



PROJECT MUGA

COUNTERING INFORMATION THREATS IN MOLDOVA,
UKRAINE, GEORGIA AND ARMENIA

Information environment research:

ARMENIA

INFO OPS
POLSKA



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The MUGA Project

Study of the information environment: ARMENIA

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**Ministerstwo
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1. Introduction

In 2018, on the wave of mass protests against growing authoritarianism and ubiquitous corruption, Nikol Pashinyan and his party Civic Contract came to power. This meant the beginning of democratic reforms and the gradual rapprochement of Armenia to the West. However, this also caused a reaction from Russia, striving to maintain Armenia in its sphere of influence and to prevent its emancipation. Russia uses the threat posed to Armenia by Azerbaijan, as well as the fact of the lack of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Türkiye. For years, this situation made Armenia a hostage of Russia. However, Armenia under Pashinyan's rule made an attempt to break free from this state of affairs, to which Russia responds with increasingly aggressive actions aimed at destabilizing the situation in Armenia.

After dramatic changes in Georgia, Armenia currently remains the only fully democratic country in the South Caucasus, which is at the same time aware of its centuries-old civilizational ties with Europe. Reports from various organizations indicate that Armenia constitutes an island of freedom of speech, surrounded by more or less authoritarian regimes. Freedom in Armenia also creates hope for reversing the negative course towards pro-Russian authoritarianism chosen by neighboring Georgia. On the other hand, the example of Georgia shows that the process of democratization and the pursuit of emancipation from Russian influence are not irreversible. In the West, in particular in the European Union, rests therefore a huge responsibility to support Armenia's pro-European and democratic course. This is a moral imperative and a test of the EU's credibility in relation to the principles and values it declares.

Armenians are at the same time an enormously traumatized nation, which favors hostile cognitive influence from Russia, exploiting the emotions of Armenians, such as in particular the sense of grievance, anger, and fear, to polarize society, undermine trust in democratic institutions, and destabilize both the internal situation and prevent the normalization of relations with neighbors. The main factors determining this trauma are the Armenian genocide committed by the Ottoman Empire in 1915, as well as the destruction of Armenia's cultural heritage in the territories incorporated into Türkiye and Azerbaijan in the 20th century. This generates psychological obstacles in Armenia's efforts to normalize relations with Türkiye and

Azerbaijan, especially since in recent years fresh wounds have been added: the lost 44-day war in 2020 and the loss of Artsakh, combined with the exodus of its inhabitants, in 2023. Russia's relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan also do not favor these efforts towards normalization, as Russia tries to fuel problems between these countries and Armenia. Both Russia and the current authorities of Armenia, as well as the pro-European opposition in that country, know that the elimination of external threats to the territorial integrity and inviolability of Armenia's borders will open the way for its emancipation, and then integration with the EU. Russia does not want to allow this at all costs.

Dramatic events in the history of independent Armenia (after the collapse of the USSR) are not only the war with Azerbaijan over Artsakh. In 1998, the first president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosian, was forced to resign, and his place was taken by the pro-Russian leader of the 'Karabakh clan,' Robert Kocharyan, who caused Armenia to plunge into corruption and economic crisis. In 1999, the then Prime Minister of Armenia, Vazgen Sargsyan, was murdered in a shooting in the parliament, and many traces indicate that Russia was involved in this assassination. The murdered prime minister had become inconvenient because he planned to strike at the gray economic zone, and his death was also supposed to block progress in the peace process with Azerbaijan conducted under the auspices of the OSCE.

This example shows that Russia is capable of resorting to all means to maintain its influence in Armenia and block its turn towards Europe. A lot indicates that Azerbaijan's attack on Artsakh in 2020 was agreed with Russia, which wanted in this way to cause the fall of Pashinyan or to induce him to greater submissiveness. However, a significant portion of Armenians noticed Russia's double game, and since then anti-Russian and pro-Western sentiments have begun to grow. This prompted Pashinyan to even greater assertiveness, and in July 2023 the chairman of the Armenian parliament, Alen Simonyan, during his visit to Poland, unequivocally stated that Armenia's goal is membership in the European Union. At the same time, Armenia began the process of withdrawing from the Russia-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization, reducing Russia's military presence in Armenia, and increasing security cooperation with France and the USA as well as other Western countries.

This, of course, caused an intensification of Russia's activity in the field of cognitive influence and disinformation. Russia led to mass protests, which were stimulated by Russian propagandists of Armenian origin such as the head of Russia Today, Margarita Simonyan. The goal was to blame Pashinyan for Armenia's defeats in the military confrontation with Azerbaijan and to overthrow him as a result of riots or a military coup. This goal has not yet been achieved, but Russia does not cease to make efforts to bring it about. It also wants to block efforts toward normalization with Azerbaijan and Türkiye, as it wants to manage this conflict and keep Armenia as a hostage.

A key area vulnerable to Russian influence is the information environment, the analysis of which is the subject of this report. The conclusions and recommendations presented in the report aim to support decision-makers, civil society organizations, and international partners in building Armenia's resilience to Russia's hybrid actions, which strike at Armenia's sovereignty and its democracy. They also aim to show the European Union how important its support for Armenia is and for its efforts to exit Russia's sphere of influence and integrate with the European Union.

2. Information environment – a characteristic

In Armenia there is great freedom regarding freedom of speech and the media market (in the Reporters Without Borders ranking it is at a high 43rd place in media freedom), which also has its negative side, i.e., greater susceptibility to disinformation and vulnerability to cognitive actions. The media landscape reflects political divisions in society, and therefore alongside the anti-Russian narrative, one can encounter a pro-Russian and anti-Western narrative. However, the media are quite independent and are not directly linked to particular political groups. Most electronic media have, in addition to the Armenian language version, also a Russian one. Furthermore, the information environment is also influenced (including as a source of disinformation) by Russian and Azerbaijani media, and to a lesser degree Turkish, Iranian, and Israeli media. In the past, certain blocks on Azerbaijani media were introduced;

however, currently there are none, whereas there are certain restrictions related to Russian propaganda (for example, concerning Solovyov's programs on RTR Planeta).

a) Traditional media

i. State-owned media

Armenia 1 TV - public television, several channels, including a strictly informational one. Also, a website portal in four languages: Armenian, Azerbaijani, Russian, and English. Rich news service on the site; presence on social media: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Telegram. Live online streaming.

<https://www.1lurer.am/>

Public Radio – also a website in 12 languages: Armenian, Kurdish-Kurmanji, Yazidi, Farsi, Arabic, Georgian, Greek, English, Russian, Assyrian, Azerbaijani, Turkish. Also broadcasting live online. Presence on social media including X, Facebook (low interactions).

<https://hy.armradio.am/>

Armenpress – the official news agency of Armenia. Information in Armenian, English and Russian, also a website in 10 languages: Armenian, Russian, English, French, Turkish, Spanish, Farsi and Chinese. Also has a fact-checking subsection, but weak. Presence on social media including X – high activity, but low interactions.

<https://armenpress.am/>

ii. Private media

TELEVISION

TV Shant – also a portal in Armenian; presence on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Telegram. Objective news-style messaging. On the website there are many interviews with various experts mainly concerning the situation in the Caucasus and in Armenia itself.
<https://www.shantnews.am/>

Azatutyun – TV, radio and portal in Armenian, Russian and English (Armenian part of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty). Online broadcast (both radio and television). Presence on social media (including 45 000 followers on X). The message focuses on Armenia, patriotic, rather supportive of the current Pashinyan government's actions. Many news items regarding the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Pro-Western, critical of Russia's and Iran's actions. Azatutyun, as part of Radio Free Europe, is financed by the US Congress through the federal agency USAGM (United States Agency for Global Media). The budget in 2023 was 787 000 dollars, in 2024 about 900 000 dollars, and for 2025 a funding request of 1.1 million dollars has been submitted to Congress. It is the second largest budget in the Eurasian region.
<https://www.azatutyun.am>

H2 – private satellite television broadcasting from the USA. It is not a news channel but a general one and does not have a news service on its website.
<https://www.tv.am/am>

Armenia TV – private television, not an informational TV, but has news and public affairs programs. Belongs to Panarmenian Media. The main shareholder is Artur Janibekyan – an Armenian businessman doing business mainly in Russia, having ties with Gazprom-Media. The report “Armenia: Profile of Media Ownership and Potential Foreign Influence Channels” (<http://docs.aiddata.org/reports/media-resilience/arm/Armenia-Profile-of-Media-Ownership-and-Potential-Foreign-Influence-Channels.pdf>) indicates that the TV officially belongs to Robert Hovhannisyan, but he is only an intermediary and the real beneficiary is said to be Janibekyan.
<https://armeniatv.am>

Kentron TV - private television (it is not strictly a news TV, but has news and public affairs programs, once cooperated with RFE/RL). Negatively inclined towards Pashinyan. According to the AID DATA report, the television is in fact controlled by Gogik Tsarukyan's party from the pro-Russian and Eurosceptic PAP party.

<https://www.kentron.tv/>

Yerkir Media - connected with the Dashnak party. Very active on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzcoHjOzAcTRbHAgzT7QXMw>). Also has an active Telegram channel (t.me/s/yerkir123). Presence on Facebook (facebook.com/YerkirWebsite) is practically non-existent. Often presents a pro-Russian narrative, critical of Pashinyan.

A-TV – private, not a news TV but has news and public affairs programs. Was associated with PanArmenian Media Holding (web.archive.org/web/20171021111858/http://armtoday.info/default.asp?Lang=Ru&NewsID=58937&SectionID=1&RegionID=0&Date=01&2F23&2F2012&PagePosition=3). The owner is David Avetisyan. This television cooperates with the Russian federal channel TNT, which can be justified by the fact that Janibekyan from Armenia TV, who also did business with Russia, was connected to this channel. Armenia TV was also part of the PanArmenian conglomerate. Information from 2019 indicates that PanArmenian Media Group was dissolved – the majority stake in ATV belongs to Avetisyan and 49% to Panarm Inc (arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=39033&lang=3). As a result of the same division, Janibekyan took over 100% of shares in Armenia TV.

<https://atv.am>

21TV – this is a music channel. According to information from SPYUR, the director is Armen Sargsyan (<http://spyur.am/en/companies/21-tv-tv-company/3741/>). The founders are said to be Naira Aghababyan and Ashot Aghababyan (http://media.am/en/media_block). The latter is a politician of the Armenian Republican Party (<http://hetq.am/en/article/45873>).

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsjjpCGaUrG68evSB2lpILg>

5TV – associated with Robert Kocharyan. According to information provided on the website, the TV channel was established based on Ararat TV and belongs to the company Shark LLC. The channel's message is opposition, focused on criticism of the Pashinyan government. The owner is Armen Tavadyan, associated with former president Kocharyan. The channel's director is Harutyun Harutyunyan, deputy Armen Andreasyan and news chief Artak Herikyan. Harutyunyan appeared at a Sputnik conference on December 27, 2019 (<http://photolure.am/photoset/186686>). In an article from the same day, he complains that the government is biased against channel 5 (<http://news.am/eng/news/552051.html>). In a 2021 interview Harutyunyan stated that his TV channel is not comfortable for the Armenian government (<http://en.168.am/2021/08/04/42651.html>).

<https://www.5tv.am>

Free News TV - the station was founded by Edgar Awagian and Mariam Margaryan, wife of the parliament chairman Alen Simonyan, who has good relations with Awagian; he works there. This means that this television station has a pro-government and pro-European orientation.

<https://freenews.am/>

(<https://www.facebook.com/freenews.am/>;

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6VGQAulthbhJmQEW5bIDGg>)

Nor Hayastan TV - the founder of the television station is Varduhi Yerosyan – a journalist associated among others with news.am.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorHayastanTV>

Horizon TV - broadcasting from California, including online on the internet. No news portal.

<https://horizonarmeniantv.com>

PanArmenian - broadcasting from the USA, founded by Panarmenian Media Group. According to the status from 2019, the owner of the station is David Avetisyan.

<https://www.panarmenian.tv/>

Other stations broadcasting from the USA:

Amga - <https://amga.tv/>, **ARTN** - <https://www.artn.tv/en>, **USArmenia TV**
- https://www.youtube.com/@usarmenia_tv

RADIO

Radio Aurora - in addition to the main channel there is an informational channel Aurora News and the website - <https://auroranews.am/> as well as video podcasts on Facebook. Live online broadcast. The director is Michael Janpoladyan. The message appears to be generally neutral.
<https://www.radioaurora.am/am/home>

Radio Azatutyan - live broadcast, affiliation same as television; the Armenian part of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Radio Van - Russian-language, present on social media including X, but with small reach. The message appears to be quite pro-Western. It often points out poor treatment of journalists by Russia and prosecution against them for promoting terrorism, etc. The director since 1998 is Shushanik Arevshatyan – born in Odessa, worked in Russia in the 1990s and was the founder of Russian Radio Yerevan. The program director is Gor Grigoryan aka Egor Glumov, who also works at TV Shant.

<https://radiovan.fm/>

Radio Jan - founded in 2012. The chief editor is Anush Nikoghosyan. Instagram: @radio_jan_90.7_official - 2980 followers, regularly posts. Facebook: facebook.com/Radio-JAN-332536306808108/ - 11 000 followers, regularly posts, similar content as on Instagram - podcasts from studio).

<https://radiojan.am>

Radio 105,5 FM - mentions on its website that it is the oldest commercial radio in Armenia, established in 1994. It broadcasts in Yerevan and the surroundings. Its current director is Gurgen Israyelyan. It is identical to Radio Hay. The owner of both stations is Anahit Tarkhanian, wife of the presidential candidate in 2013 Andrias Ghukasyan, who was in conflict with former president Serzh Sargsyan. Facebook: facebook.com/staywiththebest/ - 1400 followers, posts regularly. Instagram: @fm105.5yerevan - 9160 followers, posts regularly.

<https://1055.am>

Radio 106,5 FM - Lratvakan - “Impuls” / “News Radio”/ earlier “Impuls-Majak”. The founder of the station, established in 1997, was Koryun Khumaryan. In April 2011 Khumaryan, representing Radio 106.5 FM, signed a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese China Radio International. On its air appear pro-Russian experts such as Hayk Khalatyan, political scientist, editor of the Russian-language Alpha New. Facebook: facebook.com/LratvakanRadio - 36 000 followers, posts regularly. Instagram: @armeniannewsradio - 532 followers, posts regularly, short videos with selected interviews. Telegram: t.me/s/lratvakanam - 292 subscribers, posts regularly. YouTube: youtube.com/@LratvakanRadio - 66 100 subscribers, 9 400 materials, posts regularly.

<https://lratvakan.am>

Other stations: **Radio Yerevan, 1FM, Kiss FM, Pop FM, Radio Jazz 107 FM, Radio Marshall, To.sport FM96.3, Zark FM.**

PRESS (the most important titles)

Aravot <https://aravot.am> - daily newspaper, as well as a website in Armenian, Russian and English. Opposed to Pashinyan and negatively disposed toward Armenia's pro-Western course; once considered liberal but is associated with Serzh Sargsyan.

Hraparak <https://hraparak.am> - newspaper and portal, intensely criticizes Pashinyan, very active on Facebook with 250 000 followers but low interactions; often features an anti-Western and pro-Russian narrative.

Haykakan Zhamanak (Armenian Times) <https://armtimes.com> - daily newspaper (print edition), also has a website in Armenian and Russian. Active on Facebook with 150 000 followers, but low interactions. In the footer of the website, it is written that HZ was reopened thanks to the efforts of Nikol Pashinyan. He was editor-in-chief until March 1, 2008, when he was imprisoned, following protests related to Sargsyan's presidential election. Previously, Pashinyan was a journalist at Oragir, which was replaced by HZ. The current editor-in-chief is Anna Hakobyan – Pashinyan's wife.

Հայաստանի Ձայնը (Golos Armenii, The Voice of Armenia) <https://golosarmenii.am> – Russian-language daily newspaper, also a website in Armenian and Russian. Pro-Russian. They also publish articles from Sputnik Armenia. Activity on Facebook, but only 15 000 followers. Also on VKontakte. Editor-in-chief – Flora Nakhshkaryan (http://media.am/en/media_block). The newspaper is the successor of the newspaper 'Komunista' (<http://media.am/en/viewpoint/2016/03/19/6142/>).

Azg (The Nation) <https://azg.am> – an influential weekly (formerly a daily) opinion newspaper, also a website in Armenian. Activity on X and Facebook, but with a small number of followers. It was persecuted by Ter-Petrosyan and later supported Kocharyan. Currently, in the footer of the website, there is information that Azg is associated with the Tekeyan Foundation (tekeyancentre.am), originally founded in Lebanon, whose mission is to care for Armenian culture and the Armenian diaspora. One article from azg.am dated 16.11.2022 mentions that Azg is financed by them. An article from media.am

(<http://media.am/en/viewpoint/2016/02/19/5875>) mentions that Armen Abrahamyan holds the majority of the shares.

168 Zham <https://168.am> - a weekly and an informational website in Armenian, Russian and English. Presence on social media (X – weak, Facebook – 188 000 followers, several posts daily). Anti-Western orientation, close to Serzh Sargsyan, hostile to Pashinyan. Editor-in-chief – Satik Seyranyan (ypc.am/people/seyranyan-satik/). She has worked in many media outlets – in Avarot, Haykakan Zhamanak. Since 2017 she has been the chairwoman of the Armenian Journalists' Union. In interviews, she has accused the USA of being involved in attacks on Armenian media. There is a lot of material attacking the West, however, there are also critical materials toward Russia - e.g. <https://168.am/2024/12/12/2139635.html> ("Since the beginning of the large-scale invasion in 2022, Russian troops have killed 50 priests and destroyed nearly 700 churches in Ukraine" said President Zelensky in an interview for CBN).

Iravunk <https://iravunk.com/> - a weekly and an informational-publicistic website in Armenian and Russian. Pro-Russian, present among others on Facebook. The message is decidedly pro-Russian, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine. Only Ukrainian defeats and Russian successes are shown. Regular reposting of content from Russian Z-milbloggers on Telegram is daily routine. The whole aims to show Russia as a decisive state confidently pursuing “its own” and the Ukrainian army and all Ukraine as dependent on the mercy and displeasure of the West, doomed to ruthless defeat. According to media.am, Iravunk was founded by CRU – Constitutional Rights Union – a pro-Russian, Eurosceptic, conservative party (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_Rights_Union).

Yerevan Magazine <https://evnmag.com/> - monthly and portal, character more social-cultural than politico-informational.

Droshak is published as a monthly. The latest issue dates from September 2024 (arfd.am/droshak). The medium is related to ARF-D (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) – it is its official newspaper.

Other: **Ankakh, Yeter, Zhoghovurd (opposition to Pashinyan), Zartonik**

THE MOST IMPORTANT INTERNET PORTALS

Armenia Today <https://armeniatoday.news/> - Russian, Armenian. The founder and key editor of the service is journalist Argishti Kiviryan, brutally beaten in 2009. (<http://ypc.am/armenian-media/news-agencies-and-online-media/>). He is rather an opponent of Pashinyan, but the portal is not pro-Russian.

PanARMENIAN.Net <https://panarmenian.net/> - Russian, Armenian and English. Belongs to Panarmenian Media. On Facebook 232 000 followers and quite high activity, but moderate interactions. No presence on other social media. CEO and co-founder is Armen Azaryan ([am.linkedin.com/in/azaryan](https://www.linkedin.com/in/azaryan)) and photographer Vahan Stepanyan, who founded the PAN photographic agency. No suspicious content, dry news, since roughly 2020 no long written forms like articles. The site is not very professionally managed.

Hetq Online <https://hetq.am> - a portal in Armenian, Russian and English. Engaged in investigative journalism and publishes analytical materials. Active on social media, including X - 17 000 followers, Facebook - 248 000 followers. Manager - Christine Barseghyan, Editor-in-chief - Edik Baghdasaryan, who was severely beaten in 2008; in 2006 he was threatened by associates of Gagik Tsarukyan. It is definitely not pro-Russian. The publisher of Hetq is the non-governmental organization 'Investigative Journalists', which belongs to the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) as well as to the Global Investigative Journalism Network and the Association of European Journalists. This organization has also received recognition from the Yerevan office of USAID and Transparency International. In 2019, 'Hetq' founded the investigative and multimedia journalism school Hetq Media Factory.

Tert.am <https://tert.am/am> - in Armenian, Russian, English. One of the leading portals, broad topics from Armenia and the world. The editor-in-chief is Arkady Grigoryan, the head of news at the ATV channel, associated with the now-defunct Panarmenian Media Group. On Tert.am, relatively few news items are published 1-2 daily, sometimes one every two days.

News.am <https://news.am/arm/> - a large news portal in Armenian, English, and Russian. High activity on social media: 869 000 followers - Facebook, 3 500 - X, also on Telegram). A very professionally run portal with a large amount of news from various sources e.g. Politico. Diverse topics and a high frequency of posting. Editor-in-chief - Armenika Kiviryan, who worked at the Russian REGNUM in 2003-2004 (ypc.am/people/kiviryan-armenika).

Factor TV <https://factor.am/> (<https://www.facebook.com/factor.am/>, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UckI5KAJDh9S-BQFc6QzSUiA>) - founder Arevik Sahakyan. The service was founded by the non-governmental organization Factor Information Center (<https://directory.projectoasis-europe.com/factor/>). The chief editor is Vanik Hakobyan. In October 2022, Factor.am received an official letter from the Russian media supervisory body Roskomnadzor, demanding the removal of a publication regarding events in Bucha, which Russia recognized as disinformation. Factor.am refused to remove the article, emphasizing editorial independence and the right to inform about facts. Factor.am was mentioned in the 2024 "Reporters Without Borders" report, alongside Civilnet.am, hetq.am, and Azatutyun.am, as an example of independent portals that function as "watchdogs" and are key to democracy in Armenia.

1in.am <https://www.1in.am/> (<https://www.facebook.com/1in.am>, <https://t.me/arajinTV>) - previously associated with 'Zhamanak' Armenian-American Political Daily, an Armenian-American political daily newspaper, founded in 1908 by Shavarshe Misakian - an Armenian intellectual and activist. In 2014 there was a legal dispute between Kocharyan and the founders of the 1in.am portal and the 'Zhamanak' newspaper. Kocharyan filed a lawsuit against these media outlets. Both media were also in conflict with influential people from the Sargsyan team, for example, former NSS director Artur Vanetsyan. Currently, the editor

is Astghik Sapeyan, previously the spokesperson for the now former Minister of Economy Vahan Kerobyan (Pashinyan's team). This indicates an anti-Russian and pro-government orientation.

ArmLur.am <https://armlur.am/> (<https://www.facebook.com/armlur.am/>, <https://x.com/armlurnews>) - Armenian news portal launched on March 1, 2012, being part of the media group of the newspaper 'Zhoghovurd'. The editor-in-chief of the newspaper is Knar Manukyan and of the portal is Sona Grigoryan. It presents itself as independent, nevertheless it is critical of the Pashinyan government, and in December 2022 Knar Manukyan was deprived of accreditation in the parliament after a confrontation with MP Artur Hovhannisian. The portal sympathizes with Bagrat Galstanyan.

Iravaban.net <https://iravaban.net/> (<https://www.facebook.com/Iravabannet/>, <https://www.youtube.com/@iravabannet>, <https://iravaban.net/en/category/videos>) - founded in 2012 and is operated by the Armenian Lawyers Association (<https://armla.am/en/>, [Iravaban.net](https://iravaban.net)), within its activities, implements a project funded by the European Union aimed at promoting the fight against corruption in Armenia. In 2019, the fact-checking portal fip.am accused Iravaban of manipulations in criticism of the Pashinyan government. Meanwhile, in an article published on December 2, 2021, on the media.am portal, the results of a study conducted by the Research Center "Region" were presented, according to which Iravaban is one of the most transparent media in Armenia (alongside Aravot and Hetq).

Lurer.com <https://lurer.com/> (<https://www.facebook.com/lurercom>) - Nelly Avetisyan, editor-in-chief of Lurer.com. Established in 2012. International Media Holding LLC – the owner of the portal. The owner of International Media Holding is Arman Vardanyan, who is simultaneously the chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Yerevan branch of the Russian University of Economics named after G.V. Plekhanov, as well as the head of the pro-Russian National Movement 'Unity.' The orientation is decidedly pro-Russian.

Shabat.am <https://shabat.news/> (facebook.com/shabatarm/ - 195 000 followers; youtube.com/@ShabatamNews - 50 500 subscribers, 3 400 materials; Instagram:

@shabat.am - 5114 followers, 921 posts, irregular posting; x.com/@am_shabat - 253 followers, no posts since 2021). People associated with the portal are Mariam Melqumyan (since November 2021 press secretary of the Ministry of Justice); former Ombudsman of Armenia and former Minister of Justice in Pashinyan's government - Karen Andreasyan, Astghik Vardanyan. Mainly reposts information from other media.

Shamshyan.com <https://shamshyan.com/hy> (facebook.com/shamshyan.news/ - 49 000 followers; YouTube: youtube.com/@shamshyan_com – 100 000 followers, 6 300 materials, publishes regularly; Telegram: t.me/s/shamshyan_com – 15 400 subscribers; Tik-Tok: tiktok.com/@shamshyan.com – 37 300 subscribers; Instagram: @shamshyan.news – 7 086 followers; X: x.com/shamshyan.com – 2 100 followers, profile inactive since 2019) - Shamshyan.com similarly to Shabat.am, reposts information (mainly leads/summaries) from other media, particularly a lot from Past.am – mostly news critical of the Pashinyan government. Accusations of “destroying Armenia” or “being at the head of a corruption scheme” are everyday occurrences.

301 News <https://www.301.am/> - Armenian and English. Very active on X – 49 000, also present on Facebook – 6 000 followers, YouTube and Instagram. Records podcasts. The message is mostly focused on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

MAMUL <https://www.301.am/> - a news agency; website in Armenian, English, Russian, Turkish. Containing numerous pieces of information from social media as well as from traditional media. On X – 4 500 followers, on Facebook – 536 000, also active on other social media. It is part of the 'Social Media Internet Holding' (facebook.com/social.media.holding), whose owner is Sevak Melikyan. It publishes many materials sharply attacking Pashinyan, but also includes materials critical of Russia.

Arminfo <https://arminfo.info/> - 3 language versions: Armenian, Russian and English. Presence on Facebook and Telegram. Opposition to Pashinyan and connections indicating pro-Russian stance. Present on social media but low activity. Editor-in-chief – Emmanuil Mkrtchyan.

Statements from Kocharyan are present, as well as experts calling the Pashinyan government a 'regime in the service of the West'.

Arka.am <https://arka.am/> - 3 language versions: Armenian, Russian and English. Very good news service. Presence on Facebook and Telegram. Fairly balanced messaging, many news items from the West but also from Russia. Mainly concerning the Armenian-Azerbaijani issue. Editor-in-chief - Konstantin Petrosov, born in Baku, who collaborated in the 1990s with the SNARK agency.

Radar Armenia <https://radar.am/> - 3 language versions: Armenian, Russian and English. A very good news service. Presence on social media. Belongs to the company Radar ARM, which was founded by Serzh Varag Siseryan, Harutyun Azgldyan and Hayk Grigoryan. Serzh Varag Siseryan was the chief of staff of Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan, currently the mayor of Yerevan. The affiliation is rather pro-government.

Aysor.am <https://www.aysor.am/am> - news portal in 3 language versions: Armenian, Russian and English. Rather neutral, possibly pro-Western. Mainly Armenian topics. Editor-in-chief - Tamara Avanesova.

CivilNet <http://civilnet.am/> - 4 language versions: Armenian, English, Russian and French. Active on Facebook, X, Telegram, YouTube, and Instagram. Editor-in-chief - historian Karen Harutyunyan, his articles strongly criticize Pashinyan, suggesting that he was willing to give Karabakh to the Azeris (however, it is not pro-Russian). The current director is Abraham "Apo" Boghinian, connected with the Armenian diaspora in the USA. The site cooperates with the Civilitas Foundation (civilitasfoundation.org), which aims to promote civil society and democratic values. According to information on the homepage, partners of the magazine include the US Embassy in Armenia, the European Union, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Norway and Switzerland. They also have their own fact-checking service, cooperating with Meta and IFCN: civilnet.am/en/civilnetcheck.

Tsayg.am <https://tsayg.am/> - 3 language versions: Armenian, Russian and English. Active on social media. Rather pro-Western. Founded by Artur Ghandilyan and Artur Yezekyan, who also founded Shant TV (ypc.am/people/yezekyan-artur). The Armenian parliament deputy Nazeli Baghdasaryan from Civil Contract cooperated with Tsyag. She is currently Pashinyan's press secretary. The portal's message focuses mainly on the Caucasus region with a small admixture of EU affairs. Rather favorable to Pashinyan.

JAM News <https://jam-news.net/> - a portal broadcasting news from all over the Caucasus in Armenian, Georgian, Azerbaijani, English and Russian. Professional and objective.

AntiFake.am <https://antifake.am/> (<https://www.youtube.com/@AntiFakeam> - 42 000 subscribers) - theoretically an initiative combating fakes, but in practice focuses on criticism of Pashinyan and the ruling team, as well as criticism of Armenia's pro-Western course. The site was registered on a server in St. Petersburg, currently no data on this (hidden behind Cloudflare), although there is no clear data indicating ties to Russia, analyses suggest it is false fact-checking. Furthermore, it spread anti-vaccine narratives and questioned the credibility of the Covid pandemic; the site is also connected with the "Adekvad Brotherhood" (<https://adekvad.am/>), which is radically anti-government, pro-Russian and accused of far-right extremism (anti-liberal, anti-Western narrative, e.g. The West is Soros and demoralization/LGBT and Pashinyan is backed by Soros). AntiFake avoids topics related to Russia, which may be a tactic to mask their links to Russia (as indicated by connections with Adekvad – for more details see: <https://medium.com/dfrlab/armenia-assailed-by-deceptive-fact-checking-groups-part-2-the-coordination-2276bb6e3b2e>). The editor-in-chief is Astghik Matevosyan - a lawyer working in the NGO "Civil Consciousness," founded by Narek Samsonyan (facebook.com/samsonyan.narek), who clashed with Pashinyan and was arrested, sparking outrage in journalistic circles. He is said to have founded AntiFake (orer.eu/2024/04/03/we-draw-the-attention-of-international-organizations-to-the-encroachments-of-the-authorities-on-the-right-to-free-press-free-speech-free-expression-of-opinion-uj). Samsonyan also founded a political party named "My Strong Community", which supported Serzh Sargsyan's list "I Have Honor" in the 2021 elections.

Novosti Armeni <https://newsarmenia.am> (<https://x.com/armnews> - 2 500 followers). Armenian and Russian languages. Clearly pro-Russian. Editor-in-chief - Galina Davidyan. On her profile page at the Yerevan Press Club (ypc.am/people/davidyan-galina) there is a link to the domain newsarmenia.ru, strikingly similar to newsarmenia.am. That domain redirects to the Armenian Sputnik. The same is visible on another profile (areg.am/en/novosti_armenia). In a 2015 interview for ARKA news, she openly admits that Novosti Armenia was created in partnership with RIA Novosti and is Russian soft power, and according to her, Armenia will be the only true ally of Russia in the region.

A1plus.am <https://a1plus.am/hy> (<https://x.com/a1plusnews> - 10 000 followers). A news portal in Armenian, Russian and English. A1+ is considered a fairly important medium. Supportive of Kocharyan in conflict with him. The current message of A1+ differs depending on the language - news in Armenian and Russian mainly concern internal affairs and the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, while in English they mainly concern European matters. Practically no information about Ukraine. The message is rather neutral, but sometimes critical of Pashinyan.

Mediamax.am <https://mediamax.am/am/> (<https://x.com/MediamaxNews> - 4 800 followers). Website in Armenian, Russian and English. Criticizes Russia and attacks Pashinyan, suggesting that he is pro-Russian. Many analytical pieces on the site (authors include Sergei Melkonian and Harut Sassounyan). Editor-in-chief: Ara Tadevosyan.

Epress.am <http://epress.am/> - critical of Russia, rather left-wing (a lot about human rights, also about LGBT). Website in Armenian, Russian and English. Presence on social media, but without significant activity. Editor-in-chief is Yuri Manvelyan, who criticizes Kocharyan and Sargsyan.

24news.am <https://24news.am/> - news service. Website in Armenian, Russian and English. Presence on social media, but without significant activity. Editor-in-chief - Narek Galstyan

(miatsir.net/services/24news.am). He is also a correspondent for TASS in Armenia, supports Bishop Galstanyan. Is against Pashinyan, with a pro-Russian and anti-NATO narrative.

Panorama.am <https://www.panorama.am/am>,

(<https://www.facebook.com/PanoramaAM/> with 30 000 likes and 44 000 followers).

Registered by Lala Ter-Ghazaryan, editor-in-chief - Anaid Voskanjan. The portal was founded by circles close to R. Kocharyan.

Nagorno Karabakh Observer <https://nkobserver.com/> - portal dedicated to information related to Karabakh (<https://x.com/NKObserver> – 20 000 followers).

Fact Investigation Platform <https://fip.am/> (facebook.com/fiparmenia – 25 000 followers, posts regularly; youtube.com/@FIPFactInvestigationPlatform – 2 260 subscribers, 600 materials, posts fairly regularly; t.me/s/fiparmenia – 1 300 subscribers, posts fairly regularly; x.com/@FIPArmenia - 526 followers; @fiparmenia - 236 followers, posts regularly) – a portal dealing with the exposure of disinformation both: at the national and international level. It is run by the organization Union of Informed Citizens (UIC), working to increase civic awareness and transparency in the public sphere. Very high credibility and connections with institutions such as the Democracy Development Foundation, the US Embassy in Armenia, the National Endowment for Democracy, Internews, the French Embassy in Armenia. FIP has a clearly described transparent fact-checking methodology: fip.am/methodology. They mention that they monitor pro-Russian and Russian media (listing Sputnik Armenia, Kommersant, Regnum and RIA Novosti). The editor-in-chief since May 2024 is Hasmik Hambardzumyan.

