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Government of Georgia's Public Rhetoric – Minuscule Model of Russian Propaganda

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Abstract: Russian propaganda exploits the idea of freedom of information to promote disinformation. It aims to sow confusion using conspiracy theories and ensure there is not a single issue for society to consolidate. As a well-tested approach, this malicious practice of “brainwashing” can be applied in across countries or circumstances. Observation of statements made by Georgian authorities leads to the hypothesis that methods of Russian propaganda have been embedded in Georgia’s ruling Georgian Dream party’s rhetoric. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to study features of the Georgian government’s public communication through the prism of propaganda and test whether its rhetoric is analogous to Russia’s propaganda toolkit. The study shows apparent parallels between these two phenomena. The Georgian government’s rhetoric implies vociferous accusations against people being critical of the authorities, cultivating groundless fears among the population and shaping a negative agenda.

Keywords: Propaganda, Disinformation, Russian, Georgian, government, comparative analysis

INTRODUCTION

PROPAGANDA AND THE RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE

Propaganda is one of the widely used terms in mass communication, politics, or other related fields. At the same time, however, an accurate and comprehensive definition of propaganda remains rather challenging. It is also difficult to identify propaganda since it consists of well-structured messages designed in advance where facts, opinions, and manipulations are all mixed. According to Richard Vincent (2006), a communication scholar, propaganda uses relevant communication channels to access a mass audience and seeks through different techniques of persuasion to shape or change public opinion in the interests of those who promote it. Propaganda is used by the governments

of countries at local and international levels to exert a desirable influence over of their or foreign countries' public opinion. In addition, propaganda methods are applied by various non-government actors to advocate their ideas among the public.

Propaganda largely has a negative connotation in the modern world. The reason behind this may be use of propaganda methods by political regimes, particularly in the 20th century, as "brainwashing" instruments. Moreover, such perceptions are further enhanced by actions of contemporary 21st century Russia which has taken "brainwashing" of a society through propaganda to new heights. Experts of Russian propaganda, Pomerantsev and Weiss (2014) argue that at least since 2008, strategists in the Kremlin's military and special services no longer speak about information as any of the commonly acknowledged methods of persuasion, and public diplomacy or even simply as propaganda. Kremlin strategists now refer to information as a weapon able to sow confusion or be an instrument of blackmail which aims to demoralize, subvert and paralyze.

Pomerantsev and Weiss (2014) provide detailed descriptions of Russian methods of weaponization of information, culture and finances and suggest the Kremlin uses the idea of freedom of information to promote disinformation among the public. The aim is not to convince (as happens in classic public diplomacy) or gain trust, but instead to sow confusion through conspiracy theories and the proliferation of lies. Pomerantsev and Weiss (2014) note that weaponization of information is a vital element of contemporary Russia's hybrid, unconventional warfare.

Paul and Matthews (2016) argue the major features of Russian propaganda are rapidity, continuity (incessant dissemination) and not adhering to consistency since it acts according to a specific reality. Furthermore, such messages that may be completely out of touch, are spread through many channels which modern media and social networks provide. Russian propaganda operates as being in some endless war and never shies away from concocting and spreading the most extraordinary conspiracy theories.

We may, therefore, argue that with rapidity and continuity, Russian propaganda makes and spreads falsehoods built on the same principle used and sophisticated in the most radical cases of propaganda in the past. The argument is that the systematic repetition of a lie, will eventually lead to it being accepted as a truth. The most vivid example of such an attempt from Russian propaganda is Bucha Massacre committed by the Russian forces in 2022 (The Economist, 2022b), which Russia continues to blame Ukraine for (Khutsiberidze, 2022).

As mentioned earlier, Russia uses several methods to promote disinformation, although most of them have one thing in common as they are based on negativity. Similarly, disinformation and attempts to distort reality in general are also discernible in the Georgian government's rhetoric, as MEP Viola von Cramon

argues “Georgian Dream’s [Georgia’s ruling party] disinformation is reaching the Kremlin’s level” (von Cramon, 2022).

This paper aims to understand how reasonable is the parallel drawn above, because it is vital for the public to be aware of dangers, which may follow implementation of Russian propaganda methods into public communication.

RESEARCH METHOD AND HYPOTHESIS

Observations on statements of the Georgian authorities over time led to the hypothesis that various propaganda techniques characteristic to Russian propaganda have been embedded in the ruling Georgian Dream party’s public communication. These techniques include manipulative allegations, attempts to make inimical images and distorting reality.

