

GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice

20 June – 26 June

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Ukraine War Disinfo Narratives in Georgia

20-26 June

Prevailing over Nazism - Military Situation on the Ground through Kremlin Lenses

Kremlin propaganda considers the fate of the war already decided and shifted the messaging from reporting on the brutality and atrocities of the Ukrainian army to portraying it as defeated. In the previous week, pro-Russian propaganda focused more on the political and military context of the war rather than on the ideological; i.e., trying to convince the public that Russia is fighting against Nazism:

- The national flag of Ukraine was [labelled](#) as a Nazi flag and videos were promoted where those "Nazi" flags were removed.
- Pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots (AoP) Chairman, David Tarkhan-Mouravi, [spoke](#) live on its affiliated TV Obieqtivi. He accused the "war party" in the US political elite of igniting a war in Ukraine with the hands of a traitor, President Zelensky, just as they did in Georgia in 2008. Tarkhan-Mouravi proclaimed that contrary to the initial claims that Ukraine would stage a counter-attack and reach Moscow, the reality has been quite different - Ukraine is losing the war and has already lost twice as much territories as Georgia and Ukraine would not ever be able to take them back. He also stated that if Ukraine had agreed to become neutral, there would have been no war.

- [Alt-info](#) and other pro-Russian [outlets claimed](#) Ukraine was already defeated in the war and the US officially admitted this. To support this claim, they disseminated a video of former Colonel Richard Black in which he says that the war has not yet ended but is already lost for Ukraine due to its shortage of shells, resulting in ten times fewer shells fired per day as compared to Russia in a war that has effectively transformed into an artillery duel. He also stated that Ukraine was losing around 1,000 servicemen daily - an unbearable toll for Ukraine in the long run.
- Alt-info praised Russian tactics in the ongoing war and underscored the superiority of the Russian side. One of its leaders, Giorgi Kardava, stated that Russia has a basic but efficient tactic - preserving manpower and instead using artillery shells. He also stressed that Russia is razing Ukraine to the ground with artillery and tanks. Kardava also stated that Ukraine is also losing in the informational warfare which is why it is unable to withdraw troops from Severodonetsk as otherwise, its narrative, that the victory is on the Ukrainian side, would be unmasked. Severodonetsk was a target for another pro-Russian outlet - [News-Front](#). According to News-Front, Severodonetsk will become the second city after Mariupol where the Ukrainian army would be trapped and surrender. However, Ukrainian troops have since evacuated and retreated from the ruins of Severodonetsk to more fortified defensive positions.
- A newly-emerged pro-Russian Facebook page focused on displaying the military superiority of the Russian army. Particularly, the page emphasised the role of Kinzhal missiles in defeating Ukraine. According to the [page](#), there is no analogue of the Russian Kinzhal in the world and even the US defence systems cannot shoot it down; that is why both Americans and Ukrainians are afraid of it. The page also [concluded](#) that the war is already over and Ukraine is already defeated because Russia is deploying the

Iskander missile system in eastern Ukraine, capable of fitting nuclear warheads and destroying the targets in 500 km with precision strikes.

- Sputnik-Georgia [promoted](#) the role of another Russian missile - Calibr - in destroying Ukrainian command centres alongside high-ranking generals in the Dnepropetrovsk region. As Sputnik claims, the strikes conducted with the Calibr missiles thwarted Ukraine's plan to launch a counter-offensive in Kherson as Ukrainian forces were left without the commanders in the 300 km radius.
- Another pro-Russian [outlet](#), Isari.ge, asserted that Ukraine was granted EU candidate status because the West wants Ukraine to continue the war with Russia which it has no chance of winning and the prolonged war can only bring destruction and casualties. However, according to the author of this claim, the West is not bothered with the devastation of Ukraine once they achieve their goal of protracting the war. This message duplicates the official Kremlin position that Ukraine should lay down arms and stop the fighting and the war will be over. Hamlet Chipashvili, Editor-in-Chief of Isari.ge, even accused Zelensky and his government of committing genocide because, according to Chipashvili, Zelensky is continuing the war for his financial gains in which from 300 up to 1,000 soldiers are dying a day. Thus the pro-Russian outlet blamed Ukraine for the Russians killing Ukrainian soldiers in Putin's unprovoked war and called it a genocide committed by President Zelensky, not Putin.

