

„Co-existence“

-  
**Ethno-Nationalist  
Narratives  
in Georgia**

**Social  
Media  
Monitoring  
Report**

**2021**



This media monitoring report was prepared by the Democracy Research Institute (DRI), within the framework of the project “Co-existence “ — Countering Ethnonationalist Narratives in Georgia. The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Georgia supported the project. Views and positions expressed in the publication belong to the project team and should not be perceived as an official opinion of the donor.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Against the background of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Xenophobic, ethnonationalist and Anti-Western media campaign took off in Georgia. Various online media-platforms would frequently spread disinformation reporting, mostly aimed at fueling Xenophobic sentiments in the society. Targeted Anti-Armenian and Anti-Azerbaijani discourses were specifically designed to create conflict in the ethnic minority populated regions of Georgia.

The DRI, within its media monitoring activity, has started, since December 2020, the analysis of key trends in discourse regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in online media. The DRI studies ethnonationalist, Xenophobic and disinformation narratives. The present report on disinformation media campaign is based on two interim reports, and it sums up key trends and findings identified during the 6 months of observation.

We must note, that we made the following key observation: regarding the Karabakh conflict, the disinformation media campaign has a network nature, and manipulative, false content, aimed at promoting ethnonationalist attitudes in the society. The disinformation media campaign is a targeted attempt to have Georgia portrayed as a supporter of one of the conflict parties. The State Security Service of Georgia has evaluated this trend as extremely dangerous in their 2020 [Report](#). Another observable trend was the intensity of various online media-platforms linked to far-right groups. They depict the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as the defeat of liberal West in the region, and by doing so, they kept discrediting the Euro-Atlantic institutions.

As a result of the media monitoring, it has been found that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was actively used by the Pro-Russian media in Georgia, on the one hand, to create false, manipulative content, and on the other hand, to spread strategic, Pro-Russian messages. On a general note, the disinformation campaign had an obvious Russian signature and networked, manipulative substance. On most occasions, the disinformation narratives perpetrated by the Armenian, the Georgian, and the Azerbaijani media-platforms had Russian- language media as their primary source.

In the reporting period, various far-right leaders and media never stopped using Anti-Western rhetoric. Depending on which political or social issues were hot on a given day, Anti-Armenian, Anti-Azerbaijani, and Anti-Turkish discourses would replace each other and hence, had rather sporadic nature.

The ethnonationalist media campaign trends, considering the very substance of its nature, are not uniform. While the disinformation aimed against Turkey and Azerbaijan intends to portray them as occupying forces, with Armenia, we observe aggressively chauvinist and xenophobic messaging scheme, aimed at stirring up then Anti-Armenian sentiments.

In sum, during the reporting period, the DRI has identified 620 incidents of ethnonationalist disinformation narratives against the background of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on 6 Telegram channels, 15 Facebook pages and 12 web-sites. An important instrument of the disinformation campaign was resorting to photo/video manipulation, a powerful tool used by the Russian propaganda machine.

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The present report, prepared by the Democracy Research Institute on disinformation media campaigns, is based on two interim reports. Media monitoring covers 6 months of observation from December 2020 to May 2021. Within the frames of the media monitoring activity, we have conducted quantitative and qualitative data analysis and studied online disinformation media campaign' key messages against the

background of Karabakh conflict, its sources and prevalent trends. A qualitative analysis of the frequency and the area of the disinformation narrative distribution was conducted via Facebook’s analytical tool Crowd Tangle.

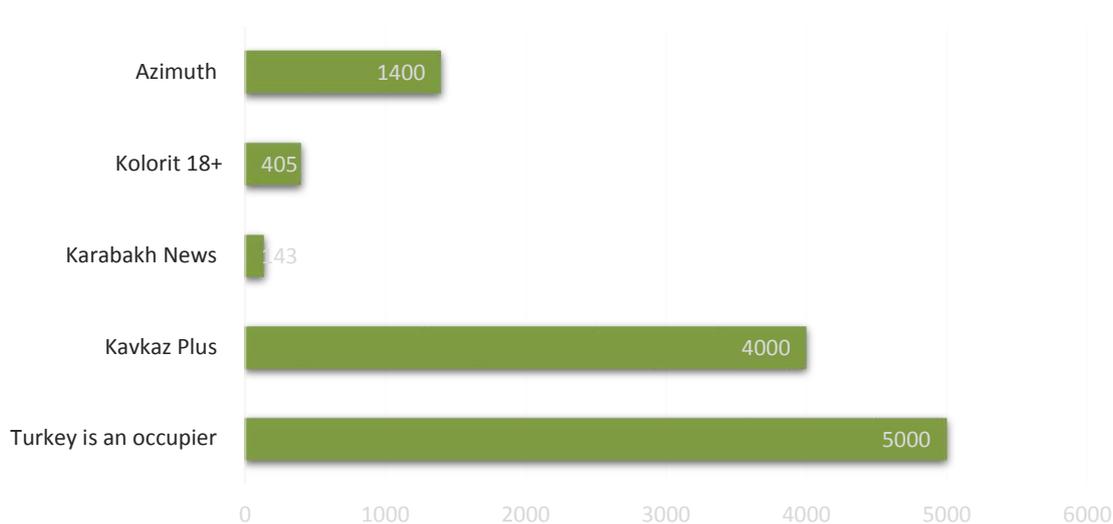
Utilizing thematic typology, the present report groups information and visual materials as they relate to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. To identify subjective messages, we have identified those Facebook pages and Telegram channels, whose users are characterized with intense online interactions. Hence, the analysis of texts found throughout various Facebook posts and articles are important characteristics. Furthermore, we have studied photos and videos disseminated on social media; We have resorted to thematic categorization to analyze information and visual contexts of the disinformation media campaign.

