



Russian Soft Power: Balancing the Propaganda Threats and Challenges

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June 2017 / Issue #5

Executive Summary

The use of Russian Soft Power and propaganda for the purpose of realizing foreign policy objectives has become increasingly noticeable in different parts of the world. Russian Soft Power in line with state-developed and controlled propaganda is commonly used to create and distribute narratives supporting the current regime in the Kremlin. By the spread of disinformation, biased interpretation of historical facts, and aggressive manipulation of value systems, Moscow is attempting to legitimize its external actions and justify its geopolitical interests.

Russian propaganda is especially active in the countries which are believed to belong to the Russia's traditional "Sphere of Influence" and which clearly proclaim a pro-Western foreign policy course. Subsequent to the 2008 August war together with obvious actions aimed at the annexation of Georgian territories, Russia is dynamically using disinformation and propaganda to hinder Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration processes.

Obviously, the threat that has become a challenge for Europe and the United States is a major problem for Georgia as well. In 2017, within the [Strategic Defence Review 2017-2020](#) and the [Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on Georgia's EU and NATO Membership for 2017-2020](#), the Government of Georgia officially labeled Russian "soft power" as a threat to Georgia's national interests, particularly by hampering its Euro-Atlantic integration efforts. Nevertheless, the fight against Russian Soft Power and propaganda remains a significant challenge for Georgia on its path toward deepening relations with the West.

The present policy document is aimed at reviewing and analyzing the foreign policy objectives of Russian soft power and evaluating steps taken by the Georgian government to combat it at the national level. Additionally, this document offers concrete recommendations for reducing the influence of anti-Western propaganda on Georgia's population and extensively enhance the country's strategic communication capabilities.

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The “Soft Power” Agenda

In the era of complex interdependence and transformation of the global architecture, the respective roles of societies, national elites, and international organizations is increasing extensively in political processes. In line with these changes within the international system, states focus on the development of soft power instruments while implementing their foreign policy objectives.

In the discipline of International Relations, the concept of “soft power” was developed by Joseph Nye to explain states’ capabilities to create positive attitudes and approaches internationally without the use of the hard power; essentially, to influence other actors in the international system with the purpose of getting to the desired outcome. Soft power is a kind of cultural power which helps states to realize their foreign policy goals through cooperation, and attraction, rather than through military power.²The soft power of a particular country may be based on three main resources:

- ❖ Culture: in places where it is attractive to others;
- ❖ Political Values: when it lives up to them at home and abroad; and
- ❖ Foreign Policies: when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority.³

From the Russian perspective, the most striking example of the influence of soft power in foreign policy is the wave of Westernization in post-Soviet countries, which is seen not as a result of the objective interests of these states, but as the result of a massive information campaign by the West. By exporting European values, the West provided the impetus for political loyalty to the Euro-Atlantic space in Russia’s “Near Abroad”, which has significantly weakened Russia’s influence in the region.⁴

Dominance within the international system primarily begins with regional supremacy. According to Russia’s exceptional interest in the post-Soviet space, the struggle against the Collective West is most noticeable on its western flank. In recent years, Russia, together with its use of traditional methods, has developed and implemented soft power instruments to generate an alternative center of integration and the Eurasian Economic Union clearly is the best illustration of Russia’s attempts.⁵

²Nye Jr. Joseph, Reviewed by [G. John Ikenberry](#), “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics”, *Foreign Affairs*, June 2004; Available at - <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/2004-05-01/soft-power-means-success-world-politics> Accessed on 02.04.2017.

³Nye Jr. Joseph, “Think Again: Soft Power”, *Foreign Affairs*, February 23, 2006; Available at -<http://foreignpolicy.com/2006/02/23/think-again-soft-power/> Accessed on 02.04.2017.

⁴Lutsevych L. Orysia, “The long arm of Russian Soft power” *Atlantic Council*, May 4, 2016; Available at -<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-long-arm-of-russian-soft-power> Accessed on 02.03.2017

⁵Jakub Korejba, „Will Russia ever be Soft “, *Latvian Institute of International Affairs*, 2015; Pg. 105-106; Available at -http://liia.lv/site/docs/LIIA_soft_power_book_web_layout.pdf Accessed on 03.04.2017

In the context of soft power, in contrast to the Euro-Atlantic Structures based on evident political values, factors which can position Russia as a role model in the international system are slightly vague and unclear. It is also arguable whether Russian political values are attractive to other states or not, whether its culture is exportable and popularizable in different parts of the world, and whether Russia's actions are perceived as legitimate or having moral grounds within the international system.

