

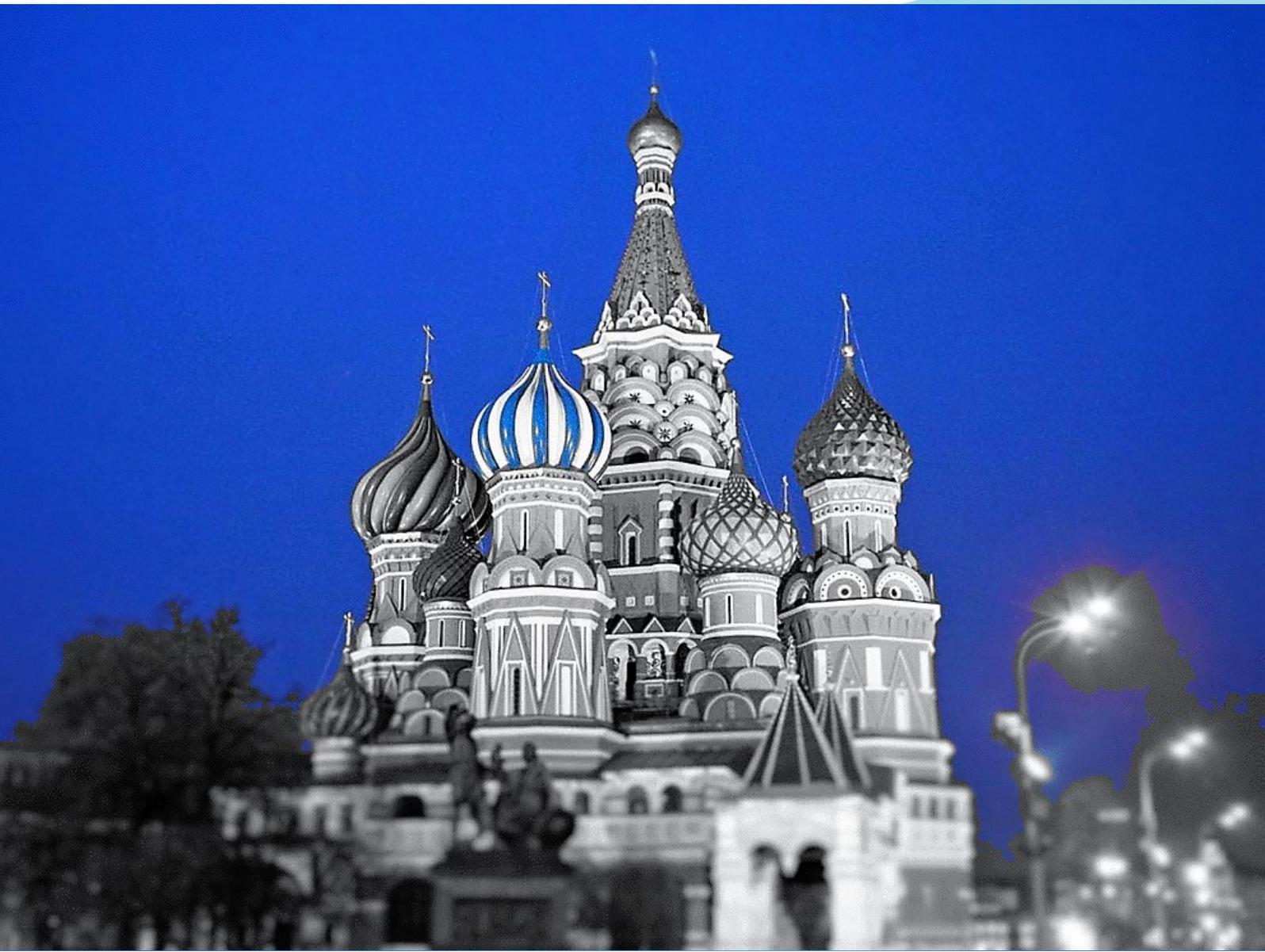
INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF  
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ინფორმაციის თავისუფლების  
განვითარების ინსტიტუტი

**Policy Paper**  
22 August, 2016

**Kremlin's Information War:  
Why Georgia Should Develop State Policy  
on Countering Propaganda**





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### Goals and Characteristics of Kremlin Propaganda

### Kremlin Propaganda Channels in Georgia

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Policy Paper was  
prepared by:

Levan Avalishvili  
Giorgi Lomtadze  
Alexander Kevkhishvili

Peer-Reviewer:

Nodar Tangiashvili

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## List of Acronyms

<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EI-LAT</b>	European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi
<b>GNCC</b>	Georgian National Communications Commission
<b>GPB</b>	Georgian Public Broadcaster
<b>GRASS</b>	Georgia's Reforms Associates
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>MDF</b>	Media Development Foundation
<b>NDI</b>	National Democratic Institute
<b>OPT</b>	Russian TV Channel 1
<b>NNLE</b>	Non-entrepreneurial (Non-commercial) Legal Entity
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>SSSG</b>	State Security Service of Georgia

## Abstract

The Russian Federation has been ramping up its use of propaganda as an effective weapon for achieving its political goals in foreign countries. Georgia is no exception. Even though Kremlin has a long history of employing propaganda to secure its interests, its sophistication and scale have substantially increased in recent years. As western countries are already working on countermeasures, the Georgian government must also recognize this growing problem and develop its own policy.

## Introduction

This policy paper reviews the characteristics of Kremlin propaganda in Georgia, its results, main messages and their impact on Georgian society, distributors of Kremlin propaganda, and the Georgian government's current approach to this problem.

The document aims to highlight the risks and challenges that accompany Kremlin information war and the necessity to develop and implement a state policy to counter it.

The policy paper contains recommendations on specific measures the Georgian government can take to counter the Kremlin's information war.

### Context: Information as a Weapon

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the influence of the Russian Federation on post-Soviet countries gradually weakened. After the so-called 'Color Revolutions', three countries in Russia's 'near abroad' – Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova – started striving towards the European and North Atlantic space.<sup>1</sup>

The EU and NATO foreign policy of promoting democracy in post-Soviet states and creating a 'circle of friends' <sup>2</sup> around Europe is perceived by the Kremlin as a direct threat to its geopolitical interests.

