



**Monitoring of gatherings and demonstrations by far-right extremist groups in
Georgia**

(May-August)

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Introduction

Since May 2019, Democracy Research Institute (DRI) has been monitoring the gatherings and manifestations of far-right extremist groups. The report describes the results of monitoring the demonstrations and counter-demonstrations of the far-right extremist groups in Georgia.

To monitor assemblies and demonstrations, the Democracy Research Institute team developed a special form of gathering and demonstration monitoring special form and principles based on the guidelines of the OSCE Democracy Institutes and principles of the human rights office.

The presented report covers the results of the 4 months monitoring from May 1st to September 1st, 2019. During this period, the DRI observed 6 gatherings of far-right groups.

For the purposes of this report, hate crime statistics have been requested from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Prosecutor's Office and the Court.

The report includes the summary of the results of the monitoring and key findings. The report aims to prevent hate-motivated crime, as well as prevent extremist radical ideology groups from recruiting members and raise awareness among law enforcement officials of the dangers posed by radical ideology groups.

1. Methodology

The information contained in the report was obtained from attending at the demonstrations of far-right groups¹ and their monitoring. During the monitoring process, DRI observers used a special form of monitoring developed specifically for the purposes of the current project. Accordingly, the findings of the Democracy Research Institute are based on the analysis of information obtained by the monitors.

Within the framework of the monitoring, public information was requested from different state authorities for data analysis.

Considering the goals and objectives of the project, the following methodology is used in the analysis process:

- The so-called. case study analysis, which focuses on specific and significant events, identifying general trends in public manifestations in the far-right discourse;
- Comparative analysis, which implies, within the framework of the present study, the compatibility of the practical aspects of the manifestations organized by local legislative norms and far-right formations;
- Statistical analysis - a qualitative reflection of the information requested from public authorities and the data in observer reports, conducting so called descriptive statistics.

The following details were highlighted in framework of the monitoring of the gatherings and demonstrations:

- Spreading the hate speech by public leaders or participants of far-right groups during the gatherings and demonstrations, as well as public announcements for the violent actions;
- Keeping order during public gatherings and demonstrations. Including the detection of disobedience to police instructions as well as the obligation to notify authorities prior the event in written warning frameworks;
- Identify violent announcements during the demonstration against specific individuals or groups. Identify posts and information that contain similar threats on social networks or media;
- Prior to notifying the relevant body of local self-government about the form / purpose, goal, place, route of commencement, start and end of the gathering/manifestation.

¹ The far-right discourse in the current study is explained by Roy McCrady's modern political ideologies, which imply a variety of ideologies that combine racism, xenophobia, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and homophobia. (Macarid's, Roy C. Contemporary Political Ideologies: Movements and Regimes, 4th ed. Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1989, p. 231).

The ongoing monitoring also identified a legal framework for analysing the compliance of public gatherings and manifestations organized by far-right groups with Georgian legislation and with international standards established by the European Convention on Human Rights.

2. Review of the existing situation

Georgia has a diverse range of far-right groups and movements. Existing groups unite and consider both informal groups and formal unions - as different political parties. In addition, there are dozens of informal groups on social networks. Some of them are registered as NGOs. While existing groups often differ in their details, they combine an apparent intolerance towards the LGBTQ community and their advocates, anti-liberal and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

3. Brief review of the legislation

To discuss the activities of radical and extremist groups (as well as their rallies and demonstrations), we should briefly look at measures adopted by the Georgian legislation to eliminate hate crime and discrimination and relevant regulations.

3.1. Hate-motivated crime in the Criminal Code

As a result of an amendment to the Criminal Code on March 27, 2012, national law recognized intolerance as an aggravating circumstance of responsibility. Accordingly, committing a hate crime aggravates a person's responsibility under Article 53¹ It should be noted that the Criminal Code of Georgia does not use the word "hate" and the word "intolerance" is used to denote the motive of bias. There are also special rules in the Criminal Code that apply independently of the article to various hate crimes (intolerance).²

In terms of legislative techniques, a model based on the indicator of bias is found in the Criminal Code of Georgia, which requires additional evidence in addition to belonging to a specific group of victims that the accused committed a crime of intolerance. It is also possible that the bias motive may be accompanied by additional motives, such as mercenary purpose.