Russian soft power significantly differs from Western soft power.⁶ In exchange for mutually beneficial economic and political cooperation, Russia is offering the format of collaboration which could be only beneficial for Russia in the political context. Therefore, the lack of attractive elements leads Russia to the formation of unusual soft power instruments which are mainly based on the creation of unconventional narratives and the spread of anti-Western propaganda.⁷

⁶Spruds, Andris and Rostoks Toms, "the different faces of "soft power: the Baltic States and Eastern Neighborhood between Russia and the EU"; Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2015 Pg: 108-109; Available at- http://liia.lv/site/docs/LIIA_soft_power_book_web_layout.pdf Accessed on 03.04.2017

⁷Burlinova Natalia, "Russian Soft Power is just like Western Soft Power but with a twist", Russia Direct, April 7, 2015; Available at- <http://www.russia-direct.org/opinion/russian-soft-power-just-western-soft-power-twist> Accessed on 03.04.2017

From Recognition to State Policy

In 2017 the Government of Georgia has officially labeled Russian soft power as the threat to Georgia's security and national interests. The Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on Georgia's EU and NATO Membership for 2017-2020, emphasizes that "Russia actively uses propaganda to hinder Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration."⁸

The threat of Russian soft power is also emphasized in the Strategic Defense Review (SDR) 2017-2020⁹, which states that Russia's use of soft power remains a major challenge for Georgia's security. The document notes that Russia will strengthen its efforts to undermine Georgia's national unity and attempt to initiate conflict among ethnic and religious groups with the purpose of creating managed destabilization. The document notes that "the Kremlin will particularly focus on reinforcing the elements of its soft power to ensure the weakening of state institutions, strengthening of pro-Russian civil and political movements and discredit pro-Western foreign policy agenda."

Russian propaganda is especially influential to the most vulnerable parts of the society, in which both a general awareness about the benefits provided through Georgia's Euro-Atlantic cooperation and the potential for direct use of the aforementioned benefits are relatively low. Due to Russian propaganda, the narrative under which Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration is associated with the loss of national and cultural identity has become particularly strong in Georgian society.

According to research commissioned in 2015 by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation and conducted by CRRC Georgia, "*Knowledge of and attitudes towards the EU in Georgia: Trends and Variations*", 28% of respondents believe that respect for Georgian traditions "Will decrease significantly/Will decrease if Georgia becomes a member of the EU".*see Table 1.*¹⁰

According to the survey, the respondents were asked to answer a similar question related to 17 different areas, while respect for Georgian traditions was the only one in which the population's negative expectations exceeded positive expectations.

⁸Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on Georgia's EU and NATO Membership for 2017-2020; Pg-1-2; Available at- <http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/en/news/7097> Accessed on 15.04.2017

⁹Strategic Defence Review 2017-2020. The Ministry of Defence of Georgia; Available at- <https://mod.gov.ge/assets/up-modul/uploads/pdf/SDR-ENG.pdf> Accessed on 15.04.2017

¹⁰"Knowledge of and attitudes towards the EU in Georgia: Trends and Variations 2009-2015" Eurasia Partnership Foundation; Pg-12-13. Available at- http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Knowledge-of-and-Attitudes-towards-the-EU-in-Georgia_Trends-and-Variations-2009-2015-survey-report-ENG.pdf Accessed on 15.04.2017

Table 1. Georgian Traditions and EU integration; “If Georgia will become EU member the respect for Georgian Traditions will.”

