



Baltic Engagement
Centre for Combating
Information Disorders

QUARTERLY BRIEF FOR BECID 2

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PARTNER ACTIVITIES

University of Tartu (Estonia)

On 19 March, Maria Murumaa-Mengel, Inger Klesment, and Gretel Juhansoo met with the Media Education Teachers' Association to discuss practical approaches supporting youth media literacy.

Maria Murumaa-Mengel and Inger Klesment participated in the Lapsevanema Kool podcast discussing children's digital media use and online safety.

Maria Murumaa-Mengel presented "Gendered Disinformation" at the BECID conference Resilient Voices: Women and Disinformation. Maria Murumaa-Mengel also delivered presentations at the Viljandi Culture Academy conference "Art During Crisis" and at Hitotsubashi University in Japan on Estonian experiences in tackling disinformation and developing digital media literacy.

On 24 March, Inger Klesment met with the Baltic Studies Institute to explore cooperation opportunities related to media literacy development in memory institutions.

On 31 March, Inger Klesment conducted a large-scale workshop at Pärnu Koidula Gymnasium involving approximately 80 students. The workshop incorporated the BECID Propawheel.

Maria Murumaa-Mengel and Inger Klesment gave interviews on Vikerraadio discussing children's digital safety.

On 7 April, BECID organised the webinar Data Protection in Memory Institutions for GLAM-sector professionals across the Baltic States.

Inger Klesment participated in the Internet Day 2026 panel discussion on whether young people should be disconnected from social media. **On 15 April**, Inger Klesment delivered presentations at the Elva Family Centre annual conference and at Valga Basic School on children's use of AI and how parents can discuss AI-related risks.

"Suur Digiseiklus" by Inger Klesment, Maria Murumaa-Mengel and Killu Agur was launched. The Great Digital Adventure is an educational children's book designed to help young audiences understand online safety, digital literacy, and responsible internet use through storytelling and interactive learning. The project supports discussions between children, parents, and educators about online behaviour, digital risks, misinformation, and safe internet practices in an accessible and age-appropriate way.

Maria Murumaa-Mengel created educational materials and public lectures for the Tagasi Kooli initiative focusing on gender stereotypes and leadership.

Additional media outreach included interviews and commentaries on children's digital skills, online safety, harassment in universities, and the role of culture in countering disinformation.

Maria Murumaa-Mengel trained teachers at Mart Reinik School on information resilience and schools.

On 27 April, Maria Murumaa-Mengel participated as an expert in a roundtable discussion at the Estonian Parliament on regulating large-scale online harassment campaigns.

BECID representatives also visited BENEDMO and the Sound & Vision Museum in the Netherlands to discuss future cooperation.

In May, Maria Murumaa-Mengel participated in public discussions on polarised social media, radicalisation, youth mental health, and online culture.

BECID organised another large-scale **DigiÄKK media literacy event for children**. **Maria Murumaa-Mengel and Maia Klaassen** delivered a workshop on building information resilience during the EJTA Teachers Training Conference in Tartu.

Maria Murumaa-Mengel moderated HARNO's youth monitoring seminar on values and radicalisation.

Additional activities included lectures for judges, media appearances, and public outreach related to digital resilience and platform governance.

Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (Latvia)

On 17 March, Agnese Ēķe-Cēsniēce, representing BCME, participated in a lunch discussion on *Women and Disinformation*, organized as part of the visit of the FCDO Regional Gender and Equalities Adviser for Europe to Riga. The discussion addressed the growing challenges of gendered disinformation, as well as the critical importance of media security and media literacy in strengthening societal resilience.

On 23 March, Agnese Ēķe-Cēsniēce, representing BCME, participated in the conference "*The Role of Media in the National Security System*" held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. As part of the event, she also took part in a meeting with Jan Braathu, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Special Representative on Freedom of the Media. Among the key topics discussed was the importance of media literacy in strengthening societal resilience.

On 26 March in Tallinn, Gunta Sloga, Executive Director of BCME, and Agnese Ēķe-Cēsniēce, Project Manager, participated in the MEDIA CONFERENCE 2026: Journalism, Freedom, Data, Privacy, held at Tallinn University. The conference explored a wide range of issues - from digital transformation and content development in the media sector to data security and accessibility - highlighting the challenge of balancing public data protection with the need for access to information, particularly for media organizations.

