



Baltic Engagement  
Centre for Combating  
Information Disorders

# BECID

## ARMY PREPARING TO ENTER UKRAINE, POLITICIANS LEAVING THE COUNTRY – HOW FEAR OF BEING DRAGGED INTO WAR IS SPREAD IN THE BALTICS

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This summer, misinformation that those in power are trying to drag the Baltic countries into a war against Russia intensified, especially in Lithuania and Estonia. Governments are allegedly considering sending troops to Ukraine, in Lithuania the foreign minister and his family are leaving the country, while Latvia is provoking its eastern neighbour with threats of a nuclear war. In this article, we explain who and how in the Baltic countries are spreading these falsehoods.

## **“LITHUANIA TO SEND 100 TROOPS TO UKRAINE”**

In the spring of this year, French President Emmanuel Macron repeatedly [said](#) that under the right circumstances NATO troops could be sent to Ukraine. This was followed by a [wave of disinformation](#) in a number of European countries, both [about Macron](#) and about Russia-related plans that NATO countries allegedly have. This is also what happened in Lithuania. Following Macron’s statements, Lithuanian politicians, including Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė and Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis (both represent the *Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats*), started discussing the possibility of sending Lithuanian instructors to Ukraine to train the country’s soldiers. Almost all statements by senior Lithuanian officials regarding the possible training mission were interpreted as calls for war, according to Aistė Meidutė, fact-checker for the Lithuanian website *Delfi*. Politicians’ insistence that the country would not initiate such a mission, as it would require involvement of larger countries such as France, was ignored.

“However, disinformation spreaders re-interpreted these claims in a different light claiming that Lithuanian politicians are ready to send Lithuanian troops directly into the warzone,” Meidutė explains. For example, one of the fake news websites [said](#) that Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico had supposedly confirmed that Lithuania and other countries would send troops to Ukraine. Even though Fico said that several EU and NATO member countries were considering this possibility, he did not mention any specific country.

Shortly after that, it was falsely [claimed](#) on Lithuanian social media that the Lithuanian parliament, Seimas, had secretly decided to send 100 troops to the Ukrainian front lines. The originator of the news was Valdas Tutkus, a former chief of defense and a candidate for Lithuania’s president. It was him who posted to social media that the Seimas had voted in favour of sending Lithuanian troops to Ukraine.



Image: Screenshot from social media, Delfi Lithuania

In reality, Seimas adopted a decision setting the number of troops that could be deployed on international operations and missions. The resolution establishes that up to 100 soldiers and civilian staff may take part in a training operation in Ukraine.

## **“ESTONIAN MERCENARIES ARE ALREADY AT WAR”**

Estonian *Delfi* fact-checker Marta Vunsh explains that in Estonia the narrative that Baltic countries or Estonia are allegedly preparing to go to war with Russia is intertwined with messages of ceasefire, “we want peace” and “not supporting Ukraine is better for Estonia”.

In Estonia too, various misconceptions spread after French President Macron’s remarks. Portal *Eestinen* claimed that France had [decided](#) to move its troops to Ukraine and start a war with Russia. This led to speculation that Estonia had similar plans to send its troops to the front line.

This narrative was [pushed](#) in the past as well. For instance, an article was published on Estonian fake news website *Telegram*, saying that the country's Defence Forces could send troops to the battlefield in Ukraine. The website had become popular during the *Covid* pandemic. This time, the misleading news story referred to an [article](#) by *Postimees*. However, the article did not mention Ukraine: it was about a proposed plan to involve volunteer reservists in other foreign operations. On social media, this lie was reinforced by posts saying that Estonian men would be sent to the "Ukrainian meat grinder". Estonian *Delfi* fact-checkers found similar messages in at least eight social media posts.

In the meantime, Estonian social media users [shared](#) a false table from the Russian Defense Ministry describing the numbers of "mercenaries" allegedly sent from different countries to Ukraine.

Jagan sõbra seinalt kommentaariga:  
 Palgasõdurite saatmine Ukrainasse riikide kaupa.  
 Eestist saadetud 190 ja neist hukkumud 85.  
 Vaadake teiste riikide numbraid ka.  
 On kellegi huvides rahu sõlmimise asemel tappa maha ka kogu maailma parimad pojad.  
 Sõda on sõda alati.  
 Seal surevad inimesed.  
 Eesti valitsus on vähemalt miljardi saatnud - rahaga et veel rohkem inimesi surma saaks.

**re:check**

NUMBER OF FOREIGN MERCENARIES SENT TO UKRAINE		
Country	Arrived since 24.02.2022	Eliminated
<b>Europe</b>		
Poland	2,960	1,497
United Kingdom	822	360
Romania	784	349
Croatia	335	152
France	356	147
Latvia	190	95
Bosnia and Herzegovina	207	90
Germany	235	88
Albania	192	87
Estonia	190	85
Kosovo	191	84
Lithuania	174	81
Ireland	158	67
<b>Asia</b>		
Georgia	1,042	561
Syria	200	102
Turkey	188	62
Azerbaijan	83	32
Israel	64	29
Armenia	70	25
Uzbekistan	70	15
Kazakhstan	21	8
Afghanistan	17	5
Republic of Korea	15	5
Kyrgyzstan	31	4
Sri Lanka	12	3

Image: Screenshot from social media, Delfi Estonia

But the fact is that neither Estonia, nor Latvia, nor Lithuania is sending troops to Ukraine. When Baltic nationals fight in Ukraine, they do so voluntarily.

