

PARLIAMENT'S ROLE AND ACTIVITY REGARDING RUSSIAN **DISINFORMATION** **AND PROPAGANDA**



**INFORMATION
INTEGRITY
COALITION**

**GRASS
REFORMANDA**



Introduction

This research analyzes Parliament's activity regarding the fight against disinformation and hybrid warfare.

The research covers the activities of the Parliament thematic inquiry group and evaluates the steps taken to implement the resulting report. Apart from the thematic inquiry report, this work will present the activities against disinformation and anti-Western propaganda conducted by the relevant Parliament committees (Foreign Relations Committee, European Integration Committee, Defense and Security Committee). To achieve this goal, this research studies publicly available strategy documents, action plans, and progress reports as well as the information requested from the relevant committees.

As a principal policy-making institution tasked to oversee the executive power, the Parliament has to play a crucial part in the fight against pro-Russian disinformation and anti-Western propaganda.

On the Parliament level, disinformation and anti-Western propaganda were first named a significant challenge to the country's security in 2018. It was a part of the Georgian Parliament's foreign relations committee's 2018-2020 strategy¹ and action plan.² The strategy names anti-Western propaganda a significant challenge, and the committee discusses its role in the fight against it from the legislative angle.

In 2019, the Parliament of Georgia established a thematic inquiry group to work on the issues of disinformation and propaganda. The report on "Strengthening Georgian State Policy on Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda" remains the only document produced by the Parliament regarding enemy disinformation and anti-Western propaganda, which defines Parliament's vision and activities.

1 The Parliament of Georgia, Foreign Relations Committee 2018-2020 Strategy. Available - <https://bit.ly/3UHE7Fr>

2 The committee workplan included the following: 1) Creation of a workgroup on disinformation and media, definition of its agenda; 2) meetings/discussions with students on the topics of foreign policy priorities, goals, and challenges as well as disinformation threats; active involvement in Europe Days and NATO Week events.

Main findings

- According to the information from the parliament's European Integration Committee, the committee discussed implementing the recommendations developed by the parliament thematic inquiry group. Despite the discussions, the committee has not taken steps to fulfill its commitment.
- The committee responsible for implementing the thematic group recommendations was changed three times before being assigned to the Defense and Security Committee in the 10th convocation parliament. However, the report is currently not listed as a working document in the committee work plan or replies to inquiries.
- Apart from the thematic inquiry group report, it is clear that the parliament and relevant committees exhibit insignificant action in response to anti-Western propaganda and disinformation, which does not correspond to the increased threats the country faces.
- In March 2023, the Defense and Security Committee, responsible for the work against disinformation and propaganda, supported the so-called Transparency of Foreign Influence draft law.
- In May 2023, the committee completely ignored the Meta report revealing the ties of the government's strategic communication department's social network with an inauthentic coordinated network. The committee did not use its oversight power to investigate this scheme.

Thematic group on disinformation and propaganda issues

Foreign Policy Committee started the thematic inquiry on disinformation and propaganda in accordance with Article 155 of the Rules of Procedures of the Parliament of Georgia on February 11, 2019, establishing a corresponding workgroup.

The thematic inquiry group was tasked to study and analyze the main challenges and issues concerning disinformation and propaganda.³ The group was also requested to analyze the existing state policy and develop recommendations for its improvement. The group included both parliament majority and minority members. The working process was supported by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD); also, the USAID-funded Good Governance Initiative (GGI) was involved in the report development process.

From February to November 2019, the Parliament's Foreign Policy Committee thematic group on disinformation and propaganda conducted oral and written inquiries with governmental and non-governmental organizations. Following state institutions participated in the interviews:

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia;
 - Information Center on NATO and EU;
- The Ministry of Defense of Georgia;
- State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia;
- State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG);

³ The Parliament of Georgia. Foreign Relations Committee. Thematic Inquiry Group on Disinformation and Propaganda. Available - <https://parliament.leavingstone.club/storage/files/shares/tematuri-mokvleva/sagareo/dezinformacia/she-saxe.pdf>

- Despite the State Security Service of Georgia participating in the interviews, SSSG refused to allow the inclusion of their written or audio accounts in the final report.

Meetings with international research centers⁴, foreign experts⁵, and members of the disinformation and propaganda thematic inquiry group of the UK Parliament were also conducted⁶.

