

GRASS Disinfo Brief: Putin's War of Choice

8 August – 14 August

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Ukraine War Disinfo Narratives in Georgia

8-14 August

Second Front and Russophobia - Favourites of Propaganda

Discussions regarding Russian citizens in Georgia are one of the most prevalent topics in the country. Propaganda claims that there is Russophobia in Georgia, and Russian citizens are being attacked in Georgia. The false claim that the West/Ukraine/Georgian opposition parties seek to open a second front against Russia in Georgia is still dominant both in terms of interactions and in terms of the number of articles. Similar to last week, when these two narratives were intertwined, this week, they converged entirely and as propaganda claims that the West and its proxies in Georgia are inciting Russophobia to cause war with Russia. Also, those narratives are in the mainstream discourse thanks to the [ruling party](#). Four MPs that have formally left the ruling Georgian Dream party (Sozar Subari, Mikheil Kavelashvili, Dimitri Khundadze and Guram Macharashvili) continued slamming the US embassy, accusing it of conspiring with the [United National Movement](#) and [plotting](#) a *coup d'état* against GD and [demanding](#) Georgia to join the war against Russia:

- Pro-Russian Alt-Info [claimed](#) that the second phase of the process to drag Georgia into the war had been activated as the "war parties" (referring to the opposition parties), NGOs and their Western partners are organising provocations against Russian tourists in Georgia in order to irritate Russia and raise the tensions so high that the situation escalates into a military conflict. Other propaganda Facebook pages

and [outlets](#) also [claimed](#) that the opposition is doing its best to make Russia attack Georgia by scolding and beating Russian tourists and demanding not to let them in Georgia without visas.

- Anti-Western organisation - Solidarity for Peace - published a [video](#) asserting that the war in Ukraine automatically means non-stop attempts to drag Georgia into the war. Particularly, he claimed that there was an orchestrated attempt by the West to open a second front in Georgia. According to him, the calls from the local "fifth column" (referring to the opposition), the EU's unjustified decision not to grant Georgia a candidate status was envisaged to be followed by a coup, the US ambassador pressuring Bidzina Ivanishvili (founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party and former billionaire Prime Minister, an informal ruler of Georgia) during a three hours-long meeting were all part of this endeavour, but unsuccessful. The author of the video stated that after the failure of the above-mentioned tactics, liberals switched to a new plan and started an organised campaign to offend Russian tourists. He accused the liberals of xenophobia and calls for violence based on ethnicity against Russians. The video argued that the aim is to make Georgia a state where anti-Russian xenophobia is widespread, potentially giving Russia the *casus belli* of *denazification* and invasion of Georgia.
- Pro-Russian Alt-Info [stated](#) that anti-Russian hysteria and xenophobia are achieving new heights and that there is an ongoing [attack](#) on Russian tourists in Georgia. According to the propaganda outlet, the "fifth column" is inciting hatred toward Russian vacationers and tourists in order to pull Georgia into the war. According to Alt-Info, to this end, the opposition and its affiliated media are creating numerous fake news stories and irrational threats and accusing Russian tourists of being FSB spies.
- Dimitri Lotrkipanidze, director of the Yevgeny Primakov Georgian-Russian Public Centre, who recently returned from a working visit with the Russian propagandists in

Moscow, in an interview with pro-Russian Georgia and the World, [discussed](#) that Russian citizens and tourists are being oppressed, which is another attempt of the West after the previous ones to ignite a new conflict between Georgia and Russia failed.

- Anti-Western journalist Zaur Natckebia [wrote](#) that the massive inflow of Russians is nothing catastrophic amidst the background of an enormous influx of other foreigners. He argued that anti-Russian hysteria in Georgia is an opportunist effort of Georgia's internal and external enemies to create a reason for a new confrontation with Russia.
- Pro-Russian outlet Georgia and the World [stated](#) that the opposition, NGOs, and Western "friends" were trying to blame everything on Russian tourists and implied that this campaign aims to cause a war.
- Another pro-Russian Facebook page [stated](#) that all Russians should be loved.

Fearmongering Narrative of the War Expanding into Georgia:

- Pro-Russian Alt-Info [claimed](#) that there is a severe threat of war to Georgia as the internal traitors (referring to the opposition) and the external enemies (referring to the West) are trying to drag Georgia into the war and open a [second front](#). According to the propaganda channel, those forces (the West) planned the war in Ukraine to weaken Russia, and Ukraine could not avoid this war.
- Alt-Info also [declared](#) that the US embassy in Georgia wants to bring the United National Movement into power to drag Georgia into the war.
- One of the leaders of Alt-Info and the political party Conservative Movement (established by Alt-Info) [argued](#) that the West does not care about democracy and

human rights in Georgia but only desires Georgia to pursue the irritation policy toward Russia and eventually cause a war with Russia.