Additionally, to analyze a wide spectrum of disinformation campaigns, we kept various media sources, with their diverse editorial policies and contexts under observation. Based on the discourse-analysis of disinformation narratives, we have separated them based on their content and grouped them into four major pillars: Anti-Western, Anti-Azerbaijani, Anti-Armenian, and Anti-Turkish messages. Furthermore, during the reporting period we identified that more than half of posts published on our study subjects (85%) was in the form of text (status, article), photos made up 13% and video content made up 2% out of the total information content we have studied).

Total post interactions revealed key trends — throughout different time-frames, various discourses were pushed forward. Namely, in the December-January period, Anti-Azerbaijani posts had the highest interaction, while the February-March period was marked by the intensification of Anti-Armenian messages. In total, against the background of the Karabakh conflict, online activity linked to disinformation narratives surpassed 100,000 users. Based on the qualitative analysis, 5 online platforms were identified, which were the most frequent distributors of disinformation narratives. Anti-Armenian attitudes were mostly found on an online media “Kavkaz pliusi” (Caucasus Plus); Anti-Azerbaijani narratives were often pushed by Armenian-language Telegram channels — Karabakh News and Kolorit 18+; While Anti-Turkish rhetoric was most apparent on Facebook pages “Turkети Okupantia” (Stop Turkish Occupation) and “Azimuti “(Azimuth).

### Disinformation pages and their followers (in numbers):

#### Top 5 Sources of disinformation



**The following Telegram channels were selected for the research during the monitoring:**

<b>Mediaport</b>	<a href="https://t.me/mediaport2020">https://t.me/mediaport2020</a>
<b>Karabakh_news</b>	<a href="https://t.me/karabah_news">https://t.me/karabah_news</a>
<b>Kolorit 18+</b>	<a href="https://t.me/kolorit_18">https://t.me/kolorit_18</a>
<b>Armenian Military Portal</b>	<a href="https://t.me/military_arm">https://t.me/military_arm</a>
<b>Artsakh Now / Karabakh now</b>	<a href="https://t.me/Arcaknow">https://t.me/Arcaknow</a>
<b>Hay mtorum</b>	<a href="https://t.me/hmtorum">https://t.me/hmtorum</a>

**The following online media were selected for the research during the monitoring:**

<b>bavnews.am</b>	<a href="https://bavnews.am/">https://bavnews.am/</a>
<b>Oxu.az</b>	<a href="https://oxu.az/">https://oxu.az/</a>
<b>Baku.ws</b>	<a href="https://baku.ws/">https://baku.ws/</a>
<b>Armenpress.am</b>	<a href="https://armenpress.am/rus/">https://armenpress.am/rus/</a>
<b>7or.am</b>	<a href="https://www.7or.am/">https://www.7or.am/</a>
<b>Media.az</b>	<a href="https://median.az/">https://median.az/</a>
<b>Kavkazplus.ge</b>	<a href="http://ge.kavkazplus.com/index.php">http://ge.kavkazplus.com/index.php</a>
<b>Golosarmenii</b>	<a href="https://golosarmenii.am/">https://golosarmenii.am/</a>
<b>Alt-info</b>	<a href="https://alt-info.com/">https://alt-info.com/</a>
<b>News Front</b>	<a href="https://ge.news-front.info/">https://ge.news-front.info/</a>
<b>kentron.am</b>	<a href="https://kentron.am/">https://kentron.am/</a>
<b>mamul.am</b>	<a href="https://mamul.am/">https://mamul.am/</a>