As regards the non-governmental organizations active in Georgia, the Thematic Inquiry Group developed a technical assignment and a questionnaire⁷. Twenty-three public organizations decided to take part in the project. The organizations which confirmed their participation received the questionnaire, in response to which 17 of the organizations presented their substantiated notion. Upon receiving the notions, the inquiry group invited a selection of organizations for a verbal interview⁸.

It is worth noting that the Thematic Inquiry Group, according to the work plan, should have finished the work process by the end of May 2019; however, it failed to meet the deadline⁹.

According to the Defense and Security Committee of the Parliament of Georgia, the committee decided to create the thematic inquiry group on disinformation and propaganda on April 23, 2019. In its address to the Parliament Bureau, the committee notes that the foreign relations committee has already established a thematic inquiry group on disinformation and propaganda and requested to join the two groups¹⁰. The bureau granted the request on June 17, 2019, and the thematic inquiry group work time-frame was effectively restarted. While the committee still has not finalized the process, the defense and security committee's appeal to start the inquiring process of the same issue was presumably made to achieve a nominal time-frame extension for the foreign policy committee group.

However, the "new" thematic inquiry group also failed to finalize the report by the assigned deadline and has appealed to the bureau to request an extension¹¹. Finally, the thematic inquiry group produced the report by the end of 2019 - "Strengthening Georgian State Policy on Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda."¹²

The head of the thematic inquiry group, Nino Gogvadze (a member of the Parliament of the ninth convocation, Foreign Relations committee deputy chair in 21.11.2016 – 25.11.2019), made a public presentation of the

4 The Parliament of Georgia, Thematic Inquiry Group Meeting with Russian Policy Analyst Brian Whitmore, 2019. Available - <https://parliament.ge/media/news/dimitri-tskitishvili-mnishnelovania-im-gamotsdilebis-gaziareba-romelits-ruse-tis-mier-tsarmoebuli-propagandisa-da-dezinformatsiis-sakitkhebtan-dakavshirebit-aris-akumulirebuli>

5 The Parliament of Georgia, the Working Meeting of the Thematic Inquiry Group on Disinformation and Propaganda at the Foreign Relations Committee with Irish Experts, 2019. Available - <https://parliament.ge/en/media/news/the-working-meeting-of-the-thematic-inquiry-group-on-disinformation-and-propaganda-at-the-foreign-relations-committee-with-irish-experts>

6 The Parliament of Georgia, the Visit of the Thematic Inquiry Group on Disinformation and Propaganda to Britain, 2019. Available - <https://parliament.ge/en/media/news/the-visit-of-the-thematic-inquiry-group-on-disinformation-and-propaganda-to-britain-accomplished>

7 The Parliament of Georgia, questionnaire for the participants of the thematic inquiry, 2019. Available - <https://parliament.leavingstone.club/storage/files/shares/tematuri-mokvleva/sagareo/dezinformacia/kitxvari.pdf>

8 The Parliament of Georgia, written responses of the organizations participating in the thematic inquiry, 2019. Available - <https://bit.ly/3DSutJo>

9 The Parliament of Georgia, Foreign Policy Committee, Disinformation and Propaganda Thematic Inquiry Group work plan. Available - <https://parliament.leavingstone.club/storage/files/shares/tematuri-mokvleva/sagareo/dezinformacia/samoqmedo-gegma.pdf>

10 The Parliament of Georgia, The Defense and Security Committee appeal, 2019. Available - <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/221118>

11 The Parliament of Georgia, the head of the inquiry group's appeal regarding the time-frame extension. Available - <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/232700>

12 The Parliament of Georgia, report, "Strengthening Georgian State Policy on Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda", 2019. Available - <https://parliament.leavingstone.club/storage/files/shares/tematuri-mokvleva/sagareo/dezinformacia/angarishi-27.01-2020-geo.pdf>

report on January 13, 2020 briefing. A more detailed presentation occurred on February 13.^{13 14}

Civil society welcomed the report and appealed to the parliament majority to create a comprehensive work plan in order to implement the recommendations reflected in the report:

“It is important for the ruling “Georgian Dream” majority to realize that the value of the work carried out by the Thematic Inquiry Group and that of the final report is determined by the concrete steps made by the Parliament and the government in follow up to the proposed recommendations.^{15”}

Thematic Inquiry Group final report - Strengthening Georgian State Policy on Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda

The report produced by the Thematic Inquiry Group featured important recommendations, allowing state institutions to take concrete steps to counter threats of disinformation and propaganda¹⁶. Some of those recommendations are relevant to this day.

