

GRASS Disinfo Brief

MONITORING PERIOD: April 23rd – May 7th







- Oligarch Ivanishvili says EU and NATO are controlled by Global War Party, threatens political repression against opposition and dissenting voices
- Georgian Dreaam lashes out on Georgia's Western partners, adopts Russian-style "whataboutism"
- Georgian Dream frames protests against the Russian-style agents law as an attempt of a revolution
- Georgian Dream's "People's Power" movement says the EU is controlled by "the Global War Party", says it will force the EU to open accession talks with Georgia
- Violent attack and harassment campaign against opponents of the Russian-style foreign agents law
- Disinformation campaign on social media discredits protests against Russian-style foreign agents law

Oligarch Ivanishvili says EU and NATO are controlled by Global War Party, threatens political repression against opposition and dissenting voices

On April 29th, the ruling party <u>held</u> "a united public gathering to say no to dark money and say yes to transparency, the real European path, and independent and sovereign Georgia!". Investigative journalists quickly <u>found out</u> that many people gathered on April 29th were public servants mobilized, sometimes forced, and brought to the capital from the regions. This was evident from the streets of Tbilisi, which were <u>packed</u> with microbuses and buses. While the people gathered outside the parliament, the Chairperson of the Legal Issues Committee, Anri Okhanashvili, led the committee hearing by <u>expelling</u> 14 opposition MPs and several NGO members. Georgian Dream MPs joined the rally after they <u>voted</u> for the Russian-style foreign agents law to move forward on the plenary session the next day.

Eventually, the founder of the ruling party and oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, General Secretary of the Georgian Dream and Mayor of Tbilisi Kakha Kaladze, Chairperson of the Parliament Shalva Papuashvili, Chairperson of the Georgian Dream Irakli Gharibashvili, and the leader of the parliamentary majority Mamuka Mdinaradze addressed the gathering. Their statements were full of anti-Western narratives.

Main points from Bidzina Ivanishvili's speech:

• The government of Georgia in 2004-2012 was a revolutionary committee, externally appointed by the West rather than being elected by the people, and as such, foreign agents were ruling Georgia. According to Ivanishvili, it is notable that the United National Movement government came to power after foreign-funded NGOs started a revolution in 2003. He continued that this led to the infringement of freedom, independence and sovereignty in Georgia. Saakashvili's government did not commit crimes against its people solely because of its unpatriotic and sadistic nature but because it was commanded and controlled by foreign forces. This was the reason why

Saakashvili's government had a green light from the same foreign politicians who today declare Saakashvili, Gvaramia and Kezerashvili as innocent saints and demand the punishment of the current government. These foreigners are motivated today to return to the inhumane and sadistic dictatorship of the previous government.

- As Ivanishvili <u>stated</u>, he thought his mission was complete in 2012 after he defeated the United National Movement government in the parliamentary elections. However, according to him, <u>since the beginning of 2022</u>, <u>Georgia endured the hardest struggles to prevent war and maintain peace</u>. Despite the promise of the 2008 Bucharest summit, Georgia and Ukraine were not invited to join NATO because such decisions are made by the "Global War Party", which has a decisive influence on NATO and the EU and only views Ukraine and Georgia as cannon fodder. The "Global War Party" first pitted Georgia against Russia in 2008 and in 2014 and 2022, putting Ukraine in an even more difficult situation. The main reason for the aggression of the Global War Party towards Georgia is that, despite great efforts, it could not open a second front against Russia in Georgia, which it would have easily achieved if foreign agents, meaning the opposition, were in power.
- Ivanishvili said that the public often asks why the foreign powers actively oppose the law on "NGO transparency". "Our team members adequately answer this question, but they do not tell the whole truth", Ivanishvili <u>continued</u>, stating what the whole truth is