In order to strengthen its positions, the Kremlin is engaged in a hybrid war. In addition to military force, it makes active use of economic, financial, political and informational tools as weapons for achieving its geopolitical goals. Among these tools are information war and propaganda, which

have become a priority for the Kremlin in recent years.<sup>3</sup>

The importance of information war is recognized at the highest level of government in the Russian Federation:

1. On February 27, 2013, the newspaper "Военно-промышленный курьер" published an article by the Chief of General Staff of Russian Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov, which outlines the various means of achieving Kremlin's geopolitical goals. Often referred to as 'The Gerasimov Doctrine', the article states that information and psychological war hold the most importance in modern warfare.<sup>4</sup>
2. Information war holds a central role in the Russian military doctrine as well, according to which, the Kremlin uses information war to pursue its interests in foreign countries.<sup>5</sup>

The use of information war by the Kremlin is not a new phenomenon and is based on the experience accumulated and methods developed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

However, unlike Soviet propaganda, information operations employed by the Kremlin are characterized by an unprecedented scale and active use of modern technology.<sup>6</sup>

In order to spread its propaganda, the Kremlin employs a wide network of distributors, which includes politicians, research institutes, journalists, non-governmental organizations, business and social groups both in Russia and in target countries.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M. Laruelle, "The Russian World: Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination", *Center of Global Interests*, May 2015.

<sup>2</sup> R. Prodi, "A Wider Europe - A Proximity Policy as the key to stability", *European Commission (EC)*, Speech / 02/619, 5-6 December 2002.

<sup>3</sup> E. Lucas & P. Pomeranzev, "Winning the Information war: Techniques and Counter-Strategies to Russian Propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe", *Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)*, August 2016, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> А. Герасимов, "Военно-промышленный курьер", № 8 (476), 27 февраля - 5 марта 2013, p. 2, [http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK\\_08\\_476.pdf](http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> E. Lucas & P. Pomeranzev, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> V. Vojtíšková et. al, "The Bear in Sheep's Clothing: Russia's Government-Funded Organisations in the EU", *Wilfred Martens Centre for European Studies (Martens Centre)*, July 2016, p. 11.

The methods of distributing propaganda are also diverse (television, radio, print media, online media, social networks). Especially noteworthy are the innovative methods of propagating information.

Western nations have gradually become aware of the threat posed by the information war and have begun to react to the information operations directed at them.

The reality and the threat of information war became especially evident in 2014, when the Russian Federation conducted large scale information operations against Ukraine in addition to its open and covert military actions.<sup>8</sup>

Propaganda is an important component of the Kremlin information war.<sup>9</sup> In Georgia, the Kremlin propaganda picked up its pace in 2013 when a number of internet based TV channels, print publications, websites, non-governmental organizations and political groups started distributing anti-Western messages.

## Why is Propaganda a Problem

Considering the increase in scale over the past few years, Kremlin information war must be considered a new problem that requires new solutions. The main countries and institutions targeted by the Kremlin have already come to this conclusion. Currently, they are working on ways to counter Kremlin propaganda and disinformation.

Georgia – a country that is especially vulnerable to influence from Russia – must not delay its recognition of this growing danger and must develop a strategy for countering propaganda. If the Georgian government fails to resist Kremlin propaganda:

1. Public support in Georgia towards European and Euro-Atlantic

integration will weaken and the number of people supporting rapprochement with Russia will increase. This will endanger Georgia's security and Euro-Atlantic integration.

2. A country with hostile intentions towards Georgia will have the ability to influence its political agenda. This will endanger Georgia's sovereignty.
3. As a result of disinformation Georgian voters will become less informed, preventing them from making decisions based on facts. In this way, a foreign country will weaken democracy in Georgia and be able to affect the outcome of elections. This will also decrease public trust in government and political institutions, reducing their legitimacy.
4. Xenophobia and hatred (ethnic and religious) will increase, civic unity will weaken and social and political integration of ethnic minorities will become more difficult.

The sheer scale of Kremlin information war leaves only the government with enough tools and resources to offer effective resistance.

This policy paper offers recommendations on specific measures the Georgian government can take to counter the Kremlin information war.

## Methodology and Limitations

The facts, observations and reasoning presented in this policy paper are all based on the analysis of articles and research documents on Kremlin propaganda prepared by various research institutions, and international and local organizations.

The policy paper also relies on publicly available official documents,

<sup>8</sup> O. Lutsevych, "Agents of the Russian World: Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood", *Chatam House*, April 2016, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> M. Laurelle, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

quantitative surveys and public opinion polls.

The document has the following limitations:

1. It is difficult to say that any particular message is a product of propaganda. Measuring propaganda is also virtually impossible. For this reason, the authors of this paper consider all messages that coincide with the Kremlin ideology to be direct or indirect manifestations of propaganda.
2. An individual or a group of individuals may be a distributor of propaganda either directly or indirectly. Without having information about the financial ties to the Kremlin, it is impossible to know the real motives. Therefore, in most cases, it is difficult to say for sure whether or not an individual or an organization is a direct distributor of Kremlin propaganda.
3. Showing the direct result of propaganda is also difficult, since it is impossible to determine the exact number of people and the degree to which they were affected by a propaganda message. Nevertheless, conclusions can still be made by looking at the intensity of propaganda and changes in public opinion.

## Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this policy paper, it is necessary to separate the concepts of information war and propaganda.

## Information War

Information war is defined differently in the West and in Russia. The United States considers information war to be

a military mechanism that includes digital, cyber and psychological operations. The goal of information warfare is to demoralize an opponent by controlling or influencing sources of information.<sup>10</sup>

Information war holds a central place in the Russian military doctrine, which was updated in December 2014. According to this document, modern warfare is characterized by:

*“An integrated use of military force, political, economic, informational and other non-military measures.”<sup>11</sup>*

The difference between these two approaches is that, while the United States reserves using methods of information warfare for military operations, the Russia approach is to use information warfare in time of peace parallel with political and economic pressure.

## Propaganda

Propaganda is part of information warfare. In its essence, propaganda is not a negative phenomenon. This term refers to influencing public opinion on a certain issue, person or a group of people, which can be positive or negative.<sup>12</sup> According to a well-known propaganda researcher Edward Bernays, propaganda is a:

*“Consistent, enduring effort to create and shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or group.”<sup>13</sup>*

Propaganda can be negative when it promotes violence, xenophobia, racism, calls for war or incites conflict. It can also be negative when it tries to influence public opinion based on false

<sup>10</sup> I. R. Porche et al., “Redefining Information Warfare Boundaries for an Army in a Wireless World”, Santa Monica; CA: RAND Corporation; 2013, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> “Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, Russian Security Council, 19 December 2014.