The Criminal Code also defines violation of freedom of speech as the crime,³ as well as obstruction of religious service,⁴ unlawful interference of the right of the organization and participating in the gathering or demonstration.⁵

² For example, Criminal Code, article 109(2)(d); article 126¹.

³ Criminal Code, article 153.

⁴ Criminal Code, article 155.

⁵ Criminal Code, article 161.

Although the deliberate violation of the above rights is prohibited by the Criminal Code, the preparation of less serious offenses is not punishable by law, with some exceptions. Accordingly, it is not possible to punish the organizer for publicly infringing the rights of a particular person or group of persons. The results of the monitoring showed that leaders of far-right groups mobilized followers and openly called on supporters to restrict the rights of the undesirable group (including by using violent methods). However, after committing a crime, they separate themselves from supporters' criminal acts and do not take responsibility.



Supporters of the movement created by Levan Vasadze.



Members of the Radical far-right movement Georgian March

In view of this, it is necessary to take measures to detect and prevent violent acts organized by the leaders of far-right extremist groups.

3.2. Civil and administrative anti-discrimination normative acts

Georgian legislation prohibits discrimination. The Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination in Georgia obliges institutions in Georgia to comply its legal acts and internal regulations with this law and to respond promptly and effectively to any alleged discrimination. ⁶

The Georgian Law on Broadcasting prohibits the broadcasting of programs that pose a clear and direct threat to any form of racial, ethnic, religious, or other intimidation, to any discrimination or incitement to violence. And the transmission of programs aimed at harassing, discriminating or emphasizing a

⁶ Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, Article 4

particular person or group because of their physical ability, ethnicity, religion, worldview, sex, sexual orientation or other characteristics or status.⁷

However, the prohibition on the production, distribution and circulation of works containing discrimination and hate speech does not apply to print media and online media, which promotes intolerance and radical ideology. The Law of Georgia on Press and Other Mass Media, which regulates the dissemination of press and other mass media, adopted in 1991, does not comply with modern requirements and no longer guarantees a safe, democratic and equitable freedom of speech and thought and the principles of free enterprise for the purposes of forming safe, democratic and equal society. Thus, unlike a broadcast sources, which are prohibited to share discrimination and hate materials, print media and other media, on the one hand use the freedom of speech without limitations and on the second hand, without any restrictions do they act against democratic rule and freedom of speech, spreading hate speech announcements for the intolerance of minorities, the LGBTQ community and migrants and the restriction of their rights.⁸

3.3. Far-right extremist groups and Georgia's strategy for combating terrorism

By the resolution No. 53 of January 23, 2019, the Government of Georgia approved the National Strategy for the Fight against Terrorism and its Action Plan for 2019-2021. This kind of document in Georgia is actually unprecedented.

The strategy aims to combat both terrorism, extremism and radicalization. It describes extremism as "a set of ideas, an ideology that does not recognize the principle of human equality, advocates hatred, intolerance, violence, endangers the country's democratic order and the rule of law." Radicalization - as a process where a person, while disseminating his / her views and supporting a particular ideology, may go beyond the law and engage in terrorist and / or extremist activities. In this process, the person's readiness to accept and / or resort to violent methods for the purposes of his / her ideology is revealed.⁹

As the first document to develop a National Strategy against terrorism and extremism, Georgia's national strategy on combating terrorism can be described as a positive event. The strategy at the executive level recognizes that groups supporting extremist and radical ideology are operating in Georgia. The document emphasizes the involvement of civil society, NGOs and the third sector in the fight against terrorism and extremism, although it should be noted that this record is formal. At present, there is no project against radicalization and extremism involving academics or NGOs.

⁷ Law of Georgia on Broadcasting, article 56

⁸ However, Articles 239¹ and 317 of the Criminal Code of Georgia prohibit the forcible alteration of constitutional order or the overthrow of state authorities, or the dissemination of material containing such a call, as well as the call for weapons for that purpose, as well as racial, religious, national, ethnic, social, political, linguistic and/or other marks, orally or in written form, or by other means to break the rift between groups of persons if it creates a clear, direct and substantial threat of violence.