	2009	2011	2013	2015
Will decrease significantly/ will decrease	20%	17%	14%	28%
Will not change	31%	29%	31%	34%
Will increase significantly/ will increase	22%	25%	30%	16%
Don't know	27%	26%	24%	21%
Refuse to answer	1%	4%	1%	1%

In the fight against Russian Propaganda, it is essential to increase public awareness about the existing threat. According to a survey of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducted in April 2017, 27% of respondents believe that Russian propaganda does not exist in Georgia, while 26% selected "I do not know" from the available response options.¹¹Based on the survey results, the government's strategic communications priority should be to foster an initial rise in awareness regarding the threat of Russian soft power and propaganda, which will be based on clear representation of the existing propaganda narratives and concrete cases.

¹¹"Public Attitudes in Georgia", April, 2017 Survey Carried out for National Democratic Institute (NDI) by CRRC Georgia; Pg- 76; Available at- https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4Ga_NfYjme2SDhPLTAwa20xeDQ/view Accessed on 10.05.2017

In addition, it is important to focus on public preferences regarding foreign policy. Twenty-one percent of respondents consider that "Georgia should join the Eurasian Union, established by the Russian Federation, Belarus, and Kazakhstan", according to the same survey by NDI.¹²

According to the results of March 2016 NDI poll, to the question "Georgia's Foreign Policy should be..?", 52% of respondents answered "Pro-Western, however, we should maintain good relations with Russia" while 27% agreed with the following statement: "Georgia will benefit more from abandoning Euro-Atlantic integration in favor of better relations with Russia."¹³

Under constant Russian occupation under which Russia continues to violate Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty while recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and continuing its creeping occupation and harassment of citizens living near the so-called "Administrative Boundary Line", it is difficult to explain the enthusiasm and desire of much of the Georgian population to consider Russia as a strategic partner and support a pro-Russian foreign policy course.

Abandoning Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration course in favor of better relations with Russia can be explained by the influence of several factors: 1. The Soviet legacy and historical experience; 2. The influence of Russian propaganda and disinformation; and 3. Shortcomings in the government's strategic communications with the population.

Following the recognition of Russian soft power as a threat in official documents adopted at the national level, it is now crucially important for the government to develop state policy to combat Russian soft power and propaganda. The government's policy priority, together with raising the awareness of the population, should be the building of strategic communication capacity and the development of a legislative and regulatory base, including implementing broadcasting restrictions and financial sanctions on specific cases of purposeful propaganda and the population's disinformation activities.

¹²"Public Attitudes in Georgia", April, 2017 Survey Carried out for National Democratic Institute (NDI) by CRRC Georgia; Pg- 33; Available at- https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4Ga_NfYjme2SDhPLTAwa20xeDQ/view Accessed on 10.05.2017

¹³"Public Attitudes in Georgia", March 2016, Survey Carried out for National Democratic Institute (NDI) by CRRC Georgia; Foreign Policy, Pg- 52,55, 62 Available at- https://ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202016%20poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_vf.pdf

From the United States to its Partners: Russian propaganda, the US, and Georgia

In 2016, the effectiveness of Russian propaganda and its geopolitical reach increased significantly. The impact of Kremlin-developed political instruments is emphasized in a US Intelligence Community Assessment document titled “Background to ‘Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections’: The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution”.¹⁴ According to the document, “Russian efforts to influence the 2016 US presidential election represent the most recent expression of Moscow’s longstanding desire to undermine the US-led liberal democratic order”. These activities demonstrated a significant escalation in directness, the level of activity, and scope of effort compared to previous operations.

According to the assessment, the main purpose of the campaign was to significantly reduce public confidence in democratic processes and discredit Hillary Clinton as a candidate in the 2016 presidential elections in the US. In addition, during the campaign the Russian government demonstrated obvious support to the eventual president of the United States, Donald Trump.

As stated in the assessment prepared by the US intelligence community, Russia, like its Soviet predecessor, has lengthy historical experience carrying out covert influence campaigns, including actively using intelligence officers and media outlets to discredit candidates perceived as hostile to the Kremlin. Within the information strategy, Russia utilizes a combination of both covert and overt tools and instruments, including:

- ❖ Cyber activity;
- ❖ Russian government agencies and state-funded media;
- ❖ Third-party intermediaries; and
- ❖ Paid social media users and “trolls.”