<sup>12</sup> “Propaganda and Freedom of Media”, Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), non-paper of the OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of Media, Vienna, 2015, p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> E. Bernays, “Propaganda”, New York: Liveright, 1928, p. 25.

and fake information. The latter is the context through which this policy paper analyzes Kremlin propaganda in Georgia.

## Goals and Characteristics of Kremlin Propaganda

### General Characteristics of Kremlin Propaganda

Over the past several years Kremlin propaganda has become a subject of study of various international research organizations.<sup>14</sup> This research is aimed at identifying the basic characteristics of Kremlin propaganda and developing effective counter mechanisms.

Based on existing research, Kremlin propaganda is characterized by the following, regardless of the target country:

- **Volume and multiple channels of distribution** – Kremlin propaganda is being created in different formats (text, audio, video, photo) and is being distributed through a variety of channels - internet, social media, radio, television, print media, public meetings and direct communication.
- **Disregard of objective reality** – Kremlin propaganda is based on fabricated events, distortion of facts or their interpretation, which involves taking facts or events out of context and covering them in the light favorable for the Kremlin.
- **Frequency, perpetuity and repetition** – Kremlin propaganda is being created rapidly and continuously. In many cases, old misinformation is being circulated anew, in order to ensure that certain issues important to the Kremlin remain relevant.

- **Sowing of confusion** – rather than trying to present lies as truth, Kremlin propaganda aims to confuse its recipients by distorting facts, so that they are no longer able to see the real picture amidst the contradictory information.
- **Rejection of criticism** – Kremlin propaganda rejects all criticism aimed at the Russian Federation and portrays it as fabricated lies that are based on Western double standards.

In addition to these general characteristics, Kremlin propagandists also take into account the specifics of the target country when determining their thematic directions.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the content of Kremlin propaganda varies based on the target country.

### Goals of Kremlin Propaganda in Georgia

Kremlin propaganda has several goals in Georgia:

1. **Incite anti-Western sentiments in Georgia.** By discrediting Western institutions (such as the EU and NATO) and states the Kremlin is trying to disparage the values associated with them - democracy, rule of law, human rights, etc.
2. **Disrupt Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspiration.**
3. **Popularize Kremlin's global policy.**
4. **Instill confusion, fear and hatred among the population by propagating conspiracy theories, half-truths and false information.**

<sup>14</sup> For more information on Kremlin propaganda see - E. Lucas & B. Nimmo, "Information Warfare: What Is It and How to Win It?", CEPA, CEPA Infowar Paper No. 1, November 2015 <http://cepa.org/sites/default/files/Infowar%20Report.pdf>; and C. Paul & M. Matthews, "The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model:

Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It", RAND Corporation, 2016, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html>.

<sup>15</sup> E. Lucas & B. Nimmo, "Information Warfare: What Is It and How to Win It?", CEPA, CEPA Infowar Paper No. 1, November 2015, p. 6.

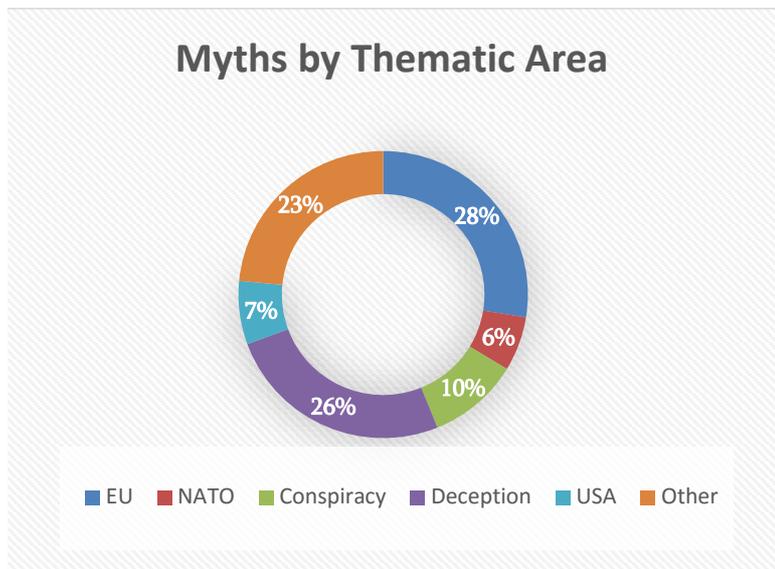
## Main Messages of Kremlin Propaganda in Georgia

The main thematic directions of Kremlin propaganda in Georgia include:<sup>16</sup>

- **Discrediting Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration** – presenting the process of integration with the EU in a negative light; propagating false information about NATO, presenting Georgia's integration with NATO as hopeless and as a threat to restoration of territorial integrity.
- **Disparaging Western values** – portraying them as incompatible with Georgian culture and traditions. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the homophobic nature of Kremlin propaganda. In addition, the Kremlin is trying to promote the shared historic and cultural characteristics of Russia and Georgia (e.g. Orthodox Christianity) and presenting them as a counterbalance to Western values.
- **Inciting negative attitudes towards Georgia's strategic partners** – most notably the United States and Turkey. Kremlin propagandists portray US as the source of global destabilization, which views Georgia not as a strategic partner, but a means of pursuing its geopolitical interests. Turkey is portrayed as a threat and as an appropriator of Georgian territories.
- **Propagating conspiracy theories** – a combination of fabricated hypotheses that portray events as being a result of a conspiracy of Western governments and institutions. For example, Kremlin propaganda claims that the US uses the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (Richard Lugar Center) in Georgia for creating biological weapons.

These thematic areas are used to create specific “myths”, which are used as a packaging for propaganda messages. Since 2014, 98 anti-West myths have been identified in Georgian media (see. Figure #1).

Figure #1 – Kremlin Generated Myths in Georgian Media



Most myths (28%) are related to the European Union, which is most likely due to the successful cooperation between the EU and Georgia.

Moreover, EU myths focus on exactly those areas (e.g. trade with the EU and benefits of visa-free travel) where Georgia has had the most success in recent years (Association Agreement, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, visa liberalization).

