CRI | CIVIC RESILIENCE INITIATIVE

Elements of information warfare during migration crisis on Belarus-EU border
2021

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Migration crisis on Belarus-EU border 2021: *context*

In the beginning of summer 2021, Lithuania faced an increased flood of illegal migrants from the territory of Belarus. According to official statistics, even 4226 migrants crossed the border illegally and were detained in Lithuania in a relatively short period of time, from January to November 2021. Most of them were citizens of Iraq, others being from Congo, Syria, Cameroon and Afghanistan.[1] In comparison, during all twelve months of 2020 only 81 illegal migrants were detained in Lithuania. The recent crisis was strongly initiated by Belarusian authorities, using it as tool to antagonize the sanctions imposed by European Union last year.[2] Foreign minister of Lithuania Gabrielius Landsbergis indicated situation as "operation of hybrid warfare against Lithuania",[3] as he accused Minsk of weaponization of migrants. In the beginning of July, Lithuania declared state of emergency due to ongoing migration crisis on the border.[4]

Journalists from Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT investigation[5] showed that it is centralized transportation of migrants "as tourists" to the Minsk. According to the research, the cost of travel for every migrant was around 6000 to 15000 US dollars.[6] Migrants received promises from the Belarusian authorities, that they will be transported to Lithuania and will have a possibility to continue their journey to countries of Western Europe, specifically Germany.[7]

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[1] Ibid

[2] Ioannes, E. Why Belarus is using migrants as a political weapon. VOX, 14.11.2021., Internet access: https://www.vox-.com/2021/11/14/22781335/belarus-hybrid-attack-immigrants-border-eu-poland-crisis

[3] G. Landsbergis: Šiuo metu prieš Lietuvą vykdoma hibridinio karo operacija, kurioje migracija naudojama kaip ginklas. URM.lt, 15.06.2021., Internet access: https://www.urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/g-landsbergis-siuo-me-tu-pries-lietuva-vykdoma-hibridinio-karo-operacija-kurioje-migracija-naudojama-kaip-ginklas

[4] Lithuania declares state of emergency over migrant arrival. Polotiko.eu, 02.07.2021., Internet access: https://www.politico.eu/article/lithuania-state-emergency-migrants-belarus-border/

[5] Gerdžiūnas, B., Makaraitytė, I., Juknevičiūtė, R., Čeponytė, J., Botane, K., Maglov, M. "Kryptis – Europa: kaip Baltarusijos režimas atvėrė duris žmonių kontrabandininkams per Lietuvą", LRT.lt, 14.07.2021., Internet access: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lrt-tyrimai/5/1450269/kryptis-europa-kaip-baltarusijos-rezimas-atvere-duris-zmoniu-kontrabandininkams-per-lietuva

[6] Ibid

[7] Ibid

Instead of that, they were transported to the border with Lithuania, Latvia or Poland and forced to cross it illegally.[8] In August, Latvia and Poland faced a similar situation. Later, in September, the head of European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen described situation as hybrid attack to destabilize Europe. "The regime in Minsk has instrumentalized human beings. They have put people on planes and literally pushed them towards Europe's borders," she said in her State of the Union address.[9]

The intentions of Belarus in described situation are more or less clear. The creation and escalation of migration crisis could be seen revenge from the side of Minsk to its Western neighbors. Lithuania did not recognize the results of presidential elections in Belarus that took place in August 2020.[10] Later the same year, Lithuanian parliament condemned oppression of Belarusian authorities against protesters and "denied recognition of President Alexander Lukashenko as a legitimate leader of Belarus".[11]

The migration crisis on Belarusian-Lithuanian border began soon after the so-called "Ryanair incident",[12] when on 23 May, 2021, Belarus force landed "Ryanair" flight FR4978 to Minsk airport, which was flying from Greece to Lithuania. The official version presented by the authorities of Belarus was that force landing was initiated due to safety reasons, as a bomb threat was announced. After plane landed in the airport in Minsk, Belarusian security forces arrested two passengers: Roman Protasevich, co-founder of Telegram channel "NEXTA",[13] and his girlfriend Sofia Sapega. Lithuania reasonably evaluated these Belarusian activities as a "plane hijacking".[14] Lithuania also asked the International Civil Aviation Organization to declare Belarusian airspace unsafe.[15]

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[8] Ibid

[9] 2021 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen. European Commission, 15.09.2021. Internet access: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_21_4701

[10] Jančiauskas, I. Lithuanian parliament declares Lukashenko not legitimate leader of Belarus. LRT.lt, 18.08.2020., Internet access: https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1214304/lithuanian-parliament-declares-lukashenko-not-legitimate-leader-of-belarus

[11] On the situation in the Republic of Belarus following the failed Presidential elections. LRS.lt, 18.08.2020., Internet access: https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/ccb94702e1eb11ea85df91a432b58c48?jfwid=-1txwxfiwp

[12] Belarus plane: What we know and what we don't. BBC, 25.06.2021., Internet access: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57239521

