

**Kremlin-aligned  
“media”  
in Latvia:  
Kingdom  
of Crooked  
Mirrors**



Narratives travelling the information space

## Executive Summary

Content analysis of BB.lv offers a good snapshot of how Kremlin-aligned media operate in Latvia. Cases of blatant disinformation are rare. More often, BB.lv presents one-sided information, omits important stories, uses contrasting framing

of Russia and the West. These methods of manipulation are not easy to spot for an average reader without advanced media literacy skills. Furthermore, BB.lv often republishes content from Russia-based Kremlin-controlled “media”. Thus,

readers in Latvia get Kremlin’s propaganda perspective on the EU and US as well as Kremlin’s version on domestic events in Russia.

## Introduction

Kingdom of Crooked Mirrors was a 1963 Soviet fairy tale movie. In the movie, the King of this kingdom used crooked mirrors to brainwash his subjects by showing altered reality to everyone who looks into them. Through these mirrors, the King changed how his subjects saw themselves and the world. This case study of content in one of the Kremlin-aligned online news sources, Baltijas Balss (Baltic Voice), throughout July 2021, illustrates how Kremlin-aligned news sources in Latvia create a crooked image of the world, aligned with Kremlin’s perspective.

There are two parallel media spaces in Latvia. There are independent media in the Latvian and Russian languages, containing decent quality news stories. In 15 focus group discussions with native Russian speakers conducted in Riga and Daugavpils throughout 2019 and 2020, many native Russian speakers of Latvia describe these media as “pro-Western”. At the same time, there are several Kremlin-aligned “media” showing an altered reality to their viewers and readers. The content of these media is distributed mainly in the Russian language. These media are consumed and trusted by roughly half<sup>2</sup> of the native Russian speakers of Latvia, who make up 36% of the total population. Within the Kremlin-aligned news sources there is a separate spectrum of sources too. A few outlets are distributing blatant disinformation and a hard-to-miss propaganda, such as BaltNews and Sputnik Latvia. In focus groups, many Russian speakers describe these sources as “propaganda”, are critical of them and can identify the manipulation methods these sources use. The biggest problem is that most Kremlin-aligned media do not contain

blatant disinformation and look more or less similar to qualitative independent media. As this case study of Baltijas Balss (BB.lv) will show, one-sided, biased, cherry-picked stories and other issues are present in these news sources. BB.lv and similar news sources in Latvia also often republish news from Kremlin-influenced, Russia-based media and thus repeat various narratives about the West and Russia put forward by the Kremlin. Regardless of these problems, participants in focus groups do not see any problems with these sources. They consider them more objective and trustworthy than what they perceive as “western” or “pro-Kremlin propaganda” sources.

The methodology of this study relies on the content and sentiment analysis of articles in the international news section of Baltijas Balss. Until 2019, BB.lv was owned by Ludmila Kalasnik, the wife of a Russian millionaire, former member of Russian Parliament and member of Putin’s party United Russia Eduard Janakov. After the sale in 2019, the current ownership is unclear.<sup>3</sup> BB.lv in the Russian language was selected for analysis as it is the most popular Kremlin-aligned online news source in Latvia.

“Real user” metrics of online audiences provided by international marketing research company Gemius Global (see Table 1) showed that in July, BB.lv in Russian was used by 238 419 real users. 39 638 real users used the Latvian language version, which makes BB.lv the 10<sup>th</sup> most popular online news source in Latvia. While the Latvian-speaking audience for BB.lv is insignificant, it has a considerable Russian speaking

audience. According to Gemius data, BB.lv had the second biggest Russian speaking audience of all online news sources in Latvia in July 2021, slightly below the Russian language version of Delfi, which is the most popular online news media in Latvia. Other Kremlin-aligned online news sources had a significantly smaller audience. Compared to BB.lv, SputnikNews contains more blatant one-sided pro-Kremlin propaganda. Content of Press.lv and MixNews is somewhat similar to BB.lv. However an in-depth comparison of all these web pages is beyond the scope of this report.

