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ADVANCING CSO CAPACITIES AND ENGAGING SOCIETY  
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# ASSESSMENT OF THE EU INTEGRATION COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION STRATEGY AND ITS ACTION PLAN OF THE GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA

SURVEY REPORT



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# INTRODUCTION

On 6 September 2013, the Government of Georgia approved the Communication and Information Strategy of the Government of Georgia in the sphere of EU Integration for the period of 2014–2017.<sup>1</sup> To ensure the implementation of activities specified in the strategy, the action plan is devised and adopted every year.

This report aims to assess the communication strategy on EU integration issues, the implementation of objectives defined in the strategy, and the action plans, taking into account the international context and media environment, and based on key findings, to draw up recommendations.

The communication strategy of the government of Georgia is designed to inform external actors as well as citizens of Georgia, but this report reviews aspects of internal communication alone.

The report consists of two parts: Part I reviews international context and media environment: 1.1. The plan of strategic communication developed by the EU in response to a hybrid warfare waged by Russia, which targets Eastern Partnership countries and Russia. 1.2. This chapter covers topics of Georgian media environment, main anti-Western messages identified within the online platform Myth Detector, and TV coverage of the Euro-Atlantic integration topic. Part II contains the assessment of EU integration strategy and action plan, including the vision of the government and consistency of its messages, goals and forms of communication, issues of coordination, monitoring and accountability. A separate part is dedicated to activities and messages geared towards achieving tangible and real aims of the agenda of Association Agreement. The study is enclosed with recommendations developed with the involvement of experts working on EU integration and communication issues.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/en/news/4913>

# METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the study involved the analysis of documents and communication materials as well as interviewing.

**Document analysis.** In reviewing international context, the following documents were used: Russia's 2015 national security strategy, EU strategic communication plan.

The assessment of communication strategy of the Georgian Government involved the study of the EU communication strategy and 2014–2015 action plans and their comparison to the following documents: a) the Association Agreement; b) the 2014–2015 action plans of the Association Agreement. The aim of the comparison was to find out the extent to which activities envisaged by the Association Agreement and corresponding national action plan were considered in the communication strategy in order to properly inform society about benefits of the EU integration. The analysis of documents also involved the study of the report on the performance of 2014 communication action plan.

**Media content-analysis.** The study also involved the analysis of typology of anti-Western messages disseminated through media, which related to the process of Euro-Atlantic integration and fell under the scrutiny of media platform Myth Detector, and also sources of these messages. A separate study was conducted to analyze typology of topics regarding the West and Euro-Atlantic integration which were covered in primetime news programs of broadcasters over the period of three months.

The media content-analysis also allowed to study consistency of government messages regarding the Euro-Atlantic integration.

**Interviews.** A questionnaire was developed for representatives of central government and local self-government units, which contained both structured and open questions (24 issues). The questionnaire included the issues of 1) coordination, 2) information and 3) reporting and monitoring. The questioning was conducted in the form of face-to-face interview.

Respondents were entities falling within a working group established within the government commission on EU integration, and representatives of 10 self-government bodies. Of local self-government bodies interviews were refused only by representatives of Tbilisi, Poti



and Rustavi. It is noteworthy that Tbilisi Mayor's Office is a member of interagency working group. The total of 33 respondents were interviewed, including 23<sup>2</sup> from the central government and 10<sup>3</sup> from the local self-government.

Interviews were conducted over the period between 20 August and 5 November.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The document defining the communication policy of the government of Georgia is reviewed in the context of international challenges and media environment. Along with the vision of the strategy, ways of implementation, issues of coordination and reporting, the report assesses communication activities in several priority areas of the association agenda, such as education, youth and sport, culture, environmental protection, public health, trade and trade-related issues, agriculture.

The study revealed the following tendencies:

- **Vision.** The communication strategy reflects the vision of the government of Georgia, according to which the priority of Georgia's foreign policy is the strengthening of political relations and the maintaining of a political dialogue with the European Union, as well as the gradual promotion of the principles of "four freedoms" and the accession to the EU in the longer-term perspective. According to the Office of the State Minister on Euro-Atlantic Integration, integration in NATO is the subject of another strategy which is in process in development.
- **Consistency of messages.** Public statements of individual representatives of various branches of power, regarding the Euro-Atlantic integration, contain messages that conflict with the declared foreign policy priorities of the government. These conflicting messages about the country's foreign policy priorities create a feeling of ambiguity in society and contribute to Euro-skepticism.
- **Values.** The communication strategy of the government of Georgia is more focused on communicating messages regarding welfare than those shared values which represent the foundation of cooperation with the EU and Eastern Partnership countries and one of guiding principles of the EU action plan of strategic communication.

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<sup>2</sup> 1. Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development; 2. Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees; 3. Ministry of Agriculture; 4. Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure; 5. Ministry of Internal Affairs; 6. Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs; 7. Ministry of Energy; 8. Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 9. Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection; 10. Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection; 11. Ministry of Justice; 12. Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs; 13. Ministry of Education and Science; 14. Ministry of Defense; 15. Ministry of Corrections; 16. Ministry of Finance; 17. Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality; 18. Office of State Office of State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration; 19. Office of State Minister for Diaspora Issues; 20. Parliament of Georgia; 21. Administration of the Government of Georgia; 22. Administration of the President of Georgia; 23. LEPL EU-NATO Information center.

<sup>3</sup> 1. Gori; 2. Zugdidi; 3. Ozurgeti; 4. Kutaisi; 5. Telavi; 6. Batumi; 7. Akhalkalaki; 8. Akhaltsikhe; 9. Marneuli; 10. Dmanisi.

- **Threats.** The communication strategy of the government of Georgia was adopted in 2013 and it does not reflect those threats that, following Russia's intervention in Ukraine, Western countries and institutions view in the context of hybrid warfare. Nor are new challenges reflected in an annually updated action plan.
- **Response to misleading messages.** Since 2015, the Strategic Communication Department has been operating in the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, which is involved in a partnership network set up by the EU strategic communication team – East StratCom Team. The department carries out media analysis but, in contrast to East StratCom, does not apply public communication mechanisms to counter misleading messages.
- **Planning.** The action plan should be devised on the basis of results of public opinion survey, however the available information does not make it clear how the results of survey affected the planning process and which activities were in particular added to the 2016 action plan on the basis of the survey conducted in 2015. Several activities are less communication-wise, which indicates about the problem in planning.
- **Structure of the plan.** The plan is devised according to a calendar principle rather than objectives set in the strategy and concrete programs envisaged in the Association Agreement and corresponding action plans; moreover, the plan mainly contains single measures rather than long-term campaigns and programs.
- **Coordination.** Certain activities are implemented by separate ministries though they are not reflected in the communication action plan or a report; this indicates about problems in coordination and planning. Moreover, a number of working group members engaged in the implementation of the plan do not have complete information about the communication process envisaged in the action plan and hence, their involvement is a mere formality. This problem is especially acute in the regions.
- **Forms of communication.** The most common form of communication is meetings with population and in this regard, the most intensive activities were conducted in the area of agriculture, trade and with specific target groups – youth and teachers. The most informative and interactive web-platforms are those developed by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Environmental Protection.
- **Priority programs.** Several programs prioritized in the association agenda, which are implemented by separate entities, are not effectively communicated.
- **Reporting and monitoring.** A common standard of reporting which would rest on unified indicators and enable to measure results of implemented activities both in terms of quantity (reach) and quality (impact) is not applied in practice. According to the report, progress is not assessed on the basis of indicators or results of public opinion poll.
- **Parliamentary control.** A mechanism of parliamentary control over the communication strategy and action plan does not work in practice since in 2014 and in 2015, the parliamentary committee did not conduct the monitoring specified in the strategy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Threats.** Considering new challenges associated with the hybrid warfare waged by Russia, the communication strategy and corresponding action plan should be revised and a new approach developed. When updating it, the action plan of EU strategic communication should be taken into account, which envisages a much broader and systemic approach.
- **Vision.** Along with EU integration issues, the strategy should include issues of NATO integration too and should focus on a common priority of Euro-Atlantic integration.
- **Values.** The strategy and its action plan should fully reflect those common values which the EU and Eastern Partnership rest upon.
- **Consistency of messages and coordination.** It is desirable for the inter-agency group working on communication to operate under the government of Georgia in order to minimize problems of coordination and conflicting messages. The media content analysis should affect the shaping of messages and should be disseminated in a coordinated manner.
- **Response to misleading messages.** The strategic communication capacity of the government needs institutional enhancement in terms of operative response to disinformation, while issues related to values should become part of long-term proactive campaign which should be carried out not only through informing but also involving and influencing public attitudes. Media literacy and critical thinking should be taught at educational institutions, become part of long-term strategy of the government and be implemented in cooperation with the civil sector.
- **Planning.** The planning of activities should be carried out on the basis of objectives and programs rather than representing separate measures.

A public opinion poll should be used in the process of planning and assessment and must be reflected in reports.

- **Forms of communication.** The communication with society should not be limited to meetings with society; it is desirable to plan thematic campaigns to share successful human experiences, thus creating a feeling of prospect in the society.
- **Priority programs.** When carrying out the planning, priority programs of association agenda should be defined; communication about these programs would contribute to providing comprehensive information about the benefits of EU integration to society. A special emphasis should be made on the education as well as programs which facilitate the involvement of citizens in the decision making process (see detailed thematic recommendations in Part II, chapter 2.4).
- **Reporting and monitoring.** The plan should include clear indicators enabling to assess the progress. A report should reflect the assessment of performance by predefined indicators, including on the basis of results of public opinion survey. A common form of reporting should be developed, which should reflect complete and unified data and make it possible to assess the performed work on the basis of indicators.
- **Parliamentary control.** The mechanism of parliamentary control over the strategy and action plan should be implemented in practice; this will add to the efficiency of the reporting.

# I. INTERNATIONAL AND MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

## 1.1. INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

**Russian politics.** A strategy to strengthen the influence over strategically important countries of the former Soviet Union, which also includes the so-called *Rusky Mir* concept, was reflected in Russia's policy documents – the foreign policy review (2007) and the national security strategy (2009).

The concept of *Rusky Mir* aims at strengthening cultural and political influence through cooperation between the Church and the state; in this process, values have significant impact on shaping the politics. It is precisely the cooperation of Church and state that defines the framework of Russia's foreign policy.<sup>4</sup>

The national security strategy of Russia, renewed on 31 December 2015,<sup>5</sup> is more explicit, compared to the 2009 document, in the criticism of the West naming it a source of tension in the Eurasian region. This document views actions of western countries, international institutions, nongovernmental and other organizations as directed against Russia's national interests and speaks about the threat of inciting "color revolutions." The document lists the following actors as main threats to the state and society:

**"The activities of radical public associations and groups using nationalist and religious extremist ideology, foreign and international nongovernmental organizations, and financial and economic structures, and also individuals, focused on destroying the unity and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, destabilizing the domestic political and social situation – including through inciting "color revolutions" – and destroying traditional Russian religious and moral values."**<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> David C. Speedie (2015). "Soft Power": The Values that Shape Russian Foreign Policy. Carnegie Council. [https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles\\_papers\\_reports/740](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/740)

<sup>5</sup> Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации, #683, 31 декабря 2015. <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/40391/page/1>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Chapter IV. Ensuring National Security.

The development of a common information–telecommunications medium on the territories of the CIS member states and in contiguous regions as a necessity for national security of Russia is also indicated in the 2015 security strategy.<sup>7</sup>

The West began to realize Russia’s use of information as a weapon to be a security problem after Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine in 2014. The hybrid warfare, which Russia uses to influence Russian-speaking world, involves various media platforms. Based on the decree of the President of Russia, dated 9 December 2013, a new multimedia international project, *Sputnik*, was created. *Sputnik*, which is owned by the Russian government, replaced news agency *RIA Novosti* and *Voice of Russia* on the international arena.

The term “hybrid warfare” originated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and implies the waging of war with the use of conventional military force, irregular military force and media.

This approach which is declared in Russia’s policy documents is assessed by countries that chose the Euro–Atlantic path of development as a challenge to their security. For example, in its 2015 security review<sup>8</sup>, Estonia considers the Russian propaganda as an issue of security of the EU and those countries which have Russian-speaking population.

Increasing Russian propaganda is the problem which, along with the EU, is a concern for NATO and other international actors. Threats to Georgia in this regard are mentioned in an annual report of US intelligence<sup>9</sup> which assesses worldwide threats. According to this document, Georgia might slow or suspend efforts toward greater Euro–Atlantic integration due to rising frustration among Georgia’s elites and the public with the slow pace of Western integration and “effective Russian propaganda.”

**The EU politics.** In response to the Russian propaganda the EU began to take active steps in 2015. On 29 January 2015, a strategic communication team, East StratCom Team, was set up at the initiative of the EU foreign affair ministers, with the mandate to work in the direction of Eastern Partnership countries and Russia. On 22 June 2015, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini presented the Action Plan on Strategic Communication against the Russian propaganda.

The EU action plan on strategic communication<sup>10</sup> sets three main objectives:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Chapter IV. Ensuring National Security, culture.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html>

<sup>9</sup> Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, Senate Armed Services Committee [Statement for the Record], James R. Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, 9 February 2016. [http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/SASC\\_Unclassified\\_2016\\_ATA\\_SFR\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/SASC_Unclassified_2016_ATA_SFR_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Action%20Plan.pdf>

- Effective communication and promotion of EU policies and values towards the Eastern neighbourhood;
- Strengthening of the overall media environment including support for independent media;
- Increased public awareness of disinformation activities by external actors, and improved EU capacity to anticipate and respond to such activities.

The guiding principles of the document speaks of necessity to communicate such effective messages about the EU policy that have a positive impact on the daily lives of people; these messages should also clearly communicate the universal values that the EU promotes, including a commitment to democracy, the rule of law, the fight against corruption, minority rights and fundamental freedoms of expression and of the media.

As discussed in Part II below, the communication strategy on the European integration of the Government of Georgia is more focused on communicating messages concerning the welfare than those common values that the cooperation of the EU and Eastern partnership countries is based upon. The strategy of the EU as well as the Government of Georgia is oriented on promoting European integration programs and preventing wrong attitudes and stereotypes towards this process, though the EU approach is broader in the action plan. While Georgia's action plan is more focused on separate measures and meetings, the EU document contains the approaches of more systemic nature, which translate into the planning of activities in the following areas:

- a) Increase EU Strategic Communication capacity;
- b) Work with partners and development of networks;
- c) Communication activities on EU funded programmes, projects and activities in the Eastern Neighbourhood;
- d) Support for freedom of the media and freedom of expression;
- e) Public Diplomacy Initiatives in the neighbourhood;
- f) Capacity building for journalists and media actors;
- g) Supporting pluralism in the Russian language media space;
- h) Engagement with Civil Society;
- i) Increase awareness, develop critical thinking and promote media literacy.

## 1.2. MEDIA CONTEXT: ANTI-WESTERN MESSAGES AND COVERAGE OF EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION ISSUES

According to the survey published by the US National Democratic Institute (NDI) in April 2015,<sup>11</sup> some 87 percent of respondents interviewed nationwide receive information about politics and current affairs from television with 20 percent amongst using foreign TV channels to this end. Of those 20 percent who named foreign media channels as information sources, the highest number of viewers watch Russia's first Channel (38%), RTR (30%), Rossiya 1 (18%) and RenTV (16%). The audience of English-language channels is distributed as follows: CNN – 15%, Euronews – 14%, BBC World News – 10%, SNBC – 6%, Fox and Sky News – 1%.<sup>12</sup>

According to a survey commissioned by the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) and conducted by the Institute for Social Research and Analysis in 2015,<sup>13</sup> which was submitted to the GNCC on 25 December 2015, some 48 percent of respondents watch foreign channels. Of these 48 percent, 34 percent of respondents watch NTV, 22 percent watch ORT and 12 percent watch almost all Russian-language channels. These findings, which show higher indicators of watching Russian channels than the NDI survey results, do not specify the types of programs watched by viewers – whether they are information, entertainment or educational. In case of the NDI survey, respondents named foreign channels as sources of information.

As the content analysis of Georgian media outlets<sup>14</sup> show, it is precisely Georgian media outlets that represent sources of anti-Western propaganda, which are either directly identified with Russian sources or apply ethno-nationalistic and patriotic platform and repeat, in essence, the narrative of Russian media platforms. Such media outlets are: TV channel *Obiektivi* which is an organization linked to the political union Alliance of Patriots; Internet portals *Sakinformi* and *Georgia and the World*, newspapers *Asaval-Dasavali*, *Kviris Kronika*, *Alia*. Given that viewership of *Obiektivi* is unknown while newspapers do not indicate their print run, it is impossible to assess the impact of these media outlets on audience in terms of their reach. However, judging by the results of NDI public opinion poll conducted in August 2015,<sup>15</sup> which showed about 17% decrease in the support of the EU, one may assume that these media platforms, in combination with other sources inciting anti-Western attitudes (a political class, clergy, various public figures, nongovernmental organizations), have a certain degree of impact on the society as well. This assumption is proved by the public opinion poll which was commissioned by the Eurasia Partnership

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<sup>11</sup> Public attitudes in Georgia, NDI. 2015, April. Pg. 8. [https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_April%202015%20Poll\\_Public%20Issues\\_GEO\\_VF\\_0.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_April%202015%20Poll_Public%20Issues_GEO_VF_0.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>13</sup> <http://netgazeti.ge/life/104681/>

<sup>14</sup> Anti-Western Propaganda, Media Development Foundation, 2014-2015. <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/geo/view-library/15>

<sup>15</sup> Support towards the EU is expressed by 61% of respondents; in 2014 this figure stood at 78%.

