



Baltic Engagement
Centre for Combating
Information Disorders

QUARTERLY BRIEF FOR BECID 2

AUTUMN 2025



Co-funded by
the European Union

PARTNER ACTIVITIES

Throughout Autumn 2025, BECID partners continued to strengthen investigative journalism, media literacy, and democratic resilience across the Baltic region and internationally.

Delfi Lithuania (Melo detektorius)

Delfi Lithuania was selected to host Global Fact, the world's largest fact-checking conference, in Vilnius in 2026 – a major international recognition of its fact-checking unit. In October–November, editor Aistė Meidutė represented Delfi at several high-level international forums, including the **Forum 2000 Conference** in Prague and the **Eastern Partnership Fact-Checkers Conference** in Chişinău, where she moderated a panel on strengthening democratic resilience through media literacy.

Delfi Lithuania also hosted visiting journalists from Sri Lanka and delivered strategic briefings to public-sector communication specialists on disinformation threats and verification tools. Fact-checker Monika Jakimčukė represented Delfi at a regional media meeting in Ukraine, presenting on Russian disinformation narratives and trust-building during wartime.

Re:Baltica (Latvia)

Re:Baltica journalists received several national awards for investigative and ethical journalism. Evita Puriņa, head of Re:Check, was named **Editor of the Year** and later participated in the U.S. State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP).

Re:Baltica also won the **Public Media Professional Ethics Award** for an investigation into sexual harassment in the medical sector. In autumn, Re:Baltica experts contributed to EU-level and regional discussions on disinformation, AI, and election security, including the EU DisinfoLab Conference and meetings with European Commission officials.

University of Tartu (Estonia)

BECID experts from the University of Tartu played a central role in public education and international knowledge exchange. Maria Murumaa-Mengel, Maia Klaassen, Inger Klesment, and Gretel Juhansoo delivered keynote talks, teacher trainings, and conference presentations across Estonia and abroad, covering topics such as social media, online safety, psychological resilience, and media literacy. BECID experts also contributed to the Media Literacy Conference 2025 in Rakvere, where Gretel Juhansoo was named **Media Literacy Promoter of the Year** and Inger Klesment's Digimentor initiative received **Media Literacy Project of the Year** recognition.

In November, **Maria Murumaa-Mengel** received national recognition as one of **Estonia's most influential science communicators** for her sustained work on misinformation, youth, and media literacy.

Delfi Estonia (Faktikontroll)

In September, Delfi Estonia launched a new weekly newsletter series, “**Spotted: Elections**”, analysing digital campaigning and social media influence ahead of elections. Delfi also hosted Armenian journalists for resilience training and international newsroom exchange. Fact-checking expert Marta Vunš represented Delfi in international seminars and Estonian public broadcasting discussing Russian information influence, journalistic responsibility, and media education for schoolchildren.

BCME (Latvia)

The Baltic Centre for Media Excellence marked its **10th anniversary** in Riga with the **Baltic Media AI Forum 2025**, gathering nearly 80 media professionals, researchers, and policymakers to discuss how AI is transforming journalism. BCME also organised the **Artificial Intelligence Media Innovation Hackathon** and participated in international forums on media freedom and trust, including the **Thomson Reuters Foundation Trust Conference and MEGAPHONE 2025** in Sarajevo.

BECID PROPAWHEEL | THE LOCAL ELECTION PLAYBOOK: THE RISING TIDE OF POPULIST RHETORIC IN ESTONIAN POLITICS

From 30 September to 30 October, BECID's **Propawheel installation** (WP4, D4.2) was displayed at the University of Tartu Library, inviting visitors to reflect on how political communication seeks to influence emotions, fears, and identities during election time. In election campaigns, people are exposed almost daily to messages that do not aim to discuss society's shared future honestly, but instead rely on emotional pressure, stereotyping, or polarisation. The Propawheel was designed as a practical tool to help citizens recognise and reflect on these techniques.

Visitors were invited to explore **eight common manipulation techniques** used in political communication by spinning the wheel and drawing a technique such as labelling, fear-mongering, personal attacks, or “us vs them” framing. Participants could also nominate a politician they believed uses manipulative messaging and describe which techniques they had observed.

An analysis of citizen feedback ahead of Estonia's local elections reveals a broad spectrum of manipulative rhetorical and propaganda techniques used by candidates. Based on the responses, the most frequently noted tactics included *polarisation (us vs them)*, *name-calling*, *scapegoating*, *fear-mongering*, and *demagoguery*. These approaches were often employed to provoke emotional reactions and obscure the lack of policy substance.