Popularity		In Latvian	In Russian
1.	Delfi	678 823	280 424
2.	TVNET	544 449	168 267
3.	LSM	543 354	164 081
10.	BB.lv	39 638	238 419
13.	Sputnik News	-	188 336
14.	Press	-	163 231
15.	MixNews	-	155 606

Table 1. Real users of online news sources in Latvia, Gemius Audience, July 2021.<sup>4</sup>

BB.lv itself divides its international news section into sub-sections: “European Union”, “Russia and CIS” (Commonwealth of Independent States) and “USA and Canada”. Only stories about Russia, US or EU member states were selected from each section, leaving out stories about Canada and stories about CIS that had

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<sup>2</sup> Berzina, I., Hirss, M. et al. (2016). *The Possibility of Societal Destabilization in Latvia*. Center for Security and Strategic Research. Policy paper. pp. 7-8.  
<sup>3</sup> Evita Purīņa. (Dec, 2019). *BB.lv – nenotikušās pārmaiņas un atbalsts Sputnikam*. Retrieved from: <https://rebaltica.lv/2019/12/bb-lv-nenotikusas-parmainas-un-atbalsts-sputnikam/>  
<sup>4</sup> Gemius Audience. *Latvia domain usage statistics, July 2021*. Retrieved from: <https://rating.gemius.com/lv/tree/64>

nothing to do with Russia. Altogether content and sentiment analysis contained 235 stories. The stories were classified quantitatively as “positive,” “neutral” or “negative”. “Positive” stories highlighted accomplishments, positive developments

or covered the state in a favourable light. “Negative” stories were about problems and covered stories that made the state in question look bad. “Neutral” stories were either factual and balanced or did not have any emotional toning and

bias. Based on this methodology, a clear picture of emotional coverage and biased narratives promoted by BB.lv emerges. The monitoring period covered July 1 – July 31, 2021.

## Contrasting coverage of West and Russia

Table 2 summarises different sentiments of BB.lv coverage of Russia, the US, EU and its member states. There are clear and striking differences for each unit of analysis. In July, the international news section of BB.lv contained 81 stories about Russia, 121 stories about the EU or its member states, and 33 stories about the United States. Each was portrayed in a different light. Most of the stories were republished from Russia-based media, mainly from Lenta.ru, which is Kremlin-influenced or even controlled.<sup>5</sup> BB.lv either republishes stories

as a whole or republishes short summaries of them, occasionally changing the title. Out of 33 stories about the US, 25 are from Russia-based sources and only 3 from Western sources. Out of 121 stories about the EU, half (61) are from Russia-based sources and 39 from Western sources. Most stories about Russia are coming from Russia.<sup>6</sup> This selectivity of republished sources is the first major problem with the content of BB.lv. Its readers in Latvia get the Kremlin’s perspective on the EU and US and especially on domestic events in Russia.

	Russia	European Union	United States
Positive	25	7	4
Neutral	33	38	8
Negative	23	76	21
Total	81	121	33

Table 2. The sentiment of BB.lv content, July 2021.

## Coverage of the US

in BB.lv was mostly negative. Out of 33 stories about the US, two thirds (21) had negative, 8 had neutral, and 4 had positive sentiments (see Table 2). This **doom and gloom narrative** about the US was created by mostly publishing stories about various problems in the US. These were stories about crime, for example, about clashes between far-right radicals and “Antifa” in Virginia with the title “Monuments that blacks did not like were demolished in America”.<sup>7</sup>

According to CrowdTangle, a story titled “Lightning strike destroyed George Floyd’s memorial wall”<sup>8</sup>, taken from the source of fontanka.ru, a site providing news from Saint Petersburg, was among the most popular stories from BB.lv on

Facebook. In July it was shared in 5 Kremlin-aligned Facebook pages, including Facebook page of BB.lv. From these 5 pages this story received 871 reactions, 528 comments and 130 shares. One person was responsible for sharing it into

### Удар молнии уничтожил стену памяти Джорджа Флойда

Мурал с изображением Джорджа Флойда в Толедо был уничтожен разрядом молнии во вторник. Об этом 14 июля сообщает полиция.