The recommendations in the report included:

- Creation of a parliament supra-party forum on the issues of hybrid threats and ensure the discussion of these issues involving governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as use a format of inquiry groups and investigation commissions if necessary.
- Establish parliament’s cooperation with the social networks, and provide for certain Facebook regulations (including advertisement transparency, sponsor identification, and others) to extend to Georgia¹⁷.
- Increase funding transparency of individuals, non-governmental, media, and political entities affiliated with Russia, and conduct required legislative changes to achieve this goal.
- Establish a supra-partisan interdepartmental body/mechanism within the executive branch, which will provide proactive communication on disinformation and propaganda, including potential foreign involvement in elections, with coordination with civil society.

13 The Parliament of Georgia, Nino Gogvadze Introducing the Report of the Thematic Inquiry Group on Disinformation and Propaganda at the Briefing, 2020. Available - <https://parliament.ge/en/media/news/nino-gogvadze-introducing-the-report-of-the-thematic-inquiry-group-on-disinformation-and-propaganda-at-the-briefing>

14 The Parliament of Georgia, the Presentation of the Report by the Thematic Inquiry Group on Disinformation and Propaganda, 2020. Available - <https://parliament.ge/en/media/news/the-presentation-of-the-report-by-the-thematic-inquiry-group-on-disinformation-and-propaganda>

15 Statement on the Process of Drafting and the Final Report of the Thematic Inquiry Group on Disinformation and Propaganda of the Parliament of Georgia. Available - <https://grass.org.ge/en/treiningebi/statement-on-the-process-of-drafting-and-the-final-report-of-the-thematic-inquiry-group-on-disinformation-and-propaganda-of-the-parliament-of-georgia>

16 Strengthening Georgian State Policy on Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda - report. Available - <https://parliament.leavingstone.club/storage/files/shares/tematuri-mokvleva/sagareo/dezinformacia/angaris-hi-27.01-2020-geo.pdf>

17 It is worth noting that some of the Facebook regulations (including the transparency of advertisement, identification of sponsors, and others) were extended to Georgia without Parliament’s involvement, thanks to the advocacy of civil society. See the civil society open letter to Facebook. <https://grass.org.ge/en/treiningebi/qartuli-samoqalaqo-sazogadoebis-ghia-tserili-facebook-s> In response to this letter, Facebook activated a selection of tools in 2020, including advertisement transparency, identification of sponsor and fact-checking program. <https://grass.org.ge/en/inmedia/facebook-announces-the-launch-of-the-third-party-fact-checking-program-in-georgia>

On March 12, 2020, Georgian parliament's foreign policy committee hearing, Nino Gogvadze, the head of the Disinformation and Propaganda Thematic Inquiry Group, presented the Disinformation and Propaganda Thematic Inquiry Group's report and corresponding recommendations to the committee members¹⁸. The hearing was led by the Committee First Deputy Chairman, Tsothe Zurabiani.

The committee hearing was also attended by representatives of civil society¹⁹, who proposed that the committee should develop a concrete action plan for the implementation of the report recommendation as well as establish technical procedures and benchmarks following the report adopted by the committee. This action plan was suggested to be published on the parliament's web page.

The mentioned offer was rejected. Public records of the committee hearing show no mention of future steps. Alongside that, the European integration committee was tasked to oversee the implementation of the report, with the participation of the Foreign Relations Committee, as noted during the committee hearing.

1.2 Thematic Inquiry Report Implementation Evaluation

According to the information requested from the European Integration Committee in 2020 (see Appx. 1), the European Integration Committee conducted discussions with the Good Government Initiative (GGI) in order to develop a work plan based on the inquiry group report, listing all activities with corresponding deadlines²⁰.

Alongside that, civil society representatives addressed the committee several times to ensure the **creation of a workgroup** tasked with implementing the recommendations from the report with the involvement of interested parties and starting the process (work plan development), planned with the information provided by the committee.

