



Baltic Engagement
Centre for Combating
Information Disorders

HOT REPORT

“OPENED SKIES” NARRATIVE: HOW RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA FRAMED BALTIC STATES AS CO- AGGRESSORS

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THIS REPORT IS BASED ON AN INVESTIGATION BY RE:BALTICA BY KRISTAPS ŪGAINIS.

WHAT'S HOT?

Following a Ukrainian drone attack on targets in Russia, several drones went off course and crashed in the Baltic states. Within hours, Russian propaganda reframed the incident into a coordinated narrative claiming that Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia had “opened their airspace” to support Ukrainian attacks on Russia. The claim is false, yet it rapidly spread across Telegram, state-controlled media, and social platforms, illustrating a textbook case of coordinated disinformation designed to escalate tensions and portray NATO countries as direct participants in the war.

What Do We See?

- **Trigger event exploited:** An accidental spillover incident involving Ukrainian drones was used as the basis for a broader geopolitical narrative.
- **Coordinated narrative building:** The story originated in small Telegram channels, was amplified by larger accounts such as MASH, and then pushed into mainstream state media.
- **Escalation framing:** Claims suggested that Baltic states’ actions constituted a *casus belli*, implying justification for military retaliation.
- **Visual manipulation:** Maps and speculative flight paths were circulated to create a sense of plausibility and “evidence.”
- **State media amplification:** Major propaganda outlets such as Rossiya 1 and Solovyov Live repeated and strengthened the claims.
- **Cross-platform spread:** The narrative expanded to TikTok, news agencies, and other online platforms, increasing reach and impact.
- **Political uptake beyond Russia:** The narrative was echoed by actors in Estonia and amplified by pro-Kremlin figures, showing spillover into local information spaces.
- **Official pushback:** Baltic states, particularly Latvia, publicly rejected the claims and identified them as part of a coordinated disinformation campaign.

Why Does It Work?

- **Speed and timing:** Disinformation was deployed immediately after the incident, shaping early interpretations.
- **Layered amplification:** Messages move from fringe channels to mainstream media, gaining credibility at each stage.
- **Plausible confusion:** Real-world incidents with incomplete information create fertile ground for speculation.
- **Emotional escalation:** Framing the event as a direct attack raises fear and justifies aggressive responses.
- **Visual persuasion:** Maps and pseudo-technical explanations give false claims an appearance of legitimacy.
- **Narrative consistency:** The story aligns with existing Kremlin narratives portraying NATO as an aggressor.

Risk Assessment: HIGH

- **Escalation risk:** Framing NATO countries as direct participants in attacks increases the risk of miscalculation and conflict escalation.
- **Information warfare normalization:** Demonstrates how quickly false narratives can be constructed and institutionalised.
- **Public confusion:** Conflicting claims undermine trust in official information and create uncertainty.
- **Cross-border influence:** The spread of narratives into Baltic political discourse shows vulnerability of domestic information spaces.

How to Respond?

For governments and institutions

- Respond rapidly and transparently to emerging incidents with verified information.
- Coordinate communication across countries to ensure consistent messaging.
- Publicly attribute and expose disinformation campaigns to reduce their credibility.

For media

- Avoid amplifying unverified claims, especially in early reporting phases.

- Provide context about how disinformation spreads and who benefits from it.
- Scrutinise visual materials such as maps and “evidence” used in narratives.

For civil society and analysts

- Monitor cross-platform narrative spread and identify key amplification nodes.
- Translate complex incidents into clear, accessible explanations for the public.
- Highlight patterns of coordinated influence operations.

For the public

- Be cautious of dramatic claims that emerge immediately after breaking events.
- Question sources and verify whether information comes from official or credible channels.
- Recognise common tactics such as emotional framing and selective “evidence.”

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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