

GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice

6 June – 12 June

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Ukraine War Disinfo Narratives in Georgia

6-12 June

Fighting Nazism and Fascism in Ukraine - Perpetual Russian Narrative

Russian propaganda continues to justify its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by invoking the concept of fighting against Nazism which resonates back to the Great Patriotic War (*Великая Оте́чественная война*). Unsurprisingly, Russian propaganda mouthpieces in Georgia continued their endless prattle of the Ukrainian government and military being Nazis and fascists:

- Various media [outlets](#) and Facebook [groups](#) disseminated videos allegedly showing the meeting of a Ukrainian "fascist and butcher" soldier, currently a PoW, and his former Russian victim miraculously survived, who was brutally beaten by the Ukrainian soldier and made to beg for mercy.
- There is a correlation between Russian military activity and the work of its propaganda machine - after the fall of Mariupol, the Azov battalion is no longer the focus of the Russian military and, consequently, it is not a primary target of disinformation as well. However, some disinformers continued to [echo](#) the narrative that the **Azov Battalion was a Nazi grouping** prepared by Poroshenko and US senators to attack Russia. This message implies that Russia is not an aggressor but was forced to launch a pre-emptive war.
- Arno Khidirbegishvili, the Editor-in-Chief of the Kremlin-backed media outlet Saqinform, voiced a [recurring](#) narrative that **Russia is liberating Ukrainian cities and their residents**. Khidirbegishvili stated that Putin embarked on a "special military

operation" to liberate Ukraine with a humanitarian cause - to help the population and rebuild infrastructure in liberated areas.

- Sputnik-Georgia also [mentioned](#) that Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia returned to peaceful life after the Russian liberation and, moreover, they have achieved a new level of integration with Russia. According to Sputnik, while the government of Ukraine is destroying Ukraine and its economy, Russia will direct its resources on rebuilding and developing liberated territories.
- The pro-Russian webpage, Isari.ge, [stated](#) that **the Russian population in Ukraine and the Baltic region is oppressed by the governments - deprived of the right to use the Russian language, restricted from watching Russian TV or consuming Russian online media**. According to the article, the so-called "tolerant" Brussels is turning a blind eye to these infringements. Editor-in-Chief Hamlet Chipashvili also reiterated that Ukrainians are fascists and to justify this fact, he recalled a quote from the German poet Heinrich Heine - "Where they burn books, they will also ultimately burn people" and linked it to the actions of "Neofascist Ukrainians" in Odesa.

Military Situation on the Ground through Kremlin Lenses

Kremlin propaganda is reinvigorated by Russia's advances in Donbas and is gloating with a triumphant tone, despite failing to achieve a regime change, taking Kyiv and other major cities and "liberating" Donbas after more than 100 days of the war, originally planned as a several day-long "special military operation."

- Sputnik-Georgia [noted](#) that according to Western military experts, Russia is just a step away from a victory in Donbas. According to Sputnik, Moscow intends to accelerate a

"special military operation" in Ukraine by significantly increasing the mobility of Russian military units and attack weapons. Sputnik concluded that the mass use of tank units in parallel with aviation and artillery would ensure a strong attack on Donbas and the success of the Russian operation on a wider front.

- Sputnik-Georgia also [boasted](#) that the Russian army destroyed more or less all of the combat-ready elements of the Ukrainian armed forces in just three months. According to Sputnik, the fierce attack of the Russian military and the day-to-day defeat of the Ukrainian armed forces on the eastern front made the West realise that Russia would never forgive the supply of weapons to Ukraine and that they would have to pay for every hostile move towards Moscow as well as for every Russia soldier killed with NATO bullets, missiles and projectiles. Sputnik reported that the collective West is ready to sue for peace with Russia at all costs, even by ceding some part of the Ukrainian territory; however, Washington and Kyiv are hesitant as the defeat against Russia would mean an end to the myth of American exceptionalism and shut down the US's "Ukrainian project" for good.
- Sputnik-Georgia also cheerfully [commented](#) that Ukraine is in a desperate situation and US intelligence is assessing the condition of the Ukrainian armed forces on the eastern front as catastrophic and the status of the Russian military as advantageous.
- Sputnik-Georgia [extrapolated](#) that the Russian "special operation" in Ukraine has proven the dominant role of tanks in modern warfare, particularly the Russian T-90 (according to Sputnik, superior to its Western counterparts) and shattered the myth of the superiority of anti-tank missiles and NLAWs.
- Finally, Sputnik-Georgia [wrote](#) that the US embassy is the primary decision-maker in Kyiv and as the Ukrainian armed forces are sustaining heavy casualties in Donbas, this

