



European Digital Media Observatory

INSECTS AND MORE: EUROPEAN UNION BECOMES THE MAIN TARGET OF DISINFORMATION IN JANUARY

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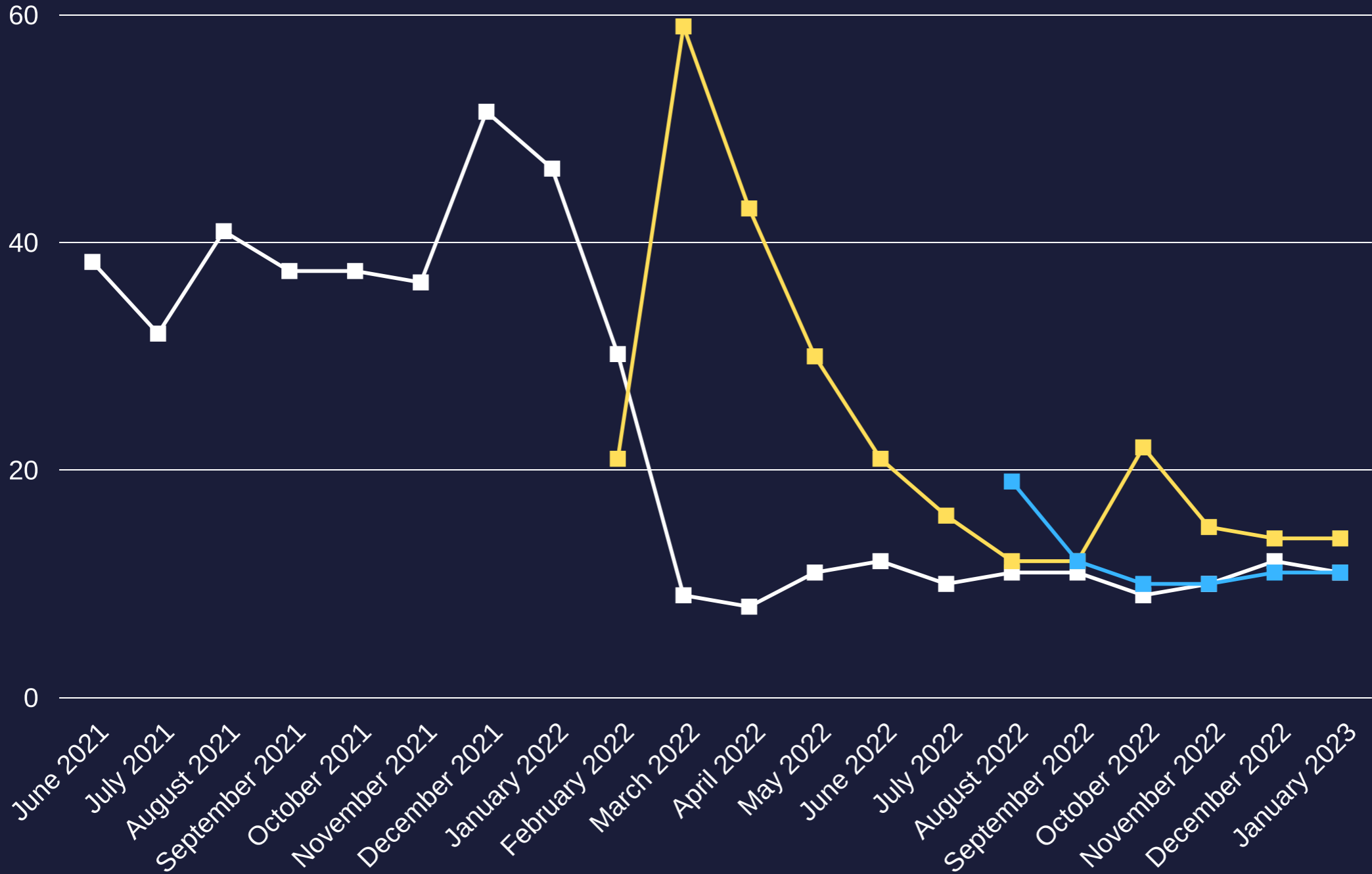
IN THE EU, MAIN TRENDS AND NARRATIVES OF DISINFORMATION REMAIN STABLE IN JANUARY

The 26 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.180 fact-checking articles in January 2023.

