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The Impact of Russia's War against Ukraine on Georgia

Introduction by the Special Editor Tatia Chikhladze (Regional Institute for Security Studies and British University in Georgia, Tbilisi)

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has fundamentally changed the regional security environment. Georgia has as a result found itself in a challenging position. The country has faced an influx of Russian citizens seeking shelter in their neighboring country, especially since the announcement of partial mobilization in Russia. Such a swift change has increased societal tensions. Simultaneously, the pro-Russian disinformation that already counted among Georgian national security's key problems, has intensified even further, targeting the most vulnerable segments of society and making the case for alienating Georgia from its Western partners. Despite such an unprecedented set of challenges, Georgia has also been given a unique window of opportunity to advance on its European integration path through receiving EU candidate status.

The first article of this special issue examines new pro-Russian disinformation narratives promoted since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It shows that the main target of such narratives is still the West, but that the content of disinformation messages has been adapted to the new realities created after the 2022 invasion. The second article analyses security, political and economic implications of the influx of Russians in Georgia, as well potential short and long-term implications of controversial decisions such as allowing the restoration of flights to Russia and keeping liberal visa regulations for Russian citizens. Through dramatic security challenges have arisen as a result of the full-scale invasion, unprecedented opportunities have also appeared for Georgia due to the European Union's decision to accelerate the accession process for Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. The third article offers a perspective on how the government of Georgia responded to this new historical opportunity, making the point that the government is hesitating to fully engage in the EU integration process, since adoption of essential reforms for meeting EU criteria are seen as a potential hindrance to the ruling party's uncontested authority.

About the Special Editor

Dr *Tatia Chikhladze* is a Senior Research Fellow at the Regional Institute for Security Studies and Associate Professor at the British University in Georgia (Tbilisi).