Fund and conducted in 2015<sup>16</sup> to study changes in the attitudes towards the EU over the period from 2009 to 2015; according to it, almost half of population (45%) agreed to the opinion that the EU poses threat to Georgian traditions – something representing the main narrative of anti-Western discourse and an element of editorial policy of the above mentioned media outlets. At the same time, a recent NDI survey, conducted in February–March 2016<sup>17</sup>, showed an improvement in the support to EU integration with 77% of respondents being in favor of the declared goal of the government of Georgia towards Georgia’s eventual membership of the European Union, thus showing a 16% increase which must be a result of information campaign launched in regards with the European integration. However, a sharp change in a relatively short period of time indicates about a fragile situation and requires the implementation of a long-term strategic communication.

### Typology of anti-Western messages

Anti-Western messages related to Euro-Atlantic integration, which were detected within the format of media platform Myth Detector, may be grouped into several main categories. These messages contain both widely spread myths and fabrications of separate facts which, at the end of the day, serve the aim of strengthening these myths and demonizing the West. The topics of myths and disinformation are diverse and basically include the following:

- Instilling skepticism about the prospects of economic cooperation with the EU and promoting the advantage of Russian market as an alternative;
- Diminishing the importance of visa-free travel to Europe and creating the feeling of disappointment;
- Portraying the West as inciter of violence and a threat to a country, which is unable to protect and assist Georgia in crisis situations;
- Portraying co-religious Russia as a counterbalance to the West by using false dilemma technique and patriotic calls, and speculative references to religious or sexual identities;
- Efforts to marginalize nongovernmental organizations linking them to interests of foreign countries.

As the appendix (see, p. 60) shows, sources of such messages are, on certain occasions, media itself and on other occasions, political forces with pro-Russian foreign orientation, including separate representatives of the ruling Georgian Dream party as well as nongovernmental organizations, religious servants and various public figures. Examples in the appendix are given for the purpose of illustration and do not fully reflect all sources which regularly spread these messages.

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<sup>16</sup> Knowledge and Attitudes towards the EU in Georgia: Trends and Variations 2009–2015 (2015). [http://www.crrc.ge/uploads/files/reports/EU\\_attitudes\\_survey\\_eng\\_nov\\_24\\_2015.pdf](http://www.crrc.ge/uploads/files/reports/EU_attitudes_survey_eng_nov_24_2015.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Public attitudes in Georgia. National Democratic Institute. NDI, April, 2016. [https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_March%202016%20poll\\_Public%20Issues\\_ENG\\_vf.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202016%20poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_vf.pdf)



## Issues of Euro-Atlantic integration in TV news programs

As the monitoring of the media content conducted in 2014–2015 showed,<sup>18</sup> the editorial policy of mainstream media is not oriented on cultivating anti-Western attitudes but is a conduit of such statements made by separate public figures. To find out the topics of Euro-Atlantic integration covered by TV news programs, we monitored primetime news programs of five TV channels during three months (1 December 2015 – 29 February 2016). Primetime news programs of the following TV channels were selected as subjects of monitoring: Georgian Public Broadcaster (Moambe), Rustavi 2 (Kurieri), Imedi (Kronika), Maestro (Kontakti 20:00), GDS (20:30).

The total of 269 neutral and positive reports on the topic of Euro-Atlantic integration were analyzed over the period between December and February. These reports were those that were clearly identified as the coverage of the topic. The coverage was classified into the following categories:

1. **Official meetings, events and visits** – visits of representatives of the government to European countries and the USA, meetings and joint events with representatives for the EU and the USA;
2. Informational-explanatory meetings of **representatives of the government with citizens, media and nongovernmental sector**;
3. **Legislative changes and reforms** planned and implemented in the integration process (the cases in which the link between reforms and the integration were clearly identified);
4. **EU programs/projects and issues of integration**;
5. **US assistance and programs/projects**;
6. **NATO Integration**;
7. **Assessments/statements/reports of representatives of US and European institutions**;
8. **Assessments and statements of representatives of the Georgian side**;
9. **Coverage of issues of Russian propaganda**;
10. **Various**.

As the three-month monitoring showed (See figure 1), primetime news programs most frequently covered official meetings, events and visits of the government (39%); followed by assessments and statements of representatives of Western countries and institutions, re-

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<sup>18</sup> Antiwestern propaganda. Media Development Foundation. 2014–2015. <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/view-library/15/>

garding developments in Georgia and processes related to Georgia (18%); materials produced on EU projects and programs (12%); legislative changes and reforms (11%); assessments and statements of representatives of Georgia (8%), NATO integration (4%), US assistance projects (3%). The least material was produced on the Russian propaganda (2%) and information meetings with population about the EU integration (1%).

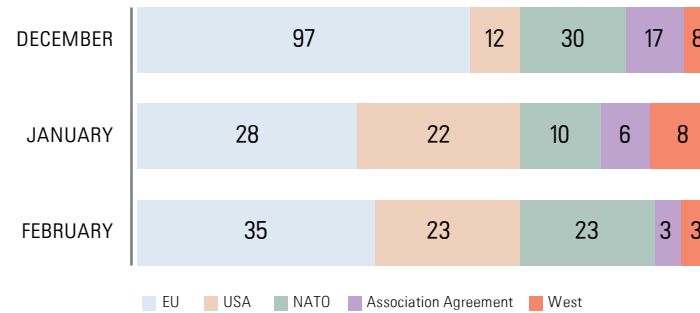
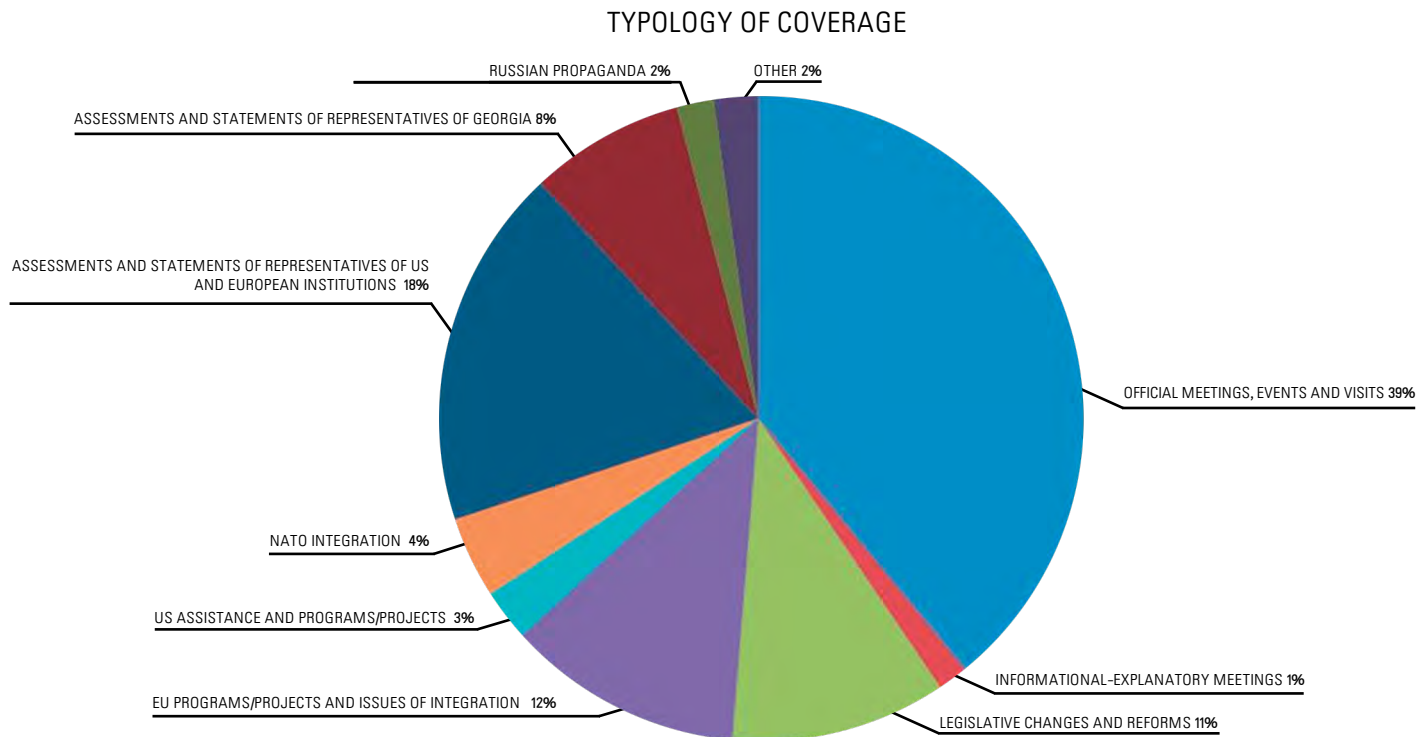
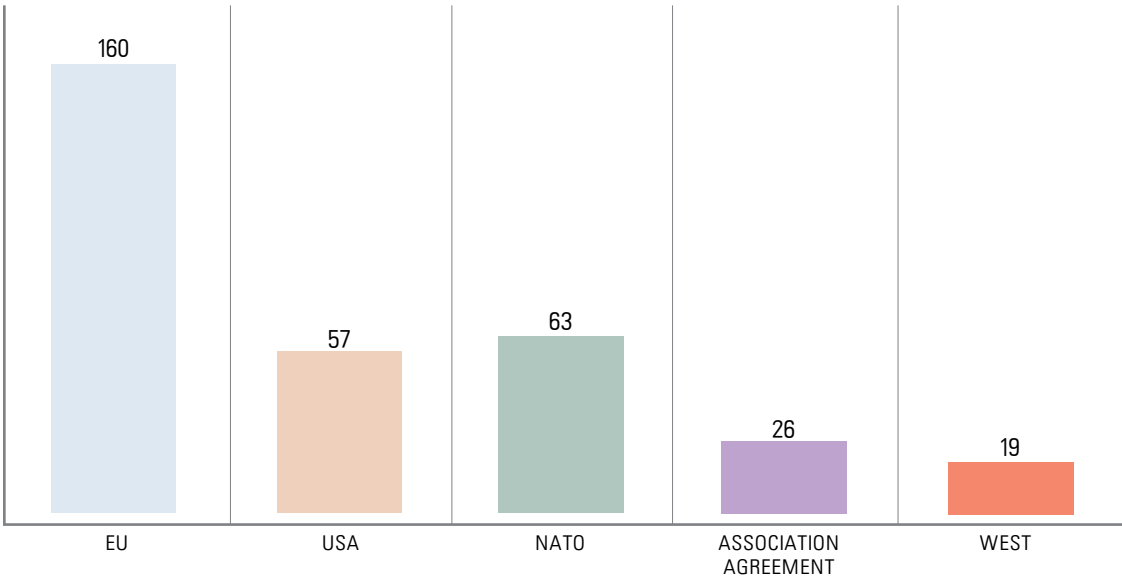


Chart 1. Topics of Euro-Atlantic integration in primetime news programs of five TV channels (1 December 2015 – 29 February 2016).



Out of 269 cases of coverage, EU was featured in 160 cases, the USA in 57, NATO in 63, the Association Agreement in 26, the West, in general, in 19; several cases of coverage featured several of these issues simultaneously.

Chart 2.



The monitoring showed that the EU is most frequently covered by TV media in conjunction with the activities of high political appointees. Official meetings of public figures, governmental visits and other similar events got far broader coverage than informational-explanatory meetings with population. Moreover, the reports on programs and projects related to the integration into the EU were more about the development of policy or political decisions (for example, the ratification of the Association Agreement by Belgium) than about the implications of this policy for citizens. The findings of the monitoring somewhat correlate with the action plan on EU integration which is more focused on separate events rather than on the promotion of programs and the TV media, actually, mirrors this approach giving less coverage to the promotion of programs.

## II. EU INTEGRATION COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION STRATEGY AND ITS ACTION PLAN OF THE GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA

On September 6, 2013 the Government of Georgia approved the Communication and Information Strategy on European Integration for the period of 2014–2017. The document has not been revised since then and consequently, it does not reflect the challenges outlined in the EU Action Plan on Strategic Communication following Russia’s intervention in Ukraine. However, taking the international context into consideration, neither has the Annual Action Plan on Communication Strategy been revised.

### 2.1. STRATEGY VISION AND CONSISTENCY OF GOVERNMENTAL MESSAGES

**Vision.** The government’s vision is unveiled in the introduction of the Communication and Information Strategy on European Integration; in particular, the document reads that “the priority of Georgia’s foreign policy is to deepen political relations and strengthen political dialogue with the European Union, as well as to gradually promote the principle of “four freedoms” (free movement of people, goods, services and capital) and support Georgia’s EU membership in a long-term perspective.” This policy document is mostly focused on informing the public on the benefits of EU integration and it does not contain the vision about how the government should respond to the flow of misinformation accompanying the process of integration. In addition, the document says nothing about fundamental European values, such as democracy, rule of law, fighting corruption, protection of minority rights, freedom of expression and media that are highlighted in the EU Action Plan on Strategic Communication.

**Consistency of governmental messages.** Consistency of the governmental messages, along with efficient coordination, is one of the major components of strategic communication needed to achieve the goals. Top government officials – President, Prime Minister, Parliament Speaker, separate ministers and others – have repeatedly declared that Georgia’s integration into Euro-Atlantic space is the choice of the government and Georgian people. However, separate representatives of the ruling Georgian Dream coalition, including from the executive authorities, make contradicting messages on Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration and sometimes they even step up anti-Western rhetoric. On the one hand, conflicting statements made by various members of the parliamentary majority group, and on the other,

contradictory statements made by separate representatives of the executive authorities about the officially declared foreign course undermine the effect of communication and create a sense of general uncertainty that, in turn, affects public attitudes.

According to the public opinion survey conducted by the Media Development Foundation (MDF) in September 2015 covering respondents aged between 17 and 35<sup>19</sup>, 40.2% of respondents believe that messages of various branches of Georgian authorities on Euro-Atlantic integration are inconsistent. During the 53th session of Georgia's EU Integration Commission<sup>20</sup>, Georgian State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Davit Bakradze also focused on the need for common messages and long-term strategic communication policy; this fact amounts to admitting the existence of the problem.

The contradicting statements made by the representatives of various branches of government and even public servants may be divided into several categories:

1. **The European Union imposes reforms on us/makes us give up our traditions.** The reforms envisaged in frames of the EU integration process are believed to be imposed from outside and local actors have to implement them against their own will. This tendency became obvious in 2014 during the adoption of the Anti-Discrimination Law by the Parliament, when some representatives of the ruling political force mostly focused on obligations rather than on rights. A part of them perceived the law as a mechanism to protect LGBT communities or, in some cases, as an attempt to legalize same-sex marriage, rather than a possibility to eradicate any forms of discrimination.

**Omar Nishnianidze, Georgian Dream MP:** “My hands were shaking, when we were adopting the anti-discrimination law, but sometimes we also have to compromise in order to save the country and, at least, to avoid Ukrainization.”<sup>21</sup>

**Gogi Topadze, Georgian Dream – Entrepreneurs MP:** “They are compelled to approve such laws: same-sex marriage, gender relations, sexual, I do not know how to say it delicately; two men can get married; married men can adopt a child and it means that a child will grow up in a quite obscure situation.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Youth Attitudes Towards European Integration, 2015, <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads//1/Research-Publication-ENG.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> September 17, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1RmRir8>

<sup>21</sup> Geworld, June 4, 2014, <http://www.geworld.ge/View.php?ArtId=5943&lang=ge>

<sup>22</sup> Netgazeti, May 15, 2014

Gogi Topadze's allegations about EU's efforts to make Georgia give up its traditions involve not only the issues of marriage involving LGBT community, but also genetically modified food exports.

**Gogi Topadze, Georgian Dream – Entrepreneurs MP:** “We have signed the Association Agreement, but we do not look carefully at what the European Union is doing, what they are imposing on us. We have compromised on a lot of issues, including on those issues which do not comply with Georgian traditions, for example, LGBT community; genetically modified foods are banned there and we are importing them.”<sup>23</sup>

Former Deputy State Minister on Diaspora Issues, Sandro Bregadze<sup>24</sup> also spoke about the process orchestrated by “external dark forces”, which compel us to legalize same-sex marriage; he made homophobic statements like radical extremist groups and resigned in February 2016.

**2. Europe/NATO = pederasty.** Minister of Education and Culture of Abkhazia in exile, Dima Jaiani also used a false dilemma technique, when a difficult choice has to be made between two alternatives; although Jaiani does not represent Georgian Dream, he was appointed to the abovementioned position in 2013 and he is affiliated with People's Assembly, an opposition movement backed by pro-Russian party Nino Burjanadze-Democratic Movement.

**Dima Jaiani, Minister of Education and Culture of Abkhazia:** “If Europe means pederasty, I do not want such Europe!<sup>25</sup>... If pederasty is needed to join EU and NATO, I, Dima Jaiani, will never accept to join NATO.”<sup>26</sup>

**3. Non-governmental organizations financed by foreign countries should be banned.** The statements made by GD lawmakers, Gogi Topadze and Tamaz Mechiauri, as well as former Deputy State Minister on Diaspora Issues, Sandro Bregadze on identifying NGOs with threats are similar to the approaches unveiled in Russia's national security strategy for 2015:

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<sup>23</sup> Interpressnews, July 1, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1HAxzPX>

<sup>24</sup> February 17, 2016, <http://bit.ly/1PQ8XTR>

<sup>25</sup> Asaval-Dasavali, August 18-24, 2014

<sup>26</sup> Prime Time, March 31, 2014

#### Russia's national security strategy for 2015

Main threats to the state and public security:

“The activities of radical public associations and groups using nationalist and religious extremist ideology, foreign and international nongovernmental organizations, and financial and economic structures, and also individuals, focused on destroying the unity and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, destabilizing the domestic political and social situation – including through inciting “color revolutions”...

and destroying traditional Russian religious and moral values.