On 27 March in Tallinn, Gunta Sloga, Executive Director of BCME, and Agnese Ēķe-Cēsniēce, Project Manager, met with Sophie Coumel, Cultural Advisor and Director of the French Institute in Estonia. The meeting focused on discussing media literacy initiatives and opportunities for collaboration across the Baltic region.

On April 14, the Executive Director of the Baltic Center for Media Excellence, Gunta Sloga, was invited to participate in a panel discussion organized by the OSCE – The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Security Committee on disinformation and the impact of AI on it. Gunta Sloga emphasized that in conditions of cognitive warfare, a strong information space is part of national security, therefore it is especially important to counter disinformation. She also stressed the need to strengthen robust and independent media by enhancing their ability to adapt to rapid digital changes. Additionally, G. Sloga encouraged the OSCE to explore ways to coordinate a whole-of-society approach to media literacy and education. She shared the successful experience of the Baltic states in strengthening societal resilience.

On April 22, the Executive Director of the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence, Gunta Sloga, participated in the “Bridging Asia and Europe in the AI Age” event, organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation and the University of Latvia. She also moderated a panel discussion “ASEF as a platform for Asia–Europe dialogue in times of technological change.”

The Executive Director of BCME Gunta Sloga provided an overview of how the Center implements media literacy and counter-disinformation projects as part of an event organized by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung on **April 22** in Riga. During the program, 15 representatives from media organizations and NGOs from Central and Southern Europe, whose focus is on disinformation, visited Latvia and Finland to learn from both countries’ experience in strengthening societal resilience. G. Sloga emphasized that the experience of the Baltic states in these areas can be valuable for other regions of Europe, and it was agreed that further cooperation is necessary.

Delfi Lithuania

On April 19, Delfi fact-checker Monika Jakimčukė led an information resilience workshop in Armenia, where participants - from young adults to seniors - learned to identify bots, trolls, and manipulation techniques, recognize AI-generated content, and verify information using fact-checking tools.

On 22 April, during the panel discussion on Building Democratic Resilience through Dialogue in Brussels, Aistė Meidutė, the editor of Delfi Melo detektorius highlighted the evolving role of fact-checkers within whole-of-society approaches to countering disinformation. She emphasized that while fact-checking alone cannot fully neutralize the spread of false narratives, it remains a critical pillar in a broader ecosystem that includes media, policymakers, and civil society. Meidutė argued that the effectiveness of fact-checkers depends on collaboration, trust-building, and the ability to reach audiences beyond traditional news consumers.

As Armenia approaches its elections, the Civic Resilience Initiative invited Monika Jakimčukė, a journalist from “Melo detektorius”, to help strengthen public resilience against disinformation. **On April 18–19**, participants ranging from young people to seniors learned together how to identify AI-generated content and responsibly verify information online.

With AI-generated content becoming an increasingly common part of everyday life, “Melo detektorius” journalists Aistė Meidutė and Monika Jakimčukė helped DELFI colleagues better understand the nuances of AI on **April 29**. From how social media algorithms shape our beliefs to practical tools that anyone can use to verify whether what we see is actually true.

DELFI Lithuania representatives participated in the event “Setting and Promoting Common Principles of AI Use in Journalism and Media” in Perugia, Italy. During the event, media and technology experts discussed the use of artificial intelligence in journalism, the risks posed by AI, practical tools, and the development of common principles for AI use in the media sector.

Delfi Estonia

Holger Roonemaa visited Paris on 14–15 April. Ahead of the upcoming presidential elections in France, the Estonian Embassy in Paris organised a panel discussion titled “*Defending Democracy in the Age of Hybrid Threats: Countering Foreign Information Manipulation*”, where Holger spoke alongside representatives from VIGINUM, Reporters Without Borders, and the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

On 29 April, Holger Roonemaa spoke at the *Media Matters* event series organised by the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga (SSE Riga), delivering a two-hour presentation titled “*How Baltic Journalists Are Investigating Russia’s Activities in the Baltics and How Does It Resonate in the West.*”

On 29 April, students from Rae Gymnasium visited Ireene Kilusk for a discussion about journalism, fact-checking, and misinformation on social media.

