

Understanding and Combating Far-Right Extremism and Ultra-Nationalism in Georgia



2019 Social Media Monitoring Results

(From May to August)

The current Media Monitoring Report was prepared by the Democracy Research Institute (DRI) within the framework of the project "Understanding and Combating Far-Right Extremism and Ultra-Nationalism in Georgia". The financial support of the current project is provided by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the project team and should not be taken as an official opinion of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

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2019

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1. Brief Glossary of Terms

- **Discourse** - Implies shared models of meaning that give social objects a specific meaning.
- **Far-Right Discourse** - Includes a variety of ideologies that combine racism, xenophobia, misogyny, antisemitism and homophobia.
- **Discourse Analysis** - A qualitative research method that involves detailed analysis of textual material.
- **Norman Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis** - Includes three main stages of discourse analysis: descriptive, interpretive, and explanatory.
- **Far-Right Groups** - Refers to groups that are promoting anti-liberal and anti-western sentiments. In addition, their rhetoric is sharply homophobic, xenophobic, and nationalist.
- **Extremism** - Implies a kind of ideology that does not recognize the principle of human equality. Fosters hatred, violence, and intolerance.
- **Social Media** - A continuous form of online communication that integrates social networks, multimedia, blogs, podcasts and other social channels.
- **Online Media** - Includes websites and news agencies working on various types of social-political issues.

These definitions of the terms are not universal and have been developed in the context of the current study.

2. Introduction

The present study is an analysis of the results of a four-month media monitoring carried out by the Democracy Research Institute (DRI), which presents and analyzes the activities of Georgian far-right groups and their leaders in social and online media, key messages and target groups from May to August 2019.

As a general observation, it can be said that the political ideology of the far-right groups in Georgia is fragmented and hybrid. Consequently, it is difficult to adapt to any particular ideology. It is also unjustified for these groups to fall under one umbrella and talk about their political content being identical. For the sake of clarity, it should be noted at the beginning, that the current monitoring of the far-right discourse is defined as an ideology that combines racism, xenophobia, misogyny, anti-semitism and homophobia.¹

An important task of the current study was to identify and replicate hate speech in social and online media and identify their foreign-policy discourse.

The current report describes the research methodological framework; The main target groups of the far-right groups and their leaders are analyzed. In addition, specific facts of their use of hate speech are described. The final part of the study covers the main findings of the study.

Main Key Words: Far-right discourse, ultra-nationalist sentiments, national values.

¹ Macridis, Roy C. *Contemporary Political Ideologies: Movements and Regimes*, 4th ed. Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1989, 83. 231

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Current media monitoring provides both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data shows the number of posts containing xenophobic, homophobic and other hate speech on various topics. Quantitative data was collected from the selected Facebook pages through the special software system Netvizz. Existing data were used to identify the typology of hate speech.

The qualitative part of the study provides a typology of the main messages, political discourses and activities of the far-right groups and their leaders. Throughout the current research, the target groups of aggression of the ultranationalist groups and foreign policy orientations have been identified through discourse analysis. In addition, it has been shown on which issues do these far-right and extremist group reflect in Georgia. Current media research uses the analysis of critical discourse by British researcher Norman Fairclough, which relies on three main characteristics: 1) text analysis, 2) processing analysis, 3) social analysis. As a tool of the research method, a content analysis was used, based on which the action discourse of the far-right groups selected within the study was studied. The research also identified key research issues:

- Identify the characteristics and trends of far-right, radical group activities on social and online media;
- Defining the foreign-policy discourse of the far-right, radical groups and their leaders;
- Hate Speech by far-right groups and their Leaders on social and online media.