#### Statements made by Georgian politicians on NGOs

**Gogi Topadze, Georgian Dream- Entrepreneurs MP:** “When you undermine your nation, your homeland only because you are receiving grants from abroad, of course, they should be held answerable. They should be banned. The Americans turned everything upside down in many countries. This is how tragedies occurred in Arab countries, Iraq, Yugoslavia, Libya, Egypt; now, the same is happening in Syria; they are demolishing the country citing the destruction of democracy. What did they do to Gaddafi; they raped him, cut him to pieces. It should be noted that Libya was one of the leading countries”...<sup>27</sup>

**Sandro Bregadze, former Deputy State Minister on Diaspora Issues:** “This campaign is carried out by some marginal groups, which are financed by quite doubtful foreign organizations and which are directly instructed to discredit our church.”<sup>28</sup>

**Tamaz Mechiauri, Georgian Dream MP:** “Those, affiliated with him [George Soros], are mostly carrying out anti-Georgian activities; they call the Patriarchate and the Patriarch abusive names.<sup>29</sup> “She [Tina Khidasheli, Minister of Defense] had worked [in NGO sector] with many persons with anti-state thinking, who were fighting against our religion and traditions.”<sup>30</sup>

4. **Neither NATO, nor European Union.** Stirring up skepticism towards Euro-Atlantic integration (Gogi Topadze, Georgian Dream-Entrepreneurs: “We do not need neither NATO, nor EU<sup>31</sup>”; Tamaz Mechiauri, Georgian Dream<sup>32</sup>: “NATO itself refuses to accept us”) was accompanied by the attempts to demonize the North Atlantic Alliance:

**NATO is an aggressor:** Gogi Topadze, Georgian Dream-Entrepreneurs: “Let’s recall, how NATO fighter jets bombed peaceful population in Yugoslavia! Let’s recall what NATO did in Iraq... What other examples of NATO’s aggression should I bring? Afghanistan, Libya, etc.”<sup>33</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Geworld.ge, March 6 <http://bit.ly/1VkvmeG>

<sup>28</sup> Kviris Kronika, January 18-24, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Kviris Palitra, September 7, 2015.<http://bit.ly/22qSiwj>

<sup>30</sup> Sakinformi, September 8, 2015

<sup>31</sup> Geworld.ge, March 12, 2015.<http://bit.ly/1MGN0ql>

<sup>32</sup> PiA, April 12, <http://bit.ly/1UYqssi>

<sup>33</sup> Asaval-Dasavali, March 23-29, 2015

By using the false dilemma technique, NATO integration was portrayed as a counterbalance to losing territories.

**NATO integration = a threat to territorial integrity: Tamaz Mechiauri, Georgian Dream: “If it poses a threat to our country’s territorial integrity and its security, I will reject any of them.”<sup>34</sup>**

Noteworthy that according to the recent public opinion survey commissioned by NDI<sup>35</sup> and fielded between February 23 and March 14, 2016, number of NATO supporters decreased by 12% compared to the similar survey conducted three years ago, in April 2013: 68% of respondents expressed support to Georgia’s NATO accession against 80% of respondents in November 2013. In November 2015 this figure stood at 70%.

**5. If Russia is an aggressor, so is the U.S.** Georgia’s strategic partner, the United States was aligned with the country, which occupies 20% of Georgian territories.

**Gogi Topadze, Georgian Dream–Entrepreneurs MP: “If Russia is an aggressor, who created a lot of problems to us, so is our trans-oceanic, so called partner.”<sup>36</sup>**

**6. Ukrainian developments have been provoked by the United States.**

**Soso Jachviani, Georgian Dream MP: “Russia, as well as Europe and the United States have a great interest towards Ukraine... When you arrive there and express support, you are not correct... [I mean] those American diplomats<sup>37</sup>, who arrive there and bring some cookies and other things. If anyone expresses such support, I will overthrow any government.”<sup>38</sup>**

**7. The West will not be able to protect us against threats.**

**Zaza Papuashvili, Georgian Dream MP: “Russia is an eternal neighbor... During the 2008 war, we received only concerns, water and diapers from the West!”<sup>39</sup>**

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<sup>34</sup> Rustavi 2, April 8, 2016, <http://rustavi2.com/ka/news/43848>

<sup>35</sup> [https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_March%202016%20poll\\_Public%20Issues\\_GEO\\_vf.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202016%20poll_Public%20Issues_GEO_vf.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Maestro, Maestro at 9pm; March 17

<sup>37</sup> He was referring to the arrival of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland in Kiev and bringing some tea and cakes to the protesters.

<sup>38</sup> Prime Time, February 24, 2014

<sup>39</sup> Geworld.ge, March 25, 2015



## 8. Russia and Eurasian Union – Alternative to the West

**Gogi Topadze, Georgian Dream – Entrepreneurs MP:** “NATO is an aggressive military bloc... The Eurasian Union is one of the alternatives, where we will feel better”<sup>40</sup> “Russia tells you, you do not need NATO, come and let’s talk; instead, you want in NATO. Can NATO help you?”<sup>41</sup>

**Soso Jachvliani, Georgian Dream:** “Neither the United States, nor Europe or Russia is our patron; all of them pursue their own interests... We should take a step and talk to Russia without any mediators; there is no other solution.”<sup>42</sup>

**Londer Tsaava, head of the Abkhazian government’s bureau of advisers:** “Rather than pinning hopes on a single idol, maybe it’s better to open the door to other weighty players, I mean Russia, instead of living in a constant fear of making Uncle Sam angry”.<sup>43</sup>

9. **Traditional Russian market has more perspectives than European.** Another example of stirring up nihilism about gaining access to European market is the statement made by Zurab Chekurishvili, adviser to the Minister of Agriculture, in the interview with Russian propagandistic media outlet Sputnik – Georgia<sup>44</sup>, according to which because of overproduction on European market, gaining access to traditional Russian market has more perspectives for Georgia. The statement prompted the Georgian Agriculture Minister to make a public explanation; he said that an adviser is not an official adding that the Ministry is actively involved in the process of European integration.

## 10. For traditional views, other countries are greater problem than Russian propaganda.

**Omar Nishnianidze, Georgian Dream:** “I do not think and I do not see any disastrous situation in the country with respect to Russian propaganda. I think that other countries are not doing less; we should stay firm and repel this propaganda with our Georgian, traditional views, our national interests.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Kviris Palitra, March 19, 2015

<sup>41</sup> Imedi, Kronika, March 11, 2015

<sup>42</sup> Interpressnews, July 22, 2015 <http://bit.ly/1Sdlg3g>

<sup>43</sup> Geworld.ge, December 11, 2014

<sup>44</sup> Sputnik-Georgia, March 10, 2016 <http://bit.ly/25c0wuy>

<sup>45</sup> Rustavi 2, April 30, 2016, <http://rustavi2.com/ka/news/43086>

Besides the above mentioned messages voiced by separate representatives of the ruling political team, which are fully in line with the remarks made by pro-Russian political parties and media, several cases were revealed, when in order to achieve internal political goals, the government was wrongly referring to the Association Agreement and the EU Directives. For example, in late 2014 Georgian Finance Minister Nodar Khaduri linked the increase in excise tax on tobacco with the commitments undertaken with the EU. Actually, the Association Agreement envisages gradual approximation (within 5 years) of excise rates on tobacco in line with the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control<sup>46</sup>. Similarly, citing the EU Directive, the Parliament approved, in an accelerated manner, the amendments to the law on broadcasting concerning the introduction of new regulations on advertising and sponsorship that according to the Association Agreement should have been a gradual process (5 years). The amendments created certain problems to TV media in terms of their financial sustainability.

## 2.1. GOALS, TASKS AND TARGET AUDIENCE

The key goal of the strategy is to raise public awareness about the opportunities related to EU integration and the commitments undertaken by the country, as well as to increase the knowledge of public servants. The document also aims to provide impartial information to the international community about Georgia's EU integration process. The communication strategy focuses on informing the public about 1) benefits, 2) obligations and 3) European values.

The key goals of the strategy are:

- To provide information on the benefits and opportunities related to the European integration process;
- To popularize the European integration process;
- To avoid creating unrealistic expectations among the population;
- To avoid shaping incorrect stereotypes and attitudes in the society about the European integration process;
- To increase public involvement in the European integration process and ensure regular feedback by the government to the citizens of Georgia on this and related issues;
- To provide objective and comprehensive information by the state on the status of the commitments taken as part of the implementation of the European integration process;
- To increase the knowledge and qualification of civil servants in relation to the European integration issues.

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<sup>46</sup> [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/77/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/77/)

Besides public servants, the list of goals also contains raising awareness of other target groups, among them academics, business and civil society sectors; moreover, one of the tasks is to inform the public on new legislative initiatives in easily understandable language.

The strategy and relevant action plan concern only EU integration and they do not involve the issues of Georgia's integration into the North Atlantic Alliance.

The document identifies three main target groups at the national level. These groups are: 1) young people; 2) vulnerable groups; 3) disseminators (people having influence on the formation of public opinion).

Seven partners are distinguished at the national level: 1) local government; 2) students and academic circles; 3) non-governmental organizations; 4) business sector; 5) community-based organizations of ethnic minorities; 6) media; 7) religious associations; 7) state institutions.

## 2.3.THE WAYS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The strategy will be implemented using three main methods: 1) education; 2) informing the public and public support/advocacy.

To implement the strategy, based on the public opinion survey, the Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, through coordination with other government agencies and in cooperation with the Georgian Public Broadcaster, Georgian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and others, develops an action plan, which is approved by Georgia's EU Integration Commission each December. The commission has already approved action plans for 2014, 2015 and 2016 years.

The annual communication action plan involves a monthly plan of activities and it is not structured according to the following criteria:

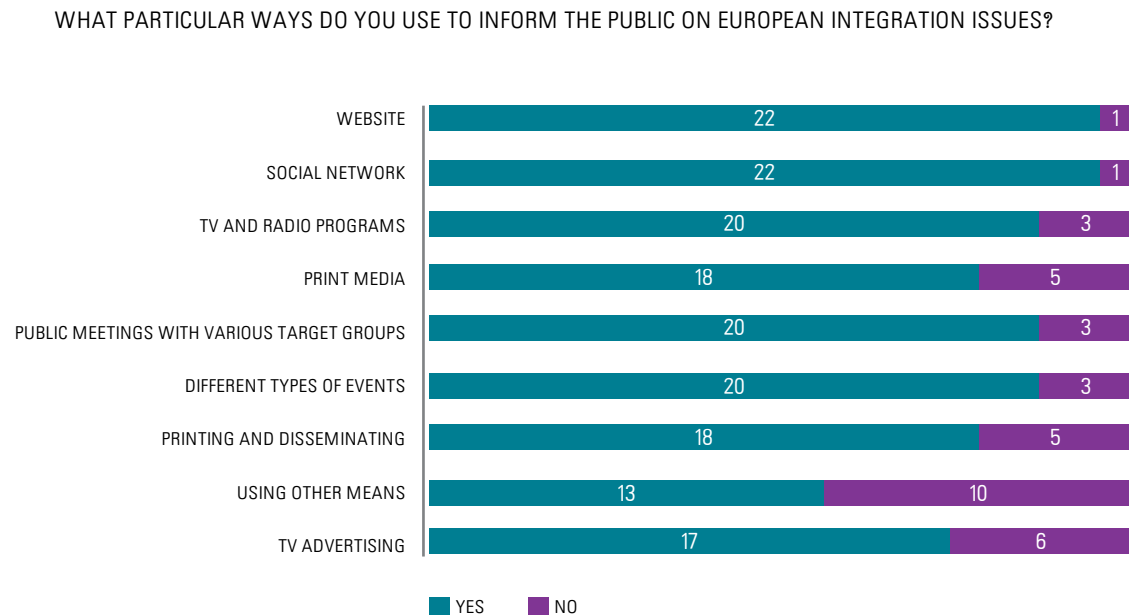
- The activities planned at national and international levels are not separated from each other;
- One-off activities and long-term campaigns are not separated from each other;
- The activities needing proactive reaction, such as value-related issues, are included in the part related to information meetings with the population; however, unlike the EU action plan, it does not contain a mechanism of reactive approach, envisaging campaign and systemic reactions to misinformation and are related to increasing the possibilities of strategic communication;
- The plan is devised by a calendar principle and not according to the tasks defined by the strategy and the particular programs envisaged by the Association Agreement and relevant action plans;

- According to the strategy, action plan should contain the following information: activities, forms and means of communication, target groups, description of activities, clear indicators, project developers, potential partners and sources of financing. Although, according to the strategy, monitoring of the action plan should be conducted on the basis of indicators defined by the plan itself, the action plans for 2014 and 2015 do not mention any other indicators except target groups and agencies responsible for carrying out the activities; the 2016 action plan additionally mentions the source of financing and the place of activities.

The strategy defines the channels and forms of communication with the Information Center on NATO and EU representing a venue to receive additional information on the European integration process.

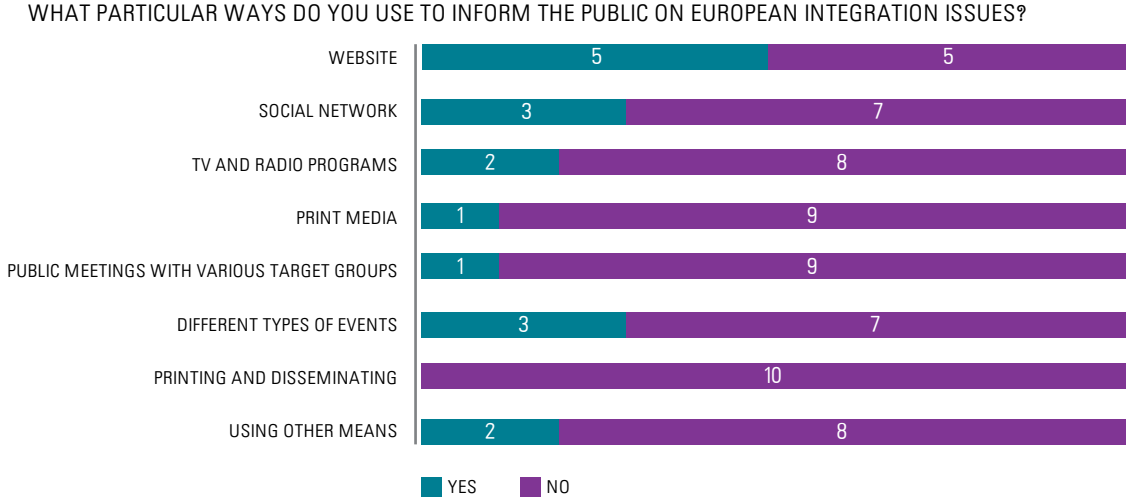
Interviews with some representatives of the central government have demonstrated that to inform the population on European integration issues, the government uses simultaneously several forms of communication with online platforms (websites, social media), TV and radio programs, public meetings with target groups and various events prevailing among them (chart 3).

**Chart 3. Forms for informing the public on European integration issues at the level of central government**



If websites and social networks are actively used to inform the public on European integration issues at the level of central government, in regions only one half of respondents use websites for this purpose, while social networks are used only by the self-government bodies of Akhaltsikhe, Marneuli and Kutaisi (see chart 4). Eight respondents said that the representatives of their agencies have never participated in TV and radio programs on informing the public on European integration issues. Only the representatives from the Akhaltsikhe and Kutaisi mayor’s offices gave positive answers to this question. Meanwhile, only the Akhaltsikhe self-government uses public meetings as the form of communication on integration issues.

**Chart 4. Forms for informing the public on European integration issues at the level of local government**



Several intensive campaigns can be distinguished among the events conducted by the government for informing the public:

- Providing general information on European integration and European values that was carried out through public diplomacy, in a format of public meetings;
- Information campaign on visa liberalisation that was recommended in the European Commission’s progress report on Georgia’s implementation of the action plan on visa liberalisation (VLAP) released on May 8, 2015. Video clips were made in frames of the campaign, providing an explanation about citizens’ rights and obligations under conditions of future visa free regime with EU; these video clips were aired on national and regional televisions; printed materials were also prepared.
- Informing target groups on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) through public meetings and various events in Tbilisi and regions, including on various opportunities and obligations in the sphere of agriculture.

- Informing the public on trafficking, migration issues through the meetings with various target groups.
- The Justice Ministry has made video clips and carried out a campaign on ID cards related to the prejudices existing in the society and requirements of the Association Agreement.

According to Tornike Nozadze, the head of Strategic Communication Department at the Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, the key form of communication involves meetings with population in Tbilisi and regions, as well as dissemination of relevant materials and information clips. He also said that the government mostly focuses on the regions populated by ethnic minorities, where Russian propaganda is especially strong. Relevant materials are translated in the Armenian and Azerbaijani languages.

The head of Information Center on NATO and EU said that 300 meetings were held during 2014 throughout Georgia and 198 meetings – during six months of 2015.

When asked how the audience is renewed when planning the meetings, Tornike Nozadze, the head of Strategic Communication Department, said that they choose a diversified approach that sometimes implies working with one and the same audience.

