

2023

# GRASS Disinfo Brief

# Mayday call - Disinfo Brief 13-26 February

## Red Alert

As reported in the previous issue of GRASS Disinfo Brief, a group of MPs formally left the ruling Georgian Dream party but remain in GD's parliamentary majority "to speak the truth publicly" (read: disseminate propaganda against Georgia's Western partners shamelessly), self-declared as People's Power, initiated a draft law on Transparency of Foreign Influence that would oblige NGOs and media organisations with 20% funding from external sources to register as "an agent of foreign influence". Since last Disinfo Brief, the ruling Georgian Dream party has announced that it will support the law on the first plenary hearing, then sent it to the Venice Commission to make technical changes but will still push through the legislation with the second and third hearings. GD has already voted in favour of the draft law during the committee hearing despite the protest from hundreds of NGOs and media, academia, strong opposition from other parties, international outcry, public demonstrations in and outside the parliament and physical clashes before the hearing when several opposition MPs were forcibly removed from the hearing.

GD also indicated that they will override the President's veto, with the authors of the draft law even claiming that the President is a foreign agent. President Zourabichvili claims law to be incompatible with the constitution and to be distancing Georgia from Europe. According to Georgia's constitution, "the constitutional bodies shall take all measures within the scope of their competencies to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization." Moreover, Georgian western partners have openly opposed the draft law and called on the ruling party to reject it:

- The US publicly [stated](#) that the law would undermine Georgia's Euro-Atlantic future.
- EU [officials](#) also [raised](#) concerns about the draft law, saying that the law goes against international law and European [values](#).
- The MFA of Norway unequivocally [said](#) that the adoption of the bill will negatively affect bilateral cooperation between the two countries.
- Samantha Power, the Head of USAID, [stressed](#) that foreign agent laws gravely threaten the ability of Georgians to fulfil their own economic, social and other aspirations.
- Dunja Mijatovic, the Commissioner of Human Rights of the Council of Europe, sent a special letter to the chairman of the parliament and parliamentarians to reject the draft law.

The case law of the ECHR regarding similar Russian law and of ECJ regarding similar Hungarian law suggests that Georgian law would have same issues, would hamper Georgia's European integration and might culminate in the same effect as it did in Russia when the CSOs were purged and forced to halt

operations in the country. The law claimed to be ensuring transparency of foreign funds, albeit it is already ensured as all the major independent organisations proactively and transparently publish all income and donor information and finances is already reported to state agencies, is aimed at discrediting the work of Western-financed CSOs in Georgia.

### **Propaganda against the EU:**

- European Parliament resolution concerning the health conditions of ex-President Saakashvili was [claimed](#) to be intended to destabilise the situation in Georgia, which would then help the West to achieve its geopolitical goals regarding Georgia, which is [you guessed it right] dragging Georgia into the war.
- Europe was [displayed](#) as a weak power that could not pursue its own interests but instead was used by the US against Russia.
- Propagandists [continued](#) peddling the message that the EU would soon be dissolved as the EU's political system was collapsing and corruption flourished.
- To discredit Georgia's European integration, the EU was [compared](#) to the USSR, and it was argued that the EU had surpassed the USSR in insulting, mocking, pressuring and mentoring Georgia. According to propaganda, European values towards which Georgia strived no longer exist, and an empire has superseded it. Also, in this context, it was claimed that neo-fascism has taken over in the West, which forces nations to join various unions against their will, something that is now happening to Georgia. Anti-Western messages also suggested that the EU does not reflect the positions of European people.
- The propaganda has also [targeted](#) visa liberalisation with the EU with absurd claims, such as 1) it is useless as it does not grant the right to work but is only limited to travel and 2) the EU needed visa liberalisation to lure Georgians into Europe with pockets full of cash and let them spend money in EU member states.
- Pro-Russian anchor [argued](#) that all of the public opinions polls that demonstrate the unwavering support of the population towards EU integration (>80% recently) and hostile attitude towards Russia were all fabricated.
- [According](#) to the pro-Russian propaganda, Georgia's Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU is not aimed at increasing Georgia's export potential and open European market for Georgia or increase EU investments in Georgia. According to the message, while the EU has increased exports to Georgia since signing this agreement, it has created extremely difficult barriers for Georgian products. Hence, pro-Russian propaganda argues that the EU signed DCFTA with Georgia in order to profit by exporting to Georgia but not letting Georgian products to reach European market.

