

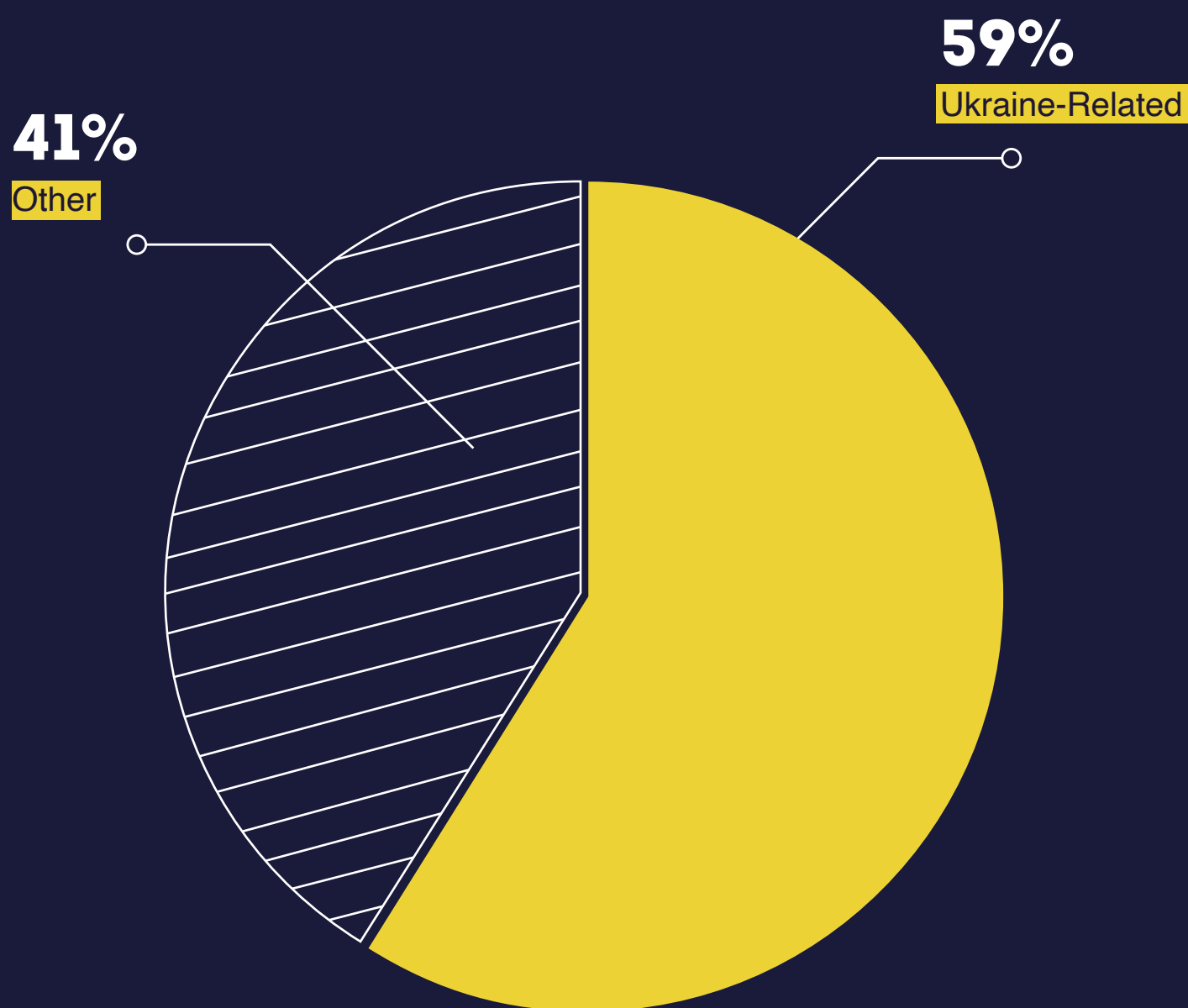


European Digital Media Observatory

A UKRAINE-RELATED DISINFORMATION TSUNAMI HIT EUROPE IN MARCH

Monthly brief no. 10 – EDMO fact-checking network

UKRAINE-RELATED DISINFORMATION IN MARCH 2022 WAS THE BIGGEST DISINFORMATION PHENOMENON EVER RECORDED BY THE EDMO MONTHLY BRIEFS



The 20 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.620 fact-checking articles in March 2022. Out of these articles, 959 (59%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation.