However, **the European Integration Committee has not taken any steps to fulfill its commitment, excusing this, first by the COVID-19 pandemic and later by the upcoming parliamentary elections**. No information on activities concerning the implementation of the thematic group report could be found in the European Integration Committee's 2020 report²¹. Apart from the thematic group report itself, only two other events mentioning the word disinformation appear in the report:

- The mutual cooperation memorandum has been concluded between the LEPL Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, the Committee on European Integration of the Parliament of Georgia, and the

18 The Parliament of Georgia, Foreign Policy Committee session, March 12, 2020. Available - <https://parliament.ge/media/news/sitting-of-foreign-relations-committee-2>

19 This meeting was attended by the representatives of Georgia's Reforms Associates, including the director Paata Gaprindashvili.

20 According to the letter received from the European Integration Committee, the committee's goals were:

- Parliament oversight on the issues regarding the fight against enemy propaganda and disinformation in the context of the 2020 elections.
- Oversight work planning and implementation, based on analyzing the challenges in disinformation and related issues compiled by the civil sector; for example, a thematic inquiry, depute interview, hearing, etc.
- Joining state and civil sector resources around the shared values to protect elections. Use of parliament levers to increase the transparency of the 2020 elections.
- Creating a basis for increasing the 2020-2024 Parliament involvement in this process.

See the letter in the appendix.

Despite those mentioned above, the committee did not conduct any related activity.

21 The Parliament of Georgia. European Integration Committee 2020 activity report. Available - <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/Komitetebi/evrointegracia/angarish-kom/evrointegracia-angarishi-2020.pdf>

LEPL Georgian Parliamentary Research Center. The memorandum encompasses cooperation projects and strengthening efforts to prevent anti-Western propaganda.

- Within the Europe Days marking, a digital informational campaign, "Six of Association for Georgia," has been conducted. The campaign included a research project competition, with "Disinformation and fake news during the Covid-19 pandemic" among suggested topics.

After the conclusion of the parliamentary elections in October 2020 and the convention of the Parliament of the 10th convocation, the Parliament of Georgia's Defense and Security Committee took over the issues regarding disinformation and propaganda, including overseeing the thematic group report. The Foreign Relations Committee provided the information explaining the reason behind this change: "Disinformation and propaganda are derived from both inside and outside actors; therefore, this issue is related to state security in general, not to foreign affairs".

The Information Integrity Coalition, within the frames of said research, made a written address to the Defense and Security Committee and the European Integration Committee of the Parliament of Georgia (see the letters in the appendix) requesting information regarding the implementation of the thematic inquiry group report as well as other activities regarding anti-Western disinformation and propaganda conducted or planned by the committees (see the letters in the appendix. Later, in May 2023, the Defense and Security Committee of the Parliament of Georgia, being a coordination committee, was sent an additional letter inquiring about the committee's activities concerning disinformation and propaganda (see the sent letters and replies appx. 4).

Disinformation and propaganda-related activities conducted by the European Integration Committee of the 10th Convocation Parliament

According to the 2020²², 2021²³ and 2022²⁴ action plans of the European Integration Committee, the committee has not performed any work in relation to disinformation and propaganda. August 2022 committee response to a related inquiry reads: "European Integration Committee of the 10th convocation Parliament has not taken measures concerning the issues mentioned in the letter" (see appx. 5).

22 The Parliament of Georgia, European Integration Committee 2020 work plan. Available - <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/Komitetebi/evrointegracia/samoqm-gegma/2020-sam-gegm.pdf>

23 The Parliament of Georgia, European Integration Committee 2021 work plan. Available - <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/Komitetebi/evrointegracia/samoqm-gegma/evrointegracia-samoq-gegma-2021.pdf>

24 The Parliament of Georgia, European Integration Committee 2021 work plan. Available - <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/Komitetebi/evrointegracia/samoqm-gegma/evrointegracia-samoqmedo-gegma-22.pdf>

Disinformation and propaganda-related activities conducted by the Foreign Relations Committee of the 10th Convocation Parliament

The Foreign Relations Committee 2022 action plan includes “activities countering disinformation and anti-Western propaganda in coordination with the Defense and Security Committee and in cooperation with international organizations and other institutions.²⁵” In the letter received in August 2022, the committee describes the conducted activities (appx. 2): “Members of the Foreign Relations Committee constantly conduct meetings with international organizations, partner states, and other public groups informing them on the priorities of Georgian foreign policy and the importance of European and Euro-Atlantic integration for the country as well as the issues of disinformation and propaganda.”

