



# GRASS Disinfo Brief

**MONITORING PERIOD:**

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REFORMANDA





- Georgian Dream founder and billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili kicks off new year by openly returning to politics
- Georgian Dream's election campaign pillars become visible as the ruling party positions itself as a defender of the Georgian church and blames opponents for being anti-Church
- Pro-Russian group says throwing paint on Stalin's icon is an attack on Christianity in Georgia
- Ruling party members criticize Danish Ambassador to Georgia for referring to Bidzina Ivanishvili as an oligarch
- Traditional propaganda narrative about the EU attempting to open a second front in Georgia remains prevalent
- Pro-Russian propaganda praises Stalin, underlines his "good deeds" for Georgia

### Georgian Dream founder and billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili kicks off new year by openly returning to politics

Bidzina Ivanishvili, the former Prime Minister and founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party was elected as the Honorary Chair of the Georgian Dream party on December 30th, a position that had not existed within the party before.

Irakli Kobakhidze, who remains the Chair of the Georgian Dream, announced that the party approved the updated composition of its revision commission, discussed future plans and pre-election preparations, and made several changes in the party charter. "The main event of today's party congress is the introduction of the position of honorary chairman in the party. Most importantly, with the unanimous support of the party congress, Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of our party, the creator of the democratic transformations of 2012, will occupy the position of Honorary Chair", [stated](#) Kobakhidze.

Ivanishvili took the stage after him and made a lengthy speech about the motivations behind his return to public politics, lambasted the opposition, and brushed up on some of the party's future plans. Several important points can be emphasized in the speech:

- [According](#) to Ivanishvili, despite political activity not being in his character, returning as an Honorary Chair was his initiative. After winning the 2012 parliamentary elections, he believed that he had completed his mission and that criminals would never have the ambition to return to power. "However, as it turned out, the criminal political system had deeper roots than it seemed at first glance", prompting him to return to politics.
- Ivanishvili [believes](#) that the ruling party would acquire 90-100 seats if parliamentary elections were held today. Therefore, he aims to protect the over-strengthened Georgian Dream party from "human temptations". According to Ivanishvili, before openly returning to politics, he used to hold consultations with 2-3 people within the ruling



party. However, that was not enough anymore, as the party required a new center of power.

- The Georgian Dream founder repeatedly [emphasized](#) that he would not take up an official governmental position. Irakli Gharibashvili will continue to hold the Prime Minister's position, as will the party's incumbent Chair, Irakli Kobakhidze.
- Ivanishvili criticized the opposition and stated that it has been destroyed against the background of the ruling party's success. According to him, when there is no external force to confront, there is a temptation to invent conflict within the team. Also, in the absence of opposition control, the risks of corruption increase. "All this made me make an uncomfortable decision to return to politics", [stated](#) the former Prime Minister.
- Ivanishvili stated that after announcing that he would distance himself from politics in 2021, he did not think that former Georgian Dream member and Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia would betray his country and the party. "I had to act as an advisor to the team, and if I had not helped with consultations, difficult scenarios would have developed for the country", [said](#) Ivanishvili.

Bidzina Ivanishvili has not made any public statements since. However, the ruling party members responded to his return by stating that it will benefit not only the Georgian Dream, but the whole country.

- Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili [stated](#) that Bidzina Ivanishvili's role is to save the country, which he successfully did in 2012 by defeating the United National Movement in parliamentary elections. Now, due to the rapidly changing geopolitical situation and the developments within the country, it was necessary for Ivanishvili to "take up this unique role". Moreover, Gharibashvili [admitted](#) that during difficult times and crisis, he consulted with Mr. Ivanishvili about strategic issues regarding the country's future and navigating in a turbulent geopolitical situation.
- Chair of the ruling party, Irakli Kobakhidze, [assessed](#) Ivanishvili's return as a very important event that will strengthen the Georgian Dream and the whole country. "We should thank Ivanishvili for making this decision", he said. Additionally, Kobakhidze argued that Ivanishvili's return proves that he never was a de facto ruler of Georgia. As for his advice and consultations, he said it is a healthy phenomenon and occurs in any country.

### **Georgian Dream's election campaign pillars become visible as the ruling party positions itself as a defender of the Georgian church and blames opponents for being anti-Church**

On January 6<sup>th</sup>, a [video](#) went viral that showed that an icon depicting a Russian Orthodox saint, Matrona of Moscow, blessing Joseph Stalin was exhibited at the Holy Trinity (Sameba) Cathedral of Tbilisi. The presence of the icon at the cathedral caused widespread controversy, and on January 9<sup>th</sup>, activist Nata Peradze [splattered](#) blue paint on the glass-covered icon in protest, which made her a target of the violent, pro-Russian group – Alt Info.