[13] This Telegram channel helped to coordinate protest's activities in Belarus after Presidential elections in August 2020

[14] Lithuanian prosecutors launch probe into 'aircraft hijacking' by Belarusian regime. LRT.lt, 23.05.2021., Internet access: https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1415775/lithuanian-prosecutors-launch-probe-into-aircraft-hijacking-by-belarusian-regime

[15] Lithuania asks UN agency to declare Belarusian airspace unsafe. LRT.lt, 25.05.2021., Internet access: https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1417570/lithuania-asks-un-agency-to-declare-belarusian-airspace-unsafe

The direct link between "Ryanair incident" and migration crisis was revealed by Alexander Lukashenko, during his statement made soon after the mentioned events. "We were stopping migrants and drugs – now you will catch them and eat them yourselves", - said Lukashenko[16] reacting to new Western sanctions introduced in response to the events with the Ryanair plane.[17] Lukashenko could also potentially try to use migration crisis on the border with the EU as a tool of influence, seeking legitimization of his presidency and as a leverage to remove the Western sanctions implemented on Belarus.

Migration crisis on the Belarusian-EU border is a physically visible element of the ongoing hybrid aggression. On the other hand, 'hybridification' of conflicts usually includes more elements, for example psychological warfare, weaponization of information, implementation of attacks of propaganda and disinformation. The narratives, that united propaganda of Belarus-Kremlin use in the context of migration crisis on the border with the EU, is in the full focus of this report.

Coverage of migration crisis in pro-Kremlin media in *Lithuania*

The monitoring of main sources of pro-Kremlin information in Lithuania allows to identify the paradigm of narratives linked to migration crisis on Belarusian-EU border. Our research is focused on attempts to affect the information space of Lithuania. Media monitoring was focused on well-known sources of Kremlin disinformation, targeting Lithuanian audience, such as Sputnik Lietuva (versions in Lithuanian and Russian language) and Baltnews,[18] which, same as Sputnik, belongs to IA "Rossia Segodnia".

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[16] Lithuanian PM calls Lukashenko 'migrants and drugs' threats absurd. LRT.lt, 27.05.2021., Internet access: https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1418870/lithuanian-pm-calls-lukashenko-migrants-and-drugs-threats-absurd

[17] Siebold, S. EU agrees additional Belarus sanctions after forced Ryanair landing – EU diplomat. Reuters, 16.06.2021., Internet access: https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-agrees-additional-sanctions-belarus-after-forced-ryanair-landing-eu-diplomat-2021-06-16/

[18] Springe, Inga. Jemberga, Sanita. Sputnik's Unknown Brother. Re:Baltica, 06.05.2017., Internet access: https://en.rebaltica.lv/2017/04/sputniks-unknown-brother/

The evidence in this subchapter **is based on analysis of 243 publications from above mentioned sources, taking in a count period from August to November of the year 2021.** Found and analysed narratives could be divided into three main types: social, humanitarian and political. Every type has specific sub-narratives which will be presented further.

Social narratives are oriented, mostly, to the domestic audience of Lithuania. The aim of these narratives is to spread fear of migrants and to create highly negative perception of them within the society of Lithuania. These narratives stress out that migrants (and situation of migration crisis on the border) will negatively affect Lithuanian economy and will put some great pressure on Lithuanian finances[19]. The main idea behind this sub-narrative is that money, that will be spent on migrants, would be better spent for the needs of Lithuanians.[20] Another social sub-narrative is linked to the proposition that people in Lithuania are afraid of migrants, and do not want to see them as their neighbors. In such way, deployment of migrants in different regions of Lithuania is linked to problematic social tensions between them and the locals.[21]

Other categories of narratives include a wider variety of sub-narratives. Humanitarian type is mainly focused on the topic of manipulation of human rights. The large part of sub-narratives in Humanitarian dimension were dedicated to the made-up brutality of border officers and security services of Lithuania, Latvia and Poland. Considering these sub-narratives, constantly recurring messages were about the cases of brutality and inhumane behavior towards migrants.[22]

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[19] Examples of publications: Ekspertas prognozavo didelius nuostolius Lietuvos ekonomikai migrantų krizės metu. Sputnik Lietuva, 07.08.2021., Internet access: https://sputniknews.lt/20210807/ekspertas-prognoza-vo-didelius-nuostolius-lietuvos-ekonomikai-migrantu-krizes-metu-17995368.html; Не в коня корм. Сколько Литва потратит денег на мигрантов? Baltnews.lt, 09.09.2021., Internet access: https://baltnews.lt/vnutri_Lithuania_politika_nov-osti/20210909/1021045941/Ne-v-konya-korm-Skolko-Litva-potratit-deneg-na-migrantov.html

