

facebook

GEORGIAN CIVIL SOCIETY'S OPEN LETTER TO FACEBOOK

To: **Mark Zuckerberg**, Founder and CEO, Facebook

Nick Clegg, Vice-President - Global Affairs and Communications, Facebook

June 29, 2020

We the Georgian civil society representatives, civic activists and media representatives, would like to draw your attention to the upcoming 2020 parliamentary elections in Georgia and continued attempts of political interest groups and foreign actors to undermine free and equal election environment by using disinformation and Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB) on Facebook, jeopardizing democracy and Georgia's Western integration.

During the 2018 presidential election in Georgia, anonymous pages used sponsored content to [wage](#) far-reaching discrediting [campaigns](#) on Facebook, with the aim of influencing voters and radicalizing election processes against the background of negative campaign. Such [methods](#) were also used [last year](#) and during key [political turning points](#). In [December 2019](#) and [April 2020](#), Facebook removal of accounts engaged in CIB in Georgia identified that the majority of these accounts were

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connected to the ruling party and some to opposition as well. This confirms that attempts to manipulate public opinion on Facebook are also carried out by internal actors along with external hostile actors such as Russia. In fact, Georgia's thirty-year history of independence has been accompanied by a constant fight for survival and freedom against the Russian Federation's aggressive actions. Russia continues to wage a hybrid war against Georgia using sophisticated [information operations](#) and [spread of disinformation](#) as a weapon. Facebook's takedown operation played an important role in increasing the integrity of the information space. However, the effect of these measures has been only temporary. Similar inauthentic pages are [still being created](#) and use more sophisticated tactics in an attempt to avoid possible future sanctions from Facebook. As disinformation and sponsored discrediting campaigns are again gaining traction ahead of the upcoming elections in Georgia, lack of transparency of political advertising on Facebook allows malicious actors to bypass requirements of Georgia's legislation on disclosure of political ad spending.

With only four months remaining until Georgia's parliamentary elections, Facebook has a chance to take a responsible role in safeguarding the information environment during Georgia's elections. Ensuring immediate introduction of Facebook's mechanisms for transparency of political advertisement is a crucial step.

We hereby urge you to take the following measures:

- Facebook should launch the Political Ad Library and Political Ads API in Georgia as soon as possible, like it did ahead of elections in Ukraine and European Parliament elections in the EU member states in 2019. In line with Georgian legislation, identity of advertisers/payers, contact information, amount spent on each ad, currency used, the time period of an ad should be disclosed along with geographic and demographic reach of the ads.
- During election period, Facebook should strengthen its efforts to identify CIB and remove from the platform accounts involved in it.
- Following identification of CIB and removal of networks, Facebook should notify subscribers and followers of accounts that were removed for CIB about the action taken.
- Facebook should develop and deepen cooperation with reputable and nonpartisan domestic civil society organizations carrying out methodological social media monitoring and fact-checking and ensure timely and effective reaction to their findings.

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- Micro-targeting of political ads based on user behavior should not be allowed.
- Running political ads from a foreign country should be prohibited.
- Facebook should increase page transparency by showing the confirmed owner of a page and continue making information available about the number and location of page administrators along with information about the page history (e.g., name changes).
- Facebook should introduce clearer and more prominent fact-checking labels and to this end, partner with IFCN accredited fact-checking organizations in Georgia.

You have [once said](#) that in a democracy it is very important that people see for themselves what politicians are saying, so they make their own judgments. However, amid the anonymous, coordinated and sponsored political discrediting campaigns in Georgia, citizens are misled, which takes away their freedom of information and possibility to form political opinions based on their own judgments – which, according to your formula, is no longer a democracy. We believe that Facebook will choose to stand on the side of democracy.

We hope that Facebook – prompt action and genuine cooperation will make it possible to secure the Georgian democracy and integrity of important 2020 parliamentary elections from external and internal interference.

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED)

Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS)

Transparency International - Georgia

Media Development Foundation (MDF)

Shame Movement

Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI)

Online media Publika - publika.ge

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Journalism Resource Center

Green Alternative

Governance Monitoring Center

TV Formula

Atlantic Council of Georgia

Tabula Media

Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC)

Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP)

UN Association of Georgia (UNAG)

Institute for Democracy and Safe Development (IDSD)

Mtavari Channel

Union Sapari

Partnership for Human Rights

Europe Foundation

Human Rights Center

Georgian Democracy Initiative (GDI)

Alliance of Broadcasters

Open Society Georgia Foundation

Democracy Research Institute

Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI)

Caucasus Research Resource Center - Georgia

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Media outlet Indigo

World Experience for Georgia (WEG)

Center Empathy

Society and Banks

Liberal Academy Tbilisi

Online media On.ge

TV Pirveli

TV Kavkasia

Studio Monitor

Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (Rondeli Foundation)

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)

Internews Georgia

Tbilisi Pride

Georgia's Future Academy

ForSet

Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC)

OC Media

IWPR Georgia

Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics

Internet Monitoring for Democratic Civil Action (IMDCA)