

II. BUDGET CONTRACTS WITH MEDIA OUTLETS PROMOTING HATE SPEECH, ANTI-WESTERN SENTIMENTS AND RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA PLATFORMS

Summerizing paragraph: Separate entities continued to sign service contracts with media outlets with editorial policies favoring xenophobia, homophobia and anti-Western sentiments in 2015 too. The news agency Newspress, associated with the pro-Russian political party Democratic Movement and the Russian propaganda media platform Sputnik, which is engaged in promoting Sputnik and spreading anti-Western messages is among media outlets that receive budget funding (in 2015: GEL 23,371; in 2016: GEL 28,941).

On July 7, 2015, the Media Development Foundation (MDF) released a report on the expediency of signing service contracts with those media outlets, whose editorial policies involve promoting hate speech and anti-Western sentiments. The survey findings were reflected in the fifth monitoring cycle report on Georgia released by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on March 1, 2016⁷, which calls on the Georgian authorities to review their contracts with such media outlets. In particular:

“ECRI recommends that the authorities review their contracts with media outlets and cancel or not renew them in cases where media are known to engage in racist or homo-/transphobic hate speech. The authorities should also ensure that future contracts contain a clause stipulating that racist or homo-/transphobic hate speech will result in contract termination” (33).

It should be noted that in 2015 separate government agencies still continued to sign service contracts with such media outlets, whose editorial policies involve promoting hate speech and stirring up anti-Western sentiments. These media outlets are: Media Union Obiektivi, newspapers Sakartvelos Respublika, Alia, Kviris Kronika and Asaval-Dasavali. Besides these outlets, two new online editions – newspress.ge and exclusivenews.ge – also appeared in this category. Unlike the above mentioned media outlets, newspress.ge stirs up anti-Western sentiments indirectly, through promoting Russian propaganda platforms, including Sputnik – Georgia.

Table 2.1. Budget contracts with media outlets signed in 2015 promoting hate speech, anti-Western sentiments and Russian propaganda sources

Media outlet	Contract price
Sakartvelos Respublika	85 916
Obiektivi (Etaloni)	68 616
Alia and Kviris Kronika	21 816
Newspress.ge	23 371
Exclusivenews	4 730
Asaval-Dasavali	2 500

⁷ The fifth monitoring cycle report on Georgia released by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on March 1, 2016. <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Georgia/GEO-CbC-V-2016-002-ENG.pdf>

Newspress.ge Affiliated with Sputnik-Georgia and Democratic Movement

In 2015 the agency, which was established in 2012, signed contracts worth GEL 23 371 with 11 public agencies⁸. It should be noted that the list of agencies that allocated funds to newspress.ge in 2015 involved the Ministry of Defence, Georgian Embassy to Hungary, Tbilisi City Assembly and separate units of the Abkhazian government. According to the preliminary data, contract financing of newspress.ge increased in 2016 and amounted to GEL 28 941. The list of organizations⁹ that signed contracts with the news agency in 2016 involves, among others, the Ministries of Agriculture and Corrections and the National Center for Educational Quality and Enhancement.

Party affiliations. The media outlet is affiliated with opposition Democratic Movement party led by Nino Burjanadze. Newspress was founded in 2012 by Alexander Chubinidze, who was the head of press office at Public Assembly¹⁰. In its turn, Public Assembly is affiliated with Democratic Movement and it is led by ex-Parliament Speaker, Nino Burjanadze; the latter is also a member of the board of People's Assembly. Among the agencies that have financed the news agency are separate units of the Abkhazian government (Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Abkhazia; Office of the Minister of Confidence Building and Reconciliation Issues of Abkhazia) led by Vakhtang Kolbaia; the latter is a member of Democratic Movement.

Editorial policy. Unlike other media outlets with radical editorial policies, who openly promote homophobic, xenophobic and anti-Western sentiments, Newspress disseminates information similar to those covered by other media outlets indirectly, within the formats of press reviews, interviews and other rubrics. For example, on May 4, almost two weeks before the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, which is associated with physical violence in Georgia, the news agency released a homophobic article prepared by Kviris Kronika titled "Political prostitute Kaladze makes us accustomed to the idea that the parade of pederasts will be held by all means."¹¹

The online portal also popularizes Sputnik Georgia, the main propaganda platform founded by the Russian government, and disseminates information with anti-Western content prepared by other Russian-language sources, which will be thoroughly discussed below.

