



## ISSUE 39



**NOVEMBER 22, 2021 - DECEMBER 6, 2021**

### TOPICS OF THIS ISSUE

- **Alt-Info, a pro-Russian media outlet-turned political party set to replace Kremlin’s old favorites**
- **Discreditation campaign against the Public defender**
- **Inauthentic network promoted far-right Georgian political party on Facebook**

### RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

**Alt-Info, a pro-Russian media outlet-turned political party set to replace Kremlin’s old favorites**

**Alt-Info, a far-right media outlet with links to Kremlin-affiliated individuals,**

which started operating as an online media outlet and later launched its own TV channel with nationwide coverage, has now [announced](#) its establishment of an openly pro-Russian political party, the Conservative Movement, promising the electorate to bring Tbilisi closer to Moscow in exchange of Georgia's territorial integrity, and improved security, economic and demographic situation - all of which should be guaranteed by Russia.

The group rose to prominence in July 2021, after **organizing attacks on an LGBT Pride event in Tbilisi**, something the local CSOs believe was [encouraged](#) by the **PM Irakli Garibashvili** himself. Back then, Alt-Info's founder Konstantine Morgoshia [personally](#) encouraged the far-right activists to storm the Tbilisi Pride supporter Shame Movement's office, resulting in TV Pirveli cameraman **Lekso Lashkarava** being severely beaten and [dying](#) 5 days after the assault (the case is still under investigation). More than 50 journalists were [injured](#) on July 5, and although certain individuals have been detained, the key **organizers of the counter Pride rally from Alt-Info group have not been arrested**.

As a result, during the constituent congress of the new pro-Russian party, Alt-Info's founder, **Konstantine Morgoshia**, party chairman, **Zurab Makharadze** and others have boasted that Georgians are not putting up with the current liberal agenda "forced on them" by the West. "On July 5, the whole world witnessed the beginning of the end of liberal dictatorship, and witnessed that billions, invested [from abroad] to degrade the nation and fight against the Orthodoxy and religion, came to nothing," [claimed](#) Morgoshia. The co-founder of the newly established openly pro-Russian party also said that Conservative Movement will launch "**direct talks with the occupier [Russia], without feeling any discomfort**," and insisted that currently the West is forbidding Georgia from doing so.

While talking in detail about Conservative Movement's vision on how Georgia should position herself to overcome various challenges, **Zurab Makharadze proposed the idea of joining the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)**. According to Makharadze, "We are ready, in parallel to [defending] the major line of the restoration of our territorial integrity, to discuss Georgia's integration into the security and economic system that is under Russia's interest, but all of this should [in return ensure] improving Georgia's fundamental interests of territorial integrity, security, economic advancement, and our demographic situation."

**With pro-Russian sentiment at 10% to 15% in the country**, as [measured](#) by the CRRG Georgia, and Russia's old favorites in Georgian politics such as the Alliance of Patriots or Levan Vasadze's ERI struggling to garner public support, we can assume that the Kremlin is now counting on the newly established Conservative Movement, aided by its own TV channel with growing influence.



### Georgian Dream and anti-Western actors united against MEPs

Following Anna Fotyga's visit to Georgia and criticism from several MEPs of the government's approach towards Saakashvili's health condition, violent anti-Western groups and Georgian authorities began disseminating messages directed at MEPs. In some cases, the messages presented MEPs as biased of the UNM party who do not express the unified position of the EU. See full article [here](#).

## GEORGIA'S OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

### *De facto* foreign minister of Tskhinvali region meets Italian MPs

The so-called foreign minister of the Russia-occupied Tskhinvali region, **Dimitry Medoev**, [met](#) with the Italian MPs, including the vice-chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, **Pino Cabras**, from the political party Alternative (expelled from Five Star movement and president of the Italian delegation in the Italy - China Collaboration Commission) and an MP from Lega Nord, Vito Komenchini. Possibilities of partnership in various fields were discussed during the meetings. Medoev visited Italy previously this year upon invitation from local communists. The FM of Georgia responded to this case, underscoring that the Italian officials and the Italian MFA have [stated](#) on numerous occasions that **Italy firmly supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity**.

