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## **PROJECTING THE FOREIGN PROPAGANDA ON THE GEORGIAN POLITICS<sup>2</sup>**

### ***Abstract:***

*From 2016, the powerful and permanent ideological impact of the Russian messages on the global community is perceived as one of the most important challenges for the western civilization at the beginning of the 21st century. It is without a doubt that the challenge is more acute for the so-called “young democracies”. Georgia is considered to be one of such states. Thus, we have decided to use Georgia as the example to discuss the general essence of propaganda, the mechanisms of its use, the level of resistance by the local societies towards it and the influence that this phenomenon can have on a small country. There is no doubt that the success of the propagandist attacks on the sovereignty of a state directly depends on the level of trust of the wide layers of the society towards the governmental structures of the target state. The higher the level of mistrust, the more successful is the propagandist campaign conducted against a state, and vice versa: the higher the level of adequacy between the government and society, stronger the society is in withstanding the propagandist attacks. In case of Georgia, the ideological frame of the Georgian society is saturated by the mix of the right-conservative ideas with the left-socialist directions, where all the narratives of outside political actors definitely find their support. Based on this, we can suppose that their rhetoric places the society at the risk of negative radicalization.*

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## Introduction

After the 2016 presidential elections, the United States administration has raised the issue of Russian propaganda on the international agenda. The conversation about the detrimental effects of the Kremlin narratives has been intensified. As a result, the powerful and permanent ideological impact of the Russian messages on the global community has been perceived as one of the most important challenges for the western civilization at the beginning of the 21st century.

The strongest gravity centres of the global politics – the US and European governments have openly declared several times that they were not ready for suppressing the Kremlin's propagandist interventions in their national politics. The political and academic societies have started the discussion in the format of international organizations in order to find possible ways of counterbalancing the Russian narratives.

It is without a doubt that these circumstances present an even more acute challenge for the so-called “young democracies” who aim to build a western liberal, polyarchic societies and who are at the stage of their development where the formation of their statehood is still not fully complete. Georgia is considered to be one of such states. Thus, we have decided to use Georgia as the example to discuss the general essence of propaganda, the mechanisms of its use, the level of resistance by the local societies towards it and the influence that this phenomenon can have on a small country.

## The essence of propaganda

Propaganda, literally, [“propago” (Lat.) – “I spread”], is perceived in the nowadays political discourse as the information – ideas or rumour, which are deliberately spread in order to achieve some specific goals<sup>3</sup>.

According to another definition, propaganda is any – true or false information, points of view or ideas, which are purposefully and widely spread across the society in order to achieve specific political, economic, or military goals. Such definition is also used to define the essence of the informational warfare<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> *Britannica. British Encyclopaedia. Propaganda*, <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/propaganda>>

<sup>4</sup> G. G. Počepcov, *Informacionnye Vojny*, Kiev 2000.

According to the definition by Jacques Ellul, propaganda is a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated into a system<sup>5</sup>.

In the political discourse we also encounter a definition, according to which a propaganda is solely false information, point of view (arguments) or ideas, which are purposefully distorted and spread by one client with the aim of misguiding another client and thus gaining political, economic or military advantage over them<sup>6</sup>.

Nevertheless, it needs to be taken into consideration that different schools of propaganda (including the Russian school) categorically advise us not to confuse propaganda with the manipulation of the mass consciousness, since propaganda is solely a targeted action which is conducted with the aim of influencing the mass consciousness, while manipulating the mass consciousness is one of the results of different purposeful activities. Moreover, the formation of the social consciousness is conducted in the same way – through propaganda and persuasion – as manipulation, i.e. deception.

Why does it matter? Because propaganda, in general, is a phenomenon, which is present not only in media and politics, but in any space where there is a point of view and a possibility to interpret it, i.e. in any form of communication: religion, culture, the educational system, arts, including cinema, theatre, literature, architecture and painting, music and even scientific theories. In its essence, every religion is an act of sharing one specific representation of the god and the universe and thus, is a form of communication. The process of upbringing is also a form of communication, no matter where the child is being brought up, in a family, in a specialized institution or on the streets, without any care; the child learns the ways of interacting with the environment through the verbal and nonverbal communication with other individuals. Needless to state that the system of education also belongs to this category: it is clear as a day that in this segment an individual is subjected to the most powerful direct influence, which is inevitable and crucial for their socialization, i.e. shaping them into individuals.

Thus, if we speak in general terms regarding the essence and appropriateness of propaganda, we will end up at an intellectual dead-end, since propaganda is an inseparable part of any communication (wherever there is communication, there always is a propagatable idea, fact, interpretation). Hence, there is a need to differentiate between the propaganda, which is aimed at forming an individual's consciousness and the propaganda, which is aimed at misguiding them.

