

Annual Media Monitoring Report 2025

Tracking and Fighting Disinformation and Influence Campaigns in the Baltic States



supported by **Google**

Introduction

This annual report is written based on and as a part of [Balticdisinfo.eu](https://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](https://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:

1. Main events shaping disinformation landscape:

• Lithuania:

- Plans to raise defence spending (5–6% GDP).
- BRELL disconnection.
- NATO-related incidents (missing US soldiers, German brigade deployment).
- Domestic unrest (protests, coalition changes).

• Latvia:

- Trump inauguration and Summit with Putin → narratives on US/NATO instability.
- BRELL exit.
- Local elections and rise of radical actors.
- Controversies around Latvian-language education and the Istanbul Convention.

• Estonia:

- BRELL exit and energy-security debates.
- Disputes over the Russian-aligned Orthodox Church.
- Pushback on e-elections and voting reforms.
- Narratives exploiting Narva base plans, 9 May events, and school threat incidents.

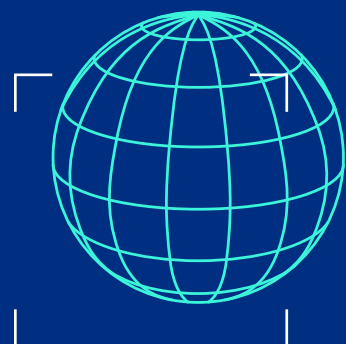
2. Main narratives - similarities and differences:

• Shared across all Baltic countries:

- Governments framed as corrupt/incompetent.
- NATO portrayed as dangerous or unreliable.
- West depicted as morally decaying.
- BRELL exit framed as harmful.
- Baltic States portrayed as US/EU "vassals".

• Country-specific narratives:

- **Lithuania:** defence issues & protests.
- **Latvia:** identity politics, Russian-speaking minority, "gender ideology".
- **Estonia:** discrimination against Russian-speakers & e-election delegitimation.



3. Affected areas:

- Defence and energy policy.
- Elections and institutional trust.
- Social cohesion (ethnic, linguistic, ideological).
- Economic policy debates.
- Identity/culture (language, LGBTQ+, family values).

4. Overview of the anti-Ukrainian narrative:

- Support for Ukraine is framed as economically harmful and provocative.
- Ukraine is depicted as corrupt, doomed, or undeserving.
- Refugees are portrayed as burdensome.
- Claims that Western support is fading, therefore Baltics should withdraw.

5. Main goals of disinformation campaigns:

- Undermine trust in governments, elections, and media.
- Reduce support for Ukraine and NATO.
- Increase social division and fatigue.
- Delegitimise defence and energy security decisions.
- Normalise pro-Kremlin positions via local actors.

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 2025, spanning from January 1 to November 30. 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 large volume of content from the Baltic states, including posts, videos, articles, and comments. A significant portion of the analyzed data for all Baltic states is available on the Balticdisinfo.eu platform.

Lithuania



Main events and popular disinformation narratives

In 2025, numerous events in Lithuania provided fertile ground for Kremlin-aligned media to operate and flourish. Among these, several key incidents provoked the strongest media reactions and most effectively facilitated the dissemination of disinformation that followed them right after:

- At the beginning of 2025, State Defence Council (VGT), composed of national and defence system leaders, agreed on that [defence funding should reach 5–6% of the gross domestic product](#) (GDP) from next year until 2030 in order to accelerate the development of a military division.

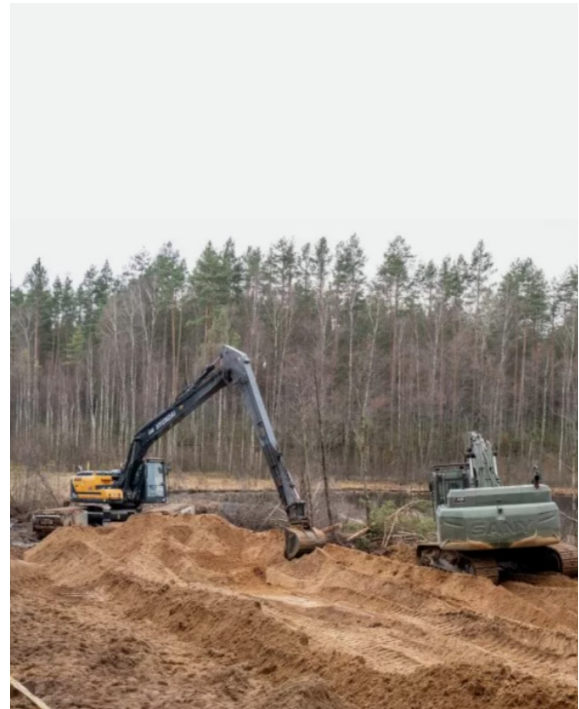
Reaction from the Kremlin-aligned media: decision met with mockery and skepticism, with narratives designed to discredit the government's determination to strengthen national security. Speculation ran rampant about where the necessary funds would come from, with suggestions that such spending was either unrealistic or would come at the expense of other critical sectors.

- On February, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania became [completely independent from the Russian and Belarusian electricity systems](#) (BRELL). They have connected to the continental European grid via Poland, successfully integrating into the EU internal energy market.

Reaction from the Kremlin-aligned media: aimed to turn public sentiment against the disconnection by emphasising that ordinary citizens would bear the financial burden. Panic-spreading tactics were widely employed, portraying the move as reckless and harmful to Lithuanian households.

- On March, four U.S. soldiers participating in a NATO [training exercise in Pabradė, went missing](#) after their vehicle was found submerged in a swamp, sparking an intense multi-day search, which resulted the successful recovery of the submerged vehicle and the tragic loss of four soldiers.

Reaction from the Kremlin-aligned media: quickly seized on the event, framing it as a consequence of Lithuania's reliance on foreign military forces. Reports emphasised the dangers posed by NATO's presence, questioning the competence of joint exercises and portraying the U.S. soldiers' disappearance as a symbol of Western recklessness.



Screenshot no. 1

A moment from intensive search and rescue operation for US soldiers who went missing in Pabradė.

Source: <https://kam.lt/en/search-for-missing-us-soldiers-during-exercises-continues-in-pabrade/>

- As of April 1, the [German 45th Brigade](#) has established its headquarters and begun operations in Lithuania, with all key functions now staffed. This also marked the first time Germany has deployed an armored brigade abroad, with its relocation to Lithuania progressing in phases.

Reaction from the Kremlin-aligned media: falsely claimed that the brigade lacked proper authorization to operate and would be unable to defend Lithuania in case of a Russian attack. These assertions aimed to undermine trust in NATO's presence and overall Lithuania's defense readiness.

- The "[Day of Shame](#)" protest that took place just a day after the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, Nemunas Dawn, the Farmers and Greens Union, and the Christian Families Alliance signed a coalition agreement to form a new government. It attracted around 10,000 protesters, who flooded the streets of Vilnius in protest of Lithuania's new governing coalition.



Screenshot no. 2

A crowd of thousands gathered for the "Day of Shame" protest.

Source: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2655137/gedos-dienos-protestas-tukstantine-minia-kirciai-valdziai-ir-skanduotes-melagiai?srsltid=AfmBOoqC0ypgGaKJS9sOskthN1a83KeDiGlaUXBlh5_phW6Y_oNaDFCM#lg=2655137&slide=2163273

Reaction from the Kremlin-aligned media: portrayed it as a sign of national unrest and deep societal division. Organisers were condemned and accused of deliberately inciting chaos and destabilising the state. Protest participants themselves were also widely mocked and discredited, often labelled as "dim-witted" and "unemployed" individuals, reinforcing a narrative that delegitimises public discontent and ridicules civic activism.

- Although all three elections in Lithuania were held last year, political changes related to the government continued throughout 2025. This included the formation and reformation of coalitions, the re-election of the Prime Minister, and the establishment of new ministerial cabinets, that saw several changes.

Reaction from the Kremlin-aligned media: consisted of many different attempts to undermine the political stability in the country, portray it as authoritarian, doubt the democratic processes and generally weaken public trust in national institutions and Lithuania's defense policies.

- In 2025, two separate incidents occurred [involving drones entering Lithuanian airspace](#) from Belarus. [Both uncrewed](#) aerial vehicles, later identified as Russian-made, crossed the border and crashed within Lithuania, prompting urgent responses from Lithuanian authorities.

Reaction from the Kremlin-aligned media: incident was used to suggest that Lithuania's allies are totally incapable of protecting its airspace, with some narratives implying that NATO would be powerless in a real military confrontation. State-issued early morning emergency alerts sent to citizens' phones were mocked as unnecessary panic within Kremlin-aligned media, and Lithuania's security institutions were portrayed as incompetent.

- [Protests by the cultural community](#) against the transfer of the Ministry of Culture to the "Nemunas Dawn" party attracted thousands of participants across hundreds of events and gatherings throughout Lithuania. During the demonstrations, Mikalojus Čiurlionis' composition "Jūra" (The Sea) became a symbolic anthem of resistance. These protests highlighted widespread concern within the cultural sector about political influence over cultural institutions and the potential impact on artistic freedom and national heritage.



Screenshot no. 3

A moment from nationwide culture sector protests and its main symbol - a sign of culture "going down" on display.

Source: <https://www.15min.lt/tema/kulturos-protestas-101434>

Reaction from the Kremlin-aligned media: quickly began framing the protests as the work of a "cultural elite" that was undermining the interests of the Lithuanian people. In their coverage, Kremlin-aligned media depicted the protesters as working "against the state": the protests were framed not as a legitimate political expression but as a destabilizing force threatening Lithuania's sovereignty and national unity.

These major events quickly triggered strong and widespread reactions from Kremlin-aligned media in Lithuania. Although the responses varied in tone and focus, the majority can be grouped into a few core disinformation narratives presented below.

