

2023

GRASS Disinfo Brief

6-12 February

Red Alert

People's power, a group of MPs that formally left the ruling Georgian Dream party but remain in GD's parliamentary majority, introduced a draft law on Transparency of Foreign Influence that would oblige NGOs with 20% funding from external sources to register as "an agent of foreign influence". If the draft is voted into law, a smear campaign against civil society would spill over into legal action. The law does not have any other goal than labelling and stigmatizing NGOs as agents, as long as all the major independent organizations proactively and transparently publish all income, donor information and the work finances is used for.

This is currently the most alarming development in Georgia that would not only deteriorate the situation of civil society but would also seriously damage Georgia's European integration as adopting a law that aims to discredit independent CSOs contradicts one of EU's 12 priorities (10th), that need to be fulfilled to achieve candidate status, regarding civil society.

The smear campaign against the US Ambassador re-emerges once again:

- Prominent pro-Russian pundits [demanded](#) the US Ambassador to Georgia - Kelly Degnan - be expelled, claiming that every NGO and group/force that fights against conservative people and god-believers, who themselves fight against liberal fascists, in Georgia are financed by the US special services. Biden's administration was claimed to be of liberal-fascist ideology and its representative in Georgia was compared to a "creature" and Satan. US special services were also blamed to be trying to resurrect the declining United National Movement.
- Another claim [suggested](#) that the US wants to use Georgia to conduct provocations against Russia. According to the claim, Degnan got a clear task from Washington to leave the Georgian population poor by hampering Georgia restarting direct flights to Russia, and getting Georgian products on the Russian market that would make them easy to control via NGOs and eventually enslave them. The former military officer and currently a pro-Russian commentator also argued that the US:
 - is not actually helping Georgia financially, but rather only small groups
 - is not exporting Georgian products,
 - tourists do not come to Georgia but only CIA agents who try to open a second front in Georgia against Russia.

Disinformation on Ukraine:

- The conspiracy theory that there is a worldwide plot to open a second front in Georgia against Russia by the "Global War party" was parroted by many, including the ruling party [leaders](#). This narrative was especially linked with calls to transfer ex-President Saakashvili for treatment in a hospital in Western countries.
- Interestingly, a Georgian MP, who formally left the ruling Georgian Dream party but remains in the parliamentary majority, Dimitri Khundadze [said](#) that this war was actually between Russia and the West; and Ukraine was already a loser in it due to its anti-Ukrainian policy.
- The pro-Russian account [blamed](#) the "Kyiv regime" for destructing Ukraine and claimed that the regime was even ready to blow up Kyiv and poison it with radioactive substances just to please their US patrons.
- A sub-narrative claiming that due to providing arms to Ukraine, the West is left defenceless has appeared once again. This time the UK was [said](#) to be having no more heavy weaponry because all was already sent to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian children were also [targeted](#) by propaganda - pro-Russian message argued that Ukrainian children were not raised up as normal, but were trained to become fascists.
- Pro-Russian Alt-Info capitalised on the reshuffle in the Ukrainian government and [claimed](#) that the change of Defence Minister in the critical moment of the war implies the existing corruption in Ukraine and that Ukraine's situation is dire. Also, Alt-Info concluded that major changes in Ukraine mean that Ukraine's claims regarding Russia's losses were false, Russia has an advantage, does not face major problems and would eventually win the war.

Demonising the West and hailing Russia:

- Putin's quote was [shared](#) with joy claiming that the West's policy was dirty and bloody and contradicted states' sovereignty. According to the propaganda, the policy of the US and the West, in general, is Satanist and forces us to be as cold-blooded against them as they are against us.
- Putin loyalist Chechen leader Kadyrov's words, that the West desired to see Russia on its knees but that this would never materialise, were also [praised](#). Propaganda claimed that historically, Russia is known as an undefeatable country and with no doubt, it will not lose now, as well.

- Notorious celebrity and well-known propagandist and pro-Russian pundit in Georgian and Russian media lobbied for the idea to [restore](#) direct flights with Russia and also, political dialogue and diplomatic relations.

Attention, Moscow is Speaking - Russian Disinformation on Facebook and Instagram, 6-12 February

During the week of 6-12 February, FactCheck Georgia debunked several new war-related disinformation pieces spread on social media platforms. First, trying to exploit American media outlet Newsweek's [article](#) on Ukraine's reach reserves of titanium, Russian sources falsely claimed that the Newsweek actually explained why the United States is supporting Kiev – to eventually control Ukraine's large reserves of titanium. Though the article did state that in case Ukraine wins the war, “the U.S. and its allies will be in pole position to cultivate a new conduit of titanium,” [nowhere did it mention](#) that it was the very reason why Washington supports Ukraine with military aid worth of tens of billions of USD. Going further, Russian social media accounts and media outlets disseminated an information, according to which, the data from Israel's spy agency Mossad suggested that since the start of the invasion, the Russia army killed 157,000 Ukrainian soldiers, while losing only 18,000 itself. In fact, disinformation spreaders relied on a [Turkish language webpage](#), which, on its part, did not indicate their own source. This particular disinformation piece went so viral on Twitter, that even Elon Musk [fell victim to it](#). Musk later [asked](#) Twitter's Community Notes team to add correct numbers to the tweet. Read more about the story in this FactCheck Georgia [article](#). Another false story focused on how “Poland is hiring local citizens as crews for the Leopard tanks destined for Ukraine” – the photo though, claimed to show this, is [edited](#). And lastly, citing CNN, Russian sources targeted the US, and claimed that the American media suggested that the US cannot help Ukraine restore the energy system. In fact, the [CNN article](#) suggests exactly the opposite, that even though the US is facing certain logistical difficulties while trying to deliver relevant equipment to Ukraine, Washington works “tirelessly with the G7 and other partners to repair, replace, and defend Ukraine's energy infrastructure.”