Propaganda Narratives Regarding Ukrainian Refugees

Propaganda sources are trying to discredit Ukrainian refugees in Georgia by accusing them of participating in various rallies that aim to organise a revolution and drag Georgia into war with Russia:

- A pro-governmental source – the Leader 41 Facebook page - [claimed](#) that if Ukrainian refugees in Georgia will take part in the June 20 rally organised by the largest opposition party – the United National Movement (UNM) (in fact, it was a pro-EU rally organised by civil society) and help the UNM destabilise the country, then the Georgian government would have been left with no other choice than to expel them from the country.
- In the [broadcast](#) of Alt-Info, one of the leaders of the Alt-Info group and the Conservative Movement (a political party established by Alt-Info), Zurab Makharadze, insisted that the West encouraged its proxies in Georgia to hold an LGBT pride event this year. According to his claim, they are currently gathering gay activists from Belarus, Ukraine and Russia to hold a "grand gay festival" in Georgia. Makharadze claimed that this has a political purpose - organise a "Maidan," seize power and open the second front against Russia in Georgia.

Propaganda Narratives Regarding Economic Sanctions

- In the [broadcast](#) of Eri Media, Soso Manjavidze, a self-proclaimed political scientist affiliated with far-right and pro-Russian groups, claimed that the EU punished Georgia for not joining the "radical sanctions" against Russia, adding that the EU wants to cause a spill-over effect of the Russian aggression to Georgia and put Georgia under pressure

as the EU has done to Latvia. He also claimed that Russia, Europe and the US are interested in dragging Georgia into the war to partition Georgia.

- [Beka Vardosanidze](#), a notorious blogger and a propagandist with links to Alt-Info and other far-right and disinformation actors, is trying to convince his more than 10,000 subscribers on Facebook that the Western-imposed sanctions on Russia have been in vain and, on the contrary, counterproductive. He also informed his audience about the European countries "reducing shower times" in an effort to cope with an acute energy crisis.
- One Facebook user [claimed](#) that due to the economic sanctions imposed on Russia, Germany is suffering from the so-called "boomerang effect" as Russia halved gas supplies to Germany and other European countries, thus forcing Germany to shift to using winter reserves. The user added that Austria and the Netherlands also face the same difficulties. The Facebook user further insisted that the German Ministry of Energy said the US and Gulf states would be able to supply only 10% to 15% of liquefied natural gas as an alternative to the Russian gas during the winter season, thus concluding that Germany is slowly returning to the 19th century by replacing natural gas (imported from Russia) with coal and mazut whilst recently they were bragging about making Russia return to the Stone Age.
- The same message was [conveyed](#) by Giorgi Kardava, Chairman of the far-right pro-Russian Conservative Movement political party (established by the Alt-Info group) in the broadcast of Alt-Info. He claimed that Russian gas prices jumped so high that Germany started using coal, ironically adding that they may soon switch to firewood.
- Anti-Western groups blamed the West for the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine by claiming that the US and the EU both tried to weaken their arch-rival - Russia.

According to the narrative, this is happening through the West deploying Ukrainian citizens in combat as soldiers and exploiting Ukraine as a battleground.

- Alluding to this issue, a far-right political party, Georgian Idea, has [criticised](#) UK's Boris Johnson for condemning Europe for pushing Ukraine to make a "bad peace."
- Arno Khidirbegishvili, Editor-in-Chief of the pro-Kremlin media Saqinform, [claimed](#) in his editorial that Georgia averted the plans of Brussels and Kyiv by not declaring war on Russia in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region after Russia launched a "special operation" in Ukraine and by not joining anti-Russian economic sanctions.
- The pro-Russian infamous website - Isari.ge, furthered the [message](#) that Euro-Atlantic unity is being torn into pieces vis-à-vis sanctioning Russia as only 15% of countries comply with the sanctions regime.
- [Gruzinform](#) (the Russian edition of Saqinform) praised Prime Minister Gharibashvili for his negative attitude towards economic sanctions and, meanwhile, lashed out at the supportive stance of opposition lawmakers on sanctions against Russia, stressing that regardless of the radical opposition and the unprecedented pressure of Western lobbyists, blackmail and speculation on the issues of occupied territories, Western values and other topics, Gharibashvili has successfully managed to save the country from the adverse effects of the sanctions.