Main disinformation narratives

An in-depth analysis of content from various Kremlin-aligned sources over the year revealed a wide range of disinformation themes and tactics targeting Lithuania. Among these, three dominant narratives stood out for their frequency and influence, shaping online discourse and public perception. These narratives were strategically designed to exploit existing societal divisions, erode trust in national institutions, and sway public opinion. By centering their efforts on these three narratives, malign actors sought to deepen discord and weaken Lithuania's resilience to external manipulation. Each primary narrative was supported by targeted sub-narratives, which provided context, reinforced the messaging, and enhanced the overall impact. The key narratives and their associated sub-narratives are outlined below:

1. General Anti-Government sentiments (46 out of 47 weekly reports)

This category includes narratives that reflect strong mistrust, harsh criticism and hostility toward Lithuania's politicians and governmental institutions of the country. Sub-narrative of major "incompetence of Lithuania's government" is central to this group. It also involves claims of "undermining the history of Lithuania" during national holidays and commemorations of historical events, criticism of "blindly following the malign Western influence" or even "portraying Lithuania as an authoritarian country". Malign-actors add to their rhetoric that "the government is corrupt", openly "question the country's security" and consistently find a way to include the Conservative Party, which, allegedly, "is the one to blame for everything bad happening in the country". Together, these sub-narratives aim to portray the government as untrustworthy and disconnected from the public, gradually eroding confidence in democratic institutions and accelerating polarization. By fueling dissatisfaction with the state, these narratives support a broader strategy to erode national unity, undermine democratic institutions, and reduce public engagement in civic life.

2. Scepticism towards NATO functionality (16 out of 47 weekly reports)

This theme focuses on undermining trust in one of the central allies of Lithuania - NATO - and raises doubts about its overall function. Sub-narratives include "scepticism towards NATO presence" in the country and whether it

ensures more harm than benefits. It also includes the sub-narrative of "inevitable war between NATO and Russia" and being a center figure of it due to belonging to the alliance. Also, idea of suffering from "malign Western influence" through NATO and its "detrimental" directions is consistently presented in Kremlin-aligned media, together with "questioning the country's security" overall. Some of the sub-narratives highly oppose to each other, as for example, the necessity of NATO in general is being criticised together with "undermining threat from Russia/Belarus" but at the same time, "Raising fears of the upcoming war" are present, argued by total mistrust in NATO in case of actual danger. All of the sub-narratives in this topic aims to portray NATO as unreliable partner, aggressive alliance, a source of instability and a risk to national well-being.

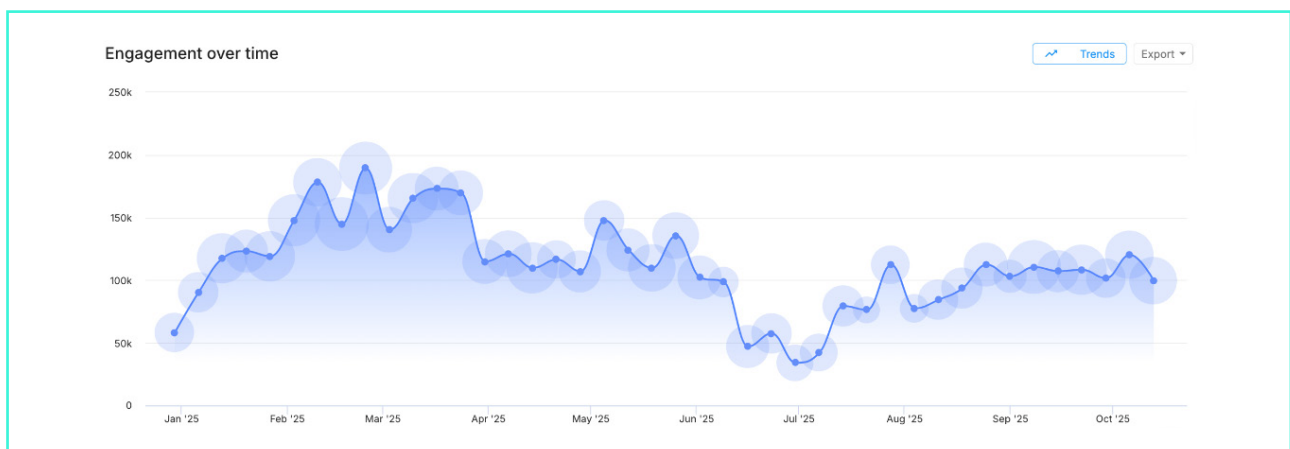
3. Anti-Ukrainian sentiments (14 out of 47 weekly reports)

This theme centers on sub-narratives such as "discrediting Ukraine and its effort to win the ongoing war", "weakening support for Ukraine" by depicting it as unworthy, and presenting "aid to Ukraine as detrimental" to Lithuania's national interests. The aim of such sub-narratives is clear: to erode public backing by portraying pro-Ukrainian policies as provocative, dangerous, and ultimately not in Lithuania's national interest. All of the talks about Ukraine's victory or Lithuania's support "until the victory" were framed as unrealistic and illogical, questioning whether victory (or even some kind of peace) in Ukraine is even attainable. These messages were frequently paired with anti-immigrant narratives targeting Ukrainian refugees, portraying them as a strain on Lithuania and fueling public resentment. Combined, these narratives erode solidarity with Ukraine and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the ongoing support.

Engagement trends

The overall engagement trends throughout the year show clear fluctuations, marked by periods of heightened activity as well as notable declines. The most striking peaks occurred in the first quarter, when engagements surged to nearly 200,000 per day — a level of activity significantly higher than the rest of the year.

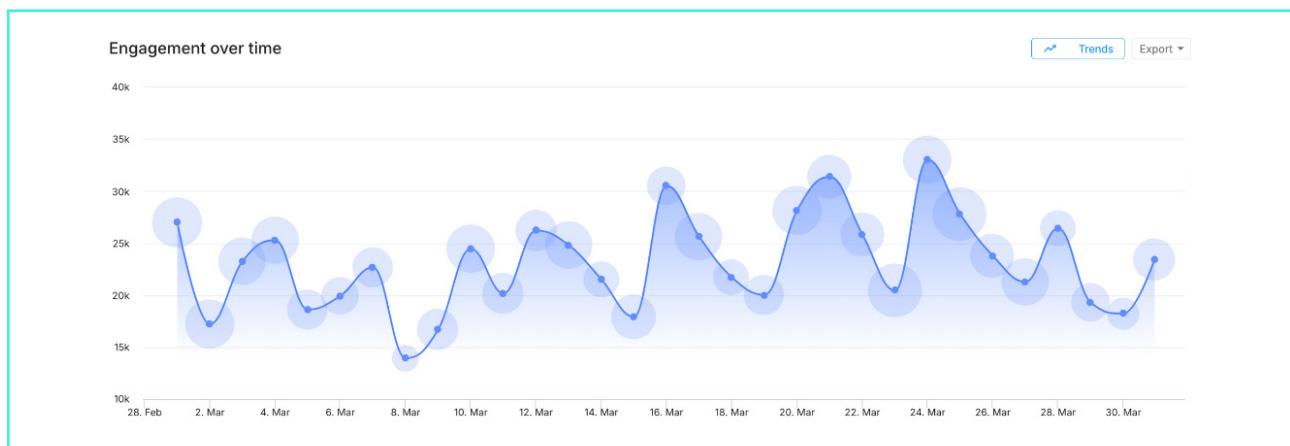
However, a gradual decline followed, with engagement levels dropping below 50,000 during the mid-summer months, potentially reflecting seasonal disengagement or reduced media intensity. In the later months of the year, a modest resurgence was observed. During the autumn, engagement stabilized at around 115,000 daily interactions. (see the GRAPH 1; source: YouScan.io).



Graph 1.

Engagement fluctuations of Kremlin-aligned content in Lithuania throughout the year 2025, based on YouScan.io data.

The most engaged month of the year 2015 was March, with the highest overall engagement of 716,392. The graph below indicates daily engagement throughout March. A more detailed breakdown based on visible trends follows.



Graph 2.

Engagement fluctuations of Kremlin-aligned content in Lithuania throughout the month of March 2025, based on YouScan.io data.

High Peaks:

Engagement levels reached their highest on the 24th of March, with 33,009 interactions. Other notable peaks occurred on the 16th and 21st of March when engagement climbed above 30,514 and 31,373 interactions accordingly.

Consistency:

Between the 16th and 29th of March, the engagements stayed between 20,000 to 33,000, showcasing a steady period of high interaction.

Decline and Recovery:

The only visible drop of interactions is observed, with engagement dropping below 15,000 on the 8th of March. However, after that engagement levels quickly rose again, averaging 20,000 daily.

Total Engagements:

The total estimated engagements for March are 716,392. This notably high level of interaction reflects the consistent audience interest throughout the month, with even several peaks around the second part of the month.

Latvia



Main events and popular disinformation narratives

Throughout 2025, Latvia experienced an ever present flow of disinformation from Russia as numerous domestic events became vehicles for both Kremlin-aligned propaganda and locally-generated disinformation, often echoing Russian narratives. Pro-Kremlin Telegram channels maintained their steady drumbeat of familiar narratives: portraying Russian speakers as persecuted, the economy as failing, military spending as reckless, Western values as decadent, and Latvia as a puppet state. However, the year's most significant development was the mainstreaming of disinformation by domestic political actors. This shift reached its apex during the October debate over withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention, where opposition politicians' social media posts spreading fabricated conspiracy theories dramatically outpaced the reach of monitored Russian channels, revealing how disinformation has migrated from foreign influence into the heart of Latvia's democracy.