Out of these articles, 163 (14%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 129 (11%) focused on COVID-19-related disinformation; and 144 (12%) focused on climate change-related disinformation. These percentages are almost identical to the ones recorded in the past month.

The main disinformation narratives about Ukraine, the pandemic, and climate change remain the same detected in the recent past. About Ukraine, many false news focused in January on tanks supply (mainly German Leopard, but not only), sometimes in connection with the narratives that blame the West for an escalation (e.g.), sometimes without agenda (e.g.). The narrative about Ukrainian refugees receiving preferential treatments in the EU remains strong (e.g., e.g.).

** Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, AFP, Correctiv, Delfi, Demagog (PI), DPA, DW, Eesti Päevaleht, EFE Verifica, Eurocomunicare, Factcheck Vlaanderen, Faktabaari, Knack, Lakmusz, Les Surligneurs, Maldita, Newtral, Nieuwscheckers, PagellaPolitica/Facta, Público, Re:Baltica, The Journal Fact-Check, TjekDet, VerificaRTVE, Verificat, VRTNWS*



% of COVID-19-related disinformation on total detected disinformation

% of Ukraine-related disinformation on total detected disinformation

% of climate change-related disinformation on total detected disinformation

DISINFORMATION ABOUT THE EU AND EDIBLE INSECTS IS A WIDESPREAD PHENOMENON IN JANUARY

In January, the European Union approved some products derived from insects for human consumption. This news generated a wave of disinformation that hit many member states (see slide n.6).

Three detected main narratives stemming from this news are:

- the EU wants to force its citizens to eat insects, so they are hidden inside products (with no labeling requirements);
- insects are poisonous and not fit for human consumption;
- this EU decision is related to sanctions against Russia/the war in Ukraine.

In addition to the ones related to these narratives, other false news (but less viral) are:





- in the Netherlands schoolchildren are already forced to eat earthworms;
- the use of insects as food was invented and is imposed on humanity to reduce the world population.