The committee’s 2021 progress report depicts two events, within the framework of which, according to the report, the chairman of the committee, Nikoloz Samkharadze, discussed threats of disinformation and propaganda coming from Russia: the November 5, 2021 meeting with the student parliaments and May 27, 2021 conference organized by the British analytical Council on Geostrategy.

Apart from that, the report mentions a working meeting on the issues of fight against disinformation and propaganda between the Foreign Relations and Defense and Security committees, during which “the members of the committee received the information presented by the Government of Georgia and corresponding ministries concerning the steps taken by these institutions regarding the struggle against disinformation and propaganda,²⁶” This meeting was highlighted by the Defense and Security Committee as well.

Disinformation and propaganda-related activities conducted by the Defense and Security Committee of the 10th Convocation Parliament.

The Defense and Security Committee took over the responsibility for implementing the Thematic Inquiry Group report in 2020. However, neither the committee’s action plans nor the responses provided by the committee indicate that the report is a working document of the committee.

Even though the letter sent by us to the committee requested information on the action plan and progress report regarding the thematic group report and its recommendations, no such documentation was provided. Even more, the committee’s replies do not mention the Parliament’s report on “Strengthening Georgian State Policy on Anti-Western Disinformation and Propaganda” at all. In the 2022 response letter, the committee notes that disinformation and anti-Western propaganda issues are a priority: “Considering the negative effect of Russian disinformation and anti-Western propaganda on Georgian state security, the corresponding response actions are among the priorities of the committee.”

25 The Parliament of Georgia, European Integration Committee 2020 work plan. Available - <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/Komitetebi/sagareo/samoqm-gegma/sagareo-samoqmedo-gegma-22.pdf>

26 The Parliament of Georgia, European Integration Committee 2021 work plan. Available - <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/Komitetebi/sagareo/angarishi/sagareo-angarishi-2021.pdf>

Publicly available 2021²⁷ and 2022²⁸ committee work plans include the issues of the fight against disinformation and anti-Western propaganda. Specifically, the 2021 work plan includes strengthening (2.2) the overseeing component within the committee's competence and conducting the committee hearing with the participation of relevant defense and security institutions (2.2.1). A committee hearing on hybrid threats (including disinformation and anti-Western propaganda) is listed among the work plan tasks.

18. Committee hearing on hybrid threats for Georgia (including disinformation and anti-Western propaganda). Irakli Beraia, committee members. Sopio Babunashvili, Bakur Utarashvili. Corresponding institutions. In the timeframe of spring and autumn sessions. Committee conclusion/recommendations.

2021 committee progress report reads²⁹:

- On November 8, 2021, the Defense and Security Committee of the Parliament of Georgia organized a closed meeting on the issues of disinformation and propaganda, where Egeria Solutions presented a report developed with the support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation "The Role of the Parliament in the fight against Disinformation and Propaganda – Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine,³⁰" report depicts the current state of events in this regard as well as recommendations. All relevant institutions of the executive branch of Georgia participated in the meeting.
- On December 27, 2021, the Defense and Security Committee of the Parliament of Georgia conducted a working meeting with the representatives of the strategic communication departments of the executive branch on the issues of disinformation and propaganda. The responsible staff of the Government of Georgia and relevant ministries briefed the committee members on conducted activities and performed steps and plans regarding the fight against disinformation and propaganda. At the meeting, problems as well as ways of their solutions were discussed and identified. The importance of strengthening the overseeing role of the Parliament in the fight against disinformation and propaganda and the need to strengthen the coordination in this issue was highlighted during the meeting.
- On November 30, 2021, a member of the Defense and Security Committee, **Eka Sepashvili**³¹ participated in the 7th Georgian Internet Governance Forum organized by the Council of Europe, where she made a presentation of Russian disinformation and propaganda-related activities conducted by the Parliament of Georgia.
- According to the 2022 work plan, thematic committee hearings, which included the issue of disinformation and anti-Western propaganda, were scheduled.

