STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT: ANALYSING THE CASES OF GEORGIA AND LITHUANIA

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of democratization and democratic consolidation, internal political crises, caused by either external shocks or dynamics in the domestic arena, pose a significant challenge to the stability of the Georgian political system. Such crises can jeopardize not only internal order but also Georgia's relations with external actors. Consequently, analyzing the government strategies of crisis management and identifying lessons from failures or successes is key to improving the level of national resilience. This paper aims at evaluating the Georgian government's responses to domestic political crises. It also provides insights, based on the Lithuanian experience, on how such responses can be improved in order to strengthen national resilience.

The paper discusses two cases from both Georgia and Lithuania. The first case from Georgia is the protest wave that started on June 20 as a result of a Russian MP from the Communist Party, Sergei Gavrilov, addressing the delegates of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO) in Russian from the seat of the speaker of the Georgian parliament. The second case is the recurring incidents of borderization, i.e. land grab and the construction of physical barriers, such as barbed wire fences, trenches, fences, etc. along the occupation line by the Russian border guards and de-facto authorities. Such incidents lead to public unrest, especially since the government cannot actively prevent these incidents. For the purposes of this paper, the Georgian government's handling of these cases are considered as failures in terms of efficient crisis management and strategic communication. The paper will identify the failures and lessons to be learned from these incidents.

The paper also overviews the Lithuanian experience and specific cases as a demonstration of successful crisis management. The first case concerns the 2018 teachers' strike. The strike was mainly triggered by the reform in the teachers salary model introducing tenure based system. The Ministry of Education implemented these changes to address persisting challenges in Lithuania's education system, including the decrease in the number of students and teachers by almost a half during the last 15 years and speedily increasing average age of Lithuania's teachers[1]. However, upon introduction of the new salary model, only 5 percent of teachers had full tenure and one third of the teachers earned only 500 euro[2] before taxes.[3] The new system and the method how it was introduced aroused opposition from one of the teachers trade unions and started wide protests that resulted in the resignation of the Minister of Education. The second case relates to how Russia portrays Lithuanian freedom fighters, who were active after WWII when the Soviet

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[1] More than half of teachers are older than 55 and the number of young teachers (below 25 years old) decreased by 71 percent in between the years 2011-2017. VZ.lt, "Mokytoju pradeda dirbti tik kas penktas pedagogikos studentas". Available at: https://www.vz.lt/vadyba/personalo-valdymas/2018/10/04/mokytoju-pradeda-dirbti-tik-kas-septintas-pedagogikos-studentas. Accessed: 9 November 2019.

[2] Average bruto salary (before taxes) in Lithuania in the first quarter of 2019 reached 1262,7 euro. Available at: https://www.vz.lt/verslo-valdymas/personalo-valdymas/2019/05/28/vidutine-alga-i-rankas-lietuvoje-perkope-800-eur. Accessed: 9 November 2019.

[3] Delfi.lt, 2018. "Prezidentė patvirtino etatinį mokytojų apmokėjimo modelį". Available at: https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/education/prezidente-patvirtino-etatini-mokytoju-apmokejimo-modeli.d?id=78486329. Accessed: 29 October 2019.

Red army "liberated" Nazi occupied territories. In 2017 when NATO presented a movie about Lithuanian freedom fighters, the Kremlin intensified its disinformation campaign, which required an urgent response from the Lithuanian government.

Over the course of the research, in-depth interviews with principal stakeholders, i.e. representatives of government institutions, were conducted in order to evaluate the crisis management strategies employed by the respective government. Additionally, for the Georgian context, data from public opinion polls was analyzed in order to evaluate how the Georgian public assesses the government's strategy of managing crises. Finally, public statements by key political figures were evaluated in order to explore what sort of discursive strategies politicians employ when dealing with internal political crises. Based on the evaluations of both successful and unsuccessful crisis management cases in Georgia and Lithuania, the paper draws lessons to be learned for the government of Georgia.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN THE TIMES OF CRISIS: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

All crises are not equally dangerous for governments. Some crises result in minor disturbances, while others can be extremely serious. One can speak about man-made crises and about natural crises. But in any case, the term refers to a situation when the normal functioning of the system is interrupted, or when certain escalatory processes undermine a social system's capacity to cope with the disturbances.[4] Thus, while analyzing political crises, one has to pay attention not only to what triggered the situation, but also to the general state and health of the system. This approach helps us to better understand why some systems are able to withstand pressures while others succumb to them.

Chronologically there are five stages of crisis management: **sense-making**, **meaning making**, **decision making**, **termination**, and **learning**[5].

The process of **sense-making** concerns identifying what is going on and why it is happening. [6]This is the part where the uncertainty of the crisis is at its peak. At the sense-making stage, one is faced with determining what indicates that the system is no longer functioning normally and is now in a state of crisis. Of course, one can point to some visible indicators, for example, protests in the streets. But does a crisis really start with the protests or does it begin much earlier when, possibly, the key actors responsible for maintaining the proper functioning of the system missed some early warning signs. What kind of early warning system does the organization have in order to start acting as soon as possible to prevent the situation from developing into a full-blown

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[4] Boin, Arjen et al. "The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure". Cambridge University Press, 2005.

[5] European Union Agency for Network and Information Security. "Report on Cyber Crisis Cooperation and Management". Available at: https://www.enisa.europa.eu/publications/ccc-study. Accessed: 30 October 2019.

[6] European Union Agency for Network and Information Security. "Report on Cyber Crisis Cooperation and Management".

tragedy? This requires an analysis that looks at objective indicators as well as a subjective assessment of the situation.

Also, at this stage it is always important to ask about the readiness of a particular organization to accept and respond to the possibility of crisis. This is particularly important when reforms are being implemented. Has the organization assessed the risks and possible negative sides of its policies, or has it adopted the attitude "it cannot happen here". It is also important to acknowledge existing political constraints in any analysis of political crises. Do the political calculations and ideological constraints allow political institutions and actors to acknowledge a state of crisis?

One can also question the degree that these variables influence the definition of a crisis during the process of **meaning-making**, which is not only used in internal dealings but is also communicated to the public. If sense-making is more about the internal attempts to grasp the roots of a looming crisis, meaning-making is more about defining the reasons for the crisis and presenting them to the public. This involves all kinds of issue framing and symbolic messaging with the purpose of building or maintaining trust and credibility[7]. The meaning-making process has a huge influence on decision-making, a later stage of crisis management. By identifying the roots of the crisis, the people and institutions responsible determine the field of possible options to solve the crisis. In this situation even the choice of the individual words used to define the problem is of critical importance. During this stage one has to decide on the targeted audiences and has to formulate the message in a way that will be understandable to the intended audience. The message relayed by the political institution dealing with the crisis does not operate in a vacuum; it is broadcast into public space, which is filled with other messages that provide both alternative explanations of the crisis as well as interpretations of the official message. That is why it is very important for an institution not only to transmit its message but also to find allies or at least not to create enmity among the broader public. Here one can speak about various actors whose voice counts in the public space: from journalists and academics to influencers on social networks. One can win hugely by gaining the support of respected voices and one can also lose if support moves to other positions. Besides, it is worth mentioning that one's ability to get the message through depends not only on the message itself but also on the reputation of one's institution and the public trust it has.

Also, communication between different institutions is important, especially if one considers how governments function. An on-going crisis is being addressed not only by prime minister, but also by his cabinet members from different ministries (quite often these members can represent other political parties), governmental institutions and agencies. It is important to agree on a common diagnosis, because failure to do so can polarize the system and paralyze the crisis solution process. Finally, it is important to mention that **crisis management is not equal to public relations**. In a world dominated by mass communication, one can easily fall into the trap of believing that the only thing that matters is having a good public relations strategy. Although messaging, especially during crisis, is important, it is not enough. Good strategic management

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[7] Ibid.

involves the early recognition of emerging problems and the political will to implement actual decisions while operating in an environment normally defined by a lack of information, where different groups compete for limited resources and where long-term goals can be in conflict with a desire to reap short-term benefits.

As stated by Boin and colleagues, "in crisis, leaders are expected to reduce uncertainty and provide an authoritative account on what is going on, why it is happening, and need to be done. When they have made sense of the events and have arrived at some sort of situational appraisal and made strategic policy choices, leaders must get others to accept their definition of the situation. They must impute "meaning" to the unfolding crisis in such a way that their efforts to manage it are enhanced. If they don't, or if they do not succeed at it, their decisions will not be understood or respected. If other actors in the crisis succeed in dominating the meaning-making process, the ability of incumbent leaders to decide and maneuver is severely constrained."[8]

The third and the fourth stages of crisis management are **decision-making** and **termination**. Decision-making is an attempt to solve a crisis while at the same time operating under time, financial, legal and other constraints. The decision-making phase lasts until the system can return to "working as usual," which means that the crisis is over. This requires identifying clear objectives about the desired outcome. Is it, for example, enough that the protests are over, or should one achieve the implementation of the reform that triggered protests in order to say that the crisis is over? During this stage of crisis management it is very important to discuss how one resolves ambiguities and uncertainties before taking action. It is also necessary to determine how flexible the organization is in terms of reviewing any previously formed hypotheses about the crisis that turned out to be incorrect[9].

Communication is also hugely important at this stage because one has not only to implement decisions, but also explain their reasons and consequences while negotiating with different actors involved. The negotiation process can be also called an attempt to build a consensus. Consensus would make the decision-making and implementing process easier, but one's position in the negotiation also depends on the level of communication and whether the broader public sees the institution as the right side or the culprit in a crisis situation.

The termination phase refers to the decision of those responsible for crisis management to announce that the crisis is over and the return to business as usual. This does not mean that all the problems have been solved. Rather it is an indication that the remaining challenges can be addressed using ordinary, non-crisis methods. Two challenges related to this stage must be addressed here. First of all, different actors involved in the crisis might assess it using their own subjective criteria and therefore disagree on whether the crisis is really over. Secondly, those responsible for crisis management might not be willing to return to business as usual because crisis management usually confers to them some extra powers which they might be tempted to exploit while they still can.

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

Finally, the last stage of crisis management is **learning**. This stage is more than summarizing what, why and how the incident happened. Most importantly, it is about taking lessons for the future. That is especially important if one wants to strengthen societal and institutional resilience as well as create more effective mechanisms for early crisis detection.

These five stages of crisis management are closely linked with strategic communication. As stated in the paper "The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure," detecting, verifying, hypothesizing, coordinating, framing, messaging and etc. are all part of communicating a narrative about a situation, as well as ideas on how to best manage it, between different stakeholders. It is important to note, there are several vital parts of this process, including the gathering and filtering of data; the transforming of data into valuable information for decision makers; planning a communication campaign; filtering the outgoing information in order to provide concise, easy-to-consume messages to the wider public while not revealing anything confidential; identifying and reaching target audiences; and finally polling members of the public to ascertain how they responded to the messages and then analyzing their responses to adjust policies.

THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO POLITICAL CRISES: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

The importance of strategic communication in the context of managing political crises and averting further escalation of potentially dangerous situations cannot be overstated. This is one tool in the arsenal of any actor, even if they have limited control over the unfolding processes. Therefore, this section analyzes the narrative constructed by the ruling party around the June events in Georgia to explore the government's use of meaning-making and attempts to convince the Georgian public why they should not view the protests favorably. This section of the paper also examines the political debates around the issue of borderization. This crisis differs from the June events in that the ruling party lacks a highly coordinated strategy and allows opposition parties and other actors to lead the discourse and instrumentalize the issue of borderization in their struggle for power.

The government's narrative about the June events

The anatomy of the June events can be easily understood according to the elaborated framework. While the paper deals with the learning stage in the final section, the first four stages of the crisis management and strategic communication can help interpret what happened in June 2019 in Georgia. The June events can be separated into two major incidents: the Gavrilov incident *per se* on June 20, followed by the use of force during the dispersion of the rally in front of the parliament the night of June 20. The latter is considered to have escalated the situation and led to further demonstrations.

The first incident started against the Russian MP from the Communist Party, Sergei Gavrilov, who is also the President of the General Assembly of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO). Protesters took to the streets when he addressed IAO delegates in Russian from the seat of the speaker of the Georgian parliament.[10] This means that the trigger for Georgian public outrage was Russia. However, demonstrators' demands shifted to internal politics following the violent dispersion of the June 20 rally by the police, which marks the starting point of the second part of the crisis.[11] In response, the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) made some concessions. One, Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze resigned. Two, the GD committed to election reform: the majoritarian vote will be abolished for the 2020 elections and the polls will be fully proportional.[12]

While the concessions from the ruling party were a welcomed step to appease the outraged public, there were two demonstrator demands that that the government did not fulfil. One was the resignation of Giorgi Gakharia, who at the time of the Gavrilov incident was the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia. Second was the release of the detained demonstrators and prosecution of those who exceeded their authority while dispersing the demonstration during the night of June 20. Gakharia showed no signs of planning to resign following the night of June 20. Although he made multiple statements about taking political responsibility for the events of the night of June 20, this responsibility did not result in his resignation. On the contrary, a few months later, in September, Giorgi Gakharia was appointed as prime minister, which some oppositional leaders argued was "a slap in the face of the people of Georgia."[13] While the interior ministry did detain some police officers,the public remained unconvinced that government's response was sufficient in terms of managing the aftermath of June 20.

In terms of sense-making, the ruling party made a clear mistake when they did not anticipate the reaction that followed the seemingly simple act of a Russian MP sitting in the speaker's chair at the Georgian parliament and trying to lead the session. This was evaluated as a symbol of Russian imperialism and breach of Georgian sovereignty by the Georgian public. Therefore, an act that otherwise would have been harmless became politicized and triggered public protest. This mistake was admitted by the representatives of the ruling party as well. However, three main patterns emerged in the public statements made by GD officials: admitting guilt, denying guilt and shifting guilt. Notably, admitting guilt was the dominating communication strategy while the ruling party tried to make meaning out of the Gavrilov incident and communicate it to the public. However, at a later stage, GD representatives, including the chairperson of the party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, tried to either downplay the symbolic importance of the incident or completely deny the ruling party's guilt.

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[10] Civil Georgia. 2019. "Opposition, Civic Activists Gather to Protest Russian Delegation's Visit to Tbilisi". Available at: https://civil.ge/archives/309241. Accessed: 25 October 2019.
[11] Civil Georgia. 2019. "Update: Protest Ends, Activists Demand Interior Minister's Resignation". Available at: https://civil.ge/archives/309840. Accessed: 25 October 2019.
[12] Civil Georgia. 2019. "Ivanishvili: 2020 Polls Proportional, Zero Threshold [detailed text]". Available at: https://civil.ge/archives/310307. Accessed: 25 October 2019.
[13] Euronews. 2019. "Georgia's controversial interior minister poised to become next PM". Available at: https://www.euronews.com/2019/09/03/georgian-pm-bakhtadze-steps-down-warning-political-divisions-will-benefit-russia. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

While admitting guilt, GD politicians tried to label the Gavrilov incident as a "mistake" or a "protocol blunder," which was "unacceptable" and the "hardest thing to watch," resulting in the "sincere outrage" of the Georgian public. For example Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze stated on June 20:

> "Today there is a full consensus in the society and within our team regarding the [Gavrilov] incident. An outrageous mistake has taken place that has harmed the entire [GD] team. … [Organizers of the IAO] will have to apologize and explain the Georgian society what has happened and why."[14]

Such a narrative was actively developed by GD representatives during the first days following the June events. On the other hand, there were some cases of denying or shifting the guilt. For example, Irakli Kobakhidze,[15] the now former speaker of the parliament and President Salome Zurabishvili[16] both tried to emphasize Russia's role as a country that has occupied Georgian territories and whose actions has nothing to do with Christianity or Orthodoxy other than using the religion as a political instrument. On the other hand, at times GD representatives would stress that Gavrilov's chairing the session was not agreed with the Georgian party or that the event was "unforeseeable" and "unavoidable." Later, on July 17, however, Bidzina Ivanishvili weighed in and argued that although public concerns were "fair," Gavrilov's visit was neither important nor a crime and that the "hype" was created by none other than United National Movement (UNM) over a small "protocol mistake."[17]

When it comes to decision-making and termination, a few steps were made to appease the public immediately after the Gavrilov incident. First, the IOA assembly was called off and the Russian delegation had to leave Georgia on the very same day. The following day, the then speaker of the parliament, Irakli Kobakhidze resigned; Zakaria Kutsnashvili, an MP in charge of organizing the assembly gave up his mandate; and, regrettably, the police used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the demonstration in front of the parliament. The latter decision, however, instead of terminating the crisis, triggered a new one, which manifested itself into a prolonged wave of protests, about which the ruling party had to create a new meaning-making narrative.

Various narratives emerged following the night of June 20. The narratives followed two main directions: first, justifying the use of force during the night of June 20; and second, blaming the domestic actors fort not only the night of June 20 but also the aftermath.

The ruling party representatives constructed a narrative about the night of June 20 around three major elements: a description of the context, i.e. the nature of the rally; the police's adequate

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[14] Civil Georgia. 2019. "Protest Russian Delegation's Visit to Tbilisi". Available at: https://civil.ge/archives/309241. Accessed: 17 October 2019.
[15] Civil Georgia. 2019. "Ruling party on the defensive over Russian MP in the Parliament". Available at: https://civil.ge/archives/309180. Accessed: 17 October 2019.
[16] Civil Georgia. 2019. "Ruling party on the defensive over Russian MP in the Parliament". Available at: https://civil.ge/archives/309180. Accessed: 17 October 2019.
[17] Civil Georgia. 2019. "Ivanishvili on Current Affairs Future Plans". Available at: https://civil.ge/archives/313557. Accessed: 17 October 2019.

response, i.e. the use of force; and the result (see Table 1). Overall, the goal of the narrative was to convince the public that the demonstration was violent and the UNM was guilty of manipulating peaceful protesters; that the use of force was not only legitimate and proportional but also unavoidable; and that the result was the police averted civil confrontation, bloodshed, and a *coup d'état*.
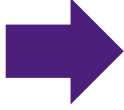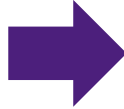
Table 1: The GD narrative about the night of June 20.

The nature of the rally		Necessary reaction		Result
Peaceful protesters got manipulated Violent demonstration Unconstitutional actions beyond limits of liberty Criminal intentions of adventurous politicians Attacks on state institutions: police and parliament	➡	Unavoidable use of force Proportional force Legitimate, legal action, using legal weapons and bullets	➡	Civil confrontation averted The state protected Bloodshed averted Coup averted

Source: Author's analysis of the public statements that appeared on the portal of the Civil Georgia news agency between June 20 and July 27 (total of 58 news articles).

When it comes to describing the domestic actors involved in the June protests, the GD narrative turns out to be dynamic, meaning that after about a week of protests, GD started to change the way they talked about the main actors in the process. This shifted rhetoric was solidified with time. Three actors can be identified: the protesters, UNM, and Interior Ministry, i.e. the police and minister himself, Giorgi Gakharia. However, only references to UNM remained constant in the government's messages over the course of the month following the protests of June 20. The authorities' narratives about the protesters changed from more positive to more negative over time, while references to the Interior Ministry changed from mildly critical to highly commendable (see Table 2).

Table 2: Portrayal of domestic actors involved in June events according to ruling party's dynamic narrative.

| Protesters		
Peaceful public expressing sincere protest	➡	Manifestation of depravity (protesters as LGBT community)
Responsible youth		UNM and their stooges
Interior Ministry: Gakharia and the police		
Need to punish isolated episodes of abuse of authority	➡	Political responsibility was not avoided
		Gakharia's resignation equals treason
UNM		
Destructive politicians/leaders and provocateurs		
Attempting to organize a violent revolution		
Purchased rubber bullets used on June 20		
Enemies of the country		
Powermonger		
Attempting to suspend tourism		
Guilty of letting Russian occupation happen		

Source: Author's analysis of officials' public statements that appeared on the portal of the Civil Georgia news agency between June 20 and July 27 (a total of 58 news articles).

Overall, in terms of meaning-making, GD officials have demonstrated solid, coordinated action to construct a narrative downgrading the importance of the Gavrilov incident, justifying the use of force during the night of June 20, and demonizing the domestic actors involved in the aftermath protests. Additionally, in terms of decision-making and termination, the ruling party let the speaker of the parliament and an MP organizing the IAO assembly leave their posts; suspended and/or detained several police officers; released detained protesters; and charged a few participants of the demonstration, including the opposition leader Nika Melia. However, the government did not recognize any injured protesters as victims, and did not let the interior minister resign. Instead he was promoted to the position of prime minister. On the surface, the coordination of strategic communication looks impressive. But it does not indicate the extent to which the government's narrative convinced the public. In fact according to data from an opinion poll conducted in July 2019, 58 percent of the surveyed respondents evaluated the government's response to the June protests as "badly" or "very badly", while the share of positive evaluations of "well" and "very well" amounted to 22 percent (see figure 1).[18] At the same time the share of

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[18] The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. 2017. "NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, July 2019". Available at: https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2019ge/ASSGOVJ20/. Accessed: 22 October 2019.

respondents who could not answer the question (sum of "don't know" and "refuse to answer") was 19 percent.[19]

