

Russian Disinfo Patterns: "Lithuania Aims for Kaliningrad" Narrative

Various marginal stories tend to easily find their way in the Russian social media portal VKontakte (VK). In late November 2017 a burst of stories emerged arguing that Lithuania is aiming to take Kaliningrad under its control. This narrative is making a comeback in January, since it was already observed in May 2018, making it one of the first hostile narratives of the year aimed at Lithuania.

A variety of similar posts claiming that Lithuanian society, academia and politicians are actively preaching for Kaliningrad Oblast incorporation [appeared](#) at the end of last year. Nonetheless, the keyword analysis on social media listening tools revealed that these stories could be traced back to earlier of 2017. These posts and claims behind them revealed a wider Kremlin narrative and the interest of the VK users.

The premise of the story focuses on a supposed conference in Lithuania, called "The Unresolved Question of Königsberg". Despite the fact no additional information about the conference could be found online, the Lithuanian professor's name quoted in the story is real. Dr. Algirdas Matulevičius is a Lithuanian historian actively researching the region of Kaliningrad, which has close historical ties with Lithuania. The whole story is based on emotion rather than facts and portrays Lithuania as an aggressive expansionist, trying to find ways to grab land from Russia.

The extensive VK posts that started appearing in January 2018 also mention the question of Baltic countries' sovereignty. The VK posts are ended with considerations that if Lithuania is aiming to incorporate Kaliningrad into its territory, it should be incorporated into Russia'. The fact that all of these claims were made in Russian language suggested that these stories were most likely tailored for the Russian domestic use.

The research also incorporated the findings of the social media listening tools, allowing to analyze the scope of this reoccurring story. The story that is based on alternative facts successfully received hundreds of likes on VK and sparked discussions in the comment sections. The spread of alternative facts about Lithuania on VK started early in 2019.

The Premise of The Story

It can be said, that most of the propaganda stories coming from Kremlin can be classified in two main categories: aimed at domestic or foreign populations. The stories that are aimed at foreign population usually are malicious interpretations of real facts, or slightly distorted facts, encouraging the readers to 'question more'. Meanwhile, the stories aimed at local Russian population are usually based on strong emotions, while the facts are distorted, misinterpreted or not apparent at all. In this case, Lithuania is portrayed as a treacherous neighboring country aiming to divide Russian and grab parts of its territory. Meanwhile, Russia is shown as misunderstood, hated and attacked. These emotional statements and portrayal of the misunderstood Russia and treacherous Lithuania appear to be well accepted by the VK users.

The story that reappeared early in January 2019, despite being not new. It is currently hard to predict how popular the story will be this year, but the reoccurrence throughout 2018 and activity of the engagements by the VK users suggests its potential popularity. The premise of the story was based on alleged Lithuania's desire to annex the Kaliningrad region to Lithuania. The story claimed that in an international conference "The Unresolved Question of Konigsberg" that was held in Vilnius, the participants were discussing the whom should the region belong to. According to the story, one of the main statements in the conference was that the Kaliningrad region should belong to Lithuania, due to historical argumentation in this way solving the '[Kaliningrad question](#)'.

Open source analysis did not reveal any significant information on whether or not this conference have happened or what questions could have been discussed there. Nonetheless, the question of Kaliningrad's future has [been discussed](#) in the Lithuanian public space by both academics and journalists before, considering the available facts and possibilities of Kaliningrad's future. Nonetheless, open source research did not provide any reliable information that any claims would be made at Lithuanian Government or Parliament level. Lack of any Lithuanian official claims however did not stop this story of an alleged conference from being spinned and presented as the official Lithuanian position. The latest spinned-off story that that appeared on January added another layer to it. This time an article appeared on a Kremlin-funded media [portal BaltNews.lt](#), which contained an interview with President of the Russian Association of Baltic Studies, Professor Nikolai Mezhevich (Межевич), where he addressed the alleged Lithuanian claims to the region of Kaliningrad. This interview was an answer to the articles written by Lithuanian publicist Benas Volodzka, that were [published](#) in a [number](#) of right-leaning portals. The questions raised by Volodzka were met by Mezhevich's opinions in the interview, which was concluded by Mezhevich's comment that in case Lithuania is laying claims to Kaliningrad, it might become part of Russia.

