

GRASS Disinfo Brief

MONITORING PERIOD: May 21st - May 27th







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Prime Minister Kobakhidze says the EU Commissioner threatened him with the fate of the Slovak leader who was shot

On May 23rd, the official Facebook page of the Government of Georgia released a <u>statement</u> from Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, which stated that a number of high-ranking foreign politicians do not shy away from even openly threatening the Georgian government elected by the Georgian people. However, the Prime Minister went further and claimed that during a telephone call, an EU Commissioner listed a number of measures that Western politicians can take after the ruling party overcomes the veto on "the law on transparency of foreign influence", and while listing these measures, he mentioned – "You saw what happened to Fico and you should be very careful." Kobakhidze added that in the context of pressure and threats coming from the West because of "the law on transparency of foreign influence", mentioning the case of the Slovakian Prime Minister, who, according to Kobakhidze, was a **victim of a terrorist attack orchestrated by one of the countries under the influence of the "Global War Party"**, is extremely concerning.

The EU Commissioner in question was Olivér Várhelyi, Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, who issued a <u>statement</u> denying accusations by Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and expressed "very sincere regret" that a certain part of the phone conversation was taken out of context. Várhelyi explained that he mentioned the tragic attack on the Slovakian Prime Minister as an example of where such a high level of polarisation can lead in a society, even in Europe, and underlined that the already fragile situation by adopting the law could lead to further polarisation and to possible uncontrolled situations on the streets of Tbilisi.

Vladimir Putin also <u>commented</u> on the situation, assessing Várhelyi's "threat" as "political stupidity and simply infuriating". Unfortunately, the irresponsibility of middle-ranking

officials, especially in this direction, is increasing, and we also often encounter this. This only causes sadness," Putin said.

- The Chairperson of the Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili <u>assessed</u> Várhelyi's "threat" as shocking and asserted that mentioning an attempted murder in any context is startling.
- Ruling party members and pro-government propagandists (<u>1</u>, <u>2</u>) portrayed the Commissioner's explanation as a confession, <u>stating</u> that such statements are an attempt to deepen polarization in the country and that Várhelyi directly admitted his words. "Mentioning such facts is blackmail and a threat," <u>argued</u> Davit Kacharava.
- "Unbelievable things are happening, an unprecedented level of threats...", Nino Tsilosani, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament <u>posted</u> on Facebook.

Georgian Dream fear-mongers with revolutions, "Global War Party", "Ukrainization", "Maidanization"

- Lack of transparency was one of the main tools that enabled certain entities to try to organize a revolution twice in Georgia, the Prime Minister <u>claimed</u>, arguing that in this context, those against transparency are once again attempting to start a revolution. He blamed the polarization in Georgia during the 2018 Presidential elections and, as he referred, "the 2019 events" [when the Georgian Parliament and Kobakhidze personally <u>hosted</u> Sergei Gavrilov, Deputy of the Russian State Duma and member of the Communist Party, causing protests and clashes between protesters and the police] on opponents and unspecified foreign forces, rather than the ruling party's actions. Moreover, he claimed that during the 2020 Parliamentary elections, a boycott of the Parliament by the opposition in 2021, the EU not granting Georgia membership candidate status in 2022, and the protests against the Russian-style foreign agents law in March 2023, were all artificially caused by foreign forces to start revolutions.
- The Prime Minister also <u>stated</u> that the reason why the ruling party cannot reach an agreement against those opposing "the law on transparency of foreign influence" is that while the Georgian Dream wants transparency, some want to benefit from causing chaos in Georgia "Some want a Maidan here, we do not. Some want a second front, we do not". As he asserted, Ukraine's example shows what letting others benefit from chaos may cause and that a "Georgian Maidan" and "Ukrainization" will have severe consequences for Georgia.
- Kobakhidze "<u>clarified</u>" that when the ruling party speaks about the "Global War Party" it does not refer to Georgia's Western partners. However, **the "Global War Party" does** have serious influence on the West, and the US and the EU require "deoligarchization" to free themselves from it.