On January 10<sup>th</sup>, Alt Info members and their supporters [surrounded](#) Peradze's house, calling for her arrest. According to the organizers of the rally, if the state did not charge Peradze with a



criminal sentence, “they would execute the law themselves”. Despite the police protecting the activist’s house, pro-Russian group members [attacked](#) her friend who was leaving her house. Alt Info held another rally on January 13<sup>th</sup> in front of the parliament, once again calling for the arrest of Peradze and threatening violence.

“Either the state takes care of her, or we will”, [stated](#) one of the leaders of Alt Info, Zurab Makharadze.

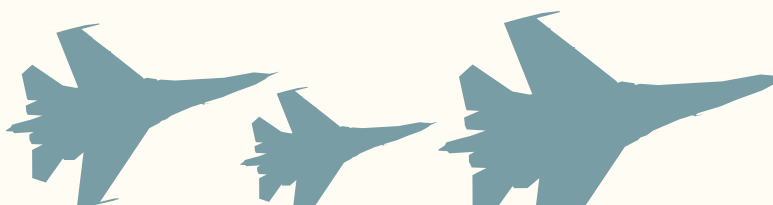
“Police will not always stand in front of their houses. We promise – these bastards will regret their savagery”, stated another leader, Shota Martinenko.

Georgia’s interior ministry launched an investigation into Peradze’s acts on the charges of petty hooliganism, which was not sufficient for the pro-Russian group.

Along with the reactions from the violent group, the Georgian Dream party has also accused its opponents of conducting a coordinated campaign to vilify the Georgian Church and depict the ruling party as pro-Russian.

In addition to the controversy around the icon depicting Stalin, the ruling party members addressed another topic that triggers discussions every year – should Christmas be celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup> or January 7<sup>th</sup>? Georgian Dream members shamed those who say that December 25<sup>th</sup> is a more valid date, framing it as an attack on the Georgian Church and Georgian values.

- Chairperson of the parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, released a long written statement, [arguing](#) that “the radical opposition’s” attacks on the Church are part of a coordinated malicious campaign aimed at demeaning the symbols and values around which Georgians have rallied historically. Papuashvili argued that the depiction of tyrants is not unusual for Christian iconography. Nonetheless, the opposition-linked media distorted the facts, portraying Saint Matrona’s icon as an icon of Stalin. He also criticized the opposition and civil society organizations for attacking the Church by calling the January 7th celebrations “the Russian Christmas” and systematically accusing the Patriarchate of being Russia’s extension. According to Papuashvili, the criticism has no rationale and does not aim to achieve progress but is part of a hostile campaign to damage the Church and the Government, portraying them as conduits of Russian propaganda. For Papuashvili, the actions of the United National Movement, Droa, Girchi, Lelo, and European Georgia are reminiscent of the Bolshevik onslaught against the Church, while the Georgian Dream embraces the Georgian Church and Christian values.
- In a statement made to the media, Papuashvili [said](#) that the opposition is a united anti-Georgian group, which is against everything that is Georgian – Georgian statehood, Georgian state institutions, Georgian Church, and Georgian traditions. According to him, the Georgian people will have two choices in the 2024 elections – the Georgian Dream, which acts in accordance with national interests and respects Georgia’s history and faith,



and the opposition, which is anti-Georgian, acting against Georgian interests and attacking Patriarch Illia II.

- Irakli Kobakhidze dedicated a social media [post](#) to Lasha Bugadze, a writer critical of the ruling party, who on January 7th [wrote](#): “Happy Russian Christmas. We, Christians, celebrated on December 25th”. Kobakhidze called the writer “a pseudo-liberal,” “pseudo-intellectual,” and “pseudo-writer” and argued as to why celebrating Christmas on January 7th is a Georgian tradition.
- In another statement, Kobakhidze [said](#) that the activities of the “radical opposition”, the collective “National Movement”, are directed against the state, the Church, and everything on which Georgian identity stands. Georgian society will give a relevant answer to these actions in the parliamentary elections. Political forces that directly oppose the Georgian state, the Georgian Church, and Georgian identity will have no chance of success.
- Georgian Dream MP Irakli Zarkua [stated](#) that the icon in question depicts Stalin with a saint, which is not unusual in iconography. Focusing on Stalin in Saint Matrona’s icon only polarizes society. According to the MP, after failing to incite a revolution, the ruling party’s opponents are attempting to divide society on religious grounds and cause destabilization. “We see how they are attacking the Church from all sectors in coordination,” said Zarkua.
- Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, Giorgi Amilakhvari, [commented](#) on the controversy around the icon exhibited in the Holy Trinity (Sameba) Cathedral, stating that “these people” [Nata Peradze and those who supported her action] have been attacking the Georgian state, Church, and identity for a long time. The Georgian people are wise and will assess these actions accordingly. “You can see that society has given these people the answer,” stated the Minister.