### Kremlin "Chinovnik" appointed *de facto* foreign minister of Abkhazia

*De facto* president of Abkhazia, Aslan Bzhania, [appointed](#) Inal Ardzinba as the *de facto* foreign minister of the Russian-occupied region. Ardzinba has previously served in the administration of the President of Russia under the curation of Vladislav Surkov, where he held the position of the head of relations with Ukraine. There has also been information that Ardzinba has been behind certain [destabilizing](#) activities in Ukraine, especially in the Odessa region. After leaving the administration of the President of

Russia, Ardzinba briefly worked in the patriarchate of Russia. During recent years, Ardzinba has been actively assisting Russia in creating a positive ground for the annexation of Abkhazia by influencing the attitudes of the local population around the issue. His appointment is believed to be orchestrated by the Kremlin to enhance Moscow's influence in Sokhumi. Experts have [assessed](#) **Ardzinba becoming the *de facto* foreign minister “as a symbol of the beginning of the end of “independent” Abkhazia”**. He is expected to work on closer integration between Abkhazia with Russia, toward the longer-term overarching goal of annexation. Ardzinba himself stated that his [priorities](#) are the “further deepening of cooperation with Russia” and “achieving recognition of independence of Abkhazia from Georgia”.

## MAIN DISINFORMATION CASES

### Discreditation campaign against the Public defender

**Nino Lomjaria, the ombudsperson of Georgia had become a target of ruling party, governmental media and trolls after she assembled a medical council to monitor Mikheil Saakashvili's health condition.** The actors against Lomjaria tried to cast a doubt on her competence and portray her and her team as executors of the United National Movement Party, in pursuit of their interests. The discreditation campaign included [disinformation](#) spread by pro-Kremlin actors. Overall, 14 Facebook pages, 20 fake accounts and several governmental media outlets were revealed. See the findings [here](#).

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### Pro-governmental media disseminates a photo of an old banner against Saakashvili

On November 23 [Post tv-Analytics](#) and online publications [MarshallPress](#) and [TV Free](#) spread a photo of a banner depicting the caricature of Mikheil Saakashvili. The inscription on the banner reads “Вышвырнули из ОДЕССЫ- Выдворим из УКРАИНЫ” [Kicked out of Odessa, we will kick him out of Ukraine as well]. Without indicating a date, pro-governmental media outlets mentioned that Saakashvili's caricature has been [hung](#) in Odessa. The banners were displayed in Odessa in 2016 after Saakashvili left the position of governor. Disseminated information about the banners lacked context and misled people as it gave the impression that the banners were related to Saakashvili's current imprisonment.

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### The EU ambassador was misquoted on social media

On November 15, 2021, “Simartlis Droa” [Time for Truth], an anti-opposition Facebook page, which has disseminated disinformation before, published a [post](#) claiming that the EU Ambassador Carl Hartzell had responded to a disinformation story aired on the Mtavari Arkhi TV channel. According to the post, Carl Hartzell stated that “disinformation is a very difficult problem to solve, and it is very unfortunate that the democratic society cannot deal with it”. Hartzell's [comment](#) was not about the story of

Mtavari Arkhi but was said as part of a media literacy event organized by the Georgian National Communications Commission.

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## Inauthentic network promoted far-right Georgian political party on Facebook

An inauthentic Georgian network operating on Facebook uncovered by the **DFRLab** promoted the **newly formed Conservative Movement political party, which grew out of the anti-LGBT Georgian far-right group [Alt-Info](#)**. In response to this investigation, Facebook has taken down assets affiliated with the network, [having originally banned Alt-Info](#) in October 2020.

