



Baltic Engagement
Centre for Combating
Information Disorders

HOT REPORT

NARVA “PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC”: A MANUFACTURED SEPARATIST NARRATIVE

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THIS REPORT IS BASED ON AN INVESTIGATIVE ARTICLE BY EESTI EKSPRESS: “MASKID MAHA! PALJASTAME, KES ON NARVA RAHVAVABARIIGI TAGA”

WHAT'S HOT?

A so-called “Narva People’s Republic” has recently gained international media attention, raising concerns about separatism in Estonia. However, investigation shows that the initiative has no real support in Narva and is most likely driven by radical Russian neo-Bolshevik activists operating online. The case illustrates how fringe extremist networks attempt to manufacture artificial separatist movements to provoke attention, create instability, and feed geopolitical narratives.

What Do We See?

- **Artificial movement with no local roots:** There is no evidence of real support for separatism among Narva residents. Local authorities confirm the initiative has no societal backing.
- **Ideological links to Russian neo-Bolsheviks:** The narrative and symbolism point to the movement “The Other Russia” (Limonovites), an extremist group combining nationalism, imperialism, and radical ideology.
- **Recycled disinformation tactics:** Similar “people’s republic” narratives have been attempted before in the Baltics, inspired by Russia’s actions in eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk).
- **Coordinated online activity:** The movement operates mainly via Telegram and Russian social media, using anonymous administrators, bots, and viral-style content.
- **Provocation through participation:** Journalists who infiltrated the group were quickly given tasks such as printing and distributing propaganda posters, indicating attempts to create artificial offline visibility.
- **Cross-border pattern:** Similar operations have been identified in Latvia (Latgale), linked to individuals affiliated with the same neo-Bolshevik networks in Russia.

Why Does It Work?

- **Exploiting media attention:** Even fringe initiatives gain legitimacy when amplified by international media coverage.

- **Mimicking real conflicts:** The use of “people’s republic” terminology draws on familiar narratives from Ukraine, making the scenario seem plausible.
- **Low-cost, high-impact tactics:** A small group using social media can create the illusion of a broader movement.
- **Ideological consistency:** The narrative aligns with the broader “Russkiy Mir” ideology promoting Russian influence over neighbouring states.
- **Ambiguity of actors:** Lack of clear ties to the Russian state allows plausible deniability while still advancing aligned narratives.

Risk Assessment: MEDIUM

- **Perception risk:** Even without real support, such narratives can damage Estonia’s international image and raise unnecessary security concerns.
- **Information manipulation:** The operation demonstrates how easily artificial movements can be constructed and amplified.
- **Radicalisation potential:** While currently marginal, such groups may attempt to recruit individuals or provoke isolated actions.
- **Strategic distraction:** These narratives divert attention and resources from real security issues.

How to Respond?

For policymakers and security institutions

- Avoid over-amplification of fringe initiatives while maintaining situational awareness.
- Monitor extremist networks and cross-border ideological movements operating online.
- Strengthen communication to clearly distinguish between real threats and artificial provocations.

For media

- Report responsibly without inflating the significance of marginal groups.
- Provide context on the origins and scale of such movements.
- Investigate and expose links to extremist networks rather than focusing on sensational framing.

For the public

- Be sceptical of sudden “movements” that appear only online and lack visible local support.
- Recognise patterns of recycled propaganda narratives (e.g. “people’s republics”).
- Avoid sharing unverified or provocative content that may amplify disinformation.

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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