## Kremlin Propaganda Channels in Georgia

### Media Organizations

Media outlets are the main pillar of Kremlin propaganda in Georgia. At least one television company, several online broadcasters, newspapers and the websites employ a distinctive anti-Western message box and rely on

<sup>16</sup> The main messages and myths of Kremlin propaganda are based on the findings of a project called Myth Detector from July 15, 2014 to July 25, 2016 that is run by a Georgian non-governmental organization Media

Development Foundation (MDF). For full information, see the Myth Detector website - [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/myth\\_detector/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/myth_detector/).

Russian sources as the main source of information.<sup>17</sup> These organizations rely heavily on social networking sites, where they try to make their material go viral.<sup>18</sup>

Sputnik-Georgia is the only Russian media organization that broadcasts in the Georgian language. Sputnik itself is one of Kremlin's multimedia propaganda projects, which went global in 2014.<sup>19</sup>

In Georgia, Sputnik first illegally attempted to start radio broadcasting in November 2014, through the FM 101.4 frequency owned by R-Radio. Shortly after the start of broadcasting, the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) fined and imposed sanctions on R-Radio.<sup>20</sup>

After this incident, Sputnik-Georgia has been operating exclusively online. Also noteworthy was the failed attempt of a major Russian TV station - OPT to start broadcasting in Georgia. On November 26, 2015, the GNCC fined a Georgian company RBJ for GEL 2,500 and banned its broadcasting for violating regulations when re-broadcasting ORT on Georgian territory.<sup>21</sup>

Earlier, in June 2015, the same company received a warning from the GNCC for re-broadcasting OPT programs in Russian.<sup>22</sup> After receiving the warning, RBJ translated ORT entertainment programs into Georgian and started airing them on the TV channel Stereo + with the OPT logo.<sup>23</sup>

## Russian Media on Georgian Television

Public surveys show that television is the main source of information for most Georgians. According to the 2016 survey by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), television is the primary source of information about politics and news for 77% of Georgians.<sup>24</sup>

Surveys also show that 47% of Georgian TV audience also watches foreign language channels,<sup>25</sup> the most popular of which are Russian TV channels (HTB, ORT and RTR).<sup>26</sup>

Kremlin propaganda could potentially influence about a fifth of the Georgian TV audience, since, according to the June 2016 NDI survey, 23% of Georgia's TV audience receives information about politics and news from foreign TV channels,<sup>27</sup> most of which are Russian.

## Non-Governmental Organizations

Kremlin propaganda also relies on a newly established network of non-governmental organizations (NGO), such as the "Eurasian Institute" and the "Eurasian Choice".

These organizations are characterized by anti-Western rhetoric and the fact that their analytical papers and articles are based on Russian sources. According to the Georgian Public Registry, the founders and managers of various pro-Russian NGOs are often the same people. These connections are also reflected on their websites. The pro-Russian NGOs also have links with anti-western media organizations:

<sup>17</sup> T. Kintsurashvili, "Anti-Western Propaganda: Media Monitoring Report 2014-2015", *MDF*, Tbilisi, 2015, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> For more information about the distributors of Kremlin propaganda see: T. Kintsurashvili, "Anti-Western Propaganda: Media Monitoring Report 2014-2015", *MDF*, Tbilisi, 2015; and N. Dzelishvili & T. Kupreishvili, "Russian Influence on Georgian Non-Governmental Organizations and Media", [www.damoukidebloba.com](http://www.damoukidebloba.com), Tbilisi, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> E. Lucas & B. Nimmo, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> "Sputnik-Georgia", *MDF*, accessed on 13 June 2016,

<http://mediameter.ge/ge/media-profiles/sputniki-sakartvelo>.

<sup>21</sup> On Imposing Administrative Penalty on Company RBJ, *Georgian National Communications Commission*, Decision N734/18, 16 December 2015.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> "Threats of Russia's Hard and Soft Power in Georgia", *European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi (EI-LAT)*, Tbilisi, January 2016, p.16.

<sup>24</sup> "Public Attitudes in Georgia: June 2016", *National Democratic Institute (NDI)*, June 2016, p. 70.

<sup>25</sup> D. Kokoshvili, "Popularity and Mission of Russian TV Channels in Georgia", *netgazeti.ge*, 29 March 2016, accessed on 14 June 2016, <http://netgazeti.ge/life/104681/>.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> "Public Attitudes in Georgia: June 2016", *NDI*, *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

- According to the 5 year interim report of the Non-Entrepreneurial (Non-Commercial) Legal Entity (NNLE) Eurasian Institute, the organization has founded NNLE Club of Young Political Scientists and People's Movement for Georgian-Russian Dialogue and Cooperation.<sup>28</sup>
- The founder of Eurasian Institute Gulbaat Rtskhiladze, together with Nana Devdariani, is the founder of NNLE Caucasian Cooperation. Nana Devdariani is also the founder of NNLE Global Research Center and NNLE People's Orthodox Movement.
- In addition to Nana Devdariani, the People's Orthodox Movement was co-founded by the owner of media holding "Georgian Times" Malkhaz Gulashvili.
- NNLE Eurasian Choice is headed by Archil Chkhoidze, who is also the board member of NNLE Erekle II Society.<sup>29</sup>

All of the above organizations are characterized by a distinct anti-Western and pro-Russian rhetoric.

None of the pro-Russian NGOs disclose information about their funding on their websites. Even though Georgian legislation does not obligate non-commercial legal entities to disclose their financial information, such complete lack of transparency still raises questions about the motives of these organizations and the possibility of them being funded by the Kremlin.

Suspicious are reinforced by the fact that several leading Russian funds list the above organizations as partners. For example, according to the website of International Eurasian Movement, an organization run by the chief ideologist of the Eurasian Union Alexander Dugin,

<sup>28</sup> "Eurasian Institute - 5 Year Interim Report", *Eurasian Institute*, Tbilisi, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> For more information see the website of the Georgian Public Registry and N. Dzelishvili & T. Kupreishvili, "Russian Influence on Georgian Non-Governmental Organizations and Media", [www.damoukidebloba.com](http://www.damoukidebloba.com), Tbilisi, 2015.

Eurasian Choice is its partner in Georgia.

