Communication Strategy of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia (2021-2024)

Introduction

The Communication Strategy (Strategy) of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia (MoD) (2021-2024) defines communication policy and principles, common communication directions for desired communication effects, communication goals, target audiences and communication channels of the MoD and the Georgian Defence Forces (GDF) for four years.

One of the most significant tasks of Georgia's resilient security and development is the strengthening of democratic state institutions, including strong and NATO-interoperable Defence Forces. On the path to the protection of the country's sovereignty and Euro-Atlantic integration the MoD and GDF are one of the most important state agencies. Given the country's security goals and national objectives, along with the process of transforming the GDF into a modern military force and increasing its interoperability with NATO, it is important to continuously promote trust and strong support of the GDF and NATO membership. Full and proactive informing of the public and broad involvement in the sphere of defence is a precondition for consolidating the society around achieving of the set goals.

Ongoing technological progress, social trends in a modern, democratic world and hybrid threats facing Georgia and other countries, especially influence operations and disinformation campaigns organized by state and non-state actors, require novel approaches and decisions. In the face of modern challenges in the information environment, it is principally important to ensure consistent, timely and proactive delivery of objective and reliable information and high standard of openness and transparency by the agency.

The communication objectives set out in this document are based on the consideration of main policy objectives of the MoD and the attitudes of the target groups, as well as analysis of the information environment shaped by security challenges in the world, the region, and Georgia.

Communication Strategy with its goals and objectives fully coincides with the objectives of the state, conceptual document of the Ministry of Defence, such as Strategic Defence Review (2021-2025) and lessons learned from the previous Communication Strategy (2017-2020).

Informational Environment

Gross violation of the norms of international law by the Russian Federation, occupation of Georgian territories and the so-called recognition as independent republics, their growing militarization, "Creeping occupation", and use of other hybrid methods, makes the country's security environment difficult and unpredictable. The Russian Federation uses all possible means to create a favorable information environment for the achievement of its strategic goals. Among them, it tries to weaken the support of Georgian citizens for NATO and EU membership and to increase disagreement among a small section of the public on the issue.

Along with the military aggression from the Russian Federation, one of the key challenges is the use of hybrid warfare methods, including cyber-attacks, to weaken the resilience of the Georgian society, disrupt its integrity, deepen distrust, and undertake activities aimed at psychological influence. Attempts to stir up anti-Western sentiments and increase tensions in the society by using variety of methods, pose a significant threat to the stable, democratic development of the country and the foreign policy direction. In the information environment, the increased number of pro-Russian non-governmental organizations and media outlets who oppose the Euro-Atlantic integration, as well as coordinated messages and campaigns against the state institutions (including continuous attempts to discredit the MoD and GDF) serve to decrease public trust towards state institutions and spread nihilistic attitudes towards European and Euro-Atlantic course.

Considering the abovementioned threats and factors/aspects, the protection of national and departmental interests in the contemporary information environment through effective and proactive Strategic Communication is one of the key governmental objectives.

The importance of communication is especially affected by the technological progress in the modern world. In particular, the growing influence of information technology and social media in political processes and conflicts has made information warfare, in many cases, one of the primary factors determining the outcome.

The information environment is influenced by the peculiarities of the information ecosystem, its influence on the formation of public opinion, and the existing socio-political attitudes in the public. For the MoD, in addition to the above-mentioned factors, an important element of the information environment is the positioning of the GDF in the society and the issues related to their role in the fulfillment of the Georgia's foreign policy course.

The results of the researches by authoritative international organizations confirm that the sources of information in Georgia are undergoing a significant transformation in accordance with the current trends in the world. For example, according to a public opinion poll conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in June 2016[1], the first major source of information (for 77% of respondents) was television. This result gradually decreased in the following years and already in December 2019[2], in the study by the same organization, it is only 69%. However, the opposite happens towards the Internet sources. If, according to a June 2016 poll by the NDI, the Internet was the primary source of information for only 14% of respondents, the number is 24% in the December 2019 survey by the same organization. It should be noted that these trends are especially evident in Tbilisi, where according to NDI surveys in December 2019, 56% of respondents named the television and 37% the Internet as primary source of information. Furthermore, according to a July 2019 survey conducted by the NDI, the number of respondents who do not use the Internet at all in villages is the highest – 38%, while in Tbilisi and large cities this number is lower and amounts to 17% and 18%. The largest part of this distribution is the 55+ age category of respondents, 65% of whom do not use the Internet at all.

