

11. *Marcin Kosienkowski, William Schreiber & Joyce Hahn.* **Social Media in the Service of Territorial Reintegration in the post-Soviet Area**

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Three former Soviet republics—Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova—have struggled with a specific brand of secessionism for over twenty years. Their separatist regions—Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Transnistria—managed to detach from their parent states and create their own state-like entities or de facto states that, however, lack international recognition or enjoy it only at a minimal level.[\[228\]](#) Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova used various political, economic and military means to restore control over their breakaway regions. At present, they can also use a new, supplementary tool—social media, such as Facebook or Twitter—to facilitate reintegration of de facto states.

These three protracted conflicts of post-Soviet succession are known for prolonged periods of conflict with limited violence. They are also notable because each of the de facto states contests the right of governance with its parent state. These political and informational aspects may make them interesting case studies for those who wish to examine the political capabilities and limitations of social media.

Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.”[\[229\]](#) Following this expansive definition, this chapter surveys not only the social networks commonly understood as social media, but also of forums and blogs that promote User Generated Content and online interaction broadly writ.

Generally, social media can be used by parent states in at least three ways: information warfare, conflict resolution and public diplomacy. The target audience may also be threefold. It is not only within the de facto state itself, but it also seeks to influence the domestic public opinion of the parent state and the international community, in other words, social media can target all of the main stakeholders involved in the dispute and its mediation.

Information warfare is “the use of information or information technology during a time of crisis or

conflict to achieve or promote specific objectives over a specific adversary or adversaries.”[230] Brett van Niekerk and Manoj Maharaj point out that social media can be harnessed to sway a target audience’s perception and behavior, to instigate and manage disturbances in virtual or physical reality, to gather intelligence and so on.[231]

Conflict resolution is about facilitating the peaceful end of a dispute. Daniel Wehrenfennig notes that social media can be used at all stages of a conflict and its management, although with varying intensity.[232] Using the four-stage concept of Eytan Gilboa for classifying conflicts based on their principal intervention goals and media involvement, it can be determined that at present the Caucasian de facto states are at the late escalation–management phase, whereas Transnistria is stuck following the de-escalation–resolution phase (the first stage is onset–prevention and the final stage is termination–reconciliation).[233] The latter stage gives far more opportunities for the use of social media. Wehrenfennig notes social media may be used to disseminate peaceful message to wider public, to stimulate e-dialogue between peoples on both sides, to form online groups in favor of peace or to counter misinformation in order to limit the alienation effect, to promote understanding, create trust or mobilize the public in the conflict resolution process.[234] Additionally, it might be added that social media give a good opportunity to hear citizens’ concerns and receive feedback to improve peace process in real time.

Finally, public diplomacy concerns the informing and influencing of publics by governments about their policies, interests, values, etc.[235] In contrast to information warfare, public diplomacy is more concerned with persuasion, credibility and dialogue rather than propaganda and domination. It is also practiced in “peacetime.” To be sure, parent states and their de facto states are in permanent confrontation (that is why these conflicts are also called frozen or protracted), but there are periods of détente and the level of tension varies over time. The difference between public diplomacy and conflict resolution is that the latter targets rather adversary, focuses mainly on the issues of the dispute, and is more concerned reconciliation than portrayal or influence.

This article examines how state authorities in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova have utilized social media to achieve policy outcomes in all three areas. However, due to asymmetries between these countries and their conflicts, the authors will not rely on any standard formula of analysis.

Azerbaijan toward Nagorno-Karabakh[236]

For the past two decades, the status of Nagorno-Karabakh has been ambiguous. Although the international community recognizes the enclave as being a part of Azerbaijan,[237] the 1994 ceasefire agreement left control of the area and seven adjacent districts—amounting to roughly nine percent of Azerbaijan’s territory[238]—in the hands of Armenian troops. Without the ability to exercise power in the region,[239] President Ilham Aliyev has resorted to words, declaring that “Azerbaijani lands [must] be liberated from the occupational forces and our fellow citizens [must be allowed to] go back to their native homes.”[240] Attempting to persuade the global community to intervene more strongly in his favor—and perhaps prolong the conflict for his own political gain—Aliyev has pushed his administration to wage information warfare against Armenia through both traditional media and diplomatic efforts. With the recent rise of the Internet in Azerbaijan, he has also begun encouraging non-state actors to join the fight and to help shape the course of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through individual efforts of information warfare. The aim of this section is to

explore and analyze this activity.

Background of the Conflict

Territorial ownership of Nagorno-Karabakh has been hotly contested since the early 1900s, when Armenia and Azerbaijan declared independence from Russia and asserted their respective claims over the enclave. Although control was ultimately granted to the latter by the Soviet Union, the ethnic Armenian majority in Karabakh increasingly pressed for reunification with Armenia—and thus secession from Azerbaijan—after Stalin’s death. As political disagreement between the secessionist movement in Karabakh, Azerbaijan and ultimately Armenia, intensified in the late 1980s, Armenians in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis in Armenia were forced from their homes when full-fledged fighting broke out in the Karabakh mountains in 1992. Although a cease-fire was brokered two years later, the conflict led to over 30,000 people killed, more than one million individuals displaced,[\[241\]](#) and numerous reports of rapes, beatings and destruction on both sides.

While leaders of both Armenia and Azerbaijan have intermittently met for peace negotiations over the past two decades, the outlook for agreement remains bleak. Talks have broken down as recently as 2011. Defense spending has increased by 25 percent over the past year in Armenia and by 30 times over the past decade in Azerbaijan.[\[242\]](#) Moreover, rhetoric has become increasingly combative, with Azerbaijan pushing for a “military solution” and Armenia talking of a “preventive strike.”[\[243\]](#) Although war in the near future seems highly unlikely, attitudes in both countries appear to have hardened against peace.

International news agencies covering the talks frequently attribute this stalemate to “domestic politics,” stating “leaders risk an angry domestic reaction if they are seen as conceding” and lack “the political will to present a deal to their citizens.”[\[244\]](#) While public opinion is certainly an obstacle, the current administration in Azerbaijan has not hesitated to use the conflict “to stoke the fires of nationalism to boost . . . support at home.”[\[245\]](#) Having created a historical and ethno-cultural narrative of Nagorno-Karabakh that “strikes an emotional chord with military and political leaders, including members of the opposition,”[\[246\]](#) Aliyev has often used the conflict to detract attention away from internal discontent and rally citizens around a shared Azerbaijani identity where Armenia, and not his administration, is the enemy. He consequently has a vested interest in either winning or extending the conflict, but not necessarily in resolving it through compromise.

Regardless, Aliyev has pushed his administration to wage information warfare against Armenia through both traditional media (e.g. newspapers, television broadcasts, and books) and diplomatic efforts (e.g. international conferences, workshops and seminars). He has also increasingly called upon non-state actors to join the fight as a part of their civic duty, declaring in 2013:

The state undertakes the fundamental task here, of course. But representatives of the media should also try to inform the international community about our fair position, in particular, on the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is necessary to create online resources in different languages. It is necessary to inform the world community of the historical truth about Nagorno-Karabakh.[\[247\]](#)

Use of Websites in Information Warfare

In response, dozens of websites presenting information about the conflict from an Azerbaijani point of view have sprung up[\[248\]](#) with many non-profit organizations devoting a page or two of their websites to similar content as well (table 1). A small sample of Internet resources found by a simple Google search reveals they are fairly well-constructed, with easy-to-navigate menus and

simple, readable designs. The most commonly used language is English, followed by Russian, indicating that the websites are targeting foreigners, particularly those in countries who wield significant voting power in international organizations like the United Nations.