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<sup>5</sup> J. Ellul, *Propaganda. The formation of men's attitudes*, New York, 1973.

<sup>6</sup> G. G. Počepcov, *Teoriâ komunikacii*, Kiev 2014.

This is why we prefer the definition, according to which propaganda is the interpretation, favourable for the propagandist, of a fact, a point of view, an argument, an idea or a value, including the purposefully distorted information, which shapes the society's opinion and can be used for misleading the society.

### **The capabilities of the propaganda**

We have indicated above that propaganda is present in any space, where there is a point of view and the possibility to interpret it, i.e. communication. Clearly, the propaganda in religion, culture, the system of education and arts are the issues that need to be discussed separately from one another, but, at the same time, all these vectors intersect and unite at the point where the conversation about politics starts, since politics is the entirety of all matters concerning the principles and rules of cohabitation of a society, a state. This unity is the cornerstone, around which consolidates the state ideology and creates the propagatable narratives, and the spreading of these narratives serve the interest of a state (or a movement, or an union) which is the author of the said propaganda.

Hence, it will be reasonable to narrow down the definition of propaganda even more and focus only on the purposeful background propagandist campaigns, which, at the first sight, preach the truth, but, on the other hand, plant anchors in our consciousness<sup>7</sup>, and the activation of the said anchors prompts us the need to conduct activities favourable for the propagandists.

Moreover, unlike a regular, or even an aggressive advertising, this "prompting" is not only emotional in our perception, but also logical, since it forms "our" points of view based on the amalgam of our own values and the information stored in our own mind (our "informational storage"). Consequently, sometimes the effect of propaganda is so unnoticeable that a question arises: how much of what the propaganda prompts us is "our own" and why should we protect ourselves from it?

The problem is that propaganda is able to give harmfully intense emotional connotation pertinent to truly important values to the issues that are in reality not a priority for us. As a result, we can assume that individuals influenced by propaganda can disregard or altogether harm their key interests while chasing the ideals that have been "rammed down their throats".

For example, humans often act based on their emotions, "not using one's head" which is proven by our latest history (the post-soviet public tensions at the beginning of 90s and the "colourful revolutions", when we united in order to gain freedom and independence, as well as being easily provoked in favour of the groups with specific political interests). Most of political theorists

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<sup>7</sup> A. Tversky, D. Kahneman, *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*, "Science" 1974, no. 185 (4157).

share the opinion that it is better to change the political rule in a state through elections rather than through a revolution. Despite this, we went through the stages, when we forgot about this knowledge and changed an unfavourable government through a revolution. As a result, we gave up certain things, we improved on other things, but whether these moments of our political life were a hindrance of growth or a step forward will be evaluated by history, and, we hope that we will have political maturity not to spend 70 years on coming to our senses. On the other hand, we are now facing new challenges, and the future of the young democracies, in general, depends on whether our political systems will withstand the powerful propaganda attacks.

### **The aspects of using propaganda**

Because of a multilateral use of propaganda, it is reasonable to distinguish the following aspects of using it:

1. for the internal politics – the role of propaganda in forming the civil consciousness in a state;
2. for international politics – the role of propaganda is realizing a country's foreign interests;
3. for ensuring the international security – the role of propaganda in the functioning of international security system.
4. apart from these, propaganda can also be viewed as an effective political tool used:
  - a) in order to realize long term goals (forming/expanding an ideology),
  - b) in order to realize medium-term goals (election/image campaigns),
  - c) in order to realize short-term goals (positioning the specific decision of the establishment, inspiring a social turmoil, a quickly escalating revolution).

In addition, while picking an ideal propagandist strategy aimed at realizing long-term goals and permanently conducting it in a background regime, it is possible to gain such a strong influence on the social opinion that it will “cheapen” the cost of conducting medium and short-term propagandist campaigns, and in case of need will be able to achieve the targeted goal simply by activating a combination of necessary “anchors”.

### **The main “anchors” of propaganda and its mechanisms of action**

It has been said above that the main “anchors” of propaganda are our values, more precisely, specific systems of values, which present certain ready-made constructs used by us for evaluating the processes, facts, circumstances

and objective reality around us through our subjective point of view<sup>8</sup>. This is a framework of our own morality and conscience, which guides us on how to act in a specific situation. Based on this framework, i.e. based on our values, we pick the right from wrong and form our attitude towards various issues.

According to Charles Fillmore, this “frame” is a cognitive structure of schematizing one’s experiences<sup>9</sup>. Shank and Abelson considered, that this scheme can be perceived as the structural context of the everyday interactions<sup>10</sup>.