Media.am <https://media.am/hy/> - a portal in Armenian and English dealing with the media environment in Armenia.

Aliq Meid <https://www.aliqmedia.am/> - a news-analytical portal considered to be objective.

Ampop.am <https://ampop.am/> - includes articles on socio-economic and political situations, health, education, and human rights.

Mediapoint.am <https://mediapoint.am/> - issues related to Goris and Artsakh, not very newsy, more social.

Other:

Pastinfo.am (attacks Pashinyan, rather pro-Russian; languages: Russian and Armenian), **Past.am** (attacks Pashinyan, rather pro-Russian, languages: Russian and Armenian), **Rusarminfo** (sharp Russian propaganda; the portal is created in Moscow and has Armenian and Russian versions); **Infocom.am**, **Medialab.am** (sharply attacks Pashinyan), **Oragir.News**, **Irates.am** (strongly pro-Russian narrative), **Irakanum.am**, **LIVEnews.am** (pro-Russian and sharply attacking Pashinyan), **Yerevan.today**, **Armday.am**, **Newday.am**, **Hayastan.news**, **MediaHub.am**, **Orer.eu** (the website of the magazine Orer published in Prague, pro-European orientation), **Infoport.am**, **Ararat News**, **Orbeli.am**, **Asekose.am**, **Politik.am**, **Generalnews.am**, **MediaMall.am**, **NewsPress.am**, **Alphanews.am**, **Free Political Prisoners** (freearmenianprisoners.com) - a portal dedicated to the release of politicians from Artsakh imprisoned by Azerbaijan, especially Ruben Vardanyan, rather pro-Russian orientation.

iii. Linked to specific groups (political, religious, ethnic)

Shoghakat TV <https://shoghakat.am/> - television belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church, broadcasting mainly religious programs.

Xiret – Yazidi internet portal in Armenian and Yazidi languages.

iv. Foreign

Topics related to Armenia often appear, for obvious reasons, in Azerbaijani media and often have a disinformational character. It should be emphasized that Azerbaijani media are under strict control of the Aliyev regime and therefore implement the state's information policy, which is hostile to Armenia. Armenian-related topics are also frequent, for equally obvious reasons, in Russian media, in particular Sputnik Armenia and Russia Today (whose head Margarita Simonyan, due to her Armenian descent, is deeply involved in disinformation about Armenia). Topics related to Armenia also often appear in Vladimir Solovyov's programs, who tries to present himself as an ally of Armenia. Disinformation about Armenia can also appear in Turkish, Israeli, and Iranian media, as these three countries are interested for various reasons in the situation in Armenia and its conflict with Azerbaijan.

RUSSIAN

The majority of Russian media do not have Armenian-language programs; however, due to the widespread knowledge of the Russian language in Armenia, this does not pose a problem, and the influence of these media is very large. They are also easily accessible, although recently the Armenian authorities have begun to combat disinformation coming from these sources. In particular, in March 2024, two programs on the public multiplex of the RTR – Planeta television were blocked: 'Evening with Vladimir Solovyov' and 'Sunday Evening with Vladimir Solovyov.' Earlier, for some time, the radio Sputnik Armenia was blocked, but the blockade was lifted at the beginning of 2024. Furthermore, the attitude towards Russian media has also changed with the growing anti-Russian sentiments, connected to Russia's role during the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan. In Armenia, especially the following Russian media are available:

- **Russia Today** - television and news portal, not in Armenian language. The portal is partly in Russian and the television broadcasts in English. Blocked on X and not present on YouTube. Present on Russian social media and on Tik-Tok as well as Telegram.

- **Sputnik Armenia** - a portal in Russian and Armenian languages and a radio exclusively in Russian. Present only on Russian social media and on Tik-Tok as well as Telegram.
- **Russian televisions:** RTR Planeta, Channel One; as well as the portal Lenta.ru and Radio Echo of Moscow.

TURKISH

The main Turkish media have rather an unfriendly attitude towards Armenians. The exception is left-wing media and those associated with the Kurds. Therefore, Turkish media are often a source of negative narratives about Armenians and disinformation. However, they have little influence on Armenian audiences due to the negative attitude of Armenians towards Türkiye and the fact that Turkish media (except for media closely related to the Armenian minority) are in Turkish and possibly English. As for Armenian media in Türkiye, these are: the weekly **Agos** (<https://www.agos.com.tr/>, left-wing and progressive, pro-Western, also publishing left-wing Turkish publicists. Published in print form as well as a website but more focused on opinion than information; website in Armenian, Turkish, and English. The newspaper **Jamanak** (<http://www.jamanak.com/>, website and newspaper in Armenian). **Nor Marmara** (newspaper and website <https://www.normarmara.com/> in Armenian). The portal **HyeTert** <https://hyetert.org/> - 9 language versions.

WESTERN

These are primarily global media, which, however, do not have Armenian-language versions (but often have Russian-language ones). Besides that, these are also Armenian media published by the diaspora in the West. They have full freedom of operation, which means they also have varied political orientations. Nevertheless, they mainly focus on diaspora issues and have limited influence on the Armenian information environment. Among the more important news and opinion-forming media are in particular:

- **The Asbarez** portal (<https://asbarez.com/>) created in California, in Armenian and English;

- **Armenian Weekly/Hairenik** (English and Armenian languages, also internet radio in Armenian, <https://armenianweekly.com/>);
- **Horizon Weekly** (in Armenian and French, created in Montreal, <https://horizonweekly.ca/>);
- **The Armenian Report** <https://www.thearmenianreport.com/> - an English-language portal published in Los Angeles, rather modest in information though with professional graphic design, founded by the American journalist of Armenian origin Anna Kachikyan;
- In Germany, the site **Caucasus Watch** <https://www.caucasuswatch.de/> is edited (covering the entire Caucasus, in English and German).

IRANIAN

The main Iranian media do not have programs in the Armenian language (except for the 'Armenian Radio Hour' program on Iranian state radio), but the narrative in the local Persian-language media regarding Armenia can permeate Armenian media. Furthermore, there are Armenian minority media in Iran, but it should be remembered that this is a non-democratic country where there is no freedom of speech, which also determines the narrative in the Armenian media in this country. Among others, the newspaper **Alik**, the organ of Dashnaktsutyun, i.e., the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, is published, available both in print form and as an online PDF and it is also associated with an information portal (<https://alikonline.ir/>) in Armenian and Farsi. There is low activity on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram (but not on X). Other Armenian media include: the weekly **Arax**, the biweekly **Hooy**s, the socio-cultural magazine **Louys**, the socio-cultural quarterly **Apaga** and the Persian-language magazine **Payman**, as well as diocesan magazines (Artaz in Tabriz and Nor Jugha Taghekatu in Isfahan).

b) Non-traditional media (bloggers, influencers, social media, YouTube, etc.)

Armenian politicians do not have very large reach on X and are not very active on Facebook, for example Robert Kocharyan – 1 700, Serzh Sarkisyan is not present at all. Nikol Pashinyan has 182 000 followers on X (in English).

In Armenia, due to the fact that it is located in the post-Soviet space, knowledge of Russian is widespread¹. And furthermore, there is a large Armenian diaspora in Russia. The Russian counterparts of social media, particularly Telegram, Odnoklassniki and VKontakte, enjoy some popularity. However, there is a declining trend in the activity of Armenians on these social media platforms. It can be assumed that while Odnoklassniki, VKontakte and Telegram are popular, they are not in the top tier of social media. Anrieta Karapetyan from Yerevan University, in the article 'Popularity of Social Networks Among Armenian Users' (russia-world.ru/jour/article/view/220), mentions the dominance of Facebook and Instagram and the limited presence of Russian social media. Here we are talking about approximately 2.1 million Armenian Facebook users (both living in Armenia and in the diaspora) and about 390 000 users each of VK and Odnoklassniki. The Digital 2024 Armenia report indicates that 74.5% of Armenia's population uses social media.

Media.am reports that there are 1.5 million Facebook users in Armenia and also points to the high popularity of the Russian Telegram (without providing numbers). According to a Similarweb report, among Android users, Telegram is the 10th most popular app, ahead of Tik-Tok, Threads, Snapchat, WhatsApp and Instagram. Among iOS users, the trend is different - Threads, WhatsApp and Tik-Tok rank ahead of Telegram. A Google search report indicates a decline in interest in Odnoklassniki and VKontakte and an increase in interest in Telegram. There is also

¹ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/languages/>

a decline in interest in Facebook (which may result from market saturation with this platform) and low interest in Tik-Tok.

Data from Ahrefs shows a clear advantage of Facebook and Instagram over OK and VK in terms of searches. Nevertheless, they still have a strong position (FB – 795 000; Instagram – 427 000; OK – 240 000; VK – 118 000; Pinterest – 113 000; Tik-Tok – 68 000; Twitter – 39 000). Also data from Semrush indicates the dominance of google.com and YouTube over Yandex, as well as Facebook and Instagram over VK and Telegram.

i. Important accounts in social media

Imnemnimi

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDXUQCigq_napon2LqYFYnEpdwXRil55r; podcast on YouTube as part of AntyFakeTV; hosted by Vazgen Sagatelyan (<https://www.facebook.com/vazgen.sagatelyan> – 14K followers) and Narek Samsonyan – their frequent guest is Edgar Ghazaryan, former ambassador to Poland, closely linked to Serzh Sarkisian.

Anti-corruption Blog <https://www.facebook.com/anticorruptionblog> (33 000 followers); related to Marina Poghosyan; <https://www.facebook.com/marinapoghosyan13> (44 000 followers).

Groong - Armenia News Network - a Facebook group with 9 000 members and podcasts on YouTube; administered by Katia Minas Peltekian (there are more such Armenian groups on Facebook, but the number of members generally does not exceed 10 000).

Para TV (Youtube channel related to bishop Galstanyan).

Anna Hakobyan - journalist and wife of Pashinyan; <https://annahakobyan.am/> (Armenian, English and Russian versions); Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/annahakobyan.official/> (120 000); X - <https://x.com/wifeofArmPM> (6 200); <https://www.facebook.com/wifeofarmenianPM>; lots of interactions on social media.

Gagik Tsarukyan - influential oligarch and pro-Russian politician; <https://tsarukyan.am/>; <https://www.facebook.com/GagikTsarukyan> (115 000 followers); not active on X;

Alen Simonyan - speaker of the Parliament; <https://x.com/alensimonyan> (10 000 followers); <https://www.facebook.com/simonyanalen> (93 000 followers); TL account - <https://t.me/s/AlenSimonyanonline/572970> subskr

Artek Beglaryan - President of the Artsakh Union, former Ombudsman of Artsakh; https://x.com/Artak_Beglaryan (60 000 followers, big interactions); <https://www.facebook.com/ArtakBeglaryan> (43 000); <https://t.me/s/ArtakBeglaryan> 3 180 subscribers)

Tigran Balayan - Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, and the EU; <https://x.com/tbalayan> (18 000 followers); <https://www.facebook.com/tbalayan> (5 000 followers); no account on Telegram, but on his Twitter profile he recommends this account: <https://t.me/s/sehidlerinfo>

Tigran Avinyan - Mayor of Yerevan; <https://x.com/AvinyanTigran> (29 000 followers); <https://www.facebook.com/tigran.avinyan> (108 000 followers).

Armen Tatoyan - former ombudsman, <https://x.com/atatoyan>; (23 000 followers); <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100017676420633> (75 000 followers).

Vardan Ghukasyan - a pro-Russian politician associated with Serzh Sarkisian; <https://www.facebook.com/VardanGhukasyanVideos/> (28 000 subscribers); Telegram

-second place in terms of subscribers – 223 000 subscribers,
<https://t.me/s/vardangukasyan/16950>

Aram Sargsyan - former prime minister and brother of the former prime minister murdered in parliament in 1999, a leading figure of the pro-Western opposition; followed by 50 000 people on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100016322520223>

Ruben Vardanyan - Russian oligarch of Armenian origin, imprisoned in Azerbaijan, featured in the banners of pro-Russian movements; https://x.com/RubenVardanyan_ (15 000 followers, in English; no new posts since June 2024); <https://t.me/s/rubenvardanyanofficial/646> - 15 000 subscribers.

Bagrat Galstanyan - <https://x.com/SrbazanBagrat> (in English, 2 500 followers); <https://www.facebook.com/archbishopbagrat.galstanyan> (19 600 followers); Archbishop of Tavush - currently suspended from his position due to political activity.

Hrachya Arzumanian - anti-Russian political scientist from Artsakh, for some time spokesperson of the Artsakh government, <https://www.facebook.com/hrachya.arzumanian>; 11 000 followers.

Hovsep Khurshudyan - an important anti-Russian and pro-Western analyst, <https://www.facebook.com/@hovsep.khurshudyan> (22 000 followers).

Ani Poghosyan - <https://x.com/aniboghoss> (12 000 followers)

Dr. Anzhela Mnatsakanyan - https://x.com/ANZHELA_YAN (13 000 followers)

Olesya Vartanyan - https://x.com/Olesya_vArt, (10 000 followers)

Araik Galstyan - @araikgalstyanmoscowschool; blogger, also addressing political, economic issues and the international situation (163 000 subscribers); <https://t.me/s/araikgalstyanmoscowschool>

Баграмян 26 - a channel dedicated to the life of Armenia, conducted in Russian, 118 000 subscribers; <https://t.me/s/bagramyan26>

Closed channel on Telegram - **†Armenian** (102 956 subscribers); world events, information.

планета Жоп – female blogger, in Russian language (102 000 subscribers), <https://t.me/s/planetapopa>

Radar Armenia – in Armenian language <https://t.me/s/radararm> (81 800 subscribers)

Zakar Keshishian - well-known personality, Armenian composer from Lebanon, who founded a choir in Shushi; deeply involved in Armenian matters and respected; <https://www.facebook.com/zakar.keshishian.3>

Aram MP3 Sargsya - a popular musician; https://www.instagram.com/aram_mp3/ (369 000 followers); Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/AramMp3Official> (250 000 followers); <https://www.youtube.com/@AramMp3Official> (19 000 followers); TL - <https://t.me/s/arammp> (3 772 subscribers).

ii. Other Telegram accounts:

Antifake - account linked to the Antifake portal; https://t.me/s/AntiFake_am (3 490 subscribers).

Telegram channel named **@srbazan_payqar** (holy struggle) is associated with Archbishop Bagrat Galstanjan. The channel's name in Armenian means 'Holy Struggle' and is a platform

where the archbishop shares his thoughts and information regarding his social and religious activities; https://t.me/s/srbazan_payqar/1116.

Andranik Hovhannisyan - internal political and geopolitical processes in the South Caucasus and Central Asia; https://t.me/s/andranik_official (7652 subscribers); FB - <https://www.facebook.com/andran1k.official>;

Narek Samsonyan Telegram - <https://t.me/s/nareksamsonyantelegram> (876 subscribers); VELES - <https://veles.am/>; FB - <https://www.facebook.com/veleshumanrightsnngo> (8 000 followers); TL - https://t.me/s/veles_human_rights_ngo (7 570 subscribers).

iii. Diaspora

Margarita Simonyan's - account on X - https://x.com/M_Simonyan; although it is not devoted exclusively to Armenian matters, it should be taken into account because of Simonyan's influence in Armenia and her reach (557 000 followers).

Garo Paylan - <https://x.com/GaroPaylan> (539 000 followers), former member of the Turkish parliament from the pro-Kurdish HDP; Instagram – <https://www.instagram.com/garopaylan/?hl=en> (49 800 subscribers); Twitter – <https://x.com/GaroPaylan> (539 000 followers). No Telegram account.

Serj Tankian - <https://x.com/serjtankian> (628 000 followers); vocalist of the band System of the Down living in California; very strongly engaged in Armenian matters; Serj Tankian - no Telegram account, YouTube channel has 760 000 subscribers - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaiQD1j4sHOTRJXP4vZjIQ>; Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/SerjTankian/> (1.9 million followers).

In the West, there are many well-known personalities and celebrities of Armenian origin with huge social media reach; occasionally, they engage in Armenian matters, e.g. Kim Kardashian, Alexis Ohanian]

iv. Cyclical nationwide and regional events

- The most important event is the commemoration of genocide – April 24;
- Religious holidays: Christmas (January 6) and Easter – according to the Apostolic-Armenian calendar (different from Orthodox and Catholic);
- State holidays: Army Day (January 28); Women's Day (March 8); Labor Day (May 1); Victory Day (May 9; moreover, May 8 was celebrated as the Day of the Liberation of Shusha but currently this city is again under the control of Azerbaijan); Republic Day (May 28 – commemorates the establishment of the republic in 1918); Independence Day (September 21 – commemorates the declaration of independence in 1991);
- Minority holidays: Yalda (old Zoroastrian tradition); Yazidi New Year (April 17); Nowruz (celebrated by Yazidis, Kurds, and Iranian tourists);
- Festivals: Golden Apricot (July, film); Hay Festival (October, theater);
- Russian cultural events: June 6 (Russian language day and anniversary of A. Pushkin's birth); October 19 (high school fraternity day; in October Russian culture days are also often organized).

c) Non-governmental organizations and other non-state entities influencing opinions (connections; division into friend-foe)

Civil society is well developed in Armenia, which causes there to be a large number of various think tanks and organizations. Especially in recent years, after the democratization related to Nikola Pashinyan coming to power, these institutions have developed, although previously the socio-political scene of Armenia was also characterized by pluralism. Institutions related

to the diaspora also have significant importance in shaping Armenia's informational environment due to the intensity of the diaspora's contacts with Armenia. This concerns both the Armenian diaspora in the West (particularly in California and France), in the Middle East (Lebanon, Syria, Turkiye), and in Russia. Social organizations and think tanks usually have a rather pro-European and pro-democratic orientation, whereas in the case of paramilitary organizations, especially veterans' organizations, the situation is more complex.

Paramilitary and patriotic organizations

The war with Azerbaijan and the constant security threat have caused a number of paramilitary organizations to operate in Armenia:

Volunteer Union Yerkrpah - <https://ekm.am/>; founded during the First Karabakh War by Vazgen Sargsyan, a charismatic Armenian commander and later prime minister, assassinated in the Armenian parliament attack in 1999. The current leader is Sasun Mikayelian;. Completely loyal to Pashinyan.

Union of Veterans of the Artsakh Liberation War - negative attitude towards Pashinyan (accuse him of betrayal and handing over Karabakh) and normalization with Turkiye and Azerbaijan; <https://www.facebook.com/XPVMMHK/>

ZReserve Officers' Union – founded in April 2021. Opposed to Pashinyan, supports Bishop Bagrat Galstanyan; <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100070844574443>

Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) – operates in the diaspora. The largest Armenian non-governmental organization in the world, involved in activities for Armenia and the Armenian diaspora. AGBU promotes Armenian culture, education, and patriotism, especially among young Armenians. Main headquarters in the USA; <https://agbu.org/>.

Organizations and institutions associated with Russia

Russian House in Armenia - <https://www.facebook.com/RSGOVArmenia>; two branches – in Yerevan and Gyumri; operates based on an intergovernmental agreement.

Russian-Armenian Friendship Museum in Abovyan

- <https://www.facebook.com/Friendshipmuseumarmrus/>.

Russian-Armenian University in Yerevan, <https://rau.am/am>, rector Edward Sandoyan.

Russian-Armenian Center for Humanitarian Aid (RACHR) – established based on the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Armenia dated May 19, 2015, signed in Moscow. Director of RACHR – A.E. Butyrskii (Russia). Co-director of RACHR – P.S. Gozalyan (Armenia); <https://www.rachr.ru/en/about/>; <https://www.facebook.com/rachremercom>.

Educational and sports complex built by GAZPROM-ARMENIA - opened in 2019. In the same year a kindergarten was opened there, followed by primary school classes. In 2023 the first Russian class was opened; <https://gaus.am/en/about-us/history>.

"Lazarian Club" - named after the famous family of Armenian philanthropists Lazarian, founders of the Lazarian Institute of Oriental Languages. Describes itself as “a platform for meetings and exchange of views between the societies of Russia and Armenia”; <https://lazarevsky.club/hy/>; https://t.me/s/lazarevsky_club

In 2012, Putin Clubs were established; however, currently there is no information about their activity. Outside the year 2012, practically no information exists. Ultimately, two clubs founded by Ararat Stepanyan were created; <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/derision-servile-putin-fan-club-armenia>; <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.org/articles/200187/>

Moscow House in Yerevan – Moscow Houses are established to promote cooperation between the authorities of Moscow and local organizations and enterprises with foreign partners.

Assembly of Eurasian Nations - projects are also implemented in Armenia, for example Forge of Happiness: <http://www.eurasia-assembly.org/ru/kuznica-schastya>; <http://www.eurasia-assembly.org/ru/news/schaste-narodov-mira-armeniy>;

Public Diplomacy Leader Contest 2023 - <http://www.eurasia-assembly.org/ru/news/startoval-obrazovatelnyy-intensiv-ii-mezhdunarodnogo-konkursa-lider-narodnoy-diplomatii-2023>; the Assembly is a partner of the Union of Armenians in Russia; <https://sarinfo.org/about/Ideology/goals>.

Economic entities having the potential to influence the shape and availability of content in the media

The political-economic system during the times of Kocharyan and Sargsyan and especially the huge corruption, caused the development of an oligarchic system. The fact that oligarchy also prevailed in Russia favored inter-oligarchic relations and the emergence of Armenian oligarchs in Russia. Many oligarchs, as well as former presidents, who basically also became oligarchs, tried and still try to influence the political scene and the informational environment. This particularly concerns Robert Kocharyan, Serzh Sargsyan, Ruben Vardanyan (who finances, for example, various Russian journalists and propagandists writing about Armenia, e.g. at one time Semyon Pegov aka Wargonzo) and Gagik Tsarukyan, Samvel Karapetyan (another Russian oligarch, head of the Tashir Group, supporting Kocharyan); Sergei Sarkisov (although there is no information about his involvement in Armenia, it is known that he is pro-Kremlin); Karen Karapetyan (working at Gazprom, former Armenian prime minister associated with Serzh Sargsyan).

An important entity is also Gazprom Armenia, whose general director is Ashot Hakobyan (<https://armenia.gazprom.com/press/news/2024/09/234/>) and who is also linked to Vardan

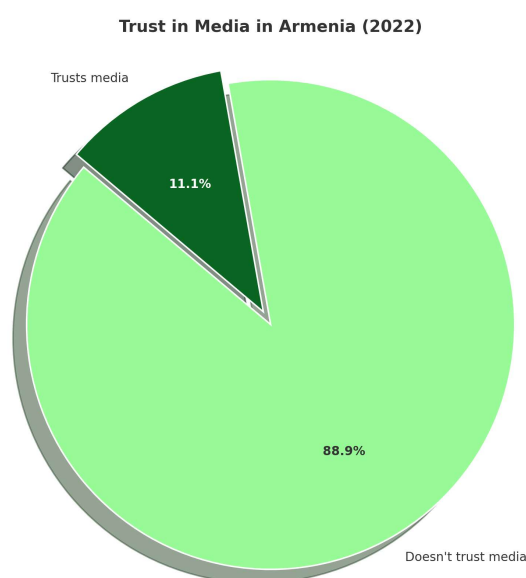
Harutyun, who in 2020 sued investigative journalists of the Hetq.am portal for alleged defamation. Gazprom Armenia, a local branch of the Russian state gas company, owns the entire gas distribution infrastructure in the country. It is also an instrument of Russia's soft power implementing projects such as the construction of schools and other facilities: <https://gaus.am/en/school/general-description>. In September 2024, the Gazprom sports complex in Armenia was opened (<https://armenia.gazprom.com/press/news/2024/09/231/>); September 2024 - on the personal initiative of the Chairman of the Board – General Director of Gazprom Armenia CJSC Ashot Hakobyan and with the active assistance of the Russian Science and Culture Center in Yerevan (the representation of Rossotrudnichestvo in the Republic of Armenia), as part of the personnel policy of Gazprom Armenia, an agreement was reached on free training for 10 candidates for bachelor's studies at the I.M. Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas (<https://armenia.gazprom.ru/press/news/2024/09/1639/>); Gazprom Armenia also donates books and educational aids to the Russian House in Yerevan (https://vk.com/wall-211411848_2488).

Additionally, key companies in Armenia that may influence the media market are Viva Armenia (mobile telephony, belongs to the Russian group MTS); Ameriabank; Grand Candy; SoftConstruct; Zangezur Copper Molybdenum Combine; Yerevan Brandy Company (owned by the French); Galaxy Group of Companies.

3. Information habits of society

Freedom of speech and media in Armenia is rated highly by international organizations, which, however, does not necessarily translate into social trust in the media. According to the latest Reporters Without Borders ranking, Armenia ranks 43rd and is a lone island of media freedom in the region. Also, the 2024 Freedom House report on Internet freedom indicates that Armenia is a free country, with increasingly better indicators. According to research, freedom of speech in Armenia is also reflected in social perceptions – 75% believe that there is freedom of speech (full or partial) in Armenia and 72% believe that there is freedom of the media (full or partial).

However, the belief in freedom does not go hand in hand with the belief in credibility. According to the CRRC Caucasus Barometer report from 2022, as many as 72% of respondents do not trust the media, and only 9% declare trust (noteworthy is the sharp increase in distrust after 2019, i.e. along with the actual democratization, which was accompanied by the defeat in Artsakh in 2020, which strongly polarized society).



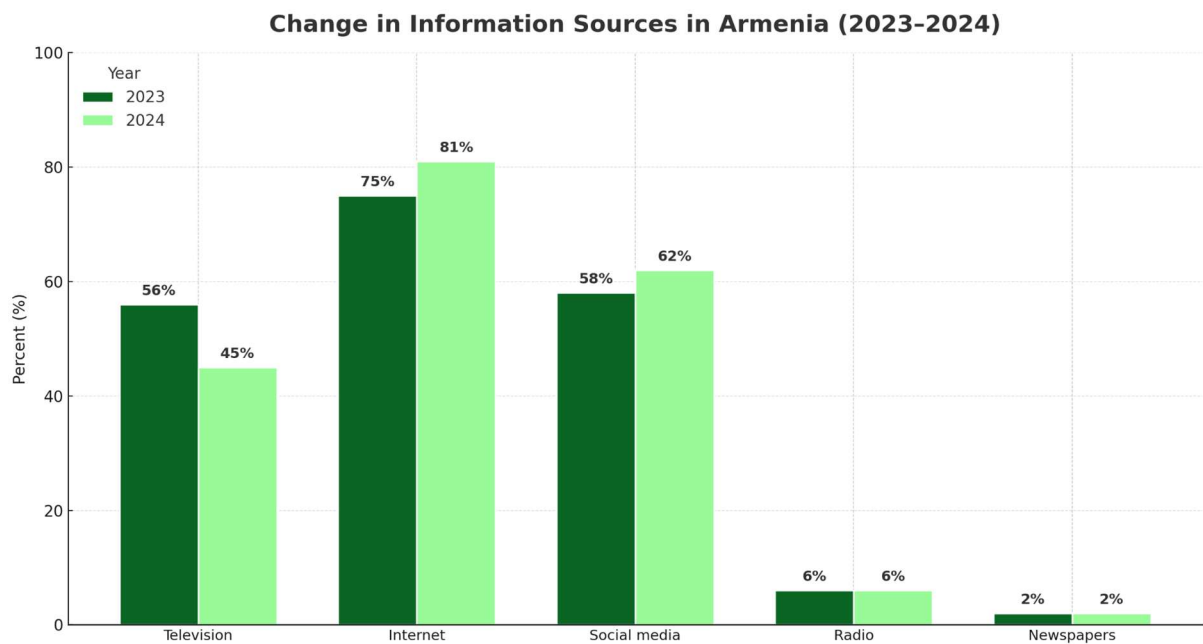
Similar data is provided by the Ebert Foundation report, which indicates that only 12% trust or rather trust the media. Furthermore, according to reports from the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, since 2023 the pressure on journalists has increased, particularly through the use of court proceedings, which may lead to self-censorship. Nevertheless, the Internews study showed an increase in trust in the media from 49% in 2023 to 53% in 2024. There are noticeable large discrepancies between the results, which are related to differences in the form of questioning; however, low trust in the media is clearly visible in many studies, and the increase in trust in the Internews study should be viewed with cautious optimism. It cannot be excluded, however, that this is related to the relatively growing professionalism of the media and increasing awareness regarding Armenia's assessment in this area in international reports (as well as the contrast with neighboring countries such as Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkiye and increasingly Georgia).

Nevertheless, the March 2024 report of Zinc Network (supported by USAID) points to institutional weaknesses of the media in Armenia, which may potentially translate into manipulation of them, including within the framework of FIMI. This particularly concerns the lack of a media financing model conducive to media independence, combined with Armenians' reluctance to use paid media (although according to Internews the share willing to do so increased from 17% to 24% between 2023 and 2024), especially on the internet. This leads to media dependence on sponsors who often have their own political agenda or corrupt ties. One of the sources of funding is also the Armenian diaspora, which can be a conduit for foreign state interests, especially when it concerns the Armenian diaspora in Russia (numbering nearly 1 million people) and local oligarchs of Armenian origin. The media, like Armenian society, is characterized by deep polarization. Polarization and the rise in popularity of internet media are the main reasons for the increase in disinformation after the 2018 revolution and consequently also the decline in trust in the media.

The Civilnet portal, which is financially supported by the EU and the governments of several European countries, lists the following reasons for the lack of trust in the media: "growing waves of disinformation and fake news; political polarization reflected in the media; constant security threats that create fertile ground for various manipulations and analyses, which in turn silence the true voices of experts; promotion of external actors' programs through locally contextualized content and rhetoric; dominance of social media, which lacks ethical norms and standards of accountability; low level of media skills; and the phenomenon of the 'echo chamber', where people, regardless of education, consume information and analyses that confirm their own beliefs. To all this are added gaps in journalism education in Armenia and a serious lack of field reporters."

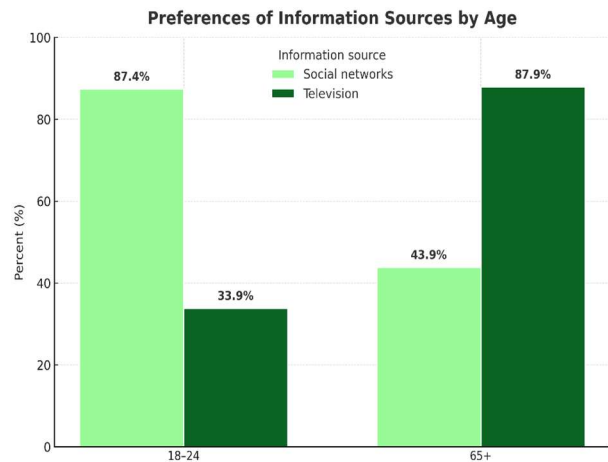
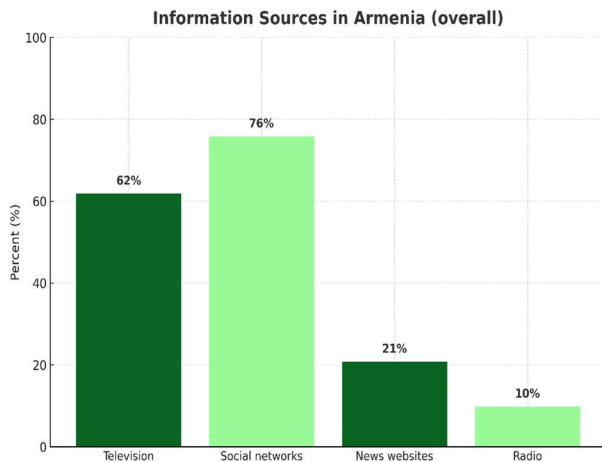
Television remains one of the two main sources of information (alongside internet platforms), with a clear trend showing a decline of television in favor of the internet, particularly social media. Access to television is available to 98% of households, and as one of the two main sources of information in the Internews 2023 survey, 56% of respondents indicated it, while the internet was indicated by 75%, radio only 6%, and print media (newspapers), whose use has

sharply declined in recent years, only 2%. In the 2024 survey, obtaining information from television was declared by only 45%, and from the internet by 81%, including social media at 62% (58% the previous year).

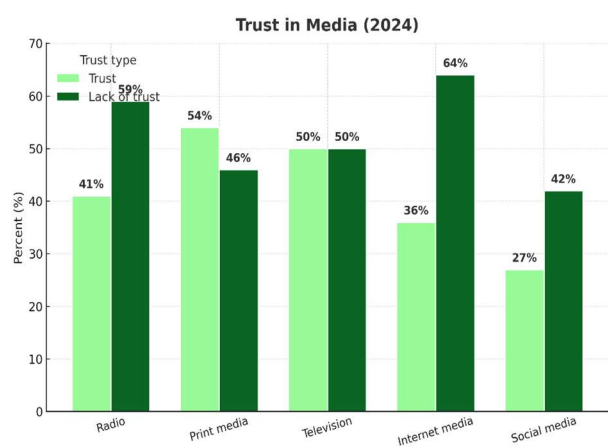
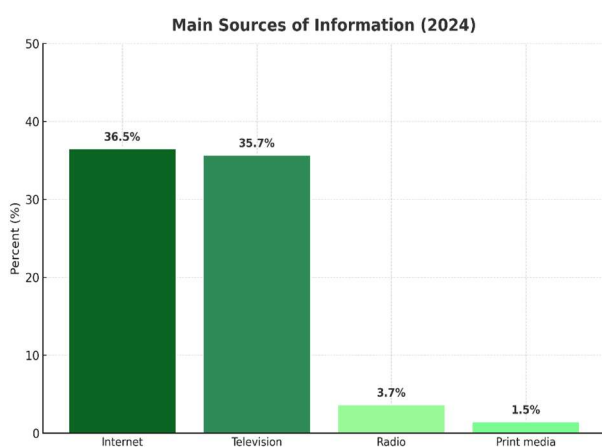


In the 2022 Caucasus Barometer study, television was indicated as the main source of information by 46% of respondents. In turn, according to the 2021 Colab Medios study, television was indicated as a source of information by 62%, while social networks – 76%, news portals – 21%, and radio – 10%. There is a large difference between the preferences of young people (87.4% in the 18-24 age group indicated social networks as a source of information, while in the 65+ group it was only 43.9%, whereas in the case of television the proportions were reversed and amounted to 33.9% and 87.9%, respectively).

