

COMMUNICATION
STRATEGY
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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE OF GEORGIA

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Introduction

This communication strategy (Strategy) is designed to outline the key communications objectives, target audiences and desired communications effects of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia (MOD) and Georgian Armed Forces (GAF). The Strategy considers the Ministry's role and policies, current security challenges in the region, the modern information environment, key target audiences, and public attitudes.

The Georgian MOD/GAF operates in a complex and unpredictable security environment. The Russian Federation continues occupation of Georgian territories – the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region (former South Ossetia Autonomous District) and thus remains the main security challenge for Georgia. After the Georgian-Russian war in August 2008, recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions by Russia and continuation of the so-called “creeping occupation” affect Georgia's sovereignty and violate the norms of international law. In the absence of international control, signing so-called “agreements on incorporation” between Russia and de facto governments, as well as Russia's growing militarization in the occupied regions, offer clear signs of continuous provocations and a resumption of military aggression.

Apart from the threat of renewed Russian military aggression, violation of the sovereignty of neighboring countries using the methods of hybrid warfare remains the top security challenge for Georgia. Annexation of Crimea and events in Eastern Ukraine, the cyber-attacks conducted by Russia, and strengthening of information warfare have significantly increased security challenges on a global scale. In this context, dealing with Russian “soft power” has become the main task for Georgia, along with considering the specifics of future hybrid warfare and adaptation to it.

The actions of Russian “soft power” are aimed at weakening state institutions, discrediting Euro-Atlantic integration and strengthening pro-Russian and anti-Western forces. The number of pro-Russian non-governmental organizations and media outlets opposing Euro-Atlantic integration is significantly growing in the information space. Their goal is to discredit state institutions, among them the Ministry of Defence, which is one of the most important institutions aimed at defending the sovereignty of the country and its Euro-Atlantic integration.

Information Environment

To the Ministry of Defence, the existing information environment encompasses opportunities for strengthening communication, as well as important challenges. The structure of information dissemination mechanisms, socio-political attitudes, and issues related to perceptions of the Ministry all influence the information environment.

According to the International Republican Institute (IRI), the population generally favors television as a source for news, though use of the internet and social media are rising. According to the World Statistics Online Resources, the number of internet users reached nearly 2.5 million as of 2016 in Georgia, while the number of Facebook users increased to 2 million. The functionality of social media, such as information exchange and the creation of space for discussion, enable an increasing impact on the formation of public opinion day by day. Development of this function is also encouraged by a free environment. In Freedom House's Internet Freedom Index, Georgia was named among free countries in 2016.

Increased access to information and greater information diversity, and more public engagement in socio-political processes, ensure enhanced communication with different target audiences, despite the growth of risks of misinformation and dissemination of unverified information.

Diversity in radio and print media outlets ensure the increasing awareness of the population. The regional media outlets provide information to ethnic minorities in the Azeri, Armenian and Russian languages.

There are no free media in the occupied territories, and Russian TV and Radio are the main sources of information.

According to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the majority of the population of Georgia still supports Euro-Atlantic integration and considers Russia as the main threat (NDI 2012-2016). During this period, two-thirds of the population supported Georgia's accession to the NATO Alliance, which shows that the enthusiasm of the Georgian population expressed during the plebiscite in 2008 remains broadly unchanged.

Intensifying Russian "soft power" policies have caused the consolidation of the pro-Russian electorate. According to research by NDI conducted in recent years, the maximum number of supporters of the Eurasian Union is about 31%. Within this indicator, those considering Russia as the best guarantor of the country's security – who should be considered as a strong pro-Russian electorate - total 13 %. It should be noted that ethnic minorities dominate in this percentage.

According to IRI surveys in 2012-2016, GAF enjoy a high level of public trust (86%), taking second place after Georgian Orthodox Church.

According to assessments by Georgian non-governmental organizations, the MoD stands out for its high level of transparency and access to information. Based on Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) research (conducted 1-15 May 2016), the Ministry's indicator in terms of proactive publication of public information is 69%.