## **“LATVIA IS READY TO TAKE PART IN THE BIG WAR”**

In Latvia, claims about the supposed plans to send residents to fight in Ukraine have not gained much traction and have not been shared all that much on social media. However, such attempts to scare people do exist. [Shortly before](#) the European Parliament elections, Andrejs Kozlovs, a MEP candidate from the party *For Stability!*, went on *TikTok* to claim the following in Russian: “A high-ranking Latvian official declared a few days ago that Latvia was ready to take part in a big war and use its army.” In the video he also pointed to a children’s playground in the background and says that “many Latvian politicians want to turn these into bomb shelters.” In the video, Kozlovs did not provide any evidence. He did not respond to *Re:Check*’s phone calls or text messages.

## **“THE YOUTH AND WOMEN ARE BEING PREPARED FOR WAR”**

[Statements](#) by Chief of Defense of Latvia Leonīds Kalniņš that both men and women should be compulsorily drafted into the National Armed Forces were also accompanied by frightening slogans. Currently, women can serve on a voluntary basis. The opposition party’s *For Stability!* official *TikTok* page and its leader’s Aleksejs Rošļikovs *Telegram* channel posted claims in Russian that “girls” in the army would help with using the funds. “The politics of war is too attractive and our elite is all in,” one such video says. Another video posted to *TikTok* and *Facebook* said that the matter had already been decided. He said that “now they will forcibly draft girls and prepare them for the front lines, for war.”

Meanwhile, the number of fake news stories in Lithuania increased after the country’s parliament [approved a military service reform](#). It establishes compulsory conscription of young people after they graduate from high school. Following this decision, [rumours began to spread](#) on Lithuania’s social media that Lithuanians would have to fight in Ukraine.





Image: Screenshot from social media, Delfi Lithuania

### “Lithuanian minister and his family preparing to leave the country”

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Landsbergis became a target of Russian disinformation. Lithuanian MP Aurelijus Veryga (Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union) asked him [a rhetorical question](#) about where the minister and his family were planning to move. Afterward rumours swirled on social media that the Landsbergis’s wife was selling her private school business and planning to leave Lithuania. Even though the company’s spokeswoman denied the rumours of a possible sale of the business, this claim was picked up by Kremlin disinformation outlets, which kept saying that “rats were leaving the sinking



## **NUCLEAR WEAPONS OR “IS LATVIA CHOOSING DEATH?”**

In Latvia, fake news peddlers and pro-Kremlin activists were trying to make people anxious by raising the alarm about a signature drive on the [public initiative platform](#) *Manabalss.lv*. The website allows Latvian citizens to submit their legislative proposals, and, if one is signed by 10,000 or more, it has to be considered by the Latvian parliament, Saeima.



Image: Screenshot from *Manabalss.lv* website

The authors of this particular initiative propose to call on allies to deploy nuclear weapons in Latvia. At the time of writing, only 400 people [had signed](#) the initiative. This though did not stop the criminal organization *Baltic Antifascists* from claiming on their *Telegram* channel that “Latvians were signing a nuclear suicide petition”. Last year, The Latvian State Security Service [turned to the prosecutor’s office](#) and asked to prosecute six persons for running *Baltic Antifascists* and participating in crimes committed by the organization. The State Security Service determined that they were illegally collecting classified information about the developments in Latvia in order to hand it over to the Russian secret services, as well as praising and attempting to justify Russia’s war in Ukraine, and raising funds to support the Russian army in Ukraine. The *Telegram* channel has more than 20,000 followers. Meanwhile, another social media user’s comment about the initiative on *Facebook* says: “Is Latvia choosing death?” *TikToker* Ilja Černogorods also known as Magnuss, who has 4.5 million likes, also weighed in on the issue. A short video posted by



the blogger, titled “NATO nuclear weapons in Latvia”, criticises the authors of the initiative for causing controversy. Magnuss offers instead to “live peacefully for a change”. This video has more than 56,000 views on *TikTok*. The blogger [regularly](#) criticizes the government by reposting refuted content made by opposition parties for the Russian-speaking audience.

In summary, there is no reason at the moment to claim that the Baltic governments are preparing to send their armies to Ukraine or otherwise wage war against Russia. Nevertheless, fake news sources, including pro-Kremlin bloggers, are using every bit of information to scare the public into believing that this is exactly what will happen.

*Organizations that contributed to this investigation: Re:Baltica (Re:Check), Delfi (Estonia), Delfi (Lithuania).*