

# REPORT ON THE ASSEMBLIES AND DEMONSTRATIONS OF FAR-RIGHT GROUPS



**2021-2022**



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## Introduction

Since 2020, the Democracy Research Institute (hereinafter the “DRI”) has been monitoring the activity of far-right radical groups at rallies and demonstrations. This report includes the results of observation of rallies and demonstrations of far-right groups from September 2021 to 31 August 2022. In total, the trends identified during the observation of eighteen meetings are analysed and the key findings are highlighted. The purpose of the report is to inform the public about the dangers caused by the strengthening of far-right radical groups.

Against the backdrop of the transformation of far-right extremist groups into political entities in Georgia, online media and social networks have acquired additional significance. In addition to spreading ideological propaganda and disinformation, social networks have proved to be a convenient platform for a number of openly pro-Russian far-right leaders in terms of mobilising supporters and organising rallies.

During the reporting period, openly pro-Russian far-right groups actively tried to stir up anti-vaccine sentiments in society and mobilise supporters in rallies to push this idea further. Anti-Western and anti-liberal sentiments were noticeable in the speeches of the far-right leaders. Children's attendance at rallies was highlighted as an alarming trend, against the backdrop of complete disregard for Covid regulations and safety rules.

The far-right groups also decided to focus on supporting the individuals charged with the violent events of 5-6 July 2021 as well as those who took part in the attack on Davit Berdzenishvili and Khatuna Samnidze, leaders of the Republican Party of Georgia.

In the period of May-June 2021, against the backdrop of the announcements of Tbilisi Pride and the public debates related to the status of a candidate country for EU membership, the main targets of the far-right groups were Euro-Atlantic institutions and representatives of the diplomatic corps. Far-right groups organised and held rallies against representatives of diplomatic missions of the European Union, the United States of America and the United Nations. The aggressive reaction of the leaders of far-right groups – Georgian Idea, Children's Rights Protection Society and Conservative Movement – followed the festival announced by Tbilisi Pride, scheduled for 2 July 2021. The far-right groups announced the full mobilisation of forces in order not to allow, in their own words, “the propaganda of depravity” in Georgia.

## Findings

- In 2021, the trend of transformation of anti-liberal and anti-Western far-right forces into political entities emerged. On 30 October 2021, Zviad Tomaradze announced the creation of the political party Nation and State. On 7 December 2021, the political party Conservative Movement was registered as the political front of the Alt-Info team. With these changes, the political visibility and legitimacy of anti-liberal, pro-Russian and anti-Western forces in the country increased.
- The assemblies and demonstrations of far-right extremist groups are characterised by systematism and discipline. They are consistent, which is reflected in their being organised. They have the capacity to mobilise hundreds of people in weekly gatherings. They have financial resources for the production of banners, posters, information booklets, etc.
- The leaders of anti-liberal and anti-Western far-right groups are not rigid opponents of the current government. On the contrary, criticism of the government in their statements was mainly related to

the activities of the members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Council, responsible for vaccination and the fulfilment of the demands of the collective “West”.

- One of the main goals of the far-right groups is to undermine the confidence in the human rights protection mechanisms in Georgian society. One of the objects of their attacks on assemblies and demonstrations is the office of the Public Defender of Georgia, which the far-right groups consider a highly liberal and biased public agency.
- Anti-vaccine gatherings and demonstrations organised by far-right groups, on the one hand, contribute to inflaming anti-Western sentiments in society and, on the other hand, increase mistrust of healthcare institutions and medicine.
- At the far-right rallies, the number of women among the organisers is small. Most of the demonstrators are middle-aged men. Children also attend the rallies, along with their family members.
- At the rallies, “liberal” media outlets critical of the government, Western institutions, the US embassy and the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia have repeatedly been targeted by the aggressive rhetoric of the far-right leaders.
- Clergymen also participate in the rallies organised by far-right groups, mainly as ordinary demonstrators. However, on several occasions, clergymen addressed the rally participants. Among the rallies held during the reporting period, the largest number of clergymen attended the rallies protesting the Tbilisi Pride Week.
- At the rallies organised by far-right groups, the regulations established for the prevention of the spread of Covid-19 were breached. Until 28 March 2022, it was mandatory to wear a facemask outdoors.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, there was a blanket ban on outdoor gatherings of more than ten individuals.
- The participants of the rallies generally did not follow the mandatory regulations regarding the use of facemasks, which increased the risks of spreading the coronavirus, especially considering the participation of children in the demonstrations.
- In the presence of political will, the government has effective capabilities to prevent criminal activities of violent groups. Unlike the events of 5 July 2021, when the government's criminal failure to act allowed violent groups to attack journalists and civilians, during Tbilisi Pride Week 2022, law-enforcement authorities provided physical security for the representatives of the queer community and media organisations.
- At the rallies organised by far-right groups, coordinated rallies, amicable communication and positive interaction between law-enforcement officers and rally organisers are noticeable.
- When managing assemblies and demonstrations, the attitude of the law-enforcement officers towards the participants is inconsistent and non-uniform. In contrast to the openly repressive policy towards civil activists who are critical of the government, the representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs have more lenient attitude towards the far-right, in some cases, even towards violent demonstrations.
- Despite the fact that the authorities ensured the peaceful conduct of Tbilisi Pride Week in a closed space, on 6 and 9 June 2022, at the rallies held in front of the office of the EU Delegation to Georgia and the Lithuanian Embassy, openly pro-Russian far-right leaders arrested by the Ministry of Internal Affairs for attempting to burn the EU flag were released within the shortest period on the basis written undertaking.
- The law-enforcement authorities did not respond to the burning of the EU and NATO flags by the representatives of the extreme far-right violent groups in front of the Parliament of Georgia and the office of the EU Delegation.

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution no. 152 of the Government of Georgia of 29 March 2022, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4877009?publication=166>.

## Methodology

During the reporting period, the DRI observers monitored eighteen assemblies and demonstrations organised by far-right groups throughout Tbilisi. This report summarises the key trends and findings identified in the process of monitoring. Furthermore, it describes the main aspect of the rhetoric expressed by far-right leaders.

The observation covers the period from September 2021 to August 2022 and thematically groups rallies organised by far-right groups in this period. Namely, rallies against vaccination and digital Covid-passports (hereinafter “Covid passports”); the process of transformation into far-right political entities; support rallies for the accused persons involved in the organised violence of 5-6 July 2021 and rallies held in connection with 17 May and Tbilisi Pride week.

During the reporting period, the DRI observers monitored all assemblies and demonstrations organised by far-right groups throughout Tbilisi.

We learned about planned demonstrations and counterdemonstrations from public sources or through social networks, which are the most used platforms for far-right groups and their leaders to disseminate information and mobilise supporters.

Online media monitoring is an important research tool, which allows us to find swiftly information on the time, topic and venue of rallies organised by far-right groups. At the initial stage of the observation, we developed a special form of monitoring assemblies and demonstrations, with the help of which we were able to systematise important incidents and violations during the demonstrations and counterdemonstrations. In addition to personal reports of monitors, photo and video information received from various media platforms helped us greatly during the observation process.