might be a prologue to NATO's and particularly Poland's direct involvement in the conflict, instead of waging a proxy war against Russia. However, Sputnik bragged that NATO is less likely to prevail over Russia in conventional warfare and NATO does not stand a chance in the case of a nuclear confrontation.

- Alt-Info [remarked](#) that there are already some outlines for peace but the Ukrainians and the forces behind Ukraine are still trying to prolong the war. It seems that the 20% of Ukraine which is occupied by Russia will never again be Ukraine but because of their rhetoric and actions, Russia is not given the opportunity to reach an agreement and, consequently, Ukraine is losing even more territory.
- Leader of Alt-Info and Conservative Movement, Zurab Makharadze, [stated](#) that the Georgians fighting in Ukraine are being put in the most hazardous war theatre - in Severodonetsk where an encirclement is practically inevitable, thus sacrificing the Georgians and saving the Ukrainians from a siege.
- Alt-Info also [claimed](#) that the endgame of the war is the scenario of Mariupol - Ukraine will resist but to no avail.
- Pro-Russian Sezoni TV, based on the SVR information, [asserted](#) that Kyiv agreed on the plan for Poland to annex Ukraine and as part of this plan, Kyiv is already sharing the most sensitive information with Warsaw and Washington.
- According to some Facebook [users](#), Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Mykhailo Podolyak is predicting a very harsh winter for Ukraine due to the lack and expensiveness of gas, a spike in prices and a deficit of products as well as the loss of many jobs and a decrease in wages. Facebook users suggested that this indicated that Ukraine was spreading fake news when they were saying to be winning the war and "were going to march to Moscow."

Ukrainian Refugees

- One user on Facebook disseminated a false [claim](#) about Sweden passing a law and officially asking Ukrainian women to respect the host country and not walk naked in the street. Instilling antagonism towards the Ukrainians, Facebook user then provocatively asks whether Georgia has made similar measures to restrict such behaviour of the Ukrainian refugees.
- In an [interview](#) with the pro-Russian online newspaper, Saerto Gazeti, Gulbaat Rtskhiladze, Director of the Russian proxy NGO – the Eurasian Institute and the Kremlin's [long-time](#) local propaganda activist, claimed that the **NGO Free Russia, affiliated with the Georgian opposition (according to Rtskhiladze), is bringing Ukrainian refugees to Georgia to conduct rallies with the demands to free ex-President Saakashvili from prison as well as anti-Russian demonstrations with the overarching aim to pull Georgia into the war with Russia.**

Economic Consequences of Sanctions

As the US and Europe roll out an array of economic sanctions to counter Russia's invasion of Ukraine, pro-Kremlin sources convey messages that these sanctions cannot pressure Vladimir Putin to stop the war and withdraw his troops from Ukraine. They also keep praising Prime Minister Gharibashvili for his pessimistic attitude towards sanctions. Generally, the pro-Russian outlets employ a two-pronged propaganda narrative to downplay the consequences of the economic sanctions – firstly arguing that the Russian economy is coping well with the sanctions and is not damaged (or just modestly damaged) and, secondly, stating that it is the West which is being severely hurt by the side-effects of the "anti-Russian" sanctions.