 obscure foreign funding of NGOs is the main instrument of external forces to appoint the government. They [foreign powers] want Georgia to be governed not by the government elected by the Georgian people but by traitors appointed by foreigners. NGO <u>funding</u>, which is often portrayed as foreign assistance, is, in fact, almost entirely used to strengthen the foreign agent network in Georgia and bring them to power. In short, NGO funding aims to deprive Georgia of its sovereignty.
- Modern Georgia is neither Shevardnadze's Georgia nor Yanukovych's Ukraine. Georgia is governed by a strong team of professionals who know the price of homeland, sovereignty, and independence. Therefore, changing the government with the hands of the United National Movement and NGOs is impossible. However, this does not mean that the ruling party should not remain vigilant to protect Georgia's sovereignty. The law on "Foreign Influence Transparency" serves exactly this purpose.
- Ivanishvili also <u>stated</u> that the ruling party introduced the Russian-style foreign agents law and the constitutional changes regarding "LGBT propaganda" before the elections because had it not, foreign powers would attempt to meddle in Georgia's internal affairs and try to undermine the government anyhow. Therefore, the ruling party took preventive measures. Ivanishvili reminded the gathered people that they [foreign powers] tried to undermine the Central Election Commission and the judiciary by demanding the implementation of specific laws and the vetting system. The same powers that attempted to organize revolutions in Georgia 2-4 years ago will imminently attack Georgia again and try to put its agent network in power. By reintroducing the law, the





energy the foreign powers and their agents were gathering for the elections is now being prematurely spent on the streets.

- Ivanishvili also <u>added</u> that many Georgian citizens are upset at the ruling party for not properly punishing the United National Movement [ruling party members refer to its opponents, including NGOs, as the "collective United National Movement"]. According to Ivanishvili, the Georgian Dream did not have enough resources to punish its opponents as they were protected by high-ranking Western officials. "They put the United National Movement as the radical opposition from outside, as they put them it in the government before", the oligarch claimed. He promised that after the elections, the ruling party will have the opportunity to issue the harsh political and legal sentence that the United National Movement deserves.
- Responding to the resolution adopted by the European Parliament, which calls for the sanctioning of Bidzina Ivanishvili, the oligarch <u>stated</u> that it is a testament of the "Global War Party's" influence on the EU. "The Global War Party" is making the EU destroy European values with its own hands, as it destroyed Georgia with the hands of Georgians in 2004-2012.

Main points from Prime Minister Kobakhidze's speech:

- Kobakhidze <u>stated</u> that certain powerful forces view the EU as a union of non-sovereign, weak countries which are deprived of identity and values. **The same people who are trying to undermine the EU's sovereignty and European values are telling Georgia to leave its sovereignty and traditional values at the door.** "They tell Georgia that it will only be accepted in the European family if it gives up democratic elections and the independence of the judiciary; democracy and the rule of law; morality, the church, faith, and other values which Europe was founded upon after the second world war", claimed the Prime Minister.
- The Prime Minister argued that the examples of Afghanistan and Ukraine show that there are no lasting friends, no lasting enemies, and only lasting interests in politics. According to Kobakhidze, the only lasting friend that states have is their sovereignty, which is why the ruling party refuses to follow orders which aim to weaken Georgia's independence. Since 2020, "the radical opposition and its affiliated NGOs" attempted to start a revolution twice, did not let the country rest for 20 years, and are currently attempting to hide their dark money to stir up the country for the third time.
- As Kobakhidze <u>continued</u>, Bidzina Ivanishvili is an example of self-sacrifice, humanity, pragmatism, and patience. **The loyalty to Georgia and the national cause is something**

that people who want to enslave and oppress this country cannot forgive Bidzina Ivanishvili. "I thank Bidzina Ivanishvili for the fact that Georgia has peace and economic progress today", stated the Prime Minister.

• <u>As per</u> Kobakhidze, for several months, they [the EU] have been threatening the Government of Georgia that if it does not give up the independence of the Central Election Commission and the judiciary, accession talks will not be opened. "We call on the EU to show due respect to the Georgian society this year, unlike from 2022, and restore justice by opening accession talks this year", said Kobakhidze, while adding that everyone should focus on the Georgian people rather than protecting the dark money of NGOs who are ill-willed towards Georgia.