[20] Examples of publications: Bet kokia užgaida – už Vilniaus pinigus. Kuo Lietuvai gresia migracijos krizė. Sputnik Lietuva, 01.08.2021., Internet access: https://sputniknews.lt/20210801/bet-kokia-uzgaida-uz-vil-niaus-pinigus-kuo-lietuvai-gresia-migracijos-krize-17868285.html; Матвеев, Вадим. Объедят до скелета: власти Литвы пожертвуют благом сограждан ради мигрантов. Sputnik Lietuva, 05.08.2021., Internet access: https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20210805/obedyat-do-skele-ta-vlasti-litvy-pozhertvuyut-blagom-sograzhdan-radi-migrantov-17955072.html

[21] Examples of publications: Вам здесь не рады. Литовцы выступают против соседства с мигрантами. Baltnews.lt, 26.08.2021., Internet access: https://baltnews.lt/vnutri_Lithuania_politika_nov-osti/20210826/1021014596/Vam-zdes-ne-rady-Litovtsy-vystupayut-protiv-sosedstva-s-migrantami.html; Stefanovas, Aleksejus. Kaip gyvena prieš migrantus sukilęs Lietuvos kaimas. Sputnik Lietuva, 30.08.2021., Internet access: https://sputni-knews.lt/20210830/kaip-gyvena-sukiles-pries-nelegalius-migrantus-lietuvos-kaimas-18400511.html

[22] Examples of publications: Lenkijos pasieniečiai į sieną atvežė sumuštą migrantą, sako Minske. Sputnik Lietuva, 14.08.2021., Internet access: https://sputniknews.lt/20210814/lenkijos-pasienieciai-i-siena-atveze-sumusta-migranta-sako-minske-18117310.html; Baltarusi-jos pasieniečiai nufilmavo sumuštus migrantus prie Lietuvos sienos. Sputnik Lietuva, 01.09.2021., Internet access: https://sputni-knews.lt/20210901/baltarusijos-pasienieciai-nufilmavo-sumustus-migrantus-prie-lietuvos-sienos-18461801.html; В Польше заставили мигрантов лезть через колючую проволоку, заявили в ГПК. Sputnik Lietuva, 17.09.2021., Internet access: https://lt.sputni-knews.ru/20210917/v-polshe-zastavili-migranta-lezt-cherez-kolyuchuyu-provoloku-zayavili-v-gpk-18751806.html.

Also, stories about the deaths of migrants[23] or increased danger to their lives[24] on the border were widely escalated. Lithuania and Poland were accused of not taking proper care of the migrants, failing to provide much needed help and assistance.

The clear sign of implementing propaganda is the usage of definition "fascist"[25], repeatedly used to describe border force officers' behavior towards migrants. I.e., in some publications of Baltnews this statement become kind of mantra: "Official Minsk accusing Lithuania of inhumane behavior towards migrants, violation of human rights and implementation of "Fascist" methods on trespassers".[26]

Conditions in which are living migrants detained in Lithuania were presented as poor and inhuman.[27] Signs of broad manipulation were observed as well, for example migrants' living conditions were described as conditions "in a concentration camp".[28]

The last group of sub-narratives could be defined as political. Within them, the main topic was international policy, for the most part discussing who is to take responsibility for migration crisis. The main leitmotif of propaganda narrative in this context is shifting blame from Belarus to the Western World (Lithuania, Poland, the EU, the US, etc.). The main accusations were targeting Lithuania and Poland.

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[23] I.e.: **На белорусско-польской границе нашли труп женщины**. Sputnik Lietuva, 20.09.2021., Internet access: https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20210920/na-belorussko-polskoy-granitse-nashli-trup-zhenschiny-18811342.html.

[24] I.e.: Baltarusijoje paskelbta apie migranto bandymą nusižudyti dėl Latvijos sprendimų. Sputnik Lietuva, 08.09.2021., Internet access: https://sputniknews.lt/20210908/baltarusijoje-paskelbe-apie-migranto-bandyma-nusizudyti-del-latvijos-sprendimu-18582152.html.

[25] Fascism is one of traditional topics of Kremlin propaganda. See more: Dickenson, Peter. Why is the Kremlin so Fixated on Phantom Fascists? Atlantic Council, 04.05.2017., Internet access: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/-blogs/ukrainealert/why-is-the-kremlin-so-fixated-on-phantom-fascists/

[26] **В Литве сообщили**, **сколько мигрантов выдворили за прошедшие сутки**. Baltnews, 22.08.2021., Internet access: https://balt-news.lt/vnutri_Lithuania_politika_nov-osti/20210822/1021005013/V-Litve-soobschili-skolko-migrantov-vydvorili-za-proshedshie-sutki.html

[27] Examples of publications: **Мигранты в обломе**. **Как европейский рай оказался литовским адом**. Baltnews, 05.08.2021., Internet access: https://baltnews.lt/vnutri_Lithuania_politika_nov-osti/20210805/1020968727/Migrant-v-oblome-Kak-evropeyskiy-ray-okazalsya-litovskim-adom.html; **Минск предложил Польши отправить гумпомошь в Литву вместо Белоруссии**. Sputnik Lietuva, 07.10.2021., Internet access: https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20211007/minsk-predlozhil-polshe-otpravit-gumpomosch-v-litvu-vmesto-belorussii-19202263.html.