Within the monitoring, the following were selected as the study objects:

1. Nine online media portals

1	Zneoba	https://zneoba.ge/
2	Georgia and World	http://geworld.ge/ge/
3	Politikano	https://www.facebook.com/PolitikanoGeorgia/
4	Alt-info	https://alt-info.com/
5	Alia	http://alia.ge/
6	Saqinform	http://saqinform.ge/
7	Progress-news	http://progressnews.ge/
8	Geo-Digest	https://geodigest.ge/
9	Asaval-dasavali	https://asavali.ge/

2. Facebook pages of fifteen far-right groups:

1	“Don’t become Liberal, think!”	https://www.facebook.com/dontbealiberal/
2	„Kardhu“	https://www.facebook.com/%E1%83%99%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%93%E1%83%B0%E1%83%A3-217114512148619/
3	„Ethnicity - Georgian“	https://www.facebook.com/erovnebaqartveli/
4	“Georgian Power”	https://www.facebook.com/GeoAltRight/
5	“Georgian Idea”	https://www.facebook.com/gaertianebaQARTULIIDEA/
6	“Anti-Paradox”	https://www.facebook.com/antiparadox/
7	“Red Pill”	https://www.facebook.com/%E1%83%AC%E1%83%98%E1%83%97%E1%83%94%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98-%E1%83%90%E1%83%91%E1%83%98-347365112564928/
8	„Caucasian”	https://www.facebook.com/%E1%83%99%E1%83%90%E1%83%95%E1%83%99%E1%83%90%E1%83%A1%E1%83%98%E1%83%94%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98-642881216062820/
9	“Dzlevai Sakvirveli”	https://www.facebook.com/dzlevai.sakvirveli/
10	“National Awakening”	https://www.facebook.com/GeorgianNationalAwakening/
11	“World Family Congress”	https://www.facebook.com/wcf10/
12	“Youth Unity”	https://www.facebook.com/%E1%83%90%E1%83%AE%E1%83%90%E1%83%9A%E1%83%92%E1%83%90%E1%83%96%E1%83%A0%E1%83%93%E1%83%A3%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98-%E1%83%94%E1%83%A0%E1%83%97%E1%83%9D%E1%83%91%E1%83%90-267188220859097/
13	Georgian March	https://www.facebook.com/QartuliMarshiGeorgianMarch/
14	Geo-Pepe	https://www.facebook.com/geopepe01/
15	Anti-Liberal League	https://www.facebook.com/Antiliberal-League-%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%A2%E1%83%98%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98%E1%83%91%E1%83%94%E1%83%A0%E1%83%90%E1%83%9A%E1%83%A3%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98-%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98%E1%83%92%E1%83%90-2029505250478169/

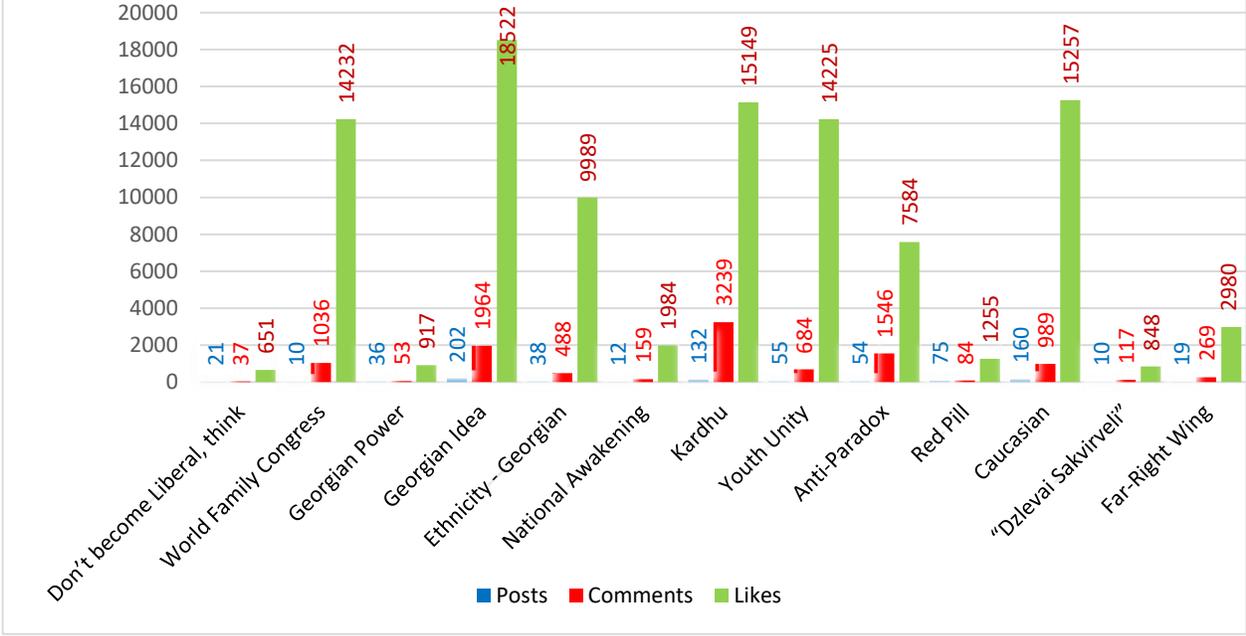
3. During the research, researchers also observed private Facebook pages of far-right leaders