Source: www.bb.lv

**Key narrative**  
Things are not going well in the US.

Accidents, natural disasters and impact of climate change in the US were covered as well: “California is a paradise that turns into hell”<sup>9</sup> due to forest fires.

<sup>5</sup> Reporters without Borders. (March 12, 2014). *Lenta.ru website is latest independent news outlet to be reined in*. Retrieved from: <https://rsf.org/en/news/lentaru-website-latest-independent-news-outlet-be-reined>

<sup>6</sup> These numbers are approximate as sometimes BB.lv republishes articles, but does not make it clear that the article has a different source other than BB.lv.

### Байден допустил, что его сочтут реинкарнацией Сатаны

В мире США и Канада

Лента.Ru 09:55, 22 июля, 2021 4  
Президент США Джо Байден заявил, что безразлично отнесется, если его станут считать “реинкарнацией Сатаны”.



Source: www.bb.lv

three groups gathering Russian speakers in Latvia - Русское Общество в Латвии<sup>iv</sup> (Russian society in Latvia), Латвия (Latvia) and ВРЕМЯ ПЕРЕМЕН (Time for a change) where the story had most interactions<sup>vi</sup> (109 shares). From there, the story travelled to other groups and was further shared through personal accounts. Overall, the post travelled to hundreds of people in the community of Russian speakers in Latvia, as well as to users in Estonia and Saint Petersburg.

This story is an example of how easily content travels through Facebook communities and among different countries. Most of reactions were happy about destruction of the memorial, criticising the US or George Floyd, often repeating the sentiment that “Even the Gods couldn’t stand this f\*ck”<sup>vii</sup>. This example illustrates the reach and impact such negative stories can have. This overarching doom and gloom narrative was present throughout other narratives about the US as well.

Another narrative in BB.lv was that **the US is incompetent and ridiculous**. BB.lv also published short, funny stories which made fun of the US and portrayed it as incompetent: “US intelligence was ridiculed for using politically correct Photoshop”<sup>viii</sup> and the US “is investigating the cause of the

<sup>7</sup> Ozolina Z., Škilters J., Struberga S. (2018). *Humour as a Communication Tool: the Case of New Year’s Eve Television in Russia*. NATO StratCom Academic Journal Volume 4. Retrieved from: <https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfs/?file=/cuploads/pfiles/4-ozolina.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Chernobrov, D. (2021) *Strategic humour: public diplomacy and comic framing of foreign policy issues*. The British Journal of Politics and International Relations. 1-20. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481211023958>

### В США заявили о катастрофе из-за сделки по “Северному потоку — 2”

В мире США и Канада

РИА Новости 07:35, 21 июля, 2021 1

Американский сенатор-республиканец Тед Круз считает, что возможная договоренность между Вашингтоном и Берлином по проекту строительства трубопровода “Северный поток — 2” станет катастрофой для США и геополитической победой России.



Source: www.bb.lv

**Key narrative**  
US is not competent.

rash among American diplomats in Vienna”.<sup>ix</sup> Two stories covered funny statements from US officials, for example, how US President Joe Biden responded on CNN discussion that “he would be indifferent if he was considered “the reincarnation of Satan”<sup>x</sup>. These examples of humour and ridicule confirm the hypothesis put forward by Dmitri Cheronbrov and other scholars<sup>7</sup> that of “strategic humour is a fast-emerging, multi-format tool in public diplomacy, facilitated by the rise of social media and post-truth politics and less dependent on the state’s broader power resources.”<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, BB.lv also portrayed the US as an aggressor up to no good. BB.lv covered the story from CNN about “alleged involvement of the US in the murder of Haitian President Jovel Moise”<sup>xi</sup> and wrote about alleged “US military plan to capture Donetsk”<sup>xii</sup>. At the same time, the impression one gets from BB.lv articles was that US foreign policy is failing. When covering Nord Stream 2, BB.lv quoted Republican Senator Ted Cruz who described it as a “catastrophe” and “disaster” for US and “geopolitical victory

for Russia”<sup>xiii</sup>. Serious news stories about US foreign policy were rare in BB.lv and tended to cover the US foreign policy from a negative perspective.