Steps countering disinformation and anti-Western propaganda. Eka Sepashvili, committee members. Sophia Babunashvili, Bakur Utarashvili. National security council office, related services. Within the year. Hearing protocol.

27 The Parliament of Georgia, Defense and Security Committee, 2021 work plan. Available - <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/Komitetebi/tavdacva/samoqm-gegma/tavdacva-samoq-gegma-%202021.pdf>

28 The Parliament of Georgia, Defense and Security Committee, 2022 work plan. Available - <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/Komitetebi/tavdacva/samoqm-gegma/tavdacva-samoqmedo-gegma-22.pdf>

29 The Parliament of Georgia, Defense and Security Committee, 2021 work plan. Available - <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/Komitetebi/tavdacva/kom-angarishi/tavdacva-angarishi-2021.pdf>

30 Egeria Solutions, 2021, "The Role of the Parliament in the Fight against Disinformation and Propaganda – Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine." Available - https://egeriasolutions.ge/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Role-of-Parliaments-in-Fighting-Disinformation-Eng.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1V8TvYRrFqmgHJHUJJN2N6BU9u6vjUQm60Jov-lcr04Ss4pwG8m_ANXZQ

31 Parliament member Eka Sepashvili moved from the Georgian Dream to the People's Power party on October 4, 2022. She was one of the initiators of the so-called Agents' Law. Available - <https://netgazeti.ge/life/633725/>

It is worth noting that the committee's written response on the conducted activities (appx. 3) also mentions the November 8, 2021 meeting, which was dedicated to the presentation of Egeria Solutions' "The role of the parliament in the fight against disinformation and Propaganda – Georgia, Moldova Ukraine" report.

It is unclear, however, what steps have been planned after hearing the report and subsequent recommendations and how this meeting affected the improvement of the committee's performance. It is essential considering that the activities and the report of the Thematic Inquiry Group in regard to the fight against disinformation and propaganda are included in the Egeria Solutions³² report, which states:

"Despite some important initial steps the Parliament of Georgia has taken for combating disinformation and propaganda operations, overall, the policy of the legislative branch lacks consistency and a systematic approach. Although the parliament has issued certain policy recommendations (mentioned above) to the executive branch, there has been no follow-up in implementing the parliament's recommendations or concerning the application of any further oversight action. Moreover, parliament has fallen short of implementing its recommendations on revising grants, broadcasting, advertising, and state procurement laws."

We have sent the Defense Committee a letter requesting information regarding the December 27, 2021 event, inquiring, in particular: what issues have been identified and what resolving measures are planned; also, we asked if the spring 2022 meeting ever took place, as it was planned on the December 27 event³³.

According to the Defense and Security August 22 response, the main issues identified on December 27, 2021, meeting were the absence of a corresponding unified legal framework as well as the coordination of relevant services, and the lack of financial resources³⁴. In addition to that, according to the information provided by the committee, - "the representatives of the legislative and executive branches agreed to continue tight cooperation on this issue and will inform the committee on the achievements and challenges in regards to the improving the combat against disinformation and propaganda." The committee did not respond to the question about conducting the planned spring 2022 event.

According to the response provided by the committee, in follow up to the December 27, 2021 event, - "The Defense and Security Committee developed a thorough questionnaire, which was sent to all corresponding institutions relevant to the activities countering disinformation and propaganda." According to the information provided in August 2022, the committee was processing the information received from the institutions. The committee also planned "to send the corresponding questionnaire to the civil society representatives, conduct individual meetings with them and learn their assessment of said issues."

In addition to that, in May 2023, the Defense and Security Committee received inquiries on the conducted activities concerning disinformation and propaganda, including the steps taken in follow-up to the processing of the information received from the state institutions as well as the planned meeting with the civil society (see appx. 4).

According to the May 2023 response from the Defense and Security Committee, the processing of the information collected from the relevant institutions through the developed questionnaire has yet to be finished and is in its final stage. The same letter states that the meetings with the civil society will be held upon the finalization of this process.