Main points from the Mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze's speech:

- Kaladze <u>stated</u> that certain powers, which cannot accept the fact that Georgia did share the fate of Ukraine [did not engage in a war with Russia], are attempting to stir up the country and bring the people back in power who have brought many troubles to Georgia.
- The Mayor of the capital also <u>argued</u> that the opponents of the Russian-style foreign agent's law are trying to prove that transparency is bad and "LGBT propaganda" is good. "They are trying to prove that NGOs have the right to start as many revolutions as they want without us asking where their funds are coming from", asserted Kaladze. According to him, those against the draft law want to deprive the Georgian people of the right to know who is financing pseudo-liberal propaganda, attacks on the Orthodox Church, propaganda of narcotics, and radicalism.
- Kaladze <u>underlined</u> that plans to adopt laws on transparency of foreign influence and "LGBT propaganda" are part of a bigger fight to protect Georgia's sovereignty and national identity.
- Georgia is currently ruled by a united team that understands its responsibilities. The government is acting according to Georgia's national interests, rather than foreign commands. As Kaladze <u>continued</u>, homelandless radicals attack Bidzina Ivanishvili because he is the biggest defender of national interests and identity. The General Secretary of the ruling party said that Ivanishvili came into politics in 2011 with a national goal of replacing the Georgia's agent government by risking his own life.
- Kaladze <u>concluded</u> that Western officials are against Ivanishvili while they support Saakashvili because the latter was easily controlled and used against Georgia's national interests, while Ivanishvili continues to stand as a guarantee of Georgia's national interests.





Main points from the Chairperson of the parliament, Shalva Papuashvili's speech:

- Papuashvili <u>claimed</u> Georgia will only be respected as an equal nation-state when it stands firm to protect its values and interests. Two issues on the political agenda [draft law on foreign agents and constitutional changes against "LGBT propaganda"] are directly linked to the Georgian way of life and how foreign forces influence it. "In both cases, we see that people who challenge us have no sense of nationality and links to Georgian roots. They prioritize foreigners over Georgia", argued the Chairperson of the parliament.
- There are people in Georgia that want to turn the country into an instrument for foreign interests, a satellite for other countries, while the ruling party staunchly continues to defend national interests. <u>According</u> to Papuashvili, the Georgian Dream puts independence, restoration of territorial integrity, and national identity as the main principles while managing relations with everyone, no matter friend or foe. "Everyone should know that Georgia's membership in any union should primarily serve Georgia's interests and not the other way around", stated the Chairperson of the parliament.

Georgian Dream lashes out on Georgia's Western partners, adopts Russian-style "whataboutism"

- After a telephone conversation with the Counselor of the US Department of State, Derek Chollet, Prime Minister Kobakhidze <u>published</u> a post stating that he "expressed sincere disappointment with the two revolution attempts of 2020-2023 supported by the former US Ambassador and those carried out through NGOs financed from external sources". "Had these attempts been successful, the second front line would have been opened in Georgia", reads Kobakhidze's post on X. In response to the Department of State's comments about the crackdown on protests in Tbilisi, Kobakhidze concluded his post by writing that he did not express his concerns with Mr. Chollet about "the brutal crackdown of the students' protest rally in New York City".
- Kobakhidze also <u>posted</u> about his phone call with the President of the European Council, Charles Michel. According to the Prime Minister, **he highlighted the active involvement of foreign-funded organizations in two attempted revolutions in Georgia between 2020 and 2023.** He also conveyed disappointment to Michel that despite numerous invitations, partners have been reluctant to engage in substantive discussions on transparency law and that the **ruling party has yet to hear counterarguments against the proposed**

legislation.