At the end of March, Ireene Kilusk delivered a seminar for nearly 300 teachers, youth workers, and parents on how to recognise AI-generated fakes, how and why misinformation spreads, who benefits from it, and how to discuss these issues with young people. At the end of March, Marta Vunš participated in the International IDEA Nordic-Baltic Region Democratic Futures Foresight Workshop in Stockholm.

On 23 April, Marta Vunš appeared on the Kuku Radio programme Kirillitsas Eesti, discussing the spread and evolution of Russian narratives, disinformation related to Ukrainian drones, and the so-called “Narva People’s Republic.”

At the beginning of May, Delfi Meedia’s investigative and fact-checking team visited colleagues at Helsingin Sanomat to plan new joint articles and other journalistic projects. Among other things, Delfi journalists also visited the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. Contacts were established and experiences exchanged.

In mid-May, Holger Roonemaa attended the Globsec security conference in Prague, where he participated in two discussions. One focused on transnational repression and included co-panelists such as Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, former European Commission Vice-President Věra Jourová, and former Echo of Moscow journalist Irina Babloyan, who has been a victim of poisoning. The second panel addressed FIMI originating from Russia.

During the Lennart Meri Conference, Delfi, together with Fotografiska and actors from Von Krah! Theatre, staged a pop-up event where actors Karl Birnbaum and Herman Pihlak performed leaked phone conversations between Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Between the calls, Holger and Hungarian colleague Szabolcs Panyi discussed the publication of the articles related to the event, influence activities related to Hungarian elections, and the country’s future outlook.

At the end of May, several European publications, led by Delfi, published articles based on a fresh data leak. Leaked emails and internal communications from the Russian Presidential Administration and the notorious Social Design Agency revealed the direct involvement of Putin’s administration in carrying out and planning hybrid attacks across Europe.

OUTREACH EVENTS

BECID Conference “Resilient Voices: Women and Disinformation”

Gendered and identity-based disinformation has become an increasingly visible challenge in democratic societies, particularly in the Baltic information environment. The conference “Resilient Voices: Women & Disinformation” brought together policymakers, journalists, researchers, and civil society representatives to explore how disinformation targeting

gender and identity operates, how it affects democratic participation, and what responses are needed to address it.

Through keynote speeches, panel discussions, and expert presentations, participants examined how digital platforms, geopolitical narratives, and social stereotypes intersect to shape the spread of gendered disinformation. Discussions emphasized the importance of strengthening media ecosystems, protecting journalists, supporting civil society, and promoting media literacy to safeguard democratic processes.

The conference opened with a **keynote by Hanah Lahe**, the youngest Member of Parliament in Estonia, who highlighted the growing impact of gendered disinformation on democratic governance and political participation.

Lahe explained that gendered disinformation rarely aims to change political opinions directly. Instead, it often seeks to silence and marginalize voices – particularly women in politics and public life. Women are frequently targeted through attacks on their identity, appearance, or personal lives, while criticism directed at men more often focuses on political decisions or actions. This dynamic illustrates how gendered disinformation functions as a political strategy designed to undermine women’s credibility in public spaces.

Technological developments have significantly amplified this problem. Artificial intelligence and deepfake technologies allow harmful content to be produced and disseminated at unprecedented speed and scale. Research cited during the keynote highlighted that the overwhelming majority of deepfake videos online are pornographic and that women constitute the vast majority of victims.

Lahe emphasized that gendered disinformation should therefore not be treated solely as a gender equality issue but as a broader governance challenge that threatens democratic participation, public trust, and inclusive political systems.

A panel discussion moderated by Linda Curika examined how gender- and identity-based narratives are increasingly used to polarize societies in the Baltic region. Speakers discussed how online harassment, hostile narratives, and social media dynamics shape the information environment.

Participants noted that gender has become a significant battleground in contemporary information warfare. Disinformation campaigns often exploit debates about “traditional values,” minority rights, and gender equality in order to deepen social divisions and undermine trust in democratic institutions.

Speakers also shared personal experiences illustrating these dynamics. **Latvia’s Minister of Culture Agnese Lāce** described how public criticism following a media appearance with her child focused on motherhood and personal credibility rather than policy issues. **Alina Lastovska**, journalist at Delfi, described similar experiences, noting that attacks

against women often target appearance, family life, or personal characteristics rather than professional work.

Experts also emphasized that online hostility is not driven only by foreign actors or automated bot networks. According to **Elīna Lange-Ionatamišvili from the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence**, a significant share of hostile content originates from authentic users, reflecting broader social norms and the normalization of aggressive communication online.