The focus of this paper is, therefore, to study features of the Georgian government’s public communication through the prism of propaganda and to test whether its rhetoric is significantly similar to the Russian propaganda toolkit and if these two phenomena have any aspects in common.

To this aim, this paper used a comparative analysis method (Mills et al. 2006), which includes both quantitative and qualitative comparisons of social entities. However, for this paper we used the qualitative version and therefore conducted a detailed analysis of the cases. Azarian (2011) explains that irrespective of any paucity of comparable cases this method allows systematic and in-depth analysis of research problems and drawing relevant comparisons at national, regional and international levels. This method is particularly valuable when a research problem or social phenomenon cannot be measured by precise statistical methods and experimental studies. Moreover, despite certain limitations, comparative analysis can be successfully applied to solve academic challenges if they clearly present comparable variables, general context and aims (Kocka 1996:197-8 as cited in Azarian, 2011). In this sense, the cases presented in this paper (examples of Russian propaganda tricks and methods used by the government in public communication), which are subjected to comparative analysis, are of virtually identical field and context.

This research study uses the ‘highlighting the particularity’ approach of comparative analysis (Azarian, 2011), which by thoroughly studying comparable variables and dozens of related cases enables the study to show in a structured way the similarities between the Georgian government’s rhetoric and Russian propaganda. Therefore, on the one side of comparative analysis there is the well-studied topic of Russian propaganda and on the other is the unexplored and novel phenomenon of the Georgian government’s propaganda messages.

The discussion in the paper is placed in a substantial theoretical framework about propaganda techniques. This implies tailoring a broadly acknowledged (by academia) specific propaganda technique to practical reality, which is currently employed by Russian propaganda and can also be discernible in the Government of Georgia's (henceforth 'the government') public communication. It should be noted here that the propaganda messages (both Russia's and the government's) discussed in the article are not and cannot be identical content-wise because the phenomena of two completely distinct countries are compared. Thus, the article mainly focuses on the search for similarities between the approaches used by the authorities of both nations. However, in some cases, the content of the two sides' propaganda messages are identical, which we will discuss below.

Since propaganda is a complex issue, it is impossible to examine all its approaches in one article thoroughly. Besides, Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) point out that „[P]ropaganda is too complex to limit its techniques to a short list” (p. 299). However, according to broadly established sources (such as McClung Lee & Briant Lee, 1939), some basic propaganda techniques can still be elaborated, such as name calling, glittering generality, transfer, testimonial, plain folks, card staking, and bandwagon. For this article, those techniques that are particularly noticeable in the public communication of the government and also show similarities with the approaches used by Russian propaganda, have been selected.

As for the selection of specific statements from the rhetoric of the Georgian authorities, they are mostly related to socio-political crisis periods. In particular, the pre-election period, which was quite polarized and tense, the events of July 5-6, 2021 (when far-right, pro-Russian mobs physically assaulted dozens of journalists). Also, the Russia-Ukraine war, which affects Georgia too, and has had a notable impact on the public communication of the government. In such periods, the use of propaganda tactics by the government is more evident.

With respect to limitations of the study this can be a nature of qualitative research method itself when findings cannot be generalized as widely as in case of quantitative research (Ochieng, 2009). However, as mentioned earlier, in order to compensate for this challenge, the paper includes not a small number of cases and at the same time they are analyzed in detail, based on unambiguous examples. One of the challenges in general, including for this paper, is clear demonstration of strong similarity between different phenomena (Mills et al. 2006). However, as Ragin (as cited in Mills et al., 2006) wrote, if research is focused on explicit, instead of associative relations, this challenge can be overcome.