#### **Pro-Russian group says throwing paint on Stalin’s icon is an attack on Christianity in Georgia**

- Leader of the Alt Info group, Konstantine Morgoshia [stated](#) that a country that assesses the desecration of a religious icon as “petty hooliganism” but gives a 6-year prison sentence to a man for burning an EU flag is destined for failure (see previous editions of GRASS Disinfo Brief for details about the EU flag burning campaign).
- Zurab Makharadze [argued](#) that “EU-financed b\*\*\*ards” will continue to damage religious sanctities in other Cathedrals if they are only punished with a 500 GEL fine or a 15-day jail sentence. According to him, activists such as Nata Peradze have foreign funders who pay their fines. Therefore, if the government does not heavily punish her, she and other activists, with the backing of Western funds, will commit worse acts in the future.
- Makharadze also [argued](#) that no matter in what context Stalin is depicted in the icon, the icon itself is dedicated to Saint Matrona, not Stalin, and whoever says otherwise is lying.
- Another leader of Alt Info, Shota Martinenko, published a social media post where he [said](#) that by throwing paint on an icon, activists crossed a line after which peaceful coexistence is impossible.

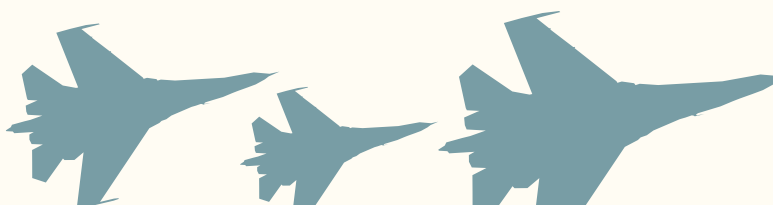


- Aleksandre Palavandishvili, an anchor on Alt Info's broadcasts, [stated](#) that the people who support the "sodomization of children and the ideology of sex change" should be expected to attack icons and religious celebratory dates. He also argued that Stalin was depicted in the icon as a historical figure rather than a saint, which is common practice in Christian iconography. According to him, throwing paint on a religious icon was an orchestrated, coordinated act.
- A propagandist on Alt Info [alleged](#) that Nata Peradze's goal was not to protest Stalin's icon but to attack Christianity as a whole. Another propagandist claimed the same, adding that the desecration of religious icons will continue because it is part of a larger campaign to undermine Christianity in Georgia. According to him, in that case, they will "have to return a really difficult answer".
- A frequent guest on Alt Info's broadcast [stated](#) that according to the EU, one of the main components of Georgia's EU integration is to end polarization, but it is the pro-European activists who are responsible for deliberately sowing division and controversy by desecrating religious sanctities.
- Another propagandist [argued](#) that because "the liberal opposition" is unable to bring people out to protest, they are provoking and deliberately annoying the people to incite civil confrontation.
- On a different occasion, propagandists [accused](#) the opposition of calling Orthodoxy "an out-of-date Russian religion", and criticized writer Lasha Bugadze for suggesting that Christmas should be celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup>.
- Several malign actors [voiced](#) an opinion that the act by Nata Peradze was planned and executed by Western intelligence services against the Georgian Church.

### **Ruling party members criticize Danish Ambassador to Georgia for referring to Bidzina Ivanishvili as an oligarch**

Danish Ambassador to Georgia, Anne Toft Sørensen, released an [op-ed](#) in a Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten, where she referred to the founder of the Georgian Dream party and former Prime Minister, Bidzina Ivanishvili, as an "oligarch, who built a fortune in Russia in the 1990s". This prompted harsh responses from the Georgian Dream members.

- After the criticism from the ruling party members, the Embassy of Denmark [stated](#) that "an excerpt from a Danish article is being used out of context in Georgian debates. The Embassy has no desire to contribute to the above and refrains from making additional comments". [According](#) to Shalva Papuashvili, the Danish Embassy's explanation points to the incompetence of the Ambassador and that she could not formulate her opinion in a way that could have been understood correctly. Papuashvili added that it is sad and



regrettable that the incompetence of individual diplomats sometimes damages the image of the country they represent in the eyes of the Georgian public.

