

ON THE FRONTLINE

Countering Disinformation in Georgia



**CHAVCHAVADZE
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*Ilya Chavchavadze Center for
European Studies and Civic Education*



On The Frontline: Countering Disinformation in Georgia

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CONTENTS

Key terms.....	2
Propaganda: history, goals and fight against it.....	3
A Brief Overview of Russian propaganda	4
The Russian lie No 1: US creates biological weapons in biolaboratories in Georgia and Ukraine to spread them	6
The Russian lie No 2: Russia defends Orthodox Christianity and traditional values, while the West promotes perversion and tries to destroy national identity	8
The Russian lie No. 3: The West promised Russia that NATO would not expand eastward	12
The Russian lie No 4: NATO threatens Russia	14
The Russian lie No. 5: Russia does not bomb civilian infrastructure and does not destroy civilians	16
The Russian lie No 6: Nazis rule Ukraine – the Nazi Ukrainian government has committed genocide against the Russian-speaking population of Donbass.....	19
The Russian lie No. 7: Russia is a global superpower	21
The Russian lie No 8: The US is as much an aggressor as Russia.....	23
The Russian lie No 9: Fearing Russia, the governments flee	24
The Russian lie No. 10: Ukrainians harvest organs of fallen soldiers..	26
Bibliography.....	28

RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA AGAINST THE FREE WORLD

Context, examples, counterarguments

Key terms

Propaganda: Encyclopedia Britannica defines propaganda as the dissemination of information, facts, arguments, rumors, half-truths, or lies, to influence public opinion, which is often conveyed through the media.¹ According to this definition, propaganda does not a priori mean the dissemination of false information. Propaganda messages are often based on truth and, in such cases, it is important to reconsider the context.

Disinformation: The deliberate dissemination of lies or information in a distorted context intended to mislead a target audience and distort reality. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines disinformation as false information deliberately and often covertly spread (such as by spreading rumors) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth.²

Misinformation (unwittingly spreading disinformation): The Georgian language has not yet have a term for the involuntary spread of disinformation. In English, this phenomenon is called misinformation.

1. Lannes Smith, Bruce. 2019. "Propaganda." In Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/propaganda>.

2. Merriam-Webster. 2019. "Definition of DISINFORMATION." Merriam-Webster.com. 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disinformation>.

Wardle defines misinformation as the spreading of false information unwittingly, without the intention of harming anyone.³

Psychological warfare: According to Encyclopedia Britannica, it means the use of propaganda against an enemy to demoralize it and break its will to fight or resist.⁴

Hybrid warfare: In contrast to the terms above, there is a great diversity of opinions regarding the definition of hybrid warfare. According to Hoffman, hybrid warfare is a combination of various components, such as conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist attacks, indiscriminate violence, and coercion.⁵ This definition was later supplemented with additional components by Glenn, according to whom hybrid warfare involves the use of political, military, economic, social, and information means along with conventional irregular, terrorist, and criminal methods.⁶ Following this definition, propaganda can be regarded as one of the tools of a hybrid war.

Propaganda: History, Goals and and Fighting against it

Human began to disseminate information for military and political purposes even before the invention of writing. The first evidence of propagandist information dissemination was found in ancient Mesopotamia. Scenes of military victories and patron gods of cities are depicted on city walls and other architectural monuments in public

3. Wardle, Claire. 2017. Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking. Council of Europe.

4. The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. 2015. "Psychological Warfare." In Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/psychological-warfare>.

5. Hoffman, Frank G. 2007. Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars. Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies.

6. Glenn, Russell W. 2009. "Thoughts on "Hybrid" Conflict." Small Wars Journal. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/188-glenn.pdf>. Accessed on 5 October, 2023.

places that have survived from those times. The purpose of depicting such scenes was to demonstrate to visitors the power of the city and to inhabitants the might of the ruler, while for the local elite it was a means of consolidating and mobilizing the masses.

The ancient Greeks were also well aware of the power of propaganda. One of the ‘propaganda’ operations that accompanied the military victories of Alexander the Great was establishing cities in the captured territories that carried the name of the commander in chief, depicting him in art, inventing and spreading legends about Alexander’s proximity to the gods, etc. Such an operation helped Alexander the Great demoralize adversaries and maintain his influence in the captured territories.

Over time, the growing number of literate people, the invention of the printing press, the emergence of print media, the invention of radio and television, and finally the massive spread of the Internet and social networks further increased the role of information and made its centralized use possible for military and political purposes.

The era in which we now live has already been called the Information Age. Never before in human history has there been so much information in circulation and available to so many people at once. Along with significant advantages, this also presents threats. Hostile countries or their affiliated organizations can transmit propaganda messages to target audiences continuously and in a matter of seconds. Such messages are usually well-veiled and may often even contain the truth, but in a distorted context that determines their impact on the behavior of the recipients.

Therefore, in the world today, and especially for citizens of states neighboring such an aggressive country as Russia, it is vitally important to know the methods necessary to discern propaganda messages. Often, propaganda is so subtle, and the flow of disinformation so consistent that even a well-versed person finds it difficult to recognize it in time. The fight against propaganda has many dimensions. First, it is the state that is targeted by propaganda that must take countermeasures. Relevant institutions of the state must strengthen society’s resilience to propaganda and raise awareness of it. Ordinary citizens also have an important role in countering propaganda. A strong civil society is resilient

to propaganda messages from enemies. To combat propaganda, every citizen must ask critical questions. Otherwise, each of us may unwittingly contribute to the spread of enemy propaganda.

The five-question model

The authors of propaganda messages wage psychological warfare by using topics that interest the public and shape public opinion, which can have a strong political, social, and economic impact. Therefore, it is important to be critical of every new piece of information on such topics. Asking specific questions helps you quickly analyze the news. Such questions are as follows:

- **Who?** – To avoid falling victim to someone’s malicious intent, it is necessary to ask who is the source of the information and who is disseminating it.
- **What?** – What is the main idea of the information being disseminated and is it supported by evidence? What could be the purpose of its publication?
- **Where?** – Where did we find this information? Is the source credible?
- **When?** – When was the information distributed? Does it correspond to contemporary reality? If the information is related to history, does it provide an appropriate historical context?
- **Why?** – Ask why the information was published. Is there any interest behind its publication?

These questions will help you treat any information critically and easily identify propaganda and disinformation.

A Brief Overview of Russian propaganda

Russian propaganda has become a hot topic in international politics in recent years. Experts, media, researchers, politicians, and governments from various countries. Public attention to this topic has increased due

to the Kremlin-provoked tension between Russia and the West, but this does not mean that Russia has not used propaganda before. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new Russian government developed into a regime prone to authoritarianism rather than a democratic one, which soon ended its seemingly friendly relationships with the free world and launched a hybrid war against the West and the post-Soviet space. Against the post-Soviet countries that are fully integrated into the West and Euro-Atlantic space (the Baltic states), Russia uses mainly means of information warfare, as it does not have sufficient power to wage conventional warfare against them, while in the case of Georgia and Ukraine, it does not hesitate to resort military force too.

Compared to Soviet propaganda, Russian propaganda is less ideologized. The main line of Soviet propaganda was to demonstrate the advantage of the communist system over the western ‘imperialist and capitalist’ world. In this narrative, the Soviet Union was presented to the world as the ‘liberator of the oppressed working class’. Within this line of propaganda, the West was portrayed as evil, and the Soviet Union as virtue. Today, Russian propaganda has no such clear line, but rather is inconsistent and often characterized by contradictory messages. A study by King’s College London found that Four weeks after poisoning Skripals, Russian state-funded media outlets published 138 contradictory narratives. Russian state-funded media outlets published 138 contradictory narratives.⁷ **The dissemination of contradictory narratives is one of the elements of Russian propaganda aimed at confusing the target audience, causing information overload, and achieving so-called strategic ambiguity.** Post-Soviet Russian propaganda has actually returned to the ‘messianistic’ idea of Tsarist Russia about Russia is the defender of Orthodox Christians and Moscow being the ‘third Rome’.

According to the US Department of State, there are five recurring themes used in contemporary Russian propaganda.

1. Russia is an innocent victim (for example, the West’s harsh re-

7. King’s College London. 2019. “Russian State Media Weaponises News to Sow Confusion and Division.” Archive.org. King’s College London. March 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220112233518/https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/how-russian-state-media-weaponises-news>.

sponse to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014 was labeled ‘Rus-sophobia’ by Russian propagandists);

2. Historical revisionism (Russia often rewrites history in an attempt to eliminate moments unfavorable to Kremlin, for example, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Holodomor, the inhu-mane Gulag prison system, the Katyn massacre, etc.⁸);
3. Russia claims that the collapse of western civilization is immi-nent (this combines narratives about the “spirituality, traditions, and virtues’ of Russia and the “decaying West”);
4. The U.S. sponsors revolutions (according to this narrative, any struggle of people in the world, including in Georgia, for a better country is not the will of citizens, but revolutions organized by the US);
5. Reality is what Russia says it is.⁹ Russian propagandists often spread stories that are strikingly different from each other but insist that each of them is true. A blatant example of this is the Skirpals case mentioned above.

Georgia has repeatedly experienced numerous problems that arise from its neighborhood with such an aggressive and hostile state. Our country is still at war with Russia, which has occupied Georgian territories since 1992-1993, expanded them to the Kodori Gorge and Akhagori in 2008, and continues its creeping occupation to date. Russia continues to fight the Georgian state through hybrid warfare.

8. Authors’ note: Russia is actively using history revision in relation to Georgia and Ukraine. Regarding Ukraine, the Kremlin claims that the country was created by Lenin. Putin has also repeatedly tried to falsify Georgia’s history. For example, he has claimed that South Ossetia became part of Russia in 1774; that Georgia occupied Abkhazia with the help of the German army in 1918; that Georgia conducted a genocide of Abkhazians and South Ossetians, etc.