We requested information about the notifications about the organisation and holding of rallies submitted by the organisers, in accordance with the procedure for requesting public information from the Tbilisi Municipality City Hall.<sup>2</sup> The documents presented by the Municipal Services Development Agency confirm that the far-right groups had not submitted any notifications to the City Hall during the reporting period, except for one instance when the organisation Nation and State notified the City Hall about the planned vehicle march on 23 January 2022, demanding the cancellation of Covid passports. According to the information available to us, the rally was not held.<sup>3</sup> Apart from this case, far-right groups have not notified the City Hall about holding another rally.<sup>4</sup>

Taking into account the goals and objectives of the project, within the framework of the monitoring of assemblies and demonstrations, the emphasis was made on the following issues:

- Whether the leaders of the far-right groups or the rally participants used hate speech;
- The extent to which the police protected public order during assemblies and demonstrations; and
- Whether there were any calls for violence directed at specific individuals or groups.

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<sup>2</sup> Response of the non-commercial legal entity Municipal Services Development Agency to application no. 21/0122041278-01, dated 10 February 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Presumably, due to the reason that the next week, under the February decision of the Inter-Agency Coordination Council (Resolution no. 53 of the Government of Georgia of 4 February 2022), the obligation to submit Covid passports to enter various facilities and institutions was revoked.

<sup>4</sup> Response of the non-commercial legal entity Municipal Services Development Agency to application no. 10/01222152237-01, dated 10 August 2022.

The report also analyses the compliance of assemblies and demonstrations of far-right groups with Georgian legislation and standards established by the European Convention on Human Rights. Our task was also to determine the compatibility of legal provisions and practical aspects of demonstrations organised by far-right extremist groups. Furthermore, we analysed from a legal point of view the quality of efforts by law-enforcement officers to maintain public order during assemblies and demonstrations.

## Legal Framework Governing Freedom of Assembly during the Pandemic

In the first half of 2021, the exercise of the right to assembly was affected by the restrictions imposed in response to the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> In June 2021, the restrictions imposed on movement were lifted,<sup>6</sup> and in September, amnesty was granted to those who were administratively and/or criminally responsible for the breaches of the regulations imposed due to the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

The obligation to wear a facemask in outdoor spaces has been removed since 28 March 2022.<sup>8</sup> Around the same period, a blanket ban on outdoor gatherings of more than ten individuals was still in force. In particular, the resolution of the Government of Georgia on Approval of Isolation and Quarantine Rules restricted, until 28 February 2022, gatherings of more than ten individuals during social events<sup>9</sup> (such as weddings, anniversaries, funerals, etc.) including mass entertainment events. On 28 February 2022, gatherings of individuals during social events (such as weddings, anniversaries, funerals, etc.), including mass entertainment events, became permissible.<sup>10</sup>

It is noteworthy that, during the reporting period, there were no cases of imposing responsibility based on the abovementioned restrictions.

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<sup>5</sup> See the 2020 Parliamentary Report of the Public Defender of Georgia, pp. 241-244.

<sup>6</sup> Resolution no. 294 of the Government of Georgia of 22 June 2021 on amending Resolution no. 322 of the Government of Georgia of 23 May 2020 on Approving the Rules of Isolation and Quarantine, Article 1.1 and Article 2.

<sup>7</sup> The Law of Georgia on Amnesty of 9 September 2021 and the Law of Georgia on Exemption from Administrative Fines" of 7 September 2021.

<sup>8</sup> The government resolution has not been amended [accessed 28/03/2022].

<sup>9</sup> Resolution no. 294 of the Government of Georgia of 22 June 2021 on Approving the Rules of Isolation and Quarantine, Article 5 (in force as of 22 February 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Resolution no. 91 of the Government of Georgia of 28 February 2021.

# 1 Reg Registration of Hate Groups as Political Parties

## “Nation and State”

During the reporting period of monitoring assemblies and demonstrations of far-right groups, two far-right movements, Nation and State and the so-called Alt-info team transformed into political parties.

At the founding conference on 30 October 2021, the non-commercial legal entity Nation and State<sup>11</sup> presented the composition of the political council to the public. At the meeting, Zviad Tomaradze talked with his colleagues about future political plans and visions and presented an action plan to the supporters. At the same meeting, they elected the audit commission.

During the speech, the organisers of the conference distanced themselves from both Georgian Dream and opposition parties and presented themselves as a political force with new national values. Party chairperson Zviad Tomaradze named God as his “only Master and Lord”.

Zviad Tomaradze is distinguished by his racist, xenophobic, nationalist and homophobic statements. Since 2016, he has been the author of a number of regressive legislative proposals.<sup>12</sup>

Information about the conference was disseminated three days in advance on the personal Facebook pages of the leaders of Nation and State, Zviad Tomaradze and Irakli Abashidze, as well as on the blog of the far-right activist Beka Vardosanidze and the official website of Nation and State. The meeting was held in the 9 April Park. The leaders of the political movement made nationalist and religious-populist statements at the meeting.

About 250 participants attended the party’s meeting, including five children. Most of the participants and organisers of the meeting were incorrectly using facemasks. Several participants in the meeting were actively involved in the process of mobilising people. They distributed party leaflets to the holidaymakers in the 9 April Park who did not participate in the gathering. At the beginning of the meeting, two police officers were present, who left the location after a short time.

As of August 2022, the Nation and State is not registered in the unified register of political associations of citizens. The public register did not review the statement of party chairperson Zviad Tomaradze on 4 November 2021. The legal basis is the failure to correct the error in the registration data within the established period.

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<sup>11</sup> In 2018, Nation and State (Identification Code 402084105) was registered as a non-commercial legal entity. Zviad Tomaradze is the chairperson of the organisation.

<sup>12</sup> Zviad Tomaradze’s name is associated with the attempt to remove the terms “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” from the Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, the initiative to ban abortion, the attempt to ban foreign-funded NGOs, authorship of draft laws on Religious Feelings and on banning wearing chador, niqab and burqa in public space, an initiative to tighten citizenship procedures for foreigners, etc. Tomaradze was a member of the initiative group of the referendum on marriage. According to the suggestion of the initiative group, the referendum question was formulated as follows: “Do you agree that civil marriage should be defined as a union between a man and a woman for the purpose of founding a family?”

## “Conservative Movement”

After a one-month interval after the establishment of Nation and State, on 20 November 2021, the Alt-Info team founded the political party Conservative Movement.<sup>13</sup> The leaders of Conservative Movement are the organisers of the mass violence of 5 July 2021. However, their criminal responsibility has not yet been established. The only sanction imposed on Alt-Info was as a result of finding a violation by the Communications Commission for the circulation of obscenity and the use of obscene language in programmes on the events of 5 July 2021. However, Alt-Info was not fined for violating the law.

The founders openly announced the pro-Russian and anti-Western direction of Conservative Movement at the party conference. Zura Makharadze (Chairperson of the party from 7 December 2021 to 11 April 2022) named the end of the “liberal dictatorship” and the inception of Christian democracy” in Georgia as the goals of the party. It is significant that the editorial policy of Alt-Info is characterised by xenophobic, homophobic and violence-inciting rhetoric.<sup>14</sup>

Under Article 23.3 of the Constitution of Georgia and Article 5.2 of the Organic Law of Georgia on Political Associations, “it is not allowed to create and operate such a party, . . . which promotes war or violence, stirs up national, regional, religious or social tensions.”

Similar restrictions apply in a number of the Council of Europe Member States that provide mechanisms for militant democracy. “The enemies of democracy should not be allowed to use the rights and freedoms of democracy to undermine it.”<sup>15</sup> Abuse of rights is also prohibited by the leading international instruments on the protection of human rights.<sup>16</sup>

On 25 November 2021, the public registry, citing the mistakes made during the filling of the documentation, suspended the registration of Conservative Movement. Presumably, after correcting the error, on 7 December 2021, the National Public Registry Agency of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia registered Conservative Movement as a political party.