- Notorious celebrity and propagandist - Lali Moroshkina - [proclaimed](#) that a massive provocation was being planned to drag Georgia into the war - the killing of a Russian journalist in Georgia. She indirectly accused Ukraine of this plot.
- According to the conspiracy theory [developed](#) by the pro-Russian outlet Georgia and the World, the West is pushing Georgia to open a second front because Georgia, like Ukraine, would become dependent on Europe and the US as Georgia would lack weaponry because the US-provided Javelins are not near enough. The article argued that this would result in either Georgia no longer existing or being a war polygon that would fulfil the West's demands and have hundreds of military and civilian casualties daily.

The West Is To Blame for the War - Pro-Russian Propaganda

Putin stated that the West needed conflicts to preserve hegemony and therefore made the Ukrainian people cannon fodder, whilst his defence minister Shoigu claimed that Russia does not need to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine despite Russia being up against the combined power of the West who control Ukrainian government. The propaganda followed suit by asserting that Ukraine is controlled by the US and the West, which are responsible for causing a war:

- Pro-Russian Facebook user Dito Bidzinashvili claimed that [according](#) to widespread information, because Zelensky desires to get more money and the Americans want to put more pressure on Russia, Ukrainian forces are mobilising to launch a major counter-

offensive in the direction of Kharkiv and Kherson, and there will be another massacre. However, according to the Facebook user, Russia is, of course, aware of this information and is preparing.

- The anti-Western Facebook [page](#) falsely claimed that Trump suggested that Biden is profiting from the ongoing war in Ukraine.
- Pro-Russian Alt-Info interpreted a [comment](#) by Georgian opposition MP Khatia Dekanoidze that Ukraine took a historic hit so the civilised world would prosper, suggesting that Zelensky does not make decisions independently and is controlled by the West.
- Alt-Info claimed that Ukraine's [victory](#) in this conflict, which has a global nature, is impossible. Alt-Info also suggests that there is a rational elite in America who will change many things starting from November and who opposes current American elites, implying that somehow the US is responsible for inciting the war.
- Alt-Info portrayed [Ukraine's](#) current government as a puppet regime of the collective West; therefore, the government was accused of not pursuing the national interests of Ukraine but trying to respond to the needs of the West.
- Alt-Info propagated an [interview](#) of Pink Floyd member Roger Waters, saying that Biden is a war criminal as he did not push Zelensky to negotiate. Waters also claimed that the war was caused by the expansion of NATO to Russian borders.
- Pro-Russian outlet Georgia and the World [stated](#) that the ongoing war in Ukraine is not a confrontation between Moscow and Kyiv but the West and Russia. According to the newspaper, a *coup d'état* orchestrated by the West allowed it to use Ukrainian people as cannon fodder, and Russia had no option but to accept the challenge and clash

with the West. Pro-Russian outlet concluded that Kremlin knows this war will not end with the collapse of the fascist government of Ukraine but with the defeat of the West as the actual war is not taking place between Russia and Ukraine but between Russia and the West.

- Sputnik Georgia [claimed](#) that the "allied armies" [of Russia and Donbas] are advancing successfully and breaking through Ukrainian defences. Furthermore, according to Sputnik, Ukraine lacks the manpower, qualified command structure and combat equipment needed to launch a successful counter-offensive as the Russian MLRS system from the Eastern bank of the Dnipro river would destroy an army of any size that would launch an attack from Kryvyi Rih or Mykolaiv.
- One of the regional offices of the pro-Russian political party - Conservative Movement - called for the "complete de-Nazification" of the "sick nation". Its Facebook page [claimed](#) that the leader of Ukrainian Nazis, Korchinks, had called for the killing of the PoWs (that was later executed), and now he is calling for a strike on Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant even if people die. Conservative Movement concluded that Ukrainians are terrorists and Nazis who are sacrificing their own people and military, calling for Georgia to open a second front and threatening Eastern Europe with the risk of radiation.
- Facebook user argued that those [who sympathise](#) with the Kyiv regime, willingly or unwittingly, support (1) Schism - struggle against the Orthodox Church, (2) legalising "LGBT filth" and (3) Neo-Nazism. According to the user, the current conflict is caused by Ukrainians forgetting their history and identity, repressions against the Orthodox Church, holding "dirty" LGBT parades in Kyiv, the rise of neo-Nazism, and declaring the fascist-Banderites as heroes and the eight-year genocide of their population.

- Pro-Kremlin newspaper – Georgia and the World [accused](#) the Security Service of Ukraine of trafficking dead soldiers' organs.