The narrative that the West poses a threat to the Orthodox Church, Georgian identity and traditions, is getting stronger on the web. Anti-Western and nihilistic narratives are gaining momentum, thus increasing the probability of affecting the armed forces, as an integral part of society.

The current information environment poses a serious threat to Georgia's national security and its Euro-Atlantic foreign policy. In this regard, it's important to inform the population about NATO-Georgia cooperation and Georgia's progress towards integration and membership, which will counter malicious Russian narratives.

Within this information environment, strategic communications will help set the agenda for communications for the Ministry, in order to advance MOD core policies by achieving the desired effects with key target audiences.

Strategic communications is defined as shaping the information environment in support of national and organizational interests. Therefore, it is fundamental for strategic communications to identify target audiences and tailor messages appropriately.

MoD Vision

The MoD aims to support building a united, democratic, independent, secure and powerful state where every citizen holds an honorable role and place. As threats to our country are growing, the Ministry aims to develop a more effective defence institution and to establish an optimal force structure that is capable of responding to existing challenges, supporting Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and meeting NATO interoperability requirements.

To achieve this goal, the Ministry is taking into account the best practices of partner countries and has introduced the principle of "Total Defence." Implementation of this approach requires rational allocation of resources, establishment of civil defence systems, development of relevant infrastructure, creation of effective reserves and a mobilization system, and defining and synchronizing tasks within a context of cross-government cooperation.

Narrative

The primary objective of Georgia's national security policy is to use all available lawful and peaceful means to ensure the sovereignty of the country, restore territorial integrity and protect its internationally recognized borders.

Accession to European and Euro-Atlantic structures is one of Georgia's top foreign and security policy priorities. At the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008, the allies agreed that Georgia would become a NATO member. Accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization will ensure the peaceful and sustainable development of Georgia, as well as the region.

Accession to European and Euro-Atlantic structures will also contribute to strengthening Georgia's resilience and defence capabilities, creating a secure environment for rapid economic development of the country, strengthening democratic institutions, and protecting rule of law and human rights.

Moreover, Georgia is the only NATO "aspirant country" that, alongside other practical pre-accession tools, also has the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) and the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP). Successful implementation of the package aims to enhance Georgia's defence capabilities and to help Georgia advance in its preparations towards membership of the Alliance, which offers an effective defence force for the challenges that the country faces.

Georgia - as a creditable member of the international community - is being transformed from a security *consumer* to a security *provider* state. Georgia, as a stable and reliable partner, contributes to global stability and security by participating in NATO, EU and UN-led international missions. Furthermore, from 2015 one of Georgia's infantry company participates in the NATO Response Force (NRF)¹. Georgia's positive contribution to Euro-Atlantic security architecture not only enriches the military experience of the GAF, but also increases Georgia's importance in the process of strengthening Euro-Atlantic security. The GAF now enjoys higher level of interoperability with NATO than ever before.

Russian military aggression against Georgia in August 2008, the occupation of 20% of Georgian territory, Russian recognition of the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions, and continuation of the so-called "creeping occupation", violate the norms of international law and negatively influence the security environment of Georgia and the whole region.

Apart from the threat of renewed Russian military aggression, violation of the sovereignty of the neighboring countries and use of methods of hybrid warfare remain the top security challenges for Georgia, as can be seen by the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and events in Eastern Ukraine.

Responding to traditional threats and new challenges requires high readiness, and flexible, well-trained armed forces, which will be able to effectively protect the country's territories and population, and support the government's in time of crisis.

For this purpose, the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces (by making effective use of available resources) tries to: develop its combat readiness; improve command and control systems; properly equip the armed forces; create mobilization and reserve systems; improve military education and training systems; and effectively use all existing formats and tools with NATO, while enhancing interoperability with NATO forces.

1 NRF, 'a highly ready and technologically advanced, multinational force'
(Source: https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics_49755.htm)

Key Communication objectives

The successful implementation of communication objectives derived from the threats and information environment analysis defined in the strategy will significantly strengthen the defence and security system of Georgia. On this path, effective and appropriate communication will increase the deterrence effect.