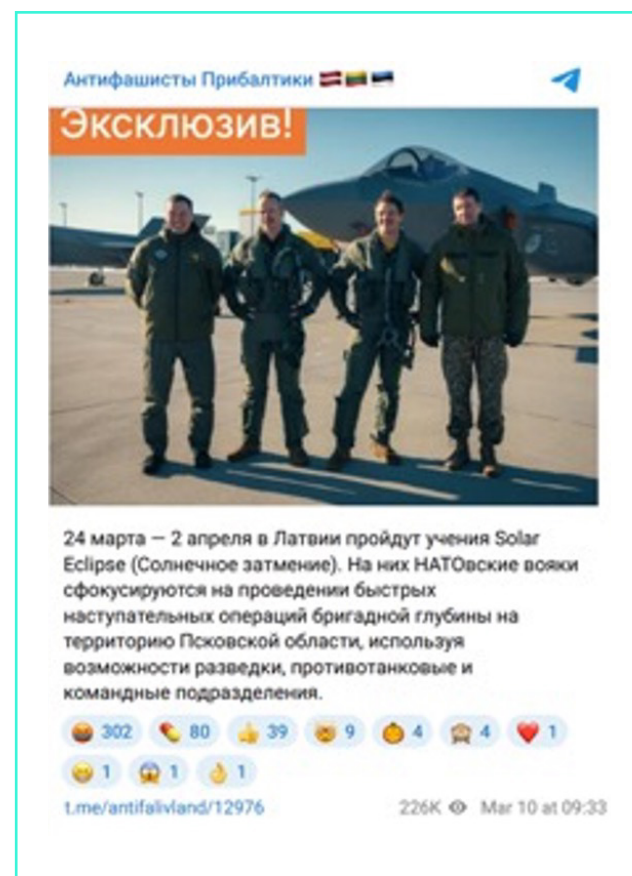
Based on the monitoring reports, here are the major events that fueled disinformation in Latvia during 2025:

- **January-February: Trump's inauguration and potential US abandonment of Baltics.** Pro-Kremlin channels exploited Trump's inauguration and his statements to promote narratives that the US would abandon the Baltics, withdraw from NATO commitments, and prioritize relations with Russia over European allies. The Trump-Putin phone conversation became propaganda material suggesting American betrayal of Baltic interests.

- **February: Baltic States' withdrawal from BRELL electricity grid.** When the Baltic States disconnected from the Russian BRELL electricity grid to join the EU power network, Russian channels mocked this as irrational puppet behavior dictated by the West, claiming it would send the region back to the „Middle Ages“ while omitting the strategic energy security benefits.

- **March: NATO military exercises in Latvia.** Scheduled

NATO exercises were deliberately mischaracterized as preparations for "an offensive deep into Russian territory" rather than defensive operations, with targeted attacks on Foreign Minister Baiba Braze and Defense Minister Andris Spruds for their security assessments.



Screenshot no. 4

Screenshot of Telegram post from Antifascists of Pribaltics, claiming NATO is training for offensive operations in the Russian Pskov region. The post gained over 226K views.

● **April-May: Municipal election campaign period.** The pre-election period saw intensified activity from radical populist Kremlin-leaning party Union of New Latvians (Glorija Grevcova and Rūdolfs Brēmanis), who gained significant social media traction with narratives about government corruption, economic failure, and alleged Russophobia.

● **June: Roslikovs' Parliamentary Incident.** Kremlin-sympathetic Stability party leader Aleksejs Roslikovs sparked major controversy by ending a parliamentary speech in Russian with "There are more of us! We cannot be banned!" in response to a National Alliance proposal to restrict Russian language use. This led to criminal proceedings and massive viral engagement on TikTok (videos surpassing 2 million views), with the incident amplified by Kremlin-linked media.

● **July: Latvia's support for Ukraine and EU SAFE Defence Initiative.** Latvia's announcement of drone shipments to Ukraine and participation in the EU's SAFE defence funding initiative was portrayed as aggressive provocation. Pro-Kremlin channels accused Latvia of involvement in drone attacks on Russian cities without evidence.

● **August: Trump-Putin Alaska Summit.** The summit provided fresh propaganda material despite producing no progress on Ukraine peace. Kremlin channels published fabricated "intelligence transcripts" portraying Trump as conspiratorially abandoning European allies for Russian trade deals, exploiting historical Baltic anxieties about great power negotiations behind their backs.

● **September: School year beginning and language education policies.** The start of the school year triggered renewed focus on Latvia's transition to Latvian-language-only instruction, characterized as discriminatory oppression of Russian speakers. Russian drone crashes in Poland and the Zapad 2025 military exercises also became propaganda topics.



Screenshot no. 5

Screenshot of Telegram post from Antifascists of Pribaltics, making claims that school textbooks in Latvia are calling Russians "pigs". The post gained over 229K views.

● **October: Istanbul convention withdrawal disinformation.** The most intensive disinformation campaign of the year was home-grown and centered on parliamentary debates about withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention (ratified November 30, 2023; entered force May 1, 2024). Latvian opposition politicians demonized this Convention against domestic violence. Particularly Ainars Šlesers (Latvia First) and Rūdolfs Brēmanis (New Latvians) spread fabricated claims about "117 genders," forced child gender transitions, and attacks on traditional families often aligning with Kremlin's narratives about immoral, decadent West. The Saeima supported withdrawal, but after intervention from the President, the decision was postponed until after next Parliamentary elections.

Main disinformation narratives

An in-depth analysis of most popular (most engaged and most viewed) content from Kremlin-aligned Telegram channels, pro-Russian domestic actors, and populist political parties throughout 2025 revealed a disinformation ecosystem targeting Latvia. While these sources deployed numerous narratives responding to specific events, five dominant themes emerged as persistent and pervasive throughout the year, consistently shaping online discourse and undermining public confidence in democratic institutions. These recurring narratives – persecution of Russian speakers, economic decline and corruption, wasteful or aggressive military spending, Western moral decadence, and denial of Baltic sovereignty – aimed to exploit ethnolinguistic tensions, deepen societal divisions, and erode Latvia's alignment with European and transatlantic institutions. What proved most concerning in 2025 was not merely the continuation of these Kremlin-aligned narratives, but their increasing adoption and amplification by domestic political actors who mainstreamed disinformation tactics within legitimate parliamentary debate. The five key recurring narratives and their manifestations throughout the year are outlined below:

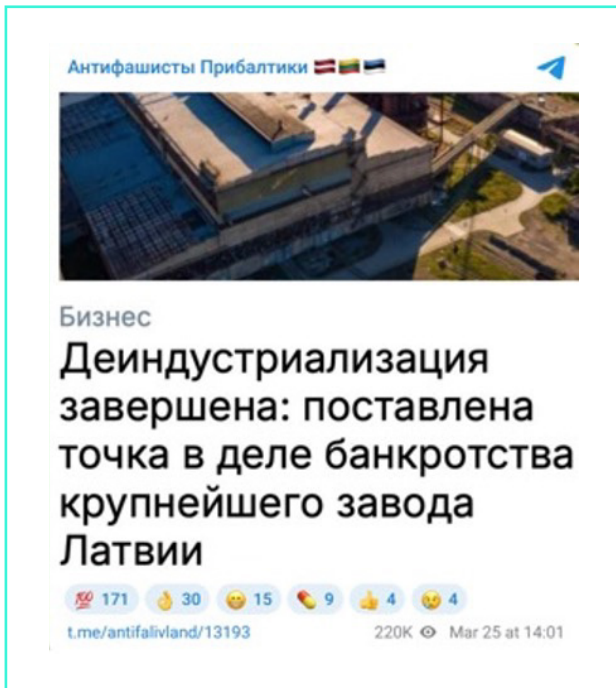
1. Persecution of Russian Speakers and Language Rights (among most popular narratives in 9 out of 10 months)

Throughout 2025, the narrative of systematic persecution against Russian speakers remained a cornerstone of both Kremlin-aligned propaganda and domestic populist messaging. The controversy intensified dramatically in June when Stability party leader Aleksejs Roslikovs ended a parliamentary speech with the provocative declaration in Russian "There are more of us! We cannot be banned!" in response to a National Alliance proposal to restrict Russian language use in public spaces. This incident, which led to criminal proceedings against Roslikovs for allegedly aiding Russia and inciting ethnic hatred, generated massive viral engagement with TikTok videos surpassing 2 million views. Pro-Kremlin channels and populist politicians systematically reframed Latvia's transition to Latvian-language-only instruction as discriminatory oppression, particularly exploiting the start of the school year in September to

characterize legitimate language policy as evidence of "Russophobia" and ethnic persecution. Politicians like Glorija Grevcova leveraged anonymous hateful comments telling her to "go back to Russia" to construct broader victimization narratives, while isolated incidents – such as objections to a football coach speaking Russian or a viral judo competition video – were amplified as representative of systematic discrimination, despite these being cherry-picked examples used to manufacture a false sense of widespread intolerance.

2. Economic Decline and Government Corruption Narratives (9 out of 10 months)

Disinformation actors consistently portrayed Latvia as an economic failure plagued by corrupt and incompetent governance throughout 2025. Populist politicians from parties like Union of New Latvians employed sophisticated social media strategies to spread narratives that "everything in Latvia is bad," claiming the country ranked worst in Europe across all economic metrics and that this alleged poor performance was driving a mass population exodus. These narratives focused heavily on alleged government waste and corruption, with leaders like Grevcova and Brēmanis highlighting expenditure on ceremonial military items during what they characterized as an "economic crisis" while sharing emotionally charged and often unverifiable stories designed to generate outrage. Roslikovs from the Stability party advanced particularly aggressive anti-government messaging, claiming authorities "rip off" citizens while wasting "billions" of public money, positioning himself as a champion against establishment corruption. When Latvia applied for EU SAFE defence funding in July, pro-Kremlin channels ridiculed the initiative as reckless and corrupt, posting sarcastic content suggesting officials would simply disappear with the money and claiming Latvia had "mortgaged its future" to pay for unnecessary militarization. These economic narratives served to delegitimize democratic institutions while tapping into genuine public anxieties about living standards, transforming legitimate policy debates into conspiracy theories about elite corruption.



Screenshot no. 6

Screenshot of Telegram post from Antifascists of Pribaltics, claiming that Latvia is pursuing policy "deindustrialisation". The post gained 220K views.

3. Military Spending Portrayed as Wasteful or Aggressive (8 out of 10 months)

Latvia's defense initiatives faced a two-pronged attack throughout 2025, simultaneously characterized as wasteful expenditure and dangerous provocation. Pro-Kremlin channels employed contradictory but strategically complementary narratives: mocking Latvia's military capabilities as primitive and ineffective while simultaneously portraying defensive preparations as recklessly aggressive acts that endangered civilians. Following Russian drone crashes in Poland, monitored channels ridiculed Latvia's air defense systems with satirical imagery of primitive weaponry, mockingly suggesting effective defense requires "idols, shamans and sacrifices" rather than credible military technology. Yet these same channels characterized Latvia's defensive fortifications and NATO exercises scheduled in March as preparations for "an offensive deep into Russian territory," deliberately misrepresenting routine defensive readiness as evidence of aggressive intentions. Parliamentary debates about increased Baltic defense spending were ironically framed as an "auction" to appease Trump rather than legitimate responses to Russian military threats, with claims that spending primarily benefited the American "military-industrial complex" through "cozy schemes." Roslikovs alleged that military installations used civilian settlements as "human shields," reframing standard defensive preparations as

government incompetence or malicious intent. This dual messaging created an impossible situation where any security policy could be attacked, serving to undermine public confidence in Latvia's defense capabilities while justifying potential Russian aggression.