- Kobakhidze <u>called</u> the Commander-in-Chief of the Georgian Armed Forces, President Salome Zourabichvili, a traitor during his speech at the swear-in ceremony of soldiers on May 26th, Georgia's independence day. He also underlined that Georgia went through three wars in the 1990s, lost its independence, and was governed by agents of foreign powers from 2004-to 2012, and due to treasonous acts of Georgian politicians, lost 20% of its territories. Since 2012, there have been many attempts to undermine Georgia's sovereignty and independence, and despite existential threats and multiple treasonous acts, including by the President, the Georgian Dream managed to maintain peace.
- General Secretary of the Georgian Dream and Mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze <u>stated</u> that if anyone wants to open a second front, "they [the West] have the Baltics and can open a second front". In another instance, Kaladze <u>referred</u> to an out of context video spread by pro-governmental propaganda outlets, which shows an interview of a famous actor and active participant of the protests, where she says she is jealous of Ukraine because they were able to free themselves from Yanukovych's pro-Russian regime. Propaganda sources portrayed the interview as if the actor was jealous of the war in Ukraine and wanted the same to happen in Georgia. "It is impossible for a sane person to be jealous of what is happening in Ukraine. We will certainly do our best to maintain peace. There is no alternative to this", asserted Kaladze.
- Kaladze <u>repeated</u> the second front conspiracy in another statement, arguing that the demand from Western partners to join the sanctions against Russia would decimate the Georgian economy. According to him, there were open calls for Georgia to open a second front, which would cause hell to break loose in Georgia.
- In recent years, **non-governmental organizations have directly attempted to organize a revolution in the country**, Kaladze <u>claimed</u>, adding that these non-governmental organizations are financed by various Western organizations and states. "Therefore, we have taken a step to stop it all!", concluded the Mayor.

Venice Commission strongly recommends repealing the Russian-style foreign agents law, Georgian Dream calls it absurd and biased

"The Venice Commission strongly recommends repealing the Law in its current form, as its fundamental flaws will involve significant negative consequences for the freedoms of association and expression, the right to privacy, the right to participate in public affairs as well as the prohibition of discrimination. Ultimately, this will affect open, informed public debate,

pluralism and democracy", states the Venice Commission's <u>assessment</u> of the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence".

"I just felt uncomfortable as a jurist when I read this document, the Venice Commission showed such a weak face with this document", <u>said</u> Prime Minister Kobakhidze, who called the assessment absurd and filled with lies without any argumentation, despite the document presenting an analysis of each provision of the law.

As a response to the Venice Commission's assessment, the Georgian Dream MP, Salome Kurasbediani <u>voiced</u> the ruling party's position:

- The conclusion of the Venice Commission confirmed there are no arguments against the law. There are many unsubstantiated and contradictory legal arguments in the conclusion, as well as a number of gross distortions of facts, which further encourage the radicalization of specific groups. Instead of issuing a professional judgment, the Venice Commission's platform was used to make biased political assessments.
- According to the ruling party, the very **first paragraph of the conclusion contains false information:** in particular, it is noted that the final text of the law with the additional amendments was not immediately made public, in fact, it was announced verbatim at the plenary session of the Parliament and which was broadcasted live. **In reality, the amendments were published together with the relevant files of the third hearing and were not reflected in the note sheet provided for** <u>the second reading</u>. Notably, the third hearing of the Legal Issues Committee only lasted 67 seconds while the opposition MPs were hindered from attending therefore it was impossible to discuss the amendment.
- The Venice Commission states that the law was adopted in a short period of time, and it seems that the interested parties did not have the opportunity to participate in its review. The Georgian Dream MP claimed that discussion of the draft law was carried out in a standard procedure for several weeks, during committee hearings and plenary sessions, where the radical opposition was fully represented. Non-governmental organizations also actively participated in the discussion. While the law was, in fact, not adopted with an accelerated procedure, it was passed within a month while interested groups, stakeholders, Georgia's international partners, and those affected by the law were disregarded.
- Kurasbediani continued that the conclusion of the Venice Commission is saturated with biased assessments, as if the protests were completely peaceful, when numerous facts of attacks on law enforcement officers, attempts to storm the Parliament building, violent blocking of entrances and damage to property were broadcasted live.
- The Venice Commission notes that the current legislation of Georgia already provides for the obligation to register the finances of non-governmental organizations and submit reports. Kurasbediani said that all current laws in Georgia do not oblige NGOs to fill out financial declarations and ensure the transparency of their finances; **Therefore, the**





