Annual Media Monitoring Report 2024

Tracking and Fighting Disinformation and Influence Campaigns in the Baltic States

Introduction

This annual report is written based on and as a part of Balticdisinfo.eu project. The project is a monitoring platform developed by the Civic Resilience Initiative (CRI) with support from Google and in cooperation with the Skeptics Society (Skeptiskā biedrība) in Latvia and the National Centre of Defence & Security Awareness in Estonia.

The program's primary goal is to systematically analyse and combat the spread of disinformation in all three Baltic states — Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The platform focuses on identifying and addressing harmful content disseminated through social media, news outlets, and other communication channels, with particular attention to pro-Russian narratives.

By providing regular (weekly and monthly) reports and analyses, Balticdisinfo.eu aims to enhance public awareness and resilience against disinformation campaigns targeting the Baltic region. The platform serves as a valuable resource for understanding and countering the challenges of misleading information in these countries.

Key takeaways:

- The 2024 elections in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia became the main target of Kremlin-aligned actors and their campaigns. They used claims of electoral fraud, corruption, and general anti-government rhetoric to undermine trust in democratic processes.

- Disinformation campaigns criticised pro-EU outcomes, framed national leadership as incompetent, and questioned the legitimacy of coalitions and election integrity.

- In Lithuania, Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram were primary platforms for amplifying disinformation narratives. Latvia saw TikTok dominate, targeting both Latvian and Russian-speaking audiences. In Estonia, YouTube played a central role, with a single channel generating the most top-engaged posts.

- Across all three countries, disinformation leveraged economic challenges, anti-EU sentiment, cultural values, and social policies like LGBTQ rights to deepen societal divisions and foster mistrust in institutions.

- Anti-Ukrainian sentiment was prominent, portraying support for Ukraine as detrimental to national interests while framing the EU as imposing harmful policies.

- These campaigns sought to weaken national resilience and align public opinion with Kremlin interests by exploiting societal divisions, eroding trust in governance, and amplifying anti-EU and anti-Western narratives.

Methodology

This report was prepared using publicly available information sources and the YouScan media monitoring tool to systematically analyse and monitor media content across Lithuanian platforms that promote Kremlin-aligned narratives. The research encompassed the entire calendar year of 2024, spanning from January 1 to December 31. The analysis included a comprehensive review of various sources, such as websites, social media profiles, and communication channels. Throughout the study, YouScan identified and aggregated a total of 348,399 content pieces comprising posts, videos, articles, and comments. A significant portion of the analyzed data is available on the Balticdisinfo.eu platform.

Lithuania
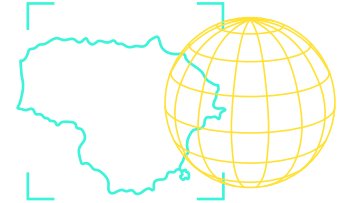
Elections at the Centerpiece of 2024

The threat of disinformation to societies has become a recurring focus in security discourse. The World Economic Forum highlights disinformation in the Global Risks Report 2024, NATO Strategic Concept 2022 and the U.S. National Security Strategy 2022 also addresses disinformation, citing it as a serious threat to democratic institutions and national security. The global transition of power in 2024 highlighted the critical need for extra vigilance towards the actions of hostile states within the information domain. The European External Action Service (EEAS) labelled 2024 as the year of the "super-elections" with at least 83 elections taking place globally. This scenario transformed the online space into a key battleground of soft power.

Democracy Times Three: the Lithuanian Case

In Lithuania, the global trend was particularly evident with three major elections held between May and October 2024: the Presidential Elections, European Elections, and elections to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. These events offered fertile ground for disinformation campaigns targeting Lithuania's political and social stability.

The Department of State Security (DSS), in its 2024 National Security Threat Assessment, highlighted the persistent challenge posed by Russian disinformation. Propaganda narratives about the war in Ukraine were shown to resonate with a significant portion of the Lithuanian public, despite the broader support for Ukraine within Lithuanian society. This demonstrated the enduring reach of Kremlin-backed narratives within segments of the population, particularly among disengaged and passive electorates. In the context of these elections, pro-Russian actors launched targeted public relations campaigns designed to consolidate their base of supporters and mobilize them to participate in the electoral process. These efforts aimed to increase voter turnout among pro-Russian sympathizers and secure votes for candidates promoting Kremlin-aligned policies.

Presidential Elections

The 2024 Presidential elections were conducted in two rounds, showcasing a competitive and vibrant democratic process. The first round took place on May 12, 2024, with a turnout of almost 60%, while the second round was held on May 26, 2024, with a turnout of 49.7%. Incumbent President Gitanas Nausėda won re-election, securing a decisive victory over his main challenger, former Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė. In the runoff, Nausėda garnered 74.2% of the vote compared to Šimonytė's 24.3%.

Popular Disinformation Narratives

One recurring narrative alleged widespread electoral fraud. For example, some sources claimed that even "800K voting ballots were falsified" and elections were rigged, and questioning the core of a democratically led country. These efforts aimed to undermine trust in the electoral process and were amplified by pro-Kremlin outlets, framing the elections as fundamentally flawed. Overall, the anti-government rhetoric was used frequently, such as calling both of the candidates "evil"[1]. (see SCREENSHOT 1).

SCREENSHOT 1.
The photo, taken during a break in the presidential debates. On the right, wearing sunglasses is Eduardas Vaitkus. On the left, other candidates can be seen, with Ingrida Šimonytė and Dainius Žalimas in the foreground.

[1] The link to the picture 1 is: https://laisvas.info/.well-known/sgcap-tcha/?r=%2Fteismas-vertina-ar-uztenka-irodymu-kad-prezidento-rinkimai-suklastoti%2F&y=ipr:62.197.149.126:1738223689.459

European Elections

The European Elections in Lithuania were held on June 9, 2024, and saw a turnout of 29%, slightly lower than the Presidential elections but consistent with historical trends. The results reinforced Lithuania's commitment to the European Union, with pro-EU parties securing the majority of seats. The Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) secured three seats, making them the dominant party. The Social Democratic Party (LSDP) won two seats, while smaller parties like the Labour Party, Liberal Movement (LRLS), National Alliance, and Freedom Party each gained one seat.

Popular Disinformation Narratives

Disinformation efforts during the European Elections often sought to undermine Lithuania's role within the European Union. Some Kremlin-aligned media outlets commented and openly questioned the outcomes of the European Parliament elections that recently took place in Lithuania. This Kremlin-aligned media focus on domestic issues, coupled with negativity towards the EU, aligns with common tactics used by pro-Kremlin actors[2] (see SCREENSHOT 2).