9. “Russia’s Top Five Persistent Disinformation Narratives.” 2022. United States Department of State. January 20, 2022. <https://www.state.gov/russias-top-five-persistent-dis-information-narratives/>.

In light of the current defense effort, the best defense is an informed citizenry, which is one of the foundations of a resilient society. Therefore, we provide here a few myths/legends made-up by Russian propaganda against Georgia and Georgia's international partners, which we believe are important to debunk to reinforce the capacity of resistance among Georgian citizens.

The Russian lie No 1:

The United States creates biological weapons in biolaboratories in Georgia and Ukraine to spread them

The anatomy of the myth: Russian officials and pro-Kremlin media outlets started talking about biolabs in Georgia and Ukraine and the creation of bioweapons there in 2011. Gennadii Onishchenko, a member of the Russian State Duma, was the first to raise this topic. According to him, the US-funded Lugar Laboratory in Georgia was creating a swine fever virus for economic sabotage against Russia's southern regions.¹⁰ In 2018, the former Georgian Security Minister, Igor Giorgadze, who held this post from 1993 to 1995, said that this Lugar Laboratory had conducted dangerous experiments on Georgian servicemen with the participation of American doctors and military personnel.¹¹ In the "journalistic investigation" on the experiments on Georgian servicemen in the Lugar Laboratory, carried out by Diliana Gaitanjieva, numerous fake documents were published that testified to the experiments carried out in the laboratory.¹²

Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Federation intensified speculation about the American biolabs operating in Ukraine. Russian officials claimed that during the military operation

10. "Civil Georgia | Head of RosPotrebNadzor Accuses Georgia of 'Sabotaging' Russia with Swine Fever." n.d. Civil.ge. Accessed September 29, 2023. <https://civil.ge/archives/186295>.

11. "Американских биологов обвинили в экспериментах над грузинами." 2018. Коммерсантъ. September 11, 2018. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3738485>.

12. <https://southfront.org/pentagon-bio-weapons/>

to “liberate” Donbass, biolabs were discovered in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, where bioweapons were being developed. *“While speaking at the Congress, Victoria Nuland confirmed the presence of American biolaboratories in Ukraine. She said that the United States should make every effort to prevent lab materials from falling into the hands of Russia. It is not hard to guess what these materials are. These materials are illegal and testify to the criminal activity of the United States of America on the territory of Ukraine,”*¹³ Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, said. In March 2022, a representative of the Russian Ministry of Defense, Igor Konashenko, said that traces of a military biological program implemented with US Department of Defense funding had been found in Donbas. According to Konashenko, “the documents obtained proved that biological weapons had been created in Ukrainian biolabs located close to Russia.”¹⁴

The Reality:

1. There is no evidence that biological weapons are being created in laboratories in Georgia and Ukraine. On the contrary, laboratories are actively working on projects aimed at preventing and eliminating biological threats. The Richard Lugar Laboratory was opened in Georgia in 2013, and since then it has been studying the causes of acute respiratory infections; determining the prevalence of norovirus and enterotoxigenic Escherichia coli (ETEC), identifying accurate and practical biologic tools to estimate HIV incidence, identifying mosquitoes (including invasive mosquitoes), sand flies and ticks present in Georgia, and determining their distribution, etc.¹⁵ The key purpose of the Lugar Laboratory is to

13. “Захарова: материалы в лабораториях США на Украине доказывают их преступную деятельность - ТАСС.” n.d. ТАСС. Accessed September 29, 2023. https://tass.ru/politika/14006329?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com.

14. Марина Совина. 2022. “В США подтвердили наличие биологических исследовательских объектов на Украине.” Lenta.RU. Lenta.ru. March 9, 2022. <https://lenta.ru/news/2022/03/09/nuland/>.

15. Review of “Peer Review Transparency Visit to the Lugar Laboratory, Georgia: An Independent Report.” 2018. Submitted by Georgia. <chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibp-cajpcglclefindmkaj/https://test.ncdc.ge/Handlers/GetFile.ashx?ID=ea7d9f23-19a7-4f01-9fab-5a4ad575f468>.

support the government in providing quality health care to the citizens of Georgia.

Since 2005, the United States of America has cooperated with the Ukraine government to strengthen the technical capacity of laboratories working in the area of public health.¹⁶ As part of this cooperation, the countries exchange information on biological threats and work to prevent these threats, not to develop bioweapons, as Russian sources claim. The quote about the creation of bioweapons in Ukraine, which Zakhaharova attributed to Victoria Nuland, is an attempt to spread disinformation. Speaking to Congress, Nuland said that there are biological research institutes in Ukraine that work not to create bioweapons but, on the contrary, to prevent their creation and spread. According to her, the activities of the laboratories in Ukraine include conducting epidemiological and laboratory surveillance of infectious and non-infectious diseases, determining the prevalence of diseases, timely detecting and studying epidemiological outbreaks, and other threats to public health.

The Kremlin's claims that Ukraine is working on biological weapons are also disinformation. The Russian media spread information that during the occupation of Donbas, the Russian military forces found traces of work on these weapons. If this is indeed true, then the question arises as to why they have not presented their evidence to the world.

2. The Lugar Laboratory has repeatedly offered a relevant team of Russian scientists to visit the lab to tour the facility. The Russian side rejected these offers. One such offer was made in 2018, when Georgia invited an independent group of scientific experts. In 2018, 22 researchers from 17 countries visited the Lugar Laboratory. Russian researchers were also invited to the meetings, but declined the invitation. In a published joint report, the invited guests noted that *"the facility demonstrated significant transparency about its activities. The visiting team did not observe anything inconsistent with prophylactic, protective and other peaceful*

16. "WEAPONS Proliferation Agreement between the UNITED STATES of AMERICA and UKRAINE Signed at Kiev." 2005. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/05-829-Ukraine-Weapons.pdf>.

*purposes. Furthermore, all the equipment and infrastructure observed was relevant to the prophylactic, protective, and other peaceful research and diagnostic purposes stated by the visited facility.*¹⁷ The refusal of Russian scientists to visit further strengthens the argument that the allegation of bioweapons being created at the lab is disinformation and that if a Russian team of scientists had traveled to the Lugar Lab, the lies spread by the Kremlin would have been exposed.

3. Russian propaganda accuses the United States of creating bioweapons in post-Soviet countries, while Russia itself: a) together with its ally Bashar al-Asad, has used chemical and biological weapons against civilians; b) poisons opponents of Putin's regime with nerve agents; c) has threatened the whole world with the explosion of the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant; d) constantly resorts to a policy of nuclear blackmail and intimidation. Russian propaganda messages about ongoing biological weapons programs are an attempt to divert attention from crimes committed by Russia. In Syria, Russia helped Bashar Al-Asad to keep in power, who has used chemical and biological weapons against his population more than 100 times.¹⁸ During the war in Ukraine, Russia kept the world under nuclear blackmail by seizing the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant. In 2018, Russia poisoned former double spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia using a nerve agent.¹⁹ Thus, Russia has no evidence against the creation of bioweapons by the US in the post-Soviet countries, while the whole world knows about the crimes committed by the Russian Federation.

17. "Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda Consideration of the Factual Reports of the Meetings of Experts Reflecting Their Deliberations, Including Possible Outcomes Building Confidence through Transparency: Peer Review Transparency Visit at the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health in Tbilisi, Georgia." n.d. Accessed September 29, 2023. <https://factcheck.ge/storage/media/other/2022-03-17/d5ab6880-a5f6-11ec-882d-39ce50e23ae0.pdf>.

18. Arms Control Association. 2012. "Timeline of Syrian Chemical Weapons Activity, 2012-2019 | Arms Control Association." Armscontrol.org. 2012. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Timeline-of-Syrian-Chemical-Weapons-Activity>.

19. Italy, U. S. Mission. 2022. "Putin's Poisons: 2018 Attack on Sergei Skripal." U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Italy. April 11, 2022. <https://it.usembassy.gov/putins-poisons-2018-attack-on-sergei-skripal/>.

Conclusion: The disinformation spread by the Kremlin that US-funded biolabs in Georgia and Ukraine are creating biological weapons and distributing them is a patent lie. The aim of Russian propaganda is to cover up its crimes by diverting attention to 'US crimes' and sowing doubts about Americans' motivation.

The Russian lie No 2:

Russia defends Orthodox Christianity and traditional values, while the West promotes perversion and tries to destroy national identity

The anatomy of the myth: After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation began the process of replacing communism with a new messianic idea built on the primacy of the Russian Orthodox Church and the exceptionalism of Russia. According to this messianic idea, the Russian Federation is the only country in the world that preserves traditional family values. In the same narrative, Russia is presented as the only counterweight to the collective West, which, in turn, fights against Orthodox Christianity, deliberately weakens national identity, promotes ‘perversion’ around the world, and tries to undermine the institution of family.²⁰ Similar propaganda messages are circulating in Georgia. Pro-Russian politicians and the media purposefully spreading disinformation that Georgia’s choice of euro-atlantic course is wrong, as it leads to the destruction of national identity and the degradation of traditional family values. According to a 2020 report by the Media Development Foundation, one of the most powerful narratives of Russian propaganda in Georgia concerns the West’s fight against Georgian identity, and the most common messages are: 1. The West is fighting against Christianity/

20. “The Unexpected Theologian: The Rise of Religious Messaging in Putin’s Re-Making of Russian State Identity > Air University (AU) > Wild Blue Yonder.” n.d. [www.airuniversity.af.edu](https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Wild-Blue-Yonder/Article-Display/Article/3511835/the-unexpected-theologian-the-rise-of-religious-messaging-in-putins-re-making-o/). <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Wild-Blue-Yonder/Article-Display/Article/3511835/the-unexpected-theologian-the-rise-of-religious-messaging-in-putins-re-making-o/>.