Commission's indication that the finances received by NGOs are already transparent is not true. In reality, financial transparency is ensured by the Law on Facilitating the Prevention of Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism, which does, in fact, set out the obligation for accountable persons, financial institutions, auditing firms, lawyers, notaries, and public institutions to carry out verification of clients, determine the basis and goals of relevant operations, and implement other preventive measures; <u>The Revenue Service</u> is informed about transactions and funds managed by NGOs and contains information detailing projects, the implementing organizations, and its commencement and conclusion dates. In general, according to the <u>Tax Code of Georgia</u> organizations have to submit monthly tax returns to the Revenue Service, including the declaration of income. Moreover, NGOs publicly <u>disclose</u> their finances and implemented projects on their websites.

The Venice Commission also states that the Georgian law on transparency contains similarities with Russian, Hungarian, and Kyrgyz laws. According to the Georgian Dream, only three lines are devoted to this issue in the Venice Commission's document. "Such a manipulative approach, the commission is an attempt to stigmatize the Georgian law!", concluded Kurasbediani.

Georgian Dream responds to possible US sanctions

On May 23rd, US Rep. Joe Wilson introduced the "Mobilizing and Enhancing Georgia's Options for Building Accountability, Resilience, and Independence Act" or <u>"MEGOBARI Act"</u> [Megobari means "Friend" in Georgian] in the United States House of Representatives. It envisions imposing sanctions on Georgian officials who undermine the country's democracy and requires relevant US government agencies to report to Congress on issues of improper influence, sanctions evasion, and Russian intelligence assets in Georgia. The act also includes a provision about enhancing bilateral relations and support. Upon certification of significant democratic progress in Georgia, the Act outlines further US assistance, including: Negotiating a more preferential trade agreement with Georgia; Enhancing people-to-people exchanges and visa simplification; Developing an economic and modernization package; Providing security and defense support to counter Russian aggression.

"The current Georgian Government has increasingly and regrettably embraced a policy of accommodation with the Russian Federation as an aspect of its increasingly illiberal turn, and has openly attacked the United States and other western democracy promotion organizations as well as local and international civil society while embracing increased ties with Russia in particular, as well as China and other authoritarian governments, in defiance of its own



preexisting foreign and security policies as reflected in its constitution and longstanding public sentiments," the <u>bill</u> reads.

The political council of the Georgian Dream <u>responded</u> with an open letter. Here are some of the main points:

- In recent years, such draft laws on Georgia have already been introduced in Congress, but in the end, none of them saw the light of day. The government of Georgia is not playing. The ruling party is passing "the NGO transparency law" because there is no other way to maintain peace in the country. Since 2020, NGOs have attempted twice to organize a revolution, and the government cannot wait for the third attempt. "We cannot trade the country's sovereignty under any circumstances," reads the statement.
- The US should prove that it is a strategic partner of Georgia with concrete steps, in particular, it should grant visa liberalization to the citizens of Georgia and sign a free trade agreement without any conditions. As it is clear from the bill, the US could have done this before, however, it showed an indifferent attitude towards Georgia and the Georgian people; The US could invest money in the Georgian economy. Last time it did in 2009-2011, when the Saakashvili regime needed to save itself from economic collapse; The US could ensure a change in the NGOs' behavior, in particular, by ending their policy of not recognizing the legitimacy of the Georgian government and revolutionary plans; The US should stop using the EU topic as an instrument to blackmail Georgia, and negotiations with Georgia should be opened by the end of the year.
- If they do all this, there will be no need for the "NGO transparency law". However, if NGOs do not stop their attempts to start a revolution, attacking the Orthodox Church, supporting religious extremism, LGBT propaganda, drug propaganda, trying to undermine state institutions, and creating obstacles for economic projects, and if a number of American politicians and officials continue attacking Georgia, the Georgian Dream will view "the law on transparency" as necessary for protecting Georgia's sovereignty.
- According to the leader of the Parliamentary majority, Mamuka Mdinaradze, the "MEGOBARI Act" is solely an initiative of one Congressman and does not represent the position of the US. It also includes threats of sanctions and aims to rekindle the extinguished protests against the law. Mdinaradze argued that strategic partnership means steps towards visa-free travel, free economic relations, and direct flights should be taken without any threats, and offering to give up independence in return is unacceptable.
- Georgian Dream MP Irakli Kadagishvili <u>stated</u> that nothing prevented the US from giving Georgia the assistance packages included in the "MEGOBARI Act" before. Now, discussing these issues with a tone of threats is an attempt to cause confrontation in Georgia.