Screenshot no. 7

Screenshot of Telegram post from Antifascists of Pribaltics, ironically criticising Latvian military. The post gained 212K views.

4. Western Values Characterized as Morally Decadent (7 out of 10 months)

The portrayal of Western values as morally corrupt and decadent formed a central ideological pillar of disinformation campaigns, reaching its most intense manifestation during the October debate over the Istanbul Convention against domestic violence. Opposition politicians and pro-Kremlin channels systematically conflated violence prevention measures with manufactured threats to traditional morality, with figures like Ainars

Šlesers fabricating claims that the Convention promotes "117 genders," enables forced child gender transitions, and represents "alien Marxist ideology" designed to destroy family values. Latvia's legal recognition of same-sex partnerships was consistently mocked as evidence of Western-induced moral decay, reinforcing broader Kremlin narratives that liberal democratic values are inherently corrupt and that progressive social policies represent a form of civilizational decline. Politicians employed homophobic slurs like "zilie" and posted images suggesting political opponents "look like transsexuals," weaponizing transphobia and homophobia to delegitimize supporters of human rights measures. Similarly, throughout the year pro-Kremlin channels celebrated Trump's presidency as a victory against LGBT "heresy" and progressive liberal values, suggesting that traditional Russia represents moral righteousness in contrast to the supposedly degenerate West. The Istanbul Convention disinformation campaign particularly exemplified this pattern, as politicians like Šlesers warned the treaty would replace "mom and dad" with "PARENT 1 and PARENT 2," creating apocalyptic narratives about the destruction of traditional families that bore no relation to the Convention's actual focus on protecting domestic violence victims, instead manufacturing non-existent threats about gender and children to transform human rights policy into culture war battles.

Humorous memes depicted Latvia as "a small village near St. Petersburg," deliberately portraying the Baltic states as irrelevant in great power politics while simultaneously claiming they receive "daily instructions from British or US embassies, complete with detailed manuals and reporting requirements." These narratives served multiple strategic purposes: delegitimizing Latvia's international standing, denying the nation any independent political will, justifying Russian interference as protection of ethnic Russians from Western manipulation, and ultimately positioning Russia as the region's inevitable hegemon while casting Latvia's democratic institutions and European alignment as artificial constructs imposed by foreign powers.

5. Baltic Sovereignty Undermined Through "Puppet State" Narratives (6 out of 10 months)

Throughout 2025, disinformation actors systematically worked to deny Latvia's political agency and sovereignty by portraying the country as a mere puppet controlled by Western powers. Pro-Kremlin channels made unfounded claims that government positions in Latvia are held by "Anglo-Saxons" and that Latvian leaders receive awards for being "correctly behaving colonized aborigines," with some channels going so far as to describe Baltics as trained "animals" conditioned by the United States to be hostile toward Russia. This dehumanizing rhetoric extended to drawing false equivalencies between Medieval German rule when Latvians were allegedly "slaves" and what propagandists characterized as current "slavery" to "Anglo-Saxons," attempting to frame NATO membership and EU integration as forms of subjugation rather than sovereign choices. The narrative intensified around specific policy decisions, such as when Latvia's withdrawal from the Russian BRELL electricity network was portrayed not as an independent strategic decision for energy security but as blind obedience to European mandates. Following the Trump-Putin Alaska summit in August, fabricated "intelligence transcripts" portrayed Trump as conspiratorially abandoning European allies for Russian trade deals, exploiting historical Baltic anxieties about great power negotiations conducted over smaller nations' heads and invoking memories of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Engagement trends with Russian propaganda:

Monitoring of three most popular pro-Kremlin Telegram channels – Antifscists of Pribaltics, Sprats in Exile and Baltnews – allow identifying strenght of different narratives throughout 2025. These channels operate in Latvia, but also in Estonia, Lithuania and are consumed by audience in Russia as well. The overall view trends throughout the year show clear fluctuations, marked by periods of heightened activity as well as notable declines (see the GRAPH 3; source: YouScan).

Before dwelling into the most viral disinformation contnet, a clear trend is visible starting September – decreased number of views of monitored channel. Monitored channels did not change the narratives, nor did they change the frequency of posting. The likelist explanation for decline in viewership is the fact that Russia [started clamping down on Telegram](#) August 13. Russian communications regulator Roskomnadzor announced restrictions on calls and limiting messaging on the platform. This crackdown is the likely cause of significantly decreased reach of these posts.

The most viral month of the year 2025 was August, with the highest overall aggregated reach of 4.5 million weekly views for all posts that week. Based on the weekly reports from August 2025, the unprecedented virality of pro-Kremlin Telegram channels during this period was driven by a singular catalyzing event and the strategic exploitation of its propaganda potential: **The Trump-Putin Alaska Summit**.

The three-hour meeting between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska (August 15, 2025) provided pro-Kremlin channels with an explosive propaganda opportunity. Despite the summit concluding without any progress on ending Russia's war in Ukraine, the mere fact that it occurred gave Russian information operations fresh, emotionally resonant material to exploit.



Graph 3.

Weekly view fluctuations of Kremlin-aligned Telegram channels in Latvia throughout 2025, based on YouScan data.

This event generated exceptional virality, because it:

● **Exploited historical trauma.** The summit allowed channels like "Antifascists of Pribaltics" to activate deeply embedded Baltic historical anxieties about great power negotiations conducted over smaller nations' heads. By deliberately invoking parallels to the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact – when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union divided Eastern Europe through secret protocols – the propaganda tapped into generational fears about being treated as "expendable bargaining chips." This historical resonance made the content emotionally compelling and shareable, as it touched on existential concerns about sovereignty and survival.

● **Fabricated "intelligence transcripts" creating viral conspiracy content.** Pro-Kremlin channels published fake ironic "intelligence transcripts" of private Trump-Putin conversations, portraying Trump as conspiratorially agreeing to abandon European allies for lucrative Russian trade deals. This fabricated dialogue format proved highly viral because it: 1) offered the illusion of "insider access" to secret conversations; 2) created scandalous, shareable content about alleged betrayal; 3) presented complex geopolitics as simple conspiracy narratives and jokes; 4) gave audiences a sense of being "in the know" about hidden agendas. The specificity and dramatic nature of these fabrications made them spread rapidly across social media platforms, even among audiences who might have been skeptical of their authenticity.

● **Exploited Trump's failure at the summit.** The summit's optics – Trump rolling out the red carpet for Putin, the three-hour duration, the "productive" characterization despite no deal – provided abundant material for psychological warfare. Channels created a devastating double-bind for Baltic audiences. If you worry about abandonment, you're "paranoid" and "hysterical". If you trust Western security guarantees, you're "naive" because betrayal is happening. This impossible psychological position generated intense emotional reactions, driving engagement and sharing as people sought validation for their concerns or attempted to counter the narratives.

● **Converged multiple propaganda narratives.** August's content showed exceptional virality because the summit allowed pro-Kremlin channels to weave together multiple established narrative threads simultaneously:

US Abandonment: Trump prioritizes deals with Russia over Baltic security.

Western Weakness: Portrayed European leaders as weak and subservient to US (which in turn is subservient to Putin's Russia).

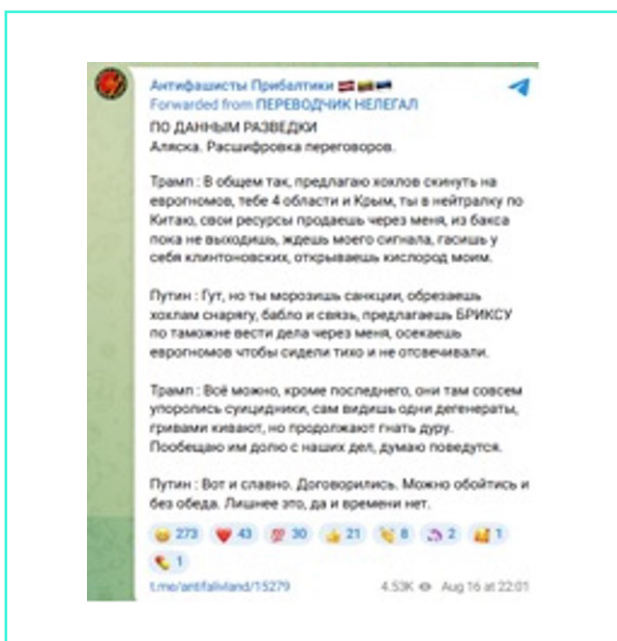
Presented Russia as peacemaker: Both Trump and Putin want peace, but undemocratic Europeans block it.

Baltic Irrelevance: Mocking Baltic reactions and portraying them as irrelevant puppets.

This narrative convergence created a comprehensive story that reinforced multiple propaganda themes at once, making the content more persuasive and shareable.

The August virality represents a textbook case of information warfare success: a real geopolitical event (the summit) with a real failure of president Trump to stand up to dictator Putin provided the foundation for elaborate fabrications that exploited historical traumas, created scandalous narratives, and generated intense emotional reactions. The pro-Kremlin channels didn't need the summit to produce any actual policy changes – the mere fact that Trump met with Putin provided sufficient raw material to construct compelling betrayal narratives that achieved unprecedented reach and engagement.

The virality was further amplified by Trump's own controversial reputation and history of statements questioning NATO commitments, making the fabricated transcripts appear plausible to some audiences. This convergence of real concerns, historical anxieties, fabricated evidence, and timely news hooks created perfect conditions for pro-Kremlin propaganda to achieve its highest impact of the year.