Recent research suggests that pro-Russian NGOs in Georgia are being funded through both official and unofficial means (with cash). According to a Georgian NGO European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi (EI-LAT):

*"They [Georgian security officials] state that overall pro-Russian and anti-Western non-governmental organizations in Georgia receive funding between USD 500,000 and 1 million. A part of this money is given to organizations through unofficial means, often in cash... Russian state agencies, state-supported funds as well as the Russian diplomatic mission in Georgia (Russian Federation Section of the Swiss Embassy) act as donors."*<sup>30</sup>

## Political Parties

Distributors of Kremlin propaganda are present in the political spectrum as well.<sup>31</sup> A number of political parties and political figures directly or indirectly spread Kremlin propaganda. These political parties can be divided into two types:

1. Parties with openly pro-Russian agendas and that visit Moscow and meet with Russian politicians.
2. Parties that officially distance themselves from the Russian political elite and declare themselves to be pro-Georgian, pro-neutrality.

Despite these differences, both types of political parties work towards raising skepticism about Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration, by portraying it as futile. Instead, they promote Georgia's pro-Russian or neutral stance.

<sup>30</sup> EI-LAT, *op. cit.*, p.32.

<sup>31</sup> T. Kintsurashvili, "Assessment of Communication and Information Strategy and Action Plan of the Government of Georgia in the sphere of EU Integration", *MDF*, Euro Communicator Publication Series #2, Tbilisi 2015.

On several occasions, current and former Members of the Georgian Parliament have also voiced contradictory messages about Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Some of them have made openly anti-Western statements as well. These messages and statements directly or indirectly serve the goals of Kremlin propaganda.<sup>32</sup>

## Georgian Orthodox Church

Representatives of the conservative wing of the Georgian Orthodox Christian Church are actively spreading the myth about the incompatibility of Georgian traditions with Western culture. It is difficult to determine exactly how much of the church shares these messages; however, it is safe to say that the conservative wing is not a minority within the church and does not shy away from propagating the myth about Georgia's civilizational unity with Russia and ideological or moral incompatibility with the West.<sup>33</sup>

Considering the degree of influence and trust the Orthodox Church enjoys in the Georgian society,<sup>34</sup> such direct or indirect distribution of Kremlin propaganda by its representatives is a serious problem for the country.

According to the June 2016 survey by NDI, 35% of respondents stated that the political views of their priest or congregation will significantly influence their decision in the parliamentary elections.<sup>35</sup>

## Results of Kremlin Propaganda

### Changing Public Attitudes

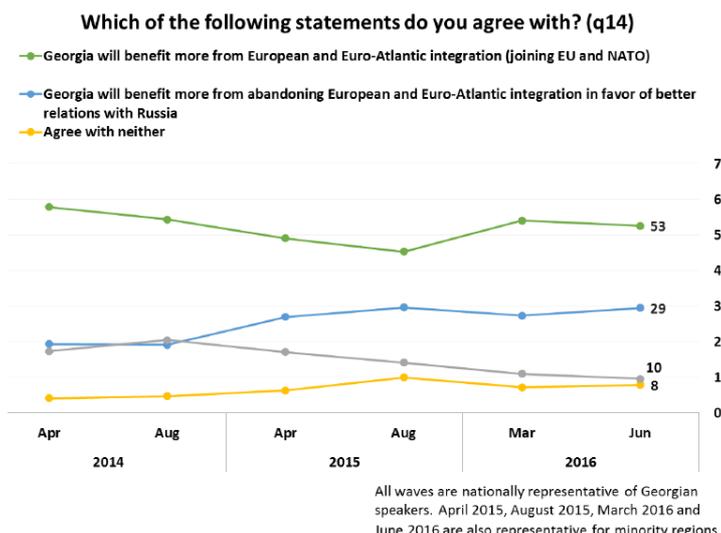
Public opinion polls suggest that pro-Western sentiments of the Georgian population are on the decline, while pro-Russian attitudes are on the rise.

These tendencies coincide with the increase in intensity of the Kremlin propaganda over the past 3 years.

Even though propaganda is not the only factor that determines public attitudes, it does affect them to some extent.

According to public opinion surveys conducted by NDI, the number of Georgians who believe that Georgia would benefit more from European and Euro-Atlantic integration declined from 59% in April 2014 to 53% in June 2016 (see. Figure #2). During the same period, the number of Georgians who favor better relations with Russia instead of Western integration increased from 20% to 29%.

**Figure #2 – Attitudes towards Euro-Atlantic Integration and Russia**



Source: Public Attitudes in Georgia: March 2016, NDI, June 2016, p. 55.

The number of supporters of joining NATO decreased from 80% in November 2013 to 64% in June 2016, while the number of Georgians opposed to joining NATO doubled from 10% in November 2013 to 22% in June 2016 (see. Figure #3).

<sup>32</sup> T. Kintsurashvili, "Assessment of Communication and Information Strategy and Action Plan of the Government of Georgia in the sphere of EU Integration", *op. cit.*, p. 23

<sup>33</sup> EI-LAT, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

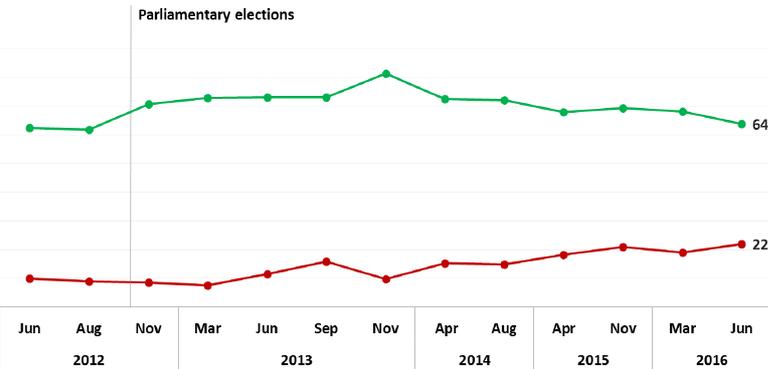
<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> "Public Attitudes in Georgia: June 2016", NDI, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

### Figure #3 – Public Attitudes towards Georgia Joining NATO

Do you approve or disapprove of Georgian government’s stated goal to join NATO? (q17)

— Approve — Disapprove



All waves are nationally representative of Georgian speakers. April 2015, August 2015, March 2016 and June 2016 are also representative for minority regions.