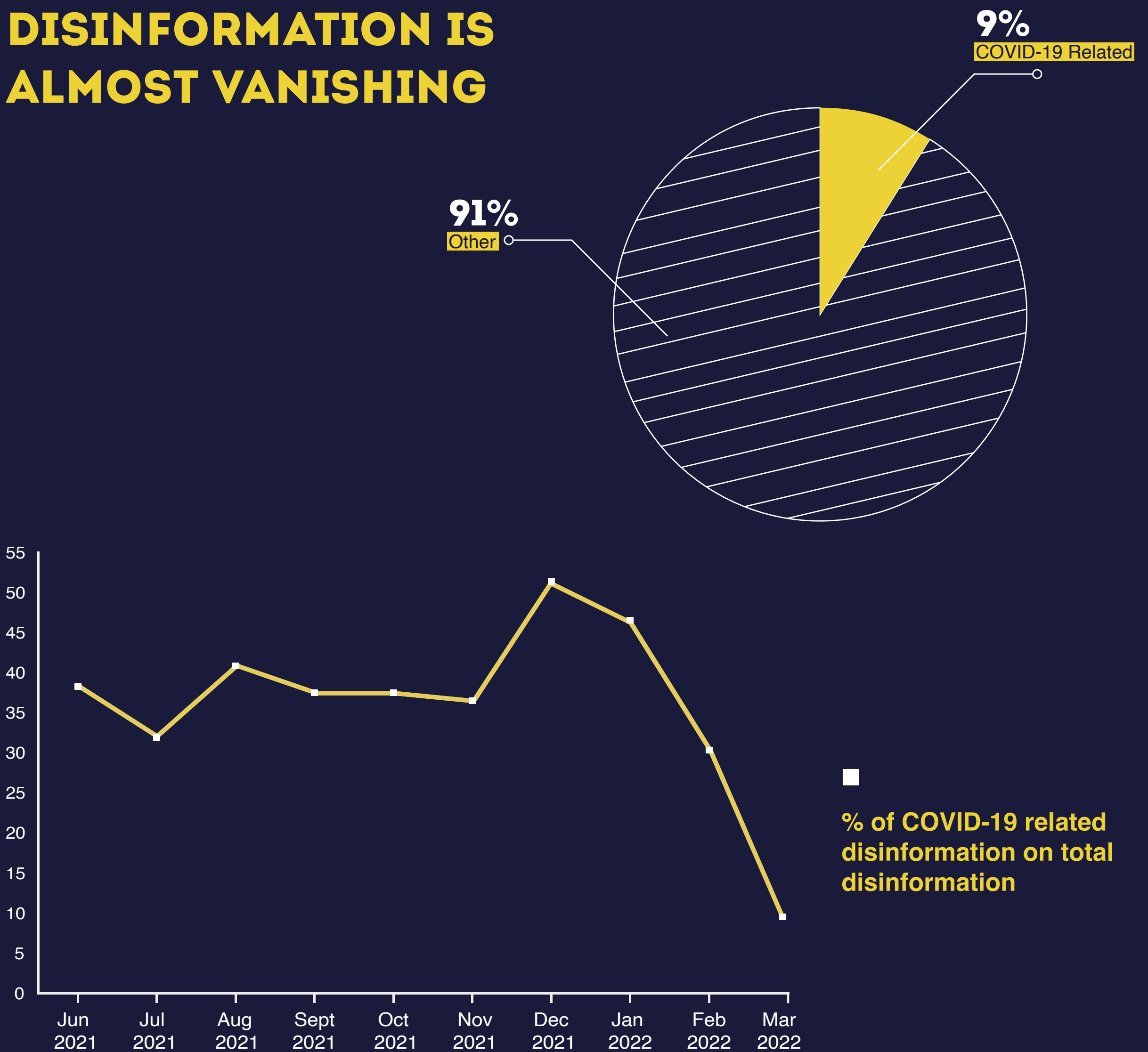
This percentage is the highest ever recorded by these briefs regarding the share of a single topic on the total disinformation detected. The previous record was about COVID-19-related disinformation, which weighted for 51.5% in December 2021.