**Alt-Info announced the formation of the political party on November 15, 2021.** On November 20, it held a constituent congress officially launching the party, where Alt-Info leader **Zurab Makharadze** was elected as as [chairperson](#). Makharadze [said](#) the party supports “a direct and unconditional dialogue” with Russia and that it would work to establish a “close partnership and alliance with the Russian Federation.” In a [video](#) circulating on Facebook, Makharadze said that he supports opening a **Russian military base in Georgia**, noting that Georgia should align with Russia's security interests in the region.

Alt-Info has a history of using inauthentic assets to distribute hyper-partisan and anti-liberal content. As previously noted, **Facebook banned the organization in October 2020**, at the time [removing](#) around 130 assets linked to the group for engaging in coordinated inauthentic behavior, and has taken action against the group on multiple occasions since then. It also removed a smaller Alt-Info network in 2019.

As part of its latest investigation, the DFRLab uncovered 15 pages, 15 groups, and 53 user accounts created by Alt-Info to promote the new political party. Read more [here](#).

## CHINA' S INFLUENCE

### "Newsday Georgia" as a new propagandist of the CCP's policies

Another Georgian media organization that actively promotes the Chinese Communist Party and the PRC as a prosperous socialist/communist state is "[Newsday.ge](#)". If we look at the list of different sections on their website, we will see that among the most common sectors, such as politics, economy, culture, society, education and others, there is **a separate column devoted solely to China**. In this [section](#), we read about “the advantages of modernized socialist China and its intentions to create an ideal world”.

Meanwhile, from 8 to 11 November, the Chinese Communist Party [held](#) the sixth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee, which was attended by different individual scholars and the leaders of the communist parties worldwide. Among them was **the editor-in-chief of the media outlet “Newsday Georgia”, Avtandil Otinashvili**, who claimed that the resolution derived from the sixth plenary session of the CCP reflects the reasons for its success. In his [opinion](#), the CCP's "prosperity

and development will also have a positive, important and far-reaching impact on the future of the world." Recently, he has been actively sharing posts regarding "the CCP's tremendous success" on his Facebook account as well. Moreover, he is in [close partnership](#) with Mr. Malkhaz Gulashvili, chief of the "Georgian Times," actively participating in the initiatives and annual conferences organized by the Chinese Embassy in Georgia.

## CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES

**The EVC** issued the Quarterly Report on the political situation in Georgia and related foreign malign influence – Issue 6, Special Edition – Georgian Local Elections, which provides information about the local municipal elections held in Georgia on October 2, 2021, and outlines why these elections have crucial importance for the country. The report compares and analyses several **assessments of the general conditions of the 2021 local elections**, which were subject to different domestic and international observation missions. In addition, the report briefly summarizes anti-Western messages and disinformation spread during the pre-election campaign in Georgia.

[Report here.](#)

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On Thursday December 9th at 4 pm (CET) the **EVC Senior Analyst David Stulík** will moderate an online roundtable "**Government strategy against hybrid threats and campaigns – Comparison of different approaches**". Other guests will be Mykola Balaban (Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security, Ukraine), Andro Gotsiridze (Cyber Security Studies & Education Center CySec, Georgia), Jan Marian (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Czechia) and Matej Kandrik (Strategic Policy Institute and German Marshall Fund of the United States, Slovakia). For more information check [Facebook](#) or directly join the LIVE stream on [Youtube](#).

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**The Roadmap concerning the Kremlin's Policy in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region - an information-analytical portal integrated with the website of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS - Rondeli Foundation)**, published the [35th issue](#) of "Review of Kremlin Policy in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region". The latest issue covers recent important developments related to Russia's policy in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, including the visits of Russian government officials in Sokhumi and on the other hand visits of ministers of Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia in Moscow.

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**Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (Roundeli Foundation)** published 27th [issue](#) of China's Activities in the South Caucasus. The publication covers various developments, most notable of which are: Chinese state media spreading disinformation regarding 2008 Russo-Georgian war, Georgia's political elites close cooperation with controversial Chinese companies and

Ambassador of Georgia to China stating that the BRI is very important.

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