



INFORMING ETHNIC MINORITIES ON GEORGIA'S EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

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Authors:

TAMAR KINTSURASHVILI
SOPO GELAVA
ANA CHITALADZE

Monitors:

TAMAR GAGNIASHVILI
KHATIA LOMIDZE
MARIAM TSKHOVREBASHVILI
SOPO CHKHAIDZE

Media monitoring and focus group data processing:

MARIAM TSUTSKIRIDZE



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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study was to identify the level of awareness of Euro-Atlantic integration issues among citizens of the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities.

Towards this end, main sources of information in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions were identified and messages of these media sources, fomenting anti-Western sentiments were studied. The study also analyzed the compliance of Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) with its legal obligation to inform ethnic minorities on issues of Euro-Atlantic integration. The study involved focus groups of minorities' attitudes towards sources of information, media messages and the GPB coverage.

A mixed methodology was used, which included desk research, media content analysis and focus group discussions.

The report starts with the review of the methodology and key finding followed by an overview of sources of information in Part I; Part II focuses on messages spread by Russian TV channels and attitudes towards these messages; Part III analyzes the GPB's content-related legal obligations, the compliance with it and media coverage. The final part of the study provides recommendations.

The study was conducted within the framework of the project "Informing Ethnic Minorities on Georgia's Euro-Atlantic Integration" supported by the Open Society Georgia Foundation.

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The study employed a mixed methodology containing quantitative and qualitative data. To study the issue in question the following methods were used:

- Desk research;
- Media monitoring and content analysis;
- Focus groups.

Desk research. The desk research draws on public opinion polls conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Caucasus Barometer survey data, the methodology of television audience measurement companies – TVMR Georgia and Tri Media Intelligence (TMI), the broadcasting legislation, GPB program priorities for 2015–2016 and 2018–2021 and reports on the fulfillment thereof.

Media monitoring and content analysis. The following channels and programs were selected to conduct the monitoring on: primetime news programs of Russian TV channels (Channel One Russia and Rossiya 24); five programs of the GPB’s 1st Channel, which later, during the presidential election campaign, were added the presidential debates and a new talk show (Moambe – Issue of the Day).

RUSSIAN TV	1 ST CHANNEL OF GEORGIAN PUBLIC BROADCASTER
Channel One – Vremya, Monday–Sunday, 22:00 p.m.	Moambe, Monday–Saturday, 21:00 p.m.
Rossiya 24 – Vesti, Monday–Sunday, 20:00 p.m.	Akhali Kvira [New Week], Sunday, 21: 00 p.m.
	42 nd Parallel, Saturday, 21:30 p.m. (irregular schedule ¹)
	Kviris Interviu [Interview of the Week], Thursday, 22:00 p.m.
	Aktualuri Tema Maka Tsintsadzestan Ertad [Key Topic with Maka Tsintsadze], Friday, 22:00 p.m.
	Moambe – Issue of the Day, Monday–Wednesday 22:00 p.m. ²
	Election debates, irregular schedule, 22:00 p.m. ³

To identify fake news, the monitoring, apart from the Russian TV channels, was conducted on 13 Georgia media outlets too.⁴

¹ In May only one program was aired, in June the programs were available only on 1st Channel webpage and Facebook page.

² From 13 September

³ From 5 November

⁴ Newspapers: Asaval-Dasavali, Alia, Kviris Palitra, Prime-Time; online news agencies: Sakinpormi, Georgia & World, pia.ge; TV channels: Imedi, Kavkasia, Obieqtivi, Rustavi 2, Maestro, Iberia.

The Russian channels were selected from the Caucasus Barometer database of the results of the NDI public opinion poll conducted in December 2017, which showed 22%⁵ trust in Channel One Russia and 7%⁶ trust in Rossiya 24 in the regions populated by ethnic minorities.

With regard to the GPB's legal obligation to broadcast on minority languages and inform public on Euro-Atlantic integration, the NDI public opinion poll of December 2017 showed the following results: the GPB's 1st Channel⁷ was a reliable source for 10% of respondents in the regions populated by ethnic minorities, while 2nd Channel⁸ of the GPB, which broadcast programs on minority languages, was reliable for 6% of respondents.

The monitoring of Russian TV channels was focused on identifying anti-Western messages and topics whereas the monitoring of the GPB was focused on the time allocated to the coverage of Euro-Atlantic integration issues, democratic institutions and countries, also the topics covered, type of reporting – direct/indirect, and the tone of reporting.

Direct/indirect reporting:

- ⇒ **Direct reporting:** Reporting fully dedicated to the Euro-Atlantic integration, Western institutions and Western countries;
- ⇒ **Indirect reporting:** Reporting dedicated to other issues and indirectly referring to the above mentioned topic in relation to covered issues.

Tone of reporting:

- ⇒ **Positive:** A topic of report is covered in a positive light;
- ⇒ **Neutral:** A report rests on facts alone, without bearing any positive or negative connotation;
- ⇒ **Negative:** A topic of report is covered in a negative light, offering allegations and one-sided criticism and bearing negative connotation.

The media monitoring was conducted over the period between 1 May and 15 November 2018.

Focus groups. Anti-western messages as well as fake news and true information were selected through media monitoring while public attitudes towards them were studied in focus groups by applying open-ended and structured questions. Yet another subject of study in focus groups was sources of information of the participants, reliability of these sources and attitudes of respondents towards the GPB programs. The total of eight focus groups involving two age groups (18-35 and 36-55) were conducted in four cities of Georgia (Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, Marneuli, Bolnisi). The total of 64 persons participated in the focus groups. The focus group participants were selected through a questionnaire; the questionnaire was developed in advance by taking into consideration factors such as the age and employment status of participants and in case of young respondents, the level of their civic activism. The selected participants included both employed and unemployed respondents and in case of young participants, those who were involved and were never involved in civic activism.

⁵ <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nd2017ge/TRURCH1-by-ETHNOCODE/>

⁶ <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nd2017ge/TRURU24-by-ETHNOCODE/>

⁷ <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nd2017ge/TRUGPBR1-by-ETHNOCODE/>

⁸ <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nd2017ge/TRUGPBR2-by-ETHNOCODE/>

The study revealed the following trends:

1. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Comprehensive information about daily media consumption of population in Samtskhe–Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities, is not available because the research panel of TV audience measurement companies does not include these regions. Consequently, TV ratings do not reflect the peculiarities of the audience who, due to lack of knowledge of the state language, is especially susceptible to the influence of information sources of neighboring countries.
- Public opinion polls conducted by international organizations provide aggregated data on ethnic minorities, which does not allow to identify different trends in Samtskhe–Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli.
- According to the NDI public opinion poll of March 2018, the shares of television (36%) and Internet (10%) as main sources of information in Samtskhe–Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli are lower than in the rest of Georgia whereas the total share of informal sources is higher (family members – 21%, neighbors and friends – 17%, coworkers – 3%).
- Distrust in TV channels is quite high in the regions populated by ethnic minorities (45% does not trust in any broadcaster) which may be explained by the lack of coverage of regional problems by national TV channels and the fact that citizens of these regions do not identify themselves with the media content.
- While at the beginning of the monitoring the NDI public opinion poll showed 22% trust in Channel One Russia and 7% trust in Rossiya 24 in the regions populated by ethnic minorities, the results of spring 2018 opinion poll, alongside Channel One Russia (23%) and Rossiya 24 (6%), included the trust in Russia Today (11%) and Rossiya 1.
- Although the majority of focus group participants (61.5%) were the users of Russian social network Odnoklassniki against Facebook users (25.6%) and traditional media outlets (12.9%), respondents rated Odnoklassniki as the least reliable (65%) whereas traditional media (35.7%) and Facebook (35.1%) as the most reliable. Among
- factors named to impede the receipt of information from Georgian media outlets were the language barrier as well as the access to Russian media and its attractiveness for better conveying information, which downgraded the problem of unreliability of information for viewers.

2. RUSSIAN TV CHANNELS

- The monitoring of primetime news programs on Channel One Russia and Rossiya 24 showed that the majority of anti-Western messages targeted the USA and US-led Coalition in Syria (46.4%) and then, almost equally, Great Britain (9.8%) and the EU (9.1%).

- Comments against the USA were mainly set to portray the USA and the US-led Coalition in Syria as a force that encourages violence and terrorism. Correlation was revealed between misinforming messages spread by Russian TV channels and respondents' attitudes according to which the so-called Islamic State originated in the USA whereas Russia actually fights against terrorism.
- Messages against Great Britain were mainly related to the case of poisoning of Skripals, where whataboutism was employed and focus was shifted from Russia's responsibility onto other actors, including Great Britain.
- Although opinions on the responsibility of Russia in the poisoning of Skripals divided, the majority of respondents viewed Russia a more dangerous country as compared to Western countries.
- Main messages targeting the EU concerned the migration crisis, demonizing not only the EU's liberal policy but also fomenting xenophobic attitudes through portraying migrants as criminals and terrorists.
- Reporting on biological subversion were mainly related to the Richard Lugar Public Health Research Center in Tbilisi. An opinion was promoted that the lab conducts lethal experiments on people and tests biological weapons; moreover, the activity of the lab was assessed as being directed against Russia.
- Negative coverage of Ukraine mainly concerned the announcement of autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarch, the annexation of Crimea, and the Euromaidan events in 2014.
- In addition to messages about loss of identity and unacceptable values imposed by the West, unjustified references were made, in a homophobic context, to sexual identity.
- Comments about US philanthropist and founder of Open Society Foundation George Soros promoted an opinion that Soros is the inspirer of velvet revolutions across the world and meddles in other countries' domestic affairs.
- From among fake news, the most reliable for focus group participants was the misinformation about the USA supporting terrorists in the Middle East to get hold of oil resources (79.7%); such attitude correlates with the narrative of Russian TV channels emphasizing the aggressive US policy and linking the USA with terrorism.
- From real facts, the least reliable for ethnic Azerbaijani respondents was the information about the US State Department discussing the issue of protecting their religious rights in its reports (true – 50%; fake – 50%) and the information about their cultural and religious heritage sites documented with the funding from George Soros (true – 46.9%; fake – 53.1%).

3. GEORGIAN PUBLIC BROADCASTER.

- The 2018-2021 program priorities of the GPB reflect legal obligations of informing society, including ethnic minorities on Euro-Atlantic integration, but quarterly reports do not provide information how the mentioned obligations are fulfilled and on assessment criteria.
- Since the GPB lacks TV audience viewership data by regions and ethnicities, it cannot regularly analyze and assess audience habits to find out the extent of access of minorities to programs intended for them and the ratings of these programs in the regions.
- It was also difficult to establish regularity of news and other programs designed to inform minorities in general and particularly on Euro-Atlantic integration in their own languages. This indicates inconsistency in policy of informing ethnic minorities of Georgia.
- Attitudes towards the GPB programs were mixed in focus groups organized within the framework of this project: a segment of respondents do not watch this broadcaster due to technical programs in the reception; another segment emphasized that programs were merely translated from Georgian and they could not identify themselves with the media content.

- The monitoring of GPB's news and analytical programs showed that the Euro-Atlantic integration topic was covered extensively and mainly neutrally or positively. The exception was the analytical program 42nd Parallel which was distinguished for its clearly negative tone in the coverage of Western countries and institutions. The editorial policy of the program which was based on ideological intolerance of neoliberal economy influenced the position of authors in assessing political developments. Also, in the immediate pre-monitoring period, the 42nd Parallel's editorial position on the poisoning of Skripals and the Western sanctions imposed for the use of chemical weapons in Syria echoed the positions of pro-Kremlin political Party Alliance of Patriots, the Russian government and Russian media outlets.

I. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Research resources. There is no comprehensive information available about daily media consumption in Samtskhe–Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities. None of the cities of Samtskhe–Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli is among seven cities⁹ selected by the two television audience measurement companies.¹⁰ Consequently, people meters, which represent the best technology for measuring TV viewership, do not reflect the peculiarities of the regions with stronger dependence, as compared to other regions of Georgia, on sources of information of neighboring countries due to lack of knowledge of the state language. Hence, the only means of information on media outlets consumed by the citizens of Georgia living in these regions is a public opinion polls conducted on a regular basis.

The study into sources of information of citizens in the regions populated by ethnic minorities encounters two types of problems:

1. In contrast to people meters, public opinion polls do not provide daily quantitative data on the frequency of watching TV channels and programs in these regions having different viewership indicators due to the language barrier;
2. Public opinion polls conducted by international organizations, which are more regular than separate research initiatives of nongovernmental organizations, provide aggregated data on ethnic minorities, which shows a general picture of Samtskhe–Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli and does not allow to identify difference in trends.

Overall data. Sources of information in the regions populated by ethnic minorities are quite diverse. According to the Caucasus Barometer database¹¹ which reflects the results of the NDI public opinion poll of March 2018,¹² the shares of television (36%) and Internet (10%) as main sources of information are lower than in Georgian-speaking regions whereas the share of informal sources is higher (41% in total: family members – 21%, neighbors and friends – 17%, coworkers – 3%).

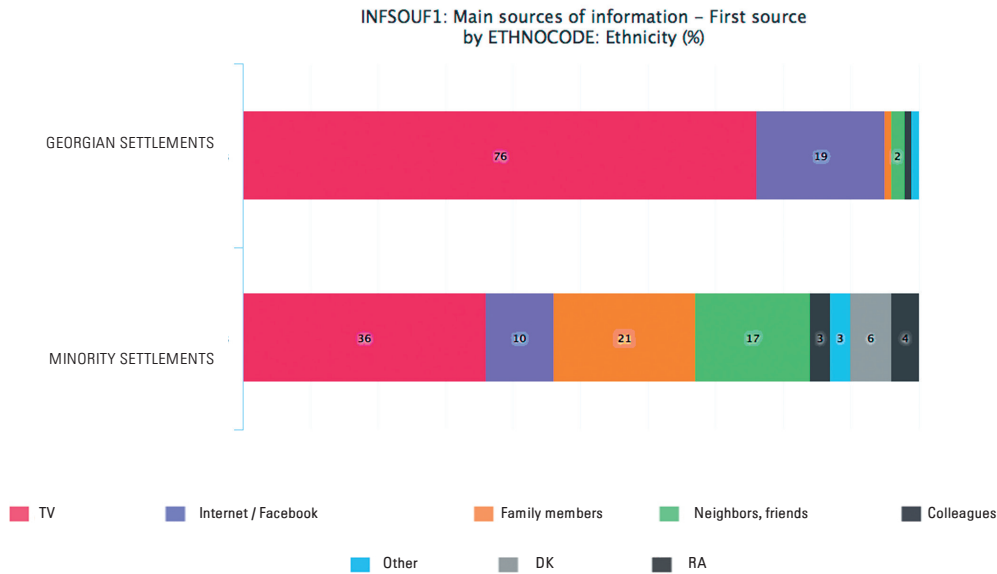
⁹ Tbilisi, Rustavi, Gori, Kutaisi, Batumi, Poti and Zugdidi.

¹⁰ Tri Media Intelligence <https://www.tmi.ge/en/basic-research>; TVMR Georgia http://www.tvmr.ge/en#!en/tam_panel

¹¹ <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nm2018ge/FRWRCO-by-ETHNOCODE/>

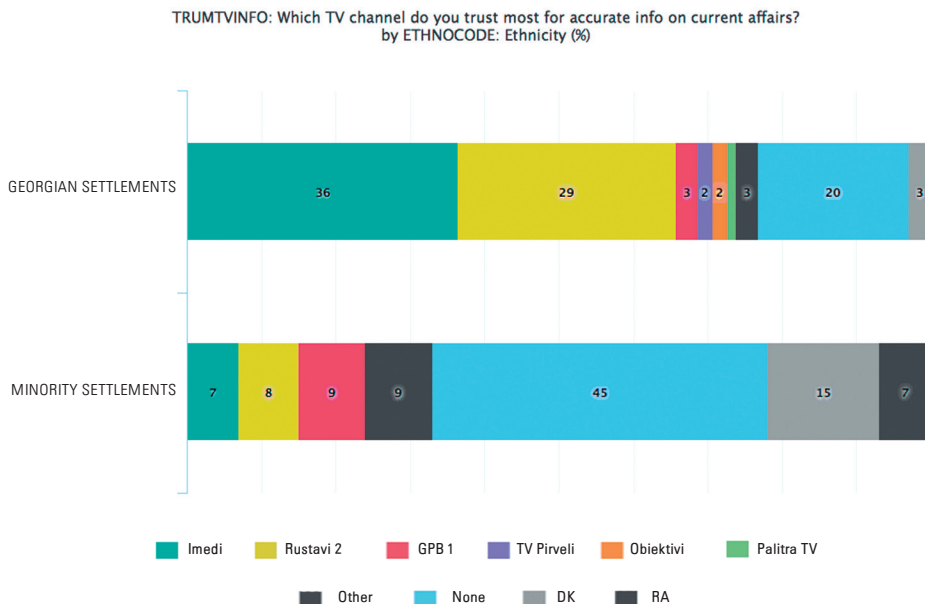
¹² NDI, CRRC, March 2018. Public Attitudes in Georgia. https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_March_2018_Public%20Presentation_English_final.pdf

FIGURE 1. MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION – FIRST SOURCE (NDI, MARCH 2018)



Distrust in TV channels is quite high in the regions populated by ethnic minorities: 45% of respondents do not trust in any of the broadcasters; the levels of trust towards 1st Channel of GPB, Rustavi 2 and Imedi are almost identical – 9%, 8% and 7%, respectively. The Russian media outlets are grouped under the category “Other” which includes 11 TV channels¹³ and shows the level of trust at 9%. The 2nd Channel of the GPB, which broadcasts news programs in minority languages, is not named in this survey at all.