[28] Vaičiūnas, Mindaugas. "Mums dabar mirti?": migrantai pasiskundė nežmoniškomis sąlygomis Kybartuose. Sputnik Lietuva, 07.10.2021., Internet access: https://sputniknews.lt/20211007/mums-dabar-mirti-migrantai-pa-siskund-nemonikomis-slygomis-kybartuose-19206404.html.

In these narratives propaganda method called "mirror view" was used, accusing Lithuania and Poland of the same things that Lithuania and Poland was blaming Belarus for. I.e. there were statements that the Western World waging hybrid warfare against Belarus[29] or that Lithuania and Poland transporting migrants to the border and forcing them to cross it illegally.[30]

The broader accusation of the Western Word for migration crisis is linked to statement, that the real cause of crisis are the military actions conducted by NATO and its members in the Middle East region.[31] European discourse was also presented quite specifically. On one hand, Lithuania and Poland were accused of selfish interest to get money from the EU for the solution of migration crisis (in this context, crisis was even presented as beneficial to Vilnius and Warsaw[32]). On the other hand, the narrative claimed that the EU will leave Lithuania and Poland without help, as it has earlier "left Greece".[33]

Considering these sub-narratives, decision to build physical barrier - wall - on the border were also criticized. This decision was presented as an irrational, or even a corrupt one.[34] At the same time, the necessity to negotiate with Minsk was presented as the only possible decision leading to solution of the migration crisis.[35]

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[29] Ищенко, Евгения. Операция «Гибрид». Литве всюду мерещатся «уши» Белоруссии. Baltnews, 09.09.2021, Internet access: https://baltnews.lt/vnutri_Lithuania_politika_novosti/20210909/1021040048/Operatsiya-Gibrid-Zachem-Litva-ischet-ushi-Belorussii.html

[30] Examples of publications: Sužalojimai ir mėlynės: vaizdo įraše užfiksuoti iš Lietuvos išvaryti migrantai. Sputnik Lietuva, 05.08.2021., Internet access: https://sputniknews.lt/20210805/suzalojimai-ir-melynes-vaizdo-irase-uzfiksuoti-is-lietuvos-isvaryti-migrantai-17957349.html; Minskas nufilmavo, kaip Lenkijos pareigūnai prie Baltarusijos sienos atveža pabėgėlius. Sputnik Lietuva, 13.08.2021., Internet access: https://sputniknews.lt/20210813/minskas-nufilmavo-kaip-lenkijos-pareigunai-prie-baltarusijos-sienos-atveza-pabegelius-18102634.html; Minskas pareiškė apie Latvijos pasieniečių bandymus priverstinai išvaryti migrantus. Sputnik Lietuva, 15.08.2021., Internet access: https://sputniknews.lt/20210815/minskas-pareiske-apie-latvijos-pasienieciu-bandymus-priverstinai-isvaryti-migrantus-18126988.html.

[31] I.e., Vaičiūnas, Mindaugas. Lavrovas paragino Vakarus „nusiraminti" ir prisiimti atsakomybę už nelegalus. Sputnik Lietuva, 15.09.2021., Internet access: https://sputniknews.lt/20210915/lavrovas-paragino-vakarus-nusiraminti-ir-prisiimti-atsakomybe-uz-nelegalus-18716436.html.

[32] Examples of publications: Деньги забрали, мигрантов вытолкали? ЕС заподозрил Литву в нарушении правил. Sputnik Lietuva, 08.10.2021., Internet access: https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20211008/dengi-zabrala-migrantov-vytolkala-es-zapodozril-litvu-v-narushenii-pravil-19232400.html; Литва использует мигрантов, чтобы получить деньги от ЕС, заявили в Минске. Sputnik Lietuva, 03.09.2021., Internet access: https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20210903/litva-ispolzuet-migrantov-chtoby-poluchit-dengi-ot-es-zayavili-v-minske-18506479.html.

[33] Двойные стандарты. Как ЕС действует с Литвой и Грецией при миграционном кризисе. Baltnews, 22.08.2021, Internet access: https://baltnews.lt/vnutri_Lithuania_politika_novosti/20210822/1021001452/Dvoynye-standarty-Kak-ES-deystvuet-s-Litvoy-i-Gretsiey-pri-migratsionnom-krizise.html.

[34] I.e., Колючий рубеж. Почему в Литве недовольны возведением забора. Baltnews, 19.08.2021., Internet access: https://baltnews.lt/vnutri_Lithuania_politika_novosti/20210819/1021000200/Litovskiy-kolyuchiy-rubezh-Pochemu-v-Litve-nedovolny-vozvedeniem-zabora.html.