Yet, despite their clear intent to inform, it is difficult to determine if these websites and pages are being read. Increasingly, Internet users are receiving links and advertisements that take them to websites, rather than searching for websites themselves. As a result, simply making online resources available is no longer enough to ensure that people will visit and read the content, much less find it persuasive and become motivated to take action.

Social media is consequently being used by more sophisticated websites to draw traffic and increase the number of readers. The most prominent of these is Justice for Khojaly,[\[249\]](#) which was started in May 2008 by Aliyev's eldest daughter, Leyla Aliyeva. While Aliyeva actively promotes the website at international conferences and consequently receives worldwide press coverage, she and her staff have also used the power of social media to attract visitors on a micro-level.

Table 1. Websites presenting an Azerbaijani point of view on the conflict have arisen in the past several years

Organization/Website	Declared Mission	Language
Armenian Terror human.az	None stated	English
Azerbaijan America Alliance azerbaijanamericaalliance.org/nagorno-karabakh	The Alliance is a non-partisan, non-profit organization providing information broadly about the people, culture, society, industry, history and current events of the Azeri people.	English
Azeri Genocide www.khojaly.org.az	None stated	English
The European Azerbaijan Society teas.eu/nagorno-karabakh	The European Azerbaijan Society (TEAS) is a UK-registered pan-European organization dedicated to raising awareness of Azerbaijan and fostering closer economic, political and cultural links between that country and the nations of Europe.	English
Heydar Aliyev Foundation azerbaijan.az/portal/Karabakh/General/generalInfo_e.html	The Heydar Aliyev Foundation was created in memory of the founding father of Azerbaijan and seeks to teach new generations about their country's rich cultural heritage, the importance of its philosophy, and ideas of	English

national statehood.

The Campaign is aimed at raising international civil awareness through demonstration of creative photos and images of suffered people in the Karabakh conflict and Khojaly Massacre in particular and reaching out globally via Media, Internet and Live events . . . The Campaign is also aimed at raising awareness on grave situation of oppressed people (due to total ethnic cleansing, only Armenians remain at these territories) under the military regime of occupation forces in Nagorno-Karabakh and on necessity for promotion of liberation of this ancient cradle of civilization.

English

Justice for Khojaly
justiceforkhojaly.org

Karabakh.org is independent nonprofit community aimed to increase public awareness about Karabakh and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict providing wide range scholarly information reflecting various aspects of Karabakh, the region of Azerbaijan.

English

Karabakh.org
karabakh.org

As a Society we would like to see the Nagorno-Karabakh issue given

Karabakh: Through History and Facts

www.karabakh.co.uk

more prominence in global diplomatic circles . . . It is disappointing to us that despite countless UN resolutions . . . the Minsk Group and other nations are letting the illegal occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenia to carry on.

English

Karabakh

www.karabakh-doc.azerall.info

None stated

Russian

My Azerbaijan

myazerbaijan.org/index.php

Web Studio ACCESS announces the launch of the beta version of the electronic library MyAzerbaijan.ORG. This site is created for users who are interested in what is happening in Azerbaijan and the Trans-Caucasus region.

Russian

Xocali

khojaly.preslib.az

None stated

Azerbaijani

Justice for Khojaly has accounts on Facebook,[\[250\]](#) Twitter,[\[251\]](#) and YouTube,[\[252\]](#) which have almost 53,000 likes, 42 followers, and 147 subscribers respectively.[\[253\]](#) Facebook clearly dominates as the website’s main social media platform and while it is difficult to determine whether visitors found the website first and then liked it or vice versa, it is clear that the website has been able to keep the attention of Facebook users. A steady number of people were “talking about” it at the beginning of 2014 and new likes have continued even five years after its creation (figure 1).[\[254\]](#)

Figure 1. Facebook is the main social media platform for Justice for Khojaly with almost 53,000 likes

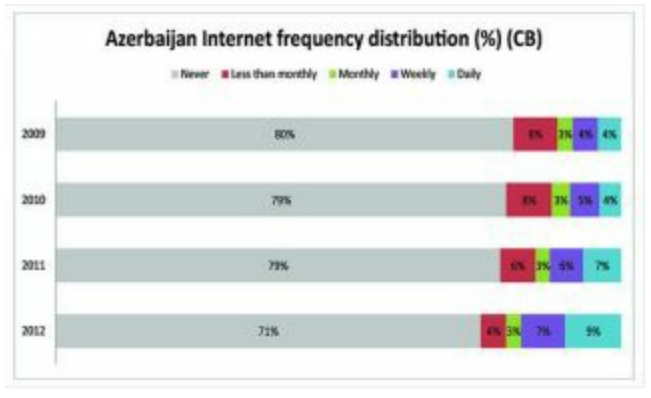


Use of Social Media in Information Warfare

While the demographic profile of visitors to Justice for Khojaly and similar websites remains unknown, a fair assumption can be made that most of them are not the intended foreign audience, but actually Azerbaijani youth taking advantage of increased access to the Internet. Although the great majority cannot afford the computers and modems that would enable them to have high-speed Internet in their homes, Azerbaijanis are increasingly finding Internet at schools, work, local NGOs and Internet cafes. The number of individuals using the Internet has consequently soared to over half of the Azerbaijani population—roughly five million people—in 2012,[\[255\]](#) essentially doubling from 27.4 percent in 2009 and rapidly surging from 8.0 percent in 2005 (figure 2). Although estimates by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers suggest much lower levels of Internet penetration at roughly 23.0 percent in 2012, their data also finds frequency of use has increased—albeit slowly—with the percentage of daily and weekly users doubling between 2009 and 2012 (figure 3).

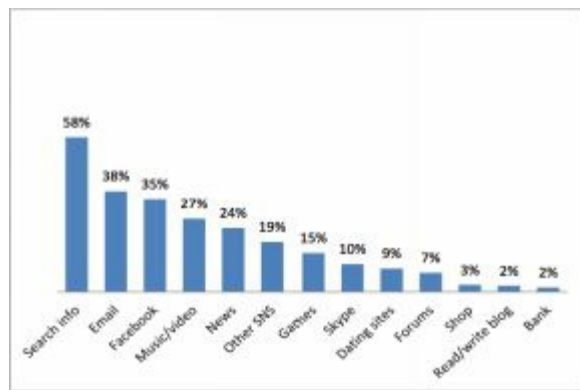
Figure 2. Access to the Internet has been rapidly increasing over the last decade . . .

Figure 3. . . . with daily and weekly frequency of use slowly going up.



Once online, these users spend more than half of their time searching for information (figure 4), which is unsurprising given that the government has frequently prosecuted and imprisoned traditional media journalists who criticize authorities^[256] and newspapers and TV newscasters consequently cover stories on an extremely superficial level. This recent rise of Internet use presents a unique opportunity for Azerbaijan in its efforts to wage information warfare in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. With the Internet in general and social media in particular, information is easy to pass along instantaneously.

Figure 4. Most users go online to search for information typically ignored or distorted by traditional media



On Facebook, for instance—where more than one-third of users go when on the Internet, individuals cannot only share websites, “like” posts, and comment on each other’s walls, but also have their actions broadcasted on Newsfeeds where friends and friends of friends can see them multiple times. This provides an avenue for websites to be promoted by any individual—not necessarily just the creator of the online resource—to a social network that extends beyond their closest contacts. Additionally, individuals concerned with a particular topic can form groups with members who have similar interests and thus spread content to many people through one centralized hub. As a result, social media provides Facebook users with a channel to quickly and easily share news articles, videos, and websites featuring Azerbaijan’s point of view through posts on their own wall as well as group walls.