Figure 1: Evaluation of government's response to the events of June 20 and the following protests (%).
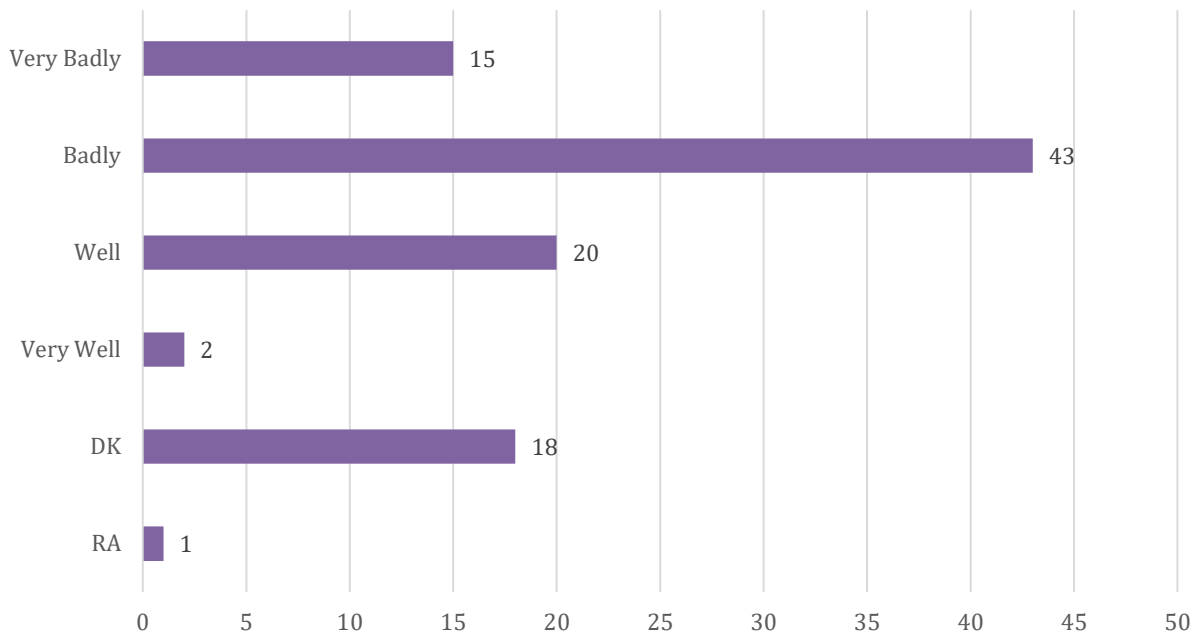
Source: NDI: Public Attitudes in Georgia, July 2019. Retrieved from https://caucasusbarometer.org/

What these figures show is that the public is dissatisfied with how the government has managed the political crisis and the numbers should be alarming for the ruling party on the eve of the upcoming 2020 parliamentary elections.

Political debates around the issue of borderization

Russia's use of military, political, and informational tactics to manipulate unresolved conflicts is a dynamic process. One novel tactic Russia has employed since 2009 is the borderization of Georgia's territory. The tactic of borderization serves Russia's strategy of undermining Georgia's sovereignty, including its democratic development and independent domestic and foreign policies. While the Georgian government condemns borderization as a deliberate provocation aimed at destabilization, it lacks tools to directly deter the use of the tactic. Consequently, borderization can be viewed as a strategy leading to not only physical and security implications but also psychological effects aimed at undermining Georgia's foreign policy goals from within the society.

In most cases, borderization has occurred along or near the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) demarcating South Ossetia, as most of Abkhazia is largely demarcated by the natural boundary

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[19] The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. 2017. "NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, July 2019". Available at: https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2019ge/ASSGOVJ20/. Accessed: 22 October 2019.

of the Enguri river. The first reported incident of borderization occurred in 2009, when local residents of the village of Kveshi on the central government-controlled side of the ABL reported[20] that Russian border guards had put up border markers in the area. However, the process picked up in intensity starting in 2013.[21]Overall, according to some calculations, there have been 155 incidents between 2011-2019.[22]

Borderization is a more complex phenomenon than the June protests for two main reasons. First, the government of Georgia has a limited toolkit in terms of influencing the behavior of Russia and the de facto regimes. Second, since the root causes of the process are beyond the control of Tbilisi, it is necessary to deal with the effects of the process of borderization, which usually provoke strong emotional responses from the Georgian public. Therefore, the meaning-making choices of the ruling party become even more important in this case than in the previous one.

The effects of borderization are multi-faceted but one of them in particular falls under the focus of this paper: psychological influence. The borderization process is a part of Russia's campaign to undermine Georgia's sovereignty as well as the wider European security order. This serves several concrete aims: to exert psychological influence over Georgia's government and society; to permanently undermine Georgia's territorial integrity; to undermine the credibility of Euro-Atlantic institutions; and to prevent further NATO expansion.[23] The effects of borderization are first felt locally by communities on both sides of the ABLs, then in Georgia on the national level, then on the international level, where they have implications for the wider European security order. The Georgian state has not been able to respond directly to Russia's actions due to the asymmetry in military power between the two sides. Moreover, as Georgia is a NATO partner but not a full-fledged member, it cannot expect the Alliance to place a check on Russian aggression. Therefore, the Georgian government is extremely cautious in its response to instances of borderization. There is no military option for Georgia, a fact which Russia exploits. Therefore, the process of borderization can be interpreted in terms of exerting psychological influence on the Georgian government and society to abandon their Western foreign policy orientation. Occupying forces ensure that whoever finds themselves near the occupation line cannot feel safe. This can be illustrated not only with multiple detentions of Georgian citizens and in some cases death of the detainees in uncertain circumstances,[24] but also with a recent case when unarmed civilian EU monitors, who were conducting their daily duties of monitoring the occupation line

[20] Aptsiauri, G. 2009. "Russian Troops Try to Shift South Ossetia Border Markers". *RFE-RL*. Available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/Russian_Troops_Try_To_Shift_South_Ossetia_Border_Markers/1791641.html. Accessed: 25 October 2019.
[21] Kakachia, K., Kakhishvili, L., Larsen, J., and Grigalashvili, M. 2017. *Mitigating Russia's Borderization of Georgia: A Strategy to Contain and Engage*. Tbilisi: Georgian Institute of Politics. Available at: http://gip.ge/mitigating-russias-borderization-georgia-strategy-contain-engage/. Accessed: 25 October 2019.
[22] The McCain Institute for International Leadership. 2019. "Tracker of Russian "Borderization" in Georgia: Interactive timeline". Available at:
https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/183ab9d69fc702c33a79bfcd27b7b4d8/russian-borderization-in-georgia/index.html?fbclid=IwAR3RpJ7kmlFa9KLdXdP8KLCSUc8dA3oL6pZvyHrdMsb4hdTQN1OzdoWAgMo
Accessed: 25 October 2019.
[23] See: Kakachia, K., Kakhishvili, L., Larsen, J., and Grigalashvili, M. 2017. *Mitigating Russia's Borderization of Georgia: A Strategy to Contain and Engage*. Tbilisi: Georgian Institute of Politics. Available at: http://gip.ge/mitigating-russias-borderization-georgia-strategy-contain-engage/. Accessed: 25 October 2019.
[24] See for example the case of Archil Tatunashvili: Agenda.ge. 2018. "26 days later: Occupied Tskhinvali returns Tatunashvili's body to family." Available at: https://agenda.ge/en/news/2018/628. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

as is the mandate of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), were "briefly held by armed South Ossetian security actors."[25] This psychological influence, however, needs to be counterbalanced by a well-designed and implemented communication strategy. Previous studies have shown that there is a lack of strategic communication to engage and inform the domestic public regarding borderization.[26] This can and does lead to the situation when opposition political parties are tempted to exploit borderization incidents to claim that the Georgian state is not doing enough to prevent borderization.

As long as the Russian state relies on proxy regimes and military force to project its power in the post-Soviet space, civilians in conflict areas continue to pay the price for power politics through violations of their safety, rights, and welfare. Although the Georgian government lacks the tools to directly influence Moscow to change its behavior, it is possible to communicate with the public in a more deliberate manner so that reactions to further incidents of borderization do not translate into outrage against the state or feed into Kremlin narratives. This is not to understate the significance of Georgia's territorial integrity. Rather, it is to ensure that the public understands that expressions of outrage might be misplaced and unhelpful in responding to borderization and to restoring Georgian sovereignty in Abkhazia and South Ossetia more generally.

The fact that Georgian political parties have divergent responses to Russia and its actions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia further complicates the situation. For obvious reasons, the issue of territorial integrity can be a potent instrument in the struggle for political power. Borderization is a tangible expression of Georgia's problems and the government can easily be criticized for its "inaction." For example, in July 2017, when the government reported another incident of borderization, one opposition politician stated, "today they will abduct a Georgian citizen. Tomorrow they will move deeper [into the Georgian-controlled territory]: they know that the Georgian government will have no reaction to it."[27] Yet another opposition politician criticized the government for not being proactive on this front: "Of course, we cannot change Russia, but we can eradicate and prevent this through a lot of active, concrete steps both inside and outside the country."[28] Such statements almost always accompany the reported incidents of borderization.

Moreover, sometimes political heat about borderization goes beyond statements and becomes physical manifested in protest demonstrations. Such demonstrations often take place at the occupation line in the Tbilisi-administered territory. However, sometimes demonstrations can take the form of a provocation. On November 10, 2018, the Girchi political party organized a protest/demonstration-performance, resulting in the so-called "mooning" of the Russian

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[25] EUMM. 2019. "Unarmed civilian Monitors of the EU Monitoring Mission - Georgia detained by South Ossetian security personnel." Available at: https://eumm.eu/en/press_and_public_information/press_releases/36655/. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

[26] Kakachia, K., Kakhishvili, L., Larsen, J., and Grigalashvili, M. 2017. *Mitigating Russia's Borderization of Georgia: A Strategy to Contain and Engage*. Tbilisi: Georgian Institute of Politics. Available at: http://gip.ge/mitigating-russias-borderization-georgia-strategy-contain-engage/. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

[27] Civil Georgia. 2017. "Tbilisi Says Russian Troops Seize Farmlands Adjacent to South Ossetia". Available at: http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30238&search=. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

[28] Civil Georgia. 2017. "Tbilisi Says Russian Troops Seize Farmlands Adjacent to South Ossetia". Available at: http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30238&search=. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

occupants. The leader of the party, Zurab Japaridze, explained that the goal of this performance was to attract international attention with an unusual behavior.[29] The occupation line is used for political gain not only by oppositional politicians but also the ruling party. A GD-backed candidate in presidential elections, Salome Zurabishvili, who eventually won the elections, organized a visit to the occupation line during her electoral campaign in November 2018.[30] She was met with protests from the oppositional party activists who verbally insulted the presidential candidate.[31] Commenting on the incident, however, a GD MP Irakli Sesiashvili stated that "it is impudence that the United National Movement dares to show up at the occupation line"[32] – essentially trying to establish GD hegemony over the issue of borderization in Georgian politics. This seems to be a recurring theme when the ruling party tries to communicate about the issues related to borderization. However, this kind of choices in terms of meaning-making do not succeed in changing the public mood, which is overwhelmingly pessimistic about the ability of any political party to responsibly manage this particular issue.

