



LITHUANIAN  
-AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY, INC

June 24, 2020

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Chairman  
House Energy & Commerce Committee  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden  
Ranking Member  
House Energy & Commerce Committee  
2322 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member Walden:

The Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.<sup>1</sup> appreciates that the House Energy & Commerce Committee is considering the problem of online disinformation. This problem has become especially apparent in the United States, but Lithuanians have been dealing with online disinformation and disinformation in the public square for decades. We would like to provide the following resources based on the experiences of our community members in the United States, as well as our family members in the Republic of Lithuania.

Although Lithuanians have confronted disinformation for decades, Lithuanians noticed a marked increase in the propagation of false information online during the Russian invasion of Crimea in Ukraine in 2014. A potent tactic of disinformation campaigns is “trolling,” creating discord online by posting inflammatory or controversial messages. To counter disinformation from online trolls, individuals from many different professions and walks of life in Lithuania, and now across the world, have banded together, calling themselves “elves.”<sup>2</sup> Elves continuously monitor social media, searching for suspicious and inauthentic accounts and media. They do not carry out cyberattacks or disseminate counterpropaganda. They use truth to combat the coordinated and often state-sponsored spreading of disinformation, which is usually aimed at manipulating elections, undermining democratic institutions, and instigating and exploiting racial and sectarian differences in democratic societies.

Lithuania has become a leader in cybersecurity and combating disinformation. Indeed, the European Union’s Cyber Rapid Response Force is based in Lithuania. Lithuania has also formed a major initiative called Debunk.eu (“demaskuok” in Lithuanian) to make society more resilient in response to orchestrated, disinformation campaigns, and it is already yielding significant results. Notably, Debunk.eu has created an analytic tool, powered by multiple AIs, that can identify disinformation within two minutes.<sup>3</sup> This initiative combines the expertise and resources of the seven largest media outlets in Lithuania (online, TV, radio), the three StratCom units of the Lithuanian foreign policy agencies and armed forces, volunteers including Lithuania’s community of elves, researchers, and IT professionals.

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<sup>1</sup> LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, INC., <https://javlb.org/en/pagrindinis-en-2/> (last visited June 24, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Liudas Dapkus, *Lithuanian ‘elves’ combat Russian influence online*, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS (Dec. 28, 2016), <https://apnews.com/27ce7f001bde4ccb9415ce4a0de74af1/lithuanian-elves-combat-russian-influence-online>.

<sup>3</sup> Vaidas Saldžiūnas and Viktoras Daukšas, *How to Spot Disinformation within 2 Minutes in Real Time?*, MEDIUM (Oct. 12, 2018), <https://medium.com/election-interference-in-the-digital-age/how-to-spot-disinformation-within-2-minutes-in-real-time-df4e7c50a5b8>.

Over the past few months, Debunk.eu has seen new disinformation efforts in the Baltic States regarding COVID-19, the coronavirus. Debunk.eu has identified specific media outlets that are targeting the Baltic States by spreading persistent narratives and conspiracy theories about COVID-19. The most prevalent stories have stirred up russophobia in the Baltics, pushed false narratives of failures of the Baltic governments, and spread messaging that COVID-19 is destroying the European Union. Debunk.eu's Chief Analyst, Algirdas Kazlauskas described the importance of this project: "In the age of social media, the ability to select reliable information and its sources has become more important than ever. This now requires the mobilization of opinion leaders and the media to highlight these issues to the public."

Debunk.eu is also working to fight disinformation in the United States. A partnership has developed with Hamilton 68, which is a part of the German Marshall Fund's Alliance for Securing Democracy, and aims to expose the sources of online disinformation campaigns, which are usually based in Russia.<sup>4</sup> The Hamilton 68 dashboard identifies messaging themes, trends, and linked accounts that amplify Russian propaganda.

Online disinformation is a global problem. We appreciate your consideration of this important topic and the opportunity to inform your deliberations based on what Lithuanian-Americans and Lithuanians have experienced for decades. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Best regards,

Arvydas Urbonavicius  
President  
Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.

Krista Bard  
Chair, Public Affairs Committee  
Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.  
Honorary Consul General of the Republic of  
Lithuania to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

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<sup>4</sup> Laura Rosenberger and J.M. Berger, *Hamilton 68: A New Tool to Track Russian Disinformation on Twitter*, ALLIANCE FOR SECURING DEMOCRACY (Aug. 2, 2017), <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/hamilton-68-a-new-tool-to-track-russian-disinformation-on-twitter/>.