Study of the information environment: ARMENIA

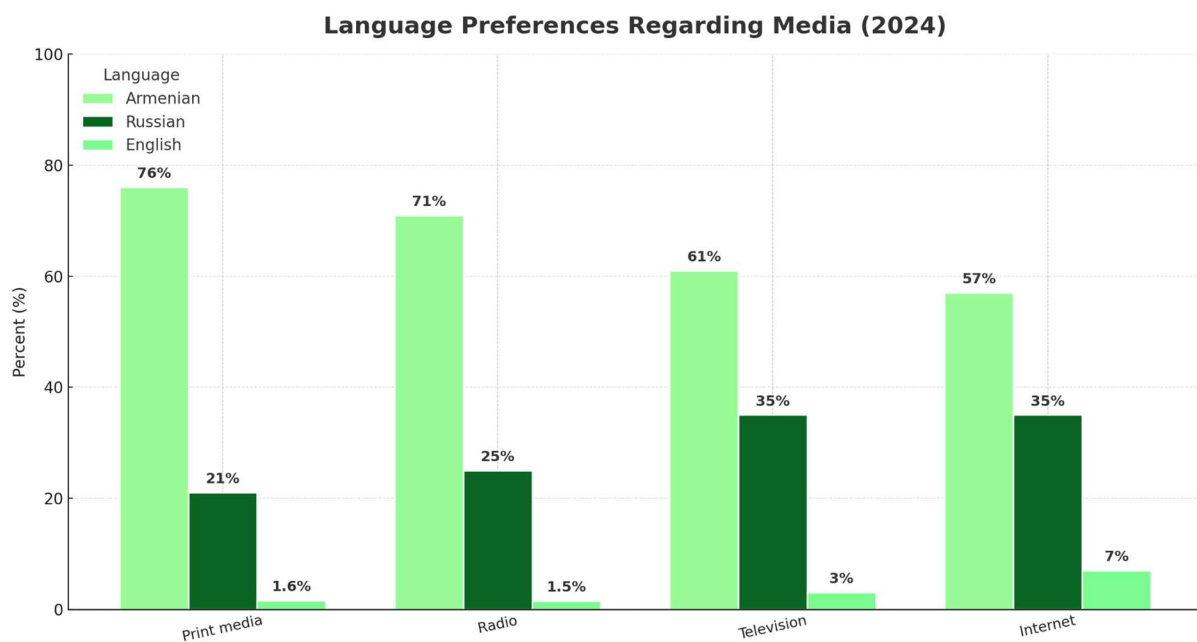


In the studies conducted somewhat earlier, namely in 2019, by the Advanced Public Research Group (APRG), the internet was indicated as the main source of information (single-choice survey) by 36.5%, while television 35.7%, radio 3.7%, and print media 1.5%. However, it is noteworthy that in this study radio and print media enjoyed the highest trust (59% and 54%, respectively), while for television it was 50%, internet media only 36%, and social media just 27% (with 42% declaring lack of trust).



This means that media habits are not necessarily motivated by recognition of credibility, but rather result from convenience and fashion, accompanied by growing distrust and a tendency (although limited) to verify information from other sources and discuss it with family and friends (while simultaneously distrusting strangers).

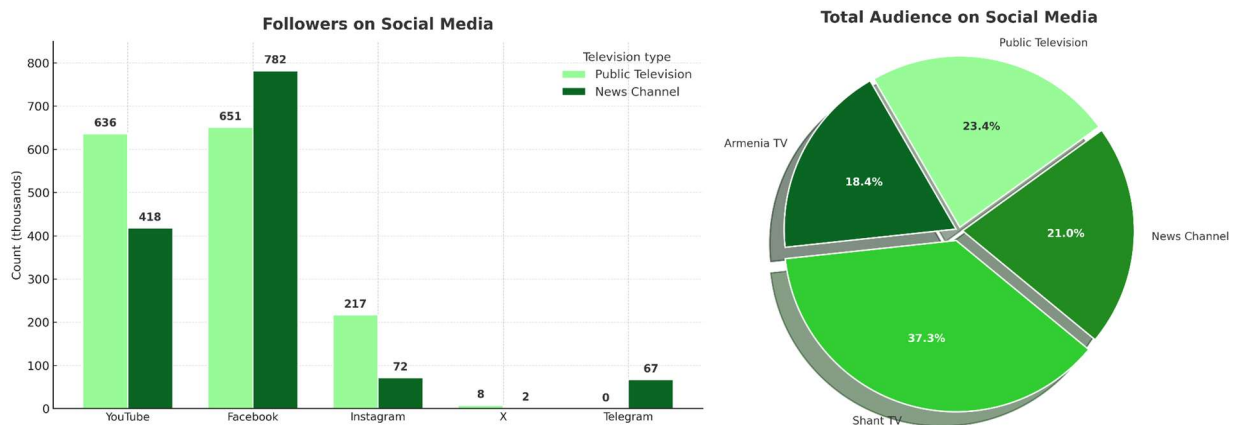
Noteworthy are also the language preferences relating to specific types of media. According to the APRG study, the Armenian language is preferred by 76% for print media, 71% for radio, 61% for television, and only 57% for the internet. For the Russian language, the respective figures are: 21%, 25% and 35% and for English: 1.6%, 1.5%, 3% and 7%.



a) Viewership and perception of state media

Public television does not enjoy the highest viewership and ranks only third after two commercial channels: Armenia TV and Shant TV. In the Internews 2024 survey, 45% of respondents declared watching it (an increase from 37% in 2023), but additionally 8% declared watching the public television news channel. Meanwhile, in the 2019 APRG survey, 12.4%

indicated public television as the most preferred (single-choice survey), and it was also third place behind the two aforementioned private televisions, each preferred by 24.6%. Public television, however, dominates on social media with 636 000 subscribers on YouTube (slightly behind Armenia TV), 651 000 on Facebook (here behind Shant TV), 217 000 on Instagram and 8 000 on X. Additionally, the public television news channel has 418 000 subscribers on YouTube, 782 000 followers on Facebook, 72 000 on Instagram, 67 000 on Telegram, and 2 000 on X. The total audience of public television on social media is 1 512, and its news channel's is 1 341, while for Shant TV it is 2,413 000, and Armenia TV – 1 190. Other televisions have significantly smaller audiences.



Public television, however, enjoys the greatest trust. According to the 2024 IRI survey, in which respondents could indicate 2 media they trusted the most, 20% chose public television as their first choice, and 8% as their second, while as many as 41% declared no trust in any medium or refused to answer. Also, according to the 2022 Caucasus Barometer survey, public television enjoys the greatest trust – indicated by 24% of respondents (single choice possible). Meanwhile, in the 2019 APRG survey, public television was indicated as the most trusted among televisions by 13.7%, and 6.8% declared the greatest distrust (also ranked first). According to Internews (multiple choice survey), trust in public television was 42% and was lower than Armenia TV (53%), but it increased from 25% (trust in Armenia TV and Shant TV also increased, while other stations enjoyed incomparably lower ratings).

Public radio remains among the most popular stations alongside, among others, Radio Aurora and Radio Van. While according to Internews, the highest percentage of respondents declared listening to this radio in 2024, namely 17% (an increase from 8% in 2023; with Radio Aurora having the same audience), it lags behind Radio Aurora and Radio Van in popularity on social media. Meanwhile, the Armenpress agency has significantly lower viewership on social media than several other news portals (220 000 followers on Facebook, 21 000 on YouTube, and 5.8 000 on X). However, in the APRG 2019 studies, 17.7% (single-choice question) rated it as the most credible, and only Radio Azatutyun had a similar result (16.5%). In turn, in the 2024 Internews survey (multiple-choice question), it was indicated as the most credible radio by the greatest number of respondents (25%).

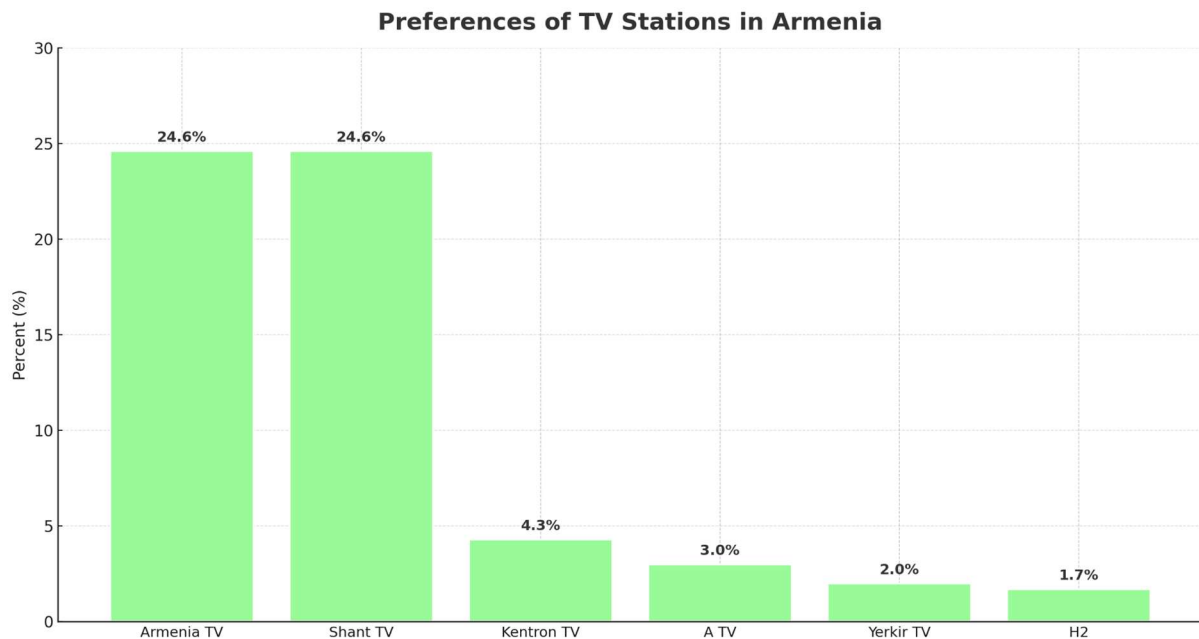
Public media are the target of attacks primarily from the anti-government pro-Russian opposition. Nevertheless, in October 2024, public television, in response to an anti-government protest by Bishop Galstanyan in front of its headquarters, invited him for an interview; however, Galstanyan refused to answer questions and wanted to deliver a message calling for the overthrow of Pashinyan. Such an approach obviously does not fit within the mission of public media in a democratic state, and the refusal to comply with such a demand did not undermine the objectivity of Armenian public television, while the negative assessments by some parts of society rather result from deep polarization and FIMI actions from Russia. It is worth adding that on public television, on the main channel and the news channel, a daily 5-minute program dedicated to disinformation is broadcast.

Critical opinions about public media also appear in independent media such as Civilnet. In one article on this site, editor-in-chief Karen Harutyunyan states that “despite increased pluralism after the 2018 revolution [...] public television has never become a medium serving the public agenda; instead, it still serves the current government,” adding that self-censorship often occurs there. As an example of serving the interests of the ruling party, he points out that in 2024 for the first time public television did not broadcast the New Year’s message of Catholicos Karekin II, with whom the ruling party is in conflict.

b) Viewership and perception of media other than state media, including party and religious media

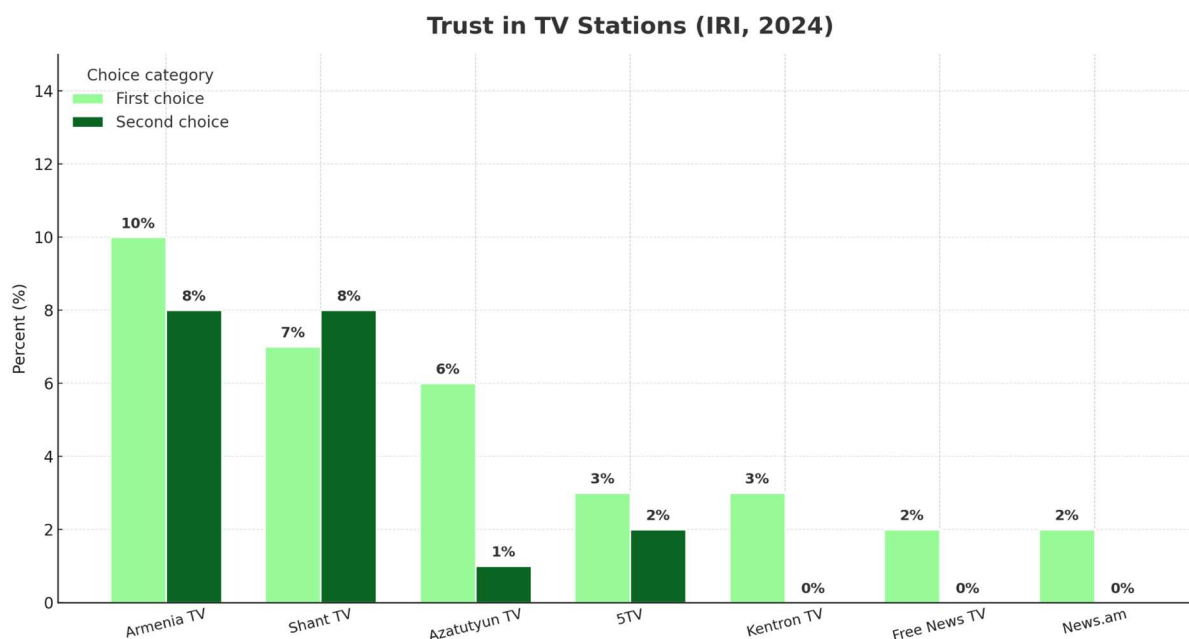
Some private media have pro-Russian origins, while others are dependent on sponsors. However, some have pro-European and pro-democratic origins, and some also exhibit high professionalism. Nevertheless, the overall assessment of private media points to a number of their weaknesses, which cause a low level of social trust. The influence of Russian state-controlled media on some Armenian media is also indirect, regardless of their origin, because due to weaknesses in their own information sources and the fact that knowledge of the Russian language is widespread in Armenia (much more so than English), they draw news from Russian sources.

The two most popular commercial televisions are Armenia TV, which according to the Internews 2024 survey is watched by 66% of respondents, and Shant TV – 50%. Besides these stations, significant market share and presence on social media also belong to: Azatutyun, Kentron, Yerkir, 5TV, ATV, Free News, Nor Hayastan, H2, and Shoghakat. In the 2019 APRG studies, as the preferred TV station, 24.6% indicated Armenia TV, 24.6% – Shant TV, 4.3% – Kentron TV, 3% – A TV, 2% – Yerkir TV, 1.7% – H2, while public television as well as three Russian stations: RTR, ORT, NTV were also among the top.



This shows that the presence of Armenia TV and Shant TV among the top three most popular stations and the main competitors of public television is a lasting phenomenon, independent of growing polarization. Other stations have incomparably smaller market shares, although several of them, namely Azatutyun, Kentron, ATV, Yerkir, 5TV, H2, 5TV and Nor Hayastan, also play a certain role.

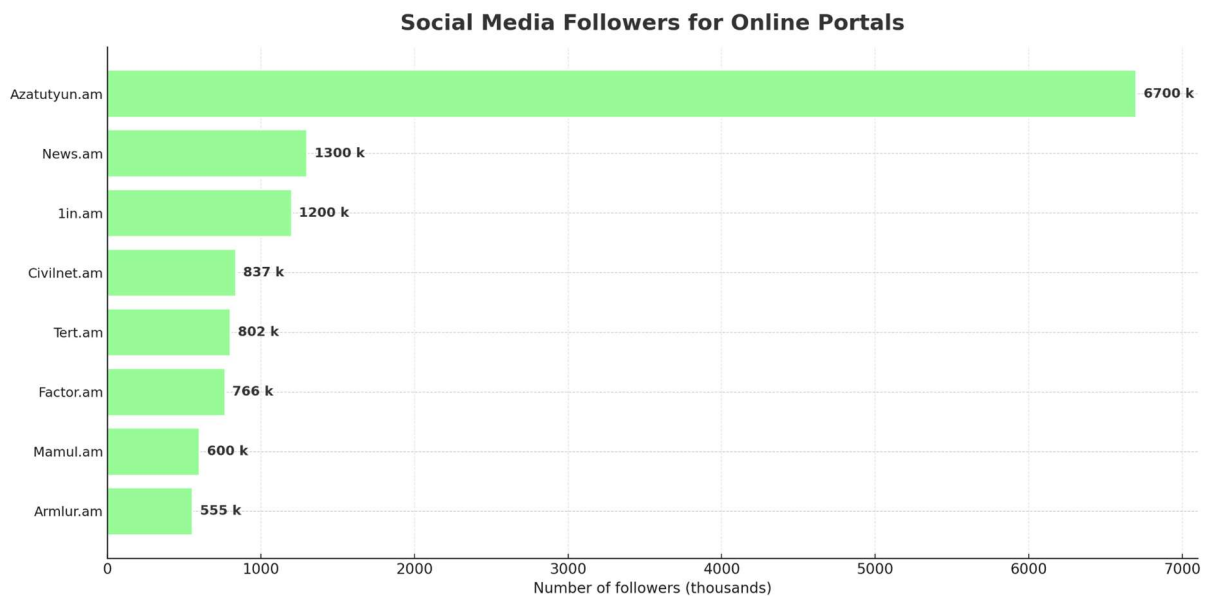
Also, in terms of credibility, Armenia TV and Shant TV are rated highest, although they rank below public television. According to the IRI survey, Armenia TV (which has an anti-government orientation and ownership-level ties to Russia but does not aggressively promote Russian propaganda) enjoys the trust of 10% and 8% of respondents (as first and second choice, respectively), while Shant TV enjoys 7% and 8%. Respondents also indicated Azatutyun TV (objective, with a slight pro-Western profile) – 6% and 1%, as well as 5TV (pro-Russian orientation) – 3% and 2%, Kentron TV (pro-Russian orientation) – 3%, Free News TV (2%), and the News.am portal (objective, professional, and without obvious ties) – 2%.



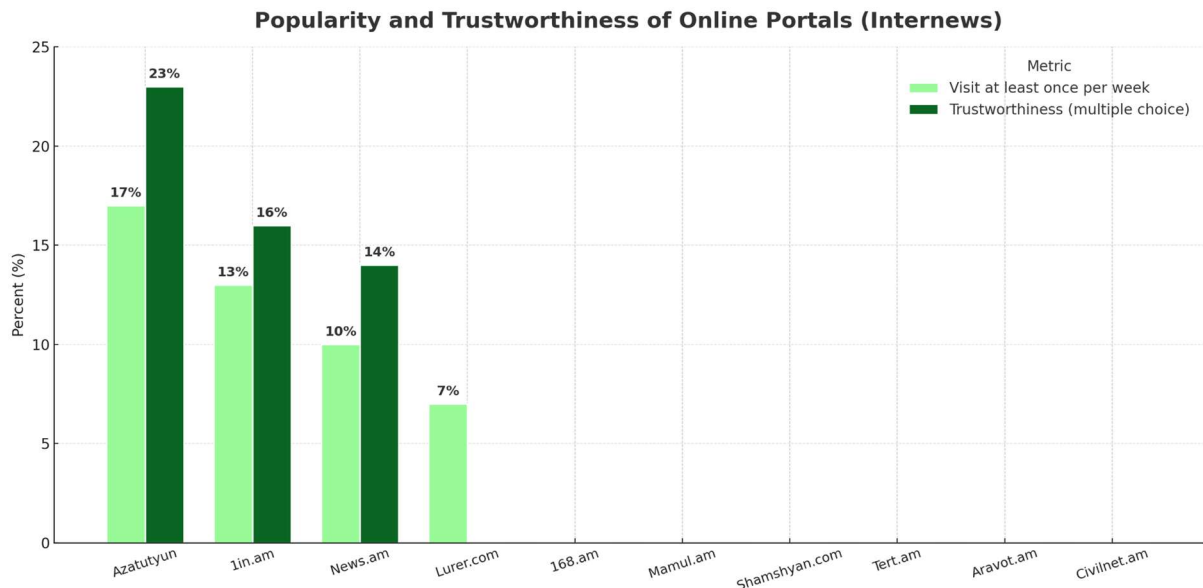
In turn, according to the 2022 Caucasus Barometer study, Armenia TV is the second most frequently indicated as the most credible television station (20%), after public television; Shant TV ranks third (16%), and further down were the no longer existing Armnews (3%), 5 TV (3%), and (pro-Russian) Yerkir Media (2%), while 27% declared that they do not trust any television station or do not watch television. In the 2019 APRG studies, the greatest trust was declared towards Shant TV – 26.6% (with 2.3% declaring the greatest lack of trust), while Armenia TV was second (21.5% and 2.8%, respectively), and further places were Kentron TV (3.9% and 8.6%, respectively) and Yerkir TV (2.5% and 6.4%). The greatest lack of trust was declared towards 5TV, associated with Kocharyan (9.3% indicated it as the least trustworthy). In the 2024 Internews study (multiple choice question), trust in Armenia TV was declared by as many as 53% of respondents, and in Shant by 38%. Other televisions (apart from the public one) had significantly lower indications (5TV – 8%; Kentron TV – 6%).

As for internet portals, the largest number of followers/subscribers in social media have: Azatutyun.am (one of the most independent, pro-democratic, professional media; associated with RFE/RL, while also dependent on external funding) – a total of 6.7 million followers on social media (mainly Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram); News.am – 1.3 million; 1in.am

– 1.2 million; Civilnet.am – 837 000; Tert.am – 802 000; Factor.am – 766 000; Mamul.am – 600 000; Armlur.am – 555 000. News.am also generates the largest web traffic (2.84 million visits in August 2024 according to the Semrush report).

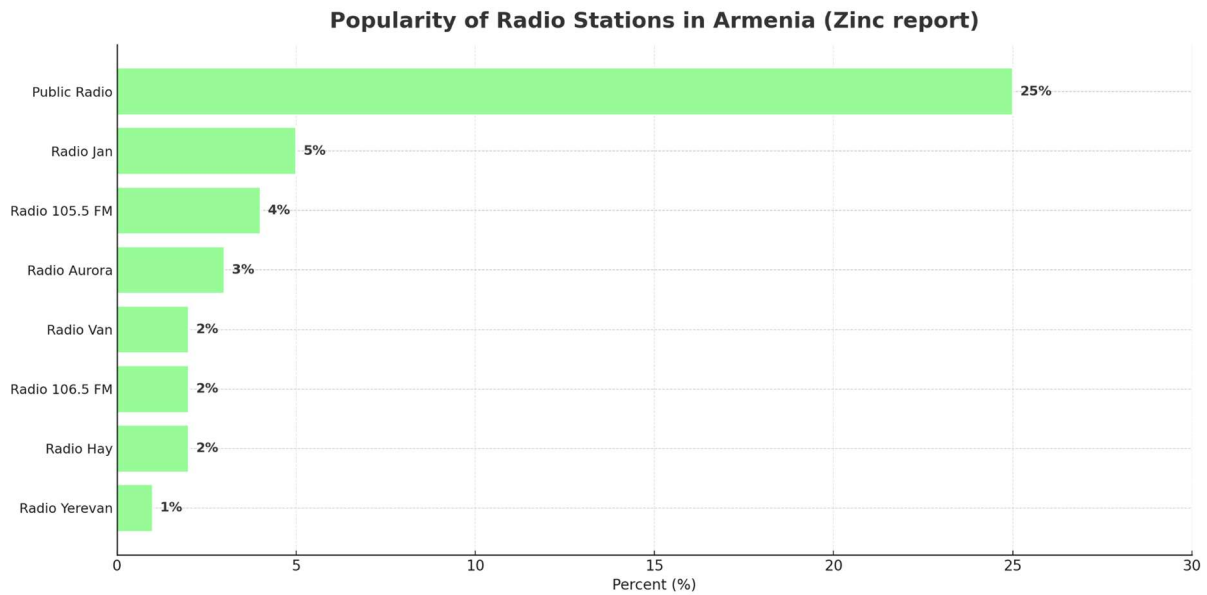


Also, in the 2019 APRG study, Azatutyun.am was indicated as the most preferred news portal (18%), while further down the list were News.am (10.7%), 1in.am (6.1%), 168.am (4.3%) and further down Tert.am, Aravot.am, Armlur.am, with 30% indicating no preference. This study also pointed to Azatutyun as the most credible site, ahead of News.am, 1in.am, and 168.am. In the Internews study, 17% declared visiting Azatutyun at least once a week, while next in line were 1in.am (13%), News.am (10%) and Lurer.com (7%), followed by 168.am, Mamul.am, Shamshyan.com, Tert.am, Aravot.am, and Civilnet.am. In this study, Azatutyun was indicated as the most credible portal (multiple-choice question) by 23%, 1in.am by 16%, and News.am by 14%.

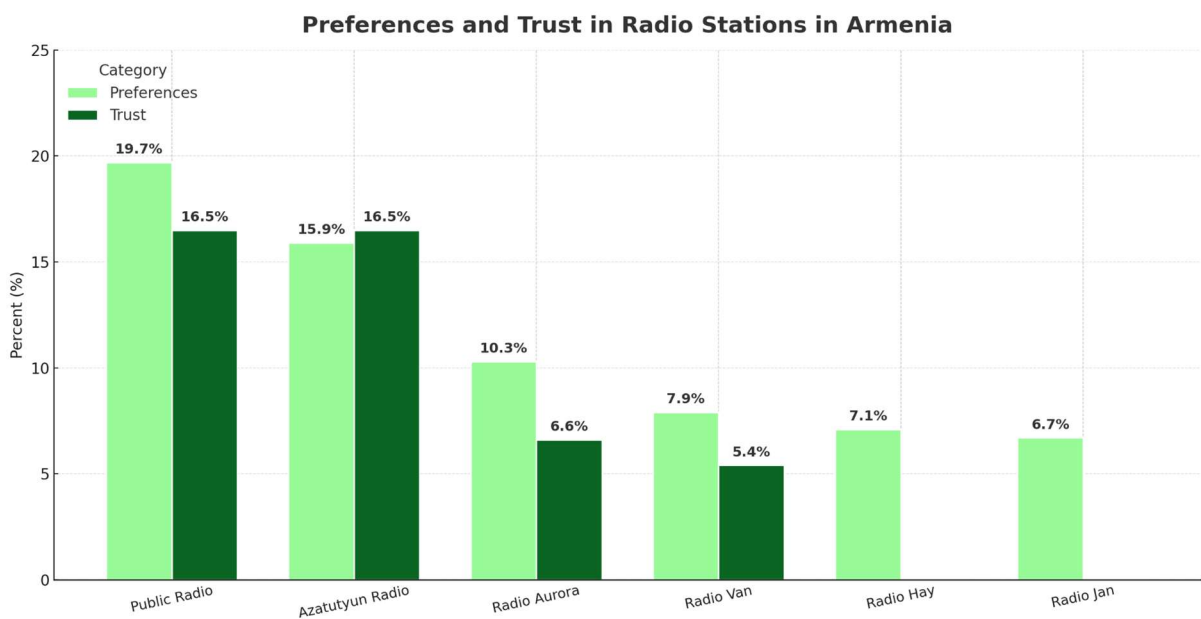


In summary, it can be considered that Azatutyun has a stable and definitely dominant position among news portals and is also strongly present in social media, as well as enjoys the greatest trust. Among the other portals, the strongest positions are held by News.am and 1in.am.

Radio is a significantly less popular source of information, but listening to at least one station once a week is declared by 25% of respondents in the Zinc report, and the most popular stations, after public radio, are Radio Jan (audience at the level of 5%), Radio 105.5 FM (4%), Radio Aurora (3%), Radio Van (2%), Radio 106.5 FM (2%), Radio Hay (2%), Radio Yerevan (1%).



In turn, in the 2019 APRG study, the most popular radio stations (after public radio, indicated as preferred by 19.7%) were: Azatutyun (15.9%), Aurora (10.3%), Van (7.9%), Hay (7.1%) and Jan (6.7%). Radio Azatutyun was, alongside public radio, the most trusted (16.5%), while Aurora and Van, which were ranked lower, gained 6.6% and 5.4% of indications, respectively.



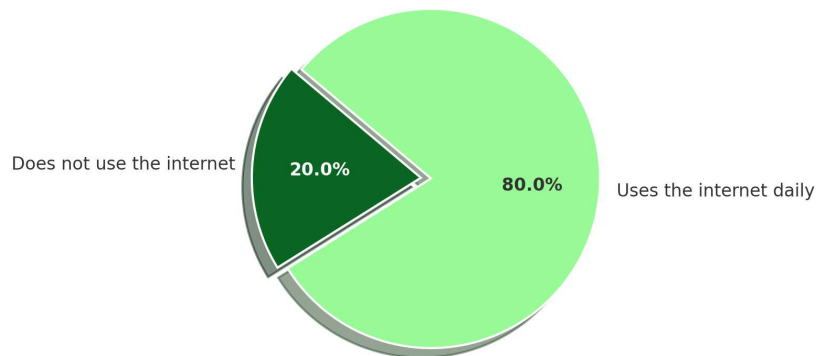
A similar picture emerges from the Infonews 2024 study (multiple choice question), in which public radio was indicated as the most trusted by 25% of respondents, Radio Aurora by 14%, Azatutjun by 13%, and further down with significantly lower indications were: Radio Jan, FM 105.5, Radio Van, Radio Yerevan, and Radio Hay.

Newspaper readership is at a very low and declining level. However, the ZINC report states that still 3% of the population reads printed newspapers. In the APRG 2019 report, Haykakan Zhamanak was indicated as the most frequently read and most credible, followed by Aravot, Hraparak, and Iravunk.

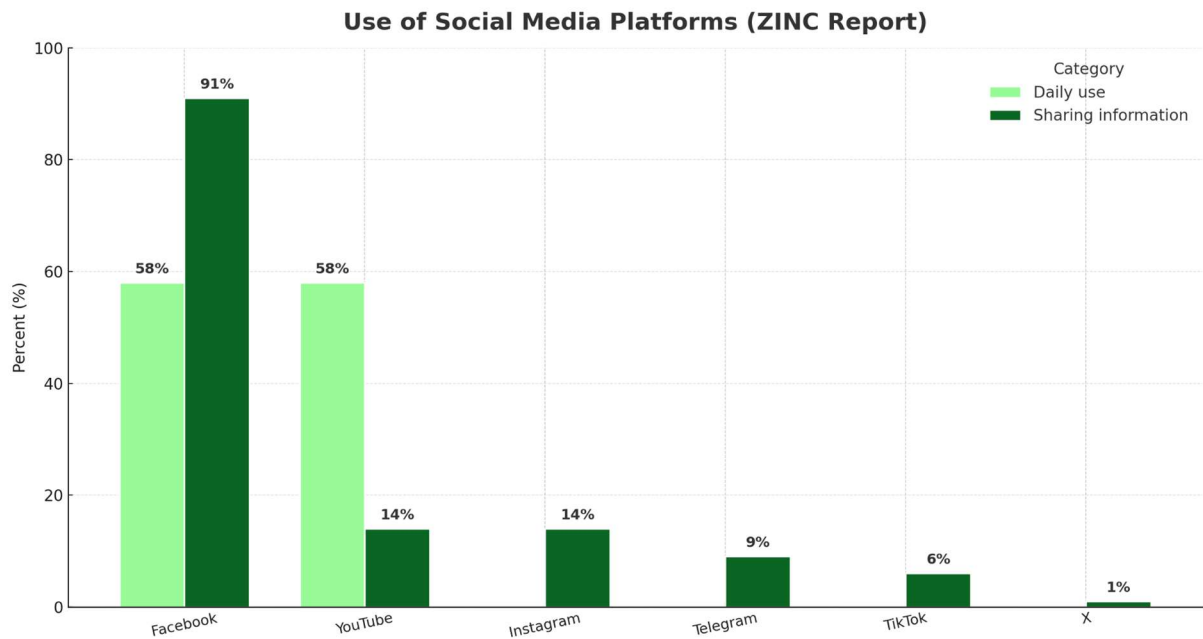
c) Popularity of internet sources, including unverified ones

Internet sources are enjoying growing popularity in Armenia, especially among young and middle-aged people, while older individuals still primarily obtain news from television. In the years 2018–2023, the percentage of people with internet access increased from 68% to 85%, which, however, is still not an impressive level. According to the ZINC 2024 study, internet platforms (social networks, blogs, vlogs, and podcasts) constituted the most popular source of information, slightly surpassing television. In the Caucasus Barometer study, 72% declared that they use the internet daily, while 18% said that they do not use it at all.