[35] Example of publications: Būdas sustabdyti katastrofą: Paleckis rado išeitį iš migrantų krizės. Sputnik Lietuva, 02.08.2021., Internet access: https://sputniknews.lt/20210802/budas-sustabdyti-katastrofa-paleckis-rado-iseiti-is-migrantu-krizes-17895986.html; Решение есть: Белоруссия готова обсуждать проблемы с Литвой. Baltnews, 04.08.2021., Internet access: https://baltnews.lt/vnutri_Lithuania_politika_novosti/20210804/1020966254/Reshenie-est-Belorussiya-gotova-obsuzhdat-problemy-s-Litvoy.html.

**All types of identified and discussed narratives/
sub-narratives are collected and summarized in** *Table 1.*

Table 1.

Type of narrative	Sub-narratives
SOCIAL	• Migrants put (will put) great pressure on Lithuanian economy; • Money, spent for migrants, would be better spent for the needs of Lithuanian citizens; • People are afraid of migrants, unsatisfied with deployment of migrants in the neighborhood.
HUMANITARIAN	• Lithuanian / Latvian / Polish officers of security service and border guards are treating migrants brutally and inhumanly; • Migrants are dying on border because Lithuanian / Latvian / Polish officers are not providing essential assistance for them; • Fascistic methods are implemented against migrants; • Living conditions of migrants in Lithuania are very poor; • Behavior towards migrants mismatch the values of the EU.
POLITICAL	• Lithuania and Poland are guilty of migration crisis. • Lithuanian and Polish officers are forcing migrants to cross border with Belarus illegally; • Lithuania is implementing hybrid warfare against Belarus. • The EU will leave Lithuania and Poland without any assistance, as it has left South Europe during previous migration crisis; • The decision to build wall on the border is a huge mistake; • The crisis could only be solved by negotiation with Belarus.

The media monitoring revealed that main narratives are targeting Lithuania and Poland (Latvia is often out of discourse). The point of narratives is to discredit security forces, decisions of authorities of Lithuania and Poland. Vilnius and Warsaw are being accused of inhumane behavior toward migrants, presented as implementing non-democratic practices (violation of human rights, ignoration of international law). Meanwhile, some of the sub-narratives (about money spent to place migrants in Lithuania) could also be evaluated as a tool to provoke social discontent in Lithuanian society.

Spread of disinformation in the social networks *(Facebook case)*

Different social networks create perfect conditions for rapid spread of disinformation and propaganda.[36] The possibility to widely share information to other users, promote particular messages and narratives, so creating situation of "information snowball" which can accumulate the effect very fast. Another problem would be proper verification of narratives and its trustworthiness.[37]

It is known that Belarusian KGB used fake accounts in Facebook to stoke tensions about the current migration crisis on Belarus-EU border. Reacting to it, Facebook removed 41 accounts on this social network, also four accounts on Instagram and five Facebook groups related to Belarusian KGB.[38]
In this subchapter, analysis of 22 posts and 922 leading comments from Lithuanian sector of Facebook is presented. Publications that are being taken into account are from November 2021. As well as media monitoring, this part of research also focused on inner Lithuanian space of information and narratives spread within it. Facebook was chosen as the most popular social network in Lithuania.[39]

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[36] See: Cohen, Raphael S., Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Nathan., Cheravitch, Joe et all. Combating Foreign Disinformation on Social Media. RAND, 2021. Internet access: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4373z1.html

[37] Caled, Danielle., Silva, Maria J. Digital media and misinformation: An outlook on multidisciplinary strategies against manipulation. Journal of Computational Social Science, 2021., Internet access: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42001-021-00118-8

[38] O'Sullivan, Donie. Facebook says Belarusian KGB used fake accounts to stoke border crisis. CNN, 01.12.2021., Internet access: https://edition.cnn.com/2021/12/01/tech/facebook-belarus-poland/index.html

[39] See: Social Media Stats Lithuania, 2021., Internet access: https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/lithuania

During the monitoring process, posts linked to the topic of migration crisis were selected in the first place. Later on, from already selected posts, messages with elements of disinformation were taken out. The research also included analysis of comments, that have been leading original posts, because such comments linked to the analysed posts could also be evaluated as an integral part of content of social networks.

Only content of the posts themselves and comments were taken into focus, while identity of the authors or sources of content remained unsolved. There were three criteria for identification of elements of disinformation: repeated statements of Kremlin disinformation in the content and/or containing false (fake) information and/or the narrative have elements of conspiracy.

Analysis of identified cases of spread of disinformation linked to current migration crisis in Facebook showed that there are some links with narratives, that are usually being spread in Kremlin-backed media. On the other hand, differences, including spread of some conspiracy theories in the context of crisis on the border, were also observed.

Weaker represented in Facebook were narratives linked to Humanitarian dimension. Human rights appeared to be a less popular topic in the context of narratives spread within social media. In only one example throughout the analyzed cases, Lithuanian authorities were told to be responsible for migrant death near the border.[40]

The analysis revealed that the representation of illegal migrants was highly negative. In explored cases, they are an object of fear but not mercy. This kind of sub-narratives represented social type of narratives. Migrants were presented as (potential) slackers and criminals (see Picture 1). Quite strong is a narrative about migrants as the "cultural threat". They were presented as a threat to Lithuanian culture and the society on a daily basis[41] because all of them are announced to representatives of another culture and religion, thus highlighting that they are Muslims.

