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## ISSUE 40



**DECEMBER 10, 2021 - DECEMBER 20, 2021**

### TOPICS OF THIS ISSUE

- **Georgia's flag displayed at the inaugural meeting of the the 3+3 platform in Moscow**
- **Mysterious website shuts down as its Pfizer vaccine conspiracy theories spread globally**
- **New details concerning Chinese groups in Batumi**

### RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

**Despite Georgia's refusal to participate in the 3+3 platform, its flag was still displayed at the inaugural meeting in Moscow**

On December 10, deputy foreign ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkey and

Russia held the very first meeting within the frames of the newly established regional cooperation format, the so-called **3+3 platform**. **Georgia has refused to join the platform**, as more than 20% of the country is currently under Russian occupation, and the format is designed in a way to exclude Georgia's Western partners from the South Caucasus region. **Even so, the Georgian flag was still displayed during the inaugural meeting in Moscow**, with the Kremlin supposedly hinting on Tbilisi that there is no escaping from joining the platform sooner or later.

"The representatives of the five countries expressed interest in Georgia joining the platform, for which the door remains open," reads the December 10 [press statement](#) of the MFA of Russia. In response, the Stratcom of the MFA of Georgia has issued the following [statement](#): "The Georgian side has been repeatedly stating its clear position on the 3+3 regional cooperation initiative - that we do not consider participation in this format. The meeting held on 10th December in Moscow, featured the Georgian flag that is unacceptable for us and to which we reacted through the relevant diplomatic channels."



### Secretary Blinken says NATO doors stay open to Georgia and Ukraine

Despite Russia's military buildup along the Ukrainian border and its [demand](#) for NATO to rescind its pledge to admit Georgia and Ukraine into the Alliance, US Secretary of State Blinken [said](#) on December 12 that the NATO doors remain open for Ukraine and Georgia. "If they continue to seek membership and meet the requirements that [process] will move forward," stated Blinken.

## GEORGIA'S OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

### Kremlin-backed South Ossetia sets its sights on gaining control over more of Georgian territories

Russia continues its creeping occupation policy towards Georgia through the puppet regime of South Ossetia. At the end of November, the so-called "parliament" of South Ossetia [presented](#) information on the work of the commission on delimitation and



the event of November 7, torture in prison, crackdown on TV stations and other human rights violations that happened when the UNM party was in power. A number of critical statements about the situation in Georgia from 2007 to 2012 are available [here](#).

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### **A pro-Russian party leader claims that the West is in the top list of crime rates.**

On November 23, Giorgi Kardava, one of the leaders of the newly created pro-Kremlin party Conservative Movement, stated that countries such as Iran, Belarus and North Korea have lower crime rates than Western countries. The numbers and research demonstrates that Kardava made several false and manipulative assertions to portray the US and Europe as a shelter for criminals. Full article is available [here](#).

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### **Mysterious website shuts down as its Pfizer vaccine conspiracy theories spread globally**

Facing potential legal action, a website that spread disinformation about the CEO of pharmaceutical company Pfizer has gone offline after it falsely claimed that CEO Albert Bourla had been arrested and his wife had died of vaccine complications.

The DFRLab analyzed how the false story about Pfizer's CEO was amplified on social media and found the claim received global attention after it was translated into several languages, including Georgian. The claim spread across platforms, but it received the most engagement from Facebook groups and pages.

Read more [here](#).

## **CHINA' S INFLUENCE**

### **Meeting of the Chinese Ambassador with the Abkhaz Envoy in Syria**

On December 6, the Chinese Ambassador to Syria [Feng Biao met](#) with the de-facto Ambassador of Abkhazia to Syria, Bagrat Khutaba, in Damascus. As reported by civil.ge, Abkhaz politician and pro-Kremlin diplomat Inal Ardzinba [commented about the aforementioned meeting](#) that the two sides, "united in support of the Syrian Arab Republic, will be able to begin fruitful work on the establishment of humanitarian and trade and economic relations." The Georgian MFA has not yet commented on this meeting.

The People's Republic of China officially recognizes Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Nevertheless, in 2019, it already had [attempts](#) to launch business relations with the occupied Abkhazia.



### New details concerning Chinese groups in Batumi

New details are gradually being revealed about the massive mobilization of Chinese specialists in Batumi. Georgian media broadcaster “Mtavari Arkhi” [interviewed](#) a Kazakhstani participant of a scandalous case. According to him, the fraudulent group brings young people from Central Asia to Batumi. They confiscate their passports and personal documents and force them to engage in illegal activities. They lie to young Central Asians about their work in the tourism sector, when in reality, the new members are obliged to engage in fraudulent schemes. In addition, they undergo a 10-day course in Ukraine, where they are trained in fraud and illicit actions. More specifically, they are tasked with identifying the obsolete Japanese personal accounts on social media and delivering them to the Chinese, who then use a certain computer program to extract large amounts of money from their bank accounts.

## CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES

On December 2, **Civic IDEA** published a collection of articles called “Analysis of the Growing Chinese Influence in South Caucasus and Central Asia”. The publication gives more detailed information about the main sectors affected by Chinese influence in seven countries: Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The distinguished scholars and the authors of the articles contributed with their findings on the following topics: Chinese Malign Economic and Security Influence in Georgia; Sino-Armenian Political Relations and Armenian Investments in China; China’s Mounting Interests and Influence in Azerbaijan; Research on Informing the People of Kazakhstan About the Activities of Chinese Companies in the Kazakhstani Extractive Sector; China’s Debt-trap Diplomacy in Kyrgyzstan; Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Impact on Governance and Corruption in Tajikistan; China’s

Power Projection in Central Asia and its Geopolitical Implications: The Case of Uzbekistan.

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On December 2, **Civic IDEA**, together with the Embassy of Poland in Georgia organized a joint conference "[China: Threat or a Strategic Alternative](#)". The event was hosted by the Embassy of Poland. During the discussions, both Georgian and foreign (including Czech) experts reviewed Beijing's engagement in Central and Eastern Europe, and discussed its economic expansion as a decisive pillar in China's grand strategy.

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