32 Egeria Solutions is a non-governmental organization founded by former members of parliament Tamar Chugoshvili, Tamar Khulordava, Nino Gogvadze, and Irina Pruidze. Available - <https://egeriasolutions.ge/our-team/>

33 The Working Meeting of the Foreign Relations and the Defense and Security Committees on Countering Disinformation and Propaganda, 2021. Available - <https://parliament.ge/en/media/news/sagareo-urtiertobata-da-tavdatvis-da-ushishroebis-komitetebma-dezinformatsiastan-da-propagandastan-brdzolis-sakitkhebze-samushao-shekhvedra-gamartes>

34 It's worth noting that the 2019 Thematic Inquiry report highlighted the issues with the lack of coordination and resources.

The committee did not reply to the question of whether the committee hearing on the issues of combating disinformation and state propaganda, scheduled for the 2022 autumn session, was ever held. Appropriately, the committee's 2022 action plan progress report does not mention a committee hearing on disinformation either.

Committee's 2022 action plan progress report only mentions the word disinformation twice: 1) On June 17, 2022, the Defense and Security, Human Rights, Civil Integration and Legal Affairs committees of the Parliament of Georgia discussed a 2021 activity report presented by the State Security Service of Georgia during a joint session. The SSSG highlighted "hybrid threats" coming from specific countries and the disinformation campaign directed against Georgia and conducted by the related security services as a significant challenge Georgia currently faces. The country's foreign policy and European and Atlantic integration are the primary targets for the threats, according to the SSSG. 2) The report mentions Strengthening Security Sector Accountability with Civil Society Effective Oversight EU project in a list of events held in relation to institutional capacity building. Estonian experience in the fight against disinformation and propaganda was shared with the committee office staff within the framework of the project³⁵.

In response to the inquiry about the actions the Defense and Security Committee has taken about the Thematic Inquiry Group on Disinformation and Propaganda final report and corresponding the recommendations issued for the relevant governmental bodies, the committee's May 2023 letter states: "A committee hearing on the topic of "hybrid threats Georgia faces and counter-actions," which also includes issues of disinformation and propaganda, is included in the current year's action plan."

The 2023 action plan also defines the committee's actions regarding the following issues: "A study/evaluation of the existing conceptual, legislative, and institutional framework in the security sector (including counter-actions against hybrid threats) and developing initiatives/recommendations, if needed."³⁶ Considering those mentioned above, it is unclear if the committee plans to work on the issues of disinformation and anti-Western propaganda.

The Defense and Security Committee, responsible for the work against disinformation and anti-Western propaganda in the Parliament, supported the so-called Transparency of Foreign Influence draft law.

The Parliament of Georgia and the relevant committees did not implement the recommendations included in the Thematic Inquiry Group report, which aimed to improve the state policy. Apart from that, in some cases, the Defense and Security Committee failed to take even the most minor steps included in its action plan; for example, the action plan included a committee hearing on the issues of disinformation and propaganda in the previous year.

Even more, the Parliament of Georgia and the committee tasked with the oversight of the disinformation and anti-Western propaganda-related issues, together with the Foreign Relations Committee, supported the

35 The Parliament of Georgia, Defense and Security Committee 2022 activity report. Available - <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/Komitetebi/tavdacva/kom-angarishi/tavdacva-angarishi-2022.pdf>

36 The Parliament of Georgia, Defense and Security Committee 2023 action plan. Available - <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/Komitetebi/tavdacva/samoqmqm-gagma/samoqmedo-gegma-2023.pdf>

Transparency of Foreign Influence draft law initiated by parliament majority members People's Power during the March 2, 2023, joint committee session. Considering its goals, civil society referred to this draft law as a so-called Russian Law³⁷.

The draft law mentioned above was considered to be incompatible with the democratic development and Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia both by the local civil society³⁸ and international partners of Georgia³⁹.

Despite all this, most Defense and Security Committee members voted in favor of the bill on the March 7 session of the Parliament of Georgia in a first hearing. After the following internal public protest and international backlash, the parliament majority of the Georgian Dream recalled the draft law⁴⁰.

The Defense and Security Committee ignored the Meta report, which revealed public opinion manipulation in Georgia by the government's strategic communication department.