According to Erving Goffman, the “frame” is recursive, and, thus, stable even when undergoing changes<sup>11</sup>. In other words, it can be unconsciously broken down into simple elements – primal “anchors”, regrouped and constructed into a new frame consisting of unchanging old elements.

Batigin, a Russian scholar of Goffman’s works, considers that typically it is impossible to consciously perceive these frames and the attempts to explicate (define) them often end up with perception disorganization. For example, if we try to manage our speech patterns, the continuity of our thoughts will break, while the analysis of our own motivations and actions can result in the deviations of our behaviour<sup>12</sup>.

It should be taken into consideration that, according to Goffman, all primal “frames” of any social group are the central elements of the group’s culture<sup>13</sup>, but as the later researches of propaganda demonstrated, there is a possibility to artificially plant such central cultural elements in the consciousness of a group. For example, the definition of Robert Entman states that the term “frames”, in general, stands for such schemes of digesting information, which strengthen the specific perception and understanding of events. In this case Entman is implying the media “packaging”, through which the media hands the society the ready-made interpretations. According to Entman, the components of the “frames” of the media often coincide with the already established discourse in the society and shape such form of thought regarding a certain event, that is already familiar for the audience from its former experience<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, New York 1963.

<sup>9</sup> Č. Fillmor, *Frejmy i semantika ponimaniâ*, NZL 1988, Vyp. 23, “Kognitivnye aspekty âzyka”, p. 24-25.

<sup>10</sup> R. S. Shank, R. P. Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding*, New Jersey 1987.

<sup>11</sup> E. Goffman, *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*, London 1974.

<sup>12</sup> G. S. Batygina, *Kontinuum frejmov: sociologičeskaâ teoriâ Irvinga Gofmana – stat’â* G. S. Batygina, [in:] *Institutsociologii RAN*, pp. 7-57, 42-43.

<sup>13</sup> E. Goffman, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> R. M. Entman, *Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm*, “Journal of Communication” 1993, no. 43(4), pp. 51-58; Idem, *Cascading activation: Contesting the white house’s frame after 9/11*, “Political Communication” 2003, no. 20, pp. 415-432; Idem, *Projections of power: Framing news, public opinion, and U.S. foreign policy*, Chicago 2004.

How do these schemes work? For example, if in regular circumstances family is more important for us than human rights according to our value systems, then we will never interfere in a family conflict, even if a married couple is physically harming each-other in front of us, or even if parents keep their defenceless children in unbearable conditions. On the other hand, if a family is a priority for us but human life and human rights are even more sacred and represent the values of the highest category, we will try to prevent and stop the family violence. How we'll do this? This is also defined by our value priorities. If the rule of law is of the utmost value for us, then we will contact the law enforcement, but if we accept the forceful regulation, the so-called "street rules", then we could possibly swing a fist or engage in a "face off".

The formation of the political taste (or the political culture) also happens according to the similar system of ranking. If the ideal environment for us is to live in a powerful state, then we put the interests of the state over our own, individual interest and we justify the attempts of the government to impose different types of politically motivated restrictions over the society. On the other hand, if we believe that the ideal environment is a state, where human rights are the highest value, we protest against any attempt to limit these rights. At the same time, as stated above, there also is a way of artificial, enforced "suggesting" ready-made schemes to the society and in this case it is possible to temporarily (or, sometimes, even permanently) change the ranking of priorities through the aggressive propaganda (frequent repetition, focusing on the other values, interpreting through different angles, etc.) and to put emphasis on a value, that is in reality of a lesser importance to us.

### **The conflict of propaganda with the existing values**

There is no doubt that the success of the propagandist attacks on the sovereignty of a state directly depends on the level of trust of the wide layers of the society towards the governmental structures of the target state. The higher the level of mistrust, the more successful is the propagandist campaign conducted against a state, and vice versa: the higher the level of adequacy between the government and society, stronger the society is in withstanding the propagandist attacks.

Hence, the target of the permanent propagandist attacks is this very function – the indicator of trust towards the government institutions: the supposed "enemies", or the entities, which aim at realizing their specific tasks towards a sovereign state, as well as the healthy forces, discuss and interpret the ongoing events inside the country in the prism of the adequacy of the relationship between the government and the society.

For example, living in a corruption-free, rule-of-law state is a natural and healthy need of a society. At the same time, we can assume that the exaggerated myth about the inevitable corruptness of the government can be a successful attempt to pass off the single cases of corruption as a trend, a tendency and ignite nihilism or a desire to take action against the government. The ex-aggerated myth about the inevitable self-willed behaviour of the law enforcement institutions can be used as a foreword for justifying the need for the armed resistance against them. Emphasized inevitable division of the citizens according to national, religious, or any other aspect and stressing the differences can be a precursor for igniting national, religious (and etc.) conflicts inside the state.