Communication objectives of the Ministry of Defence:

1. Communicate a positive image of the institution, gain public support and persuade society of the defence capabilities of armed forces, with maximum involvement of the population in the process of defence transformation:

- ✓ Effectively communicate planned reforms with the aim of improving the transformation of the armed forces and defence capabilities;
- ✓ Directly communicate with the population in the regions of Georgia and amongst local governments to increase awareness about ongoing reforms;
- ✓ Cooperate with civil society on issues concerning reforms in the field of defence and security on a permanent basis;
- ✓ Strengthen the image and reputation of the armed forces as an integral and noble part of the society and a highly trusted institution;
- ✓ Demonstrate democratic principles, adherence to the rule of law, and communication of effective governance examples;
- ✓ Promote the Ministry as a reliable, trustworthy and objective source of information;
- ✓ Demonstrate the Ministry as a leading State Institute in the field of ethnic minority integration;
- ✓ Inform target age groups interested in military affairs on defence and security issues, and on the role of the armed forces in ensuring the security of the country;
- ✓ Communicate benefits received in cooperation with NATO and EU, NATO and EU member and partner states;
- ✓ Communicate the importance of participation in International Missions aimed at increasing Georgia's defence capacity and enhancing interoperability with NATO;
- ✓ Demonstrate the Ministry as an agency capable of countering propaganda and the nihilistic attitudes of its opponents.

2. Demonstrate that the Georgian Armed Forces have modern equipment and technology and are supported by high-level training, education, and through a wide range of social programs:

- ✓ Effectively communicate about quality education and training opportunities;
- ✓ Create, develop and communicate social support programs for soldiers and their family members;
- ✓ Communicate the role of NATO and its partner countries in the process of forming modern armed forces that are interoperable with NATO;
- ✓ Communicate the importance of military careers and compulsory military service, as honorable and dignified choices for every citizen.

3. Communicate the united vision and approaches of Georgian state agencies on defence and security priorities, as a guarantee of security and stability of the country:

- ✓ Effectively communicate on defence and security issues in crisis situations, through strong coordination with law enforcement and relevant ministries;
- ✓ Increase inter-agency engagement on information operations against the state and communicate unified coordinated messages.

4. Strengthen the image of Georgia as a reliable partner, and as a country dedicated to strengthening international security and stability to NATO, EU and its partner countries:

- ✓ Communicate on Georgia's significant contribution to provide world security with its participation in NATO, EU and UN-led missions;
- ✓ Raise awareness about the importance of participating in joint events on areas such as international military exercises, combating terrorism, natural disasters, hybrid warfare, security or other challenges;
- ✓ Communicate the image of Georgia as an important partner for NATO in the Black Sea and the Caucasus region;
- ✓ Demonstrate neighborly policy with regional and neighboring states.

5. Communicate the progress achieved on Georgia's NATO membership in enhancing interoperability with NATO, strengthening the deterrent effect of the opponent, and facilitating the process of Georgia's integration in NATO:

- ✓ Inform society about successful implementation of the international obligations taken on by the Ministry;
- ✓ Effectively inform society about the participation of the Ministry in NATO's summits, ministerial and military exercises.

Communication Themes

- ✓ Current reforms in the Ministry of Defence:
 - Strategic Direction and Management;
 - Force Optimization;
 - Force Readiness;
 - Institutional Development;
 - Multilateral and Bilateral Engagement;
- ✓ Improvements in military education and training;
- ✓ Qualitative improvement of mandatory military service;
- ✓ Establishment of new reserve and mobilization systems;
- ✓ Strengthening of cross-governmental coordination in the face of modern security challenges;
- ✓ Strengthening of crisis communications capability across government;
- ✓ Georgian Armed Forces as an example of civil integration and unity;
- ✓ Social programs for the military and their families;
- ✓ Programs for wounded military servicemen;
- ✓ Enhancing transparency and public engagement in decision making processes;
- ✓ NATO-Georgia cooperation, progress towards integration and membership; implementing the 15 initiatives of the Substantial NATO Georgia Package;
- ✓ Enhancing interoperability with NATO;
- ✓ Managing expectations related to Georgia's integration into NATO;
- ✓ GAF's participation in NATO, EU and UN-led international missions;
- ✓ Security challenges: hybrid warfare, cyber security, terrorism.