On May 3, 2023, Meta (Facebook and Instagram parent company) published a quarterly report according to which the company has identified and deleted a coordinated inauthentic network. The report states that despite the attempts of people behind this network to conceal their identity, the investigation found links to the Strategic Communications Department of the Government Administration of Georgia⁴¹. The Defense and Security Committee of the Parliament of Georgia, which is responsible for the improvement of the state policy countering disinformation and anti-Western propaganda as well as the oversight of the executive branch, had to react in response to the Meta investigation. Despite the appeals of the civil organizations for the Parliament to use its oversight tools to investigate the disinformation schemes included in the report⁴², the legislative body and the Defense and Security Committee have neither taken any concrete steps nor made a public statement regarding this issue.

37 The Parliament of Georgia, Foreign Relations and Defense and Security Committees joint session, March 2, 2023. Available - <https://parliament.ge/media/announcement/2043?local=true>

Interpressnews.ge, Committee of Foreign Relations and Committee of Defense and Security support draft laws on "Transparency of Foreign Influence" and "Registration of Foreign Agents," March 2, 2023. Available - <https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/124143-committee-of-foreign-relations-and-committee-of-defense-and-security-support-draft-laws-on-transparency-of-foreign-influence-and-registration-of-foreign-agents>

38 The statement of non-governmental organizations, "Russian Law is not the Will Of Georgia," Available - <https://grass.org.ge/en/statement/russian-law-is-not-the-will-of-georgia>

39 Civil.ge, State Department, USAID Officials React to Draft Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence," March 3, 2023. Available - <https://civil.ge/archives/528627>

Netgazeti.ge, European Union is concerned about the draft law On Agents of Foreign Influence, February 21, 2023. Available - <https://netgazeti.ge/opinion/656136/>

40 Radio Liberty, The Parliament Voted down the "Agents" Draft Law. Available - <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/32311562.html>

41 Meta, Quarterly Adversarial Threat Report. May, 2023. Available - <https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Meta-Quarterly-Adversarial-Threat-Report-Q1-2023.pdf>

42 The Information Integrity Coalition statement regarding the Meta report. May 4, 2023. Available - <https://formulanews.ge/News/89971>

Conclusion

By launching the thematic inquiry on anti-Western and pro-Russian hostile disinformation and propaganda issues in 2019, the Parliament of Georgia tried to take an important step. At first, the Thematic Inquiry Group was able to create an open and inclusive process within the framework of which the representatives of the civil society presented their well-founded views on the subject in oral and written form.

The committee responsible for the oversight of the issues of disinformation and anti-Western propaganda was changed several times. The Foreign Relations Committee transferred it to the European Integration Committee, which handed it to the Defense and Security Committee. No information on the justification of any of these changes became available to the public. Despite the Defense and Security Committee overseeing it now, their responses do not clarify if the Thematic Inquiry Group report still serves as a framework document for the committee's activities regarding disinformation and anti-Western propaganda.

Both publicly available and the information collected during this study confirms that the Parliament of Georgia has taken no practical steps to improve the state policy on countering disinformation and anti-Western propaganda.

The Parliament of Georgia and the Defense and Security Committee, specifically, also took no active steps in response to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, which could have benefited from strengthening the state policy in response to the elevated threats of disinformation and anti-Western propaganda and increasing public resilience.

With the exclusion of organizing standalone meetings, it is unclear what provides the general foundation for the Parliament's or relevant committees' view on the fight against anti-Western disinformation and propaganda. The set goals and planned actions to strengthen state policy countering hostile anti-Western and pro-Russian propaganda remain unclear too.

Apart from the Georgian Parliament and the disinformation and anti-Western propaganda overseeing Defense and Security committee in particular, not implementing the Thematic Inquiry Group recommendations and taking no tangible steps to strengthen the state policy on countering disinformation and anti-Western propaganda, the committee has, in fact, taken counter-productive actions regarding some crucial issues.

The committee supported the Transparency of Foreign Influence draft law, also known as an "Agents' draft law." Later, in May 2023, the committee ignored the report by Meta, which revealed the connection of the strategic communication department of the Government of Georgia with a coordinated inauthentic behavior accounts network on a social network platform.

Appendix 1:

[The European Integration Committee response, 2020](#)

Appendix 2:

[The letter to the Foreign Relations Committee and following response, 2022](#)

Appendix 3:

[The letter](#) to the Defense and Security Committee and [following response](#), 2022

Appendix 4:

[The letter](#) to the Defense and Security Committee and [following response](#), 2023

Appendix 5:

[The letter](#) to the European Integration Committee and [following response](#), 2022