Screenshot no. 8

Screenshot of Telegram post from Antifascists of Pribaltics, ironically claiming that Trump and Putin has made a deal dividing the world between them. The post gained 4K views.

Top social media posts and platforms

Throughout 2025, Latvia's information environment was shaped by disinformation emanating from three distinct but often overlapping sources:

- Russia based disinformation channels,
- Local Kremlin-leaning politicians,
- Home grown conservative populist parties.

These actors employed different tactics and platforms but frequently reinforced complementary narratives that undermined democratic institutions, exploited societal divisions, and eroded trust in Latvia's Western alignment. The following three examples illustrate this multi-faceted disinformation ecosystem.

The most viral month of the year 2025 was August, with the highest overall aggregated reach of 4.5 million weekly views for all posts that week. Based on the weekly reports from August 2025, the unprecedented virality of pro-Kremlin Telegram channels during this period was driven by a singular catalyzing event and the strategic exploitation of its propaganda potential: **The Trump-Putin Alaska Summit**.

The three-hour meeting between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska (August 15, 2025) provided pro-Kremlin channels with an explosive propaganda opportunity. Despite the summit concluding without any progress on ending Russia's war in Ukraine, the mere fact that it occurred gave Russian information operations fresh, emotionally resonant material to exploit.

Top posts of the year by views:

Roslikov's pre-election stunt

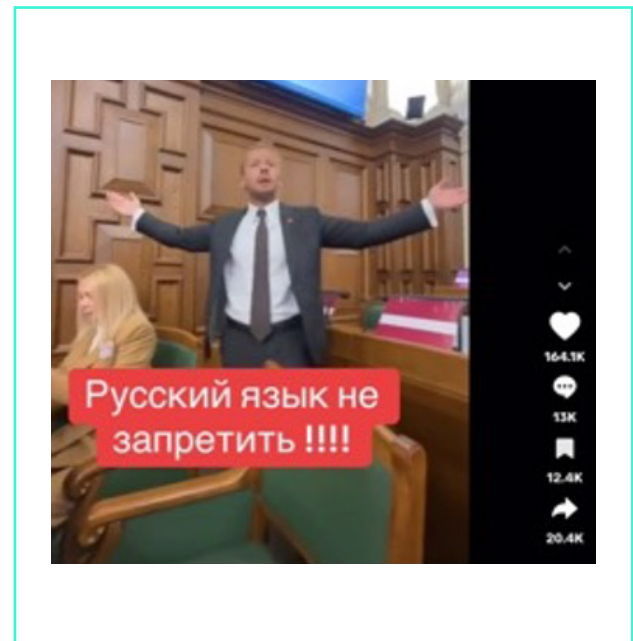
(1.st most viewed post)

Source: Roslikovs TikTok channel

Link: <https://www.tiktok.com/@roslikovs/video/7512354006619000086>

In early June 2025, immediately before municipal elections, Aleksejs Roslikovs, leader of the Kremlin-sympathetic Stability party, sparked a major controversy during a parliamentary session. Responding to a National Alliance proposal to restrict Russian language use in public spaces (this proposal was rejected), Roslikovs ended his speech in Russian with the provocative declaration in Russian: "There are more of us! We cannot be banned!" Immediately after the incident Roslikovs was expelled from Parliament for that day.

Latvia's State Security Service (VDD) immediately launched criminal proceedings against Roslikovs for allegedly "aiding the aggressor state" (Russia) and "inciting ethnic hatred". Roslikovs pivoted to social media, particularly TikTok and Telegram, to portray himself as a martyr and "heroic defender" of Russian speakers. Roslikovs' TikTok posts achieved extraordinary reach, with individual videos surpassing 2 million views – unprecedented for Latvian political content. His



Screenshot no. 9

Screenshot of TikTok video with metrics and slogan: „Russian language wont be banned!!!!” The video gained around 13K comments, 164K engagements, was watched well over 2.4 million views and was by far the most viral monitored post.

messaging framed the criminal investigation as political persecution, using dramatic language like being "willing to give his life" and being "at home, but a stranger."

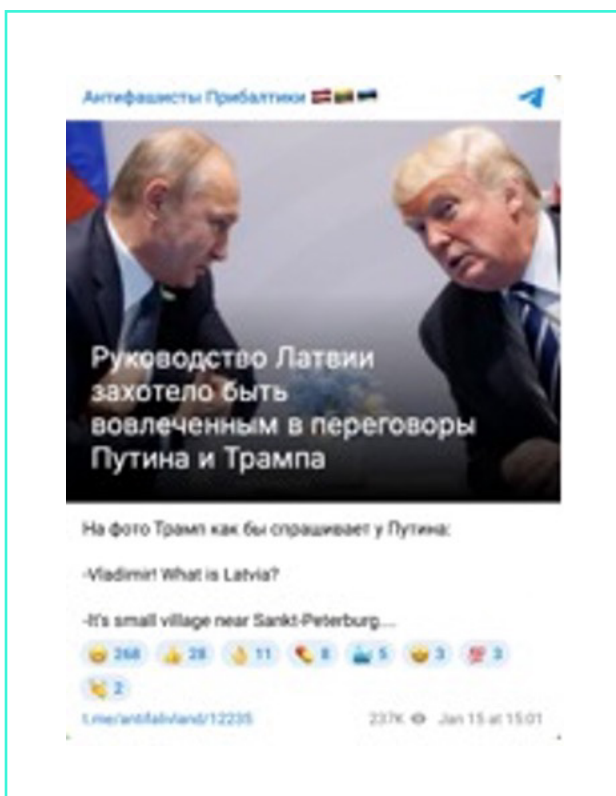
The incident exemplified reciprocal radicalization: the National Alliance's language restriction proposal (timed before municipal elections) was a deliberate provocation that Roslikovs then exploited to mobilize his base. Both nationalist and pro-Russian actors benefited politically from inflaming ethnolinguistic tensions. The content was quickly amplified by Kremlin-linked propaganda networks, demonstrating how domestic political incidents in democracies can be weaponized by hostile foreign actors.

Trump will abandon Baltics

(4.th most viewed posts in Baltic pro-Kremlin Telegram channels)

Source: Antifascists of Pribaltics Telegram channel

Link: <https://telegram.me/antifalivland/12235>



Screenshot no. 10

Screenshot of one of the most popular posts in pro-Kremlin Telegram channels with 237K views. Posted before Trump's inauguration, it shows what appears to be a headline from a news article stating „Latvia's leadership wants to be involved in Putin-Trump talks". This is followed by ironic fabricated text underneath suggesting that in the photo Trump is asking Putin: „Vladimir! What is Latvia?" with Putin's response: „It's small village near Sankt-Peterburg..."

Pro-Kremlin channels systematically weaponized Donald Trump's election and statements throughout 2025 to undermine Baltic confidence in Western security guarantees. Following his inauguration, propaganda predicted American retreat from global leadership, claiming Trump would lift sanctions, abandon Ukraine, and marginalize Baltic interests in favor of deals with Russia. Viral memes achieved massive engagement by mocking Baltic sovereignty using humor to normalize the denial of Latvian independence and portray the Baltics as irrelevant in great power politics.

The propaganda campaign peaked with the August 15 Trump-Putin Alaska summit, which channels exploited by publishing fabricated "intelligence transcripts" portraying Trump as conspiratorially agreeing to abandon European allies for Russian trade deals. This deliberately invoked memories of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, exploiting deep Baltic fears about great powers negotiating over their heads.

Russian propaganda didn't need to invent Trump's NATO skepticism – they simply amplified his actual controversial statements to create an atmosphere where abandonment seemed plausible, positioning Russian regional dominance as inevitable while casting Baltic security concerns as either "paranoid Russophobia" or naive trust in collapsing Western commitments.

Disinformation against Istanbul Convention against domestic violence

(1.st most engaged posts on the topic)

Source: Antifascists of Pribaltics Telegram channel

Link: <https://telegram.me/antifalivland/12235>



Screenshot no. 11

An interview with Ainars Slesers, party Latvia First. The slogan underneath the video (added by Slesers) states „Brainwashing of kids must be stopped." In the interview he is demonizing and misrepresenting the Istanbul Convention against domestic violence. This post received 5.8K reactions, 253 comments and 859 shares.

Populist politicians like Ainars Šlesers (Latvia First) weaponized the Istanbul Convention because fabricating threats about “gender ideology” and “brainwashing children” proved exceptionally effective at gaming social media algorithms and mobilizing voters. Šlesers’ radical posts claiming the Convention promotes “117 genders,” enables forced child gender transitions, and will replace “mom and dad” with “PARENT 1 and PARENT 2” achieved thousands of engagements – far outpacing even monitored Russian disinformation channels in October. This was a deliberate strategy to shout the loudest, put out the most crazy statements to maximize attention and social media visibility.

The Istanbul Convention was an ideal target because populists could completely misrepresent a violence prevention treaty (Latvia has Europe’s highest female homicide rate) as an attack on traditional families and children. By ignoring the Convention’s actual focus on protecting domestic violence victims and instead fabricating conspiracy theories about gender ideology, pedophilia, and Western moral decay, politicians transformed a human rights policy into a culture war battle. This approach mirrored Russian propaganda tactics portraying Western values as morally decadent while exploiting genuine parental anxieties about children, allowing politicians to position themselves as defenders of traditional values against imaginary threats. The combination of emotional intensity (protecting children), moral righteousness (defending families), and civilizational stakes (resisting Western corruption) created perfect conditions for viral disinformation that benefited populist parties electorally while undermining Latvia’s European integration and human rights commitments.

Estonia

Main events and popular disinformation narratives

Throughout 2025, Estonia was a constant target of Kremlin-aligned and locally amplified disinformation. Pro-Kremlin Facebook groups and Telegram channels, and certain domestic political figures promoted overlapping narratives that portrayed Estonia as a Russophobic 'police state', questioned the legitimacy of elections and defence spending, attacked support for Ukraine, and exploited sensitive issues surrounding the Orthodox Church, BRELL desynchronisation, domestic politics in Narva, language policy, and municipal elections. The main events that triggered disinformation campaigns in Estonia in 2025 are detailed below, based on monthly monitoring reports containing observations from pro-Kremlin channels and online information sources.