At the same time, social media platforms can amplify these dynamics by enabling rapid dissemination of hostile commentary and allowing vocal minorities to dominate public discussions.

Policy discussions emphasized the need to support independent journalism and analytical media, strengthen public broadcasting, and provide support for regional media outlets to counter local misinformation. Legal frameworks and cooperation with law enforcement were also discussed as ways to address threats against journalists and public figures.

Augustina Zamuškevičiūtė from the Civic Resilience Initiative highlighted initiatives aimed at strengthening media literacy and critical thinking among young people. She emphasized that media literacy should be integrated across educational subjects from an early age, helping students understand digital information environments and recognize manipulative messaging.

The role of civil society in defending democratic values was illustrated by **Beata Jonite**, Head of Advocacy at the Latvian NGO Centrs MARTA. She presented the organization's work supporting victims of violence and advocating for stronger legal protections.

Jonite focused on the polarized public debate surrounding the Istanbul Convention in Latvia. Despite misinformation portraying the treaty as a threat to traditional values, civil society organizations mobilized large-scale public support to defend it.

In response to political efforts to withdraw from the convention, NGOs organized protests and public campaigns. Within days, more than 70,000 signatures were collected urging the President not to approve withdrawal. Ultimately, the President refused to sign the law, demonstrating the impact of civic mobilization in defending democratic principles.

The conference also highlighted the role of investigative journalism in exposing coordinated disinformation networks.

Indrė Makaraitytė, Head of the Research Department at Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT, presented investigative findings linking protest movements in Lithuania to pro-Kremlin influence networks. Journalists documented recurring organizers promoting narratives aligned with Russian propaganda, portraying governments as illegitimate and suggesting that citizens had been deprived of political power.

Similar narratives have appeared across several countries in the region, suggesting broader influence campaigns. Investigating these networks often exposes journalists to harassment and coordinated discrediting efforts, highlighting the need for stronger protection mechanisms and cooperation with law enforcement.

Academic presentations further explored how digital environments shape gender narratives and enable disinformation.

Researcher **Jānis Šabanovs** from Rīga Stradiņš University examined how digital platforms function as “gender technologies” that shape expectations and social norms. Repeated stereotypes can evolve into prescriptive norms that regulate behavior and reinforce social hierarchies, making them powerful tools in gendered disinformation campaigns.

Similarly, **Maria Murumaa-Mengel** from the University of Tartu examined how stereotypes and emotionally charged communication are amplified online. She also highlighted the concept of social steganography – hidden messages embedded in memes, emojis, and coded language that convey discriminatory or extremist ideas to specific audiences.

Gender narratives are frequently used in geopolitical propaganda as well. Pro-Kremlin campaigns often promote narratives about “traditional values” while portraying Western societies as morally corrupt in order to provoke emotional reactions and deepen social divisions.

A central conclusion of the conference was clear: gendered disinformation is not only a women’s issue but a systemic challenge to democratic governance.

By exploiting stereotypes, emotional narratives, and digital infrastructures, such campaigns aim to silence voices, weaken independent media, and undermine trust in democratic institutions.

Addressing this challenge requires coordinated action across multiple sectors. Strengthening independent journalism, improving legal protections, expanding media literacy, supporting civil society initiatives, and enhancing cooperation between governments, researchers, and technology platforms are all essential components of a resilient information environment.

Ultimately, protecting democratic participation requires ensuring that all voices – regardless of gender or identity – can engage safely and meaningfully in public debate.

GLAM-Sector Webinar

On April 7, another BECID webinar was held for specialists from memory institutions in the Baltic States, bringing together a total of 136 participants from Estonia, Latvia, and

Lithuania. This time, the **focus was on data protection in the digital environment**, addressing both its practical and legal aspects in everyday work.

The webinar explored how the digital environment is not separate from everyday life, but rather an integral part of it, where the protection of personal data plays a central role. Discussions covered how personal data can be lawfully collected, processed, and stored, as well as how to balance service accessibility and user privacy in institutions such as libraries, museums, galleries, and archives.

