Baltic Engagement Centre for Combating Information Disorders

QUARTERLY BRIEF FOR BECID 2

SUMMER 2025

Co-funded by the European Union

PARTNER ACTIVITIES

Alongside the setup of management structures, BECID partners have actively contributed to strengthening professional networks, advancing investigative skills, and engaging with diverse audiences across the Baltic region and beyond.

Delfi Lithuania (Melo detektorius): Aistė Meidutė, editor of Delfi's fact-checking unit Melo detektorius, participated in the Summer School of Investigative Reporting at SSE Riga, where she expanded her expertise in OSINT, AI-driven tools, and storytelling under the guidance of leading international experts, including OCCRP representatives and Henk van Ess.

Earlier in June, she also presented at "Global Fact 12" in Rio de Janeiro, introducing Delfi's youth-focused initiative GROW. The project applies short-form social media video formats to reach younger audiences with fact-checked content, aiming to boost resilience against disinformation.

Re:Baltica (Latvia): Re:Baltica's team members – editor Sanita Jemberga, Re:Check editor Evita Puriņa, and journalist Annija Petrona – also joined the SSE Riga Summer School of Investigative Reporting, gaining new insights into the use of AI in journalism, advanced data research, editorial leadership, and audio storytelling.

In August, Evita Puriņa appeared on "KiberPēda", a popular weekly radio show on SWH, to discuss disinformation trends, Re:Check's work, and the importance of critical thinking in the digital age.

University of Tartu (Estonia): Maria Murumaa-Mengel, Associate Professor of Media Studies, has been actively contributing expertise on media, youth, and digital cultures through numerous public engagements. These included keynote addresses (e.g. "Truth and Trust: Communicators vs Disinformation" meeting in Tallinn), teacher trainings (e.g. Human Studies Summer School and Haridustreff workshops in Paide), and media appearances (Delfi, Kuku Raadio, Vikerraadio). She has also provided expert commentary on youth radicalisation, gender stereotypes, influencer culture, and digital media use in outlets such as Anne & Stiil and MIHUS journal.

In August, BECID experts made a strong contribution to Estonia's leading education and public discussion events, sharing practical knowledge and research insights with teachers and the wider community.

At **Haridustreff**, BECID experts from Tartu University organised three interactive workshops on digital safety, media literacy, and the role of AI in schools. Inger Klesment introduced screen-free methods for teaching children safe digital habits, while Maria Murumaa-Mengel demonstrated how media literacy can be integrated into everyday subjects. A third workshop led by Inger Klesment unpacked AI opportunities and risks, giving educators tools and resources they could immediately apply in their classrooms.

At the **Arvamusfestival** in Paide, our BECID partners took part in high-level discussions on media, technology, and online safety. Gretel Juhansoo contributed to a panel on media's role in covering progressive issues, while Inger Klesment addressed the challenges of protecting children online in the age of AI. Maria Murumaa-Mengel and Andero Uusberg discussed digital connectivity and wellbeing, and Kristina Seimann examined how algorithm-driven platforms shape health behaviour.

Delfi Estonia (Faktikontroll): Marta Vunš contributed to outreach and training activities in Estonia and abroad. In June, she led a fact-checking and disinformation workshop for content creators at the European Commission Representation in Estonia's summer school in Narva.

Later that month, she travelled to Yerevan, Armenia, to participate in a PractNet meeting with local journalists, where she shared insights on international investigative journalism collaborations, Russian influence operations, and journalist safety.

BCME (Latvia): In June, the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (BCME), together with regional partners, organised meetings in Riga with Latvian civil society, media professionals, experts, and policymakers to discuss escalating repression in Georgia. The discussions, featuring Georgian activist Ilia Glonti (DAITOVE), focused on countering disinformation, ensuring sustainable support for civic initiatives, and improving the safety of journalists and activists.

Also in June-July, BCME and the Riga Graduate School of Law launched the first phase of a multi-year EU-funded programme to develop investigative journalism in Uzbekistan. Seminars in Tashkent and Samarkand, held in cooperation with the country's Anti-Corruption Agency, gathered journalists, bloggers, and students. Experts from the Baltics and Europe – including Inga Spriņģe (Re:Baltica) and Gunta Sloga (BCME) – shared best practices on ethics, multi-platform storytelling, and building resilience against disinformation and harassment.

In July, BCME contributed to the 11th annual LAMPA Conversation Festival in Cēsis, Latvia's leading civic discussion platform. Executive Director Gunta Sloga joined a panel on the future of television, exploring how the medium can adapt to digital consumption habits and remain relevant to younger audiences.

The festival also provided a chance to reconnect with key national partners and exchange ideas for future cooperation.