BECID's preliminary analysis indicates that key techniques observed by respondents were:

1. **“Us vs Them” Narratives:** Several candidates framed their opponents or minority groups as threats to national or moral values.
2. **Ad hominem and labelling:** Instead of addressing issues, many resorted to personal attacks or dismissive stereotypes (e.g., “traitors,” “liberals,” or “globalists”).
3. **Demagoguery and Half-Truths:** Selective facts, misleading data, and strawman arguments were commonly used to distort debate.
4. **Populism and Simplification:** Complex issues were reduced to emotionally charged, easy-to-digest slogans – often devoid of realistic solutions.
5. **Performative Social Media Use:** Some candidates used platforms like TikTok to project a youth-friendly image, which voters perceived as forced or superficial.
6. **Statistical Manipulation:** Numbers were cherry-picked or taken out of context to lend false credibility.

Notable were findings on specific candidates. For example, a young female conservative politician Sandra Laur stood out for her frequent use of fear appeals, populism, and inflammatory language. Experienced right-leaning conservative politicians Urmas Reinsalu and Martin Helme often blamed all problems on the ruling coalition and used polarising rhetoric. A radical newcomer politician Andro Roos was described as using nearly all known propaganda tactics, including personal attacks, visual mimicry of other parties, and oppositional branding.

What this feedback suggests is a worrying normalisation of manipulative campaigning, where emotional provocation often trumps substantive discussion. When public discourse is dominated by division, oversimplification, and distrust, voters may disengage or become more vulnerable to populist messaging. Media literacy education must address these rhetorical strategies, helping citizens critically evaluate not just what politicians say, but how they say it and why. **Greater public awareness** is essential to foster informed, democratic participation and reduce the impact of toxic political communication.

BECID Propawheel will receive a **new permanent location at the AHHA Science Centre in Tartu from December**, ensuring continued access to this interactive media-literacy tool beyond the election period and enabling further research data collection on perception of manipulation techniques.

GLAM-SECTOR WEBINAR SERIES KICK-OFF

On 24 November, BECID launched its new GLAM-sector webinar series, focusing on media literacy in libraries, museums, and archives. Over 50 people from memory institutions all over Estonia participated. The session introduced early findings from a University of Tartu student study on how memory institutions support media and digital competences.

While the full results will be published in the D4.1 report in May 2026, key findings will be communicated in advance through a dedicated subsection on our website. The students will present their preliminary insights during the first webinar on 8 December 2025.

These insights will directly shape BECID's upcoming training and resource development.

HOT REPORTS | DISINFORMATION AS A TOOL TO UNDERMINE ELECTIONS: LESSONS FROM THE BALTICS AND BEYOND

As part of BECID Round 2, WP 3 three Hot Reports were published from August to November 2025. These reports have revealed how disinformation is increasingly used to disrupt democratic processes, polarise societies, and manipulate public perception in the Baltic region and its neighbourhood.

Although these cases emerged from different domains (green energy debates in Latvia, enforcement of the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), and pro-Kremlin narratives around protests in Georgia) they share common disinformation strategies that threaten democratic resilience, especially in the run-up to elections.

In Latvia, resistance to wind energy projects has become a new frontier for disinformation. Activist groups opposing renewable energy have adopted Kremlin-aligned narratives and conspiracy theories, claiming, for example, that wind turbines cause death through infrasound or that the EU's Green Deal is a form of global terrorism. These narratives are amplified by pro-Kremlin media and populist political parties who use anti-environmental sentiment to mobilise voters ahead of elections. Disguised as grassroots activism, this movement exploits emotional triggers and media illiteracy to erode trust in national and EU-level policy.

Meanwhile, a stress test of the DSA conducted by the Latvian think tank Providus exposed how poorly digital platforms respond to harmful content reported by users. Out of 21 posts flagged for hate speech, disinformation, or incitement to violence, platforms failed to remove a single one based on user complaints. Telegram's reporting tool was dysfunctional, while TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook offered only automated replies such as "no violations found." This inaction disproportionately affects Russian-speaking communities in the Baltics – already vulnerable after Kremlin-backed media were banned. Without effective enforcement, online spaces remain exposed to manipulation, undermining information security during sensitive electoral periods.

In Georgia, pro-Kremlin actors and government officials have spread false claims that the EU is financing civic protests, portraying demonstrations against democratic backsliding as foreign-orchestrated coups. This narrative mirrors disinformation tactics used during Ukraine's Maidan uprising and serves to discredit legitimate civic action while justifying state repression. The campaign has regional resonance, as similar foreign agent rhetoric is increasingly deployed in Baltic disinformation ecosystems.

These cases highlight the interconnected threats posed by online disinformation: weakening trust in democratic institutions, manipulating electoral discourse, and fostering social polarisation. They also expose the failure of major platforms to act effectively, despite regulatory frameworks like the DSA, and underscore how Kremlin narratives are repurposed to suit local contexts.