• Such important decisions are not made by one congressman, <u>argued</u> Guram Matcharashvili, a member of the "People's Power" movement, the Georgian Dream's radical anti-Western wing. If the US really wants a partnership with Georgia, the Georgian law should not be baptized as Russian, the Georgian society should not be told that atheism is better than religion, that LGBT propaganda is equal to modernization, and that traditions should be abandoned.

Days after the Georgian Dream claimed that a draft law initiated by one congressman should not be taken seriously, US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken <u>announced</u> a Visa Restriction Policy for Undermining Democracy in Georgia and Comprehensive Review of All U.S.-Georgia Cooperation. "Anyone who undermines democratic processes or institutions in Georgia including in the lead-up to, during, and following Georgia's October 2024 elections — may be found ineligible for U.S. visas under this policy and precluded from travel to the United States. Immediate family members of such persons may also be subject to these restrictions", stated Secretary Blinken

The Georgian Dream issued another <u>letter</u> in response:

- Secretary Blinken's statement is a continuation of the **anti-Georgian rhetoric** voiced since 2012 and which was especially intensified in 2021-2022, the ruling party claims. Threatening visa restrictions is nothing but a crude attempt to limit Georgia's independence and sovereignty. This is an unprecedented event in the history of world politics, when an official representative of one country threatens a lawmaker of another country with sanctions simply because they voted for a transparency law.
- The ruling party continued to assert that no one has been able to present any argument against the "law on transparency of foreign influence", and that similar laws operate in a much stricter form in the US, France, and many other countries, but sanctions were never imposed upon them.
- Extending sanctions to family members, including children, is a form of sanctioning that not only has Europe refused to use since the 1940s, but it has not even been used by the Soviet Union since the 1960s. However, after relevant forces used the example of the terrorist attack on the Slovakian Prime Minister in a conversation with the Georgian Prime Minister through one of the European commissioners, and thus threatened the highest official of the Georgian government with the loss of life, such sanctions are neither unexpected nor surprising.



- Similar visa restrictions were imposed on Georgian Judges by Secretary Blinken several months ago without any justifications. Despite that, the Georgian judicial system continues to function properly, and this decision did not affect the independence of this institution.
- Kakha Kaladze stated that it is unclear why sanctions are even considered when the parliament, elected by the majority of the country's population, passed a law that deals with one thing only transparency. **"When you factor that in, turns out we are not partners, not friends, we are enemies",** said the Mayor of Tbilisi, adding that the US's actions are very bad, because the population and the ruling party consider the US to be a friend.
- Mamuka Mdinaradze <u>assessed</u> the announcement on visa restrictions as a continuation of threats against Georgia so that quits making decisions independently. Despite spending millions on creating an agent network, the opposition is weak and depends on the actions of foreign powers.
- Georgian Dream MP Irakli Kadagishvili <u>said</u> that if someone presented a fair and constructive opinion on the law, the ruling party is ready to sit down and discuss, but no one has presented arguments so far because nobody wants to talk to Georgia as a sovereign state. Therefore, the ruling party has two choices either give up and put Georgia under neo-colonial rule or protect sovereignty and maintain the right to adopt a law that almost half the world already adopted.
- "If I, the father of five children, should make a decision of maintaining dignity in my country, protecting family sanctity and protecting centuries-old Georgian traditions at the cost of not going to some other country, then I am ashamed of that country who put me in front of this dilemma!" <u>wrote</u> Levan Mgaloblishvili, a Georgian Dream MP, on his personal Facebook page
- A member of the "People's Power" movement, the Georgian Dream's radical anti-Western wing, Sozar Subari, <u>issued</u> an open letter to US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken. In it, he accuses Secretary Blinken of attacking Georgia and acting against the will of the Georgian people, including by supporting "an aggressive minority" against the majority of the population and attempting to artificially change the Georgian Dream government with NGOs and political parties that do not have the Georgian public support. According to Subari, nothing is unexpected from a senior official who is in the vanguard of LGBT propaganda, but fortunately, criticism of the Georgian law and the spread of pseudo-liberal ideology is unacceptable to Georgia. "Remember well that in our country a man is a man, and a woman is a woman, the mother is called mother, and father is called a father, and no propaganda can change that", reads the statement.