On 5 July 2022, the Public Defender of Georgia announced that she had prepared a constitutional complaint, requesting the banning of Conservative Movement as a political party. Since the Public Defender does not have the legal standing to apply to the Constitutional Court on this basis, the draft complaint was referred to several entities authorised to apply to the Constitutional Court. The Public Defender believes that a number of statements of the group organising the illegal rallies and large-scale violence of 5 July 2021 contained signs of breach of the constitutional order, incited violence or contained signs of violence and represented war propaganda.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> At the founding conference, Giorgi Kardava was elected the general secretary of the party, and Zura Makharadze the chairperson. Irakli Martynenko and Irakli Morgoshia joined the Political Council.

<sup>14</sup> DRI, 22.11.21, “The National Public Registry Agency should not register the political party Conservative Movement”, available at: <https://www.democracyresearch.org/geo/805/>.

<sup>15</sup> Rory O’Connell, *Militant Democracy and Human Rights*, Constitutional Law Review, I, 102.

<sup>16</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 29(2) and 30; The European Convention on Human Rights, Article 17.

<sup>17</sup> The statement of the Public Defender of Georgia of 5 July 2022 “Statement of the Public Defender of Georgia one year after the violence of 5 July 2021,” available at: <https://bit.ly/3CQBJXl>.

### Rally of 26 September 2021

The purpose of the rally held in front of the Parliament of Georgia on 26 September was to demand the release of those arrested on the charges of attacking journalists on 5 and 6 July 2021. The organisers of the rally were the founders of the far-right pro-Russian media platform Alt-Info, the chairperson of the far-right political party Georgian Idea and the leaders of the non-governmental organisation Children's Rights Protection Society, known for its far-right rhetoric.<sup>18</sup>

The number of participants in the rally did not exceed 150, and therefore the road was not blocked. Three children and two clergymen also participated in the rally.

Alexander and Guram Palavandishvili announced the rally four days before the event through his personal Facebook pages. Information about the rally was also posted on the Facebook pages of Georgian Idea, Alt Info and Children's Rights Protection Society.

The participants of the rally referred to the persons arrested in connection with the organised group violence of 5-6 July as “prisoners of conscience”<sup>19</sup> and “victims of the liberal dictatorship” and demanded their immediate release. The main addressee of the appeals was Georgian Dream. According to the organisers, the government is in the captivity of the “liberal” and “Western dictatorship”. The organisers of the rally referred to the attempt to hold the “March of Dignity” as a provocation of the “liberal media” and blamed the journalists for the aggression expressed by their “fellow brothers”.

Zura Makharadze, one of the organisers of the rally and the founder of Alt-Info, noted in his speech that the main goal for him and his “fellow brothers” on 5 July 2021 was to prevent the “propaganda of depravity” on Rustaveli Avenue, and it was the Georgian people who did not allow this “parade of depravity” to take place.

The leader of Georgian Idea Levan Chachua said that the “arrested guys” were defending religious purity and Georgians on 5 July 2021. He referred to the arrest of their “comrades” as the greatest shame of Georgian Dream and called it a “national disgrace”.

In their speech, the organisers used homophobic language (“propaganda of depravity,” “fag parade”, “march of filth,” etc.).

The absolute majority of participants and organisers of the rally were using masks incorrectly. In addition, they did not practise social distancing from each other.

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<sup>18</sup> Founders of Alt-Info – Zura Makharadze, Giorgi Kardava, Konstantine Morgoshia and Shota Martynenko, one of the leaders of Children's Rights Protection Society Alexander Palavandishvili and the chairperson of the society Guram Palavandishvili, chairperson of Georgian Idea Levan Chachua.

<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that the defence actively used this term at the court hearing

## Rally of 24 November 2021

The rally of 24 November 2021 coincides with the period when the detention was swapped for bail for three individuals charged with breaking into the office of “Tbilisi Pride” on 5 July 2021. The rally was held near the office of the Public Defender of Georgia. The participants of the rally called on the Public Defender to protect the persons detained in the cases of organised group violence of 5-6 July 2021.

The rally organisers were the leaders of the far-right political party Conservative Movement based on Alt-Info, namely, Zura Makharadze, Konstantine Morgoshia, Shota Martynenko and Giorgi Kardava. Beka Vardosanidze, a well-known far-right activist, expressed his support to the organisers and covered the rally live on his blog.

Information about the rally was posted a week earlier on the personal Facebook pages of the organisers, as well as on the online media platforms of Alt-Info and Beka Vardosanidze.

The rally participants were mostly relatives and lawyers of the persons arrested on 5 and 6 July 2021. The number of rally participants was approximately three hundred. Due to the narrowness of the rally location and the number of demonstrators, it became necessary to block the roadway temporarily.

According to the observation of the DRI, about sixty law-enforcement officers were mobilised at the rally near the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia.

The rally participants held posters with homophobic messages and inscriptions “No to the European Sodomite Court” “No to the propaganda of depravity” “Freedom for prisoners of conscience” etc. The posters featured portraits of Public Defender Nino Lomjaria, US Ambassador Kelly Degnan, and EU Ambassador Carl Hartzel. They were referred to as “LGBT Thugs” and “LGBT Fascists.” The rally participants had trumpets and party flags.

Archpriest Spiridon Tskipurishvili addressed the rally participants. According to him, “the function of the public defender has already been completed and is in the past. [...] The time of liberalism is over, and it is already dying.”

The speeches of the rally organisers were strongly anti-Western and homophobic. Zura Makharadze addressed the demonstrators with the following words: “On the 5th, we, ordinary people managed to preserve the dignity of our country, we preserved the honour of the country. The boys were arrested because they did not allow the honour of their homeland to be tarnished in their own country, in the courtyard of Kashveti Church.”

The “liberal” media was also a target of the organisers' aggression, which, according to them, is the main culprit of the 5 July 2021 events. According to representatives of the far-right groups that day, the attacks on journalists were a result of pre-planned provocations by the liberal forces.

Beka Vardosanidze, an active supporter of the organisers of the demonstration, did not allow Public Broadcaster’s journalist Ketii Tutberidze to perform freely her professional activities. Vardosanidze, together with the rally participants, surrounded the journalist and insulted her verbally. Beka

Vardosanidze accused the journalist of spreading disinformation.<sup>20</sup> The law-enforcement officers did not prevent the interference in the journalistic activities of the Public Broadcaster's journalist. There was no response from the law-enforcement officers. The Ministry of Internal Affairs instituted a criminal investigation based only on Ketii Tutberidze's statement. As of August 2022, the journalist has not been granted victim status.

Beka Vardosanidze's administrative responsibility, which later became known through the media, is related to the rally of the same day, when Vardosanidze allegedly verbally abused a police officer. The Tbilisi City Court found Vardosanidze to be guilty of an administrative violation under Article 173 of the Code of Administrative Violations and imposed a 2,000 GEL fine as a sanction.

The participants and organisers of the rally neglected the Covid regulations and the obligation to use a facemask.

## 3

## Anti-Vaccine Rallies

During the reporting period, far-right extremist groups planned and successfully conducted an information campaign against Covid vaccination. From 1 September to 31 December 2021, Zviad Tomaradze, the leader of the far-right group Nation and State, together with his associates, held eight gatherings and demonstrations against vaccination. Anti-vaccine rallies were usually organised a few days before they were held using Facebook.<sup>21</sup>

The DRI representatives observed all eight rallies held by the far-right groups. Each anti-vaccine campaign was monitored using a special questionnaire.