MORE DISINFORMATION ABOUT THE EU

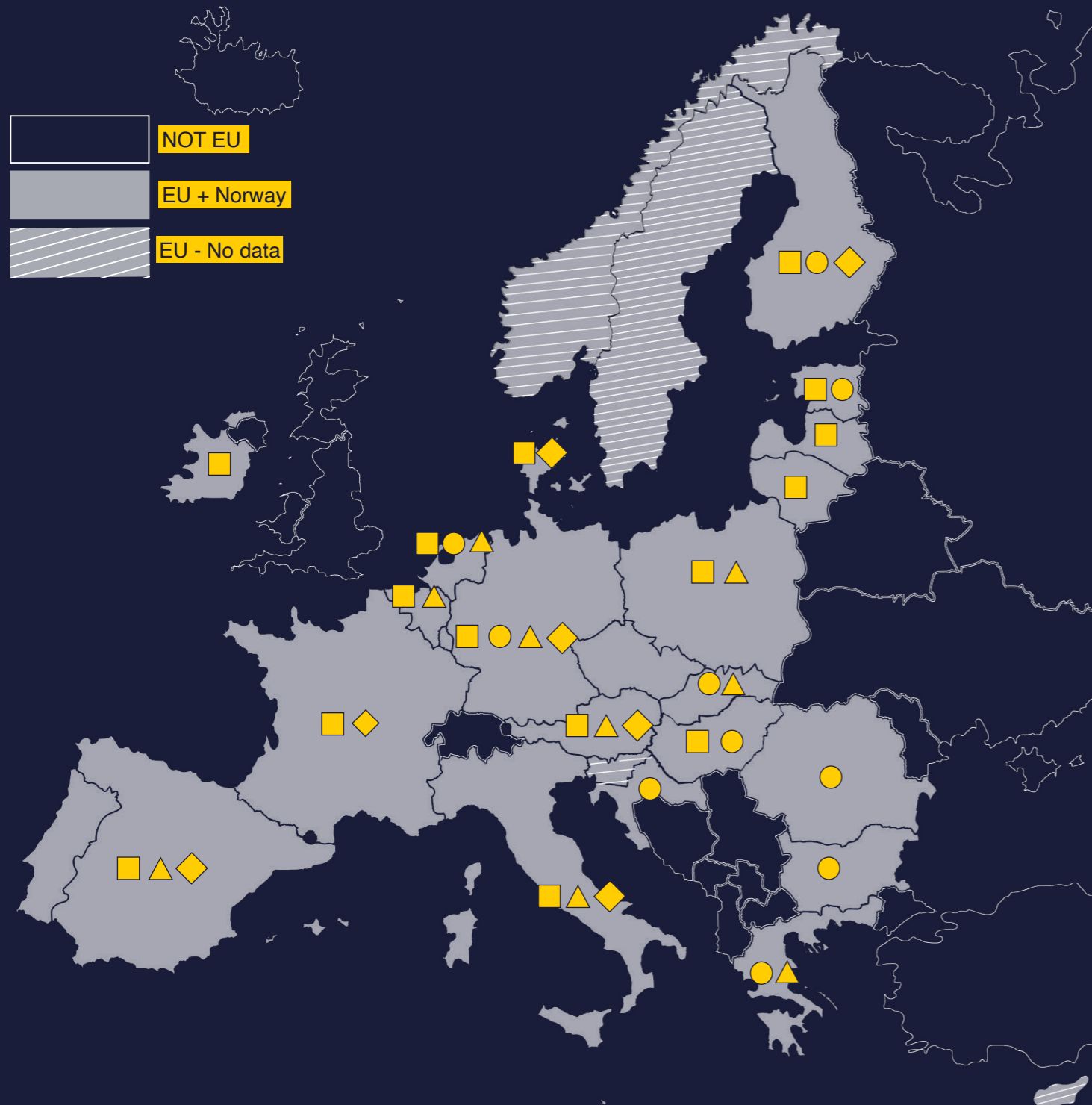
Another widespread false news (see next slide) targeting the EU was about the Hungarian president, Viktor Orbán, announcing during a New Year's speech that Hungary will leave the European Union. The false news was shared generally with comments of appreciation for Orbán's alleged decision.

In addition to the false news about insects and Orbán, the following have been detected in January:

-  The implementation of the French pension reform was included in the EU recovery plan, as a counterpart to the payment of 40 billion euros in financial aid to the country;
-  The EU is considering “climate lockdowns” for member states where certain levels of pollution are surpassed;
-  Bulgaria is the only EU member state that has not held a referendum on EU membership or on joining the euro area;
-  The European Commission has begun using the term “minor-attracted people” instead of “pedophiles”.



THE FOUR FALSE STORIES WITH THE WIDEST CIRCULATION IN THE EU IN JANUARY, BASED ON THE FACT-CHECKERS' REPORTS, WERE:



- The EU wants to force its citizens to eat insects.
- Viktor Orban said in a New Year's speech that Hungary will leave the European Union.
- ▲ A video showing a delivery of German Leopard tanks to Ukraine.
- ◆ A graph showing that the current Earth temperature is among the lowest ever recorded.

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VERIFIED DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



Czech presidential candidate Petr Pavel announced on Twitter he planned to send Czech soldiers to Ukraine.



Recurring disinformation about expensive and extravagant houses bought or being built by leading politicians, across all the political spectrum, in Spain.



The World Economic Forum hired unvaccinated pilots to transport the participants to its annual meeting in Davos.



A medical flight with a patient on board had to change route due to climate protest at Schiphol.



METHODOLOGY

The information contained in this brief was collected via a questionnaire sent to the fact-checking organizations that are part of the EDMO fact-checking network.

Reference period: 1-31 January 2023. Number of respondents: 26.

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