hidden behind similar contracts.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' INITIATIVES

Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS - Rondeli Foundation) published the 17th [issue](#) about China's activities in the South Caucasus, in which the newest developments in politics, economics and other relevant issues between China and the South Caucasus states are described. According to the publication, many public figures, including director/president of Georgian media (Georgian Times, NewsDay Georgia, TV 24), some representatives of academia, sports and more importantly, members of the ruling party and MPs congratulated CCP on its 100th anniversary. Noteworthy, Prime Minister Garibashvili claimed that "under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, China has achieved unprecedented development" and "wholeheartedly" wished China to continue achieving long-term development and lasting prosperity. The Chairman of the ruling Georgian Dream party, Irakli Kobakhidze stated that "with the [communist] party's effort, China achieved great progress that the whole world sees clearly" and he is glad that "There is a close political relationship between the two countries"; he also added that "China supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and Georgia is an unwavering supporter of the One-China policy."

A new [publication](#) by **Rondeli Foundation (GFSIS)** - Formation of a New "Political Elite" in Abkhazia - Who Will Replace the Old "Elite?" - shows "how the process of rejuvenation of the "political elite" of Abkhazia is happening, and what it could mean in the context of relations with Official Tbilisi and Georgians in general."

[Issue 2](#) of China Radar: South Caucasus - a monthly publication by **Rondeli Foundation (GFSIS)** dedicated to China's activities and influence in the three nations

of South.

The **European Values Center for Security Policy (EVC)** organized an expert discussion on the current state of play in Georgia with the aim to bring a light on the possible international consequences of the crisis. The event brought together **Markéta Gregorová** and the experts from Georgian civil society such as **Tamar Kintsurashvili** - Executive Director at Media Development Foundation, **Nino Gelashvili** - Senior Editor at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and **Givi Gigitashvili** research assistant for the Caucasus at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) based in Georgia. Watch the [discussion online HERE](#).

[READ THE GEORGIA WATCH BRIEFING IN GEORGIAN LANGUAGE HERE.](#)

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