The topic was further discussed in country-specific working groups. In the Estonian-language session, **Gunnar Gabriel Einlo from the Estonian Data Protection Inspectorate** gave an overview of the main principles of data protection and the legal bases for processing personal data. His presentation emphasized that privacy is a fundamental right and that personal data includes any information through which a person can be identified directly or indirectly. He explained that data processing encompasses a very broad range of activities, from collection to deletion. Einlo outlined the legal grounds on which data may be processed (e.g. consent, contract, legal obligation, or legitimate interest) and stressed the importance of the principles of data minimization and purpose limitation — only the amount of data necessary for fulfilling a specific purpose may be collected and shared. In addition, he discussed restrictions on processing sensitive data, data retention and security (including in cloud services), and provided practical examples from library work, such as the use of reader data and security risks related to public computers. He also introduced individuals' rights regarding their personal data and highlighted potential violations, such as risks associated with the use of personal email accounts.

In the Latvian-language session, **Sabīne Simsone, Legal Adviser at the Prevention Department of the Latvian Data State Inspectorate**, spoke about data protection in the digital environment. She emphasized that the digital space is not separate from everyday life, but its natural extension, closely linked to the protection of personal data. Her presentation addressed the practical and legal aspects of collecting, processing, and storing personal data, especially in institutions such as libraries, including how to ensure lawful data processing, maintain a balance between service accessibility and privacy, and avoid common data protection mistakes. Simsone also highlighted the responsibility of organizations, such as establishing internal policies, training employees, and preparing for data security incidents, as well as the responsibility of individuals to understand and apply data protection principles in practice. In addition, she provided practical cybersecurity recommendations, discussed risks related to digital tools, social media, cookies, and artificial intelligence, and stressed the importance of critical thinking and responsible use of technology in protecting personal data.

In the Lithuanian-language session, **data processing specialist Gertrūda Pliaukšytė** focused on data protection in everyday work, particularly in the handling of personal data, including the laws and requirements governing the processing and storage of personal

data, which are especially relevant in museums, libraries, galleries, and archives when working with visitor data. She also discussed the main principles by which organizations can strengthen employees' skills in preventing data leaks and shared examples of data breaches that have occurred in Lithuania, along with the possible consequences of insufficient protection of personal data.

Workshop on AI and OSINT

On 30 March, BECID held the first session in its new training series, bringing together BECID team members and external participants for an introductory workshop on AI and open-source intelligence (OSINT).

The session was led by Anna Danielyan, OSINT analyst currently engaged in contractual work with Graphika as a Navigator and alumna of the University of Tartu's Disinformation and Societal Resilience MA programme. The workshop was opened by BECID project manager Gretel Juhansoo, who invited participants to suggest tools and topics for future trainings so the series can respond directly to the needs and interests of the community.

During the one-hour session, Anna introduced the fundamentals of OSINT workflows and demonstrated how open-source methods can be used to investigate suspicious online content. Using practical examples, she walked participants through an image-led attribution process that included reverse-image search, domain registration checks, page-source analysis, and amplification tracking, showing how these steps can help connect content to known influence operations.

The training also covered how to present findings in a clear and actionable way. Participants were introduced to concise reporting formats built around key findings, significance, evidence of online activity, and source links, helping translate raw information into usable analytical insight.

A major part of the session focused on the ethical and legal boundaries of OSINT work. Anna emphasized that responsible use of AI and OSINT tools depends on compliance with privacy and platform rules, including GDPR and the Digital Services Act. She also highlighted the importance of avoiding the collection, storage, or sharing of illegal material, and noted that content such as terrorist propaganda or child sexual abuse material must be reported to the relevant authorities rather than downloaded or redistributed.

The workshop further addressed operational security (OPSEC) for researchers and journalists. Participants discussed device protection, browser choices, anti-malware practices, the cautious use of VPNs, and the creation of secure research identities for monitoring online spaces.

In the second half of the session, Anna introduced advanced search techniques, including Google dorking, and provided an overview of Russian and pro-Kremlin influence

ecosystems. She outlined different categories of actors, from overt state media to covert networks and amplifiers, and presented examples of known operations such as Storm-1516 CopyCop, Operation Overload, and the Pravda/Portal Kombat network.

To conclude the training, participants were offered a voluntary home assignment on influence activity related to Estonia and the Baltic region. Anna invited participants to analyze a recent spike in narratives on X on 27 March and offered to provide individual feedback on completed assignments.

BECID will continue the training series with future sessions shaped by participant suggestions, helping ensure that the programme remains relevant, practical, and useful for those working on resilience against disinformation and influence operations.