While no statistics on the number of posts, likes and shares about Nagorno-Karabakh exist, a simple search for “Karabakh” on Facebook results in a list of hundreds of pages and groups that call for war and brutality against Armenia.^[257] Names of these groups range from “DO NOT RECOGNIZE THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH REPUBLIC!!!!” with over 12,000 likes to “Karabakh is Ours!!! (Karabakh is Azerbaijan)” with more than 3,000 likes to “Karabakh + Azerbaijan = Love” which

features a profile picture declaring “F*** U Armenia.” Activity levels and exact content vary by group, but on the whole, subscribers are Azerbaijanis with social networks that rarely extend to foreigners. In fact, the most commonly used language of these groups is Azerbaijani. Those groups using English have far fewer members and less frequent posts by members.

Specific events have also added fuel to the fire. When a small skirmish broke out on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, tensions were heightened, but did not result in any armed escalation. Nevertheless, rumors abound and Twitter users instantly began spreading their understanding of what happened through tweets, such as “Çiraqlı village liberated” and later “a state of emergency, troops going places, all out war” and “Armenia and azerbaijan [sic] got into a war and russia [sic] is bombing azerbaijan [sic]. RIP to the 54 armenians [sic] who lost their lives.” Although some users cautioned against making hasty statements without proof, Twitter appears to some to “run the risk of potentially becoming a new instrument for increasing [tensions] further.”[\[258\]](#)

Although President Aliyev called on non-state actors to engage in information warfare in order to gain the attention of the international community, their efforts appear to have primarily attracted the attention of Azerbaijanis. With social media bundling information about Nagorno-Karabakh into a form that can be quickly and easily reposted, re-shared and re-liked, individuals are increasingly waging information warfare on a micro-level, but in doing so, their efforts are frequently aimed toward those in their own social network who happen to be also Azerbaijani and well-acquainted with the Azerbaijani narrative of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As such, these efforts ultimately end up reaffirming the Azerbaijani perspective and further entrench Azerbaijanis against making the concessions necessary for any viable peace settlement. Information warfare efforts waged through social media by Azerbaijanis have consequently turned into a self-indoctrination that heightens tensions and prolongs the conflict.

What Does the Future Hold?

With the information and communications technology sector developing at such a rapid pace in Azerbaijan—second only to energy—the government has increasingly focused on developing Internet accessibility. Over \$500 million has been allocated by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies to install fiber-optic cables and satellite communications[\[259\]](#)—so that all the regions of Azerbaijan can have access to high-speed Internet by 2017[\[260\]](#)—and the price of unlimited, high-speed Internet has decreased from 500 Azerbaijani manats (\$700 US) per month in 2008 to 10 manats (\$12) in 2013[\[261\]](#)—registering one of the biggest increases in affordability in International Telecommunication Union’s ICT Price Basket between 2008 and 2011.[\[262\]](#)

The use of social media in Azerbaijan is thus poised to take off over the next five years and while social media has yet to substantially change the official status of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it could significantly alter the conflict in the future. On the one hand, it could increasingly be used by Azerbaijanis who feel that part of their civic duty is to engage in information warfare and attempt to “enlighten” foreigners and international communities about the conflict from an Azerbaijani point of view. On the other, it holds the promise of engaging more and more Armenians and Azerbaijanis in direct dialogue, with the hope that increased communication and cooperation could lead to conflict resolution and peaceful co-existence. Activists from both Armenia and Azerbaijan have therefore begun making presentations about the use of social media tools for youth and starting multilateral

efforts like Conflict Voices[263] to battle “negative perceptions and stereotypes, perpetuated by nationalists and often amplified by the local media”[264] that prevent both sides from entertaining ideas of peace. A growing number of Facebook groups are also pushing a new path forward with eloquent statements such as “Join this group if you’ve had enough . . . Join this group if you believe the region’s leaders should do the right thing, lay down their shields, and affect real, positive change.”

While there is room for one or both trends to grow, there is also potential for online progress to stagnate or reverse course. Particularly worrisome is the fact that while the government has yet to censor social media to the same degree as traditional media,[265] it is increasingly cracking down on online efforts, particularly after 2011, when the Arab Spring inspired a series of pro-democracy protests.[266] International organizations and Azerbaijanis may therefore have a very short window of opportunity should they wish to use social media for conflict resolution rather than information warfare.

Georgia toward Abkhazia and South Ossetia[267]

Historically, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been two ethnically and culturally distinct regions, but both were long-linked to their Georgian neighbors. During the Soviet period, the two territories experienced autonomy with caveats—their self-governance was subordinated to the central authorities and contained within the framework of the Georgian Soviet Republic. This included policies that disadvantaged the Abkhaz and Ossetian languages in favor of Georgian and Russian, particularly during the regime of Joseph Stalin, né Dzhughashvili.

As the Georgian SSR declared its independence in the early 1990s, two consecutive but overlapping conflicts broke out that would cement the de facto independence first of South Ossetia (1992) and then of Abkhazia (1993). The conflicts were notable for their ethnically charged component, the lack of military organization, equipment and training on both sides, and the involvement of the Russian Federation. Later, the Russian-Georgian War in 2008, also known as the Five-Day War, was ignited by tensions and skirmishes in South Ossetia, but the conflict was quickly broadened to a second front in Abkhazia. It resulted in the occupation of both territories by Russian troops, and, subsequently, in the partial recognition of the two territories’ authorities by Russia and five other UN member states.

Significantly, information warfare formed an integral front in the Russian-Georgian conflict—and it operated in several dimensions of public opinion. Most prominent was the well-documented battle for international public opinion, which was linked to the efforts for recognition of the two quasi-states and to the role of international mediators.[268] Second, there were internal campaigns in the two contested regions to morally discredit the other side, although in marked contrast to the 2014 conflict in Ukraine’s Donbas region, these internal efforts were secondary, perhaps because the societal division between Georgia and the territories was already quite deeply rooted. Finally, there was an information campaign within the Russian Federation itself to portray the involvement of its own military as a humanitarian intervention to protect Russian citizens, which led to then-President Dmitry Medvedev’s highest approval rating while in office and may have augured, as the *New York Times* argued, the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014.[269]

Georgian political scientist Kornely Kakachia describes the constant desire to raze and rebuild between administrations, as one of the great tragedies of Georgian politics.[270] While he spoke in

terms of presidential palaces, the same might well be said of social media strategy, which requires an equally lengthy construction period to both build an audience and focus an effective long-term messaging strategy.

Georgia under President Mikheil Saakashvili was replete with young western-educated officials open to implementing digital solutions. Certainly, the administration's track record in e-governance initiatives suggest a breeding ground for digital policy innovation. So why did the peace process fall outside the scope of online governance? A partial answer may lie in the many reincarnations of the state institution responsible for reintegration of the territories.

As early as 2007, the then-titled State Ministry on Conflict Resolution Issues discussed the possibility of using online resources and social media as a cost-effective method of reaching residents of the territories and breaking the information monopoly of Russian-language media.[\[271\]](#)

Interestingly, this strategy was conceived primarily in terms of the track-two diplomacy, that is to say the Georgian state's social media efforts were designed primarily to facilitate unofficial, organic contact between ordinary citizens in Georgia and its breakaway provinces.[\[272\]](#) Initially, these efforts primarily targeted news websites and forums read by Abkhaz residents—official Georgian efforts mainly involved sponsoring bloggers and pundits sympathetic to the Georgian narrative of the conflict, many of whom were based in Tbilisi. In the admission of one former official, these efforts were rarely effective persuasion, but simply inserting the Georgian perspective into online discussions.

