



## Online and Social Media Discourse of Far-right Groups

(August – October, 2023)

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## Introduction

The Democracy Research Institute continues to monitor the activities of far-right groups. As a result of a three-month observation spanning from August to October 2023, this report summarizes and analyzes 465 instances of propaganda and disinformation content distributed through social networks and online media. Additionally, the report scrutinizes the activities of the political faction within the far-right, examining their key pre-election campaign messages.

Throughout the reporting period, the discourse from leaders of the "Georgian Dream" and the overtly pro-Russian far-right political faction "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info" displayed striking similarities on specific issues. The synchronized rhetoric between violent groups and the government notably escalated in October, particularly following the State Security Service's [announcement](#) that an event supported by USAID was allegedly preparing for the "processes of violently overthrowing the government."

The State Security Service's [announcement](#) about potential destabilization and the planning of civil disturbances served as the catalyst for rallying supporters and establishing a militant entity called "[Anti-Maidan](#)" by "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info". Despite the organizers' calls bearing indications of a potential crime, law enforcement authorities did not appropriately address this matter. On one hand, the government's lack of action concerning the formation of a violent movement, and on the other hand, the State Security Service's emphasis on the alleged attempt by Western forces to destabilize the country, gives rise to the impression that there may be a government interest in utilizing violent groups as a political tool.

During the reporting period, prominent political figures from the ruling party, in collaboration with far-right factions, attempted to counterweigh the direct influence of Russian spies in Georgian politics. On September 14, 2023, following the imposition of [sanctions](#) by the US State Department on the former Prosecutor General of Georgia, Otar Partskhaladze, there was a vehemently negative response from both the government, the "Georgian Dream" satellite political union, "People's Power," and far-right groups. In a concerted effort and using identical rhetoric, these entities sought to shield Otar Partskhaladze, the former Prosecutor General of Georgia, who had been exposed for engaging in activities beneficial to the Federal Security Service of Russia.

Through the monitoring of social networks and online media, we identified two main focal points in the discourse of far-right groups, representing areas with the highest levels of interaction:

**1. Anti-Western and anti-American rhetoric** - The State Security Service became notably agitated after the statement implicating USAID in the planning of potential destabilization and civil unrest. The heightened anti-American rhetoric of openly pro-Russian far-right groups gained momentum following the renewed military conflict sparked by the Hamas attack on Israel in October.

**2. Organization of "Anti-Maidan" and pre-election preparations** - The State Security Service's statement on September 18 regarding potential destabilization served as the foundation for establishing the militant organization "[Anti-Maidan](#)". In October, it became evident that the "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info" aimed to mobilize supporters through regional meetings. This effort was twofold: to bolster the "Anti-Maidan" movement and garner political advantages ahead of the elections.

## Methodological framework

The report examines the online discourse of far-right political groups and their leaders on social networks and media platforms from August to October 2023, utilizing content analysis. It incorporates both quantitative and qualitative characteristics of media monitoring data, with Facebook's analytics tool CrowdTangle employed for social media monitoring.

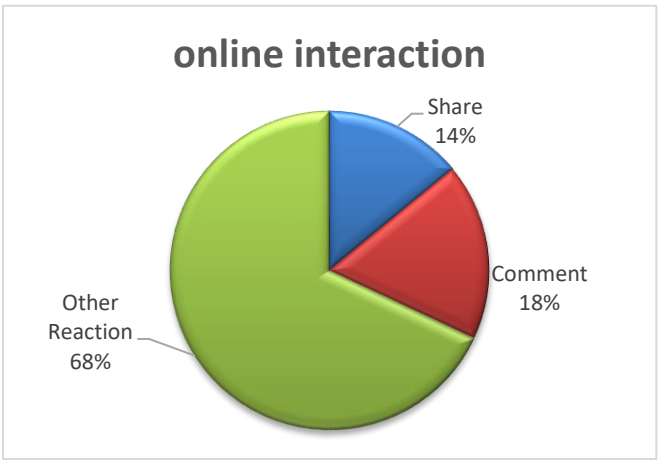
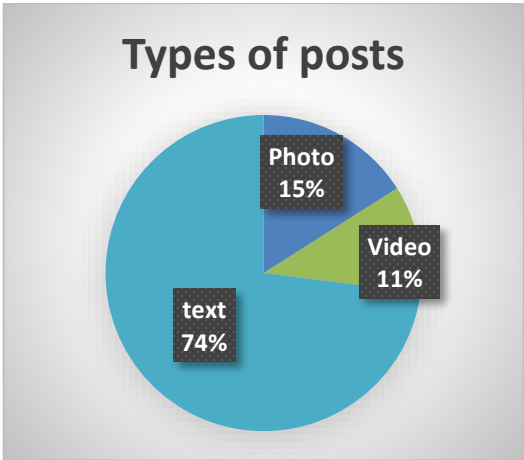
The initial section addresses the parallel rhetoric between far-right groups and the government, along with