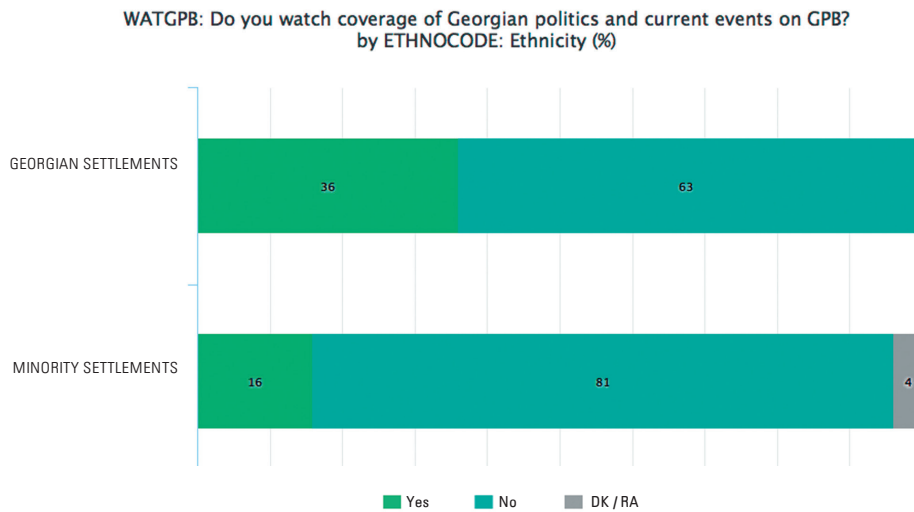
FIGURE 2. TRUST IN TV CHANNELS (NDI, MARCH 2018)



According to the results of December 2018 survey, 16% of citizens in the region populated by ethnic minorities watch the GPB.

¹³ GDS, Channel One Russia/ORT, Euronews, Kavkasia, BBC World News, CNN, Ajara TV, RTR, Maestro, Rossiya 24 and Rossiya 1. <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nm2018ge/TRUMTVINFO-by-ETHNOCODE/>

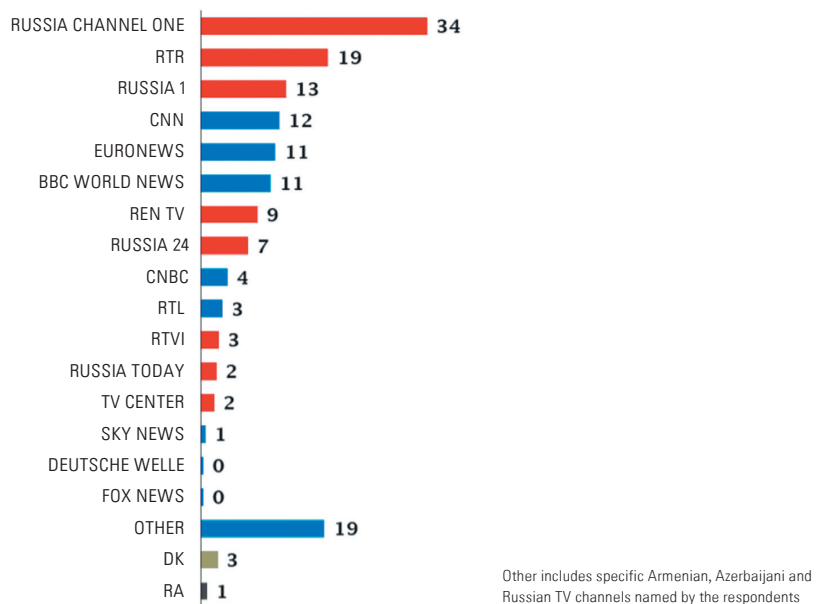
FIGURE 3. VIEWERSHIP OF NEWS ON POLITICS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS ON THE GPB (NDI, MARCH 2018)



The results of the NDI public opinion poll of March 2018 also show that the largest share of that 18% of population who receives news on politics and current affairs from non-Georgian TV channels accounts for Channel One Russia (34%) which is followed by the Russian TV channel RTR (19%) and Rossiya 1 (13%).

FIGURE 4. VIEWERSHIP OF NON-GEORGIAN TV CHANNELS (NDI, MARCH 2018)

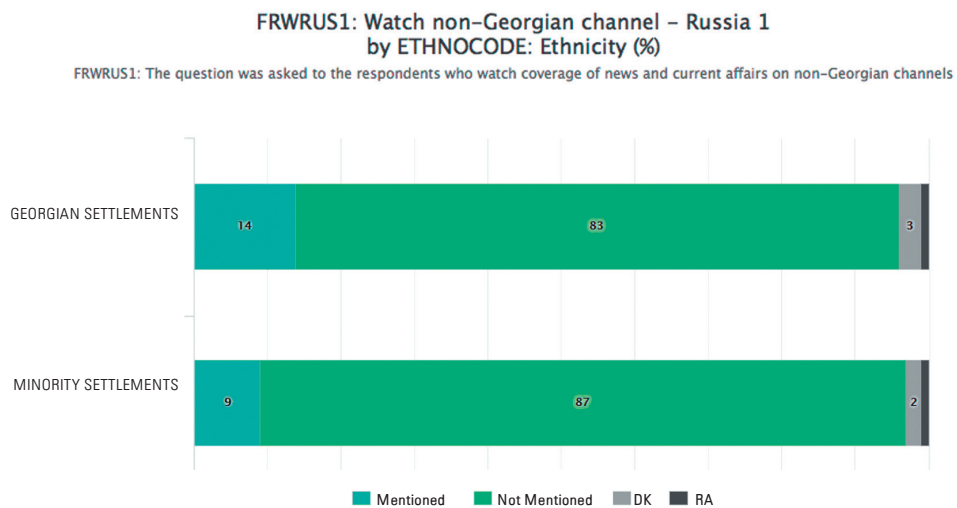
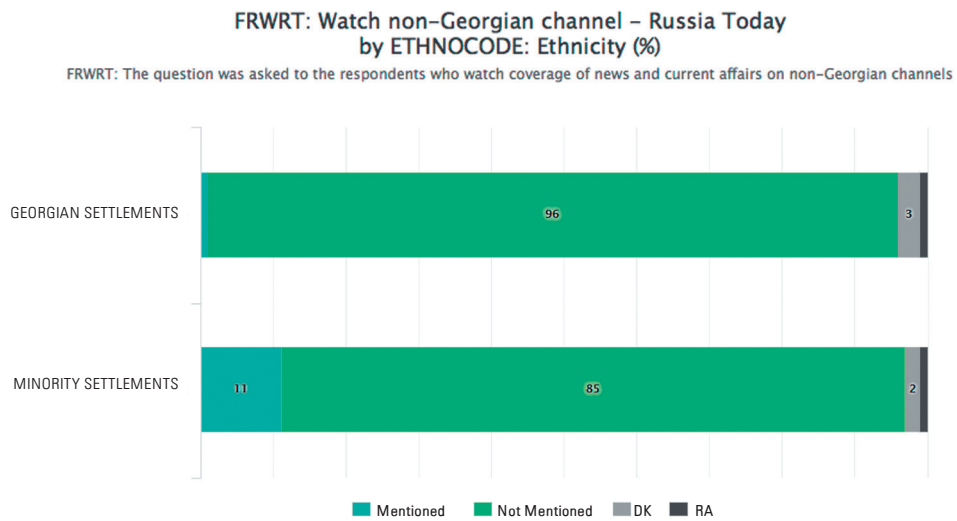
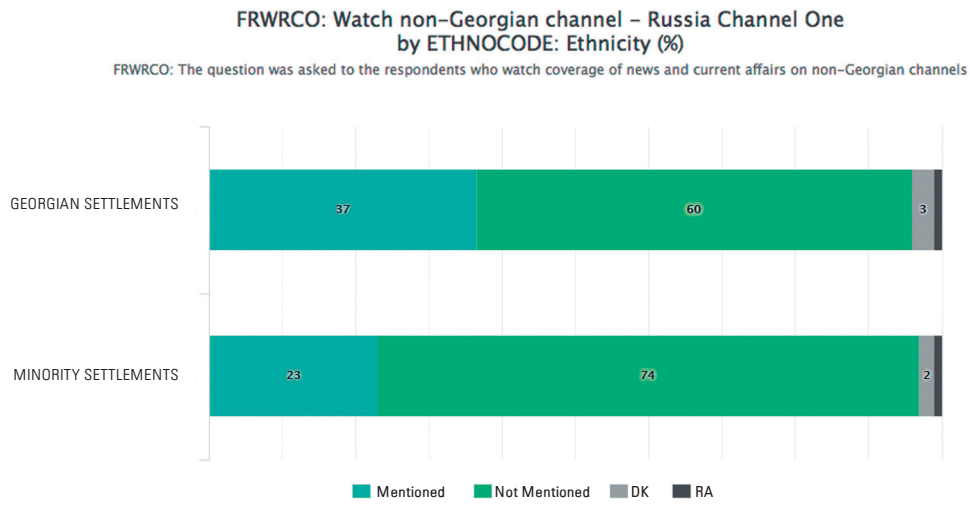
Which non-Georgian TV channels do you watch? (q52) - of the 18% who said they watch non-Georgian TV Channels



According to the Caucasus Barometer database,¹⁴ the frequency of receiving news on politics and current affairs from non-Georgian TV channels by citizens of the regions populated by ethnic minorities looks as follows: Channel One Russia – 23%, Russia Today – 11%, Rossiya 1 – 9%, and Rossiya 24 – 6%.

¹⁴ <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nm2018ge/FRWRCO-by-ETHNOCODE/>

FIGURE 5. NON-GEORGIAN TV CHANNELS – SOURCES OF NEWS ON POLITICS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS (NDI, MARCH 2018)



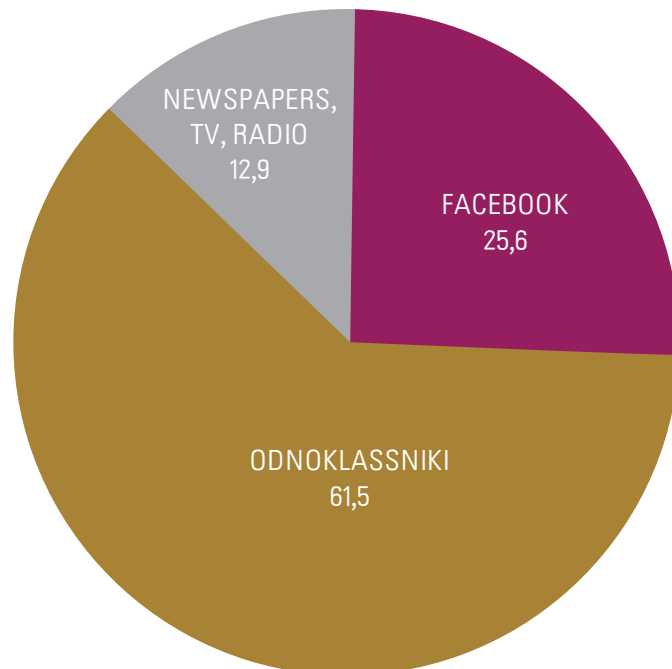
**FRWRUS24: Watch non-Georgian channel – Russia 24
by ETHNOCODE: Ethnicity (%)**

FRWRUS24: The question was asked to the respondents who watch coverage of news and current affairs on non-Georgian channels



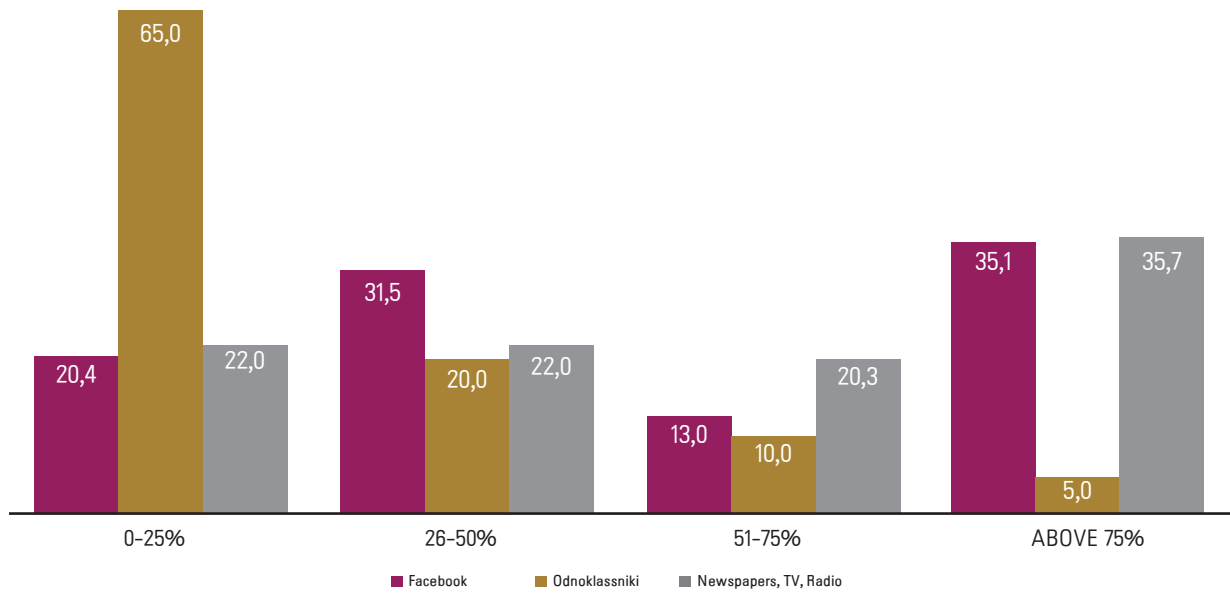
Public attitudes towards sources of information: The focus group participants filled out questionnaires in which they were to indicate whether they received information from traditional media (newspapers, TV, radio) or social media. As Figure 6 shows, the majority of focus group participants (61.5%) were the users of Russian social network Odnoklassniki, followed by users of Facebook (25.6%) and traditional media (12.9%).

**FIGURE 6. SOURCES OF INFORMATION OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS
– TRADITIONAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA**



The focus group participants were asked to rate the reliability of sources of information named by them on a 100% scale. As shown in the figure below, Odnoklassniki was rated as the least reliable (65%) whereas traditional media (35.7%) and Facebook (35.1%) were rated as the most reliable.

FIGURE 7. RELIABILITY OF TRADITIONAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA



The respondents were also asked to name particular media outlets where from they receive news on current affairs. They named Georgian-language, Russian-language, Armenian-language, Azerbaijani-language and Turkish-language sources of information as well as Western media outlets.

GEORGIAN MEDIA	RUSSIAN MEDIA	ARMENIAN / TURKISH / AZERBAIJANI MEDIA	WESTERN MEDIA
Georgian-language TV (4)	Russian-language TV (10)	Armenian-language TV (3)	English-language TV (2)
Rustavi 2 Imedi Iberia, MarneuliTV	Rossiya 24 RTR NTV ORT MIR RTV Pyatnitsa TV Dozhd TNT Match TV	Channel One Armenia Armenia TV Shant TV	BBC CNN
Radio (2)	Online media (4)	Azerbaijani-language TV (2)	
Radio NOR Radio Marneuli	RIA Novosti REGNUM Sputnik News.mail.ru	ATV Dunyatv.az	
Online media (7)		Turkish-language TV (1)	
Samkhretis Karibche IPN Apsny.ge Jnews Chai Khana Business Media Georgia Inetrnews		TRT	
Print media (1)			
Sakartvelo-Gurjistan			

As the above table shows, Russian TV channels were among the most frequently named outlets in all four cities. A segment of the respondents explained it by the language barrier (**a woman, Akhalkalaki, 18-35**: “*Had we understood Georgian we should have probably watched Georgian channels too*”) while another segment said it was attracted by a better ability and skills of Russian media to convey information regardless of whether it was true or not (**a man, Marneuli, 36-55**: “*Russians convey information in a better way. They may be lying, but...*”). According to the Marneuli focus group, the viewership of Azerbaijani TV channels is higher in Marneuli villages because Russian language is spoken mainly in urban settlements:

A woman, Marneuli, 36-55: “*Urban settlers know Russian better. The population in villages does not watch Russian-language channels. They watch Azerbaijani channels.*”

Sources of information named by participants of younger focus groups were much more diverse in terms of language as well as platforms.