- US Ambassador to Georgia, Robin Duniggan, issued an official <u>statement</u>, according to which the US invited senior members of the Georgian Government to engage directly with the most senior leaders in the United States to discuss the strategic partnership between the countries and any concerns with US assistance. "Unfortunately, the Georgian side chose not to accept this invitation", reads the statement. Later, the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs <u>responded</u> that the invitation was made by the US "on the condition that the Georgian Parliament suspend the process of debate on the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence" prior to the visit" and thus "not in conformity with the spirit of partnership" between the two countries.
- The Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also lashed out at its French colleagues after the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs <u>condemned</u> the violence and called on the Georgian authorities to enforce the right to peaceful protest as well as freedom of the press. Georgian MFA <u>responded</u> that "despite violent groups affiliated with the political opposition and financed from abroad carried out large-scale violent acts against state institution buildings and law enforcement, Georgian officers, with the exception of a few unfortunate incidents, acted in accordance with the highest human rights standards." The Georgian side reminded the French that it refrained from making a critical statement even when law enforcement officers in Paris confronted the protesters with brutal methods completely inconsistent with universal standards of human rights.
- Responding to the US State Department's <u>statement</u> that it "condemns the Kremlininspired "foreign influence" legislation", Irakli Kobakhidze <u>assessed</u> that anyone who lies and calls the draft law Russian without providing relevant arguments is **an accomplice in the violence executed by the "collective United National Movement"**. "No one wants transparency, no one wants their finances to be transparent", added the Prime Minister.
- <u>Commenting</u> about the <u>resolution</u> adopted by the European Parliament, which says no negotiations on EU membership shall open while that foreign agents law is in force, Kobakhidze stated that the European Parliament has adopted similar resolutions in the past, calling on the Georgian government to release Saakashvili from prison. Despite the Georgian government not doing so, it was still granted EU membership candidate status, and according to the Prime Minister, this recent **resolution will also remain an empty paper, and the EU will open accession talks with Georgia at the end of the year.**
- The mayor of Tbilisi also <u>responded</u> to the European Parliament's resolution, stating that the Georgian Dream freed Georgia from marionettes controlled by foreign forces and could help the EU free itself from such figures as well. According to Kaladze, the resolution attacks Bidzina Ivanishvili, who rescued Georgia from "criminal agents,"





while it praises Mikheil Saakashvili, known for business racketeering, torture, human rights violations, etc.

- A bipartisan group of 14 US senators <u>addressed</u> the Georgian Prime Minister, stating their "profound concern regarding the decision to re-introduce and advance a Russianstyle foreign agents law... If this legislation is passed, we will be compelled to encourage a shift in US policy toward Georgia..." reads the statement. Chairperson of the Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, <u>said</u> it is surprising that representatives of a country which has a similar law [FARA] called on the Georgian government not to adopt it. According to Papuashvili, it would have been simpler for the Senate to publicize the funds received by Georgia from the US budget. "The National Endowment for Democracy does not disclose what projects it finances in Georgia... **US tax dollars are being diverted to fund political parties, radical groups, and disinformation campaigns**", said Papuashvili.
- According to Georgian Dream MP Irakli Zarkua, the ruling party will not pass the Russian-style foreign agents law if the US, UK, France and Israel abolish their respective laws on foreign interference. As he argued, Georgia is in an unstable region, and anyone who is supportive of the Georgian state cannot be against transparency. "As soon as funds become transparent, Nino Lomjaria and Eka Gigauri will disappear because they will be replaced with those who do actual Georgian work. Those who do dark work, naturally, donors will not fund them! They are afraid of losing their jobs!" stated Zarkua.

Georgian Dream frames protests against the Russian-style agents law as an attempt of a revolution

On April 30th and May 1st, after the ruling party held "the united public gathering", police started to <u>violently crackdown</u> on protesters outside of the parliament building. The ruling party was quick to voice conspiracy theories about its internal and external opponent's planning to start a revolution and overthrow the government.

 "The radical opposition" has been trying to cause civil confrontation for years now, and the recent protests are part of that attempt, <u>according</u> to the Prime Minister. As Kobakhidze argued, the "collective United National Movement" was planning to stir up the country after the elections but is forced to spend its violent energy now, which will be futile. Furthermore, he claimed that there are 15 violent youth groups specifically trained for violence during protests. "Part of the youth are directly linked to Dima Chikovani [member of the United National Movement, who was physically assaulted by unknown individuals near his home on May 8th]. They call these young people sincere, but they are members of the United National Movement's youth movement", <u>said</u> Kobakhidze.