Following the Russian-Georgian War in 2008, much attention was paid to Russian policy of passportization in Georgia's breakaway republics, which used soft-power incentives, including free education, to incentivize residents to claim a Russian passport. According to one report, in 2009, half of all South Ossetian graduates received free education and a stipend to study in Russia. In 2010, Abkhazia was unable to produce enough qualified graduates to meet the number of full-ride scholarships offered by Moscow.[\[273\]](#)

Itself rebuilt in early 2008, the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reintegration of South Ossetia and Abkhazia led government efforts to structure incentives for residents to adopt the Georgian passport, offering free access to healthcare and higher education. The program did not achieve its desired results and research showed that public awareness of the initiative in Abkhazia and South Ossetia was low. To address this, a YouTube video was developed to promote the offer of free higher education associated with claiming a Georgian passport. Students of Abkhaz and Ossetian background were filmed speaking about the project in front of universities and landmarks across Tbilisi. The video was filmed, produced and edited, but never uploaded. Instead, there were several changes in leadership and the project was suspended.

The ministry's new administrators were skeptical of social media's actual reach in the breakaway regions and it decided instead to pursue a brass PR strategy, one relying on word of mouth and traditional methods of information, such as distributing pamphlets at the border. According to officials in August 2013, this more targeted approach reached residents of the breakaway regions already traveling to Georgia, who were more likely to be receptive to the program.

Under the direction of Paata Zakareishvili, the ministry has changed course on social media in the reintegration process, at least with regard to Abkhazia. Part of the reason for this may be that

Zakareishvili has remained in place long enough to start a social media presence, avoiding a cabinet reshuffle the June 2014 local elections.[\[274\]](#) On January 1, 2014, the Office of the State Minister for Reintegration was renamed and rebranded to the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. On May 20, 2014, the same office launched Facebook and Twitter accounts in the Abkhaz language aimed at reaching residents of the breakaway region. The government-run portal Agenda.ge explained the decision as follows:

As the majority of Abkhazians did not understand the Georgian language and had no access to Georgian resources, the Georgian Government decided to expand its social media reach and have its words translated into the Abkhaz language. This would help residents in Abkhazia gain a better understanding of the goings-on in Georgia.

“Unfortunately our countrymen living in Abkhazia is only provided with information in Russian on the Internet and in the media, which in many cases, does not reflect the truth,” said the press office of the Georgian Government.

Meanwhile, Georgia is the only country that has taken liability to protect the Abkhazian ethnicity, culture and language.[\[275\]](#)

The first Tweet of @govgeoabkhaz came nearly a month after this official announcement, on April 30, 2014. Since then, the account has garnered a pitiful 116 followers[\[276\]](#) and a thorough analysis of these followers showed that the vast majority were based in Tbilisi. Close to half of the followers had identifiably ethnic Georgian surnames; a significant percentage of profiles were official Georgian government accounts.

Only two followers had profiles indicating their users were actually residents of Abkhazia. Ironically, one of these was the official outreach Twitter account of the Government of Abkhazia, @Abkhaziagovge, which tweets primarily in Georgian, English and Russian—but never Abkhaz.[\[277\]](#) The Abkhaz account has been in operation two years longer and, at the time of this writing, its 158 followers outnumbered the Georgians’ account. It is worth noting that the Georgian government did not return the follow.

The new Facebook page aimed at Abkhazians has a slightly more robust following of some 512 likes, reflecting the wider usage of Facebook across the region.[\[278\]](#) The content on the Facebook page is also updated on a more regular basis. Although the page’s privacy settings do not allow users to view other subscribers, unsurprisingly, the Facebook analytic tool Most Engaged Insights, lists Tbilisi as the most-reached geographic area.

While the official websites and news portals of the Georgian government do offer versions in the Russian language, it is worth noting that the Abkhaz outreach accounts from the Reconciliation have not been complemented by Russian-language versions. Nor have official accounts been opened on popular Russian social networks like VKontakte. The spirit behind these efforts seem like a good first step, but only that. There is an overall lack of effort behind the Georgian government’s social media campaign.

The question then arises as to why the ministry would devote any resources at all to maintaining social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr.[\[279\]](#) One possible explanation is that the true audience for these social media accounts is not the Abkhaz population at all—but the international community. A Potemkin social media strategy may lie at intersection between public diplomacy and information warfare.

Demonstrating before the international court of public opinion that the Georgian government is proactively and culturally engaged in its breakaway provinces is one way to deny the quasi-states’

claims to solely represent their constituencies. By doing so, they deny them their most desired resource: legitimacy. In the ongoing battle over the international recognition of these breakaway territories, the perception of cultural outreach has gained strategic value in its own right. In other words, the ministry is not just tweeting to be on Twitter, but to occupy the moral high ground.

Yet, as the adage holds, anything worth doing is worth doing right. After the violence of the onset stage subsided, Georgia found itself in a contest with other actors to govern in its breakaway territories. The example of passport politics is the most obvious case of two states bidding to attract the citizenship of residents. Like traditionally understood forms of insurgency, Georgia's protracted conflict can be understood in terms of competition with its de facto states. As with any so-called beauty contest, marketing matters, and a social media campaign focused on genuine engagement could accomplish exactly this.

Even in the absence of hard data, we can infer that social media has the potential to reach not only ordinary citizens of Georgia's breakaway states, but those capable of determining politics there. In the spring of 2014, Abkhazia saw mass protests that led to the successful ouster of President Alexander Ankvab. The mobilization of these protests was an interesting hybrid of traditional and new media: On the one hand, the protests followed a controversial interview about formal association with Russia in the traditional mainstream press.[\[280\]](#) On the other hand, Liana Kvarchelia, a civil society activist in Sukhumi, notes the "war of words in social media" that accompanied the political crisis and describes the role that closed (non-public) Facebook groups play in organizing factions of dissidents.[\[281\]](#)

It is true that activists in Sukhumi might not use social media tools the same way as activists in Kyiv: Given the smaller populations of both Georgian breakaway states, ten thousand may achieve what takes 100,000 in Ukraine. Given less incentive to broadcast calls for mobilization and with regimes less accustomed to plurality, it is not surprising that Abkhaz social media networks are often invite-only.

But the Georgian government can ill afford to wait for its invitation. Until the parent state commits to building a consistent social media strategy, one durable across administrations, one that takes into account local languages and usage patterns, it will continue to undersell its potential to residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Moldova toward Transnistria[\[282\]](#)

Transnistria declared its independence from Moldova in September 1990, but de facto its independence was gained only in the aftermath of the brief war in mid-1992. There have been no armed clashes since then, but the conflicting parties have been unable to resolve the dispute. Negotiations are held in the so-called 5+2 format with participation of the OSCE, Russia, Ukraine, the EU and the US, all formally supporting Moldova's territorial integrity. No UN member state recognizes Transnistria. Current factors behind the dispute are similar to the initial ones. First, it is a politico-economic conflict over power and assets, which the parties do not want to share. Second, it is a geopolitical and socio-cultural dispute. Moldova is a more Western and Latin region while Transnistria is more Russified and still Sovietized. Moldova cooperates more closely with the European Union, the United States and Romania (which included Moldova in the interwar period), whereas Transnistria cooperates with Russia, even declaring its desire to join it. Moreover, Moscow

uses Transnistria as a lever over Moldova and keeps the separatist region alive giving it comprehensive support. Finally, it should be underlined that the Transnistrian conflict is not ethnic. Both the parent and de facto state are inhabited by the same ethnic groups: Moldovans, Russians, and Ukrainians, although the proportions are different.