- Sezoni TV, a pro-Russian media outlet, promoted the quotes of Vladimir Putin and Maria Zakharova, saying that inflation is under [control](#) in Russia, thus indicating that **Russia is coping well with the sanctions** and that the West has [miscalculated](#) the sanctions policy and as a result, **the West is suffering from a boomerang effect**.
- Anti-Western blogger Beka Vardosanidze [implied](#) that the sanctions on Russia are not working and, on the contrary, they are damaging the West as Biden had to declare a state of emergency due to the energy crisis.

Some disinformation messages focused on Georgia's role in the international sanctions regime against Russia:

- Ramin Abesadze, one of the leaders of the fringe pro-Russian and anti-Western political party "Georgian Idea", posted a video and [proclaimed](#) in the description that the US Ambassador to Georgia was threatening Georgia with severe consequences if the country did not comply with the international sanctions, something that Georgia is doing. Moreover, the video falsely argued that by this approach, **Ambassador Kelly Degnan was trying to incite a conflict between Georgia and Russia, and then would leave Georgia alone to face Russia's aggression**. It is noteworthy that Ambassador Kelly Degnan, in the same video, unequivocally underscored that the US is not urging Georgia to impose bilateral sanctions; however, Abesadze ignored this fact in his assessment.
- Continuing the same rhetoric, the pro-Russian outlet, Isari.ge, [claimed](#) that the **EU obliges Georgia to support Ukraine** (something that the outlet regards as a disastrous policy) and impose sanctions on and use harsh wording to condemn Russia (also unacceptable for the publisher) in order **to obtain membership candidate status**. On top of that, the author highlights that imposing sanctions on Russia causes controversy even

among EU countries, adding that Brussels aggressively urges member states to levy sanctions on Russia, describing the process as a "liberal dictatorship [of Brussels]."

- Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, one of the leaders of the pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots political party, in the broadcast of its affiliated TV Obieqtivi, [argued](#) that **Georgia should engage in parallel import with Russia; that is, import goods that are sanctioned in Russia and sell them in Russia and earn profits of billions of dollars.** He mentioned that Armenia is already benefitting from such a scheme and is using Georgian territory to export goods to Russia. Therefore, he claimed that Georgia is better suited than Armenia to reap the gains from the situation and should not miss the chance. Tarkhan-Mouravi also reasoned that it is not immoral to help Russia ditch the sanctions and profit from bypassing the international sanctions regime because the West is also trading with Russia, particularly in the energy sector.

Disinformation Narratives in Georgia's Occupied Regions

Russian propaganda is repeatedly reiterating the same message in Abkhazia that Russia is conducting a "special military [operation](#)" in Ukraine against [Nazis](#) and [liberating](#) Ukraine from Nazis. Sputnik-Abkhazia is spearheading the Kremlin disinformation machine in Abkhazia.

Fearmongering Narratives of the War Expanding Beyond Ukraine to Georgia

Threatening the Georgian public with the war against Russia has been the major narrative of the pro-Russian and far-right groups in the week of 6-12 June. Traditionally, the Georgian opposition and the critical media have been targeted for their "desire" to open a second front in Georgia. However, after blaming the opposition for craving to drag Georgia into the war

against Russia for the past few weeks, the **Georgian Dream (GD) government found a new scapegoat – the EU** – to justify their political failures. The Georgian Dream government, along with its supporters, affiliated experts and public figures, found a perfect unison with the Kremlin groups in attacking the European Parliament for a resolution extremely critical of the Georgian government which even suggested discussing sanctioning Bidzina Ivanishvili - the billionaire founder of the ruling Georgian Dream and the former Prime Minister, allegedly still being the informal ruler of the country.

