

GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice

1 August – 7 August

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Ukraine War Disinfo Narratives in Georgia

1-7 August

Fearmongering Narrative of the War Expanding Beyond Ukraine and into Georgia

The message that the West (the US and Europe) and Georgian opposition parties seek to open a second front against Russia in Georgia has once again been a dominant narrative, taking into account the interaction rate. Traditionally, the ruling Georgian Dream party was at the forefront of fuelling the message. Apart from linking the topic of opening a second front against Russia with the issue of the condition of Russians in Georgia, the ruling party chair Irakli Kobakhidze [stated](#) that he could not say what was discussed in the closed meetings but acknowledged that there the interest regarding Georgia [joining] the war was and still is directly expressed. According to Mr Kobakhidze, a collective "they" (indirectly referring to Georgia's Western partners) want to make Georgia a second front in the fight against Russia.

- The Georgian Dream (GD)-affiliated expert and philosopher, Zaza [Shatirishvili, published](#) an [open letter](#) dedicated to defending Bidzina Ivanishvili, claiming that one of the biggest Swiss banks, Credit Suisse, with the support of the US, is blackmailing Ivanishvili in order to force him to open the second front in Georgia. According to Mr Shatirishvili, the US wants to change the government in Georgia against the will of the Georgian people and bring the United National Movement back to power to deceive the people and instigate a war against Russia in Georgia. The anti-

Western political party - Georgian Idea - also [voiced](#) the same narrative regarding Mr Ivanishvili's public letter that the US and Europe were trying to drag Georgia into the war. Similarly, Alt-Info also [suggested](#) that it was evident that the US was trying to plunge Georgia into the war.

- The GD-affiliated TV Imedi hosted the chairman of the organisation – Solidarity for Peace, Merab [Tchiqashvili](#), who has [speculated](#) that Mikheil Saakashvili has been set to Georgia by the West to orchestrate the forceful change of government in Georgia and bring the ex-president back to the government who would propagate the war against Russia. Other sources also [claimed](#) that the opposition parties sought to open a second front in Georgia but failed to succeed.

For Kremlin-sympathizers in Georgia the threat is coming from Ukrainian refugees in Georgia who could “outnumber” Georgians soon

The second most dominant narrative in terms of interactions, after the fearmongering with war expanding in Georgia, concerned Ukrainian refugees. This narrative had been absent in the previous week but as expected, it re-emerged due to the debate over the issue sparked by the change of government aid policy for Ukrainian refugees - some criticised the new scheme due to the lack of support towards Ukrainians in Georgia while propagandists denounced giving any aid at all. The propaganda narrative rebounded much stronger than anticipated. The most active messages suggested that:

1. Ukrainian refugees in Georgia are wealthy and do not care about Ukraine's fate but only about their entertainment;
2. Ukrainian refugees undermine internal stability;

3. Ukrainian refugees are prioritised over Georgian citizens and hence, Georgia should stop providing financial aid to Ukrainian refugees:
- [According](#) to a Facebook user, with winter closing in, the humanitarian situation is expected to worsen in Ukraine and, therefore, more people are running from the country to Europe. However, the propagandist claimed that if the European states welcomed and happily greeted Ukrainian refugees, now Europeans are telling Ukrainian refugees that they do not have any more space and they should look for shelter elsewhere.
 - Notorious [influencer](#) and propagandist Lali Moroshkina claimed that Ukrainians who came to Georgia are spending so much money on entertainment that they could have supported their fellow compatriots for half a year, thus suggesting that Ukrainians in Georgia have a lot money and do not require assistance and they do not care about their country. She also claimed on Alt-Info's broadcast that the high-ranking Ukrainian officials, with the leadership of Zelensky, are buying houses and businesses in Georgia to escape the wrath of Ukrainians. She suggested that Georgia should restrict selling houses and businesses to Ukrainian citizens (this discussion is taking place in Georgia regarding Russian citizens and this comment is typical whataboutism) because if every Ukrainian refugee - all 5 million of them - comes to Georgia then they would outnumber Georgians and eventually take over Georgian territory with soft power.
 - Another [claim](#) in the social media suggested that Ukrainian refugees should not be given the financial aid, which is more than "hungry pensioners" get, and they should not live in luxurious hotels as they are able to work while one-third of Georgians live in poverty and the other third has been forced to migrate to the other countries to work for their living. The claim argued that if one (referring to Ukrainian refugees) wants to

have something to eat, one should work like a slave and if one wants to earn money easily, the journalist indicated that one could become a prostitute.