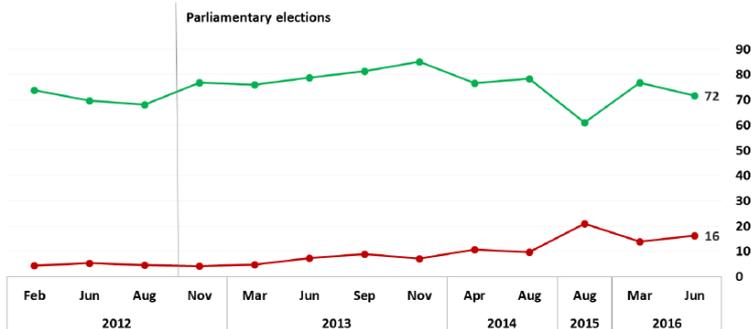
Source: Public Attitudes in Georgia: March 2016, NDI, June 2016, p. 51.

Public attitudes towards the EU have also been following the same tendency, with support decreasing and opposition increasing (see. Figure #4).

### Figure #4 - Public Attitudes towards Georgia Joining the EU

Do you approve or disapprove of Georgian government’s stated goal to join the EU? (q13)

— Approve — Disapprove



All waves are nationally representative of Georgian speakers. April 2015, August 2015, March 2016 and June 2016 are also representative for minority regions.

Source: Public Attitudes in Georgia: March 2016, NDI, June 2016, p. 51.

Finally, the 2016 NDI survey suggests that respondents who receive information from Russian TV channels (ORT and RTR) are more likely (46%) to believe that Georgia would benefit more

from having better relations with Russia in exchange for abandoning its Euro-Atlantic aspirations compared to respondents who primarily watch Georgian language TV channels (30%).<sup>36</sup>

### Ethnic Minorities - the Most Vulnerable Group against Propaganda

Ethnic minorities living in densely populated communities in Georgia (regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti) are largely separated from the Georgian media space, which makes them especially vulnerable against Kremlin propaganda.

According to NDI's June 2016 public opinion survey, the number of people who receive information about politics and news from foreign language TV channels is highest in ethnic minority communities, who also show the least support towards Georgia’s Western integration and have the strongest pro-Russian sentiments.<sup>37</sup>

This, of course, is largely due to the fact that ethnic minorities in Georgia speak little Georgian, making it difficult for them to watch Georgian TV channels.<sup>38</sup> From their part, Georgian national broadcasters have little incentive to create content for ethnic minorities in their own language and on topics that are of interest to them.<sup>39 40</sup> In addition, programs offered by Russian TV channels are considerably more entertaining.

The Law on Public Broadcasting obligates the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) to:

*“Reflect the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, age and*

<sup>36</sup> NDI, *op. cit.*, accessed on 2 August 2016, <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2016ge/codebook/> code 1. EUATLINT 2. IMDWPE; RUSWPE; FRWRTR; FRWRCO.

<sup>37</sup> “Public Attitudes in Georgia: March 2016”, NDI, June 2016, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> “Youth Attitudes on Georgia’s European Integration”, MDF, Euro Communicator Publication Series #1, September 2015, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> G. Gogsadze, I. Kachkachishvili & L. Basheleishvili, “Minority Integration in Georgia: Main Challenges and Opportunities (Case of Javakheti)”, *The Levan Mikeladze Foundation*, Tbilisi 2014, p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> “The Law of Georgia on Broadcasting”, 23 December 2004, N780- RS, Article 16 (h).

*gender diversity of the Georgian society in its programs.*"<sup>41</sup>

However, Channel 2 of the GPB broadcasts news in minority languages (Abkhaz, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Ossetian and Russian) only for 15 minutes each weekday.<sup>42</sup>

## Propaganda Result Case Study - Referendum on Defining Marriage

A clear example of how Kremlin propaganda can influence the political agenda and social events in Georgia was the recent failed referendum on defining civil marriage.

Since 2013, Kremlin propagandists were deliberately disseminating disinformation, according to which, in exchange for integration with western institutions (for example in exchange for signing the Association Agreement or Visa-free travel with the EU) Georgia would have to legalize same-sex marriage.<sup>43</sup>

The disinformation campaign became especially active since 2014, when the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law of Georgia on "Eliminating all Forms of Discrimination". Before its adoption as well as afterwards, different sources of Kremlin propaganda circulated information of homophobic character.

The eminence of the topic gradually increased and in 2015 ex-Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili announced the initiative of the ruling coalition – to introduce a definition of

marriage in the constitution defining it as a union between a man and a woman.<sup>44</sup> Strangely enough, one of the explanations for this decision voiced by the government was exactly to act against Russian 'soft power'.

The initiative did not gather parliamentary support; however, later, an initiative group with homophobic tendencies used a direct democracy mechanism of holding a referendum and registered a referendum request with the Central Election Commission on defining civil marriage.

Members of the initiative group are characterized by anti-western, homophobic and anti-Turkish remarks, making them direct or indirect disseminators of Kremlin propaganda.<sup>45</sup>

The referendum request received an acute response from pro-western members of society and political parties. On August 4, an online petition was created, which urged the President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili not to hold the referendum. According to the authors of the petition:<sup>46</sup>

*"The process completely falls in line with the narrative of the Kremlin propaganda, where the west is presented as "perverted" and "enemy of national identity and Orthodox Christianity". Holding a referendum, especially when no LGBTQI organization in Georgia has marriage equality on its agenda, would be legitimizing those legends and myths used by*

<sup>41</sup> S.V. Mateu, "The Armenian Minority in the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region of Georgia: Civic Integration and its Barriers", *Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS)*, 2016, p. 22.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> None of the agreements signed with Georgia's partners entails such obligation. Additionally, Civil Code of Georgia already determines marriage as "a voluntary union of a woman and a man for the purpose of creating a family".

<sup>44</sup> N. Gogsadze, "I will do anything to make sure that the constitution is amended to include that marriage is the union of a man and a woman, - Irakli Gharibashvili", *Rustavi-2*, 29 June 2015, accessed on 13 June 2016, <http://rustavi2.com/ka/news/19964>.

<sup>45</sup> The initiative group included – Alexander Bregadze, Soso Manjavidze and Zviad Tomaradze.

1. Alexander Bregadze served as Deputy Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues from October 2014 to February 2016. He resigned

from the position voluntarily. During his tenure Mr. Bregadze made homophobic comments, for which a part of the non-governmental sector requested his resignation.