● January 2025: Energy security, identity and defence spending.

- Planned desynchronisation from the Russian-controlled BRELL grid was portrayed as a reckless step that would cause blackouts, soaring prices and an energy collapse.
- Debates around the future of the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the renaming of the Russian Cultural Centre in Tallinn were portrayed as an attempt to 'erase Russian culture' and ban Orthodoxy.
- Tax increases, heating tariffs and the political proposal to increase defence spending to 5% of GDP were depicted as evidence that the government is "feeding NATO" while impoverishing its citizens.
- Trump's inauguration and his initial statements were used to imply that the US might abandon NATO, suggesting that Estonia had backed the 'wrong side'.

● February 2025: BRELL desynchronisation; the Orthodox Church; and Trump's Russia policy.

- The disconnection from BRELL remained the main trigger of disinformation: pro-Kremlin voices emphasised the vulnerability of the Suwałki Corridor and predicted blackouts, unaffordable electricity and systemic instability.
- Government pressure on the Moscow-linked Orthodox

attack on 'centuries-old spiritual ties with Russia', despite the Church's attempts to rebrand itself.

- Estonia's large-scale military and financial support for Ukraine was criticised as irrational and offering "no security dividends", while Trump's more accommodating rhetoric towards Russia was celebrated as proof of Europe and Estonia's strategic irrelevance.

● March 2025: Constitutional amendments and Orthodox Church law are used as 'proof' of Russophobia.

- Constitutional changes that strip non-EU citizens and stateless persons (many of whom are Russian speakers) of their local voting rights were framed as 'institutionalised Russophobia'.
- Planned amendments to the Churches and Religious Associations Act, which are intended to cut links with the Moscow Patriarchate, were portrayed as a direct ban on Orthodoxy and as an interference in sacred affairs.
- Estonia's decision to increase defence spending towards 5% of GDP was described as madness, escalation, and servility to NATO.
- The Trump-Putin ceasefire initiative in Ukraine was presented as a diplomatic triumph for Russia and a sign of NATO's division and weakness.

● April 2025: The Orthodox Church, a new military base in Narva, and 'censorship' narratives.

- Parliament's attempt to restrict religious organisations with hostile foreign ties, with a particular focus on the Moscow-linked Orthodox Church, remained a central theme of manipulation, despite the president's refusal to promulgate the amendments. This was recast as 'banning Orthodoxy'.
- Plans to build a new military base in Narva were portrayed as a NATO provocation on Russia's doorstep and a threat to local residents, fuelling concerns in the predominantly Russian-speaking town.
- The Estonian Internal Security Police yearbook naming Russian-speaking blogger Oleg Besedin as a propagandist was used to reinforce narratives about censorship

and the political persecution of 'alternative opinions'.

- The seizure of the sanctioned oil tanker *Kiwala* was described as Estonia 'playing policeman for the West', endangering its own security and acting beyond its means.

● **May 2025: Claims of a police state, 9 May and Pride as moral decay.**

- The government's plans to expand CCTV and AI-supported surveillance were portrayed as steps towards a totalitarian 'police state' that monitors citizens and suppresses dissent.
- An incident involving language use at a hospital was amplified as evidence of systemic discrimination against Russian-speaking patients and state-sanctioned Russophobia.
- Around 9 May, Kremlin-aligned channels contrasted 'authentic' celebrations in Ivangorod with 'repressive' Estonia, using doctored videos of police behaviour in Narva and Tallinn, as well as the 'Putin – War Criminal' banner at Narva Castle, to claim 'rehabilitation of Nazism'.
- Tallinn Pride and the acquisition of water cannons were fused into narratives about Western moral decadence, police brutality, and misplaced state priorities.
- The long-running treason trial of Aivo Peterson continued to be used to depict Estonia as imprisoning opposition figures and 'peace activists'.

● **June 2025: De-Russification, unemployment and NATO escalation.**

- The decision to rename the Russian Theatre and the Russian Cultural Centre in Tallinn was portrayed as an act of cultural cleansing, intended to eradicate Russian identity from the public sphere.
- High unemployment, particularly in Ida-Viru County, was used as evidence that state economic policy intentionally harms Russian speakers.
- The six-year prison sentence given to journalist Svetlana Burceva for treason and propaganda was portrayed as a crackdown on free speech and independent journalism.
- Revisions to the Churches and Congregations Act reignited claims that Orthodox Christians are being persecuted.
- The NATO summit, Estonia's debate on hosting nuclear-capable aircraft, and broader Western policy in the Middle East were used to argue that NATO is aggressive, divided, and morally hypocritical, and that Estonia is a blind follower of a decaying West.

● **July 2025: Taxes, the economy and cultural policy are weaponised.**

- The decision to raise VAT from 22% to 24% was used to portray the government as elitist and indifferent to low-income and Russian-speaking residents.
- Estonia's plan to host the Ukraine Reconstruction Conference in 2027 was criticised for prioritising Ukraine

over domestic needs, thereby reinforcing the 'Kyiv first, people last' narrative.

- Funding IShowSpeed's visit and discrepancies in official economic data were used to suggest corrupt, PR-driven governance and statistical manipulation.
- Controversies surrounding religious legislation and financial surveillance were presented as further steps towards a 'police state' and the persecution of Orthodox believers.
- The Song and Dance Festival was criticised for its Soviet-era infrastructure and traditions, and for its "lavish" cultural spending during an economic crisis.

● **August 2025: Ethnic slurs, scandals and security incidents.**

- The scandal surrounding MP Züleyxa Izmailova's use of the ethnic slur 'tibla' was exploited to suggest that Russophobia is normalised at the highest political levels, with contextual commentary from Estonian politicians and journalists being selectively distorted.
- A luxury retreat scandal involving the Health Board, combined with tax hikes and critical comments from the Estonian Finance Ministry, fuelled the idea that the elite are corrupt and waste money while ordinary people suffer.
- The 'zhduny' debate concerning Russian-speaking Estonians 'waiting for Russia' was exploited to exacerbate feelings of exclusion and mutual mistrust.
- Estonia's expulsion of a Russian diplomat was contrasted with the Trump–Putin Alaska summit, reinforcing the idea that Estonia is a reckless pawn while the great powers negotiate over its head.
- Misleading coverage of a national celebration event where children allegedly shot at caricatures of Russian soldiers, as well as a Ukrainian drone crash near Tartu, was used to depict Estonia as militaristic and Russophobic, and as lacking real air defence capabilities.
- Debates over EU refugee quotas served to portray Estonia as a powerless state forced to obey Brussels.

● **September 2025: Defence mismanagement and the 'rehabilitation of Nazism'.**

- Revelations from the National Audit Office about missing contracts, erroneous payments, and frozen funds in the Estonian Ministry of Defence were seized upon as proof that defence spending is corrupt, wasteful, and socially harmful.
- The raid on the home of lawyer and blogger Andrei Vesterinen in connection with a fraud case was reframed as a politically motivated attack on a local Russian activist.
- Russian drone and aircraft incursions into Estonian and Polish airspace were aggressively denied and mocked as fabrications, with the aim of accusing NATO of staging provocations.
- Layoffs at Tallinn's Södalinna Theatre were presented as yet another attack on Russian culture, providing further evidence that 'Russophobic cultural cleansing' is underway.

- Estonia's appeal to the UN Security Council regarding airspace violations was dismissed as 'hysteria'.
- The 10-year in absentia sentence handed down by a Moscow court to Narva Museum director Maria Smorzhevskikh-Smirnova for displaying a "Putin-Hitler" banner was used to accuse Estonia of "rehabilitating Nazism" and inciting hatred against Russia.

● **October 2025: Municipal elections, distrust of e-voting and narratives surrounding free speech.**

- The municipal elections and debates over restricting the voting rights of Russian and Belarusian citizens, as well as proposals regarding language requirements for candidates, became a central trigger for disinformation. Pro-Kremlin actors claimed that Russian speakers were being erased from politics and that Estonia was sliding into ethnic democracy.
- After the results were announced, electronic voting was portrayed as opaque and rigged. The Centre Party's strong but not dominant performance in Tallinn and Ida-Viru was cited as evidence of 'manipulated e-votes' and a system 'controlled by the ruling elite', with the 5% threshold presented as a tool to exclude 'undesirable' parties.
- Omniva's decision to discontinue Russian-language customer service, coupled with a viral case of alleged discrimination against a Ukrainian student, fuelled narratives about state-driven de-Russification and language-based humiliation.
- The short-term entry ban on Latvian politician Aleksejs Rosļikovs and several of his colleagues, who had been invited to the "The Future of the Baltics – Dialogue Without Borders" event, was used as evidence that Estonia lacks freedom of speech and fears dialogue with Russian speakers.
- The government's decision to commission journalist Henrik Roonemaa to prepare recommendations on reducing war-related anxiety was mocked as the creation of a 'Ministry of Calm', which was used to portray Estonia as hysterical, weak, and dependent on NATO.

● **November 2025: School threat operations, cultural censorship claims, and the Besedin backlash.**

- Coordinated threats of bomb attacks and violence against Tallinn schools, mainly spread via the Telegram messaging app, were identified by the authorities as an information operation aimed at spreading fear and distrust. Pro-Kremlin commentators exploited the incident to claim state incompetence and alleged discrimination against Russian-speaking schools.
- The cancelled Limp Bizkit concert sparked 'censorship' narratives. Following FM Margus Tsahkna's statement that artists supporting Russian aggression are unwelcome, Kremlin-aligned voices accused Estonia of suppressing artistic freedom. This narrative was partially echoed by opposition politicians.
- Oleg Besedin's arrest triggered the strongest identity-driven backlash. Pro-Kremlin voices portrayed him as

a victim of 'Russophobic repression', disregarding his links to sanctioned media networks. His detention has intensified political infighting in Tallinn regarding past cooperation with companies linked to Besedin.

- Reports of Ukrainian corruption and US media leaks on a 28-point peace plan fuelled Kremlin-friendly commentary claiming that global issues cannot be resolved without Russia, and that Estonia will soon be 'ordered' by Washington to soften its pro-Ukraine stance.