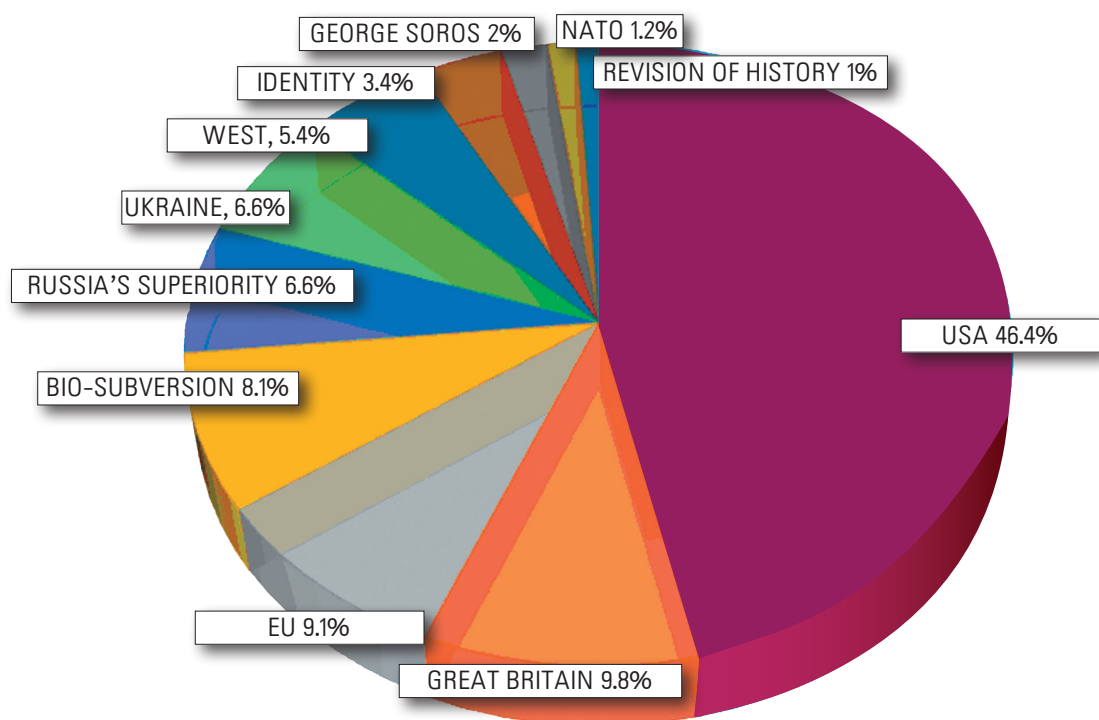
A woman, Marneuli, 18-35: “*To receive information I watch Georgian channels, Russian channels, US channels, all of them, because this is my sphere of activity and I want to be aware of everything what’s going on.*”

A man, Gardabani, 18-35: “*I have a phone application downloaded. Look, ‘novosti’ [news in Russian]... not only Russian news... When opening it, all the news appear at once - CNN, BBC, in other words, it is random. I just read in Russian.*”

II. MESSAGES OF RUSSIAN TV CHANNELS AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES

Total quantitative data. During the monitoring period (1 May – 15 November 2018), primetime news programs on two Russian TV channels, Channel One Russia and Rossiya 24, spread 407 anti-Western messages with the majority amongst targeting the USA and US-led Coalition in Syria¹⁵ (46.4%) and then, almost equally, Great Britain (9.8%) and the EU (9.1%). These were followed by messages on the threat of biological subversions (8.1%), the superiority of Russia's strength over the West (6.6%), the threat of losing identity (3.7%), George Soros (2%) and NATO (1.2%) as well as the messages in which history was revised (1%).

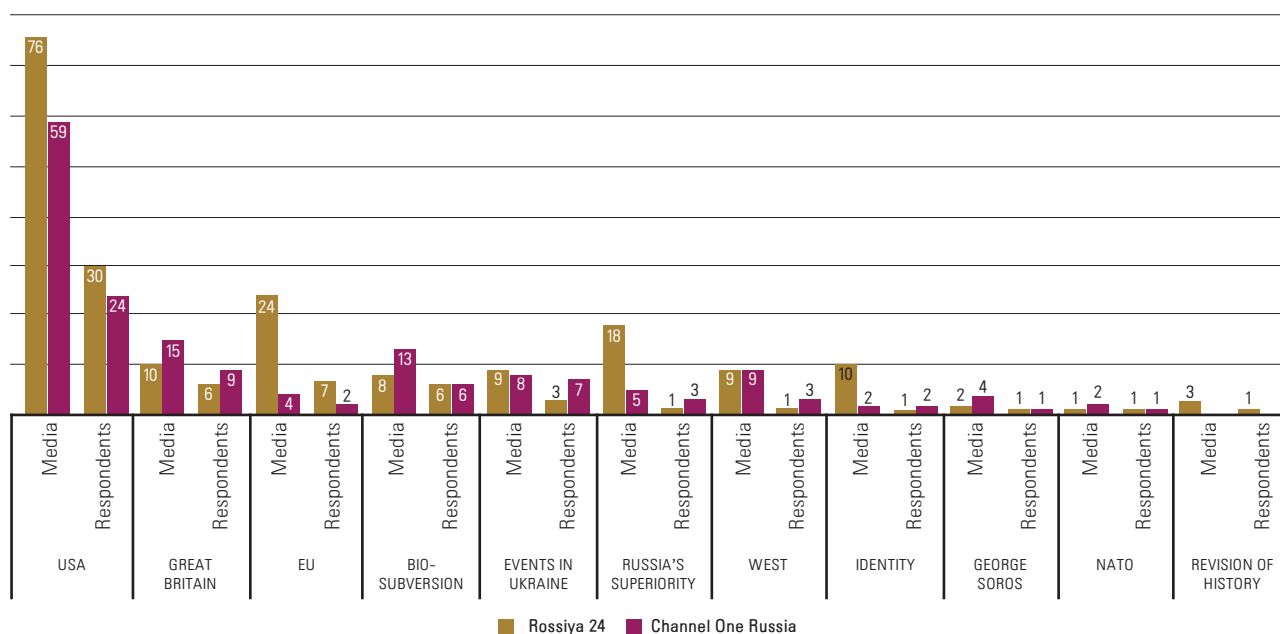
FIGURE 8. TOPICS OF ANTI-WESTERN MESSAGES SPREAD BY CHANNEL ONE RUSSIA AND ROSSIYA 24 (1 MAY – 15 NOVEMBER 2018).



As Figure 9 shows, sources of anti-Western messages on both channels were the media itself than respondents.

¹⁵ The USA, Great Britain, Canada, Turkey, France, Germany, Italy, Denmark.

FIGURE 9. TOPICS OF ANTI-WESTERN MESSAGES
BY CHANNEL ONE RUSSIA AND ROSSIYA 24



TOPICS OF MESSAGES AND TOPOLOGY

USA/US-LED COALITION. Editorial and respondents' comments against the USA (88) were mainly set to portray the USA and the US-led Coalition in Syria as a force that encourages violence and terrorism, while placing the emphasis on the events unfolding in Syria. Both media outlets promoted the following allegations:

- USA/US-led Coalition encourages violence, conflict, terrorism:** “Exactly seven years ago, in September 2011, the US-led Western coalition, with the French and English armed forces, was putting an end to the Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya – a prosperous country... A substantial territory of the country has become a promenade area for ISIS terrorists, remaining Al-Qaeda groupings and simply, all kinds of criminals.”¹⁶ “The US interpreted the notion of Syrian opposition in such broad terms that it sometimes even did not mind supporting terrorist organizations.”¹⁷
- Chemical airstrike in Syria is not the responsibility of Bashar al-Assad’s regime but rather a provocation staged by the USA and US-led coalition to prepare a ground for military escalation:** “Idlib is the last stronghold of fighters and the place where, according to the data available to our armed forces, a provocation with the use of chemical weapons is being prepared so as to lead to a new strike on Syria by the US and its allies.”¹⁸
- The USA hinders the humanitarian aid to Syria:** “Al Rukban refugee camp is almost a disaster zone with 60 000 peaceful citizens living in the gravest conditions next to terrorists. Americans pretend not to see anything and do not hurry to restore what was destroyed.”¹⁹
- The USA is not a reliable partner:** “It is not worth making an agreement with the USA. Washington is not capable of arriving at agreement. Trump seems to know what he is up to.”²⁰

¹⁶ Dmitry Kiselyov, presenter, Rossiya 24, Vesti Nedeli, 16 September. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3672938>

¹⁷ Oleg Mashkin, correspondent, Channel One, Vremya, 17 July. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-07-17/21:00#5>

¹⁸ Vitaliy Eliseyev, presenter, Channel One, Vremya, 29 August. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-08-29/21:00#6>

¹⁹ Andrey Ukharev, presenter, Channel One, Voskresnoe Vremya, 5 August. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-08-05/21:00#7>

²⁰ Ernest Matskevichus, presenter, Rossiya 24, Vesti 20.00, 8 May. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3589375>

- **The USA encourages coups, meddles in other countries' domestic affairs:** “[The International Republican] Institute was especially active in Egypt and Tunisia where Arab Spring took place, as well as in Russia’s neighboring countries, for example, Georgia where the Rose Revolution took pace.”²¹
- **The USA exacerbates the situation because of its energy interests:** “All this very much looks like that Trump exacerbates the situation around Iran to ensure the fixing of the price for a barrel of oil at above USD 80. Such prices make it cost-effective in the USA to extract shale oil, especially, by business friends of Trump.”²²

GREAT BRITAIN. There were three types of messages targeting Great Britain (40): the first was related to the case of poisoning of Skripals;²³ the second type of messages alleged that British special services physically destroy people; while the third one portrayed London as the city of money laundering.

With regard to Skripals’ poisoning, whataboutism was employed and focus was shifted from Russia’s responsibility onto other actors:

- **The poisoning of Skripals was in Britain’s interests/a provocation staged against Russia:** “It is not difficult to guess what Britain tries to achieve. Suffice it to recall that in a month after Skripals’ poisoning a chemical airstrike was carried out in Douma, Syria; then the USA launched airstrikes on Syria.”²⁴ “An attempt to distract the attention from her [Theresa May] domestic failure towards a scandalous case of Skripal fell through.”²⁵
- **The poisoning of Skripals was carried out from Porton Down laboratory:** “It is much easier for them to look for an invisible hand of Moscow than explain why is that strange poisonings happen near the highly secret Porton Down chemical lab whose experts identified the substance called Novichok. This means that they have samples of this nerve agent.”²⁶
- **There is no evidence that Russia poisoned Skripals:** “...they did not and do not have a theory that would really show a link between Russia and the Skripal case.”²⁷
- **Had Skripals been poisoned with Novichok they would not have survived:** “I am not a specialist in chemical weapon agents but as far as I understand, when a chemical weapon agent is used it instantly kills a victim of such attack.”²⁸
- **Other countries produce Novichok too:** “Its formula has been known not only in Russia, but also across Europe, even more so, for quite a long time now. One question remains: who would benefit from the poisoning of Skripals at that time?”²⁹

MESSAGES REGARDING THE EU. Main messages targeting the EU concerned the migration crisis, demonizing not only the EU’s liberal policy but also fomenting xenophobic attitudes by portraying migrants as criminals and terrorists:

- **Migration crisis is the consequence of the EU policy:** “By the way, all this [discussion on migration policy among EU countries] is the consequence of the first fatal mistake made by the EU. The second [mistake] is the opening of the door wide to migrants.”³⁰ “However, terrorists may be among refugees. Let’s recall the case of

²¹ Alexander histenko, correspondent, Rossiya 24, Vesti, 26 August, <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3658439>

²² Sergey Brilov, presenter, , Rossiya 24, Vesti v subotu, 2 June. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3608652>

²³ On 4 March 2018, Sergei Skripal, a former Russian agent, and his daughter were poisoned in Salisbury, England, with a Novichok nerve agent.

²⁴ Mikhail Akinchenki, correspondent, Channel One, Vremia, 5 September. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-09-05/21:00#2>

²⁵ Yevgeni Razhkov, presenter, Rossiya 24, Vesti 20.00. 3 May. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3584215>

²⁶ Gregory Emelivanov, correspondent, Channel One, Vremya, 4 July. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-07-04/21:00#11>

²⁷ Nikolay Platoshkin, Department Head of International Relations and Diplomacy at the Moscow University for Humanities, Channel One, Vremya, 4 May. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-05-04/21:00#1>

²⁸ Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, Rossiya 24, Vesti, 25 May. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3603596>

²⁹ Yekaterina Andreeva, presenter, Channel One, Vremya, 18 May. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-05-18/21:00#1>

³⁰ Dmitry Kisilev, presenter, Rossiya 24, Vesti Nedeli, 24 June. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3622704>

that bearded man, a simultaneous functionary of two terrorist organizations – Jihad Islam and Al-Tawhid. He is officially banned from entering Germany until 2022, but he appeared at the border and uttered a magic word – refugee.”³¹

- **The EU experiences crisis:** “Instead of blaming themselves and the European Commission for the crisis of the Europe project, the press and liberals more often blame right-wing politicians. For example, Orban. However, the rise of right-wing politicians is the consequence of their helplessness and mistakes.”³²
- **Visa-free travel with Ukraine is tantamount to labor exploitation:** “A visa-free regime has backfired on Ukrainians in the form of real labor camps – mediators seize their documents and force them to work without any pay... Those who do not want to become a cheap labor force devoid of rights, head for Russia.”³³

BIOLOGICAL SUBVERSION. Allegations about biological subversion were mainly related to the Richard Lugar Public Health Research Center which was built and developed with the support of the US government in Tbilisi. This topic has been covered time and again since 2012; however, the intensification of coverage in September 2018 coincided with the British government pressing charges against two Russian citizens for poisoning Sergey Skripal and his daughter with the Novichok nerve agent on 4 March 2018. A campaign-like coverage of the Lugar lab topic on Rossiya 24 and Channel One Russia in September created an impression that the coverage of the topic aimed at distracting the attention from accusations against Russia concerning the Skripals’ case and portraying the Lugar lab as a threat.³⁴ During the monitoring period the following allegations were spread regarding the Lugar bio-lab:

- **Lugar lab conducts experiments on people/produces biological weapons:** “Seventy-three people – this is the price Georgia has already paid for testing US biological weapons on its soil, or to be more precise, offering its citizens for horrible experiments. The Public Health Research Center named after Senator Richard Lugar, which was built with American monies, turned out to be a death factory.”³⁵ “Judging by official documents, people died as a result of anti-viral drug testing. It is manufactured by the company whose shares are held by the former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld... Americans have keen interest in atypical forms of plague, anthrax, dengue fever and other mosquito-borne diseases.”³⁶
- **The USA manufactures and tests biological weapons in laboratories of other countries too:** “In her article, a Bulgarian journalist Dilyana Gaytandzhieva asserts that the US military uses this scheme [opening secret military labs in other countries] to evade international prohibitions on the manufacturing of biological weapons. The Pentagon uses such a scheme in 25 countries, including those of the former Soviet Union, whose governments have no control over the operation of those labs. This has been underway for two decades now.”³⁷
- **The Lugar lab is directed against Russia:** “It was precisely from there [the Lugar lab] that the Pentagon spread African swine fever to our country.”³⁸
- **Biological weapons laboratory of Britain is located in Georgia:** “An increase in mosquitoes and other insects has been observed in Georgia of late. Many people are unaware that a military bio-lab of Great Britain is located in Kobuleti and we know that mosquitoes are a means of spreading viruses.”³⁹

³¹ Ivan Blagoy, correspondent, Channel One, Vremya, 20 August. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-08-20/21:00#8>

³² Mikhael Antonov, correspondent, Rossiya 24, Vesti, 12 September. <http://www.myvideo.ge/v/3669207>