**“We do not insist that the same people should not attend (the meetings). On the contrary, we can only welcome it. The more they listen to updated information, the better for us. Thus, we give them a chance to decide. It is also prompted by pragmatic considerations,” Tornike Nozadze said.**

It should be noted that according to most respondents from the central government, mostly local governments mobilize audience during meetings. The Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia has posted on its special website on cultural policy the list of people<sup>47</sup>, who attended the policy document discussion in regions. According to the list, mostly top officials from central and local governments, cultural and educational institutions attend such meetings. When speaking about the problems in implementation of the communication strategy, Deputy Minister of Culture and Monument Protection, Levan Kharatishvili names the lack of public interest and involvement as one of the problems.

**“It is a complex problem and it does not stem from one particular agency, but is mostly related to public engagement with social and everyday problems. Only a narrow circle is interested and the same persons take the initiative. So, it is our challenge to involve the public in it,” Levan Khatishvili said.**

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<sup>47</sup> <http://culturepolicy.ge/EventSideMenu/Regional-Meetings.aspx>

It should also be noted that some ministries use the form of communication not specifically for informing the public on European integration issues, but for providing information on reforms that, according to one of the respondents, indirectly means European integration, because reforms are just envisaged by the European integration agenda.

**“Proceeding from the Ministry’s format, there are no expectations that information should be provided on the issue of European integration... When you provide information on reforms and these reforms also cover European integration, it is already meant,” Nana Kavtaradze, a representative of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Protection said.**

Giorgi Dididze, the deputy head of the Department of European Integration, Reforms and Innovations at the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, has quite a different position. He questions the expediency of informing the public on institutional reforms, because, he supposes that public expectations are related to receiving concrete benefits and similar communication may trigger opposite results.

**“We offer a European product, but this is not the product, which you should present to the society. We are afraid of receiving a bad result. For example, we made an amendment to the law on self-government: it is elective and what else? Have we come closer? Has it brought any benefits? Has it increased incomes?” Giorgi Dididze asks.**

It is worth noting that the representative of the government agency, whose functions include “development of proposals on de-centralization and de-concentration of the governance system and on separation and distribution of authorities of central, regional and local self-government bodies”, believes that any communication with the public on the amendments to the Law on Self-Government is inexpedient.

## **2.4. ACTIVITIES AND MESSAGES FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF TANGIBLE AND DEFINED GOALS OF THE ASSOCIATION AGENDA**

One of the objectives of the Association Agenda is to achieve tangible and defined results through the implementation of practical measures.<sup>48</sup> The main message of the communication strategy is the improvement of welfare of citizens of Georgia, which requires complex reforms.

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<sup>48</sup> Association Agenda between the European Union and Georgia. 1. Principles, instruments and resources for implementing the Association Agenda. <http://www.civil.ge/files/files/EU-GeorgiaAssociationAgenda.pdf>

**“In spite of the fact that the process of European Integration involves the need to implement a number of fundamental and complex reforms, this constitutes a unique opportunity for each citizen of Georgia to improve the standard of living for himself and his family,” the strategy reads.**

The strategy defines key messages underlining the interrelation of benefits and commitments:

**“The key message should emphasize the fact that the European integration process may be associated not only with benefits but may equally involve certain commitments.”**

This chapter evaluates the extent to which activities specified in the Association Agreement and its national action plan are reflected in the communication strategy and consequently, the degree of communication with public about those benefits which the government implements in each direction. The chapter is divided by thematic directions and mainly covers the issues of education, youth and sport, culture, environmental protection, public health, trade and trade-related issues, including agriculture. It also assesses separate activities and various forms of communication.

## 2.4.1. EDUCATION

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**Summarizing paragraph.** Of four main directions outlined in the Association Agenda in the field of education, the highest number of activities were envisaged for two directions in the 2014–2015 action plan. Of 25 activities set out in the 2014 action plan, the relevant report provides the information about only four activities. The report does not fully reflect those activities either which are implemented by relevant ministries. Among implemented activities worth noting is a program designed to raise awareness among teachers as disseminators. Significant EU programs such as Erasmus + and the learning of foreign languages do not represent part of the long-term campaign of the communication action plans.

**Priority directions.** The Association Agenda in the field of education, training and youth envisages the following priority directions for 2014–2016:

- 1) promoting Georgia’s further integration into the European Higher Education Area (the Bologna process), fostering the independence and autonomy of Georgian universities;
- 2) promoting academic cooperation, student and staff mobility (Erasmus+ programme and Marie Skłodowska–Curie Actions);
- 3) bringing Georgia’s vocational education and training (VET) system in line with the modernisation of EU



VET structures; 4) encouraging a strategic approach to youth policy and enhancing exchanges and cooperation in the field of non-formal education for young people and youth workers, as a means to promote intercultural dialogue and support civil society, inter alia through EU programmes in the field of youth. The cooperation in the field of education includes the support to lifelong education, modernization of education and training systems, exchange in academic sphere and encouraging the learning of foreign languages.

**Activities:** The highest number of activities in 2014–2015 action plans was envisaged for two directions. These directions are:

1. Cooperation in the area of vocational education and training;
2. Reinforcing understanding and knowledge on the European integration process, the academic dialogue, and participation in relevant EU programmes.

Promoting activities in the direction of vocational education served the aim of raising the awareness of various target groups,<sup>49</sup> whilst the activities specified various communication forms (reports, TV advertisement, brochures, briefings, conferences, festival, study tours, social media). Among activities planned for the second direction were: essays, blogs, competitions in painting, lectures and workshops, meetings with teachers, arranging EU corners in schools, organizing tours and study tours, thematic winter and summer schools.

An important activity aimed to communicate information on the European integration topics to teachers as disseminators was the program “Teacher – Guide to Europe” implemented by the National Center for Teacher Professional Development and the Information Centre on NATO and EU with the assistance from Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the EU. Apart from communicating information through workshops on various thematic topics such as: religion in EU countries, education, ways of tackling ecological problems, human rights, the mentioned project also envisaged a public diplomacy component – a familiarization tour to Latvia to learn about its experience. The report on the implementation of 2014 communication action plan contains scanty information about this program, limited to a single event (the conduct of workshop), and does not provide information about a competition and a study tour. However, the 2015 report of the Information Centre on NATO and EU,<sup>50</sup> which reflects activities implemented by target groups, shows that the program annually involves up to 100 teachers from various regions of Georgia and 10 teachers, having cleared a competition stage of the program, are selected for a study tour.

Although several programs are implemented by separate entities, the communication action plan and the 2014 report provide information only about single activities under those programs rather than the results of long-term, complex measures; nor do these documents

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<sup>49</sup> Youth, adult population, vocational students, vocational educational institutions.

<sup>50</sup> <http://natoinfo.ge/uploads/other/1/1760.pdf> pg. 13.

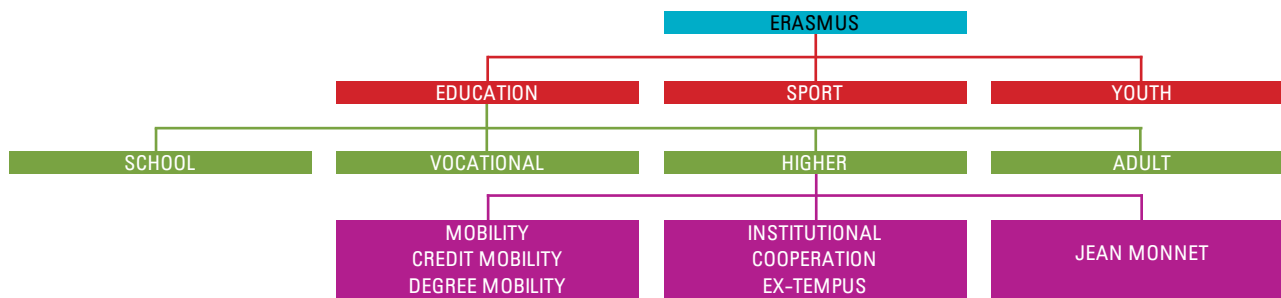
contain data about a communication component of such activities. The majority of activities planned in 2014 and 2015 served the aim to raise awareness about the EU; for example, competitions, lectures and workshops on the topic of European integration, communicating information about EU integration issues through print media, radio, brochures, TV, meetings with ethnic minorities. We considered these activities as matching the obligation in the Association Agreement, which requires “reinforcing understanding and knowledge on the European integration process, the academic dialogue on EU-Eastern Partnership relations, and participation in relevant EU programmes” (359h). However, the activities are more relevant to the first part of this obligation than the second part – concerning the academic dialogue. As regards the academic dialogue, the planning/implementation of communication in this direction is quite limited, according to the action plans and the report.

Only the 2014 communication action plan includes activities that match the commitment of reinforcing the academic dialogue, participating in EU programs and increasing teacher mobility. The 2014 communication action plan contained two such activities: grants competition for doctorate educational programs and the involvement of residents of occupied territories and representatives of ethnic minorities in the EU mobility and education programs.

**Erasmus +.** The action plans for 2014 and 2015 do not include a long-term information campaign or other measures for such an important program as Erasmus +.

Erasmus + is the EU’s seven-year grants program with the budget amounting to 14.7 billion euros. Along with the youth and sport component, the education is a significant direction of the program, providing unique opportunity to cooperate in the field of science; to obtain international higher education; to develop institutionally; to cooperate in the area of researches.

**Chart 5. Erasmus + higher educational programs**



In an interview a representative of the Ministry of Education noted that the involvement of the Ministry in the Erasmus + program is limited to signing grants agreement or giving consent on the announcement of a competition. In this regard, the Ministry cooperates with higher educational institutions. Moreover, upon the consent of the Ministry, a nongovernmental organization (National Erasmus + Office Georgia) has been established to coordinate the implementation of the project.

**In a survey “Youth attitudes towards the EU integration process”,<sup>51</sup> conducted by the Media Development Foundation in September 2015, the exchange programs and information about the education possibilities in the EU were named by 20.3% of respondents as the second most important issue among the topics of European integration they would like to learn about.**

**Encouraging the learning of foreign languages.** The comparison of the Association Agenda, the national action plan for the implementation of the Association Agreement and the 2014-2015 actions plans of the communication strategy has shown that there are several directions which are not reflected in the communication strategy. One of them is the learning of foreign languages.

**Encouraging the learning of foreign languages.** According to the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, the cooperation in the field of education and training shall focus, inter alia, on encouraging the learning of foreign languages.

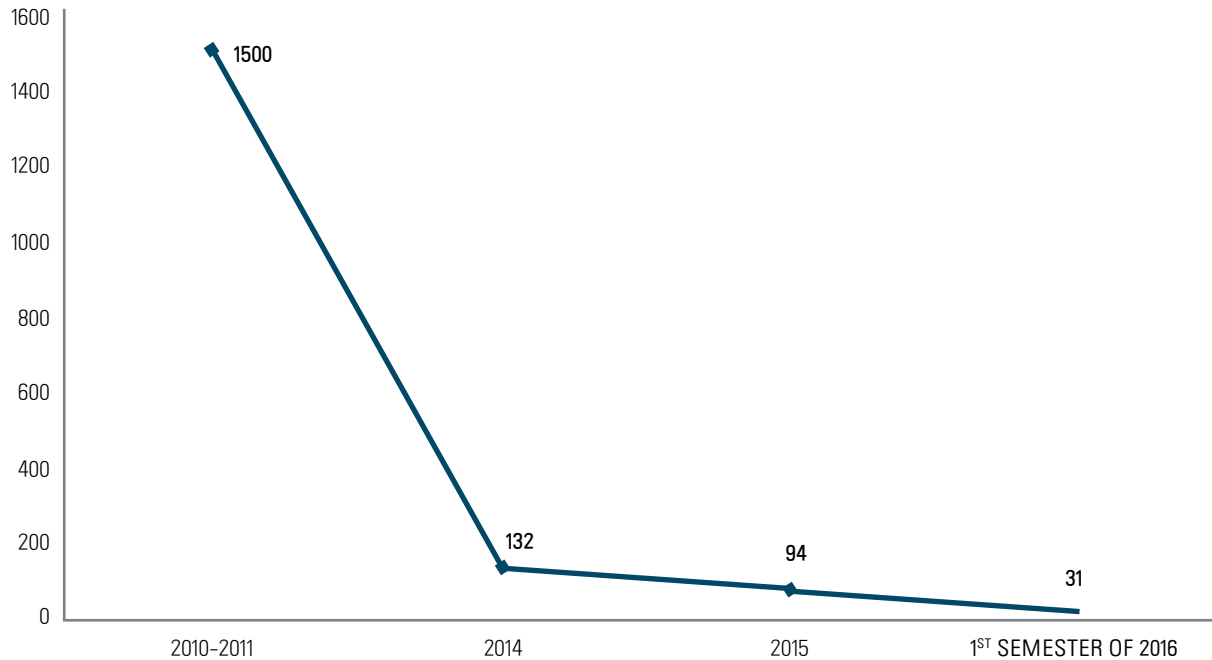
The 2014 of the national action plan for the implementation of the Association Agreement does not include any activity planned in this direction whereas the 2015 action plan envisages the training of foreign language schoolteachers in various countries; the implementation of the English Language Fellow Programme; and the invitation of foreign volunteer teachers within the framework of the “Teach and Learn with Georgia” programme. Informing target groups about opportunities to learn foreign languages was not part of 2014 and 2015 action plans of the EU integration communication and information strategy.

According to the information requested from LEPL National Center for Teacher Professional Development, some 31 volunteer teachers participate in the “Teach and Learn with Georgia” programme in the first semester of 2016. As the Figure 5 shows, while the Association Agenda allows for the intensification of activity in this direction, there is a sharp decrease observed in the number of teachers engaged in this program since 2010.

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<sup>51</sup> <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/view-library/27> p. 49.

Chart 6. Data on volunteer teachers engaged in “Teach and Learn with Georgia” programme, 2010–2016



2011-2011 ACADEMIC YEAR

1500 volunteers

2014 YEAR

132 volunteers

2015 YEAR

94 volunteers

2016 1<sup>ST</sup> SEMESTER

31 volunteers

According to the results of the survey conducted among youth by Media Development Foundation in September 2015<sup>52</sup>, some 11.2 percent evaluate their knowledge of English as very good, 20.4 percent evaluate it as good, 22 percent think their knowledge of English is intermediary whilst 28.4 percent think that it is bad and 18 percent say they do not know English at all.

**Vocational education.** The communication component about a 27 million worth EU budgetary assistance project in the area of vocational education, which is specified in the action plan, envisaged producing TV reports and informing society through online platforms, briefings

<sup>52</sup> <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/view-library/27> pg. 12.

and conferences; however, the 2014 report does not contain any data either about an information campaign carried out by means of various media platforms or about key messages of the campaign.

In his interview, the Head of Social Partnership Support Division of the Ministry of Education and Science, Nikoloz Meskhishvili, also spoke about a project supported by the International Organization for Migration, which facilitates the engagement of successful Georgian emigrants in the vocational education. Successful Georgian specialists of concrete fields are brought from Europe to engage in various activities. Along with the development of vocational skills, this program aims to support employment too. In this regard, it is worth to mention the Diaspora Economic Forum organized by the Office of the State Minister for Diaspora Issues – an important event to which Georgian businessmen operating in the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and other European countries were invited to share their experience.

**According to the public opinion poll conducted by the US National Democratic Institute (NDI) in February–March 2016,<sup>53</sup> as many as 57 percent of respondents name employment as the most important national issue.**

**Online platforms of the Ministry of Education and Science.** The website of the Ministry of Education<sup>54</sup> conspicuously displays banners which, when clicked, redirect users to the webpages of Horizon 2020<sup>55</sup> and vocational education<sup>56</sup>, though the Ministry website does not have a banner which would redirect users to the webpage of the National Erasmus+ Office (NEO) Georgia.<sup>57</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Erasmus +:** An active information campaign to promote Erasmus + and other European educational programs should be planned with the involvement of program beneficiaries so as to clearly illustrate, through sharing success stories and personal experience, concrete benefits of the integration process.
- **Encouraging the learning of foreign languages:** Against the backdrop of hybrid warfare waged by Russia, the knowledge of English language, as a means of communication and receiving information, acquires a special connotation. At the same time, the knowledge of

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<sup>53</sup> [https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_March%202016%20poll\\_Public%20Issues\\_ENG\\_vf.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202016%20poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_vf.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> Last accessed on 29 March 2016. <http://www.mes.gov.ge/?lang=eng>

<sup>55</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/>

<sup>56</sup> <http://vet.ge>

<sup>57</sup> <http://erasmusplus.org.ge/en/Home>

foreign languages is a necessary precondition to obtain quality European education and apply for Erasmus + program. It is important for the Ministry to fully enforce this program, on the one hand, and on the other, to inform society about this possibility.

- **Facilitating employment through education:** The assistance provided by EU programs in the field of vocational education, which create strong possibilities for employment, as well as the program envisaging the support to lifelong education should be an important component of the communication. The engagement in this process of Georgians living abroad to show examples of success should be part of a large-scale campaign, not a single event alone.

## 2. SPORT AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

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**Summarizing paragraph.** Of four priority directions in the field of sport and youth, the highest number of activities were planned in the areas of employment and informal education and the cooperation with youth organization. However, out of 24 planned activities the report contains information about only four activities the majority of which are one-off events. Meetings to inform youth about the EU integration process were most intensively held by the Information Centre on NATO and EU. The report does not contain any information about the promotion of a sport program under Erasmus +; nor does it provide information about the campaign No to Hate Speech in the online space, or about those thematic programs the information on which is available on the webpage.