SCREENSHOT 2.
A collage from the portal: on the left, a photo of Vytautas Landsbergis alongside a quote attributed to him, "Kas meluoja, tas ir vagia" ("He who lies also steals").

When talking about the results, the victory of the conservative party, as frequently noticeable, was heavily criticised by the Kremlin-aligned actors. The "poor voter turnout" explanation by the Chairperson of The Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania, that election fatigue got in the way of higher turnout, was used to generate content. The European Elections were no exception for doubts about their transparency while questioning their results, discrediting elections, claiming that Lithuania joined to EU through an illegal referendum and finalised with anti-government sentiments, criticising those who are in charge and already targeting those who will be replacing them.

Seimas Elections

The Seimas elections marked a pivotal moment in Lithuania's domestic political landscape. The first round took place on October 13, 2024, with a turnout of 52.2%, and the second round was held on October 27, 2024, with a turnout of 41.4%. The Social Democratic Party (LSDP) emerged victorious, securing 52 seats, while the Homeland Union (TS-LKD) won 28 seats. The coalition consists of The Social Democratic Party (LSDP), the Union of Democrats "For Lithuania", and Nemuno Aušra which secured 86 seats in the Parliament.

Nemuno Aušra was the focus of several disinformation narratives during the Seimas elections. Its inclusion in Lithuania's governing coalition caused public backlash against the party. It was highlighted through events such as the "10 Minutes of Silence" protest, which was portrayed as widespread dissatisfaction with the coalition's legitimacy[3] (see SCREENSHOT 3).

SCREENSHOT 3.
A moment from the "10 tylos minučių" protest: in the crowd, a sign resembling the cover of TIME magazine can be seen, depicting Žemaitaitis with a Hitler-style moustache, referencing his antisemitic remarks.

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[2] The link to the picture 2 is: https://ekspertai.eu/uz-sukciavima-rinkimu-ose-atsakingai-vyriausiajai-rinkimu-komisijaidar-teks-papluseti-ir-teisme111921/

[3] The link to the picture 3 is: https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-eng-lish/19/2413438/several-thousand-people-protest-against-lithuania-s-coalition-government

Popular Disinformation Narratives

The Seimas elections became a focal point for disinformation campaigns, with multiple narratives targeting the process and specific political players. For example, Kremlin-aligned narratives have defended Nemuno Aušra led by Remigijus Žemaitaitis, who faces accusations of antisemitism from criticism by former President Dalia Grybauskaitė. Kremlin-aligned narratives not only dismissed her concerns but also attacked her credibility, accusing her of being a Kremlin collaborator[4] (see SCREENSHOT 4).

Grybauskaitė: negaliu vertinti kitaip tik kaip kremlinio dvoko koalicija su fašistuojančių rudmarškinių prieskoniu [23]

Paskelbta: 2024-11-11 08:51 | Autorius: ekspertai.eu

SCREENSHOT 4.
The article features a 2014 photograph of former President of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė.

Claims of electoral fraud were also featured in the disinformation efforts. For instance, Kremlin-aligned outlets amplified narratives suggesting that "widespread falsification" occurred during the Seimas elections, framing the results as manipulated. Zigmas Vaišvila, a signatory of Lithuania's Act of Independence, is frequently cited by pro-Russian and Kremlin-controlled media, raising concerns about his alignment with anti-democratic narratives even held a press conference to share his knowledge of missing ballots.

What did all three elections have in common?

A comparative analysis of the three elections reveals consistent patterns in disinformation efforts. Across all three, narratives questioning the integrity of the electoral process were prominent. The Presidential elections saw intense personalisation of attacks, targeting individual candidates, while the European and Seimas elections focused more on institutional and systemic critiques. Platform usage also varied. Facebook emerged as the dominant platform for rapid dissemination of disinformation, while YouTube facilitated more in-depth propaganda. Telegram played a crucial role in amplifying fringe narratives and conspiracy theories. The report will delve deeper into the three most prominent disinformation narratives in Lithuania in the following chapters.

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[4] The link to the picture 4 is: https://ekspertai.eu/grybauskaitenegaliu-vertinti-kitaip-tik-kaip-kremlinio-dvoko-koalicija-su-fasistuojanciu-rudmarskiniu-prieskoniu/

Main disinformation narratives

The material of different Kremlin-aligned sources analysed throughout the year resulted in narratives that revealed various themes and perspectives, reflecting a broad spectrum of disinformation efforts in Lithuania. However, three overarching narratives emerged as the most prominent, dominating virtual discussions and shaping perceptions of the targeted audiences. These narratives were deliberately crafted to exploit societal divisions, undermine trust in local institutions, and manipulate public opinion. By focusing on these three categories, malign sources aimed to amplify discord and weaken resilience against external influence. Each theme was further supported by specific sub-narratives that reinforced its messaging and helped contextualise its intent and impact. Below are listed the three narratives with specific sub-narratives that were included in the count:

1. General Anti-Government Sentiments
(occurred in 50 out of 52 weekly reports)

This category encompasses narratives that reflect widespread mistrust and hostility toward governmental institutions and politicians of Lithuania. Sub-narratives include claims of "anti-government narratives," "questioning the transparency of politicians," and "mistrust in official institutions." They also involve "questioning the country's security" and "creating divisions between politicians and ordinary citizens." The narrative that "the government is corrupt" and the effort to "minimise trust in official institutions" are central to this category. Collectively, these sub-narratives aim to paint the government as untrustworthy and disconnected from its citizens, eroding public confidence and creating divisions that weaken the social fabric.

2. The incompetence of the Government
(occurred in 36/52 weekly reports)

This theme centres on portraying the government as incapable of addressing the country's needs. Sub-narratives include "the incompetence of the government," which suggests a general inability to govern effectively, and "the incompetence of the current government," which specifically targets the leadership in power, accusing it of mismanagement and poor decision-making. Another prominent sub-narrative claims that "the Lithuanian government is incompetent and plunges the country into chaos," emphasising that governmental actions are ineffective and harmful to the nation's stability and well-being. These narratives undermine trust in the government by portraying it as a direct threat to the country's future.

