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RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Tbilisi fails to address the condition for EU's financial assistance

Georgian PM Irakli Garibashvili stated last week that **in an attempt to reduce foreign debt and avoid political insinuations, the country would refuse a EUR 75 million loan from the EU, which was conditioned on the court reform and upholding the EU-brokered April 19 [deal](#)**. The ruling Georgian Dream (GD)

government argues that Georgia's GDP grew faster than expected, bringing an additional GEL 1 billion (USD 320 mln) to the budget, allowing the country to refrain from requesting additional loans. Responding to the Georgian government's move, the EU [stated](#) that while it respects Tbilisi's decision, it notes that "Georgia failed to sufficiently address the condition for this macro-financial assistance and notably, to increase independence, accountability and the quality of the judicial system."

In November last year, Georgia received the first tranche of the EU's EUR 150 million loan [package](#), a macro-financial assistance aimed to help the country cope with the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, **following harsh criticism from both the EU and the US on Georgia's Supreme Court appointments, it was expected that the EU would block the second tranche**, prompting the Georgian government to save face and make the first move.

Assessing the developments, the US ambassador to Georgia, Kelly Degnan [said](#): "We were a little surprised at the Georgian government's statement that Georgia doesn't need 75 million euros in assistance, despite the high unemployment and poverty rate and of course the impact of the pandemic." According to the ambassador, Washington will take note of the Georgian authorities' "statement that they don't need" the EUR 75 million in assistance.

MEPs from EPP, Viola von Cramon and Andrius Kubilius [lambasted](#) the decision, with MEP Cramon [tweeting](#): "You can't decline what you were not eligible for." This has seemingly irritated the Georgian PM who underscored that the EPP members are "traditionally in solidarity" with GD's main political opponent, ex-president Saakashvili-led United National Movement (UNM), as the EPP is UNM's "mother party." Commenting on MEPs criticism of the GD government over not asking for the EU loan conditioned on court reform and upholding the April 19 EU-brokered deal, Garibashvili even said that "a Member of the European Parliament is not my boss. Our bosses are the Georgian people."

Recent developments in EU-Georgian relations have been assessed as alarming by the Georgian opposition, with many of the opposition leaders arguing that the **upcoming elections will define whether Georgia will transform into a truly European state, or the country will continue stagnating further** and diverging from its EU integration path.



Lavrov's comments on Georgia

While Tbilisi's partnership with the EU is hitting the lowest points of recent years (see the first part of the GWB), **Moscow is using the opportunity to offer a "hand of friendship"** to Georgia.

On September 1, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [addressed](#) MGIMO students on the occasion of the beginning of a new academic year. During the Q&A session, one of the students asked Lavrov whether he has any specific initiatives to improve Russia's relations with Armenia or Georgia. When answering the part about Georgia, **Lavrov solely blamed Tbilisi for severing relations with the Russian Federation** and noted that when Georgia introduced visa-free travel for Russian citizens, Moscow was also planning to reciprocate that action. "In 2019, we were also willing to announce visa-free travel for Georgian citizens, but an unpleasant incident occurred with gross provocations against the Russian parliamentary delegation in Tbilisi [referring to the June 20 [events](#)]". Interestingly, **Georgia has introduced a visa free regime for Russian citizens (up to 90 days) in 2012. Therefore, Russia had seven years to "reciprocate" that action**, though it seems that they were planning to do so just before the June 20 events of the year 2019.

Lavrov concluded his remarks by stipulating that "If Georgia really doesn't want to "play the Russian card" in an effort to maintain Western patronage, but instead prefers to have good relations with us as a neighbour, we are ready for this at any time".

GEORGIA'S OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Seventh Russian military base in Abkhazia to significantly renew its arsenal

According to the outlet "Izvestia", **officials from the Ministry of Defence of Russia are reporting that the arsenal of the 7th Russian military base in Gudauta district of occupied Abkhazia will be significantly renewed**. It should be noted that Russia has taken, and in a gross violation of international law, is not fulfilling the obligation to withdraw its military base from Gudauta. Upgrading the base with new weaponry represents yet another example of a breach of international law. New equipment and weapons are expected to arrive already next year. Namely, the Gudauta base will receive upgraded БМП-3s with additional protection (which are far better defended and armed than currently used БТР-82A), modern drones and motorized shooting brigades will be equipped with the latest AK-12 submachine guns.

Bzhania meets Russian delegation

Russian Deputy Economy Minister Dmitry Volvach and Deputy Energy Minister Evgeniy Grabchak held a meeting with the de facto president of Abkhazia, Aslan Bzhania in Sokhumi. Bzhania emphasized the importance of Russian investments for "creating a common space for socio-economic development under the 2014 Russo-Abkhaz "Treaty of Alliance and Strategic Partnership", an agreement which is widely assessed as a **step towards annexation of the occupied Abkhazia region**. Bzhania also stated that they "cannot do without Russian support and investment in infrastructure".