As elections approach across the Baltics and Eastern Europe, the stakes are high. Unchecked disinformation not only distorts public debate – it can alter the outcomes of democratic processes. Governments, civil society, educators, and tech platforms must respond urgently and collectively. Strategic public communication, stronger enforcement of platform accountability, and robust media literacy are all essential to building democratic resilience.

RESEARCH BRIEF | WHY SOME PEOPLE HESITATE ABOUT VACCINES AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

BECID's research team in WP5 published a Research Brief (D5.2) based on [research article](#) on vaccine hesitancy.

In recent years, vaccine hesitancy has become one of the biggest challenges in public health. But contrary to common stereotypes, most people who are hesitant about vaccines are not “anti-science” or conspiracy theorists. In fact, new research shows that many are well-informed, deeply reflective, and simply trying to make the best decision for themselves or their families – especially during emotionally vulnerable moments in life.

A recent [BECID study explored](#) what people who have postponed or refused vaccines actually think and feel. The findings provide valuable guidance for doctors, public health experts, and policymakers who want to build trust and improve vaccination rates.

Listen First, Then Inform. Many hesitant individuals say they don't feel heard. Instead of immediately correcting their views or dismissing concerns with phrases like “just trust the science,” health professionals should start by listening. Showing empathy and validating the person's feelings creates space for open conversation and trust.

Timing Matters. Life is full of transitional moments – becoming a parent, facing a new diagnosis, caring for an ageing relative. These are times when people are flooded with emotion, information, and questions. This research found that such vulnerable life phases are when individuals are most likely to seek out health information – and most open to both good and bad advice. This makes it crucial for doctors and health communicators to engage at the right time, with the right message.

Trusted Messengers Make the Difference. It's not always the official voice that people trust most. Midwives, general practitioners, and even practitioners of alternative medicine

often have strong relationships with vaccine-hesitant individuals. Partnering with these “trusted messengers” can help bridge the gap between public health goals and personal belief systems.

Speak Their Language. Some people feel that vaccines are “unnatural” or out of step with their lifestyle. Instead of arguing, health professionals can show how vaccines support the body’s own defence system and complement other wellness practices. Reframing the conversation around shared values (like protecting children or staying healthy) can make a big difference.

One Message Doesn’t Fit All. People hesitate for different reasons: some are worried about side effects, others feel pushed by the system, and many just want to decide for themselves. This means public health campaigns need to be more targeted and personalised. A message that works for a new parent might not work for someone with strong beliefs in natural healing. Tailoring communication to different audiences is essential.

What Can Policymakers Do? On a broader level, building trust takes time and investment. Policymakers should support community outreach programmes that focus on relationships, not just risk communication. They should also back interdisciplinary research that includes social, cultural, and psychological insights – not just medical ones. And finally, boosting health literacy from an early age, especially in schools and parenting programmes, helps people navigate complex health choices more confidently.

The peer-reviewed research article [*Exploring subjective understandings among vaccine-hesitant individuals: findings from a Q methodology study*](#) by Kristina Seimann, Andra Siibak & Marit Napp was published in *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*.

SECTION OF INTEREST | HYBRID THREATS IN THE BALTICS: FEAR AND DISINFORMATION ARE WEAPONISED

This section focuses on information-manipulation techniques across the Baltic states, with particular attention to hybrid threats focusing on activities in WP3.

Between 2023 and 2025, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have faced a surge of hybrid threats designed to disrupt democratic societies, sow mistrust, and erode public security. These threats often exploit public fears about safety, war, or political instability, and combine misinformation, anonymous provocation, and emotional manipulation into well-orchestrated campaigns. Three recent cases illustrate how hybrid actors exploit fear to destabilise societies, particularly by targeting trust in institutions and the safety of children and migrants.

Fabricated Hate Crimes and Psychological Provocations (Estonia)

In November 2025, Estonian media outlet Rus.Postimees received an anonymous email, allegedly from a Ukrainian refugee, claiming to have witnessed hate graffiti in Tallinn calling for violence against Ukrainians. The email included photos, a detailed narrative, and references to far-right imagery (the "AC" logo linked to the radical Active Club movement). Yet closer investigation revealed no such graffiti existed at the alleged location, and the police had received no such report. Moreover, the anonymous source, "Mikita," used encrypted email accounts and a Telegram profile with multiple fake names tied to a Polish number and had sent similar letters to several newsrooms in Europe.

The objective was likely twofold: first, to trick media into publishing inflammatory content that could later be discredited, undermining media credibility; second, to instil fear among Ukrainian refugees in Estonia. By exploiting a real security concern (right-wing extremism) and mimicking emotional testimony, the campaign aimed to erode trust in both local security and Ukrainian integration.

