



საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების კვლევის ფონდი  
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# Security Review

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**Far-Right Groups in Georgia**

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During the last several months, Georgia has been faced with the activities of various far-right groups. The right-wing organizations actively participated in rallies related to the counter-demonstration against the protest of police raids on the Bassiani and Galery night clubs as well as Family Purity Day on May 17.<sup>1</sup> Among them were groups such as Georgian March, Georgian National Unity, Georgian Power, Edelweiss, and Bergman.<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, the leader of Georgian National Unity, Giorgi Chelidze, openly made fascist statements and announced the forming of squads of like-minded individuals.<sup>3</sup> This recent trend suggest the growth of far-right groups in Georgia.

### **Far-Right and Neo-Nazi Groups in the World**

Ultra-right groups are widespread in many of the world's countries. For instance, there are the English Defense League in the UK, Nederlanse Volks-Unie in Belgium, Slav Union in Russia, the White Arian Resistance in the US and others. All of these organizations have particular attributes that form a unique subculture. Far-right groups can be violent as well as non-violent. Furthermore, some of them enabled their own transformation into political parties and even acquired mandates in their local parliaments. Some examples of such parties are: the Finnish Party in Finland, UK Independence Party, New Power in Italy, the Freedom Party of Austria and others. Different far-right groups have different social bases. However, the issue that almost all of them have in common is hatred against a particular social group or process. In academic literature, these groups are known as hate groups. Nevertheless, many far-right groups claim not to be driven by hate at all. For instance, white supremacist groups in the US proclaim that “we don't hate anyone. We simply love white people.”<sup>4</sup> Far-right groups in Georgia do not follow strictly right political doctrines but sometimes even intermix them with Stalinism which underlines their vague ideological platform. Nevertheless, we will use the term far-right, right wing or ultra-right to describe these organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> Tabula (2018): “ksenopobiuri da ultranatsionalisturi jgubebi rustavelis gamzirze aktsias martaven” [Xenophobic and Ultranationalist Groups Protest on Rustaveli Avenue]. Available at: <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/132700-qsenofobiuri-ultranacionalisturi-jgufebi-rustavelis-gamzirze-aqcias-martaven> Available at: [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>2</sup> EMC (2016): “27 sektembers ultranatsionalisturi jgubebis mier gamovlenil dzaladobis pakts ekhmianeba” [EMC's Statement about the Violence Committed by Ultranationalist Groups on 27 September] Available at: <https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/emc-27-sektembers-ultranatsionalisturi-jgufebis-mier-gamovlenili-dzaladobis-fakts-ekhmianeba> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>3</sup> Tbiliselebi (2018): “rogor igeben kalebs kartul pashistur organizatsiashi da sad ekrdzalebat mat sikvaruli” [How Women are Accepted to Georgian Fascist Organizations and Where Love is Forbidden for Them?] Available at: <http://tbiliselebi.ge/index.php?newsid=268453070> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>4</sup> Ph. Gerstenfeld, *Hate Crimes: Causes, Controls and Controversies*. Sage 2013. p. 130

## Targets of Far-Right Groups

Far-right groups can direct their hatred towards communities such as immigrants, LGBT, people of color, Jews, Muslims and others. The phenomenon of racial separatism, which means separating and isolating one race from others, can be observed among far-right groups. Their rhetoric is usually saturated with conspiracy theories, fake information and distorted facts.<sup>5</sup> In Georgia, the rhetoric of far-right groups targets the following communities or processes:

**Immigrants** – Despite the insignificant number of immigrants in Georgia, anti-immigration is one of the key pillars in the rhetoric of Georgian right-wing organizations.<sup>6</sup> Their hatred is mainly addressed towards the Middle Eastern (Turks, Arabs, Iranians), Asian (Hindus, Chinese) and African residents of Georgia. In this regard, numerous demonstrations against immigrants have taken place in Tbilisi. The main irritating factors can be: the multitude of visitors from the respective regions, a high number of Middle Eastern tourists and the commercial-entertainment sites on Aghmashenebeli Avenue, in Tbilisi,<sup>7</sup> and on Kutaisi Street, in Batumi;<sup>8</sup> a huge number of investors from the Middle East,<sup>9</sup> forest privatization by Chinese companies<sup>10</sup> and purchasing of agricultural lands by foreigners and others. Moreover, far-right groups have many times accused immigrants, especially Turks and Arabs, of engagement in child prostitution.<sup>11</sup> The grievances also include the issue of the privatization of agricultural land.<sup>12</sup> For example, the right wing movements expressed their