(hereinafter referred to as "leaders"). As the objects of the study the following pages have been selected:

1. Zviad Tomaradze	https://www.facebook.com/%E1%83%96%E1%83%95%E1%83%98%E1%83%90%E1%83%93-%E1%83%A2%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9B%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%90%E1%83%AB%E1%83%94-511471425912362/
2. Ramaz Gagnidze	https://www.facebook.com/ramaz.gagnidze
3. Beka Vardosanidze	https://www.facebook.com/beqavardosanidzeofficial/
4. Mikheil Amisulashvili	https://www.facebook.com/mixail.amisulashvili
5. Aleksandre Palavandishvili	https://www.facebook.com/a.palavandishvili/
6. Konstantine Morgoshia	https://www.facebook.com/konstantine.morgoshia
7. Levan Chachua	https://www.facebook.com/chachualevan1971
8. Gulbaant Rtskhiladze	https://www.facebook.com/gulbaat.rcxiladze.001
9. Gia Korkotashvili	https://www.facebook.com/gia.korkotashvili
10. Davit Nemsadze	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100015762797617
11. Lado Sadghobelashvili	https://www.facebook.com/lado.sadgobelashvili?ref=br_rs
12. Nikoloz Mzhavanadze	https://www.facebook.com/nikoloz.mzhavanadze
13. Sandro Bregadze	https://www.facebook.com/sandro.breg
14. Levan Vasadze ²	https://www.facebook.com/wcf10/?epa=SEARCH_BOX
15. Dimitri Lortkipanidze	https://www.facebook.com/dimitri.lortkipanidze

As part of the present monitoring, 2,272 statuses posted by 15 far-right Facebook groups have been studied. In addition, 1,043 articles published in online media were analyzed. It should be noted that far-right groups are actively using the social network to replicate their beliefs and hate speech. This is evidenced by the high interaction among group followers who often endorse different statuses and are actively involved in current far-right discussions.

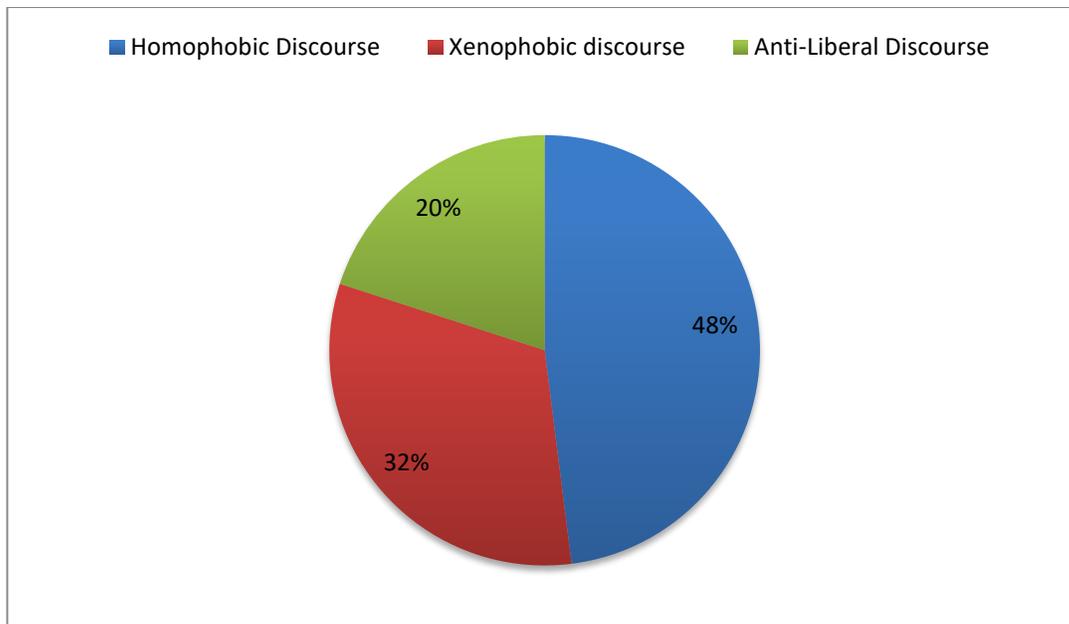
² Levan Vasadze does not have a personal page on Facebook, however, his posts can be viewed on the World Family Congress Facebook page, where Levan Vasadze's video addresses are actively shared.