• Another member of the "People's Power" movement, Dimitri Khundadze <u>asserted</u> that the US is promising visa-liberalization for the people standing in the street to exacerbate the protests while threatening sanctions on government representatives because of transparency. He suggested that the US should give Georgia visa-liberalization, a free trade agreement and other assistance packages but **not in exchange for revolution, war, obedience and giving up values**.

Pro-Kremlin groups repeat Georgian Dream's narratives about the Russian-style foreign agents law

- A member of Alt Info <u>claimed</u> that the young people protesting do not know the contents of the law and only have a surface-level understanding of it, which is utilized by the West to organize protests. The same narrative was spread by the host of a pro-Russian Sezoni TV broadcast, Nikoloz Mzhavanadze, who <u>belittled</u> the Georgian youth and pointed at their lack of education. According to him, this is due to the fact that the new generation in Georgia was "created by the US, who dismantled the education system". Prime Minister Kobakhidze's "letter to the "honest youth" was also written in the same spirit, <u>arguing</u> that the youth was misled, unintelligent and easily manipulated.
- One of the hosts on Alt Info's broadcasts, Giorgi Dzvelaia repeated the Georgian Dream's narrative that the US law (FARA) is much stricter than the law passed by the Georgian Parliament and the fact that US officials refer to it as a deviation from the democratic path points to double standards. Another propagandist on Sezoni TV shared the same thoughts and spread disinformation about France, the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Israel having a similar law in place.
- In another instance, the same propagandist <u>adopted</u> the ruling party's warmongering narrative about **"if pro-Westerners and NGOs start a revolution, there will be no EU, there will only be Bakhmut and Avdiivka** [meaning Georgia will be destroyed by war]. Furthermore, he argued that Georgia should not integrate with the EU when its official is directly threatening the Georgian Prime Minister.
- A guest on Alt Info <u>asserted</u> that the law was labeled as pro-Russian as it goes against the West's interests, not because it is flawed. Furthermore, he stated that partnership with the West never brought anything beneficial to Georgia and, on the contrary, resulted in the loss of territories and wars.

- A propagandist <u>insisted</u> that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, **the West deployed agents in former members of the Soviet Union under the guise of NGOs**, which in reality serve foreign intelligence services and provide them with illegal and confidential information.
- A guest on Sezoni TV <u>spread</u> a conspiracy about **US and EU intelligence services organizing, training, mobilizing, and planning the protests** against the law to undermine the government, which is proven by the fact that young people gather every day to protest. According to him, if an outside force is not involved, the Georgian youth does not have the discipline or skills to mobilize itself.
- In an interview with "GeWorld" a pro-Russian propagandist <u>assessed</u> the passing of the law as Georgia's awakening and fight for sovereignty. NGOs are one of the main instruments for the EU and the US to spread their influence, but now, the hegemon that dictated what Georgia should do is losing its power.
- Another article on "GeWorld" <u>shared</u> the Georgian Dream's narrative about the EU threatening the Georgian Prime Minister's life. According to him, even though Slovakia is a member of the EU and NATO, its leader was still attacked because he does not blindly do what he is told. "Imagine what they will do to Georgia…" the article concludes.