**Program priorities.** The Association Agreement specifies four main directions of cooperation in the field of sport and youth:

1. Reinforce cooperation and exchanges in the field of youth policy and non-formal education for young people and youth workers (360a);
2. Support young people and youth workers' mobility as a means to promote intercultural dialogue and the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences outside the formal educational systems, including through volunteering (360b);
3. Promote cooperation between youth organisations (360c); strengthen contacts and exchange of information and experience between all sectors of civil society in the EU and in Georgia (369a);
4. Promote cooperation in the field of sport and physical activity through the exchange of information and good practices in order to promote a healthy lifestyle and the social and educational values of sport, mobility in sport and in order to fight global threats to sport such as doping, racism and violence (368).

**Activities.** In 2014, the communication action plan envisaged 24 activities in the field of sport and youth; the 2014 report, however, contains information about four planned activities (a conference, the student days, a round table and a seminar) and up to 40 meetings with

students (1,500 beneficiaries) on the EU integration issues, organized by the Information Centre on NATO and EU in various regions of Georgia and in Tbilisi.

Much like in case of other fields, the report, in this filed, describes separate measures too and does not provide information about the results of promoting the programs implemented under the Association Agenda. For example, according to the webpage of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs,<sup>58</sup> the Ministry implements a number of programs including on volunteering, integration of ethnic minorities, civil and informal education, vocational orientation and others; however, the report does not contain information either about these programs or about the cooperation of youth in various international formats.

**No to Hate Speech!:** Although No to Hate Speech in online space is included in the 2014 communication action plan, the report does not provide any information about this campaign. No to Hate Speech in online space is spearheaded by the Council of Europe in its member states and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs coordinates it in Georgia. The information about this campaign cannot be found in the form of a separate banner on the Ministry's webpage; the only information which can be sought about this campaign is in the news section of the webpage, but it is dated to 2013.<sup>59</sup> The movement No to Hate Speech has its Facebook page<sup>60</sup> which is not integrated into the Ministry's webpage. This Facebook page has a small number of users – 1,757, whilst the information on it was update with the interval of eight months (11 August 2015 – 18 April 2016). All this creates an impression that the coordination of this project on the national level is a mere formality for the Ministry and it does not view the project as its priority.

**Sport.** Yet another important program which is envisaged within the EU format is the sport component of Erasmus +. The webpage of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs contains information about separate activities of this program (a presentation of the program, a conference, an information day), but no information is available about those opportunities which the sports program<sup>61</sup> of Erasmus + offers.

**Online platforms of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.** The webpage of the Ministry<sup>62</sup> contains information about the youth programs including annual programs on volunteering, integration of ethnic minorities and informal education. The webpage Myprofession.ge,<sup>63</sup> created within the program of youth policy development, helps youth choose a professional orientation.

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<sup>58</sup> [http://msy.gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=GEO&sec\\_id=1356](http://msy.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=1356)

<sup>59</sup> <http://bit.ly/1qnTswC>

<sup>60</sup> Last accessed on 20 April 2016. <http://bit.ly/1N3Knha>

<sup>61</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/sport/opportunities/sport\\_funding/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/sport/opportunities/sport_funding/index_en.htm)

<sup>62</sup> [http://msy.gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=GEO&sec\\_id=1](http://msy.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=1)

<sup>63</sup> <http://myprofession.gov.ge>

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Ministry should provide interested persons with more information about EU programs and promote cases of successful cooperation which will encourage more young people to benefit from opportunities of various programs.
- The Ministry should use online platforms, especially, social media in a more effective way to promote EU programs among youth.
- The fight against hate speech in online space and the engagement of youth in this process is one of important directions as a number of studies<sup>64</sup> show the necessity of its implementation. It should also be noted that hate speech is often applied in anti-Western context. The conduct of effective campaign against the use of hate speech is a priority activity in terms of human rights protection.

## 3. CULTURE

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**Summarizing paragraph.** Of three priority directions in the field of culture, the highest number of activities were planned in the area of the development of culture policy. Although the process of policy development is underway, the report does not contain information about this activity. The web-platforms of the Ministry are distinguished for their interaction with society and reporting. The reports, however, reflect such activities that aim at building institutional capacity and upgrading the qualification of staff in separate directions rather than at communicating the information. No activities are envisaged to promote the Western assistance provided for the protection of cultural heritage.

**Program priorities.** The Association Agenda includes the following priorities in the field of culture: 1) implementation of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions; 2) cooperation on the development of an inclusive cultural policy in Georgia and preservation and valorisation of cultural and natural heritage with a view to fostering socio-economic development; 3) promote the participation of Georgian cultural actors in cultural cooperation programmes, including Creative Europe.

**Activities.** The majority of activities in the 2014 communication action plan of the government of Georgia was planned within the framework of the dialogue about cultural policy. Of seven activities planned in the field of culture in 2014, the information is provided about five activities in the report and no information about the remaining two activities:

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<sup>64</sup> Hate Speech and Xenophobia, the Media Development Foundation, 2015. <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/view-library/19/>



1. First activity – the involvement of EU expert in the process of developing culture policy of Georgia carried out within the framework of the Eastern Partnership cultural program is part of policy development process which cannot be really considered a communication activity; this points to problems existing in the planning of the action plan;
2. Second activity, which is not reflected in the report, involves the communication of information to broader society about the policy development process itself. Although the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection implemented many activities in this direction, the report does not provide any information about them, which again points to problems in coordination and reporting.

**Developing culture policy.** To ensure the involvement of society in the development of culture policy, the Ministry created a special webpage with the motto Let's Develop Culture Policy Together.<sup>65</sup> The site contains detailed information about documents as well as meetings with society and participants in those meetings and one may say that in terms of reporting it is distinguished from websites of other entities. The webpage uses infographics to illustrate problems existing in cultural heritage, creative industry and the field of art.

**Creative Europe.** The 2015 annual plan reflects one of important projects – Creative Europe which Georgia joined in February 2015.

**Creative Europe is a six-year program established under the Eastern Partnership initiative to support the European cultural, audiovisual, creative sector, editing, cinema, TV, music, interdisciplinary art, cultural heritage and videogame industries. The program, lasting until 2020, provides access to a billion and a half budget through grants competitions to representatives of the field of culture.**

The banner<sup>66</sup> is conspicuously placed on the webpage of the Ministry of Culture and the webpage provides exhaustive information about the rules and possibilities of using the program in a simple, question and answer form. Moreover, contact details of persons responsible for the implementation of the program are provided for interested persons.

**Miscellaneous.** It should be noted that the 2014 report does not contain comprehensive information about those activities which the Ministry of Culture implemented to inform broader society, involve them in the policy development process and various European projects, but it reflects such activities that aim to upgrade the qualification of employees in the field of culture. For example, a training course on the Assessment and Monitoring of Restoration and Conservation or the training of employees of the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia, which are reflected in the 2014 report, do not fit into the communication format of the action plan but rather conform with the activity of the association action plan, namely, the strengthening of the capacity of the cultural sector (363b).

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<sup>65</sup> <http://culturepolicy.ge>

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.culture.gov.ge/Creative-Europe.aspx>

The action plan envisages activities for the promotion of Georgian culture in the West, though it does not envisage the activities which concern the preservation, restoration and development of monuments of Georgian cultural heritage by Western institutions and countries.

**Online platform of the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection.** As it was noted above, the webpage of the Ministry of Culture and a special page on the development of culture policy (along with the webpage of Environmental Information and Education Center which is discussed below) is distinguished among web-platforms of all entities, in terms of informing and interacting with society as well as reporting. The Facebook page of the Ministry has 84,015 users;<sup>67</sup> it contains information about planned events and Ministry's activities; however, it is not highly interactive.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

- Considering that one of most widespread messages fanning anti-Western sentiments among society is related to Western national identity and fight against traditions, it is important to conduct an information campaign which will highlight the contribution of the West to the preservation and development of Georgian cultural heritage. This campaign should be based on the concept of multiculturalism and common cultural heritage, portraying Georgia as an inseparable part of the Western culture.

## 4. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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**Summarizing paragraph.** Of seven priority directions of the Association Agenda, some activities envisaged in the communication action plan are field-specific and represent the process of implementation of the Association Agreement rather than the communication component. The activities are mainly related to celebrating various international days, one-off events and legislative changes rather than to long-term measure of informing public about these changes. The webpage of the Environmental Information and Education Center is one of distinguished online resources for various age groups, though the information about it is not provided in the report.

**Program priorities.** The Association Agenda envisages the following directions in the area of environment and climate change: 1) full implementation of Georgia's National Environment Action Plan for 2012-2016; 2-7) the adoption and implementation of national legislation,

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<sup>67</sup> Last accessed on 20 April 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/culturegovge/?fref=ts>

development of a coherent method of environmental data collection; 3) adoption and implementation of a national biodiversity strategy and action plan; 4) full implementation of international conventions; 5-6) implementation of activities on climate change.

**Activities.** Some activities implemented under the communication action plan envisage legislative changes (for example, protection of environment, ozone layer) rather than the communication of information about these changes to society; also, the celebration of various international days.

Some activities in the communication action plan are field-specific and are more related to the implementation of the association process than to the communication component (for example, technical assistance in preparation of compliance plans for existing landfills, in line with the international experience, is part of 2014 communication plan).

**Road map.** To implement the environment section of the Association Agreement, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources developed a road map<sup>68</sup> detailing 2015–2016 activities.

**Aarhus Convention.** When talking about communication activities, the head of Sustainable Development and Euro Integration Department of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Gizo Chelidze, singled out an EU directive which implies the awareness raising of society about environmental issues and the establishment of mechanisms of involving society in decision-making process. In this regards one should mention Aarhus Convention which Georgia ratified in 2000 and enforced in 2001. The Association Agenda envisages a full implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

**Aarhus Convention:** Adopted in 1998, this convention establishes a new approach which rests on environmental rights and establishes high standards for the access to environmental information, public participation in the decision making process and access to justice. Apart from participating in decision making on licenses, construction permits and any other issue which may affect the environment, the Convention grants the right to citizens to apply to court, inter alia, in case of breach of environmental legislation and harm to environment. Precedents in terms of court practice have already been set in Georgia. For example, in 2002, the Mtatsminda-Krtsanisi District Court, based on the Aarhus Convention, ruled in favor of Lilo residents and ordered the Tbilisi Mayor’s Office to close down a landfill site and the city council to consider costs for the conservation of landfill.

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<sup>68</sup> [http://moe.gov.ge/files/news\\_img/2015/ivnisi/sagzao\\_ruka/AA-DCFTA\\_Roadmap\\_GEO.pdf](http://moe.gov.ge/files/news_img/2015/ivnisi/sagzao_ruka/AA-DCFTA_Roadmap_GEO.pdf)

The communication action plans do not include activities for communicating information to public about the rights guaranteed under the Aarhus Convention. Although the Aarhus Convention itself is available on the website of the Environmental Information and Education Center, the website does not offer a user-friendly guide. It, however, includes a special form for notifications about violations of law,<sup>69</sup> thus creating a possibility to receive information from citizens electronically.

**Online platforms of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural resources.** To inform public the Ministry established the Environmental Information and Education Center with its webpage<sup>70</sup> enabling users to receive diverse information about environmental protection and plans and policies existing in this regard. The webpage is interactive and provides possibilities for the involvement of interested people in various programs. For example, the webpage has a green assistant application<sup>71</sup> which is meant for facilitating the participation of public in thematic discussions, seminars and other events. As an experiment, a researcher of Media Development Foundation filled in the online application for participation in an organized discussion and as a result, was invited to the meeting – Green Tea with the Minister – on 8 April. The meeting aimed at informing society about the goals of the ministerial, Environment for Europe, scheduled for 8-10 June in Batumi. The Center also has the Facebook page<sup>72</sup> reflecting educational events conducted for various age groups.

A kids webpage<sup>73</sup> for schoolchildren of various grades is integrated in the webpage of the Centre. In a simple form (comics, puzzles, riddles, crosswords) the site provides information to children of various age groups. The 2014 report does not provide information about this webpage or about separate planned activities (for example, training on the issue of managing water resources for school eco-clubs and awareness raising about European norms and standards) which were planned to inform various target groups.

The Facebook page of the Ministry has 88,105 users,<sup>74</sup> and the interaction from society is low.

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<sup>69</sup> <http://www.eiec.gov.ge/MenuCenter/ElectMess.aspx>

<sup>70</sup> <http://eiec.gov.ge/Home.aspx?lang=en-US>

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.eiec.gov.ge/MenuCenter/GreenAssistant.aspx>

<sup>72</sup> 7,629 users; last accessed on 15 April 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/eiecgovge/?ref=hl>

<sup>73</sup> <http://kids.eiec.gov.ge/eng/home>

<sup>74</sup> Last accessed on 20 April 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/MOEgeorgia>

## RECOMMENDATION:

- The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources should pay more attention to informing public about such projects which imply an active involvement of citizens in decision making process on environmental issues. The communication action plan should allocate more space to informing public about those activities which the Ministry implements.

## 5. PUBLIC HEALTH

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**Summarizing paragraph:** Of three priorities of the Association Agenda in the direction of public health, the communication action plan envisages only one. At the same time, the report reflects inter-agency coordinating activity. Informing public about the assistance provided by the West in combatting epidemic and communicable diseases, a topic which Russian media speculates about, is not part of the action plan.

**Program priorities:** In the field of public health, the Association Agenda envisages the cooperation in the following directions: 1) approximation of legislation; 2) implementation of international standards of tobacco control; 3) strengthening of epidemiological surveillance of communicable diseases.

**Activities.** The 2014 and 2015 action plans specify “Communication of information to public about a top priority of EU countries – universal reach of medical services.” The 2014 report, however, reflects not a communication measure but inter-agency meeting with heads of structural units of the Ministry and its subordinated legal entities in public law, at which the status of Ministry’s commitments to the European integration process and implementation of these commitments were discussed.

In her interview, the head of the office of the minister, Nana Kavtaradze, spoke about the activities envisaged in the Association Agreement, which relate to communicable diseases – TB and HIV/AIDS, citing an international conference held on this topic and a brochure informing population about communicable diseases that was distributed in regions as proof of performing these activities.

**Combatting epidemic and communicable diseases.** One of directions of the Association Agenda is the fight against epidemic and communicable diseases. It is in connection with Western assistance in this area that a myth, spread by Georgian media based on Russian sources, portrays the Richard G. Lugar Center for Public Health Research Center as threat.

The Richard G. Lugar Center for Public Health Research Center is a unique opportunity to be protected and secure against epidemics detected or spread in the region as well as against different types of biological disasters; to diagnose at an early stage and restrain the spread of both human and animal epidemics (Ebola, swine flu, avian flu, etc.).<sup>75</sup> The Richard Lugar laboratory which is equipped with modern technologies, plays an important role in preventing epidemics in agriculture and is of vital importance for the development of this field.

The information about the assistance provided by the West to Georgia in the fight against epidemic and communicable diseases, including about activities to counter disinformation about the Lugar Center, is not provided in the government report.

**Online platforms of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs.** The main page of Ministry's official website<sup>76</sup> does not display conspicuously the information about public health care direction related to the Association Agreement, though it displays the banner about the EU technical assistance in employment. The Facebook page of the Ministry counts 101,955 users<sup>77</sup> but shows less intensive interaction between users and the Ministry.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

- It is important to clearly explain to public the type and amount of assistance Georgia receives from Western governments and individual institutions for combatting epidemic and communicable diseases and provide comprehensive information to public to counter the disinformation disseminated by external and internal sources.

## 6. TRADE AND TRADE-RELATED ISSUES

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One of priority directions of the Association Agenda is the trade and trade-related issues. The activities specified in this regard in the 2014–2015 communication action plans mainly concern the measures implemented by the Ministry of Economy to inform business and other actors about the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), and the field of agriculture.

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<sup>75</sup> Myth Detector: The myth that the Lugar laboratory conducts biological experiments on Georgian population is groundless, Batu Kutelia, 11 December 2015. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/209/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/209/)

<sup>76</sup> <http://www.moh.gov.ge>

<sup>77</sup> Last accessed on 20 April 2016. [https://www.facebook.com/mohgovge?\\_\\_mref=message\\_bubble](https://www.facebook.com/mohgovge?__mref=message_bubble)

## 6.1. DCFTA

**Summarizing paragraph.** A wide-scale campaign conducted to inform target groups about the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU mainly involved meetings and various events. One of the events worth mentioning involved representatives of Georgian diaspora recounting their successful experience on the European market; however, it was a one-off event.

**Activities.** The communication of information about the DCFTA to representatives of private and civil sectors, academic circles and local self-government aimed at familiarizing target groups with new legislative regulations. The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia receives assistance from the USAID to organize this process.

Although the intensity of meetings is high, the information about the number of beneficiaries is not provided in the report on the implementation of the action plan; the deputy head of foreign trade and economic relations of the Ministry, Mariam Gabunia, does not have this information either, explaining this with the fact that the Ministry is not involved in organizing these meetings. Speaking about problems in informing public, Mariam Gabunia named a local nature of meetings as they are limited in reach and are attended by maximum 100 people. Moreover, she says that TV advertising requires financial resources and the entity has to seek donors for this activity.

In addition to meetings with target groups, according to the action plan, various events are organized –business forums, thematic workshops and study tours. On 12-18 October 2014, at an economic forum held within the format of Global Diaspora Week, Georgian entrepreneurs working in various European countries shared their experience about the DCFTA with the participants.

