



Democracy Research Institute (DRI)

Democracy Research Institute is a public policy think tank that aims at promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms; establishment of the transparent and accountable governance system based on the rule of law and human rights; support to the establishment of free and fair society; support to the protection of human rights in conflict-affected regions; restoration of trust among parties and promotion of integration policy and support to the European integration.

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Western orientation of Ukraine and Georgia targeted by Georgian far-right pro-Russian groups

In February, in the wake of the military attack on Ukraine, the sharply pro-Russian wing of far-right groups has become particularly active in Georgia. The far-right forces tried to use the war in Ukraine to fuel skepticism in Georgian society against NATO and to illustrate the need for full distancing from the West.

The media monitoring conducted by the Democracy Research Institute made it clear that the propaganda of the far-right forces, which openly support the Kremlin, was aimed at changing Georgia's Western foreign vector and involving the country in Russian-supported international platforms.

DRI: Liability for war propaganda must be tightened

From February 24, 2020 until today, against the background of the war waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the Alt Info broadcasting company has been spreading pro-Russian and pro-Kremlin narratives particularly aggressively. Unlike many other European countries, Georgian channels are still justifying the war launched by Russia.

It is permissible to perceive the spread of Russian propaganda as a threat and to take measures to be protected from it for the purpose of ensuring state security and public safety (Constitution of Georgia, Articles 17.2, 17.5). The first paragraph of Article 56 of the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting prohibits propaganda for any kind of war.

The Democracy Research Institute considers that a self-regulation mechanism is an ineffective means against war propaganda.

Accordingly, DRI called on: The Parliament of Georgia - to immediately start legislative work in order to develop a package of effective sanctions against propaganda for war of a hostile state; Electronic communications network operators - to show high state responsibility and take appropriate measures to restrict the transmission of the Kremlin propaganda media in Georgia.

Far-right groups' pro-Russian media discourse in the Russia-Ukraine war context

On 15 March, 2022, in order to analyse the disinformation rhetoric and far-right narrative backed by the far-right groups, the Democracy Research Institute published a social media monitoring [report](#) which summarizes the outcomes of the media monitoring conducted in January and February 2022. During the reporting period, the DRI analysed 450 incidents, where disinformation and propaganda was spread on social and online media. The report also analyses political assessments made by far-right leaders in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine War. Political entities with openly pro-Russian aspirations wage information warfare through a coordinated network engaging various Facebook groups and websites.

In this information warfare, Alt-Info is arguably the major pro-Kremlin far-right platform, which in turn is closely linked to Conservative Movement, a political party in Georgia. Alt-Info broadcasts pro-Russian new flashes which are later shared to Facebook audience through internal groups and pages linked to Conservative Movement. Alt-Info ensures that disinformation is spread swiftly and constantly among its followers, through a coordinated action.

Democracy Research Institute considers methods Alt-Info and the Conservative Movement use for their propagandist media campaigns, such as fake content and manipulated photos and videos to be dangerous. Therefore, studying their activities and financial resources should be a critically important for the authorities.

The sources of funding for Alt-Info's political party are unknown

On 23 March, 2022, the Democracy Research Institute published a monitoring report analysing the activities of far-right radical groups in Georgia. The report summarises the preliminary results of the monitoring of the Conservative Movement.

The Conservative Movement is a political party created by the far-right, openly pro-Russian Alt-Info. Through it, the far-right group, which initially emerged as a television channel, is trying to get engaged in the political life of the country. Irakli Martinenko, Irakli Morgoshia, Giorgi Kardava and Vasil Gvalia are the members of the political council of the party. The leaders of the Conservative Movement are the organizers of the mass violence of July 5, 2021.

Information on the Conservative Movement's finances has not been available for a long time. According to Giorgi Kardava, the Alt-Info and Conservative Movement are largely funded by Konstantine Morgoshia, although the relevant information is not officially available. As for the officially disclosed donations, they cannot be enough to rent the offices already opened, to pay staff salaries and to cover other expenses.

DRI: Authorities have an obligation to tolerate peaceful protest

On March 7, 2022, as the war in Ukraine entered its eleventh day, activists protesting against the Russian militaristic policy were arrested in Tbilisi, near the building of the Georgian Government.

According to the information obtained by the Democracy Research Institute from various sources, the arrest of the protesters preceded the throwing of flour at police officers. Consequently, the argument that the actions of the rally organizers went beyond freedom of expression is unfounded.

The Democracy Research Institute has repeatedly stated that it is illegal to detain non-violent protesters with the use of increased police forces and violent methods. It is also alarming that Georgia is the third country, following Russia and Belarus, where protesters showing support to Ukraine and protesting against Russia's aggressive policy have been arrested.

DRI presents a one-year report on its work on occupied territories

On March 11, the Democracy Research Institute presented a Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

The report reviews all the acute and important issues of the occupied territories of Georgia throughout 2021.

