



Preventing Far-Right Extremism in Georgia

Report on Monitoring the Activities of Far-Right Radical Groups

(Preliminary Report)

2022

Far-Right Political Party – Conservative Movement

Introduction

The Democracy Research Institute (DRI) has been monitoring the activities of far-right radical groups in Georgia since 2019. During this period, far-right groups have undergone significant transformations. The newly formed political party Conservative Movement has attracted a great deal of public interest due to its express pro-Russian orientation.

This report presents the preliminary results of monitoring the activities of Conservative Movement. In developing the report, the project team relied on the information provided by both the official and other media, as well as sources of the DRI, which is verified by alternative means.

Conservative Movement is the political formation of the far-right media outlet Alt-Info, which is openly pro-Russian. Through Conservative Movement, Alt-Info – a far-right group that initially emerged in the form of a television channel in the public sphere – is trying to become a part of the mainstream political life of the country. The party's political council includes Irakli Martinenko, Irakli Morgoshia, Giorgi Kardava, and Vasil Gvalia. The leaders of Conservative Movement are the organisers of the mass violence that took place on 5 July 2021.¹ However, they have not been held accountable through criminal proceedings to this day.

On 20 November 2021, at the party conference, the party founders openly announced the pro-Russian and anti-Western foreign policy of Conservative Movement. Zura Makharadze declared that the party aimed to put an end to "liberal dictatorship" and establish "Christian democracy" in Georgia.²

According to the public registry records, Conservative Movement was [registered](#) on 7 December 2021. Zurab Makharadze is the chair of the party and Giorgi Kardava is the secretary-general.³ Both of them are faces of Alt-Info.

Conservative Movement applied to the Public Registry for party registration as early as November 2021. However, the application was rejected and the [registration procedure was suspended](#). One of the reasons for the rejection was that the list of members submitted to the registry by Alt-Info did not contain their ID numbers. Furthermore, there were following relevant circumstances:

- The sketch of the emblem submitted for registration did not meet the requirements determined by the statute of the political association of citizens;
- The statute submitted for the registration of the party did not determine the Conference as the governing body and the audit commission was not referred to in uniform terms;
- The statute provided for the appointment, instead of electing, the party's political council, audit commission and party chairman;
- The statute did not provide for the rule of using party property; and
- Two articles of the statute were contradictory.

¹ Available at: shorturl.at/dxj27.

² Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FaAe5H5qjk>.

³ Radio Liberty, 2021, *The Public Registry Registered Alt-Info as a Party*, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31597491.html>.

Alt-Info was given a [deadline](#) of 10 days to correct the existing shortcomings and it was officially registered as a party after the shortcomings were rectified.

1. Expansion of the Party, Its First Steps and Donations

Having been registered as a party, since January 2022, the Alt-Info group actively started opening offices across Georgia. According to the [statement](#) made by Konstantine Morgoshia, the number of party offices would be 80 by the end of March 2022 and later they would be opening offices abroad.

In February 2022, 25 offices were opened across the country, covering the regions of Kakheti and Samtskhe-Javakheti, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and western Georgia. Such rapid expansion has raised questions about the party's financial resources.

According to a source of the DRI, the monthly rent for each office is around GEL 1,500-2,500. In addition to this cost, salaries have to be paid to those who have been employed by Alt-Info in its local offices. There are 5-6 employees allocated for each such office. Their remuneration is presently confidential. According to a source of the DRI, most employees receive their salaries not by bank transfers but in cash, which deepens the doubts about the source and the amount of funding for the party.

Information about Conservative Movement's finances has not been available for a long time, although, according to the party's founders, their funding is fully transparent and comes [from businessmen](#) living in Georgia or other post-Soviet countries, who have "virtually no connection" with Georgia.⁴

By the end of February 2022, [information about the sponsors of Conservative Movement](#) was posted on the page of political finance monitoring. According to Giorgi Kardava, Konstantine Morgoshia mostly finances Alt-Info, and now Conservative Movement. However, no formal information is available that Morgoshia funds the party. At the same time, officially disclosed donations cannot be enough to pay the rent of already opened offices, staff salaries or cover other expenses.