⁸ Ministry of Defence; Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Abkhazia; Embassy of Georgia to the Republic of Hungary; Office of the Minister of Confidence Building and Reconciliation Issues of Abkhazia; Tbilisi City Assembly; Public Service Development Agency; National Wine Agency of Georgia; Georgian State Hydrographic Service; Service Agency of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia; Financial Analysis Service and Sakaeronavigatsia.

⁹ Ministry of Agriculture; Ministry of Corrections; National Center for Educational Quality and Enhancement; Office of the Minister of Confidence Building and Reconciliation Issues of Abkhazia; Gymnastics Development Sports Center under the Tbilisi Municipality; State Construction Company; Georgian State Hydrographic Service; Service Agency of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia and Sakaeronavigatsia.

¹⁰ Newspaper Akhali Taoba, February 3, 2012. "Who created a new news agency Newspress – Merabishvili or Ivanishvili?" <http://www.opentext.org.ge/index.php?m=4&y=2012&art=2501>

¹¹ <http://bit.ly/1Tr5P5l>

Promotion of Sputnik–Georgia and other Russian platforms in Newspress. A five-month observation over Newspress has shown that the online edition tries to keep balance and along with diverse sources, it offers its readers Russian propagandistic platforms and their messages. For example, press reviews contain materials not only from Russian-language propagandistic sources, but also from authoritative Western editions (such as Washington Post, Voice of America, etc.). However, main emphasis is laid on Sputnik, as well as other Russian propagandistic platforms and they have quite a different implication in Newspress largely due to the following circumstances:

- Newspress considers Sputnik–Georgia not only in the context of press review, but systematically popularizes this platform through constant coverage of its new projects. During five months the web portal posted 16 materials covering various cultural or public activities, as well as new media projects implemented by Sputnik–Georgia.
- Director of Newspress, Aleko Chubinidze simultaneously works for Russia’s propagandistic platform Sputnik¹², which considers the reaction of western states on Russia’s propaganda in the context of internal security problem of Eastern European countries¹³.
- Newspress releases an interview with Modest Korelov, Russia’s main ideologist in CIS issues, according to which Georgia will join NATO in exchange for losing its territories (see table 2.2.). Modest Korelov has been declared persona non grata in Latvia (2009)¹⁴ and Lithuania (2009)¹⁵. In 2012, the President of breakaway Transnistria awarded the Order of Friendship to him¹⁶. Modest Korelov is the founder of Russian propagandistic websites regnum.ru, polit.ru and regions.ru. Since 2013, he has been editor of Rex.ru. His name is also associated with Tbilisi-based pro-Russian media portal Sakinformi.
- The messages made by Sputnik as well as other Russian-language propaganda platforms, which are re-distributed by Newspress, are in line with those anti-Western and xenophobic messages, which are disseminated through various anti-Western platforms (see table).

¹² Damoukidebloba.com, July 24, 2015. “Who works for Sputnik?” http://damoukidebloba.com/c/news/vin_mushaobs

¹³ For example, radio interview “Dangerous Priority”, host Aleko Chubinidze; respondent Simon Kiladze; topic: the statement made by American republican congressman on the urgency of the struggle against Russian propaganda, <http://sputnik-georgia.com/radio/20150813/228292209.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/12093-foreign-minister-declares-two-russian-citizens-persona-non-grata-in-latvia>

¹⁵ http://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2009/07/090730_kolerov_stop_lithuania.shtml

¹⁶ <http://www.iarex.ru/news/28849.html>

Table 2.2. Anti-Western and xenophobic messages in Newspress citing Sputnik and other Russian sources