3. Anti-Support for Ukraine
(occurred in 28/52 weekly reports)

This theme focuses on undermining support for Ukraine by portraying it as undeserving or ineffective and framing assistance to Ukraine as harmful to Lithuania's interests. Sub-narratives include "discrediting Ukraine and its effort to win the war," which seeks to delegitimise Ukraine's struggle and diminish international support. "Anti-support for Ukraine" highlights resistance to Lithuania's aid efforts, with claims such as "support for Ukraine is ineffective" and "Ukraine is prioritised over Lithuania and its domestic issues," suggesting that Lithuania's resources are being misallocated. Additionally, narratives like "sowing mistrust in the government of Ukraine" and "Ukraine's victory is elusive" aim to create doubt about Ukraine's leadership and the feasibility of its success. These messages are often coupled with "anti-immigrant narratives emphasising refugees from Ukraine," framing them as a burden on Lithuania and fostering resentment among the local population. Together, these narratives weaken public solidarity with Ukraine and challenge the justification for continued support.

Engagement trends

The trends of total engagement throughout the year reveal notable fluctuations, highlighting periods of increased activity and significant lows. The most striking peak occurred mid-year when engagements surged to nearly 200,000 per day — an apparent anomaly compared to the rest of the year. Earlier in the year, engagements were relatively steady, hovering around 100,000, particularly noticeable in January and March. (see the GRAPH 1; source: YouScan.io).

However, a gradual decline followed, with engagements dipping below 50,000 during the mid-summer months. The year's later months saw a resurgence, with engagements spiking again in November and December, approaching the year's second-highest peak and the concentration of notably high engagements.
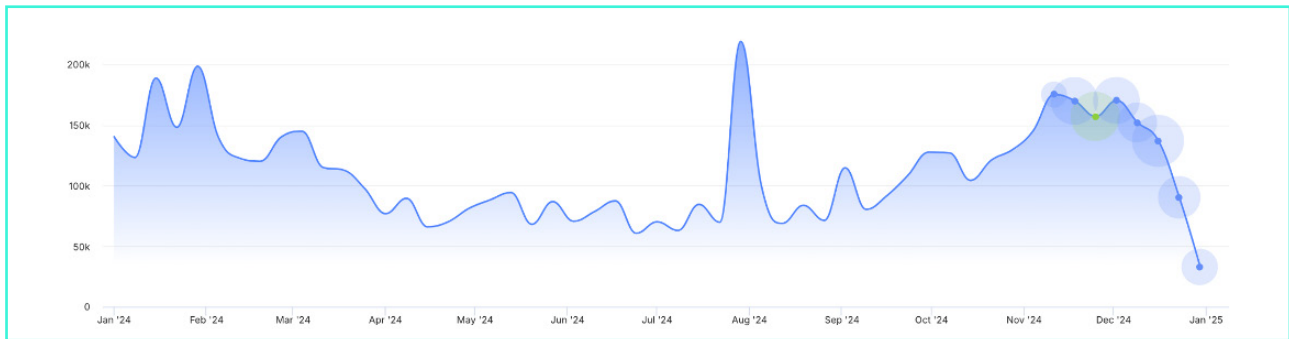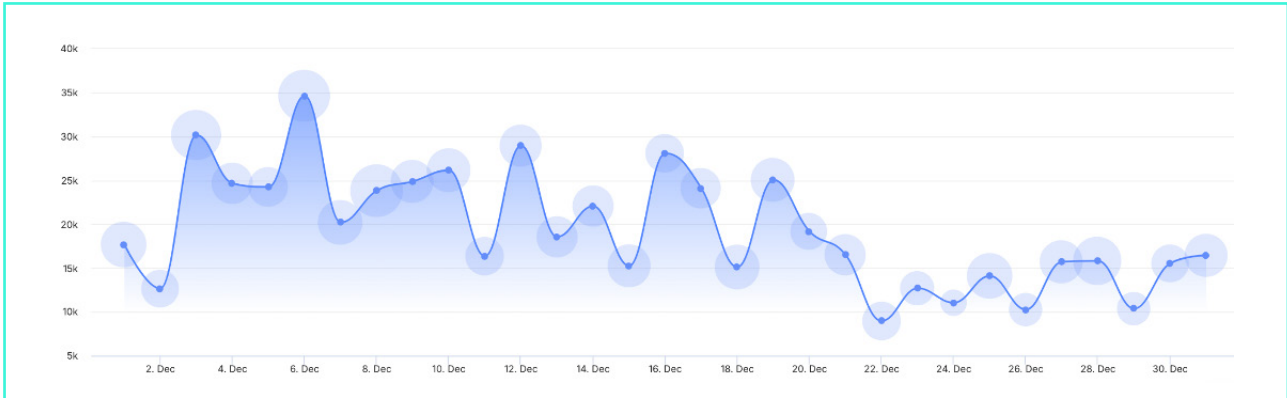

GRAPH 1.
Engagement fluctuations of Kremlin-aligned content in Lithuania throughout the year 2024, based on YouScan.io data.

During the before-mentioned most striking peak that occurred mid-year, one particular post stood out by garnering an astonishing number of engagements, significantly surpassing typical interaction levels (see SCREENSHOT 5). This post by "Nepatogi Tiesa" focused on evaluating the Olympics in Paris, explicitly highlighting debates surrounding drag queen performances and other inclusion-related initiatives during the games. The content struck a chord with audiences, sparking widespread discussion and polarized opinions, contributing to its viral spread. It alone gathered over 87.5K reactions, 3.1K comments and has been shared over 21.3K times5.
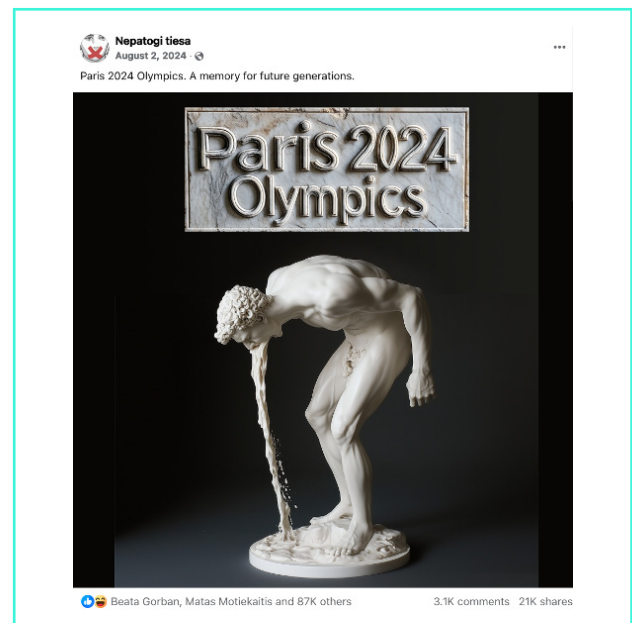
SCREENSHOT 5.
An image depicting a vomiting sculpture with the inscription 'Paris 2024 Olympics,' expressing the author's dissatisfaction with the Olympic Games' opening ceremony, drag performances, and other inclusion-related initiatives during the event.