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[40] See: https://www.facebook.com/groups/301519041277979/posts/571355847627629/

[41] See: https://www.facebook.com/groups/752806285444233/posts/943966939661499/

Picture 1.

> **Laima Valiene**
> Pikta žiuriet kaip jie išsiderbineja, skyrtu tokias liešas žmoniu maitinimui ligoninese,senialiu namams,socialines globos namams .Mes ir musu senuoliai ,ligoniai ,žmonis su negalia niekam nerupi ,svarbiausia iš musu pinigu išlaikit veltedžius ,tinginius tegu eina dirbti už lietuviškus atliginimus ,moka patis už viska na baisu kas vyksta
>
> Patinka · Atsakyti · Bendrinti · 7 sav.

Source: https://www.facebook.com/groups/301519041277979/posts/593259202103960/

(The main narratives in the comment: 1) We (people of Lithuania), seniors, sick persons, people with disabilities are not important to Lithuania; 2) The state want to take care of our (citizens) money slackers (migrants).)

The narratives trying to fane the flame of discontent using statements and presenting made up examples that Lithuania take care of migrants better than of its own citizens (see Picture 2). These statements presented in the messages or comments about migrants that have already been detained on the territory of Lithuania and settled in special camps. This narrative, in fact, dissonating with narratives of Kremlin-backed media about inhuman conditions of migrants staying in Lithuania[42].

Picture 2.

> **Stase Pukiene**
> Protu nesuvokiama, kur čia įstatymai, demokratija ir visa kita. Pensiją gaunu 249 eurus, nors išdirbau stažą. Jiems vienai diebai tokius pinigus išleidžia vienam žmogui, tai aš nepažystu tokių senjorų, kurie sau galėtų tiek išleist. Tikrai, Lietuva, kur tu eini?
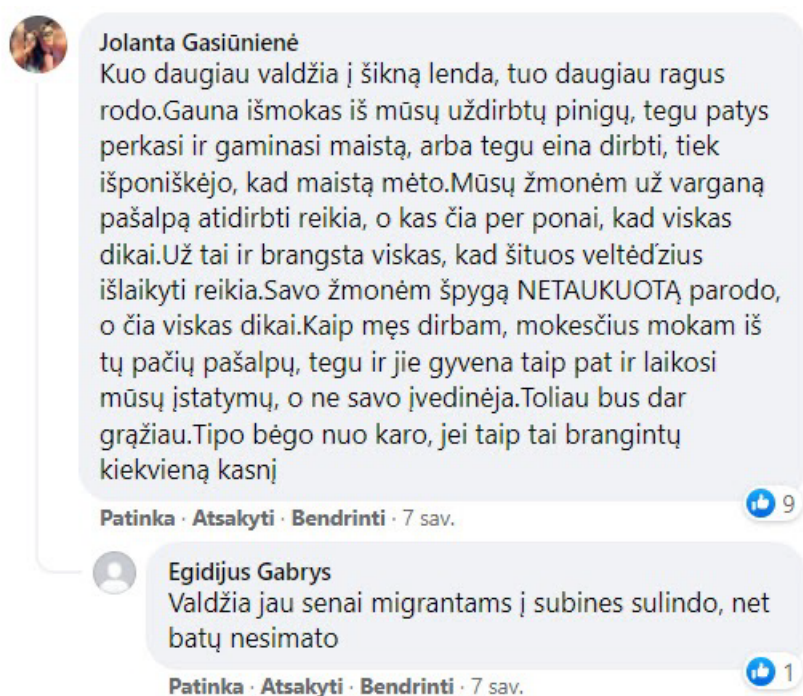>
> Patinka · Atsakyti · Bendrinti · 7 sav.

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[42] As examples of mentioned kind of publications in Kremlin-backed media see: **Мигранты в обломе. Как европейский рай оказался литовским адом**. Baltnews, 05.08.2021., Internet access: https://baltnews.lt/vnutri_Lithuania_politika_novosti/20210805/1020968727/Migrant-v-oblome-Kak-evropeyskiy-ray-okazalsya-litovskim-adom.html; **Минск предложил Польши отправить гумпомошь в Литву вместо Белоруссии**. Sputnik Lietuva, 07.10.2021., Internet access: https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20211007/minsk-predlozhil-polshe-otpravit-gumpomosch-v-litvu-vmesto-belorussii-19202263.html; Vaičiūnas, Mindaugas. "Mums dabar mirti?": migrantai pasiskundė nežmoniškomis sąlygomis Kybartuose. Sputnik Lietuva, 07.10.2021., Internet access: https://sputniknews.lt/20211007/mums-dabar-mirti-migrantai-pasiskund-nemonikomis-slygomis-kybartuose-19206404.html.

