



## “Coexistence” - Ethno-Nationalist Narratives in Georgia

### Social Media Monitoring Report

(February-March 2021)

The media monitoring report was drawn up by the Democracy Research Institute (DRI) as part of the project “Coexistence” – Researching Ethno-Nationalist Narratives in Georgia. The project is supported by the Norwegian Embassy. The views and opinions expressed in this publication belong to the team of the project and should not be perceived as an official opinion of the donor.

## 1. Preface

The resumption of an armed conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia sparked a new information warfare in the region. In the wake of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, anti-Western rhetoric and disinformation online campaigns intensified on social and online media in Georgia. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was used by various media outlets to fuel ethnic strife. Therefore, xenophobic online discourse intensified as well.

Our observation shows that disintegration is an important goal of the propaganda and disinformation media campaign in Georgia. On the one hand, a desire to split society on ethnic grounds, and on the other hand, attempts to discredit Western institutions are evident. Numerous manipulative narratives were spread against Georgia within the framework of the disinformation media campaign. Various pro-Russian media outlets tried to discredit Georgia's western course and stir up xenophobic sentiments in the society.

Georgian pro-Russian media linked Armenia's failure to Prime Minister Pashinyan's liberal and Western course. Various propaganda media platforms tried to use the defeat of Armenia in the Karabakh conflict to discredit Western institutions in Georgia. Various narratives were spread, according to which, Armenia lost the war because of its pro-Western course and liberal values. The pro-Russian media also tried to downplay the "color revolutions" (Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia) in the context of Armenia's defeat and to portray it as a failed project of George Soros in the region.

Several provocative and manipulative media contents were created about Georgia. Far-right leaders also became more active, calling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict an example of the failure of liberal values. Russian-language fake news, spread on online media platforms, aimed to stir up anti-Armenian and anti-Azerbaijani sentiments in Georgia. In general, it was easy to notice the Russian trace and manipulative content within the framework of the disinformation campaign.

Throughout the reporting period, the Democracy Research Institute identified a total of 210 cases of disinformation narratives spread on ethno-nationalist grounds in the wake of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on 6 Telegram channels, 12 Facebook pages and 12 websites. Photo/video manipulation, a tool of Russian propaganda, was identified as an important tool of the disinformation campaign.

## 2. Methodological framework

The present report is a result of a social media monitoring conducted by the Democracy Research Institute, which analyzes the content and dissemination area of information warfare and disinformation narratives related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in February-March 2021. The report also analyzes the manipulative media content posted on various media platforms and the major informative materials of the disinformation media campaign, in which xenophobic and anti-Western sentiments were particularly evident. The quantitative and qualitative data of information materials (photos/videos, articles and posts) disseminated via Telegram channels, online media platforms and social networks were analyzed as part of

the monitoring. The qualitative research of the frequency and area of dissemination of disinformation narratives was carried out by using Facebook analytical tool CrowdTangle.

We grouped the disinformation narratives studied during the reporting period into three main directions: anti-Azerbaijani, anti-Armenian and anti-Western. We used content analysis method to analyze the main quantitative and content characteristics of the manipulative and disinformation media campaign that intensified in the light of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Given the subject of the monitoring, discourse analysis was selected as a research design. Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian media platforms, Facebook pages and Telegram channels, which most often circulated xenophobic and ethno-nationalist narratives around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and were characterized by a disinformation editorial policy, were selected as objects of the monitoring.

The quantitative and substantive analysis of the data revealed that more than half of the posts - 83% - on the selected sites were textual materials (statuses, articles), 3% - video content and 14% - photos. The final analysis of the posts showed that anti-Armenian content enjoyed the highest online interaction.

#### Number of interactions per post

Narrative	Number of statuses and articles	Number of shares	Number of comments	Other reactions	Total interaction
Anti-Azerbaijani messages	40	2 300	435	1 110	3845
Anti-Armenian messages	45	5233	19 233	20 233	44699
Anti-Western messages	125	10234	2367	3112	15713

#### Telegram channels selected as research objects within the framework of the monitoring:

1.	Mediaport	<a href="https://t.me/mediaport2020">https://t.me/mediaport2020</a>
2.	Karabah_news	<a href="https://t.me/karabah_news">https://t.me/karabah_news</a>
3.	Kolorit 18+	<a href="https://t.me/kolorit_18">https://t.me/kolorit_18</a>
4.	Armenian Military Portal	<a href="https://t.me/military_arm">https://t.me/military_arm</a>
5.	Artsakh Now / Karabakh now	<a href="https://t.me/Arcaknow">https://t.me/Arcaknow</a>
6.	Hay mtorum	<a href="https://t.me/hmtorum">https://t.me/hmtorum</a>