insights into the activities of the "Anti-Maidan" organization and the pre-election campaign of the far-right "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info." The second chapter focuses on the primary messages of the anti-American campaign amid the renewed conflict between Israel and Hamas. Our observation encompassed openly pro-Kremlin and anti-Western media platforms, including "Alt-Info" and "Sezoni TV," as well as pro-Kremlin outlets such as "Georgia and the World" and "Sakinform."

To examine the far-right rhetoric and related narratives, we conducted observations on the personal Facebook pages and social media platform pages associated with leaders known for their far-right perspectives, including Levan Chachua ("Georgian Idea"), Zurab Makharadze, Konstantine Morgoshia, Irakli and Shota Martinenkos, Giorgi Kardava ("Conservative Movement/Alt-Info"), Guram and Aleksandre Palavandishvilis ("Society for the Protection of Children's Rights"), and Vato Shakarashvili ("Georgia First").

Furthermore, we analyzed the online space and media content where the formation and dissemination of the action agenda and postulates of far-right forces are most active. The study explored the frequency and distribution areas of manipulative and populist narratives using Facebook's analytical tool CrowdTangle.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of information materials within the monitoring framework revealed that 74% of the posts comprised text materials (status, articles), 11% consisted of video content (including live broadcasts), and 15% involved photo materials.



## 1. Anti-Western rhetoric of Far-right groups and "Georgian Dream".

Throughout the reporting period, far-right groups consistently engaged in anti-Western campaigns. Notably, there were instances where the messages from leaders of the ruling party aligned with those of far-right groups on issues such as: 1) the imposition of sanctions by the US State Department on the former Prosecutor General of Georgia, Otar Partskhaladze; 2) the official visit of the Vice President of the European Commission and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to Tbilisi in September; 3) the statement from the State Security Service of Georgia regarding the role of USAID in potential destabilization and a coup attempt in the country.

In all three cases, openly pro-Russian far-right radical groups sought to fuel anti-Western sentiments in society. Simultaneously, their messages aimed at bolstering the government's positions. Notably, the reporting period witnessed an intensified propaganda campaign against the European Union, primarily aiming to portray Georgia's aspiration to join the European Union as futile.

Furthermore, efforts to coordinate the use of pro-government and far-right media platforms within the framework of the anti-Western campaign were evident during this reporting period.

### 1.1. Sanctioned former prosecutor – traces of Russian spies in Georgian politics

The imposition of [sanctions](#) by the US State Department on the former Prosecutor General of Georgia, Otar Partskhaladze, was followed by strongly negative assessments from the government, the satellite political union of Georgian Dream, People's Power, and far-right groups. The aforementioned forces tried in unison to protect Otar Partskhaladze, the former Prosecutor General of Georgia, who was exposed in his activities as acting for the benefit of the Federal Security Service of Russia.

The former Prosecutor General of Georgia, who was exposed as acting to benefit [the Federal Security Service of Russia, on September 18, 2023, according to the decree of the National Bank on](#) banking assets and financial transactions had his access restricted. Chairman of "Georgian Dream" Irakli Kobakhidze declared the said decision unconstitutional and noted that the action of the National Bank was against the presumption of innocence and the Constitution of Georgia.

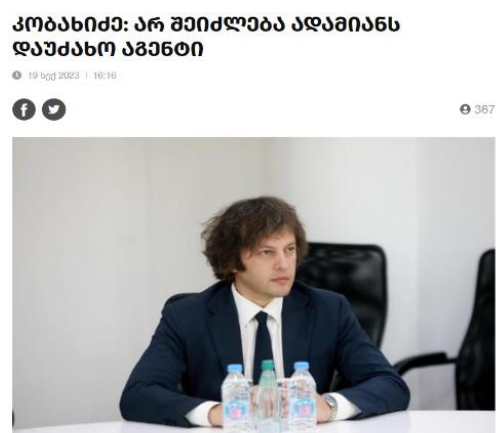
In light of the aforementioned assessment, Natia Turnava, the acting president of the National Bank of Georgia (NBG), instituted modifications to the procedure governing the implementation of sanctions regimes. As per the amendment, international sanctions will not be applicable to Georgian citizens unless there is a conviction against them in the relevant case in a Georgian court. This alteration provided Otar Partskhaladze with the opportunity to transfer a portion of his property to his son's name on the same day. The actions taken by Natia Turnava, which resulted in the resignation of three NBG vice-presidents, received positive evaluations from the satellite political association of Georgian Dream, People's Power, and the openly pro-Russian Alt-Info.