Message	Russian-language sources	Title/fragment
NATO in exchange for territories	Noev-kovcheg.ru	Modest Korelov: “Georgia will probably join NATO, but only without Abkhazia and South Ossetia.” ¹⁷
NATO = threat	Fap News (ФАП News)	“Georgia will be absorbed by NATO.” ¹⁸
	Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obzrenie (Независимое военное обозрение)	“Russian military press writes about possible efforts in the Caucasus in case of war with NATO.” ¹⁹
	Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Независимая газета)	“Tbilisi again felt Russian threat and following small progress the Georgian-Russian relationship started to aggravate.” ²⁰
Georgian army is weak, NATO has done nothing to assist it.	Voенно- Promishlenni Curier (Военно-промышленный курьер)	“Georgia can only boast about its army.” ²¹
Georgian-American-British military exercises = provocation against Russia	Krasnaya Zvezda (Красная звезда)	“Russia warned Georgia strictly that Moscow considers the military drills in Vaziani a provocation.” ²²
Richard Lugar laboratory = threat	Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obzrenie (Независимое военное обозрение)	Russian press accuses Georgia of producing biological weapons. Was swine flu disseminated from Georgia? ²³

¹⁷ <http://bit.ly/1Rn8qZ4>

¹⁸ <http://bit.ly/1TJRL0D>

¹⁹ <http://bit.ly/1sNTCPn>

²⁰ <http://bit.ly/1RnaLmT>

²¹ <http://bit.ly/1VoOiwK>

²² <http://bit.ly/1XQLUzo>

²³ <http://bit.ly/1Ubhlfl>

	Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie (Независимое военное обозрение)	It is possible to create Zika virus in Georgia – indirect accusation of the Russian side ²⁴
Turkey = threat	Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Независимая газета)	“Turkey may demand Georgia to give up Adjara” ²⁵
	Commerçant (Коммерсантъ)	“Survey results: Europeans doubt that Turkey is cooperating with the Islamic State.” ²⁶
Religious conflict in Georgia was provoked by the European Institute	Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Независимая газета)	“Georgia again walked a tightrope and managed not to get involved in the conflict with a religious context.” ²⁷
		“This time, tensions [in Adigeni] were caused by the fact that the government allocated a plot of land for a Muslim cemetery that was dictated by one of the European institutes.”
Crimea is a part of Russia	Sputnik. Mnenia	“One third of Europeans and Americans consider Crimea to be a part of Russia.” ²⁸
Armenians try to spread dividing policy over Georgia too	Politicheskie Izvestiya (Политические Известия)	Armenian provocations against Georgia” ²⁹ „Armenia has been the source of conflicts, splits and provocations in the Caucasus over centuries. The question is about the tactics through which Yerevan tries to establish dominance in the South Caucasus; Armenia actively follows the principle: divide and rule.”

²⁴ <http://bit.ly/1XQPW14>

²⁵ <http://bit.ly/1syScrg>

²⁶ <http://bit.ly/22nzdg0>

²⁷ <http://bit.ly/22tjL1S>

²⁸ <http://bit.ly/1skQ6LM>

²⁹ <http://bit.ly/1qVx7pQ>

One of the main media platforms of Russian propaganda – Sputnik – is an international multimedia project, which was created under the Russian President’s order dated December 9, 2013. The government-owned Sputnik has replaced RIA Novosti and Russian Voice news agencies on the international arena. Sputnik-Georgia was officially registered in the Georgian public registry on January 23, 2015.

Sakartvelos Respublika newspaper

In 2015, newspaper Sakartvelos Respublika received the largest funding – GEL 85 916 – among print media. The newspaper signed contracts on advertising services with 13 public agencies³⁰. It should be noted that the list of these public agencies contains the Government of Georgia, Ministry of Education and Culture of Abkhazia and National Bank of Georgia. In 2013–2014, the funding of Sakartvelos Respublika amounted to GEL 63 923 with the Abkhaz government’s office, Finance and Economy Ministries of Adjara, Road Department and other agencies being among the sponsors.

In its report released in 2015³¹, MDF brings several headlines from Sakartvelos Respublika to illustrate its homophobic, xenophobic and anti-Western editorial policy: “Does the road towards NATO and Europe go through the Georgians’ asses?”; “Before we have turned into Sodom and Gomorra”; “France turned pederast, Vladimir “the Strong Man” and a lawyer in Nakhalovka”; “Will Georgia turn Chinese or Wonderful?” and others.

Obiektivi TV

Etaloni Media received GEL 68 616 for producing TV program Etaloni aired on Obiektivi TV. A part of contracts envisaged transfer of liabilities undertaken on Georgian Public Broadcaster to Obiektivi TV. The contract was signed with 16 public agencies³² with 12 local municipalities among them. The Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia also provided support to Obiektivi TV. In 2013–2014, the total amount of budget contracts signed with Obiektivi was GEL 52 167. These contracts were signed with the Ministries of Education, Defence, Internal Affairs as well as various entities of the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Agriculture³³.