Church; 2. The West is imposing homosexuality on us; 3. The West supports legalization of child adoption by same-sex couples.²¹

The Reality:

1. It is Russia that is fighting against the Georgian Church and the Georgian identity, not against the West. For the past three centuries, Russia has been purposely fighting against the Georgian Church and Georgian culture. By destroying the Church and culture, it is trying to destroy the Georgian national identity and distinctiveness. The aforementioned statement is supported by the following historical facts and events:

- In 1811, Russia abolished the autocephaly of the Georgian Church and established the Georgian Exarchate, which was directly subordinate to the Russian Church;
- In the 19th century, Georgian schools and teaching in the Georgian language were banned;
- There are reasonable doubts that Bolshevik special services were involved in the murder of Catholicos-Patriarch Kirion Sadzaglishvili;
- Hundreds of churches, including Svetitskhoveli, Alaverdi, Blue Monastery, Katskhi, Manglisi, and others, were plastered and whitewashed on the direct order of the Russian Church. Russia destroyed the gates of the cathedrals of Svetitskhoveli, Alaverdi, and Ikorta;
- In the 19th century, Russian exarch Pavle Lebedev anathemized the Georgian nation;
- After the annexation of Georgia by Bolshevik Russia and subsequent forced integration into the Soviet Union, 1,305 churches were closed between 1922 and 1953, most of which were destroyed or had their purpose changed. During the years of Soviet rule, churches sacred to Georgians were turned into houses, warehouses, or barns for domestic animals. For example, the Davit Gareji Monastery Complex was used as a barn for sheep;

21. Tamar Kintsurashvili, Tina Gogoladze, Mariam Tsutskiridze, Nika Shekiladze, Tamar Gagniashvili, Sopo Gogadze, Khatia Lomidze, and Sopo Chkhaidze. 2021. Review of Anti-Western Propaganda 2020. Media Development Foundation.

- In 1978, the Soviet leadership intended to deprive the Georgian language of state status in an attempt to erase Georgian identity;
- In 2010, in occupied Abkhazia, a Russian-style dome was placed on the Ilory Monastery, the façade whitewashed, and the Georgian inscriptions plastered over;
- In 2017, an eight-century church and the remains of a settlement were destroyed to develop a military training ground in the village of Tsebelda. Many similar actions could be listed.²²

This is exactly what the Russian Federation has been doing in Ukraine, where Russia, after starting the war, has destroyed more than 115 Orthodox churches and religious buildings.²³

2. The West is not fighting the Georgian Church and identity, but rather helping Georgia preserve religious and cultural monuments. Since the restoration of independence, Georgia has received millions of dollars in financial assistance from the EU and the United States of America to preserve Georgian religious and cultural monuments. Since its inception, the US Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) has spent a total of 2,000,000 dollars on the preservation of religious and cultural monuments in Georgia.²⁴ Some of the projects funded in Georgia by the US Ambassador Fund for Cultural Preservation are:

- 2003-2008 – restoration of the Gelati monastery complex; the project was financed in the amount of USD 600,000;
- In 2004 – conservation of the interior murals in the Ateni Sioni Church; the project was financed in the amount of USD 30,000;
- In 2008 – preservation of the early Christianity frescoes in the Tetri Udabno Monastery; the project was financed in the amount of USD 13,665.

22. Sopo Gelava. 2017. Myth: “The USA Combats Cultural Identity, Russia Is a Third Rome.” Mythdetector.ge. February 23, 2017. <https://mythdetector.ge/ka/mithi-ashsh-ebrdzvis-kulturalul-thvithmqhophadobas-moskovi-mesame-romia/>.

23. “Over 115 Holy Sites Damaged in Ukraine since Start of Russian Invasion, Top UN Official Tells Security Council, Urging Respect for Religious Freedom | UN Press.” n.d. Press.un.org. <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15366.doc.htm>.

24. Tamar Sopromadze. 2022. “What Cult Buildings Have Been Restored in Georgia with Assistance from the US?” Mythdetector.ge. August 8, 2022. <https://mythdetector.ge/ka/romeli-sakulto-nagebobebis-restavratsiashi-daekhmara-amerika-saqarthvelos/>.

- In 2009, protection and preventive conservation treatment of ethnographic objects, medieval manuscripts, and icons at the Svaneti History and Ethnography Museum; the project was financed in the amount of USD 29,100.
- In 2011 – preventive conservation of the Khakhuli triptych was financed in the amount of USD 18,000.
- 2014-2015 - Restoration of Ekaterine Dadiani palace.
- In 2019 - Conservation of the Jvari Monastery in Mtskheta was financed in the amount of \$ 600,000.²⁵

Regarding the European Union, it has been implementing two ‘twinning’ projects since 2010: the project to introduce best practices of the EU best practices into the activities of the National Museum (budget: 2 million euros) and the program of institutional development of the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia (budget: 1 million euros). The Eastern Partnership’s culture program, which focuses on the preservation of Georgian culture and cultural monuments, has been in place since 2012.²⁶ The EU implements the EU4CULTURE project with a budget of 7.85 million euros, which will be spent in 2021-2024 on the preservation and development of Georgian culture.²⁷

In addition, Some NATO and the EU members are countries with predominantly Orthodox Christian Populations, such as Greece, Cyprus, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Romania, and others. The EU spends millions of dollars on the preservation and restoration of monuments of Orthodox Christian culture in these countries. For example, the EU funds the conservation and preservation of the monastery complex on Mount Athos.

25. Sopo Gelava. 2017. Myth: The USA Combats Cultural Identity, Russia Is a Third Rome. Mythdetector.ge. February 23, 2017. <https://mythdetector.ge/ka/mithi-ashsh-ebrdz-vis-kulturul-thvithmqhophadobas-moskovi-mesame-romia/>.

26. Sopo Gelava. 2017. Myth: The USA Combats Cultural Identity, Russia Is a Third Rome. Mythdetector.ge. February 23, 2017. <https://mythdetector.ge/ka/mithi-ashsh-ebrdz-vis-kulturul-thvithmqhophadobas-moskovi-mesame-romia/>.

27. Gvantsa Kokoshvili. 2021. EU4Culture to support cultural development in five Georgian cities – EU for Georgia. EU for Georgia. September 10, 2021. <https://eu4georgia.eu/ka/%E1%83%94%E1%83%95%E1%83%A0%E1%83%9D%E1%83%99%E1%83%90%E1%83%95%E1%83%A8%E1%83%98%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1-%E1%83%9E%E1%83%A0%E1%83%9D%E1%83%94%E1%83%A5%E1%83%A2%E1%83%98-eu4culture-%E1%83%A1/>.

3. Russia accuses the West of promoting a perverted lifestyle, while Russia itself is the ‘leader’ of the world in suicide, domestic violence, divorce, alcoholism, drug abuse, and prostitution. According to 2023 data on suicide rates, Russia ranks ninth out of almost 200 countries with 25.1 suicides per 100,000 people.²⁸ Russia ‘is leading’ in the number of people with alcohol use disorder. Based on 2023 data, Russia ranks second after Hungary. About 20.9% of the Russian population suffers from alcoholism. European countries are also in the top ten, but their respective figures (13% on average) are much lower than those of Russia.²⁹ Along with alcoholism, drug addiction is also widespread among the Russian population. In terms of drug abuse, Russia ranks eighth among 200 countries in the world.³⁰

The divorce rate in Russia is disproportionately high. The Russian Federation ranks third in the world in terms of divorces per 1,000 people (3.9 divorces per 1,000), trailing only the Maldives (5.52) and Kazakhstan (4.6). Of the Western countries, only Belgium (3.7), Ukraine (2.88), and Denmark (2.7) are in the top ten.³¹ Domestic violence against women is also widespread among the Russian population. According to this indicator, Russia ranks 22nd in the world (4.06 cases of domestic violence per 100,000 women). Among European countries, Latvia outranks only by Latvia (4.13 cases of domestic violence per 100,000 women); other Western countries are rarely found in the top 50.³² Russia has the second highest number of sex workers per 10,000 people in the world (208 sex workers per 10,000 people), second only to Sierra Leone (325).³³

28. World Population Review. 2023. “Suicide Rate by Country 2020.” Worldpopulationreview.com. 2023. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/suicide-rate-by-country>.

29. World Population Review. 2021. “Alcoholism by Country 2020.” Worldpopulationreview.com. 2021. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/alcoholism-by-country>.

30. “Drug Use by Country 2022.” 2023. Worldpopulationreview.com. 2023. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/drug-use-by-country>.

31. “Divorce Rates by Country 2020.” 2023. Worldpopulationreview.com. 2023. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/divorce-rates-by-country>.

32. “Countries Ranked by Intentional Homicides, Female (per 100,000 Female).” n.d. Www.indexmundi.com. <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/VC.IHR.PSRC.FE.P5/rankings>.