³³ Igor Kozhevin, presenter, Rossiya 24, Bolshie Vesti, 12 August. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3651926>

³⁴ Myth detector, 27 September, 2018. How Kremlin Tries to Cover up Russian Trace in Skripal Case with Lugar Laboratory. <http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/how-kremlin-tries-cover-russian-trace-skripal-case-lugar-laboratory>

³⁵ Dmitry Petroc, correspondent, Rossiya 24, Vesti, 4 October. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3686520>

³⁶ Anatoliy Lazarev, correspondent, Channel One, Vremya, 4 October. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-10-04/21:00#3>

³⁷ Pavel Pcholkin, correspondent, Channel One, Vremya, 11 September. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-09-11/21:00#4>

³⁸ Igor Kozhevin, presenter, Rossiya 24, Vesti, 24 October. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3686520>

³⁹ Jeffrey Silverman, expert, Channel One, Vremya, 14 September, <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-09-14/21:00#6>

DEMONSTRATING THE SUPERIORITY OF RUSSIA. Editorial materials of, and respondents' comments on, Rossiya 24 and Channel One constantly emphasized the superiority of Russia over the West in regard with various topics, especially the Kremlin's military strength and the role in the fight against terrorism:

- **Russia is incomparable in its military strength and role in security:** "The weaponry and technique produced owing to their [Russian scientists, engineers] labor and talent have outstripped foreign analogues by years and perhaps, decades. They rendered many expensive, one may say, extremely expensive foreign systems morally obsolete."⁴⁰ "Regarding the lessons learned from the Munich treaty, the key lesson must be that the security in Europe is impossible to ensure without Russia. This was proved back then [during World War II] and will be proved again now. It is not worth to even give it a try."⁴¹
- **Russia actually fights against terrorism:** "President [Putin] has quoted a concrete example: ISIS has hundreds of hostages, including citizens of Western countries, in the territory controlled by the [US-led] coalition. This is the result of US anti-terrorist activity whereas Russia continues to fight extremists in practice."⁴²

MESSAGES CONCERNING UKRAINE. Negative coverage of Ukraine mainly concerned the announcement of autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarch, the annexation of Crimea, and the Euromaidan events in 2014 also known as the Revolution of Dignity:

- **The West is to be blamed for the developments in Ukraine:** "Why was the West assisting the violent coup in Ukraine when it had loyal politicians such as Tymoshenko and Yushchenko in Kyiv?"⁴³ "There are new developments in a high-profile case in which, according to a theory of special services, the American trace can be detected. The assault on the leader of Donetsk People's Republic was prepared by several subversion groups."⁴⁴
- **Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is a US project:** "Experts believe that before embarking on this political project [to gain the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine], Petro Poroshenko secured the support from curators in Washington."⁴⁵ "The US game is crystal clear here: using Ukraine as a foothold against Russia – this is the condition of the USA."⁴⁶
- **Granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is not a discretion of the Patriarch of Constantinople:** "According to canonical law, envoys of thugs [two bishops sent to Kiev by Patriarch of Constantinople] want to strike a thuggish deal by applying a thuggish method."⁴⁷
- **Statehood of Ukraine is a fiction:** "No Ukraine existed 1000 years ago, even this word did not exist... [Addressing Poroshenko] May God let you live to see being lost somewhere at Vienna where two centuries ago, you and those of your ilk were invented within the scope of the fight of Austro-Hungarian Empire against the Russian Empire."⁴⁸

MESSAGES CONCERNING THE WEST. The following messages were heard concerning separate Western countries as well as the West, in general:

⁴⁰ Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, Channel One, Vremya, 18 May, <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-05-18/21:00#6>

⁴¹ Dmitry Kisilev, presenter, Rossiya 13, Vesti Nedeli, 30 September. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3682499>

⁴² Igor Kozhevnikov, presenter, Rossiya 24, Vesti, 18 October. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3694453>

⁴³ Tatyana Remezeva, correspondent, Rossiya 24, Vesti v Subotu, 26 May. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3603830>

⁴⁴ Yekaterina Andreeva, presenter, Channel One, Vremya, 17 October. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-09-17/21:00#6>

⁴⁵ Oleg Shishkin, correspondent, Channel One, Vremya, 8 October. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-10-08/21:00#6>

⁴⁶ Dmitry Kisilev, presenter, Rossiya 13, Vesti Nedeli, 30 September. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3693871>

⁴⁷ Alentin Lukiyankin, expert, Rossiya 24, Vesti Nedeli, 30 September. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3682494>

⁴⁸ Kiryll Kleimionov, presenter, Channel One, Vremya, 7 November. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-11-07/21:00#7>

- **The West foments violence/conflicts:** “Ritual dances around Africa. Why have Western leaders raided the black continent?”⁴⁹
- **The West is in crisis:** “This [events in Libya] is a glaring and tragic example of sheer fiasco of geopolitical modeling experiment by the Western countries.”⁵⁰
- **The West applies double standard:** “After all, are you not fed up with these double standards of the West?”⁵¹
- **The West artificially creates threats:** “Experts note a miraculous sequence of resurrections across the world: Syria, London, and now Kiev. Scenario is similar everywhere: set a precedent, stir up public opinion and hurriedly appoint culprits without investigation and trial.”⁵²

MESSAGES RELATED TO IDENTITY. In addition to messages about loss of identity and unacceptable values imposed by the West, presenters of Rossiya 24, on several occasions, made unjustified references, in a homophobic context, to sexual identity of the US ambassador to Germany:

- **The West fights against traditional identity:** “Almost every week yet another teenager from provincial America declares about the change of sex and triggers yet another wave of family discussions on gender belonging with children. Many specialists are convinced that this is precisely how a mental deviation of individuals evolved into a mass mental disorder... To cut a long story short, it might not even be worth fearing NATO expansion as they have to fear much more dangerous thing.”⁵³ “The data is interesting – half a year ago, the American Pew Research Center published estimates whereby the share of Muslims in Germany, Britain, France and Austria will increase by 18–20 percent by 2050 if the migration policy remains unchanged. If nothing changes, a corresponding number in Sweden will be 30 percent in the middle of this century. While Muslims are historically native in Russia, they are foreign bodies for Europe, coming from god knows where. They live in isolated communities and give rise to suspicion and fear.”⁵⁴
- **Implant unacceptable values:** “Who will guess within three tries what has become an obstacle for [Brett] Kavanaugh?⁵⁵ Correct: malignant disease of feminism... Malignant disease of feminism is spreading from America to Europe and Russia too. Malignant feminism does not recognize the supremacy of law. Women having contracted this disease, even after many years and decades, continue to project their sexual phantasies onto the life and in general, onto professionally successful men and blame them for rape.”⁵⁶
- **Unjustified reference to sexual identity:** “Ambassadors to Germany [US Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell], even gay ambassadors, shall not behave like this.”⁵⁷

GEORGE SOROS. All the eight comments about US philanthropist and founder of Open Society Foundation George Soros were promoting an opinion that Soros is the inspirer of velvet revolutions across the world and meddles in other countries’ domestic affairs:

- “Open Society organizations led the overthrow of Milosevic in Serbia in 2000; overthrow of Shevardnadze in Georgia in 2003; coup in Kyrgyzstan in 2005; Maidan events in Ukraine in 2014. All these events now have one name – color revolutions. However, there was also Arab Spring: Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Syria and Algeria. Here Soros steadily supported radical Islamists whom he, surprisingly, called freedom fighters.”⁵⁸

⁴⁹ Rossiya 24, Vesti Nedeli, 2 September, <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3663466>

⁵⁰ Mariya Zakharova, Russian Foreign Ministry, Channel One, Vremya, 13 September. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-09-13/21:00#12>

⁵¹ Dmitry Kisilev, presenter, Rossiya 13, Vesti Nedeli, 17 June. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3618535>

⁵² Yekaterina Andreeva, presenter, Channel One, Vremya, 31 May. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-05-31/21:00#11>

⁵³ Dmitry Kulko, correspondent, Channel One, Vremya, 9 November. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-11-09/21:00#8>

⁵⁴ Dmitry Kisilev, presenter, Rossiya 13, Vesti Nedeli, 24 June. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3622702>

⁵⁵ Republican Party nominee for an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of United States.

⁵⁶ Dmitry Kisilev, presenter, Rossiya 13, Vesti Nedeli, 30 September. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3682506> ; <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3682505>

⁵⁷ Mikhail Antonov, correspondent, Rossiya 24, Vesti Nedeli, 6 June. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3608670>

⁵⁸ Mikhail Akinchenko, correspondent, Channel One, Voskresnoye Vremya, 3 June. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-06-03/21:00#9>

- “In the past years Soros’ nongovernmental organizations infiltrated all decision making levels in Europe, they also infiltrated some political parties in Hungary... Soldiers of Soros want to decide for us what we should do and how we should think, even more so, what we should be.”⁵⁹
- “Their [Soros-funded NGOs] aim is to create rift between Yerevan and Moscow and clearly, to change those priorities and directions which Yerevan has set for the time being.”⁶⁰

NATO. Negative messages about the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were designed to portray NATO as a hostile association and a threat:

- “Those bad memories, Stoltenberg talked about, are cluster bombs – anti-armor munitions with uranium content, which were dropped on Belgrade and left the lasting trace through causing outbreaks of oncological diseases for many years. NATO forces attacked not only military facilities... That ‘humanitarian intervention’ left several thousand people dead, including 1700 civilians and around 400 children.”⁶¹
- “If they allow Ukraine to join NATO the third world war will be inevitability because we hear statements of Ukrainian politicians, Petro Poroshenko...”⁶²

REVISION OF HISTORY. Messages involving the revision of history promoted the following allegations:

- **European states bear responsibility for the outbreak of the World War II:** “They do not mention this date [the date of Munich Agreement] and divert the attention of their students towards the Soviet Union–Germany Non–aggression Pact of August 1939, which, as they allege, provoked the World War II. However, in retrospect, looking back from the 21st century, it is absolutely clear which of European states are to be blamed for the World War II.”⁶³
- **Unification of Germany = annexation:** “Of course, this [unification of Germany] was annexation, nothing else. From a legal standpoint, the unified Germany has not even adopted a new constitution yet... and from an informal, practical standpoint, the West came to the East as a patron, even a sort of occupant.”⁶⁴

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS RUSSIAN MEDIA COVERAGE

USA. To study public attitudes towards the role of the USA in military operations, we conducted an experiment in focus groups in Samtskhe–Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions. We distributed among focus-group participants a transcript of BBC report (see, Annex 1)⁶⁵ on Russian air strikes in Syria that caused death of civilians. The country was not identified in the transcript; an empty space was left in the text and the participants were asked to write down the omitted country which, in their opinion, carried out the shelling.

The answers revealed differences in attitudes both in regional and age-specific terms: the number of respondents who thought that air strikes on Syria were carried out by the USA was the highest in Gardabani (36–55 – 50%, 18–35: 43.8%), Akhalkalaki (36–55 – 40%, 18–35: 40%) and Ninotsminda (36–55 – 40%, 18–35: 33.3%) whereas the

⁵⁹ Viktor Orban, Prime Minister of Hungary, Channel One, Voskresnoye Vremya, 3 June. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-06-03/21:00#9>

⁶⁰ Arman Gukasiyan, International organization for humanitarian development, Rossiya 24, Vesti Nedeli, 6 May. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3588025>

⁶¹ Channel One, Vremya, 8 October. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/issue/2018-10-08/21:00#4>

⁶² Oleg muzika, participant in the rally, Rossiya 24, Vesti v Subotu, 7 July. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3631229>

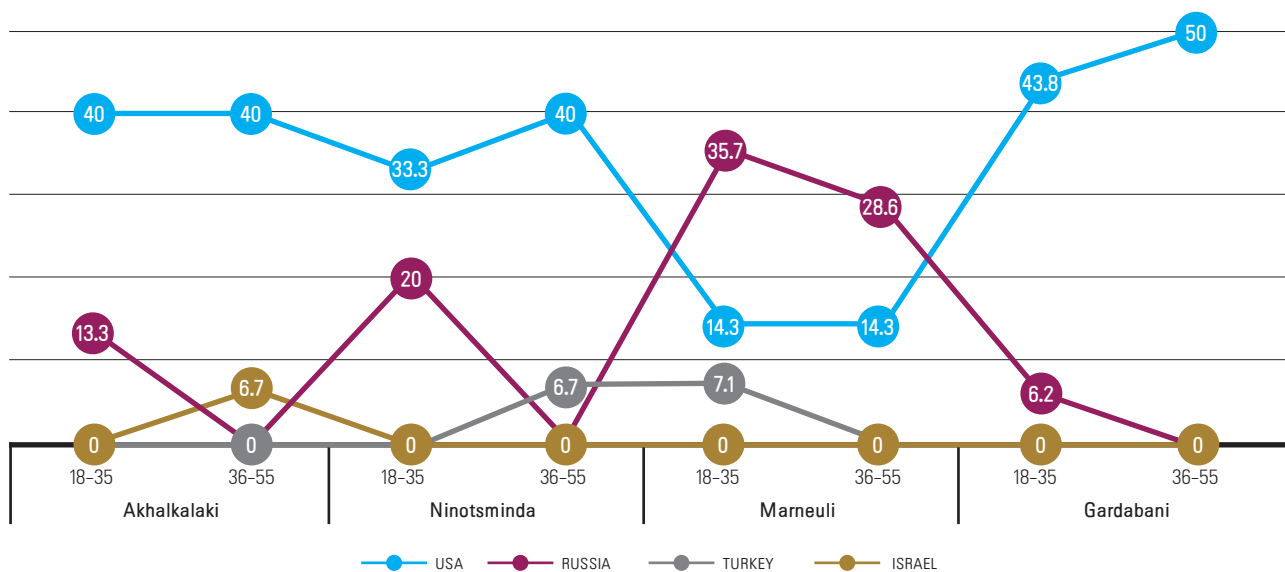
⁶³ Dmitry Kisilev, presenter, Rossiya 13, Vesti Nedeli, 30 September. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3682496> ; <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3682498>

⁶⁴ Mikhail Antonov, correspondent, Rossiya 13, Vesti, 7 October. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3689482>

⁶⁵ BBC Russian, 2 October, 2015, Who do Russian jets shell in Syria. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3tc3Por0mE>

number of those who correctly identified the real author of the shelling – Russia, was the highest in Marneuli (36–55 – 35.7%, 18–35: 28.6%). Based on this data we may assume that compared to other cities, residents of Marneuli are either less susceptible to the Kremlin propaganda or have less access to pro-Kremlin media outlets. At the same time, Russia was not named by any of the older age-group participants, with the exception of those in Marneuli, as the author of the shelling in contrast to the younger participants who identified Russia as such, though less frequently as compared to the USA (Ninotsminda – 20%; Akhalkalaki – 13.3%; Gardabani – 6.2%). It is worth noting that in separate cases the air strikes were thought to be carried out by Israel (Akhalkalaki: 36–55 – 6.7%) and Turkey (Marneuli: 18–35 – 7.1%; Ninotsminda: 36–55 – 6.7%).

FIGURE 10. PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ROLE OF USA AND RUSSIA IN THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA



Respondents from Ninotsminda and Gardabani named the US aggressive foreign policy as the reason of identifying the USA as the author of air strikes:

A man, Ninotsminda, 36-55: “There has not been a war in the USA for 300 years now. It constantly fights in other countries, but has not had war in its country for 200, 300 years now.”

Correlation was revealed between misinforming messages spread by Russian TV channels and respondents’ attitudes according to which the so-called Islamic State originated in the USA whereas Russia actually fights against terrorism:

MEDIA COVERAGE	FOCUS GROUPS
<p>Rossiia 24, Vesti, 18 October; Igor Kozhevin, presenter: <i>“This is the result of US anti-terrorist activity whereas Russia continues to fight extremists in practice.”⁶⁶</i></p>	<p>A man, Gardabani, 18-35: <i>“America shells the Syrian state whereas Russia fights against the terrorist organization of Islamic state.”</i></p>
<p>Rossiia 24, Vesti, 18 May; Igor Kozhevin, presenter: <i>“Terrorist groupings remaining [in Syria] feel themselves somewhat safe in the districts controlled by the US-led coalition.”⁶⁷</i></p>	<p>A man, Gardabani, 36-55: <i>“America lives with wars... This is what actually ensures its development. Islamic state has also originated there.”</i></p>

⁶⁶ <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3694453>

⁶⁷ <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3596486>

Marneuli focus-group participants had a different opinion: the majority of them named Russia as the author of the shelling and explained this with Russia's aggressive policy:

A woman, Marneuli, 18-35: *"I don't know why but it was Russia that came to mind; perhaps, because it is associated with the aggressor."*

Having watched a full report of the BBC Moscow Bureau, showing that the air strikes were carried out by Russia, the participants did not significantly change their attitudes due to, as explained by some of them, one-sided media coverage:

- **The US has oil-related interest in the conflict:** "[America in Syria] pursues the same aim as it did in Libya. Actually, it is related to oil since everyone depends on oil" (a man, Gardabani, 18-35).
- **NATO is the aggressor:** "NATO is our adversary and its troops are against us. We know everything what we are watching now. What else should I add...? Who shelled Vietnam? Who shelled Yugoslavia? How many such examples can be cited?" (a man, Marneuli, 36-55).
- **Russia actually fights against terrorism whereas the USA fights against Syrian government:** "What we have been reading is that the USA attacks the state of Syria whereas Russia fights against a terrorist organization of Islamic State" (a man, Gardabani, 18-35).
- **Both USA and Russia are equally guilty:** "I think that both Russia and the USA are guilty. Both are offenders as they fight in a foreign state" (a man, Ninotsminda, 36-55).