Fearmongering Narrative of the War Expanding Beyond Ukraine into Georgia

Disinformation actors have been consistent in finding false interconnections between granting the EU membership candidacy status and opening a second front against Russia in Georgia.

After the European Council announced its final decision to give candidacy status to Ukraine and Moldova and the European perspective for Georgia (with the chance to get the candidacy status if Georgia meets the specific criteria foreseen by the EU Commission and upheld by the European Council), there has been a massive upsurge of the propaganda narratives circulating in the Georgian information ecosystem.

The Georgian Dream (GD) government, in unison with anti-Western and pro-Russian actors, has also slammed the Georgian opposition and blamed them for attempting to destabilise the country, referring to the big pro-EU and anti-government protests happening in Tbilisi and other big cities after the EU Commission and the European Council revealed their positions regarding the EU membership candidacy status.

- Chairman of the pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots (AoP), David Tarkhan-Mouravi, [stated](#) that the West and Ukraine want to drag Georgia into the war, open the second front in Georgia and plunge Moldova into the war and open a third front against Russia there. Tarkhan-Mouravi employed the fearmongering tactic, asserting that a threat of opening a second front in Georgia is imminent and if it materialises, Georgia will not survive.
- The leader of another far-right anti-Western political movement, Georgian March - Sandro Bregadze, has also [claimed](#) that the maximum effort is used by the Western-backed Georgian opposition parties, comprised of traitors, to drag Georgia into the war against Russia.
- Member of the Board of Trustees of the Georgian Public Broadcaster, Bondo Mdzinarashvili, who is famous for his anti-Western positions, [stated](#) in an interview with the TV Alt-Info that Georgia is far ahead of Ukraine and Moldova when it comes to reforms and it might even do much better than some EU member countries.

According to Mdzinarashvili, EU institutions and leaders know this fact but they still refused to give Georgia the EU membership candidacy status because Georgia did not open the second front against Russia.

- In a hotly contested debate, actress and former Tbilisi city mayoral candidate from the Labour party, Asmat Tyabladze, [noted](#) that Ukraine and Moldova were granted EU membership candidate status because they are in a war situation and Georgia was rejected because there is no war in Georgia.
- One Facebook user also posted a video [claiming](#) that the EU's statement that granting candidacy status for Georgia will be reconsidered if Georgia meets some criteria and asserted that the only actual criteria is the opening of the second front in Georgia.
- Pro-Russian media outlet Georgia and the World published an [article](#) with so-called civil activist, Levan Adeishvili, who claimed that the NATO membership perspective pushed Georgia into the war with Russia in 2008 which resulted in the increased anti-Western attitudes among the Georgian public. Adeishvili contended that the EU had given an ultimatum to Georgia - if the country wants to become a member of the EU, then Georgia has to start another war with Russia. So, according to Adeishvili, the West deliberated new bait for Georgia and Ukraine which is EU membership. According to him, the West has already dragged Ukraine into the war with Russia and now they are trying to do the same for Georgia.
- The leader of the ultra-nationalistic political party Georgian Idea, Levan Chachua, has also given an [interview](#) to Georgia and the World where he noted that Pride Week (June 28 – July 2) in Georgia is a planned process to start the destabilisation in the country and prepare the ground for the "Georgian Maidan," referring to the Euromaidan events of 2014 in Ukraine. According to Chachua, there will be civil unrest

in Georgia which would attract Russian attention and Europe would do anything to start another war in Georgia.