HOT REPORTS

Coordinated Disinformation Campaign Claims Lithuania Is “Not Independent”

At the end of January 2026, a coordinated disinformation campaign circulated on Facebook claiming that Lithuania is not truly independent. The messages used misleading interpretations of real facts, such as euro adoption, NATO cooperation, migration policy, and border control, to suggest that the country is controlled by foreign actors.

BECID’s March Hot Report analyses how these narratives spread, why they can be persuasive, and what risks they pose for public trust in democratic institutions. The report also highlights how coordinated social media activity and the repetition of distorted claims can create the impression of widespread concern.

This campaign reflects a broader pattern of influence operations targeting the Baltic states and their participation in the EU and NATO.

“War Is Coming”: How Russian Z-Bloggers Frame NATO as the Aggressor

In March, BECID identified two significant and evolving disinformation trends shaping the Baltic and wider European information space. The first Hot Report revealed a coordinated campaign falsely claiming that Lithuania is not an independent state. By distorting historical and legal facts, this narrative seeks to undermine trust in national sovereignty, weaken confidence in democratic institutions, and blur the legitimacy of EU and NATO member states.

The second Hot Report focuses on the growing influence of pro-Kremlin military bloggers, known as Z-bloggers, who are actively shaping perceptions of a potential Russia–NATO conflict. Operating within a decentralised propaganda ecosystem, these influencers amplify and radicalise official Kremlin narratives, portraying NATO and Europe as

aggressors while framing Russia as acting in self-defence. Their messaging – often emotional, alarmist, and widely shared on platforms like Telegram – frequently presents war as inevitable and justified, while shifting blame for escalation onto the West.

Together, these cases illustrate how disinformation campaigns operate across multiple fronts: from undermining state legitimacy to preparing audiences for geopolitical confrontation. They also highlight the increasing role of loosely coordinated influencer networks in amplifying strategic narratives and shaping public perception at scale.

These findings underscore the importance of continued monitoring, critical media consumption, and coordinated responses to counter the evolving dynamics of information manipulation.

How Russian Propaganda Fabricated a Drone Attack Narrative of “The Baltics opened the skies to Ukrainian drones”

This Hot Report examines how a rapidly emerging narrative following recent drone incidents was transformed into a coordinated disinformation campaign targeting the Baltic states.

Drawing on investigative findings, the report traces how a single claim evolved into a cross-platform information operation – moving from fringe online channels into mainstream media and political discourse within a short timeframe.

Without revealing all findings, the report highlights key patterns in how such narratives are constructed, amplified, and made to appear credible. It also outlines why these campaigns can be effective, particularly during fast-moving events when verified information is still limited.

The analysis points to broader risks, including the potential to escalate tensions, influence public perception, and expose vulnerabilities within national information environments. This edition of the Hot Report provides a concise but critical overview of the mechanisms behind modern disinformation campaigns and why understanding them is essential.

Narva “People’s Republic”: A Manufactured Separatist Narrative

A so-called “Narva People’s Republic” has recently captured international attention—but how real is this threat? BECID’s latest HOT Report reveals that behind the headlines lies a largely artificial narrative, driven by fringe extremist networks rather than genuine local support.

The report uncovers how coordinated online activity, recycled disinformation tactics, and provocative strategies are used to manufacture the illusion of separatism and amplify geopolitical tensions. It also explains why such narratives gain traction – and what risks they pose despite their limited roots on the ground.

Fear Politics and Migration: How Latvian Politicians Amplify Anti-Immigrant Narratives

As parliamentary elections approach in Latvia, migration has once again become a focal point of political debate, but not always in ways grounded in reality. BECID's latest HOT Report examines how fear-based narratives about migrants are being amplified in political and media discourse, often far beyond what the facts support.

Despite third-country nationals making up only a small share of Latvia's population, they are frequently portrayed as a major threat to national security, culture, and economic stability. The report highlights how selective use of data, conspiracy narratives such as the "Great Replacement," and emotionally charged messaging are used to shape public perception. At the same time, evidence shows that migrants are significantly less likely to be involved in crime than local citizens.

The report also explores why these narratives gain traction – pointing to emotional appeal, political incentives, and the amplifying role of social and traditional media. The consequences, however, are significant, which increase social polarisation, normalise extreme rhetoric, and risk policy decisions driven by fear rather than facts.