According to the key judgments of the assessment, Moscow will apply lessons learned from its Putin-ordered campaign aimed at influencing the US presidential elections to future advancement of its geopolitical efforts worldwide, including against the election processes of US and its allies.¹⁵

In this direction, the focus of Russian propaganda was initially intensified toward Georgia, as the country belongs to Russia’s historical privileged sphere of influence and

¹⁴“Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections”: The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution; Pg ii; 6 January 2017; Available at- https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf Accessed on 12.04.2017

¹⁵ Background to “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections”: The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution; Pg iii; 6 January 2017 Available at- https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf Accessed on 12.04.2017

is currently a strategic partner of the US. This issue is also reflected in the US-Intelligence Annual Report of 2016. According to the official document assessing threats worldwide, increasingly effective Russian propaganda raises the prospect that Tbilisi might slow or suspend its efforts toward deeper Euro-Atlantic integration.¹⁶

Georgia's obvious success in implementing domestic reforms and achieving rapprochement with the West seriously irritates Russia, for which the approximation of NATO and EU borders represents principal threats to its national security. The post-Soviet space and especially the South Caucasus remain strategically important for Russia. The loss of influence over the region increases threats related to Russia's national interests and security.

The US intelligence report also emphasizes the growing frustration of Georgia's elites and society with the slow pace of Euro-Atlantic integration, which in addition to economic problems make Georgia's population increasingly vulnerable to propaganda. One of the key objectives of Kremlin propaganda efforts in Georgia is to kindle distrust and disappointment in Georgian society.

In the long run of the reform process on the path of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration, Russia is sowing frustration among the population as well as a narrative according to which Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration is an extremely long-term prospect for the country, or even an impossible task. As an alternative to the grueling process of transformation and reform, Russia offers Georgia the chance to establish a strategic partnership covering both economic and political dimensions.

¹⁶Clapper, R.James „Statement for the Record Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community Senate Armed Services Committee “, Russia and Eurasia: The Caucasus and Central Asia; pg- 19; Available at- https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/SASC_Unclassified_2016_ATA_SFR_FINAL.pdf Accessed on 15.04.2017

The EU against the Russian propaganda

On November 23, 2016, the European Parliament adopted the resolution “EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties”, which discusses the Russian Federation together with Islamist terrorist groups (ISIL/Daesh) as the main source of disinformation and propaganda.¹⁷

According to the resolution, Russia’s information war is targeted against EU integration processes and initially aims to undermine the policy. According to the official document Russian strategic communications are part of a larger subversive campaign to weaken EU cooperation and the sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity of both the Union and its member states.

Russia is actively supporting right-wing extremist parties and populist forces within EU member states. Such groups not only support and promote anti-EU campaigns but also reject the fundamental values of liberal democracy. Russia rationally and effectively uses bilateral meetings and contacts with EU representatives for propaganda purposes, to weaken the united position of the Union and endorse disintegration and frustration among the member states.¹⁸

Russia invests relevant financial resources in disinformation and propaganda instruments. Kremlin-controlled companies and organizations serve the regime's desire to present itself as the *only* defender of Christian traditions and values in the world, as well as to weaken democratic values in societies around the world, undermine political cohesion, and endorse the division of Europe.

According to the EU resolution, under its communication strategy the Russian government uses diverse instruments and misinformation channels to disseminate propaganda and conduct information warfare. That includes the following mediums:

- ❖ Think tanks and special foundations (e.g. Russkiy Mir);
- ❖ Special authorities (Rossotrudnichestvo);
- ❖ Multilingual TV stations (e.g. RT);
- ❖ Pseudo news agencies and multimedia services (e.g. Sputnik);
- ❖ Cross-border social and religious groups; and

¹⁷European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016 on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties; European Parliament; Available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2016-0441&format=XML&language=EN> Accessed on 12.05.2017

¹⁸Samuels, Gabriel, “EU approves resolution to fight back against Russian 'propaganda warfare'”; Independent; Thursday 24 November, 2016; Available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-approves-resolution-to-fight-back-against-russian-propaganda-warfare-a7436036.html> Accessed on 12.05.2017

❖ Social media and internet trolls.¹⁹

Utilizing the aforementioned instruments significantly increases Russian influence in the EU and gives Russia the opportunity to conduct operations intended to destabilize the political, economic, and social situation in EU member states. Such operations often take the form of political extremism and large-scale disinformation campaigns in the mass media. According to the resolution, such media campaigns are currently present and active in the EU.