While in the conditions of a closed, non-transparent society it was a much easier task for the author of the propaganda to impose their own interpretation on the wide layers of the society, the accessibility of information has made this considerably more difficult. As a result of a fast development of informational technologies and online media, the possibility of unlimited broadcasting of different interpretations has arisen, which is, on the one hand, confusing for the society, but, on the other hand, protects it from being “imprisoned” by some specific imposed system of values.

Thus, nowadays informational field represents a form of a combat theatre, where propagandist interpretations of different internal and external political, economic, ideological and religious interests (including the outside powers oriented at weakening a state) are engaged in an open struggle with each-other. This is why frequently in our society there is a conflict between the existing system of values and the elements replaceable/created through the ways of propaganda.

### **The common platforms of Russia and the West and the contrasts between the two**

In the reality of the Georgian state today we can differentiate between two main gravity centres in terms of outside propagandist influences. These are the west and Russia. However, the lesser heavyweight actors, such as Turkish, Azerbaijanian and Armenian propagandist flows also constantly intrude in the informational field of the country. It should also be taken into account that while the abrupt “invasions” are relatively easier to identify, it is much more difficult to detect the pressure, the scheme of which largely coincides with the state interests. In such cases the difference is so minor that mostly it goes



unnoticed, but it can still be identified (for example, using Goffman's or Entman's frame-analysis method)<sup>15</sup>.

Among the different systems of values (ideological, religious, cultural, etc.) this time we have picked the ideological "frame", and have tried to analyze the propagandist information streams only through this context and determine, what concurrences and contradictions follow the propagandist narratives of the significant political actors excessively present in the country's informational field (we should also emphasize here that the concurrences are not always positive, just like the contradictions are not always negative).

Despite the fact that during the discussions regarding the world political order there are frequent attempts to find a resolution based on a consensus in the form of a "third way", a so-called "measured ideas", it is evident from observing the current state of media that ideologically, the western propagandist informational flows and narratives are mainly aimed at establishing the values of the liberal democracies, which implies such state propaganda, where in the state of representative democracy, inviolability of the individualism, human rights and the right of private property are the supreme values. In a liberal state the economy is liberal, based on market demand. Consequently, around this type of economic dynamics are shaped the social relations, and also happens the determination of upper-lower levels of society. Of course, an ideal political system does not yet exist, and thus it is natural that the most successful model of such a state – the US – still is facing a number of challenges which it is trying to solve taking into consideration the same core values that have been mentioned above.

Despite the fact that the ideas of the "third way" have received quite a strong resonance in the Russian political system, the consciousness of the society in the post-soviet Russia, the 70-year stage of the development of which was saturated by the propaganda of the socialist ideas, is still not fully free from the charms of the impressive slogans shaped on the idea of collectivization and it always puts the state interests ahead of the inviolability of the right of private property. Ideologically, such a ranking of value system is typical for etatism, or, say, a type of totalitarianism. Thus, for the post-soviet mentality limiting the private freedoms because of the state interest are fairly acceptable. On the other hand, the consciousness shaped this way places the care for individual's social and economic well-being fully under the responsibilities of the state, because of which, achieving the economic wellbeing is associated not with a private effort, but with "a strong hand" ("a good leader"), "the government protection"

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<sup>15</sup> R. M. Entman, J. Matthes, L. Pellicano, *Nature, sources, and effects of news framing*, [in:] K. Wahl-Jorgensen, T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies*, New York 2009, pp. 175-190; E. Goffman, *Frame analysis...*, *op. cit.*; Idem, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre 1959.

and “inevitable corruption” (if you become a part of corruption chain – you won). From the propagandist point of view, spreading the brazen socialist ideology in the world, which has seen the breakdown of the socialist camp with its own eyes, would be politically disadvantageous. This is why the post-soviet Russian propaganda has returned to the state of criticizing the opposing camp and has shaped its narratives so as to demonstrate the flaws of the western model of government.

Here we should also mention the common propagandist platform of Russia and the west: because Kremlin has the ambition to position itself as a global political player, it is important for Russia, just like it is for USA, to be represented as a force to be reckoned with, a powerful state that is determining the international rules of the game.