** Organizations that contributed to this brief: AFP, Correctiv, Delfi, Demagog (PI), Ellinika Hoaxes, Eurocomunicare, Faktisk, Factcheck Vlaanderen, France tv, Knack Magazine, Maldita, Nieuwscheckers, Newtral, Ostro, PagellaPolitica/Facta, Poligrafo, Re:Baltica, The Journal Fact-Check, TjekDet, VerificaRTVE*

It's worth noting that the number of organizations that contributed to this brief (20), is a new record, and so is the number of countries covered: 24 (23 EU + Norway).

The situation in Ukraine strongly mobilized the fact-checking community and its coordination efforts.

COVID-19 RELATED DISINFORMATION IS ALMOST VANISHING



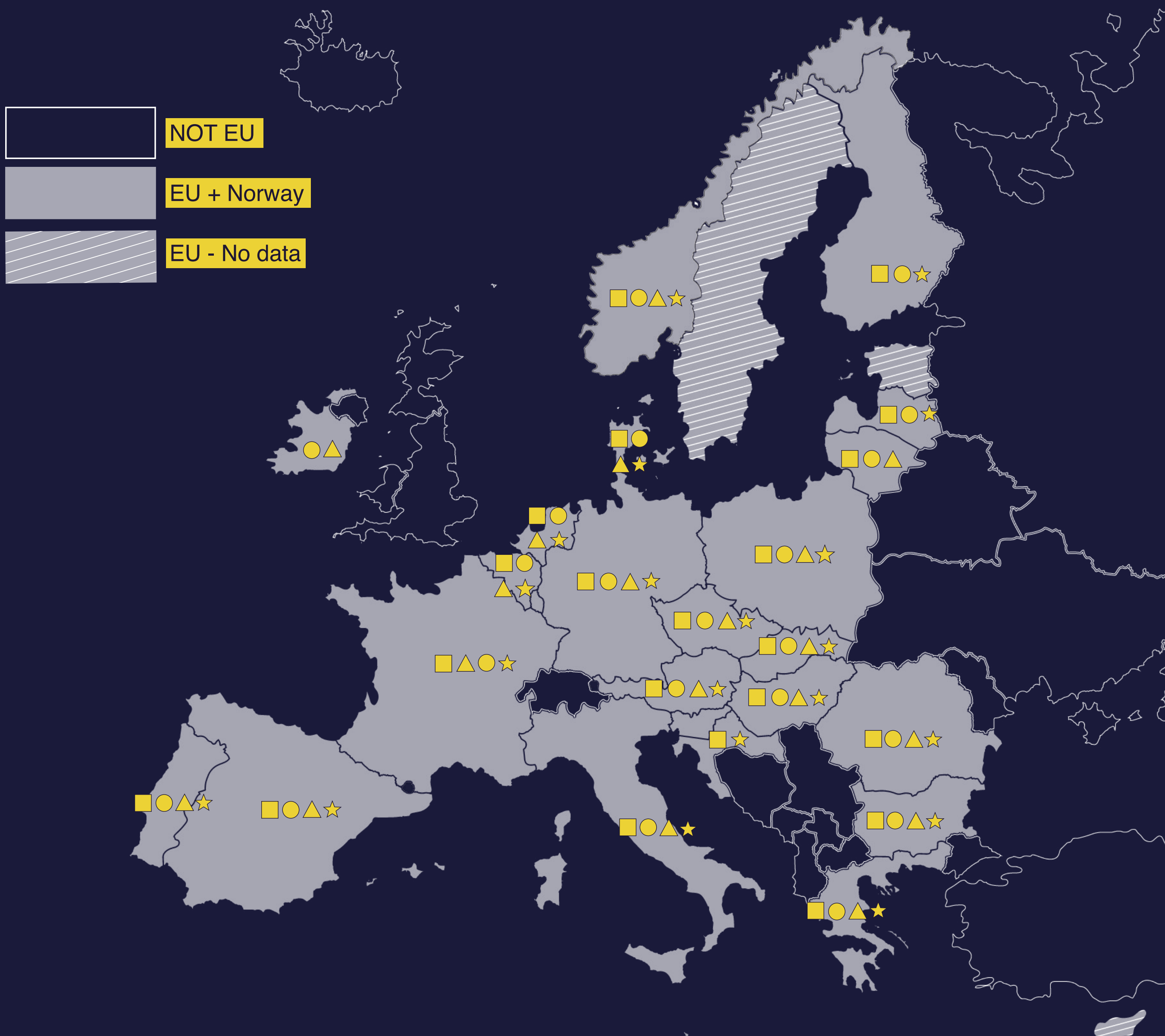
Out of the 1.620 fact-checking articles published in March by the 20 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief, 144 (9%) focused on COVID-19-related disinformation.