The resolution adopted by the European Parliament urges member states governments to be vigilant in countering Russian information operations on European soil and to increase capacity sharing and counterintelligence efforts aimed at tackling Russian disinformation and propaganda campaigns. In this regard, exceptional attention is paid to raising public awareness of the Kremlin's propaganda narratives in the former member states of the Soviet Bloc.

The East StratCom Task force was created in 2015 by the joint efforts of the high representative of the EU and the member states, a year before the aforementioned resolution was adopted. The Task Force is devoted to effective communication and promotion of EU policies toward the Eastern Neighborhood and aimed at proactive strategic communications campaigns based on focused analysis explaining key policy areas. It attempts to create a positive EU narrative while busting myths and explaining disinformation narratives.²⁰

The East StratCom Task Force publishes two weekly newsletters, *Disinformation Review* and the analytical *Disinformation Digest* based on a compilation of reports received from members of the myth-busting network, which is comprised of more than 400 experts, journalists, officials, NGOs and think tanks in over 30 countries that report disinformation articles to the task force. The Task Force newsletters collect concrete examples of pro-Kremlin disinformation articles and stories in Europe and inform the population about actual Kremlin narratives.²¹

¹⁹European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016 on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties; European Parliament; Available at - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2016-0441&format=XML&language=EN> Accessed on 12.05.2017

²⁰"Questions and answers about the East StratCom Task Force", European Union External Action, 14 January, 2017. Available at - https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/2116/%20Questions%20and%20Answers%20about%20the%20East%20StratCom%20Task%20Force Accessed on 15.03.2017

²¹ "EEAS's East StratCom Task Force Publishes two weekly newsletters", Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) 13 April 2016; Available at - <http://www.tepsa.eu/eeass-east-stratcom-task-force-publishes-two-weekly-newsletter/> Accessed on 15.03.2017

Georgia against Russian Soft Power and Propaganda

In line with its Western partners, the growing influence of Russian soft power and propaganda in Georgia has made clear the necessity of elaborating effective instruments for combating it. In accordance with the decision of Georgia's EU Integration Commission held in March 2015, in June of this year, a new entity – the Strategic Communications Department – was established under the Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. The main task of the new entity is to develop and coordinate messages supporting Euro-Atlantic integration based on relevant research and opinion polls.²²

The Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and Strategic Communications Department in Georgia – which includes the LEPL Information Center on NATO and EU – actively works to spread information and raise awareness about Georgia's relations with the EU and NATO. The main objective of the Information Center, which was established in 2005, is to increase awareness of the population and gain its conscious support for the country's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.²³

In 2015, the Information Center established direct communication with around 43,600 Georgian citizens within 342 different activities. Around 28,845 citizens attended activities held in the format of a meeting, and up to 8,170 citizens participated in various types of trainings and seminars on Euro-Atlantic integration topics.²⁴

The Information Center, together with the Department of Strategic Communications of the Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, plays a crucial role in delivering information to the public about Euro-Atlantic structures. Although the general attitude of the population toward Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration is quite positive, based on public opinion polls, the vast majority of the population consider themselves to lack sufficient information about the EU.

According to the results of the "Knowledge of and attitudes towards the EU in Georgia"²⁵ poll from 2015, 49% of respondents note that they would like to receive more information about the EU. It is noteworthy that a large share of respondents – from 70%

²²Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Strategic Communications Department; Report 2016; Pg. 2; Available at-<http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/sites/default/files/%E1pdf> Accessed on 18.05.2017