- High-level government officials and ruling party leaders did not hesitate to resort to anti-Western propaganda in response to the European Parliament's critical resolution towards the Georgian government. Kakha Kaladze, Mayor of the capital Tbilisi and one of the most influential figures in the ruling GD party, [stated](#) that "even if each of us is sanctioned, the country will not engage in the war against Russia" despite no such demands in the European Parliament's resolution. Another GD leader, Gia Volski, First Vice-Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, in an interview with the Georgian Public broadcaster, [claimed](#) that **Ukraine's interest, Georgia to open a second front against Russia, is supported by the United National Movement (Georgia's biggest opposition party) and by the people who voted for the European Parliament's resolution, referring to the 308 MEPs**, eventually labelling them as warmongers.
- Many disinformation actors have claimed that the EU is conditioning the **candidacy status** for Georgia to the **opening of the second front against Russia**. Space News [contended](#) that the resolution adopted by the European Parliament was highly critical of the Georgian Dream government because the GD refused to accept the EU's request to start the war against Russia. Bondo Mdzinarashvili, a member of the Georgian Public Broadcaster's Board of Trustees, famous for his anti-Western stance, used a false dilemma technique and posted a [question](#) on his Facebook account asking

the public to pick between the "getting EU candidacy status with no perspective of membership in exchange for dragging Georgian into the war with Russia" and "peace in Georgia." Mdzinarashvili noted that he chooses peace.

- Other propaganda actors claimed that the EU and USA are punishing Georgia for not starting the war with Russia. Pro-governmental expert, philosopher Zaza Shatirishvili, [speculated](#) that the resolution adopted by the European Parliament resulted from the US's pressure on the EU to **punish Georgia for not opening the second front against Russia**. Gia Gachechiladze, a former politician and musician with the stage name Ucnobi, who is famous for his anti-Western positions, also [stated](#) in his interview with the government-affiliated TV Imedi that the West punishes the Georgian government for maintaining peace in the country. Soso Manjavidze, a self-proclaimed political scientist affiliated with far-right and pro-Russian groups, has also [claimed](#) that there are two reasons behind the European Parliament's critical resolution: 1. Georgia has not opened a second front against Russia and refused to join the Western sanctions against Moscow – thus, according to Manjavidze, Georgia saved itself from physical annihilation. 2. Georgia fights against LGBTG+ and gay pride – therefore, according to Manjavidze, Georgia escaped spiritual death. Another anti-Western actor, economist Demur Giorkhelidze, has also [responded](#) to the European Parliament resolution and suggested that it was a punishment for Georgia for refusing to join the war against Russia and for not being willing to conduct "gay marches."
- The far-right pro-Russian group Alt-Info, once again, [reiterated](#) the conspiracy-type narrative that the West-led groups in Georgia were going to use Tbilisi Pride (LGBTQ event) as a provocation to destabilise the country and overthrow the Georgian Dream government and then open the second front and start the war against Russia.

- The government-affiliated media TV Imedi distorted the words of the former Minister and opposition MP politician, Zurab Tchiaberashvili, spreading the news with the manipulative [headline](#) on Imedi's Facebook page "Zurab Tchiaberashvili - Yes, I want the war." This text-book fake news was later amplified by pro-Russian groups and Facebook users [scolding](#) the whole Georgian opposition for being frustrated with the peace that the Georgian Dream government established in Georgia and seeking to drag Georgia into the war with Russia.
- The infamous celebrity influencer and a well-known propagandist, Lali Moroshkina, [expressed](#) her "infuriation" towards the "war propagandists" in Georgia and claimed that the collective "they" (people who want to open a second front in Georgia) want to eliminate the young Georgian men to damage country's demography and eradicate the Georgian nation. Moroshkina added that in the case of a war against Russia, Georgian men would share the fate of a considerable number of Ukrainian military personnel who had been taken into captivity by Russians and, together with many foreign fighters, are facing the death sentence. The same narrative was amplified by the anti-Western Saerto Gazeti newspaper which [claimed](#) that if the second front is opened in Georgia, there would be nothing left of Georgia, something that is not of any concern for the West or the USA.