By unpacking these dynamics, the report offers valuable insights for policymakers, media, and the public on how to recognise and respond to fear-based manipulation.

"Opened Skies" Narrative: How Russian Propaganda Framed Baltic States as Co-Aggressors

A recent drone incident near the Baltic region quickly became the basis for a much larger – and false – geopolitical narrative. In its latest Hot Report, BECID examines how Russian propaganda transformed an accidental spillover event into claims that the Baltic states had deliberately "opened their airspace" to support Ukrainian attacks on Russia.

The report shows how this narrative was constructed and amplified within hours. What began in smaller Telegram channels was rapidly picked up by larger accounts and pushed into state-controlled media, before spreading across multiple platforms, including TikTok and news outlets. Through the use of manipulated visuals, speculative maps, and emotionally charged framing, the story was presented as credible "evidence" of Baltic states acting as co-aggressors.

Crucially, the report highlights how such narratives exploit moments of uncertainty. Real-world events with incomplete information create openings for disinformation actors to shape early interpretations, escalate tensions, and reinforce existing geopolitical narratives, particularly those portraying NATO as an aggressor. The speed, coordination, and cross-platform amplification observed in this case demonstrate a textbook example of modern information warfare in action.

The risks are significant. By framing NATO countries as direct participants in military actions, such narratives increase the potential for miscalculation and escalation, while

also undermining trust in official information and exposing vulnerabilities in domestic information spaces.

By unpacking how this narrative spread and why it resonated, the report provides practical recommendations for governments, media, and the public on how to respond more effectively to fast-moving disinformation.

SECTION OF INTEREST

Due to a significant rise in phone and social media scams in Estonia, we decided to dedicate this section to findings from D4.1. As BECID2's MIL activities focus on supporting GLAM institutions, the following article – originally published in Estonian by Inger Klesment in the news section of the National Library of Estonia – provides an overview of practical ways to support older adults in today's complex information environment.

The topic is also closely connected to BECID2's bi-monthly webinar series. On 1 June, in response to several major public fraud cases, the upcoming webinar for Baltic GLAM professionals will focus specifically on online/phone frauds and scams.

Bridging the Digital Divide: Practical Solutions for Libraries

*Inger Klesment, Media Competence Project Manager at the University of Tartu
First published on May 19 2026 on [the National Library of Estonia website](#).*

Interviews conducted in autumn 2025 by students from the University of Tartu's Institute of Social Studies with 54 memory institution employees confirmed that libraries have become the primary lifeboats for those falling into the digital divide. Representatives from 38 libraries shared ideas on how to guide visitors' media literacy in ways that prevent staff burnout while still attracting participants.

Systematic and Inclusive Support for Older Adults

The interviews revealed that the most active group seeking help consists of people over the age of 65, for whom many essential services have moved online. A library worker's ability to manage time-consuming one-on-one assistance, which often requires specialised knowledge, depends on both their preparation and the availability of IT support and smart work organisation.

One structural solution proposed was a travelling specialist shared between libraries, who would visit branch libraries according to a schedule to train people. This would relieve local staff of the expectation to be experts in every field while ensuring consistent quality of guidance. Resources could also be pooled and workloads reduced through regularly scheduled digital literacy sessions and physical learning folders with step-by-step

instructions for common tasks such as digital signing. This would help ensure that skills learned during training are not forgotten at home.

A successful model mentioned was the “the egg teaches the chicken” approach, organised in cooperation with youth centres, where older adults can ask young people for help using smart devices. In return, they teach young people practical skills such as cooking, strengthening intergenerational ties. To support and motivate school students, a digital mentor project has been created, with free materials available on the meedia.ut.ee website for both student mentors and their supervisors. A positive example highlighted collaboration with a vocational education centre, where IT students assisted older adults with digital problems as part of their practical training, helping to ease library staff shortages.

Although interviewees expressed a desire for training on how to help people fill out official documents and direct them to the correct authorities, libraries have also invited police officers to speak as a one-time solution. Their real-life examples are compelling, and older adults tend to trust uniformed officials. An added benefit is that bringing in guest speakers removes some responsibility from librarians in highly specialised matters while introducing a new authoritative voice into the library.

