Yet another new political party, the Conservative Movement, has now been founded in Georgia. Usually these parties are personal vehicles for one person, and vanish when their grievances do. This one however has a more unusual provenance, which seems to causing undue concern.

The Conservatives began life as an alternative media company, Alt-info. This is a well-known TV outlet, but is known largely by reputation, for standing its ground over Georgian values, rather than for people actually watching its broadcasts.

The station originally came to public attention for not being a proper station at all. It had the temerity to use a Facebook page to spread its views about politics and social events, focusing on this rather than its actual TV output.

This raised a number of questions about what the station was and who was behind it. But the most important was, why should an up-and-coming political movement NOT be allowed to fall in line with bigger and seemingly legitimate political parties by using FB to get its message across?

**Opinions Equals Friends**

Alt-info were allegedly provocateurs in the July 5, 2021 events, in which the Gay Pride rally in Tbilisi turned violent
due to the actions of protesters. Arrests were made and some Alt-info associates arrested.

Many mainstream journalists, upwards of 50, were injured, and this made it easy to blame Alt-info for the violence. In fact the rest of the media, even outlets which pride themselves on their independence, seems determined to close ranks with the political establishment to trash this party.

Some, especially amongst those closest to the NGO community, allege that it is connected with the “continuing Bolshevik” Alexander Dugin, a comic book hate figure in Georgia. It is said that the new party has held talks with him about NATO bases, the plight of Mikheil Saakashvili, religion and so forth.

This and other similar Facebook and media outlets are being “investigated” by organisations such as the Digital Forensic Research Lab at the Atlantic Council. This claims that the people behind it have attempted to conceal their identities and coordination, but “our investigation found links to individuals associated with Georgian March, a political movement in Georgia, and its youth wing.”

What exactly was this investigation, and how were these conclusions drawn? We may never know – we are not supposed to question “expert” organisations, and have to assume they know best because is it in their financial interest to pretend this.

**Play on Another Field**

It is easy to understand the Western perspective on a political party which has the audacity to venture from the official pro-Western, Pro NATO, standpoint. However, when the accusations against it have no real substance, they turn to figures such as the lawyer quoted in a Eurasianet article, notorious for threats against journalists who see things differently, to get their point across.

When asked if he knew what patriotism was, and “if he had even taken an Oath of Allegiance to the United States”, his response was to threaten to contact the police. He was unwilling to defend his position—unable to present anything based on fact rather than rhetoric.

Alt-inform TV is also accused of having exploited the ongoing protests in the United States against police brutality and racial injustice, selectively amplifying content that shows individuals setting fire to churches. Apparently the US doesn’t want Georgians to see attacks on churches, or draw conclusions about the nature of Western society, and the positions it imposes, from that.

But it is the fact that people with the views it holds want to gain political representation, if the populace so desire that, which is most upsetting to some. As one recent article reads, “the leaders of the Alt-info media outlet, notorious for its hard-line anti-liberal, anti-LGBT, anti-Muslim stance, inaugurated today a new political party, which they named “the Conservative Movement.”

**Anyone for Pogroms?**

One would get the impression that only thing that matters in Georgia any more is “incidences of violence toward LGBTQ+ activists and media” and “a long history of government inaction against radical right figures.” When the Western media claims there is a multi-party democracy in Georgia, it sets that concept on one side, the protests against LGBTQ+ activists (who are not a political party) on the other.

This in itself demonstrates that Georgia is closer to a Potemkin Democracy, as so well described by Charles King of Georgetown University. Georgia has shown how pluralist it is regarding people defending its own traditions by caving into Western criticism, sending the police to question and search the apartments of several leaders of groups alleged to be involved in organising these attacks.

These include Zurab Makharadze, the founder of Alt-info. Facebook has reported the Alt-info Facebook page many times, on the grounds of hate speech, whilst ignoring hate speech towards Christians by gay activists.

If Makharadze were a member of Bandera’s movement in Ukraine, that would be stated without comment. But to prove a point, his outlet has to be described as “a right-wing online platform that has been one of the main nodes of illiberal messaging in Georgia.”