Since December 2021, Conservative Movement has opened up to 60 regional offices. The majority of these offices are located in the city centres, which must entail large expenses. According to [official data](#), from the foundation date of the party until 22 March 2022, the income of the political party already amounted to GEL 90,935. At the same time, the number of donations officially declared by the political party almost tripled in the last six days. As of 16 March 2022, the total amount of officially declared donations of Conservative Movement was GEL 36,675. By the afternoon of 21 March 2022, this sum was GEL 44,725. On 22 March 2022, as this report was being finalised, the total amount of donations was 90,935 GEL, according to the State Audit Office.

Presently, the largest donor of the party is Zezva Chankseliani (GEL 8,000). During the 2018 presidential election, he [donated](#) GEL 1,000 to Salome Zourabichvili, who was supported by the ruling political party. Zezva Chankseliani [owns](#) multiple companies. The majority of the party donors are heads of the party's regional offices. Most of them have donated money to the party on two occasions.

Increased public interest in Conservative Movement may partly explain how the number of officially declared donations has almost tripled. However, this does not dispel doubts as to how the newly formed party with no previous experience could open up to 60 regional offices for GEL 36,675. As of 16 March 2022, the party had already opened 59 offices throughout Georgia.

⁴ Radio Liberty, 2021, *It Is Necessary to Prepare – Why Does Alt-Info Group Create a Party?*

2. Regional Offices of Conservative Movement and Public Protests

Since December 2021, Conservative Movement has been opening party offices, starting with Samegrelo. The first office was opened in Zugdidi on 27 December 2021. The head of the office is Gia Gulua. After Zugdidi, an office was opened in Khobi, [headed](#) by Rostom Kilasonia. Rostom Kilasonia had been an acting *Gamgebeli* of Khobi in 2013. However, he left the Georgian Dream coalition and joined Nino Burjanadze in 2013. According to his [statement](#), the reason for this change was the “cohabitation” of Georgian Dream with United National Movement.

[Otar Danelia](#) was appointed as the head of Conservative Movement’s office in Martvili and [Giorgi Natchkebia](#) in Tsalenjikha. The Abasha office is headed by [Zurab Tsomaia](#).

Expansion of the party continued with the opening of offices in Borjomi and Akhaltsikhe. The office in Borjomi Municipality is located at 1 St. Nino Street and will be headed by [Shorena Kobidze](#). Shorena Kobidze is a frequent guest on Alt-Info programmes. The Akhaltsikhe office of Conservative Movement is located at 1 Niko Ketskhoveli Street, and Simon Eghiashvili and Akaki Jelia head it.⁵

At a later stage, the party opened offices in Sachkhere, Tchiatura and Zestaponi. Lasha Gomarteli is the head of the Sachkhere office. Giorgi Lobzhanidze and Zaur Modebadze are co-heads of the Conservative Movement office in Tchiatura. As for the [Zestaponi office](#), it will be headed by Davit Tchumbadze and Besik Leonidze. The names cannot tell the public anything, as these individuals have no previous political experience as revealed by the vetting process.

Offices have also been opened in the Zemo Svaneti region. Yuri (Khuta) Ratiani owns a building in the centre of Mestia, at 16 King Tamar Street, where the regional organisation of Conservative Movement is now located. He is the former [General Director](#) of the Democratic Governance Development Fund of the Mestia Administrative Unit of Mestia Municipality. In 2018-2019, Yuri Ratiani was the Vice President of Sakrebulo Faction [Bakradze, Ugulava – European Georgia](#). On 2 October 2021, he again ran for office as a [fourth candidate on the same party list](#), however, this time, unsuccessfully. It should be noted that the Mestia Regional Election Commission is located in the same building.

Unlike the managers of offices opened in the other regions of Georgia, whose names yield no information, Giorgi Ratiani, the head of the pro-Russian party's regional organisation in Mestia, had been an employee of the Counter-Intelligence Department of the State Security Service for Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and was in charge of the Mestia municipality. According to the official data, Ratiani has not been with the State Security Service since September 2021. An initiative group [nominated](#) him as a candidate for Mestia mayoralty during the municipal elections of 2 October 2021. It is assumed that Ratiani ran for office on the instructions of the State Security Service to “poach” votes away from the mayoral candidates nominated by the parties of Giorgi Gakharia and Ana Dolidze. Giorgi Ratiani denied this claim. In the very first round of elections, the candidate of the ruling party won by 64.34%. Giorgi Ratiani [obtained](#) 9.01% of the votes (412 votes).