**Online platforms of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development.** The menu of official website<sup>78</sup> contains a separate section on the DCFTA with 12 chapters of the agreement available for users; however, it lacks an adapted and simplified guide of the type which is offered by, for example, the Foreign Affairs Ministry website.<sup>79</sup> It is worth noting that reorganizing the website and adding to it this section is specified as a separate activity in the 2014 communication strategy report. The Facebook page of the Ministry has 48,247 users.<sup>80</sup> The page is distinguished for its high level of interaction.

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<sup>78</sup> <http://www.economy.ge/en/home>

<sup>79</sup> Guide to Association Agreement (frequently asked questions). <http://bit.ly/1F7z2xD>

<sup>80</sup> Last accessed on 20 April 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/economypr/?fref=ts>

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Apart from informing target groups about new regulations, the action plan should include regular communication of information to wider public about results of the DCFTA, including success stories.
- Sharing of success stories by Georgian entrepreneurs operating in European countries should be part of wide scale campaign rather than a one-off event in order to have public better understand benefits of the DCFTA.

## 6.2. AGRICULTURE

**Summarizing paragraph.** The intensity of meetings about ongoing changes in the field of agriculture was high; moreover, there is a large amount of various informational materials for distribution, which was produced partially owing to the assistance of donor organizations. However, the report does not reflect the information about the results of public information campaign, a positive tendency and the activities implemented to promote success stories.

**Program priorities.** The 2014–2015 action plan of the communication strategy covers four commitments under the Association Agreement. They are:

1. convergence of policies and legislation for agricultural and rural development (332, 333a);
2. the modernisation and the sustainability of the agricultural production (333c);
3. sharing knowledge and best practices of rural development policies with rural communities (333d);
4. disseminating knowledge and promoting extension services to agricultural producers (333h).

According to the 2014 report on the communication action plan, 13 events were implemented including thematic meetings with target groups and production of information materials.

**Meetings.** Thematic meetings were held on general issues as well as specific agricultural issues. General meetings discussed commitments under the DCFTA and new regulations to be observed, on the one hand, by the state and on the other hand, by agriculture operators. Field-specific meetings were held with farmers, bee farmers, fish farmers, honey producers, including to inform them about the European Neighbourhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD). The topics of the meetings concerned legislative changes in the



field of food safety, veterinary and plant protection, peculiarities of agricultural imports (fresh fruit and vegetable, processed food products, beverages) to the EU market, supply chain and other sectoral issues.

The report does not contain the information about the number of attendees of such thematic meetings.

**Distribution materials.** The 2014 report provides information about six types of information material concerning Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) system, trade with the EU, various epidemic diseases, plant and animal protection. These materials are not available on the website of the Ministry of Agriculture, though separate publications are uploaded on web-platforms of different entities; for example, the HACCP guide<sup>81</sup> is available on the webpage of the National Food Agency; publications on various topics concerning the production of hazelnuts and honey, cooperatives as well as growing various agricultural products are available under the useful information section of the Agricultural Cooperative Development Agency webpage.<sup>82</sup>

The Deputy Head of the European Integration Department of Ministry of Agriculture, Lasha Inauri, believes that interactive, easily understandable video clips would improve communication of information about the EU integration to public because, in his opinion, communication during meetings, although it is carried out in a simplified manner, is not a sufficient form of communication.

Several video clips were produced about the agricultural development and the prospects of EU market, though they were broadcast in a rather fragmented way and not in the form of a campaign. A video clip “Georgia Chooses Europe”<sup>83</sup>, which is uploaded on the YouTube channel of the State Ministry of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and not on the webpage of Agricultural Ministry, contains the following messages:

- The EU assists Georgian village with new technologies;
- The development of agriculture will lead to increase in employment;
- Georgian products (concrete examples, wine, water, hazelnut, blueberry and kiwi) are already sold on the EU market.

Two other video clips – Europe is Progress, Georgia is Europe, are uploaded on the YouTube channel of the Parliament of Georgia, aiming to promote success stories. Nino Zambakhidze, the head of Georgian Farmers’ Association,<sup>84</sup> speaks about traditional cheese production and

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<sup>81</sup> <http://nfa.gov.ge/uploads/other/4/4893.pdf>

<sup>82</sup> <http://acda.gov.ge/index.php/geo/static/43>

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7LDQw-EpqY>

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PduM9ihg7i4>

the prospects of European market; a wine producer Iago Bitarishvili<sup>85</sup> recounts about his wine being on the European market since 2006 and underlines the stability and attractiveness of 500 million-strong market. With the assistance from UNDP and EU and participation of the Parliament of Georgia, these video clips were produced within the framework of European Week in 2015 and are also available in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages.

**Online platforms of the Ministry of Agriculture.** In the main menu of the official website of the Ministry, users can easily find a separate section named “What is the DCFTA”<sup>86</sup> which contains thematic chapters of the agreement, the legislation and an adapted guide produced within the framework of technical assistance of USAID Project Restoring Efficiency for Agricultural Production. The European integration banner<sup>87</sup> is displayed on the main page of the Food Agency too, which contains a list of EU legislative acts on Food Safety (102), Veterinary (84) and Plant Protection (85), indicating topics and timetable of their enactment. However, an adapted version of regulations is not presented. The banner of ENPARD is not displayed on the website of the Ministry of Agriculture but is on the webpage of agricultural cooperative development center. The webpage of ENPARD<sup>88</sup> itself provides comprehensive information about the program, financing, consultation services and regional offices.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

- When informing public it is desirable to make emphasis on not only opportunities but also a positive dynamic observed in terms of exports of Georgian products to the EU market. Moreover, the promotion of separate success stories should take on the form of a campaign, not one-off measures, in order to further stimulate the process.<sup>89</sup>

## 2.5. COORDINATION OF COMMUNICATION ON EU INTEGRATION ISSUES

The implementation of the action plan is coordinated by the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration whilst the implementation of the action plan is the responsibility of a working group set up within the EU integration commission of the

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<sup>85</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxAwC9Mlyxfg>

<sup>86</sup> <http://www.moa.gov.ge/En/DCFTARoadmap/>

<sup>87</sup> <http://nfa.gov.ge/ge/evropastan-integracia>

<sup>88</sup> [www.enpard.ge](http://www.enpard.ge)

<sup>89</sup> For example, the web-platform Europe for Georgia carried out a regular promotion of success stories in the field of agriculture. See <http://eugeorgia.info>

government of Georgia, which is mainly composed of representative of the executive branch. The working group includes representatives of the parliamentary committees on the European integration and the defense and security as well as the Tbilisi Mayor's Office.

On 16 June 2015, a department for strategic communications was created in the State Ministry of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, which has six employees. According to amendments to the ordinance #100, dated 22 June 2014, introduced in 2015 and 2016, the functions of the office of state minister were extended to include the following tasks: to develop, coordinate and monitor a long-term strategic communication policy and its action plan; to carry out analytical work, researches and based on them to draw up a concept; to coordinate with various branches of government, local and international organizations, inter alia, for the development of common plan of measures.

Similar to the State Ministry on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, a strategic communications department was also created in the Ministry of Defense on 13 August 2015, with the mandate to communicate information mainly about the issues of NATO integration.

Interviews with civil servants on the central and local government levels showed a mixed picture. Although the situation with coordination is better on the central level, the director of the Information Centre on NATO and EU,<sup>90</sup> Elene Gotsadze, named the coordination as the main problem in the implementation of the action plan.

**“Coordination is central; if coordination is good, the action plan will be implemented well and everyone will be involved,” said Elene Gotsadze.**

The head of the office of Minister of Labor, Health and Social Affairs, Nana Kavtaradze, speaks about the need of strategic planning and identifying priorities and believes that the Office of the State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration should be a strategic planner and issuer of recommendations whereas the entities should take care of the content themselves.

The majority of central entities, in particular, 15 entities were involved in the development of strategy from the very beginning. Representatives of five entities have no information about this process whilst three respondents – representatives of parliament, finance ministry and the president's administration, said that their entities were not involved in the process of development of strategy.

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<sup>90</sup> Interview was conducted in September 2016. Since 2016, Elene Gotsadze no longer holds this position.

Answers to a question about the frequency of meetings held by a group working on the Communication and Information Strategy of the Government of Georgia in the sphere of EU Integration for the period of 2014–2017, were contradictory: 18 respondents from central government entities said that the group meets as need be, whilst two respondents said that they meet quarterly; representatives of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and the Parliament had no information on this issues. A representative of the Ministry of Energy did not specify the frequency but noted that he personally participated in two or three meetings.

In the process of communicating information to public about the EU integration issues, the coordination among central government entities is mainly carried out by email, telephone and meetings. According to a representative of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development, communication of information on EU integration issues does not fall within their competence; a representative of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs does not have information and said that the Office of State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration plans activities for them.

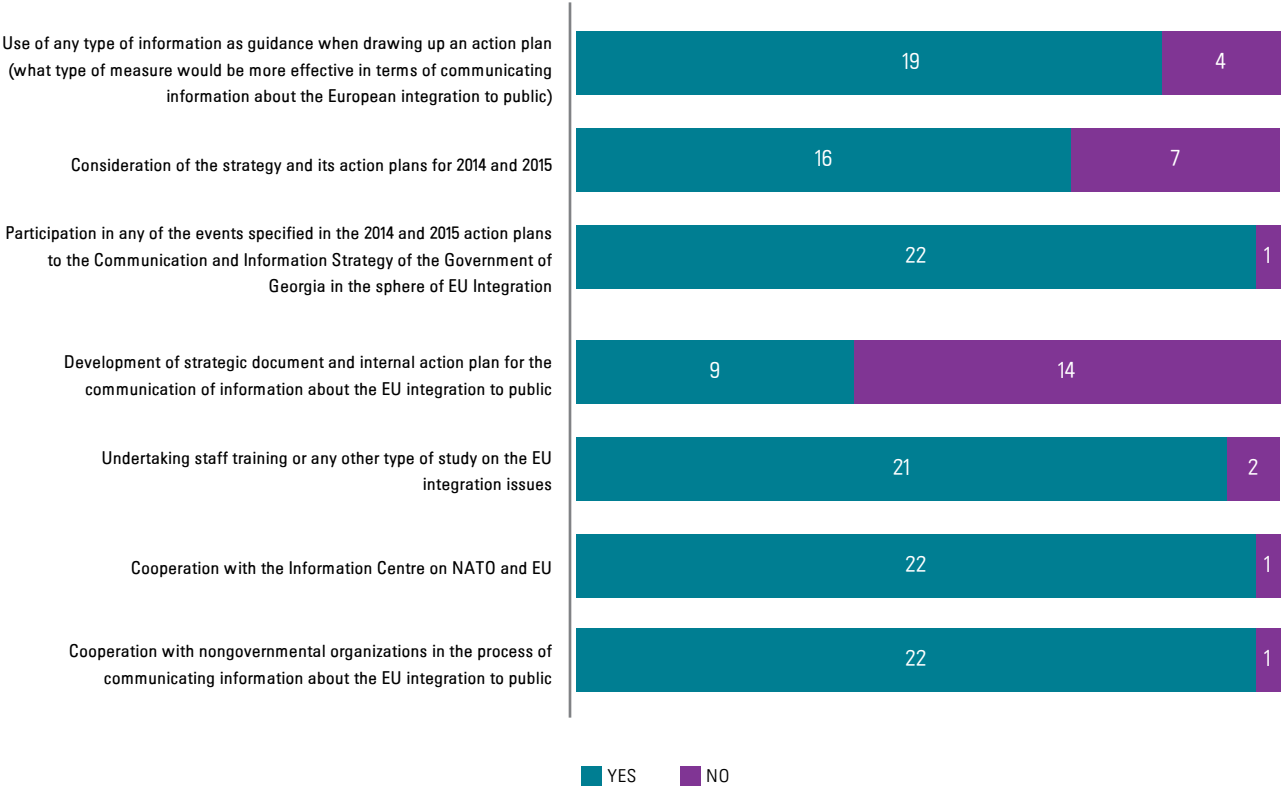
Of 23 interviewed entities of the central government, 16 entities held internal discussions on the implementation of the communication strategy and 2014–2015 action plan (see chart 7). Nine entities developed a strategic document and/or internal plan for communicating information on EU integration issues to public whereas seven entities did not. The majority of central government entities (22) were directly involved in the implementation of measures envisaged in the action plans with the exception of the Ministry of Corrections a representative of which said during the interview that their entity do not participate in such events. It is noteworthy that the answer of the representative of the Ministry runs counter to the communication action plan which specified one activity in 2014 and seven activities in 2015 for communicating information about the European integration to women probationers, women inmates, juvenile convicts and other convicts.

The head of Sustainable Development and Euro Integration Department of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Gizo Chelidze, noted that they are willing to participate in the events planned in regions, but due to scarce human resources they are unable to frequently participate in such events.

The results were similar in regards with the cooperation with the Information Centre on NATO and EU, and nongovernmental organizations. In particular, 22 respondents from 23 entities of the central government level gave a positive answer to a corresponding question. The exception was a representative of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs who said that the entity was planning to cooperate with the information center in future. A representative of the Ministry of Finance failed to recall a concrete case of cooperation with the nongovernmental sector.

Of 23 central government entities, employees of 21 entities have undertaken the training on the European integration issues. Representatives of the Office of State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality and the President’s Administration gave a negative answer to this question.

**Chart 7. Implementation of EU integration issues on the central government level**



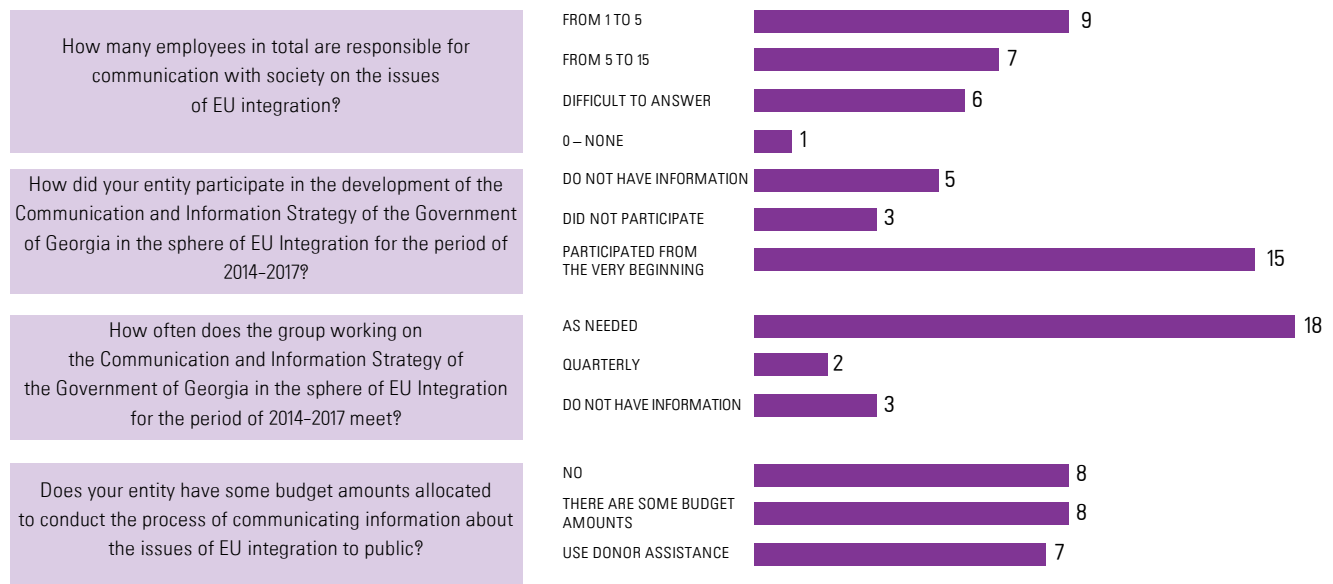
To a question how many employees in total are responsible for communicating information about the EU integration to public, seven respondents named from five to 15 employees, nine respondents named from one to five, representatives of six entities found it difficult to answer this question whilst the representative of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development declared that informing public on these issues is not their function according to the communication strategy and that they are responsible to inform only public servants about these issues.

It is worth noting that of 23 respondents from the central government participating in the survey only two were from the strategic communications departments,<sup>91</sup> five were from PR departments,<sup>92</sup> one from the Information Centre on NATO and EU whereas the remaining 15 were from various structural units.<sup>93</sup> This must be indicating that those structural units which are responsible for the communication with public are less aware of those topics which should be communicated.

The communication with public on the issues of European integration is carried out directly from five entities of the central government, through PR service from nine entities and both ways from nine entities.

To implement the communication action plan, eight entities have some budget amounts allocated for that, another eight entities do not have any, while according to other seven respondents their entities use donor assistance to this end.

**Chart 8. Coordination of EU integration issues on the central government level**

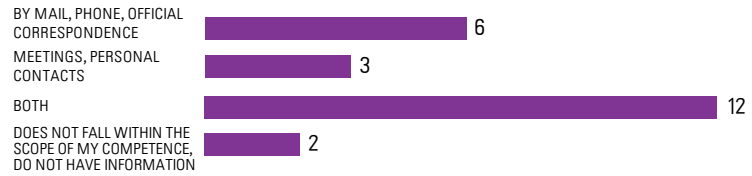


<sup>91</sup> The Office of State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and the Ministry of Defense.

<sup>92</sup> Parliament of Georgia, the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry Finance.

<sup>93</sup> Heads and deputy heads of foreign relations departments/divisions; advisor; a deputy minister; three heads of those structural units of ministries, who are responsible for separate sectoral issues of European integration participated jointly in the survey; also representatives of PR service.