The share is less than one third of the previous one, which was already the minimum ever recorded by these briefs.

The drop in the number of cases in the EU is only a partial explanation. The rise of a new, all-embracing topic like the war in Ukraine relegated the pandemic at the margins of public debate.

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

- Ukraine hosts secret US bio-labs (e.g.)
- Mariupol's hospital was not bombed by Russia and the attack was staged by the Ukrainians forces (e.g.)
- ▲ Victims in the Ukraine war are actually actors (e.g.)
- ★ CNN is spreading false news about the war in Ukraine (e.g.)



THE 9 MAIN NARRATIVES DETECTED IN DISINFORMATION CIRCULATING IN THE EU IN MARCH ARE:

- Russian invasion of Ukraine is actually justified (e.g. there was a genocide of the Russian-speaking population in Donbass; NATO broke a deal signed with the Ussr in 1991; US bio-labs in Ukraine needed to be destroyed, etc.)
- Calumniating Volodymyr Zelensky (he is a Nazi, a satanist, a drug addict, a coward, etc.)
- Ukrainians and Ukrainian forces are largely Nazi
- Pro-Ukraine war propaganda (e.g. ‘Ghost of Kiev’ mythology)
- Western traditional media spread false news/false images about the war (e.g. about the Bucha massacre or the Mariupol hospital bombing)
- Ukrainian refugees are violent, fascists, thieves etc.
- Humanitarian aid to Ukraine is useless (e.g. medicines and food are thrown away, and the human assistance trucks are instead filled with weapons)
- Exaggerated russophobic sentiment in European countries
- Exaggerated negative economical consequences of the war and of the sanctions in Europe

These narratives are supported by many false news widely spread all across Europe, as detected also in EDMO’s Weekly Brief on Ukraine-related disinformation. The amount of identical or similar hoaxes detected simultaneously in different EU countries is unrivaled in previous briefs.

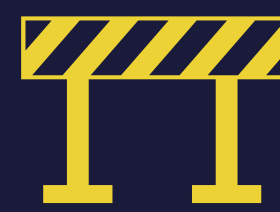
An alarming phenomenon, common to many EU countries, is the emergence of self-appointed “fact-checking” Russian outlets that spread Russian propaganda and disinformation.

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VERIFIED DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



CZECH REPUBLIC:

The Czech government is planning mandatory conscription for all citizens from 18 to 60



LITHUANIA:

Lithuanians buy in bulk in Belarusian supermarkets, forming queues at border checkpoints



SPAIN:

Supply shortage in Spain due to the war



HUNGARY:

Ukrainian far-right nationalists attacked the town hall of an ethnic Hungarian town in Western Ukraine

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 March 2022. Number of respondents: 20.
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