



“Coexistence” - Ethno-Nationalist Narratives in Georgia

Social Media Monitoring Report

(December 2020 - January 2021)

The media monitoring report was drawn up by the Democracy Research Institute (DRI) as part of the project “Coexistence” – Researching Ethno-Nationalist Narratives in Georgia. The project is supported by the Norwegian Embassy. The views and opinions expressed in this publication belong to the team of the project and should not be perceived as an official opinion of the donor.

1. Preface

In Georgia, as well as around the world, social media is an important source of receiving and disseminating information. Consequently, social networks have become one of the main areas of dissemination of disinformation and online manipulations. Observations have shown that social media is a tool of action for extremist and ultranationalist forces and serves to polarize society. The global discussions around important civil and political processes have shifted to the online space and, consequently, ultranationalist, extremist groups are actively carrying out consolidated, discrediting and manipulating online campaigns.

Ultranationalist and xenophobic online narratives in Georgia have become particularly noticeable in the wake of the renewed Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia since September. Despite the officially neutral position, Georgia turned out to be an important target of the Armenian, Russian and Azerbaijani-language disinformation campaigns in the social media context. Disseminating provocative, fake news aimed at inciting xenophobic sentiments and ethnic conflict has become a disturbing trend on online media platforms.

2. Methodological framework

As part of the media monitoring, the Democracy Research Institute, based on the quantitative and qualitative data analysis, plans to study the ethno-nationalist, xenophobic and disinformative narratives of the online media campaign relating to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The data presented in this report will be categorized thematically and will provide the visual material and information about the main narratives, original sources and trends on social media relating to the Karabakh conflict. As part of the media monitoring, we will use the Facebook analytical tool CrowdTangle to qualitatively identify ultranationalist narratives and fake news.

Georgia is inhabited by ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities. Consequently, any xenophobic or disinformation narrative about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict spread via social media may have a significant impact on public sentiments. Given the above, the content of ultranationalist narratives and discussions around Nagorno-Karabakh on social media will be analyzed based on the content analysis method. In addition, emphasis will be placed on highlighting the key trends in the news spread by various online platforms relating to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As part of the monitoring, based on the topic, discourse analysis will be selected as a research design.

A number of online platforms in Kvemo Kartli have become active after the resumption of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict since September 2020. Various Facebook pages and Telegram channels still actively cover the ongoing events relating to the conflict in the Armenian, Russian or Azerbaijani languages. The online platforms of civil activists, bloggers and media influencers have even become a kind of information space around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Georgia has turned out to be an important target of the disinformation and ultranationalist campaign on social media. Consequently, fake news actively portrayed Georgia sometimes as a supporter of Armenia and sometimes as a supporter of Azerbaijan.

The Armenian, Azerbaijani, Russian and Georgian-language online platforms, Facebook pages and Telegram channels, which were most actively focused on covering the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on the one hand and disseminating disinformation and ethno-nationalist narratives on the other hand, were selected as

objects of the monitoring.

Online media outlets selected as objects of the monitoring:

1.	bavnews.am	https://bavnews.am/
2.	Oxu.az	https://oxu.az/
3.	Baku.ws	https://baku.ws/
4.	Armenpress.am	https://armenpress.am/rus/
5.	7or.am	https://www.7or.am/
6.	Media.az	https://median.az/
7.	Kavkazplus.ge	http://ge.kavkazplus.com/index.php
8.	Golosarmenii	https://golosarmenii.am/
9.	Alt-info	https://alt-info.com/
10.	News-Front	https://ge.news-front.info/

Telegram channels selected as objects of the monitoring:

1.	Mediaport	https://t.me/mediaport2020
2.	Karabah_news	https://t.me/karabah_news
3.	Kolorit 18+	https://t.me/kolorit_18
4.	Armenian Military Portal	https://t.me/military_arm
5.	Artsakh Now / Karabakh now	https://t.me/Arcaknow

Facebook pages selected as objects of the monitoring:

1.	Hayastan	https://www.facebook.com/Hayastans/
2.	BORCALI.PRESS. DIGEST	https://www.facebook.com/groups/zumrud.orxan
3.	Armenian Military Portal	https://www.facebook.com/Armenian-Military-Portal-354622311710777
4.	MƏN GÜRCÜSTANLIYAM	https://www.facebook.com/groups/1015249085537901
5.	Gündəlik - Gürcüstan	https://www.facebook.com/gundelikgurcistan
6.	Turkey is occupant	https://www.facebook.com/StopTurkishOccupation/
7.	Parnavaziani	https://www.facebook.com/FarnavaZiani
8.	BORÇALI	https://www.facebook.com/groups/elvar010/?ref=share
9.	Themis	https://www.facebook.com/ThemisEstonia/
10.	In Armenia	https://www.facebook.com/inarmenya/

3. Narratives spread on social media

Disinformation: Azerbaijani armed forces opened fire on Armenian trucks in Marneuli.

Truth: The Armenian-language Telegram channel MediaPort reported that on January 10, 2021, at 20:00, in Marneuli, the Azerbaijani Armed Forces opened fire on Armenian trucks. In fact, this information is untrue and represents **disinformation**, which was responded by the Samtskhe-Javakheti Information Website on January 11 by publishing an article stating that their representatives contacted the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who did not confirm that the Azeri Forces had opened fire on Armenian trucks in Marneuli. The article emphasizes that the Ministry of Internal Affairs has not received any notification regarding this fact. In addition, the Samtskhe-Javakheti Information Portal checked the photo attached to the disinformation and found that it was taken back **in 2018**. The disinformation was also published on the Armenian and

Russian-language portal Voice of Armenia. The online interaction relating to this disinformation exceeded 20,000 people.

Photos:



МВД информацию о нападении на армянский грузовик в Марнеули не подтверждает



Video manipulation: Azerbaijan dreams of conquering Georgia

Truth: Nikoloz Mzhavanadze, the leader of the Union of Human Rights Defenders, known for his far-right attitude in Georgia, posted a video on his Facebook page with the following caption: "Azerbaijan dreams of fully conquering Georgia and posts a scandalous clip on social network. If the Russians had made a similar clip, some SOCAR spies would have believed it." In fact, this Facebook post is a video manipulation, made of footage taken from the computer game Age of Civilizations II. This online game includes simulation military strategies, within the framework of which Azerbaijan occupies neighboring countries. The original video about the strategy online game belongs to YouTuber Eren Ceylan, who published it in 2019. Accordingly, the graphics in the video released by Nikoloz Mzhavanadze, which shows how Azerbaijan conquers Georgia, is a video manipulation and, unlike the original video game, has the caption: "Victorious Azerbaijan - "Kazanan AZERBAYCAN", which promotes stirring up xenophobic, anti-Azerbaijani sentiments in Georgia.

The online interaction relating to this video manipulation involved a total of 295 people.

Photos:



Nikoloz Mzhavanadze

30 November 2020 · 🌐

- აზერბაიჯანი საქართველოს მთლიან დაპყრობაზე ოცნებობს და სოც - ქსელში სკანდალურ კლიპს ატვიყნებს.
- რუსებს რომ გაეკუთვინათ მსგავსი კლიპი მაშინ ზომ დაიკერებდა ზოგიერთი SOCAR-ის ავენტე.



Azərbaycan | Age of Civilizations II - Bölüm 1

High-profile series of videos and discussions on social networks: "Azerbaijani military accused of brutal treatment of Armenian soldiers."