How do you coordinate with other entities in the process of communicating information about the issues of EU integration to public?

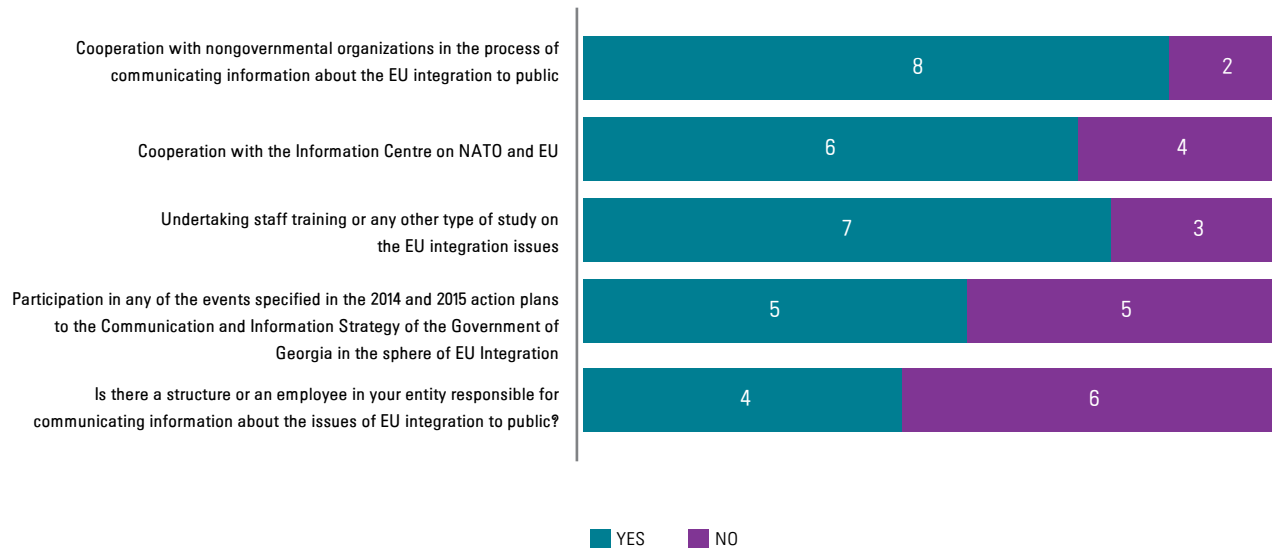


When talking about organizing public meetings in regions, the head of the Information Centre on NATO and EU underlined lack of awareness and inadequate involvement of local civil servants, which resulted in low attendance at several meetings.

Of 10 respondents in the regions, six entities cooperate with the Information Centre on NATO and EU on the issues of European integration while eight entities cooperate with nongovernmental organizations (see chart 9). Representatives of Batumi municipality city hall and Kutaisi Mayor’s office gave negative answers to the question about the cooperation with nongovernmental organizations.

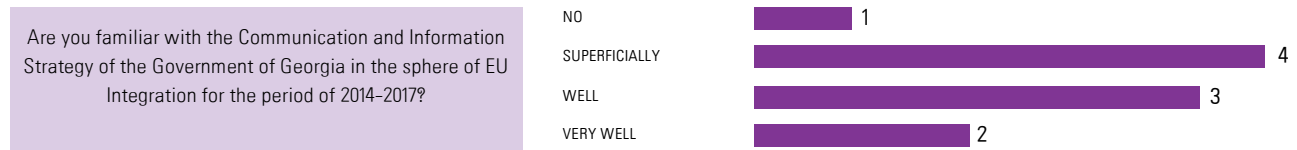
Out of 10 respondents, representatives of seven entities undertook training on the European integration issues. Representatives of city halls of Gori and Kutaisi municipalities gave negative answers to the corresponding question while a representative of Batumi municipality did not have any information about such training. Only half of respondents (five) participated in the events envisaged by the action plan.

**Chart 9. Coordination of European integration issues on the local self-government level**



Of 10 respondents interviewed in regions, two are very well familiar with the communication strategy, three know it well, four know it superficially and one is not aware of it at all.

**Chart 10. Coordination of European integration issues on the local self-government level**



To a question as to what kind of problems and impeding factors they see in their entity's communicating information about the European integration to public, the majority of central government representatives (seven) named lack of finances; seven respondents did not name any problem in this regard; the lack of meetings/events and qualified personnel/training and lack of interest on the part of public were each named by three respondents; insufficient coordination and attention of TV projects were each named by two respondents and increase in anti-Western propaganda and conflicting messages of political groups were each named by one respondent.

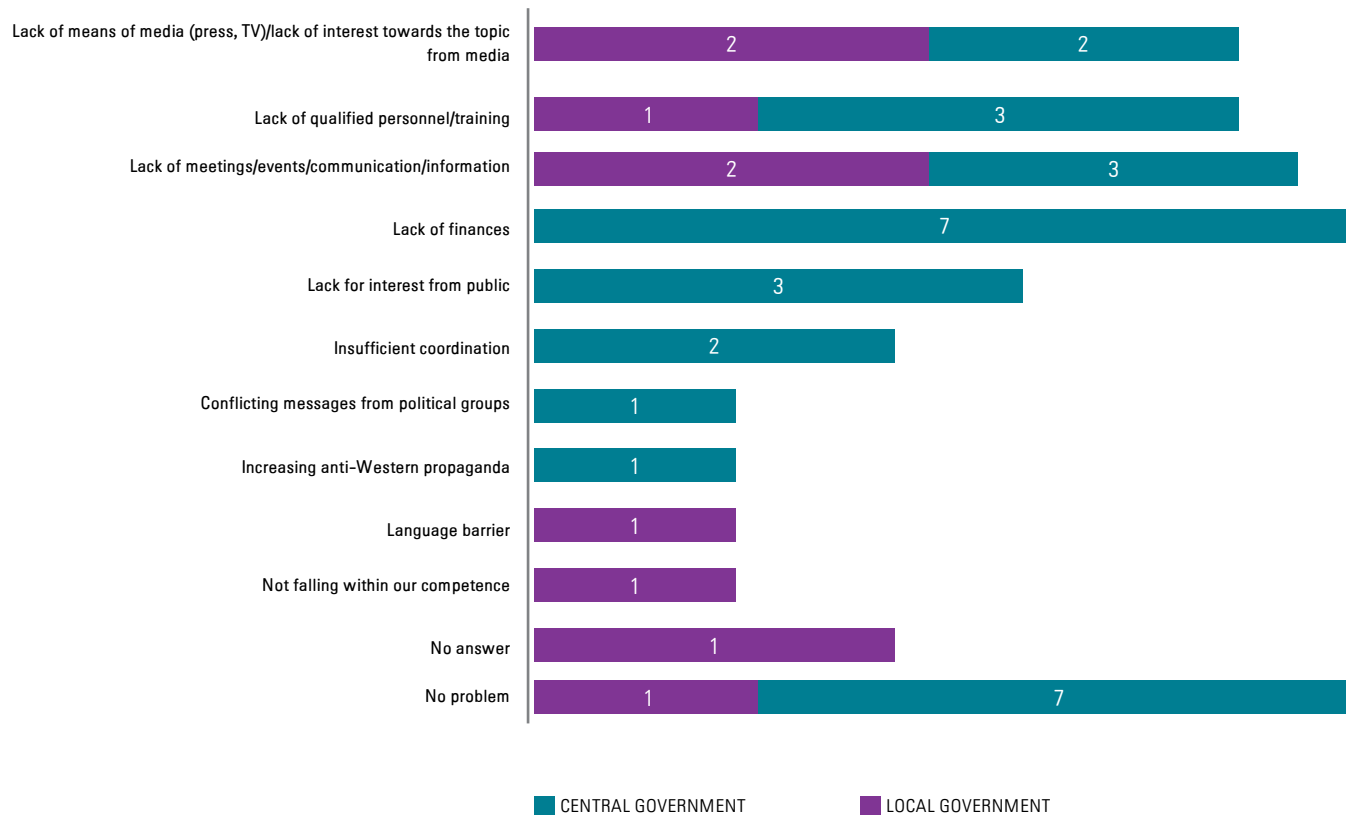
Talking about problems, the director of the Information Centre on NATO and EU, Elene Gotsadze, emphasized the increase in nihilism and the confusion caused among society by conflicting messages.

A question regarding problems in the communication on issues of the European integration in regions was not answered by two respondents, one said that this topic does not fall within the scope of his competence, two respondents indicated about the lack of interest, another two respondents indicated about the lack of information, one named the language barrier, one named lack of cadres and one ruled out any problem.



Chart 11. Problems in the process of informing society (central and local governments)

WHAT KIND OF PROBLEMS AND IMPEDING FACTORS DO YOU SEE IN YOUR ENTITY'S COMMUNICATION WITH PUBLIC ABOUT THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION?



To a question as to how, and by whom, are messages developed in their entities when communicating with public about the European integration issues, of 23 respondents four named the Office of the State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, seven respondents named the heads of their respective entities, the Office of the State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration named the inter-agency group and experts, whilst the representative of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development said that the entity does not have priorities in this direction.

## 2.6. REPORTING AND MONITORING

According to the strategy, the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of communication strategy action plan is carried out by the Parliamentary Committee on the Integration of Georgia with Europe, EU experts and the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership's Civil Society Forum.

According to the strategy, the monitoring is conducted based on indicators provided in the action plan. The strategy also specifies public opinion survey as a main indicator of the success, which will be carried out on a regular basis.

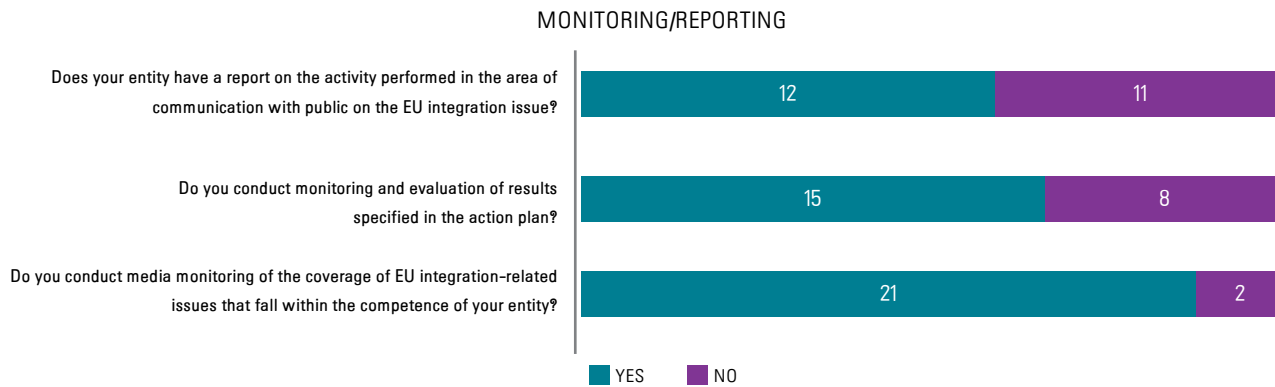
The mechanism of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of action plan, which is specified in the communication strategy, does not work in practice. Neither the Parliamentary Committee on the Integration of Georgia with Europe nor the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership's Civil Society Forum conducted the monitoring of 2014 action plan. According to information received from the parliamentary committee, they plan to conduct a committee hearing on this issue.

The strategy specifies public opinion survey as one of important indicators for assessing the implementation of action plan. The 2014 report does not contain results of survey as an indicator of assessment of performed activities. Moreover, 2014 and 2015 action plans do not specify which new activities were planned on the basis of findings of opinion polls. According to information requested from the Office of the State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, the Ministry commissioned a survey to the company ACT which conducted it in spring 2015. At the same time, according to the Office, public opinion is regularly studied through those questionnaires which are filled out by population during meetings conducted by various entities and organizations.

To a question as to how the conducted opinion polls affected the process of planning the communication action plan and which activities were added to the action plan as a result of findings of those polls, the Office of State Minister provided a general response. According to it, the results of the survey were used as a basis for the 2016 action plan; they showed the need of geographic as well as thematic coverage which was translated into the increase of activities and thematic messages.

As regards the reporting of implementing entities and the assessment of their performance, the results of the survey show that of 23 interviewed central government entities the performance report was prepared by 12 entities whereas 11 entities did not prepare such reports. Of 23 interviewed entities only 15 conduct the monitoring and evaluation of results specified in the action plan. The media monitoring of the coverage of European integration issues is conducted by the majority of entities – 21. Representatives of two entities gave negative answers to this question; namely, LEPL the Information Centre on NATO and EU and the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, citing lack of resources as a reason.

Chart 12. Monitoring and reporting



The 2014 report provides only partial information about beneficiaries of various events (for example, meetings on the topics of migration, trafficking, employment, meetings with youth) rather than comprehensive information about all campaigns. At the same time, criteria for the evaluation of other activities are not given in the action plan – for example, the audience reach, changes resulting from the conduct of a campaign, et cetera.

As the report of 2014 EU integration communication action plan shows, a uniform standard of reporting is not developed which would be based on common indicators and enable to measure performed activities both quantitatively (reach) and qualitatively (influence). Without the data on the reach and impact on attitudes, which should be expressed in public attitudes, it is very difficult to evaluate the communication strategy and to plan next steps.

# ANNEX I

## DISINFORMATION AND REAL FACTS ABOUT EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION IN MEDIA REVEALED BY “MYTH DETECTOR”

### 1. MESSAGES REGARDING ECONOMIC BENEFIT

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
Traditional Russian market has more prospects for Georgia than the European one	Zurab Chekurishvili, Advisor to the Minister of Agriculture of Georgia (Sputnik-Georgia, 2016 )	In 2015, Georgia exported agriculture products to the EU member states amounting to almost 35% of Georgia’s gross annual agro exports. The value of agro exports to Russia decreased by 45% compared to 2014. <sup>94</sup>
DCFTA yields zero results; Georgian economy has no prospect without integration with Russia.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Valeri Khaburdzania, former Minister of Security (Newspaper “Rezonansi”, 2015).</li> <li>2. Micheil Khubutia, Chairman of the Union of Georgians in Russia (Newspaper Prime-Time, 2014).</li> </ol>	DCFTA: The trade turnover between the EU and Georgia hit almost 2 billion US Dollars in January-August 2015 i.e. 31% of Georgia total foreign trade. In the same period, Russia accounted for only 7.1% of Georgia’s total foreign trade. Georgian exports to the EU rose by 12% in the first 6 months of DCFTA. Duty free Georgian products enter to the largest market of the world: European market (500 million consumers and GDP above 18 trillion USD <sup>95</sup> ).
The EU is destroying Georgian village.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dimitry Lortkipanidze, Burjanadze-United Democrats (Newspaper „Asaval-Dasavali”, 2014).</li> <li>2. Saqinform, 2014.</li> </ol>	The entire budget of the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development – ENPARD program, launched in March 2013, is 52 million Euros <sup>96</sup> .
As a result of Association Agreement, a grandma from Kakheti cannot sell her Matsoni in the Georgian trade network as well as a woman from Imereti cannot sell her cheese.	Jondi Baghaturia, “Kartuli Dasi”/Electoral bloc Burjanadze – United opposition” (Newspaper “Alia”, 2014).	Requirements of establishing hazard analysis and critical control point system (HACCP) do not apply to individuals, including the products manufactured by farmers or homemade products <sup>97</sup> .

<sup>94</sup> Myth Detector (2016). Representative of the ministry of agriculture of Georgia made false statements regarding the EU market in an interview with Sputnik-Georgia. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/301/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/301/)

<sup>95</sup> Myth Detector (2015). The myths of free trade deal with the EU yielding zero results and Georgian economy having no prospect for success without further integration with Russia are groundless. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/133/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/133/); Myth Detector (2014). Myth that European market will remain closed for Georgia is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/33/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/33/)

<sup>96</sup> Modebadze, Zurab (2015). The myth that EU is destroying Georgian agriculture is baseless. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/93/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/93/)

<sup>97</sup> Modebadze, Zurab (2014). Myth regarding the prohibition of trade with homemade agricultural products is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/69/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/69/)

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
Georgia gets more income and assistance from Russia than from the West.	Archil Chkhoidze, Neutral Eurasian Georgia (Sputnik-Georgia, 2015).	According to the data of the first three quarters of 2015, EU member states invested 390 million USD (38% of total foreign direct investment) in Georgia, while Russian investments equaled 37 million USD (3.7%) <sup>98</sup> .
West does not need Georgia's agricultural and industrial production.	Aleksandre Chachia, Russian-based Political Analyst (Saqinform, 2015).	In the first 6 months of DCFTA, exports of hazelnuts, fruit juices, and other agricultural products doubled or even tripled <sup>99</sup> .
EU caused the economic collapse of the Baltic countries.	Saqinform, 2014.	After joining the EU, from 2004 to 2013 GDP per capita in Estonia increased by 102%, in Lithuania-133% and in Latvia by 153% <sup>100</sup> .
The EU caused Greek economic crisis	Georgia & World, 2015.	Membership of the European Community since 1981 and becoming part of the Eurozone 20 years later brought investments and significant economic growth to Greece. However, this did not sufficiently translate into budget revenues due to massive tax evasion. Greece has been losing revenues of 3-4% of GDP annually. Latest figures put the size of shadow economy at 24% of GDP <sup>101</sup> .
The EU prohibits the slaughtering of less than one-year old piglets.	Vasil Maglaperidze, Publicist (Social Network, Voice of Abkhazia, 2014)	EU standards do not prohibit the slaughtering of less than 1 year old piglets <sup>102</sup> .