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<sup>5</sup> Ph. Gerstenfeld, pp. 153-159

<sup>6</sup> For official statistics on immigration see:

[http://migration.commission.ge/files/migraciis\\_profilis\\_2017\\_a4\\_new.pdf](http://migration.commission.ge/files/migraciis_profilis_2017_a4_new.pdf) [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>7</sup> Rustavi 2 (2017): “ets kartuli marshi da utskhoeli biznesmenebis gantskoba msvlelobis mimart” [So-called Georgian March and the Opinion of Foreign Businessmen about the Demonstrations] Available at:

<http://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/80458> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>8</sup> Batumelebi (2017): “mitebi da realoba turkul ubanze” [Myths and Reality about the Turkish Neighborhood] Available at: <http://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/news/101564/> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>9</sup> Versia: “rogor apasebs 14 ivlisis msvlelobas amerikashi mtskhovrebi eks magalchinosani da saberdznetshi mogvatse biznesmeni” [How the Former Official who Lives in the US and the Entrepreneur from Greece Evaluate 14 July Demonstrations] Available at: <https://bit.ly/2EHtKPT> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>10</sup> Kviris Palitra (2011): *Giorgi Gachechiladze: chinelebi da indoelebi barbarosulad chekhaven kartul tkeobs* [Giorgi Gachechiladze: Chinese and Hindus are Barbarically Cutting the Forest] Available at: <https://www.kvirispalitra.ge/kviris-tema/8289-giorgi-gachechiladze-chinelebi-da-indoelebi-barbarosulad-chekhaven-qarthul-tyeobs.html?add=1&start=10> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>11</sup> GMP (2017) Sandro Bregadze: There are Brothels on Plekhanovi where the Arabs, Iraqis, Syrians, and Turks are Involved in Georgian Child Prostitution] Available at: <https://goo.gl/85mr6x> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>12</sup> Expressnews (2017): “kartuli marshi dges otsnebis tsentraluri saarchevno shtabis piketirebas gegmavs” [Georgian March Plans to Picket the Election Head Office of Georgian Dream] Available at: <http://expressnews.com.ge/?id=51629> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

irritation over the purchase of vast territories by Punjabi farmers in the Sighnaghi municipality and by Arab investors in the Gardabani municipality.<sup>13</sup> It is noteworthy that far-right groups often use the history of Georgia and historical hostility as an argument against immigrants from Muslim countries. Additionally, they explain the increasing Turkish influence in the Adjara region by Turkey's neo-Ottoman policy.<sup>14</sup> All of these statements are saturated with a variety of conspiracy theories. For instance: 100,000 Chinese will be settled in new apartment blocks in the Hualing neighborhood,<sup>15</sup> very soon Georgians will become a minority in Georgia,<sup>16</sup> 25,000 Turkish citizens are residing in Batumi,<sup>17</sup> and Turks, Arabs and Iraqis should no longer feel comfortable on Aghmashenebeli Avenue. These are very destructive and serve to distort the opinions of the young generation.<sup>18</sup> Although labor migration from the Middle East and Africa to Georgia is practically non-existent, far-right groups often stress the problems of illegal immigration.<sup>19</sup>

**LGBT Community** – Next to immigration, homophobia is the second pillar in the rhetoric of ultra-right groups. As noted above, these groups are usually active for the May 17 Family Purity Day commemoration.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, far-right groups demanded a constitutional amendment that marriage can only be the union between men and women which, as they believe, will make same-sex marriages impossible in Georgia.<sup>21</sup> Admittedly, far-right groups do not protest the existence of LGBT individuals but are against their propaganda. The term 'propaganda' includes their appearance in media and the open

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<sup>13</sup> See the comments on the blog: <https://iberiana.wordpress.com/2017/07/26/tsnori/>