**The following Facebook pages were selected for the research during the monitoring:**

<b>Hayastan</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Hayastans/">https://www.facebook.com/Hayastans/</a>
<b>BORCALI.PRESS. DIGEST</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/zumnrud.orxan">https://www.facebook.com/groups/zumnrud.orxan</a>
<b>The caucasian telegraph</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/TheCaucasianTelegraph">https://www.facebook.com/TheCaucasianTelegraph</a>
<b>MƏN GÜRCÜSTANLIYAM</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/1015249085537901">https://www.facebook.com/groups/1015249085537901</a>
<b>Gündəlik – Gürcüstan</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/gundelikgurcistan">https://www.facebook.com/gundelikgurcistan</a>
<b>Turketi Okupantia (Stop Turkish Occupation)</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/StopTurkishOccupation/">https://www.facebook.com/StopTurkishOccupation/</a>
<b>Farnavaziani</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FarnavaZiani">https://www.facebook.com/FarnavaZiani</a>
<b>BORÇALI</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/elvar010/?ref=share">https://www.facebook.com/groups/elvar010/?ref=share</a>
<b>Themis</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/ThemisEstonia/">https://www.facebook.com/ThemisEstonia/</a>
<b>In Armenia</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/inarmenya/">https://www.facebook.com/inarmenya/</a>
<b>Ojakhebis Msoplio Kongresi (World Family Congress)</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/wcf10/">https://www.facebook.com/wcf10/</a>
<b>Alt-tv</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/alttv01">https://www.facebook.com/alttv01</a>
<b>Azimuti (Azimuth)</b>	<a href="https://bit.ly/3wIpm9n">https://bit.ly/3wIpm9n</a>
<b>Kardhu</b>	<a href="https://bit.ly/2SyiWed">https://bit.ly/2SyiWed</a>
<b>Dadumebuli Kartveloba (Georgianness Silenced)</b>	<a href="https://bit.ly/3vAKT3w">https://bit.ly/3vAKT3w</a>

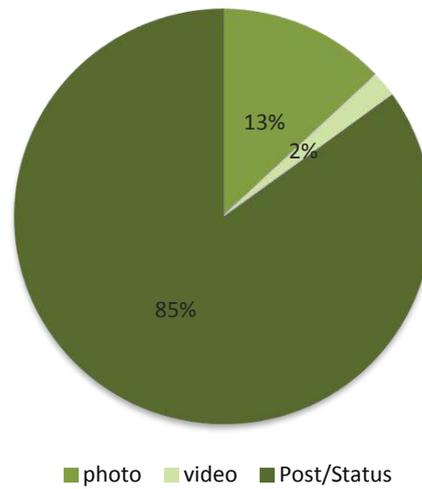
## პოსტებზე ინტერაქციის რაოდენობა

Narrative	N of statuses and posts	N of sharing	N of comments	Other reactions	Total N of interactions
<b>Anti-Azerbaijani messages</b>	230	6 300	10 480	14 150	30 930
<b>Anti-Armenian messages</b>	200	6 155	22 435	15 233	43 823
<b>Anti-Western messages</b>	150	10 125	8 564	5 222	23911
<b>Anti-Turkish messages</b>	40	300	7 638	2 235	10 173

**Disinformation  
discourse**



**Types of Posts**



### 3. ANTI-TURKISH AND ANTI-WESTERN DISCOURSES IN THE PRO-RUSSIAN ONLINE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Various far-right groups and Pro-Russian media actively carry out Anti-Turkish disinformation campaigns in Georgia. During the reporting period, propaganda actors depicted Turkey as an occupant, an enemy state and attempted to appeal to threats coming from Turkey within the context of the Karabakh conflict. In the Karabakh war, after Azerbaijani victory, most notable focus was made on the increase of political influence of Turkey in the region. Media engaged in disinformation, while continuing their Anti-Turkish rhetoric, also tried to demonize Euro-Atlantic institutions. More specifically, they were appealing to the threats coming from Turkey and, thus, emphasizing that the idea of European Union and NATO was not working at all. Hence, unlike the Anti-Azerbaijani and the Anti-Armenian discourses, markedly Anti-Turkish rhetoric was developing against the background of Anti-Western narratives. Also, noticeable was that NATO was discredited in light of Turkish demonization. Therefore, the present report reviews Anti-Turkish and Anti-Western rhetoric in parallel to each other, as they truly are two information branches of the same discourse.

## Anti-Turkish Disinformation Campaign

The anti-Turkish campaign aimed to foster pro-Russian attitudes, by designating Russia as a supporting state, which supposedly saved Georgia from Turkish expansion. In December, a pro-Russian Facebook page “[Stalin](#)“ and media-platform “[News-Front](#)“ published identical information, which claimed that Russia helped Georgia get back the territories Turkey had taken away from it, and it is wrong to portray Russia as a historical enemy.

During the reporting period, Anti-Turkish rhetoric became exceptionally intense within the context of construction of HPP in Rioni Valley. A Turkish company, ENKA is building a dam, called Namakhvanhesi (Namakhvani Hydro Power Plant). Anti-Western media actors tried to portray this as an economic and political expansion attempt on behalf of Turkey. The Facebook pages “[Stop Turkish Occupation](#)“ and “[Kardhu](#)“ were particularly prolific in carrying out Anti-Turkish campaign with regard to Namakhvani HPP, mostly aiming at depicting Turkey as a historical enemy to Georgia. Georgian Government was accused in the betrayal of national interests and in openly taking Turkish side, by notoriously Xenophobic and far-right activists, including Davit Nemsadze. On his own Facebook page, on April 06, he published a video, in which he stated, that in order to instigate conflict between Georgia and Turkey, Turkish special forces had invaded Rioni Valley. The report of Turkish special forces deployed to the Rioni Valley are unfounded. Furthermore, the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, in their April 04 statement, claimed that in order to restore order, various representative of the Ministry’s departments and units were deployed, and they were responsible for keeping order and safety there.