5 The link to the picture 5 is: https://www.facebook.com/1014306064074972/posts/914413610730885

The most engaged month of the year 2024 was December. The graph below (see GRAPH 2) indicates daily engagement levels throughout December. A more detailed breakdown based on visible trends follows.

GRAPH 2.
Engagement fluctuations of Kremlin-aligned content in Lithuania throughout the month of December, based on YouScan.io data.

High Peaks:
Engagement levels reached their highest on the 6th of December, with 34,600 interactions. Another notable peak occurred around the 12th of December when engagement climbed above 30,000.

Consistency:
Between the 3rd and 9th of December, the engagements hovered around 20,000 to 30,000, showcasing a steady period of interaction.

Decline and Recovery:
After mid-December, a noticeable decline is observed, with engagement dropping to just above 10,000 on some days. However, towards the end of the month (around the 28th to 31st of December), engagement levels rose steadily again, nearing 20,000 daily.

Total Engagements:
The total estimated engagements for December are 607,600. This high level of interaction reflects the consistent audience interest throughout the month, with notable peaks around the 6th and 12th of December.

Top social media posts and platforms

In total, social media monitoring tools captioned **348,399 content pieces**, including posts, videos, pictures, articles, and comments from pages/profiles/channels considered to be Kremlin-aligned. It is important to note that some of the posts were neutral information republished from official sources to raise the legitimacy of the outlets.

28 out of 50 top posts by engagement were YouTube videos, and 28 were Facebook posts.
Nearly half, 23/50 top posts by engagement were issued by the same Youtube channel - Komentaras TV, https://www.youtube.com/@KomentarasTV, yet 3 of the most engaged ones belong to GGN.ekspertai.eurasia channel, https://www.youtube.com/@ekspertai.eurasia.

TOP 3 YouTube videos of the year by engagement:

1. Европу готовят к войне на замену Украине. Ядерный армагеддон близок?
(en: "Europe is being prepared for a war to replace Ukraine. Is nuclear Armageddon near")

Channel: GGN.ekspertai.eurasia
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_bAcEF5mUU

Video description claims (translated from Russian): "Pan-European news comes to life, set against the backdrop of Rachmaninov's enchanting music and stunning visuals showcasing the beauty of our modest and often-overlooked European subcontinent. Alexander Peske and Audrius Nakas from the Global Gaze Network delve into notable, significant, and timely events. Their discussions go beyond surface-level analysis, exploring the profound role of individuals in shaping history."

GGN.ekspertai.eurasia 15 K
youtube.com 2 October 2024 16:41 Sweden
Европу готовят к войне на замену Украине. Ядерный армагеддон близок? • ПанЕвропа
Паневропейские новости, обрамлённые чудесной музыкой Рахманинова и кадрами красот нашего маленького и бедного Европейского субконтинента. Александр Песке и Аудрюс Накас от Global Gaze Network обсуждают заметные, значимые и актуальные события, не брезгуя ухода в детальное обсуждение роли личности в истории. Ekspertai.eu veikla galima tik dėka skaitytojų ir žiūrovų, mus paremti galima šiuo būdu: Association „Global Gaze Network" IBAN: CH94 0900 0000 1612 7657 1 BIC: POFICHBEXXX (banko pavedimo mokestis toks pat, kaip darant pavedimą ir
Translate
7.6K 1.5K 147.2K 14.5K 7 2 945

SCREENSHOT 6.
Screenshot of YouTube video metrics and its description, in its original language, Russian, provided by the author. The video gained over 10K engagements, including likes, comments, and shares.

2. "Балтийские орлы и орлицы ведут ЕС в бой • ПанЕвропа"
(en: "Baltic eagles lead EU into the war")

Channel: GGN.ekspertai.eurasia
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2DbWbQd7Z8

Video description: "Pan-European news framed by the wonderful music of Rachmaninoff and footage showcasing the beauty of our small and impoverished European subcontinent. Alexander Peske and Audrius Nakas from the Global Gaze Network discuss notable, significant, and current events, delving into detailed discussions about the role of individuals in history.", while in reality, they harshly criticize pro-European politicians, Lithuanian leaders, mock Ukraine's willingness to further fight in the war or Georgia's wished to have new democratic elections."

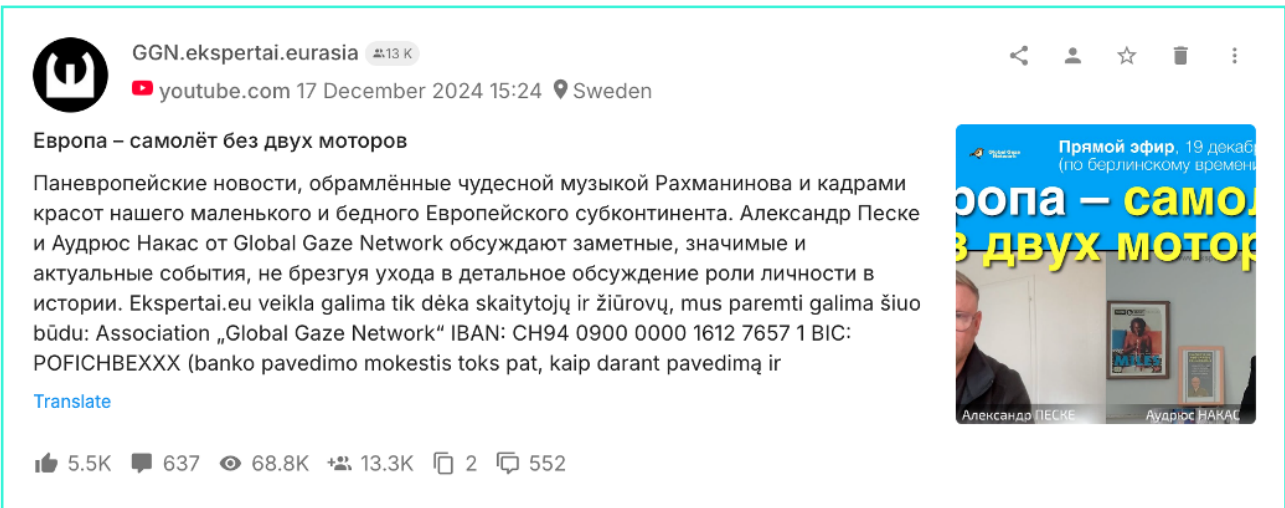GGN.ekspertai.eurasia 👥15 K

▶ youtube.com 25 September 2024 15:29 📍 Sweden

Балтийские орлы и орлицы ведут ЕС в бой • ПанЕвропа

Паневропейские новости, обрамлённые чудесной музыкой Рахманинова и кадрами красот нашего маленького и бедного Европейского субконтинента. Александр Песке и Аудрюс Накас от Global Gaze Network обсуждают заметные, значимые и актуальные события, не брезгуя ухода в детальное обсуждение роли личности в истории. 2024 09 25 laida PanEuropa – Europos gelbėjimo planą sukūręs Mario Draghi žino, kad dainelė sudainuota Ekspertai.eu veikla galima tik dėka skaitytojų ir žiūrovų, mus paremti galima šiuo būdu: Association „Global Gaze Network" IBAN: CH94

Translate

👍 7.5K   💬 820   👁 129.0K   👥 14.5K   🔗 578

SCREENSHOT 7.
Screenshot with video description in its original language, Russian, and numbers of notably high engagement.