Military Aid to Ukraine

The battle of Donbas has effectively transformed into an artillery duel; thus, Ukraine is desperate for heavy weapons; namely, precise long-range artillery and MLRS systems and tanks as claimed by the Ukrainian political leadership. Henceforth, Russian propaganda

campaigns have gotten more active in order to disrupt military aid to Ukraine. Traditionally, these messages have resonated in Georgia as well:

- Pro-Russian TV Obieqtivi [claimed](#), based on a former US intelligence officer, that US military aid sent to Europe ends up on the black market and this process will lead the world to destruction.
- Alt-Info also [voiced](#) the message that **weapons provided to Ukraine are going to the black market** and have ended up in Syria. According to the leader of Alt-Info and Conservative Movement, such stories appear in the Western tabloids because the West is not willing to supply qualitatively more weapons and is *ex-ante* creating a justification.
- Eri Media, established by the infamous Georgian businessman and public figure, Levan Vasadze, [promoted](#) the message that Ukraine might attack Russia's territory with Western weaponry. It stated that the West is prolonging the war artificially by providing Ukraine with weaponry at the current tempo. According to Eri Media, Europe and the US believe that Ukraine will not stop on its territory in case of Ukrainian victory; hence, the US and Europe are afraid that Ukraine will invade Russian territory. Therefore, Eri Media concluded that the West is supplying Ukraine with the amount of armament needed to retake the lost territory, not to attack Russia.
- Sputnik-Georgia [threatened](#) that providing Kyiv with more heavy and long-range weaponry would result in bombing the logistical centres on the suppliers' (i.e., NATO members) territories. Sputnik also mentioned that **more military aid would lead to a further escalation** and the dragging of **NATO armies into the conflict** with Russia.
- Pro-Russian Alt-Info and the leaders of the Conservative Movement [asserted](#) that the Western **military assistance to Ukraine would not make a difference on the battlefield**

as the weaponry supplied by the West is not nearly enough the needed amount. However, paradoxically, Alt-Info also claimed that the support of the West was at the maximum level and the only remaining tool for further assistance was for the West to join the war. The leader of the Conservative Movement also claimed that Ukraine would experience problems due to the diversity of howitzers supplied and the lack of personnel trained in using them.

- A pro-Russian blogger [indicated](#), without facts or valid reasons, that if the Republicans win the midterms in the US, funds would no longer be appropriated for the Zelensky regime.
- Saerto Gazeti and [TV Obieqtivi argued](#) that there are no results despite so much military aid supplied to Ukraine. This message suggested that **Western military assistance to Ukraine is in vain** and hence, there is no reason to continue the policy.
- Kartuli TV (Georgian TV) [stated](#) that the West is not trying to end the war in Ukraine and sanctions and military aid serve the goal of weakening Russia and partitioning Ukraine.

No to Europe, Declare Neutrality and Start Negotiations with Russia - Say Pro-Russian Actors

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on violations of media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia which speaks in a critical tone towards the Georgian government and even suggested discussing sanctioning Bidzina Ivanishvili. All of the Georgian Dream leaders, including the Prime Minister, Irakli Gharibashvili, and the Chairman of the Party, Irakli Kobakhidze, lashed out against the resolution, labelling it as shameful, anti-Georgian, anti-

state, immoral, etc., and arguing that it was based on fake information. GD leaders and affiliated speakers retaliated against the MEPs by accusing them of being irresponsible, supporters of criminal opposition political groups and advocates of opening the second front of the war against Russia in Georgia. Kobakhidze [stated](#) that the “European Parliament resolution may be perceived as a hint that Georgia, unlike Ukraine and Moldova, may not be granted EU candidate status;” however, he also [noted](#) that “it has nothing to do with European values and such a resolution, to put it frankly, is not worth anything.” PM Gharibashvili went further and [threatened](#) the EU to uncover anything in the case of a negative decision on Georgia’s candidacy status: “...on June 17 there will be the opinion of the European Commission, I will wait for June 23-24 and until then I will refrain from publicly disclosing the details, so that I do not speak more in front of our people, if the decision is unfair, shameful for our country, for our people, I keep the option that I will uncover everything and I will tell the people everything.”