According to the estimates of the DRI observers, the number of participants in the anti-vaccine rallies varied from 100 to 800. The approximate number of participants at the rallies was as follows: on 15 September – 200 people, on 5 November – 170, on 20 November – 350, on 28 November – 800, on 5 December – 700, on 7 December – up to 100 people, on 12 December – 150, and on 26 December – approximately 200 people.

Women constituted half of the rally participants. The rallies were usually attended by clergymen (at least 4-5). According to the DRI, up to ten minors attended each rally.

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<sup>20</sup> "According to Lawyer, Beka Vardosanidze Is Also Arrested," Radio Liberty, 31 December 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/387huHz>.

<sup>21</sup> Information about the 15 March rally was disseminated through Zviad Tomaradze's personal Facebook page, Beka Vardosanidze's Facebook blog and the Facebook page of the organisation – Against the Group Enemies of the Country.

### 3.1. Law-Enforcement Authorities

On average, about 50 law-enforcement officers were mobilised at the anti-vaccine rallies. The observation showed that, as a rule, the number of police officers was not proportional to the number of rally participants.

According to the DRI observers, about 60 police officers were mobilised at the rally held on 15 September; about 80 on 5 November; up to 50 on 20 November; on 28 November, when about 800 people turned up for the rally, a total of 50 policemen were mobilised; on 5 December, their number increased to 60; there were 50 law-enforcement officers at the 7 December rally; up to 30 police officers on 12 December and about 45 policemen on 26 December. As for the patrol crews, there were 15 on 15 September; 10 on 5 November; 6 on 20 November; 7 on 18 November; 9 on 5 December; 6 on 7 December; 3 on 12 December and, on 26 December, 6 patrol cars patrolled the area surrounding the rally.

The largest number of law-enforcement officers was mobilised at the 5 November rally near the Palace of State Ceremonies (the former official residence of the President of Georgia).

There were also large numbers of police officers and patrol crews at the rally held near the Patriarchate of Georgia on 5 December.

The DRI observers noticed private phone conversations between the organisers and law-enforcement authorities. In Zviad Tomaradze's cordial addresses, a positive attitude towards police officers was emphasised. Tomaradze publicly stated several times that police officers supported their cause. In general, the amicable attitude between the rally organisers and the law-enforcement officers was mutual.

During four out of eight rallies, the road was blocked due to the number of demonstrators (and not based on a notification submitted to the Municipality of the City Hall). Under Article 5 of the Law of Georgia on Assemblies and Demonstrations, the executive body of the municipality must be notified in advance if an assembly or demonstration is held on the road or obstructs traffic. However, in all the cases, the rally organisers because of the number of rally participants took advantage of the legal exception to block the roads.<sup>22</sup>

On 12 December, at the rally held in front of the building of the Administration of the Government of Georgia, organisers burned a poster with the image of the so-called Green Passport. It is noteworthy that law-enforcement officers did not respond to this incident. At the same time, there are numerous known examples, where police was eager to act at rallies organised by civil activists.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The Law of Georgia on Assemblies and Demonstrations, Article 11<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> For example, on 9 November 2020 and 2 December 2020, law-enforcement officers did not allow civil activists who were holding a rally in front of the parliament to bring firewood to the place on the pretext that the firewood could be ignited. In this regard, see also the Report of the Public Defender of Georgia on the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia, 2020, pp. 244-247, available at: <https://ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2021040110573948397.pdf>.

## 3.2. Clergymen

According to the observations made by the DRI, clergymen attended all anti-vaccine rallies. In several cases, they addressed the rally participants. It is significant that one of the addressees of the anti-vaccine rallies was the Patriarchate of Georgia.

Clergyman Iacob Abashidze, whose clerical status had been suspended by a decision of the Synod in 2013, addressed the participants of the rally on 15 September and expressed his full support to the organisers. During his speech, Iacob Abashidze compared the mandatory vaccination programme to a “Fascist approach” and stated that vaccination propaganda and intimidation of people were unacceptable. Iacob Abashidze systematically took part in anti-vaccine campaigns.

## 3.3 Description of Anti-Vaccine Campaigns

The organisers of all anti-vaccine gatherings and demonstrations held during the reporting period were Zviad Tomaradze, chairperson of Nation and State<sup>24</sup> and other leaders of the party. Blogger Beka Vardosanidze, known for his strongly anti-liberal statements, provided coverage of the rallies.

### Anti-Vaccine Rally of 15 September 2021

Information about the 15 September rally was disseminated three days before on Zviad Tomaradze's Facebook page and in the Facebook group of the organisation – Against the Enemies of the Country.

The main demands of the rally were the inadmissibility of forced vaccination, the expulsion of Amiran Gamkrelidze and Paata Imnadze from the Inter-Agency Coordination Council of the Government of Georgia for trying to establish a “Covid dictatorship”, and the dismissal of the “Covid dictatorship supporter” Nino Lomjaria, the Public Defender of Georgia.

The area in front of the building of the Administration of the Government of Georgia was the main venue for anti-vaccine rallies. The 15 September rally started in the area adjacent to the building of the Administration of the Government of Georgia, which was attended by about 200 demonstrators. The demonstration continued to head towards the office of Georgian Dream and ended with a common prayer at the Patriarchate of Georgia.

Many children were present at the rally, where the main demand was to protect children from Covid and exclude them from the vaccination programme. The majority of the rally participants failed to wear masks appropriately or practice social distancing.

At the rally on 15 September, Soso Manjavidze voiced a number of critical statements towards the World Health Organisation of the United Nations:

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<sup>24</sup> On 30 October 2021, the movement was transformed into a political party; see Chapter 2 of the report for more details.

*"The WHO is requesting the government to establish this Covid dictatorship, and now they have shamelessly talked about vaccinating children, which is unacceptable."*

Beka Vardosanidze referred to the pro-Western media as the main "culprit" in the introduction of "Covid fascism":

*"In Georgia, there is a lot of disinformation spread by the media regarding the suitability of vaccinations. The media is spreading statistics about the Covid deaths in order to instil fear in the society."*

The rally participants did not block the road. The organisers, therefore, had had no obligation to submit a written notification to the executive body of the municipality.

At first, about 30 police officers were mobilised at the rally in front of the building of the Administration of the Government. About 150 demonstrators attended the rally. When the rally reached Georgian Dream's office, number of people gathered increased to 200. 60 patrol police officers controlled the area.

## Anti-Vaccine Rally of 5 November 2021

The organisers of the rally were the leaders of the political association Nation and State chairperson Zviad Tomaradze, general secretary Irakli Abashidze, member of the political council Nikoloz Khomasuridze, as well as far-right activist and blogger Beka Vardosanidze.

According to the organisers, the reason for holding the anti-vaccine rally on 5 November was the statement made by the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, at the briefing of 3 November.<sup>25</sup> At the briefing, the president spoke about the importance of mandatory vaccination, the need to introduce Covid passports and impose certain restrictions on unvaccinated persons.

The rally was planned in response to the President's briefing. The information about it was disseminated through the organisers' personal Facebook pages the day before the rally. The demonstration started from the President's Atoneli Palace and ended near the Palace of State Ceremonies. 130 demonstrators attended the rally at the initial location and 70 at the final venue.

During the rally, it became known about the President of Georgia meeting with the diplomatic missions. With the motive of having a personal audience with the president, after the address of the organisers, the rally participants moved to the Palace of State Ceremonies in Avlabari.