ANALYSIS

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF PROPAGANDA METHODS – GEORGIAN EXAMPLES AND RESEMBLANCE TO RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

One of the most widespread and simple propaganda techniques is name-calling, which requires the labeling (negative or positive) of a person, group or idea. Mostly, name-calling is used in a negative context. In addition, the goal of this propaganda technique is to demoralize the recipients of the information and discourage them from scrutinizing the facts behind the label. In other words, the intention is to make sure that emotions erode evidence-based discussion. Name calling is used to create enemy image through developing and customizing assorted stereotypes. The main objective of this technique is to manipulate the audience's emotions and push them to make hasty and superficial conclusions (Vincent, 2006). Russian propaganda frequently resorts to this technique. The most recent and vivid example would be war of Putin's Russia against Ukraine. Before and after start of the war, Russian authorities and their propaganda mouthpieces attacked and continue to denounce legitimate government of Ukraine as Nazis, neo-Nazis and fascists (Horvath, 2022). Furthermore, one of the official reasons for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which Moscow insisted was a "special operation," was the denazification of Ukraine. This term is so meaningless and vague that even the Kremlin struggled to provide a proper definition (Project, 2022 as cited in Realpolitika, 2022). The important issue, however, is not the lack of any kind of rational explanation but the manipulation of the audience's emotions (the domestic audience of Russian nationals) which is vulnerable to propaganda, sowing fear among them and negating their common sense in this manner (The Economist 1843 magazine, 2022). Prior to the outbreak of war, Russian President Vladimir Putin used this term multiple times vis-à-vis the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky. Another label which Mr. Putin used against the government of Ukraine was the "gang of drug addicts" (The Print, 2022). This groundless label was nevertheless a strong weapon to discredit the opponent, manipulating the audience's stereotypical and negative attitude towards drug users.

Recently, in the run-up of 2021 Georgia's local self-government elections, drug addiction was a quite popular topic in Georgian politics. This discussion was spearheaded by the ruling Georgian Dream party when the party chairperson, Irakli Kobakhidze, proclaimed without producing any evidence, that the former political ally and later leader of the opposition party, Giorgi Gakharia, was a drug addict by calling him a "cokehead" (Kavkasia TV, 2021). Given how obvious it was that this label was intended for extremely negative propaganda purposes, even some of the Georgian Dream's current members were reluctant

to repeat this claim (Chichua, 2021). However, certain events before this statement, when the candidate for Mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze, suddenly and out of context decided to take a drug test and urged opponents to do the same were a clear indicator that the above-mentioned label was a result of deliberate and advance-planned smear campaign (Radio Liberty, 2021e). Like Russian propaganda, it was also intended to manipulate public's negative attitudes towards people suffering from drug addiction.

The Russia-Ukraine war illustrated resemblance of the Georgian Dream's rhetoric to Russian propaganda, particularly about targeting opponents with negative labels. Since the outbreak of war, many among the public and government opponents came to believe that the Government's positioning in supporting Ukraine, especially with respect to the element of rhetoric, is insufficient (Kutidze, 2022). In response to this idea, the statements of the Georgian Dream members started to feature "war party" label which was initially directed against the United National Movement (UNM), Georgia's largest opposition party, but later was expanded to include virtually every individual who criticized the incumbent government for its position vis-à-vis Russia-Ukraine war. This label was based on false and manipulative arguments (Batashvili, 2016), although deep-rooted among the public narrative, that suggested it was possible to avoid the 2008 war with Russia but that the-then ruling UNM did not do that. However, this narrative later went beyond the UNM and was used to target some other political parties (which did not even exist in 2008) or even the Public Defender (the Office of the Ombudsman). These statements below, made by the Georgian Dream's leadership, to illustrated this.

Irakli Kobakhidze¹: "There is a war party in Georgia whose sole objective is to drag Georgia into a military conflict. Covert campaign which is directed against the decisions made by the Government vis-à-vis sanctions and sending volunteers serves precisely that objective. We would like to remind the public once again that dragging Georgia into a military conflict, something that the war party wishes for, would bring devastating consequences..." (Radio Liberty, 2022).

Irakli Gharibashvili²: "If we imagine for a second that Bidzina Ivanishvili³ had not get rid of this anti-statehood and anti-national power under Saakashvili's [Mikheil Saakashvili – the third President of Georgia] leadership, bent on destroying and ruining this country, I guarantee you that Saakashvili

1 Chairperson of the ruling Georgian Dream party.

2 Georgian Prime Minister.

3 Founder of the Georgian Dream and former Georgian Prime Minister, believed to be informal ruler of Georgia's incumbent government.

would have still been in power and we would be having a second Mariupol here” (Interpressnews, 2022b).

Sozar Subari, Member of the Parliament, in response to a draft resolution about Ukraine prepared by the opposition Lelo party, stated: “The Chairperson of the Georgian Dream’s parliamentary faction made it clear that we will not take seriously any of the initiatives on foreign issues put forward by the “war parties”, let alone discussing them” (Interpressnews, 2022a).