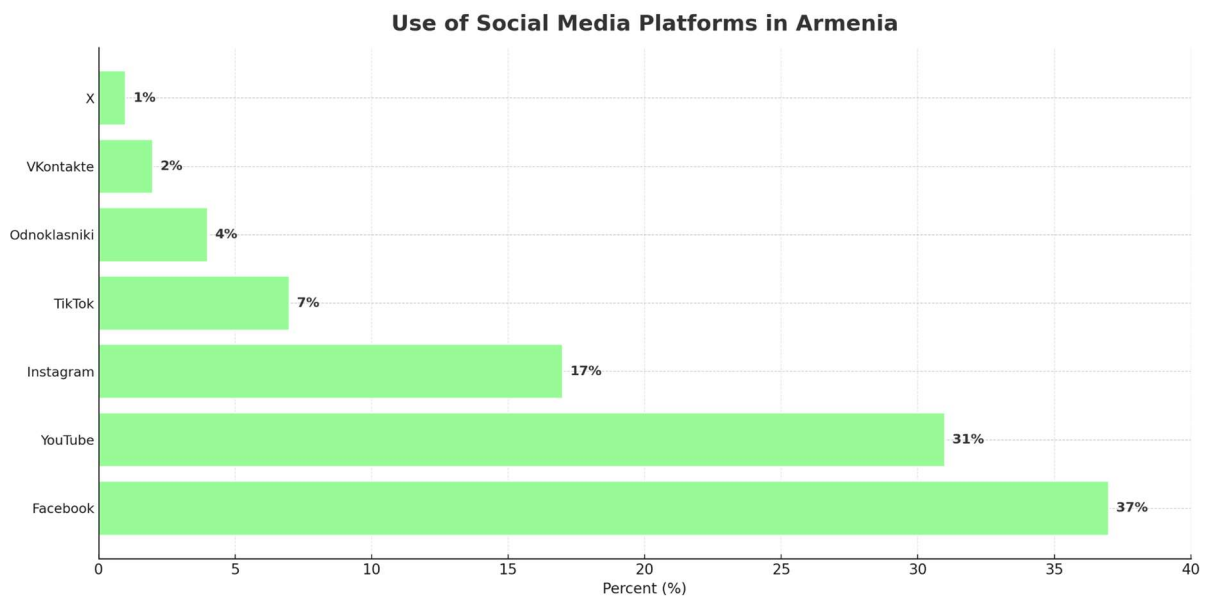
Daily Internet Use in Armenia (Caucasus Barometer)



As one of the two main sources of information, it was indicated by 58% of respondents in the ZINC 2024 survey, while internet news portals accounted for 16%. In the 2022 Caucasus Barometer study, internet sources were indicated as the main source of information by 46%, including 32% for social media and 14% for other internet sources. The most popular internet platform is Facebook, followed by YouTube, Instagram, and increasingly Telegram, while X is far behind. According to the ZINC report, 58% of respondents use Facebook and YouTube (several times a day), while 91% admit to sharing information on Facebook, 14% on YouTube and Instagram, 9% on Telegram, 6% on TikTok, and only 1% on X.

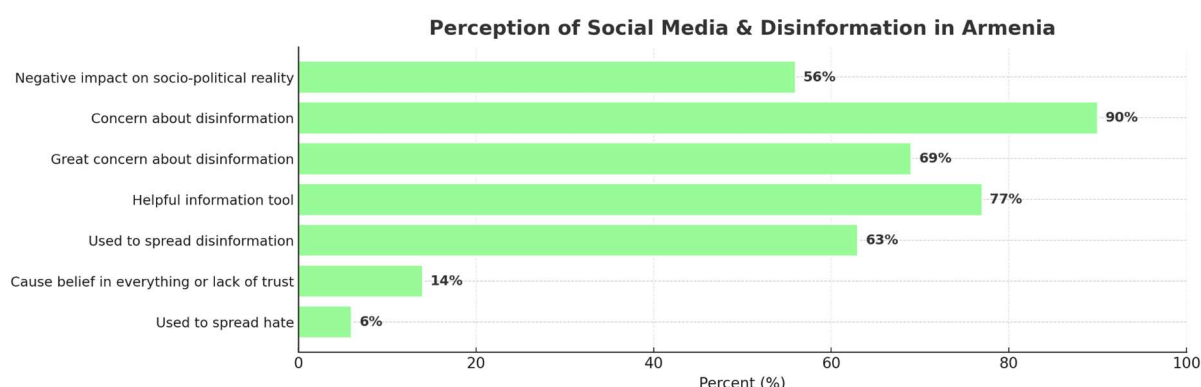


A similar result is presented by the Caucasus Barometer study: 37% declared using Facebook, 31% YouTube, 17% Instagram, while TikTok – 7%, Odnoklassniki – 4%, VKontakte – 2% and X – 1%.



There is a downward trend regarding the use of Odnoklassniki and VKontakte; nevertheless, given the polarization, it can be assumed that people negatively disposed towards Russia are abandoning these platforms, while the pro-Russian segment of society will not be willing to leave these platforms. Meanwhile, 84% of respondents declare that they use social media platforms to obtain information. Telegram, however, is listed in this study under communication platforms and ranks below Viber, Messenger, and WhatsApp, with only 9% declaring that they use this application. Nonetheless, only 39% declare that they use messengers to obtain information.

The studies show, however, that most Armenians have a high awareness of the threat of disinformation, although many lack knowledge on how to effectively avoid it. According to the Caucasus Barometer study, 56% believe that social media has a negative impact on the socio-political reality in Armenia, 90% declare concern about disinformation in Armenia (of which 69% have great concern). Moreover, although 77% consider social media to be a helpful tool for obtaining information, at the same time 63% believe that it is used to spread disinformation, additionally 14% think that it causes people to believe everything or not know what to believe, and a further 6% consider that it is used to spread hatred and extremism.

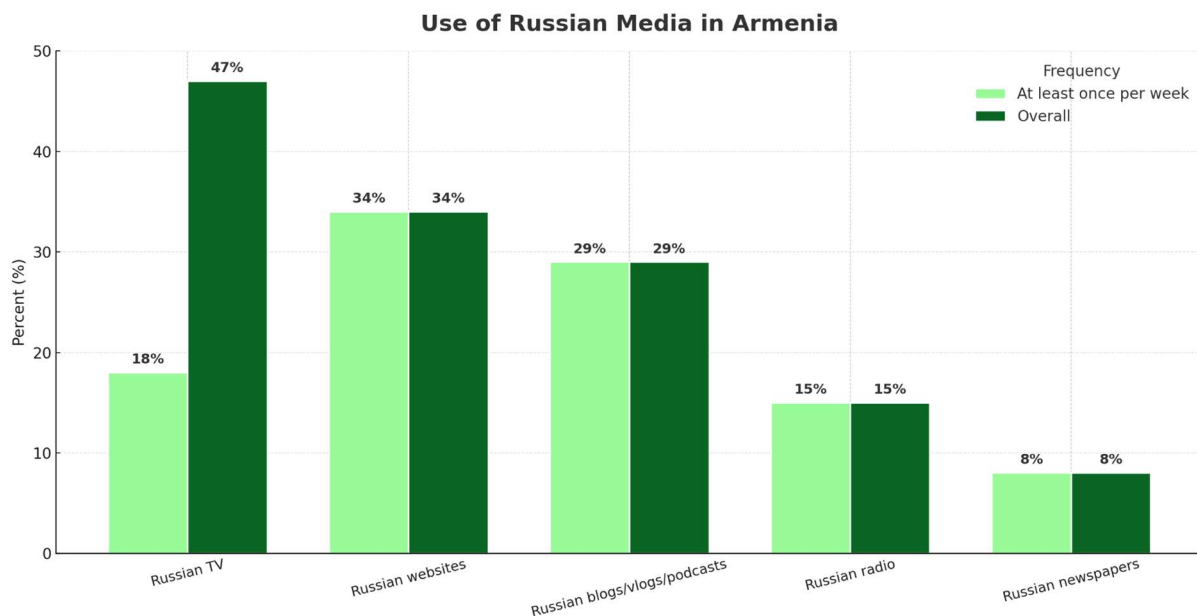


Nevertheless, according to the Internews 2024 study, 37% of respondents admit that they do not verify information obtained from the internet, while 37% verify it through other internet sources, and 13% declare verification by asking someone they trust. On the other hand, in the 2019 APRG study, 50.3% considered the internet the most reliable source of information,

while 42.5% held the opposite view. Generally, the studies indicate a certain level of distrust and resilience; however, it is at an insufficient level to avoid frequent and unconscious spreading of disinformation. The Internews report assesses the ability to recognize disinformation and perform fact-checking at only 18%, noting that among young, educated, and urban residents, awareness is higher.

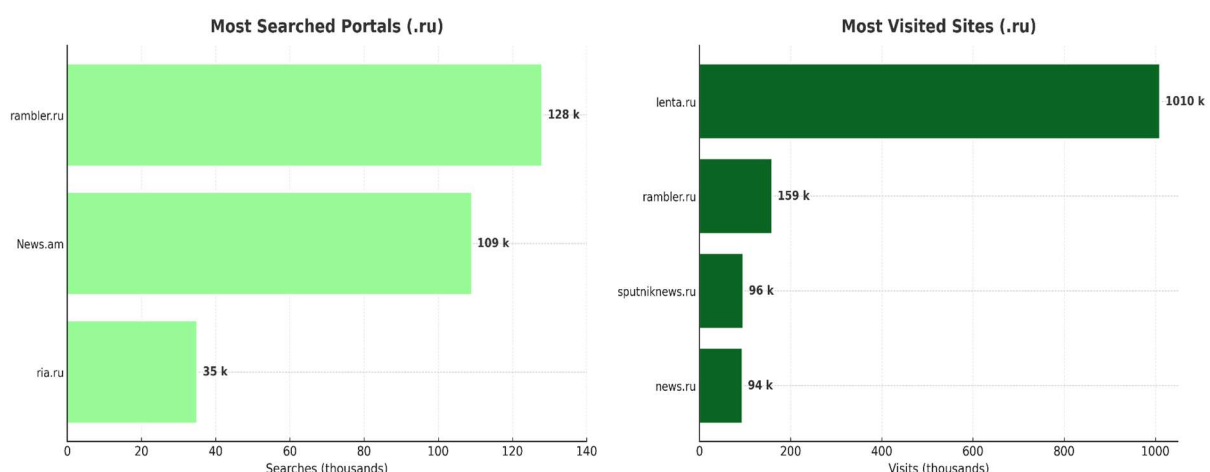
d) Popularity of foreign media

Among foreign media, Russian media have the greatest popularity and influence, which is determined by language issues (although in the Colabos 2021 study, only 9% stated that they obtain information from Russian-language sources, while in neighboring Georgia this percentage was 22%). According to the Internews 2024 study, 18% of Armenians declare that they watch Russian television at least once a week, and in general, 47% admit to watching it. For Russian websites, this is 34%; for Russian blogs, vlogs, and podcasts – 29%; Russian radio – 15%; and newspapers – 8%.



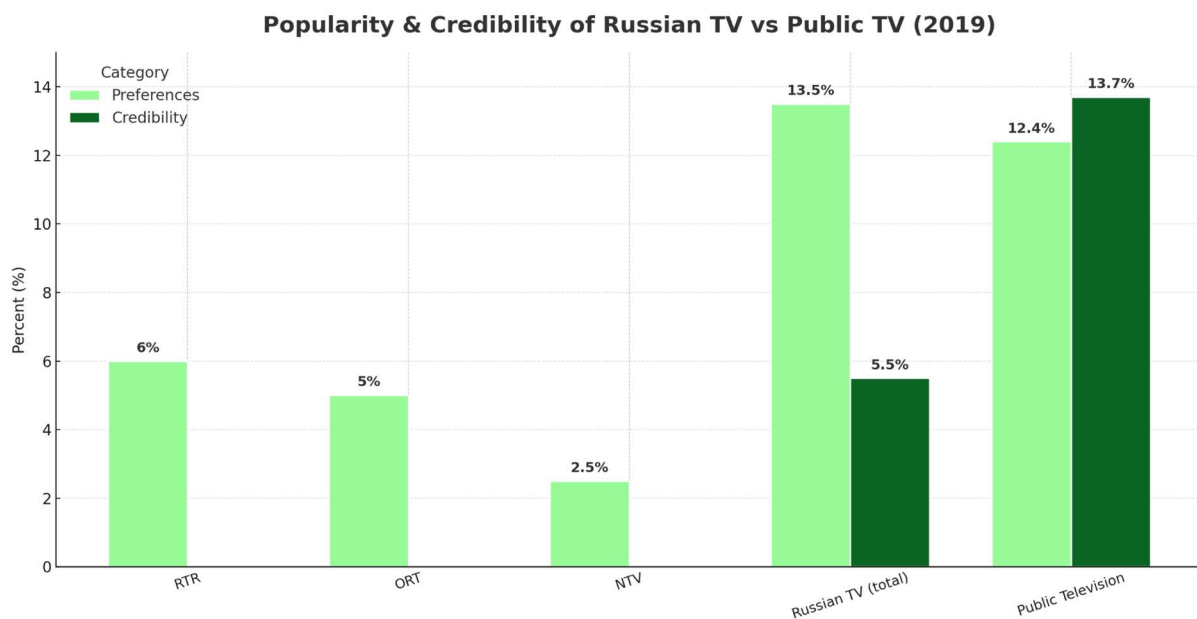
This is a significantly lower percentage than in the case of Armenian sources, but the difference is not huge, and this percentage is very high, although it may be partly related to Russian emigration after the invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, due to limited access to sources, journalists—not necessarily pro-Russian—resort to news from Russian sources. Media other than Russian media enjoy lower popularity largely for linguistic reasons and the incomparably greater availability of Russian television. International news portals were visited by 30% in 2024, while for blogs, vlogs, and podcasts, it was 26%, respectively.

The popularity of Russian media in Armenia is also noticeable in online activity reports. Ahrefs and Semrush reports (the main providers of SEO tools) indicate a significant presence of portals with the .ru domain. According to this information, among the most frequently searched portals in Armenia are rambler.ru (a Russian news portal owned by Sberbank—with 128 000 monthly searches, it ranks first, ahead of News.am with 109 000), ria.ru (the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti—with 35 000 searches). According to Semrush analysis, among the top websites visited in Armenia in August 2024 were: lenta.ru (1.01 million visits—ranking 5th after YouTube, Wikipedia, Instagram, and News.am); rambler.ru (159 000); sputniknews.ru (96 000) and news.ru (94 000).



The highest number of visits for foreign non-Russian media is bbc.com (which, however, does not have a service in the Armenian language but does have one in Russian) – 557 000 visits in August 2024.

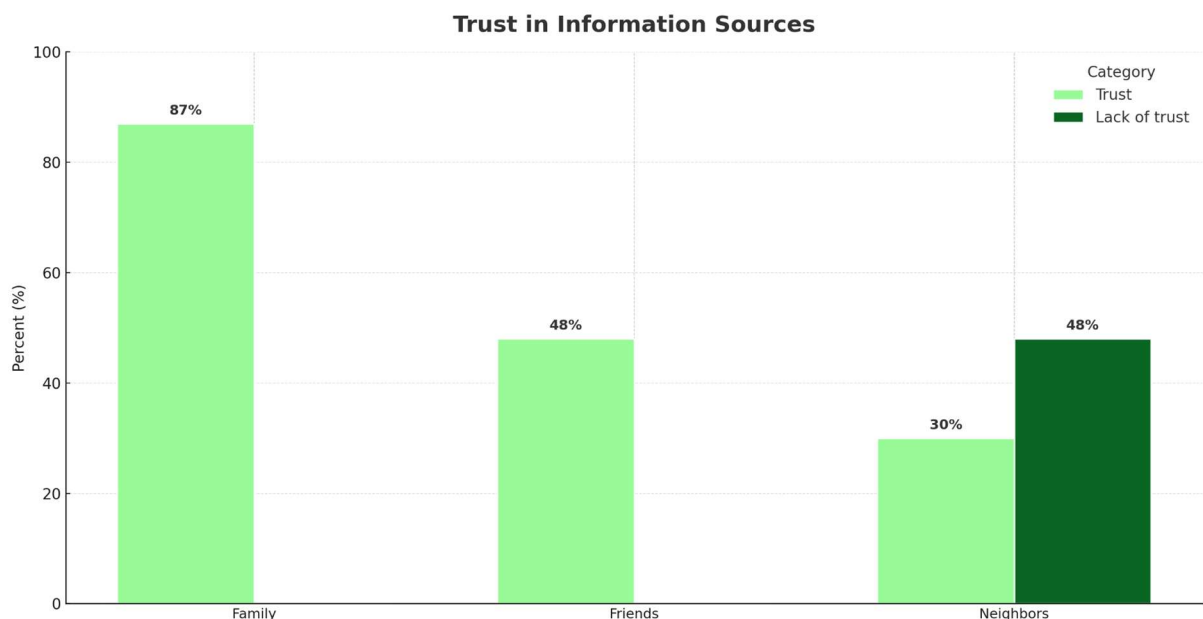
According to the APRG report, the most popular Russian televisions in 2019 were RTR (preferred by 6%), ORT (5%), NTV (2.5%). Altogether, Russian televisions were the preference of 13.5% of respondents, while public television was indicated by 12.4%. On the other hand, as the most credible, these three television stations were then indicated by only 5.5%, while public television by 13.7%.



This survey was also conducted before the 44-day war in 2020, after which the negative attitude toward Russia rose sharply.

e) Susceptibility to 'bazaar' information, including conspiracy theories

Family and friends, as one of the two main sources of information, were indicated by as many as 18% of respondents in the ZINC 2023 survey, and in the 2022 Caucasus Barometer study as the main source of information by 4%. Meanwhile, in the Colab Medios study, 28.4% of respondents declared that they obtain information from friends, and 24.2% from relatives. In the 2019 Advanced Public Research Group studies, family, friends, and acquaintances as the main source of information were indicated by as many as 19% of respondents. In the same study, respondents expressed the highest level of trust in information obtained from family (87%), while significantly lower trust was reported for friends (48%) and neighbors (30%). In this case as many as 48% declared a lack of trust.



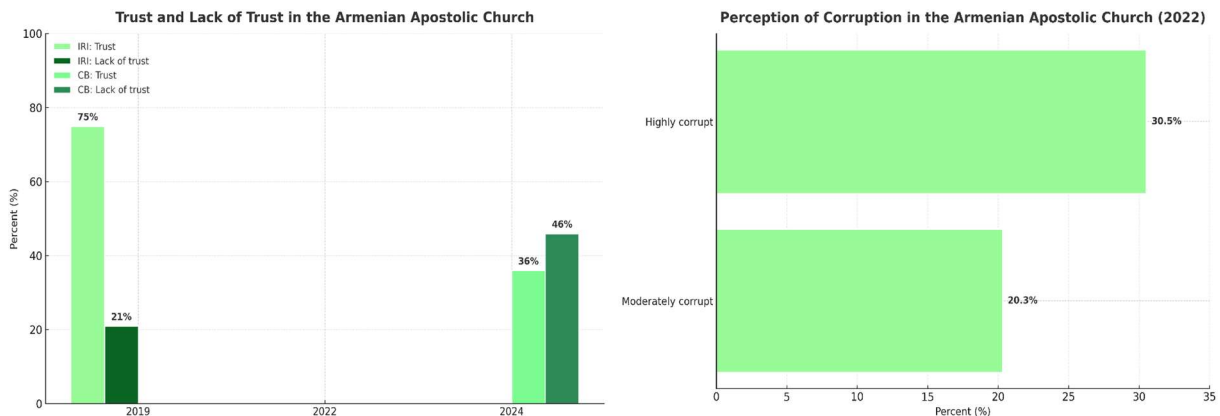
For comparison, in the case of television it was 50%, radio 59%, and print media 54%, while internet sources were significantly lower. It follows that interpersonal contacts are an important source of information circulation; nevertheless, trust is selective, which limits susceptibility to the spreading of rumors and conspiracy theories, although it does not exclude

such a threat. Susceptibility to conspiracy theories is also increased by mutual accusations between the main political forces of betrayal, collusion with enemies, etc. Because Armenia is actually in a difficult position regarding security and the geopolitical situation, Armenians often find it difficult to separate what is a conspiracy theory from what is an actual conspiracy. Many conspiracy theories also circulate around the defeat in the war in Artsakh, including especially suggestions spread by Russian propaganda about Pashinyan's betrayal.

Susceptibility to conspiracy theories increased due to the traumatization of society after the defeat in the 44-day war and the subsequent fall of Artsakh. Speculations of a conspiratorial nature are also expressed by experts; for example, in 2023 Armen Ayvazyan, in an interview with NEWS.am, expressed the opinion that Armenia is systematically being handed over by Russia to Western influence, as some secret agreements were concluded in this respect. On the other hand, pro-Russian circles and Russian media such as Sputnik spread conspiracy theories suggesting arrangements between Pashinyan and Aliyev concerning, among other things, the transfer of some territories to Azerbaijan.

f) Recognition of religious institutions as a source of information

The Armenian Apostolic Church enjoys a large, although declining, level of trust, which is related to polarization. According to the IRI survey conducted in September 2024, 48% of respondents trust it, while 46% declare a lack of trust. For comparison, in October 2019, these figures were respectively 74% and 21%. Similar results are reported by the Caucasus Barometer – 35% declare trust, and 44.5% lack of trust, while in 2019 these were respectively 80% and 8%. Other studies, conducted in November 2022, indicate a high level of public distrust towards the Armenian Apostolic Church. 30.5% of respondents considered the Church to be highly corrupt, and 20.3% moderately corrupt.



These results reflect a crisis of trust towards the religious institution and indicate the need for reforms and greater transparency in its activities.

This downward trend should be explained, on the one hand, by the general decline in trust in institutions, and on the other hand, by the political involvement of part of the clergy, particularly Bishop Bagrat Galstanjan. Galstanjan is a deeply polarizing figure within Armenian society and the most outspoken opponent of Prime Minister Pashinyan. At the same time, he is increasingly identified with the pro-Russian former Armenian presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, which also affects the trust towards the entire church among people negatively disposed to these figures. On the other hand, Pashinyan's supporters accuse the Apostolic Church of politicization.

Another example of political activity by the clergy is their accusation against Pashinyan's government of pursuing a "defeatist" concession policy towards Azerbaijan, especially in the context of returning several villages in the Tavush province (April 2024). They claimed that the policy of concessions weakens Armenia's position and legitimizes Azerbaijan's territorial claims. The clergy also criticized Pashinyan's vision of an "era of peace" based on one-sided compromises, considering it a dangerous illusion. Criticism of Pashinyan's government also concerns the alleged threat to the moral and spiritual values of the nation. Conversely, Pashinyan accuses the highest leadership of the Armenian Apostolic Church of failure in spiritual leadership of the nation. In his opinion, the Church has not met the challenges facing

society, especially in difficult times, and its leadership has failed to unite the nation in the face of crises. This criticism fits into the broader context of tensions between the government and the clergy.

4. FIMI key resources

a) Companies

On the Forbes billionaire list, there are 9 Armenians, all of whom live in the diaspora and 6 of them are Russian citizens. In particular, Ruben Vardanyan, a Russian oligarch who has been in an Azerbaijani prison since September 2023 (after serving as a state minister in the Artsakh government from November 2022 to February 2023), plays a major role. Since then, Vardanyan has become a symbol for pro-Russian circles accusing the Pashinyan government of ignoring the fate of Armenian prisoners held by Azerbaijan (although Russian intervention could quickly lead to his release - Russia clearly does not want this, as the pro-Russian opposition would lose a propaganda tool). Vardanyan made his fortune with the company Troika Dialog (now Sberbank), whose shares he sold in 2012, after which he and Mikhail Broitman founded an investment company. He currently holds 75% of the shares and through it controls a number of other companies, including the Armenian commercial bank Ameriabank. He is also the founder of Global Blue Russia. Vardanyan is involved in many philanthropic projects (although his intentions in this activity are questioned), particularly Initiatives for Development of Armenia (IDEA), through which he financed, among others, the creation of UWC Dilijan College, the renovation of the Tatev monastery, and he is a co-founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative (which is not, however, an initiative under his control). Vardanyan was also one of the founders of the construction of the Armenian cathedral in Moscow, which gave him influence in the Armenian Apostolic Church. Vardanyan has close relations with Putin and has been accused of supporting Russian expansion in the post-Soviet area, including Ukraine, and striving to subordinate Armenia to Russia.

Other Russian oligarchs of Armenian origin include: Sergey Galitsky-Arutyunyan (owner of the Magnit supermarket chain and the football club Krasnodar), Samvel Karapetyan, Albert Avdolyan (founder of the company Yota, which became the first LTE operator in Russia; owner of coal mining and gas companies in the Far East and Siberia), Artem Khachatryan (co-founder of the Russian retail store Fix Price in 2007), and Andrey Andreyev-Ogadzanyantsas (who since 2004 has created five online dating websites and apps: Mamba, Badoo, Bumble, Chappy, and Lumen).

Karapetyan founded Tashir Group in 1999, which financed a number of initiatives in Armenia and Artsakh and, through it, controls two shopping complexes in Yerevan. He also financed the construction of a hospital in Stepanakert in 2013, and in September 2021 announced a plan to invest \$600 million in the modernization of the energy sector in Armenia, although there is no confirmation that this actually took place. Since 2017, Tashir Group has held a 70% stake in Electric Networks of Armenia, one of the main electricity distributors in Armenia; however, in December 2024, the JAM News portal wrote that ENA does not invest at all in the transmission infrastructure, which is the main cause of outages, while at the same time investing in meters to be able to easily cut off people who are behind on their electricity payments. He is closely connected with Kocharyan - in June 2020, he paid a \$5 million bail for his release from detention. He has received numerous state decorations from Russia and Armenia, as well as from the Armenian Apostolic Church. He also supported the reconstruction of the Armenian district in Beirut after the explosion in the local port in 2020. He is closely connected to Putin

On the other hand, the richest people in Armenia include Robert Kocharyan, Serzh Sargsyan, and Gagik Tsarukyan. The latter is, among other things, the owner of Multi Group, which includes the Yerevan Brandy, Wine, and Vodka Factory Ararat (the NOY brand). Besides them, the richest people also include Samvel Aleksanyan, a member of parliament from Serzh Sargsyan's Republican Party, who controls the Yerevan City and Kaiser supermarket chains, the production of low-quality vodkas, and the Alex Grig company dominating the food import market; Ruben Hayrapetyan, a businessman associated with Serzh Sargsyan.

One of the most important companies in Armenia is Gazprom Armenia (owner of all gas infrastructure in Armenia), with associated people including former prime minister Karen Karapetyan, Ashot Hakobyan, and Vardan Harututyun. Additionally, the mobile phone company Viva Armenia belongs to the Russian group MTS. The Russian company GeoProMining Gold exploits gold deposits in the Sotk mine on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and controls the Zangezur Copper Molybdenum Combine, which is the largest company in Armenia employing 4,500 people.

The influence of Russia and the Armenian diaspora in Russia is also connected with the role of remittances from Armenians working in Russia, whose value in 2022 amounted to 3.6 billion USD. Furthermore, Russia is Armenia's main trading partner, and after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the value of exports from Armenia to Russia increased significantly, although this is mainly re-export of goods subject to sanctions. In 2022, exports to Russia accounted for 41% of the total value of Armenia's exports, which gives Russia an instrument of pressure on Armenia (threatening with sanctions).

b) NGO

Among the organizations that are or may be susceptible to Russian influence operations, the following should be particularly mentioned:

- Artsakh Union, an organization created to represent refugees from Artsakh; (due to the pro-Russian narrative blaming Pashinyan for the fall of Artsakh);
- Helsinki Committee of Armenia (Հայաստանի Հելսինկյան կոմիտե) – although its goal is the defense of human rights, its chairman Avetik Ishkhanyan uses the Russian narrative regarding "Pashinyan's betrayal" and accuses the current team of "anti-Russian rhetoric";
- Union of Fighters for the Freedom of Artsakh, with a negative attitude towards Pashinyan and normalization with Türkiye and Azerbaijan;

- Union of Reserve Officers; founded in April 2021, opposed to Pashinyan, supports Bishop Bagrat Galstanjan;
- Russian House in Armenia (two branches - in Yerevan and Gyumri); operates based on an intergovernmental agreement;
- Russian-Armenian Humanitarian Assistance Center (RACHR) - established under an Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Armenia;
- "Lazarian Club" - a platform for meetings and exchange of views between the societies of Russia and Armenia;
- Putin Clubs – an initiative from 2012, two such clubs were founded by Ararat Stepanyan;
- Moscow House in Yerevan;
- Assembly of Eurasian Nations - not an organization founded in Armenia but implements various projects there.

c) Religious leaders

Armenia is a country that is basically uniform in terms of religion, and religious minorities, including Christian denominations other than the Armenian Apostolic Church (including Catholicism and Orthodoxy), play a secondary role. The Church is very strongly connected with Armenian identity, as it is the national church, although this may not correspond with the actual religiosity of Armenians. The significance of religion in the history and present of Armenians is also related to the conquest of Armenia by Muslim empires of the Arabs, Seljuks, Persians and Ottomans. However, Armenian-Muslim relations have not always been confrontational; the conflict with Türkiye and Azerbaijan has a nationalist background, and religious differences play an important, albeit secondary, role and are often instrumentalized. The involvement of priests in the national struggle against the Muslim opponent further contributed

to the impression that it is a war of a religious nature. Also, the destruction of Armenian churches and khachkars by Turkiye (in the 20th century) and Azerbaijan (in the 20th and 21st centuries) contributed to this impression, although in reality it was (and is) done not because of religion but because of the connection of these objects with Armenian national identity. However, such a narrative also served to strengthen the role of the church in society.

The national character of the Armenian church, which, contrary to widespread stereotypes, has nothing to do with Orthodoxy (neither doctrinally nor historically), theoretically should make it independent of external influences. However, there are several factors that may expose it to external influence. This concerns in particular the importance of the diaspora, the propagandistic portrayal of Russia as the defender of Christianity (especially in the Middle East), as well as the narrative related to the alleged "degeneration" of the West.

Historically, the relations between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church are complex. In the 19th century, during the wars with the Persian Empire and the Ottoman Empire, Russia presented itself as the defender of Christians; however, after occupying Armenian territory, tensions very quickly arose between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the tsarist authorities, who had no intention of granting Armenians even autonomy and saw the Apostolic Church as a threat. Therefore, the tsarist authorities systematically restricted the independence of the Apostolic Church and also unsuccessfully sought to absorb it into Russian Orthodoxy. On the other hand, Russia tried to play the role of protector of Armenians in Ottoman territories, which limited the maneuvering room of Armenian clergy. The perception of Russia by part of the clergy is still influenced by the persecutions to which clergy, including hierarchs (Catholicos Khoren was murdered on Stalin's orders), were subjected during the USSR times. Many current clergy and hierarchs in Armenia were born in the diaspora; for example, Catholicos Karekin I came from Syria.

During the rule of the pro-Russian "Karabakh clan," i.e., presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, the Apostolic Church had a strong position thanks to government support, which translates into good relations with the political option represented by these politicians even now. This, in turn, influenced growing tensions between the Catholicos and Prime Minister Nikol

Pashinyan. It is also highly significant that the largest diaspora concentration, estimated at 2-2.5 million Armenians, is in Russia, which means that the Apostolic Church must maintain good relations with the authorities of that country. Two dioceses of the Armenian Apostolic Church operate in Russia: The Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan (which also includes Belarus, Moldova, and the post-Soviet Central Asian republics) and the Diocese of Southern Russia (with its seat in Krasnodar). The position of the Church was also influenced by the situation of the diaspora in the Middle East, especially in Syria. The unequivocal siding of the West with the anti-Assad opposition, combined with ignoring the threat posed by its jihadist part to Syrian Christians, caused Russia to again begin to claim the role of "defender of Christians." Additionally, Russian influence in the Apostolic Church is stimulated by the liberal attitude of part of Pashinyan's pro-European political base, which, combined with a narrative based on the alleged threat to traditional values (e.g., LGBT) from the West, causes some clergy to replicate anti-Western stereotypes and see Russia as an ally.

A special political role among the clergy is played by Bishop Bagrat Galstanjan – his family moved from Iran to the Armenian SSR in 1971; from 1998 to 2000 he stayed in England and from 2003 to 2013 he headed the diocese in Canada, from which he left amid deep conflict; since 2015 he has been the bishop of Tavush, and since February 2023 – archbishop; in May 2024 he led protests against the return of 4 villages in the Tavush region to Azerbaijan, and then founded the movement "Tavush for the Homeland"; he is supported by pro-Russian circles, particularly those associated with Kocharyan and Sargsyan, who have dominated Galstanjan's political base. Hovhanes Hovhanisian is also associated with Galstanjan – a charismatic prelate from Dadivank; a resolute opponent of normalizing relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan, which positioned him in opposition to Pashinyan.

The Russian Orthodox Church also operates in Armenia, and although the number of Orthodox Armenians is small, in 2021 the Diocese of Yerevan and Armenia was established. This happened even though, jurisdictionally within Orthodox churches, Armenia falls under the Georgian Orthodox Church. However, the creation of this diocese was insisted upon by Catholicos Karekin II himself.

Moreover, Armenian monasteries in Artsakh were taken over by the so-called Udi-Albanian community, whose place on the map of Christian denominations has not yet been determined, but it will most likely be recognized as an Orthodox community. Meanwhile, in Azerbaijan, there is also the Baku diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, whose leader Archbishop Alexander (Ischein) congratulated Aliyev in 2020 on the victory in the 44-day war.

d) Military leaders and military cooperation and non-state military formations

Russian influence in the area of Armenia's military security results from: Armenia's membership in the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), the presence of Russian troops on Armenian territory, pro-Russian sentiments among veterans, and Russian influence in the army and security structures.

Armenia has been a member of the CSTO since the establishment of this format in 1994; nevertheless, in May 2022, it effectively suspended its participation in the CSTO due to the organization's failure to fulfill the obligation to assist Armenia under the collective defense mechanism. Since 2023, Armenia has boycotted CSTO summits and joint exercises. Earlier, in November 2018, the government of Nikol Pashinyan (who took power in May 2018) caused the removal from the position of CSTO Secretary General of Armenian General Yuri Khachaturov, who was accused of overthrowing the constitutional order due to his role in suppressing opposition protests in 2008 after the presidential elections. At that time, Khachaturov was Chief of the General Staff.