3. Европа - самолёт без двух моторов
(en: "Europe - a plane without two motors")

Channel: GGN.ekspertai.eurasia
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdnnskTsmFM

As written in the video section, it is "Pan-European news framed by the wonderful music of Rachmaninoff and footage showcasing the beauty of our small and impoverished European subcontinent. Alexander Peske and Audrius Nakas from the Global Gaze Network discuss notable, significant, and current events, delving into detailed discussions about the role of individuals in history.", while in reality, they harshly criticize pro-European politicians, Lithuanian leaders, mock Ukraine's willingness to further fight in the war or Georgia's wished to have new democratic elections.

GGN.ekspertai.eurasia 👥13 K

▶ youtube.com 17 December 2024 15:24 📍 Sweden

Европа – самолёт без двух моторов

Паневропейские новости, обрамлённые чудесной музыкой Рахманинова и кадрами красот нашего маленького и бедного Европейского субконтинента. Александр Песке и Аудрюс Накас от Global Gaze Network обсуждают заметные, значимые и актуальные события, не брезгуя ухода в детальное обсуждение роли личности в истории. Ekspertai.eu veikla galima tik dėka skaitytojų ir žiūrovų, mus paremti galima šiuo būdu: Association „Global Gaze Network" IBAN: CH94 0900 0000 1612 7657 1 BIC: POFICHBEXXX (banko pavedimo mokestis toks pat, kaip darant pavedimą ir

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👍 5.5K   💬 637   👁 68.8K   👥 13.3K   🔗 2   🔗 552

SCREENSHOT 8.
Screenshot with video description in its original language, Russian, and numbers of notably high engagement.

Latvia
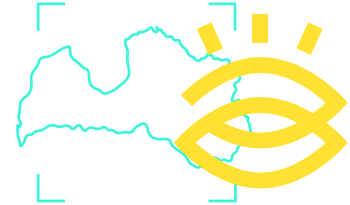
European Elections

The European Parliament elections in Latvia, held on **June 8, 2024**, with a voter turnout of 33.82%, highlighted the country's diverse political landscape. Pro-EU parties like Jaunā Vienotība, affiliated with the European People's Party (EPP), secured two seats with 25.09% of the vote. Nacionālā Apvienība, part of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), also won two seats with 22.07% of the vote. Other parties that gained representation included Latvijas Attīstībai (Renew Europe), Apvienotais Saraksts (ECR), Progresīvie (Greens/EFA), Sociāldemokrātiskā Partija "Saskaņa" (S&D), and Latvija Pirmajā Vietā (Patriots for Europe), each securing one seat. These results showcase the ideological diversity within Latvia's electorate, balancing pro-European and nationalist perspectives.

Popular Disinformation Narratives

Disinformation narratives surrounding Latvia's European Parliament elections in 2024 focused heavily on undermining trust in the European Union and its policies. Months prior to the European Elections, disinformation narratives emphasised that the European Commission wielded excessive power, tying this to claims that Ursula von der Leyen was responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination policies.

As the European Elections came closer several messages highlighted that Latvia should not be in the European Union. During the election week, claims extended to domestic and EU-wide corruption, with targeted criticism of the Green Deal, portraying it as harmful to Latvia's economy. Following the elections, anti-EU sentiments continued to dominate. Messages echoing anti-government narrative have became frequent, especially on TikTok.

TikTok has emerged as the dominant platform for spreading these narratives, effectively reaching both Russian and Latvian-speaking audiences, while engagement on other platforms like X (formerly Twitter) showed inconsistencies. This highlights a shift in strategy among disinformation actors, prioritizing platforms with higher engagement to maximize reach.

Throughout 2024, Latvia encountered a multifaceted disinformation landscape characterized by persistent narratives and sub-narratives aimed at undermining public trust in governmental institutions, the European Union (EU), and societal cohesion. The key themes, sub-narratives, and platforms utilized in these campaigns are detailed below.

Key Narratives and Sub-Narratives Identified:

1. Government Corruption and Incompetence:

Portrayal of Government as Corrupt and Ineffective:
The Latvian government was depicted as corrupt, out of touch, and burdened by bureaucracy, leading to economic decline and social issues.

Exaggeration of Economic Challenges:
Narratives exaggerated economic challenges, portraying Latvia as a failing state with high inflation, rising unemployment, and ineffective policies.

Critique of Infrastructure Projects:
Projects like Rail Baltica were labeled as wasteful investments, suggesting mismanagement of public funds.

2. Critique of the European Union:

EU Policies as Detrimental to Latvia:
The EU was portrayed as imposing unfavorable policies on Latvia, negatively impacting the economy and national sovereignty.

Opposition to the EU Green Deal:
The EU Green Deal goals were described as unachievable and disadvantageous for Latvia, potentially harming its economic interests.

Resistance to Social Policies:
Criticisms targeted the EU's advocacy for LGBTQ rights and migration policies, suggesting they conflicted with Latvian cultural values.

3. Exploitation of Social Issues:

Anti-LGBTQ Narratives:
Support for LGBTQ rights was framed as contrary to Latvian cultural values, with claims that such advocacy was driven by external (EU) influences.

Healthcare Conspiracy Theories:

Conspiracy theories related to healthcare, including the allocation of medical services to Ukrainian war casualties, were propagated to create divisions and undermine public confidence.

Misinformation on Vaccines:

Vaccines were portrayed as tools of oppression used by the government, fostering mistrust in public health initiatives.

4. US-Related Conspiracy Theories:

Speculation on US-Latvia Relations:

Following the election of President Donald Trump, disinformation narratives suggested a weakening of US-Latvia relations and potential abandonment by the US in times of conflict.