⁹ The same source, page 5

The ambiguity in the Georgian National Strategy on Counter-Terrorism should also be emphasized. Even though the involvement of civil society in the prevention of extremism and radicalization is one of the key priorities, the specific vision or ways of how this cooperation is to be identified is not defined. This is most likely detailed in the 2019-2021 Action Plan developed in conjunction with the Strategy, which is classified as secret. Public access to such information cannot be restricted by the need to safeguard state interests. Classification of the action plan also contradicts the Law of Georgia on State Secrets, which provides that public access to information may be restricted only if it is necessary for the protection of public or public security or litigation interests. Notwithstanding, at this stage, authorized government structures do not appear willing to disclose the document (or part thereof). The Democracy Research Institute (DRI) has several times addressed to the authorities but without any results.

In line with international practice, the Action Plan on Combating Extremism and Radicalization (or similar normative acts) in the EU Member States is publicly available to improve public engagement. Non-use of this resource in Georgia leads to the consolidation of far-right and other radical ideologies.

4. Monitoring results

4.1. Demonstration of 17.05.2019

On May 17, 2019, in parallel with the Day of the Holiness of the Family organized by the Patriarchate of Georgia, far-right groups led by Guram Palavandishvili, Koba Davitashvili and other organizers organized a rally in front of the Chancellery of the Government in Tbilisi. The demonstration started at 18:00 and lasted for one hour. Participants held posters containing hate speech. Hate speech was also used by speakers. People holding liberal values and representatives of the LGBTQ community at this rally have been identified as the reasons for the social and economic problems and a threat to the country. According to the speakers, their goal was to change the education system in Georgian schools, degenerate the country and oust children. According to the aforementioned, the organizers of the rally stated that it was planned to create special groups, the members of which would be prepared for the so called "informational and political warfare". On the demonstration there was also announced that based on article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights to restrict freedom of gathering and expression for members of the LGBTQ community and their human rights defenders. The rally also said they were eager to get in touch with forces with similar ideologies in Europe.

4.2. Demonstration of 14.06.2019

On June 14, 2019, Tbilisi Pride organizers [planned](#) a rally in front of the Chancellery of the Government of Georgia with the name "State, Where Are You?" The main demands from the LGBTQ activists was from top legislative and executive officials to make an official statement on the events surrounding

Tbilisi Pride. The action was planned in front of the Chancellery of the Government of Georgia at 19:00. It was preceded by a statement of the Patriarchate calling on the authorities not to allow Tbilisi Pride to be held in Georgia. Far-right groups have announced a mobilization in connection with the rally. Protesters and their supporters met with representatives of homophobic far-right groups near the administration of the Chancellery and their leaders. The aforementioned persons have contracted. The gathering was organized by Guram Palavandishvili, Levan Vasadze and Zviad Tomaradze, who were joined by other leaders of the far-right groups: Dimitri Lortkipanidze, Levan Chachua and Alexander Palavandishvili. On this counter rally numerous announcements with the hate speech and violent proclamations were made. Representatives of the counter rally threw balls and bottles at participants of the "State, Where Are You?" Gatherings. Participants verbally and physically assaulted the journalists of Liberal, Netgazeti and TV Pirveli. The Deputy Ombudsman of Georgia also became the target of threats and aggression. Towards the end of the rally, several protesters called for the physical destruction of activist Nata Peradze. Anti-Western, anti-American and pro-Russian messages have also been announced on this demonstration, both by organizers and clergy. Father David Isakadze has officially stated that "Georgians hate West for legalizing such obscenities and that is why they love Russia." The contr-rally was distinguished by the use of hate speech and calls for various violent acts. The law enforcement authorities arrested 28 people for violating administrative regulations. Seven of them were sentenced to administrative imprisonment, while others were verbally warned. It is noteworthy that in some cases, despite legal grounds, state authorities did not commence criminal proceedings.

4.3. Demonstration of 19.06.2019

Regarding the demonstration of 14.06.2019, Levan Vasadze - a representative of the World Family Congress in Georgia announced in the television interview that he was going to create a union, whose members would bind the hands of the members of LGBTQ community with the belts and force them to leave the territory and if the police would take appropriate action, the members of this group would oppose the police with sticks.