<sup>14</sup> GMP (2017): "ushvelet acharas turkebi ipkroben" [Save Adjara, Turks are Conquering it] Available at: <https://goo.gl/ssggMS> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>15</sup> Kviris Palitra (2013): "saukunis galati anu patara chinuri avtonomia tbilisi" [The Betrayal of the Century or the Small Chinese Autonomy in Tbilisi] Available at: <https://www.kvirispalitra.ge/politic/15610-saukunis-ghalati-anu-patara-chinuri-avtonomia-tbilisshi.html> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>16</sup> Ambebi (2013): "tu ase gagrdzelda sakutar kveqanashi etnikur umtsiresobad viktsevit" [At this Rate We will End up as an Ethnic Minority in our Country] Available at: <https://www.ambebi.ge/article/76722-tu-ase-gagrdzelda-sakutar-kveqanashi-erovnul-umtsiresobad-vikcevit/> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>17</sup> GMP (2017): "tamaz mechiauri: ase natoshi ki ara pirdapir turketshi shevalt" [Tamaz Mechiauri: At this Rate Instead of NATO We will Join Turkey] Available at: <https://goo.gl/r1gw1H> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>18</sup> Mediachecker (2017): "kartuli marshi da ksenopobia asaval-dasavalshi" [Georgian March and Xenophobia in *Asaval-Dasavaḥi*] Available at: <https://www.mediachecker.ge/ka/siakhleebi/article/49225-qarthveltha-marshi-da-qsenofobia-asaval-dasavalshi> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>19</sup> Imedi (2017): "marshi – vin arian da ra undat aktsiis organizatorebs?" [March – Who are They and What do the Organizers of the Demonstration Want?] Available at: <https://imedinews.ge/ge/theme/12/marshi--vin-arian-da-ra-undat-aqtsiis-organizatorebs> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>20</sup> Sputnik Georgia (2018): "tbilisshi ojakhis sitsmindis dges msvlelobit agnishnaven" [The Day of Family Purity is Celebrated in Tbilisi] Available at: <https://sputnik-georgia.com/society/20180517/240496075/TbilisSi-ojaxis-siwmindis-dRes-msvlelobiT-aRniSnaven.html> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>21</sup> Civil.ge (2014): "mtavroba ertskesiani kortsinebis konstitutsiit akrdzalvis tsinadadebit gamodis" [The Government Initiates a Constitutional Amendment which Bans Same-Sex Marriage] Available at: <https://old.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=28016> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

manifestation of their sexual orientation. Far-right groups see the LGBT community as the threat that could lead to the degrading of a nation and the moral corruption of a generation.<sup>22</sup> Anti-LGBT propaganda includes the conspiracy theory according to which Western NGOs are undermining Georgian traditional values by promoting gay culture and attempting to make it a social norm.<sup>23</sup>

**West** – Anti-LGBT rhetoric is linked with the anti-Western views of far-right groups. The West is considered as the main source of moral corruption in Georgia. Terms such as “Geivropa” (the combination of the words “gay” and “Europe”) and “liberasti” (the combination of the words “liberal” and a pejorative term used to describe gay) are used very often.<sup>24</sup> Far-right groups also often mention the name of George Soros. According to conspiracy theories, George Soros is funding LGBT and feminist groups in order to degrade the Georgian nation. This group even organized a demonstration in front of the office of the Soros-related Open Society Foundation and were demanding its closing down.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, far-right groups also protest against the existence of pro-Western parties in Georgia and have several times demanded a ban of the United National Movement and European Georgia parties.<sup>26</sup> Aside from the oppositional parties, ultra-right groups have criticized members of the ruling party (Irakli Kobakhidze, Tamar Chugoshvili, Archil Talakvadze and members of the Republican Party when they were part of the ruling coalition) who consider themselves as pro-Western politicians.<sup>27</sup>

**Defending Religious Feelings** – Right-wing groups in Georgia present themselves as defenders of religious feelings. For instance, the Georgian March organized a demonstration in front of the Rustavi 2 television office following a joke about Jesus Christ made by journalist, Giorgi Gabunia. The demonstrators even attempted to physically assault Mr.

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<sup>22</sup> Geworld (2015): “unda ikrdzalebodes tu ara homoseksualizmis propaganda?” [Should Homosexual Propaganda be Banned?] Available at: <http://geworld.ge/ge/6428/> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>23</sup> 17 maisi (2013): “ruseti vs dasavleti, lgbt uplebebi da propaganda” [Russia vs West: LGBT Rights and Propaganda] Available at: <https://17maisi.com/2013/09/24/russia-vs-the-west/> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>24</sup> YouTube: Speech of Levan Vasadze <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tq6NXeH85Mo> and Accent (2016): “didi bizantiis memkvidre, geiropa, pankisis bazebi da haaga saakashvili” [The Successor of the Great Byzantium, Gay Europe, Bases in Pankisi and The Hague for Saakashvili] Available at: <https://bit.ly/2D5odB7> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>25</sup> Netgazeti (2018): “kartuli marshis aktsia tbilishshi jorj sorosis tsinaagmdeg” [The Demonstration of Georgian March against George Soros] Available at: <http://netgazeti.ge/news/254897/> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>26</sup> Alia (2017): “kartuli marshi petitsias akveknebs” [Georgian March Publishes Petition] Available at: <http://www.alia.ge/news/4045> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>27</sup> Netgazeti (2017): “kartuli marshis lideri lado sadgobelashvili kaladzis shtabtan daakaves” [The Leader of Georgian March Lado Sadgobelashvili has been Arrested in Front of Kakha Kaladze’s Office] Available at: <http://netgazeti.ge/news/220024/> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