Only a few of the stories in BB.lv could be classified as disinformation. On one occasion, BB.lv republished disinformation originating from the US. BB.lv referred to a story in Fox News, which allegedly “found another confirmation of the laboratory origin of the coronavirus”<sup>xiv</sup>. The story about alleged US involvement in murder of Haitian President came from the CNN. Not only BB.lv republished stories from Russia based media, it also used Western media to portray the US from a negative perspective and to give more credibility to dubious stories.

Overall, there were few serious or real news about US domestic or foreign policies. Only a negative portrait of the US was presented. No statements from the US state institutions were covered, unlike in the coverage of Russia. When covering public figures, BB.lv chose statements that make them look bad or statements from the opposition which criticised the current US administration. The image of the US (and EU as well) starkly contrasts with the image of Russia presented in BB.lv.

## Coverage of EU

was similarly negative with specific nuances. Although in stories about the EU and its member states, BB.lv used more independent Western sources than in its coverage of the US and Russia, many of the stories republished from independent western sources were critical and negative. Out of 121 stories about the EU, almost two-thirds (76) had negative, almost a third (38) had neutral, and only 7 had positive sentiment (see Table 2). The positive news was rare and not really about international relations. Positive stories covered the construction of the tallest building in Europe in Spain,<sup>xv</sup> a bridge constructed in Croatia,<sup>xvi</sup> European cities included in the UNESCO heritage list,<sup>xvii</sup> and similar topics.

to the declining population,<sup>xviii</sup> Doom and gloom narrative also applied to the rest of Europe. There were “Strikes at airports in Portugal”<sup>xix</sup> and multiple stories covered flooding in Germany, focusing on death and destruction.<sup>xx</sup> BB.lv covered the climate crisis as well with a title “Europe began preparations for a global catastrophe”<sup>xxi</sup> The popular Kremlin narrative that **Nazism is on the rise in the EU** also briefly appeared on BB.lv. It republished the story that “French actress was fined for using the word “subhuman” (“Untermensch”)”<sup>xxii</sup> and story that Germany was “criticised for Nazism and violence in their army”.<sup>xxiii</sup> In other stories the EU and its member states were framed in a negative perspective as well.

Often repeated narrative was **the EU is struggling with COVID-19**. Stories covered COVID-19 restrictions across Europe and opposition to these restrictions: “Tear gas was used at the rally against vaccination passports in Paris”.<sup>xxiv</sup> BB.lv also emphasised negative developments in the fight against the pandemic, for example, “Errors in vaccination process led to the death of 10,000 people in Bulgaria”.<sup>xxv</sup> Only one story on COVID-19 in Europe about vaccination rates was positive.<sup>xxvi</sup> The overarching narrative BB.lv readers receive is that the EU is facing a multitude of problems and is experiencing social upheaval in its fight

against the global pandemic.

### Another set of stories covered the struggle of the Lithuanian government with increased immigration from Belarus.

Over the summer of 2021, the Belarussian government allegedly started sending immigrants over the Lithuanian border. BB.lv covered this new development: “Illegal migrants started riots”<sup>xxvii</sup> in Lithuania, “Lithuanians protest against the acceptance of migrants”<sup>xxviii</sup> and “police forcibly pushed people protesting against migrants”<sup>xxix</sup>. Furthermore, BB.lv tried to construct a narrative that this is a regional crisis: “Lithuania is flooded, now to us?” Poland complains about the flow of refugees from Belarus”.<sup>xxx</sup> Often these stories were republished from reputable media in Latvia and Estonia, but BB.lv added a more negative spin in the title. Coverage of these regional challenges added to the overall narrative of the EU as struggling and in chaos, without talking about Belarus as an important actor and root of this migration crisis.