<sup>98</sup> Myth Detector (2016). The statement that Georgia gets more income and assistance from Russia compared to western states is false. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/277/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/277/)

<sup>99</sup> Myth Detector (2015). The myth of Georgia's agricultural and industrial products being useless for the west is groundless. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/181/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/181/)

<sup>100</sup> Lelashvili, Davit (2014). Myths regarding collapse of the economies of the Baltic countries' are misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/25/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/25/)

<sup>101</sup> Myth Detector (2015). Myths and reality about economic crisis in Greece. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/89/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/89/)

<sup>102</sup> Modebadze, Zurab (2014). Myth that EU requires prohibition of slaughtering of less than one-year old domestic pigs is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/65/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/65/)

## 2. MESSAGES REGARDING VISA LIBERALIZATION/MIGRATION

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
Visa free travel is only for wealthy people/No one will allow auntie Martha to enter the EU	Gia Khukhashvili, Expert (Obiektivi, 2015). Hamlet Chipashvili, Political Analyst (Asaval-Dasavali, 2014).	Every Georgian citizen, holding citizenship document will be able to travel and stay for three months within Schengen countries. As a result of visa liberalization, Georgian citizens will be fully exempt from visa fees <sup>103</sup> .
Visa free rules will grant no privileges other than we will no more have to stand in long queues.	Soso Tsiskarishvili, Political analyst (Alia, 2015)	Currently, Georgian citizens have to pass through seven stages to arrive in the Schengen area. After successful finalization of the visa liberalization process with the European Union, Georgian citizens, holding biometric passports, will be able to enter the Schengen area without visas and they will have to pass only through two compulsory stages <sup>104</sup> .
Readmission agreement with the EU obliges Georgia to let in Syrian refugees.	Dimitri Lortkipanidze, Democratic Movement, (Asaval-Dasavali, 2016).	Georgia is only associated with the EU and the EU is not requesting Georgia's participation in the process of accepting refugees. It is not possible to make such one-sided request to a country on the basis of readmission agreement with the EU <sup>105</sup> .
Despite anti-Russian sanctions imposed by some European countries, Russia still managed to outmatch us and Russian citizens will be able to travel to Europe without visas from April 17, 2016.	Georgian Source: Politicano Russian Source: Kont	The source of the information disseminated by Kont is the website Gorabbit.ru. The latter noted at the end of its article that the mentioned publication was an April Fools' Day prank, but neither Kont, nor Politicano mentioned a word about it and spread it under the guise of a real story <sup>106</sup> .

## 3. MESSAGE REGARDING CONTROLLING PERSONAL DATA

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
According to the European Court of Human Right's (ECHR) decision, the employer is given the right to control employee's private mails in the EU.	Public Broadcaster Adjara TV; Info 9, 2016	ECHR's decision BĂRBULESCU v. ROMANIA was about monitoring Yahoo messenger account which was created for work purposes, not private mail <sup>107</sup> .

<sup>103</sup> Myth Detector (2015). Assertion that, visa liberalization will not bring tangible benefits to Georgian citizens is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/109/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/109/)

<sup>104</sup> Myth Detector (2016). Myths and real facts about non-visa rules. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/313/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/313/)

<sup>105</sup> Khuntsaria, Tamar (2016). Information that readmission agreement with the EU obliges Georgia to let in Syrian refugees, is wrong. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/253/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/253/)

<sup>106</sup> Myth Detector (2016). April Fools' Day prank spread in social network under the guise of truth. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/325/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/325/)

<sup>107</sup> Meladze, Giorgi (2016). Statement, that according to European court decision the employer is given the right to control employee's private mails, is false. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/241/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/241/)

#### 4. MESSAGES REGARDING NATIONAL –ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN–CULTURAL IDENTITY AND TRADITIONS

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
Civic education (School subject “Me and Society”) facilitates the degradation of religious and national consciousness and promotes depraved lifestyle.	Levan Vasadze, Businessman (Maestro, 2015). Zviad Tomaradze, Georgia’s Demographic Society XX (Georgia & World, 2016).	The school subject “Me and Society” is about surrounding environment (Family, School, and Community), healthy lifestyle, developing social skills, environmental protection and other issues <sup>108</sup> .
According to the ruling issued by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) infant baptism will be considered a crime	Mediacity.ge, 2016 Russian Source: kominform.ru	The ruling is not available at the ECHR website and as the Italian news website thelocals.it reports, the European Court of Human Rights dismisses the entire story as untrue <sup>109</sup> .
“European values” are not acceptable for Georgian national traditions.	Asaval-Dasavali, 2015.	European civilization was fed by various world cultures and has never been confined to only itself <sup>110</sup> .
America/West fights Orthodox Christianity	Valeri Khaburdzania, Former Minister of Security, (Asaval-Dasavali, 2015).	Among the developed countries, the USA is the most religious state <sup>111</sup> .
Juvenile legislation is directed against the institution of family.	Levan Vasadze, Businessman (Kviris Palitra, 2015)  Russian sources: “Геноцид Русов”, “Стоп Ювенальной Юстиции”	The main goal of juvenile legislation is to give priority to the rehabilitation over punishment when crimes are committed by minors <sup>112</sup> .
Liberalism fights against the national identity	Levan Vasadze, Businessman (Imedi, 2015).	Protection and encouragement of cultural diversity under the name of “multiculturalism” has become one of key directions among the liberal political trends <sup>113</sup> .
The West is fighting against Georgia’s cultural identity	Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, Alliance of patriots of Georgia; Rezo Amashukeli, Poet (Obiektivi, 2014).	The Western government agencies and private foundations, as well as international organizations have been providing significant financial and technical assistance for the protection and development of Georgian cultural heritage <sup>114</sup> .

<sup>108</sup> Chkhartishvili, Denola (2016). Myths and reality about ‘me and society’. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/281/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/281/);  
Gurchiani, Tamar. Myth that Civic Education threatens National Identity and Individuality, is groundless. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/125/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/125/)

<sup>109</sup> Myth Detector (2016). Information that European Court bans infant baptism is false. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/245](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/245)

<sup>110</sup> Ghaghanidze, Merab (2015). What do we mean by “European values” and how acceptable are they for Georgian national tradition. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/213/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/213/)

<sup>111</sup> Meladze, Giorgi (2015). Myth, that the Americans are fighting religion, is groundless. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/157/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/157/)

<sup>112</sup> Kurdadze, Dali (2015). The myths that juvenile legislation is directed against the institution of family are groundless. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/121/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/121/)

<sup>113</sup> Nodia, Gia (2015). The myth that liberalism fights against the national identity, is unfounded. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/105/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/105/)

<sup>114</sup> Tevzadze, Manana (2014). Myth that the west is fighting against Georgia’s cultural identity is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/61/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/61/)

## 5. MESSAGES REGARDING LIBERALISM, SEXUAL IDENTITY, WESTERN LIFESTYLE

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
Liberalism is connected to the old Roman god of sexual perverseness – Liber	Levan Vasadze, Businessman (Palitraneews, 2016).	Today, liberalism is a political ideology and represents one of the models of the arrangement and governance of society. It does not have much link with religion <sup>115</sup> .
The West obliges us to legalize incest	Nino Burjanadze, Democratic Movement (PIA, 2014)	Incest among adults is criminalized in the majority of EU member states; One of the most severe punishments is provided in the US. As for Georgia and Russia, they do not prosecute incest <sup>116</sup> .
European union obliges Georgia to legalize gay marriage	Gogi Topadze, Georgian Dream/Industrials (Netgazeti, 2014)	In a case heard in 2014 against Finland, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) held that contracting parties of the European Human Rights Convention may regulate issues of marriage according to their discretion <sup>117</sup> .
Pedophilia is not a punishable offence in the West	Kakha Kukava, Free Democrats (Rezonansi, 2014); Gia Korkotashvili, Georgian Mission (Georgia & World, 2014).	Sexual violence against children in Western countries is considered a serious crime. In some European countries (for instance Poland, Estonia) penalty for sex offenders may result in forced chemical castration <sup>118</sup> .
In Europe sexual violence against woman is the way of life	Soso Tsintsadze, Political Analyst (Kviris Qronika, 2016) Ketevan Kiknadze, Actress (Asaval-Dasavali, 2016) Russian source: Первый канал (Channel 1)	The information disseminated by Russian Media, as if migrants from the Middle East and North Africa raped 13-year-old Russian girl in Cologne (City of Germany), is not confirmed by investigation <sup>119</sup> .

## 6. MESSAGES REGARDING EDUCATION

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
The West is interested in worsening Georgia's education and science system	Merab Jibladze, Academician (Asaval-Dasavali, 2015)	Georgia receives different types of assistance from Western states in the sphere of Education: Unified national examination system was set up with the help of the World Bank; Western grants are spent on the development of Science, conducting several activities, as well as financing educational programs for Georgian youth to study in Western universities at BA and MA programmes <sup>120</sup> .

<sup>115</sup> Tsurtsunia, Zurab (2016). The statement that a liberal means a worshiper of the roman god is wrong. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/293/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/293/)

<sup>116</sup> Myth Detector (2014). The myth about legalization of incest in the west is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/1/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/1/)

<sup>117</sup> Noniashvili, Giorgi (2014). The myth, as if European Union obliges Georgia to legalize gay marriage, is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/45/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/45/)

<sup>118</sup> Meladze, Giorgi (2014). Myth that pedophilia is not a punishable offence in the west is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/37/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/37/)

<sup>119</sup> Tsomaia, Tiko (2016). Myth and reality about sexual violence against women. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/257/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/257/)

<sup>120</sup> Janashia, Simon (2015). The myth that the west is interested in worsening Georgia's education and science system is groundless. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/101/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/101/)



## 7. MESSAGES ABOUT PORTRAYING THE WEST AS THE INCITER OF VIOLENCE

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
EU paid EUR 3 billion to Turkey to down Russian warplane	Arno Khidirbegashvili, Editor of “Saqinform”	Talks between the EU and Turkey about EUR 3 billion assistance was connected to migration management issues and it was launched on October 2015, a month before downing Russian warplane <sup>121</sup> .
Women in Saudi Arabia are executed for driving and the United States encourages it	Giorgi Akhvediani, The Democratic Movement (Kavkasia, 2015).	Saudi Arabia has banned women driving since 1957, although there is no concrete law restricting this right. No death penalties have ever been imposed on such offenders. The United States also support women’s rights campaigns in Saudi Arabia <sup>122</sup> .
In the U.S partner Saudi Arabia, eating wife is permitted	Archil Chkoidze, Eurasian Choice (Rustavi 2, 2015).	The initial source of the false Fatwa is Moroccan blogger who published the publication sarcastically mocking Grand Mufti’s fatwa allowing husband to eat his wife <sup>123</sup> .
The west provoked military actions in Ukraine	Soso Jachvliani, Georgian Dream, Georgia & World, Saqinform, 2015	On February 27, 2014 Russian Special Forces unit took over the government and parliament buildings of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. From April to August 2014, Russia was waging military actions against Ukraine in a similar scenario like Russia did during Abkhazian War in 1992-1993 <sup>124</sup> .
In Europe, human leather is used to make clothes.	Asaval-Dasavali, 2016 Russian Source: Журналистская Правда	The photo disseminated by the newspaper portrays the jacket which was created by Olivier Goulet, a French designer. He has worked for years to create a material resembling human skin <sup>125</sup> .

<sup>121</sup> Myth Detector (2015). Information that EU paid EUR 3 billion to turkey to down Russian warplane is false. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/205/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/205/)

<sup>122</sup> Myth Detector (2015). Information that women in Saudi Arabia are executed for driving and the United States encourages it, is wrong. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/201/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/201/)

<sup>123</sup> Myth Detector (2015). Assertion that the U.S partner Saudi Arabia permits men to eat their wives is wrong. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/169/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/169/)

<sup>124</sup> Batashvili, Davit (2014). Myth, that the west provoked the military conflict in Ukraine, is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/57/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/57/)

<sup>125</sup> Myth Detector (2016). Manipulation with human leather clothes in Asaval-Dasavali and Russian media. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/321/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/321/)

## 8. MESSAGES REGARDING EURO-ATLANTIC ALLIANCE

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
Joining NATO will threaten Georgia's territorial integrity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nino Burjanadze Democratic Union (Kviris Qronika, 2015);</li> <li>2. Irma Inashvili, Alliance of Patriots (Reportiori, 2014).</li> <li>3. Tamaz Mechiauri, Georgian Dream (Rustavi 2, 2016).</li> </ol>	Neither the EU nor the US recognizes the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Together with Russia, the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is recognized by Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru. Russian Federation paid 3.25 billion dollars to these 3 countries for this reason <sup>126</sup> .
Euro-Atlantic integration turns Georgia into a Turkish military base	Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, Alliance of Patriots, (Obiektivi, 2015).	In case of Joining NATO, the military bases of NATO-member States, including Turkey will not be placed in Georgia. The NATO functioning, procedure and structure do not imply the placement of military bases on the territory of its member-states <sup>127</sup> .

## 9. MESSAGES THAT THE WEST CANNOT DEFEND GEORGIA

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
The west helped us only with "water and diapers" during the 2008 Russia-Georgia war	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nino Burjanadze, Democratic Movement (Kavkasia, 2015)</li> <li>2. Zaza Papuashvili, Georgian Dream (Georgia &amp; World, 2015).</li> <li>3. Archil Chkoidze, (Institute of Eurasia 2015).</li> </ol>	During and after the war, Georgia received the total of 4.45 billion US dollars from the western countries and international organizations. This fund was used for both the private (banking sector), as well as the public sector, which included budgetary support, material and financial support for refugees, a number of infrastructure and rehabilitation projects <sup>128</sup> .

<sup>126</sup> Turmanidze, Tornike (2014). The myth that Euro-Atlantic integration threatens Georgia's territorial integrity, is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/49/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/49/)

<sup>127</sup> Khoshtaria, Elene (2015). The myth about Euro-Atlantic integration turning Georgia into a Turkish military base is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/21/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/21/)

<sup>128</sup> Kurdadze, Dali; Tsurtsunia, Zurab (2015). The statement that the west helped us only with "water and diapers" during the 2008 Russian-Georgian war is wrong. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/141/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/141/)

## 10. MESSAGES ABOUT PORTRAYING WEST AS THE THREAT

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
Richard Lugar laboratory conducts biological experiments on Georgian population	Tengiz Kitovani, Former Minister of Security, 2015.  Arno Khidirbegashvili, Editor of Saqinform.  Russian sources in “Obiektivi”: МИР, Россия 24, 31 КАНАЛ and RBK TV	Richard Lugar laboratory created with the assistance of the US government in Georgia, is the unique opportunity for the region to be protected against epidemics detected or spread in the region, as well as against different types of biological disasters; also diagnose at an early stage and restrain the spread of both human and animal epidemics (Ebola, swine flu, avian flu, etc.) <sup>129</sup> .

## 11. MESSAGES REGARDING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS)

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
Funding of local NGOs by the US and any other foreign countries is prohibited in Poland	Archil Chkoidze, Institute of Eurasia, 2015.	Neither Polish “Law on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism” nor the legislation on “Associations” and “Foundations” contains provisions forbidding foreign countries to provide funding of NGOs in Poland <sup>130</sup> .
NGOs are foreign mercenaries and fight against their own country	Gogi Topadze, Georgian Dream;  Tamaz Mechiauri, Georgian Dream;  Elizbar Javelidze, People’s Assembly (Georgia & World, 2014)	Except monitoring the activities of the authority and revealing systemic problems, NGOs advocate for Georgian citizens, protect their rights, assist state institutions within the process of implementing reforms <sup>131</sup> .

<sup>129</sup> Kutelia, Batu (2015). The myth that the Lugar laboratory conducts biological experiments on Georgian population is groundless. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/209/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/209/)  
Zhvania, Anna (2014). The myths about Lugar Center are misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/17/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/17/)

<sup>130</sup> Myth Detector (2015). The information, that foreign funding of local NGOs is prohibited in Poland – is groundless. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/97/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/97/)

<sup>131</sup> Khorbaladze, Tamar (2015). Myth that NGOs are foreign mercenaries fighting against their own country is groundless. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/145/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/145/)

## 12. MESSAGES REGARDING MICROCHIPS, ID DOCUMENTS

DISINFORMATION/MYTHS	SOURCE	REAL FACTS
The EU makes mandatory to implant microchips in newborn babies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nino Ratishvili, Anchor of talk-show “Obiektivi”.</li> <li>2. PIA;</li> <li>3. Georgia &amp; World according to the Italian media outlet “Corriere di Roma”, 2014.</li> </ol>	The use of microchips in newborn babies or adults has never been raised by EU authorities or as part of the socio-political discourse of European nations <sup>132</sup> .
Adoption of ID cards is an obligation under the Association Agreement and it contains the sign of the devil	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Organizational Union of Orthodox Christians.</li> <li>2. Basil Mkalavishvili, Priest.</li> </ol>	In some EU countries, ID cards are not used at all. Under the Order of Holy Synod dated 5 July 2012, it is provided: “According to the eschatology of the Christian faith, The ID Cards in their present version are not antichrist seals and therefore may be used” <sup>133</sup> .

<sup>132</sup> Myth Detector (2014). Myth: story about microchips being implanted in newborn babies is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/9/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/9/)

<sup>133</sup> Kipshidze, Tato (2014). The myth, that adoption of ID cards is an obligation under the association agreement, is misleading. [http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view\\_myth/81/](http://eurocommunicator.ge/eng/view_myth/81/)