- Anchor of pro-Russian Alt-Info, Tatia Gabrichidze, [stated](#) that instead of fuelling Russophobia - hatred towards many Russians currently visiting or residing in Georgia, the public should focus on the massive number of Ukrainians who, according to her, have settled in Georgia. She also claimed that the Ukrainian men that are currently in Georgia are having fun while their country is at war. The respondent, propagandist Khatuna Khoperia (a former MP currently associated with infamous pro-Russian public figure Levan Vasadze), echoed Ms Gabrichidze's comments and argued that nowadays, aggression in Europe is towards Ukrainian refugees, not Russians.

Propaganda Narratives Regarding the Conditions of Russians

A narrative regarding the conditions of Russians, previously absent in propagandistic media, has emerged. Currently, a vast number of Russians have arrived in Georgia (and the trend still continues) and there is a public debate in Georgia to impose a visa regime on Russians or restrict them from buying property or registering businesses. This has been assessed by Russian propaganda as an attack on its citizens and the propaganda became very active, even from mainstream channels. Even the ruling party members accused the opposition, NGOs and the Public Defender of xenophobia and Russophobia. Propaganda sources have disseminated messages that Georgia is Russophobic, Russian citizens are being attacked in Georgia and the West and its proxies organise this process to incite Russophobia to cause tensions with Russia. Also, interestingly, the narrative has been intertwined with the narrative that the West seeks to open a second front in Georgia and a message has been developed that the West is

organising an attack on Russians in Georgia in order to cause a war between Russia and Georgia. For instance, the ruling Georgian Dream party chair [argued](#) that "the authors of the xenophobic campaign want to somehow drag Georgia into the military conflict." Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili [stated](#) that "since they (referring to the opposition who are, according to him, traitors) did not achieve their goal and could not open the second front in Georgia, they want to harm our citizens somehow and hinder the flow of tourists."

- Irakli Martinenko and Giorgi Kardava, the leaders of the pro-Russian Conservative Movement, [claimed](#) that Russian tourists are widely persecuted to "annoy" and provoke Russia and this campaign is well-organised. According to them, liberals in Georgia aim to incite Russophobia in society and stir up massive aggression towards people who supports negotiations with Russia. They also argued that this attack on Russian tourists is a new effort to cause tensions after an unsuccessful attempt to open a second front against Russia. Messrs Kardava and Martinenko underscored that the organisers of this campaign realise that Russia is such a country that would have to react when there is an attack on its citizens in another country, at least by making a statement and, hence, this is the reason why liberals try to incite Russophobia.
- Pro-Russian Alt-info [claimed](#) that liberals are conducting a massive Russophobic propaganda campaign in Georgia directed against Russian tourists to incite hatred and aggression against Russian citizens. According to the pro-Russian TV channel, the Western-financed traitors are spreading propaganda about the need to restrict Russians from coming to Georgia as tourists. Alt-Info argued that this campaign is a Plan B for straining relations with Russia after the attempt to open a second front against Russia. In an interview with the pro-Russian Alt-Info TV, the leader of the anti-Western political movement Georgian Dasi, Jondi Baghaturia, stated that the US, after failing to

influence the Georgian government to drag Georgia into the war with Russia, amended its tactics and now they have a new target – Russian tourists. According to Mr Baghaturia, the US tries to instigate the civil unrest in Georgia by fuelling inter-ethnic conflict between Georgians and Russians. Mr Baghaturia claimed that this is the new trend of the Biden administration to create as many hot spots of conflict against Russia as possible and Georgia is one of their targets.