- ERR board chair Rein Veidemann criticised a Father's Day TV segment featuring a same-sex couple, prompting a strong backlash from liberal politicians. Russian-language commentators portrayed the incident as the silencing of the last "sane voice" and as proof that Estonia is being forced into "foreign tolerance".

Main disinformation narratives in Estonia during 2025

An analysis of the most-viewed and most-engaged disinformation content across Russian-language Facebook groups, Telegram channels and websites, as well as the activities of local political and public figures in Estonia, reveals a stable ecosystem of recurring narratives. While pro-Kremlin voices exploited real controversies to inflame public sentiment, local actors — particularly in Russian-speaking regions and within conservative-populist circles — have increasingly normalised these narratives by merging domestic grievances with the Kremlin's ideological framing.

Five dominant themes emerged as the major lines of Estonia's disinformation landscape across 2025. These narratives consistently shaped online debates, undermined trust in democratic institutions and exacerbated ethnolinguistic divisions.

1. Systemic Persecution of Russian Speakers and Cultural "De-Russification" (appears in 11 out of 11 months)

The most persistent and emotionally resonant narrative of 2025 portrayed Estonia as a deeply Russophobic state. Pro-Kremlin commentators framed nearly every policy change — from BRELL desynchronisation to theatre layoffs — as evidence of cultural erasure or discrimination:

- Renaming of the Russian Theatre and Russian Cultural Centre was framed as the destruction of Russian identity.
- Language policy enforcement in schools, hospitals and customer service (e.g., Omniva) was portrayed as ethnic humiliation.
- Constitutional amendments restricting local voting rights for non-EU citizens were interpreted as 'Russophobic action'.
- The Orthodox Church crisis was weaponised all year to depict Orthodox believers as persecuted.
- Controversies involving ethnic slurs (tibla) were reframed as proof that anti-Russian racism is tolerated by the Estonian state.

Throughout the year, isolated incidents — a teacher's remark, a security guard's comment, a theatre restructuring — were systematically cherry-picked, exaggerated and generalized. By framing Estonia's integration

policies as "ethnic cleansing of Russian identity," disinformation actors reinforced pro-Kremlin narratives aimed at separating Russian speakers from broader Estonian society.

2. Estonia as a Corrupt, Incompetent and Elitist State (9 out of 11 months)

Economic grievances formed the backbone of domestic disinformation. Tax increases (VAT hike, income tax, heating tariffs etc.), inflation, and unemployment were consistently weaponised to construct an image of a failing state led by corrupt elites disconnected from real people.

Popular tactics included:

- Linking every defence-related expense to "stealing from pensioners and families".
- Amplifying scandals (Health Board retreat, statistical errors, real-estate comments) as systemic corruption.
- Claiming that desynchronisation from BRELL would cause catastrophic energy price hikes.
- Portraying municipal and state-level spending — from Song Festival investments to YouTuber visits — as wasteful PR stunts.

The narrative was deeply populist: Estonia's leaders are "corrupt, Westernised elites" serving Brussels, NATO and global corporations rather than their own citizens.

3. Militarisation, NATO Dependency and Western Puppet Status (8 out of 11 months)

A foundational Kremlin narrative is that Estonia is a NATO pawn with no agency. In 2025, this storyline intensified:

- Defence spending increases to 5% of GDP were framed as hysteria and "feeding the war machine".
- The Narva military base plans were described as a NATO provocation designed to drag Estonia into war.
- Drone crashes, airspace violations and border closures were recast as fabricated provocations orchestrated by

Tallinn under NATO command.

- Estonia's seizure of the Kiwala tanker was mocked as dangerous overreach by a "micro-state playing global policeman".
- NATO nuclear-capable aircraft discussions were twisted into narratives about Estonia wanting war with Russia.

This dual messaging — mocking Estonia as militarily irrelevant while also claiming it threatens Russia — mirrors long-standing Kremlin disinformation strategies across the Baltics.

The core message: Estonia is not a truly sovereign country, but a puppet state of the West, implementing foreign agendas at the expense of its own population. This narrative directly supports Russia's broader strategy of delegitimising the statehood and weakening societal resilience.

4. Western Moral Decadence and the "Decline of Values" (7 out of 11 months)

Throughout 2025, disinformation actors fused Kremlin ideological tropes with local culture-war rhetoric:

- Tallinn Pride was portrayed as state-sponsored moral collapse and anti-family propaganda.
- Police equipment purchases (e.g., water cannons) were linked to narratives of oppressive "liberal dictatorship".
- Comparisons between Western actions in the Middle East and Russia in Ukraine were used to accuse Europe of hypocrisy.

This narrative resonated not only in Kremlin-linked spaces, but also among certain domestic conservative commentators, illustrating the convergence between foreign and homegrown disinformation ecosystems.

5. Undermining Estonia's Sovereignty and Legitimacy of Democratic Institutions (6 out of 11 months)

A central strategic objective of Kremlin information operations is to weaken trust in Estonia's democratic institutions:

- E-voting was repeatedly portrayed as opaque, manipulable and controlled by the "ruling elite".
- Municipal election results were used to claim that the Centre Party was robbed of victories and other smaller parties were excluded by a "5% barrier designed to silence Russians".
- Court cases involving pro-Russian activists (Burceva, Vesterinen, Peterson) were framed as political persecution.
- The KAPO Yearbook was used to depict Estonia as criminalising dissent.

Engagement trends with Kremlin-aligned propaganda in Estonia during 2025

Monitoring of pro-Kremlin Telegram channels and Russian-language Facebook groups active in Estonia reveals sustained high-intensity engagement throughout 2025.

Across the dataset, posts accumulated over 30,500 reactions, with an average of 52–53 reactions per post, indicating consistent audience mobilisation. The ecosystem also produced a series of high-impact viral spikes: the most engaged posts reached 926, 915, 840, 828, and 814 reactions, demonstrating that emotionally charged or identity-based narratives were capable of rapidly amplifying within Russian-language online communities.

The reaction patterns show:

- Stable baseline engagement across routine political content — a sign of persistent, habitual consumption of Kremlin-aligned messaging.
- Sharp virality peaks aligning with disinformation flashpoints (language policy, Orthodox Church controversies, high-profile arrests, e-voting debates, and culturally symbolic incidents).

This distribution confirms that pro-Kremlin narratives in Estonia maintained both breadth (steady weekly engagement) and depth (episodic viral surges), forming a resilient information ecosystem capable of influencing discourse throughout the year.

Thematic analysis of pro-Kremlin social media activity in Estonia (2025)

Monitoring of pro-Kremlin Telegram channels and Russian-language Facebook groups active in Estonia throughout 2025 reveals three dominant thematic clusters, consistently driving engagement and shaping the disinformation environment. The themes below are derived from the dataset's *theme labels and reaction metrics*.

● **“General anti-government sentiments” — the most frequent and consistently engaging theme.** This theme accounts for the largest share of posts and demonstrates steady mobilisation across the year. Narratives include:

- Claims that Estonia is ruled by an incompetent or corrupt elite;
- Accusations that the government prioritises Ukraine/NATO/EU over its own citizens;
- Criticism of defence spending, economic policy and public sector management;
- Amplification of crises (e.g., inflation, energy prices) as “proof” of state failure.

Although not always the most viral, this category shows stable, medium-to-high engagement, indicating a persistent appetite for anti-institution rhetoric among the audience. It forms the baseline emotional backdrop that enables more extreme narratives to spread.

● **“Blames of alleged Russophobia” — the strongest identity-based amplification driver.** The second-largest category in the dataset is also one of the most virally reactive.

Narratives revolve around:

- Claims that Estonian authorities discriminate against Russian speakers;
- Outrage over language policy (schools, public services, media content);
- Portraying any law enforcement or security action as “targeting Russians”;
- Mobilisation around cultural flashpoints (Orthodox Church, historical memory, e-voting).

This category produced many of the top engagement spikes — including posts with 900+ reactions. Identity narratives outperform all others in virality, confirming that perceived cultural and linguistic injustice is the most potent mobilisation driver in Estonia’s Russian-language online sphere.

● **Anti-Western, anti-liberal, and pro-Soviet narratives — smaller volume, high volatility.** Less frequent but strategically important narrative clusters include:

- Anti-Western: NATO escalation claims, EU weakness narratives, U.S. manipulation tropes. These posts generally gained above-average traction during international crises.

- Anti-liberal: moral panic, "decadence of the West", LGBTQ+ visibility, opposition to progressive values. Engagement tends to spike around cultural controversies.

- Pro-Soviet nostalgia: Soviet-era stability, "things were better before 1991", glorification of monuments or symbols. Usually moderate engagement, but high emotional resonance.

- Anti-Ukrainian: attempts to frame Ukrainian refugees as privileged, ungrateful or destabilising. Rare but often cross-amplified with Russophobia narratives.

While smaller in number, these topics acted as force multipliers, amplifying spikes in response to geopolitical events (e.g., war developments, NATO summits, cultural disputes).

● The correlation between themes and virality

Reaction metrics show:

- Typical posts receive ~50 reactions, indicating a stable baseline community.
- Viral posts exceed 800–1,500 reactions, almost always tied to:

- Russophobia narratives,
- Language-rights controversies,
- Scandals involving politicians, police or media,
- Emotionally charged incidents (arrests, threats, religious issues).

These spikes reinforce that identity and grievance-based narratives are the most effective in Estonia's Russian-language information ecosystem.