- In his TV show on Eri Media (established by a notorious businessman and anti-Western public figure, Levan Vasadze), Soso Manjavidze, a self-proclaimed political scientist affiliated with far-right and pro-Russian groups, [stated](#) that the West is trying to start a war in Georgia to have "more bargaining items on the geopolitical trading table" with Russia. According to Manjavidze, the same has happened to Ukraine and now the West is pushing Georgia to open another front against Russia.
- One of the leaders of the prominent pro-Russian political group Alt-Info, Shota Martinenko, twisted the words of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and [claimed](#) that the West had put Ukraine through hell with the false promise of giving EU membership. According to Martinenko, now the West is trying to do the same with Georgia.
- Editor-in-Chief of the Anti-Western and Pro-Russian media, Isari.ge, Hamlet Chipashvili, has also [claimed](#) that the West granted Ukraine candidacy status because they are in a war against Russia and Georgia has to open a second front to achieve it.
- Editor-in-Chief of another anti-Western media, *Saerto Gazeti*, Vakhtang Kharchilava, [posted](#) an open letter to the Georgian public where he stated that the pro-EU and anti-GD government protest starting on June 24 in Georgia aims not to support Georgia's EU integration but rather to destabilise the country and bring the United National Movement (UNM) back to the government. According to Kharchilava, the UNM will then open a second front and start the war against Russia immediately.

Propaganda Narratives Regarding Military Aid to Ukraine

Russia's triumphant tone has spilled over into its narrative regarding military aid as pro-Russian sources focused on pushing the messages that the Western military assistance does not make any difference and Russia is winning nevertheless:

- Besides stating that Russian precise missile strikes against Ukrainian command centres stopped Ukraine's ambition of a counter-attack in Kherson, Sputnik-Georgia [claimed](#) that the war's statistics showcase both the Ukrainian military's catastrophic situation and the ineffectiveness of NATO military aid. This message suggests that Ukraine is already on the brink of defeat and Western military aid has not made any difference; therefore, there is no need to waste more resources on military assistance.
- Similarly, according to [Alt-Info](#), it was initially said that the Ukrainian counter-attack would start in June or July after the arrival of Western military aid but now Arestovich states that Ukraine will launch a counter-offensive in August. Per Alt-Info's judgement, it will never begin because this conflict has transformed into resource warfare, determined by who has more shells and firepower, where Russia has a considerable advantage. Alt-Info argued that the West had been periodically providing Ukraine with new weapons and Ukrainians are being told they have to hold against the enemy just a bit longer until the new arms arrive. However, nothing changes on the battlefield after acquiring these weapons and the process starts over again, resulting in a vicious circle.

Pro-Russian Actors Suggest Alternative Foreign Policy "Ideas"

- Alt-info [promoted](#) a new alternative for Georgia's foreign policy and disseminated the bizarre idea that Georgia would enter Europe through Russia. As Shota Martinenko claimed, Russia has a significant influence on Europe because of its gas supply and soon, Russia will have the leverage to dictate to Europe. Thus, according to Alt-Info, the idea that Georgia will join liberal Europe is nonsense because liberal Europe will no longer exist but would be able to enter Europe with Russia's influence. On top of that, Alt-info presented a future scenario, recalling the Soviet past. Its leader, Zura Makharadze, stated that Russia would inevitably exert influence over Georgia and Georgia's role should be different from its role in the Soviet Union, indicating that the country should already start negotiating with Russia on the terms based on which Georgia would be in Russia's sphere of influence. Alt-info suggested that Georgia should not serve as service personnel and a place of leisure for Russians but should be a stronghold for Christianity. He also claimed that there would be a time when Georgians and Russians would fight together for the same aims.
- Levan Vasadze [claimed](#) that giving the European perspective, not a candidate status, to Georgia is a mockery which means that 30 years of promises [were](#) a mirage. He suggested that, in reality, not granting the EU candidate status to Georgia should be a push for Georgia to build a better country whose foreign policy course would be Caucasus-centric instead of pro-Western.
- One of the leaders of the Alliance of Patriots (AoP), David Tarkhan-Mouravi, [claimed](#) that Georgia is deceived when it is told that good relations with Russia are obstacles on the way to the EU. As he argued, Moldova is a CIS member. According to him, Georgia is told that conflict is a hindrance, but both Moldova and Ukraine were granted the candidate status despite being embroiled in conflicts. Besides,

he argued that the narrative that neutrality is a barrier to EU membership is false. To illustrate this, Tarkhan-Mouravi brought the example of Moldova, which has a neutral status and Ukraine, which is discussing the policy of neutrality.