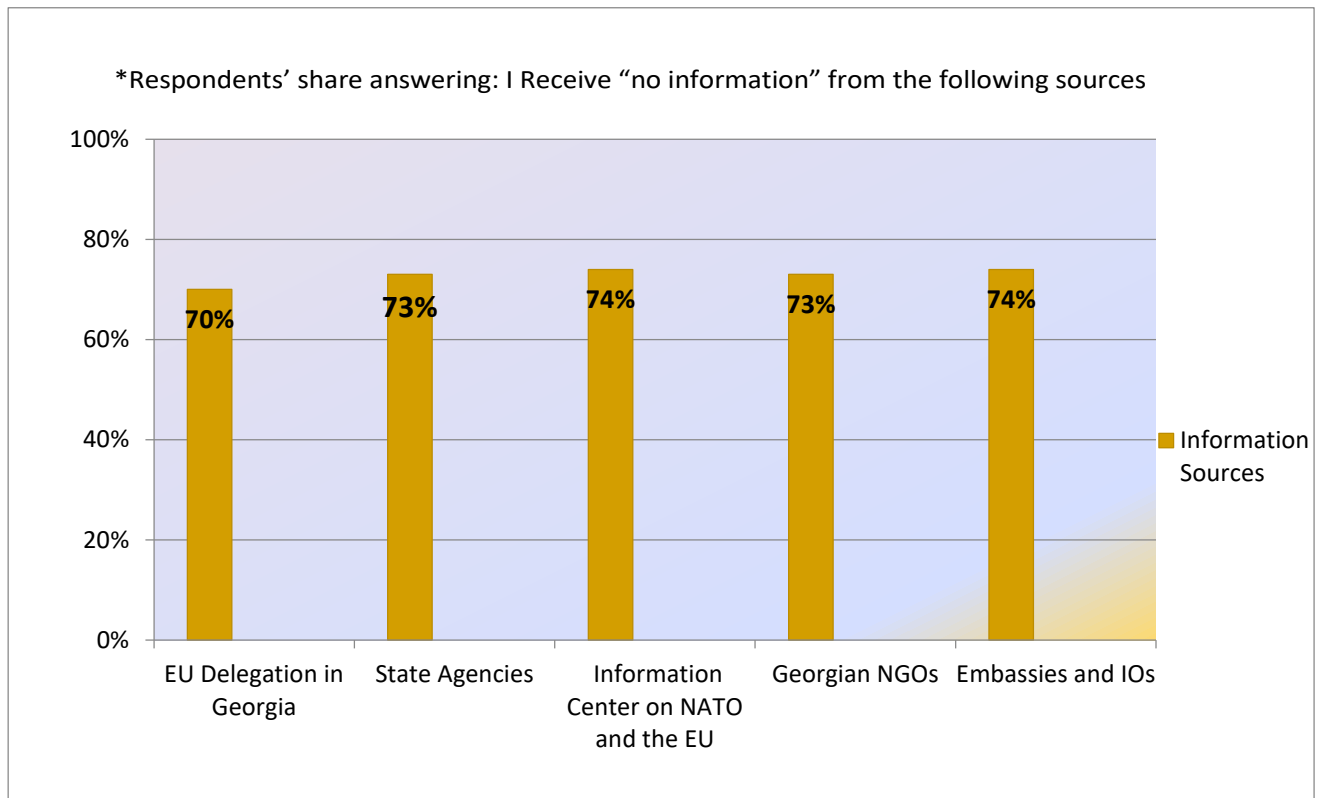
²³Information Center of NATO and the EU; Available at-<http://infocenter.gov.ge/1005-vin-varth-chven.html> Accessed on 18.05.2017

²⁴Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Strategic Communications Department; Report 2016; Pg. 2-3. Available at-<http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/sites/default/files/%E1pdf> Accessed on 18.05.2017

²⁵"Knowledge of and attitudes towards the EU in Georgia: Trends and Variations 2009-2015" Eurasia Partnership Foundation; Pg-8-9 Available at- http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Knowledge-of-and-Attitudes-towards-the-EU-in-Georgia_Trends-and-Variations-2009-2015-survey-report-ENG.pdf Accessed on 14.04.2017

to 74%-reported that they receive “no information at all” from the main information sources which are believed to be responsible for informing the population²⁶ (State Agencies, Information Centre on EU and NATO, IOs, NGOs, EU Delegation, the Diplomatic Corps). (See. Chart 2.)²⁷

Chart 2. Information sources: Information about the European Union



According to the same survey, 79% of respondents who wish to receive more information about the EU name television as the preferred source for receiving information. According to polls recently conducted by IRI and DNI, television still represents the main source of information for the Georgian population (93%-IRI and 76%- NDI, respectively)²⁸