On September 19, Eka Sefiashvili (co-author of the so-called Russian bill on the transparency of foreign influence) [in the program](#) "Post-Analytics" reviewed the policy of sanctions implemented in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war and the package of changes implemented by the National Bank against the background of anti-Western rhetoric, appealing to the Constitution of Georgia. She gave a positive assessment: *"It is very good that the National Bank issued such a resolution that is in full compliance with the Constitution and recognizes the presumption of innocence."* Guram Macharashvili, representative of "People's Power", [repeated](#) identical messages: *"The National Bank has now adopted a norm corresponding to the Constitution. The Constitution protects the citizen of Georgia, his life, health, and property. Accordingly, property must be*

protected in any case, regardless of what international norm applies."

The chairman of "Georgian Dream", who in March 2023 actively supported the so-called "Transparency of Foreign Influence," the Russian draft law, [he said](#) that *"a person cannot be called an agent until the court says so."* His rhetoric was also acceptable to the presenters of the ultra-right, openly pro-Russian media platform "Alt-Info". In the "Comment of the Day" program, Tengo Omanidze reviewed the issue of sanctioning Otar Partskhaladze against the backdrop of anti-American sentiments and [noted](#): *"The representatives of the opposition, without a court decision, have already convicted a person and declared him a Russian spy, agent, traitor."*

Aleksandre Palavandishvili, the leader of the far-right organization "Society for the Protection of Children's Rights", also approved the changes implemented by the NBG and [noted in a Facebook post](#): *"When the National Bank obeyed the Constitution of Georgia instead of America, the spies have started to leave the NBG as a sign of protest!"*



Rather than undertaking substantial reforms to counteract the influence of a hostile state within the security sector, the authorities made an effort to conceal the presence of Russian spies in collaboration with far-right forces. This suggests the possibility that, in certain instances, "Georgian Dream" is utilizing far-right forces in Georgia as a political tool.

## 1.2. Disinformation campaign against the European Union in the wake of Joseph Borell's visit to Tbilisi

On September 7, 2023, Josep Borrell, the Vice President of the European Commission and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy paid [an official visit to Tbilisi](#). He held meetings with representatives of the Georgian government, parliamentary opposition and civil society. Within the framework of the visit, Josep Borrell made several statements supporting the European future of Georgia. At the same time, he [expressed](#) dissatisfaction with the restoration of direct flights between Georgia and Russia and spoke about the progress of the implementation of 12 recommendations developed by the European Commission for Georgia. According to Borell, Georgia fulfilled three recommendations, and regarding the remaining recommendations, additional efforts from the government were needed. The mentioned assessment was followed by a negative response from the government, the satellite political union of "Georgian Dream" - "People's Power" and the far-right groups.

Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili responded to the statements of the EU High Representative and [noted that "not a single"](#) sanctioned airline and not a single sanctioned plane flies in Georgia." According to Irakli Gharibashvili, the decision of the European Union was **unfair**, while Ukraine and Moldova received

the candidate status as an advance.

Mamuka Mdinardze also assessed the decision of the European Union in 2022 **as unfair and noted that "if an unfair decision is made in relation to Georgia at the end of the year, it shall mean they pushed Georgia towards Russia"**.

A member of the satellite political party of the government, Davit Kartvelishvili from "People's Power", used Borell's assessments to demonize the European Union and, accordingly, to incite anti-Western sentiments. In his opinion, Borell's assessments regarding Georgia are false and hypocritical. In his statement, Kartvelishvili revived the disinformation narrative of the "opening of the second front" and noted that if Georgia is dragged into the war against Russia, then the country will no longer have a problem with receiving the candidate status.