Such mood among the public has resulted in establishing an anti-occupation movement Strength in Unity. The movement conducts civilian patrolling along the occupation line with the purpose of detected new incidents of borderization. However, the leader of the movement, David Katsarava, has been involved in several incidents along the occupation line on repeated occasions. In August 2019, he was physically abused near the occupation line by a group of people, which, he claimed, was a government-organized attack against him and his movement.[33] On another occasion, Katsarava claimed that his movement had neutralized an unmanned aerial vehicle that originated from the South Ossetian territory and was operating across the occupation line.[34] The de facto authorities from Tskhinvali reported shootings from the Tbilisi-administered territory at the place of the incident and claimed that it was actually Georgian forces that took down the quadrocopter.[35]

These cases illustrate that actions of civilians can have unintended consequences in terms of provoking the occupying forces. However, the public demand for action comes from the perception that the government is not actively managing the issue of borderization, which is a direct effect of Russia's psychological influence on the Georgian society. Meanwhile, the ruling party does not do much more than blaming the occupation on the previous UNM government

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[29] Georgia Today. 2018. "Opposition Party Girchi Moons Russia Occupants at Atotsi Boundary Line." Available at: http://georgiatoday.ge/news/13181/Opposition-Party-Girchi-Moons-Russia-Occupants-at-Atotsi-Boundary-Line. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

[30] 1TV. 2018. "„ნაციონალური მოძრაობის" აქტივისტმა, ლანა დვინჯილიამ სალომე ზურაბიშვილს სიტყვიერი შეურაცხყოფა მიაყენა [ვიდეო]". Available at: https://1tv.ge/news/nacionaluri-modzraobis-aqtivistma-lana-ghvinjiliam-salome-zurabishvils-sityvieri-sheurackhyofa-miayena-video/. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

[31] 1TV. 2018. "„ნაციონალური მოძრაობის" აქტივისტმა, ლანა დვინჯილიამ სალომე ზურაბიშვილს სიტყვიერი შეურაცხყოფა მიაყენა [ვიდეო]". Available at: https://1tv.ge/news/nacionaluri-modzraobis-aqtivistma-lana-ghvinjiliam-salome-zurabishvils-sityvieri-sheurackhyofa-miayena-video/. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

[32] 1TV. 2018. "ირაკლი სესიაშვილი - უტიფრობაა, როცა „ნაციონალური მოძრაობა" ბედავს, საოკუპაციო ხაზთან გამოჩნდეს". Available at: https://1tv.ge/news/irakli-sesiashvili-utifrobaa-roca-nacionaluri-modzraoba-bedavs-saokupacio-khaztan-gamochndes/. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

[33] Netgazeti. 2019. "კაცარავას თქმით, საოკუპაციო ხაზთან რამდენიმე პირი თავს დაესხა". Available at: https://netgazeti.ge/news/387629/. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

[34] Netgazeti. 2019. "ცხინვალს არ სჯერა, რომ მათი დრონი დავით კაცარავამ ჩამოაგდო". Available at: https://netgazeti.ge/news/389528/. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

[35] Netgazeti. 2019. "ცხინვალს არ სჯერა, რომ მათი დრონი დავით კაცარავამ ჩამოაგდო". Available at: https://netgazeti.ge/news/389528/. Accessed: 25 October 2019.

and, therefore, trying to silence their criticism with blame-games. On the other hand, for the opposition parties, the approach to borderization is linked to their general stance towards Russia, which is why the lack of GD's proactive approach towards borderization is often criticized.[36]

This kind of political debates about borderization has led to the situation when the Georgian public cannot trust political parties to manage the issue of the country's territorial integrity. An opinion poll conducted in June 2017 included a question: "Which political party do you trust the most to manage the following issue?"[37] The respondents then were shown a list of issues that included "restoration of territorial integrity." According to the data, only 16 percent of Georgians trusted the current ruling party to effectively manage the issue of the restoration of territorial integrity, while by contrast, 40 percent reported trusting no party and 28 percent could not answer the question (see Figure 2).[38]

Figure 2: Trust in political parties to manage the issue of restoration of territorial integrity (%)
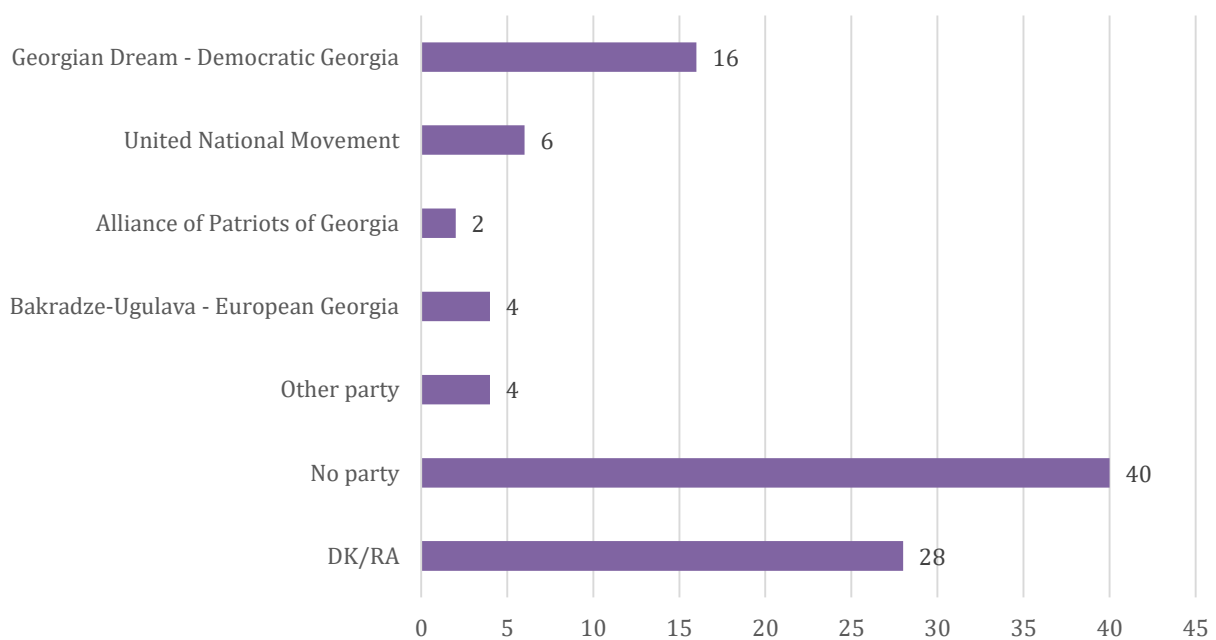
Source: NDI: Public Attitudes in Georgia, June 2017. Retrieved from https://caucasusbarometer.org/

Although Georgians tend not to trust political parties and have a low opinion of their competences,[39] the issue of restoration of territorial integrity still stands out. Overall, respondents

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[36] For the comparison of how GD and UNM governments have viewed Russia and behaved towards Russia, see: Kakachia, K., Minesashvili, S., and Kakhishvili, L. 2018. Change and continuity in the foreign policies of small states: Elite perceptions and Georgia's foreign policy towards Russia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70(5), 814-831.

[37] The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. 2017. "NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, June 2017". Available at: https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2017ge/NATTERR/. Accessed: 22 October 2019.

[38] The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. 2017. "NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, June 2017". Available at: https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2017ge/NATTERR/. Accessed: 22 October 2019.

[39] See: Kakhishvili, L. 2019. "Decreasing level of trust in Georgian political parties: What does it mean for democracy and how to avoid negative consequences?" Issue 17. Georgian Institute of Politics. Available at: http://gip.ge/decreasing-level-of-trust-in-georgian-political-parties-what-does-it-mean-for-democracy-and-how-to-avoid-negative-consequences/. Accessed: 22 October 2019.

were asked to evaluate their trust towards political parties across ten issues[40] including the territorial integrity. The responses on this issue were the lowest out of the nine questions. In fact, the lowest share of trust in parties is exhibited with the issues of economic development and military and defense capabilities with 51 percent in both cases, while in the case of territorial integrity, the same figure stands at mere 32 percent. These numbers are alarming and, although the data is two years old, there is no evidence that would suggest that the picture is different today.

What these figures suggest is that the Georgian public does not see any political party as competent enough to trust them to manage the issue of Georgia's territorial integrity, to which borderization is directly connected. By extension, that means that Georgians do not trust any political party to properly manage the issue of borderization. Borderization, therefore, is treated in this paper not as an issue of party competition but as a non-partisan issue. This means that the recurring crises and subsequent public outrage that new incidents of borderization spark are a challenge for not only the current ruling party but also for any future ruling party. However, the GD has the primary responsibility of managing public outcries in order to control the situation and not allow it to escalate into either internal unrest or an external potential military conflict with Russia.

TEACHERS' STRIKE IN LITHUANIA: LEARNING THROUGH CRISIS

There have been recurring teachers' strikes in Lithuania for the past few years. Teachers were striking in 2015 when they jointly marched from the Cathedral Square in Vilnius to the government headquarters located a few hundred meters away. Whistling, ringing bells and chanting "shame!" they demanded increased budgetary spending on education.[41] Similar strikes also took place in 2014 and 2016.

The 2018 teachers strike, however, was among the most important issues of the year, according to the annual survey of journalists conducted by the news agency BNS.[42] This strike led not only to the temporary occupation of the Ministry of Education by the striking teachers, but also to the replacement of the minister and a reduction in the popularity of the prime minister.

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[40] These issues include: economic development, healthcare, education, democratic development, military and defense capabilities, relations with EU, relations with Russia, relations with NATO, relations with the USA, and restoration of territorial integrity.

[41] LRT.lt. 2015. "1,000 teachers stage protest in Vilnius to require higher pay". Available at: https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/47775/1-000-teachers-stage-protest-in-vilnius-to-demand-higher-pay. Accessed: 29 October 2019.

[42] Baltictimes.com, 2018. "Journalists name papal visit key 2018 event in Lithuania, and Skripals' poisoning globally. Available at: https://www.baltictimes.com/journalists_name_papal_visit_key_2018_event_in_lithuania__and_skripals__poisoning_globally/. Accessed: 29 October 2019.

The idea to make the teaching profession prestigious by the year 2025 was proposed at the beginning and was selected by experts and the general public as one of the top three "Ideas for Lithuania," a national initiative led by the biggest media platforms and state leaders. As the president at that time, Dalia Grybauskaite, said, the future of Lithuania depends "on how we—politicians, society and our state—invest in, regard, and treat teachers. The position the teacher has in our society is like a litmus test. Do we understand that education is key to our state's survival?"[43] Not only this statement by the president, but also the entire initiative to select the ideas for Lithuania, demonstrated the existing gap between the real situation of the educators and the perceived importance of this profession. For example, in 2016, the European Commission report stated that Lithuanian teachers are second worst paid in the European Union, coming in before Latvia. [44]

In order to better understand the context of the strike, it is important to start from the introduction of the new wage calculation model. This tenure-based or full-time payment system, which replaced the old model based on the number of classes the teacher had, was introduced from the beginning of the new academic year in 2018. The new model was supposed to allow for teachers to be paid for all of the work done for the school community, not just for lessons and activities related to them. Before the teacher salaries were calculated according to individual hours.[45]

It has to be mentioned that the changes to the teachers' payment model were necessary and well-intended. In this context, the sense-making phase should concentrate on discovering why, despite the general agreement on necessary changes, a strike was called by one of the teachers' professional unions. The strike was a clear indicator that the system has ceased to function as normal.

One explanation for the strike could be the implementation process. The striking teachers argued that not enough time was given to prepare for the implementation of the changes and not enough time and effort were directed to explain all the specifics of changes to the teachers. Also, it was argued that too much responsibility—and too much freedom to act—was given to school principals. They also complained that even the law itself needed corrections, but the Ministry of Education was not cooperative and did not respond to their requests.

