



Baltic Engagement
Centre for Combating
Information Disorders

HOT REPORT

RUSSIA IS “NOT INTERESTED” IN LITHUANIA – A NARRATIVE DESIGNED TO UNDERMINE DEFENCE

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THIS REPORT IS BASED ON AN ANALYSIS BY DELFI
LITHUANIA'S MELO DETEKTORIUS, "WHAT LIES BEHIND
RUSSIA'S FALSE CLAIM THAT IT IS NOT INTERESTED IN
LITHUANIA AND THAT THE KREMLIN DOES NOT INTEND TO
ATTACK IT?"

WHAT'S HOT?

A persistent pro-Kremlin narrative in Lithuania claims that Russia poses no real threat to the country, has no interest in attacking Lithuania, and therefore Lithuania is wasting money by strengthening its defence.

The narrative has become particularly relevant as Lithuania increases defence spending. It combines seemingly reassuring messages – “Russia does not need Lithuania” – with more confrontational claims that Lithuania itself is provoking Moscow and that NATO would abandon the country in the event of war.

The strategic effect is clear: if Russia is presented as harmless and NATO as unreliable, investments in defence can be framed as unnecessary, provocative and economically damaging.

What Do We See?

- **Threat minimisation:** The basic claim is that Russia is neither attacking Lithuania nor interested in doing so. Lithuanian intelligence assessments contradict this, identifying Russia as a continuing security threat to Lithuania and the wider region.
- **Defence spending portrayed as waste:** Lithuania's efforts to increase its defence capabilities are reframed as unnecessary expenditure against an imaginary threat.
- **Aggressor-victim reversal:** Lithuanian and NATO defence measures are portrayed as provocations that could force Russia to respond. In reality, NATO's reinforcement of its eastern flank followed Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and was strengthened after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.
- **NATO abandonment narrative:** Another claim suggests Lithuania would be incapable of defending itself and NATO would not come to its aid. This isolates Lithuania rhetorically from the Alliance and encourages doubt about collective defence.



- **Mocking Lithuania's military weakness:** Russian narratives compare Lithuania's armed forces directly with Russia's, ignoring Lithuania's NATO membership. According to the figures cited in the source, NATO collectively substantially exceeds Russia in personnel, aviation, tanks, armoured vehicles and naval forces.
- **Hybrid activity contradicts the "Russia is not interested" narrative:** Lithuanian intelligence reports Russian collection of information about Lithuanian and allied forces, military movements and exercises, alongside cyber espionage, disinformation and preparations for destructive operations.
- **Physical sabotage adds another dimension:** Lithuanian authorities have linked recent cases to suspected Russian involvement, including an attempted attack on military aid for Ukraine in Šiauliai and the 2024 explosion and fire at an IKEA store in Vilnius.

Why Does It Work?

- **It sounds reassuring:** "Russia does not want to attack us" is emotionally more attractive than warnings about long-term security threats.
- **It exploits the cost of defence:** When defence spending competes with healthcare, education, social policy and other public expenditure, the argument that money is being spent against a nonexistent threat can resonate.
- **It creates a false choice:** Audiences are encouraged to choose between "peace" and "militarisation", although deterrence is intended precisely to reduce the likelihood of military aggression.
- **It reverses responsibility:** Russian military actions disappear from the causal chain, while NATO responses are presented as the original source of escalation.
- **It mixes contradictory messages:** Russia is simultaneously portrayed as harmless and overwhelmingly powerful – too peaceful to attack Lithuania, but so militarily dominant that resistance would supposedly be futile.
- **It targets trust:** The narrative does not need audiences to become explicitly pro-Russian. Creating doubts about Lithuania's defence policy, NATO commitments and government spending can itself serve the strategic purpose.

Risk Assessment: HIGH

The narrative directly targets Lithuania's security policy at a time of increased defence investment and heightened regional security concerns.

Threat minimisation can reduce public willingness to support defence spending and

preparedness. At the same time, narratives about NATO abandonment can weaken confidence in collective defence.

The combination is particularly potent: citizens are told both that defence is unnecessary because Russia poses no threat and that defence is futile because Russia would be impossible to resist.

The narrative also provides an information backdrop for hybrid operations. Cyber espionage, sabotage or other hostile activities can be treated as isolated incidents while the broader Russian threat is simultaneously denied.

How to Respond?

For Policymakers and Security Institutions

- Explain defence through cause and effect. Avoid communicating NATO deployments or increased defence expenditure without explaining what triggered them: Russia's annexation of Crimea, full-scale invasion of Ukraine and continuing military expansion.
- Connect hybrid threats to everyday examples. Espionage, cyberattacks, sabotage and information operations demonstrate that hostile activity does not begin only when tanks cross a border.
- Avoid exaggerating the threat. Credible communication should distinguish between Russia having hostile capabilities and intentions, hybrid activity already taking place, and an imminent conventional attack. Overstatement can make threat-minimisation narratives more persuasive.
- Explain deterrence clearly: defence investment is not evidence that war is expected or desired. Its purpose is to make aggression less attractive and less likely.

For Media and Fact-Checkers

- Identify contradictory narratives. When the same information ecosystem argues both that "Russia does not care about Lithuania" and that "Lithuania has no chance against Russia", show audiences the contradiction.
- Do not reduce security debates to "Will Russia attack Lithuania – yes or no?" The more useful question is what capabilities, intentions and hostile activities can currently be observed.
- Put individual incidents into context without automatically attributing every hostile act to the Kremlin. Clearly distinguish confirmed evidence, official assessments and allegations still under investigation.
- Explain why NATO matters. Comparing Russia only with Lithuania creates a misleading picture because Lithuania's defence is based on collective defence.

For Educators and Civil Society

- Teach threat-minimisation as a manipulation technique. Disinformation does not always exaggerate dangers; sometimes its purpose is precisely to convince audiences that a documented threat does not exist.
- Use contradictory claims as media-literacy exercises: How can Russia simultaneously be “not interested in Lithuania” and so powerful that Lithuania supposedly has no reason to resist it?
- Discuss the distinction between deterrence and provocation. Defensive preparations do not automatically constitute aggressive intentions.

For the Public

- Be cautious of absolute statements such as “Russia has no interest in Lithuania” or “NATO would never defend Lithuania”. Geopolitical intentions cannot be established from slogans.
- Look at behaviour as well as rhetoric. Military expansion, intelligence collection, cyber operations and suspected sabotage provide more useful evidence than statements about peaceful intentions.
- Ask what is missing from the argument. If someone says Lithuania is “provoking Russia” by strengthening NATO forces, ask what events preceded those decisions.

Key Takeaway

The “Russia is not interested in Lithuania” narrative is not simply about denying the possibility of invasion. It creates a broader argument: Russia is supposedly harmless, Lithuanian defence spending is unnecessary, NATO causes escalation, and resistance would be futile anyway.

The most effective response is therefore not to predict whether Russia will attack Lithuania. It is to show the observable security environment, explain why Lithuania and NATO have strengthened deterrence, and distinguish clearly between current hybrid threats, military capability and the risk of future conventional aggression.

What is BECID?

BECID – the Baltic Engagement Centre for Combating Information Disorders – brings together expertise in fact-checking, media literacy, and journalism across the Baltics. We conduct fact-checks in collaboration with Delfi/Delfi Meedia, monitor disinformation narratives and campaigns under the leadership of investigative journalism organisation Re:Baltica, and promote media literacy through the Baltic Centre for Media Literacy (BCME). We also develop methodologies to effectively counter disinformation. Learn more: becid.ut.ee

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