- Secretary General of the Georgian Dream and Mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze, [assessed](#) the Ambassadors op-ed as “dirty”. According to him, Bidzina Ivanishvili has done many things for Georgia, including deposing the “bloody, terrible regime in 2012”. In addition, the Mayor of the capital also spoke about some members of the European Parliament, who also make similar statements. According to him, these MEP’s are bought by money to make such statements and should be ashamed of it. “They have no friendly attitude towards Georgia. They have their own interests, and they serve them”, said Kaladze.
- Georgian Dream MP Irakli Zarkua [said](#) that the Ambassador’s assessment was “a lie, disinformation, and insolence”. According to him, the Ambassador must have forgotten her role to help Georgia and its people in European integration. By insulting Bidzina Ivanishvili, the Ambassador is discrediting the progress that the Georgian Dream has achieved in the past year. Moreover, Zarkua thinks that the statement aimed to deepen polarization, and whether or not it was done by mistake or on purpose, it is unacceptable.
- [According](#) to another Georgian Dream MP, Gia Volski, the Danish Ambassador's statement was directed against Bidzina Ivanishvili and the Georgian Dream, and encouraged societal confrontation, which the collective "National Movement" was eagerly awaiting to spill blood and incite violence.

### **Traditional propaganda narrative about the EU attempting to open a second front in Georgia remains prevalent**

- Propagandists on pro-Russian broadcasts had no trouble linking the controversy around Stalin to a Western conspiracy that allegedly aimed to open a second front in Georgia against Russia. Specifically, one propagandist [argued](#) that the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza are directly linked to Nata Peradze’s actions. According to the claim, the West needed another conflict to start the Third World War, and because of the presence of “liberal-fascist powers” in Georgia, it is fertile ground to incite a new war.
- Another propagandist [claimed](#) that the West has serious internal problems. Therefore, it is their main goal to drag Georgia into a war against Russia to divert people’s attention. The same propagandist argued that the EU is a farcical union and will dissolve until 2027.
- Moreover, propaganda [accused](#) the West of instructing former President Mikheil Saakashvili to initiate a war with Russia in 2008. Since then, the West opened another front against Russia in Ukraine and is aiming to drag Georgia into it. According to the narrative, if Saakashvili had still been in power, he would have obeyed Western demands, which would have led to Georgia’s destruction.
- A propagandist who repeatedly spreads anti-Western propaganda and disinformation on social media published a [post](#) according to which the EU membership candidate status for Georgia will only lead to the increased funding of Western conduits and interests, punishment of patriots, the spread of LGBT propaganda and acceptance of illegal migrants. It is in the globalist agenda to force Georgians to emigrate and bring in migrants



from Africa and Asia in their place, making Georgians an ethnic minority in their own country. Those who support Georgia's EU integration are supporting this plan, as claimed.

- People who were [arrested](#) after the July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021 attacks were sentenced because the West ordered the Georgian government to do so, speculated a guest on Alt Info, who claimed that the West wants to punish every Georgian that dares to “protect dignity and policies based on national interests”.
- [According](#) to an article published by a prominent pro-Russian propagandist, Hamlet Tchipashvili, if Georgia becomes a member of the EU, it will completely lose the minimal amount of sovereignty it currently retains. Simultaneously, the article argues that the EU is entirely obedient and has given up its own sovereignty to the US. Additionally, the author suggests that Georgians have a distorted perception of the economic welfare of EU member states when, in reality, an economic crisis is weakening the union. Commenting on the fact that the new French Prime Minister is gay, the author alleges that in order to hold an important governmental position in Europe, you have to be gay.

#### **Pro-Russian propaganda praises Stalin, underlines his “good deeds” for Georgia**

- Leader of the Alt Info group, Konstantine Morgoshia, [praised](#) Joseph Stalin as not only the greatest Georgian but also the greatest historical figure in the world, shadowing over others such as Napoleon and Alexander the Great. According to him, Georgia birthed a man who gave the world nuclear balance, significantly influenced the whole world, and defeated liberalism and Zionism.
- Pro-Russian propagandists [credit](#) Joseph Stalin with ensuring the autocephaly of the Georgian Church. Moreover, Stalin [allegedly](#) released a decree that stated that churches should not be shut down or destroyed and restored theological schools. One propagandist claimed that the number of churches increased from 400 to 22,000 under Stalin's rule.
- Propaganda [argued](#) that it is Stalin's merit that the world was introduced to “The Knight in the Panther's Skin”, a 12<sup>th</sup>-century poem that Georgians are very proud of.
- Another propagandist [stated](#) that Stalin was solely responsible for the industrialization and urbanization of Georgia. Georgians were living in village huts before Stalin's rule, but thanks to Stalin's Soviet Union, jobs, low prices, an abundance of products, and newly built apartments became available.
- Georgia never had such “a genius chief, a true treasure”, a propagandist [claimed](#), according to which Stalin showed the world that the Georgian nation is the most powerful.
- Georgia was “the strongest state in that territory” (the Soviet Union), [according](#) to another narrative.