Photo 1 caption:

HPP proper is irrelevant here. What we are facing is a treason and expansionism of Georgia’s genetic enemy — Turkey, right in the middle of Western Georgia.

Photo 2 caption:

No HPP shall be built in Rioni Valley, no Turkish occupant will set foot here and no fake worship places will be erected. This is the will of the Georgian People.



\* \* \* \*

**Video Manipulation:** Turkish computer game “Turkey vs Georgia — War Scenario“ depicts Turkey’s hostile plans against Georgia.

**Reality:** video is an animation, created by an individual. It is a cartoon. The original source of the video was a Turkish — language YouTube channel “Cem Algül.” The simulation scenario shown in the video depicts farmers from Turkey’s Artvin region crossing into Georgian border and illegally stealing wood from the Machakhela National park. In the Video, the Georgian side demands that the Turkish farmers are punished, but Turkey refuses to comply. The video author offers us a simulation scenario, which compares Georgia’s and Turkey’s military forces and war scenario is discussed. The video ends with a peace treaty between Georgia and Turkey, according to which, Turkey gets Batumi, in exchange for a billion USD fee.

The video is a content created by a private individual and hence, it is a manipulation to portray it as if it was showing an official position of Turkish state. For example, the same YouTube channel also hosts another video game, where the same author offers and reviews different scenarios of the game. Here, the creation of a joint block by Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan is presented in a positive light. This content allows us to say that the creator of the video was intent on making a viral and popular entertaining platform.

This video has become a source of Anti-Turkish messages in Georgia. On April 1st, the video with its manipulative content first appeared on a Facebook page of an independent Khashuri Mayoral candidate, Ramaz Nozadze. The post noted that this is a scenario in case a war breaks out between Turkey and Georgia, and represents what Turkey really dreams about regarding Georgia. On 5-6 April, the video went viral on a notoriously Anti-Turkish Facebook page “Azimuti (Azimuth)“ and on a Facebook profile “Lasha Amire“. Online interaction around this video exceeded a total of 20,000 users. On the Facebook page, the video game is accompanied by the following caption: “Turkey is an occupant“ and this game reveals true interest Turkey has towards Georgia.



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**Disinformation:** In Akhalkalaki, a former 62 Russian military base, will host Turkish military base.

**Reality:** Since September 19, 2020, this territory is home to the Military Training center for the Recruits, named after Georgian hero, Sergeant Zaza Peradze.

The initial source of the disinformation was the Facebook page of the Russian-language news agency “Realist” and a Telegram channel. On April 03, 2021, an Armenian- and Russian-language Telegram channel and online media-platform regst.net and ИА Реалист (I am a realist) disseminated disinformation with identical content: “that in Akhalkalaki, a former 62 Russian military base was planned to host Turkish military base.” Armenian media-platform published an article, titled “Akhalkalaki might start hosting, Turkish military base,” which notes that in Akhalkalaki, Turkish companies are building military bases. The agency in question quotes a Russian-language Telegram channel ИА Реалист (I am a realist) as a source of this information. The Telegram post stipulates that they have received this information from Tbilisi, but they fail to mention its source.

In reality, since September 19, 2020, this territory is home to the Military Training center for the Recruits, named after Georgian hero, Sergeant Zaza Peradze. Then Defense Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili inaugurated the center in a special ceremony and emphasized, how important the establishment would be for the local population, in terms of economic welfare as well. The Minister also made a promise to renew infrastructure on 250 buildings that are present on the location. The Ministry of Defense of Georgia StratComm statement stipulates that refurbishment works on this territory are a part of ongoing infrastructure renewal policy currently underway in Georgian Defense Forces. Hence, the argument that current works underway on the territory of a former Russian military base are in any way linked to the construction of a Turkish military base deployment in Georgia is Russian disinformation.

The Ambassador of Turkey to Georgia responded to this lie on April 05, and noted that this is a classic example of a dangerous disinformation. According to the Ambassador, this disinformation is aimed at fostering Anti-NATO sentiments in the Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani societies. It was based on the TV interview, given by the Turkish Ambassador, that an Armenian-language news agency “Aliq media” published an article named: “Turkey will not be sending military forces to Javakheti”. In the article, we only find a fragment of the statement the Turkish Ambassador gave to TV Pirveli: “Kars Treaty will not be annulled, Turkey is not asking back for Batumi and Turkey is not sending military forces to Samtskhe-Javakheti region — a disinformation disseminated by groups located outside of Georgia, intent on destabilizing the region. Such illogical and obvious lies stem not from Georgia, but from abroad”.