In August, BCME took part in a high-level roundtable with Cristina Gherasimov, Moldova's Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration. The discussion focused on democratic resilience, EU integration, and countering Russian disinformation. Drawing on Latvia's own EU accession experience, BCME highlighted the importance of regional cooperation and knowledge-sharing to strengthen democratic institutions under pressure.

HOT REPORTS

Summer 2025 was marked by impactful research and active public engagement across the BECID consortium. Two Hot Reports (**here** and **here**) exposed emerging disinformation threats: one on "digital reputation washing" through manipulated Google searches, and another on a Kremlin-backed smear campaign misusing human rights rhetoric at the UN.

Specifically, the first Hot Report examined how defamatory campaigns exploit Google's search engine to damage reputations and suppress legitimate journalism. Known as "digital reputation washing," this tactic involves fake copyright complaints and imitation news sites, with evidence linking it to pro-Kremlin influence networks.

The second report revealed how a Kremlin-backed smear campaign misused human rights language at the UN to attack Estonia. Investigations showed that the Swiss-based NGO behind the claims was financed through Russian intelligence channels, while Kremlin-funded media amplified the narrative to undermine Estonia's global standing.

The third Hot Report was published in August 2025 about a new wave of disinformation that has targeted Lithuania's nuclear sector, particularly the decommissioning of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant (INPP).

False claims circulated on social media suggest a secret nuclear waste facility near Kaunas importing radioactive waste from across Europe. In reality, all planned facilities are transparent, publicly announced, legally compliant, and strictly monitored, with the deep geological repository site not selected until 2049.

It was concluded that these misleading narratives align with prior Kremlin and Belarusian campaigns aimed at undermining trust in Lithuania's energy policies, public confidence in science, and strategic EU-aligned decisions, while diverting attention from external risks such as Belarus's Astravyets plant.

LANGUAGE STRATEGY FOR FACT-CHECKING

BECID2 has adopted a language strategy to guide the publication and translation of fact-checks across Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Russian, and English. Local language fact-checks address domestic misinformation, while Russian-language outputs focus on Kremlin narratives targeting Russian speakers. English translations are prioritised for EU-level stakeholders, international audiences, and cross-border disinformation cases.

Each partner – Delfi UAB, Delfi Meedia, and Re:Baltica – will contribute 144 local language fact-checks and 36 in Russian and English, amounting to 540 fact-checks over the project period. Draft translations are supported by AI tools, followed by human review for contextual accuracy. Outputs are published on partner platforms, automatically syndicated to the BECID website, and integrated with EDMO channels. Progress and language balance are reviewed bi-monthly in consortium meetings.

SECTION OF INTEREST: SHIFT IN CONTENT MODERATION PRACTICES

As part of BECID Round 2, Work Package 6 focuses on developing a comprehensive framework for monitoring how effectively Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) and Very Large Online Search Engines (VLOSEs) meet their obligations in combating disinformation. In this context, we see it as crucial to comment on TikTok's recent decisions concerning its Trust and Safety teams in several countries.

This summer, employees on TikTok's Trust and Safety teams – who are primarily responsible for content moderation based on company policies – were informed of large-scale staffing cuts in **Germany** and **the UK**, mirroring similar reductions previously carried out in South Asia. These roles are being replaced by AI-driven systems. The announcement came shortly after the **UK introduced new strict age verification tools** in late July to enhance online protections for underage users.

The move has drawn criticism from both policy experts and content moderators themselves, who warn that current AI technologies still fall short of human-level nuance and contextual understanding, often resulting in harmful content slipping through the cracks or legitimate content being wrongly removed.

TikTok is not alone. Meta – parent company of Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Threads, and Messenger – **announced in May that up to 90% of its content moderation will now be automated**, following massive investments into AI development.

This shift comes in parallel with Meta's termination of its third-party fact-checking programme in the US, a decision that **BECID has publicly criticized** for undermining efforts to ensure information integrity online.

As BECID brings together fact-checkers, media literacy experts working closely with (young) social media users, and researchers investigating AI and VLOP policies, these recent developments represent a clear step backward in our shared mission: creating a more accountable and transparent information space. Drawing on both prior research and ongoing fieldwork, our media literacy experts have observed that mis- and disinformation is spreading more rapidly, a trend increasingly recognized by the communities we engage with.

Our emphasis on human-centered interaction has been intentional. Now, as human moderators are replaced by AI systems, the burden shifts even more heavily onto individual users – including kids and youth – to recognize and resist manipulated information in an ever-faster media environment.

We encourage everyone to remain alert: notice content that may be misleading, manipulative, or harmful (to yourself or to others) and take action by reporting it. And just as importantly, don't let these policy shifts happen quietly. They affect all of us, and our collective attention and advocacy are needed now more than ever.