As a result, in order to conduct their foreign propagandist strategies, both Russia and the west use the “anchors”: tolerance, family values, multiculturalism and a leader-state. But together with this compilation, the US is actively lobbying for the democracy and the cliché of the “American dream” (the chance to achieve wellbeing through an individual effort), emphasizing the rule of law and the technologic predominance, and under tolerance, together with the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity, it also recognizes the right to the diverse gender identity. As for The Russian propagandist machine, its main accents are on the “Russian spirit” (open-hearted, “simple” people, which unite against an enemy), the wealth of the natural resources on the country’s territory (where the economic well-being is in itself-expected), military superiority and the strong leader. According to the Russian understanding, “justice” is not a rule of law but some form of a naturally existing “public justice”, while tolerance is solely cultural, ethnic and religious diversity and the issue of gender identity is perceived as a challenge for the family institution.

It should also be noted that while in case of the US the foreign propagandist vector is in full harmony with those state values, which are the bases for the country’s political agenda, in case of Russia these is a serious dissonance in this direction (for example, the economic well-being never comes on its own, nor can justice exist in itself, the military predominance is highly arguable, tolerance is selective and neither can the “strong leader” alone ensure the orderly functioning of a political system in the scopes of a democratic paradigm). This is why the Russian propaganda has to artificially strengthen its narratives, for which it often has to resort to the instruments of the “soft power” and falsifying facts.

### **Projecting ideological narratives on the local mentality**

Nevertheless, which of the anchors propagated by the powerful political centres are acceptable for us and which are unacceptable? Which narratives

come in disagreement with our real interests and which are the ones that help us in the global integration?

First of all, we should note that in Georgia, despite the country's choice of a western direction which has no alternative, the political culture is not yet fully formed. The reason for this could be the historical changes in the country's political preferences, which on a historic scale, were quite frequent and which resulted in a picture where the frame of none of the political cultures could fully establish its roots. To be more specific, according to the political theorists, the political culture is forged by ancient values and it is passed from generation to generation not genetically, but through teaching and learning<sup>16</sup>. Thus, when different generations had to live in the cultural frames of different civilizations, none of the frames of a political culture have been fully absorbed by the consciousness of the society and as a result we get some form of a mix of the cultural achievements of different civilizations. It is highly probable that this is exactly the reason why for the consciousness of the Georgian society the dogmatic doctrines of the Christian and Islamic civilizations, the cornerstones of the eastern and the western cultures, are equally acceptable. On the one hand, the politicians' bold, insulting comments regarding their colleagues are unacceptable and on the other hand, there always exists a window for discourse in the society, where these "unacceptable" comments find explanation and justification.

We encounter the same ideological mix in the political culture of Georgia, where the platforms of the party spectrum mostly coincide with the rightist and the centre-rightist ("third power") ideological values. For example, as a result of studying the ideologies of the Georgian party spectrum we have determined that the classic rightist views are shared by the "National-Democratic Party" (Christian Democracy), "Freedom" (conservatism), "the National Forum" (moderate conservatism), "the Movement for Just Georgia" and "the Conservative Party"; while the centre-rightist ideas are shared by "the New Rightists", "the Industry Will Save Georgia", "United National Movement" (liberal conservatism and civil nationalism), "Georgia's Way" (national-democracy), "Democratic Movement – United Georgia" (nationalist state, Unitarianism, traditions), "the Patriotic Alliance" (conservatism), "Georgian Republican Party" (liberalism, individualism), "Free Democrats" (liberalism), "Girchi (pinecone)" (classic liberalism, libertarianism). The spectrum of the parties with the leftist ideologies is much more humble – here, among the centre-leftists (social democracy) are the "Labour Party", "People's Party", "Social Democrats for the Development of Georgia" and one of the most potent and formidable power, "the Georgian Dream". There are only two parties with the classic leftist ideology in Georgia: "Independent Georgia" and the "Green Party".

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<sup>16</sup> A. Heywood, *Politics*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Palgrave Foundations 1997.

Obviously, the narratives of the political powers are represented the media daily agenda in appropriate doses. Because of this, the ideological frame of the Georgian society is saturated by the mix of the rightist ideology and the socialist directions, where the narratives of both outside political actors definitely find their support. The society's political taste, its political culture is also being shaped accordingly. In these circumstances it is disadvantageous for a party entity to conduct their political communication in an ideological context and these communications are instead conducted in the context of diminishing one another. Based on this, we can suppose that their rhetoric places the society at the risk of negative radicalization.

### Conclusion

If we take into account the ever-growing trend of globalization, we can suppose that the ideological mix which characterizes our nowadays society is, in fact, advantageous, since the globalization brings such a mixture in the minds of the citizens of all states across the world. Thus, we can even consider the immaturity of the Georgian culture as its “bonus” at this point, since it is being refined and shaped in synchronicity with the world’s new political culture, taking into account the modern political realities.

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