At the same time, according to the data of the online resource of world statistics 2020[3], the number of Internet users in Georgia has reached 2,658,311, which is about 2/3 of the population. According to the same source, the number of Facebook users is 2,524,000, which is significantly higher than the features of other countries in the South Caucasus region. This indicates the social network in Georgia, especially the high popularity of "Facebook". This is confirmed by NDI studies. According to the December 2019 survey, out of the people who use the Internet (69%) 72% are Facebook users.

With help of the social media, any person has the opportunity to become a communicator, which in particular expands the sources of information and creates a space for discussion. It should be noted that this process increases the transparency of the system and contributes to the establishment of democratic principles, although there is also a high risk of disseminating false and unverified information. To make the most of the benefits of social media and to protect the information space, it is paramount to ensure transparency, timeliness, and participation of the public. In this regard, the positions of the MoD are recognized by

[1] NDI, Public attitudes in Georgia, June, 2016:
https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_June_2016%20poll_Public%20Issues_GEO_VFF%20(2).pdf
[2] NDI, Public attitudes in Georgia, December, 2019:
https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_December%202019_Public%20Presentation_GEO_VF.pdf
[3] Internet World Stats, 2020: https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm

authoritative international organizations. According to the "Transparency International's" 2020 Anti-Corruption Defense Survey, transparency in the field of defense, freedom of information, and its timely issuance are assessed as one of the strengths of the MoD[4]. Furthermore, according to the research of the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) "Practice of Proactive Disclosure of Public Information in Georgian Public Institutions 2020"[5], the MoD takes up the leading position among the central public institutions, namely the second place with 97%.

The participation of various segments of the society in the communication processes with help of the internet is supported by the state of the freedom of internet in the country. In the Freedom House "Internet Freedom Index", Georgia is constantly included in the list of free countries.[6]

According to the NDI March 2018 survey, which includes the latest information on the number of recipients of information from non-Georgian media, the number of recipients of such information is still high - 18%, especially in regions populated by ethnic minorities - 29%. The largest share in non-Georgian sources of information is occupied by Russian media, and in specific media - by Russian state televisions. Out of 18% of the respondents who watch non-Georgian channels, 33% watch Russia's "First Channel", the second most frequently answered is "RTR" 19% and third "Russia1" for 13%.

Trends in terms of media, including social media freedom, do not extend to the Russian-occupied territories of Georgia, where there is virtually no independent media and the main sources of information are Russian television and radio.

In terms of public attitudes, the public still has the same positive attitude towards European and Euro-Atlantic choices. According to a public opinion poll conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in 2016-2020, the will expressed in the 2008 plebiscite remains unchanged and more than 2/3 of the population supports Euro-Atlantic integration.

However, the influence of Russian propaganda messages is still visible in some segments of the society. According to a survey by the NDI in April 2019, 21% of respondents believe that Georgia will benefit more if it rejects European and Euro-Atlantic integration in exchange

[4] Government Defence Integrity Index 2020: https://ti-defence.org/gdi/countries/georgia/

[5] Practice of Proactive Disclosure of Public Information in Georgian Public Institutions 2020: https://idfi.ge/ge/the%20practice%20of%20proactive%20disclosure%20of%20public%20information

[6] Freedom of the Net 2020: https://freedomhouse.org/country/georgia/freedom-net/2020?fbclid=IwAR0KTj8KF0k4jUt58Zv3Y6SEGoD9PyCFjBAoQpmSKdFYCpZFpMjVMrzYPqg

for better relations with Russia. According to the same survey, measurements of various propaganda messages show that about a quarter of respondents are particularly vulnerable against Russian propaganda and anti-Western messages.