Bzhania has also referred to the severe epidemiological situation in Abkhazia and asked the Russian delegation for their support to get Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccines from Russia - Moscow has provided only a few doses of Sputnik V to Sokhumi and since then Russia has refused to donate or sell additional doses to Abkhazia.

MONITORING OF DISINFORMATION CASES

Election Disinformation

On September 4, **a photo of Giorgi Gakharia, former PM of Georgia and leader of the political party "For Georgia" was published alongside nine election promises.** According to the list of promises, Gakharia has a specific plan to combat the existing political and economic crisis which includes a drastic decrease in consumer prices, an increase in the monthly pension provision (up to 500 GEL a month), subsidizing the costs of electricity, water and natural gas, etc. **The list of promises is fabricated and has been circulating on social media since 2019. Gakharia never made these promises** either during his time being a PM or while in the opposition.

On August 31 and September 1, **Facebook accounts "Political Satire" and "Savior of Georgia" published a fake quote** attributed to Giorgi Vashadze and Grigol Vashadze, members of the political party "Mesame Dzala" (Third Force). According to the quote, the members of the "Mesame Dzala" perceive the protection of sexual minorities as the main challenge for the country. Facebook accounts of **"Political Satire" and "Savior of Georgia" often publish supportive posts of the "Alliance of Patriots of Georgia" and aim to discredit the opposition** and the critical media.

Disinformation about Georgia receiving Afghan Refugees. On August 26, pro-Kremlin media outlets News Front Georgia and Sputnik Georgia published articles claiming that Georgia plans to receive a large number of refugees from Afghanistan and offer them permanent residency. The same information was disseminated by Sandro Bregadze, the leader of the far-right movement "Georgian March". The Georgian government **stated** that the country will offer temporary shelter, not to the refugees, but to the evacuated employees of international organizations operating in Afghanistan. Davit Zalkaniani, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia called the allegations deliberate disinformation disseminated by Russian agencies.

Old manipulative documentary of REN TV re-shared on Facebook. A documentary made by Russian channel REN TV in 2007 about the dispersal of the demonstration on November 7, 2007 by Georgian authorities was shared on Facebook on August 28. The author linked the video to chipization, claiming that "the impact of radio frequencies on the chipped people will be significantly stronger!" The Russian documentary itself claims that the former government dispersed the rally with the American acoustic weapon LRAD, previously tested in Afghanistan and Iraq. According to REN TV's documentary, the device transmits powerful sound impulses and can even pierce the armour of a tank. In fact, the LRAD device has extremely high decibel power and can be used as a sub-lethal weapon to control the masses. There is no medical research assessing the effects of acoustic weapons on humans. It should be

noted that similar weapons can be found in the equipment of the Russian police. See more [here](#).

Video of Georgian Orthodox priests pushing anti-vax disinfo spread through republishing

A video featuring priests from the Georgian Orthodox Church pushing anti-vaccination sentiment spread online via Facebook, YouTube, and pro-Kremlin Georgian online news outlets. On Facebook, users were encouraged to download the video and republish it, making the complete removal of the video more difficult.

The Georgian Orthodox Church holds significant influence over many in Georgia, so any narrative from church officials — regardless of topic or veracity — has the power to change public behavior. **The [Georgian Orthodox Church](#) has also [demonstrated significant hostility](#) toward COVID-19 vaccines**, which — combined with its power to influence — is likely to be reflected in public attitudes toward vaccination. In this case, the video of Georgian Orthodox priests pushing anti-vax messaging may not have gained significant traction, but the methods by which it was promoted point toward an intention to make it difficult to control its spread and, therefore, a drive for potential inculcation of anti-vax sentiment. Read more [here](#).

CHINA' S INFLUENCE

Protocol signed by Archil Kalandia on deepening cultural relations with the PRC

Based on the information spread on the official FB account of the Embassy of Georgia to the People's Republic of China, on August 16, the **Georgian Ambassador to China, Archil Kalandia, and the Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism of the PRC, Chang Xi, [signed a protocol on cultural cooperation](#) between the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China**. At the meeting held prior to the signing ceremony, the two sides stressed the importance of the document and discussed the new agenda for bilateral cooperation in the field of culture. The sides limited themselves to general statements in front of the press. The details of the protocol have not been publicly distributed.

According to the document, **Sino-Georgian cultural relations have [extended to 2025](#)**. Therefore, in the upcoming years, we might expect the creation of new Chinese language and cultural centers, new initiatives, and exchanges to attract the young Georgians and raise their awareness about the PRC.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' INITIATIVES

The Rondeli Foundation (GFSIS) published an Expert Opinion [“The European Perspective of the Anti-Western Information Warfare”](#), analyzing the European Union's role in opposing anti-Western hybrid warfare; assessing the importance of Russian propaganda and disinformation in the domestic political processes of the European states; and explaining the importance of the Eastern Partnership in overcoming disinformation and bolstering European security.

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