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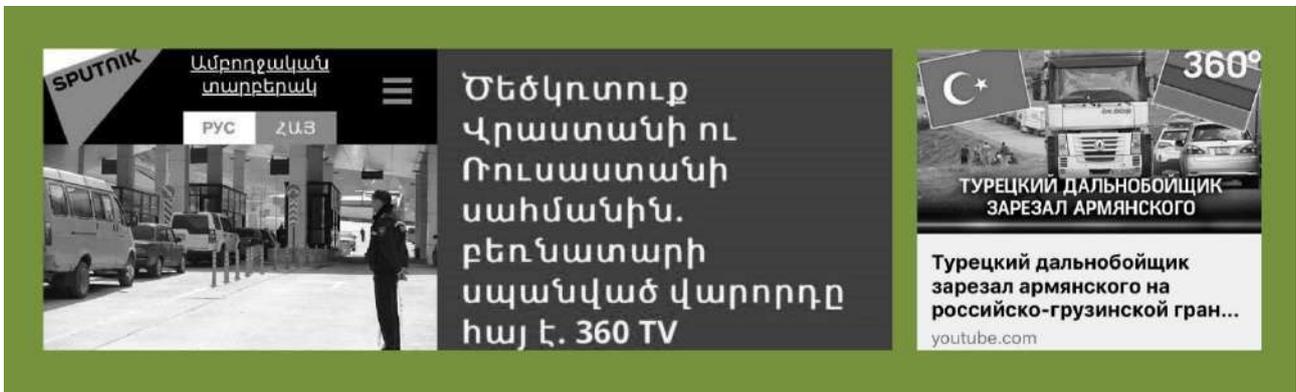
**Disinformation:** At the Georgian-Russian border, a conflict between the drivers of transit tracks ends with a Turkish driver murdering his Armenian colleague.

**Reality:** Neither the [Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs](#), nor the official Armenian side, confirms the incident ever took place.

The source of the disinformation is Russian TV company “[360tv.ru](#)“. This information was also disseminated on Armenian media-platforms: [panorama.am](#) and [Iragir.am](#).

On March 24, a Russian TV channel [360tv.ru](#) disseminated information on Georgian-Russian border conflict between track drivers, in which supposedly the conflict between the drivers of transit tracks ends with Turkish driver murdering his Armenian colleague. This information was widely disseminated in the following days through various Armenian media-platforms. Among those, [aravot.am](#) published an article „Turkish driver murdered an Armenian at the Russian-Georgian border“. The argumentation in the article follows the line, in which the incident supposedly took place due to inter-ethnic hatred.

None of the official parties have confirmed that such an incident ever took place. The [Georgian MIA](#) stated, that they have not received any notification from the Zemo Larsi (upper Larsi) checkpoint regarding any conflict between track drivers and or murder. Armenia’s Foreign Affairs Ministry Spokesperson, Ana Nagdalian has responded to this information, stating the Armenian side has contacted respective bodies in Georgia and in Rostov region, but none of them have confirmed such an incident ever [took place](#).



### NATO — A Target of Disinformation Campaign

Disinformation media campaign targeted the North Atlantic Alliance in a significant manner. The moment the conflict was over in Karabakh, a new media narrative emerged, according to which, Russia is the Region’s key power, and without an alternative, which has further expanded its military presence here by the time the War was over in the Caucasus. This narrative is intent on discrediting NATO and serves to diminish Georgia's desire to join the North Atlantic Alliance. A Pro-Russian media-platform “Georgia and World“ published an article, called “He, who will now start talking about NATO, is an enemy of the country!“ and the desire to integrate with NATO is linked with treasonous tendencies and betrayal of national interests.



Furthermore, the article notes, that Georgia’s aspirations towards NATO is fraught with peril for the country. “The Russian army is stationed within 40 Kilometers. Liberal politicians are keen on destroying this tiny, beautiful country and turn it into a war theater,” - reads the article.<sup>1</sup>

Anti-Western messages around the Karabakh conflict became obvious after November 2020. In the Pro-Russian media-platform „Georgia and World“<sup>2</sup> [article](#) „Politics is a money-making instrument in Georgia“, Armenia’s defeat is linked to the PM Pashinyan’s liberal reforms and George Soros. „Soros won’t bring anyone any good!“ - reads the article. Furthermore, it should be noted, that in the Karabakh conflict, by appealing to the losses sustained by Armenia, the Pro-Russian media „Georgia and World“ is trying to also discredit the Northern Atlantic Alliance and the European Union. According to the [article](#), it was the Armenian example that should have hinted to Georgia to detour from its Pro-Western orientation and the desire to join Western institutions and to declare neutrality. Furthermore, the Pro-Russian media links Armenia’s defeat to its Pro-European foreign orientation. Another important message coming from this Anti-Western rhetoric was that the idea of “color revolutions”, which are apparently the project of the liberal West, has failed. „Liberal project, called “Pashinyan’s color revolutions” has ended in total disarray“.<sup>3</sup> - notes the Pro-Russian online platform „Tvalsazrissi ([Viewpoint](#))“. Additionally, in parallel to the Anti-Western rhetoric, the Pro-Russian media were trying to emphasize the supremacy of Russia in Karabakh conflict and to portray it as an undefeated state. In this case, the goal was to demonstrate that the Russian President, Vladimir Putin was able to end the Karabakh conflict<sup>4</sup> and bring both sides to immediately sign a ceasefire agreement without any support of the [European Union or USA](#).