Unlike its predecessor, the present Moldovan government, which took power in 2009, does not wage an information war against Transnistria, at least not overtly or on a large scale. There may indeed be some activities in this area, including social media. It is quite likely that the Moldovan intelligence agency penetrates social networks in order to gain primary source information about Transnistrian users, as well as the situation on-the-ground in various areas such as public opinion, which is not monolithic. It cannot be excluded that employees of the Moldovan state institutions and/or people paid by them engage incognito in domestic and foreign Internet discussions about Moldova and Transnistria, using various tactics such as trolling and propaganda. Importantly, until the spring of 2013, the Moldovan services may have worked with internet forums of the de facto state. The most popular of these—the Transnistrian Social Forum—had 10,000 unique visitors per day, although the region is inhabited by no more than 500,000 people. Because of content critical of the Transnistrian authorities, however, the forums were closed down by the authorities of the breakaway region.[\[283\]](#) Most likely, many forum users migrated to foreign social networks. For example, the popular group “Pridnestrov’ye” (Transnistria in Russian) on Facebook.[\[284\]](#)

Moldova does not use social media for conflict resolution. There are no such initiatives run by the government and there are most likely no such initiatives backed by the state either organizationally or financially. Admittedly, there is an account on Facebook of the Moldovan Bureau for Reintegration—the institution responsible for the promotion and realization of the governmental policy of state reintegration—but its activity should be considered public diplomacy.[\[285\]](#) The profile was set up as late as August 2013. In most cases, posts by the bureau refer to other online sources: a government news agency or interviews with Moldovan officials and articles by the local media. It means there is little original content, but the profile may be useful to people who enjoy working with social media and who want an aggregated source of information on Moldova’s take on the Transnistrian conflict. However, information is posted almost exclusively in Romanian, Moldova’s official language (termed “Moldovan” in the 1994 Constitution). This limits its audience worldwide, especially in the predominantly Russian-speaking Transnistria, and even partially in Moldova itself, where not everybody can (or wants to) speak Romanian. It also contributes to the alienation of the Transnistrian region, taking into account that the language problem has been one of factors behind the conflict since its very beginning; Romanian is seen by many as the language of the enemy.

Furthermore, the bureau’s profile has few comments, no outside posts on its wall and no discussions. Interactivity via messaging is doubtful: The bureau did not respond to this author’s inquiry in English related to the preparation of this section. All of these characteristics may explain why the profile was liked only 692 times as of October 30, 2014 (and 431 times as of January 26, 2014). It should be added that the Moldovan Bureau for Reintegration runs its website in Romanian, English and Russian.[\[286\]](#) It functions within the official website of the government and does not have an original Internet address. There is no link on the website to the bureau’s Facebook profile. The page is old-fashioned and not fully translated from Romanian into other languages, but it still has more original information than the Facebook account.

Finally, it ought to be mentioned that the senior officials responsible for the Transnistrian issue do not use social media. Eugen Carpov, the Deputy Prime Minister with prerogatives in the territorial reintegration of the country, is not present on social media. Gheorghe Bălan, the Head of the Bureau for Reintegration has a profile on Facebook[287] with public access but there is no personal activity except for materials shared by other Facebook users, related mainly to the Transnistrian conflict. His profile in Odnoklassniki is apparently abandoned. Similarly, if other officials have accounts on social media, they do not use them or limit their activity to non-political issues. Interestingly, many experts interested in the Transnistrian problem were very active on social media before they started working for the government. Their own citizen diplomacy did not transfer into social media work for the state. However, it cannot be excluded that officials use social media to gather information related to the Transnistrian conflict and for private communication connected to their work. There may also be non-public accounts.

As a whole, the digital public diplomacy of Moldova is better developed than its “Transnistrian element.” Although it offers little information on Transnistrian issues, it may improve the knowledge of foreign and domestic audience about Moldova and its policies and help shape the country’s positive image. This, in turn, may facilitate the Transnistrian settlement process. However, it ought to be added that Moldovan digital public diplomacy, with some exceptions,[288] is still in its foundation phase. It is poorly personalized, it has low levels of interactivity, it is imitative in many cases, it heavily prefers Romanian, ignores the Russian language and Russian social media, and it often serves for the promotion of individual politicians. Additionally, Moldova’s public presence on social media contrasts to Transnistria’s robust activity on the Internet, which was initiated by its president, Yevgeniy Shevchuk, who came to power in December 2011, and led by its foreign minister, Nina Shtanski.[289]

Some explanations—provided in September 2012, but likely to be repeated today—as to why Moldova neglects the use of social media within the Transnistrian conflict settlement were given by Moldovan officials dealing with the Transnistrian problem. Discussing the active use of social media by Transnistria, he said it should be perceived in terms of propaganda and added that it would be better for Moldova not to copy the Transnistrian online policy and start an information campaign on social media, since it would end up with unnecessary verbal confrontation. He referred to the many negative stereotypes that had appeared during the twenty years of the conflict and added it would be hard to refrain from reacting negatively to certain adversarial actions. He said that the campaign to prepare people from Moldova and Transnistria for a conflict settlement should be launched only when the political agreement between the conflicting parties was on the horizon.

Thus, social media is seen, at the current stage of the conflict, as a useless tool or even a threat rather than enabler. While Transnistria has adopted an aggressive online policy, the position expressed by the official is debatable. It seems it would be reasonable to square up against Transnistria’s social media activity and, at least selectively, target stereotypes and propagandistic statements. Furthermore, a well-prepared information campaign could help negotiate, reach and implement a resolution to the conflict, making it more viable.

There is another, deeper reason why Moldova ignores social media as a tool for facilitating reintegration. The problem predominantly results from its general approach toward the Transnistrian conflict. The authorities push the problem of the country’s reintegration into the background. While

the resources of such a small state are limited, almost all their energies are devoted to European integration. It is enough to recall the name of government coalition—the Pro-European Coalition (earlier the Alliance for European Integration)—to understand its top priority. Moreover, although this is not overtly admitted, the pro-Russian and authoritarian Transnistria is identified by the Moldovan authorities as an obstacle on Moldova's road to the European Union. It seems Moldova would prefer to follow the path of Cyprus: to approximate and integrate into the EU without its breakaway region, although it is quite unlikely the EU will accept another territorially divided member.

Additionally, as a diverse, internally incoherent structure and under constant pressure from the opposition, the government apparently finds it reasonable to leave aside the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict (but this does not mean that nothing is done on the matter). The unconstructive policy of Transnistria and its patron state, Russia, is another important, discouraging factor. Finally, there is almost no pressure on the government from society to deal with the Transnistrian conflict, because the people living in one of the poorest European states are preoccupied with their socio-economic problems.[\[290\]](#) But the past has proved that the people may be mobilized against a resolution, just like in 2003, when pressured mainly from the West but also from protesters made, at the last moment, then-Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin forgo signing the Russian settlement plan, the so-called Kozak Memorandum, which was negotiated behind the public's back.

As a result, the Moldovan Bureau for Reintegration is a weak structure,[\[291\]](#) it faces a problem in identifying a coherent message to spread,[\[292\]](#) and Moldova does not have a comprehensive reintegration strategy with an action plan,[\[293\]](#) except for some general policy assumptions.[\[294\]](#) The main assumption is that the Europeanization of Moldova—leading to a significant increase in its standard of living, democracy and free-market economy—will make the parent state more attractive to the Transnistrian population and its politico-economic elites and will encourage them to support the idea of reintegration with Moldova. Despite the fact that Moldova is a leader in the Eastern Partnership—the European Union's initiative to assist six states from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus with nearing and integrating into the EU—there have been few achievements perceptible by ordinary people so far. Thus, Moldova cannot tell Transnistrians much about its attractiveness. However, social media could be harnessed into a balanced and well-argued campaign in favor of the EU itself, which at present is associated, by the conservative population of Transnistria, but also by many in Moldova, with the propagation of homosexuality and economic crisis. Common values might be found and highlighted via social media. Moreover, Moldova could challenge these elements of Transnistrian propaganda.