On 2 March 2022, a rally in support of Ukraine was held in Mestia, where it was voiced that pro-Russian parties and TV stations should not be allowed to exist in Georgia. Later, the demonstrators moved to the newly opened office of Conservative Movement and demanded the closure of the office. The action escalated into a physical altercation. After the face-off between the residents and the party representatives, eventually, the owner of the office space promised the protestors that the party would

⁵ Shota Martinenko’s Facebook post, dated 13 February 2022, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/100074583109872/videos/4767769213260158/> (accessed 18/03/2022).

[vacate](#) the office as soon as possible.

A similar confrontation between locals and representatives of Conservative Movement took place in Ambrolauri on 27 February 2022. Ambrolauri residents announced even larger-scale rallies, which, according to them, would continue until the party left Ratcha.⁶ In the Adjara region, namely, [Khulo](#) and [Shuakhevi](#), residents protested against the establishment of the party's regional offices. The offices were closed the next day due to the protests. In this regard, the following statement was posted on the party's official Facebook page:

“As for the Khulo office, before the conclusion of the lease agreement, the owner of the office space was pressured by forces led by liberal Nazis and Wahhabis which had resulted in a temporary closure of the Khulo office.”⁷

There was a backlash following the opening of the Sagarejo office as well. On 14 March 2022, residents protested the party's expansion into the Kakheti region.⁸ In this regard, one of the leaders of the party, Konstantine Morgoshia, stated that such a reaction was a good sign and protests indicated that the party was going in the right direction:

“We have opened up to 60 branches. These days we are planning to open more offices. Every single day we stick to our agenda and aim... This shows us that we are moving in the right direction because there are protests. This [protest] makes us, on the contrary, happy because it means we are taking the right steps. There are 64 regions and these four regional offices will open in a few days and we will add a few more offices.”⁹

The opening of the office was followed by confrontation between locals and party representatives in Ozurgeti as well. On 13-14 March 2022, locals protested against the expansion of pro-Russian forces in the Guria region. It was reported in the media that Conservative Movement was supported by [Vakhtang Tokhadze](#), a priest and a member of the Shemokmedi Diocese in Ozurgeti. In this regard, Metropolitan Ioseb of the Diocese stated that, if the information were confirmed, rev. Vakhtang would be [suspended](#) from the priesthood. The backlash from the residents is also noteworthy. These reactions [did not allow](#) the party to open an office. In Ozurgeti, the party office was given the area, which is registered to the City Hall and is rented by Georgian Dream in pre-election campaigns. On 16 March 2022, due to residents' protests, the party was forced to [close down](#) its Ozurgeti office, which had not started functioning.

Residents started preparing for a rally in Lanchkhuti, where Conservative Movement planned to open an office. [Gia Gotua](#), the former Lanchkhuti governor and businessperson, was appointed as the head of the office. According to a DRI source, he is a close friend of the father of Irakli Kobakhidze, the president of the ruling party Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia and enjoys great influence in the region. He owns [Iveria 7 Ltd](#), which has won contracts worth a total of [GEL 10,937,112.13](#).

After protests in Guria, the anti-Alt-Info protests took place in Marneuli, where on 14 March 2022, Samira Bairamova, a civil activist, painted the facade of the office, that had been opened in the centre of

⁶ Publika, 2022, *What Happened in Mestia, Is our Motivation, We Will See them Off From Here Too – Protesting Alt-Info in Regions*, available at: <https://publika.ge/alt-info-regionebi/?fbclid=IwAR0JA88jydvikXvTCItf2DbVePSmG25gCybWPCvuffdaE-0-uJP-8XUjNaA>.

⁷ Facebook page of Conservative Movement, a post of 8 March 2022, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/conservative.movement.official/posts/132283789324549>.

⁸ Radio Liberty Facebook page, 14 March 2022, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/radiotavisupleba/posts/10160149601817360>.

⁹ Publika, 3 March 2022, *What Happened in Mestia, Is Our Motivation, We Will See them Off From Here Too – Protesting Alt-Info in Regions*.