4. The Main Target Groups of the Far-Right Discourse in Georgia

During the present monitoring, there have been identified the groups most likely to be victims of aggressive rhetoric by far-right groups. The observation revealed that the far-right groups use social networks and online media to replicate hate speech. Although the social network Facebook has several times severed regulations on hate speech circulation, which has led to the blocking of various far-right Facebook pages, some of these groups soon recovered their pages and aggressively continued their homophobic, xenophobic and anti-liberal rhetoric. Closed and open groups, pages, and profiles of individuals actively targeted to discredit migrants, LGBTQ people, and religious minorities are actively found in the Georgian Facebook space. In parallel, the Facebook discourse reveals anti-western and pro-Russian messages of the far-right rhetoric. The study identified three main target groups: sexual minorities, migrants, and liberals, with the most negative attitudes from the ultra-far groups.

Diagram N 1: Key Messages of the Far-Right Groups



4.1. Homophobic Discourse

The circulation of homophobic and transphobic messages is a characteristic of Georgian far-right rhetoric. During the four months of media monitoring, four major events were highlighted, surrounding the homophobic discourse of far-right groups and their leaders.

1) **May 17**, When, on the one hand, the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia is celebrated, on the other hand, the Day of Family Holiness and Parents. Far-right groups have openly protested the actualization of LGBTQ issues. Homophobic and transphobic rhetoric in Georgia is mainly associated with anti-liberal and anti-western discourse. Current far-right groups have accused George Soros and Open Society Foundation of targeted propaganda and support for the LGBT community. In these statements they mean "normalization of homosexuality, that demolishes" Georgian national values.

2) **June 20, so called Gavrilov Night** - Far-right groups have been actively campaigning for an anti-occupation rally, linking them to the LGBTQ community. The mockery of them became the rally organizers. They also called on citizens not to participate in provocative activities planned by LGBT people. It is noteworthy that in this case, the demonization of the LGBT community was actively linked to an issue such as the demonstration with national character where ordinary citizens protested the holding of a parliamentary session of Georgia by Russian MP Sergey Gavrilov.

3) **„March of Honor” and Tbilisi Pride** - In July, the so-called homophobic discourse was preceded by a so-called March of Honor from the LGBTQ community. In this regard especially, active Facebook pages were “Anti Paradox” and “Don’t become Liberal, think!” which spread overtly aggressive and cynical content with homophobic narratives.³

Levan Vasadze's homophobic and hate speech video statements were shared 9 times on the Facebook page of the World Family Congress and in these videos, he directly condemned Tbilisi Pride.⁴



His announced: "If there is a police cordon, our goal is to break through and get the propagandists out of there",⁵ was supported actively by the far-right leaders such as Guram Palavandishvili, Levan Chachua, Alexander Palavandishvili, Konstantine Morgoshia and Nikoloz Lortkipanidze. This is where another notable trend emerges - various clergymen have actively supported the "leaders". Aleksandre Palavandishvili's Facebook page news from the Garden of Vera clearly shows support for

³ <https://www.facebook.com/antiparadox/photos/a.1811057452250407/2453884921300987/?type=3&theater>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/wcf10/>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/wcf10/videos/1375123525961137/>

far-right activists by clergy.⁶ The main geographical area of the far-right activists during this month was exactly the garden of Vera.