Nevertheless, in recent years, the GDF have remained in the lead in terms of trust in institutions. According to the International Republican Institute (IRI) 2020 survey, 89% of respondents positively evaluate the activities of the GDF.[7]

The GDF are one of the main foundations of Georgia's national security system and are an important institution in Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration process, increasing and consolidating public support which strengthens the state. In order to maintain and strengthen high confidence, it is important to properly inform the population about the results of the GDF transformation processes, its interoperability with NATO, and the progress achieved in the process of Georgia's accession to NATO and EU.

Considering the challenges in the information environment, it is important to use strategic communications effectively and proactively to create the desired information environment to support national / departmental interests. This approach means defining the Ministry's communication / information policy, achieving the Ministry's communication goals successfully, including developing effective messages and proactive communication with key target audiences, which will significantly reduce the challenges in the information space. This will allow us to strengthen the position of the MoD as the primary source for the information relating to the defence and military field.

Narrative

The GDF is the primary state institution responsible for the protection of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which makes a significant contribution to the peaceful and democratic development of the country, the fulfillment of international obligations, and the country's Euro-Atlantic integration process.

The Defence Forces unites Georgian citizens, women and men with military uniforms, regardless of their religious, political, ethnic or other differences, whose dignified and faithful service, serves the interests of defending the homeland.

---

[7] Public Opinion Survey Residents of Georgia 2020: https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri_poll_presentation-georgia_june_2020_general-aug_4_corrections_1.pdf

In order to ensure security, integration in the North Atlantic Alliance and enhancement defence capabilities, are the most significant tasks for Georgia. Integration in the NATO is Georgian people's unwavering choice, which is enshrined in the Constitution of Georgia (Article 78),[8] the country's "Foreign Policy Strategy 2019-2022"[9] and is reflected in the "Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia on Foreign Policy of December 25, 2020." Georgia's historic choice is supported by the decision made in NATO Bucharest Summit of 2008, where all members of the Alliance agreed, that Georgia will become a member of NATO. Therefore, transformation process of the MoD and the GDF and the ongoing reforms are aimed at NATO integration and fulfillment of international commitments. NATO membership will strengthen Georgia's stability, resilience, and defence capabilities. It will create a safe environment for public welfare, ensure strengthening of democratic institutions in Georgia, the rule of law and the protection of human rights. Consequently, Georgia, as a NATO aspirant country, in preparation for Alliance membership, is successfully using all the practical mechanisms of cooperation with NATO, including the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) and the Refreshed Substantial NATO-Georgia Package.

At the same time, Georgia, as a security provider and a reliable and trustworthy partner, successfully continues the fulfillment of its international obligations under NATO, the EU and the UN, in ongoing international missions. Since 2015, Georgia participated in the NATO Response Force (NRF) with relevant units, which enhanced combat experience of the GDF and strengthened Georgia's role in the process of strengthening security of the Euro-Atlantic space.

Taking into account the existing security environment and the principle of Total Defence, in order to strengthen the defence capability and achieve a high level of readiness, the MoD and the GDF, with rational distribution of resources, seeks to establish an effective defence institution and optimal force structure, increase and modernize combat capabilities, improve command and control system, equip the GDF according to NATO standards, develop effective mobilization and reserve system, improve education and support system, create the best conditions for military servicemen and maintain the high public trust towards the institute.

Therefore, the Ministry's policy goal is to develop, with broad public involvement, highly combat-ready and motivated, well equipped and trained, NATO interoperable Defence

---

[8] Constitution of Georgia: https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?publication=36

[9] "Foreign Policy Strategy 2019-2022", https://bit.ly/36GEnhX

Forces, that successfully continue defending country's interests and after the NATO membership, will take valuable position in the ranks of the Allied Forces.

Communication Objectives

The implementation of the principles and objectives of the MoD communication policy derived from the MoD policy, threats and information environment analysis specified in this strategy, will strengthen Georgia's defence and security system. Consequently, it is critical to clearly define the Ministry's communication principles, goals, and themes.

To maintain the Ministry's authoritative and credible first source position on the Defence Forces and the defence sector in general, all types of communication, including crisis situations, must be based on the principles of ethics, objectivity, professionalism, transparency, and proactivity. For effective communication, it is important to continue strengthening the strategic communication capabilities of the MoD system and the GDF.