In order to mitigate the problems identified as a result of one year of work, the Democracy Research Institute appealed to the Government of Georgia to:

- intensify diplomatic efforts to proactively inform the international community about the systemic human rights violations in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia;
- ensure that the issue of international responsibility of the party exercising effective control in the region (Russian Federation) is part of the agenda of international negotiations, including application of international sanctions against it;
- strengthen security measures in the villages adjacent to the administrative boundary line to prevent the illegal abduction of Georgian citizens;
- due to the difficult human rights situation in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, the efforts of the Georgian authorities need to be proactive and action plans need to be developed in response to key risks, including to reopen the so-called checkpoints in order to ensure access of the population of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia to timely and quality health care;
- establish special support mechanisms, in addition to the existing education and health care programmes, in order to assist the people living in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and along the dividing line.

DRI opinion: What does the regulation of NGOs' activities by Russian legislation in Abkhazia mean?

The first sign of changes in Abkhazian politics was the appointment of Inal Ardzinba as a de facto foreign minister, a person with experience of working for Putin's authorities in Moscow. Any kind of ties with Russia has always been useful for the promotion in the so-called government of Abkhazia – as it meant that the person had the necessary ties.

Now that the de facto government of Abkhazia seems to have finally decided to legislate for the Russian regulatory framework, known as "foreign agent law", to restrict non-governmental organizations, the risks likely to face Abkhazia, especially in terms of its growing dependence on Russia, are becoming evident.

We can assume that the task of the current de facto government of Abkhazia and its minister of foreign affairs, at the behest of the Russian Federation, is not only to reformulate or suppress the Georgian-Abkhazian civil dialogue, but it has more far-reaching goals. First of all, of course, it could be aimed at cutting another weak link between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia, created by cooperation and dialogue between NGOs.

The above steps taken by the de facto government of Abkhazia further increase Abkhazia's dependence on Russia and provide a fertile ground for neutralizing potential opponents to this process for the purpose of the region's integration with Russia.

DRI view: Russian "soft power" and manipulation of memory in the Gali district

As the de facto ministry of foreign affairs of Abkhazia is threatening to suspend international activities carried out in Abkhazia without its consent, the Russian Federation's illegal representation in Abkhazia is active in charitable and humanitarian directions. Their activities apply to the Gali district as well.

Recent developments show that the Russian Federation's illegal representation in Abkhazia may remain the only "international" force operating as a humanitarian mission in Gali, thus disguising Russia's strategy of annexing Abkhazia.

If the de facto authorities of Abkhazia realize the dangers that Russia poses with such a game, they will inevitably have to reconsider their approaches to the Gali district. This should include the opening of a space for international organizations and civil society sector, so that the policy of "winning the hearts of population" is not exclusively Russian and they gain the trust of the Gali population. In a broader context, this "revision" should apply to the passportization of the Gali district and elimination of rights discrimination as well.

Understanding "unknown" tragedies

Many agree today that it is futile to talk about conflict transformation or reconciliation without a critical review of the past. The future of our society and state depends a lot on how much we refuse to embellish history and admit our mistakes and crimes.

Today we, Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians know much more about the developments in distant countries than about each other, even about the tragedies of our recent past. It has been almost three decades after the atrocities of war and we need to realize the significance of those days.

The tragedies of Dzari and Eredvi are one of the most painful pages of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict for Ossetians, and the Lata tragedy is the hardest episode of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict for Abkhazians.

The memory of innocent people obliges us to take steps to find out the truth. Respecting the innocent victims will help us in rebuilding trust.

Anti-Corruption Agency - Legal Framework and Gaps in Practice

On March 18, the Democracy Research Institute presented a [report](#) “Anti-Corruption Agency - Legal Framework and Gaps in Practice”.

The main purpose of the study was to explore the activities of the structural subdivision of the State Security Service - the Anti-Corruption Agency and to establish whether the cases investigated by the Agency were related to state security. The study was focused on the investigation of cases inconsistent with the work direction of the Service and the duplication of competencies between different agencies.

The organization recommends the following:

- To completely deprive the State Security Service of its investigative powers (especially relating to corruption crimes); the Parliament of Georgia to continue working on the establishment of an independent anti-corruption investigation mechanism
- Prior to implementing the proposed changes, the Democracy Research Institute believes that it is necessary for the State Security Service to limit itself to investigating only actions that actually pose a risk to the security and interests of the State.

DRI in Coalition activities

The Democracy Research Institute actively cooperates with other civil society organizations. In March, with the support and involvement of DRI statements. Issues related to the European Union were topical this month.

DRI took the initiative for the preparation of the [appeal for the immediate launch of Georgia's rapid EU accession procedure](#). The organization also responded to the [application for membership in the European Union](#) and joined CSO initiative - [10 steps on the path to EU membership](#).

Together with partner CSOs DRI [appealed to the Public Broadcaster of Georgia](#) to actively cover the issues related to EU integration on the basis of Article 16 of the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting. In one more joint [statement](#), DRI with partner [organizations called on the Georgian authorities](#) to openly convey their will and readiness for the organized reception of refugees from Ukraine and take effective refugee-receiving measures, including developing streamlined procedures for granting the refugees appropriate status.

DRI with partner organizations along with the Democracy Index, [responded](#) to the Georgian Dream's dispute with the President of Georgia in the Constitutional Court, calling the dispute over a constitutional violation and separation of powers by the president a legally unfounded and unpromising one.

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