There is also an objective factor limiting the use of social media by Moldova in its reintegration policy. There exists no ethnic or religious hatred between people living in Moldova and Transnistria, they even have a common football league and Olympic team,[\[295\]](#) and many people have relatives on the other side of the Dniester River. The internal border can be crossed with relative ease, there are about thirty direct buses daily between the capitals—Chisinau and Tiraspol. This means that physical interaction between ordinary people and programs facilitating reintegration can be implemented in the real world, although there are some limitations imposed mostly by the Transnistrian authorities.

However, social media could still be used to organize events, inform about them, present their results and maintain contacts between their participants after the events have ended. Non-

governmental initiatives could also be presented and given wider publicity. It should be added that despite the abovementioned contact, a majority of Moldovans are indifferent to what happens in and with Transnistria, while many Transnistrians are prone to believing the anti-Moldovan/Romanian propaganda, mistrustful of any Moldovan authorities and partially of the Moldovan people themselves. Social media could be a supplementary tool to challenge the attitude of the de facto state's inhabitants and to build trust between the two banks, the more so as it is another objective of Moldova's reintegration policy.[\[296\]](#)

Furthermore, social media could help Moldovan officials—very often unknown, misinterpreted or demonized in Transnistria and its sponsor, Russia—to spread their message without middlemen, to present their more accurate and human face by posting photos from informal situations, and maybe to show their positive attitude toward the Russian language and literature, etc.[\[297\]](#) Interestingly, the most liked post on the Facebook page of the Moldovan Bureau for Reintegration is a photo of its head planting a tree during the National Day of Greenery.[\[298\]](#)

A former Moldovan official, talking in September 2012 generally about digital diplomacy, pointed out that Moldovan politicians and diplomats—unlike their Transnistrian counterparts—were too busy to personally run social media accounts, while profiles managed by communication teams or institutions were very boring. However, some work in social media could be done by other, even lower-ranking officials and diplomats, ideally those who are the most tech-savvy. In the present circumstances, the Moldovan Bureau for Reintegration and embassies could be more active on social media. If needed, it is likely that support could be granted by the more digitized Western partners of Moldova. The former official also underlined that top Moldovan politicians work with traditional mass media, which reaches a greater audience both in Moldova and abroad, than a smaller subset of social media users. Yet social media gives an opportunity to quickly transmit information, to speak at any time of the day directly to the people, without reliance on traditional media. While the number of people who read a given message posted on social media is hard to determine, it is very likely that it will be noted by various experts, scholars and journalists, and then repeated by the traditional media. Some other officials dealing with Moldovan and Transnistrian issues may also pay attention. It can be added that while the de facto state's authorities have tightened their grip on the local media,[\[299\]](#) the inhabitants of Transnistria have had unhindered access to non-Transnistrian sources of information, including the Internet, so far. Its penetration rate is about 20–40 percent.[\[300\]](#)

The first step to improving Moldova's presently weak activity on social media related to the Transnistrian conflict settlement could be to introduce languages other than just Romanian. First of all, messages should be spread in Russian to influence Transnistrian and East European constituencies, mainly in Russia, which are rather more favorably inclined towards Transnistria than Moldova. It would be better for Moldovan officials to tell the story themselves than leave it to others. It would not be an economically or politically costly step, because Russian is widely spoken in Moldova, it dominates in Transnistria, and it has been an official language of official Moldovan-Transnistrian negotiations since their beginning. Another step could be to target Russian social media networks—such as VKontakte and Odnoklassniki—the most popular in the post-Soviet republics. But work with Facebook—ideally if complemented by the use of other Western social media networks, such as Twitter—should not be abandoned. It has the greatest number of users worldwide and is quite popular among experts, journalists, and politicians in the post-Soviet area, including in both Moldova

and Transnistria.

As it has been argued, despite certain constraints and limitations social media could, in some cases even *should* be used by Moldova to facilitate the Transnistrian conflict settlement process, or at least to contribute to the stabilization of the region and the improvement of Moldova's image. Additionally, new activity can be launched if Moldova redefines its policy toward Transnistria. To be sure, social media efforts may not cause robust effects, they may be even risky if these activities are not handled carefully. Transnistria may also take some countermeasures to impede their effectiveness such as trolling, hacking, and slander campaigns. But it is still worth trying, taking into account that social media is a low-cost tool and used with increasing intensity by more and more states. The Moldovan government has also achieved important e-government reforms. Interestingly, social media already has a place in the history of Moldova: The current authorities came to power in 2009 in the aftermath of events known worldwide as the Twitter revolution, although most likely the role of social media was not decisive.[\[301\]](#)

Conclusion

The long-perpetuated conflicts in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova all exhibit the importance of public information and communications strategy. Similarly, the reach of the Internet in general, and of social media networks in particular, is also on the rise in each of these cases. Yet none of the parent states examined have developed social media strategies in pursuit of the reintegration of their respective de facto states.

Azerbaijan leaves much of its online activity to non-state actors. They focus on information warfare with the aim of presenting Azerbaijani narrative on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to the world community. However, it turns out that the main audience is Azerbaijanis themselves what deepens their entrenchment and prolongs the conflict.

Georgia, which may have taken the most promising first steps in social media strategy, still seems more concerned with reaching the international community than the citizens in its breakaway republics. Its activity on social media lies at the intersection between public diplomacy and information warfare.

Finally, Moldova harnesses social media for the purpose of public diplomacy but, overall, focuses mainly on the Romanian-speaking audience and mostly ignores the use of online tools within the Transnistrian conflict settlement. The main reason for this is that Moldovan elites push the country's reintegration into the background and, instead, prioritize European integration.

With the 2014 conflict in eastern Ukraine polarizing opinions between the Russian-speaking world and the rest, the distinct lack of social media efforts in the Russian language seem especially shortsighted. The emerging prospect of another de facto state in the Donbas region highlights how poor governance and information warfare can tragically divide societies. It may also illustrate an incentive for those states seeking to regain full territorial reintegration to ease their reliance on information warfare and engage in conflict resolution in earnest, including genuine efforts to engage the residents of de facto states through social media.

Eytan Gilboa, a renowned expert on international communication, wrote in 2009 that "Actors that do not employ the Internet rob themselves of a highly useful tool for engaging in foreign policy and

diplomacy.”[\[302\]](#) The countries in this chapter seem not to have taken this advice to heart. Although social media has been successfully applied by states in the areas of public information and information warfare, its potential as a tool in conflict resolution has yet to be tested. The protracted conflicts of the post-Soviet space, with low levels of violence and high informational components, could be ideal proving grounds for mediation by way of social media. However, greater political will when it comes to conflict resolution is a necessary pre-requisite.