- The pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots and its affiliated TV Obieqtivi [argued](#) that the West forces Georgia to mistreat Russians as the West itself mistreats Russians. They argued that the West and its proxies in Georgia do not care about human rights when it comes to the Russians. They concluded that the Russians are considered enemies because they do not fulfil the requirements set by the West and an identical situation would happen to Georgians if the West set the requirements for Georgia that it does not want to fulfil. Another claim voiced in the broadcast was that to ensure security, Georgia should declare neutrality as NATO does not accept Georgia as a member and the US only needs Georgia in order to irritate Russia. Another leader of the Alliance of Patriots even questioned whether or not NATO would still exist after the war.
- The propagandist Facebook page – 2012-იანელები (2012ians) [argued](#) that Nazism directed against Russians is gaining ground in Georgia, something that the Public Defender ignores. The page claimed that mistreating Russians due to their ethnicity is fascism. The page also claimed that the plot is to make Russia angry so that it attacks Georgia and the war starts.

Military Situation on the Ground in the Fight Against Nazism Through Kremlin Lenses

Russia's military campaign in Ukraine has been largely stalled in the last week but the same cannot be said regarding Kremlin propaganda campaigns aimed at justifying the invasion and stating Russia's military prowess:

- Leader of the pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots, Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, [claimed](#) that Ukraine keeps losing territories as city after city falls to Russia's hands. According to him, Ukraine did not have any military success and eventually would cease to exist as a state.
- The pro-Russian Facebook page [saluted](#) the Russian armed forces as unbeatable. The page claimed that no one could withstand the Russian Army and voiced a fake message that [American soldiers](#) had to fight with the Russian army in Ukraine for a month but then they stated they realised that they could not face the Russian military and fled. Consequently, the propagandist page labelled the US army as a "do-nothing." The page also asserted that Ukrainian soldiers had run away from the cities and left them to the Russians. The Facebook page [reported](#) that Russian armed forces have also managed to destroy HIMARS systems which has not been documented so far.
- The pro-Russian outlet Georgia and the World [referred](#) to an article by the French media, France-Presse, to state that according to many locals in Donbas, Ukrainian soldiers are hiding in abandoned schools and residential houses and the Russian soldiers are aware of this. Georgia and the World also claimed that Pavle Kirilenko, the governor of the Donetsk region, confirmed that among the locals, many are waiting for the Russian world; i.e., the Russian army. Georgia and the World also [reported](#) that residents of Kherson expressed their happiness about getting Russian passports in the report of the Swedish TV channel SVT.

- Sputnik [blamed](#) the US for inciting a war in Ukraine as the US is trying to do in Taiwan now.
- The Sect Facebook page [proclaimed](#) that the occupation and annexation of Crimea was the fault of the US and caused by the overthrow of the legally elected government in Kyiv. The page claimed that the Maidan revolution was orchestrated and organised by the US and hence, a similar scenario to Georgia in 2008 unfolded.
- Pro-Russian Obieqtivi TV [continued](#) humiliating Zelensky and accused him of provoking war in Ukraine. According to the outlet, the "silly actions" taken by Zelensky would destroy Ukraine.
- Georgian Facebook users [hailed](#) Russian soldiers as heroes fighting against fascism, arguing that they are superior to Hollywood stars such as Superman and Batman. Additionally, the pro-Russian Facebook page [labelled](#) the Ukrainian flag as a "Nazi Flag." These messages aim to state that Ukraine is a Nazi and fascist state and, therefore, Russia's "special military operation" serves a noble purpose.

Propaganda Narratives Regarding Economic Sanctions

Narratives concerning the impact of economic sanctions are recurring trends in the pro-Russian propaganda ecosystem and the messages that Russia is unaffected by the sanctions while the West is more damaged and threatened by an energy crisis are constant. In the previous week, a number of messages were observed, although they were not very popular, ranking in the middle as compared to other narratives:

- A pro-Russian Facebook user, who has previously disseminated propaganda narratives, [cited](#) Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov saying "no payment - no gas,"

adding that Europe has no choice but to pay in Russian roubles for natural gas imports. The Facebook user further claimed that with winter approaching, the West needs to start supplying firewood, sarcastically adding that even the firewood needs to come from Russia.