33. “Wikiwand - Prostitution Statistics by Country.” n.d. Wikiwand. <https://www.wiki>

Conclusions: *The Kremlin's narrative that the West is fighting against the Church and national identity while Russia is defending traditional family values is disinformation. An analysis of statistical data proves quite the opposite.*

The Russian lie No. 3: The West promised Russia that NATO would not expand eastward

The anatomy of the myth: For years, the president of Russia has claimed that in the past the West made a promise to Russia to stop the eastward expansion. *“We have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr. Woerner in Brussels on May 17, 1990. He said at the time that ‘the fact that we are not ready to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee’.*³⁴ Russian President Vladimir Putin said this in Munich in 2007. For his subsequent aggression against neighboring states, Putin held the West responsible, which, according to him, was seizing the zone of Russia’s ‘vital interests’, posing serious challenges to its national security, and ‘encircling’ Russia with NATO, and therefore, Russia’s attacks on neighboring states were not aggression, but an act of Russian defense. With this narrative, Putin ‘justified’ his aggression against Georgia (in 2008) and Ukraine (in 2014, and 2022).^{35,36}

34. www.washingtonpost.com. 2007. “Putin’s Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy,” February 12, 2007. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html>.

35. Putin, Vladimir. 2014. “Address by President of the Russian Federation.” President of Russia. March 18, 2014. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

36. “Russia’s Putin Says Western Leaders Broke Promises, but Did They?” n.d. VOA. <https://www.voanews.com/a/russia-putin-western-leaders-nato-expansion/6392427.html>.

The Reality:

1. The West has never made a promise to Russia not to expand. There has never been a formal agreement signed between Russia and NATO that obliges the North Atlantic Treaty Organization not to expand toward Russia's borders. Putin's repeated mention of NATO's 'promise' not to expand eastward is related to the unification of Germany. After the tearing down of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, negotiations on German unification began between the Soviet Union and Germany. The topic of the talks was the integration of a united Germany into NATO, but the Soviet Union wanted to discuss the issue of additional security guarantees. On 31 January 1990, German Chancellor Hans-Dietrich Genscher stated that NATO would not expand eastward; however, this statement by Genscher was about the stationing of NATO forces in East Germany, not the admission of new members to NATO.³⁷ When discussing NATO expansion, US Secretary of State James Baker stated on 9 February 1990 that NATO's jurisdiction would not move one inch further east, but Baker later retracted this statement because, he said, the word "jurisdiction" gave an impression that NATO would not deploy its force in the territory of East Germany, which would limit Germany's sovereignty. Therefore, Baker soon refuted this statement. Thus, the topic of the negotiations was the deployment/nondeployment of NATO forces in East Germany, not the possibility of admitting new members to the Alliance.³⁸ Neither the West promised not to expand eastward, nor did the Soviet Union put this issue on the negotiating table. The talks on the German issue ended with the signing of an agreement on September 12, 1990, according to which NATO troops would not be stationed on the territory of East Germany until the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from that country. In addition, no nuclear weapons would be stationed on the territory of the former GDR.

37. Baker, Peter. 2022. "In Ukraine Conflict, Putin Relies on a Promise That Ultimately Wasn't." *The New York Times*, January 9, 2022, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/09/us/politics/russia-ukraine-james-baker.html>

38. Myth Detector. 2023. "Three Manipulations about NATO Expansion by Levan Vasadzze," *Mythdetector.ge*. March 1, 2023. <https://mythdetector.ge/ka/levan-vasadzis-3-manipulatsia-natos-gapharthoebase-chechnethsa-da-ruseth-saqarthvelos-molaparakebebeze/>.

As with the 1990 agreement, further NATO enlargement was not mentioned in the act on bilateral cooperation concluded between NATO and Russia in 1997. This document was a kind of framework agreement on the future partnership between NATO and Russia. It should be noted that the agreement did not provide for any restrictions on the admission of new members to NATO.

2. Gorbachev himself denied that Baker and other western leaders made the so-called “promise” not to expand NATO eastward. General Secretary of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev repeatedly stated in his interviews that the 1990 negotiations were related to the issue of German reunification, and the issue of NATO expansion/nonexpansion was not discussed at the talks. *‘The topic of ‘NATO expansion’ was not discussed at all and it wasn’t brought up in those years. Another issue we brought up was discussed: making sure that NATO’s military structures would not advance and that additional armed forces would not be deployed on the territory of the then-GDR after German reunification. Baker’s statement was made in that context... Everything that could have been and needed to be done to solidify that political obligation was done. And it was fulfilled. The agreement on a final settlement with Germany said that no new military structures would be created in the eastern part of the country; no additional troops would be deployed; no weapons of mass destruction would be placed there. It has been obeyed all these years.’*³⁹ Consequently, the fact that the West has never given Russia a promise of nonexpansion of NATO has been repeatedly confirmed by the General Secretary of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, himself. Nor did Eduard Shevardnadze, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, write in his memoirs or say in any of his interviews that such a promise had been made.

3. Putin’s statement that the West initiated conflicts in post-Soviet countries is not true. The only initiator of aggression against post-Soviet countries has always been the Russian Federation. NATO is a military-political defense alliance that has never been an initiator of conflicts. The only time in NATO’s 74-year history when the Alliance engaged in a full-scale war was in 2001, when one of its member states was attacked

39. “Did NATO Promise Not to Enlarge? Gorbachev Says ‘No.’” n.d. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/did-nato-promise-not-to-enlarge-gorbachev-says-no/>.

(9/11 terrorist attack).⁴⁰ With regard to Russian attacks on neighboring countries, three post-Soviet states have become victims of Russian aggression: 1. The conflict in the Tskhinvali region (1991-1992), the war in Abkhazia (1992-1993) and the war in August 2008, when the Russian army invaded Georgia's territory and waged war against the sovereign state; 2. In March 2014, the Russian Federation annexed the territory of neighboring Ukraine (the Crimean peninsula) and started military actions against Ukraine, using local separatists. On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale military operation against Ukraine with the aim of its complete annexation; 3. In Moldova, in 1992, Transnistria declared de facto independence with the help of Russia, thus violating Moldova's territorial integrity. In all three cases, the conflicts were initiated by the Russian Federation. Unlike NATO, which has never started a war in its entire history, the conflicts taking place in post-Soviet countries have been initiated by Russia. Consequently, Putin's claim that NATO and the collective West are the sources of current conflicts is incorrect.

Conclusion: *The Russian propaganda narrative that NATO promised Russia not to expand eastward is based on a lie, as no agreement was ever signed between the West and Russia on the expansion or nonexpansion of NATO.*

40. NATO. 2022. "NATO-Russia: Setting the Record Straight." NATO. September 21, 2022. <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/115204.htm>.

The Russian lie No 4: NATO threatens Russia

The anatomy of the myth: Putin has been actively spreading disinformation against NATO since 2007. According to one of Putin's main lies, NATO poses an existential threat to Russia, restricts its "vital space" and "encircles" it. In 2007, Putin said: *'I think it is obvious that NATO expansion has no relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. In contrast, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended?'*⁴¹

When asked in an interview with Fox News how he would respond if NATO admitted Georgia and Ukraine to its membership, Putin said: *'For us, this is a direct and immediate threat to our national security. Moving the NATO infrastructure to our borders will be a threat, and the reaction will be extremely negative. Russia views the expansion of NATO's infrastructure and military contingent eastward as a threat to its national security.'*^{42,43}

41. "A Speech Delivered at the MSC 2007 by the President Vladimir Putin." n.d. https://is.muni.cz/th/xlghl/DP_Fillinger_Speeches.pdf.

42. "Chris Wallace Interviews Russian President Vladimir Putin." n.d. www.youtube.com. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHY8yG4mVzs&t=929s>.

43. "Putin: NATO Expansion Is a Threat to Russia." n.d. ghn.ge. <https://ghn.ge/news/236397-natos-gafartoeba-safrtkhes-ukmnis-rusets-putini>.

The Reality:

1. NATO is a defense alliance that has never started a war. NATO did not start the wars in Georgia and Ukraine. They were started by the Russian Federation. Established on 4 April 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization aimed to contain the Soviet Union during the Cold War. NATO is an organization established to ensure collective security, the purpose of which is the joint defense of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its member states. The organization is based on the principle of collective defense, which is regulated by Article 5 of its founding treaty.⁴⁴ In its 74-year history, NATO has invoked Article 5 only once, following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, which threatened the security of one of the alliance's member states, the United States of America. Regarding the military campaign in Yugoslavia, NATO entered the conflict after tens of thousands of civilians were killed on the wars that erupted in the territory of Yugoslavia. Unlike NATO, whose actions are guided only by defense considerations, the Russian Federation has always been an initiator of aggression against its neighboring states. It was Russia that invaded Georgia in 2008, invaded the sovereign territory of Ukraine, and annexed the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014. It was Russia that started the war against Ukraine in the Donbas region, using local separatists. Russia started a full-scale war against Ukraine in February 2022.⁴⁵ Given these historical facts, NATO is a defensive alliance and has never waged a war of aggression, unlike the Kremlin, which has always been a key initiator of post-Soviet conflicts.

2. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO began actively working to establish a constructive relationship with Russia. Until 2014, NATO and Russia cooperated closely on regional and global security issues. The annexation of Crimea put an end to this cooperation. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there was a consensus in the West that the successor to the USSR, the Russian Federation, should be integrated into the European and global security systems in some

44. NATO. 2021. "Collective Defence - Article 5." NATO. November 23, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm.

45. Editors, History.com. n.d. "5-Day Long Russo-Georgian War Begins." HISTORY. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/5-day-long-russo-georgian-war-begins>.

form. To this end, the North Atlantic Alliance began close cooperation with Russia. On 22 June 1994, Russia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace program. The NATO-Russia Founding Act, signed on 27 May 1997, was a significant step forward in NATO-Russia relations, defining the framework for further relations between the Alliance and the Russian Federation. Based on this Act, the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (NRPJC) was established, followed by the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) at the NATO summit in Rome in 2002. This body became the main platform, defining the relations between the Alliance and the Russian Federation. Through the platform of the NATO-Russia Council, over the following decades, the parties cooperated on issues such as the fight against terrorism and organized crime, arms control, missile defense, nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, etc.⁴⁶ Relations between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Russia soured after the Kremlin launched a war against Georgia in August 2008, but NATO did not stop cooperation with Russia completely. The Alliance canceled almost all formats of cooperation with Russia only after the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014.⁴⁷ Before 2014, NATO's presence in former Soviet countries was limited to a 5,000-strong military contingent. Troops of this size did not pose any threat to Russia, whose armed forces, as of 2022, counted more than one million troops. Based on the above, NATO has always tried to establish constructive relations with Russia, which invariably ended with Russia abusing the benevolence of NATO and initiating new conflicts in post-Soviet space.