BB.lv also portrayed **EU member states as bickering among themselves**. BB.lv republished an article from French newspaper Le Figaro: “Paris and Berlin quarrel with Eastern Europe on all counts”.<sup>xxxi</sup> Multiple articles, two of them republished from Deutsche Welle,<sup>xxxii</sup> covered EU disputes about LGBT rights with

### Key narrative The EU struggling and in chaos.

Overall, the mood of stories about the EU countries was **doom and gloom**, similar to the stories about the US. Consequently, the key message the readers receive about the EU is that **Europe is in decline and chaos**. Titles of two articles stated that “Survival of the Estonian people is under threat” due

### В Таллине заговорили о том, что выживание эстонского народа под угрозой

В мире | Евросоюз

LETA | 12:19, 11 июля, 2021 | 5

Департамент статистики Эстонии видит угрозу выживанию эстонского народа, однако Министерство социальных дел не считает ситуацию такой уж плохой, потому что Эстония больше не будет терять граждан из-за эмиграции, пишет в субботу новостная лента ERR.



Source: www.bb.lv

### В Париже на акции против санитарных паспортов применили слезоточивый газ

В мире | Евросоюз

Интерфакс | 19:00, 31 июля, 2021 | 3

Французские полицейские применили в субботу слезоточивый газ в Париже против участников акции протеста против санитарных паспортов, сообщает местное телевидение.



Source: www.bb.lv

### В Литве полиция силой растаскивает людей, протестующих против мигрантов

В мире | Евросоюз

LETA | 09:16, 27 июля, 2021 | 17

В понедельник полиция силой растаскила людей с дороги, которая ведет к полигону в Рудинкай, где намечается разместить нелегальных мигрантов на территории Шальчининкского района, сообщает Вильнюсское бюро BNS.



Source: www.bb.lv

Hungary and Poland. One of them, titled, “The EU deprives Hungary and Poland of funding for pressure on LGBT people” was shared within two the groups covering Latvian issues in Russian, by one person evoking comments of hatred towards the LGBT community and the EU.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

LGBT was not the only salient issue in which the EU is portrayed as disunited. Two stories used Nord Stream 2 also as proof of internal conflict within the EU. For example: “Warsaw accused the EU country of secret meetings with Moscow on Nord Stream-2”.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Another story about internal conflicts within the EU was that “Lithuania will be left without EU money for the construction of a wall with Belarus”.<sup>xxxv</sup> All of these were real news stories. Most were republished from reputable Western media. However, these were only cherry-picked news stories about problems and internal divisions within the EU and nothing else. This biased selection of only negative stories about the EU is the main problem with BB.lv.

### Key narrative EU countries are incompetent.

Similar to the US, **EU countries were also occasionally portrayed as silly and incompetent**. Stories that “Lithuania has run out of barbed wire for migrants. Estonia is in a hurry to the rescue”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

### ЕС лишает Венгрию и Польшу финансирования за давление на ЛГБТ

В мире | Евросоюз

Deutsche Welle | 20:15, 8 июля, 2021 | 11

Евродепутаты проголосовали за скорейшее задействование механизма сокращения финансирования в отношении стран ЕС, нарушающих верховенство закона.



Source: www.bb.lv

and “Lithuania is very happy with barbed wire from Estonia”<sup>xxxvii</sup> made fun of these countries and portrayed them as incapable. Similarly, story “Military exercises led to a fire! 28 hectares of burning forest are extinguished in Estonia”<sup>xxxviii</sup> and the story about “wiretapping of Macron’s phone by foreign special services”<sup>xxxix</sup> leaves the impression that both countries and NATO are incompetent. The use of humour against EU countries was similar to use of humour against the US.

There were no blatant cases of disinformation in BB.lv coverage of the EU and its member states. Sole publishing of negative articles, which are based on facts, is not problematic in itself. Nonetheless, what matters is the cherry-picking of one-sided negative stories which allowed the outlet to portray the EU in a negative frame, similar to the negative coverage of the US. Coverage of both EU and US was significantly different from the coverage of Russia in BB.lv.

### В Литве закончилась колючая проволока для мигрантов. Эстония спешит на выручку

В мире | Евросоюз

LETA.RU | 16:15, 24 июля, 2021 | 1

Эстония отправит Литве 100 километров колючей проволоки для обустройства заграждений на границе с Белоруссией. Об этом сообщает РИА Новости со ссылкой на заявление главы эстонского министерства обороны Калле Лаанета.