According to Levan Vasadze, individuals with the military experience and athletes would take part in the management of this union. The union would have a hierarchy and structure. For this purpose, volunteer registration and personal data collection have begun in the Vere Park area. The Ministry of Internal Affairs has commenced an investigation of this incident.¹⁰ Despite the signs of crime in the announcement of Levan Vasadze, which has been confirmed by numerous video recordings and other direct evidences, criminal proceedings on this case has not begun yet.¹¹

Collecting signatures for joining an illegal formation and registering for volunteers was actively going on for the next 3 days. Law enforcement officials did not prevent volunteers from joining.

¹⁰ Based on article 223 of the Civil Code of Georgia

¹¹ As of September 20, 2019

On June 19, 2019, at 18:00, a warning demonstration was held at the intersection of Ilia Chavchavadze Avenue and Noe Ramishvili Streets near the office of Tbilisi Pride. The rally was organized by the Youth Center “Zneoba”, “Children's Rights Association” and “Teachers Association”.

The demonstration was held on the ground of hate speech and homophobic statements. Participants called on the authorities to restrict freedom of expression for the LGBTQ community. Orthodox clergy actively participated in the rally. Father David Isakadze said that the offices of Tbilisi Pride and similar NGOs were engaged in deliberate efforts to alter the mentality of the Georgian people and to conduct "spiritual genocide". Consequently, it was necessary to close all the aforementioned organizations and abolish the Ombudsmen's office, as the functioning of this institution was not in the interests of the Georgian people.

4.4. Events of 08.07.2019

The development of events culminated on July 8, 2019. On July 7, 2019, Tbilisi Pride announced the holding of the March of Honour. The events were preceded by the breaking up the rally of protestants by the government in front of the Parliament after the so called "Gavrilov's Night",¹² postpone of the March of Honour scheduled for June 21, 2019 and the announcement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, according to which it was impossible for the organizers of the Tbilisi Pride event to take place in such format, taking into account the safety risks of the persons involved in the process.¹³

The far-right groups and their leaders in Georgia have announced a full mobilization of these events. Levan Vasadze publicly called on people to gather in the Garden of Vera to prevent with force the LGBTQ representatives and their supporters to hold the March of Honour. Many Orthodox clergymen have been publicly involved in the process, who have also called on people to patrol the central streets from 6 am to avoid any LGBTQ events. Leaders of far-right groups Guram and Alexander Palavandishvili, Levan Chachua, Dimitri Lortkipanidze and Levan Vasadze announced mobilization of the supporters against the March of Honour.

On July 8, 2019, at 9 am, in front of the Tbilisi Patrol Police Department, about 20 people have been gathered who were organized by Guram Palavandishvili and they demanded from the authority to prevent holding the March of Honour. After it became known that the Pride organizers had refused to organize the so called March of Honour, leaders and followers of the far-right groups moved to the Garden of Vere, where their supporters gathered. Clergymen were actively involved in mobilizing supporters. The main gathering of the far-right forces took place around Levan Vasadze, a businessman and a member of the World Family Congress. He voiced the main demands of the protesters, which

¹² <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/150958-gavrilovis-ghame-rogor-daitsko-darbeva-da-ramdeni-adamiani-dashavda>

¹³ Statement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs see at: <https://police.ge/ge/shinagan-saqmeta-saministros-gantskhadeba/12775?print=1>

remained unchanged during the rally - the repeal of the Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and the so-called anti-discrimination law and preventing depravity by the law. Following the announcement, the protesters moved to the Georgian Parliament in front of the Georgian Parliament.

During the rally, it became clear that one of the goals of the participants was to hinder the gathering of anti-occupation protesters who had been gathering in the area for a whole week. Archbishop David Isakadze described the anti-occupation protesters as sinful and impure. Businessmen Levan Vasadze, Dimitri Lortkipanidze, Sandro Bregadze and clergyman David Isakadze were active during the rally outside the Parliament. There were pro-Russian and anti-Western statements in the current discourse.