²⁶Knowledge of and Attitudes towards the EU in Georgia: Trends and Variations 2009 – 2015”, CRRC Georgia, Eurasia Partnership Foundation. Pg. 8-9; Available at- http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Knowledge-of-and-Attitudes-towards-the-EU-in-Georgia_Trends-and-Variations-2009-2015-survey-report-ENG.pdf

²⁷ *The Chart is based on the research conducted by CRRC Georgia. Pg. 8-9; Available at-http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Knowledge-of-and-Attitudes-towards-the-EU-in-Georgia_Trends-and-Variations-2009-2015-survey-report-ENG.pdf

²⁸Survey of Public Opinion in Georgia February 22 – March 8, 2017, International Republican Institute (IRI), Pg. 75 Available at- http://www.civil.ge/files/files/2017/Iri_Poll_2017.pdf Accessed on 17.05.2017

Public attitudes in Georgia Results of a April 2017 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia; Pg- 90. Available at- https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4Ga_NfYjme2SDhPLTAwa20xeDQ/view Accessed on 16.05.2017

therefore government efforts related to information campaigns should be strengthened in this dimension and more concentrated on messages transmitted via TV.

The main task of the government's new four-year Communication Strategy on Georgia's EU and NATO Membership²⁹ is achieving a decline in the influence of Russian propaganda on the Georgian population, together with raising awareness about Euro-Atlantic structures. In addition, the strategic objectives of the communication agenda include managing the population's expectations towards integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, especially in situations where Russia is actively trying to promote public distrust and disappointment with the West. According to the government strategy, the main communication messages are based on analysis of the results of public opinion polls and are designed for both national and international communities.

- *At the national level:* The main goal of strategic communication is to assure Georgia's society that Euro-Atlantic integration endorses the country's democratic development processes, gives initial support to the protection of national and cultural values, aids the improvement of the living standards of citizens, and enhances the country's defense capabilities.
- *At the international level:* The main task of strategic communication is to underline Georgia's geopolitically strategic location and demonstrate Georgia as a leader on the regional level in terms of democratic development and an important contributor to the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.³⁰

In order to effectively implement the goals and objectives of the four-year Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on Georgia's EU and NATO Membership, it is essentially important that strategic communication and informational campaigns are delivered to the population through the preferred and desirable sources.

²⁹Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on Georgia's EU and NATO Membership for 2017-2020; Pg-1-2; Available at- <http://eu-nato.gov.ge/sites/default/files/pdf> Accessed on 16.05.2017

³⁰Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on Georgia's EU and NATO Membership for 2017-2020; Pg-1-2; Available at- <http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/en/news/7097> Accessed on 21.05.2017

Russian Soft Power in Georgia: the Constructivist Approach

The influence of Russian soft power and propaganda is initially supported by the Georgian population's ideas and attitudes which have been developed at different stages of historical development. The constructivist approach to international relations focuses on social context and emphasizes the importance of issues such as identity and belief. For constructivists, the social component of international relations is essential, and is therefore constructed on the basis of three major elements: shared knowledge, material resources, and historical practice.³¹

Taking the abovementioned theoretical aspects into consideration, the attitudes and perceptions of the Georgian population are influenced on the one hand by historical experience, and by currently-accessible information on the other. As there is a lack of information about Euro-Atlantic integration and the benefits that Georgian citizens accrue from it, the index of direct use of aforementioned benefits is significantly low, while in contrast the majority of residents remember well concrete examples of both economic and political relations with Russia enjoyed during the Soviet past.

According to the 2015 survey conducted by CRRC Georgia, the number of individuals who have personal experiences living in or traveling to EU countries is still minimal. Only 3% of respondents reported having lived in an EU country for at least three months since 1993. The share of those with a family member who has lived in an EU member country for at least three months since 1993 is low as well – 6%. As regards travel, only 9% of respondents or members of their families have traveled to an EU country since 1993.³² (See Table. 2.)

³¹ Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," in *Theories of War and Peace*, ed. Michael E. Brown and others (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1998), 416-18.