The strike was officially started by five schools on November 12. By November 28, more than 70 schools out of nearly 2,000 were on strike.[46] This shows the deepening of the crisis. One of the

[43] Delfi.lt, 2018. "Lithuanian president: it's our duty to invest in teachers". Available at:
https://en.delfi.lt/culture/lithuanian-president-its-our-duty-to-invest-in-teachers.d?id=77059437. Accessed: 29 October 2019.
[44] Delfi.lt, 2016. "Lithuanian teachers second worst paid in Europe". Available at:
https://en.delfi.lt/politics/lithuanian-teachers-second-worst-paid-in-europe.d?id=70774442. Accessed: 29 October 2019.
[45] Eurydice, 2019. "Lithuania: National Reforms in School Education". Available at:
https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-38_en. Accessed: 29 October 2019.
[46] Delfi.lt, 2018. "Government plans to hold minister accountable for on-going teachers' strike". Available at:
https://en.delfi.lt/politics/government-plans-to-hold-minister-accountable-for-on-going-teachers-strike.d?id=79755561. Accessed: 29 October 2019.

hypotheses to explain such a development is that the November 12 strike, which was not the first of its kind, was rather small and that led the authorities to believe it was only a temporary obstacle in the implementation process that would pass. The second hypothesis concerns the fragmented nature of the teachers' trade unions, which also might have led those responsible for the implementation of the changes to believe that the strike represented the concerns of just one union, meaning they could continue negotiations with the others. The third hypothesis rests on the belief that the main problem was in how the law had been communicated, not the law itself. This approach reflects a belief that the crisis can be solved by more effective communication regarding the implemented changes in the payment model.

As was already mentioned in the introduction, it is very important that an organization implementing changes does not assume that a crisis will not happen. Decision-makers need to assess the risks and possible negative sides of the proposed policies. The previously mentioned hypotheses demonstrate that, in the case of the teachers strike, the risks that the situation could develop into a full-blown crisis were underestimated.

Communication with strikers and the Lithuanian government's mistakes

The turning point in the teachers strike happened on November 28, 2018, when dozens of striking teachers accused the minister, Jurgita Petrauskienė, of being unwilling to negotiate. That day the minister left the meeting organized by the parliamentary education and science committee, stating that she needed to attend another governmental meeting. After finishing the meeting at parliament, the striking teachers moved to the Ministry of Education and refused to leave the building until negotiations resumed and their demands were heard.[47]

Another milestone event happened on November 30, when the demonstration was held next to the parliament. Afterwards the teachers returned to the ministry, where they had slept for the last few days, and found the doors locked. They were not allowed to enter the building. The teachers who had remained at the ministry opened a window on the first floor to allow their colleagues to re-enter the building.[48] Of course, all these events were captured by the media and broadcast in real time.

The meaning-making phase involves defining the crisis and communicating the message to the targeted audiences, which in this case means not only teachers but other sectors of society, such as parents of the students whose educational process was interrupted by the strike and other public sector employees, such as medics, who were striking earlier in 2018. Also, as was already noted, during this phase it is of crucial importance to coordinate the work of the various institutions that are involved in crisis management. In the context of the teachers strike, one has to carefully analyze the coordination of communication between different governmental branches, especially between prime minister and the minister of education.

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[47] Delfi.lt, 2018. "Devynios mokytojų dienos ministerijoje: kaip viskas buvo iš tikrųjų". Available at: https://www.delfi.lt/a/79794437. Accessed: 29 October 2019.
[48] Ibid.

Few months after the crisis Petrauskienė, who had already stepped down from her post, told journalists that it had been very hard to operate in an environment where the public distrust towards the ministry gave powerful tools into the hands of her opponents. "Teaching is a respected profession in Lithuania. […] These events only confirm that the society supports teachers and will always stand by their side,"[49]she said.

Her quotation illustrates the main mistakes that the ministry, and the government in general, committed during the meaning-making process when the strike morphed into the occupation of the ministry. First of all, the lack of dialogue with the striking teachers was interpreted by the media as signs of arrogance and insensitivity. The sit-in in the ministry and the attempt to stop the striking teachers from re-entering the ministry building only strengthened this perception and pushed politicians, musicians, media personalities and social media influencers to ally with the strikers. The mistakes made by the government inadvertently bolstered voices in the teachers' unions who were ready to take radical measures and did not trust the negotiations. This, in its turn, undermined the teachers who wanted to hold negotiations.

The communication strategy of the ministry and the prime minister during the time of crisis can be described as divisive and an attempt to demonize the enemy. Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis said that the strikes violate the rights of the children. He also stated that some of the striking teachers lacked clearly formulated goals for their actions.[50] His adviser, Skirmantas Malinauskas, compared the tactics of the strikers to those of so called "little green men" who occupied Crimean Peninsula. "Let's leave humor aside. If some unfriendly country would organize a hybrid operation, this case would be a perfect example of it. Putin's thugs in Crimea were calling themselves "polite people." Now we are confronting two alternatives. Either the pictures of abused teachers in the Ministry of Education and a deep political crisis, or the same political crisis when the ministry is occupied and impossible to meet requirements are being put forward and repeatedly changed, a huge flow of lies, the withdrawal of political leadership, and the control taken by the teacher of physical education from Zarasai, support being given to him by the leaders of the biggest political parties, influencers. All of this is combined with an attempt to persuade that such form of protest is a normal thing. Which ministry will be next?" – wrote Malinauskas on Facebook.

The leader of the striking union, Andrius Navickas, was referred to as a "physical education teacher" in a clear attempt to imply he lacked the skills to lead the strike and negotiations. The strikers were portrayed as some kind of fifth column that poses a threat to national security.

Prime Minister Skvernelis also spoke of an attempt to organize a coup in Lithuania and named popular columnist and social media influencer Andrius Tapinas, who organized the December 10 demonstration "Paskutinis skambutis" (Final bell), of having politicized aims and serving the

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[49] Dovydas Pancerovas, Birutė Davidonytė "Kabinetas 339". Vilnius: Alma Littera, 2019.
[50] Kauno diena, 2018. "S. Skvernelis: mokytojų streikai pažeidžia vaikų teises". Available at: https://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/lietuva/politika/s-skvernelis-mokytoju-streikai-pazeidzia-vaiku-teises-890778. Accessed: 30 October 2019.

interests of the opposition "Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats" party. Skvernelis also accused him of trying to involve teachers trade unions in politics.[51]

Petrauskienė, the then education minister, argued that 99 percent of the teachers were not striking. She underscored that the non-striking teachers had also proposed ways to improve the payment model and were doing so in a constructive way, unlike striking teachers, whom she accused of acting unconstructively.[52] Petrauskienė spoke about approaching municipal elections and said the teachers were being manipulated, adding that fake news had instigated the strike.[53]

To summarize the meaning-making process, it is worth stressing that at that stage, the government tried to portray the protests as organized by only one trade union that was making impossible demands, while other engaged parties were ready for constructive dialogue and compromise. There were attempts to communicate the message that the teachers' requirements could only be implemented at the expense of other public sector employees. They also tried to portray the striking teachers as being manipulated by their leader and political powers. Attempts to play the Russian card and portray the strikers as a threat to national security were also observed.

All three hypotheses mentioned in the sense-making section were proven false. First of all, the strikers showed they were determined to continue their action until their demands were met. Secondly, governmental actors failed to build support around themselves while the striking teachers attracted broad cross-sectoral solidarity. For example, the demonstration "Last bell" attracted the support of more than 40 professional trade unions, according to the organizers. Finally, the strategy to create a negative image of striking teachers without addressing their complaints was doomed to failure. The representatives of the medics' trade union argued that the government was repeating the same mistakes that it committed earlier in the year when the medics protested.[54] At that time Prime Minister Skvernelis was quoted as advising the protesting young medics to emigrate.

"Today we are here in order to say that in the course of this year the prime minister has been repeating the same mistakes over and over again. He has been trying to transfer responsibility for his mistakes to the shoulders of the society. He has been attempting to polarize policemen and parents, pensioners and teachers, medics and their patients, but we have managed to stay united. We are here in order to say that enough is enough and that the last bell rings for the prime

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[51] 15min.lt, 2018. "Premjero nerimas dėl perversmo ir kreipimasis į teisėsaugos tarnybas: ką žinome?" Available at: https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/premjero-nerimas-del-perversmo-ir-kreipimasis-i-teisesaugos-tarnybas-ka-zinome-56-1074764. Accessed: 29 October 2019.

[52] 15min.lt, 2018. "J. Petrauskienė su ministeriją užėmusiais mokytojais išsiskyrė be susitarimo, bet atsistatydinti neketina". Available at: https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/nakti-uzimtoje-ministerijoje-praleido-keliolika-mokytoju-i-pastata-nebeileidziami-zurnalistai-56-1068232?copied. Accessed: 30 October 2019.

[53] 15min.lt, 2018. "15min paaiškina: kodėl streikuoja mokytojai ir ko jie nori?" Available at: https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/15min-paaiskina-kodel-streikuoja-mokytojai-ir-ko-jie-reikalauja-56-1060656?copied. Accessed: 30 October 2019.

[54] Delfi.lt, 2018. "Protestuotojai Skverneliui – jums premjere atėjo paskutinis skambutis". Available at: https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/protestuotojai-skverneliui-jums-premjere-atejo-paskutinis-skambutis.d?id=79818301. Accessed: 30 October 2019.

minister,"[55] stated the representative of the trade union of medics Robertas Adomaitis during the event "Last bell".

Lithuanian government's response: Correcting past mistakes

Mistakes made during the crisis eventually led to a sharp decrease in trust in the education system. A public opinion poll published at the end of October by the Vilmorus polling agency stated that trust in the education system was at the lowest level reported in the last 20 years. The head of polling agency, Vladas Gaidys, mentioned that the level of trust had reached a record low in September but in October the situation got even worse. 37 percent of respondents stated that they trust educational system, whereas 13 percent expressed distrust. In January the percentage of those who express their distrust in the system was 12.2 percent.[56] The highest percentage of trust the educational system had in 2004 when it was sanding at 70 percent. At the same time the number those who negatively evaluated the work of the education minister, Petrauskienė, rose from 40 percent to almost 50 percent.[57]

In December the situation got even worse: only 5.6 percent of respondents positively evaluated her performance. Here it is important to add that by December, the Chief Official Ethics Commission was investigating Petrauskiene in order to establish whether she placed herself in a conflict of interest situation due to the fact that her husband's company had won a number of public procurement contracts from agencies subordinate to the Ministry of Education.[58] On December 5, the commission unanimously decided that Petrauskienė had violated the law.[59] By the time the commission's verdict was announced, the minister had already resigned. But the investigation itself played an important role during the meaning-making and decision-making stages. It sent the message that the teachers were protesting against an opaque system where conflicts of interest could thrive. It was sending signals to the public that the teachers are protesting against a system with a murky transparency and a possible conflict of interests.