### **Propaganda against the US:**

- Propagandists claimed that the US had incited and was waging a proxy war in Ukraine and did the same in 2008 in Georgia with the goals of 1) damaging EU-Russia trade ties and driving a wedge between Russia and Europe, 2) demonise Russia and 3) weakening Russia with an eventual goal of dissolving it.
- Pro-Russian propaganda [stressed](#) the message that the US is interfering in Georgian internal affairs with the lowest-ranking officials oppressing and instructing Georgian government, especially the previous government.

### Propaganda regarding Ukraine:

- Pro-Russian propaganda [claimed](#) that the US-Russia war is taking place in Ukraine with around 50 countries trying to put Russia on its knees and destroy it. According to the propaganda, Russia's loss would be a catastrophe for Georgia because without Russia Georgia's historical enemies (probably pointing at Iran, and strategic partners, such as Azerbaijan and Turkey) would wipe Georgia out of the world map.
- Pro-Russian propaganda [claimed](#) that February 24 pro-Ukrainian demonstration was not aimed to showing solidarity but at opening a second front in Georgia.
- The West was [blamed](#) for trying to spread the war outside Ukraine, at least in Moldova and Georgia.
- Local pro-Russians [parroted](#) Kremlin narratives that nothing was threatening Ukraine's security until 2014 but the West planned an operation to make Ukraine anti-Russian bastion and endanger Russian statehood and security. The claim suggested that Ukraine's territorial integrity was destroyed only for Association Agreement with the EU.
- Pro-Russian channel [emphasised](#) that Ukraine was in a dire situation after one year of war with deficit of weaponry and ammunition on the frontlines and argued that this would continue because ammunition was not supplied to Ukraine from existing reserves but was currently produced, but only part of it was reaching Ukraine because the US is storing the remaining in the US bases in Central Asia where it is preparing for Taiwan conflict.
- On one year anniversary, the West was [blamed](#) for prolonging the war in Ukraine. However, according to the propaganda, the war would still end with Ukraine [ceding](#) territories to Russia and therefore, by prolonging the war and forcing Ukraine to fight until the [last Ukrainian](#), the West is only increasing death toll and making bloody money.

### Devastating earthquake in Turkey used for propaganda purposes in Russia:

Throughout the week of February 13 to 19, FactCheck Georgia debunked a number of disinformation pieces about the recent powerful [earthquakes](#) that have shaken Turkey and Syria, causing tens of thousands of deaths and leaving millions without shelter. Shortly after the series of destructive

earthquakes occurred, conspiracy theories started to flood the internet. According to one such theory, the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that happened in the vicinity of a triple junction between the Anatolian, Arabian, and African plates was artificially caused by the US. Viral Facebook posts falsely claimed that it was done by employing a HAARP "tectonic weapon" – read more about this in FactCheck Georgia's [article](#). The conspiracy that the US caused the earthquake had quite a few manifestations – some posts suggested that the mainstream Turkish TV channels were openly reporting about the US using HAARP "tectonic weapon", which, according to the claims, could be witnessed looking at the lightening's in the sky during the earthquake – this claim was [false](#).

Other posts on Facebook argued that even the country's Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu had openly criticised the US for the inhumane act against Turkey, something that has [never happened](#). And lastly, FactCheck Georgia prepared yet another explanatory [article](#), debunking disinformation pushed by pro-Russian vlogger Dmitry Vasilets, according to which the US proposed Russia 20% of Ukraine's territories in exchange for peace – a claim not supported by any evidence.