³² Knowledge of and Attitudes towards the EU in Georgia: Trends and Variations 2009 – 2015", CRRC Georgia, Eurasia Partnership Foundation. Pg. 9; http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Knowledge-of-and-Attitudes-towards-the-EU-in-Georgia_Trends-and-Variations-2009-2015-survey-report-ENG.pdf

Table 2. Experience of living or travelling to EU countries

	Since 1993	
1.	Personally lived in an EU country for at least three months	3%
2.	Family member has lived in an EU country for at least three months	6%
3.	Personally has traveled or has a family member who has traveled to an EU country	9%

In line with the lack of experience of living, getting an education, or traveling in the EU, the Georgian population's attitudes and perceptions are partly based on the information they receive from news sources. In this regard, part of the population which receives information from unreliable sources becomes particularly vulnerable to Russian propaganda.

In order to change the sentiments and perceptions of the Georgian population, it is necessary to develop and implement an inclusive state policy which will, on the one hand, provide the population with information on strategically-important issues, and on the other hand, facilitate direct utilization of benefits offered to each citizen via integration with Euro-Atlantic structures, whether that be visa-free travel or economically-beneficial trade relations established within the framework of the DCFTA.

Conclusion

Due to the intensification and strengthening of Russian soft power and propaganda tools, there is a greater need to combat and counterbalance it. After acknowledging and officially labeling soft power as a threat to Georgia's security and national interests, the government needs to develop an actual strategy for combatting that threat. In this process, the active involvement of interest groups, the NGO sector, and civil society is especially important.

Public opinion polls conducted in Georgia clearly demonstrate that despite general support for Georgia's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, awareness about the benefits provided through Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration – and the index of direct use of the aforementioned benefits – are significantly low. These factors increase the effectiveness of Russian propaganda and make the Georgian population initially vulnerable to it.

In the process of developing and disseminating strategic communications, it is necessary that the information to the population be delivered through preferred sources. In spite of technological development, television still remains the main source of information for the Georgian population. Accordingly, it is recommended that strategic communications mostly be expressed via the medium of TV.

Recommendations

To respond to the security challenges Georgia faces from Russian soft power and propaganda, this policy document recommends the following:

- It is highly recommended to provide more information to the population about the concrete benefits provided to Georgian society from integration with Euro-Atlantic structures. In addition to internet sources, attention should be paid to the medium of television as it remains the main source of information for the majority of the Georgian population, especially in the regions.
- It is advisable to increase the frequency of informational meetings conducted by NGOs, as well as the volume of distribution of information brochures. It is especially important that content is accessible for ethnic minorities with command of Russian, Armenian and Azeri languages.
- In addition, within the strategic communication campaign it is necessary to clearly explain to the population that Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration does not threaten the country's national traditions and values. In this regard, special emphasis should again be made on the information sources used by the population.
- It is important to increase public awareness regarding the assistance provided by Euro-Atlantic structures to Georgia, as well as their contribution to enhancing the country's security, democratic development and economic stability.
- In order to reduce the influence of Russian propaganda, it is expedient to develop a legislative and regulatory base, including implementing broadcasting restrictions and financial sanctions on specific cases of providing incorrect information to the population. In this process, the experience sharing of Western partners is especially important;
- In addition, in the process of establishing and developing the legislative framework, it is necessary to draw a distinct margin between freedom of expression, media freedom and the purposeful propaganda damaging the national interests of the country;
- It is important that the strategic communications department's findings on Russian propaganda narratives and disinformation be made available to the public at the national level;

- In addition, it is recommended to prepare a weekly Disinformation Review document similar to that which is prepared by the East StatCom Task Force and spread it through information portals, which will inform the population about the latest and concrete cases and narratives of Russian propaganda;
It is crucial, that in the process of combating Russian Soft Power and propaganda, the Government of Georgia promotes experience sharing and counter-intelligence activities with its Western partners;
- It is highly important that in accordance with the existing security challenges the threat of Russian soft power and propaganda be reflected on during the revision of conceptual, as well as strategic documents of the country, such as Foreign Policy Strategy, National Security Concept, Threat Assessment Document and other relevant documents.

GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS (GIP)

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