In terms of how the public reacted to the government's overall handling of the crisis, polls showed that in December—for the first time during his time tenure as prime minister— respondents felt more negatively than positively about Saulius Skvernelis (36.8% vs. 40.2%)[60]. This was a clear sign

[55] Ibid.
[56] Alfa.lt, 2018. "Apklausa: pasitikėjimas švietimo sistema - mažiausas per 20 metų". Available at: https://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/50265382/apklausa-pasitikejimas-svietimo-sistema-maziausias-per-20-metu. Accessed: 9 November 2019.
[57] LRT.lt, 2018. "Lietuviai šalies švietimu nepasitiki labiausiai per pastarąjį dvidešimtmetį". Available at: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/231059/lietuviai-salies-svietimu-nepasitiki-labiausiai-per-pastaraji-dvidesimtmeti. Accessed: 30 October 2019.
[58] Delfi.lt, 2018. "PM waits for ethics watchdog's decision on education minister". Available at: https://en.delfi.lt/politics/pm-waits-for-ethics-watchdogs-decision-on-education-minister.d?id=79004065. Accessed: 30 October 2019.
[59] 15min.lt, 2018. "VTEK: ministrė pažeidė įstatymą, ministrė nemano, kad supainiojo interesus". Available at: https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/vtek-svietimo-ir-mokslo-ministre-j-petrauskiene-pazeide-istatyma-56-1069974. Accessed: 30 October 2019.
[60] Lrytas.lt, 2018. "Reitingai: į duobę šlumštelėjo ministrė su premjeru, o mokytojų streikas sukėlė netikėtų pasekmių". Available at: https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvosdiena/aktualijos/2018/12/15/news/reitingai-i-duobe-slumstelejo-ministre-su-premjeru-o-mokytoju-streikas-sukele-netiketu-pasekmiu-8573553/. Accessed: 30 October 2019.

that crisis management attempts were not bringing the desired results. On the contrary, the reputation of those involved was plummeting.

Figure 3: Public approval rating (December)
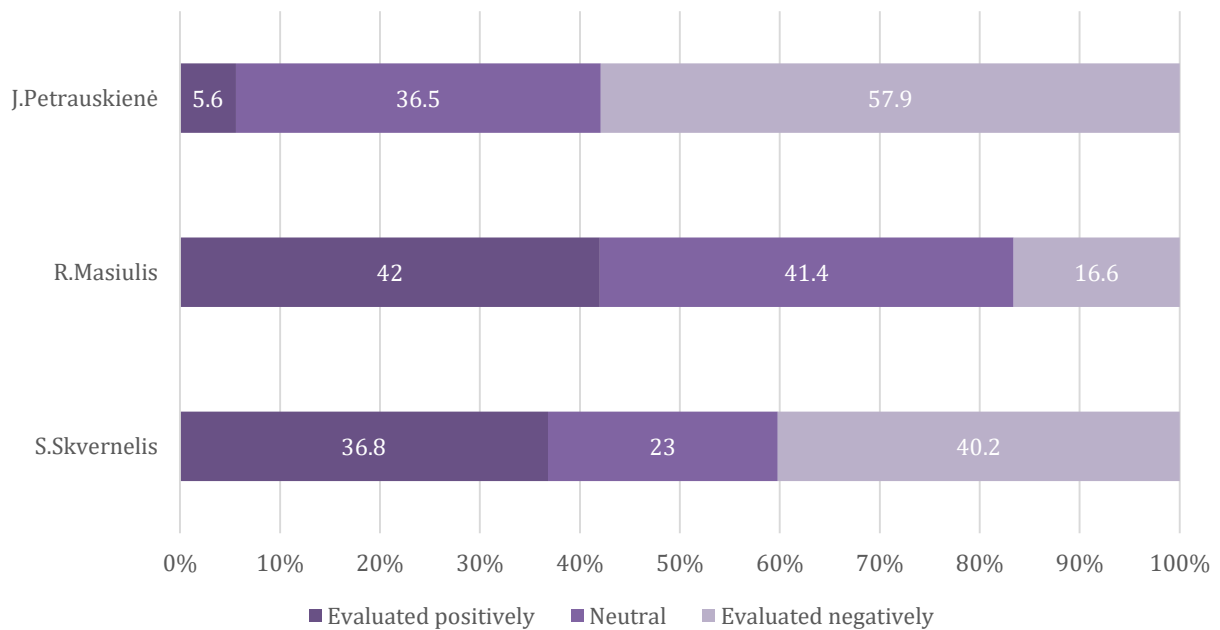
In this context it is important to analyze a key step taken by the prime minister to reach a breakthrough in the prolonged crisis. On December 3 Skvernelis announced that he was dismissing three ministers, including Petrauskiene. Later on, while reflecting on her time as a minister, Petrauskiene said that she always felt a lack of support from the ruling party and, especially, a lack of trust from its leading members.[61] She also noted that previous governments constantly made promises to teachers but failed to implement them. For this reason, general trust in the system was quite low.[62]

The prime minister made a strategic choice by appointing a more popular minister, Transport Minister Rokas Masiulis, to temporarily manage the education ministry. Masiulis had been credited for important structural reforms, as well as effectively implementing anti-corruption measures. According to the December survey, Masiulis was positively viewed by 42 percent of respondents; he was negatively accessed by 16.6 percent.[63]

Termination of the crisis

Masiulis was the one who managed to reach an agreement with the striking teachers and end the sit-in in the ministry. Three aspects are very important in this context. First of all, as stated by those who took part in the strike, Masiulis was more open to dialogue with the strikers and

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[61] Pancerovas, Davidonyte, 107.

[62] Ibid, 108.

[63] "Reitingai: į duobę šlumštelėjo ministrė su premjeru, o mokytojų streikas sukėlė netikėtų pasekmių"

managed to avoid using accusative and divisive language. Also, in order to bring more transparency to the system, Masiulis ordered an audit at the Ministry of Education and 17 of its subordinate regulatory institutions.[64]

He said that the audit might help to find additional finances needed to implement the striking teachers' demands.[65] Masiulis also managed to reach an agreement with the striking union on how to improve the algorithm to calculate teachers' salaries in the new tenure-based model. The strike ended, leaving other questions to be negotiated in the future meetings between trade unions and ministry representatives.

HISTORY OF LITHUANIA AS A TARGET OF THE KREMLIN'S DISINFORMATION TACTICS

In the summer of 2017, NATO premiered a short documentary that explained the Baltic fight for freedom after World War II to Western audiences. The film underscored that even today the special forces of these countries take their strength and inspiration from the partisans who resisted the Soviet occupation. This short documentary was important as a sign that NATO was prepared to defend the Baltic countries not only militarily but also in the field of hybrid aggression where information is also used as a weapon.

In response to the film, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia Spokesperson Maria Zakharova posted on Facebook that the partisans were formed by former Nazi collaborators who were working with the occupying regime as police officers, civil administrators or even, as in the Latvian case, formed SS battalions. She claimed that thousands of ordinary citizens fell victims to their aggression and that the Western secret services had supported these partisan movements until the mid 1950's.

Her claims were echoed by other high-ranking Russian officials. Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin tweeted that NATO's support for the Forest Brothers demonstrates that "in the face of NATO, we are dealing with the heirs of Hitler's remnants."[66] Online daily Sputnik published the opinion of a scientific researcher of the Russian Military History Society Mikhail Miagkov, who stated that partisans in the Baltic countries killed 80 percent of local Jews and, after the war, hid

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[64] Delfi.lt, 2018. "Ministry of Transport and STT will audit the Ministry of Education and Science and subordinate institutions". Available at: https://en.delfi.lt/politics/ministry-of-transport-and-stt-will-audit-the-ministry-of-education-and-science-and-subordinate-institutions.d?id=79898923. Accessed: 30 October 2019.
[65] After the audit was completed, Masiulis commented that some very bad things had been uncovered, including restrictions placed on competition, services bought from a single supplier and a lack of competence. Available at: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/948423/masiulis-svietimo-ministerijai-pavaldziu-istaigu-auditas-nustate-labai-negeru-dalyku
[66] Donara Barojan, 2017. "History Revisited: The Forest Brothers". Available at: https://medium.com/dfrlab/history-revisited-the-forest-brothers-e49cdcadb7bf. Accessed: 30 October 2019.

and fought in the forests.[67] Finally, a post written on the official Facebook page of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs portrayed the partisans as killers of innocent people.
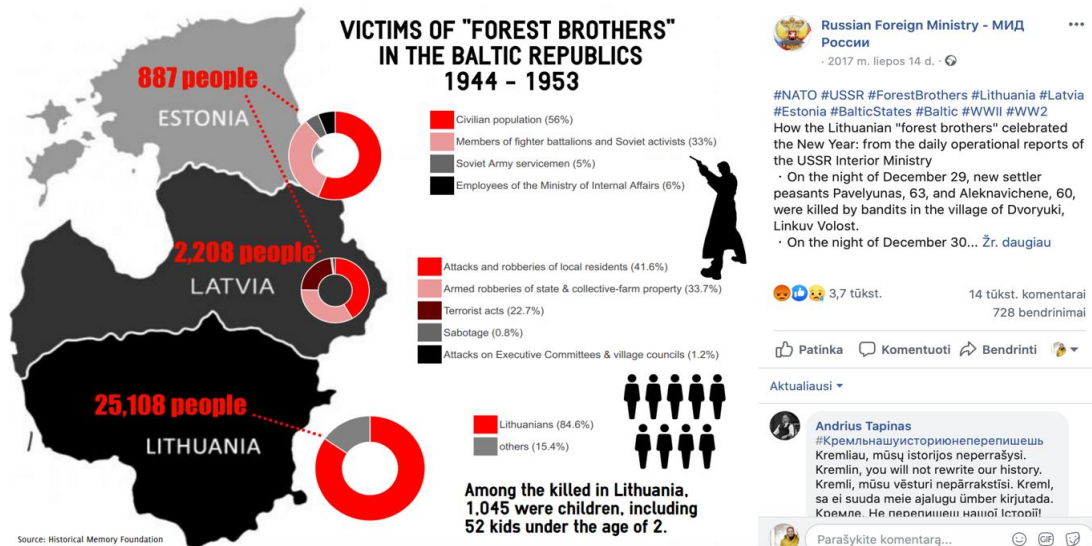
These statements by Russian official clearly indicated intense Russian hybrid aggression. According to Marc Galeotti, the senior researcher at the Institute of International Relations in Prague and head of its Centre for European Security, there are two types of hybrid aggression and the Kremlin pursues them both. The first type is when a conventional war is preceded by a phase of political destabilization. In this case, the means of hybrid aggression, such as disinformation, cyber-attacks, election interference and etc., are just a step before a ground invasion. The second type, though, speaks about the Kremlin's hybrid aggression, which is not intended to prepare the ground for an invasion. Rather it is aimed at destabilizing, demoralizing and distracting the West.[68] "Hybrid aggression of whatever form ultimately stems from weaknesses: a challenger without the strength to turn to direct confrontation, and a defender with sufficient divisions and shortcomings, whether military or socio-political, to be vulnerable,"[69] writes Galeotti.