Marneuli, in the colours of Ukrainian and EU flags, stating that Conservative Movement is a pro-Russian power which is intolerant towards ethnic minorities and is a threat to Georgian statehood.¹⁰

The opening of the party office in Kobuleti was also met with [protests](#). The local office opened on 12 March 2022. In Telavi, Conservative Movement has opened an [office](#) in the city centre, near the administrative building of the City Hall and the governor's administration. Iliia Megrelishvili and Gia Kartchauli were appointed as co-heads of the office. The latter is a former [member](#) of the National Forum party. In Akhmeta, the party's office is located in the centre, opposite the City Hall. The building where the office space was rented belongs to the family of Kakha Mamulashvili, a Georgian Dream member of Akhmeta Municipality *Sakrebulo* and the President of the Finance and Budget Commission. However, according to him, he has no connection with Conservative Movement and he only rented the place to them.

The opening of Conservative Movement's office on 20 March 2022 [in Akhaltsikhe](#) took place amid public protests.

Among the new party members appointed as heads of regional offices is the head of the Rustavi office Merab Gigani, who is Alexander Kardava's business partner. Alexander Kardava is the brother of Giorgi Kardava, one of the leaders of Alt-Info. Alexander Kardava and Merab Gigani own shares of Victoria + Ltd. Gigani [is also on the list](#) of donors contributing to Conservative Movement. He [took part](#) in the violent assaults carried out on 5 July 2021 and controlled the events from a distance. Gigani is not like other heads of regional offices of the party, who have had no previous links to Alt-Info or its leaders.

Despite facing such protests from the public in various regions, on 14 March 2022, Konstantine Morgoshia, one of the leaders of Conservative Movement, said in his interview given to the media that the party would further expand for this very reason. The party's leaders are travelling to Russia to hold meetings with politicians willing to get the [relations](#) between the two countries "cooled down". In a statement to the media, Konstantine Morgoshia noted that there were political actors in Russia who were ready to contribute to Conservative Movement [financially](#) to make it more viable. According to him, "soon they will be financially strong, because there are people, including those from Russia, who will support them."

Considering the fact that Conservative Movement has been only recently founded, has no political past and, at this point, its prospects are unclear, the desire of Russian political actors to cooperate with it, raises questions. It is also noteworthy that, presently, politics in Russia is strictly limited to the Kremlin ruling party.

Annex Offices of Conservative Movement

1. Tbilisi – II Exit, 11a Saakadze Str.
2. Zugdidi – 32 Gamsakhurdia Str., Gia Gulua, the Head.
3. Khobi – 2 Gamsakhurdia Str., Rostom Kilasonia, the Head.
4. Abasha – 17 Freedom Str., Zurab Tsomaia, the Head.
5. Tsalenjikha – 2 Gamsakhurdia Str., Giorgi Natchkebia, the Head.

¹⁰ Radio Liberty, 14 March 2022, The Marneuli Office of Conservative Movement was Painted Over in the Colours of the Ukrainian Flag, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31752637.html?fbclid=IwAR1gSyI6Ede4ZkxE1Q-T-veh8VHW5wCStJrShA-j9TKdH5tdnifPcieAbRw>.