We can interpret “illiberal” to mean anything not pro-Western, which covers a lot of territory, and is open to picking and choosing. In effect, it means anything which upsets accepted Georgian norms and standards of decency – which have a greater moral and cultural pedigree than the norms now being imposed upon the country in the name of
The Conservative Movement is no more illiberal than a number of parties allowed to flourish in Western liberal democracies – its rhetoric is no worse, from that viewpoint, than that of Boris Johnson’s Brexit Conservatives or the Trump Republicans. But as these parties are in “civilized” countries, and this is Georgia, its existence is anathema to those who cannot abide the lower orders thinking for themselves.

The Georgian National Agency of Public Registry initially refused to register the party, citing Article 23 – Freedom and Political parties under the Georgian Constitution. This reads:

“The establishment and activity of a political party that aims to overthrow or forcibly change the constitutional order of Georgia, infringe on the independence or violate the territorial integrity of the country, or that propagates war or violence or incites national, ethnic, provincial, religious or social strife, shall be inadmissible. Additionally, the establishment of a political party on a territorial principle shall be inadmissible.”

The Agency gave the party ten days to change some parts of its Charter. It was finally registered on December 7, 2021. Maybe the Registry folks remembered than when Zviad Gamsakhurdia closed down one TV station for broadcasting calls for an armed revolt to overthrow the government, which the Conservative Movement has not done, he was declared a danger to the same Georgia which says in its constitution that it is exactly what should be done.

The Conservative Movement is causing concern because it has credibility in the population, and thus provides a meaningful alternative to the ruling Georgian Dream and the formerly ruling United National Movement. After long years of Western attempts to make Georgian politics anodyne and irrelevant, with parties no one is interested in talking about things that one cares about, here is a force people can relate to, either positively or negatively.

The problem with a Potemkin Democracy is that you still have to give people a vote. The disgruntled masses see nothing in the many Georgian political parties which stand only for the individuals who founded them, mostly for financial gain, at the behest of foreign interests.

The Georgian Dream are not the criminals the UNM were, but that in itself is no longer enough. With other alternatives having lost credibility by tossing in their lot with the UNM in recent elections, suddenly pretending it is a real political party which wants to help the country when they know otherwise, there is room for a third force, whose interests, for good or ill, are known and understood.

Nearly 50 percent of voters vote by not voting. There are many reasons for this, from lack of interest to willful boycott, but the main one is that no one has a choice they can support with confidence – the only option is the lesser of two evils, however that is defined at a given time.

In a survey by the National Democratic Institute in July 2021, 51 percent of respondents said that Georgia is not a democracy, and the same proportion said that the country is moving in the wrong direction. Only 30 percent named a political party they would vote for. As such polling in Georgia is notoriously unreliable, because people traditionally say what they think the pollster wants to hear, the 51% figure must be much higher in reality.

The Conservative Movement seeks to have normal relations with Russia. Most political parties secure their funding by professing hostility to Russia. Yet it is the Conservative Movement which appears more patriotic in spite of this, and this is a threat the other parties and their sponsors must take seriously.

The party also understands that NATO and EU membership may mean that Georgia will have less control over its own development and political orientation. Georgians have been told the opposite for a very long time, and no one is allowed to question this mantra. If Georgian traditions and independence are believed to mean anything, a lot more questions will be asked about the past as well as the present, and the answers are not ones Westerners and their stooges want to hear.

It is Westerners themselves who make clear that in their client states, free speech only works in one direction. Take this internet report by a Western-funded site about hate speech in Georgia.

This report “Anti-Western Propaganda”, by the Media Development Foundation (MDF), is made possible by the
generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) within “Promoting Integration, Tolerance and Awareness Program in Georgia [PITA], implemented by the UN Association of Georgia. The contents are the responsibility of MDF and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government and UNAG. The MDF conducted similar studies in 2016 and 2014-2015. The study was carried out in partnership with the UN Association of Georgia within USAID’s Promoting Integration, Tolerance and Awareness Program.

Most of what is painted as hate is different values and traditions, not hostility to the West or what it stands for. Most Georgians would prefer the West to Russia any day, but respect their own traditions above all. The question is how far they are prepared to call themselves backward and bigoted to get Western help – and what happens when they decide it isn’t worth it.

The most revealing concern amongst the so-called gatekeepers of media freedom and Georgian democracy is that there is a significant rise in something the Georgian state declares to be impossible - coverage which promotes “so-called Georgian traditional values” but is also Russian-friendly. That strikes at the heart of the state Georgians know other people, not themselves, have constructed. All these threats together will ensure the Conservative Movement is trampled – but the gates it has opened cannot be closed behind it.

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