- AN openly pro-Russian Facebook page [posted](#) that no matter how much money you spend on rewriting history, you cannot change the fact that Russia is Georgia's friend. This page, similar to TVM.ge, [claimed](#) that NATO and the USA are meddling in the internal affairs of Georgia, [limiting](#) its sovereignty, and do not bother with Georgia's development. Therefore, according to the page, they prohibit Georgia from opening factories because the right to pollute the air is given only to them. As this page stated, Georgia would be a top country if it distanced itself from the USA and Europe.
- Pro-Russian actors [tried to](#) discredit the pro-EU rally by equalising the demonstrators to the LGBTQ+ community. Pro-Russian politician, Kakha Kukava, [stated](#) that Georgia has objective obstacles on the way to Europe, such as the justice system, which can be addressed, but some hindering circumstances will be constant no matter which government is in power, such as not holding the LGBTQ+ [pride](#). He and other propagandists, including [Alt-Info](#), [claimed](#), that Ukraine and Moldova held Pride Marches in Chisinau and Kyiv in exchange for candidate status which [proves](#) that the EU demands that Georgia organise Pride Marches in Tbilisi and normalise homosexuality, something they consider as entirely unacceptable.

To discredit the pro-EU foreign policy, some disinformation sources blamed the EU for pursuing a revolution in Georgia:

- Alt-Info also [suggested](#) that the EU deliberately did not grant candidate status to Georgia to trigger a protest from Georgia's pro-Western society to cause destabilisation and revolution in the country.

- The narrative that the European Commission made such a decision because they aimed to overthrow the government by coup is [supported](#) by 2012-იანელები (2012ies) and the anti-Western online [media](#) - *Saerto Gazeti* (*Common Newspaper*). As they claimed, Europe gave six months to the opposition to get into power by either scheduling a new election or overthrowing the government. Moreover, 2012-იანელები stated that if the United National Movement came to power, they would send the army to the occupied Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, thus starting a war against Russia.
- Dimitri Lortkipanidze [claimed](#) that, as was expected, depolarisation and deoligarichisation turned out not to be an EU recommendation but an ultimatum which means the government's resignation and the formation of the technical government. Additionally, Lortkipanidze underscored that Zelensky's (and other Ukrainian politicians) readiness to support the Georgian opposition in implementing the ultimatum makes the pressure on Georgia even more alarming.
- Disinformation actors continued to amplify the message that Georgia did not get the EU candidate status due to Ukraine advocating against it. The Facebook page [claimed](#) that, alongside Georgian opposition, the Ukrainian government played a key role in tipping the EU's decision against granting the candidate status to Georgia. Specifically, the Facebook page argued that the Ukrainian government strictly demanded from the EU not to dare to give the candidate status to Georgia. The Facebook page even downplayed Russia's aggression and atrocities against Georgia and portrayed Ukraine at the top of the list of Georgia's enemies, ahead of Russia (other sources equalled Ukraine with Russia). Based on this baseless theory, the Facebook page labelled Europe as an "elder fascist "who acts like a marionette of the Georgian opposition and the Ukrainian government. This message not only discredited the EU but also promoted anti-Ukrainian sentiments.

Disinformation Narratives in Georgia's Occupied Regions

Kremlin propaganda keeps pushing the messages in the occupied region of Abkhazia, [claiming that Russia is conducting](#) a "special military [operation](#)" against [Nazis](#) and [fascists](#) to [liberate](#) Ukraine.

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

Over the past week, Kremlin propaganda sources have continued spreading false information through social networks on variety of issues regarding the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. FactCheck Georgia [debunked](#) a Facebook post falsely claiming that Russia destroyed two Polish battalions in Ukraine – something, that the Russian propaganda has been [insisting](#) on since at least May 23. Another widely spread post [fabricated](#) the statement of German Air Force generalleutnant Ingo Gerhartz, claiming that according to the commander of the German Air Force, “NATO must be ready to use nuclear weapons *in Ukraine*.” An old false story on Russians having shot down the Turkish-made Bayraktar drone, for which the Lithuanians collected money, [resurfaced](#) once again. Going further, according to the Russian propaganda’s [false](#) claims, “Pentagon requested Lithuania's exclusion from NATO due to the blockade of the Kaliningrad region by Vilnius,” with Ukrainians now, [allegedly](#), thinking about selling Crimea to Russia.



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