- Kakha Kaladze <u>stated</u> that the opposition always calls on the people to blockade state institutions and leave young people alone in direct confrontation with law enforcement. The Mayor of Tbilisi assessed the protests against the foreign agents law as violent and highlighted that no one who steps over the law should be pardoned. He also claimed that the protesters used items that are not sold in Georgia, hinting that external forces orchestrated the protests.
- Shalva Papuashvili <u>stated</u> that directives given by foreign powers control the opposition, and their plans only involve returning to power through destruction and radicalism.
- Georgian Dream MP Irakli Kadagishvili <u>assessed</u> that the protests, according to the Ackermann method, aim to raise the political temperature by causing a loss of human life. However, the authorities already know about these plans and will ensure that protests remain peaceful and in line with the law.
- Member of the parliamentary majority and the "People's Power" movement, Sozar Subari <u>stated</u> that as a former journalist and member of an NGO, he knows that USAID funds were directed towards revolutionary processes in 2003, hinting that the US is currently funding the same scenarios.
- Another member of the "People's Power" movement, Mikheil Kavelashvili, <u>argued</u> that while young people are sincerely participating in the protests, there are also groups of young people deliberately trained for violence. "This is a project directed against the Georgian government, and it has been going on for years", the MP claimed, who stated that people standing behind these violent groups are members of the "United National Movement". He also argued that external forces planned the project against the Georgian government. "I call on the youth, you are serving the commands of foreign powers which are directed against Georgia's sovereignty", said Kavelashvili

"People's Power" movement says the EU is controlled by "the Global War Party", says it will force the EU to open accession talks with Georgia

On April 25th, the Georgian Dream-affiliated "People's Power" movement released a <u>statement</u> which evidently seems to have contributed to Bidzina Ivanishvili's speech made on April 29th. Several main points can be highlighted from the statement:





- Europe as a political space was exemplary for Georgia only decades ago, specifically in the years 1949-2008, when it had sovereignty and maintained its Christian faith and political, cultural, ethnic, religious, and sexual identity. It was during this period that democracy, rule of law, human rights, accountability and transparency became the main principles of European governance. However, in 2008, the EU started to face serious challenges "the Global War Party" started three wars in Europe and established an agent network within the EU. Through this agent network and total control of the media, "The Global War Party" is making Europeans lose their cultural, ethnic, religious and sexual identity. Additionally, total migration, which is externally controlled, is creating an existential threat to European cultural, ethnic and religious identity.
- The "People's Power" movement claims that, along with the majority of the Georgian people, it wishes to become a part of the European family as Europe was in 1949-2008. "We do not want Michels, Macrons, Scholz's, but Schumann's, Adenauer's, De Gaulle's, Miterand's and Kolle's Europe.
- Despite numerous challenges, Georgia continues to maintain its sovereignty and the cultural, ethnic, religious, and sexual identity of its people. Thus, the movement thinks that Europe existentially needs to share Georgia's experience to free itself from "the Global War Party's" agent network.
- They [the West] want to destabilize the Central Election Commission and the judiciary and fund LGBT propaganda and attacks on the Orthodox Church. The funds portrayed as assistance to Georgia are directed towards strengthening the agent network in Georgia. They openly support those who trampled over democracy and human rights in 2004-2012.
- They [the West] tried to undermine the Georgian government by rigging the 2020 parliamentary election parallel vote tabulation results and by forcing the ruling party to sign an unconstitutional agreement in 2021 [April 19th agreement signed between the ruling party and the opposition, which Charles Michel mediated]. All of these aimed to weaken the Georgian Dream before the elections.
- The EU unjustly refused to grant Georgia membership candidate status in 2022 while calling on the Georgian government to release Saakashvili from prison to stir up the situation and prepare grounds for a revolution. However, the rhetoric around the law on "transparency of foreign influence" is much more shameless and radically anti-European,



and its internal or external opponents cannot provide arguments about its negative effects.

• As the statement claims, as the "People's Power" movement promised the Georgian people that it would force the EU in 2022 to grant Georgia candidate status, it will force it again to open accession talks with Georgia.

Violent attack and harassment campaign against opponents of the Russian-style foreign agents law

Along with the crackdown on protesters throughout the week, members of civil society, NGOs, activists, and opposition MPs have been subjugated to violent physical attacks and harassment.