#### Online media publications selected as research objects within the framework of the monitoring:

1.	bavnews.am	<a href="https://bavnews.am/">https://bavnews.am/</a>
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2.	Oxu.az	<a href="https://oxu.az/">https://oxu.az/</a>
3.	Baku.ws	<a href="https://baku.ws/">https://baku.ws/</a>
4.	Armenpress.am	<a href="https://armenpress.am/rus/">https://armenpress.am/rus/</a>
5.	7or.am	<a href="https://www.7or.am/">https://www.7or.am/</a>
6.	Media.az	<a href="https://median.az/">https://median.az/</a>
7.	Kavkazplus.ge	<a href="http://ge.kavkazplus.com/index.php">http://ge.kavkazplus.com/index.php</a>
8.	Golosarmenii	<a href="https://golosarmenii.am/">https://golosarmenii.am/</a>
9.	Alt-info	<a href="https://alt-info.com/">https://alt-info.com/</a>
10.	News-Front	<a href="https://ge.news-front.info/">https://ge.news-front.info/</a>
11.	kentron.am	<a href="https://kentron.am/">https://kentron.am/</a>
12.	mamul.am	<a href="https://mamul.am/">https://mamul.am/</a>

Facebook pages selected as research objects within the framework of the monitoring:

1.	Hayastan	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Hayastans/">https://www.facebook.com/Hayastans/</a>
2.	BORCALI.PRESS. DIGEST	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/zumnrud.orxan">https://www.facebook.com/groups/zumnrud.orxan</a>
3.	The caucasian telegraph	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/TheCaucasianTelegraph">https://www.facebook.com/TheCaucasianTelegraph</a>
4.	MƏN GÜRCÜSTANLIYAM	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/1015249085537901">https://www.facebook.com/groups/1015249085537901</a>
5.	Gündəlik – Gürcüstan	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/gundelikgurcistan">https://www.facebook.com/gundelikgurcistan</a>
6.	Turkey Is Occupant	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/StopTurkishOccupation/">https://www.facebook.com/StopTurkishOccupation/</a>
7.	Farnavaziani	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FarnavaZiani">https://www.facebook.com/FarnavaZiani</a>
8.	BORÇALI	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/elvar010/?ref=share">https://www.facebook.com/groups/elvar010/?ref=share</a>
9.	Themis	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/ThemisEstonia/">https://www.facebook.com/ThemisEstonia/</a>
10.	In Armenia	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/inarmenya/">https://www.facebook.com/inarmenya/</a>
11.	World Family Congress	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/wcf10/">https://www.facebook.com/wcf10/</a>
12.	Alt-tv	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/alttv01">https://www.facebook.com/alttv01</a>

### 3. Anti-Western and anti-liberal discourse on social media

#### *Anti-Western and anti-liberal rhetoric of far-right leaders*

##### *Video address by Levan Vasadze*

In the wake of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, far-right leaders and pro-Russian media outlets strengthened anti-Western and anti-liberal rhetoric in Georgia. Businessman Levan Vasadze posted a video on the Facebook page of the World Family Congress, in which he linked Azerbaijan's victory to the leader's "strength", "undemocratic, illiberal rule" and consolidation of its own forces. According to Vasadze, "This victory of Azerbaijan would not have been possible if they, like us [Georgia], had blue-pink democratic rule that is trying to surprise Europe with bubbles."

##### *Interview with Alexander Dugin*

On February 1, Alt Info, a well-known far-right media platform, recorded an interview with Alexander Dugin, a Russian ultranationalist philosopher and leader of the Eurasian movement. Dugin used the defeat of Armenia in Karabakh to demonize Western values. His anti-Western rhetoric clearly contained an attempt to create an irrational fear by emphasizing the imminent threat of a war and loss of territories. "If the Western course is maintained, Georgia, like Armenia, will be doomed by the West and will become a kind of bridgehead for the West to start wars with other countries," he said in the interview. In addition, Dugin tried to downplay Western institutions and fuel distrust towards Georgia's strategic Western partners. According to Dugin's reasoning: the West failed to protect Armenia in the Karabakh conflict and Georgia will share the same fate, as the West will not be able to protect Georgia's sovereignty if necessary. In contrast, Dugin portrayed Russia as an alternative force supporting Georgia that can protect the country from the values imposed by liberals and globalists.