Gabunia.<sup>28</sup> In addition to these examples, far-right groups condemned the Aisa condom due to the hand gesture that represented the sign of the cross and the portraits of Georgian kings featured on the condom's package.<sup>29</sup> As stated, these groups participate in rallies dedicated to Family Purity Day on May 17 every year.

### **Far-right Groups and Russia**

Although, the rhetoric of Georgian far-right groups does not contain clear pro-Russian messages, some of their features demonstrate their association with them. The Georgian March's name resembles the name of the Russian neo-Nazi demonstrations called the Russian March. Admittedly, none of the far-right groups has protested the manifestation of Russian policy such as the creeping occupation or the murders of Archil Tatumashvili and Giga Otkhoshvilia. Ultra-right groups have also adopted Russian-style information warfare tactics which involve the proliferation of fake news throughout fake social media accounts. More precisely, the Facebook pages linked with these groups spread fake news and incite hatred against various ethnic or social groups. It is known that Russia has been actively funding far-right and neo-Nazi groups across Europe in order to increase its influence.<sup>30</sup> For instance, one of Russia's key allies in France is the Front National led by Marine Le Pen. Nowadays, the financial sources of Georgian far-right organizations are unknown and there is no evidence of their links with Russia. Nevertheless, taking into account the anti-Western rhetoric of far-right groups, they can be considered as Russia's proxies in Georgia.

### **Threats and Risks**

The activities of far-right groups pose risks to Georgia's national security. Among the risks are:

**Inciting Ethnic and Religious Hatred** – Although Georgian far-right groups avoid insulting Georgia's indigenous ethnic and religious minorities, it is not impossible for them to be targeted in the future. Xenophobia addressed towards minorities could lead to sectarianism and undermine the process of the integration of ethnic minorities.

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<sup>28</sup> Tabula (2018): "ets katuli marshis tsevrebi gabunias khumrobis gamo rustavi2-is ezoshi ar ushveben" [The Members of So-called Georgian March do not Allow Giorgi Gabunia to Enter the Yard of Rustavi2 due to his Joke] Available at: <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/130882-ets-qartuli-marshis-tsevrebi-gabunias-xumrobis-gamo-rustavi-2-is-ezoshi-ar-ushveben> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>29</sup> Netgazeti (2018): "mdumare aktsia prezervativebis kartuli brendis tsinaagmdeg" [Silent Demonstration against the Georgian Brand of Condoms] Available at: <http://netgazeti.ge/news/269384/> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

<sup>30</sup> Independent (2014): "Putin's Far-Right Ambitions: Think-tank Reveals How Russian President is Wooing – and Funding – Populist Parties across Europe to Gain Influence in the EU". Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putin-s-far-right-ambition-think-tank-reveals-how-russian-president-is-wooing-and-funding-populist-9883052.html> [Accessed October 25, 2018]

**Decreasing the Number of Tourists and Foreign Investors** – The share of foreign investments and tourists from the Middle East and China is significant. Tourism and foreign investments represent key segments of the Georgian economy and losing them could have a dramatic impact on the Georgian economy. Additionally, African and Asian students are one of the main sources of income for Georgian state or private higher education bodies. In the case of a growing aggression towards Africans and Asians, Georgia could lose a source of income by decreasing the number of tourists, investors and overseas students.

**Inciting anti-Western Sentiments** – As mentioned above, far-right groups pursue an anti-Western ideological platform. Hence, the activities of such groups can be utilized by anti-Western political parties and media resources.

### **Recommendations**

In order to diminish the risks from far-right groups, the Georgian state should work on the following directions:

- In-depth research and analysis of the social basis and the ideology of far-right groups
- Active counter-intelligence measures in order to reveal the potential links between far-right groups and foreign intelligence services
- Active informational campaign designed to inform Georgian society about the real statistics on foreign citizens in Georgia which should combat fake news and facts being used for manipulation by far-right groups.