Irakli Kobakhidze: “Public Defender represents that political group whose name is a war party.” In addition, according to Irakli Kobakhidze, anyone who supports sending the former President and current convict Mikheil Saakashvili abroad for medical purposes, including the Public Defender, is part of efforts that war breaks out in Georgia (Interpressnews, 2022c).

It is noteworthy that together with active application of the “war party” label, the Georgian dream invented a new conspiracy theory which blames the opposition for attempting a coup d’état.

Irakli Gharibashvili: “What do you think why Mikheil Saakashvili came to Georgia? He came to Georgia for one purpose alone – to cause instability in the country, revolution and mass killings, including killing of the opposition leaders and to organize coup d’état. This, with no doubt, meant nothing but outbreak of a new war in the occupied country...” (Interpressnews, 2022b).

Irakli Kobakhidze: “First and foremost, Saakashvili came to aggravate situation in the run-up of the elections in Georgia and naturally, the main reason to aggravate situation was toppling the government and after government overthrow Saakashvili was coming to power with his partners – Gakharia⁴ and Lelo⁵. He was about to get involved in war under Georgia’s name. I am saying this based on our logical conclusions and information. Certainly, it was planned scenario of the “war party”, which has been foiled...” (Interpressnews, 2022d).

It is also noteworthy that recently, the term “global war party” (henceforth GWP) appeared in the rhetoric of Georgia’s ruling party, which suggests was the GWP was trying to drag Georgia into a war against Russia (Chichua, 2023). Although the Georgian Dream party does not specify whose interests the GWP

⁴ Former Georgian Prime Minister, currently leader of one of the opposition parties.

⁵ One of the opposition parties.

represents, they indirectly point to the West. There is evidence a similar term was already well-established in the Russian narrative (Konkov, 2013; Tass, 2016). After the war in Ukraine started, Russian propaganda used this 'global war party' epithet more frequently to refer to the Western countries.

The frequency of the messages from the Georgian authorities indicates that the propaganda campaign incessantly "bombarded" the audience, which made it similar to Russia's tactics. As mentioned, Russian propaganda uses the *ad nauseam* technique, which involves endless repetition of the same idea or slogan (media Literacy Lab – MilLab). In addition, when the "war party" label was attached to political or public groups which were not directly linked with the UNM, the authorities used another ploy – generalization. In this case, an entire cluster is shown negatively through generalizing a specific event, subject, or idea. This enables the authorities to blend all critical thoughts into "one pot" and portray them as uniformly unacceptable, hostile and advocates of narrow partisan interests. Indeed, the identity of the author of criticism – any opposition party, Public Defender, civic sector, or media is not important (Kutidze, 2021). Russian propaganda has tested and used this approach when suggesting "western maliciousness" as an explanation of any negative occurrence in the Western countries. The approach seeks to aggrandize a specific negative event as a problem affecting society as a whole (Pomerantsev and Weiss, 2014).

Confronting an accuser is yet another propaganda technique, which Vincent (2006) argues is using the logic that says the best defense is a good offense (Vincent, 2006). Absurd lies and conspiracy theories are often used in this technique, which it is known as 'huckster' propaganda (Ballentine, 2015). Russian propaganda has employed this technique numerous times, particularly in crisis situations. An example of huckster propaganda would be Russia accusing the Ukrainian army of brutality against their own citizens, victims of the Bucha Massacre, which was committed by the Russian army (Khutsiberidze, 2022). Another similar example occurred when a passenger aircraft of Malaysia Airlines was shot down over Ukraine's territory. At that time, Russia started to advocate an obnoxious theory about the USA's CIA shooting down. Moscow also accused the Ukrainian military of accidentally shooting down the aircraft, having mistakenly identified the plane was carrying the President of Russia. This dense information fog concealed the simple truth that ill-trained pro-Russian separatists had accidentally shot down the plane with a missile supplied by Russia (MacFarquhar, 2016). The subsequent investigation also confirmed later that Russia-backed rebels were involved in shooting down the plane and killing innocent civilians (BBC NEWS, 2020).