The Soviet past, conflict with Türkiye, which is in NATO, and membership in CSTO meant that most of Armenia's armed forces' equipment was of Soviet or Russian origin. Around 2020, Armenia began attempts to acquire Western equipment, which, however, was blocked due to the perception of Armenia as a Russian ally. This also applied to Armenia's attempts to purchase arms from Poland. Only in October 2023 did Armenia sign a letter of intent with France to purchase the Mistral-3 missile defense system and bought French ACMAT Bastion

armored personnel carriers, CEASAR self-propelled howitzers, and GM-200 radars. In July 2024, Armenia conducted joint exercises, "Eagle Partner 2024," with the USA.

These actions fit into an increasingly clear trend of geopolitical reorientation of the Pashinyan government, which also includes military and security spheres. However, this government tries not to completely sever ties with Russia due to fears of an attempted coup using the Armenian diaspora in Russia and pro-Russian elements in the military and security forces. Additionally, Russia threatens Armenia with the threat from Azerbaijan, suggesting that only it can influence Aliyev not to attack the Syunik province.

Russian forces are still stationed in Armenia, numbering approximately 4,000 Russian soldiers at the 102nd Russian Military Base in Gyumri and along the borders of Armenia with Iran and Türkiye. The Gyumri base was established under the Treaty on the Legal Status of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation located on Armenian territory, signed August 21, 1992 and the Treaty on the Russian Military Base on Armenian Territory of March 16, 1995. According to these agreements, these forces are to remain in Armenia until 2044 to "defend the territory of Armenia."

The base is equipped with S-300V anti-aircraft missile systems, MiG-29 fighter jets, Mi-24P and Mi-8MT helicopters. Part of the base is located on the territory of Erebuni airport; additionally, near the Gyumri base, there is a settlement for families of Russian soldiers with about 4,000 residents.

Since 1992, the borders of Armenia with Iran and Türkiye have been patrolled exclusively by Russian troops; however, in July 2024, the Russians left Zvartnots airport, and in October 2024 it was agreed that from January 1, 2025, they will cease to control the border with Iran.

Pro-Russian sentiments among veterans:

- Union of Veterans of the Liberation War of Artsakh – an organization founded in 2000 by General Vitaly Balasanyan; it maintains a narrative blaming Pashinyan for the fall of Artsakh and accusing him of betrayal; at the same time, it refers to the tradition of Armenians serving in the Soviet army.
- Union of Reserve Officers; founded in April 2021, opposed to Pashinyan.
- Union of Reserve Officers of the National Security Service.
- Union "Shield of the Homeland".
- Other smaller veteran organizations and paramilitary organizations.

Associated with these organizations are individuals such as retired General Hayk Nahapetyan, former Director of the National Security Service Tatul Petrosyan, reserve Colonel Mikael Ambartsumyan.

Russian influence in the army and security structures – despite personnel changes made after 2018, until recently commanders linked to Russia, Robert Kocharyan, and Serzh Sargsyan remained in command structures. In this context, among others, can be mentioned General Yuri Khachaturov (former Chief of the General Staff 2008-2016, wanted for suppression of protests in 2008); General Grigoriy Khachaturov (his son); General Onik Gasparyan (former Chief of the General Staff 2020-2021 and initiator of the letter demanding Pashinyan's resignation, signed by a group of officers in March 2021); General Movses Hakobyan (former Chief of the General Staff 2016-2018); General Tiran Khachatryan (one of the signatories of the officers' letter in 2021); General Mikael Harutyunyan (former Chief of the General Staff 1995-2007 and Minister of Defense 2007-2008, wanted for suppression of protests in 2008 and holding Russian citizenship); General Seyran Ohanyan (former Chief of the General Staff 2007-2008 and Minister of Defense 2008-2016, wanted for suppression of protests in 2008).

Although Iran is perceived by Armenians as a friendly country, there is no close cooperation in the area of security. For Iran, having a border with Armenia has strategic geopolitical significance, and it openly threatened intervention in case of an Azerbaijan attack on Syunik;

nevertheless, Armenia decidedly does not want the presence of Iranian forces on its territory. However, Armenia made significant arms purchases from India, and their transport can only occur through the territory or airspace of Iran. Additionally, Iran opened its consulate in Kapan in Syunik to emphasize its support for Armenia's territorial integrity.

e) Traditional media

Due to the widespread knowledge of the Russian language in Armenia and the significance of the Armenian diaspora in Russia, including the active participation of some of its representatives in influence operations in Armenia on behalf of Russia (in particular Margarita Simonyan), Russian media play a huge role in Russian FIMI activities in Armenia. In addition, there is significant polarization in the media. Some media also have financial ties to Russia or Russian oligarchs of Armenian origin. Those media that are connected with Robert Kocharyan, Serzh Sargsyan, or Gagik Tsarukyan also have a pro-Russian orientation. Television and radio stations:

- Kentron TV – television associated with Gagik Tsarukyan
- 5TV – connections with Kocharyan
- Armenia TV (does not have a distinct political message but has ties with Gazprom)
- Yerkir Media
- A-TV (capital ties with Russia)
- Radio 106.5 FM (Lratvakan)
- Internet portals and newspapers:
 - Tert.am
 - Armlur.am
 - Lurer.com – pro-Russian ties and content
 - Arminfo – pro-Russian ties and content
 - AntiFake – false fact-checking and suspicious ties
 - Novosti Armenia – connections with Sputnik, pro-Russian content
 - 24news – pro-Russian and anti-Western content

- Panorama.am – connections with Kocharyan
- Past.am – pro-Russian and anti-Western propaganda narrative
- portal and newspaper Hraparak
- Weekly Azg (positive attitude towards Kocharyan; negative towards Pashinyan)
- Weekly Iravunk – pro-Russian content; founded by the Union of Constitutional Rights – a Russophile, Eurosceptic, conservative party
- Weekly 168 Zham – orientation close to Sargsyan; hostile to Pashinyan
- Aravot daily (connections with Sargsyan)
- Armenian Voice daily – Russian-language, cooperates with Sputnik
- Monthly Droszhak
- Russian media: Russia Today, Sputnik Armenia, RTR Planeta, Channel One; portal Lenta.ru, Radio Echo of Moscow.

f) Non-traditional media

Many pro-Russian politicians such as Gagik Tsarukyan and Vardan Ghukasyan are active on social media. Bishop Bagrat Galstanyan is also very active. Russia and pro-Russian Armenian oligarchs and politicians maintain troll farms on social media, especially on Telegram. Pro-Russian disinformation is also spread by some Russian journalists active in Armenia, who gained a significant audience during the 44-day war while being war correspondents – in particular Semyon Pegov, also known as "war gonzo."

g) Academic and scientific cooperation

A key institution from the point of view of academic and scientific cooperation between Russia and Armenia is the Russian-Armenian University (RAU). The university offers programs in Russian and Armenian, supports academic mobility, and collaborates with other Russian universities, including Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU). Many Armenian-Russian conferences take place at RAU, including recurring ones; for example, in October this year, the

"Russian-Armenian Media Forum: Youth Perspective" was held. Meanwhile, in June, the 10th Armenian-Russian Youth Forum was held in Moscow, organized by the Russian Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

In 2018, a Scientific Cooperation Agreement was signed between the Russian Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia. In 2021, an action plan was signed for the implementation of the provisions of this agreement, according to which key joint research and scientific projects will be carried out in areas such as global problems and international relations, mathematics, physics, chemistry and materials science, biological sciences and biotechnology, historical and philological sciences, medical research, agricultural sciences, nanotechnology, energy, machine building, and mechanics. The action plan encompassed about 60 joint projects and studies. Some of the research was to be conducted with the involvement of the Southern Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Meanwhile, in June 2023, the first Russian-Armenian scientific-educational forum titled "Integration of Science, Education and Production – the Motor of Economic Modernization" was held in Yerevan. On the Armenian side, participants included the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia, Yerevan State University, and the Russian-Armenian University. In April 2024, Ashot Saghyan, President of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, and Grigoriy Trubnikov, Director of the Russian Institute for Nuclear Research, signed a cooperation agreement in the fields of basic sciences, information technologies, innovations, and education. Under this agreement, the creation of a joint research structure is planned to maintain and develop cooperation between scientists and specialists from the research institutes of the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research (JINR) and the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, as well as for the training of scientific personnel and staff.

There are many more similar initiatives, which results, among other things, from the fact that a large part of Armenia's scientific and academic staff was educated at Russian universities. Furthermore, these ties are also favored by the significant Armenian diaspora in Russia and the widespread knowledge of the Russian language in Armenia.

5. Selected techniques and tactics of manipulation, linguistic mechanisms of persuasion, actions and psychological effects – identification and analysis

Influence operations are strategic actions aimed at changing perception, public opinion, policy, and social behaviors in target countries. In the case of Armenia, they are mainly carried out by Russia, which uses various disinformation and psychological techniques to weaken Armenia's relations with the West, as well as to keep it within its sphere of influence. Armenia is particularly susceptible to such actions due to historical, religious, and economic ties with Russia and geopolitical instability.

DISINFORMATION AND MANIPULATION

Creating an alternative reality: The narrative that "The West wants to start World War III," built on quotes from Western politicians taken out of context. For example, Sputnik Armenia published an analysis in which quotes from French President Emmanuel Macron were manipulated to suggest aggressive NATO intentions towards Russia.

Persuasions about alleged aggression by Western countries focus on arousing fear and undermining trust in international institutions. Claims such as "The West wants to start World War III" or "Poland plans to annex western Ukraine" are examples of strategic information manipulation aimed at destabilizing the social and political order in the countries targeted by this propaganda. These narratives are based on exploiting historical and cultural conditions that make the societies of these countries vulnerable to certain forms of propaganda. Conspiracy theories concerning alleged neo-imperial ambitions of Western countries, including Poland ("Poland is inciting World War III" – Sputnik Armenia presents false statements by Polish leaders intended to create fear of conflict escalation) are often propagated in a way that

suggests close cooperation between the USA and NATO in destabilizing the region (not only in the sense of Central Europe but also the area of the former USSR, which also includes Armenia). Particular attention is drawn to the repeated accusation of supporting so-called "color revolutions" and instrumental use of radical groups, including jihadists, as tools to realize Western geopolitical interests. These messages are not accidental; their construction is based on advanced social engineering techniques. Fear of global conflict and concerns about interference in territorial integrity are skillfully exploited, allowing the maximization of the reach of these contents.

The persuasions discussed use cognitive mechanisms such as confirmation bias and availability heuristics. Thanks to this, they are effectively targeted at audiences with certain worldviews who show a greater tendency to accept information consistent with their beliefs. Research shows that these contents gain popularity especially during periods of international crises when societies are more susceptible to emotional manipulation.

False accusations against the West: Narratives about the alleged annexation of western Ukraine by Poland. Pro-Russian media in Armenia, such as Iravunk, published manipulated maps and false reports suggesting that Poland plans an "Anschluss" of these territories in exchange for financial support for Ukraine. The persuasions used are strongly emotionally charged. For example, the campaign "Betrayal of the West" towards Christian Armenians in the Middle East, where jihadist groups, allegedly supported by the West, threaten the Armenian population, and the information campaign "The West sacrificed Armenia for its interests" – (Iravunk), based on criticism of the West for lack of support in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Information activities aimed at the perception of the West in Armenia can be presented from the perspective of several leading tactics of action:

Spreading false narratives about the West: Through persuasion about alleged Western aggression, e.g., "The West wants to start World War III" or "Poland plans to annex western Ukraine." Suggestions that the USA and NATO support destabilization of the region through jihadists or color revolutions.

Redirecting responsibility: By portraying Armenia as a "victim of the West," which tries to detach it from Russia, allegedly resulting in destabilization of the country, and attributing to the West the blame for the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and the alleged "sacrifice of Armenia" in the "geopolitical game."

Discrediting attacks: Discrediting the image and intentions of the West as well as pro-Western aspirations follows two main vectors: Personalization of the message through attacks on Armenian political leaders, especially Prime Minister Pashinyan, who is presented as a "Soros puppet" or a tool of the West acting in favor of Azerbaijan and Türkiye. Undermining the credibility of institutions through persuasion that the European Union and NATO are ineffective and act only in the interest of their most powerful members, ignoring the needs of Armenia.

Creating a contrast between the "good ally" and the "bad ally": The analyzed cycle of influence operations shows Russia portrayed as the only true defender of Armenia, while the West is depicted as unreliable and focused on its own interests. At the same time, narratives emphasize losses resulting from Armenia's "betrayal" of Russia, e.g., potential loss of military and economic security. These persuasions largely rely on the foundation of a threat atmosphere through narratives of war, betrayal, and impending disasters. Emotional arguments are used, such as comparing Armenia's situation to other conflicts (e.g., Syria or Ukraine), to emphasize the alleged betrayal by the West and its allies and the benefits gained from belief in pro-Russian aspirations, which supposedly guarantee the security of Armenians.

Utilizing historical contexts: Disinformation narratives referring to the historical relations of Armenia with Russia and the West constitute an important geopolitical tool that shapes the perception of international politics in the Caucasus region. To counter these narratives, it is necessary to conduct educational and informational activities that not only debunk false claims but also strengthen a critical approach to historical content by referring to deeply rooted historical contexts that resonate with the collective social memory. In the case of Armenia, Russia repeatedly emphasizes its historical role as the alleged defender of Christianity and

traditional Armenian culture. At the same time, it points to alleged "betrayals" of the West, suggesting its passivity during the Armenian genocide at the beginning of the 20th century. Such narratives aim to arouse distrust towards contemporary actions of Western countries and to strengthen the perception of Russia as a reliable ally of Armenia.

The Russian narrative about the defense of Christianity in the Caucasus is based on the thesis of a "centuries-old" tradition of cooperation between Russia and Armenia. Narratives about the role of the Russian Empire in protecting Armenians from persecutions by the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century and Russia's participation in safeguarding the Christian heritage of the region are emphasized.

An example may be the treatment of Armenia as a "bridgehead of Christianity" in the Caucasus in Russian propaganda. These narratives also suggest a cultural and religious community between Russia and Armenia (blurring the difference between the Apostolic Church and Orthodoxy), portraying Russia as the only power capable of protecting Armenia from external threats, including from Islamic states such as Turkiye or Azerbaijan. The second pillar of these narratives is portraying the West as an unreliable partner whose actions throughout history allegedly brought harm to Armenia. A particular reference point is the Armenian genocide of 1915, when Western countries, including European powers and the USA, supposedly remained silent in the face of the tragedy, leaving Armenia without support. An element of these narratives is also the omission of facts inconvenient for the Russian narrative, such as agreements between Bolshevik Russia and Turkiye regarding the transfer of some ethnic Armenian territories under the control of Turkiye and Azerbaijan, the plan to create a Greater Armenia by US President Woodrow Wilson, or the role of France in evacuating Armenian refugees.

Such narratives also refer to contemporary events, such as the lack of a decisive Western response to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is emphasized that although the West declares support for democracy and human rights, in practice it does not take action to protect Armenia from the geopolitical pressure of Azerbaijan and Turkiye.

Historical narratives of this kind use psychological mechanisms such as confirmation bias and availability heuristics to reinforce existing social prejudices and fears. By referring to events tragic for the Armenian nation, these narratives build a sense of threat that can be effectively instrumentalized in international politics.

Moreover, by creating historical roles of defender (Russia) and traitor (the West), these narratives strengthen polarization in the perception of international politics. For Armenians who face real geopolitical challenges, these narratives may appear credible and logical, especially in the context of Russia's actions as the main security guarantor of Armenia within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

The use of historical contexts in disinformation leads to strengthening distrust towards Western countries and hinders the development of Armenia's relations with the West. Strategically targeting emotional and historically significant narratives can not only destabilize Armenia's contemporary politics but also affect long-term social processes, such as the geopolitical orientation of the state.

A long-term consequence of such narratives is also limiting the possibilities of building an independent Armenian identity in international relations. Armenia, seen through the prism of these narratives, remains dependent on Russian security structures and politics, which restricts its freedom in making autonomous strategic decisions.

Instrumentalization of the media: The instrumentalization of the media is one of the key elements of influence operations, especially in the context of manipulating social perception and strengthening specific political narratives. In Armenia, this process is mainly carried out by external states, with the dominant role of the Russian Federation, which uses a wide range of media means to promote its geopolitical interests and to undermine the credibility of Armenia's allies, especially the West.

Applied capabilities:

- Use of pro-Russian media (Sputnik, Iravunk, Panorama.am) for the distribution of anti-Western and pro-Russian narratives.
- Supporting troll farms and propaganda accounts on social media that spread false information and disinformation.

Russia effectively uses various forms of media, both traditional and digital, to promote pro-Russian narratives in Armenia. A key role is played by Russian media operating locally, such as Sputnik Armenia and rebroadcast programs of Russian stations (e.g., RTR Planeta, Channel One). Their message is supported by some Armenian media that have pro-Russian political or financial ties. Sputnik Armenia regularly publishes articles and analyses criticizing the West, portraying Russia as the sole guarantor of Armenia's security, while media such as Iravunk and Panorama.am reproduce pro-Russian narratives, reinforcing anti-Western attitudes through interviews with pro-Russian experts and politicians.

Media and social polarization

Armenian media, especially those with a clear pro-Russian orientation, play a key role in polarizing society. They use emotionally charged language to emphasize differences between supporters of the West and pro-Russian traditionalists through frequent use of ideological topics. The West is often accused of promoting values "incompatible" with Armenian tradition, such as LGBT rights, which aims to provoke opposition reactions in society. Media such as Hraparak and Novosti Armenia often publish articles accusing pro-Western organizations of acting against Armenia's national interests.

Social media in Armenia are intensively used to spread pro-Russian content and disinformation. Many of these activities are carried out by troll farms and organized groups operating on Telegram, Facebook, and other platforms, with coordinated attacks against pro-Western leaders playing a significant role. On Telegram, pro-Russian channels regularly publish offensive memes and manipulated content accusing Prime Minister Pashinyan of treason.

The propaganda is legitimized by "Fake Fact Checking" - sites such as Antifake reproduce pro-Russian narratives under the pretext of "fact checking".

Monitoring of social networks has revealed the presence of a huge number of comments and posts supporting the pro-Russian narrative in order to suppress criticism and divert attention from the actions of the Russian government. Social media services also enable the use of content selection algorithms to popularize "media authorities" and celebrities to strengthen the pro-Russian message in religious and cultural contexts.

Linguistic mechanisms of persuasion in influence operations (FIMI) in Armenia

Influence operations use language as a key tool of manipulation, serving to shape public opinion, exert emotional impact on recipients, and mislead them. The linguistic persuasion mechanisms employed in such activities are deliberately designed to reinforce specific narratives, undermine the credibility of opponents, and provoke particular emotional reactions. Emotional manipulation is one of the most effective techniques used in influence operations. It is based on utilizing psychological mechanisms of emotional responses in order to shape attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of recipients. Unlike rational persuasion, emotional manipulation appeals to subconscious cognitive processes, which makes it an extremely effective tool in crisis, political, or social situations. Within this mechanism, various linguistic and narrative strategies are used with the aim of arousing intense emotions such as fear, anger, hatred, compassion or a sense of pride.

Emotional manipulation operates on the principle of activating cognitive processes based on experienced emotions, which influence the way information is interpreted, and decisions are made. According to Lazarus's theory of emotion (1991), emotions serve a regulatory function, directing an individual's attention to stimuli with high personal significance. In influence operations, those emotions that have the greatest mobilizing potential and are easiest to evoke in a specific social and cultural context are utilized.

Key emotions used in manipulation identified within MUGA monitoring

- Fear – related to the threat to an individual, social group, or values.
- Anger – provoked by a sense of injustice or threat from an enemy.
- Hatred – directed at a specific group, institution, or ideology.
- Compassion – mobilized to evoke empathy towards the victims of a given situation.
- National pride – used to unite society around specific ideas.

The use of emotionally charged language as a tool of informational influence.

Emotionally charged words and phrases operate at the cognitive and affective level, impacting the emotions of the recipient before they undergo rational analysis. Thanks to this, such narratives are extremely effective in shaping public opinion.

Fear as a tool of mobilization

Reference to fear is one of the most powerful linguistic tools used to arouse a sense of threat and the necessity for immediate action. An example of such a message might be:

- *Without Russia's support, Armenia will become a victim of aggression by Azerbaijan.*

Such messages exploit real threats related to Armenia's geopolitical position, emphasizing its isolation and the potential dangers resulting from the lack of an appropriate ally. The effect is to evoke in the recipient a sense of Armenia's dependence on Russian support, which hinders open discussion about alternative geopolitical options.

Anger as a tool of polarization

Expressions charged with anger direct the audience's attention to actual or alleged injustices and betrayals, provoking emotions that foster polarization. In the case of Armenia, narratives are often used that point to the alleged lack of credibility of the West, for example:

- *The West betrayed Armenia, using it only to pursue its own interests.*

Such statements emphasize the West's lack of support at key historical moments, such as the Armenian genocide, and build an image of the West as a calculating player concerned solely with its own benefits. The anger caused by such messages leads to increased distrust towards Western international structures.

National pride as a tool of consolidation

National pride is an emotion that allows building a sense of community and unity, often in opposition to external threats. In the case of Armenia, narratives emphasize the heroism and endurance of the national identity:

- *Armenia has defended its Christian identity against foreign influences for centuries.*

Such messages refer to Armenia's historical heritage as the first Christian state and its struggle with many opponents, which strengthens the sense of pride in national uniqueness. In the context of international relations, this kind of language promotes internal consolidation while simultaneously building hostility towards influences perceived as "foreign."

Although emotionally charged language can be effective in the short term, its long-term consequences may be problematic. The intense emotions evoked by such narratives favor the escalation of conflicts and the solidification of stereotypes. Moreover, recipients exposed to such messages become less susceptible to objective data and rational arguments.

Creating catastrophic narratives as a tool of disinformation

Catastrophic narratives, referring to visions of threat, doom, or inevitable disasters, constitute an important element of the FIMI strategy in Armenia. Such messages use fear as a tool for mobilizing and manipulating societies, especially during periods of social, political, or economic crises. The key goal of catastrophic narratives is to evoke a sense of threat and to persuade recipients to seek protection from the entity promoting a specific narrative. Catastrophic narratives are based on three key mechanisms:

Exploitation of existing fears: These narratives refer to real or exaggerated threats that are already present in social consciousness. For example, in the context of Armenia, the narrative "Without Russian support, Armenia will become the next victim of Western imperialism" appeals to historical traumas and fears related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the geopolitical rivalry in the Caucasus region.

Simplification of reality: Catastrophic messages reduce the complexity of reality to simple oppositions, such as "us" versus "them" or "protector" versus "threat." In this way, recipients are inclined to choose the only supposedly safe solution.

Escalation of emotions: The use of emotionally charged language, e.g., "moral degeneration," "chaos," or "national destruction," intensifies the sense of fear and urgency of the situation, blocking the ability to rationally analyze the content. An example of such a message is: "The West deliberately destroys our national values by promoting moral degeneration and chaos".

Catastrophic narratives fulfill several functions in the context of disinformation and manipulation:

Mobilize recipients: Evoking fear of an inevitable catastrophe prompts recipients to seek protection from the entity offering a solution, often a propagandist or political actor. In the case of Armenia, Russia presents itself as the only guarantor of security and stability.

Consolidate control: Entities using catastrophic narratives build a sense of recipients' dependence on their actions, which makes it difficult to question their authority. An example is portraying Russia as the "defender of Christian Armenia" in opposition to the allegedly hostile West.

Polarize society: These narratives divide societies, strengthening antagonisms between internal and external groups. In the case of Armenia, this polarization may take the form of a division between supporters of pro-Western and pro-Russian orientations.

Catastrophic narratives lead to an increase in the sense of fear and uncertainty in society, which may result in the radicalization of attitudes and the escalation of internal conflicts. In the long term, they also limit citizens' ability to think critically and to rationally assess the situation. Such narratives reinforce authoritarian tendencies and justify the restriction of civil liberties in the name of protection against threats. For example, they may legitimize the growing influence of Russia in Armenia as a necessary measure of national protection. These narratives use motifs threatening the existence of the nation or its values. Examples include:

- *The West deliberately destroys our national values by promoting moral degeneration and chaos.*
- *Armenia will be isolated and deprived of support, which will lead to its destruction.*
- *Without Russian support, Armenia will become the next victim of Western imperialism.*

Such messages build an atmosphere of distrust towards external entities, while simultaneously strengthening dependence on the propagator of the narrative. They are based on the suggestion that the lack of a specific alliance or action will lead to catastrophic consequences. These kinds of narratives reinforce the sense of isolation and lack of geopolitical alternatives, especially in the context of territorial conflicts.

Catastrophic narratives are one of the most effective disinformation tools that use human emotions to achieve certain political and social goals. To counter their influence, it is necessary to develop critical thinking skills in society and promote messages based on facts and multifaceted analysis. In the context of Armenia and its relations with Russia and the West, it is particularly important to strengthen informational independence and transparency in public communication.

Demonizing the opponent as a tool of disinformation and social mobilization

Demonizing the opponent is a communication strategy that involves portraying certain individuals, groups, or institutions as the source of all evil, threat, or destabilization. Such narratives are commonly used in the context of disinformation campaigns aimed at polarizing society, weakening trust in democratic institutions, and strengthening authoritarian control. Portraying the opponent as the embodiment of threat plays a particularly important role in regions with tense geopolitical situations, such as Armenia and the Caucasus. The strategy of demonization is based on several key mechanisms:

Personalization of the threat: Demonizing the opponent often involves pointing to a specific person as a symbol of danger. In the case of Armenia, an example may be the narrative:

- *Prime Minister Pashinyan is a puppet of Soros, carrying out the anti-national interests of the West.*

Such messages evoke negative emotions towards political leaders, portraying them as traitors or individuals acting to the detriment of national interests.

Stigmatization of groups and institutions: These narratives often include entire social groups or organizations, suggesting that their activities threaten the stability of the state. An example:

- *Western foundations support non-governmental organizations that are destroying our national identity.*

Such messages exploit fears related to the loss of cultural identity and moral degeneration, attributing responsibility for these threats to external entities.

Reduction of complexity: Narratives demonizing the opponent are characterized by a simplification of reality, reducing complex political or social problems to a conflict of "good" (defenders of national values) and "evil" (external or internal threat).

Emotional charge: Demonizing the opponent uses emotionally charged language that intensifies the feeling of fear, anger or indignation. In the case of Armenia, narratives about the West as a "hostile aggressor" reinforce distrust towards international institutions such as the European Union or NATO.

Narratives demonizing the opponent serve to evoke a sense of threat and social mobilization to defend against the "enemy". They also reinforce social polarization, dividing people into "patriots" and "traitors". The demonization of the West and politicians considered pro-Russian or pro-Western serves to strengthen Russia's position as the "guarantor of stability" in the region. By portraying the opponent as the source of all evil, demonizing narratives eliminate space for debate about alternative political or geopolitical solutions.

The persuasions identified in Armenia and presenting Western countries as responsible for destabilizing Armenia and other regional states are:

- *Western foundations support non-governmental organizations that destroy our national identity.*
- *The West deliberately destabilizes the region by promoting liberal values and social divisions.*

Political leaders as traitors: These narratives focus on stigmatizing political leaders whose actions are presented as contrary to national interests, for example: "Prime Minister Pashinyan is a puppet of Soros, carrying out the anti-national interests of the West".

Demonizing the opponent is an effective, though destructive, disinformation tool that allows for mobilizing society, consolidating power and eliminating alternative political narratives. In the context of Armenia and the Caucasus region, developing media literacy among the public and supporting independent media, which can counteract the influence of this kind of narrative,

is of key importance. Understanding the mechanisms of opponent demonization is crucial to counteracting its long-term effects.

Instrumentalization of cultural and historical values

National, religious, and historical values play a key role in shaping collective identity. However, in the context of political and propaganda narratives, they are often instrumentalized to evoke pride, loyalty and a sense of duty towards specific political goals. Such references strengthen the identification of the audience with a particular narrative while simultaneously marginalizing alternative points of view.

Emphasizing uniqueness and national mission: narratives referring to the uniqueness of the nation often present contemporary challenges as a continuation of the historical mission of defending identity. In the case of Armenia, such messages may sound like: “Only faithful cooperation with our traditional allies can ensure Armenia's survival”. Pointing to threats to the survival of culture and national identity reinforces the sense of duty towards certain actions. This is accompanied by the imposition of a specific historical narrative based on manipulated collective memory that questions the centuries-old relations between Armenia and Europe and exaggerates historical and cultural Armenian-Russian ties.

The instrumentalization of historical values is often associated with deprecating the actions of those who deviate from the imposed narrative. For example, cooperation with the West may be portrayed as a betrayal of so-called “traditional values and alliances”, which limits room for debate about other geopolitical solutions. Cultural and historical values are closely tied to emotions, which makes narratives referring to them more impactful. Terms such as “defense of Christianity” or “moral obligation” build an atmosphere of grandeur and urgency.

Strengthening collective identity: references to shared historical and cultural values consolidate society around specific narratives. In the case of Armenia, narratives emphasizing traditional alliances with Russia reinforce the sense of belonging to a particular cultural-political block.

Russia is often portrayed as the only guarantor of the protection of Armenia's Christian identity.

Example of a narrative:

- *Russia has defended Christianity for centuries, while the West remained silent in the face of the Armenian genocide.*
- *Only faithful cooperation with our traditional allies can ensure Armenia's survival.*

Such narratives exploit historical traumas and a sense of threat to build the image of Russia as an irreplaceable ally. These messages exclude the possibility of seeking alternative political directions, suggesting that only “historical” alliances guarantee security.

National values are an effective tool for social mobilization, especially in the context of threats. The message suggesting that the survival of the nation depends on the protection of its identity encourages the audience to support specific political actions. The instrumentalization of values allows for the justification of actions that under other circumstances might be criticized. For example, narratives about the “defense of Christianity” can be used to legitimize close cooperation with Russia, even if it is criticized in other areas.

The instrumentalization of cultural and historical values is a constantly present tool of FIMI, which strengthens collective identity and mobilizes societies around specific, pro-Russian narratives.

Using the victim image as a tool of persuasion

Narratives based on portraying certain groups, states or nations as innocent victims of persecution, betrayal or aggression are widely used in propaganda communication, regardless of the legitimacy of the image itself (the fact that it is based on truth does not mean it cannot be used instrumentally for manipulation). The victim image, built on historical, cultural and emotional foundations, evokes sympathy, strengthens the sense of moral responsibility and legitimizes the political actions of the entity promoting the narrative. In the context of Armenia,

such messages often refer to historical traumas, such as the Armenian genocide and contemporary geopolitical conflicts, such as the war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Reference to historical traumas: Narratives based on the victim image often exploit the historical experiences of nations related to persecution or betrayal. In the case of Armenia, the Armenian genocide of 1915 is frequently invoked as a symbol of betrayal and abandonment by the world: “The West supports jihadists who threaten our Christian brothers”.

Moral contrast: Building the victim image relies on a strong contrast between the innocence of the portrayed group and the cruelty of the persecutors. An example may be the depiction of Armenia as a Christian fortress surrounded by hostile forces allegedly supported by the West.

Emphasizing helplessness: These narratives underline the inability of the victim to defend itself independently and the necessity of external intervention, for example:

- *Armenia was abandoned by the West in the face of Azerbaijan's aggression.*

Universalization of experiences: Narratives utilizing the victim image often appeal to universal moral values, such as the right to life, dignity or justice, which increases their impact. The victim image evokes sympathy and a moral obligation to intervene, especially within international communities. In the case of Armenia, these narratives mobilize both internal social support and attempt to attract international attention to its difficult situation. These narratives serve to justify political and military actions that under other circumstances might be considered controversial. An example may be the justification of Armenia's close cooperation with Russia as the only guarantor of protection against threats.

Presenting oneself as a victim allows avoiding debate about internal political problems or strategic mistakes. In this way, these narratives focus attention on external threats, diverting it from internal challenges. Narratives based on the victim image also serve social polarization, dividing the world into those who support the victim and those who stand with its perpetrators.

In the context of Armenia, such messages strengthen distrust towards the West and its supposed allies.

The West as complicit in persecutions: Messages that point to the West as a passive observer or even complicit in the threats Armenia faces are commonly used in political narratives:

- *Armenia was abandoned by the West in the face of Azerbaijan's aggression.*
- *The West supports jihadists who threaten our Christian brothers.*
- *Without Russian support, Armenia would not survive the pressure from aggressors.*

The image of Armenia as an innocent victim of persecution is often paired with portraying Russia as the only ally acting in its defense.

These narratives may lead to an increase in the sense of helplessness and dependency on external entities. At the same time, they strengthen defensive attitudes and distrust towards international partners. The victim image is often used to justify authoritarian actions or policies that exclude alternative geopolitical directions. In the case of Armenia, these messages may legitimize close cooperation with Russia at the expense of openness to the West. The use of the victim image can weaken the international position of the state, portraying it as a passive participant in geopolitical events, which in turn reduces its ability to actively shape its own fate. The use of the victim image is a powerful tool in political and propaganda narratives that allows for internal mobilization as well as attracting international attention. Although it may lead to short-term benefits, such as increased social solidarity or gaining external support, the long-term consequences can be negative, including weakening sovereignty and losing the ability to independently solve problems.

Emotions Used by Russia in Influence Operations in Armenia

Russia, conducting influence operations in Armenia, effectively uses emotions as a tool of manipulation aimed at shaping public opinion, mobilizing society, and strengthening its geopolitical interests. By appealing to emotions such as fear, anger, hatred, a sense of national

pride, or compassion, Russia builds narratives that affect Armenia's perception of the West, neighboring countries, and its own role in the region.