Source: www.bb.lv

# Coverage of Russia

was significantly different compared to that of the EU and the US. Firstly, the coverage of Russia was more balanced. Negative news did not dominate the stories covered in July - out of 81 stories about Russia, only a quarter (23) had a negative sentiment. Most of the stories (33) were neutral, and more than a quarter (25) were positive (see Table 2). Secondly, the coverage of Russia was about real news. Stories covered politics, significant international events, and serious statements by key political leaders of Russia.

**Key narrative**  
 Russia is an active player in international politics.

Contrary to the ironic and incompetent depiction of the US and EU countries, **BB.lv portrayed Russia as a state actively and seriously involved in international politics.** Stories titled “Russia is ready to return: Putin and Macron held talks”,<sup>xi</sup> “Biden and Putin spoke on the phone”,<sup>xii</sup> Russia is “Dealing with” Lukashenka,<sup>xiii</sup> Ukraine,<sup>xiiii</sup> Turkey,<sup>xv</sup> portrayed Russia as a serious country. This depiction was in stark contrast to news about failing and funny Western countries. Furthermore, BB.lv freely republished statements on international issues from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, President Putin, and other institutions or government officials. For example: “Lavrov commented on West’s attempts to create a belt of instability around Russia.”<sup>xvi</sup> Multiple stories covered Russia’s decision to file a complaint with the ECHR against Ukraine.<sup>xvii</sup> Finally, while Nazism is allegedly on the rise in the EU, Russia actively fights it: “Russia started to withdraw from sale books about Nazi leaders”,<sup>xviii</sup> BB.lv did not cover anything similar to these stories about the US and EU states.

BB.lv used **specific frames for NATO-Russia relationships and climate change.** BB.lv framed NATO as a supplicant to Russia: “NATO wanted a “serious” dialogue with Russia”<sup>xviii</sup>. Furthermore, while there were multiple negative stories about the

## Лавров заявил о попытках Запада создать вокруг России пояс нестабильности

В мире Россия и СНГ  
 Lenta.Ru 13:21, 23 июля, 2021 2  
 Запад пытается сформировать пояс нестабильности вокруг России, в том числе за счет Белоруссии и Молдавии, сказал глава МИД РФ Сергей Лавров.



Source: www.bb.lv

impacts of climate emergency on the EU and US, there was only one story on Russia about this topic. The narrative of this story was the opposite. While BB.lv portrayed the EU and US as struggling with climate change, it ran a story that “Russian forests will help solve the global climate equation”.<sup>xlix</sup> These were small but significant nuances that leave the audience of BB.lv with a positive impression of Russia and a negative impression of the EU and US.

**Key narrative**  
 Russia is a victim of Western attacks.

While some of the stories emphasised Russia’s important role in international politics, other stories framed **Russia as the victim of aggressive Western foreign policies.** Not only the US is supposedly acting aggressively, but also “The British Navy will continue to enter the territorial waters of Ukraine”<sup>li</sup> and “In Ukraine, Russian books declared a threat to independence”.<sup>lii</sup> The EU also is aggressive against Russia. The article on “European Court of Human Rights ordered Russia to recognize same-

sex marriage”<sup>liii</sup> received a particularly high reach on Facebook due to not only portraying Russia as a target of the Western criticism, but also the West as an entity trying to impose values-based changes onto Russia. In light of Russian efforts to curb down the rights of LGBT community<sup>li</sup>, the articles support the pro-Kremlin narrative of decadent West trying to impose “LGBT propaganda” on the East. The article was shared into 5 groups for Russian-speaking Latvians, by only one person, a member of a fringe pro-Kremlin political party Latvian Russian Union.

**Key narrative**  
 Russia has its internal problems.

However, **a quarter of BB.lv stories about Russia had a negative sentiment.** Some of the negative stories were about accidents. However, there were also stories critical of Kremlin’s response to COVID-19: “St. Petersburg does not have time to burn the bodies of COVID victims”.<sup>liii</sup> Occasionally Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine

## Есть разговор: в НАТО захотели «серьёзного» диалога с Россией

В мире Россия и СНГ  
 Lenta.Ru 21:59, 6 июля, 2021 5  
 В НАТО в любое время готовы начать диалог с Россией, однако он должен предусматривать серьезное отношение, заявила министр обороны ФРГ Аннегрет Крамп-Карренбауэр. Ее слова приводит ТАСС.