Borell's visit to Georgia was actively reviewed on the air of the ultra-right media platform "Alt-Info". On September 7, in the "Comment of the Day" program, Zurab Zukakishvili, a member of the "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info," expressed criticism towards the culture of democracy in the European Union, condemning it for its colonialist history. He asserted that the EU established its "garden" through genocide and the plundering of other nations rather than through the implementation of sound policies and democratic principles. Another pro-Russian propagandist and member of the Conservative Movement/Alt-Info, Iliia Megrelishvili, stated on the "Comment of the Day" program that the official visit of EU high officials was intended as an attack on conservative patriots.



On September 12, the openly pro-Kremlin website "Georgia and the World" published an article titled "In Europe, they know that confrontation with Russia can cost Georgia dearly, but they still tell us to do as they have dictated." The article, evaluating Josep Borrell's visit to Georgia, suggests that the West's true agenda is to bring about a change in the government through a revolution in Georgia. It emphasizes that the West's interest lies in encouraging Georgia to open a second war front against Russia.

An interview with pro-Russian propagandist Mamuka Kartoza, also published on the same website on September 12, asserts that "Georgia's sovereignty is only a formality, and any of our so-called rebellions are perceived by the West as a slave rebellion. We are perceived as slaves. We have been given no choice."

In this manner, pro-Kremlin forces, propagandists, and far-right groups aim to instill nihilism about the European Union within society. They seek to establish a narrative that undermines the development perspective of Georgia in the Euro-Atlantic space, suggesting that Georgia lacks a connection with European identity. The anti-Western rhetoric of far-right groups forms the basis for government representatives to indirectly discredit Euro-Atlantic institutions. In contrast to violent groups, the Georgian Dream attempts to maintain a politically advantageous position in the status-granting process. In the event of a negative decision by the European Commission, the government-backed anti-Western campaign aims to create a skeptical and negative attitude towards Euro-Atlantic institutions in society. Conversely, in the case of a positive answer, "Georgian Dream" intends to consider the candidate's status as its own political achievement. Simultaneously with Josep Borrell's visit, the intensified propaganda and discrediting campaign about the "injustice" of the

European Union reveals the government's dual political interest, which implies the use of extreme right-wing violent groups as a political tool in this process.

### **1.3. State Security Service's statements reinforced the anti-Western rhetoric of the "conservative movement/alt-info"**

On October 2, 2023, [the statement of the State Security Service](#) on USAID A sponsored event to train a group of activists to prepare for "violent overthrow of the government" drew immediate backlash from openly pro-Russian far-right radical groups. Their rhetoric was marked by strongly anti-American and anti-Western sentiments.

The State Security Service initially [published](#) a statement on possible destabilization and civil unrest planning on September 18, which became the basis for the creation of the violent organizational unit "Anti-Maidan" by the "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info". On September 25, 2023, party leaders Zura Makharadze, Giorgi Kardava, Shota and Irakli Martinenkos held [a briefing](#), where, based on the statement of the State Security Service, they spoke about the need to mobilize "like-minded forces" against the coup attempt in Georgia. "We need to organize **organized, cohesive groups throughout Georgia, in order to have the opportunity to transport tens of thousands of people from the regions in a few hours.**" Shota Martynenko [said](#).

Zura Makharadze noted that: **"There will be a confrontation between two groups of people in Georgia."** He called his supporters to fight and noted that "the choice will be reduced to two positions - either you want the fate of Ukraine for Georgia or you will fight against it." If you don't want to watch Tbilisi burning, if you don't want Georgia to lose territories, **you will have to fight and this fight will not be easy. Maidan is an attempt to overthrow the state through violence. Only force can oppose force"**.

The founder of "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info" Konstantine Morgoshia also responded to the statement of SSS in a [Facebook post](#) and noted: "It seems that the fate of our country will be decided in the streets of Tbilisi instead of offices and administrative buildings, and it is strategically important that a healthy, conservative part of this country, to be ready for this scenario." In order to mobilize supporters, the information was spread on the "Alterinfo" Facebook page, where one of the photo caption [reads](#): "Join Antimaidan!" Be ready for battle! Let's save Georgia from war and coup!"

"Anti-Maidan" is actively discussed on the personal telegram channels of "Conservative Movement/Alt Info" leaders: [Shota Martynenko](#), [Zura Makharadze](#), [of Giorgi Kardava](#) and [Irakli Martynenko](#), which in many cases are accompanied by violent appeals in the form of subscribers' comments. The leaders of the violent group call their supporters to be active and try to instill fear in the society by appealing to the issue of a coup d'état. It is for this purpose that the leaders of the "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info" [broadcast](#) a video appeal on the Telegram channel, where they call on their supporters to "join the anti-Maidan movement" in order to protect the country from "Western revenge".