During his speech, Zviad Tomaradze objected to the president calling on the Patriarchate of Georgia to become more active in the vaccination process and assessed it as a demand for the blessing of mandatory vaccination and the legalisation of discrimination against those who are not vaccinated.

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<sup>25</sup> Civil.ge, 4 November 2021, *President is discussing Covid Passports and mandatory vaccination of risk-groups*, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/452944>.

Furthermore, at the rally, Zviad Tomaradze announced a boycott of the companies Wissol and Coca-Cola since the management of both companies had announced the full vaccination of their employees and called on the demonstrators to boycott them.

Irakli Abashidze evaluated the president's briefing as the legalisation of the Covid dictatorship and called on Salome Zourabichvili to leave the office of president.

The majority of participants and organisers of the rally were using masks incorrectly.

About 40 patrol police officers were mobilised in front of the President's Palace and in the surrounding area, and about 80 near the Palace of State Ceremonies. As on other occasions, there was a positive relationship and full understanding among the organisers and the police.

Due to the fact that the road was not blocked, the organisers had no obligation to submit a written notification to the executive body of the municipality.

## Anti-Vaccine Rally of 20 November 2021

The Rally of 20 November aimed at protesting the government's decision,<sup>26</sup> according to which, from 1 December 2021, entry into a number of facilities would be restricted to the so-called Covid passport holders.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, the main demand of the rally was the inadmissibility of mandatory vaccination, banning children's vaccination and stopping the introduction of Covid passports.

The First Republic Square was the venue of the rally. Demonstrators marched towards the building of the Parliament of Georgia. At the initial stage (at First Republic Square), there were about 300 people at the rally. During the march, their number increased to 350.

During the rally, the organisers informed the demonstrators that they were actively working on the creation of a petition regarding Covid Passports to capture the opinion of the population.

Most of the participants of the rally did not wear masks or wore them incorrectly. They did not observe social distancing.

An organiser of the rally, Soso Manjavidze told the demonstrators:

*“Against the backdrop of these rallies, the government should listen to the public's call that Covid passports and mandatory vaccination will lead to economic collapse and the complete destruction of small businesses.”*

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<sup>26</sup> The decision of the Government of Georgia was announced a few days before the amendment to the law. On 1 December 2021, Resolution no. 562 of the Government of Georgia of 30 November 2021 was amended.

<sup>27</sup> From 1 December 2021, all adults living in Georgia could use the indoor spaces of the following facilities only if they had the so-called green status: Hotels and other accommodation facilities, food establishments (open and closed spaces of restaurants, cafes, bars, including those in shopping centres), cinemas, theatres, concert halls, opera, entertainment facilities, casino and gaming business facilities, spa centres and fitness halls and cableways of mountain resorts. See in detail <https://covidpass.moh.gov.ge/>.

Beka Vardosanidze, another organiser of the rally, expressed his critical statements about the media:

*“Liberal media is spreading disinformation, it is hiding the truth about the Covid virus and they should be punished by law.”*

With a spot of performance and smoke screen, Zviad Tomaradze named Amiran Gamkrelidze the “Top-Covid Fascist.” According to him, “the only master to whom the Georgian people obey is their Lord” and they will not cope with being slaves of others.

About 30 patrol police officers escorted the procession. Around 50 patrol police officers were monitoring the area around the parliament.

### Rally of 28 November 2021 at the Public Broadcaster

The participants of the 28 November demonstration protested the editorial policy of the Public Broadcaster, which did not allow anti-vaccine protests to be aired live. The organisers announced at the rally that they would start a legislative fight against the Covid regulations and Covid passports.

The participants of the rally gathered at First Republic Square and marched towards the building of the Parliament of Georgia. The final destination of the demonstration was the building of the Public Broadcaster. At the initial stage, according to the DRI observers, about 700 demonstrators were mobilised in First Republic Square. During the march, their number increased to 800. At the building of the Public Broadcaster, the number of participants in the rally decreased to 300.

The rally was led by Zviad Tomaradze, chairman of Nation and State, Irakli Abashidze, one of the leaders, Beka Vardosanidze, an activist and blogger of the far-right wing, and Soso Manjavidze, an active supporter of the far-right forces. Irakli Pirtskhalava, a singer working in the Russian Federation, known for his anti-vaccine sentiments, joined the team of organisers.

Speakers at the rally emphasised the inadmissibility of mandatory vaccination. The majority of the participants of the rally did not wear masks or wore them incorrectly.

The organisers openly expressed their displeasure with the implementation of the Covid passports regulation on 1 December 2021 and demanded that the authorities withdrew the decision. Beka Vardosanidze requested the Public Broadcaster to cover their rallies live.

According to the DRI observers, up to 30 law-enforcement officers were mobilised in the First Republic Square, and up to 50 in front of the building of the parliament. Patrol cars were mobilised as an additional force. The entrance of the Public Broadcaster building was guarded by a human chain of law-enforcement officers, but there was no verbal confrontation between the demonstrators and the law-enforcement officers. It is significant that, unlike the previous rallies, the number of both participants and law-enforcement officers doubled.

Due to the number of participants in the rally, the road from Republic Square to the Parliament of Georgia was closed. Due to the New Year's infrastructure installation activities, it would be impossible for the demonstrators to gather in front of the parliament without blocking the road.

## Anti-Vaccine Rally of 5 December 2021

On 5 December, the rally in the form of a march started from the First Republic Square, continued to the building of the Parliament of Georgia and ended at the building of the Office of the Patriarch of Georgia. The leaders of the rally demanded from the government the cancellation of Covid passports and a clear position from the representatives of the Patriarchate.

The participants gathered in front of the building of the parliament chanting “End the Covid dictatorship!”, “We don't want Covid passports!”, and “Don't impose Covid regulations on us!”

650 demonstrators attended the rally in First Republic Square. Their number increased to 700 during the march to the parliament and decreased to 400 at the final venue, i.e., in front of the Patriarchate of Georgia.

The participants of the rally prayed together in front of the building of the Office of the Patriarch of Georgia and called on the Patriarchate to express its position. A part of the demonstrators expressed their dissatisfaction because the Patriarchate refused to meet them. Particular backlash was caused by the Facebook post of the head of public relations of the Patriarchate.<sup>28</sup> The participants of the rally described the statement as betrayal and an “escape from the battlefield”.

At the rally, as per tradition, Beka Vardosanidze accused media outlets with a “liberal agenda” of spreading disinformation regarding the pandemic caused by the Covid virus. Soso Manjavidze made the key emphasis on the importance of rallies; Zviad Tomaradze criticised the vague position of the Patriarchate and the refusal to meet them. Tomaradze thanked the couriers of Glovo and Wolt courier companies for participating in the rally.

About 60 law-enforcement officers and 9 vehicles were mobilised to First Republic Square. Some law-enforcement officers followed the procession on foot and others in crew cars and, at the same time, regulated the traffic. The participants of the rally, because of their number, temporarily blocked Rustaveli Avenue in front of the building of the parliament. Police officers gave instructions to the organisers about their movement. Despite blocking Rustaveli Avenue in front of the Parliament of Georgia, the road near the Patriarchate of Georgia was not closed and the number of participants in the rally decreased.

According to the DRI observers, a larger number of law-enforcement officers were mobilised near the Patriarchate of Georgia than near the building of the parliament. The law-enforcement officers and the organisers of the rally called the participants of the rally near the building of the Patriarchate in a coordinated manner to move to the pedestrian area.