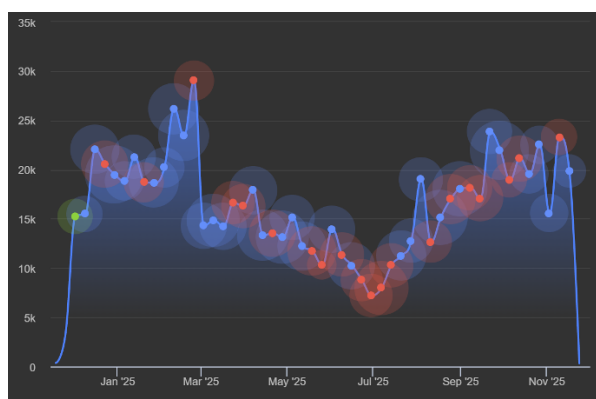
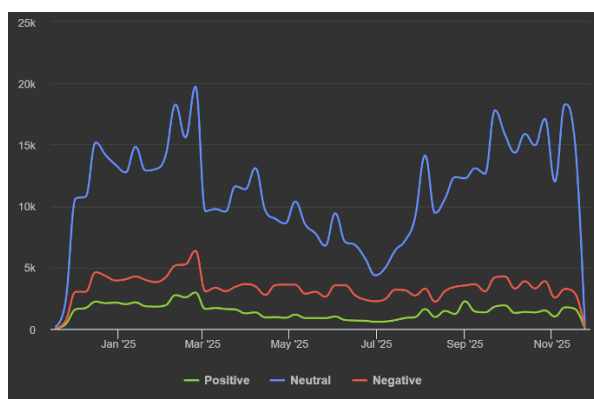
Overall conclusion

Across 2025, pro-Kremlin online communities in Estonia leveraged a stable combination of anti-government grievances and ethno-linguistic identity narratives to sustain engagement. The data confirms that:

- Anti-government rhetoric provides broad resonance,
- Russophobia claims provide emotional depth,
- Anti-Western and anti-liberal themes provide ideological framing,
- Periodic incidents create viral disinformation peaks.

This interplay forms a resilient narrative architecture that has shaped Estonia's Russian-language information landscape throughout the year.

The charts below demonstrate a clear imbalance between negative and positive sentiment, with negative reactions consistently prevailing across the year. Periodic spikes in outreach coincide with major political or social flashpoints, indicating that disinformation actors successfully harnessed moments of uncertainty to maximise emotional impact, deepen public distrust, and amplify divisive narratives.



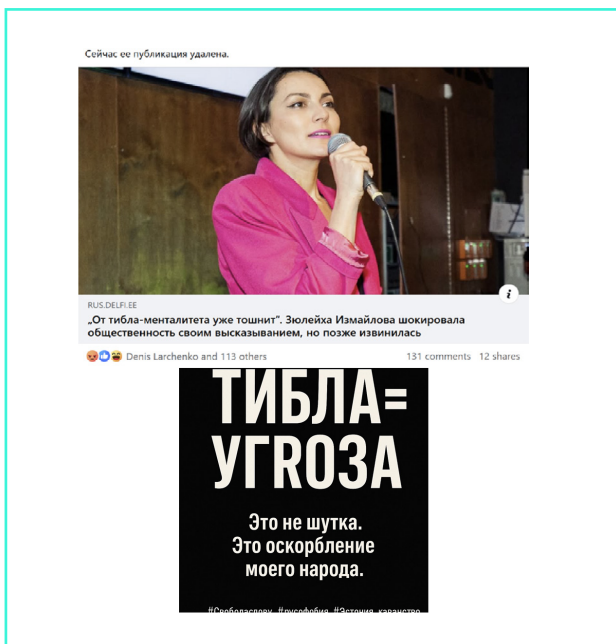
Top posts and platforms (Estonia, 2025)

Estonia's most viral disinformation content originated from a combination of:

1. Telegram channels,
2. Local pro-Kremlin personalities,
3. Populist actors exploiting culture-war and ethnic narratives.

1) The 'Tibla Controversy' - Weaponised Ethnic Slur Debate

(Most viewed and most engaged incident of 2025 in Estonia)



Screenshot description:

SDE MP Züleyxa Izmailova's tweet containing the slur 'tibla' received widespread attention in the mainstream and social media, provoking harsh reactions and accusations of Russophobia.

Narrative impact:

The incident became a perfect storm:

- Emotional (ethnic insult)
- Easily decontextualised
- Perfect for victimisation narratives

Pro-Kremlin actors reframed the incident **as proof of state-level racism**, ignoring Izmailova's apology and the

political consensus condemning the slur.

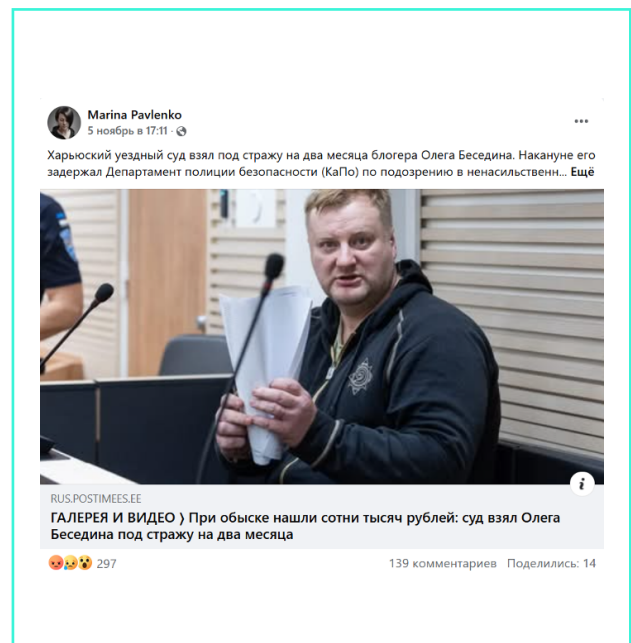
The event was used to argue:

- "Russian speakers will never be accepted."
- "Estonian elites hate Russians and get away with it."
- "Russophobia is systemic, not accidental."

This became **the single most viral identity-based narrative of the year**.

2) The 'Besedin Case' - Weaponised Free-Speech and Political Persecution Narrative

(One of the most emotionally charged and highly amplified "political persecution" narratives of 2025 in Estonia)



Screenshot no. 12

Oleg Besedin in the courtroom. The caption under the photo reads: "During the search, hundreds of thousands of rubles were found: the court placed Oleg Besedin in custody for two months."

Posts featuring this image circulated widely in Russian-language Facebook groups in Estonia, generating hundreds of reactions.

Pro-Kremlin commentators used the case to accuse the Estonian authorities of persecuting "independent journalism" and silencing Russian-speaking voices.



Screenshot no. 13

A political cartoon originally published by Radio Sloboda, depicting a figure labeled "PRESSA" (Press) trapped at the center of a web of accusations such as "violation," "insulting the authorities," and "extremism."

The cartoon was originally intended to illustrate media repression in Russia. However, after Besedin's detention, Russian-speaking users in Estonia began repurposing the image to visualise and reinforce their narrative that "there is no freedom of speech in Estonia."

Narrative impact:

The incident became a perfect storm:

- Emotional (claims of ideological and cultural persecution).
- Easily decontextualised (his online posts were reframed as "victim of censorship" rather than investigated propaganda).
- Perfect for victimisation narratives (he presented himself as the "voice of the ignored Russian-speaking minority" in Estonia).

Pro-Kremlin actors reframed the incident as proof of state-level Russophobia and suppression of free speech, ignoring the documented evidence that Besedin is suspected of participating in Russian influence operations and distributing media under sanctions.

The event was used to argue:

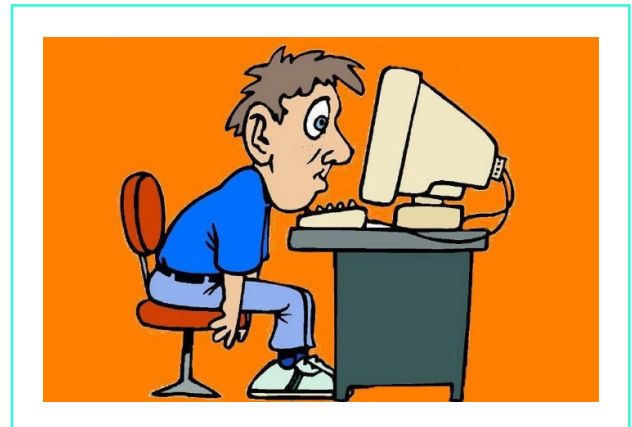
- "Russian-speaking voices are silenced in Estonia."
- "Estonian elites are hostile to Russian culture and manipulate media freedoms."
- "The state treats Russian language media as enemies of the people, not communities."

This has become one of the most effective identity-and-freedom based narratives leveraged in Estonia's Russian-language information space throughout 2025.

3) The 'Municipal Elections Manipulation' - Crisis of Democratic Trust in Estonia

(One of the largest engagement peaks of 2025 driven by claims of rigged e-voting, voter exclusion and ethnic targeting)

The charts below demonstrate a clear imbalance between negative and positive sentiment, with negative reactions consistently prevailing across the year. Periodic spikes in outreach coincide with major political or social flashpoints, indicating that disinformation actors successfully harnessed moments of uncertainty to maximise emotional impact, deepen public distrust, and amplify divisive narratives.



Screenshot no. 14

A political cartoon widely circulated in social media discussions about Estonia's electronic voting system. This type of imagery dominated the Russian-language segment of Estonian social networks, where authors used such cartoons to reinforce and visualise the narrative of "electoral fraud" and alleged manipulation of e-voting results.

Narrative impact:

The elections became a catalyst for a powerful disinformation surge:

- Emotional (questions of identity, exclusion and fairness).
- Easily decontextualised (complex reforms and election tech simplified into "system is rigged" soundbites).
- Perfect for victimisation narratives (Russian-speaking communities depicted as deliberately silenced).

Pro-Kremlin actors reframed the municipal elections as proof of state-level manipulation and discrimination, ignoring official observer reports that the elections were well-organised and transparent.

The event was used to argue:

- "Russian speakers are being excluded from politics."
- "Electronic voting is a tool of the elite to steal our voices."
- "Estonian democracy is a façade; real decision-making happens behind closed doors."

This became one of the most potent narrative clusters of the year — combining questions of identity, technology, sovereignty and trust in one amplified story.

Co-authors:

Lithuania:

Urtė Andriukaitytė
Tomas Kazulėnas
Lukas Andriukaitis

Latvia:

Dr. Martins Hirss

Estonia:

The National Centre of Defence
& Security Awareness in Estonia

Legal notice and disclaimer

© 2025 Civic Resilience Initiative – all rights reserved

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior permission in writing from Civic Resilience Initiative. This report is not a legally binding document. It is a collaborative informational, assessment and forecasting document, and as such does not necessarily reflect the views of each of the contributing partners in all of its content. Any errors are the sole responsibility of the authors.



supported by **Google**