Even though the organizers' calls likely exhibited indicators of a criminal offense, law enforcement authorities did not respond proportionately. The government's apparent disregard for addressing the formation of a violent movement, coupled with the State Security Service's emphasis on alleged attempts by Western forces to destabilize the country, has given rise to suspicions that the government may be inclined towards an anti-Western stance, actively leveraging violent groups as a political tool.

In response to the statement of SSS, the Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, [Shalva Papuashvili](#), [charged](#) USAID with the responsibility for the coup attempt: **"USAID should explain why the money of the American people is going to another country to inspire riots, to train groups that should plan riots and provoke violence." This is a black day in the history of American aid to Georgia.**" (Photo in the middle)

Irakli Kobakhidze, the chairman of "Georgian Dream" once again invoked the "second front" for intimidating the public and accused the "Western forces" of trying to drag Georgia into the war; he [noted](#) that: **"It is**

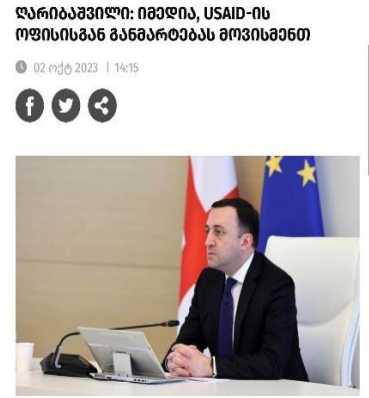


*necessary to get clarifications as to why such training was financed by USAID, with the direct goal to prepare a revolution in Georgia."* (Photo on the left)

[Irakli Gharibashvili](#) also accused "certain destructive forces" of trying to drag Georgia into the war, and at the government meeting, he noted that: *"In the background of many years of cooperation with USAID in many directions, it is a pity that such facts are happening."* (Photo on the right)



შალვა პაპუაშვილი - ეს არის შავი დღე საქართველოს მიმართ ამერიკის დახმარების ისტორიაში, როგორც ჩანს, ამერიკელი ხალხის ფული გამოყენებულია, რომ მოხდეს რევოლუციური პროცესების დაგეგმვა



The leaders of the "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info" continued to organize the "Anti-Maidan Movement" with similar rhetoric and anti-Western sentiments of the government. They started holding regional meetings and mobilizing supporters in the wake of the announcement of the SSS with the manipulative motive of "preventing a coup".

On October 1, 2023, "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info" [held an organizational meeting of "Antimaidan" with local residents in Telavi](#). It should be noted that the meeting was held in Vazha Phshavela Telavi State Professional Drama Theater. The theater is a legal entity under public law and is financed by the state. At the meeting held in Telavi, the representatives of the pro-Russian forces openly talked about the importance of "Anti Maidan" and the parliamentary elections of 2024. Shota Martynenko confirmed that the openly pro-Russian group is preparing to participate in the 2024 parliamentary elections. "Now we have two immediate tasks. One is effective organization for "Antimaidan" and second, elections are planned for next year. The events that will be held now will be a very important basis for building that unity, which will help us achieve a very important result in the elections next year."

The leaders of "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info" held [the second regional meeting in Rustavi on October 7](#). At the meeting, Irakli Martynenko said: "We are confronting the West. They are organizing a coup so that their agents can seize power and plunge our country into war."

[The third](#) meeting was held on October 14 in Gori. At the meeting, Zurab Makharadze again stood out with violent and threatening messages: "If someone is afraid, we only have one thing to say about that. Go home, park your derrier as needed and nothing will happen. If you come out, start burning, destroying and dragging this country into war, then we will also come out, and then we will finish you off."

[The fourth](#) organizational meeting was held in Mtskheta on October 21, which, unlike other regional meetings, was attended by Konstantine Morgoshia. "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info" leaders met with experts and political scientists. [According to](#) Shota Martynenko, one of the main goals of the event was the formation of the "Anti-Maidan" Council and an alternative political and ideological platform, which will be a counterweight to the liberal agenda.



## 2. Far-right groups' Anti-American rhetoric against the background of the Israeli-Hamas military conflict

The renewed military conflict following the Hamas attack on Israel has reinvigorated the anti-American rhetoric of openly pro-Russian far-right groups. The "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info" utilized the Israel-Hamas conflict to portray the West as an unreliable partner and the U.S. as a force inciting conflicts, with Israel now taking precedence as the main priority. Consequently, international support for Ukraine appears to be diminishing against this backdrop.