Pro-Kremlin groups respond to the US statement on sanctions with conspiracies and disinformation

- Nikoloz Mzhavanadze <u>stated</u> that the "MEGOBARI Act" is a continuation of the US's "sticks and carrots" policy. On the one hand, **it threatens sanctions and incites a revolution**, and on the other hand, it promises visa-liberalization and free trade if Georgia becomes obedient, a vassal of the US.
- A member of Alt Info <u>argued</u> that despite Ukraine being an ally of the US and receiving unprecedented assistance packages, it is on the verge of complete destruction. Hence, **being an ally of the US is not beneficial.**
- Promises of providing military assistance are cynical because **the US is trying to open a second front in Georgia**, Alt Info hosts <u>argued</u>.
- An Alt Info propagandist <u>claimed</u> that **the US has not only lost its global influence but also resorted to using terror to influence opponents due to its diminishing power**. He further cited the 'assassination' of the Iranian president and the attack on Slovakia's prime minister as evidence of this strategy. According to him, this is the only way left for the US and Europe to exert any influence on their opponents.





- Pro-Russian propagandist and host of Sezoni TV, Nikoloz Mzhavanadze, argued that all Western politicians are being controlled by the US. According to him, the US determines the conclusions of the Venice Commission and the statements made by European leaders. Mzhavanadze suggested that if these leaders do not act according to the US directions, they will be attacked, as seen in the cases of the Prime Minister of Slovakia, Orban, Erdogan, and the "assassinated" Iranian President.
- A guest on Alt Info's broadcast <u>stated</u> that **the threats posed by the US target the Georgian people, not the Georgian Dream.**
- A frequent guest on Sezoni TV's broadcast <u>claimed</u> that the US does not recognize the hundreds of thousands of people who took part in the May 17th march [a holiday dedicated to the Day of Family Purity and Respect for Parents] as Georgians. According to her, the US only acknowledges the 20,000 people who were paid to participate in the protests [against the so-called "Russian law"] and who waved the American flag as Georgians.
- According to another propagandist, those supporting efforts to cause instability and overthrow the government should be arrested, and their financial sources must be blocked. He further proposed, if necessary, recalling the Georgian ambassador from the US and shutting down the US embassy in Georgia, which he describes as a center of terrorism and unrest in Georgia.

Other anti-Western narratives spread by pro-Kremlin groups

- <u>According</u> to Edisher Gvenetadze, a guest on pro-Russian Sezoni TV, whose "expert opinions" are also spread by the pro-governmental news channel POSTV, stated that **the** West perceives Georgia as a colony and Georgia is, in fact, a Western colony.
- One of the hosts of Alt Info's broadcast, Aleksandre Palavandishvili <u>stated</u> that the West does not mind sanctioning Georgia, but it does mind that Georgia is no longer acting as a slave **the West wants Georgia to start a war**. He claims that the West is upset because, in a country where they made significant financial investments, they have to issue sanctions to continue governing Georgia.



- A guest of Alt info <u>claimed</u> that **the 'Global War Party' does exist** and confronting it without backing from other countries is impossible.
- As Nikoloz Mzhavanadze, pro-Russian propagandist host of Sezoni TV <u>contends</u>, the EU is ten times worse than the Soviet Union, since, **despite not being a member of the EU**, **it is blackmailing Georgia and if Georgia were to join the union, it would completely lose independence**.
- A guest on Alt Info <u>contended</u> that the US and the EU will soon announce Georgia's ruling party as a dictatorship, and **the next step will be to deploy Western military forces in Georgia**.
- According to Guram Palavandishvili, a prominent pro-Russian propagandist who often appears on Alt Info's broadcasts, the West will declare the 2024 Parliamentary elections as rigged and incite a revolution. According to the narrative, the West is cautious because if it deploys the Georgian Legion, now fighting in Ukraine, to Georgia, Russia will do the same, and the West will lose all chance of advancing its interests.
- According to a host of Alt-Info's broadcasts, whoever governs the US does not matter as Washington will always try to create problems for Russia, China, and Iran far away from American soil to weaken them, and Georgia is part of that plan, evidenced by the 2008 August war.
- Another guest on Sezoni TV propagated that the West organized the genocide of the Georgian people through the Saakashvili government. It also destroyed the Georgian economy, industry, agriculture, education, and future generations. "God willing, the government is warming relations with Russia and is against the LGBT community... The European path is destructive for Georgia", he argued.