3. Between 1991 and 2000, the West provided the Russian Federation with approximately 60 billion in aid to rebuild an economy that had entered recession after the collapse of the Soviet Union. After the USSR broke up, its successor, the Russian Federation, faced serious economic problems. Help for an extremely impoverished Russia came once again from the West. Various Western countries, as well as financial institutions, provided Russia with billions of dollars in grants and loans, thus helping Russia revive its economy. Between 1992 and

46. "NATO-Russia Relations: The Background." n.d. https://www.nato.int/nato_static-fi2014/assets/pdf/2020/4/pdf/2003-NATO-Russia_en.pdf.

47. NATO-Russia Relations: The Background." n.d. https://www.nato.int/nato_static-fi2014/assets/pdf/2020/4/pdf/2003-NATO-Russia_en.pdf.

1999, the United States provided about USD 7 billion in aid.⁴⁸ In 1991-1998, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) implemented projects worth \$ 5.5 billion in Russia.⁴⁹ Between 1992 and 2001, the World Bank provided Russia with loans worth USD 12.1 billion, of which USD 3.1 billion was spent on investment projects.⁵⁰ The greatest assistance to the Russian Federation came from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which provided grants and loans worth USD 37 billion to the Russian Federation between 1992 and 1999.⁵¹ It was the assistance of western countries and financial institutions that created a solid foundation for the stabilization of the Russian economy. High oil prices in the 2000s have enriched Russia considerably, although before that the existence of this country was entirely dependent on Western grants and loans. Consequently, the claim that the West and NATO pose an existential threat to Russia is a patent lie. History shows the opposite: If the West wanted to destroy Russia, why did it not abandon Russia in its predicament in the 1990s rather than help it out of the economic crisis?

Conclusion: NATO is not a threat to Russia, but rather the opposite: Russia's aggressive actions are a threat to NATO. NATO is a defense organization that, unlike Russia, has never waged wars of aggression. The West has always sought to deepen its cooperation with Russia and has provided economic assistance to the Kremlin in its most difficult periods.

48. "NATO-Russia Relations: The Background." 169

49. "NATO-Russia Relations: The Background." 153

50. "NATO-Russia Relations: The Background." 137

51. "NATO-Russia Relations: The Background." 113

The Russian lie No. 5:

Russia does not bomb civilian infrastructure and does not destroy civilians

The anatomy of the myth: For many years, the Russian Federation has been actively spreading the narrative that in conflicts in which Russia has directly or indirectly participated, the Kremlin bombed only military targets and did not conduct airstrikes against civilians and civilian infrastructure. Such statements have been made by Russian President Vladimir Putin and members of his inner circle during every war waged by Russia. *‘The Russian Aerospace Forces’ strikes in Syria target areas outside the population centers and only facilities of the international terrorist groups. Reports by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is based in Great Britain, are yet another false.*⁵² This was the Kremlin’s official position on the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights report, according to which Russian jets bombed civilian settlements and civilian infrastructure in Syria. The Kremlin repeated the same statement after the full-scale intervention in Ukraine: *“Nobody is going to attack the people of Ukraine,”* Russia’s foreign minister Sergei Lavrov told CNN, *“no strikes on civilian infrastructure.”*⁵³ Vladimir Putin claimed the same.⁵⁴ However, the history and facts of the past two decades show

52. BBC News. 2017. “Syria War: Russia Denies Bombing Civilians in Deir Al-Zour Village,” November 27, 2017, sec. Middle East. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42142579>.

53. Polglase, Gianluca Mezzofiore, Katie. 2022. “Russia Says It’s Not Hitting Ukraine’s Civilian Infrastructure. Evidence Suggests Otherwise.” CNN. February 26, 2022.

54. Welle (www.dw.com), Deutsche. n.d. “Fact Check: Putin’s Lies about the Bombing of Ukraine | DW | 10.07.2022.” DW.COM. <https://www.dw.com/en/fact-check-putins-lies-about-the-bombing-of-ukraine/a-62419749>.

otherwise. Russia has bombed civilian infrastructure and killed civilians in those conflicts in which it has been directly or indirectly involved.

The Reality:

1. During the August 2008 war, Russian air force bombed civilian buildings, killing 228 civilians in Georgia.⁵⁵ Russian airspace began bombing nonmilitary targets on August 7. On 7 August, a Russian warplane dropped several bombs near the village of Shavshvebi, 500 meters from the Georgian military radar. The same day, Russian aircraft bombed the villages of Nuli, Kurta, Tamarasheni, Zemo Prisi, and Shavshvebi.⁵⁶ On 8 August, the highway between Poti and Tbilisi was hit by a Russian military jet. Gori and Kareli villages were also shelled. At around 21:00 o'clock on 8 August, two missiles were fired from a Tochka-U tactical ballistic system belonging to the Russian 58th Army stationed in Ochamchire and they landed in the center of the city of Poti.⁵⁷ On 9 August, in addition to military targets, Russian air forces bombed the port of Poti and the city of Gori.⁵⁸ On August 10, Russia bombed the Baku-Supsa-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Kodori Gorge and the city of Anaklia.⁵⁹ On 11 August, Russian aviation again shelled the city of Gori, destroying dozens of civilian buildings.⁶⁰ On 12 August, the SS-26 Iskander-M ballistic missile

55. Arabuli Nastasia. 2023. Review of "The 2008 War and the consequences of the war in numbers." Radio Liberty, August 7, 2023. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/%E1%83%90%E1%83%92%E1%83%95%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1%E1%83%A2%E1%83%9D%E1%83%A1-%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9B%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1-%E1%83%A8%E1%83%94%E1%83%93%E1%83%94%E1%83%92%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%98-%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%AA%E1%83%AE%E1%83%95%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%A8%E1%83%98/32537884.html>.

56. Hizan. n.d. "The August 2008 War." [Augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge](https://augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge). Accessed September 29, 2023. <https://augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge/#day-7>.

57. Hizan. n.d. "The August 2008 War." [Augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge](https://augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge). Accessed September 29, 2023. <https://augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge/#day-8>.

58. Hizan. n.d. "The August 2008 War." [Augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge](https://augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge). Accessed September 29, 2023. <https://augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge/#day-9>.

59. Hizan. n.d. "The August 2008 War." [Augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge](https://augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge). Accessed September 29, 2023. <https://augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge/#day-10>.

60. Hizan. n.d. "The August 2008 War." [Augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge](https://augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge). Accessed Sep-

system bombed the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline and the city of Gori. According to Human Rights Watch, Russia dropped RBT 250-type cluster bombs on the central square and the stadium of the city of Gori, killing eight civilians and severely injuring 15. Furthermore, on 12 August a Russian helicopter fired on a passenger minibus along the road, killing nine civilians. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, there were 1,040 theft cases, 89 robberies, 132 burglaries, 13 rape cases, seven cases of illegal deprivation of freedom, and 164 cases of damage or destruction of property during the war.⁶¹

2. During the Syrian campaign, Russian aircraft bombed civilian infrastructure, destroying civilians and sites of cultural heritage. In the five months after the Russian Federation was involved in the Syrian civil war, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights recorded 1,700 civilian deaths as a result of the Kremlin's bombardments of civilian infrastructure (hospitals, schools, kindergartens, markets, and residential buildings).⁶² According to Amnesty International, between September and November 2015, Russian aviation bombed civilian facilities in Syria 25 times, killing 250 civilians and 12 soldiers. The strikes destroyed residential buildings, hospitals, and schools.⁶³ According to Human Rights Watch, in January-February 2016, Russia used cluster bombs against civilians 14 times, killing 37 civilians and injuring dozens more.⁶⁴ In September-October 2016, Russian airstrikes on Aleppo were extremely intense. These strikes claimed the lives of 446 civilians from Aleppo. Hospitals, schools, kindergartens, civilian buildings, and cultural heritage monuments,

tember 29, 2023. <https://augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge/#day-11>.

61. Hizan. n.d. "The August 2008 War." Augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge. Accessed September 29, 2023. <https://augustwar.radiotavisupleba.ge/#day-12>.

62. Graham-Harrison, Emma. 2016. "Russian Airstrikes in Syria Killed 2,000 Civilians in Six Months." The Guardian, March 15, 2016, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/15/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-killed-2000-civilians-in-six-months>.

63. "Russia's Bombing in Syria Has Killed Hundreds of Civilians - New Report." n.d. Www.amnesty.org.uk. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/russias-bombing-syria-has-killed-hundreds-civilians-new-report>.