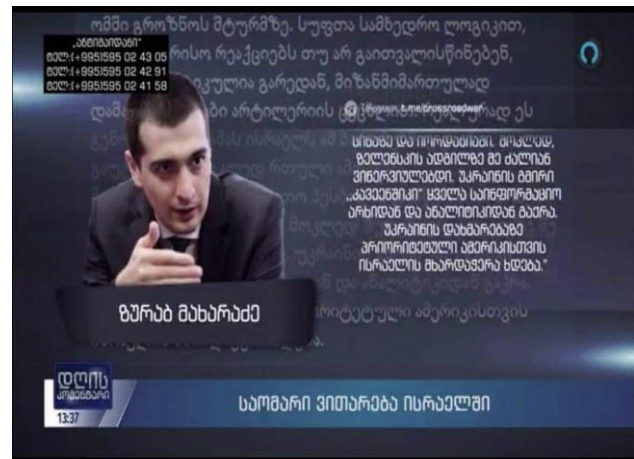
In the program "Realpolitika" of the "Alt-Info" TV company, the leader of "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info" Zura Makharadze noted that the situation in Ukraine is becoming increasingly dire against the background of the war in Israel: *"In short, in Zelensky's place, I would be very worried. Hero of Ukraine "comedy show" disappeared from all news channels and analytics. America's priority over helping Ukraine is to support Israel."* (Photo on the right, below) With this statement, the far-right leader attempts to portray Ukraine as a nation abandoned by its Western partners. This narrative aligns with the notion that, akin to Ukraine, Georgia would be left isolated in the face of a Russian attack. Such declarations contribute to the amplification of anti-American sentiments and nihilism, serving as a crucial informational tool for the pro-Kremlin campaign. For years, this campaign has sought to construct the myth of Russia's influence and invincibility in the region. This disinformation is notable and warrants caution, as it underpins the widespread propaganda message that asserts, "peaceful and close relations with Russia are necessary, as Georgia would lack support in the event of a confrontation with it."

In Georgia, far-right actors develop anti-American rhetoric, as a rule, against the background of pro-Russian sentiments. Their propaganda media usually use methods of exaggerating and demonizing the facts. In this regard, it is worth noting the statement of Giorgi Papunashvili, an active member of "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info" on October 9 in the program "Comment of the Day", where he reviews the Israel-Hamas conflict as a disturbing signal for Georgia and tries to establish the opinion that America, as a strategic partner, is unreliable. and is dysfunctional. *"What is happening now in Israel should be a signal for us. When you bet on a geopolitical power that is too far away from you, you have natural enemies in the region. Our ally is across the ocean. We take their interest and take their word for it, if something happens here, tomorrow it will be impossible for the collective West to sort out elementary military logistics."*

The leader of "Conservative Movement/Alt-Info" Shota Martynenko assessed the Hamas military attack on Israel as a consolidation of anti-American forces in Islamic countries and an event directed against Western hegemony. He aimed to reinforce the narrative that a new geopolitical agenda is emerging globally, wherein Islamic countries are strategically aligning themselves with America's geopolitical counterparts, including Iran, China, and Russia. *"The task of Hamas was to provoke a tough reaction from Israel and through it to*

*consolidate the anti-American position of the Islamic countries, and as we can see, they have fulfilled this task."*

In summary, the anti-American rhetoric employed by far-right groups, particularly heightened during the Israel-Hamas military conflict, depicts the West as an unreliable partner. This rhetoric plays on fears of war and positions Russia as the guarantor of Georgia's security. Such messaging directly contradicts Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and seeks to evoke irrational fears within society.



## Conclusion

Far-right groups in Georgia employ manipulative tactics and disseminate false information to reach the general public. A recurring theme in their anti-Western rhetoric is the portrayal of an inherent incompatibility between Georgia and the West. Concurrently, the negative campaign initiated by far-right and openly pro-Russian groups against the collective West can be seen as a direct or indirect element of the Kremlin's propaganda campaign. Social media serves as an alternative medium for their disinformation campaign and populist messages.

According to the Democracy Research Institute, the deliberate spread of disinformation significantly exacerbates the polarization within the country. This not only hampers European integration but also impedes the development of a democratic culture. Moreover, the anti-Western rhetoric poses a considerable threat to the national interests of the country, creating the risk of alienation from Western strategic partners and leaving it alone to face Russia.