2. Soso Manjavidze is a member of the Tbilisi City Council. In 2013-2014, he held the position of the chairman of one of the political parties Alliance of Patriots of Georgia that is characterized by anti-western rhetoric.

3. Zviad Tomaradze is the Chairman of the board of the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Georgia's Demographic Society 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Tomaradze frequently echoes main narratives of the Kremlin propaganda in interviews with different media outlets.

<sup>46</sup> "Petition Asking the President not to Approve Referendum on Defining Marriage", *civil.ge*, 4 August 2016, accessed on 10 August 2016, <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=30526>.

*the Russian propaganda machine to intimidate the Georgian society.”*

On August 9, President Margvelashvili declined the request to hold the referendum. However, on the same day, another initiative group of citizens, with Nino Burjanadze (leader of one of the parties supporting closer relations with Russia) as its leader, filed a request to the Parliament to start gathering signatures to hold a referendum on the issue of Georgia’s non-block status. The Chairman of the Parliament responded to the initiative group with a proposition to instead strengthen Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspiration by including it in the Constitution.<sup>47</sup>

The events related to the referendums are a clear example of how Kremlin propaganda and disinformation can shape public discussions and political agenda; how they can potentially change the existing balance of power and through legal means impede Georgia’s pro-western development, as well as its integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions.

The threat of Kremlin propaganda is made greater by the fact that, according to public opinion polls, anti-western political powers in Georgia already have a relative high chance of being voted into Parliament in the upcoming elections.

## **The Georgian Government’s Policy towards Kremlin Propaganda**

The information war waged by the Kremlin is not acknowledged as a threat to Georgia’s national security in any official government document.

According to the National Security Concept of Georgia:

*“The Russian Federation aims to turn Georgia into a failed state, to hinder the realization of Georgia’s European and Euro-Atlantic choice, and to forcibly return Georgia to the Russian political orbit.”<sup>48</sup>*

However, the document does not indicate using information operations or propaganda as tools of achieving this goal, whereas NATO Parliamentary Assembly Resolution, western institutions and governments acknowledge such threats in relevant documents.<sup>49</sup>

Representatives of the Georgian government have expressed their concerns over dangers of such propaganda on several occasions. In November 2015, while addressing the Parliament of Georgia, the Prime Minister stated that the Russian propaganda is a definite threat to the chosen path and strategy of the country.<sup>50</sup>

Similar statements were made by the Minister of Defense, Chairman of the Parliament, state Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and other representatives of the executive government.

Even though the threat of Russian propaganda has been verbally acknowledged on the highest political level, government measures against propaganda are not known to the public, pointing to the passivity of the current state policy on this issue.

<sup>47</sup> Davit Usupashvili’s Briefing on Amending the Constitution of Georgia, *Parliament of Georgia*, 12 August 2016, accessed on 14 August 2016, <http://www.parliament.ge/en/parlamentarebi/tavmdjdomare-1125/tavmdjdomaris-axali-ambebi/davit-usufashviliis-brifingi-sagartvelos-konstituciashi-cvlilebis-shetanis-taobaze.page>

<sup>48</sup> “National Security Concept of Georgia”, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> “NATO Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 421 on Countering Russia’s Propaganda and Disinformation Campaigns”, *NATO*, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> “Giorgi Kvirikashvili: Russian Propaganda is Harmful for our Country’s Strategy”, *ipress.ge*, 30 November 2015, accessed on 13 June 2016, <http://www.ipress.ge/new/20841-giorgi-kvirikashvili-rusuli-propaganda-chveni-qveynis-strategiistvis-sazianoa>.

## Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia in the sphere of EU Integration

On September 6, 2013, the Georgian government approved the Communication and Information Strategy of the Government of Georgia in the sphere of EU Integration for the period of 2014-2017.<sup>51</sup>

The main aim of the strategy is to “provide information to the population of Georgia on the advantages related to the European integration process and on the commitments that the country has undertaken in this respect”, as well as to popularize the process of Euro-integration.<sup>52</sup> Along with the strategy, action plans for 2014, 2015 and 2016 were created.<sup>53</sup>

Different government entities are involved in implementation of the strategy (including LEPL Information Center on NATO and EU), as well as non-state organizations and the EU delegation in Georgia.

The strategy, which was based on the experience of countries in the process of integrating with the EU, first and foremost, aims to inform the public on the specific commitments and possible benefits of the process of integration. Therefore, it was not designed to directly counter a full-scale and multi-thematic Kremlin propaganda, which became more prominent in 2013-2014.

The strategy focuses solely on matters of EU integration and does not include other thematic areas of Kremlin propaganda, such as Georgia-NATO or

Georgia-US partnership (the Communication and Information Strategy of Georgia in the Sphere of NATO integration is in the process of creation).<sup>54</sup>

## Department of Strategic Communication

In 2015, the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European & Euro-Atlantic Integration set up a Department of Strategic Communication. This was definitely a positive step. However, the department is removed from the main decision-makers, which negatively affects its functioning.

The department is within the partnership network of the East Stratcom Team, which is part of the EU administration and deals with strategic communication by preparing weekly disinformation reviews and disseminating them via its website and Facebook page.<sup>55</sup>

Like the East Stratcom, the Georgian Department of Strategic Communication analyzes media; however, it does not use the same public communication mechanisms to disseminate disinformation reviews.<sup>56</sup>

## State Security and Crisis Management Council

The State Security and Crisis Management Council is the highest political authority in regards of determining Georgia’s security threats. The members of the Council are – Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Minister of Internal Affairs, Minister of Defense and

<sup>51</sup> Government Decree on the approval of Communication and Information Strategy of the Government of Georgia in the sphere of EU Integration for the period of 2014-2017, (*Georgian*), Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European & Euro-Atlantic Integration, 25 December 2013, <http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/ge/news/4910>.

<sup>52</sup> Communication and Information Strategy of the Government of Georgia in the sphere of EU Integration for the period of 2014-2017, Government of Georgia, 6 September 2013, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> The 2016 action plan provides for various types of measures:

- Preparation and distribution of articles and publications about European integration;
- Conducting information meetings with representatives of the society (including the clergy);

• Production of social ads, brochures and posters on European integration (including in Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian) and their distribution throughout Georgia (TV, social media, press).