False Claims about US Diplomatic Actions:

Fabricated claims about US embassy service reductions and alleged global conspiracies were disseminated to sow fear and uncertainty.

Engagement trends
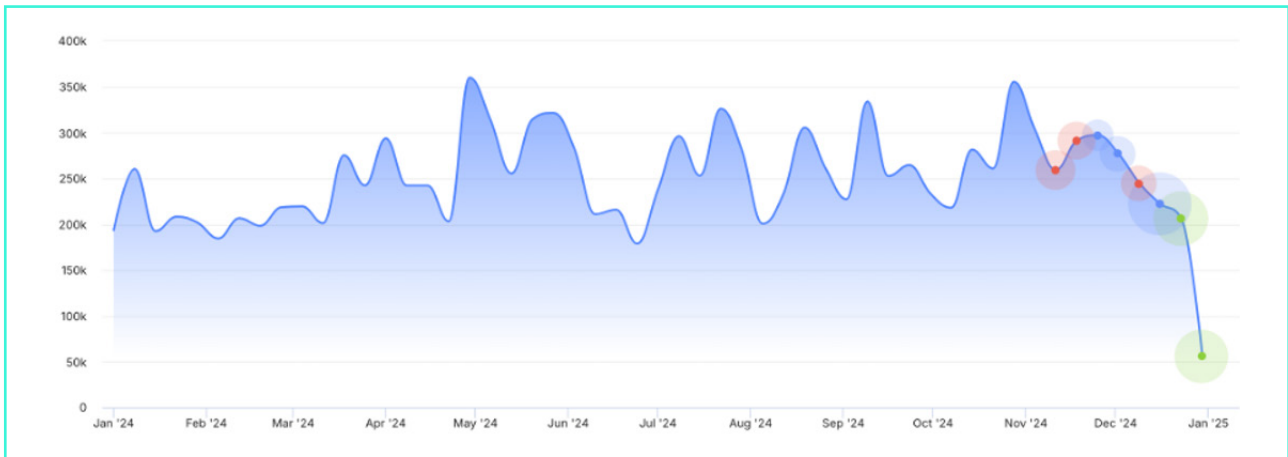
GRAPH 3.
Engagement fluctuations of Kremlin-aligned content in Latvia throughout the year 2024.
(source: YouScan.io data)

Throughout 2024, engagement with Kremlin-aligned content in Latvia exhibited notable fluctuations, reflecting varying levels of public interaction with misleading content.

Early Months:

January to March: Engagement levels were relatively steady, averaging around 200,000 interactions per week. This period was marked by consistent public interest in disinformation narratives, with no significant spikes or drops.

Mid-Year Peak:

May-June: A significant surge occurred, with engagements well over 300,000 per week. This peak suggests a heightened dissemination of disinformation, with lots of TikToks shared, yet no specific uniting event was captured.

Summer Decline:

July to August: A noticeable decline in engagement was observed, with interactions falling below 180,000 per week. This downturn may be attributed to seasonal factors, such as summer holidays, leading to reduced online activity and, consequently, lower interaction with disinformation content.

Year-End Resurgence:

November to December: Engagement levels rose again, approaching the year's second-highest peak.
These engagement trends underscore the dynamic nature of disinformation dissemination in Latvia, influenced by temporal factors and periods that either amplify or diminish public interaction with misleading information.
The primary platforms for disseminating disinformation remained TikTok, Facebook, Telegram, and X (formerly Twitter), with video content achieving the highest engagement.

Insights and Conclusions:

Persistent Anti-EU and Anti-Government Sentiment: The consistent portrayal of the EU and the Latvian government as detrimental to national interests indicates a sustained effort to erode public trust in political institutions.

Exploitation of Social and Cultural Issues: Disinformation actors continued to exploit sensitive social issues, such as LGBTQ rights and healthcare, to deepen societal divisions and promote narratives aligned with external (pro-Kremlin) interests.
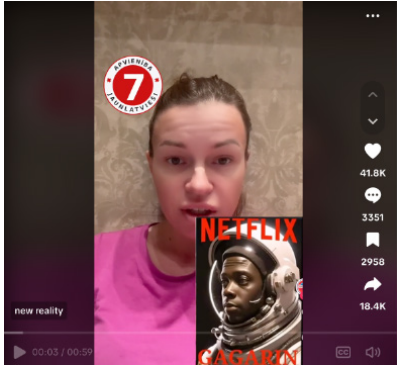
Emergence of US-Related Conspiracy Theories: The election of President Donald Trump was leveraged to introduce new disinformation narratives, suggesting a potential shift in US foreign policy that could negatively impact Latvia's security and international relations.

Top social media posts and platforms

In total, there were social media monitoring tools managed to caption **717,030 content pieces**, including posts, videos, pictures, articles and comments from pages/profiles/channels that are considered to be Kremlin-aligned.

Even 48 out of 50 top posts by engagement were TikTok videos, 1 was a Facebook and 1 was a Telegram post. Nearly half, 23/50 top posts by engagement were issued by the same TikTok account - Glorija Grevcova, https://www.tiktok.com/@glorijagrevcova.

TOP 3 YouTube videos of the year by engagement:
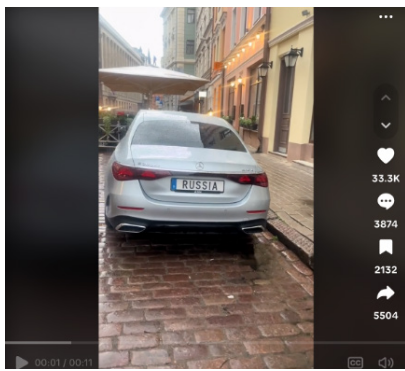
SCREENSHOT 9.
A screenshot of a TikTok video featuring the author herself, along with a photo that complements her story; presented alongside the notable video metrics. source: TikTok profile @glorijagrevcova

The link: https://www.tiktok.com/@glorijagrevcova/video/7364847436071800096
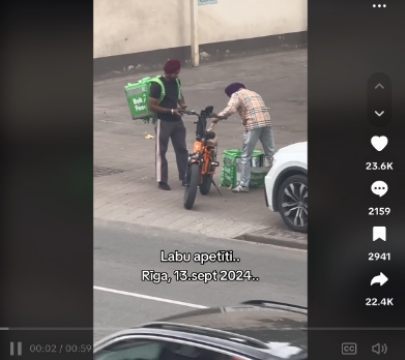
SCREENSHOT 10.
A screenshot of a TikTok video featuring the author herself, along with a photo that complements her story; presented alongside the notable video metrics. source: TikTok profile @glorijagrevcova