In December, the Telegram channels [karabakh news](#) and [Kolorit 18+](#) actively released videos alleging torture and verbal humiliation of Armenian soldiers by Azerbaijani troops in Karabakh. The video, which shows how the military beheads a man, drew a lot of attention. The video says that the incident took place in Karabakh, where Azerbaijani soldiers brutally treated an Armenian man. The footage sparked a lot of discussions on social media. The fact was condemned by both the Azerbaijani and Armenian sides. The Prosecutor General's Office of Azerbaijan soon responded to the series of videos and issued a statement saying that an investigation was ongoing to establish the authenticity of the videos. The statement said that if the atrocities were proven to be true, the Azerbaijani military would be prosecuted: *"The Prosecutor General's Office is currently investigating the allegations of inhuman and degrading treatment of our soldiers. Even though a lot of fake information has recently been spread, we still suspect that some of them [videos] reflect the reality,"* Gunai Salimzade, Spokesman for the Prosecutor General's Office, told the Azerbaijani BBC News.

Khadija Ismail, a well-known Azerbaijani journalist and civil activist, responded to the above video. He called on the Ministry of Defense and the Prosecutor General's Office of Azerbaijan to immediately launch an investigation and to provide information to the public. *"All the imprudent, and those who record and then release these videos, as well as all those who like these videos on social networks, must be held responsible before the law. I call on the Ministry of Defense and the Prosecutor General's Office to inform the public of the results of the investigation."*

Another prominent Azerbaijani, exiled journalist and activist Afghan Mukhtarli also called the Karabakh conflict an ethno-nationalist and horrific war. He posted a statement on his Facebook page, condemning the atrocities shown in the videos and appealing to his compatriots to stop this brutal war.

"We are facing one of the most horrific wars. Insult, cruelty and murder are common in ethnic wars. Ethnic hatred destroys everything human. We must stop this war. Radical reforms must be carried out in the army, not only in the direction of armaments, but it is also necessary to provide a course of psychological training

for soldiers. If that doesn't happen, we'll see many more scenes of beheading. Let's not forget that the conflict is not over yet and the third Karabakh war is inevitable," he said in his Facebook post.

It should be noted that dozens of videos shared on social networks were examined by the international organization Human Rights Watch. The organization notes that the videos clearly show the humiliation and inhuman treatment of Armenian prisoners of war by the Azerbaijani side. In many cases, Azerbaijani soldiers do not hide their faces and do not shy away from responsibility. In addition, the report emphasizes that international humanitarian law prohibits violence, intimidation and harassment of prisoners of war during military conflicts.



Khadija Ismayil

8 December 2020 · 🌐

Bütün baş, qulaq kəsənlər də, onların videosunu çəkib bəh-bəhlə paylaşanlar da, sosial şəbəkədə onlara əhsən deyənlər də qanun qarşısında cavab verməlidir. Mühəribə hər şeyə haqq qazandırır. Azərbaycan Respublikası Müdafiə Nazirliyi, Azərbaycan Respublikasının Baş Prokurorluğu, ictimaiyyətə araşdırmaların nəticələri barədə məlumat verin.



Afqan Muxtarli

8 December 2020 · 🌐

Bəxtimizə mühəribələrin ən iyrenci düşüb. Etnik mühəribələrdə xüsusi amansızlıq, qəddarlıq, qətilər adi hala çevrilir. Etnik nifrət bütün insanı hissələri arxa plana keçirir. Hər döyüşdən, hər atəşkəsdən sonra bizi düşündürən ən ümdə sual qarşı tərəfdən necə nəfərin ölməsi olur. Azad edilən ərazilərdən çox düşmənin canlı itkisinə sevinirik. Qarşı tərəfdə eynən bizim kimi düşünür. Etnik mühəribədə 1 nömrəli məqsəd daha çox düşməni öldürməkdir. Mühəribəni sözün bütün mənalığında Vətən mühəribəsinə çevirməliyik. Orduda ciddi islahat aparılmalıdır. Yalnız silahlanmada, təlimlərdə yox. Əsgər güclü psixoloji hazırlıq kursu keçməlidir. Bu olmasa çoxlu baş kəsmə səhnələri görəcəyik. Unutmayaq ki, münaqişə bitməyib və 3-cü Qarabağ savaşı qacılmazdır.