In influence operations carried out in Armenia, Russia employs a wide range of emotions that together create a coherent narrative system. **Fear** and **anger** are used to mobilize society against the West, while **hatred** and **compassion** reinforce a sense of dependence on Russia. At the same time, **a sense of national pride** serves to build loyalty to pro-Russian narratives and to antagonize society toward values promoted by the West.

These techniques constitute an integral part of Russia's geopolitical strategy in the region, whose goal is to keep Armenia within its sphere of influence and weaken Yerevan's relations with Western partners. The analysis of emotions used in these operations reveals a deep understanding of social psychology and the ability to manipulate perception in a long-term and systematic manner.

Fear as a tool of influence

Fear is one of the strongest emotions that affects human perception of reality and the ability to make rational decisions. In political and propaganda narratives, this emotion is often used to mobilize societies, legitimize political actions, and limit the audience's ability to think critically. In the context of Armenia, Russia often uses fear by referring to military threats, loss of sovereignty, political destabilization, and threats to cultural identity.

Military threat: Narratives based on fear of war or aggression are especially effective in mobilizing societies around specific political actions. In the case of Armenia, Russia presents itself as the only guarantor of security against the alleged aggression of Azerbaijan:

- *If Armenia leaves Russia's sphere of influence, Azerbaijan will immediately attack, and the West will leave Armenia at the mercy of the enemy.*

Such messages exploit real geopolitical tensions to strengthen Armenia's dependence on Russia and exclude alternative political directions.

Loss of cultural identity: Fear of losing traditional cultural values is used to reinforce narratives that favor isolation from the West. Claims such as:

- *The West promotes moral degeneration that destroys the foundations of our culture,*

appeal to concerns related to the influence of liberal values, such as LGBT rights, on Armenia's Christian heritage. These narratives build an image of the West as a threat to national identity.

Political destabilization: Russia often portrays the West as responsible for “color revolutions” and other forms of political destabilization, which allegedly aim to subordinate Armenia to foreign interests:

- *The West deliberately promotes ‘color revolutions’ to overthrow governments in Armenia and subordinate it to its interests.*

Such narratives reinforce fears of a change of power and promote the perception of political stability as a key priority that can only be ensured through close cooperation with Russia.

Fear allows for the rapid unification of society around specific political actions, especially in crisis situations. In the case of Armenia, narratives about military threats strengthen social support for a pro-Russian security policy (which correlates with Russian actions maintaining a state of threat to Armenia's security). The appeal to fear allows for the justification of political actions that under other circumstances might be criticized. For example, close cooperation with Russia is presented as a necessity arising from external threats. Fear diminishes the audience's ability to think analytically and assess alternative narratives. In an atmosphere of

threat, society is less inclined to question the message of the authorities or the media. Narratives based on fear create clear divisions between “defenders of traditional values” and “external threats.” In the context of Armenia, such messages amplify tensions between supporters of pro-Russian and pro-Western orientations. Narratives used in FIMI operations emphasize that Armenia’s security depends solely on the presence of Russia in the region:

- *Without Russian support, Armenia will be attacked by Azerbaijan.*
- *The West supports moral degeneration that leads to the downfall of traditional values.*
- *Color revolutions supported by the West aim to destroy Armenia’s sovereignty.*

These narratives warn against the influence of Western liberal values, which allegedly destroy Armenia’s Christian identity. These messages point to the West as responsible for actions destabilizing Armenia. The fear caused by such narratives leads to an increased sense of helplessness and dependency of society on the entity promoting the narrative, e.g., Russia. At the same time, it limits society’s ability to openly debate and consider alternative political directions. These narratives strengthen authoritarian tendencies by legitimizing actions that restrict civil rights and reinforcing dependence on external powers. The use of fear as a tool of political narrative makes it difficult to build balanced international relations because it increases distrust toward potential partners and solidifies dependence on traditional allies. Fear is a powerful tool in political narratives that allows for mobilizing society and legitimizing political actions. However, its excessive use leads to long-term consequences such as limiting the ability to think critically, polarization of society, and the entrenchment of geopolitical dependency.

Anger as a tool of mobilization

Anger is one of the most mobilizing emotions, directing the attention of the audience toward a designated enemy and encouraging action against them. In propaganda narratives, anger is often used as a tool for building resistance against political opponents, strengthening social divisions, and legitimizing certain political actions. In the context of Armenia, Russia often

appeals to anger toward the West, portraying it as a traitor and aggressor, as well as toward Azerbaijan and Turkiye as historical and contemporary enemies of the Armenian nation.

The West as a traitor: These narratives are based on emphasizing the alleged lack of support from the West at key moments for Armenia, which provokes outrage and strengthens the sense of betrayal. For example:

- *The West used Armenia as a tool in its geopolitical game and then abandoned it.*
- *The European Union and the United States use Armenia as a tool in their maneuvers, not caring about its fate.*

Such messages exploit historical traumas and contemporary conflicts, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh war, to build the image of the West as an unreliable partner.

Instrumentalization of historical antagonisms (Azerbaijan and Turkiye): These narratives exploit historical threats from Azerbaijan and Turkiye to promote the thesis that they are supported by the West, which allegedly seeks to destabilize the region:

- *The United States and NATO support Turkiye, which for centuries has been the greatest threat to Armenia.*
- *Turkiye, supported by the West, is the greatest threat to Christian Armenia.*
- *Azerbaijan receives weapons and military support from NATO countries, which supposedly defend human rights.*

In this way, pro-Russian media use anger toward neighboring countries while exaggerating and demonizing Western cooperation with them as evidence of global conspiracies against Armenia.

Demonizing international actions: Narratives highlighting Western cooperation with Azerbaijan and Türkiye in military or economic matters strengthen the sense of threat and provoke anger, for example:

- *NATO's cooperation with Azerbaijan is a betrayal of Armenia's interests and support for the aggressor.*

Anger is a powerful stimulus mobilizing society to action, often against a designated enemy. In the case of Armenia, these narratives mobilize the rejection of Western alliances in favor of cooperation with Russia.

Anger strengthens social and international divisions, leading to the escalation of conflicts and difficulties in building dialogue. In Armenian society, it can also lead to increased distrust toward entities promoting alternative political directions. The use of anger in political narratives legitimizes authoritarian tendencies and weakens democratic processes, as critical voices against the dominant narrative are marginalized as "treasonous." Provoking anger toward the West and Armenia's neighbors hinders the development of balanced international relations, strengthening Armenia's dependence on Russia as the sole guarantor of security.

Anger is an effective but destructive tool in political narratives that allows for mobilizing society and legitimizing certain political actions. However, in the long term, provoking anger leads to social polarization, loss of the ability to think critically, and deepening geopolitical isolation.

Hatred as a tool of persuasion in propaganda

Hatred, as an escalation of the emotion of anger, is a strong narrative tool used to mobilize societies against a specific group, state, or ideology. In political narratives, hatred is employed to strengthen antagonisms, eliminate public debate, and legitimize political actions. In the context of Armenia, Russia incites hatred toward the West, portraying it as a threat to Christian values, national identity, and Armenia's sovereignty.

Demonizing the West: these narratives focus on portraying the West as a source of evil, moral decay, and a threat to the Christian and national values of Armenia. Examples of such narratives include:

- *The West promotes demoralization, threatening our youth and traditional values.*

Demonizing the West appeals to traditional social norms and fear of change, reinforcing cultural and ideological divisions.

Hatred toward Soros and Western organizations: These narratives accuse Western foundations, such as the Soros Foundation, of actions destabilizing Armenia, suggesting that they support “unpatriotic” movements that threaten the sovereignty of the state:

- *The Soros organizations are tools of the West to destroy Armenia’s independence.*
- *The West destroyed traditional family values in Europe and now wants to do the same in Armenia.*
- *The demoralization promoted by the West is the greatest threat to our youth.*
- *Western foundations are instruments of imperialism working to weaken Armenia.*

In this way, the image of non-governmental organizations is built as a “fifth column,” acting in the interest of foreign powers at the expense of national identity.

Manipulation of national identity: These narratives exploit the sense of national pride and Armenia’s Christian heritage, portraying the West as an opponent of these values. They emphasize the alleged hostility of the West toward traditional norms, which strengthens feelings of hatred and resistance.

Hatred strengthens the sense of community by creating the image of a common enemy. In the case of Armenia, these narratives mobilize society to reject Western influences and to support cooperation with Russia as the defender of national values. Hatred toward the West serves as

a tool to legitimize pro-Russian policies and to eliminate opposing voices, which may be portrayed as “unpatriotic” or “traitorous.” Narratives based on hatred lead to the radicalization of attitudes, which hinders open debate about alternative political and social directions. Portraying the West as an enemy reinforces the perception of Russia as the only defender of Armenia against the “external threat.” Hatred leads to deep polarization of society, strengthening divisions between groups with different worldviews. It may also lead to the marginalization of individuals and organizations promoting dialogue and international cooperation. The use of hatred strengthens authoritarian tendencies because it eliminates space for criticism of dominant narratives and justifies actions against other political options. Hatred toward the West entrenches Armenia’s dependence on Russia and isolation from international partners, which limits opportunities for cooperation and modernization. Hatred as a tool of political narratives is extremely effective in mobilizing societies and legitimizing political actions. However, its long-term consequences are destructive, leading to social polarization, elimination of dialogue, and the entrenchment of geopolitical dependency.

Compassion as a tool of persuasion in Armenia

Compassion is one of the key emotions that builds social bonds, strengthens solidarity and mobilizes action on behalf of victims of crises and conflicts. In political and propaganda narratives, compassion is used as a tool to strengthen support for specific actions and actors. In the context of Armenia, Russia often appeals to compassion for Christian Armenians, portraying itself as the defender of their interests and values in the face of threats from Muslim neighbors and alleged Western indifference.

Defense of Christianity: These narratives portray Armenians as victims of religious threats and Russia as the only defender of Christianity in the Caucasus. Examples of such messages include:

- *Without Russia, Christian Armenians have no chance to survive surrounded by hostile Muslim neighbors.*
- *Russia is the only country that defends Christian values in the Caucasus.*

- *Russia has defended Christianity in the Caucasus for centuries, while the West supports jihadists.*

Appeal to religious and historical values strengthens the sense of solidarity with Armenians as part of the Christian community, which in turn legitimizes the Russian presence in the region.

Victims of conflicts: These narratives emphasize the tragic fate of the civilian population, especially refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, in order to evoke compassion and justify Russian intervention. Examples:

- *Thousands of Armenian families were forced to leave their homes, and only Russia offered them real help.*
- *Nagorno-Karabakh has become a place of human tragedies that the West does not want to notice.*
- *Without Russian support, thousands of Armenians have lost their homes and hope for the future.*

In this way, Russia presents its actions as humanitarian and necessary to protect the Armenian population from further losses.

Contrast with the West: These narratives juxtapose Russia's alleged concern for Christian Armenians with the indifference or actions of the West, which are supposedly beneficial to Armenia's Muslim neighbors, for example:

- *The West supports Azerbaijan and Turkiye, ignoring the suffering of Christian Armenians.*

Compassion strengthens internal solidarity within society, mobilizing support for actions aimed at protecting victims. On the international stage, these narratives build a positive image of Russia as a state that cares for Christian minorities. The appeal to compassion for Christian

Armenians allows for the justification of Russia's military presence in the region and its role as a guarantor of security. Narratives based on compassion limit the possibility of criticizing Russia's actions because they are presented as morally justified and necessary to protect the civilian population. Evoking compassion for Christian Armenians is used to delegitimize alternative geopolitical solutions, such as Armenia's cooperation with the West, which are portrayed as indifferent to the suffering of Armenians.

The use of compassion to legitimize political actions strengthens authoritarian tendencies and Armenia's dependence on Russia as the sole guarantor of security. These narratives reinforce Armenia's dependence on Russia and limit the possibility of building balanced international relations with other partners, such as the European Union or the United States. The appeal to compassion as a narrative tool may lead to the instrumentalization of human suffering for political purposes, which in the long term undermines trust in such messages. An example of such actions is the instrumentalization of the real suffering of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh to attack Prime Minister Pashinyan as allegedly responsible for their fate and to promote Armenia's dependence on Russia, while ignoring Russia's actual responsibility for the exodus of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh (failure to meet obligations).

Although compassion is a natural reaction to human suffering, it is used in political narratives to build solidarity towards victims and legitimize the actions of certain actors. In the context of Armenia, Russia effectively uses compassion toward Christian Armenians to strengthen its geopolitical position and weaken alternative narratives. However, the instrumentalization of compassion carries the risk of polarization, manipulation of emotions and limiting the ability to think critically.

National pride as a tool of manipulation

National pride is one of the most powerful tools in political narratives, used to build loyalty to certain values, ideology, and actors. In the context of Armenia, national pride is often exploited to strengthen support for pro-Russian narratives and to antagonize society toward the values

and influences of the West. Appeals to “historical” alliances, Christian tradition and the cultural uniqueness of Armenia are key elements of these narratives.

Russia as a traditional ally: These narratives impose the perception of Russia’s historical role as the alleged defender of Armenia and its Christian values. Examples:

- *It is thanks to Russia that Armenia survived the most difficult times in its history.*
- *Without Russia’s help, Armenia would not have survived in the face of historical threats.*
- *Russia has always stood guard over Armenia’s Christian identity.*

The reference to “historical” alliances strengthens the perception of Russia as a reliable partner who supposedly ensures Armenia’s survival in the face of external threats.

Promoting Christian values: These narratives emphasize the uniqueness of Armenia as the first state to adopt Christianity and highlight the threat posed by Western liberal values:

- *Armenia, as the first Christian state, should reject the liberal influences of the West.*
- *As the first Christian state, Armenia should remain faithful to its roots.*
- *Western liberal values are contrary to Armenia’s Christian heritage.*

In this way, pro-Russian narratives expose the differences between Armenia’s traditional values and Western ideology, building a sense of cultural superiority.

Strengthening national pride can build a sense of solidarity and collective identity, but at the same time led to isolationism. These narratives can thus be instrumentalized to maintain pro-Russian policies, marginalizing alternative geopolitical directions. At the same time, they weaken democratic processes by stigmatizing voices critical of the dominant narratives.

The use of emotions by Russia to support its own image in Armenia

Russia, carrying out its influence operations in Armenia, effectively employs manipulative strategies based on evoking certain emotions that support its image as an irreplaceable ally. Through skillful use of emotions such as gratitude, a sense of security, community and solidarity, compassion, national pride, as well as admiration and respect, Russia strengthens its influence while neutralizing potential actions by the West.

Gratitude: Russia shapes narratives that evoke gratitude for its historical and contemporary role in protecting Armenia from threats. By recalling (and largely creating and falsifying) the past, Russia emphasizes its actions as a defender of Christianity and a helper to Armenia in surviving difficult historical periods. Russia is portrayed as the protector of Armenia from the Ottoman Empire and Muslim neighbors. Narratives such as:

- *It is thanks to Russia that Armenia was able to preserve its Christian identity.*

Russian military bases and military support are presented as key elements of protecting Armenia from Azerbaijan and Türkiye. For example:

- *The presence of Russian soldiers in Gyumri is a guarantee of our national security.*

Building the belief that Armenia owes its security and stability to Russia weakens interest in cooperation with the West. It strengthens social loyalty toward pro-Russian political leaders and institutions.

Sense of security: Russia presents itself as the guarantor of stability in the region, the only one capable of preventing war and chaos. It creates the image of a state that provides Armenia with military, political and economic protection.

- Preventing war: Russia highlights its mediating actions in conflicts such as the Nagorno-Karabakh war as key to maintaining peace.

- *Without Russia, Azerbaijan would immediately attack Armenia.*
- Alternative to the West: The narratives suggest that the West is not capable of real support for Armenia in the face of threats. For example: *Western promises are only words – it is Russia that guarantees the stability of the region.*

Goals: Creating dependence on Russia regarding national security. Limiting support for initiatives aimed at cooperation with NATO or the EU.

- **Community and Solidarity:** Russia emphasizes close historical, cultural, and religious ties with Armenia to evoke a sense of community. These narratives aim to strengthen the image of Russia as Armenia’s “brotherly nation.”
- **Historical relations:** Highlighting the cooperation between Armenia and Russia over the centuries, from the Russian Empire to the USSR. Example: *Russia and Armenia have cooperated for centuries to protect the Christian heritage.*
- **Religion as a bond:** Russia portrays itself as the defender of Christianity, which strengthens the sense of cultural and civilizational community. Example: *Shared faith in Christian values unites our nations.*

By using such tactics, Russia seeks control and influence over Armenian society, among others by increasing loyalty to pro-Russian narratives through appeals to the allegedly shared cultural heritage and by rejecting values promoted by the West as “foreign” and incompatible with Armenian identity.

- **Compassion:** Evoking compassion is one of the tools that Russia uses to present itself as the defender of Armenia and Christian communities in the region. Russia exaggerates its involvement in humanitarian activities and the protection of the civilian population, while simultaneously covering up the negative aspects of its role in this regard, for example, the role it played during the blockade of the so-called “Lachin corridor”, as well as its role during the fall of Assad in Syria in 2024.

- **Humanitarian aid:** Russia emphasizes its role in delivering humanitarian aid to refugees from Artsakh. Example: *Russian soldiers not only defend the borders but also provide assistance to those in need.* This narrative omits the fact that the Russian soldiers present in Nagorno-Karabakh did not take any action to lift the blockade of the “Lachin corridor” in 2023, despite being obligated to do so.
- **Defense against radicalism:** Russia presents its actions in Syria as the protection of Christian minorities from Islamic radicals, which is meant to strengthen its image in Armenia. Example: *Russia is the only one resisting jihadists, protecting Christian communities.* This narrative omits the fact that in December 2024, involvement in the aggression against Ukraine was more important to Russia than defending Christians in the face of the offensive by Islamic radicals.
- Creating the image of Russia as the “guardian” of Armenia, who protects it both at the local and global level and lays the foundations for the unconscious building of emotional dependence on Russian support.
- **National Pride:** Russia strengthens Armenia’s national pride by emphasizing its importance as a strategic ally and promoting shared conservative and Christian values.
- **Armenia as a strategic partner:** narratives presenting Armenia as a key ally of Russia in the Caucasus. Quote: *Armenia is a pillar of security in the region, valued by Russia.*
- **Protection of values:** Russia emphasizes the shared attachment to traditional values, in opposition to the liberal norms promoted by the West. Quote: *Together we stand guard over the Christian heritage.*

Mechanisms of influence constructed in this way in the Russian psychological operation aim to strengthen the sense of Armenia’s uniqueness in the context of its relationship with Russia and to mobilize against Western narratives, which are perceived as threatening national pride.

- **Admiration and respect:** Russia builds its image as a military and economic power that can provide Armenia with stability and prestige. It presents itself as a nation worthy of respect and admiration.

- **Military power:** Highlighting Russian military resources as a guarantor of Armenia's security. Example: *Alliance with Russia gives Armenia access to advanced military technology.*
- **Defense of Armenia's international image:** Russia presents itself as the defender of Armenia on the international stage, especially in the context of the conflict with Azerbaijan. Example: *Russia always stands up for Armenia in the international forum.*

Mechanisms of influence constructed in this way aim to build Armenia's prestige through its alliance with Russia and to strengthen the perception of Russia as an irreplaceable strategic partner. Russia effectively uses a wide range of emotions in its influence operations in Armenia. By evoking gratitude, a sense of security, community and solidarity, compassion, national pride, and admiration, Russia strengthens its political, military, and cultural influence while simultaneously marginalizing Western influence.

6. Propaganda activities aimed at the perception of the West

One of the main issues around which social polarization and related polarization of narratives in the information environment is growing, is the attitude toward the West. On one hand, it is a consequence of the pro-Russian stance of some Armenian political circles and their associated media, as well as direct or indirect actions by Russia itself and elements of the Armenian diaspora controlled by it in Russia. In this regard, the anti-Western narrative is a copy of Russian propaganda and is based on the same narrative threads, specifically the spreading of the narrative about NATO's instrumentalization of Ukraine to carry out a hybrid attack on Russia, accusations against the West that its actions lead to the outbreak of World War III and also scaring with the supposedly demoralized West fighting religion and promoting LGBT, while opposing it to Russia as the alleged defender of religion and traditional values.

On the other hand, it must be remembered that in some Western countries there is a large number of Armenians who often play a very important role there. This particularly applies to the USA and France. It is also worth remembering that France and the USA played a much more positive role in the recent history of Armenians, and the goal of Russian propaganda is to obscure or falsify this image to eliminate the influence of these countries in Armenia. Thus, emphasis is placed on undermining the credibility of France and the USA, as well as the West in general, by linking them with the enemies of Armenians (Turkiye, Azerbaijan, jihadists).

a) Motivated externally

- "The West wants to trigger World War III."
- "The West supports jihadists in the Middle East, which creates a threat to Armenians."
- "European countries pursue anti-Russian goals of the USA and are not independent."
- "The West used Ukraine for confrontation with Russia."

b) Motivated internally

- "The West is unreliable as a security partner for Armenia and Prime Minister Pashinyan's turn toward the West leads to a deterioration of relations with the only true ally, namely Russia."
- "The West is demoralized and threatens traditional values in Armenia."
- "Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his team are agents of the West and tools of Soros carrying out the goal of destroying Armenia in accordance with the interests of Turkiye and Azerbaijan."

c) Examples of actions

1. Russia lost in Syria to the West

Context: This fits into the narrative that Russia is fighting against the West on many fronts and the Syrian one was one of them and in Syria the West used jihadists, who threaten local Christians, including Armenians.

168.am, 12/10/2024, “More than 40 countries have declared war on Russia. There is a danger of the introduction of Greater Turan”; An interview with Gagik Harutyunyan, director of the Network Research Institute, who interprets Assad’s fall in Syria as an effect of the fight of the West, Turkiye and Israel against Russia, on which the West is spending 'billions'; <https://168.am/2024/12/10/2138807.html>

2. Narrative striking at the pro-Western course of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

Iravunk, September 18, 2024 – “Pashinyan is pushing Armenia into the abyss of the West” - Statement by Russian deputy Alexey Zhuravlev, criticizing Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Zhuravlev accuses Pashinyan of acting in favor of the West and claims that the prime minister is leading Armenia to an "abyss - economic, social and military." The article suggests that Pashinyan's actions are inspired by the West. The main narrative is that the West is leading to the deterioration of relations with the only true ally, namely Russia.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=293022&l=ru>

Iravunk, June 25, 2024 – “Armenia’s political vector is increasingly leaning toward the West” - Statements of Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexey Overchuk, who expresses concern over Armenia's growing rapprochement with Western countries. Overchuk emphasizes, that the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) are incompatible structures and the presence of players from outside the region in Armenia may have consequences. He also notes

that Russia is interested in Armenia's stability and maintaining good trade and fraternal relations.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=286823&l=ru>

Iravunk, June 18, 2024 – “The West perceives Armenia as an instrument of a hybrid war against the Russian Federation” - the position of a Russian diplomat on Western influence in Armenia. Galuzin claims that the United States and the European Union aim to weaken the ties between post-Soviet countries, including Armenia, attempting to pull them away from Russia and integrate them into their sphere of influence. According to him, the West uses Armenia in its strategy against Russia, which may lead to regional destabilization.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=286286&l=ru>

Iravunk, May 24, 2024 – “The West is trying to create conditions for 'color revolutions' in CIS countries” - statements by Alexander Bortnikov, Director of the Russian Federal Security Service. Bortnikov claims that Western countries, especially the USA and the UK, strive to destabilize the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) by supporting opposition movements and NGOs aimed at seizing power in those countries. According to him, the West is creating "governments-in-exile" ready to take power in case of internal destabilization in CIS countries. The main narrative - negative impact of the West on the region.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=284241&l=ru>

Iravunk, April 6, 2024 – “Pashinyan's policy will lead Armenia not to Europe, but to shame or new genocide” (<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=280437&l=ru>). Criticism of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan for his pro-Western policy. The author suggests that every meeting of Pashinyan with representatives of the West brings Armenia closer to a national catastrophe. The article ends with a warning that Pashinyan's policy may lead Armenia to disgrace or a new genocide, instead of the promised integration with Europe. The main narrative is that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is carrying out the goal of destroying Armenia.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=280437&l=ru>

Iravunk, February 15, 2024 – “Big problems for Armenia will arise if Russian security guarantees are replaced by Western ones - Alexander Krylov” - the main narrative is that the West leads to the deterioration of relations with the only true ally, namely Russia. Interview with Alexander Krylov, chief research fellow at the IMEMO RAN Center for Post-Soviet Studies. Krylov warns that replacing Russian security guarantees with Western ones may cause serious problems for Armenia, suggesting that the current authorities are moving to change policy, which may contradict the traditional perception of national interests by Armenian society.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=276372&l=ru>

Iravunk, November 15, 2023 – “The West brutally holds Armenia and tries to tear it away from Russia.” Statement by Maria Zakharova accusing the West of trying to detach Armenia from Russia. Zakharova claims the West imposes its interests on Armenia using local political forces. She points to actions such as Armenia’s refusal to participate in the CSTO session or increased deliveries of Western weapons as part of the strategy to subordinate the country to the West. The statements emphasize Armenia’s benefits from relations with Russia and warn against “enslavement” by the West.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=269659&l=ru>

Iravunk, November 10, 2023 - “The West is ‘courting’ Armenia and wants to befriend it against Russia - Lavrov” - statement by Sergey Lavrov who said that Western countries are intensively courting Armenia, trying to strengthen relations at the expense of Russia. Lavrov emphasized that Russia has no prejudices against Armenia’s partners and that Yerevan should independently shape its relations with other countries. He also noted that Russia never builds alliances against anyone. The main narrative - The West leads to the deterioration of relations with Russia, acting to the detriment of Armenia.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=269273&l=ru>

Iravunk, October 13, 2023 – “Armenia: Pashinyan’s anti-Russian turn or waiting for a Western miracle” - an analysis of Nikol Pashinyan’s policy, pointing to his anti-Russian actions since 2018. The author suggests that Pashinyan aims to weaken ties with Russia, blaming it for the

problems of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. It also emphasizes that the current Armenian authorities are intensifying anti-Russian rhetoric, trying to shift responsibility for their failures onto Moscow.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=267244&l=ru>

Hraparak, September 19, 2024 – “Money from Russia, political loyalty from the West” - description of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s policy, who balances between Russia and the West. The author suggests that Pashinyan criticizes the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to gain Western favor while maintaining membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) for trade benefits with Russia. The article highlights that despite anti-Russian rhetoric, trade with Russia is growing, while trade with the European Union is declining. The author criticizes Pashinyan for a lack of coherence in foreign policy and suggests that his actions are motivated by the desire to maintain power rather than the real national interest of Armenia.

<https://hraparak.am/post/43bbc01303cb398d09cce65998272f99>

Hraparak, March 16, 2024 – “With his anti-Russian attitude, Pashinyan turns to the West to stand up for him” - discussion of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s anti-Russian actions, interpreting them as an attempt to gain the support of the West. Menua Soghomonyan from the “Hayakve” initiative notes that Pashinyan, losing legitimacy due to anti-democratic actions and corruption, tries to win the trust of the EU through criticism of Russia.

<https://hraparak.am/post/229e7b7e60a29123d3a6a9a8812f4d1a>

Hraparak, December 28, 2023 – “Armenia is trying to replace the alliance with Russia with vague promises from the West” – the main narrative: the government’s actions lead to the deterioration of relations with the true ally, namely Russia. The article on hrarak.am quotes the statement of Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who criticizes Armenia for trying to replace the alliance with Russia with the “vague promises” of the West. Lavrov claims that Yerevan, yielding to Western influences, is changing its foreign policy, blaming Russia for its problems, including the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that Armenia remains a strategic partner of Russia in the South Caucasus.

<https://hraparak.am/post/a92b5a4b7a9af78eb0cb006476cb3292>

Sputnik Armenia, July 12, 2024 - key elements of the narrative: The joint American-Armenian exercises serve as a tool of Western influence on Armenia's security policy and pose a threat to its sovereignty. Additionally, they represent the rejection of Armenia's true ally, which is Russia.

<https://am.sputniknews.ru/20240712/erevan-vtyagivayut-v-antirossiyskie-proekty-zakharova-ob-armyano-amerikanskikh-ucheniya-kh-78280165.html>

3. "The West is unreliable", "The West supports Turkiye and Azerbaijan against Armenia", "The West wants to carry out a coup in Georgia as part of 'color revolutions'", "The West poses a threat to peace in the South Caucasus".

168.am, December 9, 2024 - an interview with Artur Khachikyan (introduced as an expert from Stanford University, USA). The title warns that Azerbaijan may take Armenia just as HTS took Syria and Pashinyan will flee like Assad; mockery of democracy in the context of HTS: "The terrorist dried his hair, straightened his beard, combed it, and became a democrat". The USA, especially the new Trump administration, supports Israel and Israel plays together with Azerbaijan against Iran, thus Armenia will be sacrificed. Quotes: "Trump has a very aggressive, pro-Israel stance. And Turkiye and Azerbaijan are allies of Israel. They will try to use the situation and solve the Zangezur corridor issue"; "The hypocrisy of the West is unbearable." <https://168.am/2024/12/09/2138386.html>

Iravunk, May 4, 2023 - "Ukraine's existence as a state is not part of American plans - Patrushev" - the main narrative is that the United States is using Ukraine for confrontation with Russia. Statement by Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Russian Security Council, who claims that the United States does not plan to preserve Ukraine as a state. According to Patrushev, the USA exploits Ukraine's natural resources, causing mass emigration due to socio-economic problems and repression. Patrushev stresses that Washington's policies led to a significant

population decline in Ukraine over the last 30 years and that the USA is now continuing the war with Russia “to the last Ukrainian”, not planning to maintain Ukraine as a sovereign state.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=254816&l=ru>

Hraparak, June 22, 2024 – “The West does not take a position favorable to Armenia because Armenia is not their ally” - the main narrative is that the West is unreliable and does not support Armenia. Interview with Andrias Ghukasyan, chairman of the Constructive Armenia Party, who discusses the issue of Armenia’s potential membership in the European Union. According to him, the current authorities are unwilling to act and focus rather on cooperation with Turkiye and Azerbaijan.

<https://hraparak.am/post/598c24e218cc9f6cbd0ce5fccc8b65b1>

Hraparak, April 13, 2024 – “The West is preparing another color revolution coup in Georgia, now or in autumn” - the author suggests that Georgian authorities, represented by the “Georgian Dream” party, are perceived by the West as insufficiently obedient, especially regarding their refusal to fully join anti-Russian sanctions and maintaining trade relations with Russia. Accordingly, the West plans to support opposition forces in Georgia, financing parties and NGOs to bring about a change of power during the upcoming parliamentary elections in autumn 2024.

<https://hraparak.am/post/b23f6719e35eb4a72b47ff6fc25fce90>

Hraparak, April 28, 2023 - "The West is forcing Armenia to make a decision"- pressure exerted by the West on Armenia to quickly sign a peace treaty with Azerbaijan. The draft treaty was delivered to Armenia by Erika Olson, who met with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. The details of the document are not publicly known, but it is suggested that its provisions may be unfavorable for Armenia and Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). The West seeks to push Russia out of the region by pressuring Armenia to comply with economic sanctions against Russia and remove Russian peacekeeping forces from Artsakh.

<https://hraparak.am/post/fd494eac6b7a38c5a12993da9e5a08d2>

Hraparak, April 30, 2021 - "Nikolai Patrushev on the destructive policy of the West" - statement by Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Russian Security Council, who criticizes the activities of the Soros Foundation and its supporters. Patrushev claims that these organizations seek to impose their own standards of state assessment, which may lead to sanctions or military interventions against sovereign countries.

<https://hraparak.am/post/05eb174fb9abab25bfed59511f22bf1e>

Hraparak, November 18, 2020 - "The West has started provoking Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalists" - interview with Sergey Naryshkin, head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, who accuses the West of fueling tensions between Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalists to discredit and break the ceasefire agreements in Nagorno-Karabakh. Naryshkin claims that Western countries try to convince Armenians that peace in Karabakh means Yerevan's defeat, encouraging the continuation of fighting.

<https://hraparak.am/post/87481333f4d94c10f102b28e136a841b>

Novosti Armenia, November 13, 2024 - Zakharova: 'The USA and EU do not care about the fate of the South Caucasus; they want to squeeze Russia out of the region' - statement by Maria Zakharova, spokesperson of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who accuses the USA and the European Union of seeking to push Russia out of the South Caucasus region. Zakharova claims that the West, taking over the role of mediator, copies Russian peace initiatives, distorting their essence to subordinate the peace process to itself. According to her, the true goal of the USA and EU is control over the region. Zakharova emphasizes that Russia, unlike the West, is interested in the stability and prosperity of the South Caucasus.

https://newsarmenia.am/news/in_the_world/zakharova-ssha-i-es-plevat-na-sudbu-yuzhnogo-kavkaza-oni-khotyat-vydavit-rossiyu-iz-regiona/

Novosti Armenia, December 18, 2024 - "The West's desire to strengthen its position in the South Caucasus has a destructive effect on the region - Gerasimov" Statement by Valery Gerasimov, who states that the efforts of the United States and the European Union to strengthen their presence in the South Caucasus have a destructive impact on the situation in

the region. Gerasimov emphasizes that these actions aim to keep Georgia in the Western sphere of influence and draw Armenia under its influence, which negatively affects the stability of the South Caucasus. <https://newsarmenia.am/news/armenia/stremlenie-zapada-usilit-pozitsii-v-zakavkaze-destruktivno-vliyaet-na-region-gerasimov-/>

168.am, December 7, 2024 - an interview with military expert and analyst Davit Jamalyan, who claims that the Armenian-Russian alliance is strategic and must be maintained, and that developing military cooperation with France or India will not ensure Armenia's security.