64. "Russia/Syria: Daily Cluster Munition Attacks." 2016. Human Rights Watch. February 8, 2016. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/08/russia/syria-daily-cluster-munition-attacks>.

most of which were several thousand years old, were destroyed.⁶⁵ In May 2020, Amnesty International published a report in which Russia repeatedly “*violated international humanitarian law, committed war crimes and committed crimes against humanity’ in the Syrian war.*”⁶⁶

3. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian air force has bombed the civilian infrastructure of almost all Ukrainian cities, killing thousands of civilians. According to Human Rights Watch, as of January 2023, Russian aggression against Ukraine has killed 6,919 civilians and injured more than 11,000. The figures cited reflect the number of confirmed cases and it is assumed that the actual death toll is much higher. As a result of the aggression of the Russian Federation and Russian air strikes, approximately 14 million Ukrainians were forced to leave their homes, of which 6.5 million moved to other regions of Ukraine and 8 million left the country.⁶⁷ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Russia has carried out more than 700 strikes on Ukrainian hospitals since February 24, 2022. As of November 29, 2022, 144 hospitals had been completely destroyed and 1,033 partially damaged.⁶⁸ In 2022, Russia destroyed around 300 schools. To this day, Russia is actively using cluster bombs to this day. The use of cluster bombs has been recorded in 10 of the 24 regions, killing 689 civilians in February-July 2022 alone. The Russian strikes destroyed the energy infrastructure, leaving the population of many regions without electricity, natural gas, and water for months. Human Rights Watch recorded the killing of 441 people and 86 cases of rape in the Russian-occupied territories in 2022. Since the beginning of the war, Russian aggression has claimed the lives of at

65. “Russia/Syria: War Crimes in Month of Bombing Aleppo.” 2016. Human Rights Watch. December 5, 2016. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/01/russia/syria-war-crimes-month-bombing-aleppo>.

66. “NOWHERE IS SAFE for US’ UNLAWFUL ATTACKS and MASS DISPLACEMENT in NORTH-WEST SYRIA.” n.d. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2420892020ENGLISH.PDF>.

67. Human Rights Watch. 2023. “Ukraine: Events of 2022.” Human Rights Watch. January 12, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/ukraine>.

68. “Home.” n.d. Extranet.who.int. https://extranet.who.int/ssa/LeftMenu/Index.aspx?utm_source=Stopping%20attacks%20on%20health%20care%20QandA&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=Link_who.

least 500 children in Ukraine.⁶⁹ The most egregious example of Russia committing a crime against humanity is the massacre in Bucha. When they entered the town in April 2022, Ukrainian troops found hundreds of corpses scattered across the streets. Russian soldiers killed 458 people on the streets of Bucha.⁷⁰

Conclusion: *The Russia-propagated narrative that Russian aviation does not bomb civilian infrastructure and does not kill civilians is a lie. The chronicles of the August war, the Syrian campaign, and the war in Ukraine suggest otherwise. In all three cases, Russian airstrikes resulted in the destruction of civilian buildings and casualties numbering several hundreds and sometimes several thousands of civilians.*

69. "500 Children Killed during Russian Invasion of Ukraine – Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office." n.d. Ukrainska Pravda. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/08/13/7415366/>.

70. "War Crimes Watch: A Devastating Walk through Bucha's Horror." 2022. AP NEWS. April 9, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-war-crimes-7791e247ce7087dddf64a2bbdcc5b888>.

The Russian lie No 6:

Nazi rule Ukraine – the Nazi Ukrainian government has committed genocide against the Russian-speaking population of Donbass

The Anatomy of Myth: After the Yanukovich government was overthrown and replaced by a pro-Western government as a result of the Euromaidan revolution, Russian propaganda targeted the pro-Western government. Beginning in 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his entourage began actively claiming that Ukraine was under Nazi rule and that this Nazi government was oppressing the Russian-speaking population of the country. According to this false narrative, between 2014 and 2021, Ukrainian authorities carried out genocide on the Russian-speaking population living in the Donbass region. Putin’s regime described the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 as a “special military operation” allegedly aimed at ‘demilitarizing’ and “denazifying” Ukraine. In virtually every speech that Putin has made, he has stated that the military actions of the Russian Army serve the sole purpose of liberating the Ukrainian people and the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine from the Nazi regime. *‘The purpose of this operation is to protect people who for eight years have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kyiv regime. To this end, we will seek to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, as to well as bring to trial those who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation’*,⁷¹ the Russian President said to ‘justify’ the attack on Ukraine. The Russian propaganda message that

71. Treisman, Rachel. 2022. “Putin’s Claim of Fighting against Ukraine ‘Neo-Nazis’ Distorts History, Scholars Say.” NPR, March 1, 2022, sec. Europe. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/01/1083677765/putin-denazify-ukraine-russia-history>.

Ukraine is ruled by Nazis/Neo-Nazis and that the Nazi regime has carried out genocide on the Russian-speaking population of the Donbas region is a lie. The purpose of this lie is to create the illusion that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was 'just'.

The Reality:

1. Ukrainian legislation prohibits Nazi and communist ideologies. Far-right groups have never received more than 2% of the vote in any election in Ukraine. In 2015, the Ukrainian government issued a decree condemning Nazi and communist ideologies. The decree also outlawed the propaganda of Nazi and communist ideologies and the use of their symbols.⁷² Despite the existence of far-right groups in Ukraine, they have never enjoyed popularity among the population and, consequently, have not been able to win any tangible victories in elections. It should be noted that far-right political parties and candidates in a number of European countries have shown better electoral results than in Ukraine. For example, in the 2022 presidential election in France, the radical far-right candidate, Marine Le Pen, received 41.45% of the vote, while in the 2019 presidential election in Ukraine, the radical far-right candidate, Ruslan Koshulynskiy, was able to garner only 1.64% of the vote. In the parliamentary elections, The Platform of United Nationalist received only 2.15% of votes.

The myth of a Nazi regime in Ukraine is rendered absurd by the fact that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is a Russian-speaking Jew by birth who spoke poor Ukrainian before running for president. In the second round of the 2019 presidential election, Zelensky won 73% of the vote.⁷³ One might wonder how Zelensky managed to win the hearts of virtually all segments of the Ukrainian population (3/4 of the country's total population) if he was a neo-Nazi leader with anti-Russian

72. "Про засудження комуністичного та націонал-соціалістичного (нацистського) тоталітарних режимів в Україні та заборону пропаганди їхньої символіки." n.d. Офіційний вебпортал парламенту України. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/317-19#Text>.

73. BBC. 2019. "Ukraine Election: Comedian Zelensky Wins Presidency by Landslide." BBC News, April 22, 2019, sec. Europe. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48007487>.

and anti-Jewish sentiments when, according to 2022 data, Ukraine's Russian-speaking population was more than 30% of the country's total population. It should be noted that Zelenskyy's main support in the election was the Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine, unlike his rival, Petro Poroshenko, who was supported by an electorate with more nationalist sentiments.

2. The 2014-2021 war in the Donbas region claimed the lives of 14,500 people, of which 3,404 were civilians. Ninety percent of the victims were killed in 2014-2015, when Russia, with the help of local separatists in this region, was fighting against the Ukrainian government.

The narrative promoted by Putin about the genocide of the Russian-speaking population of the Donbass region by the Ukrainian government is a lie for three main reasons: 1. As a result of the hostilities that occurred in the Donbass region between 2014 and 2021, 14,500 people were killed. The deaths of 14,500 people in eight years do not fall under the category of genocide under international law; 2. Of the total number of deaths, 3,404 were civilians, 6,500 were Russian separatists involved in the conflict, and 4,400 were Ukrainian military personnel. Consequently, the share of civilian deaths was 23.4%; 3. Up to 90% of civilian deaths over eight years occurred in 2014 and 2015, when Donbass separatists, with Russian support, launched military action against Ukraine.⁷⁴ What makes the above-mentioned narrative even more absurd is the actions of Russian troops in regions of Ukraine inhabited by Russian-speaking population. After the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Russian aviation carried out the harshest strikes on regions with an ethnic Russian population (Kharkiv, Mariupol, and Donbass).

3. The existence of a Nazi regime in Ukraine is claimed by the state, one of its main paramilitary groups, the Wagner Group, is founded on a neo-Nazi platform. There are dozens of neo-Nazi groups in Putin's Russia. The most prominent of them is the Wagner Group, a mercenary unit created under Kremlin directives. The main founders of the group were Yevgenii Prigozhin and Dmitry Utkin, who had clear neo-Nazi aspirations. The backbone of the group was made up of reserve

74. Kitsoft. n.d. "ناريا يم ال سا يروه م ج رد ني اركوا ترافس" - Fake: Ukraine Committed Genocide against Donbas Inhabitants." Iran.mfa.gov.ua. <https://iran.mfa.gov.ua/fa/news/fake-ukraine-committed-genocide-against-donbas-inhabitants>.

officers, and after the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the ranks of Wagner were replenished with prisoners convicted of particularly grave crimes. The name of the group, 'Wagner', indicates neo-Nazi sympathies; The German composer Richard Wagner was Hitler's favorite composer. The insignia of the Wagner Group is reminiscent of Nazi insignia. Their logo is a black letter W on a red background, which is reminiscent of Nazi Germany's main symbol, the black swastika in a white circle on a red background.⁷⁵ The history also suggests its neo-Nazi leanings. The Wagner Group participated in the civil wars in Syria and Libya, where it gained notoriety for its particular brutality. Then Wagner gained a foothold in Africa, where it made efforts to strengthen Russia's influence (Mali, the Central African Republic). After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the Wagner Group that conducted combat operations in the Donbas region, distinguishing itself by its extreme cruelty towards the local population.⁷⁶ Therefore, the Russian Federation's talk about Ukrainian Nazis, when the Wagner Group represented the advance units of the Russian Army, is nothing more than absurd.

Conclusion: Given the above arguments, the Russian propaganda myth about the Nazi government in Ukraine and the genocide of the Russian-speaking population in the Donbas region is disinformation aimed at creating the illusion of "justice" for the war Russia is waging in Ukraine.