MEDDLING IN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS OF A FOREIGN STATE. The aim of discussion of a comment made by the head of Russia Today, Margarita Simonyan, about the 2018 revolution in Armenia⁶⁸ was to find out how the focus-group participants perceive the developments in Armenia and whether they see the meddling of a foreign country as suggested in the comment of the Russian media representative.

Margarita Simonyan, RT TV channel: *"If anyone – be it Nikola Pashinyan or any other leader – lacks senses and makes attempts to sever ties [Russia-Armenian relationship] and turn Armenia into the 51st or already 151st state of America, this will not have any good consequences. This is what I am concerned about. Anything else is up to Armenian people to decide."*

Respondents' opinions divided during the discussion. A segment of respondents from Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda talked not about the US role, but about Russia's influence on Armenia. According to them, Russia will not let Armenia go easily.

A woman, Akhalkalaki, 36-55: *"It is not correct to say that it cannot survive without Russia. I do not think so."*

A man, Ninotsminda, 18-35: *"Russia impedes Armenia in many ways to become a normal country."*

In the opinion of another segment of respondents, Armenia is a traditional ally of Russia and Armenia's closer ties with the USA may have, due to geographic closeness to Russia, a negative impact on the security as well as economic wellbeing of the country:

⁶⁸ From 12 April 2018 anti-government protest started in Armenia and resulted in resignation of the Prime-Minister and election of opposition leader Nikola Pashinyan as a Prime-Minister.

A man, Akhalkalaki, 18-35: *“For many thousand years Armenians have been on friendly terms with Russia... Russia supports Armenia and at this stage, Armenians feel themselves secure [with Russia].”*

A woman, Ninotsminda, 36-55: *“Georgia as well as Armenia gets income, jobs and everything from Russia; there has not been anything from the USA yet.”*

A man, Ninotsminda, 18-35: *“If Armenia changes its course, Armenian population will come under pressure there [in Russia].”*

A woman, Ninotsminda, 18-35: *“Russia is near and if anything happens and Russia decides to attack, the USA is too far to defend. Thus, Armenia is in the hands of Russia; the threat is higher for Georgia too as we are near it.”*

Despite these attitudes, a segment of respondents saw the need to revise the opinion that Armenia could not exist without Russia.

THE SCRIPALS’ CASE. To study attitudes towards the poisoning of Sergei Skripal, a former Russian agent, and his daughter in Salisbury with a Novichok nerve agent as well as the response of Western countries to Russia by imposing sanctions on it, a relevant information was provided to the participants. They were to discuss whether the US and British sanctions against Russia for this incident were fair and in general, whether Russia is a safe country.

The opinions of participants divided on the case of Skripal poisoning. A segment of participants questioned the reliability of information and consequently, the responsibility of Russia whereas another segment did not rule out such an action by Russia. Respondents echoed narratives of Russian TV channels. In particular:

- **It was not established that Russia poisoned Scripals:** *“Yes, high officials accused [Russia], but I don’t know how founded the accusation was; the text does not show that there was evidence proving that these agents were poisoned by representatives of Russia”* (a woman, Marneuli, 18-35).
- **Poisoning of Scripals was in the interest of England and it was a provocation staged against Russia:** *“European researchers found this poison in Britain and this text does not say that apart from Scripals other people were also poisoned there. This is a one-sided information”* (a man, Ninotsminda, 18-35).
- **The Scripals could be poisoned both by Russian and British special services:** *“Any special service could do that”* (a woman, Akhalkalaki, 36-55).
- **The USA and Britain were looking for a reason to impose sanctions on Russia:** *“I do not believe it. They were looking for a reason to impose yet another sanction”* (a woman, Akhalkalaki, 36-55).

At the same time, younger participants expressed an opinion that Russia always tries to avoid responsibility and to blame others:

A woman, Marneuli, 18-35: *“It is customary for Russia to blame other states for everything and assert that it is innocent in everything. This is the problem.”*

Although the opinions on this issue divided, the majority of respondents agreed that sanctions were justified provided that these facts were real. Among other opinions were that Great Britain should have responded to Russia’s actions much earlier, in case of Berezovsky and that the imposition of sanctions for an attempted murder of one person was unfair:

A woman, Marneuli, 36-55: *“Why was England not concerned similarly in case of poisoning of Berezovsky?.. Serious questions were raised then, it [the case] was so obvious, given his weight in Russian politics... It is clear that he was killed. Back then, Britain treated that incident very cool-headed because it was not in its interest to engage in conflict with Russia.”*

A man, Marneuli, 18-35: *“It is unfair to impose this sanction because of one agent.”*

The majority of respondents considered Russia to be a more dangerous country compared to Western countries and to support this opinion cited examples of political killings, crime situation in Russia as well as its militarist ambitions and interventions:

A man, Gardabani, 18-35: *“It [Russia] is not the safest country for population; perhaps it is safer than African countries, but not otherwise.”*

A woman, Marneuli, 18-35: *“Of course, agents are under the threat if they do not play their game. Killings of journalists... the leader of opposition who was killed at the river bank one or two years ago.”*

A woman, Akhalkalaki, 18-35: *“Russia is not safe either inside or outside.”*

A woman, Marneuli, 36-55: *“I have 22-year-old son. I am half Russian. If I have a possibility to send him to either Moscow State University or to London I will, of course, send him to London. There is crime, lawlessness, disorder there [in Russia].”*

A man, Akhalkalaki, 18-35: *“It is dangerous because it has a military power. It wants to be the leader.”*

A woman, Gardabani, 36-55: *“It was with the assistance of Russia that Karabakh was lost, like Ossetia and Abkhazia in case of Georgia, was it not?”*

The Gardabani focus group, which proved to be most influenced by Russian media, justified Russia’s actions by the US and NATO policy which, in their view, nudged the Kremlin to strengthen its positions at its borders:

A woman, Gardabani, 36-55: *“Russia defends its borders and that’s why it invades those states in order to prevent US troops from approaching Russia’s borders.”*

A woman, Gardabani, 36-55: *“If, for example, Georgia joins NATO and they [NATO] deploy their troops here, this will, of course, adversely affect the CIS.”*

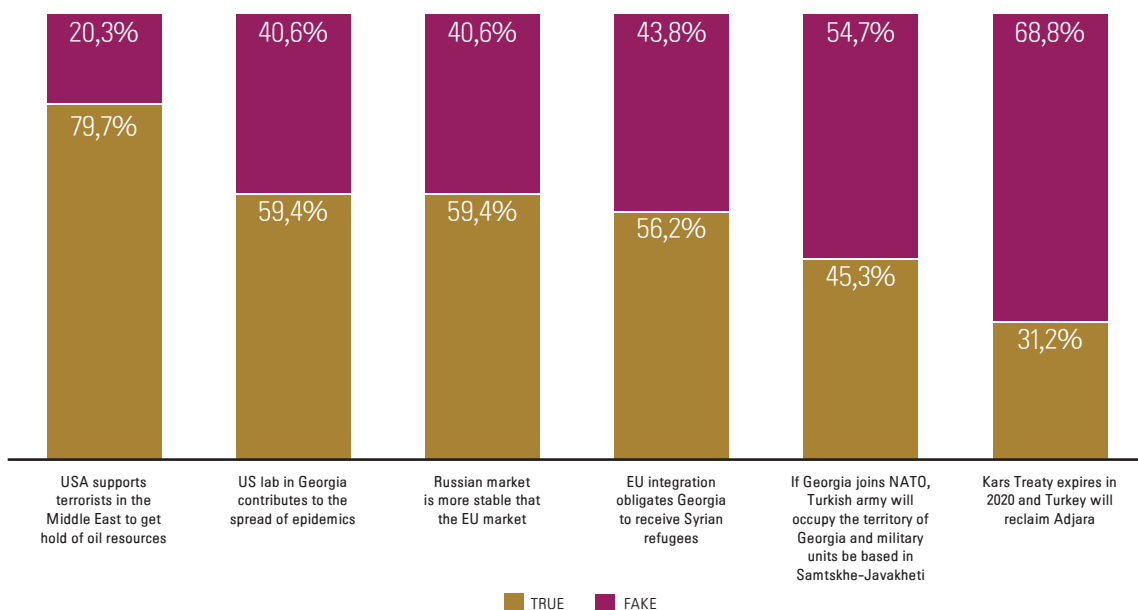
PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TO FAKE NEWS

To identify perceptions and attitudes of respondents to fake news, the focus group participants were distributed a digest containing both true information and fake news about the USA, the EU, NATO, George Soros and other issues. The participants were to identify fake news and then to discuss the criteria they applied to establish whether the information was true or fake.

FAKE NEWS	TRUE INFORMATION
The USA supports terrorists in the Middle East in order to get hold of oil resources.	In its annual reports, the US State Department writes about infringements on religious rights of Muslims in Georgia and the need to investigate these incidents.
The American laboratory in Georgia contributes to the spread of epidemics.	The study and photo-documenting of wooden mosques facing the threat of total destruction, as well as the publication of a catalogue of wooden mosques in Adjara was made possible with the financial assistance from George Soros.
The EU integration obligates Georgia to receive Syrian refugees.	Russian market is more stable than the EU market.
If Georgia joins NATO, the Turkish army will occupy the territory of Georgia and military units be based in Samtskhe-Javakheti.	Assad used chemical weapons.
The Kars Treaty expires in 2020 and Turkey will reclaim Adjara.	The Western world protects ethnic, national identity.
	The EU supports the development of agriculture in Georgia.
	In its annual reports, the US State Department writes about the issue of return of religious buildings to the Armenian Apostolic Church.
	Export to the EU countries increased by 20%; the share of CIS countries in the total trade decreases.

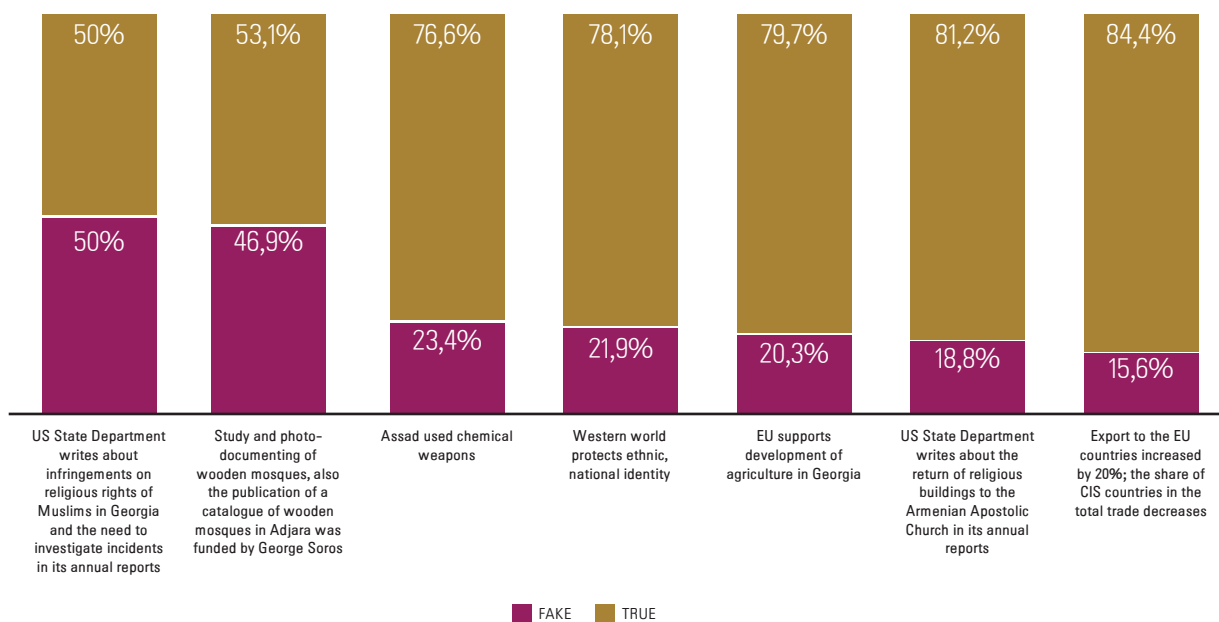
Total data. Of those fake news provided to respondents, the most reliable for them was the misinformation about the USA supporting terrorists in the Middle East to get hold of oil resources (79.7%); such attitude echoes the narrative of Russian TV channels emphasizing the aggressive policy and linking the USA with terrorism. A fake news about the Lugar lab which alleged that the American lab is a source of epidemics in Georgia proved reliable for 59.4% of respondents and unreliable for only 40.6%. The results were identical about the misinformation that the Russian market is more stable than the EU market (true – 59.4%; fake – 40.6%). More than half of respondents also considered the fake news that the EU integration obligates Georgia to receive Syrian refugees reliable (52.2%). A conspiracy theory that the NATO integration would result in the Turkish army intervention into Georgia proved reliable for 45.3% of the respondents and fake for 54.7%. Yet another conspiracy theory that the Kars Treaty would expire in 2020 and Turkey would reclaim Adjara was seen as less reliable (true – 31.2%; fake – 68.8%).

FIGURE 11. PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TO FAKE NEWS



As Figure 12 shows, respondents from ethnic Azerbaijani-populated Kvemo Kartli considered the least reliable among real facts the information about the US State Department reports discussing the issue of protecting their religious rights (true – 50%; fake – 50%) and the information about their cultural and religious heritage sites documented with the funding from George Soros (true – 46.9%; fake – 53.1%). In contrast, respondents from ethnic Armenian-populated Samtskhe-Javakheti showed a higher trust in the information about an annual US State Department report discussing the problem of return of religious buildings to the Armenian Apostolic Church (true – 81.2%; fake – 18.8%). The most reliable for the respondents proved to be the information about a 20% increase in EU exports and the decrease in the share of CIS countries in the total trade (true – 84.4%; fake – 15.6%).

FIGURE 12. PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDES TO TRUE INFORMATION



The information that the study and photo-documenting of wooden mosques facing the threat of total destruction as well as the publication of a catalogue of wooden mosques in Adjara was made possible with the financial assistance from George Soros proved to be the least reliable for respondents of the older age group in Marneuli and Gardabani, who thought that Soros is only interested in democratic and revolutionary processes:

A woman, Gardabani, 36-55: *“George Soros will not spend his money on Muslim mosques because he spends it on democracy and revolution.”*

A man, Gardabani, 36-55: *“Soros, in principle, can spend money on the interests of Muslims in Georgia if they serve political aims he pursues.”*

Respondents from Kvemo Kartli, who do not believe in US State Department discussing Muslim religious rights in its reports, explained their attitude partially by the absence of problems of Muslim community in Georgia and partially by a mere disbelief that the US government may protect Muslim rights, stressing the US policy regarding Shia Muslims and events in Syria:

A man, Gardabani, 18-35: *“This cannot be so, it is impossible that the US demands from Georgia that Muslim citizens live well in Georgia – I do not believe it, this is illogical.”*

A man, Marneuli, 36-55: *“[Americans] deride us... For example, we both work in military service – you are Sunni and I am Shia. They [Americans] will not allow me to stay in the service because I am Shia. Americans force Georgians to prevent Shia Muslims from serving and to make it possible for Sunni Muslims to stay in the service... Sunni – Turkey, Shia – Iran.”*

A woman, Gardabani, 36-55: *“Russia knows the Muslim world better than America; for example, America started attacking Syria whereas Russia started defending it.”*

The share of respondents who believed the information about the US State Department stressing the problems concerning religious buildings of Armenians in its annual reports was higher in the focus group of ethnic Armenians from Samtskhe-Javakheti. However, a smaller segment of the respondents considered this information unreliable because, in their view, the USA would not act against Georgia. One of the respondents even linked this issue to Georgia’s interest to join NATO:

A man, Akhalkalaki, 18-35: *“I do not believe that America will go against Georgia.”*

A man, Akhalkalaki, 18-35: *“I do not know when and where this happened, but I think that America would not go against Georgia. America wants Georgia to join NATO whereas Armenia does not want that.”*

DATA BY REGIONS. Misinformation about the Richard Lugar laboratory proved the most reliable for respondents in Akhalkalaki (68.7%) and Marneuli (56.2%) and the least reliable for those in Ninotsminda (12.5%) and Gardabani (12.5%).