<https://168.am/2024/12/07/2137131.html>

168.am, December 3, 2024 - an interview with Abraham Gasparyan, director of the Genesis Armenia think tank, who suggests that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is carrying out an Azerbaijani-Turkish plan to eliminate democracy in Armenia and to pave the way for an Azerbaijani invasion, with the Vatican and the United Kingdom involved in the conspiracy against Armenia. Quotes: "The Vatican is playing very badly against us. One must understand which multinational corporations are revolutionizing the whole world or what new globalist organizations the Vatican leads"; "The fourth President Armen Sarkisian was here the curator of British policy. The negro did his job; the negro could go. Nikol Pashinyan is just a facade, people from outside are playing him."

<https://168.am/2024/12/03/2135490.html>

4. Disinformation regarding the war in Ukraine: "The West is striving to trigger World War III"

Hraparak, February 5, 2024 - "The government of Ukraine is moving to Lviv" - the material suggests that Ukraine is losing and NATO wants to enter Ukraine to help the "regime in Kyiv".

<https://hraparak.am/post/e7d184b60f94e3d755346bc272a56542>

Sputnik, March 5, 2024 - Ukraine is losing, but the West is desperately striving for war with Russia, so NATO wants to send an expeditionary corps to Ukraine. Quote: "Consistent

statements from London, Paris, and Washington about the possibility of sending NATO troops to Ukraine reflect the catastrophic state of the Ukrainian armed forces and the perennial desire of the collective West to enter into direct armed conflict with Russia".

<https://arm.sputniknews.ru/20240305/nato-i-eqspedicivon-kvorpustn-ukrainajum-linel-te-chlinel-73069314.html>

Iravunk, July 5, 2024 - key narrative elements: According to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Western countries are striving to trigger World War III, at the moment when Russian President Vladimir Putin calls for peace.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=287589&l=am>

Iravunk, March 3, 2024 - key narrative elements: There has been a leak of conversations among German military personnel regarding NATO plans in case hits on Russian targets become necessary. This means that NATO countries are considering direct confrontation with Russia, which would obviously escalate into World War III.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=277752&l=am>

Iravunk, February 28, 2024 - key narrative elements: President of France Emmanuel Macron is provoking the outbreak of the third world war by suggesting the possibility of sending Western countries' armed forces to Ukraine. The President of France has thus forgotten the experiences of Napoleon and his defeat in Russia.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=277430&l=am>

Golos Armenii, December 20, 2021 - key narrative elements: The aggressive and arrogant policy of the USA and NATO poses a threat to the entire human species by rejecting the principles of a multipolar world order. Such behavior may result in triggering the third world war, which could ultimately lead to the extinction of all humanity.

<https://www.golosarmenii.am/am/article/137332/La-Jornada--amn-i-agryesiv-qaghaqakanvothvone-yerrvord-hamashkharhayin-patyerazmi-khangyetsni>

Sputnik Armenia, October 13, 2024 - key narrative elements: According to the words of the US presidential candidate Donald Trump, the third world war may begin within 3-4 months due to the fault of the USA.

<https://am.sputniknews.ru/20241013/tramp-zayavil-chto-tretya-mirovaya-voyna-mozhet-nachatsya-v-techenie-3-4-mesyatsev-iz-za-ssha-81802446.html>

Sputnik Armenia, November 18, 2024 - key narrative elements: The Joe Biden administration, in cooperation with the American military-industrial complex, is striving to trigger the third world war before Donald Trump's election as President of the USA. This is seen, among other things, in the approval to Ukraine for the use of American weapons on Russian territory. According to the President of Russia, this constitutes direct NATO involvement in the conflict.

<https://am.sputniknews.ru/20241118/syn-trampa-vpk-ssha-khochet-nachat-tretyu-mirovuyu-voynu-do-prikhoda-otssa-k-vlasti-83099683.html>

Sputnik Armenia, August 26, 2022 - key narrative elements: In view of the above article, Russia is taking all measures to prevent the outbreak of World War III, including the launch of a “special military operation.” Therefore, any entities supporting Russia's enemies in this fight act directly to provoke a global conflict.

<https://am.sputniknews.ru/20220826/apokalipsis-esche-ne-nastupil-situatsiyu-udaetsya-uderzhivat---medvedev-47358541.html>.

Sputnik Armenia, April 29, 2020 — key narrative elements: The West, especially the USA, used Ukraine as a field of confrontation with Russia. For this purpose, it spread false information and misled its own society. Due to the above, the West is ready to carry out even anti-Russian provocations in Ukraine.

<https://am.sputniknews.ru/20220429/tretya-mirovaya---voyna-bez-veteranov-ili-komu-lozh-a-komu-smelaya-i-uspeshnaya-strategiya-41430997.html>.

Sputnik Armenia, March 23, 2023 - key narrative elements: The USA uses Russia's involvement in the “special military operation” to impose new sanctions on the Russian arms industry. This

action aims to weaken Russia and make it vulnerable to attacks from the West. It is worth emphasizing that the sanctions also affected entities responsible for equipping Russian troops with radiological protection. Western sanctions, besides weakening Russia's military security, also aim to destroy the country's economic stability by lowering the standard of living of the citizens of the Russian Federation and causing mass unemployment.

<https://am.sputniknews.ru/20230323/zapad-ne-brezgoval-nichem-mishustin-nazval-nastoyaschuyu-tsel-antirossiyskikh-sanktsiy-57116766.html>

Sputnik Armenia, May 1, 2024 - <https://am.sputniknews.ru/20240501/v-minfine-ssha-zayavili-o-novykh-antirossiyskikh-sanktsiyakh-75192122.html>

Sputnik Armenia, November 18, 2024 - narrative warning of the outbreak of World War III: The Ukrainian army “subordinate” to NATO may carry out missile strikes, including on the Kursk nuclear power plant. The following narrative lines can be distinguished:

- Attempt to instill fear of escalation of the conflict into a third world war;
- Attempt to instill fear of radiological contamination;
- Attempt to portray Ukraine and NATO as aggressive entities striving for
an open conflict with Russia.

<https://am.sputniknews.ru/20241118/na-poroge-iii-mirovoy-ssha-britaniya-i-frantsiya-razreshili-sebe-raketnye-udary-po-rossii-83134397.html>

5. Discrediting European values and conspiracy theories related to Soros

According to the 2020 report by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, the medium most intensively engaged in discrediting European values was Iravunk, as well as Russian media such as RTR Planeta and programs especially “Evening with Vladimir Solovyov” and “60 Minutes”. Among the leading narrative motives in this regard are attacks on the Istanbul Convention and the topic of sexual minorities.

Sputnik, December 7, 2021 - Liberal democracy and Western civilization lead to the persecution of whites, promotion of LGBT, and gender change in children.

<https://arm.sputniknews.ru/20211207/shur-tvats-rasizm-serapvokhutjun-arevmutqy-paraktvel-e-dzakh-liberal-gaghaparneri-pattsharvov-36150885.html>

LiveNews, April 20, 2020 - Reference to the words of Ali Khamenei regarding the alleged moral decay of the West, including not treating the elderly during COVID-19, as a result of atheism and materialism prevailing in liberal democracies.

<https://livenews.am/press/2020/39441/20/19/34/>

Hraparak, December 6, 2022 - Interview with director Hovhannes Ishkhanyan, who believes that Soros acts in Turkiye's interest and therefore wants to destroy Armenia through his anti-Russian projects in Armenia.

<https://hraparak.am/post/487010cf0371958e03d8b12f0a1daba1>

Iravunk, July 27, 2019 - "War declared on Armenia - aimed at destroying culture and people. How to win?" - the main narrative is that the West is demoralized and threatens traditional values in Armenia. The article points to intensifying actions aimed at traditional values and national culture in Armenia. The author indicates that after the "color revolution" in the country, propaganda and legal campaigns against the Armenian Apostolic Church began, supported by Western foundations. Special attention was paid to the planned adoption by Armenia of the Istanbul Convention, which causes controversy in society fearing the imposition of foreign cultural norms. The article emphasizes that similar initiatives met resistance in other European countries such as Croatia and Lithuania. The author appeals for the defense of national values and traditions against external interference.

<https://www.iravunk.com/?p=176959&l=ru>

7. Propaganda actions aimed at the perception of Poland

The perception of Poland in Armenia is positive, which results from historical relations between the two nations, as well as the lack of significant problems for the Armenian diaspora in Poland. Negative information about Poland does not appear very often in Armenian media. The polarization of Armenian media focused on the attitude towards Prime Minister Pashinyan, the West, Russia, and the assessment of the loss of Artsakh, only to a limited extent affects the portrayal of Poland and concerns topics related to Russia and the war in Ukraine (Polish “Russophobia,” alleged border revisionism, provoking World War III). Such content is addressed to that part of society which sees Russia as an ally and does not support Armenia’s turn to the West, and its sources are mainly Russian media. To some extent, information indicating cooperation between Poland and Türkiye may also evoke a negative reception. However, the visit of the President of the Republic of Poland to Armenia did not provoke negative narratives even in anti-Western media (with a few exceptions). The main source of anti-Polish narratives, however, are Russian media, including Armenian-language ones such as Sputnik Armenia.

a) Motivated externally

- Poland is Russophobic;
- Poland is inciting war in Ukraine and wants to seize its western part;
- Poland is an ally of Türkiye, which is an enemy of Armenia.

b) Motivated internally

- Information actions targeted at Prime Minister Pashinyan indirectly impacting the image of Poland.

c) Examples of actions

Plans for the annexation of western Ukraine by Poland or the partition of Ukraine involving Poland - materials fitting this narrative appeared almost exclusively in media maintaining a strictly pro-Russian narrative, mostly based on Russian sources. In other Armenian media, articles appeared indicating that the alleged plans to partition Ukraine with Poland's involvement are disinformation.

Lurer, May 6, 2022 - <https://lurer.com/article/463251/am> - Poland began implementing a plan to annex the western regions of Ukraine. The source indicated is a former deputy of the pro-Russian party "Opposition Platform - For Life" (his post on Telegram); This information was repeated on MediaMall, May 6, 2022 - <https://topnews.mediamall.am/?id=249123>).

Hayastani Hanrapetutyun (the title no longer exists), April 12, 2023 - <https://hhpress.am/mijazgayin/2023/18776/> - an article by Lusine Mkhitarian, who argues that Poland is expanding its influence in western Ukraine thanks to the war and adds that "some analysts and media mention the possibility of an approaching unification of Ukraine and Poland within a confederation. According to another view, the annexation (German: Anschluss – ed. note) of Western Ukraine is becoming increasingly real. For example, the publicist of the portal 'Independent Political Journal', Hanna Kramer notes that the USA may divide Ukraine and hand over the western part of the country to Poland in exchange for Warsaw's financial support to the authorities in Kyiv." The narrative was built on disinformation from a Polish-language fake news portal.

Azg.am, November 29, 2024 - Ukraine will be divided between Great Britain, Germany, Poland and Romania. In the article referring to "information from the press office of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service", there is also mention of "NATO invasion plans on Ukraine" through the deployment of 100,000 peacekeeping troops (the same on Hayastan News, <https://hayastan.news/am/post/34528>).

<https://azg.am/news/%D5%AF%D5%A1%D6%80%D6%87%D5%B8%D6%80%D5%A8/%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%AF%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%AB%D5%B6%D5%A1%D5%B6-%D5%AF%D5%A2%D5%A1%D5%AA%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%BE%D5%AB-%D5%B4%D5%A5%D5%AE-%D5%A2%D6%80%D5%AB%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%AB%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%AB-%D5%A3%D5%A5/>.

Iravunk, January 18, 2023 - <https://www.iravunk.com/?p=246450&l=am> - repetition of a Russian fake with an alleged TVP1 weather forecast screenshot where the map of Poland included western Ukraine. Commentary suggesting that western Ukraine is already recognized by Poland as its territory.

Politik.am, March 25, 2022 - "A map of the division of Ukraine was shown in Poland" - the source is former pro-Russian Ukrainian deputy Illya Kyva. The division map was allegedly shown on TVP.

<https://politik.am/am/lehastanum-cucadrel-en-ukrainayi-bazhanman-qartezy>

NewsPress.am, June 29, 2023 - Poland and Lithuania are planning an invasion of Ukraine and the spokesperson of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, M. Zakharova stated that Poland wants to destroy Russia as an independent state through Ukraine. <https://www.newspress.am/?p=187326&l=am>

Iravunk, May 7, 2022 — <https://www.iravunk.com/?p=226234&l=ru> — material about an alleged Polish plan to take over western Ukraine, emphasizing that this is only possible with Russia's consent; based on a manipulated statement by President Duda that in the future there will be no borders between Poland and Ukraine, and a commentary by State Duma Deputy Chairman O. Morozov.

Russophobia and attacks on the Russian ambassador in Poland

Context: This information may affect only part of the audience, since the attack on the ambassador itself is not a shocking event for Armenians, who as a nation tend to have rather strong emotional reactions.

- Iravaban, May 9, 2023, <https://iravaban.net/384728.html> - the leader of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, demanded on his Telegram channel that the Polish authorities officially apologize to the Russian ambassador in Poland for the attack against him on Victory Day.

Radio Sputnik.ria.ru reports: "What is Poland trying to achieve? After Ukraine, if there is a team, we will show you in six seconds what we are capable of. It is better to take your weapons, your mercenaries, and officially apologize to our ambassador. We simply will not allow it. Take note... You started playing very bad games with our state... Do not play with the voice of the West and America; this will not lead to anything good" - he wrote.

It should be noted that on May 9 in Warsaw, while laying a wreath at the Soviet soldiers' cemetery, "red substance" was poured on the Russian ambassador Sergei Andreev in Poland. An aggressive crowd blocked his path and shouted insults. Because of this, the ambassador was forced to leave the cemetery early under police escort.

- General News, May 9, 2023 - in the information about the attack on Andreev, it was emphasized that "employees of the Russian Embassy came to the memorial complex to honor the memory of soldiers who died liberating Poland from fascism"; TASS was cited as the source.

<https://generalnews.am/hy/article/1ceb109ed740ea7df0ec3b7d4b6b3584/>

Sputnik, May 10, 2023 - the information emphasized that the attack on Andreev was part of broader Russophobic actions by Poland, and "a police officer present at the scene stated that the protest action was coordinated with the municipality".

<https://arm.sputniknews.ru/20230510/rusastanum-lehastani-gvortseri-zhamanakavvor-havatarmatary-kanchvel-e-rd-agn-59457745.html>

- Oragir, November 16, 2022 - <https://oragir.news/hy/material/2022/11/16/62437> - the headline asks whether Poland will apologize to Andreev. Context: Poland summoned Andreev to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at night due to the incident in Przewodów, and Polish media pointed to Russia as responsible, while later the USA and President Duda admitted that Russia did not fire the missile (source: Zakharova's Telegram account).
- Oragir, November 16, 2022 - <https://oragir.news/hy/material/2022/11/16/62425> - "Fragments of missiles that fell on Polish territory were Ukrainian S-300 missiles"; Peskov was quoted as saying that "Poland's reaction was hysterical and Russophobic".
- Sputnik, November 16, 2022 - "The US reaction was 'restrained', Poland's was 'hysterical'. Peskov on the explosion in Poland" - in the context of the Przewodów incident.
<https://arm.sputniknews.ru/20221116/amni-ardzaganqy-zusp-er-lehastaniny-histerik-peskvovy-lehastanum-pajtjuni-masin-51366654.html>
- Sputnik, October 22, 2024 — "Poland closes the Russian Consulate General in Poznań". The material contains a statement linking this action to the alleged Western plan to start a war with Russia: "Recently, thoughts about a direct military conflict between the alliance and the Russian Federation have appeared more and more frequently in the West. The Kremlin noted that the Russian Federation threatens no one but will not ignore actions that may pose a potential threat to its interests. Moreover, in recent years Russia has observed unprecedented NATO activity near its western borders".
<https://arm.sputniknews.ru/20241022/lehastany-pakum-e-pvoznatum-rd-glkhavvor-hjupatvosutjuny-82152290.html>

Destruction of monuments to Soviet soldiers

Context: The participation of Armenians in the Soviet army during World War II

- 1in.am, April 14, 2022 - <https://www.1in.am/3097782.html> - Poland is massively removing monuments to Soviet soldiers and previously they were being desecrated (source of information: Sputnik).
- Sputnik, May 21, 2021 - Poles, by destroying monuments to Soviet soldiers, are like Azerbaijanis and Turks destroying the national heritage of Armenians - <https://arm.sputniknews.ru/20210521/voch-voq-alievin-thaj-hartser-chi-talis-27635532.htm>

Information regarding the war in Ukraine portraying Poland as a state not desiring peace

- Panorama, November 23, 2024 - Switzerland bans the export of military equipment to Poland due to Ukraine - <https://www.panorama.am/am/news/2024/11/23/%D5%87%D5%BE%D5%A5%D5%B5%D6%81%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%AB%D5%A1-%D4%BC%D5%A5%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%BD%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%B6/3081916>.
- 168.am, April 10, 2024 - <https://168.am/2024/10/04/2106408.html> - Lukashenko on Belarus helping Ukraine defend itself against attempts by Poland to seize Western Ukraine.
- Sputnik, July 10, 2023 - Poland has signed a security agreement with Ukraine and is ready to go further than other NATO countries in supporting Ukraine, which may lead to a NATO war with Russia and is "dangerous for the world". <https://arm.sputniknews.ru/20240710/hrg-lehastany-mtadir-e-lvvovi-erknqum-voch-trichqajin-gvoti-steghtsel--78207725.html>

Information related to the visit of President Andrzej Duda to Armenia, having or potentially having a negative connotation

- Rusarminfo, November 26, 2024 - an interview with Vladimir Bruter, who claims that Duda's visit to Armenia is the implementation of Duda's "imperial plans" and that

Armenia, as part of the “Poland from sea to sea” plan, is perceived by him as “Polish borderlands”.

<https://rusarminfo.ru/2024/11/26/polsha-ot-morya-do-armenii-duda-v-erevane-ishhet-imperiyu-video/>

- Yerevan Today, November 26, 2024 - anti-Russian speech by the Polish president - <https://yerevan.today/all/politics/147043/lehastani-naxagahy-hayastani-ambionn-ogtagortsec-hakarousakan-haytararoutyouanner-anelou-hamar>
- 168.am, December 11, 2024 - during preparations for President Duda’s visit to Armenia, the Armenian authorities committed financial irregularities - <https://168.am/2024/12/11/2139221.html>

Poland is a friend of Turkiye

Information about Polish-Turkish cooperation does not necessarily form part of any anti-Polish campaign but may evoke negative emotions in part of the society.

- Armtimes, January 31, 2018 - "The Armenian community protests against the plan to erect a monument to the Turkish soldier in Krakow" - although the information is presented in a fairly neutral way, it may create the impression that Poland wants to honor Turkish soldiers, who are responsible for the Armenian genocide, although they have no merits for Poland. The source indicated is segodnia.ru.

Examples of other information with a negative connotation

- 168.am, November 14, 2023 - <https://168.am/2023/11/14/1957306.html> - "The Ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Armenia: Armenians should live in a territory recognized by the international community" - the title is an exaggeration; from the content, it follows that Polish ambassador P. Skwieciński stated that Poland has never recognized Artsakh as Armenian territory. However, there is no mention that Armenians should not live there (context: the statement was made shortly after Artsakh was taken over by Azerbaijan and its residents expelled).
- Sputnik, November 23, 2018 - "In the capital of Poland, Armenians were forced to hide the Artsakh flag" - information about Azeris forcing the removal of the Artsakh flag at

one of the booths during a tourism fair

<https://arm.sputniknews.ru/20181123/lehastanum-hayastani-nerkayacucchin-stipelen-heracnel-arcakhi-droshy-15835618.html>

8. Case study – analysis of the narrative targeted against Poland based on the DISARM model

DISARM RED Framework - an attempt to unify the method of description and exchange of information concerning actions in the information space

History of the DISARM RED framework

DISARM RED (DISinformation Analysis & Risk Management RED) is an analytical model used to describe offensive actions in the information space (infosphere). One of the main challenges accompanying their analysis is a great conceptual heterogeneity. Entities involved in studying and countering threats in this domain have developed their own vocabularies and semantics used to describe this type of activity. With the steadily increasing intensity since the mid-2010s of multidomain informational actions, of which influence operations are also a component, the need arose for reliable information exchange among entities engaged in identifying and combating such threats.

At the turn of 2017 and 2018, Sara-Jayne “SJ” Terp, together with a group of cybersecurity specialists, began work on adapting existing tools describing strictly digital threats to the reality of hybrid operations². Shortly after, the prototype of DISARM was created - the AMITT framework (Adversarial Misinformation Influence Tactics & Techniques), which began to be used by NATO, the EU, WHO, and the UN. The current version of DISARM RED is the result

² <https://github.com/DISARMFoundation/DISARMframeworks?tab=readme-ov-file#whos-responsible-for-disarm-and-a-little-history>

of combining AMITT and the SPICE model created by MITRE Corporation - based on the classic cybersecurity framework MITRE ATT&CK (used to identify and describe tactics and techniques employed in offensive operations in cyberspace)³.

DISARM is a fully open-source project managed by the DISARM Foundation, compatible with the STIX language and the MISP platform, regularly updated to better describe reality and become increasingly compatible with other models, such as the Meta Kill Chain.

Basic characteristics of the DISARM RED framework

The DISARM RED framework is divided into several parts arranged in a specific hierarchy, describing individual stages and tools used in influence operations. The model opens with "phases," marked with tags starting with the letter "P." These are assigned tactics (tags starting with "TA"), which include various techniques (tags starting with "T").

The “P” tags describe 4 main phases of informational actions—planning, preparation, execution, and evaluation. The tactics “TA” within them indicate objectives belonging to individual phases, achieved through various tools, i.e., the “T” techniques. Descriptions of phases, techniques, and tactics are publicly available on the project’s website.

Example of using the DISARM RED framework

The DISARM RED framework is particularly useful for exchanging information about incidents. It allows describing the encountered reality easily and uniformly, leaving no room for ambiguity. It works excellently at the initial reconnaissance stage, i.e., identifying actions in the information space, as well as during attribution analysis, where it serves as a tool to describe characteristic and repeatable techniques that may be helpful in identifying the author of the influence operation. Its advantage is the aforementioned compatibility with the STIX syntax, enabling its use on platforms such as Open CTI.

³ <https://www.disarm.foundation/brief-history-of-disarm>

An example use of DISARM is a situation where an analyst identifies a network of fake accounts on a social media platform spreading the same meme designed to legitimize a narrative previously present in another medium, e.g., a web portal. Thanks to the framework, it is possible to specify, name, and classify the techniques used, assign them to tactics, and then pass this information to another analyst who can further enrich the product within the intelligence cycle.

Limitations of the DISARM RED framework

The DISARM RED framework is a precise and useful tool, but its limitations must be recognized. While it works well to describe and report individual incidents in the information space and classify digital evidence obtained during OSINT investigations, it lacks elements that more precisely describe psychological effects caused by the activity and is too distant from analysis models used in assessing psychological operations.

DISARM RED limits the description of psychological impact to several techniques in phase 1-planning. The framework describes them as ways to achieve a given goal at the tactical level, while in reality, the above-mentioned techniques are both tools and goals themselves -contained within a much broader spectrum of psychological influence employed by entities acting as attackers in influence operations.

Russian influence operation conducted in the information space of ARMENIA: Creating a false image of Poland and the West as aggressors seeking to annex Ukrainian territories.

Analysis of the Russian influence operation conducted in the information space of Ukraine according to the DISARM RED framework v 1.6

Introduction

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the Kremlin has consistently used disinformation as one of the key tools for “legitimizing” its aggression policy.

Russian propaganda, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine, is based on a deliberate narrative structure aimed at manipulating recipients by mixing facts with fiction, emotional appeals, and creating a false historical background.

The analysis reveals current disinformation techniques and narrative mechanisms used in this specific infosphere. One of the latest examples is the widely spread narrative about alleged Western plans to partition Ukraine.

The Russian propaganda apparatus continues its disinformation operation, whose leading narratives are based on theses about plans for the annexation of Western Ukraine by Poland, Hungary, and Romania.

Monitoring of the Armenian infosphere has shown that in this country there are artifacts of a broad Russian influence operation aimed at discrediting Poland on the international stage, portraying it as an aggressive country with imperial ambitions. False narratives aim to create in recipients the belief that Poland is preparing to annex or occupy parts of Ukrainian territories that once belonged to the territory of the Second Polish Republic.

TACTICS AND TECHNIQUES USED ACCORDING TO DISARM v1.6:

PHASE	TACTIC	TECHNIQUE	DESCRIPTION
P01 - Plan	TA02 - Plan Objectives	T0066 - Degrade Adversary	Russia uses narratives that portray Poland in a bad light, aiming to destroy its reputation and credibility
		T0079 - Divide	Poland is portrayed as an aggressive and neo-imperialist country, as well as acting on the orders of the "evil, collective West."

Study of the information environment: ARMENIA

		T0138 - Motivate to act	An attempt to provoke negative emotions towards Poland and the P
		T0135 - Undermine	An attempt to create the impression that Poland has hidden intentions towards Ukraine and is planning the annexation of part of its territories behind its back.
P02 Prepare	- TA07 - Select Channels and Affordances	T0152.004 - Website Asset	<p>Websites with Russian or pro-Russian affiliation (RT, Sputnik).</p> <p>A number of news portals in Armenia, openly pro-Russian, favorable to Russia, or unknowingly reproducing narratives consistent with its goals (Lurer, Hhpress, Azg, Topnews, Hayastan News, Iravunk), for example:</p> <p> https://lurer.com/article/463251/am, https://hhpress.am/mijazgayin/2023/18776/, https://azg.am/news/%D5%AF%D5%A1%D6%80%D6%87%D5%B8%D6%80%D5%A8/%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%AF%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%AB%D5%B6%D5%A1%D5%B6-%D5%AF%D5%A2%D5%A1%D5%AA%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%BE%D5%AB-%D5%B4%D5%A5%D5%AE-%D5%A2%D6%80%D5%AB%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%AB%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%AB-%D5%A3%D5%A5/, https://topnews.mediamall.am/?id=249123, https://hayastan.news/am/post/34528, https://www.iravunk.com/?p=246450&l=a m, https://politik.am/am/lehastanum-cucadrel-en-ukrainayi-bazhanman-gartezy, </p>

		T0151.004 - Chat Platform	Telegram messenger.
		T0151.001 - Social Media Platform	Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram
		T0151.008 - Microblogging Platform	Service X (formerly Twitter)
	TA14 - Develop Narratives	T0003 - Leverage Existing Narratives	An attempt to prove that Poland wants to occupy the western territories of Ukraine with the “blessing” of the West. Suggesting that NATO countries—Poland, Romania, the United Kingdom, Germany—want to divide Ukraine among themselves.
		T0022 - Leverage Conspiracy Theory Narratives	Lies that Poland is allegedly implementing the plan of the “Return of the Eastern Seas,” meaning the incorporation of former lands of the Second Polish Republic into the Third Polish Republic.
		T0068 - Respond to Breaking News Event or Active Crisis	Depending on current political events, Russia places false narratives in various communications.
	TA06 - Develop Content	T0023 - Distort Facts	Posting false articles on websites that attack the image of the Republic of Poland.
		T0085 - Develop Text-Based Content	Publishing false maps showing a divided Ukraine and “zones of influence” of individual countries.

Study of the information environment: ARMENIA

		T0086 - Develop Image-Based Content	Using fakes—modified maps—that are allegedly broadcast on Polish television. Referring to the situation from 2014, when Russia suggested to Poland the annexation of parts of Ukraine and using archival television materials (maps showing the Russian proposal) to prove the “true plans of Poland.”
	TA15 - Establish Assets	T0092 - Build Network	Dissemination of false narratives using multiple websites that either cite each other or share the same information.
	TA16 - Establish Legitimacy	T0097.102 - Journalist Persona	Citing official Russian sources, such as the foreign intelligence service SWR, which is meant to suggest the truthfulness of the conveyed “information.”
		T0097.108 - Expert Persona	Referring to statements of experts, politicians (including Ukrainian pro-Russian parties, e.g., from the Opposition Platform — For Life), as well as journalists.
		T0097.111 - Government Official Persona	
		T0097.202 News Outlet Persona	
P03 - Execute	TA09 - Deliver Content	T0115 - Post Content	Dissemination of false narratives in the form of articles on websites, graphics with forged maps of Europe, posts on social networks.
	TA17 - Maximise Exposure	T0119 - Cross-Posting	Publishing the same or very similar content on many different news services and on various platforms.

Summary

The current version of this campaign suggests that Poland, Hungary, Romania, and other Western countries are already “planning” to divide Ukraine into specific territories. By attributing alleged preparations for annexation carried out by NATO, the propaganda attempts to discredit the West’s support for Ukraine and fit these theses into disinformation about NATO’s offensive plans.

These messages are simultaneously used in propaganda activities that portray Russia in a false light as a state defending itself rather than militarily attacking Ukraine (a strategy of inverted logic).

Russia consistently uses rhetoric comparing Ukraine and the West to Nazism. Such references are intended to provoke an emotional reaction and “legitimize” Russian disinformation about aggression in Ukraine as a “denazification” operation or, more broadly, as a defensive operation against the West—suggesting that the West’s actions are provocative and offensive in nature and lead to conflict.

Understanding these mechanisms allows not only better analysis of propaganda but also more effective defense against it.

9. Case study – weakening Armenia’s European aspirations

Narrative war of Russia and Azerbaijan against Armenia's European path

The leaders of Russia and Azerbaijan often promote closely related, and sometimes identical, narratives attacking Armenia's efforts to get closer to the European Union. Both countries have a common interest in opposing closer relations between Armenia and Europe. Russia seeks to

prevent Armenia from reducing its dependence on Moscow, while Azerbaijan tries to maintain regional balance of power by undermining Armenian investments in national defense and resilience. Both countries aim to achieve these goals through coordinated actions in the information space, using similar narratives to challenge Armenia.

Russian and Azerbaijani disinformation campaigns targeted at the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMA) in Armenia

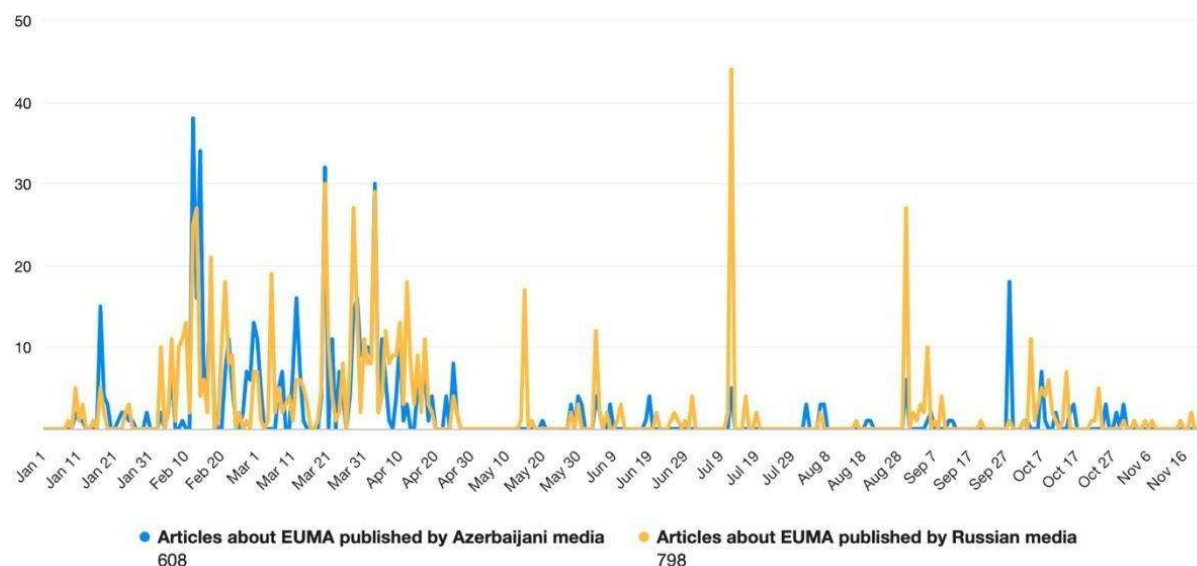
In 2023, at the official request of the Armenian government, the European Union established the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMA) on the Armenian side of the international border with Azerbaijan. EUMA, whose task is to monitor and report on the development of the situation on the ground, aims to increase the safety of people in conflict-affected areas and to build trust between Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, EUMA is often the target of disinformation campaigns by the propaganda apparatus of Russia and Azerbaijan.

In March 2024, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused EUMA of turning into a NATO mission due to the involvement of personnel from Norway, Canada, and the United States. Similarly, in September 2024, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stated that by including representatives from Canada, EUMA has turned into a NATO mission.

This was not the first case of coordinated statements against EUMA. In March 2023, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that EUMA is spying on Russia, Iran, and Azerbaijan from Armenia, contributing to increased "tensions" in the region. Reiterating this, President Aliyev accused EUMA of engaging in "binocular diplomacy." Moreover, the first deputy defense minister of Azerbaijan, Colonel General Karim Valiyev, stated that EUMA worsens the situation in the South Caucasus.