On the background of sharply anti-Western messages, the protesters' attitude towards Russia's occupation of Georgian territory was revealed. Mr Vasadze said that through dialogue he was going to persuade Russia to return the lost territories, and the clergymen at the rally repeatedly stated that it was important to maintain moral and national values and the territories would be returned by the Lord's help. The protesters held posters containing hate speech.

The overwhelming majority of protesters and speakers were men. In one case, when a female speaker expressed an unacceptable position on the part of the participants, the microphone was denuded from her and denied access to the conversation. The protesters were distinguished by their rhetoric of homophobic and hate speech. Protesters threw bottles at Mikhail Mshvildadze, organizer of anti-occupation rally and verbally abused him.

The situation escalated on Rustaveli Avenue, especially at 7 pm, when supporters of the anti-occupation rally came outside the parliament. Law enforcement officials were mobilized across the perimeter to separate the two parallel protesters.

Despite all the excesses and contradictions, at the end of the day, the anti-occupation rally was able to hold its demonstration peacefully and secure its peaceful end.

4.5. Demonstration of 25.07.2019 held in front of the Chancellery of the Government

The rally on July 25, 2019, differed from previous demonstrations with a different theme and a less radical statement. The action was related to the tension in Davit Gareji monastery complex. On July 23, 2019, one of the leaders of the far-right extremist group, Guram Palavandishvili posted on his personal Facebook page about the rally and called on the public to take part in protecting the holy Gareji.

During the rally, Guram Palavandishvili said that "the government of Georgia is a hostage of the United States subdivision," which does not deserve confidence. At the rally, they demanded that their representative figure be included in one of the negotiations with David Gareji over the issue of Azerbaijan. According to Palavandishvili, this person would provide the far-right groups with full

information on the current crisis or achievements regarding the talks with David Gareji on the Azerbaijani side.

The demonstration highlighted the negative attitude of the far-right forces towards the partnership between Georgia and Azerbaijan. According to the participants, only Georgia is interested in maintaining good neighbourly relations. However, if Azerbaijan does not make appropriate concessions, according to the rally organizer, Georgia still has a neighbour that can positively impact the country's economy and provide it with natural resources. Towards the end of the rally, activists marched to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia with flags and shouts that they would not surrender to David Gareji. In front of the Ministry, they once again called on the government to be more principled in the matter of David Gareji and gave it a week to meet the basic demand - to allow their representative to attend the ongoing negotiations on David Gareji. Otherwise, they threatened to organize a large-scale rally on August 1.

4.6. Demonstration of 12.08.2019 held in Batumi

On August 12, 2019, a celebration was held in Batumi, in cooperation with the Green Future of Georgia, Alternative for Georgia and Alt-Info team. The main reason for the gathering was the ambition of some of its neighbours in Batumi in the conditions of economic weakening of Georgia and the increase of Turkey's demographic and economic influence on Adjara.¹⁴

The demonstration was attended by clergymen. The procession from Hero Central Park to Hero Square was arranged. About a thousand people participated in the procession. This demonstration was distinguished by several aspects. First and foremost, during the DRI project, it was the first gathering outside the capital. Also, the gatherings have become increasingly anti-Turkish and anti-migrant. Zurab Makharadze, a member of the Alt-Info group at the rally, noted that the authorities were deliberately trying to undermine the significance of the Didgori fight and make the date a mere one day. The second member of Alt-Info team Giorgi Kardava said that in the eleventh century Muslim hostile countries entourage of Georgia with a similar geopolitical challenge today and called on the people to the true faith protection, paving the way for Georgia's recovery. Also, the participants rejected building Ataturk Palace and mosque in Georgia, as it was said to be a way of Turkish cultural expansion. There was also a demand at the gathering to declare Didgoroba a national holiday in order to enhance the self-awareness of Georgian society. The collection of signatures has begun.