Communications Channels

1. Media Relations: Broadcast media – TV, Radio

Television and radio represent the most accessible information channels for domestic target audiences, to quickly spread messages and garner support for MOD reforms. Special attention should be paid to communicating with ethnic minorities in their own languages. Mass media also plays a significant role in holding debates on Georgia's integration in NATO and reforms, thus representing the most effective tools for Georgian citizens to obtain clear information on these processes. Various programs, video clips, short documentaries and animated films could have the best impact.

2. Internet and social media

The MOD uses internet and social media channels (web portals, social networks, blog posts) to reach key opinion makers, youth, and urban populations. Social media pages (e.g. Twitter) have been established to connect the Ministry with international target audiences and deliver accurate and reliable information. Moreover, the MOD web platform is being developed and will include forums and blogs.

3. Print media

The newspaper "Geo Army" and other printed media can ensure delivery of more specific and detailed information to the public, international community and decision makers. Articles in Georgian newspapers on key security themes should be encouraged.

For the purpose of informing target audiences and distribution of messages, the production of so-called "visibility material" (for example, pens, flyers, brochures, posters, stickers etc.), to be distributed during events and campaigns, is proposed.

4. Public events – interactive, two-way communication

Conferences, seminars, discussions, round tables, debates, informative meetings with local government, the wider population and community representatives will enable effective two-way communications and bring the Georgian Armed Forces closer to people. These platforms could also be used to disseminate information on security issues and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration process.

5. Information Centers on NATO and EU

By cooperating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Legal Entity of Public Law Information Centres on NATO and EU, the MOD can provide additional information on the process of Georgia's integration in EU and NATO through the eight Information Centers around Georgia.

6. Civil Society

The Ministry pays great importance to civil society's engagement in ongoing processes and in implementation of defence and security policies. Creation of cooperation platforms (conferences, round tables, information meetings) will encourage civil society representatives to actively engage in implementation of defence reforms, increase transparency of defence and security systems, and support the country's foreign and security policy priorities.

7. Internal communication channels

The Ministry will circulate information to employees across structural units about activities and achievements within the Ministry and Armed Forces. It will use electronically-available products such as the newspaper "Geo Army", PowerPoint presentations, press releases, key messages, and Frequently Asked Questions and Answers for legislative initiatives and priority themes. The Ministry will also use 'information visualization tools' such as graphs, statistics, pie charts, graphics and videos, to enhance understanding. These tools will help broaden knowledge of policies, ensuring Departments and other structural units are involved in the priority directions of the Ministry, and

that relevant speakers are identified and messages circulated. Some products can be used for international audiences (for example, the diplomatic corps and international organizations accredited in Georgia) to provide information.

The internal communication resource of the Ministry of Defence is also composed of its employees, the General Staff and the Armed Forces. Effectively informing them about events and developments taking place in the Ministry of Defence helps to create several thousand communicators. Since employees represent a more reliable source of information for their families and friends than any other communication channel, it is invaluable to strengthening internal communication and making information readily available for all employees.

8. Cross-government communication

The MOD regularly provides information to the Administration of the Government of Georgia, Ministry of Internal Affairs, National Security Council, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs on MOD communication themes and messages. MOD is actively participating in developing a crisis communication capability and network across the government.

Recommendations and Risks

The MOD Communications Strategy has been developed in this form for the first time. It would therefore be reasonable to study the effectiveness of MOD communication objectives and themes based on monitoring and analysis, and to take into consideration that study's results for improvements when developing future iterations of this strategy. Communication objectives and themes should be revised in accordance with changes in defence priorities and directions. This document is designed for peacetime and non-crisis situations. It is intended to develop a crisis communication handbook and to determine the role of strategic communication in crisis and war situations.

It is intended that the communication strategy will be revised annually, based on analyses of the dynamic informational and strategic environment.