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<sup>28</sup> “It is unacceptable for the Patriarchate to request a meeting in this form of a rally and with such an ultimatum”- Andria Jaghmaidze, 5 December 2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3qGbwUw>.

## Anti-Vaccine Rally of 7 December 2021

The rally took place on 7 December in front of the building of the Administration of the Government of Georgia, where they demanded a meeting with the members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Council and the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili. Later, they moved to the building of TV Pirveli" and accused the television of biased reporting. Zviad Tomaradze demanded a public apology from the TV Company because of wrongly interpreted stories about them.

Information about the rally was disseminated two days before through Facebook, both on the personal Facebook pages of Nation and State leaders Zviad Tomaradze and Irakli Abashidze, as well as on the blog of the far-right activist Beka Vardosanidze.

A significantly reduced number of demonstrators attended this rally; according to the estimates of the DRI observers, there were about 100 people. The road was not blocked during the rally.

About 40 representatives of the patrol police guarded the order near the building of the Administration of the Government of Georgia while about ten more law-enforcement officers with six cars controlled the adjacent streets. About 50 Patrol Police and the Criminal Police Department representatives were mobilised near the territory of the TV Company. The law-enforcement officers did not allow the demonstrators to stick stickers on the walls of the building of the TV Company. The representatives of the Patrol Police and the Criminal Police Department formed a human chain to guard the entrance of both the chancellery and the TV Pirveli station.

## Anti-Vaccine Rally of 12 December 2021

The main goal of the rally held on 12 December was to stop the so-called Green Passports and cancel the Inter-Agency Coordination Council under the leadership of the Prime Minister of Georgia.

About 150 demonstrators marched from the First Republic Square through Rustaveli Avenue to the building of the Administration of the Government of Georgia, where their number increased to 350.

The speakers at the rally demanded the creation of a coordination council for the prevention of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic within the Human Rights Protection and Civil Integration Committee of the Parliament of Georgia, the inclusion of Zviad Tomaradze in the council and the removal of Amiran Gamkrelidze and Tengiz Tsertsvadze from their respective office. Representatives of various restaurants and fitness clubs joined the rally, demanding the cancellation of the Covid regulations imposed on businesses. The majority of participants and organisers of the gathering used masks incorrectly and social distancing was not practised.

The participants of the rally held posters with the slogan, "No to Green Passports!" They also had a large number of small placards with the slogan, "No to the Covid dictatorship," and posters with the slogans – "Green Passports will not work in Georgia" and "NO GREEN PASS."

The speakers talked about the dangers of the regulations of the World Health Organisation. According to them, Georgia should not have shared the practice of the West against the Covid pandemic in terms of

introducing regulations and prohibitions. In addition, the organisers informed the participants of the rally that Georgian Dream MP Lado Kakhadze not only shared their position but also supported it.

The organisers of the rally near the building of the Administration of the Government of Georgia burned a poster with the image of the so-called Green Passport. Law-enforcement officers did not intervene in this process.

The organisers urged the participants of the rally to obey the law-enforcement officers. In Zviad Tomaradze's cordial addresses to the police officers, the positive attitude between the parties was noticeable. Zviad Tomaradze claimed that the police officers supported them.

The road was not blocked. There were about three patrol cars and about 30 law-enforcement officers at First Republic Square.

### Anti-Vaccine Rally of 26 December 2021

At the 26 December rally, the organisers of the rally protested the Covid passports and the information spread by the “liberal media” regarding the Covid virus. The announcement about the rally was disseminated through the personal Facebook pages of the organisers. About 200 demonstrators marched from the First Republic Square, through Rustaveli Avenue, to the Administration of the Government of Georgia, where their number increased to approximately 260.

At the gathering, a large number of small-sized leaflets were distributed to the rally participants, on which it was written: “No to the Covid dictatorship”. Some of the participants were holding percussion instruments, on which photographs of Amiran Gamkrelidze and Paata Imnadze were pasted.

In his speech, Zviad Tomaradze talked about the heavy impact of Covid regulations on restaurant businesses. He announced his televised debate with the allergist Bidzina Kulumbegov to the rally participants. According to him, giving him time in the television space of the Public Broadcaster was related to their organised rallies.

The majority of participants and organisers did not keep a reasonable distance between each other and most of them either did not wear a mask or wore it incorrectly.

The rally participants did not block the road. Six patrol cars and about 40 law-enforcement officers were mobilised to First Republic Square, and about 45 police officers were standing as a human chain in front of the chancellery. Tomaradze urged the rally participants to obey the police and not create problems on the road during the march. The amicable attitude between the law-enforcement officers and the organisers of the rally was again apparent.

The organisers announced the continuation of the rallies after the New Year’s celebrations if the Georgian authorities did not change their position regarding Covid regulations and Green Passports.

This chapter of the report presents the rallies held from January 2022 to August 2022, which preceded the events of Tbilisi Pride Week. The rallies that are discussed below were strongly anti-Western and homophobic. The participants of the rally demanded the cancellation of the diplomatic missions of the European Union, the United Nations and the US in Georgia. They referred to the Tbilisi Pride Week as the propaganda of “depravity” of the LGBTI+ community.

On 6 June 2022, one of the leaders of the Republican Party of Georgia, Davit Berdzenishvili, and a Member of the Parliament of Georgia, Khatuna Samnidze, were attacked by two people on Rustaveli Avenue. The Ministry of Internal Affairs arrested only one person, the attacker of Davit Berdzenishvili, and charged him under Article 156 of the Criminal Code (persecution committed by violence). Detention as a preventive measure was imposed on the accused person. However, it was later replaced by bail. In the same period, several members of the far-right group held a rally in support of the accused.

All homophobic and anti-Western rallies were covered by the Alt-Info platform and blogger Beka Vardosanidze.

### Rally of 17 May 2022

The main goal of the rally of ultra-right groups was to celebrate the day of sanctity and unity of the family announced by the Patriarchate on 17 May. The rally was organised, on the one hand, by the Patriarchate of Georgia and its related youth organisation "Davitianni". On the other hand, the leaders of Georgian Idea, Levan Chachua and Gega Khvedelidze, Alexander Palavandishvili, the leader of Children's Rights Protection Society and Konstantine Morgoshia, the founder of Alt-Info, were involved in organising the march and mobilising people.

On 17 May, participants of the rally began to gather in First Republic Square. The procession continued on Rustaveli Avenue through Kashveti Church and ended at the Sioni Temple.

About 150 people gathered at the starting location (First Republic Square) during the march. Their number increased to 250 near Kashveti Church. At the end of the march, there were still about 150 people near Sioni Temple. Clergymen were also among the participants. About 10 clergymen were present in the First Republic Square; their number increased to 20 during the march. At Kashveti Church and Sioni Temple, the number of clergymen exceeded 50, including the clergymen serving in the respective churches.

The participants of the rally held posters with the slogans: “17 May the day of family sanctity”, “Let's not turn Georgia into Sodom-Gomorra” and “Sodomy is a legalised genocide of a nation.”

The participants of the rally in Kashveti Church listened to the audio address of the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia-II, in which the Patriarch emphasised the importance of 17 May as the day of family

unity. A concert was held in the courtyard of Kashveti Church in parallel with the chapel, where children's ensembles performed Georgian dances to Georgian folk music.

Law-enforcement officers were stationed around the participants of the rally at their initial venue, the First Republic Square. When the march started, they moved together with the participants of the rally. The 10<sup>th</sup> patrol crew controlled the order near Kashveti Church and Sioni Temple.