Mass Threat Emails to Schools (Estonia)

In October 2025, nearly 20 schools in Tallinn received threatening messages via Telegram and email, warning of violent attacks against children and staff. The letters, signed off with statements like "we are more than 50 people, and we are not afraid," led schools to impose emergency security measures, restrict access, and alarm thousands of families. Despite no confirmed threat, the situation created real fear. The Estonian police assessed the threat level as low but acknowledged that psychological damage was already done: the disruption of daily life, panic among parents, and media coverage all served the interests of whoever sent the threats. This incident fits the classic disinformation pattern of terror by rumour, where fear itself becomes the weapon.

The case revealed how hybrid actors, whether foreign or domestic, can paralyse public institutions without firing a shot, simply by exploiting vulnerability in the education sector and parental instincts to protect children.

Disinformation as Political Disruption (Latvia & Lithuania)

In Latvia, Re:Baltica uncovered a coordinated disinformation campaign targeting renewable energy projects, specifically wind farms. Opponents used conspiracy theories (e.g., wind turbines cause death), emotional imagery (coffins at town halls), and Kremlin-affiliated media to portray green energy as a Western threat. These narratives were then picked up by populist politicians, turning misinformation into political capital, especially ahead of elections.

Meanwhile, in Georgia – a country closely monitored by Baltic states due to parallels in Russian disinformation tactics – Kremlin-friendly actors spread false claims that

the EU was financing anti-government protests. Similar accusations have previously circulated in Baltic media spaces, showing how Russian narrative templates are recycled across regions.

Common Patterns of Manipulation

These cases demonstrate how hybrid threat actors bypass traditional defences by weaponizing everyday vulnerabilities. By manipulating fear and public empathy, they turn democratic freedoms (e.g., free press, open information spaces, civic activism) into tools of disruption. These hybrid threats share the following tactics:

- **Exploiting fear:** of violence, marginalisation, environmental destruction, or foreign interference.
- **Anonymous and unverifiable sources:** often using encrypted platforms and fabricated identities.
- **Multi-channel amplification:** from Telegram to mainstream media to foreign press.
- **Emotional framing:** urgent, personal, or violent messages that override critical thinking.
- **Strategic targeting:** of schools, refugees, civic protests, or policy issues – areas of emotional or political sensitivity.

As Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania prepare for different upcoming elections in coming years, the role of disinformation in manipulating public sentiment is especially dangerous. Hybrid campaigns do not need to convince a majority, they only need to erode trust, suppress participation, or inflame divisions.

COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION PLAN

In November 2025, BECID finalised its Updated Communication and Dissemination Plan (D2.1), which defines how the consortium will coordinate internal communication and strengthen external visibility throughout the project lifecycle. The purpose of the plan is to ensure smooth cooperation across all work packages – including administration, fact-checking, research, and media literacy – while systematically increasing BECID's visibility across the Baltic region and internationally.

BECID's primary target groups include the general public in the Baltic states, Russian-speaking audiences if possible, the GLAM sector (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums), journalists and media professionals, as well as national and EU-level policymakers. Secondary audiences include NGOs and civil society organisations, the EDMO network, the academic community, students interested in media literacy and disinformation research, and international observers.

The communication objectives are divided into internal and external goals. Internally, the

focus is on ensuring timely and well-aligned communication between partners, maintaining a consistent flow of information, and supporting good governance through structured reporting and documentation.

Externally, the objectives are to raise awareness of BECID's mission and outputs, disseminate fact-checks, Hot Reports, research briefs, and media literacy campaigns, actively engage the GLAM sector and educators with practical tools and training, and achieve measurable growth in reach, engagement, and visibility in line with the project's KPI framework.

The plan also defines BECID's key strategic messages. A strong emphasis is placed on cross-Baltic cooperation, multilingual communication, and inclusivity. Audience-specific messaging highlights BECID's role in supporting the GLAM sector with media and information literacy tools, providing policymakers with research-based monitoring and recommendations, and explaining disinformation threats to the general public in accessible formats.

Communication is implemented through a wide range of internal and external channels. Daily, weekly, and monthly communication activities are clearly structured in the plan. These include regular internal coordination, website and social media content production, publication of Hot Reports and fact-checks, visual content creation, cross-platform coordination with partners, preparation of external newsletters, EDMO reporting, and basic analytics monitoring.

On a monthly and quarterly basis, BECID produces internal newsletters, prepares steering committee materials, uploads official deliverables, and analyses engagement metrics.

UPDATED CORPORATE VISUAL IDENTITY (CVI) & COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

In autumn 2025, BECID also finalised its updated Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) and Communication Guidelines, providing all consortium partners with a unified framework for external communication.

The updated CVI ensures a consistent visual and textual identity across all BECID materials, including websites, reports, presentations, social media, and public events. It defines the core visual elements: logo usage, colour palette, typography, layout principles, and co-branding rules with partners and funder, while also setting standards for tone of voice, multilingual communication, and accessibility.

The guidelines support clearer recognition of BECID as a Baltic-wide centre of excellence and strengthen the professional coherence of the project across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.