A man, Marneuli, 36-55: *“Yes, (I agree) one is in Marneuli and I think, there are other 20 [labs].”*

A woman, Marneuli, 36-55: *“I do not agree because representatives of nongovernmental organizations arrive and they speak at trainings in order to prevent the spread [of this allegation] and why should they have done so?”*

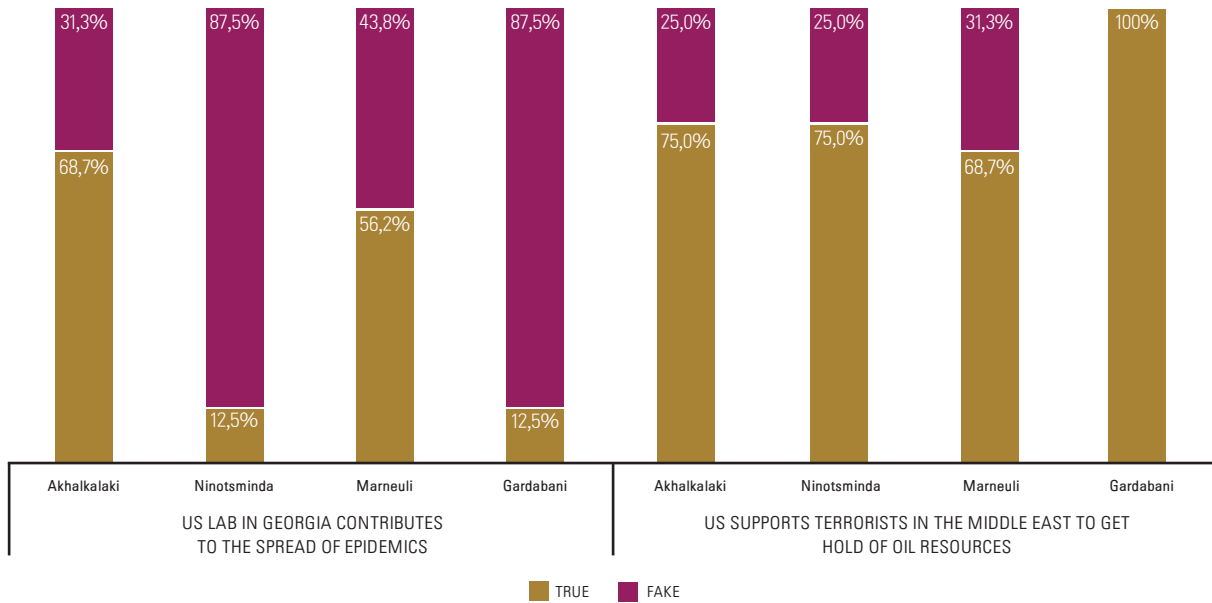
A conspiracy theory that the USA supports terrorists in the Middle East to get hold of oil resources proved reliable for the majority of respondents in every region, even more so, Gardabani respondents were unanimous in this opinion (100%).

A man, Ninotsminda, 36-55: *“We live here and suppose, Turks or Russians come and say: you go and we will live here now – will that be fair?! It is the same in Syria; Americans went there and told them to leave.”*

A woman, Marneuli, 18-35: *“That person has some interest, assists us because he wants oil. Then he destroys and what is your motivation to receive assistance from him if you know that you will be destroyed?”*

A man, Ninotsminda, 18-35: *“There is a school in France; they raise terrorists themselves, who are they? They pay money while these perform dark job.”*

FIGURE 13. PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TO US-RELATED FAKE NEWS BY REGIONS



From among fake news about the EU, the misinformation concerning the obligation to receive Syrian refugees and an opinion that Russian market is more stable than that of the EU proved the most reliable for Ninotsminda focus-group respondents (93.7%). The advantage of the EU market was most actively discussed in the Marneuli focus-group while the stability of Russian market was most popular among the Ninotsminda and Gardabani focus groups:

A man, Gardabani, 36-55; a woman, Ninotsminda, 36-55: *“Russian is more stable.”*

A man, Marneuli, 18-35: *“In my opinion, European market is better than Russian. In the EU, everything conforms to standards. It is cleaner and more organic.”*

A woman, Marneuli, 36-55: *“Not Russian, of course. Russian ruble depreciates daily.”*

It is worth noting that Marneuli focus group participants were better informed about the benefits of free trade with the EU and that the possibility of free trade with the EU shrinks exports to Russia:

A woman, Marneuli, 18-35: *“Are not able and do not export [to Russia]. The West is opening up.”*

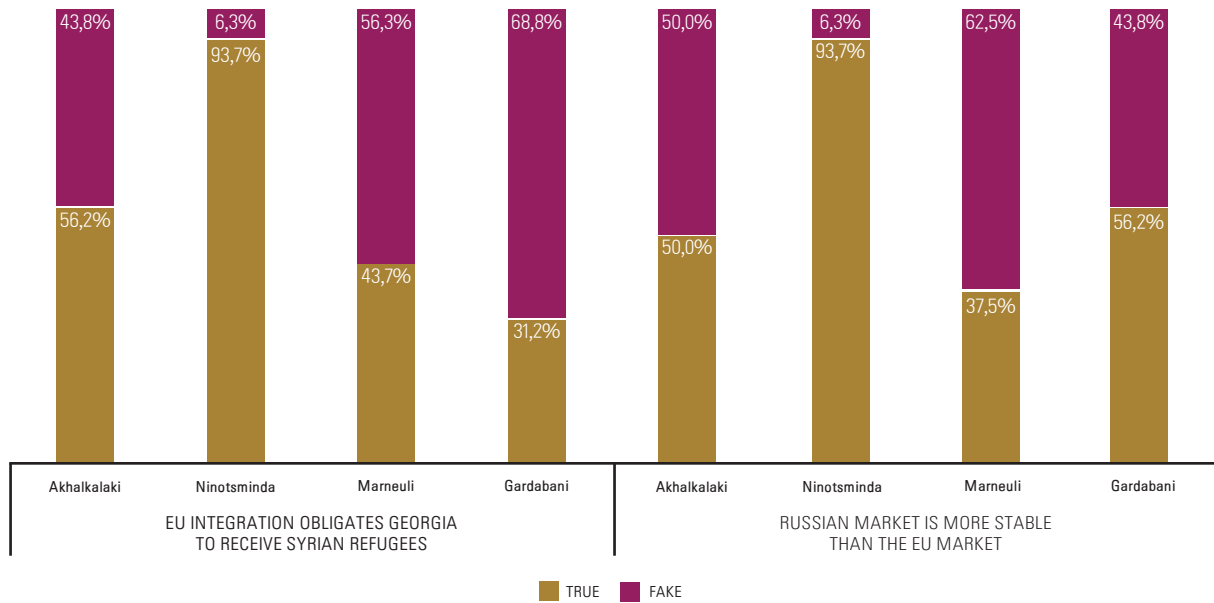
The obligation to receive Syrian refugees was least believed by respondents in Gardabani focus group (31.2%).

A man, Marneuli, 18-35: *“I am not sure. They have this problem themselves.”*

A segment of respondents, however, did not rule out such a possibility.

A woman, Akhalkalaki, 18-35: *“It could be and could not be an allegation; how should I know?”*

FIGURE 14. PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TO EU-RELATED FAKE NEWS BY CITIES

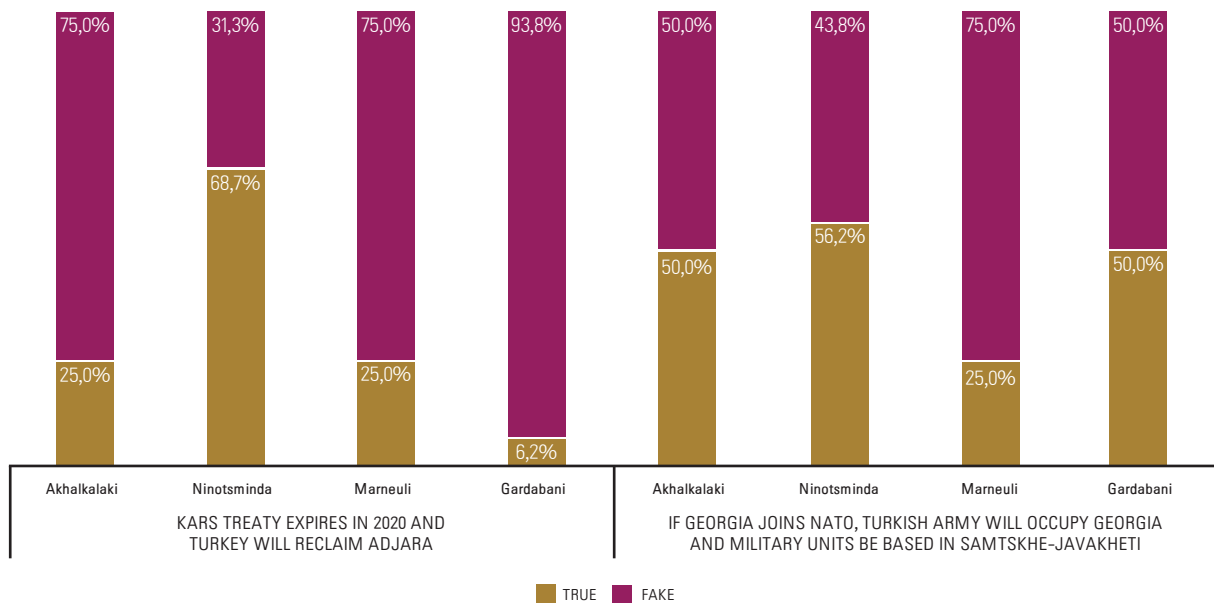


A conspiracy theory whereby the Kars Treaty expires in 2020 and Turkey will reclaim Adjara was considered true by the majority of respondents in Ninotsminda (68.7%) and the minority of respondents in Gardabani (6.2%). The belief of those who deemed this information true was based on a general attitude to Turks rather than the terms of the Treaty:

A man, Ninotsminda, 18-35: “Yes and No. Not because of the Kars Treaty but because when I was there [in Adjara] there were very few Georgian hosts; there are Turks everywhere and seems that nothing native is left there.”

A man, Ninotsminda, 36-55: “The key is to ensure that there are no Turks.”

FIGURE 15. PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TO TURKEY – AND NATO-RELATED FAKE NEWS BY CITIES



A possibility of Turkish military forces to be deployed in Samtskhe-Javakheti if Georgia joins NATO seemed the most convincing for respondents in Ninotsminda (65.2%), Akhalkalaki (50%) and Gardabani (50%) and the most unconvincing for respondents in Marneuli (25%).

A man, Ninotsminda, 18-35: *“I consider this possible because in his interview when coming to Georgia, Bidzina Ivanishvili warned us about that. He precisely said this – there will be Turkish soldiers in Samtskhe-Javakheti. I can tell you that the newspaper Georgia [Vrastan] also wrote about that.”*

A woman, Ninotsminda, 36-55: *“They built the railway here, took lands and did not even pay to several people; Turks are allowed to do everything... They built the railway on my land and were to pay me GEL 1500 and has not paid it yet. Therefore, everything may happen.”*

ANNEX 1.

Please write down the country in the empty space.

----- asserts that the aviation targets the facilities of so-called Islamic State. But the result of its action in Syria----- conflicts with the words. On Wednesday morning, two ----- aircrafts flying at high altitude fired rockets on the city of Syria. The filmed video features destroyed buildings and people desperately trying to draw the wounded and dead bodies from under the rubble. According to local residents, a meeting of the city council responsible for the distribution of bread was being held in this place

III. GEORGIAN PUBLIC BROADCASTER'S CONTENT OBLIGATIONS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND COVERAGE

3.1. LEGAL OBLIGATIONS RELATED TO CONTENT

The Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) is the only Georgian TV channel which as a publicly financed institution accountable to society has the following content-related obligations prescribed by the law:

- “Promote main directions of the foreign policy of Georgia, including the integration of Georgia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (hereinafter, NATO) and the European Union;”⁶⁹
- “Broadcast a number of programs in certain proportions prepared in the languages of minorities, about minority groups and programs prepared by minorities.”⁷⁰

PROGRAM PRIORITIES OF GPB. Pursuant to Paragraph 1 of Article 20 of the Law on Broadcasting, “The Board of Trustees identifies program priorities in consideration of **main directions of domestic and foreign policy of Georgia, including integration into NATO and the European Union**, events related to the occupied territories of Georgia, public opinion, as well as trends and priorities of state policy in the broadcasting sector.”

It should be noted that at the time the study started (1 May 2018), the GPB followed the 2015–2016 program priorities⁷¹ approved by the Board of Trustees on 10 July 2015. On 17 August 2018, a new document of program priorities for 2018–2021 was adopted and entered into force.⁷²

There were three references to the Euro-Atlantic integration and the informing of minorities on this topic in the 2015–2016 program priorities:

1. **News and current affairs:** e) To cover issues/processes concerning Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration.
2. **Political and analytical programs:** Upon switching to digital broadcasting, to translate bulk of programs into languages of ethnic minorities.
3. **To provide the history** of Georgian-European dialogue in historical-educational programs.

The 2018–2021 program priorities identify the coverage of the following issues as one of content priorities of news and current affairs programs and other products on the relevant topic:

⁶⁹ Parliament of Georgia, 23 December 2004. The Law of Georgia on Broadcasting, Article 16(m). <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/32866?publication=49>

⁷⁰ Ibid, Article 16 (l).

⁷¹ Since a new documents was not adopted from 2016 till 17 August 2018, the 2015–2016 priorities were extended till 20 August 2018. GPB (2015), 2015–2016 program priorities of the GPB. <https://cdn.itv.ge/app/uploads/2017/10/hjkhjkhjk-1508151107.pdf>

⁷² GPB (2018), 2018–2021 program priorities of the GPB. <https://cdn.itv.ge/app/uploads/2018/08/Download-File-1534504689.pdf>

“c) Issues/processes concerning Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration: possibilities of integration into NATO, positive impact of Western integration on the country, possibilities provided by the Association Agreement, other.”

In contrast to the documents of previous years, the 2018–2021 program priorities stresses the challenges of hybrid warfare and the need to avoid the spread of fake news as well as the necessity to provide services to the audience with special needs:

“In the conditions of hybrid warfare, the broadcaster must undertake all necessary measures to avoid the spread of fake news; at the same time, it must inform the population about this problem.”⁷³

“Universal service: to serve diverse audience, including the audience with special needs. To this end, the products and costs must be redistributed for the provision of the service to various groups of population, including ethnic and religious groups, people with disabilities, regional population.”

While the previous program priorities lacked any criteria for evaluating the performance, the new document provides for “performance evaluation measurements” and states that the performance of the broadcaster will be evaluated by these criteria, through one-off surveys and quantitative data, at least once a year. The criteria such as “quality, diversity and impact” are to be assessed by scores. The document also notes that the Board of Trustees will use various studies to assess the fulfillment of program priorities.

One can identify two main problems in carrying out the assessment of the fulfillment of program priorities, defined by the Board of Trustees, with regard to informing ethnic minorities on the issues of Euro-Atlantic integration:

- 1. Reach of target audience:** as noted in the chapter about sources of information, the geographic area covered by the television audience measurement companies does not include the regions populated by ethnic minorities. This is precisely the reason which the General Director of the GPB cited in his letter to the MDF to explain why the broadcaster lacks the data on the viewership by the target audience of programs that are intended for them: “Data on regions is aggregated and not broken down by cities, regions or regions populated by ethnic minorities.”⁷⁴ Consequently, the GPB does not have the data on minorities’ access to programs intended for them and the viewership in these regions.
- 2. Program priorities assessment criteria and accountability:** The 2018–2021 program priorities, much like the previous program priorities, does not provide for assessment criteria by program priorities – be they quantitative or qualitative. Consequently, neither the second quarter report⁷⁵ nor the third quarter report⁷⁶ submitted to the Board of Trustees contains information on the quantity and quality of fulfillment of content priorities (informing society on Euro-Atlantic integration) but mainly shows the quantity of programs produced in the accounting period, novelties or activities of separate services. The third quarter report does not provide information on the activity of the GPB in the area of informing society on fake news and challenges of hybrid warfare, as this is defined in the program priorities.