Caption of the Photo:  
I am neither praising Pashinyan, nor singing love songs to Ilham Aliyev

<sup>1</sup> „Georgia and World“, „He, who will now start talking about NATO, is an enemy of the country!“, November 24, 2020. Accessible at: <https://bit.ly/3u6xsHH>

<sup>2</sup> „Georgia and World“, „Politics is a money-making instrument in Georgia“, November 20, 2020, Accessible at: <https://bit.ly/3cufNUN>

<sup>3</sup> „Tvalsazrissi (viewpoint)“, “As it was expected. one more post-Soviet liberal project, named “Pashinyan’s Colorful Revolution” ends in total failure.” November 12, 2020. Accessible at: <https://bit.ly/3f1WgY4>

<sup>4</sup> “Georgia and World“, „I am neither praising Pashinyan, nor singing love songs to Ilham Aliyev“, November 17, 2020. Accessible at: <https://bit.ly/3fmXxxN>

## Anti-Western Messages in Connection with the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in Online Media

- The victory of Azerbaijan in the Karabakh conflict is linked to its centralized governance, strong presidency and non-liberal course (this narrative was posted on the Facebook page „[World Family Congress](#)“ on December 16, 2020, by a far-right leader, Levan Vasadze).
- Putin was able to end the Karabakh conflict and bring parties to agree on immediate cease-fire without even having the USA and the EU to interfere in the ongoing processes. The Russian President deserves a Nobel Prize for bringing peace to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (This message was spread by the Pro-Russian media-platform „Georgia and the World“ on [17](#) and [3 November 2020](#)).
- Reconciliation of Armenians and the Azeris, and especially cohabitation under “single roof” is practically ruled out; Despite this, wherever the Russian peacekeeping forces have been stationed and are present, those cities, or regions have witnesses ceasefire (The source of this message is a Pro-Russian media-platform “[Saqartvelo da Msophlio \(Georgia and the World\)](#)“, November 17, 2020).
- Armenia’s loss in the Karabakh conflict is linked with Pro-Western orientation and liberal “dictatorship” (This narrative was spread on November 12, 2020, on an online platform „[Tvalsazrisi \(Viewpoint\)](#)“ and also, on the Pro-Russian media-platform “[Sakartvelo da Msophlio \(Georgia and the World\)](#)“ on November 03, 2020).

## Anti-Turkish Messages in Online Media

- Turkey is a historical enemy of Georgia and Georgia will not be saved from it neither by NATO nor the EU. Neutralizing the threats coming from Turkey can only be done with Russia’s help (this narrative was spread on the Pro-Russian media-platform “[News Front](#)“ on December 05, 2020, and on Facebook page „[Stalin](#)“ on December 08, 2020).
- The issue of Namakhvani HPP shows the expansionism of Georgia’s genetic enemy, Turkey and we are now facing the betrayal of Georgia’s national interests (this narrative was spread on the Facebook page “[Stop Turkish Occupation](#)“ on May 24, 2021, and on Facebook page „[Azimuth](#)“ on April 06, 2021).
- Turkey is an occupier of Georgia, which has installed a new border in the Rioni Valley (this narrative was spread on the Facebook page “[Stop Turkish Occupation](#)“ on April 09, 2021).
- 



Photo on the Left: Turkish-Georgian Border, Gumati, Rioni Valley.”

Photo on the Right: Stop Turkish Occupation: “Turkish occupants have installed borders in our Rioni Valley! (With the support of our traitor Government and its shameful gendarmerie”

## 4. ANTI-ARMENIAN NARRATIVES OBSERVED IN SOCIAL AND ONLINE MEDIA

Against the background of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the disinformation campaign visibly accelerated Anti-Armenian rhetoric. In this regard, we have observed a certain trend, where attempts were made to fuel ethnic hatred and create hotspots in Georgian regions with ethnic Armenian population. In January, Anti-Armenian media-platforms devoted attention to the symbolic ceremony, organized on the New Year's Eve by the ethnic Armenian population in Javakheti. The ceremony was intended to symbolically honor their compatriots fighting in the Karabakh [conflict](#). Notoriously Anti-Armenian Georgian-language web-site "[KavkazPlus](#)" assessed this fact as a separatist event, and those ethnic Armenians participating in it, are christened with such terms as "terrorists", and "separatists". A charity foundation "With Javakheti Armenians" also became a target of Anti-Armenian campaign in February. The Foundation's new branch was inaugurated in a [ceremony](#) in Ninotsminda on February. Famously Anti-Armenian online media-platform [KavkazPlus](#)<sup>5</sup> responded to this news and called the Foundation a "separatist project," intended to legalize the Armenian violence against Georgia using the "Karabakh scenario." However, according to the [statement](#) of the Foundation's founders, „the Foundation was created for charity purposes, so that Samtskhe-Javakheti region is able to assist the citizens of Javakheti, Karabakh and Armenia“.