- [213] Abkhazia's MFA, "Otchet o deyatel'nosti."
- [214] "Enchanting Abkhazia," YouTube video, 3:54, posted by "MFA APSNY," February 7, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDyi-3FybBQ>.
- [215] Abkhazia's MFA, "Otchet o deyatel'nosti."
- [216] <http://abkhazworld.com/aw/>
- [217] <http://abkhazia.co.uk/>
- [218] <http://www.instabkhazia.com/>
- [219] <http://reflectionsonabkhazia.net/>
- [220] "About AW," Abkhaz World, <http://abkhazworld.com/aw/about>.
- [221] <http://apsnyteka.org/>
- [222] "Places that don't exist" is part of a BBC series on unrecognized states that included episodes on all four post-Soviet de facto states, broadcast in 2005.
- [223] In recent years, authors have referred to the possibility that de facto states had "caught on to what they perceive as a normative change in the international arena," accepting that "recognition might be awarded to entities that have succeeded in building effective, democratic institutions." By proving their viability, they could claim that they "earned" their sovereignty. See Nina Caspersen, "Separatism and Democracy in the Caucasus," *Survival* 50, no. 4 (2008): 114, doi:10.1080/00396330802329014.
- [224] See Nina Caspersen, "The Politics of Getting Online in Countries That Don't Exist," *The Conversation*, January 14, 2014, <http://theconversation.com/the-politics-of-getting-online-in-countries-that-dont-exist-21399>.
- [225] Abkhazia is a multi-ethnic territory, but ethnic Abkhaz have a dominant role in the political system of contemporary Abkhazia and by all evidence shape the territory's foreign policy.
- [226] Cf. John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Rebecca Chamberlain-Creangă, "Divided Space, Divided Attitudes? Comparing the Republics of Moldova and Pridnestrovie (Transnistria) Using Simultaneous Survey," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 54, no. 2 (2013): 227–58, doi: 10.1080/15387216.2013.816619; John O'Loughlin, Vladimir Kolossov, and Gerard Toal, "Inside Abkhazia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 27, no. 1 (2011): 1–36, doi:10.2747/1060-586X.27.1.1; Gerard Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail) and John O'Loughlin, "Inside South Ossetia: A Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2013): 136–72, doi:10.1080/1060586X.2013.780417.
- [227] After the efforts of Mikheil Saakashvili to re-brand Georgia, and the attempt to establish "Tbilisi—the city that loves you" as a brand in 2010, Armenia has also given signs of interest in creating its own brand by inaugurating in early 2014 a partnership with an American PR company with expertise in nation branding, see Siranuysh Gevorgyan, "Country Branding: New York-Based Company Working on Armenia's New Image," *ArmeniaNow.com*, February 26, 2014, http://armenianow.com/news/52298/armenia_country_branding_company.
- [228] See more on de facto states: Nina Caspersen, *Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).
- [229] Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media," *Business Horizons* 53, no. 1 (2010): 61.
- [230] *WordNet Search 3.1* (Princeton University), s.v. "information warfare," accessed December 29, 2013, <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=information+warfare>.
- [231] Brett van Niekerk and Manoj Maharaj, "Social Media and Information Conflict," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013), 1162–84.
- [232] Daniel Wehrenfennig, "From an Analog Past to a Digital Future: Information and Communication Technology in Conflict Management," in *Cyberspaces and Global Affairs*, ed. Sean S. Costigan and Jake Perry (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 23–49. Wehrenfennig focuses predominantly on use of information and communication technology in conflict resolution by non-official actors but these tools can be utilized in a similar way also by state actors. Moreover, he underlines governments use them even more actively.
- [233] Eytan Gilboa, "Media and Conflict Resolution: A Framework for Analysis," *Marquette Law Review* 93, no. 1 (2009): 93–97.
- [234] Wehrenfennig, "From an Analog Past to a Digital Future," 35–36. See also: Sheldon Himelfarb, "The Real eHarmony," *Foreign Policy*, January 2, 2014, accessed January 3, 2014, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/01/02/real_eharmony_virtual_exchanges_peace.
- [235] See more on public diplomacy and social media: Nicholas J. Cull, "The Long Road to Public Diplomacy 2.0: The Internet in US Public Diplomacy," *International Studies Review* 15 (2013), 123–39.
- [236] This section was written by Joyce Hahn.
- [237] "Statement of the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group," March 2008, accessed April 23, 2014, <http://www.osce.org/mg/49564>.

- [238] *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Nagorno-Karabakh War,” last modified April 25, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagorno-Karabakh_War.
- [239] Nagorno-Karabakh is currently self-governed by a de-facto independent entity, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.
- [240] President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, “Azerbaijan: Karabakh,” 2012, accessed April 23, 2014, <http://en.president.az/azerbaijan/karabakh>.
- [241] Zulfugar Agayev and Sara Khojoyan, “Kerry Calls for Karabakh Headway as Azeri-Armenian Talks Resume,” *Bloomberg*, November 19, 2013, accessed March 15, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-11-19/kerry-calls-for-karabakh-headway-as-azeri-armenian-talks-resume.html>.
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- [243] *Ibid.*
- [244] Ellen Barry, “Azerbaijan and Armenia Fail to End Enclave Dispute,” *New York Times*, June 24, 2011, accessed April 23, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/25/world/asia/25karabakh.html?_r=0.
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- [246] *Ibid.*
- [247] Ilham Aliyev, “Opening speech by President Ilham Aliyev at the Friend of Journalists award ceremony,” November 24, 2013, accessed April 23, 2014, <http://en.president.az/articles/10428>.
- [248] “Azerbaijani Official Calls for Information Warfare Against Armenia,” *HistoryofTruth.com: Armenian Allegations*, January 25, 2011, accessed April 23, 2014, <http://www.historyoftruth.com/news/azerbaijani-official-calls-for-information-warfare-against-armenia#.Ushrm2RDvYc>.
- [249] The Khojaly massacre or tragedy, known as the Khojaly genocide in Azerbaijan, was the killing of hundreds of ethnic Azerbaijani civilians from the town of Khojaly on February 25–26, 1992 by Armenian and Commonwealth of Independent States armed forces during the Nagorno-Karabakh War.
- [250] <http://www.facebook.com/JFKCampaign>
- [251] twitter.com/Jforkhojaly
- [252] <http://www.youtube.com/user/JUSTICEFORKHOJALYJFK>
- [253] As of April 23, 2014.
- [254] Justice for Khojaly’s Facebook account was created on June 2, 2009.
- [255] Shahla Sultanova, “Azerbaijan: Can Facebook Become Substitute for Live Opposition Protests,” *Eurasianet*, November 19, 2012, accessed April 23, 2014, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66201>.
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- [257] Arzu Geybullayeva, “Nagorno-Karabakh 2.0: How New Media and Track Two Diplomacy Initiatives Are Fostering Change,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2012).
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- [261] Abbasov, “Azerbaijan: How to Measure.”
- [262] Hamadoun I. Touré, “Speech by ITU Secretary-General, Dr. Hamadoun I. Touré presented at the ITU WSIS Forum, Thematic Workshop – Azerbaijan, Opening Remarks,” Geneva, May 15, 2013, accessed April 23, 2014, <http://www.itu.int/en/osg/speeches/Pages/2013-05-15-4.aspx>.
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- [266] *Ibid.*
- [267] This section was written by William Schreiber.