4) **Far-right campaign against "LGBT depravity" and Anti-Discrimination Law** - Far-right groups and their leaders in various regions of Georgia have begun to actively mobilize supporters to collect signatures against anti-discrimination law. According to them, the law serves to popularize the LGBT community and promote propaganda. Levan Vasadze, Levan Chachua and Guram Palavandishvili have been trying to attract supporters through social networking. They called on the Georgian population to sign up to support a campaign against homosexuality. The far-right leaders were soon joined by the clergy. Specifically, 1) On Kvirikoba celebration day, Archbishop Ilarion blessed and supported the campaign; 2) In Zugdidi Virgin Mary Church was held a repast and the signatures were collected against the "propaganda of filth". In front of the repast, father Gerasime performed a liturgy for Georgia's integrity. Levan Vasadze also attended the liturgy.⁷

Levan Chachua, the head of the social-political movement "Georgian Idea" was also actively involved in the campaign against LGBT oppression and the call for the abolition of anti-discrimination law. He was in Stepantsminda where he was assisted by Archbishop Yegudiel in campaigning against "LGBT filth". Homophobic discourse was especially distinguished by the socio-political group Georgian Idea. They posted a petition on their Facebook page asking supporters to sign it against legalizing "Sodomy Sin" (LGBT propaganda). Observations have shown that members of the far-right group use religion as a tool to justify their homophobic discourse. "A Christian must by all means fight depravity" - quotes the Georgian Idea on Facebook.



⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/a.palavandishvili/videos/336913017255415/>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/a.palavandishvili/videos/472901343543453/>

4.2. David Gareji, Didgoroba and xenophobic discourse

The far-right groups quickly absorbed the tensions that arose over David Gareji with the Azeri authorities, which significantly reinforced ethno-nationalist narratives in the far-right discourse. Facebook has become a platform to attract supporters. Monitoring groups urge the population to mobilize and defend David Gareji ("that was sold by the Georgian government") from the enemy. They published various maps and disseminated unspecified information on the seizure of Georgian territory by Azerbaijan. The ongoing xenophobic discourse was followed by intimidating and offensive words against Azeris. The main motto of the rallies in the David Gareji area was: "David Gareji is our Jerusalem."⁸



The noteworthy component of the xenophobic discourse was the official statement made by the group - Anti-Paradox. In the first paragraph of the status posted by them on June 23, we read: "“Why are you stupid? You do not have information about Georgia's geopolitical location. All of Georgia's neighbors have annexed Georgian land and are also occupying a crawling occupation. Armenia and Azerbaijan are settling their people in southern Georgia. As a result, Georgians are in the minority in a number of regions” .⁹

Anti-Turkish sentiments were also evident in the xenophobic rhetoric of far-right groups and their leaders within the current monitoring. On August 12, celebration day "Didgoroba" was celebrated in Batumi. The photos and illustrations shared by the Facebook page "Ethnicity - Georgian" on this day were strongly anti-Turkish.

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/217114512148619/photos/a.217989565394447/560306267829440/?type=3&theater>

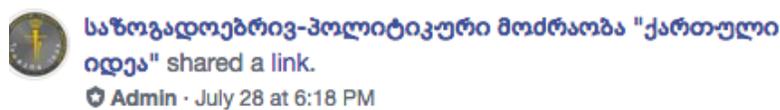
⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/pg/antiparadox/posts/>



Foreigners and especially migrants are often becoming victims of the xenophobic rhetoric. Members of the far-right groups try to illustrate the complexities and dangers of immigration policy in various European countries; They often share the crimes committed by specific individuals and generalize these facts; They create the impression that all migrant criminals are violent and dangerous.

4.3. Anti-Liberal Discourse

The rhetoric of far-right groups and their leaders is strongly anti-liberal. Liberalism is seen as a major source of depravity that fights and destroys every Georgian. The main figure of the liberal conspiracy is often referred to as George Soros, who, according to their thoughts, deliberately finances the LGBT community. In addition, liberals are the main reason for the nation's extinction. Liberalism is identified with pedophilia and filth. Ongoing monitoring also revealed that liberalism is often identified with Orthodox blasphemy.