## 4. Anti-Armenian narratives on social media

Anti-Armenian narratives were particularly evident within the framework of the disinformation campaign in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In early February, the target of disinformation was a charitable foundation - Javakheti Stands by Armenians, which was declared as a supporter of separatist forces and a threat to Georgia. In addition, Abkhazia was also in the spotlight of the Russian, Georgian and Azerbaijani media. Disinformation about the settlement of 3,000 Armenians in Abkhazia was actively spread on various media platforms in order to stir up Anti-Armenian sentiments.

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On February 25, a post was published on the Telegram channel Javakheti, saying that a new branch of the Javakheti Stands by Armenians Foundation was opened in Ninotsminda. The opening of the office was attended by locals and clergy. "It now is a very difficult time for us, we need steadiness not only in words but also in actions, to prove that Javakheti stands by Armenia," said clergyman Ter Armash Poghosyan, who opened the new branch of the foundation. According to the founders, the foundation was created for charitable purposes. An article<sup>1</sup> published on tv9news quotes Karen Papikyan, one of the founders of the foundation, as saying: "The purpose of the opening of the office is to help the citizens of Armenia and Georgia. The goal of the foundation is for the Samtskhe-Javakheti region to support the citizens of Javakheti, Karabakh and Armenia." Another regional media also responded to the opening of the foundation's new office in Ninotsminda with an article<sup>2</sup> titled as "Branch of Javakheti Stands by Armenians Foundation Opened in Ninotsminda." The article cites founder Karen Papikyan as saying: "In four months we have visited more than 10,000 people, the wounded soldiers and the families of fallen soldiers. We have two homelands - Georgia and Armenia, and if anything happens, we will stand by Georgia."

The information published by the Telegram channel Javakhi was followed by immediate reactions on various online media platforms and it became a source of anti-Armenian sentiments. Kavkazplus,<sup>3</sup> an online media platform known for its anti-Armenian sentiments, responded to the post and called it a "separatist project" aimed at legitimizing Armenia's aggression against Georgia under the "Karabakh scenario."

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<sup>1</sup> Tv9news, Javakheti Stands by Armenians - Branch of Charitable Foundation Opened in Ninotsminda", February 23, 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/2PenlSf>

<sup>2</sup> Jnews, Branch of Javakheti Stands by Armenians Charitable Foundation Opened in Ninotsminda", February 23, 2021, available: <https://bit.ly/31tlfq>

<sup>3</sup> Kavkazplus, Does Separatist Foundation "Javakhi Stand by Armenians" Pose Threat to Georgia's Security?!", February 27, 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/2NZhWOf>

„პავსახეთი სომხებთან ერთად“ – ნინოწმინდაში საჰველმომჭედლო ფონდის ფილიალი ბაიხსნა



Source: [tv9news.ge](http://tv9news.ge)

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The Azerbaijani media platform day.az spread information about the settlement of Karabakhi Armenians in Abkhazia. "Recently, about 3-4 thousand Armenians have been resettled in Abkhazia," reads an article posted on day.az<sup>4</sup> under the title: "Karabakhi Armenians Massively Settled in Abkhazia - New Plan of Separatists." The article refers to Karabakhi Armenians as separatists. It is also mentioned that the majority of the population of Abkhazia are Armenians. The source of the article is Russian media platform smi6.ru.

According to the Azerbaijani media platform day.az, it is in Armenia's interest to change the demographic situation in the region and to strengthen the status of Armenians as an ethnic majority. It is noteworthy that an article with identical messages was published by Kavkazplus,<sup>5</sup> a Georgian-language online media platform known for its anti-Armenian sentiments. An article entitled "Armenian Migrants Massively „Rush into” Occupied Abkhazia of Georgia" was published on their page on February 9. The article does not specify the source or identity of the author, although the photo attached to the article is identical to the photo of the article published by day.az on the same topic, which raises doubts about the link between them. The article reads: "It is obvious that the process of settlement of Abkhazia by Armenians is becoming uncontrollable and "avalanche-like". Before Abkhazians know it, their separatist "independent state" can be quietly called "coastal Armenia." This information was verified by the Antifake website with the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in Georgia, representatives of which stated that the reports about the mass settlement of Armenians in Abkhazia were a **lie**. In addition, it should be noted that during the mentioned period, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Georgian state border with Armenia was closed and, consequently, thousands