## Rally at the EU Delegation Office of 6 June 2022

The rally of 6 June was planned against the backdrop of Tbilisi Pride Week. Information about the rally was disseminated through the personal Facebook pages of Alexander Palavandishvili and Davit Lortkipanidze.

The rally was organised by Guram and Alexander Palavandishvili and Davit Lortkipanidze, leaders of the far-right organisations Children's Rights Protection Society and Morality. The rally was covered by far-right activist and blogger Beka Vardosanidze. Members of the Conservative Movement were among the demonstrators. In total, about 35 people attended the gathering.

The participants of the rally were holding posters with homophobic contents: "No to Euro-Sodom," "No to LGBT promiscuity," "All shameful LGBT ambassadors should be kicked out of Georgia," "Homosexuality is a pathology," "LGBT people are perverts." On the posters, photos of EU Ambassadors of diplomatic missions to Georgia Carl Hartzell and US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan were pasted with the slogan "Shame on you - stop the interference by UN and EU missions in Georgia's internal affairs".

About 50 law-enforcement officers and 5 patrol crews were mobilised in front of the office of the EU Delegation.

The participants of the rally tried to burn rainbow flags and the flag of the European Union. This attempt was followed by a verbal confrontation between the law-enforcement officers and the demonstrators, after which seven participants of the rally were arrested near the office of the EU Delegation, including Guram and Alexander Palavandishvili. Two articles of the Code of Administrative Violations were the grounds for these arrests, namely, Article 166 (petty hooliganism) and Article 167 (discharging firearms, gas weapons, sound (acoustic) weapons or signal weapons in a populated place or a place not designated for the purpose or in a place designated for the purpose, but in violation of the established rule). According to the information received from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the arrested persons were released after a verbal warning.<sup>29</sup>

For comparison, on 8 March 2022, Shota Dighmelashvili, one of the founders of the Shame Movement was sentenced to four days of administrative imprisonment for throwing eggs at the building of the Administration of the Government of Georgia.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Letter no. MIA 1 22 01923395 of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, dated 13 June 2022.

<sup>30</sup> *Shota Dighmelashvili imprisoned for four days for throwing eggs*, 10 March 2022, available at: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/598726/>.

## Rally at the Embassy of Lithuania of 9 June 2022

Andrius Kalindra, the Ambassador of Lithuania to Georgia, condemned the homophobic and anti-Western rally held in front of the EU office on 6 June 2022 and stated the following: “I want to express my disappointment and condemn the unambiguous insult to the diplomatic corps in Georgia, my fellow representatives, who represent their countries in Georgia with dignity and spare no effort to help Georgia on its way towards the European Union.”

On 9 June 2022, homophobic groups planned a rally in front of the Embassy of Lithuania, demanding the expulsion of the ambassador from the country. The organiser of the rally was Alexander Palavandishvili, who had been arrested three days earlier during a violent rally near the EU office and released after a verbal warning.

The participants of the rally held posters that read: “No to Euro-Sodom” “No to LGBT depravity!” “All disgraceful LGBT ambassadors should be kicked out of Georgia!” “Homosexuality is a pathology” and “LGBT people are perverts.”

The statements of the rally participants were strongly anti-Western and homophobic: “We will never allow gay parades and propaganda of this depravity to be held in our country!” “No gay parades!” “The government is under pressure from the West to increase control over us so that they can openly hold gay parades.”

At the rally, Alexander Palavandishvili addressed the Ambassador of Lithuania and the representatives of the embassy: “In which families, in which schools, in which groups did you grow up, that the biggest depravity on earth, indecent abomination, homosexuality became the norm for you and you all act as its furious lobbyists?! You and your ‘diplomat’ goons are far worse than ordinary terrorists, murderers and torturers because you serve not only the physical annihilation of our society, our children, but also their complete moral and spiritual degradation and death.”

About 40 people gathered at the rally, most of whom were members of Conservative Movement. About 60 law-enforcement officers and 10 patrol crews were mobilised in front of the embassy. It should be noted that, at the rallies held on 6 and 9 June, the number of law-enforcement officers exceeded the number of rally participants.

The rally participants did not block the road.

The rally participants tried to burn the flags of the LGBTI+ community and the European Union, which resulted in a verbal confrontation between the law-enforcement officers and the participants of the rally. Law-enforcement officers arrested two participants and two organisers of the rally - Guram and Alexander Palavandishvili - under Articles 166 and 173 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Georgia.<sup>31</sup>

The rally was covered by three journalists of the openly pro-Russian far-right media Alt-Info.

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<sup>31</sup> Letter no. MIA 1 22 01923395 of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, dated 13 July 2022.

## Small-Scale Rally at Matrosov Prison of 16 June 2022

Organised by Georgian Idea, the purpose of the rally held near penitentiary establishment no. 9 (the so-called Matrosov prison) was to support Irakli Khomasuridze, who is charged in the case of Davit Berdzenishvili, one of the leaders of the Republican Party of Georgia. The rally participants started gathering around 7 pm. About 10 people gathered in front of the penitentiary establishment. Vepkhia Ghvaladze, who participated in the attack on Khatuna Samnidze and Davit Berdzenishvili, was present at the rally.

A patrol police car appeared near Matrosov prison only at 07:15 pm and left the area in about 10 minutes.

## Rally against Tbilisi Pride Week's Film Screening of 28 June 2022

The rally held on 28 June 2022 aimed at disrupting the screening of the film *Wet Sand*, organised by Tbilisi Pride, and protesting against the ambassadors present at the event. The participants of the rally, about 40 people, gathered near the club Khidi. 5 women and about 10 clergymen attended the rally. The rally was organised by Guram Palavandishvili. The main rally took place on the opposite side of the club Khidi, although the mobilisation of the participants of the rally on foot was also observed near the road leading to the club (extreme right to Khidi). The rally participants held posters that read as follows: "All of the disgraceful LGBT ambassadors should be kicked out from Georgia!" and "LGBT ambassadors hands off our children!" The road was not blocked.

The employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, together with the private security of the club Khidi controlled the entrance of the club. The entrance was fenced with protective metal barriers about one meter high.

About 100 law-enforcement officers were mobilised in front of the club, in the surrounding area, directly on the bridge and with the participants of the rally. Around 10 patrol police cars and 3 minivans were parked there. After the end of the film and the departure of the ambassadors from the territory, their number decreased. Vazha Siradze, Director of the Patrol Police Department, was at the scene. The largest number of police officers was observed at the rally during his presence.

The law-enforcement officers arrested one participant of the rally, who tried to overcome the one-meter barrier. He also had a phone with him, which he used to record and presumably broadcast live events.

According to information disseminated on social networks, after the display of the rainbow flag by Cafe Mziuri's management, the rally moved towards Mziuri Park, near Cafe Mziuri. The rally continued the next day as well.

## Rally against Cafe Mziuri of 29 June 2022

The purpose of the gathering on 29 June 2022 was to protest the exhibition of the flag supporting the Tbilisi Pride week on the premises of the cafe on 28 June. The participants of the rally demanded the flag be taken down. A DRI observer attended the two-day rally held at Cafe Mziuri only on 29 June.

Guram Palavandishvili organised the assembly. The call for the assembly had been made through the organiser's personal Facebook page the day before the rally, 28 June. About 40 participants of the rally gathered in the park, including seven clergymen. The participants of the meeting held posters which read as follows: "No to LGBT propaganda" "Legalisation of sodomy and its propaganda is genocide of the nation" etc.

According to Cafe Mziuri employees, the participants of the rally were more aggressive on 28 June.