However, not all groups vulnerable to information disorder, such as older adults and people with disabilities, are able or willing to come to libraries themselves. For this reason, interviewees stressed the need for closer cooperation with social workers, care homes, and day centres. One interviewee described a successful collaboration with a day centre located across the street, where shared schedules were arranged for digital literacy sessions in a familiar environment where older adults already gather. As an outside-the-box solution, home visits were also suggested to support people who cannot or do not dare to visit libraries. This would allow them to learn in familiar surroundings using their own devices.

At the national level, interviewees identified the National Library of Estonia as the main source of guidance and training. Its website contains a large number of high-quality media literacy materials. Libraries can also order media literacy training for non-Estonian-speaking groups through the MediaRadar project. For cybersecurity topics, interviewees recommended using materials from the Estonian Information System Authority’s website. Free online training is also offered by BECID.

Media Literacy Can Be a Turn-Off

Memory institutions considered people aged 30–50, especially men, to be the most difficult target group. They are characterised by lack of time, scepticism, and misplaced confidence in their digital skills. Several examples were given of visitors arriving at libraries searching for books or quotations hallucinated by artificial intelligence that do not actually exist. This target group often does not recognise their need for help and does not voluntarily participate in training sessions.

As a result, memory institutions have adopted alternative approaches from one another, such as exhibitions and educational events, because “media literacy training” as a label does not attract people. One interviewee highlighted a successful workshop on optical illusions that taught visual critical thinking without explicitly using the term media literacy. Participants examined images and reflected on how accurately they represented reality. Similarly, workshops have used historical propaganda materials as well as modern caricatures and memes to teach people how public opinion is shaped. Adults have also enjoyed myth-busting programmes where they learn fact-checking skills through topics such as alcohol or traffic safety. In smaller communities, personal contact is especially important. Instead of formal training sessions, people gather to discuss news and societal issues together, providing a natural way to develop critical thinking without the formal label of training.

To prevent information about events from disappearing in the noise of modern media environments, libraries need to maintain visibility across multiple platforms. Interviewees noted that posting announcements on a website alone is no longer sufficient. Posters on doors may go unnoticed by people focused on screens. Librarians have therefore turned to artificial intelligence for ideas, information gathering, and planning marketing and educational activities. AI tools are used to proofread texts, support bookkeeping and project writing, and help structure ideas. Artificial intelligence also assists with drafting Facebook or local newspaper articles as well as creating posters, stickers, and slides.

Still, in some regions the issue is not information dissemination but simply the low number of residents. Poor participation rates, often characteristic of smaller settlements, prompted suggestions to organise larger events in regional centres. People from smaller communities could be transported there by bus, ensuring more participants. Interviewees also recommended greater cooperation in technical capacity, such as sharing event equipment. One successful example involved a music school and a library jointly using speakers and microphones.

Solutions for Teaching Digital Competence

Interviewees unanimously stated that, outside compulsory school visits, it is almost impossible to reach young people. Cooperation works best when institutions are physically located in the same building. Students’ biggest challenges are poor information-search skills, lack of source criticism, and excessive trust in artificial intelligence.

To address this, libraries have experimented with activities where schoolchildren search for answers to the same question – such as “Why is snow white?” – using different sources and then comparing the results with answers from artificial intelligence tools. This demonstrates how much answers can vary and why information must be verified. Several libraries have also created exhibitions introducing how artificial intelligence works and highlighting its risks, offering visitors opportunities for hands-on participation.

Because young people enjoy learning through playful and surprising activities, city-wide scavenger hunts developed in cooperation with youth centres have proven successful. These activities use digital applications and QR codes to combine movement and information searching. However, game-based learning does not necessarily require leaving the library. One library, for example, has developed successful “smart device classes” for grades 2–5 that go beyond technical skills to focus on digital waste, reducing digital footprints, and cyberbullying. Literature is often used to discuss safety and trust, linking stories from books to risks in the digital world.

Competitions with attractive prizes are also popular among students. In one recently concluded contest, participants creatively used museum databases, developing their information-search skills and understanding of copyright. For many years, the online competition “Netikirjariin,” aimed at students in grades 5–9, has also attracted large numbers of participants who improve their information-search skills through gameplay. Based on the interviews, it can therefore be concluded that libraries are no longer merely book lending points for visitors, but community centres where successful media literacy promotion relies not on traditional training models, but on creative and audience-centred solutions.