The Georgian government too, resorts to such tactics of self-defense in crisis. Speaking of 5-6 July 2021 events (when far-right, pro-Russian mobs physically assaulted dozens of journalists and the insufficient response from the authorities

(Social Justice Center, 2021), government figures were stating that violence against journalists is unacceptable, although journalists themselves often commit violence against public, albeit psychologically. One of the leaders of the Georgian Dream and Mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze made the following statement:

Undoubtedly, violence and hatred strangle our country and its future and all those people who showed no mercy, hit you and assaulted you, were damaging development of the country and our tomorrow. This action is punishable, and all of these are shameful. No less evil is psychological violence which unfortunately takes place in our society for years. We often hear from different TV channels and TV screens how people are mocked, defamed, bullied only because of different political or other grounds (Radio Liberty, 2021c).

The Prime Minister responded with the similar rhetoric to rallies erupting after the July 5-6 events demanding his resignation. According to Irakli Gharibashvili, anti-statehood, anti-church and therefore anti-national messages were voiced at the July 11 rally outside the Parliament of Georgia organized by media workers (*Radio Liberty*, 2021a).

Additionally, in times of crises, when the government also bears responsibility, authorities do not seek to debunk allegations through relevant arguments but instead attack opponents with propaganda messages and churn out conspiracy theories. Since the Georgian Dream came to power, the party has informed the public about numerous plans of the opposition to conduct coups d'état, accusations of insurrection over "the Gavrillov affair", the 2021 plan to overthrow the government, etc., (Rekhviashvili, 2022). The latest in this string of allegations was Irakli Kobakhidze's statement (Interpressnews, 2022d) that Mikheil Saakashvili, Giorgi Gakharia and Mamuka Khazaradze (leaders of the opposition parties), had plotted a coup d'état, and would on coming to power open a second front against Russia in parallel with Russia-Ukraine ongoing war. None of these cases have been investigated, which lends further credibility to an argument that such statements were intended for propaganda purposes.

Similar to the huckster method is the 'what-aboutism' propaganda technique, which instead of answering difficult questions either poses counter-allegations or shifts focus to another issue aiming to either or both switch attention from the object of criticism and justify this objective through making false comparisons and manipulative moral judgements (Media Literacy Lab – MilLab). This tactic was extensively used by the Soviet Union, pointing out problems of the West in response to any criticism. This approach is still very popular in modern Russia (Leonor, 2016). The Russian Federation which still lags far behind the West in terms of economy, technology, quality of life and prosperity (The Economist, 2022a) constantly aspires to discredit Europe and the USA through messages

of disinformation (Chatham House, 2021). This is yet another example of negative propaganda, characteristic for Russia, which nurtures the following idea: “Maybe not all is well in Russia, but it is worse in the West.”

There is an abundance of similar examples in the public communication of the Government. The Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili when questioned why he failed to protect journalists during the 5-6 July 2021 crackdown, gave the following answer:

You [Journalists] represent the United National Movement... All of you. In Saakashvili's time the state was committing violence against TV, business, citizen, against everyone. If there was some kind of fistfight in the street, the state prevented it and arrested all offenders. This is what is important (Rustavi TV 2, 2021).

The authorities use similar rhetoric vis-à-vis numerous other problems. For instance, when discussing rapid growth of oil prices in 2022 and subsequent protests.

Irakli Gharibashvili: “...I would like to remind our citizens that under the previous government there were basically several groups at the market. One group had monopoly in their own hands and they dictated, giving directive to every importer. This was in the hands of former Minister of Defense, Davit Kezerashvili and Saakashvili...” (Tolordava, 2022).

Election campaigns of the Georgian Dream, especially those of the last few years, can be considered as cases of similar public communication. The ruling party's answer on flaws in judiciary or other pressing problems is that the situation was worse during the UNM's rule and public's main concern should be preventing this opposition party from ever coming back to power. In other words, the predominant rhetoric of the Georgian Dream is based not on the visions of future, but on defeating the UNM. The ruling party's campaign is largely attuned to negative and meaningless messages instead of campaign platform and pledges (ISFED, 2021). The Georgian Dream's election motto (for the run-off of 2018 presidential elections where the ruling party had to spare no efforts to win) “No to the Nazis!⁶ No to the evil!” (Tabula, 2018) also confirms this. The propaganda nature of this motto is best illustrated by posters unveiled for 2021 self-government elections where the photo of Giorgi Gakharia, former leader of the Georgian Dream and currently an opposition figure, was added to the photos of incumbent and former leaders of the UNM. The motto was

⁶ Denoting the major opposition UNM “United National Movement” party.

also modified as follows: “No to the Nazis! No to the evil!” No to the treachery!” (Tarkhnishvili, 2021).