The link: https://www.tiktok.com/@glorijagrevcova/video/7374480616617823521

SCREENSHOT 11.
A screenshot of a TikTok video featuring Bolt couriers, presented alongside the notable video metrics.
Source: TikTok profile @rudibremanis

The link: https://www.tiktok.com/@rudibremanis/video/7414134195263442208
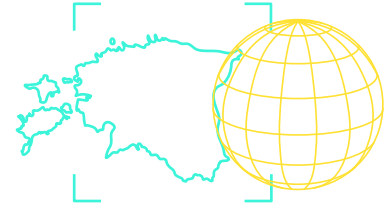
Estonia

European Elections

The European Parliament elections in Estonia were held on **June 9, 2024**, with a turnout of **37.6%**, reflecting moderate engagement from the electorate. The results highlighted Estonia's consistent support for European integration, with pro-European Union parties securing the majority of seats. Isamaa Erakond, affiliated with the European People's Party (EPP), emerged as the leading party, securing **21.5% of the vote** and two seats. Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond, part of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), also won two seats with **19.3% of the vote**. Other parties gaining representation included the Eesti Reformierakond (RE), the Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond (ECR), and the Eesti Keskerakond (RE), each securing one seat. These results reflect Estonia's diverse political spectrum, balancing liberal, centrist, and nationalist perspectives.

Popular Disinformation Narratives

Disinformation narratives surrounding Estonia's European Parliament elections criticised the European Union and the election process. One prominent narrative alleged that the televised debates leading up to the elections were "propagandised" to favor certain political parties, particularly pro-EU ones, over those perceived as more nationalist or Euroskeptic. Many posts and articles discussed the European Parliament votes and how TV debates have become propagandised by giving wins to different parties than those who received public support.

During the week of the European Elections in Estonia, disinformation actors started claims of an impending totalitarian government in Estonia and the detrimental impact of liberal policies on the economy and national sovereignty. These posts drew comparisons to George Orwell's 1984, highlighting alleged government overreach and surveillance while tying these critiques to EU-wide liberal policies.

Key Narratives and Sub-Narratives Identified:

1. Economic Mismanagement & Taxation

Government's Increasing Taxes and Economic Mismanagement:
Claims that rising taxes, especially on pensions, have led to widespread poverty, economic stagnation, and a lack of government competence.

Unjustified Government Spending on RailBaltica:
Criticism that the RailBaltica project wastes taxpayer money while essential public services and welfare suffer.

2. Russophobia and Discrimination Against Russian-Speakers

Attack on Russian Language and Rights:
Allegations that Estonia is systematically eradicating the Russian language and marginalising Russian-speaking citizens.

Exclusion of Russian and Belarusian Citizens from Voting:
Claims that depriving Russian and Belarusian citizens of voting rights is discriminatory and further entrenches Russophobia.

3. Government Incompetence and Corruption

Government's Failure to Address Economic and Social Issues:
Assertions that the government is unqualified to handle the country's economic crises, rising poverty, and inflation.

Corruption in Politics and Elections:
Allegations of corruption and manipulation of elections, with politicians and lobbyists allegedly rigging votes and suppressing opposition.

4. NATO and EU Criticism

NATO's Role in Escalating Tensions:
Claims that NATO's military presence in Estonia and its expansionist policies have heightened the risk of conflict with Russia.

Western Values Incompatible with Estonian Culture:
The argument that European Union and NATO values conflict with Estonian identity and sovereignty, leading to national decline.

5. War in Ukraine and Anti-Ukrainian Sentiment

Ukraine as a Neo-Nazi Regime:
Claims that Ukraine is a neo-Nazi state and a terrorist entity, responsible for atrocities against Russian-speaking populations in Ukraine.

Estonia's Support for Ukraine Escalates Tensions:
Criticism of Estonia's unwavering support for Ukraine and its role in the geopolitical conflict often framing this as Estonia's betrayal of its Russian-speaking population.

6. Government Censorship and Media Manipulation

Estonian Government's Control Over Public Discourse:
Allegations that the government is censoring dissenting views, suppressing protests, and restricting freedom of speech to enforce state agendas.

Spreading of Propaganda and Media Bias:
Claims that media in Estonia, often controlled by pro-government interests, misrepresents facts to promote political agendas, stifling independent journalism.

7. Energy Crisis and Environmental Criticism

Energy Dependency on Russia:
The belief that Estonia's reliance on Russian energy sources is a safer, cheaper, and more reliable option than transitioning to green energy.

Government Failure in Energy Security:
Criticism that Estonia's energy policies and transition to renewable sources are poorly planned, causing energy insecurity and high prices.

8. Cultural and Religious Issues

Persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church:
Allegations that the Estonian government is attempting to suppress the Russian Orthodox Church by limiting its rights and pushing it to sever ties with Moscow.

Anti-Israel Sentiment in Estonia:
Criticism of the Estonian government's stance on Israel, framed as part of broader anti-Western or anti-Israel sentiment.

9. Social Unrest and Public Discontent

Public Dissatisfaction with Government Decisions:
Complaints about the government's handling of public services, including early closure of Christmas markets and poor public infrastructure.

Rising Protests Against Government Policies:
Public discontent, particularly related to economic hardship and political decisions, leading to widespread protests against the government.

Engagement trends

The graph below highlights engagement with disinformation content in Estonia throughout 2024, displaying key trends and patterns. Engagement levels varied significantly over the year, with periods of noticeable spikes and lulls. The year began with modest activity, showing engagements around 25,000-60,000 weekly in January and February, indicating a relatively stable but low baseline.

A gradual rise in engagement occurred in spring, with peaks observed around March and May. The latter saw a notable spike that exceed 114,000 engagements weekly.

During the summer months (June-August), engagement levels dipped, hitting some of the lowest points of the year, often below 70,000. This decline likely reflects decreased audience interaction due to seasonal factors like holidays or reduced content distribution.