ლიბერალუზმმა თავის საწყის ეტაპზევე დაინახა ქრისტიანობაში თავისი შეურიგებელი მტერი. მან მიზნად დაისახა ყალბი თავისუფლების ქადაგება, რაც არსობრივად ადამიანის ღვთისაგან, მისი მცნებებისაგან განთავისუფლებას ნიშნავს. ლიბერალიზმი სულიერი სენია, ცოდვია, რომელიც ჯერ შინაგანად ხრწნის ადამიანს, შემდეგ კი მის ... [See More](#)

The far-right groups were very happy when to called Soros Foudnation - Open Society Founadtion headquarters was picketing. The far-right groups even discussed that behind the so called "Gavrilo Night" were the ambassadors of western countries, so called "Liberasts", the symbol of which is National Movement, Rustavi 2 and NGO sector.

The issue of Rustavi 2 became particularly relevant as soon as the Strasbourg court's decision was published, according to which Kibar Khalvashi was registered as the owner of Rustavi 2. Nika Gvaramia soon became the target of irony and aggression from the leaders of the far-right discourse. In addition, anti-European and anti-liberal rhetoric has intensified in this period. For far-right groups and their leaders, Rustavi 2's team is constantly linked to "Western" values and thus to replicating anti-Georgian values.



5. KEY FEATURES OF ONLINE MEDIA IN FAR-RIGHT DISCOURSE

Nine online media sources were monitored as part of the ongoing media monitoring. A total of 1,043 articles came under observation. It is emphasized that these nine media sources were actively disseminating key messages to far-right groups.

The monitoring process revealed that the foreign policy views of the media sources were relatively different. Patriotic values and ethno-nationalist themes are emphasized by the media sources such as "Alt-Info", "Alia" and "Zneoba". While, "Sakinform", "Politikano" and "Sakartvelo da Msoflio" have sharply pro-Russian discourse. In the far-right groups the following media sources are also popular: "Geo Digest" and "Progress News", which often directly or indirectly publish far-right views. In addition, these media sources create a platform for far-right leaders to reach out to the masses. A clear example of this is the publication of Lado Sadghobelashvili's statement and Levan Vasadze's video address by "Geo Digest" in July.

ლეონი ვანსაძე მოწოდებთ მიმართვას ავრცელებს (ვიდეო)

adminprogress / 27 ივლისი 2019



„ქალიან თეხანს აღაშინანს ვირადულზე რომ ეხეზი... სანძობი ილაპარაკეთ“

adminprogress / 27 ივლისი 2019



These media sources are actively devoting their time to covering and circulating various ultranationalist topics, spreading anti-Western messages and romanticizing the Soviet past.

In addition, online media sources that are under surveillance actively replicate the confusing narratives of ethnic and religious minorities, disseminating unverified information. For example, "Alt Info" team, which focuses on events abroad, often publishes unverified surveys of migrants and LGBT people in Europe. Inviting far-right politicians as respondents is also noticeable on their platform (including Jondi Bagaturia, Irma Inashvili, Koba Davitashvili, Emzar Kvitsiani).

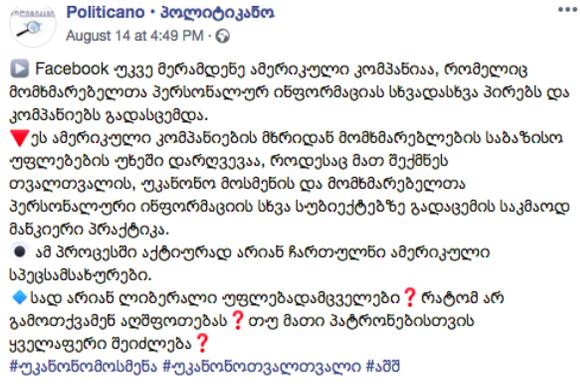
Online media monitoring has also revealed that some media sources often publish pro-Russian narratives in the wake of anti-Western messages. The editorial team of "Sakartvelo da Msoflio". For example, they actively covered the offensive statement by Rustavi 2 journalist Giorgi Gabunia against the Russian president, saying that it would cost the country dearly. In parallel, on July 10, an article was published on Russian President Vladimir Putin's statement that the President does not support

sanctions on Georgia for respecting the Georgian nation.¹⁰

The editorial team of "Politikano" was particularly active in spreading anti-Western and anti-European narratives. They were showing in negative context the RU and the United States. They are actively expressing aggression and cynicism against globalization. In addition, they share the Eurosceptic statements of Italian Foreign Minister Matteo Salvini.