„პავანხეთის სომხებთან ერთად“ - ნინოწმინდაში საქველმოქმედო ფონდის ფილიალი გაიხსნა

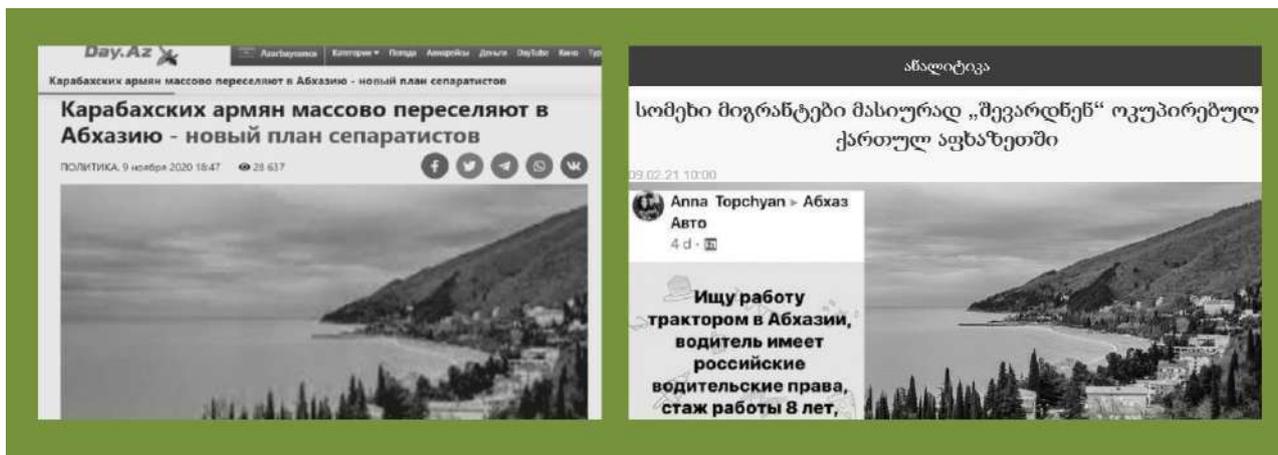


Source: tv9news.ge (Title: "With Javakheti Armenians" — A Ninotsminda Branch of Charity Foundation is Inaugurated)

To fuel Anti-Armenian attitudes, various social media began massively spreading disinformation that 3,000 Armenians were resettled in Abkhazia. The Facebook pages "[Abkhaz Convention](#)", "[Refugees for Refugees](#)" and "[Public National Movement](#)" were sharing news about the massive Armenian resettlement in Abkhazia. Azerbaijani media-platform [day.az](#), also reported, via [smi6.ru](#) that 3-4 thousand Karabakh

<sup>5</sup>„KavkazPlus“, „Is the Foundation „With Javakheti Armenians“ a separatist threat for Georgian Security?!“, February 27, 2021, accessible at: <https://bit.ly/2NZhWOf>

Armenians were sent to Abkhazia for resettlement. The Democracy Research Institute investigated this information by studying various sources and found that it was false and disinformation. It must be noted, that during this period, due to Covid-19 pandemic, Georgia had its borders shut with Armenia and there was no way thousands of Armenians could cross borders into Georgia



## 5. ANTI-AZERBAIJANI NARRATIVES OBSERVED IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Against the background of military conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, in Georgia the Pro-Russian media has intensified Anti-Azerbaijani media messaging. The Russian-language media-platforms and social networks were observed trying to depict Azerbaijan as an enemy.

Disinformation posters “Marneuli is an Azerbaijani territorial unit, named “Borchalo” had high online interaction. Disinformation posters were disseminated on the Armenian and Russian-language Telegram channels and online media-platforms [kentron.am](http://kentron.am), [MAMUL.am.ru](http://MAMUL.am.ru) and [Hay mtorum](http://Hay mtorum). The original source of this disinformation was a Russian-language news platform [АЗЕРБАЙДЖАН online](http://АЗЕРБАЙДЖАН online). Given the tensions in the region, spreading such types of disinformation narratives, and attempting to portray Azerbaijan, the strategic partner, and a neighbor of Georgia, as an enemy, is a dangerous message sent by the Russian disinformation campaign. It is an important trend, that the fake news, which fuels ethnic hatred, mostly are disseminated not on Armenian or Azerbaijani, but on Russian language media sources.



Пропагандистские плакаты, распространённые азербайджанскими ресурсами. Армения, Иран, Ирак, Грузия. Россия. Кто следующий?