- On April 18th, the leader of the opposition party "Citizens", Aleksandre Elisashvili, was arrested outside the Government of Georgia building. <u>Video</u> footage shared by "TV Pirveli" later showed several police officers physically assaulting the MP after he was detained. According to him, he suffered a broken rib and a split lip.
- Chairperson of the "United National Movement", Levan Khabeishvili, was severely <u>beaten</u> after police started to violently <u>crackdown</u> on protesters late on April 30th. According to the MP, he was trying to help a young protester who was getting arrested when he was <u>detained</u> and beaten for 10-15 minutes after. He suffered a fractured nose along with other injuries and required surgery.
- Well-known Tbilisi resident and American lawyer Ted Jonas was arrested along with 63 other detainees during the night of April 30th-May 1st. As he <u>reported</u>, he was grabbed and dragged on the sidewalk, being beaten and kicked in the process. He estimates he suffered 20 30 blows and ended up with a bloody nose, bruises on his head, jaw, right eye socket and somewhat on the left.
- The next night, on May 1st, police allegedly started using <u>rubber bullets</u> along with water cannons and tear gas. Several protesters reported being hit by rubber bullets, although authorities said they never used them. One of the protesters was hit near the eye, and as he <u>stated</u>, vision in his right eye is permanently partially impaired.
- Protesters were attacked by men in civilian clothing on May 3rd, near Heroes Square, where a mass protest was taking place. Several unknown men arrived in the surrounding area and unexpectedly started to assault some demonstrators physically (<u>1</u>, <u>2</u>, <u>3</u>, <u>4</u>). Journalists later identified the men. However, law enforcement has not made any arrests to this day.
- Georgian teacher Lado Apkhazava, who was <u>named</u> among the 10 finalists of the world's best teachers in 2019, <u>reported</u> that he and his son were physically assaulted near his





home in Lanchkhuti. The police arrested the attacker and <u>released</u> him with a 4000 GEL fine.

- Executive Director of the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), Giorgi Kldiashvili, and TV Formula's crew were also <u>attacked</u> outside the Swedish Embassy in Tbilisi.
- Activists, people affiliated with opposition parties and NGOs, and other public figures actively opposing the Russian-style foreign agents law reported being contacted on the telephone by unknown men with numbers from foreign countries. The callers reportedly started swearing at the respondents and telling them their addresses. Parents and other family members of civil activists also reported the phone calls.

Disinformation campaign on social media discredits protests against Russian-style foreign agents law

Propaganda and disinformation are at full speed in the background of the non-stop protests in the streets of Tbilisi to discredit the demonstrations against the draft law along with those who publicly oppose it.

• A photo of a demonstrator holding a sign saying "Like the women of the first republic, we fight for Georgia's future now!" was <u>altered</u>. The edited photo showed the same demonstrator holding a sign which said "No to Russian law! Yes to same-sex marriage".



Real



• Another photo was <u>edited</u> in a similar style. The sign on the original photo says "Special forces, please hold your gases", it was altered to portray it as a pro-LGBT sign.



BORGSADOR SJEMERS!

Real

Fake

• A photo of a couple kissing while at a protest on Heroes Square was spread on social media. Propaganda sources claimed that the photo depicted a same-sex couple, which is <u>false</u>.





• A <u>fake screenshot</u> of a post from Nino Lomjaria was widely spread on social media, which purported that the former Public Defender posted a photo of an egg painted in rainbow colours on Easter. Lomjaria never posted such photo.







- A <u>video</u> from the May 3rd protests on Heroes Square was spread with altered audio. Propaganda sources claimed that "Satanic noises" were heard during the protests; however, similar noises were not heard from up to ten live broadcasts of the demonstration. No other sources have confirmed hearing such noises as well. The claim was <u>false</u>.
- Anonyomous pages and propaganda sources on different social media platforms spread a conspiracy theory that the US is planning a revolution in Georgia without providing any evidence. Most of these posts were sponsored to amplify the dissemination of the conspiracy theory. News media outlets (1, 2) also spread a quote from a former CIA analyst, Larry Johnson, who claimed that the "West is executing a colour revolution in Georgia". Larry Johnson often spreads anti-American disinformation or conspiracy theories. His statements, articles, and appearances are often used by Kremlin's propaganda outlets, such as Sputnik, and Vladimir Solovyov's show. Quotes from Scott Ritter, another former CIA employee, were also used to boost the conspiracy theory. Notably, Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ritter has been openly

spreading propaganda narratives and disinformation in collaboration with Kremlin disinformation actors.