Government-affiliated sources also organised massive online smear campaigns against the MEPs. Some MPs from the Georgian Dream, such as [Dimitri Khundadze](#) and [Aluda Ghudushauri](#), and many affiliated speakers (for instance, [Gia Gachechiladze](#)) aired outright anti-Western messages:

- Dimitri [Khundadze](#) (MP): “If Georgia receives the status of an EU candidate with unjust commitments, the country should refuse it!”
- Aluda Ghudushauri (MP): “How can a resolution containing lies be taken into account? I do not want Europe based on lies, I do not even want my own family if it is based on lies.”
- Gia Gachechiladze: “If sanctioning Bidzina [Ivanishvili] and dragging us into the war is a pathway to Europe, then let this path be closed!”

Openly pro-Russian actors exploited this aggressive and overtly critical rhetoric towards the EU. They did not miss the chance and utilised the fertile ground for disseminating propaganda, created by the government, and revived the narrative that **Europe limits Georgia's sovereignty and interferes with its internal affairs**. Pro-Russian actors [suggested](#) that the European Parliament had adopted the anti-Georgian resolution which contained "unprecedented slander" against the Georgian government. Another interpretation of the resolution [developed](#) a sub-narrative that both the opposition and the government are puppets of the West and the EU will punish Georgia if we do not organise a "gay parade" and "do not open a second [front](#)" in Georgia. Based on these false allegations, pro-Russian groups [blatantly argue](#) that Georgia [does not need](#) membership in such a union.

As an alternative and a solution, pro-Russian actors proposed abandoning the pro-Western foreign policy and immediately negotiate with Russia. Giorgi Iremadze, Director of the pro-Russian Patrioti TV, [stated](#) that Europe had turned its back on Georgia by adopting the resolution and the time had arrived to start a dialogue with Russia, most probably referring to allying with Russia.

Along with the openly pro-Russian narratives that promote an alliance with Russia, the pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots (AoP) political party continued advocating for false neutrality. Leader of the Alliance of Patriots, David Tarkhan-Mouravi, [claimed](#) that there are only two security models in the world: NATO and neutrality. He argued that NATO failed to ensure security in the world and parroted Putin's narrative that NATO acts against Russia.

Lugar Lab - Russia's Made-up Threat

Disinformation about the Lugar laboratory, a biological laboratory based in Tbilisi and a constant target of high-ranking Russian officials and propaganda sources, [resumed](#) last week. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, conveyed Moscow's fears about US activities in the post-Soviet space and demanded a response from Washington on its military-biological work. As Zakharova asserted, Russian officials, public figures and even Georgian experts (probably referring to pro-Russian propagandists) had repeatedly noted that the Lugar Centre's secret activities raise serious questions about US compliance with its obligations under the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. According to her, the US collects biomaterials and conducts research using insects which constitute hazardous biological agents and spreaders of infections.

Attention, Moscow is Speaking - Russian Disinformation on Facebook and Instagram

Russia's Ukraine-war-related disinformation continues proliferating on Facebook and Instagram. During the previous week (6-12 June), the Kremlin-supported actors have once again tried to convince the public to make savings in roubles as the rouble, according to the propaganda, "[is the most profitable currency](#)." Last week, **FactCheck Georgia** also debunked a fake story according to which Stephen M. Twitty, Former Deputy Commander of United States European Command, said "200,000 Ukrainian soldiers have disappeared" from the Ukrainian army – a [fabricated quote](#). Going further, Russian media outlets have also fabricated a story about the Polish Deputy Foreign Minister, Marcin Przydacz. According to the false claim, Przydacz accused Russia of destroying Western weapons going to Ukraine – when, [in fact](#), the Deputy Foreign Minister merely said that Russia was *trying* to destroy those weapons. Last week, Russian propaganda also targeted another Polish official, this time, Paweł Szefernaker –

Secretary of State at the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. According to the disinformation, Szefernaker stated that "it is time for the Ukrainians to return home" – a quote that [does not belong](#) to him. And in a desperate attempt to prove that the Ukrainian soldiers are Nazis, pro-Russian actors have circulated a picture allegedly depicting Ukrainian POWs with tattoos but the photo was [actually](#) taken in El Salvador, Central America.



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