This second type of hybrid warfare stems from Russia's understanding that militarily, it can't match the West. That is why, Russia—in order to expand its influence, especially to the former Eastern bloc countries—is choosing to target the West using non-military tools, according to the Lithuanian Ambassador at Large Eitvydas Bajarūnas. It is a tool to wage a war without declaring one. Bajarunas stresses that hybrid aggression is dangerous because of its unpredictability. It can target any vulnerability in a society in order to weaken it.[70]

[67] Sputnik.lt, 2017. "Ekspertas: "Miško broliai" sunaikino 80% žydų Baltijos šalyse". Available at: https://sputniknews.lt/russia/20170714/3442058/ekspertas-teigia-kad-misko-broliai-nuzude-80-procentu-baltijos-saliu-zydu.html. Accessed: 30 October 2019.
[68] Mark Galeotti, 2018. "(Mis)Understanding Russia's Two "Hybrid Wars". Available at: https://www.eurozine.com/misunderstanding-russias-two-hybrid-wars/. Accessed: 30 October 2019.
[69] Ibid
[70] Puslys, Donatas, 2019. "Ambasadorius: hibridinė agresija pavojingiausia savo nenuspėjamumu". Available at: http://www.bernardinai.lt/straipsnis/2019-07-03-ambasadorius-hibridine-agresija-pavojingiausia-savo-nenuspejamumu/176456. Accessed: 30 October 2019.

According to the head of media project Internews Ukraine, Konstantin Kvurt, the Kremlin's tactics are best described by the RT slogan "question more." It is a tactic of "scorched earth" when disinformation is targeted at destroying all values and beliefs, including trust in existing institutions and leaders. The Kremlin leaders believe that it is much easier to manipulate such a society and bring it under their influence.[71] Lithuanian Military StratCom Analyst Karolis Zikaras noted that disinformation directed at the partisans targets not only history but also the present because the contemporary Lithuanian military incorporates the ideals of the freedom fighters. So, an attack on the partisans is also an attempt to target the morale of today's soldiers and discredit Lithuania internationally.[72]

Planning the communication

The meaning-making phase is a connective tissue between the sense-making and decision-making stages. During this phase, it is necessary to decide which institution should be responsible for managing the situation, who can become its allies, which audiences should be targeted in the communication process, and how to attract their attention.

The Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the StratComs of the Military and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were the key institutions in this situation. They were helped by various non-governmental initiatives, such as Debunk.eu, Lithuanian elves and #PackOfLies, which work in the fields of disinformation debunking and media literacy education.

Initiatives like the Lithuanian elves are very important because they not only react to—and try to debunk—cases of disinformation post-factum but they also invest efforts in preventive work. They are especially active on social networks, where they try to expose and report the Russian bots and trolls responsible for spreading malicious propaganda.

Elves describe themselves as a community of volunteer fighters against internet trolls and disinformation. "This community unites professionals from different fields, including but not limited to experts in foreign, security, IT, cyber, environmental, economic and other affairs. Depending on the situation, elves may act both proactively or reactively. They operate both individually and as a well-organised social media community."[73]

Finally, in terms of communication tactics, it is important to pay attention to two dimensions: engagement vs. disengagement and outward projection vs. inward projection. Every time one is faced with the challenge of disinformation, it is necessary to make a choice in the two continuums. The first choice, between engagement and disengagement, determines whether the state actively

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[71] Puslys, Donatas, 2019. "Krymas nebuvo okupuotas per vieną dieną: gudrūs metodai, kurie gali būti panaudoti ir kitur". Available at: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1056633/krymas-nebuvo-okupuotas-per-viena-diena-gudrus-metodai-kurie-gali-buti-panaudoti-ir-kitur. Accessed: 30 October 2019.
[72] Puslys, Donatas, 2019. "Kariuomenės analitikas: kova vyksta dėl kiekvienos širdies ir proto". Available at: http://www.bernardinai.lt/straipsnis/2019-06-26-kariuomenes-analitikas-kova-vyksta-del-kiekvienos-sirdies-ir-proto/176349. Accessed: 30 October 2019.
[73] Debunk.eu, 2019. Available at: https://debunk.eu/about-elves/. Accessed: 30 October 2019.

confronts the perceived opposing narrative/s by producing and disseminating a narrative or narratives of its own, or by setting up channels and vehicles for this purpose.[74] The second choice, between outward and inward projections, presupposes the need to decide if your targeted audience is domestic or foreign. As the table below illustrates, four different action models are available.

Table 3. Inward- and outward-looking strategies in information warfare:[75]

	Outward projection	Inward projection
Engaging	Confrontation	Blocking
Disengaging	Naturalization	Ignoring

The choice of one or another particular strategy enables or constrains the state in constructing its own strategic narrative. In the case of Russian disinformation against Lithuanian partisans, Lithuanian institutions and civic activists have chosen the strategy of confrontation, which is aimed at forming a direct response to a particular narrative. The strategic narrative, according to Hellman and Wagnsson, is thus discursively constructed in direct opposition to the foreign narratives which are seen as false, inaccurate and denigrating. "It is outward-looking in the sense that the leadership pays great attention to and tries to meet the perceived threat originating from outside the domestic sphere. The narratives that are projected can be directed both inwards towards the domestic population and outwards towards the perceived enemy or towards other audiences beyond domestic borders. The intention is to project counter-narratives in order to exercise influence and to change attitudes and this is sometimes made explicit and sometimes implicitly understood," writes Hellman and Wagnsson.[76]

The chosen tactics of confrontation meant the ambition to show the Kremlin that Lithuania was prepared to actively confront its disinformation. It also targeted the local audience to assure it that informational space would be protected from outside attempts to instigate divisions and polarization. Finally, foreign audiences were a targeted audience through various media platforms in order to not only deny the Russian narrative but also to educate them about the history of the freedom fighters.

Responding to disinformation

The StratCom of Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted to the Kremlin's disinformation by tweeting an infographic (Annex 1) which detailed the cooperation between Soviet and Nazi totalitarian regimes. This infographic was addressing the Western audience in order to disprove internationally spread Kremlin disinformation.

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[74] Hellman, Maria, Wagnsson, Charlotte, 2016. "How can European states respond to Russian information warfare? An analytical approach". Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09662839.2017.1294162. Accessed: 30 October 2019.
[75] Ibid
[76] Ibid.

Stories of MOLOTOV RIBBENTROP Pact

Cooperation Between Two Totalitarian Regimes

WW2 WAS STARTED BY NAZIS AND SOVIETS TOGETHER

Following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Nazis and Soviets invaded Poland and started WW2.

SOVIETS HAD A JOINT PARADE WITH NAZIS

After defeating Poland, Soviets and Nazis had a joint military parade on 22 September, 1939, in Brest.

SOVIETS SUPPORTED NAZIS IN EXCHANGE FOR TECHNOLOGY

1 million tons of cereal

0.5 million tons of wheat

900,000 tons of oil

500,000 tons of various metal ores

500,000 tons of phosphates

Considerable amounts of other vital raw materials

This helped the Nazis survive the blockade imposed by the British.

SOVIETS STOOD BY NAZIS

Soviets congratulated the Nazis on victory against France in 1940.

SOVIETS PROVIDED SHELTER FOR NAZIS

USSR hid Nazi submarines in Soviet ports during blockade.

**SOVIETS WANTED MORE SECRET PACTS**

In November, 1940, Soviets suggested to Nazis further division of Central and Eastern Europe.

Source: LT_MFA_Stratcom. 2017, July 13. "#RU MFA: Partisans in Baltics fought on Nazi side.2 notes: 1)Nazis defeated in 1945,resistance ended in 1953; 2) Soviets fought on Nazi side". [Twitter post] Available at:
https://twitter.com/LT_MFA_Stratcom/status/885491942473306112?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweet embed%7Ctwterm%5E885491942473306112&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2F

But the most important step in this situation was taken by journalist and well-known influencer Andrius Tapinas. "If Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its official page dares to smear us, then we should respond. You can visit their Facebook page and leave there a polite hashtag "Kremlin, you will not falsify our history" (#Кремльнашуисториюнеперепишешь)," he wrote on his Facebook page. He also asked people to rate the page of Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is worth noting that he did not direct people to give the page a single star, rather he asked them to rate it based on their own assessment.

This hashtag was later translated into Latvian, Estonian, Ukrainian and other languages and spread online. In total around 17,000 people took part in this initiative and soon the rating of Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Facebook page was downgraded to one star. After the campaign gained momentum, the administrators of the page decided to remove the rating function.
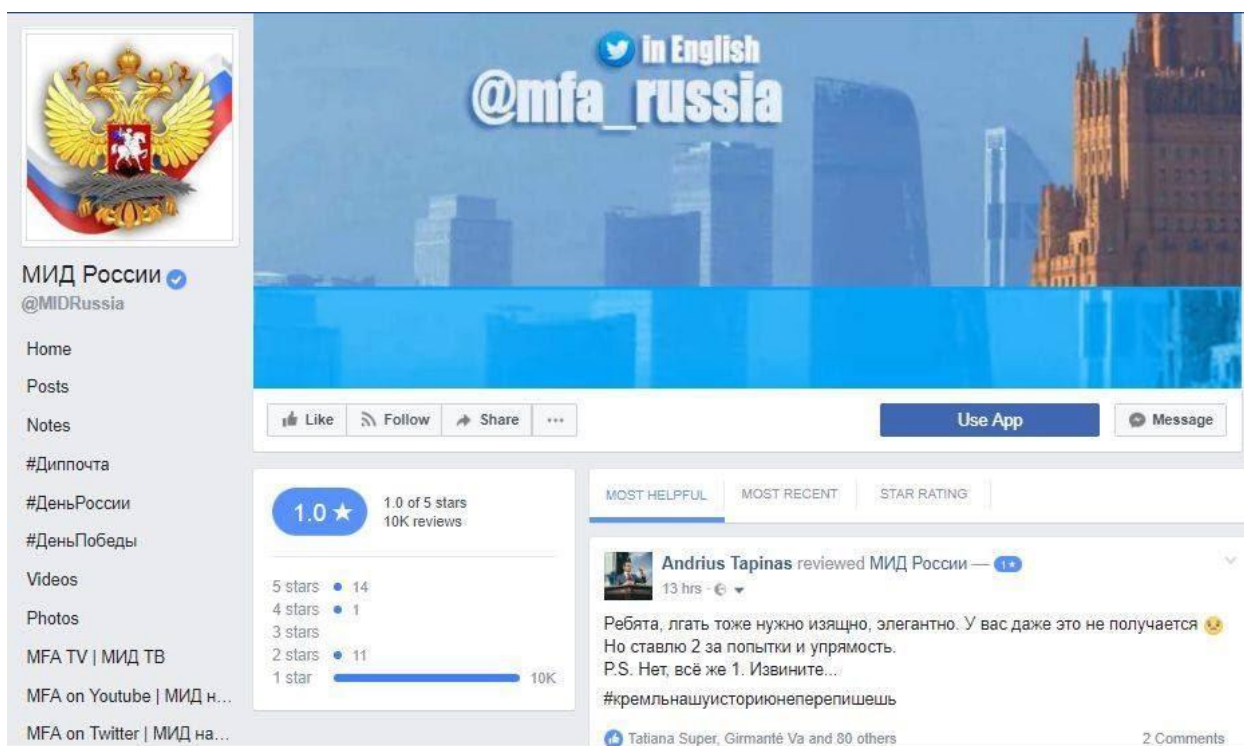
Reacting to the flood of activists sharing the hashtag, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on Facebook expressing its "gratitude" to Tapinas. "Thanks to Andrius Tapinas that he did our job for us and managed to gather thousands of Lithuanians to whom now we will be able to tell the historical truth and familiarize them with historical facts and documents regarding the crimes of the Forest brothers."