6. Martvili – 12a Freedom Str., Otar Danelia, the Head.
7. Mestia – 19 King Tamar Str., Giorgi Ratiani, the Head.
8. Dmanisi – 52, 9 April Str., Giorgi Arghvliani, the Head.
9. Rustavi – 21 Zhiuli Shartava Str., Merab Gigani, the Head.
10. Telavi – 2 Goderdzi Chokheli Str., Ilia Megrelishvili and Gia Kartchauli, the Co-Heads.
11. Lagodekhi – 26 Qiziki Str., Vakho Barbakadze, the Head.
12. Kaspi – 6 Eprem II Str., Giga Karbelashvili, the Head.
13. Khashuri – 7 Galaktion Tabidze Str. Giorgi Kiknadze and Ramaz Nozadze, the Co-Heads.
14. Tetrtskaro – 1 Merab Kostava Str., Anton Tamliani and Tamaz Beqauri, the Co-Heads.
15. Gardabani – 64 Davit Aghmashenebeli Str., Giorgi Dadvani, the Head.
16. Borjomi – 1 St. Nino Str., Shorena Kobidze, the Head.
17. Akhaltsikhe – 1 Niko Ketskoveli Str., Simon Eghvashvili and Akaki Jelia, the Co-Heads.
18. Akhmeta – 1 Bakhtrioni Str., Jimsher Bukhachauri, the Head.
19. Kvareli – 111 Ilia Chavchavadze Str., Gocha Kekenadze, the Head.
20. Tsnori – 5 Davit Aghmashenebeli Str., Giorgi Khatiashvili, the Head.
21. Sachkhere – 8 Ivane Gomarteli Str., Lasha Gomarteli, the Head.
22. Tchiatura – 23 Egnate Ninoshvili Str., Giorgi Lobzhanidze and Zaur Modebadze, the Co-Heads.
23. Zestaponi – 27 Davit Aghmashenebeli Str., Davit Tchumbadze and Besik Leonidze, the Co-Heads.
24. Samtredia – 28 Ilia Chavchavadze Str., Gia Vashakidze, the Head.
25. Senaki – 95 Ilia Chavchavadze Str., Giorgi Bokuchava, the Head.
26. Poti – 9 Davit Aghmashenebeli Str., Davit Dvalishvili, the Head.
27. Chkhorotsku – 14 Davit Aghmashenebeli Str., Beqa Gabedava and Emzar Miqava, the Co-Heads.
28. Batumi – 127 Vakhtang Gorgasali Str., Gogi Qadidze, the Head.
29. Kutaisi – 40 King Tamar Str., Giga Sulakadze, the Head.
30. Vani – Jvari Square, Revaz Pashkuridze, the Head.
31. Khoni – 3 Freedom Square, Gia Managadze, the Head.
32. Tskaltubo – 13 Galaktion Tabidze Str., Zaza Museliani, the Head.
33. Tkibuli – 30 Gamsakhurdia Str., Arsen Popkhadze, the Head.
34. Baghdati – 19 Shota Rustaveli Str., Mamuka Kvetenadze, the Head.
35. Terjola – 68, Shota Rustaveli Str., Zaur Oboladze, the Head.
36. Dusheti – Adjacent to Restaurant Aragvi, Abo Samkharadze and Marine Lapanashvili, the Co-Heads.
37. Qareli – 2 Egnate Ninoshvili Str., Mariam Miqadze and Estate Khosruashvili, the Co-Heads.
38. Gori – 18, Stalin Str., Gela Megrelishvili, the Head.
39. Akhalkalaki – 31 Mesrop Mashtots Str., Ararat Qamalian, the Head.
40. Ninotsminda – 1 Teriani Str., Iurik Mghdesian, the Head.
41. Lentekhi – 15 King Tamar Str., Aleko Bendeliani and Lasha Liparteliani, the Co-Heads.
42. Tsageri – 27 Merab Kostava Str., Nikoloz Liparteliani and Giorgi Kentchadze, the Co-Heads.
43. Oni – 17 Kakhbridze Str., Giorgi Lobzhanidze, the Head.
44. Ambrolauri – 1 Bratislava-Ratcha Str., Gocha Khurtsidze, the Head.
45. Sagarejo – 74 Erekle II Str., Mikheil Titvelashvili, the Head.
46. Gurjaani – 21 Shota Rustaveli Str., Nodar Chakvetadze, the Head.
47. Dedoplistskaro – 35 Hereti Str., Demna Karatieli, the Head.

48. Kharagauli – 7 King Solomon Str., Giorgi (Gogi) Latsabidze, the Head.
49. Tianeti – 20 Shota Rustaveli Str., Lado Arabuli and Zurab Mokverashvili, the Co-Heads.
50. Mtskheta – 12 Antioqia Str., Tengiz Veshaguri, the Head.
51. Lanchkhuti – 1 Tbilisi Str., Gia Gotua, the Head.
52. Ozurgeti – 12 Ilia Chavchavadze Str., Misha Andghuladze, the Head.
53. Chokhatauri – 4 Shota Rustaveli Str., Roman Gogiberidze, the Head.
54. Qobuleti – 152 Davit Aghmashenebeli Str., Ilia Benidze, the Co-Head.
55. Qeda – 1, 9 April Str., Roman Beridze, the Co-Head.
56. Khelvachauri – 350 Pridon Khalvashi, Giorgi Sahabidze da Mirza Makharadze, the Co-Heads.
57. Khulo – Cancelled.
58. Shuakhevi – Cancelled.
59. Adigeni – 10 Shota Rustaveli Str., Besik Zaridze and Shalva Zaridze, the Co-Heads.