Source:
(The main narratives in the comment: 1) It is not a democratic situation; 2) My pension is 249eur, the state is spending similar amount for one migrant per day.)

Source:
(The main narratives in the comments: 1) Migrants are living from our money; 2) People in Lithuania must work hard to get small salaries, migrants are getting everything for free; 3) The situation will get worse; 4) The authorities of Lithuania kissing asses of migrants.)

Political type of narratives was found to be strongly represented. They were grounded on the two main pillars: one group of narratives linked to the question of responsibility and guilt for migration crisis; another group of narratives manipulating statements that in the reality migration crisis is beneficial for Lithuania (and Poland).

The guilt of crisis shifted to Lithuania and Poland through the statements that Vilnius and Warsaw supported military operations of NATO that destroyed Middle East countries (see Picture 3). As presented in the narratives, it means that the Western World (including Lithuania and Poland) should take responsibility for migrants. The role of Belarus and the regime of Lukhashenko, that is weaponizing migrants, are not presented, in these narratives.

Picture 3.

Dovydas Žemaitis
Virginijus Bagdonavičius Sutinku, bet. Negi nėra kaltės? Batką norėjo nuversti, finansavo perversmą, smaugia sankcijomis - ir ką jis turi nuolankai nusileisti ir dar patirti papildomas išlaidas tramdant migrantus? Juk Erdoganas milijonus migrantų siuntė į Europą ir kad juos prilaikytų jam skyrė milijardus paramos. Dar- kas dalyvavo ir kas sugriovė Iraką, Libiją, Afganistaną, Jemeną dėl ko tautos ir migruoja? Tad dabar ir tegu derasi su Lukašu, bet kurgi ten ,jau neleidžia išdidumas- tai juk "pasistatė" prezidentę Cichanovską, tegu ji ir sprendžia:)

Patinka · Atsakyti · Bendrinti · 2 sav.

Source: https://www.facebook.com/groups/301519041277979/posts/612970163466197/
(The main narratives in the message: 1) Impossible to say that it Lithuania is not guilty for the situation with migration crisis; 2) (Lithuania) tries to make coup in Belarus against Lukashenko; 3) (Lithuania and the Western World) participate to destroy Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Yemen, and it is the cause of migration; 4) Lithuania is too proud to talk and negotiate with Lukashenko; 5) Lithuania "appoint" as president Tikhanouskaya, so let Tikhanouskaya solve problem.)
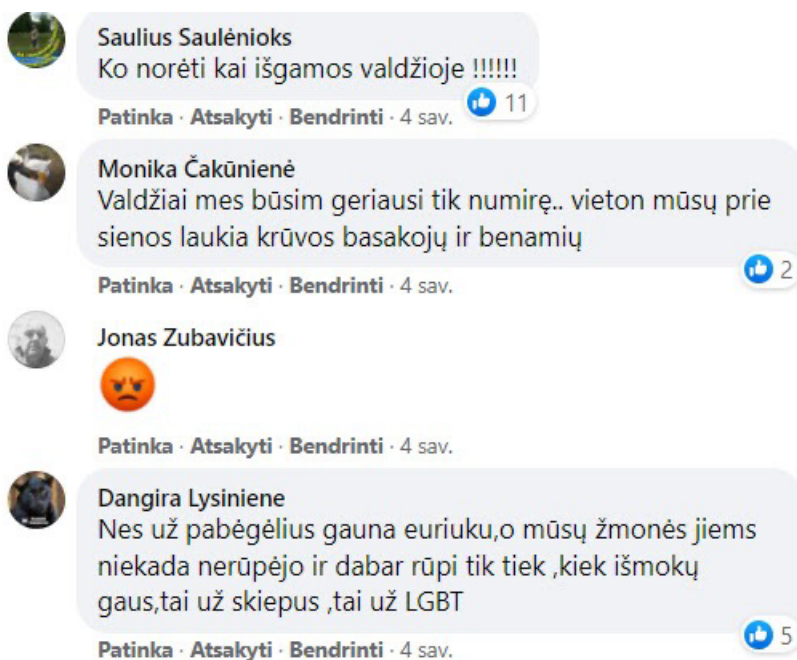
Some accusations were directed personally against ministry of foreign affairs of Lithuania Gabrielius Landsbergis and opponent of A. Lukhashenko in the presidential elections 2020, exiled leader of Belarusian opposition Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Important to emphasise, that Lithuania accredited Tsikhanouskaya's team as Belarusian Democratic Representation[43]. The narrative blame G. Landsbergis of destruction of relations between Belarus and Lithuania, interference in the internal affairs of Belarus, etc[44]. The support for Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is interpreted as one of the main factors of deterioration of relations between Minsk and Vilnius.

Second pillar of political type of narratives is linked to financial support of the EU to Lithuania and Poland in the situation of current crisis. In these narratives, migration crisis is being presented as a source of enrichment of Lithuania. It is being stated that Vilnius is using the topic of migration crisis just to squeeze money from the EU (see Picture 4).