To obtain more detailed information on how the broadcaster fulfills the obligations of promoting Euro-Atlantic integration and informing ethnic minorities about it, as prescribed both by the law and the program priorities, we

⁷³ 4 – pg.2

⁷⁴ Letter of General Director of GPB Vasil Maghlaperidze to the Media development Foundation, 29 November 2018.

⁷⁵ GPB Report for Quarter II, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2SnOaPm>

⁷⁶ GPB Report for Quarter III, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2Eafqfi>

requested additional information from the GPB. According to the response,⁷⁷ in the reporting period, these topics were covered in the following program:

1ST CHANNEL	Moambe New Week 42nd Parallel Washington Today (Voice of America) Khanmokle Meotse Saukune [Short 20 th Century]
GEORGIAN RADIO	News programs, Ghia Studia [Open Studio], Saghamos Pikis Saati [Evening Rush Hour] VOA program

As regards informing ethnic minorities on issues of Euro-Atlantic integration in their native languages, the letter from the GPB names the following programs and platforms:

- The project “Diverse Georgia”⁷⁸ which represents Azerbaijani- and Armenian-language online radio and Internet TV channel. According to the GPB, the online radio broadcasts live on 1tv.ge 12 hours a day;
- Moambe in Azerbaijani and Armenian languages is broadcast through multimedia means at 19:00 o’clock;
- News translated in Abkhaz, Azerbaijani, Ossetian, Russian and Armenian languages is available on 1 tv.ge;
- With the assistance from US Embassy, a primetime news program of 1st Channel is translated into Azerbaijani and Armenian languages and broadcast with set-top boxes as well as online.⁷⁹
- Real Time (Настоящее Время) – is a news program aired on 1st Channel in the Russian language, which represents a joint project of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America.

It should also be noted that the GPB’s 2nd Channel stopped airing news programs in minority languages since the spring of 2017 and resumed them in October 2018, but the regularity of broadcast is questionable because these programs cannot always be found in the schedule of 2nd Channel. It was also difficult to verify regularity of live broadcasting of “Diverse Georgia” and frequency of providing translated Moambe news program in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages through multimedia means. All these indicate inconsistency in policy of informing ethnic minorities of Georgia in their own languages.

3.2. PUBLIC ATTITUDES

Attitudes in focus groups towards the GPB programs were mixed. Separate respondents drew their attention to technical problems in the reception:

A man, Ninotsminda, 18-35: *“We cannot receive it; we have only satellite antennas and they cannot find the channel.”*

A segment of respondents cited the language barrier as a reason of not watching the GPB:

A woman, Gardabani, 36-55: *“I know many people who do not watch and listen because they do not speak Georgian, but those who speak Georgian, find it interesting.”*

⁷⁷ 28 September 2018.

⁷⁸ <https://1tv.ge/show/mravalferovani-saqartvelo/?tab=overview>

⁷⁹ <https://bit.ly/2lyHuhH>

A segment of respondents in Samtskhe–Javakheti said that they either do not watch GPB programs in Armenian language at all or watch them irregularly:

A woman, Akhalkalaki, 36-55: *“Some time ago... Moambe in Armenian language was broadcast. I used to watch it.”*

A woman, Ninotsminda, 36-55: *“I watch it sometimes.”*

Respondents also emphasized that in GPB programs they were unable to identify either themselves or their problems and the provided information was merely a translation of current affairs from Georgian:

A woman, Marneuli, 18-35: *“I watch it but I think it does not report any problems. There is a program “Diverse Georgia,” a sort of entertainment program. I think it is a joint US Embassy-GPB program... and a news program. Guess what the news program is? It provides translation of events in Georgia – that’s it.”*

A man, Marneuli, 18-35: *“It does not concern community at all.”*

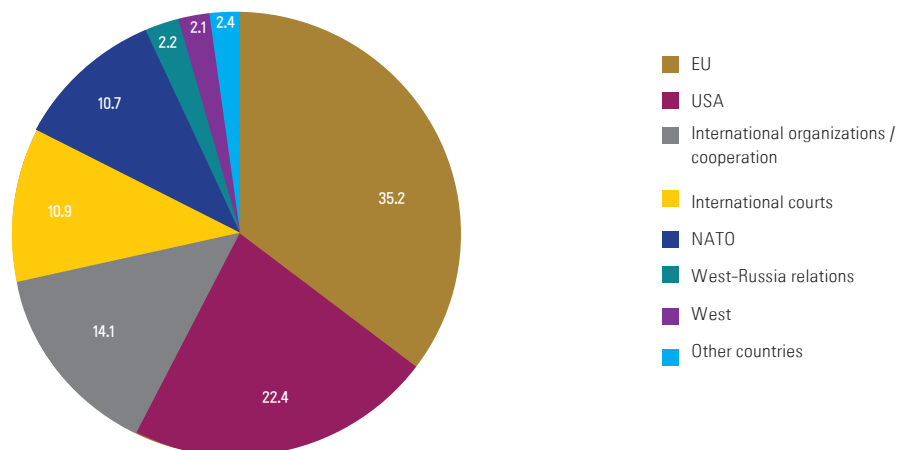
One respondents (a man, Marneuli, 36-55) named Russian TV channels, while another named an informal source, Chai Khana, as an alternative source of information:

A man, Gardabani, 18-35: *“Once you go to Chai Khana you hear all the news.”*

3.3. MEDIA COVERAGE.

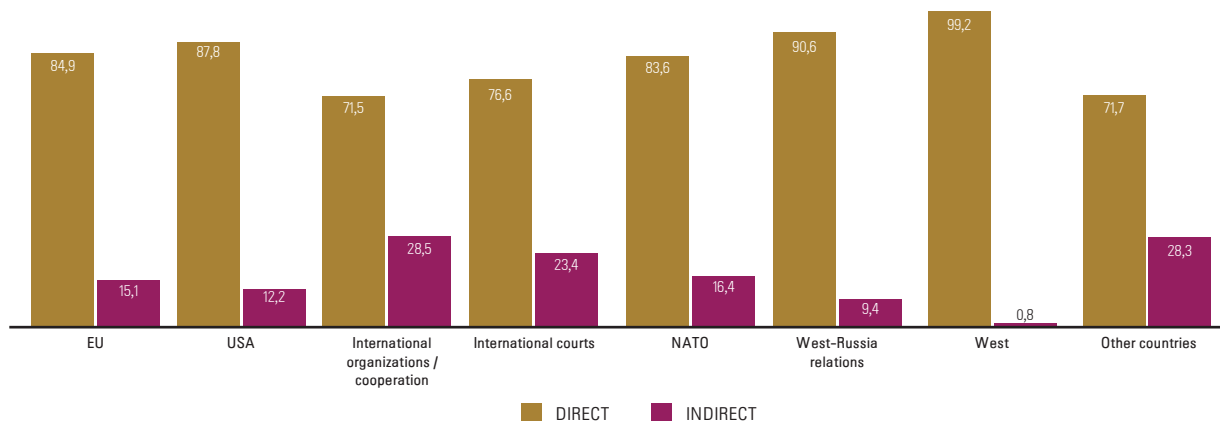
TOTAL QUANTITATIVE DATA. The monitoring of coverage of Euro-Atlantic integration in the GPB’s news and analytical programs (Moambe, New Week, 42nd Parallel), also talk shows (Interview of the Week, Key Topic with Maka Tsintsadze, Moambe – Issue of the Day) and partially, in pre-election debates revealed the following trends in terms of thematic diversity: the largest amount of time in these programs was allocated to the EU (35.2%), followed by the USA (22.4%), international organizations and various cooperation formats (14.1%), international courts (10.9%) and NATO (10.7%). Relatively smaller was the share of materials about various Western countries (2.4%), the relationship between the West and Russia (2.2%), and in general, the West (2.1%).

FIGURE 16. TOPICS RELATED TO EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION AND THE WEST (1ST CHANNEL)



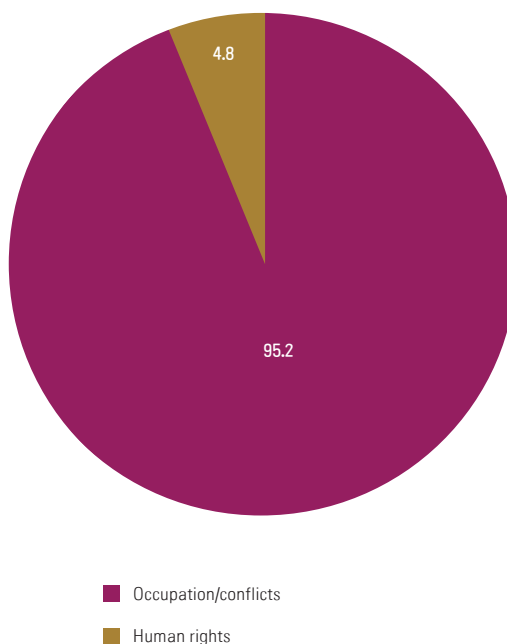
As the Figure 17 shows, these topics were mainly reported directly while the share of indirect reporting was small.

FIGURE 17. DIRECT AND INDIRECT REPORTING OF TOPICS RELATED TO EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION AND THE WEST



It should be noted that the coverage of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg and the International Criminal Court in Hague (10.9%) was largely dominated by issues concerning the court disputes of conflict-affected Georgian citizens who suffered from the occupation of Georgia by Russia (95.2%) whereas a smaller share concerned the disputes concerning human rights (4.8%).

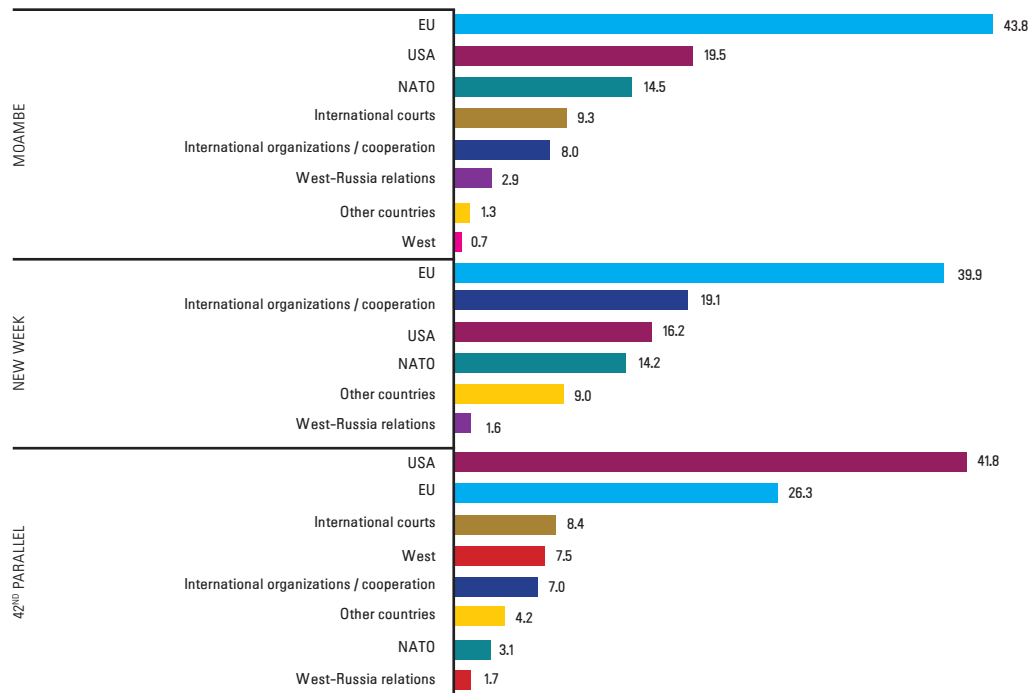
FIGURE 18. TOPICS RELATED TO INTERNATIONAL COURTS



The issue of occupation of Georgian territories and conflicts was broadly represented in the coverage of topics concerning the EU as well as the USA and other Western institutions.

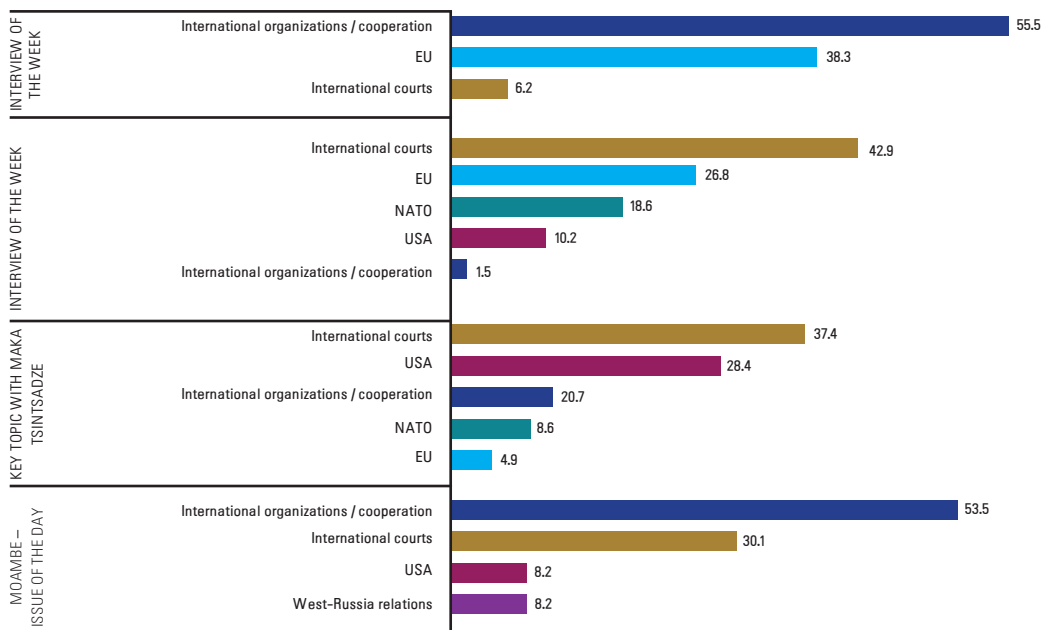
DATA BY PROGRAMS. While the daily news program Moambe (43.8%) and a weekly summing-up news program New Week (39.9%) allocated the largest amount of time to the EU topic, 42nd Parallel, a weekly program on international affairs, spent most of its airtime on the USA (41.8%).

FIGURE 19. TOPICS RELATED TO EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION AND THE WEST IN NEWS AND ANALYTICAL PROGRAMS



Dominating topics in talk shows and pre-election debates, where Euro-Atlantic integration was covered indirectly mainly through respondents' comments, were international organizations and cooperation formats (Kviris Interview – 55.5%; Moambe – Dghis Tema – 53.5%) as well as the issue of international courts which largely concerned court disputes related to the Russian occupation (pre-election debates – 42.9%; Key Topic with Maka Tsintsadze – 37.4%).

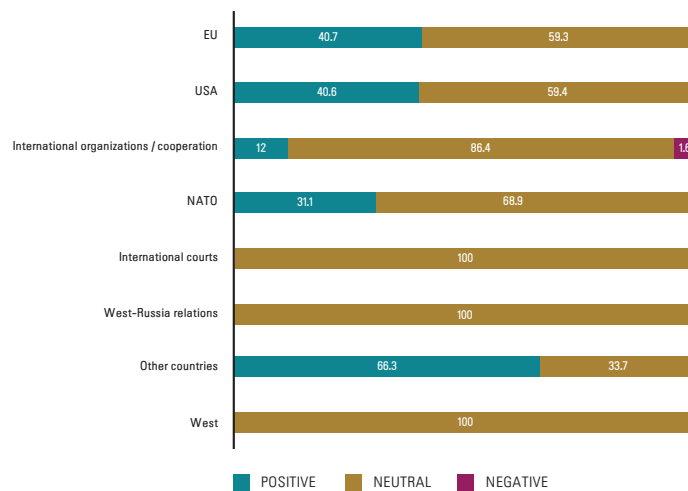
FIGURE 20. TOPICS RELATED TO EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION AND THE WEST IN TALK SHOWS AND PRE-ELECTION DEBATES (1ST CHANNEL)



TONE OF REPORTING

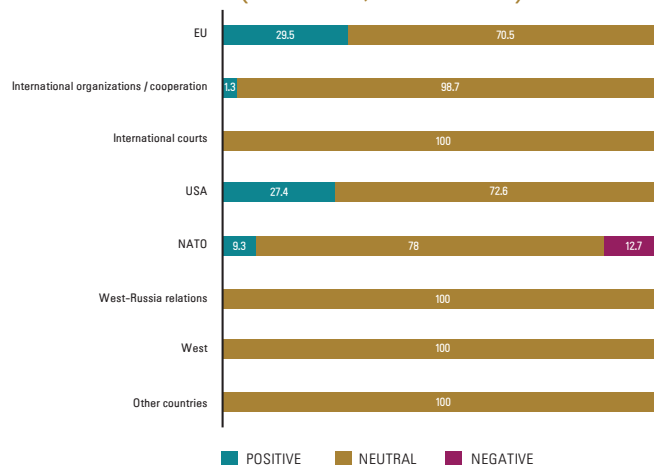
MOAMBE AND NEW WEEK. Direct reporting of Euro-Atlantic integration issues was largely neutral or positive in a daily news program Moambe and a weekly program New Week. A small share of negative coverage (1.6%) was observed in relation to international institutions (the International Republican Institute⁸⁰ and Freedom House⁸¹) in the form of one-sided criticism of these institutions by the ruling Georgian Dream party. Thus, it can be said that a small amount of negative tone concerns the issues of internal political dimension and is associated with the ruling political team.