- In a broadcast of the pro-Russian outlet TV Obieqtivi, the leader of the pro-Russian Alliance of Patriots, David Tarkhan-Mouravi, [claimed](#) that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia became the world's 36th economy. Mr Tarkhan-Mouravi added that over the years, Russia's economy grew further, first becoming the world's 10th biggest economy, later the world's 9th and as of today, the world's 6th. Referring to these statistics, Mr Tarkhan-Mouravi claimed that any talk of Russia's economy being weakened is baseless.
- Talking about the Georgian economy and its trade partners, the Alliance of Patriots (AoP) leader, David Tarkhan-Mouravi, [recalled](#) Russia's current status as the second largest trade partner of Georgia, which, according to the pro-Russian politician, is not enough. Instead, Mr Tarkhan-Mouravi suggested that Russia should be Georgia's largest trade partner, claiming that the highest demand for every major Georgian agricultural product, including wine, is on the Russian market. The AoP leader concluded that the fact that Russia is not Georgia's largest trade partner only demonstrates that Tbilisi abstains from developing stronger economic ties with Moscow, thus "imposing sanctions on itself." Furthermore, Mr Tarkhan-Mouravi voiced an idea to engage in a parallel import scheme with Russia, similar to what Armenia does, and benefit from helping Russia to bypass sanctions.
- Talking on the air of the Alt-Info TV channel, the pro-Russian Conservative Movement's leader, Zura Makharadze, [claimed](#) that Russia felt extremely insulted after

the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but now, Russians know that sanctions do not hurt them and they will fight as long as they need to.

- A Russia-sympathiser Facebook-user [argued](#) that sanctions were, indeed, beneficial for Russia, referring to gains of the rouble and Russian industry as all the foreign competitors have withdrawn from Russia. This Facebook user further claimed that due to the "anti-Russian" sanctions, the West finds itself in a very tough situation due to the emerging energy crisis which would only worsen as winter approaches.
- [Talking](#) about high energy prices in Europe, the pro-Russian outlet Georgia and the World tried to convince the public that people in the Netherlands are forced to start supplying firewood and building fireplaces. Moreover, Georgia and the World insisted that with winter approaching, there might even be a shortage of firewood whilst the demand for fireplaces is increasing significantly.
- Overestimating Europe's dependence on Russian energy resources, a pro-Russian Facebook page [claimed](#) that Europe currently relies on Russia for 80% of its imported energy resources.
- The pro-Russian newspaper Georgia and the World [reiterated](#) that the Western-imposed sanctions hurt the West itself more than Russia, citing the former Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria, Karin Kneissl, saying that due to the sanctions, Europe is becoming more and more irrelevant demographically and politically. Furthermore, the newspaper insisted that a severe economic crisis could lead the Western capitals to mass rallies against the government.
- Georgia and the World also published an [article](#) penned by the pro-Russian journalist and former leader of the United Communist Party of Georgia – Valeri Kvaratskhelia. He claimed that since Russia limited natural gas supply, Europe was urged to lessen

energy consumption. To portray the severity of the situation in the West and persuade the audience that the Western-imposed sanctions have backfired, Mr Kvaratskhelia cited the head of the International Energy Agency, Fatih Birol, who has recently stated that the world has never witnessed such a major energy crisis and that the worst might still be ahead.

- Another pro-Russian Facebook page tried to [display](#) a distorted picture of the economic situation, claiming that the "Western partners" were initially convinced that the sanctions would weaken the Russian Federation but Russia has managed to mobilise economic resources and started even more rapid development whilst the population in Europe and the US are concerned about the increased prices of gasoline and natural gas.

Propaganda Narratives Regarding Military Aid to Ukraine

Regarding military aid, the message that the US is providing Ukraine with military assistance in order to make Ukraine fight until the last Ukrainian has been observed:

- Head of the pro-Russian Conservative Movement's one of the regional offices, Arsen Popkhadze, [suggested](#) that the fact that the US provides military assistance to Ukraine is proof that the US seeks war and does not care about Ukraine as they wish Ukraine to fight until the last Ukrainian. Another Facebook user also [claimed](#) that Ukraine receives a vast number of Western weapons every day. She argued that Europe and the US promising not to deprive Kyiv of arms indicates that the West would wage war against Russia until the last Ukrainian soldier.