To form and strengthen the MoD's positive image, to increase public trust, and to strengthen Georgia's image as a reliable partner, it is crucial that the MoD's campaign-type communication on various initiatives and events is based on thorough target audience analysis and uses messages and appropriate communication channels tailored to the key audiences.

Strategic communications are especially important in light of today's hybrid challenges, where security can only be maintained through society cohesion and participation in the process of country's defence capacity building. These objectives require the most effective communication with both internal and external audiences, as well as their active participation in processes.

On the road of the GDF development, it is critical to effectively communicate educational and career opportunities in the military service and ministry system to the younger generation. Thus, in order to popularize the Defence Forces and the military profession, the agency needs to increase communication efforts in relevant audiences.

In order to tackle the modern information challenges, establishing proper communication with the media and opinion leaders and sharing the vision and perspective of the MoD with them is essential, especially concerning the challenges in the information space. Since journalists are regularly exposed to information influence activities in the course of their

professional duties, it is essential that they are prepared to meet those challenges. Therefore, continuing and further deepening activities and projects aimed at sharing experiences and improving cooperation with journalists is imperative for the MoD.

Responding to information influence activities from external and internal actors can be an overdue activity, because sensational and in many cases, belief-driven misinformation significantly impacts the target audiences. Targeted and proactive dissemination of objective information relating to the defence and security sphere on regular basis will limit the scope of effective dissemination of potential disinformation, and will mitigate the harmful effects of propaganda and disinformation.

Therefore, the public information space should be filled with reliable, objective and authoritative information on themes such as:

- Visions, goals and objectives of the GDF development;
- Ongoing reforms in the agency and the process of transformation of the GDF;
- Social programs;
- Procurement, production and modernization of weapons and equipment;
- The importance of NATO and the EU integration, and the MoD's role in these processes;
- The importance of international missions, Georgia's participation, and the benefits received;
- Modern security challenges: hybrid warfare, cyber security, terrorism.

Furthermore, work on the development and implementation of modern capacities for monitoring and analysis of the information environment should be strengthened and intensified. Increased awareness of the information environment will enable us to foresee the weaknesses adversary might try to exploit and prevent such activities by the coordinated use of all communication resources of the MoD.

Based on the aforementioned, the Ministry's Strategic Communications Objective is to achieve the following communication goals:

- Further strengthening of public trust in the GDF as the main guarantor of the protection of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia;
- Promote the GDF as one of the leading and successful institutions in the process of Georgia's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures;

- Demonstrating Georgia's successful cooperation and partnership with NATO, the EU, the United States, and other partner countries;
- Further strengthen the Ministry's credibility and authority as a primary source in the defence and security field;
- Highlighting the educational opportunities in the MoD system;
- Demonstrating the integration process of modern and NATO-compatible equipment, military technology and weaponry in the Defence Forces and displaying their advantages;
- Exhibiting the progress made on the path to enhancing interoperability with NATO, strengthening the deterrence effect of the GDF, and Georgia's membership in the Alliance;
- Further emphasizing the importance of domestic and international exercises and trainings in increasing the combat readiness of the Defence Forces;
- Promote the ongoing and planned transformation process in the GDF, the adoption of modern standards, the welfare programs for the military and their families, the process of infrastructure and logistical modernization, the development of the Georgian military industry;

Strategy implementation and monitoring

The goals outlined in the strategy will be achieved through the relevant annual action plan, which will be developed by the Department of Strategic Communications and Public Relations of the MoD. Accordingly, the above-mentioned department, in cooperation with other structural units of the agency, will assure the implementation and coordination of the action plan.

The strategy's action plan and the events outlined in it will be implemented with the Ministry's relevant budgetary funding, as well as, in some cases, inter-agency and international cooperation formats.

The effectiveness and reach of individual campaign activities tailored to the respective target audiences will be regularly measured and evaluated to determine the progress of the activities defined in the action plan. It is critical to use quantitative and qualitative methods and to analyze various statistical data during this process. Based on the material, the progress of the tasks defined by the strategy will be analyzed each year, and recommendations will be developed, which will be considered in the planning process of the next action plan.