FIGURE 21. TONE OF DIRECT REPORTING ON TOPICS RELATED TO EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION AND THE WEST (MOAMBE, NEW WEEK)



Negative tone on NATO (12.7%) in indirect reporting was seen in the comments⁸² made by a presidential candidate Mikheil Gela Saluashvili in his live interview to Moambe in the pre-election period and the assessment⁸³ made by MP Ada Marshania of the Alliance of Patriots.

FIGURE 22. TONE OF INDIRECT REPORTING ON TOPICS RELATED TO EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION AND THE WEST (MOAMBE, NEW WEEK)



⁸⁰ Moambe, 8 June, 2018. Meeting with IRI representatives. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3610209&rc=1>

⁸¹ Moambe, 16 May 2018. Freedom House's explanation. https://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=3593562

⁸² Moambe, 16 October 2018. Presidential elections 2018. https://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=3693143; https://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=3693140

⁸³ Moambe, 13 July 2018. Reshuffled government at the parliament. <https://ltv.ge/video/mtavrobis-ganakhlebuli-shemadgenloba-parlamentshi/>

42ND PARALLEL. 42nd Parallel, a weekly analytical program on international affairs which was aired irregularly during the monitoring period, sometimes releasing video reports via social networks, was distinguished from other programs by its clear negative tone in covering Western countries and institutions. The editorial policy of the program mainly rested on ideological intolerance of neoliberal economic policy which affected the authors' assessments of political processes. It must be also noted that in the immediate pre-monitoring period, the 42nd Parallel's editorial position on the poisoning of former Russian agent Sergey Skripal and his daughter as well as on Western sanctions imposed for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, whereby the West acted without evidence, echoed the positions of pro-Kremlin political Party Alliance of Patriots, the Russian government and Russian media outlets.⁸⁴

During the monitoring period, the 42nd Parallel's direct reporting on the activities of international institutions was 100% negative in tone. The editorial criticism targeted the Monetary Fund as being a cause of economic crises⁸⁵ and the UN Security Council,⁸⁶ in particular, the inefficiency of the right to veto. The negative tone was also frequently applied in relation to the EU (41.3%) which was covered in several reports. The main opinion promoted was that the EU has betrayed the idea of Europe's unity and that it experiences a systemic crisis which was illustrated by an example of economic crises in Greece.⁸⁷ In this program, the 42nd parallel described the Greek economic crisis as resulting from the policy of EU and European institutions so that the author did not even inform the audience about high budget expenditures, protectionist economy, concealment of taxes and other structural problems that actually led Greece to the economic crisis:⁸⁸

Mate Gabitsinashvili, author: "The institutional arrangement which is defined in the Maastricht Treaty is the main cause of current systemic crisis of the Eurozone. The Maastricht Treaty created a common monetary union of the EU, but failed to create a common political union... This is what led to, for example, the failure of democratically elected government of Greece to change, even after winning two elections and the referendum, a destructive belt-tightening policy which was imposed by Troika and the International Monetary Fund... How destructive was this coerced policy we have seen more than once on TV – burned down streets, clashes of angry population with police and a collapse of economic system."

Negative tone of the program towards the West (21.4%) was applied in the program on the topic of "destruction of the idea of equality" and "superiority of elites,"⁸⁹ while towards the USA (9.1%) was seen in the coverage of the role of Reagan administration in Nicaragua⁹⁰ and the issue of Iran⁹¹ where the journalist tried to justify the launch of Iran's nuclear program by the desperate situation which the country was put into:

Shota Tkheldze, author: "*Trump's confrontational rhetoric and withdrawal from the agreement when Iran did not evade obligations specified therein, undermines Tehran's trust in Washington and minimizes a possibility of new bilateral negotiations*".

⁸⁴ Myth detector, 24 April 2018. GPB's 42nd Parallel and Alliance of Patriots Voice Pro-Kremlin Messages. <http://www.mythdetector.ge/en/myth/gpbs-42nd-parallel-and-alliance-patriots-voice-pro-kremlin-messages>

⁸⁵ 42nd Parallel, 15 August 2018. Coca-Cola or Pepsi? <https://1tv.ge/video/42-paraleli-koka-kola-tu-pepsi/>

⁸⁶ 42nd Parallel, 22 September 2018. 'Free Veto' or a Monkey with Peas <https://1tv.ge/video/42-paraleli-tavisufali-veto-anu-maimuni-bardati/>

⁸⁷ 42nd Parallel, 5 May. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3586000>

⁸⁸ Myth Detector, 11 May 2018. 42nd Parallel Blames European Institutions for Greek Economic Crisis. <http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/42nd-parallel-blames-european-institutions-greek-economic-crisis>

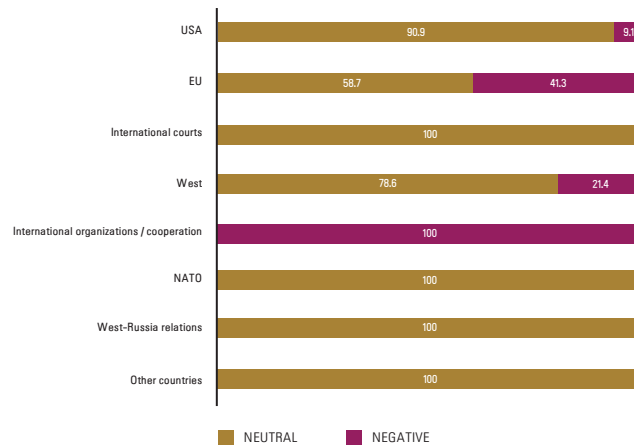
⁸⁹ 42nd Parallel, 29 September. Crisis of modern politics. <https://1tv.ge/video/42-paraleli-tanamedrove-politikis-krizisi/>

⁹⁰ 42nd Parallel, 20 October, Demonstrations in Nicaragua – transformation of Daniel Ortega's rule. <https://1tv.ge/video/42-paraleli-demonstraciebi-nikaraguashi-daniel-ortegas-mmartvelobis-transfomracia/>

⁹¹ 42nd Parallel, 23 May, The future of Iran's nuclear agreement. <https://1tv.ge/video/42-paraleli-iranis-birtvuli-shetankhmebis-momavali/>

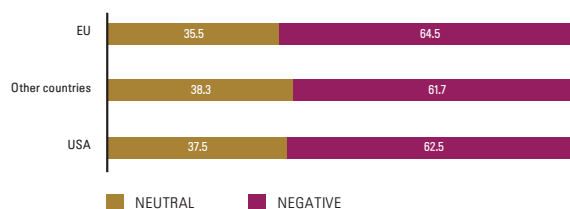
Shota Tkheldize, author: “The vacuum created after the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq was filled in by Iran and nudged the political elite of Iraq towards the Iranian orbit. A military vacuum created in the Syrian conflict was also filled in by Iranian military forces which played a significant role in supporting its historical ally and maintaining the Assad regime. The war in Syria also led to the strengthening of military-political Shia movement Hezbollah which is supported by Iran.”

FIGURE 23. TONE OF DIRECT REPORTING ON TOPICS RELATED TO EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION AND THE WEST (42ND PARALLEL)



The tone of 42nd Parallel was quite negative in indirect reporting on the EU (64.5%) as well as the USA (62.5%) and other countries (61.7%).

FIGURE 24. TONE OF INDIRECT REPORTING ON TOPICS RELATED TO EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION AND THE WEST (42ND PARALLEL)



ELECTION DEBATES. Presidential debates in the run up to the elections applied mostly negative tone towards the USA (92.4%). Positive (48%) and negative (43.5%) tones were almost equally applied towards NATO. The least negative tone was applied towards the EU (1.9%).

Presidential candidates tried to promote an opinion that NATO would be unable to settle Georgia’s conflicts and guarantee its security. In parallel to kindling skepticism towards NATO, a policy of neutrality and the objective of restoring relations with Russia were promoted as an alternative:

Kakha Kukava, presidential candidate of Georgia: “It is a fact that NATO is not the guarantor of our security... We must tell our people the truth that Georgia will neither become a NATO member or come close to NATO.”⁹²

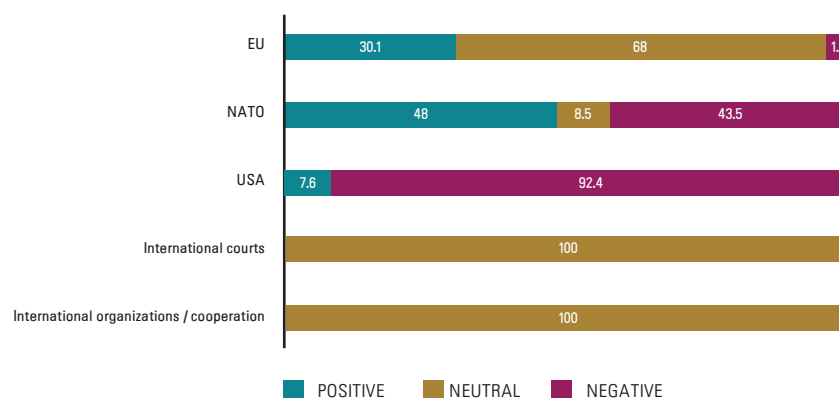
Kakhaber Chichinadze, presidential candidate of Georgia: “In case of joining NATO all our relations with other neighboring countries where from we may purchase some weapons or carry out modernization of our armament will be closed.”⁹³

⁹² Presidential election 2018, 26 October. <https://1tv.ge/video/archevnebi2018-debatebi2018-davit-usufashvili-kakha-kukava-da-levan-chkheidze-live/>

⁹³ Presidential election 2018, 12 October. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3691351>

Nino Burjanadze, Democratic Movement United Georgia: “... Is your main goal and desire to join NATO? No person raised their hands [in confirmation] and when I asked: do we need to improve relations with Russia? An absolute majority of people said that we need to improve relations with Russia.”⁹⁴

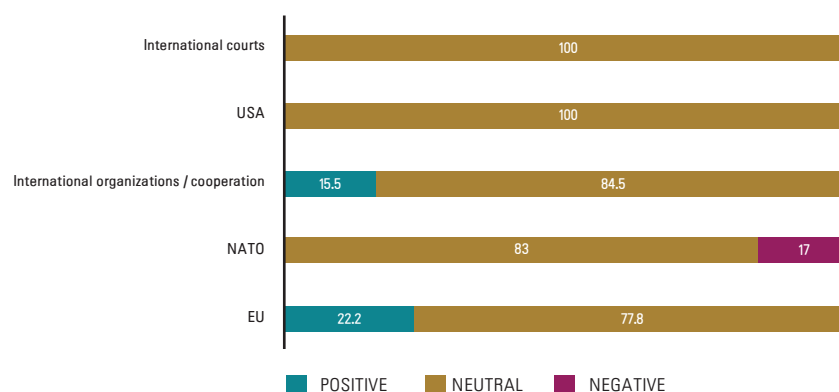
FIGURE 25. TONE OF INDIRECT REPORTING ON TOPICS RELATED TO EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION AND THE WEST (ELECTION DEBATES)



TALK SHOWS. Indirect coverage of Euro-Atlantic integration in talk shows, Interview of the Week and Moambe – Issue of the Day, were largely neutral while a negative tone towards NATO (17%) in the talk show Key Topic with Maka Tsintsadze was applied by a representative of the Alliance of Patriots.

Ada Marshania, Alliance of Patriots of Georgia: “Unfortunately, our highest authority does not see the threats that await us on this path, on the path towards NATO. It does not think whether it is beneficial for us, whether it will contribute to the restoration of our country’s territorial integrity.”⁹⁵

FIGURE 26. TONE OF INDIRECT REPORTING ON TOPICS RELATED TO EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION AND THE WEST (KEY TOPIC WITH MAKA TSINTSADZE)



⁹⁴ Presidential election 2018, 78 November. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3707676>

⁹⁵ Key Topic with Maka Tsintsadze, 2 May. <https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3583413>

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

TO RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS

- For a comprehensive and systematic study of information environment in the regions populated by ethnic minorities it is important to revise the research panel of television audience measurement so as to include the TV consumption habits affected by language barrier in the mentioned regions.
- Instead of accumulated data about ethnic minorities research organizations should provide break down of media consumption data by regions, which will provide a possibility for a better analysis of audience by sources of information and media habits.

TO GOVERNMENT, INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Bearing in mind that the share of informal sources of information is quite high in the regions populated by ethnic minorities (41%), it is important to develop and introduce effective formats of direct communication on issues of Euro-Atlantic integration with various target groups and to assign those persons as communicators, who can influence public opinion.
- Considering the access to and influence of Russian TV channels on the regions populated by ethnic minorities, which is also proved by focus group data, the government shall develop a communication strategy tailored to the regions. This strategy must ensure response to misinformation as well as positive agenda setting.
- Immediate response to misinformation must envisage the development and communication of consistent messages both on central and local government levels, especially on issues that directly concern local population.
- The communication of positive agenda must be oriented on benefits from Euro-Atlantic integration and help overcome the hopelessness kindled by an opinion that the West is good but unattainable for Georgian population. Such campaigns must focus not on abstract possibilities but 1) success stories involving representatives of ethnic minorities; 2) sharing of the experience of Baltic countries which we have a common post-Soviet identity with and which succeeded in securing their place in the Euro-Atlantic space.
- The government must facilitate an effective implementation of programs on learning the state language as well as English and other Western languages.
- Media and information literacy must not be only a transversal competence in school curricula, but become a mandatory subject facilitating the development of skills of critical reasoning and responsible media consumption from early age. The government must cooperate with nongovernmental sector in this area and draw on international and local resources and expertise.

TO MEDIA OUTLETS, NONGOVERNMENTAL AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- To overcome the alienation of ethnic minorities from national TV channels it is important to ensure that these people identify themselves with media content. Inclusive coverage will increase trust of target groups in media outlets, thereby increasing the interest towards Euro-Atlantic integration. At the same time, it is important to ensure diversity of programming that would make local channels more attractive for the audience.
- It is important to provide in-depth coverage of Euro-Atlantic integration issues; the media should not limit itself to superficial reporting of policy issues but explain to audience how policy issues may affect their daily life or future prospects.
- Media managers and media professional organizations must strive for the improvement of quality of media products and forms of expression; this must be achieved not only through trainings but also exchange programs and experience sharing.
- To make citizens of these regions more sensitive to fake news and capable of identifying such news, media and nongovernmental and professional organizations must cooperate with one another. In parallel to the implementation of educational media literacy programs it is necessary to conduct a campaign to raise awareness of methods and ways of identifying fake news; this campaign must be conducted by using traditional as well as social media.
- Given that focus group participants understand that Russian social networks are not reliable whereas the traditional media and Facebook are more reliable, it is important, on the one hand, to focus media literacy campaign on explaining the risks that are posed by the spread of unreliable information, and on the other hand, to advocate for the effective implementation by the government of English and other Western language learning programs.

TO GEORGIAN PUBLIC BROADCASTER

- The GPB must ensure provision of regular information to the target audience in minority languages and also offer it a diverse programming.
- Given the challenges of hybrid warfare, the GPB must offer such programs that contribute to the development of media and information literacy as well as skills of identifying fake news.
- Study into audience needs must contribute to the improvement of access to and quality of programs.
- The Board of Trustees must develop the criteria enabling to assess the fulfillment of content-related program priorities. The GPB management should prepare its quarterly reports in accordance with these criteria.