Source: www.bb.lv

was covered negatively: “Slovakia returned to Russia most doses of “Sputnik V””<sup>liv</sup> This criticism of some of the Kremlin’s policies differentiates BB.lv from blatant disinformation sources in Latvia such as SputnikNews or BaltNews, which contain far more problematic content and never cover Kremlin negatively.

Omitting important information, e.g. not covering the impact of the climate crisis on Russia, is a major problem of BB.lv coverage of Russia as well. While BB.lv occasionally criticised specific domestic problems in Russia, criticism of Russia’s foreign policy was completely lacking. Also, BB.lv cherry-picked real stories which showed Russia in a good light. Overall, the content and tone in coverage of Russia was in stark contrast to how BB.lv covered the US and the EU.

SOURCE (FOLLOWERS)	DATE	INTERACTIONS	LINK
Baltijas Balss 25,443	Jul 13, 2021	248	
RODINA.LV - ФОРУМ РУССКОЙ ЛАТВИИ. 5,016	Jul 13, 2021	113	
Латвия 4,217	Jul 13, 2021	68	
Русское Общество в Латвии 3,851	Jul 13, 2021	43	
Russian Canada-Русская Канада 29,174	Jul 13, 2021	35	
RODINA.LV - ФОРУМ РУССКОЙ ЛАТВИИ. 5,016	Jul 13, 2021	18	
ЛАТВИЯ И МИР ВОКРУГ 1,186	Jul 13, 2021	6	

Source: Crowdtangle

## НГ: в Петербурге не успевают сжигать тела умерших от ковида

В мире Россия и СНГ  
 Новая газета 16:38, 14 июля, 2021 2  
 Чиновники Северной столицы рапортуют о снижении числа заболевших коронавирусом и госпитализированных с таким диагнозом. Однако свободных коек в петербургских больницах больше не становится, очередь в крематорий не сокращается, в городе открываются новые пункты регистрации смертей, а прибыль похоронных агентств выросла на 30%. Об этом пишет “Новая газета”.



Source: www.bb.lv

<sup>9</sup> Kurtanidze, E. (April 30, 2021). *Dismantling LGBT+ rights as a means of control in Russia*. Freedom House. Retrieved from: <https://freedomhouse.org/article/dismantling-lgbt-rights-means-control-russia>

## Conclusions

The content and sentiment analysis of what readers of BB.lv are exposed to in one month provides a snapshot of how Kremlin-aligned media operate in Latvia. Blatant cases of easily debunkable disinformation are rare, therefore, the problems with Kremlin-aligned content go far beyond what simplistic fact-checking of disinformation can help with. BB.lv presents one-sided information, omits important stories, uses contrasting framing of Russia and the West as well as other tools of manipulation. These methods of manipulation are not easy to spot for an average reader without advanced media literacy skills. Furthermore, these stories likely tap into long-established narratives about the West and Russia within their audiences, which consider independent media in Latvia “pro-Western”. This allows some of these stories to spread far on a network of pro-Kremlin Facebook pages.

In addition to various methods of manipulation, an even more significant issue is a regular republication and thus amplification of content from Russia-originated Kremlin-controlled “media” and uncritical coverage of statements from Russia’s institutions. Essentially, the readers of BB.lv are exposed to many of the narratives the Kremlin’s propaganda uses for domestic audiences in Russia. Together with the murky ownership of BB.lv, it is hard to characterise BB.lv as “media”. More appropriate term would be an agent of foreign influence in Latvia, whose readers are directly exposed to Kremlin’s version of international events and Kremlin’s narratives about the West.

## Endnotes

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- xiii <https://bb.lv/statja/v-mire/2021/07/21/v-ssha-zayavili-o-katastrofe-iz-za-sdelki-po-severnomu-potoku-2>
- xiv <https://bb.lv/statja/v-mire/2021/07/29/v-ssha-nashli-eshche-odno-podtverzhenie-laboratornogo-proishozhdeniya-koronavirusa>
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