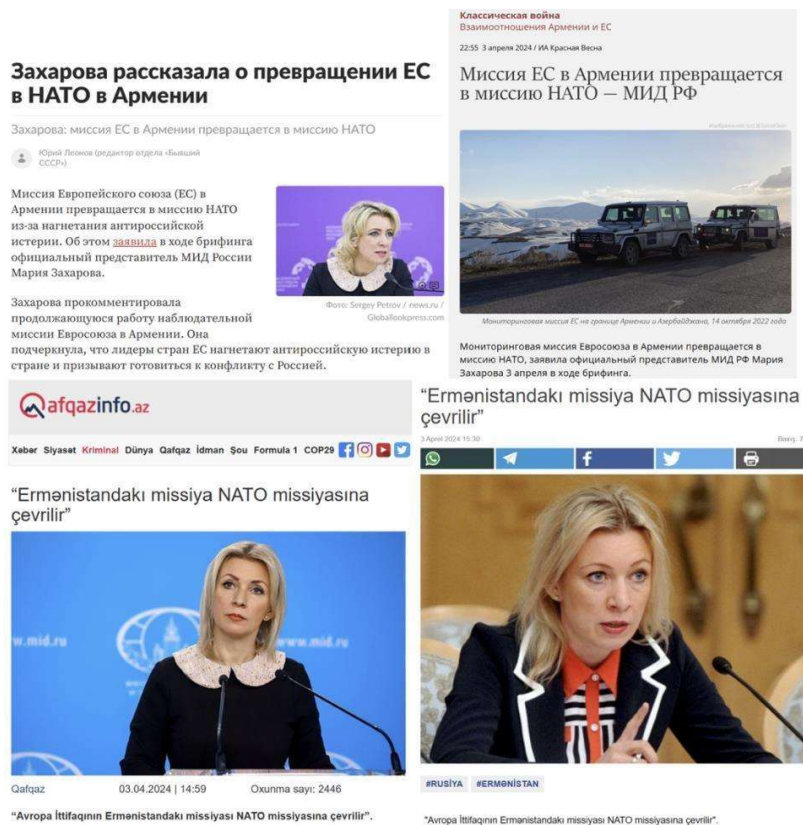
The use of the Meltwater tool to analyze mentions of EUMA in Russian and Azerbaijani media revealed that both countries actively engaged with EUMA in February and March 2024. Interestingly, these media published a similar number of articles about EUMA on certain days,

suggesting a comparable level of interest in the topic. These articles primarily contained narratives aimed at discrediting EUMA.



The chart illustrates the number of articles published by Russian and Azerbaijani media referring to EUMA.

Two cases in which reports by Azerbaijani and Russian media about EUMA reached similar peaks - March 20 and April 4, 2023 - coincide with Zakharova's statements about EUMA. Furthermore, Zakharova's April 3 statement, in which she said that it was becoming a NATO mission, also took place before Armenia's trilateral meetings in Brussels on April 5.



Screenshots of headlines promoting Zakharova's claim that EUMA is transforming into a NATO mission. The top row shows examples from Russian media, while the bottom row shows reports in Azerbaijani media, proving the correlation of Russian and Azerbaijani propaganda activities.

Russia and Azerbaijan respond to France's decision to supply weapons to Armenia

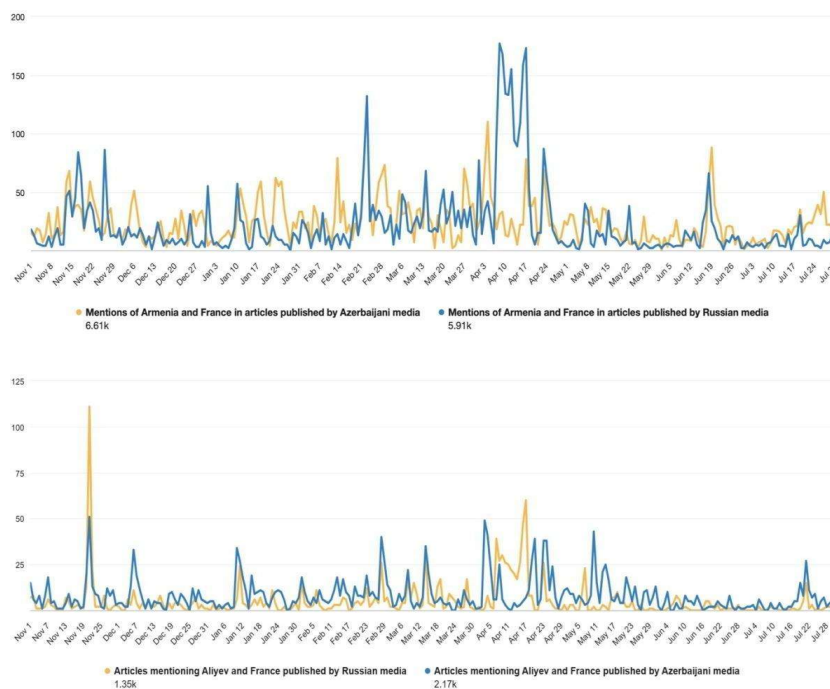
In recent years, France has become a key partner for Armenia, supplying advanced military equipment to strengthen its defense in the face of regional challenges. France's decision to supply weapons to Armenia quickly sparked negative and closely related reactions from Azerbaijan and Russia. On November 21, 2023, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stated that France is "laying the groundwork for a new regional war" by arming Armenia.

Azerbaijan accused France of destabilizing "not only its former and current colonies but also our region, the South Caucasus". Similarly, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs accused France of provoking the resumption of armed conflict in the region. Spokeswoman Maria

Zakharova suggested that France, which failed in its efforts to maintain peace in Africa, is trying to compensate by taking on a peacekeeping role in the Caucasus.

It was noted that when France and Armenia signed defense agreements on February 24, 2024, Russian and Azerbaijani media published almost the same number of articles about the event (130 and 127 respectively). The number of articles on this topic rose again in June 2024, after Armenia announced the purchase of CAESAR howitzers from France.

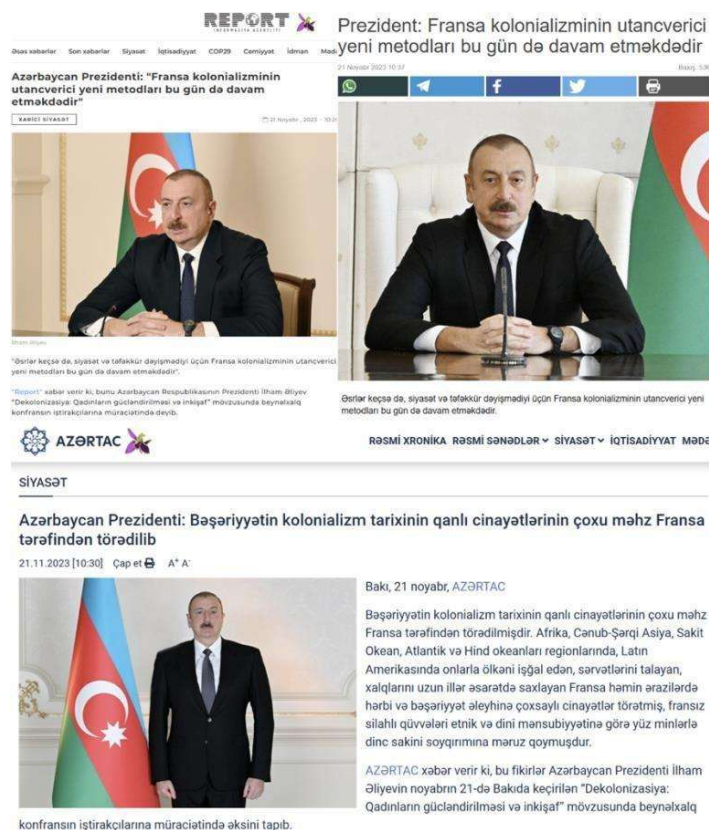
Azerbaijani media clearly emphasized the statements of Maria Zakharova, while Russian media widely reported on Ilham Aliyev's remarks on the matter. Interestingly, when President Aliyev accused France in November 2023 of laying the groundwork for a new war, his statement received a broader response in Russian media than in Azerbaijani media. Media analysis on November 21, 2023, identified 51 mentions of Aliyev's statement in Azerbaijani media, compared to 111 in Russian media.



Top: The chart shows the number of articles published by Russian and Azerbaijani media about French-Armenian defense cooperation.

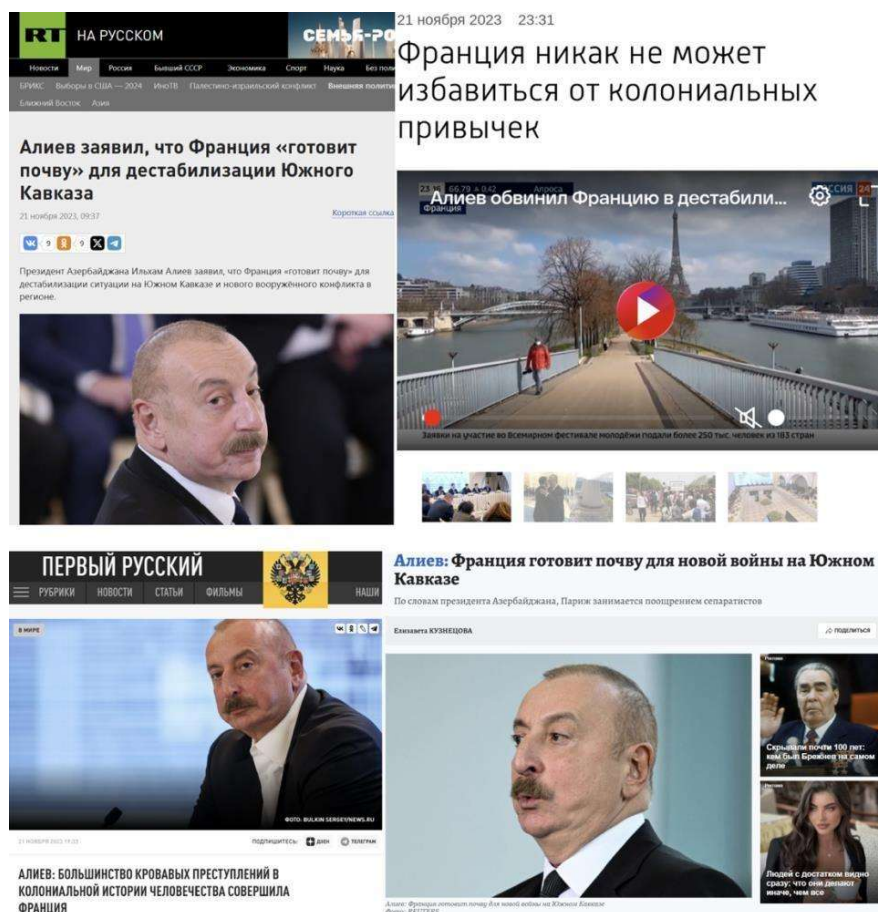
Bottom: the chart shows the number of articles in Russian and Azerbaijani media containing Aliyev's accusations against France.

Most reports referring to Aliyev's statements in Azerbaijani media focused on his accusations against France of practicing neocolonialism. State-controlled Azerbaijani media in their reports emphasized France's colonial past, aligning with the broader narrative promoted by Aliyev as well as the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This rhetoric aims to discredit France and its partnership with Armenia, portraying France as a hypocritical power that criticizes others while simultaneously neglecting its own history of exploitation and colonialism. Pro-government media published headlines such as "President of Azerbaijan: Most bloody crimes in the history of human colonialism were committed by France." This reinforces a narrative aimed at undermining France's image in the region and delegitimizing its support for Armenia.



Headlines in government-controlled Azerbaijani and pro-government media promoting Aliyev's November 21 speech, reinforcing Aliyev's accusations by emphasizing France's colonial history and fitting into the narrative undermining military cooperation between France and Armenia.

Headlines in government-controlled Azerbaijani and pro-government media promoting Aliyev's November 21 speech, reinforcing Aliyev's accusations by emphasizing France's colonial history and fitting into the narrative undermining military cooperation between France and Armenia.



Examples of Kremlin-controlled media promoting Aliyev's accusations against France with an emphasis on a new war and colonialism

Russia and Azerbaijan are trying to delegitimize Armenia's trilateral talks with Europe and the United States

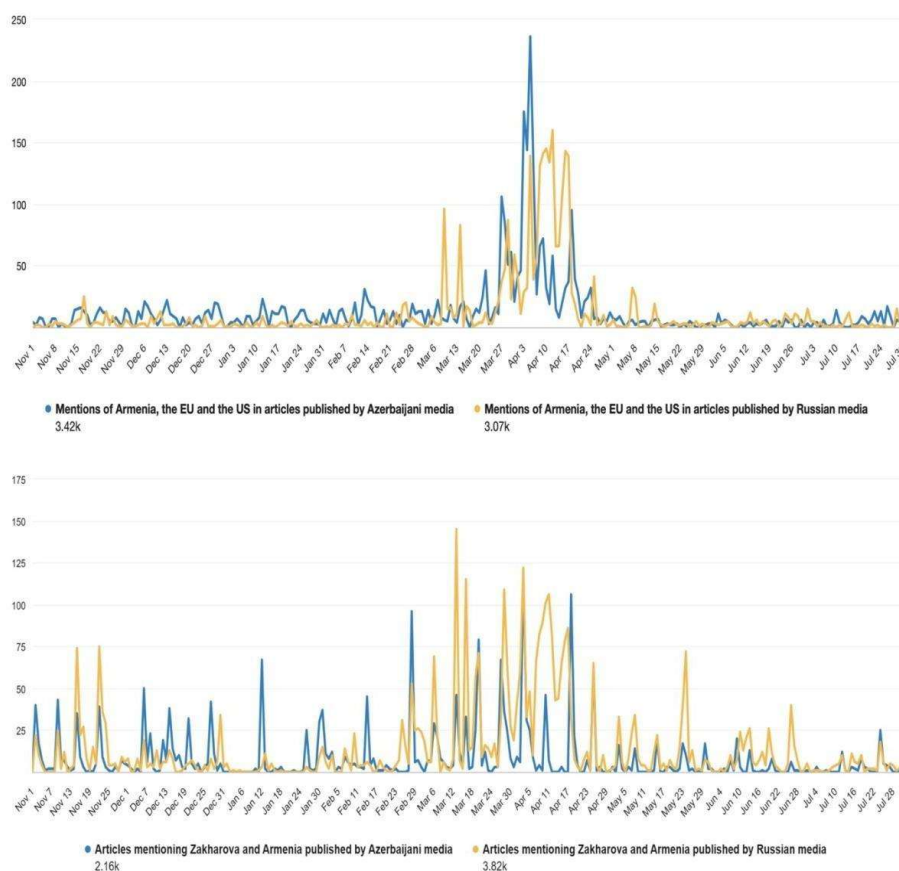
On April 5, 2024, in Brussels, Belgium, a trilateral meeting took place with the participation of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, EU High Representative Josep Borrell, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. During the meeting, the European Union presented a resilience and growth plan worth 270 million

euros, and the United States announced financial aid to Armenia amounting to 65 million dollars.

As in previous cases, the leaders of Russia and Azerbaijan expressed strikingly similar claims about the meeting. Ilham Aliyev stated that the Brussels meeting aimed to undermine regional cooperation and to "create lines of division and isolate Azerbaijan." Similarly, Maria Zakharova criticized the participants and stated that the meeting was "against Russia." She accused them of attempting to "draw new lines of division in the South Caucasus" and pushing a policy of "isolating Azerbaijan." Zakharova also accused the West of using Armenia to incite instability in the region instead of promoting peace and repeated that Russia supports Azerbaijan's plan for the reintegration of Armenians in Karabakh.

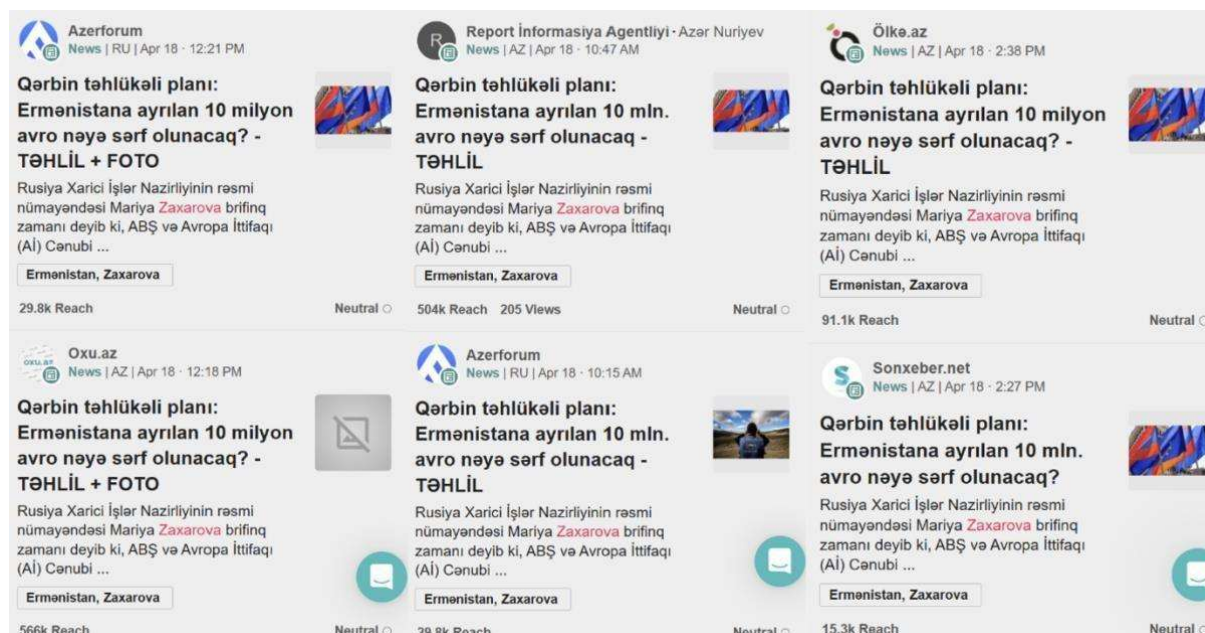
An analysis conducted by Meltwater showed that on the day of the trilateral meeting, Azerbaijani media published over 230 articles about the event, and Russian media published over 130 articles and continued publishing about it in the following days. Further queries of mentions of Zakharova's statements about Armenia led to the identification of over 3,800 such mentions in Russian news services and over 2,100 mentions in Azerbaijani media. The point at which Azerbaijani reach surpassed Russian reach occurred on April 18, coinciding with Zakharova's regular press briefing.

Study of the information environment: ARMENIA



The top chart shows the number of articles published by Russian and Azerbaijani media discussing Armenia's relations with Europe and the United States. The bottom chart shows articles in Russian and Azerbaijani media mentioning Maria Zakharova and Armenia.

Interestingly, Zakharova's briefing on April 18 met with minimal response in Russian media, with only 32 mentions identified by Meltwater. However, due to the alignment of her statements with Azerbaijan's agenda, the briefing was discussed 106 times in Azerbaijani-language media. In addition to the standard amplification of Zakharova's quotes, we identified nine duplicated articles with the headline "The West's Dangerous Plan: What Will the 10 million Euros Granted to Armenia Be Spent On?" on five Azerbaijani websites. This amount referred to the preliminary agreement between Armenia and the EU regarding the granting of 10 million euros from the European Peace Facility to strengthen Armenia's armed forces. The reports emphasized Zakharova's comments and portrayed the European Union's support as an attempt to transform Armenia into an anti-Russian platform.



Examples of articles reinforcing Zakharova's statements and claiming that Western support for Armenia contributes to new tensions in the region.

Russia and Azerbaijan convey negative information about the EU-Armenia dialogue on visa regime liberalization

In September 2024, the European Union and Armenia began talks on visa regime liberalization. It is expected that the negotiations will last several years, during which Armenia will have to carry out comprehensive and liberal reforms to meet EU standards.

Once again, Russia and Azerbaijan spread similar negative messages about this event. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that a visa-free regime with the European Union "would lead to a significant outflow of young and economically active people to Europe and would have a negative impact on the Armenian economy and security". Zakharova stated that Europe is deliberately delaying the visa liberalization process, making Armenians "hostages of regular political intrigues of Europeans". Similarly, the official Azerbaijani news agency Azertag stated that visa-free entry to Europe will worsen Armenia's demographic situation and lead to the "emptying of the country". Pro-government experts from Azerbaijan presented similar arguments and forecasts.

10. Recommendations / Suggestions

a) Summary of the information environment

The information environment in Armenia is highly polarized around attitudes toward Russia and the West, as well as around Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his main political opponent, Bishop Bagrat Galstanyan. Pro-Western and pro-European media mostly try to maintain professional standards in their content and use neutral language. However, they are not uncritical of the authorities, and some criticize Nikol Pashinyan for what they consider insufficiently pro-Western policies. These media also contain unequivocally negative portrayals of Russia as a state that betrayed Armenia in the war with Azerbaijan and threatens its security. Pro-Russian media often use very aggressive language, especially towards Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who is accused there of betrayal, serving Soros's interests (allegedly pro-Azerbaijani and pro-Turkish), and surrendering Armenian lands to Azerbaijan. In these media, the figure of Bagrat Galstanyan is often idealized.

A very significant factor influencing Armenia's information environment is the trauma related to the loss in the 44-day war of 2020 with Azerbaijan and the loss of Artsakh, from which 120,000 ethnic Armenian inhabitants had to flee. This causes many Armenians to be unable to accept the truth about the causes of defeat and to resort to conspiracy theories, including those promoted by Russian propaganda, which in this way tries to drown out accusations directed at it for failing to fulfill alliance commitments to Armenia. The fact that Armenia is a small country, and that politics in recent years has had a huge impact not only on the lives but also on the emotions of Armenians (especially anger, a sense of injustice, and also fear), makes them quite susceptible to the spread of conspiracy theories. Another factor influencing Armenians' emotional perception of reality is the situation in the Middle East, which is related to the large Armenian community in Lebanon and Syria and fear of jihadists, combined with the propagandistic image of Russia as the alleged defender of Christianity in the Middle East.

Historical memory also affects the emotional attitude toward politics and the way information is absorbed: pride in a rich history and culture, trauma related to the genocide committed against Armenians in 1915 by Türkiye and the loss of many territories that were part of historical Armenia, as well as the ambiguity of Russia's role in Armenian history and its relationship to the Soviet era. Regarding this latter aspect, the thesis about Russia's allegedly positive role in Armenian history, including in relation to the fights against Azerbaijan over Artsakh, is increasingly being questioned. As for memory relating to the Soviet times and its impact on absorbing information, significant factors include the considerable participation of Armenians in battles in the Soviet army during World War II, certain sentiments regarding the USSR stemming from dissatisfaction with the current economic situation, and idealization (on this basis) of the Soviet past. A very important historical figure often referred to by the Armenian information environment as a model patriot is Garegin Nzhdeh. Interestingly, the fact that he fought against Russian Bolsheviks and died in a Soviet prison, and that Russia protested against erecting a monument to him in Yerevan (which still happened during Serzh Sargsyan's time), does not negatively affect his use as a symbol by pro-Russian circles in Armenia.

Freedom of speech prevailing in Armenia also influences the information environment, which is not a standard in neighboring countries. However, the problem is media funding. A large part of pro-Russian media is de facto controlled by oligarchs and businesses connected to Russia and supporting former presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan. Some media, on the other hand, are supported both financially and substantively (in terms of professionalism standards) by European and American institutions. Nonetheless, a significant part of the Armenian information environment still relies unreflectively on news from Russian sources, which results from easy access to these sources (due to a weak network of their own correspondents), widespread knowledge of the Russian language in Armenia, and the fact that many Armenian journalists have also worked in Russian media. Russian media also directly affect Armenia's information environment by being one of the main sources of anti-Western disinformation and manipulation affecting the cognitive sphere. Moreover, the large and very well-organized diaspora in the USA also has its own media tools and influences Armenia's information environment.

b) Strategic analysis - the impact of the situation in the region on Poland's strategic goals

Perception of Armenia in Poland and of Poland in Armenia is positive, and it is in the interest of both Poland and Armenia that this country integrates with the EU. Armenia's pro-Western course is the only way to political and economic stabilization and to breaking free from the destructive Russian influences on Armenia, which are based on the oligarchization of public life, pervasive corruption, and as a result, the extreme weakening of the state, incapable of resisting aggression from Azerbaijan. For Poland, any weakening of Russian influence in the South Caucasus is desirable and supporting democracy and European values in a country whose historical civilizational ties with Europe are unquestionable constitutes not only a moral imperative but also an axiological foundation of Europe, including Poland. Lack of support for democratic Armenia would undermine the credibility of the entire European narrative regarding Europe's commitment to values such as democracy, individual freedom, freedom of speech, and human rights. Experiences from neighboring Georgia show that processes of democratization and exiting the Russian orbit are not irreversible. Therefore, the EU should draw lessons from the experiences in Georgia so as not to repeat them in Armenia, i.e., in particular, actively support Armenia's pro-European course and all related non-governmental initiatives, as well as strengthen Armenia's resilience to Russian FIMI operations in this country.

The role of Poland in supporting the EU's pro-Western course of Armenia should be crucial both because Poland is an important EU country and has always been an advocate of the Eastern policy assuming the enlargement of the EU to include democratic countries of the former USSR and thus limiting the Russian sphere of influence, as well as because of the historical conditions and significance of Armenians in the history of Poland. Moreover, Poland, having struggled for years with hybrid threats from Russia, including in the area of FIMI, has appropriate know-how in counteracting such actions and strengthening resilience. Unfortunately, in recent years Polish-Armenian relations have not been maintained at the desired level of intensity. The visit of the President of the Republic of Poland to Armenia in November 2024 was the first since 2011, despite the fact that during this time many visits at the highest level took place to the

other two South Caucasus republics. It is worth noting that the coverage of this visit in the Armenian media, regardless of their Western or Russian orientation, was positive or at least neutral. This shows considerable potential for Poland as a bridge between Armenia and Europe. Therefore, an intensification of political contacts, including at the highest level, is necessary.

Poland should also actively support negotiations regarding the normalization of relations between Armenia and Türkiye as well as Azerbaijan, while maintaining the territorial integrity of Armenia and respecting full sovereignty over its territory. However, this process cannot block the modernization of the Armenian armed forces, in which Poland should also participate, especially since Armenia showed interest in such cooperation several years ago. Furthermore, Poland should advocate for the abolition of visas to the EU for Armenian citizens and for the expansion of scientific and educational exchange opportunities, including within the framework of Erasmus+.

c) Summary of the Russian message in the region

Russian propaganda focuses on undermining the credibility of the West and spreading the narrative blaming Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan for losing the 44-day war in 2020 and the occupation of Artsakh by Azerbaijan. In this way, Russia pursues two goals: first, to divert attention from the fact that it has not fulfilled its commitments to Armenia and the population of Artsakh; and second, to discredit the pro-Western course of the current Armenian government and pressure it to change its policy in this regard. According to this narrative, Russia remains the only credible ally of Armenia, and limiting cooperation, including leaving the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), exposes Armenia to the danger of an Azerbaijani-Turkish invasion, including the elimination of Armenian statehood. Russia's and the CSTO's failure to fulfill their commitments is covered up by accusations against Nikol Pashinyan and his team of treason and deliberately ceding Armenian territories to Azerbaijan, allegedly because he follows orders from Soros. Meanwhile, according to this narrative, the West uses Armenia as an instrument in a hybrid war against Russia and at the same time remains inactive in the event of an Azerbaijani or Azerbaijani-Turkish invasion of Armenia. The West's policy in the South Caucasus allegedly increases the risk of regional war, which would lead to the

elimination of Armenia if it does not maintain an alliance with Russia. This narrative aligns with one about the war in Ukraine, portraying the West as the aggressor and suggesting its desire to provoke World War III. Furthermore, the West is depicted as degenerate, anti-Christian religion, and promoting LGBT.

In order to combat Russian FIMI actions in Armenia, constant monitoring of the Armenian infosphere is necessary, including both Armenian-language and Russian-language spheres, as well as rapid response to any cases of disinformation or cognitive campaigns exploiting Armenian traumas, historical memory, and emotions such as anger, a sense of grievance and fear. The message countering Russian narratives should be transparent and refer to shared civilizational values and Armenia's place within the family of democratic European states. It is also necessary to strengthen fact-checking platforms in Armenia by developing permanent, operational cooperation between them and Polish organizations combating influence operations. The undertaking of such actions is facilitated by the fact that Armenia currently remains a democratic state and its authorities are open to such cooperation, which (as the example of Georgia shows) may change if these actions are not taken. Strengthening democracy in Armenia, its independence from Russian influences, and resilience to FIMI operations is undoubtedly beneficial for this country.

d) Implementation

The following actions are indicated, whose undertaking is justified by the observations and conclusions contained in the report:

- an expert trip to Armenia, the aim of which will be to strengthen cooperation with local partners and to prepare conditions for the creation of permanent partner centers that will continue monitoring the information environment, counteracting manipulations, and increasing resilience to them.
- organization of an international conference during which this report will be presented. The conference will include experts, representatives of academia, non-governmental

activists, and representatives of administrations from Poland, Armenia, and other countries covered by this report.

- development (together with local partners) of implementation guidelines and best practice recommendations;
- development (together with local partners) of materials for student classes and conducting these classes;
- creation of a communication channel with local participants (with whom cooperation will be established as a result of implementation activities) in order to create a joint working and mentoring environment;
- development, implementation, and evaluation of actions and tools in the field of civic and media education on international disinformation and the dangerous use of artificial intelligence techniques (tools: informational materials, e.g., leaflets, code of good practice, white paper on how AI should be approached in social media), through which the local community will be able, for example, to formulate proposals/expectations regarding laws and legislation on counteracting disinformation;
- launching a media project that will promote good practices in the field of information environment security and warn about the most important disinformation and propaganda campaigns identified in Armenia;
- developing further steps to maintain activity after the grant project ends, aimed at the long-term preservation of the task's outcomes.

e) Trainings

The following actions are indicated, whose undertaking is justified by the observations and conclusions contained in the report:

- trainings conducted by DFRLab, targeted at workshop graduates (program activities 1-4) as well as decision-makers, experts, journalists, influencers, and opinion leaders. The aim of the trainings is to build competencies and awareness in the area of information security, i.e., identification of informational threats and disinformation,

mitigation of influence and manipulation campaigns, strengthening digital resilience in the context of harmful narratives;

- a training cycle on information environment security, including training on the DISARM model, detection of foreign interference operations (FIMI), fact-checking, media education;
- the trainings are expected to increase the effectiveness of detecting and neutralizing disinformation and to raise the quality of civic education in this area;
- through the trainings, the project will enhance the competencies of academic, research, and media communities in Armenia regarding the identification of and counteraction to disinformation campaigns (including those utilizing artificial intelligence techniques), as well as expose disinformation narratives of foreign actors aimed against the image of Poland, the West, and democratic values;
- as a result of the trainings, the development, implementation, and evaluation of tools in the field of civic and media education on disinformation will occur. The project will deliver high-quality reports and materials containing a set of recommendations that will promote reliable knowledge and best practices for countering disinformation;
- the project foresees the development of a long-term strategy to ensure the sustainability of achieved results and the further development of initiatives counteracting disinformation.

f) Information and educational activities

The following actions are indicated, whose undertaking is justified by the observations and conclusions contained in the report: informational activity in the media, launching a media project, a cycle of seminars and workshops. These actions aim for the widest possible dissemination of information about the project's implementation, informing about its assumptions, schedule, and planned effects, as well as sharing experiences with other entities in various countries engaged in the fight against Russian influence operations. The beneficiaries of these activities will be recipients and creators of the information

environment and media messages, including decision-makers, experts, journalists, influencers, opinion leaders, academic and research communities (scientific institutes, think tanks), and NGOs. This concerns both the mentioned entities in Poland and in allied countries, as well as those particularly exposed to Russian influence operations.

The media project will promote good practices in the field of information environment security and will warn about the most important disinformation and propaganda campaigns identified in the target country. Its result will also include strengthening social resilience to disinformation and building public awareness about the impact of disinformation campaigns on various regions, including Iraq and specific regions. Cyclical reports and informational campaigns will contribute to increasing public knowledge (both in Europe and Poland as well as in Armenia and other countries exposed to Russian influence operations) about the impact of disinformation on the security and stability of the state and the region.

Additionally, media activity in the form of television, radio interviews, as well as for the press, online portals, and podcasts, will serve to reach a broadly understood public opinion, increase its knowledge and resilience, and also serve to strengthen democratic values in Armenia, the development of civil society, and good Polish-Armenian relations.

g) Counteracting social polarization

Social polarization in Armenia is very deep, and Russian disinformation is a factor stimulating this phenomenon. Russia's goal is to provoke a social uprising against the government of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and thus carry out an undemocratic coup, overthrow democracy in Armenia, and reintegrate it into the Russian sphere of influence. Since the main factor influencing polarization is the exploitation of the Armenian trauma related to the issue of Artsakh and undermining the credibility of the West through disinformation, it is expected that actions countering these activities will contribute to reducing polarization and preventing the negative scenario of the overthrow of democracy in Armenia. This will be favored by the positive image of Poland in Armenia, which will affect trust in actions undertaken by Polish organizations.

h) Further research

- Open-source research and analyses of informational threats directed at Armenia.
- Periodic activities in the field of digital forensics and regular monitoring of Armenia's information space, aimed at providing long-term insight into the situation in the information environment of the states, as well as responding to potential current incidents and their analysis. Result: Articles (case studies), digital investigations, and short-term alerts presenting insights into the information environment of the states covered by the project and/or the informational incidents occurring within them.
- Conducting further empirical research on methods and actions undertaken by Russia and other entities in disinformation, manipulation, and other influence operations targeting the image of Poland, the West, and democratic values, including analysis of message content in the Iraqi infosphere;
- Increasing the know-how of Armenian journalists regarding good practices and resilience to manipulation when using foreign information sources.
- Development of analytical tools based on artificial intelligence, including automatic detection of false content, analysis of dissemination patterns, and creating algorithms for natural language processing to identify fake news based on language structure, tone and context.
- Developing international cooperation in combating Foreign Influence and Manipulation Operations (FIMI) in Armenia through establishing partnerships with other non-governmental organizations engaged in similar activities.
- Providing substantive support for the development of fact-checking platforms in Armenia.
- Conducting further research on the psychology of information reception, including influence mechanisms on recipients and the impact of a priori beliefs and prejudices on susceptibility to disinformation.