Propaganda Outlet Lobbying Change of Georgia's Policies

Pro-Russian sources are continuously disseminating messages aimed at discrediting Georgia's pro-Western policies and advocating for adopting directly or indirectly pro-Russian policies:

- Attacking the US Ambassador in Georgia is still relevant. The pro-Russian newspaper – Saqinform.ge – [suggested](#) that Kelly Degnan has discredited the US policy in Georgia by promoting the overthrowing of the government by coup. Saqinform.ge also accused Ms Degnan of inciting anti-American sentiments in Georgia and interfering in the internal and foreign affairs of the country, especially in the justice system. Saqinform.ge developed a conspiracy theory that the US ambassador also attempted to expropriate Bidzina Ivanishvili's assets which would translate into isolating Georgian politics from Mr Ivanishvili and returning Mikheil Saakashvili to power.
- Lali Moroshkina [stated](#) that monsters rule Ukraine today. She portrayed Ukraine as an enemy of Georgia and argued that supporting Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees would devastate Georgia.
- Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, the chairman of the AoP, [asserted](#) on a broadcast of the AoP's affiliated TV Obieqtivi that the only way to maintain peace in Georgia is by declaring neutrality. He also claimed that NATO is on the verge of collapse, implying that pursuing NATO integration is senseless either way.
- As mentioned multiple times in the previous issue of the GRASS Disinfo Brief, another salvation of Georgia's future has suggested neither neutrality nor pro-Western politics but negotiations and eventual alignment with Russia. Alt-info [remains](#) the main mouthpiece of pro-Russian foreign policy in Georgia. Irakli Martinenko, one of the group's leaders, [claimed](#) that distancing from Russia means depending on Turkey and deploying Turkish military bases in Georgia. According to [Alt-info](#), Russia would talk

more to those who are firmly on Russia's side and do not consider it a temporary ally. Alt-info also [portrayed](#) the West as anti-Christian power, which prevented Georgia from conducting negotiations with Russia and Russia as a Christian power and natural ally of Georgia.

- Dimitri Lortkipanidze, Director of the Yevgeny Primakov Georgian-Russian Public Centre, who recently toured Moscow for negotiations, [stated](#) that he held another round of talks with the members of the council of the foreign and security policy and with the director of Carnegie Moscow Centre. According to him, the prospects of possible development Georgia-Russia relations were discussed at the meetings.
- A fringe pro-Kremlin Facebook page also voiced a sympathising narrative about Russia. The page [stated](#) that Russia has always been our fatherland while Georgia has been the motherland.
- A pro-Russian Facebook account even [claimed](#) that Russia would destroy the US that would liberate Georgia from the influence of the evil, bloodthirsty and wicked country.

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

Russian propaganda continues targeting Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky with the viral Instagram fake story now falsely claiming that he announced surrendering to Russia on his official page – clickbait disinformation explained by **FactCheck** Georgia in this [article](#). Pro-Russian sources have also fabricated the front page of a Polish newspaper, Dziennik, falsely suggesting that "Zelensky will return Ukraine to Poland." Going further, anti-Western messages, such as the one according to which Ukraine is being [manipulated](#) by the US and the

EU and [exploited](#) as a weapon against Russia, are observed to be widespread on social networks. In this regard, pro-Russian sources targeted US Senator Lindsey Graham and his recent statement which was [taken out of context](#) in which the Senator underscored the high level of readiness of the Ukrainians to fight against Russia by saying that "[in case the needed support is provided to Ukraine] they will fight till the last person." Similarly, the [statement](#) made by another US lawmaker, Mike Waltz, who has called for increased support for Ukraine, was also taken out of context. Furthermore, Russian propaganda, trying to legitimise the aggression against Ukraine and showcase that the so-called special military operation has supporters even in the West, circulated a [video](#) from 2009 where the US MMA fighter Don Fry expresses his admiration of Vladimir Putin.



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