75. ceb95. 2023. "The Wagner Group Explained." Yale University Press. July 7, 2023. <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/2023/07/07/the-wagner-group-explained/>.

76. BBC. 2022. "What Is Russia's Wagner Group of Mercenaries in Ukraine?" BBC News, April 5, 2022, sec. World. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60947877>.

The Russian lie No. 7: Russia is a global superpower

The anatomy of the myth: After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia lost its status as a superpower. In the 1990s, it was so weakened that it could not simply exist without the help of the West. This changed when Vladimir Putin came to power and global oil prices rose, but still, Russia, after the demise of the USSR, has not come close to the scale of power it had between 1945 and 1991.

Vladimir Putin, however, has proven to be a ruler with enormous ambitions, and from the very first days of coming to power, he began working to create an image of Russia as a major world power. The first step to this end was a large-scale naval exercise in the Barents Sea in 2000, which ended with the sinking of the nuclear submarine Kursk. The first attempt to demonstrate its might turned out to be a disaster; Russia was not even able to raise the sunken submarine from the seabed on its own and had no choice but to resort to the help of Norway and Great Britain. All members of the Kursk crew perished.

Despite being militarily and technologically behind the West, Putin has not abandoned his plan and has launched a large-scale propaganda campaign about Russia's greatness, aimed at audiences in Russia, post-Soviet countries, and the West. The goal of this propaganda is to consolidate the society around Putin in Russia and to sow fear of the Kremlin outside Russia.

The propaganda myths about Russia's 'invincibility and greatness' are spreading in Georgia as well. In 2014, Nino Burjanadze declared that Russia was a superpower whose strong leverage was taken into account

by the entire world.⁷⁷ Similar messages about Russia have circulated time and again in Georgia, but since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, this narrative has taken on a new dimension. *‘Never will Ukraine be able to defeat Russia in the war... Russia is compatible with the United States of America in terms of weaponry, so how can Ukraine win the war?’*⁷⁸ argued Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi in early 2023. Similar rhetoric is constantly used in its television programs by the aggressive group Alt-Info, claiming that Russia *“can make the world do what it wants”, “is not fighting against Ukraine with all its might”,*⁷⁹ etc.

The Reality:

1. Russia is so weak that it does not meet the criteria of a superpower. A superpower is a country that has sufficient military capability and economic capacity to influence any other country anywhere in the world. The only such country today is the United States of America. Regarding Russia, the size of its economy is little more than that of Italy,⁸⁰ and its armed forces, despite their military superiority, have been shown incapable of achieving Putin’s goals. Ukraine continues to offer effective resistance and to regain control over the territories it temporarily lost in the early months of the war. As a general rule, superpowers have always successfully managed the military component of war against much weaker adversaries. The only thing that may be inherent to Russia as a superpower is its huge nuclear arsenal.

2. Russia lags far behind the United States and its allies in technological and military fields. Russia’s military industry cannot exist independently

77. “Russia is a superpower.” 2014. Kvira.ge. March 4, 2014. <http://kvira.ge/16632>.

78. “Tarkhan-Mouravi: Never, under no conditions, can Ukraine defeat Russia in the war, this is nonsense.” 2023. Tabula. February 13, 2023. <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/697113-tarkhan-mouravi-verasodes-veranair-pirobebshi-ver>.

79. Mtisambebi.ge. n.d. “How Alt-Info justifies crimes against humanity committed by Putin in Ukraine.” Mtisambebi.ge. <https://mtisambebi.ge/news/item/1471-rogor-am-artlebs-%E2%80%9Ealt-inpo%E2%80%9C-putinis-mier-ukrainashi-kazobriobis-xi-nashe-chadenil-danashaulebs>.

80. Silver, Caleb. 2022. “The Top 25 Economies in the World.” Investopedia. September 1, 2022. <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/>.

and is highly dependent on components manufactured outside the country; most of these components are Western technology. A superpower should be able to manage its military industry on its own and should not depend on countries that it itself considers its adversaries. Without western microchips, Russia would not be able to manufacture the missiles it boasts so much about.⁸¹

3. In terms of development, Russia lags notably behind not only the West but also its developed neighbors. For comparison, the area of Russia's territory is more than 17 million square meters, while that of Japan is less than 380,000 square meters. However, the road networks of Russia and Japan are almost the same length. The length of the Russian road network is 1.28 million kilometers, while that of Japan is 1.22 million kilometers.⁸² By its size, Russia is 45 times larger than Japan, but these two countries have road networks of almost the same length. According to World Bank's data, Russia is not even among the top 50 countries in terms of purchasing power parity per capita,⁸³ more than 20% of the Russian population, that is, more than 30 million people, do not have a sewage system in their homes;⁸⁴ in terms of higher education, Russia lags far behind the West: According to Times Higher Education, in 2023, the only Russian university to make it into the top 200 world universities is the Lomonosov Moscow State University, which ranks 163rd.⁸⁵ Russia is just an undeveloped country that has boasted of its powerful armed

81. Óscar Gutiérrez (special correspondent. 2023. "The Missiles Russia Deploys against Ukraine Have Western Parts." EL PAÍS English. August 13, 2023. <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-08-13/the-missiles-russia-deploys-against-ukraine-have-western-parts.html>.

82. "Road Network Worldwide 2020, by Country." n.d. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1150796/road-network-by-country>.

83. "World Bank Open Data." n.d. World Bank Open Data. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD?locations=TH%2F&most_recent_value_desc=true.

84. Times, The Moscow. 2019. "Indoor Plumbing Still a Pipe Dream for 20% of Russian Households, Reports Say." The Moscow Times. April 2, 2019. <https://www.themoscow-times.com/2019/04/02/indoor-plumbing-still-a-pipe-dream-for-20-of-russian-households-reports-say-a65049>.

85. Times Higher Education. 2022. "World University Rankings." Times Higher Education (THE). October 4, 2022. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2023/world-ranking#>.

forces, but the heroic struggle of Ukrainians has debunked this myth too.

Conclusion: Russia's attempt to present itself as a superpower is ridiculous. In terms of level of development, Russia lags behind not only the only superpower, the USA - but also neighboring countries that do not even have ambitions to become superpowers.

The Russian lie No 8: The US is as much an aggressor as Russia is an aggressor

The anatomy of the myth: Today, even the most pro-Russian people can no longer hide the fact that the wars unleashed by Russia over the past three decades have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, perhaps even more. There is hardly any justification for the atrocities this country committed in Chechnya (twice, first and second Chechen wars), in Georgia (three times, Samachablo, Abkhazia, and the August 2008 war), in Ukraine (twice – in 2014 and 2022), and in Syria (2015-2016). The wars unleashed by Russia, in which there are always signs of ethnic cleansing, simply cannot be justified, and therefore, in this regard, Russian propaganda actively uses the tactic of diverting attention towards the West and, above all, towards the United States of America. This tactic implies the following: ‘I may be bad, but the US is even worse.’

A favorite topic of Russian propagandists is the US intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. Russia tries to instill the idea that the West invaded these two countries and killed civilians there because America is an imperialist.⁸⁶ In spreading this narrative, Russia often uses disinformation and various manipulations. This propaganda narrative seeks to have Russia viewed on a par with the US, and if Russia is perceived as an aggressor, then the US and the West should also be perceived as such.

The Reality:

1. In the case of Afghanistan, the main purpose of the intervention was

86. Sputnik Georgia, 2021. “Opinion: America is counting the results of the big war.” Sputnik Georgia. 2021. <https://sputnik-georgia.com/20210906/mosazreba-amerikis-mier-warmoebuli-omebis-sesaxeb-259348667.html>.

to punish the masterminds of the 9/11 terrorist attacks who had taken refuge in that country. The intervention was carried out within the rules of international law. It should be noted that even Vladimir Putin supported the US antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan.⁸⁷ Before the US started its intervention in Afghanistan, this country was fragmented between different forces and the population lived in extreme poverty and, practically, in war conditions. The occupation of this country by the US and its allies for 20 years was probably the most peaceful period in this country. Between 2001 and 2020, Afghanistan's population increased from 19 million to 39 million.⁸⁸ During the same period, the US provided more than USD 120 billion in aid.⁸⁹

2. The US has never intervened in democratic countries where human rights are protected. The countries in which the US has intervened have been a threat either to international peace or to their own citizens, or both. Afghanistan was a major safe haven for terrorists in 2001, while Iraq under Saddam Hussein was an authoritarian regime. Hussein's rule claimed the lives of up to 2 million people; between 250,00 and 290,000 are reported missing or dead. Kurds and Shiites were particularly mistreated and genocide was carried out on them.⁹⁰ The war launched by Hussein against Iran in 1980 killed, according to various estimates, more than a million people.⁹¹ Russia tends to be on friendly terms with such authoritarian regimes and attacks mostly democratic countries that pose no threat to anyone, so it is not correct to consider the US and

87. McFaul, Michael, and Michael McFaul. 2001. "U.S.-Russia Relations after September 11, 2001." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. October 24, 2001. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2001/10/24/u.s.-russia-relations-after-september-11-2001-pub-840>.

88. "Afghanistan Population 1950-2021." n.d. www.macrotrends.net. <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/AFG/afghanistan/population>.

89. "FACT SHEET: Continued U.S. Support for a Peaceful, Stable Afghanistan." 2021. The White House. June 25, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/25/fact-sheet-continued-u-s-support-for-a-peaceful-stable-afghanistan/>.

90. "HRW: Justice for Iraq: A Human Rights Watch Policy Paper." 2019. hrw.org. 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/mena/iraq1217bg.htm>.

91. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2018. "Iran-Iraq War | Causes, Summary, Casualties, & Facts." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iran-Iraq-War>.