However, engagement began to surge again in autumn, spiking sharply in late November and December. These months saw the highest peak of the year, with daily engagements climbing close to 160,000, representing a dramatic increase in activity.
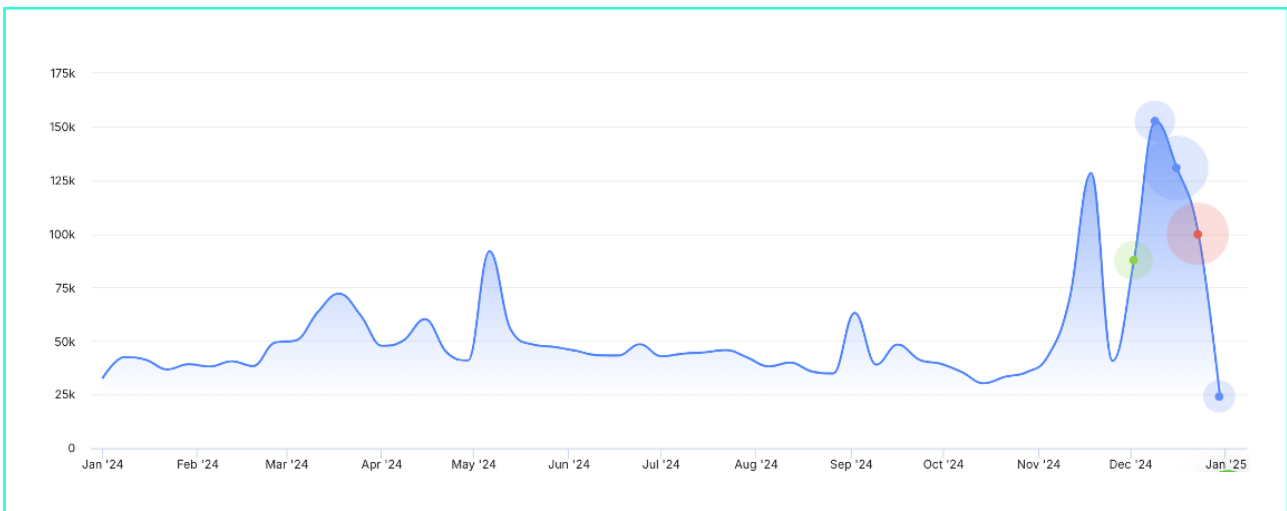
GRAPH 4.
Engagement fluctuations of Kremlin-aligned content in Estonia throughout the year 2024, based on YouScan.io data.

Top social media posts and platforms

In total, there were social media monitoring tools managed to caption **207,236 content pieces**, including posts, videos, pictures, articles and comments from pages/profiles/channels that are considered to be Kremlin-aligned.

Even 38 out of 50 top posts by engagement throughout year 2024 were Youtube videos, 9 were Telegram posts, 2 - TikTok videos and 1 Facebook post.

Even 34 of 50 top posts by engagement were issued by the same YouTube channel which belongs to Oleg Besedin, https://www.youtube.com/@OlegBesedinTVN .
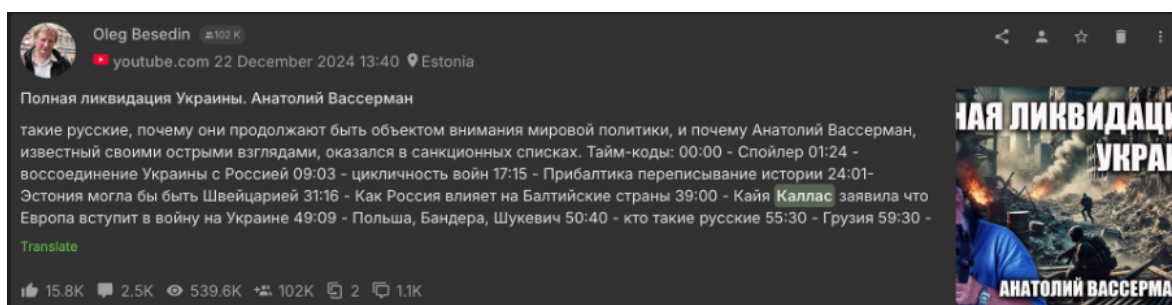
TOP 3 YouTube videos of the year by engagement:
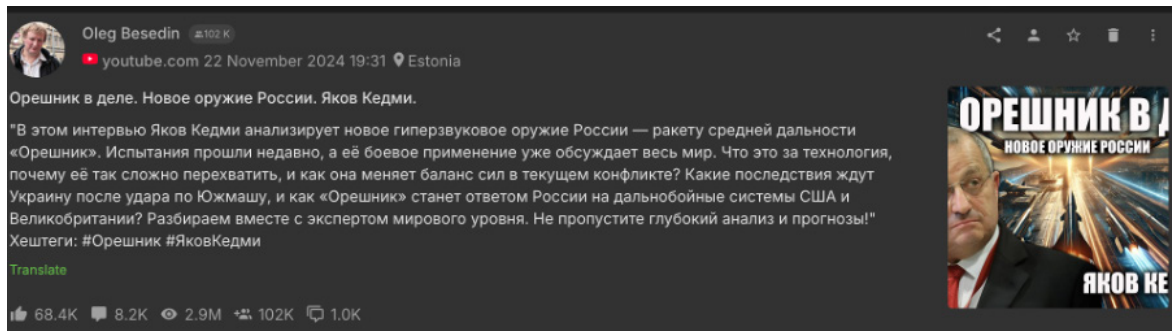
"Oreshnik в деле. Новое оружие России. Яков Кедми."
(en. Oreshnik in action. New weapons of Russia.Yakov Kedmi") - nearly 3M views.

The link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ke5atTiVeT4
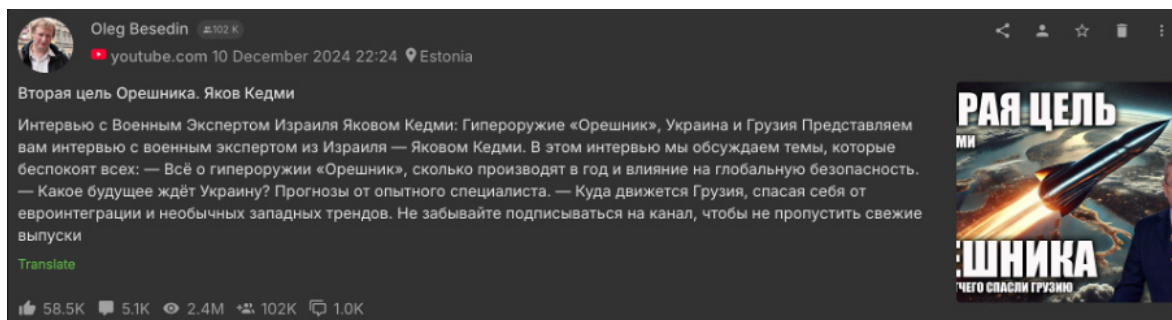
"Вторая цель Орешника. Яков Кедми"
(en. "The second goal of Oreshnik. Yakov Kedmi") - 2.4M views.

The link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdvOfd4EQ-Q

"Полная ликвидация Украины. Анатолий Вассерман"
(en. "Complete elimination of Ukraine. Anatoly Wasserman") - over 500k views.

The link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRPoxra5YHI

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