- [268] Matthew Collin, “Media war flares over S Ossetia,” *Al Jazeera*, November 24, 2008, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/focus/2008/11/20081122163930714458.html>.
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- [271] Unless otherwise stated, this information is based on a series of interviews in August 2013 with former and current communications officials at the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reintegration of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The author would like to thank the Office for its time and transparency.
- [272] Susan Allen Nan, “Track I Diplomacy,” *Beyond Intractability*, June 2003, Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/track1-diplomacy>.
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- [274] Olesya Vartanyan, “The political crisis in Abkhazia – expectations in Tbilisi,” July 2014, International Alert, accessed October 24, 2014, <http://www.international-alert.org/blog/political-crisis-abkhazia-expectations-tbilisi-en>.
- [275] “Georgian Government’s social media published in Abkhazian,” *Agenda.ge*, May 2014, accessed October 26, 2014, <http://agenda.ge/news/14463/eng>.
- [276] All account usage data is as of October 24, 2014.
- [277] Use of social media by the de facto states themselves is outside the scope of this chapter. Please see the description of Abkhazia’s use of digital media in Giorgio Comai’s chapter in this volume, “Post-Soviet De Facto States Online.”
- [278] <https://www.facebook.com/GeorgianGovernmentabkh>
- [279] As of October 20, according to the official website of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality: <http://www.smr.gov.ge/index.php?lng=eng>.
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- [281] Liana Kvarchelia, “What Happened in Abkhazia,” September 2014, International Alert, accessed October 24, 2014, <http://www.international-alert.org/blog/what-happened-abkhazia-en>.
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- [284] <https://www.facebook.com/groups/pridnestrovie/>
- [285] <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Biroul-pentru-Reintegrare/1399244030299700>
- [286] <http://www.gov.md/category.php?f=en&idc=600>
- [287] <https://www.facebook.com/george.balan.33>
- [288] One of exceptions is activity of Moldova’s ambassador to Estonia, Victor Guzun (Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/vguzun>; Twitter: @victorguzun). The Twitter activity of the Moldovan Foreign Ministry could also be mentioned (@Diplomacy_RM).
- [289] See Marcin Kosienkowski, “Transnistria’s Model of Facebook Diplomacy,” *New Eastern Europe*, September 18, 2012, accessed January 26, 2014, <http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/component/content/article/20-eastern-europe-50/369-transnistria-s-model-of-facebook-diplomacy>; Nina Caspersen, “The politics of getting online in countries that don’t exist,” *The Conversation*, January 14, 2014, accessed January 30, 2014, <http://theconversation.com/the-politics-of-getting-online-in-countries-that-dont-exist-21399>.
- [290] Settlement of the Transnistrian conflict is a top priority just for 1 percent of Moldovans, 3.5 percent calls it the second most important issue, while 7.2 percent—the third one. Institute for Public Policy, “Barometer of Public Opinion (Final Report),” November 2013, slide 22, accessed 30 January, 2014, <http://ipp.md/libview.php?f=en&idc=156&id=666>.
- [291] See Victor Chirilă, “Can Transnistria be reintegrated?,” *Analyses of the Foreign Policy Association of Moldova*, February 25, 2013, 5–6, accessed January 26, 2014, <http://www.ape.md/doc.php?f=en&idc=152&id=1932>.
- [292] The change of internal (between Moldova and Transnistria) border crossing rules, including the opening of Moldovan migration posts along the Dniester River, is a case in point. The media reported the Moldovan authorities’ plans—inspired by the European Union within the EU-Moldova visa liberalization process—in Spring 2013, while the bill was passed in October 2013. For almost all this period, the authorities found it difficult to give a clear explanation of how the new regulations would look. It was also unclear if some rules had

been implemented even before adopting the law. All of these doubts gave rise to harmful speculations and met with a negative reaction from Transnistria, since it believed in the worst-case scenario. In the end, it turned out that people living in Transnistria were not affected by the new regulations, although one Moldovan official interviewed shortly after bill's passing, said that nobody knew how exactly a crucial provision would be executed, namely how Transnistrians without Moldovan citizenship and "real" foreigners would be differentiated.

[293] See Victor Chirilă, *Politica de Reintegrare a Republicii Moldova: Viziune, strategii, mijloace* (Chişinău: Cartier, 2013), accessed January 26, 2014, <http://www.ape.md/lib.php?f=ro&idc=156>.

[294] See Marcin Kosienkowski, "The Alliance for European Integration and the Transnistrian conflict settlement," *Sprawy Narodowościowe—Nationalities Affairs* 38 (2011): 23–32.

[295] Adam Eberhardt, "The Paradoxes of Moldovan Sports. An insight into the nature of the Transnistrian conflict," *Point of View (Centre for Eastern Studies)*, November 2011, accessed January 26, 2014, http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/punkt_widzenia_26_en.pdf.

[296] For example, one interviewee, Octavian Milewski, suggests that "some money from the budget for reintegration (which is not spent properly) could be spent on pilot projects for using social media among high school kids, youth, and teachers as well. The goal would be to transmit messages of commonality, or, if not commonality, then of Europeaness. There could be a contest to bridge Transnistria through social media. Kids would like it. One project could be making Rezina kids reach out to Rybnitsa kids [neighboring Moldovan and Transnistrian towns located on the Dniester]. The OSCE Mission to Moldova [familiar with the use of social media] could flag this."

[297] In a 2007 talk with the section author, a senior Russian expert working at a Moscow-based branch of a Western think tank admitted he changed his mind about expert community unaffiliated with the then-Communist authorities, when he met its representatives in Moldova in a previous year. He was impressed by their Russian and appreciated their moderate views. Even this expert, with ties to the Western world, expected to meet anti-Russian non-Communists. Despite the fact that eight years passed and the non-Communists formed a Moldovan government that includes the mentioned experts, the present situation may not differ substantially. That is why suggested activities in social media—ideally personalized—could be useful.

[298] https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1426874194203350&set=a.1399754033582033.1073741827.1399244030299700&type=1&stream_ref=10

[299] Nikolay Pakhol' nitskiy, "Obzornoye vedomstvo," *Kommersant.md*, January 29, 2014, accessed January 29, 2014, <http://kommersant.md/node/25093>.

[300] There are no precise and reliable data about number of Internet users in Transnistria. A dominant Transnistrian Internet provider, Interdnestrcom, had seventy thousand wired Internet subscribers at the beginning of 2013. Sergey Ganzha, interview with the Transnistrian television channel *TSTV*, March 13, 2012, accessed January 28, 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=fl6jxTg_Es. While discussing closure of Transnistrian forums in 2013, one Transnistrian official said that "according to statistics, the Internet is used by no more than 0.10 percent of people, this also concerns Transnistria, where our elderly do not sit in front of computers." Quoted in Andrey Mospanov, "Zapreshchyennyye internet-forumy v Pridnestrov'ye otkryty ne budut," *RLA «Novyy Region»* 2, June 24, 2013, accessed January 28, 2014, <http://www.nr2.ru/policy/445560.html>. While the elderly are numerous in Transnistria, since younger people prefer to leave this poor region faced with unclear prospects, the 0.10 percent figure is heavily understated, even if the speaker considered only the number of users of the aforementioned forums.

[301] See Volodymyr V. Lysenko and Kevin C. Desouza, "Moldova's Internet Revolution: Analyzing the Role of Technologies in Various Phases of the Confrontation," *Technology Forecasting and Social Change* 79 (2012): 341–61; Henry E. Hale, "Did the Internet Break the Political Machine? Moldova's 2009 'Twitter Revolution that Wasn't,'" *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 21, no. 4 (2013): 481–506.

[302] Gilboa, "Media and Conflict," 99.

[303] For instance, Ronald Reagan stated in 1989 that "The Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip." See Evgeny Morozov, "How the Net aids dictatorships," filmed July 2009, TED video, 11:54, accessed August 12, 2013, http://www.ted.com/talks/evgeny_morozov_is_the_internet_what_orwell_feared.html.

[304] This pertains to blogging on LiveJournal, social networking via Facebook and VKontakte (the Russian version of Facebook) and micro-blogging on Twitter.

[305] Damir Gainutdinov, "RuNet: the 'Shit List,'" *Open Democracy*, May 21, 2014, accessed June 9, 2014, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/damir-gainutdinov/runet-%E2%80%98shit-list-roskomnadzor-censorship-in-russia%E2%80%99>.

[306] <http://navalny.livejournal.com/>

[307] Masha Egupova, "The Navalny Case: An Offline Power of Online Activism in Russia," *Vladivostok the city of sea and cucumber cliff* (blog), March 19, 2011, accessed August 2, 2013, <http://mashavladivostok.wordpress.com/2011/03/19/the-navalny-case->