In January, the Armenian Telegram channels and media-platforms became visibly active in spreading an Anti-Azerbaijani disinformation, which was linked to Georgia. Namely, disinformation was disseminated on several occasions as if in Marneuli a conflict took place, based on ethnic grounds, between ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

On January 10, an Armenian-language Telegram channel [Mediaport](#) disseminated disinformation that in Marneuli, Armenian transit tracks came under attack by the Azerbaijani military forces.

On January 25, an Armenian-language media-platform [Yerevan Today](#) disseminated disinformation that in Marneuli, Armenian transit tracks suffered attack by the Azerbaijanians. The Embassy of Armenia in Georgia immediately put out a statement, clarifying that the incident took place in the village Phonichala and not in [Marneuli](#). Furthermore, the ethnic identity of those who attacked the tracks is not known. Within the frames of media monitoring, both incidents were studied in detail by the DRI. After reviewing several sources, it was found that on both occasions, disinformation narratives were disseminated.<sup>6</sup>



During the reporting period, a certain trend was found in the actions of far-right groups: they were attempting to initiate religious and ethnic conflict between ethnic Azerbaijani and Georgian population. In this regard, their network disinformation media-campaign is noteworthy. The campaign capitalized on the incident, when on January 27, 2021, a cross was stolen, which was erected on Gagi Fortress, and on May 16, a physical altercation took place in Dmanisi.

The far-right groups and media-platforms tried to use Dmanisi violence to fuel Anti-Azerbaijani attitudes. An ultra-nationalist media [“Alt-Info”](#) was covering the conflict on the ground. Alt-Info evaluated this incident as a provocation perpetrated by the ethnic Azerbaijanis.

The far-right Facebook pages [“Kardhu”](#), [“Patriotuli Gverdi \(Patriot Page\)”](#) and [“Dideba Ers - Sikvili Mters \(Glory to the Nation, Death to the Enemy\)”](#) were emphasizing that ethnic Azerbaijanians were equipped with various cold-arms, sledgehammers, stones and were exceptionally aggressive towards Georgians

<sup>6</sup> Democracy Research Institute, „Social Media Monitoring Report (December, 2020 - January, 2021 )”, accessible at: <https://bit.ly/3vA9iq7>

Altercations in Dmanisi received extremely ethnonationalist messages from the following Facebook pages: “[Faktebi \(facts\)](#)“, and “[Georgian Page](#)“. According to their rhetoric, “Georgia, first belongs to the Georgians and the representatives of all other nations are just guests here“. Mobilization of social network was actively used to recruit supporters by an ultra-nationalist group, [Kartuli Dzala \(Georgian Power\)](#). Their Facebook page published information, as if ethnic Azerbaijanis living in Marneuli were physically joining Azerbaijanis living in Dmanisi to protest together. And they called on ethnic Georgian population to come together and support Svanetians in Dmanisi.



The far-right groups were notoriously pushing Anti-Azerbaijani rhetoric on January 27, when the cross erected on Gagi Fortress [was stolen](#). This fact was preceded by the Statement of the Marneuli and Hujabi Diocese, regarding an incident that took place in the village Meore Kesalo (Second Kesalo), in Marneuli Municipality due to issues related with land cultivation between the ethnic Azerbaijani Georgian citizens and the Diocese of Marneuli and Hujabi. An ultra-nationalist media “[Alt-Info](#)“ accused ethnic Azerbaijanians for instigating the incident. The process of re-hoisting of the cross in Marneuli saw immediate involvement of the leaders of far-right groups “[Kartuli Marshi \(Georgian March\)](#)“ and [Kartuli Idea \(Georgian Idea\)](#)“. The posts they would publish was characterized with Anti-Azerbaijani attitudes, while the comments these posts attracted were markedly ethnonationalist, and contained the signs of religious extremism and had threatening messages.

## KEY FINDINGS OF MEDIA MONITORING

- The following trend was identified: The pro-Russian media used the Mountainous Karabakh conflict for creating manipulative, fake content, and for spreading Pro-Russian messages.
- Georgian far-right groups portray the Mountainous Karabakh conflict as the defeat of Liberal West in the Region, which in turn is used to discredit Euro-Atlantic institutions.
- Ethnonationalist media campaign trends, given its characteristics, are not uniform. While the disinformation mostly attempts to portray Turkey and Azerbaijan as occupying countries, with Armenia we observe the markedly chauvinistic and Xenophobic messages, used as an instrument for fueling Anti-Armenian sentiments.
- Against the background of the Mountainous Karabakh conflict, Anti-Armenian and Anti-Azerbaijani media campaigns intensified. In this regard, fueling hatred based on ethnicity, and creating hotspots for conflict in the regions of Georgia, where most inhabitants are ethnic minorities, became a trend.
- The Russian and Azerbaijani language media platforms and/or social networks were visibly trying to depict Azerbaijan as an enemy for Georgia, and in this regard, were spreading a wealth of disinformation

- Another trend observed was the far-right groups attempting to fuel ethnic-based hatred between the Azerbaijani and the Georgian population.