Pro-Russian sentiments are often replicated at the expense of demonizing Western values. Liberalism, NATO and the European Union are shown as a threat to Georgia. "Politikano" editorial team is distinguished by its aggression and cynicism towards the United States.



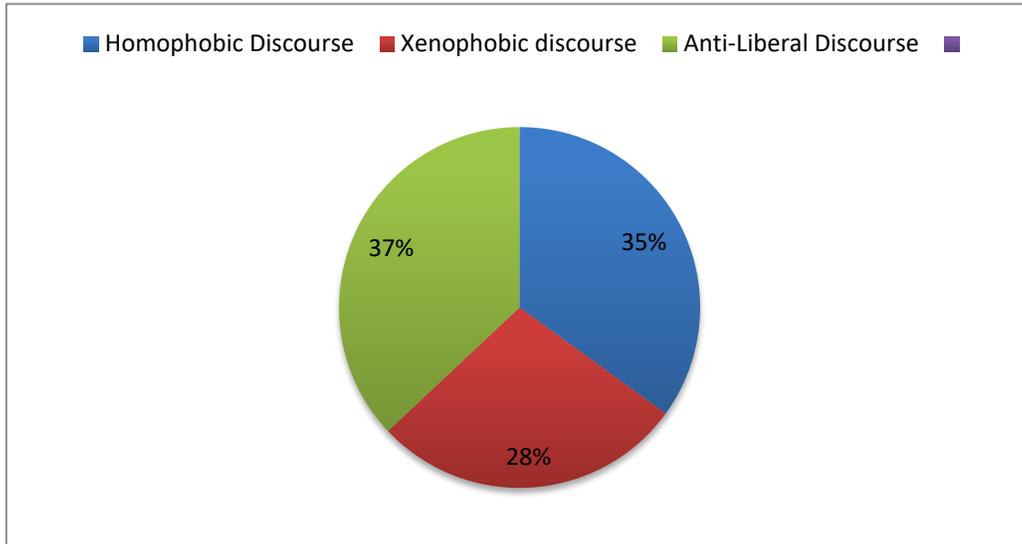
"Sakinform" editorial team also shares pro-Russian course, often devoted to pro-Russian political scientists and politicians. For example, "Sakinform" published an interview with the leader of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia. "Nothing useful in saying that we are occupying Russia we have not received. We need to build sincere relationships, without lies," David Tarkhan Mouravi said in an interview. A prominent pro-Russian message was also posted on the August 29 facebook page, where Arno Khidirbegishvili, editor-in-chief of "Sakinform" wrote - "Russians, welcome to Georgia, where

¹⁰ <http://geworld.ge/ge/putinma-sanqciebze-uari-tqva/>

you love and are looking forward!”¹¹.

Although Georgian far-right groups are actively positioning themselves in the Facebook space, they have not used such important social networks or forums as Twitter, YouTube or Instagram.

Table N3 Far-right discourses on online media



¹¹<http://saqinform.ge/news/43438/rusebo%2C+keTili+iyos+Tqveni+mobrZaneba+saqarTveloshi%2C+sadac+uyvaxarT+da+gelian%21+-+arno+xidirbegishvili.html>

6. KEY FINDINGS OF MEDIA MONITORING

- Rhetoric of Georgian far-right groups sharply anti-Western and anti-liberal;
- Most frequently targeted by far-right groups are sexual minorities, migrants, and liberals;
- West and the European Union are represented as the legislators of filth, incest and pedophilia, which fight against Orthodoxy, national traditions and values;
- The far-right discourses in social and online media is characterized by ethnonationalist approaches on the one hand and sharply pro-Russian messages on the other;
- In social and online media, far-right discourse relies heavily on unverified research findings and propaganda disinformation.