One more propaganda technique, the ‘bandwagon’ approach, implies the use of the notion: “Everybody does that.” This approach urges members of public to ‘bandwagon’ this or that group and follow the crowd (Vincent, 2006). Often, Georgian authorities also seek to bandwagon with religion or traditions. Here, a special emphasis needs to be made on statements of government figures issued about 5-6 July 2021 events, when the March of Dignity announced by LGBTQ+ groups was followed by counter-rally and assault on journalists by a small group. Prior and after these events, high-ranking public officials stated that LGBTQ+ community should not have gathered at Rustaveli Avenue because this contradicts teachings of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the will of most of the population.

Irakli Gharibashvili: “*When 95% of our population opposes demonstratively holding propaganda march or parade, we all should obey this. This is the idea of the absolute majority of our population and we, as government elected by the people, have to take this into account. We will always take this into account and minority will no longer decide the fate of majority unlike to what used to happen in the past when any decision in Georgia was made with violence*” (Radio Liberty, 2021b).

However, public opinion polls illustrated that the Prime Minister could be wrong when speaking on behalf of the population, because 95% of the population, after all, does not oppose holding the above-mentioned march. Moreover, according to 73% of the surveyed respondents, the state should ensure freedom and safety of assembly for the minorities” (Edison Research, 2021, as cited in Radio Liberty, 2021f).

The similar approach has been used multiple times in various types of crises when the Government was targeted with heavy criticism. Under such circumstances, the ruling party members seek to bandwagon with the so called “majority”, “will of the people” and church, which is currently the most influential institution of the country.

As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons why Russian propaganda spreads so easily is that the purveyors do not think much about homogeneity of messages and act only according to needs. In this case, it is possible to argue one thing today and claim its absolute opposite tomorrow. Old data vanishes so rapidly in the unending waves of information that propaganda mouthpieces are not afraid to adopt a drastically new stance. Furthermore, Russian propaganda does not, as Pomerantsev and Weiss (2014) argue, even bother to prove “its own truth”. Russia’s propaganda does not aim to convince or gain trust but to sow

confusion and spread lies through conspiracy theories. This approach is reminiscent of card stacking propaganda technique, defined by McClung Lee and Briant Lee (1939) as involving the selection and use of facts, falsehoods, distractions, and logical or illogical statements to confuse the audience.

The incumbent government's communication with the Georgian population before and after elections bears a clear resemblance with the cardstacking approach. Since 2013, the ruling Georgian Dream party has been claiming that the former ruling power, the UNM was finished and had a very little influence as an opposition party. However, in the run-up of every new election, virtually the whole election campaign of the Georgian Dream revolves on the notion of how dangerous it will be if the UNM comes back to power. This campaign, as mentioned earlier, was characterized by strong and negative slurs, such as "murderers", "traitors", etc. As a result, the narrative was shaped so that it was not future ideas and the prospect of development that mattered in the upcoming election but "ending" the UNM. Of additional note is that the list of those that needed to be "ended" is inevitably expanded with new opposition parties and government propaganda seeks to equate them with the UNM. There are several examples to illustrate this approach of the Georgian authorities.

Election year is coming and politically bankrupt parties and politicians will try to somehow remind population of themselves (Kaladze, K. 2015).

They [UNM] are spreading rumors, they are well aware that they have no chance to achieve a serious result – they had 46 people in the parliament and now they may gain 10 seats. (Ivanishvili, B. 2016).

The UNM is a bankrupt political party. (Kaladze, K. 2018).

Despite these statements, even after nine years of coming to power, the Georgian Dream still proclaimed in the run-up to 2021 local self-government elections that "ending" the UNM was a major objective (Kuntchulia, 2021). Video footages with mottos "Being Nazi is a Shame"! Let's End Nazis!" was published on 18 October 2021 at the Georgian Dream's official Facebook account (Georgian Dream, 2021). At the same day, one of the leaders of the ruling party, Mamuka Mdinaradze, stated:

We have to rule out risks, as much as possible, that our opponent achieves any success in even a single municipality. This is because in this case it will be some kind of revolutionary HQ and with this one victory (we should not allow that, but), I am speaking hypothetically here, they will make some kind

of revolutionary municipality and it will not be focused on the needs of public. (Radio Liberty, 2021d).