Military Aid to Ukraine

- Pro-Russian Alt-Info [claimed](#) that neither the Western-donated HIMARS nor the whole NATO weaponry or the US could change the result in Ukraine due to Russia's advantage in strategic weaponry.
- A Member of the anti-Western political party - Georgian Idea - [stated](#) that the West only provides just enough military and financial (to buy weapons) aid to Ukraine to prolong and observe a war between two brotherly nations.

Economic Consequences of Sanctions

Messages regarding economic sanctions – that sanctions did not affect Russia, but made it stronger, that the West is more damaged and threatened by an energy crisis – are continuing trends but with only a moderate interaction rate:

- Pro-Russian Facebook user [claimed](#) that Russia has the edge over the West as a result of Western sanctions on Russia. According to him, Putin would not let go of this advantage as a long and cold winter is looming on the horizon for Europe, and it is interesting how many governments would manage to survive the protests of enraged people.
- In the broadcast of pro-Russian Alt-Info, a former MP and a propagandist Demur Giorkhelidze [insisted](#) that there is no alternative for Russian gas for Europe. According

to him, alternative supply options are limited with Azerbaijani and Northern African gas, but the lack of infrastructure makes it impossible to transfer the needed amount of gas in the short term to substitute Russian gas supplies to the EU. He concluded that the only option for the EU would be to halt the industry's production. However, he excluded other energy supply options, including LNG terminals. Demur Giorkhelidze once again [criticised](#) the West for its "miscalculated and irrational" sanctions policy against Russia. According to Giorkhelidze, Europe has imposed many sanctions on Russia but intentionally left certain areas to fulfil its energy demands. Giorkhelidze further claimed that without Russian fertilisers, the European farmers would see their harvest amount extremely diminished, exacerbated by the severe droughts in Europe. Similarly, Giorkhelidze stated that European industry would face hard times without Russian natural gas, causing a forced stop of work for the factories.

- Talking live on air at pro-Russian Alt-Info, Ilia Megrelishvili, head of the Telavi (center of the Kakheti region in Eastern Georgia) office of the "Conservative Movement" [repeated](#) the mantra of the propaganda that the sanctions against Russia do not work. He further emphasised the unbearable conditions the energy crisis has created in Europe, with ordinary Europeans now trying to get enough wood to keep themselves warm in the cold winter. In addition, Megrelishvili claimed that the West perceives Georgia not as a strategic partner but as a military training ground and wants to exploit the country and its resources for its own economic growth.
- Pro-Russian Alt-Info [claimed](#) that Russia has already seized the land equivalent of the UK and is going further as Ukraine is helpless. The propaganda channel asserted that stopping Russia by sanctions was and will be ineffective, and only Europe would suffer from this Anglo-Saxon policy.

- According to Russian propaganda [outlet](#) Sputnik-Georgia, under the UN-brokered deal, Ukrainian grain is not being transported to the countries suffering food shortages, such as Yemen, Somalia or Ethiopia, but rather to Europe. Underscoring that only a small fraction of the grain shipments from the newly unblocked Ukrainian sea ports are made to the developing countries, Sputnik-Georgia tried to deface the selfish nature of the West, which does not care about those in need at all. However, as [explained](#) by Ukrainian fact-checkers from StopFake, this claim is manipulative and ignores the fact that though most of the ships that have managed to leave Ukrainian ports are engaged in commercial transportation, they carry grain purchased under commercial contracts even before the start of the war; and according to UN, the commercial trade plays a significant role in stabilising the world grain market, even if the shipments from Ukraine are not made directly to the countries facing food shortages.
- Russia-sympathizer Facebook user [tried](#) to convince the public that as Russia cuts off gas flows from Ukraine to Europe, the only alternative that remains for the EU is the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines, adding that Western intermediary companies are buying Russian gas in roubles and then selling it in higher prices to the rest of Europe. The Facebook post further suggested that it is highly unlikely that the Kremlin would ever give Ukraine's resource-rich territories back under Kyiv's control, which Russia has already seized. Facebook user also claimed that Europe has even started lifting sanctions on Russian oil.
- Pro-Russian journalist Valeri Kvaratskhelia [reiterated](#) that the Western-imposed sanctions are counter-effective, saying that they hurt not Russia, but the EU and, as a consequence, the Russian rouble has bounced back. Kvaratskhelia insisted that for the EU, only two alternatives remained: (1) to allow the import of Russian gas and save the economy; however, according to him, it would result in strengthening Russian

influence over EU countries, and (2) another alternative for the EU is to completely ban Russian gas supplies which would mean the EU damaging its economy. The article suggested that plausible development caused by the current harsh energy crisis is the collapse of the EU, with the member states subsequently developing bilateral relations with Russia - something that Putin tries to achieve.