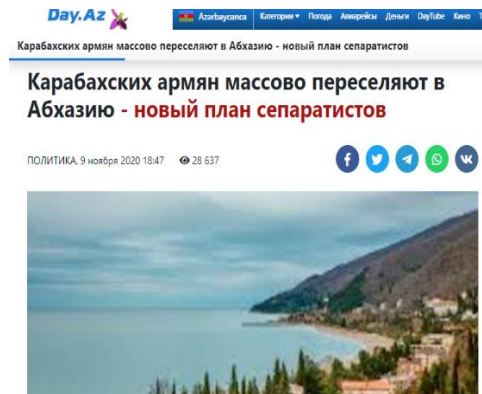
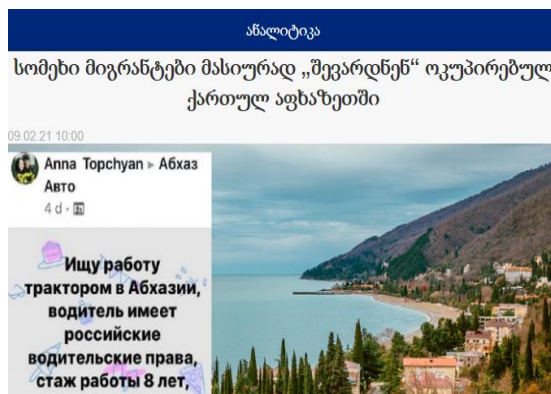
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<sup>4</sup> day, az, Karabakhi Armenians Settled Massively in Abkhazia - New Plan of Separatists, November 9, 2020, available at: <https://bit.ly/3u0ODKz>

<sup>5</sup> Kavkazplus, Armenian Migrants Massively "Rush" into Occupied Abkhazia of Georgia, February 9, 2021, available: <https://bit.ly/2Ph7h2b>

of Armenian citizens would not be able to cross the border in the direction of Georgia.

Disinformation about the mass resettlement of Armenians in Abkhazia was spread in the following Facebook groups: Abkhazian Assembly, IDPs for IDPs and People's National Movement. Online interaction exceeded 33,000 people.



## 5. Anti-Azerbaijani narratives on social media

The military confrontation in Nagorno-Karabakh was accompanied by the spread of anti-Azerbaijani messages in Georgia. Russian-language media platforms and social networks tried to create an image of an enemy of Georgia from Azerbaijan, alleging that the main goal of Azerbaijan was the territorial occupation of Georgia. Disinformation posters captioned: "Marneuli is Azerbaijan's territorial unit called Borchalo" drew a great deal of attention on the social and online media.

The spread of such disinformation posters during the tense situation in the region contributes to the creation of anti-Azerbaijani sentiments in Georgia. It is important that the source of disinformation was Russian. In addition, disinformation was mainly spread not in the Armenian or Azerbaijani, but in the Russian language.

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From January 2021, posters of identical content were spread on Armenian and Russian Telegram channels and online media platforms - kentron.am, MAMUL.am.ru, Hay mtorum, in which Marneuli was marked as a territory of Azerbaijan and was replaced by a word "Borchalo". Each post had Russian-language caption saying that the poster was the propaganda of the Azerbaijani side and that "appetite comes with eating." It should be noted that disinformation posters were spread not only relating to the territorial unit of Georgia, but also the territorial units of Armenia, Iran and Russia. The poster also asked a rhetorical question about who would be the next target of Azerbaijan.

The initial source of the disinformation is a post published in the form of posters by the Russian-language information platform AZERBAIJAN Online back in 2019, which had the following caption: "Remember.



Save. Share." The disinformation posters again became the subject of discussion in August 2020, when the Russian-language online platform zen.yandex.kg published information entitled "Azerbaijan's Territorial Claims." The post discusses the widespread disinformation poster about Marneuli and states that Azerbaijan has territorial claims not only in Armenia, but also in Georgia, in particular in Marneuli. Amid the tensions in the region, the spread of such disinformation narratives and the creation of an enemy icon from Azerbaijan, a strategic ally and neighboring country of Georgia, represents a dangerous message of the disinformation campaign.



АЗЕРБАЙДЖАН online  
27 Oct 2019

Запомните, сохраните и поделитесь.  
#азонлайн\_интересное



Аппетит приходит во время еды.  
Пропагандистские плакаты, распространяемые азербайджанскими ресурсами

00:25, Среда, 20 Января, 2021 года



Пропагандистские плакаты, распространяемые азербайджанскими ресурсами.

Армения, Иран, Ирак, Грузия, Россия. Кто следующий?