¹⁴ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxS11wcWe8Y>

5. Summary of surveillance results and key trends

As a result of monitoring the following has been revealed:

- Far-right extremist associations are actively using the online media platform and social networks to plan meetings and attract supporters;
- Law enforcement agencies fail to prevent recruitment and radicalization of new members by extremist organizations;
- These groups publicly state that their main goal is to establish a nationalist rule in the country that is opposed to liberalism and that even violence is permissible and justified. However, the relevant authorities underestimate the threat posed by the reinforcement of such groups;
- Demonstrators of liberal values / organizations are demonized at gatherings of the radical far-right groups. Liberalism and tolerant politics are seen as the root of social and economic problems in the country. In this context, the use of hate speech in supporters of far-right extremist groups (the overwhelming majority of the participants in the demonstration are young men) increases aggression against those who hold an ideology unacceptable to them;
- One of the main targets of the far-right groups is the LGBTQ community and their human rights defenders. The group leaders identify these individuals as paedophiles and supporters of paedophilia. Violence against LGBTQ community is justified by desire to protect children and prevent paedophilia;
- Monitoring revealed that the far-right extremist groups did not, in most cases, comply with the obligation to notify the appropriate authority about the gathering or demonstration in writing;
- Far-right radical ideology groups are actively recruiting supporters. In two cases watched by staff at the Institute for Democracy Research, organizers called on supporters to join special groups for various physical and ideological training. Particularly noteworthy is the call by Levan Vasadze, a representative of the World Family Congress, to set up an armed (with sticks) union and in case of necessity using force against police. Despite the fact that in this announcement there were signs of crime defined by the Criminal Code,¹⁵ on this case criminal procedures have not been commenced yet;
- The groups with far-right radical extremist ideology do use legal and political methods seek to restrict freedom of expression for unacceptable individuals;¹⁶

¹⁵ Criminal Code, Article 223, Creation, management, joining, participation in and / or conduct of other activities in favor of illegal formation

¹⁶<http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/151963-vasadze-gauqmdes-antidiskriminaciuli-kanoni-da-aikrdzalos-garkvnilabis-propaganda?fbclid=IwAR1L5emzuJEhRD06-zyN0KYtwrV9jHFnu9sB3jbD-wfdDRauM1ZnU2MaEbA>

- Leaders of far-right extremist groups are cautious when dealing with the media. They use nonviolent terms and try not to exceed the limits of freedom of expression. Leaders usually speak of peaceful nonviolent protest and do not identify themselves as the ones with authority. However, the monitoring shows that the rally was mainly attended by groups whose members wear similar attire, structure and a plan of action. Consequently, there is a unified and coordinated activity of a certain group with the organization and delivery of individuals;
- The overwhelming majority of people attending far-right demonstrations are men. The number of women in these rallies usually does not exceed several tens. They do not actively participate in group activities and do not make speeches on these gatherings. In addition, the leaders of all far-right organizations are men;
- Law enforcement authorities use ineffective methods against organizations with a radical far-right ideology. In extreme cases, the person is arrested for an administrative infringement. Despite sufficient grounds, criminal proceedings have not commenced against these organizations, their members and leaders.¹⁷

6. Opinions and Findings

The report reflects the data obtained from the monitoring of the gatherings and demonstrations of the far-right extremist groups for 4 months. According to the team of the Democracy Research Institute, the findings presented illustrate the aspects of far-right extremism and radicalization in Georgia and the best ways to prevent it. In view of the observational results, the DRI is of the opinion that:

- Independent governmental body created to study and analyse the far-right extremist and radical narrative on the Internet which will likely help to inform the public and government structures, as well as to have a significant impact on the prevention of hate crime;
- Appropriate legislative changes in the field of criminal, civil and administrative law are likely to have a positive impact on the prevention of hate crimes and reduce the spread of hate speech in print media, social networks and online publications;
- Government cooperation with the public, academic circles NGOs will reduce the spread of radical ideology on the Internet, ensures society's involvement in the fight against extremism and radicalization, and likely reduce the number of hate crimes.

¹⁷ For example, on June 14, 2019, at the demonstration outside the Chancellery of the Government of Georgia, unidentified persons shouted "break her!" and "kill her!" to the activist Nata Peradze but besides the mobilization of sufficient number of law enforcement officials, criminal proceeding has not commenced on this case.

See: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/372456/> As well as, Levan Vasadze's call for the creation of a groups of armed (with sticks) men: <https://bit.ly/2knQefs>