Initially, the number of law-enforcement officers at the cafe and in the surrounding area was around 60. However, it was later reduced to 35. In addition to patrol police officers, MIA officers clad in civilian clothes were also present at the site. According to a DRI observer, one of the law-enforcement officers clad in civilian clothes must have been a high-ranking official. The police officers treated him with greater respect. A small quarrel between one of the citizens and him happened when a passer-by took a photo of the cafe.

According to the observations made by DRI staff members, there was communication between the participants of the rally and the law-enforcement officers, which was expressed in private conversations between the above-mentioned.

## Rally against Tbilisi Pride Festival of 2 July 2022

A strongly homophobic and anti-Western rally was held against the planned Tbilisi Pride festival on 2 July 2022. The rally was held in several places. The original meeting venue was the area around the building of the Parliament of Georgia (on Rustaveli Avenue). Later, some of the participants of the rally moved through Freedom Square to the head office of Georgian Dream. After that, the march continued to the head office of the European Union in Georgia (Chavchavadze Avenue no. 64). A large part of the participants of the rally returned to the original venue of the gathering (in front of the Parliament of Georgia), and a small part went to Mtatsminda Park, where the Tbilisi Pride festival was held.

The organisers and participants of the rally were dissatisfied with the activities of the diplomatic corps and demanded the termination of their mandate in Georgia.

The organisers of the rally were the openly pro-Russian far-right political formation Conservative Movement, the related media platform Alt-Info, the far-right party Georgian Idea, the organisation Children's Rights Protection Society and their leaders Guram and Alexander Palavandishvili, Levan Chachua, Gega Khvedelidze, Konstantine Morgoshia, Giorgi Kardava, Irakli and Shota Martynenko, Zura Makharadze and blogger and activist Beka Vardosanidze. Some of the organisers were present at the rally

– Shota Martynenko, Giorgi Kardava, Konstantine Morgoshia, Levan Chachua and Gega Khvedelidze. The rest of the organisers were arrested in administrative proceedings after 00:00 on 2 July.<sup>32</sup>

About 1,200 people, mostly men, attended the assembly held in front of the parliament. About 400 people took part in the march to the office of Georgian Dream. About 300 demonstrators marched towards the office of the EU Delegation. About 100 people gathered around Mtatsminda Park.

The participants of the assembly were holding homophobic and anti-Western posters which read as follows: “No to Euro-Sodom” “No to LGBT depravity” All disgraceful LGBT ambassadors should be kicked out of Georgia!” and “What right do you have to interfere in our affairs!” Some of the posters featured photos of Carl Hartzell, the EU Ambassador to Georgia, and US Ambassador Kelly Degnan with the slogans: “Shame on you – No more the involvement of the UN and EU missions in Georgia's internal affairs” and “Stop the LGBT dictatorship – end your missions!”

The anti-Western drive was especially felt near the European Union headquarters, where the participants of the rally declared that they would never allow “gay parades” to take place. Konstantine Morgoshia addressed the demonstrators in front of the EU office: “If LGBT propaganda is a necessary condition for Western integration, then we don't need such a West.”

A part of the demonstrators chanted “Nationalists!” near the office of the Georgian Dream. When the participants of the rally arrived at the Office of the Patriarch of Georgia, they loudly addressed the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Ilia-II, shouting: “We love you!” and “We will not allow Pride!”

There were about 30 clergymen at the rallies. Several of them addressed the demonstrators, saying that Georgia is a country with a long tradition of Orthodoxy, which will never tolerate Sodom sins and “LGBT depravity”. The speeches of the clergymen were anti-Western, with several saying, “Europe is imposing Sodom depravity on us.”

About 400 law-enforcement officers were mobilised in front of the parliament and the surrounding area. About 100 police officers were controlling the area in front of the offices of Georgian Dream and the EU Delegation. There were about 400 law-enforcement officers in the territory of Mtatsminda Park. The human chain of police officers guarded the entrances of the head office of Georgian Dream and the EU Delegation and the entrance to Mtatsminda Park.

Despite the prohibitions under the legislation of Georgia, several participants in the rally near the parliament had alcoholic beverages with them, and several tried to bring in a large amount of gasoline, which the police did not allow. This incident was preceded by an attempt by one of the demonstrators to set himself on fire using gasoline.

The participants of the rally burned NATO and EU flags in front of the parliament and the office of the EU Delegation to Georgia. In addition, the flags of the LGBTI+ community were cut, burned, and afterwards thrown in front of Georgian Dream's office. The law-enforcement authorities did not respond to this incident.

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<sup>32</sup> Radio Liberty, 2 July 2022, the Ministry of Internal Affairs arrested 26 individuals, including leaders, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31925272.html>.

Under Article 11 of the Law of Georgia on Assemblies and Demonstrations, participants of an assembly or demonstration are prohibited, on the one hand, to have explosive or easily flammable substances or weapons that are used or can be used to cause harm to life and limb of the participants of the gathering or demonstration or other persons. On the other hand, it is also forbidden for participants to have alcoholic beverages with them.<sup>33</sup> The breach of the rules of organising and holding a gathering or demonstration is punishable by 500 GEL if committed by the participants of the rally, and 5,000 GEL by the organiser of the rally.<sup>34</sup>

Koka Morgoshia, the organiser of the rally, was leading the burning of the flags of the European Union and the LGBTI+ community. According to him, “hundreds of European Union flags are burned every week because the vast majority of the population of Georgia associates Europe with Bokeria, Saakashvili and others. I know it is punishable. If they are punished for this, there is no problem; they will be punished by law.”

Pre-determined groups of law-enforcement officers protected the representatives of media organisations in order not to allow interference with their professional activities. According to the observation of the DRI, there were many representatives of the State Security Service, clad in civilian clothes, without identification insignia, at the rallies (at all locations).

Neutral communication was observed between the participants of the rally and the law-enforcement officers. However, the situation became tense after some of the demonstrators tried to break through the corridor of the law-enforcement officers at the entrance of Mtatsminda Park.

Some of the participants of the rally tried to obstruct the nearby festivalgoers and did not obey the request of the law-enforcement officers, which is why the police arrested dozens of people under Article 173 of the Code of Administrative Violations (disobedience to the legal request of the police).

The DRI requested information<sup>35</sup> from the Ministry of Internal Affairs about the number of individuals arrested during the rallies held in Tbilisi in front of the Parliament of Georgia (on Rustaveli Avenue), near the offices of Georgian Dream and the EU Delegation to Georgia as well as on the road leading to Mtatsminda Park on 2 July 2022, and also information regarding the legal grounds for arrests and administrative fines (if any).

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs:<sup>36</sup>

On 28-29 June and 2 July 2022, in connection with the Tbilisi Pride Week, 45 (forty-five) persons were arrested in administrative proceedings by the authorised units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia at several locations in Tbilisi, under Articles 166 and 173 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Georgia.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs did not provide us with detailed information on the area where the arrests were made. As for the information about administrative fines, the ministry referred us to the Tbilisi City Court. Despite the question asked, the letter of the Ministry of Internal Affairs does not clarify whether the administrative responsibility of the persons arrested in the administrative proceedings was established.

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<sup>33</sup> The Law of Georgia on Assemblies and Demonstrations, paras. a), b) and d) of Article 11.2.

<sup>34</sup> The Code of Administrative Violations of Georgia, paras. 1 and 2 of Article 174<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Letter no. 26072022-355 of the DRI, dated 26 July 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Letter no. MIA 8 22 02443132 of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, dated 1 September 2022.