Georgia's Neutrality again on Russian Proxies' Mind

Anti-NATO messages:

- The anti-Western Sect Facebook page [parroted](#) the Kremlin message that Russia seized Crimea and Abkhazia because of NATO. The page falsely claimed that as soon as Ukraine deviated from neutrality, Crimea was immediately taken, and as long as Ukraine was neutral until 2013, there was no threat from Russia. However, Ukraine voted to ditch the policy of neutrality after the illegal annexation of Crimea. Facebook page also argued that NATO had not allowed Georgia into its ranks for 20 years and concluded that declaring neutrality is essential for Georgia.
- A fringe anti-Western movement - Movement Miraculous Victory - [called](#) for Georgia to declare neutrality. However, the movement also openly criticised Russia and claimed they would allow neither West nor Russia to make Georgia their slave country because the first aims to drag Georgia into NATO, and the second – into CSTO.
- Alt-info [spread](#) nihilism regarding the Euro-Atlantic aspirations, arguing that even the radical liberals (referring to the pro-Western groups) no longer believe that Georgia would join NATO. As they claimed, Georgia may formally become a member of the weakened European Union but never of NATO.

- Georgia and the World [argued](#) that NATO would dissolve as well as the EU, and a civil war would break out in the US.

Propagandist groups continue deliberate attacks on the US and its Ambassador in Georgia:

- The regional representative of the Conservative Movement on the air of Alt-info [claimed](#) that when Russia ends the war in Ukraine, the next target will be Georgia, but Georgia's strategic partner, the US and its embassy are doing nothing to solve that problem. As he explained, the US's indifference can be explained by its goal to dissolve and shred Georgia, as it [did](#) in 2008.
- Anti-Western Facebook page, 2012-იანელები (2012ians - the year Georgian Dream came into power) ironically [thanked](#) Kelly Degnan for unmasking the US's real face, which, for a long time, was perceived as a friend of Georgia.
- Pro-governmental expert Zaza Shatirishvili [accused](#) Kelly Degnan of colonial attitudes towards Georgia. He also blamed the US Ambassador for backing the pro-EU rally organised by the United National Movement. Shatirishvili repeated its previous message that the US is blackmailing Bidzina Ivanishvili due to a refusal to drag Georgia into war against Russia.

The West - source of all of Georgia's problems:

- Facebook pages – [Political Satire](#) and [Solidarity for Peace](#) - published identical content claiming that the Ukraine-Russia war uncovered the attitude of the "Collective west" towards Georgia. According to them, the West perceives Georgia as a tool against Russia. Facebook pages accused the US of trying to drag Georgia into the war against Russia and claimed that one metropolis - the USSR, was replaced by another, the West, thus suggesting that the West regards Georgia as a colony.

- Alt-info's respondent [claimed](#) that the West's influence has been decreasing for the last 20 years, something that is proven by multiple scholars, sociologists and political scientists. They [also argued](#) that Europe and the US manipulated Georgia for the last three years and tried to overthrow the government with a coup.
- Pro-Kremlin and pro-Stalin actor Grisha Oniani [voiced](#) the "No to Europe" narrative as, according to him, the West is pursues imperialist and conquering politics.

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

Russian online propaganda sources continue circulating false claims aimed at convincing the audience that, first, Moscow was forced to start the "special military operation" and put an end to the "genocide" in the Donbas region, and second, that Russian troops are successfully "liberating" Ukraine from the "Nazi" regime.

According to the Kremlin-supporting [accounts](#) on Facebook, which have re-shared an old blog authored by Ukraine's ex-PM Mykola Azarov, the West was, apparently, preparing a nuclear attack on Russia, and the invasion of Ukraine was a preventive measure by Moscow – one of many unfounded excuses Russian sources have employed in trying to justify the unprovoked war in Ukraine.

Along with this, other pro-Russian sources have [insisted](#) that the decision of one Georgian volunteer fighter to leave the battlefield due to the injuries received in combat and receive medical treatment is an indicator of Ukraine losing the war. Circulating a [video](#) of a ghetto-like neighbourhood in the US, Russian trolls further claimed that sanctions against Putin's regime had caused a sharp drop in living standards in the country.

Ukrainian refugees have not been overlooked either, Russian propaganda sources have falsified the closed captions of a Spanish news program dedicated to the wildfire in Spain's Zamora province. Disinformers have falsely claimed that the cause of the wildfire, according to the Spanish TV channel, was a group of Ukrainian refugees trying to burn down the Russian flag – FactCheck Georgia explains the fake story in this [article](#).

Furthermore, a favourite topic of the Russian propaganda sources, that is the "traditional values" – this time the target was Estonia's former President Kersti Kaljulaid. A false image [post](#) on Facebook claimed to show Kaljulaid with and her son, when, in fact, that picture was depicting the President awarding an Estonian writer Mikk Pärnits for his contribution to the prevention of violence.



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