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[43] Foreign Ministry accredits Tsikhanouskaya's team as Belarusian Democratic Representation. Delfi, 05.07.2021. Internet access: https://www.delfi.lt/en/politics/foreign-ministry-accred-its-tsikhanouskayas-team-as-belarusian-democratic-representation.d?id=87632983

[44] See for example: https://www.facebook.com/groups/301519041277979/posts/613996310030249/

Picture 4.

Source: https://www.facebook.com/groups/301519041277979/posts/606847037411843/
(The main narratives in the messages: 1) In Lithuania degenerates are in the power; 2) The best Lithuanians for their authorities are dead Lithuanians and migrants taken instead of them 3) Homeless migrants will replace Lithuanians; 4) Authorities get money for migrants but they don't care about people in Lithuania.)

The explored narratives in Facebook are presenting some conspiracy theories too. For example, it is stated that the migration crisis is just a pretext to implement measures for control of society/people in Lithuania[45]. Social narrative about "cultural difference" of migrants is also linked to the theory, stating that current migration crisis is a part of "the plan to exterminate white race"[46].

Interesting tendency that has been explored is the mix of narratives about migration crisis and another topical challenge of COVID-19 pandemic. For example, vaccination is presented as a (deadly) measure to reduce population in Lithuania and cleanse the sediment for migrants, or presented assumption that "migrants have not died from coronavirus" because they are not being vaccinated.[47] Meanwhile, not vaccinated inhabitants of Lithuania will be left out without medical care.[48]

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[45] See: https://www.facebook.com/groups/301519041277979/posts/610639423699271/

[46] See: https://www.facebook.com/groups/301519041277979/posts/612970163466197/

[47] See: https://www.facebook.com/groups/752806285444233/posts/944364519621741/

[48] See comments of the post: https://www.facebook.com/groups/301519041277979/posts/611931376903409/

The main narratives analysed from Facebook social network are collected and summarized in the *Table 2.*

Table 2.

Type of narrative	Sub-narratives
SOCIAL	• Lithuania takes care of migrants better than of its own citizens; • Migrants are slackers and criminals; • Migration posess a threat to Lithuanian culture and everyday life because migrants are Muslims.
HUMANITARIAN	• Lithuania is responsible for the deaths of migrants at the border;
POLITICAL	• Lithuania and Poland are guilty for migration crisis; • Gabrielius Landsbergis and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya are personally guilty Fforor migration crisis; • Migration crisis is beneficial for Lithuania; • Lithuanian political elites will be enrich on building of the physical barrier (wall) on the border.
CONSPIRACY	• Migration crisis is a pretext to implement measures used to control people in Lithuania; • Migration crisis is a part of a plan to exterminate white race.

In the narratives spread in Facebook, alarmistic messages about migrants were dominating. Migrants are presented as "Significant Others" who could replace Lithuanians, displace Lithuanian culture, broke traditions and etc. The topic of migration crisis is widely used to criticize authorities. Between dominating narratives there isa statement that Lithuanian government take better care of migrants than of citizens of Lithuania. Another clear narrative is that migration crisis is beneficial for Lithuanian authorities because it is a possibility to get more money from the EU.

Conclusions

Information warfare is an integral part of hybrid aggression. In the situation of migration crisis on Belarus-EU border (crisis has affected Lithuania, Latvia, Poland) the implementation of information warfare is obvious. As analysis of narratives of Kremlin-backed media has showed, Kremlin propaganda supports information attacks against Lithuania, Latvia, Poland. The main aspects of information warfare in the context of migration crisis are: defamation of authorities of affected countries and their solutions of situation of migration crisis; accusation of Lithuania and Poland of inhuman behavior towards illegal migrants; shift of the guilt for migration crisis to the Western World and advocacy of Belarus and its regime; demonization of migrants, representation of migrants as a threat for traditional cultural and social order of European countries.

The main differences in representation of narratives in Kremlin-backed media and social networks (Facebook) is a lack of humanitarian type of narratives in posts and comments. Representation of migrants are negative; they are not presented as an object of mercy. The "quality" of narratives of disinformation in sphere of social networks is lower than in publications of Kremlin-backed media. Some narratives in Facebook are linked to conspiracy theories or mixed to other hot topics (i.e. COVID-19 pandemic).

The aim of information warfare in the situation of migration crisis on Belarus-EU border is defame authorities of Lithuania and Poland ant their decisions to solve crisis. One more goal is to provoke social tensions inside of the societies of affected countries, decrease level of trusts between authorities and citizens.

Research that has been presented also have some limitations. It was only focused on the narratives that were spread in the information space of Lithuania. The analysis of social networks are also not providing a full picture (as the focus was only Facebook). Regardless, presented evidence allow understand main vectors of information warfare which is applied against Lithuania in the context of ongoing migration crisis.

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