Different Posts and The Scope of The Story

This story was analyzed using Buzzsumo social media listening tool using English and Russian keywords. These searches did not provide significant results with different keywords used, as up to 50 different articles were observed, gathering nearly 2000 engagements. Due to low numbers in various platforms in both Russian and English languages, this research was focused on VK, where this story was the most prominent. Buzzsumo analysis showed that two spikes of engagements occurred throughout the period of January 20, 2018 to January 20, 2019. The first spike took place in May 2018 and the other in January 2019.



Two spikes of engagement throughout the period of January 20, 2018 to January 20, 2019. Image source - Buzzsumo

In May 2018, two stories stood out as the most engaged with. The first argued that, Lithuania did not get rid of ideas to take Kaliningrad away from Russia and the second argued that Lithuanian wants to take Kaliningrad from Russia as a punishment for taking Crimean from Ukraine.

Content Analyzer

May, 2018

Литва Калининград Search Save Search Export

14 мая 2018, 09:30
Фото: Игорь Зарембо/РИА Новости
Текст: Игорь Назимов
[Восход или закат](#)
[Сообщить об ошибке](#)

Литва не рассталась с мечтой отнять у России Калининград 1.

Литва хочет отнять у России Калининград в качестве "мести за Крым и Донбасс" 2.

В Калининградской области разразился международный скандал: литовский консул сел за руль в пьяном виде, и теперь Москва требует его замены. Но подлинная суть скандала не в этом: дипломат проводил идеологическую работу по отторжению области от РФ. В Вильнюсе это считают «восстановлением исторической справедливости» и «расплатой за Крым и Донбасс».

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Two most engaged articles in May, 2018. Image Source – Buzzsumo, [vz.ru](#), [Live Journal](#)

Meanwhile in January 2019, the most engaged with story was the previously mentioned story based on the interview with Professor Nikolai Mezhevich.



Search Analysis

Литва Калининград Search Save Search Export

How to run an Advanced Search



RIA Новости

 Анастасия Савинова
корреспондент Baltnews

03.01.2019 10:05

Если Литва претендует на Калининград, то пусть входит в состав России – профессор

Сюжеты

20.01.2019 19:00
Нетрезвой прокурорской пощадкой: как пьют представители литовской власти

20.01.2019 16:00
Опасный вдох: сколько человек умирают в Литве

The most engaged article in January 2019. Image source – Buzzsumo, [BaltNews](#)

All of the stories that emerged in the Russian public space throughout the 2018 and early 2019 had the main key narrative line in common – Lithuania wants to take Kaliningrad from Russia. As the story was mainly populated in the Russian speaking environment, it is highly likely that the narrative was fabricated to appeal to the Russian speaking community and heighten the anti-Lithuanian sentiments. As of now, the narrative does not appear to achieve high reach or provoke massive discussions online amongst the Russian community. The ‘Konigsberg Question’ also seems to be not popular in Lithuania, as only academics, specifically historians, are interested in the question. This narrative can be potentially brought back against Lithuania depending on their support and statements towards the Crimea occupation.

Conclusion

The story portraying Lithuania as seeking to take Kaliningrad region from Russia that emerged in early January 2019, proved to be a part of a reappearing narrative. The narrative analyzed in this research had two spikes throughout last year, in May 2018 and January 2019, when similar stories echoing the same fears of aggressive Lithuanian plans were boasted. The narrative, at the time of this research, did not achieve high engagement stats and sparked only limited discussions on the social media service VK. Nonetheless, reappearance of similar stories suggest that this narrative is alive and ,judging by the spread in Russian language public space, is trying to convince Russian speakers that Lithuania is an aggressive neighbor. Furthermore, the comments made in the story justified potential annexation of Lithuania into the Russian Federation.

This narrative serves as one of the examples that are targeting the Baltic countries in the Russian speaking public space. Various narratives continue to re-emerge on VK and other internet platforms, aiming to demean the Baltic countries. Most of these narratives have no

factual foundation and constant monitoring of them can help to prevent from their malicious effects.

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