Candidate for the Mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze, also changed his rhetoric before the run-off in local self-government elections. As opposed to the first round when his communication with the voters was based on “European-style, forward-looking election campaign” and demonstration of future urban development plans of the city, Kakha Kaladze also started to speak about problems during the rule of the previous government:

Unfortunately, today we have to remind everyone once again how people’s dignity was infringed, how terror and violence took place, how property rights were disregarded, how innocent youth were murdered, how freedom of speech was suppressed, how media was cracked down and there was cynicism, lies and racketeering. This is a dark past of our country and our city which we will never, ever, come back. However, we should not forget to know – what path did we take and what mistakes we made (Georgian Dream, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This document offers an overview of propaganda techniques of persuasion:

- 1) Negative name calling against undesirable subjects and groups together with shaping an image of an enemy.
- 2) The *ad nauseam* technique that implies constant repetition of one slogan or idea and seeks to convince the public with seemingly the most inconceivable lies.
- 3) Generalization that puts the entire cluster into a negative light through generalization of a specific occurrence, subject or idea.
- 4) Challenging the accuser is based on the logic that the best defense is a good offense.
- 5) Huckster technique that employs absurd lies and conspiracy theories.
- 6) The ‘what-aboutism’ technique that instead of giving answers to difficult questions either comes forward with counter-allegations or shifts the focus to other issues to evade well-deserved criticism.
- 7) The ‘bandwagon’ approach that implies the use of the notion: “everybody does that” and urges the members of society to bandwagon this or that group and mimic crowd behavior.

- 8) Cardstacking, the taking inconsistent positions (similar to card stacking) where the purveyor does not think much about homogeneity of messages and acts only according to practical needs. It is perfectly possible in this case to argue one thing today and start to claim the absolute opposite the very next day.

All eight of these techniques are universal and can be used for a variety of situations and purposes. However, the cases examined in this article – Russian propaganda and the Georgian government's rhetoric – exhibit similar characteristics, which means they are primarily based on a negative agenda, create enemy images and promote conspiracy theories to keep their misdeeds out of sight.

Notably, negative propaganda campaigns used by the Georgian authorities have become particularly robust during pre-election periods and during assorted political or social crises. The ruling Georgian Dream party seeks to discredit its opponents by negative name calling. The labels of the “war party” and the wider GWP are vivid examples since the target was essentially the UNM opposition party, albeit it is routinely used against the other opposition parties. Georgian Dream has broadened usage of these war party labels to target their supporters including Georgia's Office of the Public Defender (Ombudsman), all media outlets, western politicians and any actor who criticizes the government. The rhetoric of the government not only bears similarities to Russian propaganda in its approaches but also disseminates precisely the same message. Specifically, it is evident that the GWP label, around which the corresponding conspiracy theory was constructed, was already firmly entrenched in the Russian narrative. Following the commencement of the war in Ukraine, Russian propaganda increasingly employed this epithet to characterize Western countries.

For years, the Georgian government has been sowing the fear that the opposition parties were about to start a coup d'état. Since 2013, the claim is that several cases have been launched to this aim, although none of them were investigated, which lends credibility to an argument that such statements were intended for propaganda purposes alone.

Furthermore, when targeted with criticism, the Georgian Dream starts to employ the counter-allegation technique and instead of speaking on challenges currently facing the country, strives to remind wrongdoings of the previous government. The Georgian Dream's rhetoric, when discussing poverty in Georgia, problems afflicting the judiciary, safety of journalists or fuel prices still heavily features problems during the rule of the previous government. Moreover, it has been tenth year already, since the Georgian Dream started to feed voters with propaganda narratives that states the although previous government of UNM was a politically “bankrupt” party, the “ending” of the UNM remained as a strategic goal of the country in the run-up to every election.

Finally, it is possible to conclude that public communication of the Georgia Dreams' government implies not only making severe allegations against political opponents and civil society with critical thoughts, but also sowing groundless fear among the population, and through making manipulative public sentiments attempting to shape a negative agenda. This should be a matter of concern for Georgia's populace. This type of communication, akin to Russian propaganda, contributes to disorientation and disunity throughout the society.

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