2016 Action Plan on the Implementation of the Communication and Information Strategy of the Government of Georgia in the sphere of EU Integration.

<sup>54</sup> “Communication and Information Strategy of Georgia in the Sphere of NATO Integration September 2009”, Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European & Euro-Atlantic Integration, 9 October 2013, accessed on 14 June 2016, <http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/ge/news/4843>.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia.<sup>57</sup>

The Council assesses internal and external national security threats, and creates and provides the Prime Minister with the framework of essential measures to predict, expose, prevent and neutralize threats to vital national interests.<sup>58</sup>

The council meetings are closed, hence, we cannot state with certainty whether the Council has discussed the issue of Propaganda or not. Nevertheless, propaganda was not mentioned on the level of statements after the council meetings, which points to the passive stance of the Council on the issue.

It is crucial that the highest political authority responsible for determining and responding to threats takes part in the process of countering propaganda. Without the participation of the council, efforts to counter disinformation will not have high political legitimacy, which is essential for effectively countering propaganda.

## State Security Service of Georgia

One of the principal entities responsible for national security is the State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG).

Information about exposing Kremlin propaganda and measures taken against it cannot be found on SSSG's website. Such information can neither be found in SSSG's 2015 report (SSSG's first report).

Therefore, it is impossible to ascertain whether or not SSSG reacts to Kremlin's information operations and its possible results.

## Conclusion

The information war and propaganda conducted by the Russian Federation constitute a threat to Georgian national security and democratic development.

Kremlin's information war damages and prevents Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration, discredits Western values, institutions and partner states in Georgian society, undermines public trust in government and political institutions, incites ethnic and religious conflict, and promotes xenophobia and hatred.

Since the intensification of Kremlin propaganda in 2013, public support towards Western institutions has been steadily declining in Georgia. It has already influenced the Georgian political agenda and may have an effect on the upcoming 2016 parliamentary elections.

The network of propaganda distributors is wide and interconnected. It includes traditional media outlets, internet and social media, non-governmental organizations, public associations and political parties.

So far, the Georgian government has not given the threat the credit it deserves and has not taken adequate countermeasures. Even though some mechanisms exist, they have not been designed to specifically meet the danger and challenges presented by Kremlin propaganda.

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<sup>57</sup> "Government Resolution on Creation of the State Security and Crisis Management Council and Approval of its Statute", Article 3 (2), Resolution N38, Tbilisi, 6 January 2014.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 2 (h).

## Recommendations

### **1. The Kremlin information war must be officially recognized as a threat in state documents.**

Kremlin propaganda poses a threat to Georgian national security and hinders the country's democratic development. Therefore, this danger must be reflected in the National Security Concept of Georgia.

The Georgian Parliament must adopt a resolution recognizing the threat posed by Kremlin propaganda and launch broad public discussions on making relevant amendments to the "Freedom Charter" and the "Law on Occupied Territories".

### **2. The Georgian government must develop a unified strategy for countering Kremlin propaganda.**

The strategy must include a detailed description of the problem that is Kremlin propaganda, and the government's vision on how to counter it. Based on this strategy the government must develop an action plan that will determine the state agency that will be responsible for coordinating relevant efforts. The action plan must also ensure a consolidated and active cooperation between government, NATO and EU Information Center, media, Georgian Public Broadcaster, civil society and various public groups.

The strategy must include reactive, proactive, tactical and strategic methods of countering Kremlin propaganda that have already been identified by European experts as effective ways to combat propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe.

### **3. The State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG) must include anti-propaganda activities among its priorities.**

The SSSG must publish annual reports on Kremlin information operations in

Georgia so that the public is made aware of the threat propaganda poses. For this purpose, the SSSG can share the experience of the Estonian Security Service (Kaitsepolitseiamet - KAPO).

Since 2002, KAPO has been gathering information about the sources of Kremlin propaganda in Estonia, and activities of non-governmental and media organizations affiliated with the Kremlin. KAPO provides this information to the public through annual reports.

### **4. The Georgian government must set up a disinformation analysis, response and anti-propaganda coordination group.**

Georgia must take measures against disinformation. Like the European Union's EastStratCom team, Georgia must also have a state structural unit that will reveal sources of propaganda through research and analysis, in cooperation with international partners, civil society, research institutions and journalists, and provide this information to the public through various channels of communication.

This group must have a high degree of political legitimacy. Therefore, it must be set up either within the State Administration or the State Security and Crisis Management Council.

### **5. A unified message from the government regarding propaganda threats.**

High-ranking public officials, including Ministers and Members of Parliament, must take active part in combating Kremlin propaganda. Representatives of the ruling coalition (at the executive, legislative and local government levels) should refrain from making contradictory statements and must express a unified position regarding Georgia's policy and plans towards Kremlin propaganda.

**6. Standards of financial transparency for non-governmental organizations must be raised.**

Lack of financial transparency in non-governmental organizations is an ideal environment for the Kremlin to conduct its propaganda and information war.

Since identification of direct financial ties is the only way to truly expose propaganda, the Georgian civil society and government must launch discussions on possible ways to raise the standards of financial transparency for non-governmental organizations at the legislative level.

**7. The Georgian government must launch target programs to support the development of local media and civil society in regions populated by ethnic minorities.**

Support of local Armenian and Azerbaijani language media and internet outlets is essential for integrating ethnic minority groups into the Georgian media space. The central and local government must also support the development of local civil society organizations through targeted grants and campaigns.

**8. The Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) must take the lead in countering disinformation.**

The Public Broadcaster, being a publicly funded national broadcaster, must take the lead in countering disinformation by preparing programs about Kremlin propaganda and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration, and by organizing frequent TV and radio debates and discussions on these topics.

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**საკონტაქტო ინფორმაცია**

ა. გრიბოედოვის ქუჩა 3,  
0108, თბილისი, საქართველო  
ტელ: + 995 32 2 92 15 14  
ელ-ფოსტა: [info@idfi.ge](mailto:info@idfi.ge)  
[www.idfi.ge](http://www.idfi.ge)

**CONTACT DETAILS**

A. Griboedov Str. 3,  
0108, Tbilisi, Georgia.  
Phone: + 995 32 2 92 15 14  
E-mail: [info@idfi.ge](mailto:info@idfi.ge)  
[www.idfi.ge](http://www.idfi.ge)