Russia on par. Similarly, it is incorrect to compare Georgia and Ukraine with fundamentalist Afghanistan, where terrorists were hiding, and Saddam Husein's Iraq, where genocides were committed.

3. The US spends tens of millions of dollars each year to help foreign countries.⁹² The United States spends the most to meet the needs of developing countries. This aid is directed toward the development of health care, the economy, democracy, human rights, the environment, education, and many other important areas. On the contrary, Russia has doubled its defense budget in 2023 to continue bombing civilians in Ukraine and waging the war that is the most brutal in Europe since World War II.⁹³

Conclusion: It is not correct to equate Russia and the US because, on the one hand, there is a state that wages unjustified wars against democratic countries, and on the other hand, there is the USA, which spends millions of dollars to help poor countries. It is also not correct to compare the wars waged by Russia against Georgia and Ukraine with the military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, because unlike Georgia and Ukraine, these two countries had inhumane regimes that claimed the lives of millions of people.

92. "ForeignAssistance.gov." 2010. Foreignassistance.gov. 2010. <https://www.foreignassistance.gov>.

93. Faulconbridge, Guy. 2023. "Blood and Billions: The Cost of Russia's War in Ukraine." Reuters, August 23, 2023, sec. Europe. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/blood-billions-cost-russias-war-ukraine-2023-08-23/>.

The Russian lie No 9: Fearing Russia, governments flee

The anatomy of the myth: One of the narratives actively used by Russia in its psychological warfare is to accuse its adversaries of cowardice. Russia has regularly used this tactic for at least the last hundred years, and Georgian society in particular has fallen victim to this myth at least twice. First, in 1921, Bolshevik Russia created legends about the fleeing of Georgian Social Democrats,⁹⁴ and then Putin created legends about the Georgian government fleeing the country during the 2008 war.⁹⁵ Similar legends were spread in February 2022 against Zelenskyy and members of his cabinet, and to dispel these lies, the Ukrainian President had to go out into the streets of Kyiv under Russian bombardments and record video clips confirming his presence in the capital city.⁹⁶

Byspreading these myths, Russia initially trying to cause demoralization in the ranks of the adversary. An example is the psychological operation conducted against Ukraine in February 2022. According to the Russian plan, the myth of Zelenskyy flight was supposed to cause chaos among the country's military and political leadership and population, making it easier for Russia to annex Ukraine, but, fortunately, this plan failed. Another aim was to gain a foothold in the country, of which Georgia became a victim in 1921. Myths about the fleeing of the government of the First Republic allowed the Communists to easily consolidate

94. Civil Georgia. "Soviet Propaganda against the Democratic Republic – Part 1." n.d. Civil.ge. <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/417143>.

95. Nika Gurin. 2020. "Did government representatives cross t cross the border entering or leaving the country during the 2008 war?" Mythdetector.ge. August 11, 2020. <https://mythdetector.ge/ka/gadakovethes-thu-gadmokvethes-sazghvari-2008-tslis-omis-dros-khelisuphlebis-tsarmomadgenlebma-2/>.

96. Zelenskyy: I'll Remain in Kyiv." n.d. Wwww.youtube.com. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0-Yeqh4PFY>.

their position in Georgia, while in the memory of Georgians, the Social-Democrats, instead of being remembered as successful reformers who implemented many progressive reforms, became traitors of their own people and criminal Mensheviks. By discrediting them, the communist regime tried to discredit the idea of the Georgian state in general.

Unfortunately, this tactic developed by Russia is also used by the current government of Georgia, which, in order to discredit its predecessor, repeats, word for word, the propaganda myth invented by Russia about the August 2008 war,⁹⁷ and nolens volens plays into the hands of the enemy.

The Reality:

1. Noe Zhordania's government did not leave the country without a fight; Despite severe shortages of weapons, ammunition, artillery, and shells, Georgians continued to resist after the fall of Tbilisi. The war with Russia continued until March 17. When all means of resistance were exhausted, the Georgian government had no choice but to emigrate; otherwise, it would have been imprisoned and forced to capitulate and hand over power to the Bolsheviks, which would have destroyed the legal grounds for the struggle for Georgia's independence and legitimized the Russian occupation.⁹⁸ It should also be noted that a significant number of the deputies of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia remained in Georgia, while some of those who emigrated returned to Georgia to organize the uprising in 1924. They were captured and killed by the Bolshevik regime.⁹⁹

97. "Mamuka Mdinardze: Let the 'party of war' and its associates abandon war propaganda and, on the other hand, attacks on national interests and values through various speakers." n.d. 1TV. <https://1tv.ge/news/mamuka-mdinaradze-omis-partiam-da-matma-tanamoazreebma-tavi-daanebon-omis-propagandas-meore-mkhriv-skhvadaskhva-spikeris-meshveobit-erovnul-interesebsa-da-faseulobebze-tavdashkme/>.

98. "Seven myths about Russia-Georgia war in 1921." n.d. NETGAZETI.ge. <https://netgazeti.ge/opinion/343224/>.

99. "Civil Georgia. The 1924 Uprising: Eleven Executed Georgian Parliamentarians." n.d. Civil.ge. <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/318072>.

2. The Georgian government also did not flee the country in 2008. Based on border crossing data, it is clear that between August 7 and August 17, most of the members of the Georgian government returned to Georgia, rather than leaving it. Some of them had gone on vacation abroad before the outbreak of the war and returned to Georgia when the Russian aggression started. This fact is confirmed by documents that can be made available to anyone on request.

3. To say that Zelenskyy and his government members fled the country is also absurd. Zelenskyy's words to his partners, who offered him help safely leaving Kyiv, will probably remain in history: "I need ammunition, not a ride." Interesting fact: In the first weeks after the war in Ukraine started, Vladimir Putin was virtually inaccessible; no one knew where the Russian President was; he was rumored to be hiding in a bunker, although Moscow was as safe a city at that time as it was before the war started. It is strange why Putin disappeared from the radar just as the largest war since the collapse of the Soviet Union was unleashed by him.

Conclusion: The claims by Russian propagandists that at different stages of history, the Georgian and Ukrainian governments fled without a fight in fear of Russia are a lie and not supported by historical facts.

The Russian lie No. 10: Ukrainians harvest the organs of fallen soldiers

The anatomy of the myth: The myth that the Ukrainian government trades in the organs of fallen soldiers is one of the most frequently spread lies by Kremlin propagandists. The spread of this disinformation did not begin in 2022. The Russian government uses this narrative against countries it views as hostile to it, and Georgia was once a victim of this lie as well. Russia has started to carry out such an information operation intensively against Ukraine since 2014. In 2019, they invented the conspiracy theory that high-ranking Ukrainian officials are involved in organ trafficking together with Western countries.¹⁰⁰

This disinformation fabricated by Russia is actively spread in Georgia by pro-Kremlin groups, as well as by actors openly affiliated with the Georgian Dream party. For example, on December 1, 2022, Nikoloz Mzhavanadze, a presenter of the Sezoni TV channel, stated that the business of organ trafficking started in Ukraine and organs were exported to different countries.¹⁰¹ Following the example of Russian media and groups in Georgia clearly linked to the Kremlin, Utsnobi, who has close ties to the Georgian Dream party, accused Ukraine of exporting human organs abroad on 16 July 2023.¹⁰²

100. Chkhetiani Lika, 2019. "Repeated lie by pro-Kremlin actors about trading organs of Ukrainian soldiers." Mythdetector.ge. December 5, 2019. <https://mythdetector.ge/ka/kremlis-aqtorebis-ganmeorebithi-tqhuili-ukraineli-jariskatsebis-organoebith-vatchrobis-shesakheb-2/>.

101. "Facebook." n.d. www.facebook.com. <https://www.facebook.com/TVSezoni/posts/1134640637191223/>.

102. Tinatin Tvauri, 2023. "Pro-Government "I Ucnobi" Amplifies the Kremlin Conspiracy about the Alleged Organ Trafficking in Ukraine." Mythdetector.ge. July 24, 2023. <https://mythdetector.ge/ka/ai-utsnobi-ukrainashi-organoebith-vatchrobaze-kremlis-konspiratsiis-theorias-imeorebs/>.

As with other myths, Russia's goal this time is to show that it is fighting for virtue and that everyone else is a criminal, Nazi, pervert, and organ trafficker. To support this opinion, it concocts numerous lies and resorts to various manipulations.

The Reality:

1. Under field conditions, it is impossible to organize an adequate medical infrastructure to safely remove organs from a deceased person, store them under the right conditions, transport them, and eventually transplant them to recipients.

2. Human organs can survive outside the body for only a short period of time. The survival time of most organs outside the body is four to six hours; Only the kidneys can last for more than one day if continuously supplied with oxygen and stored under proper conditions,¹⁰³ which is virtually impossible in a combat environment.

3. All the facts that Russia cited as evidence of organ trafficking in Ukraine have turned out to be blatant lies. No reputable media outlet, journalist, or organization is talking about organ trafficking in Ukraine. This is simply a lie invented by Russia and Kremlin-associated media. The fact that the media, investigative bodies, and courts are independent is evidenced by numerous facts, including cases of investigative journalism that expose corruption and other wrongdoings by politicians or high-ranking officials. If Ukraine and Western countries had been involved in a human organs trafficking scheme since 2014, it would certainly have attracted the attention of the media or investigative bodies of any of the countries.

Conclusion: Information about the organ trafficking of dead Ukrainian soldiers is a lie, as Russia has not presented a single piece of evidence. Moreover, from a logistical point of view, it is practically impossible to organize such an operation.

103. "Matching Donors and Recipients | Organdonor.gov." n.d. www.organdonor.gov. <https://www.organdonor.gov/learn/process/matching#criteria>.

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