According to the MDF’s early reports, Obiektivi pursues anti-Western, Turkophobic and homophobic editorial policy. The channel airs Russian-language films and stories with anti-Western content. According to the fifth monitoring cycle report on Georgia released by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), “Obiektivi TV has long pursued an anti-Turkish editorial

³⁰ The government’s office; Ministry of Education and Culture of Abkhazia; United Water Supply Company of Georgia; Roads Department of Georgia; National Environmental Agency; National Bank of Georgia; Telavi Municipality; Georgian National Academy of Sciences; Ministry of Finance and Economy of Adjara; Raphiel Dvali Institute of Machine Mechanics; Ivane Beritashvili Center of Experimental Biomedicine; Georgian State Electrosystem; Georgian National Film Center

³¹ <http://mediameter.ge/ge/research/sabiujeto-saxsrebi-sizulvilis-enisa-da-antidasavlurigancqobebis-gamavrcelebel-mediashi>

³² Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs; Tbilisi Transport Company; the Municipalities of Adigeni, Dusheti, Kazbegi, Martvili, Oni, Khulo, Kaspi, Akhmeta, Zestaponi, Ninotsminda, Shuakhevi, Senaki, Ambrolauri and Abasha.

³³ <http://mediameter.ge/en/research/public-funds-media-promoting-hate-speech-and-anti-western-sentiments>

policy, visible in its talk shows through comments made by presenters and the choice of guests. It also led a campaign against a new mosque in Batumi. Irma Inashvili, founder of Obiektivi and leader of the Alliance of Patriots party, stated: “First and foremost, they realize that threat which the construction of a new mosque, or to be more precise, erecting a symbol of might of Turkey in the center of Batumi can cause.”³⁴

The TV channel is affiliated with the Alliance of Patriots party.

Alia and Kviris Kronika newspapers

In 2015, Alia Holding members – newspapers Alia and Kviris Kronika signed contracts on advertising and information services with six public agencies³⁵, among them the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Protection. Total amount of contracts signed by Alia Holding members in 2013–2014 with various entities of the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Agriculture amounted to GEL 55 835³⁶.

According to the MDF reports, these newspapers pursue homophobic, xenophobic and anti-Western editorial policies that was also highlighted in the fifth monitoring cycle report on Georgia released by ECRI³⁷.

Various

In 2015, the contracts worth GEL 4730 and GEL 2500 were signed with newspaper Asaval-Dasavali and web portal Exclusivenews, respectively.

It should be noted that advertising materials related to the information campaign on the report summarizing the government’s three-year work were placed in newspaper Asaval-Dasavali under Decree 2552 of the Government of Georgia dated November 27, 2015. A contract with Exclusivenews was concluded by the Interior Ministry’s Security Police.

Besides openly declared xenophobic and homophobic content, newspaper Asaval-Dasavali is also stirring up anti-Western sentiments. The newspaper’s platform is more of ethno-nationalistic nature, but as demonstrated by the MDF’s research, its content is identical to the narrative of openly pro-Russian outlets.

Exclusivenews disseminated misinformation with homophobic content about the marriage of ex-UNM member, Giorgi Vashadze’s brother to a man with a headline “Vashadze’s brother got married to a man³⁸”. Davit Vashadze filed a lawsuit against Exclusivenews and won the case in the first instance court.

³⁴ <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Georgia/GEO-CbC-V-2016-002-ENG.pdf>

³⁵ Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Protection; Notary Chamber of Georgia; Public Service Development Agency; National Center for Teacher Professional Development; Entrepreneurship Development Agency; European Youth Olympic Festival Tbilisi 2015 Organizing Committee;

³⁶ <http://mediameter.ge/en/research/public-funds-media-promoting-hate-speech-and-anti-western-sentiments>

³⁷ 1 March, 2016 <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Georgia/GEO-CbC-V-2016-002-ENG.pdf>

³⁸ Presently this article is not available at the website of Exclusivenews currently, but Georgia and the World (<http://bit.ly/ITS3vUK>) and for.ge (http://www.for.ge/view.php?for_id=35345&cat=9) have posted it on their respective websites citing the agency.