Termination of the crisis

The shared initiative of Tapinas and Lithuanian elves was an important sign of how civil society and the state can cooperate to address the challenges of disinformation. Thousands of civil society activists involved in a grass-roots campaign organized from below might have been an unexpected challenge for the Kremlin. It also demonstrated how social media can be used to mobilize society.

Ambassador Bajarunas outlines three important tasks to build resilience against hybrid threats. The first one is the strengthening of state's institutional capabilities to address hybrid threats. The second one is lobbying EU and NATO to pay more attention to hybrid threats. And finally, the third one is building societal resilience. Bajarunas underscores that this last aspect is of crucial importance because neither the state and its institutions, nor international organizations will be able to achieve tangible results if society fails to share responsibility and initiate campaigns from the ground up.[77]

Institute of International Relations and Political Science Researcher Nerijus Maliukevičius states that there are two ways to deal with disinformation. The first one is to apply the law and take action, as was done to certain Kremlin-linked TV channels inciting hatred. But if disinformation borders on breaching the law without really overstepping the line, creative responses, according to Maliukevicius, are very important.[78]

For this reason, the challenge to respond to the disinformation campaign against Lithuanian partisans was very important as a testing ground to check if governmental institutions working with civic initiatives and activists could send a strong message both to the local and international audiences. From this perspective, for the state institutions involved in the fight against disinformation it is very important not only to take the lead themselves but also to invest in media literacy education and support (through education, projects, help in establishing international networks and etc.) various grassroots initiatives while at the same time coordinating their work.

It was important to address the local audience in order to demonstrate the unity and readiness of the majority of society to resist informational aggression. This show of unity encouraged other citizens to become more active in forming and delivering a response to disinformation. The international audience had to be reached because the Russian disinformation attempted to internationally spread a distorted view of Lithuanian history and portray Lithuania as country glorifying Nazis. To counter these efforts, Lithuania had to develop a more creative communication strategy. The traditional institutional approach was not enough.

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[77] Puslys, Donatas, 2019. Ambasadorius: hibridinė agresija pavojingiausia savo nenuspėjamumu.
[78] Delfi.lt, 2017. Tapinas evaluated impact of Forest Brothers campaign on Facebook. Available at: https://en.delfi.lt/archive/tapinas-evaluated-impact-of-forest-brothers-campaign-on-facebook.d?id=75255511. Accessed: 30 October 2019.

CONCLUSION: WHAT CAN GEORGIA LEARN FROM LITHUANIA?

Successful crisis management revolves around the analysis of what was happening during the crisis and what can be learned in order to improve the response. There are a number of lessons Georgia and Lithuania can draw from the analyzed cases. These lessons are related to the key areas of crisis management, such as communication and informational campaigns for the targeted audience, including the establishment of a participatory decision-making process; the language adopted when describing a certain crisis; coordination with various influential actors; and education, especially in the context of media and digital literacy.

Lesson 1: All crises are important

The first and most important lesson for any government aiming at efficient crisis management is that all crises, no matter how trivial they may seem, should be taken seriously. The case of the teachers strike shows the crisis was taken seriously only after the teachers refused to leave the ministry building and the situation had spun out of control. That was a huge mistake: it made it more difficult to hold effective negotiations and resulted in loads of negative publicity for the ministry. The attitude that it would be a short-lived strike prevailed among decision-makers and implementers prior to the teacher sit-in. There was a similar situation in Georgia about the June protests: the government assumed that after a few concessions, the demonstrations would end. However, unlike the Lithuanian government, the Georgian government did not successfully terminate the protests. They allowed the protests to drag out for weeks. The problem with this strategy is that the government eventually loses credibility with its own voters.

Lesson 2: Conduct informational campaigns and involve the target audience in making important decisions

The second lesson seems straightforward but often overlooked. This can happen for various reasons, for example, such campaigns can be costly and/or time-consuming. However, one of the mistakes is that often government simply do not expect the public will react the way they do once a particular decision has been made. This was the case in Lithuania's attempt to reform the educational system and Georgia's decision to organize and host the IAO session in the parliament of Georgia. Those on the receiving end of the changes often feel insecure. One can argue that it is very important to inform them about the coming changes in a transparent manner and provide answers for all their worries. But it is possible to begin implementing major changes on a smaller scale. In the Lithuanian case, for example, the Ministry of Education could have selected several schools to introduce the new payment model. If everything went well, it would have served as a model of success to be implemented on a national scale. On the other hand, in case it did not work, a smaller amount of people would have been affected, and it would have been easier to make the necessary changes to the model. This approach allows governments to not only minimize possible risks but also to involve the target audience in the decision-making and

reform-shaping process. This means that there will be a channel through which they can express their own proposals and address possible weak spots.

Lesson 3: Avoid polarizing language

It must be stressed that politics is more than just communication. Public relations also play an important role and can either help or impede the process of crisis solving. In particular, it is important to avoid polarizing and divisive language which hinders dialogue. Public communication should not only inform people about certain policies. It should also help build support around the proposed initiative. In the case of the teachers strike, we clearly see how the communication chosen at the beginning of the crisis alienated the public and created a cross-sectoral solidarity with the striking teachers. Afterwards the interim minister was able to improve the situation by simply changing the language he used to address the striking teachers and showing his willingness to negotiate. In Georgia, however, in the context of June protests, the opposite strategy can be observed. The representatives of the government used more favorable language when addressing protesters at the beginning of the demonstrations but later adopted a more demonizing strategy towards both ordinary protesters and their political opponents. Such an approach contributed to protracted protests on the streets. A similar strategy is observed in the borderization case in Georgia but this time opposition parties also use heavily polarizing and often demonizing language against the government.

Lesson 4: Avoid "divide and rule" tactics

The tactics of "divide and rule" essentially involve playing the actors of the crises against each other. This seemingly masterful plan often fails due to the fact that the government should be listening to the society as a whole and aggregating the interests of all factions or fragments of the society instead of sparking a disagreement between different stakeholders to avoid responsibility. For example, the Lithuanian experience during the teachers' strike demonstrates that the general perception among society was not concentrated on the fact that the strike was initiated by only one union. The public understood it as a strike representing all the teachers. In this case, focusing on the fact that the majority of the unions were willing to negotiate while the only one was avoiding dialogue and choosing inappropriate tactics was destined to fail. Similarly, in Georgia, it was unacceptable to play "good people" and "bad politicians" against each other by labeling protesters as people manipulated by adventurous politicians. This kind of rhetoric leads Georgian voters to disillusionment with politics and decreasing trust in political actors.

Lesson 5: Ensure close coordination of various government institutions and cooperate with civil society as well as other political parties

Communication between different branches of the government should be coordinated in order to strengthen the message, show unity and try to avoid communicational slips where the message issued by one branch might damage the other. This is especially important when dealing with crises sparked by external actors. Such crises can be harder to respond to in a meaningful manner.

Both Georgia and Lithuania have experienced Russia's hybrid aggression in the form of borderization and disinformation, respectively. Lithuania was able to develop a tactical response to the Russian disinformation threat because the government joined together with civil society actors to deploy an effective message to the necessary audiences. In the Georgian experience, however, such tactical responses are lacking. When there is a political debate around the issue of borderization, Georgian political class often engage in blame-games and avoid the real issue at hand. Moreover, they do not coordinate their efforts with civil society, which appeared to be the key element for successful crisis management in Lithuanian experience. As a result, the political discourse in Georgia about borderization remains fragmented without a clear narrative communicated to the public.

Lesson 6: Increase media literacy of the vulnerable parts of the society to minimize the impact of acts of hybrid aggression

Experience shows that media literacy in the digital age is becoming increasingly important. Detecting fake news, being critical towards received information and, generally, not being gullible are important qualities for good citizenship today. This helps build the resilience of the society to hybrid threats. According to Ambassador Bajarūnas, it is very important that institutions like the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education understand their role in building resilience against hybrid aggression.[79] On a strategic level their input could rest on strengthening media literacy in the educational system, especially educating the educators; supporting civic initiatives through various projects; and coordinating the work of various institutions in the field of media literacy education. These issues are also of crucial importance in Georgia. However, such a coherent overarching strategy is missing in the Georgian context. Especially important is the focus on particularly vulnerable parts of the society. The Kremlin's hybrid aggression attempts to exploit existing divisions in the society. For this reason, it is very important to invest in preventive activities that would be directed towards working with the groups in society that are the most vulnerable to disinformation. Sometimes media literacy education falls short because it suffers from a tendency to preach to the converted.

Lesson 7: Tailor media literacy programs to the needs of the target audience

Media literacy training can backfire if it is not tailored to meet the specific needs of vulnerable groups. For example, it is very important to work with Russian-speaking communities in Lithuania and ethnic minorities in Georgia. The training should avoid accusative language or collective clichés and the principle of collective guilt. It is necessary to speak about the Kremlin and Russian political elite—but avoid making general statements about all the Russians. Hellman and Wagnsson stress that confrontational tactics to counter disinformation may be criticized in that the response might resemble the kind of behavior that one aims to confront, and may thus seem unfitting for a pluralist, democratic state.[80] In their opinion, it can also serve to legitimize

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[79] Puslys, Donatas, 2019. "Ambasadorius: hibridinė agresija pavojingiausia savo nenuspėjamumu".
[80] Hellman, Maria, Wagnsson, Charlotte, 2016. "How can European states respond to Russian information warfare? An analytical approach"

media actors spreading disinformation such as RT.[81] Or it can aggravate tensions inside society if those proposing the counter-narrative attempt to impose it without discussions. It might be advisable to also look for other options when choosing response tactics. For example, one can always think about ignoring disinformation and, instead of reacting, continue working on strengthening unity in society. One can also discuss the possibility of blocking disinformation, but this carries its own risks.

Overall, Georgian state institutions and political class needs to learn efficient ways of managing political crises. Although Lithuania can also improve its ways of crisis resolution, Georgia can still learn a lot from the Lithuanian experience. This paper has analyzed two cases of political crises from each country and based on these insights, identified seven lessons for the Georgian government to consider in the future. Living in an increasingly volatile world without the luxury of being a member of such structures as NATO and the EU, the Georgian government will need to be vigilant to avoid any decisions that can spark a new crisis. Additionally, Tbilisi will have to establish preventive measures and systems of early warnings especially designed for those crises that are driven by external actors. Exact ways of how to implement these measures are, however, a topic of another research project.

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[81] Ibid.