



European Digital Media Observatory

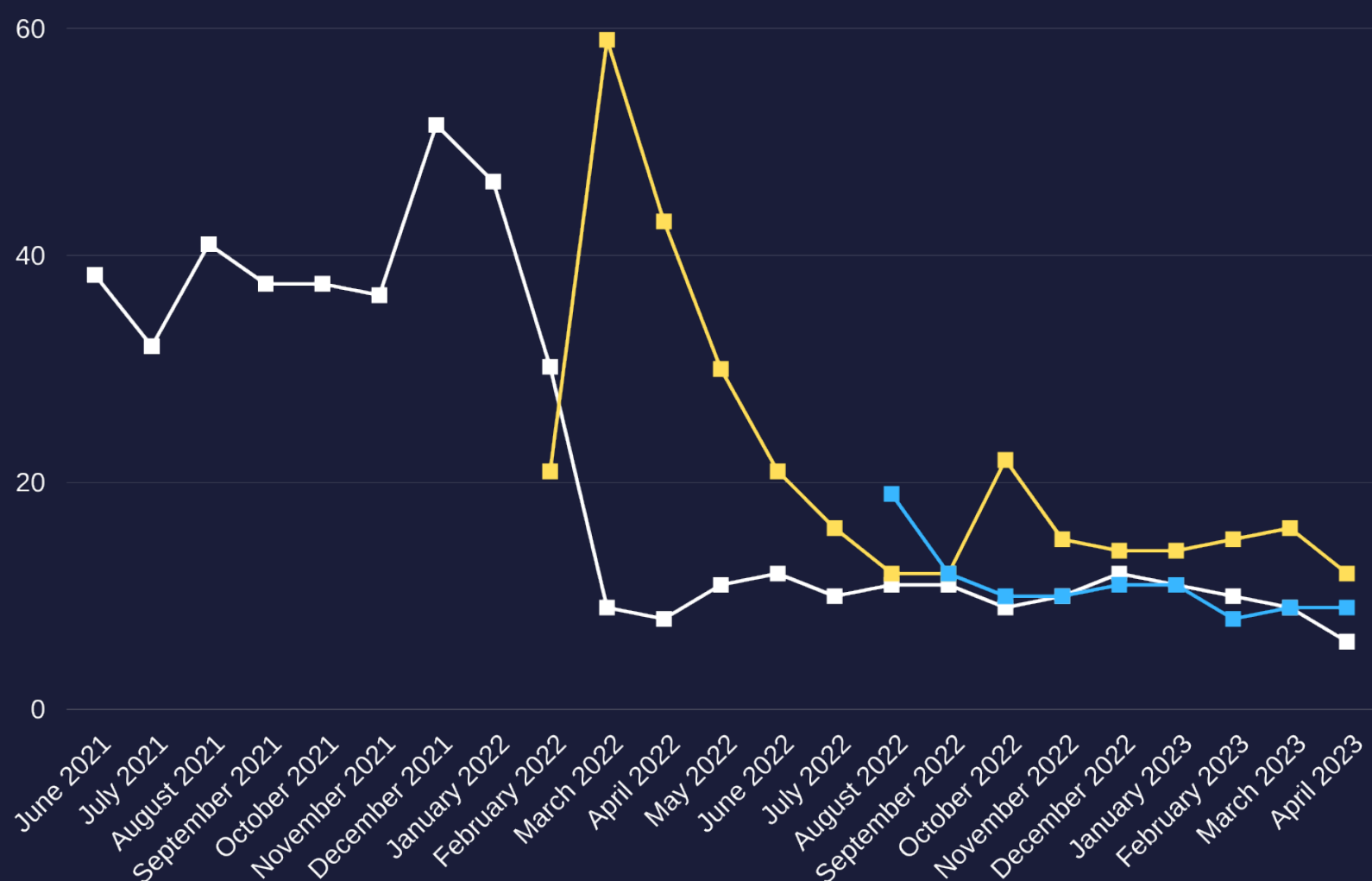
IS THE COVID-19 INFODEMIC FADING AWAY?

Monthly brief no. 23 – EDMO fact-checking network

Published on 17 May 2023

DISINFORMATION ABOUT UKRAINE DIMINISHES IN APRIL, CLIMATE-CHANGE-RELATED DISINFORMATION REMAINS STABLE, AND DISINFORMATION ABOUT THE PANDEMIC HITS A NEW MINIMUM

The 30 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.402 fact-checking articles in April 2023.



Out of these articles, 173 (12%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 130 (9%) focused on climate-change-related disinformation; and 88 (6%) focused on COVID-19-related disinformation, a new minimum. The three topics combined weight about a quarter of the total detected disinformation, the lowest share since the EDMO monitoring started.

% of Ukraine-related disinformation on total detected disinformation

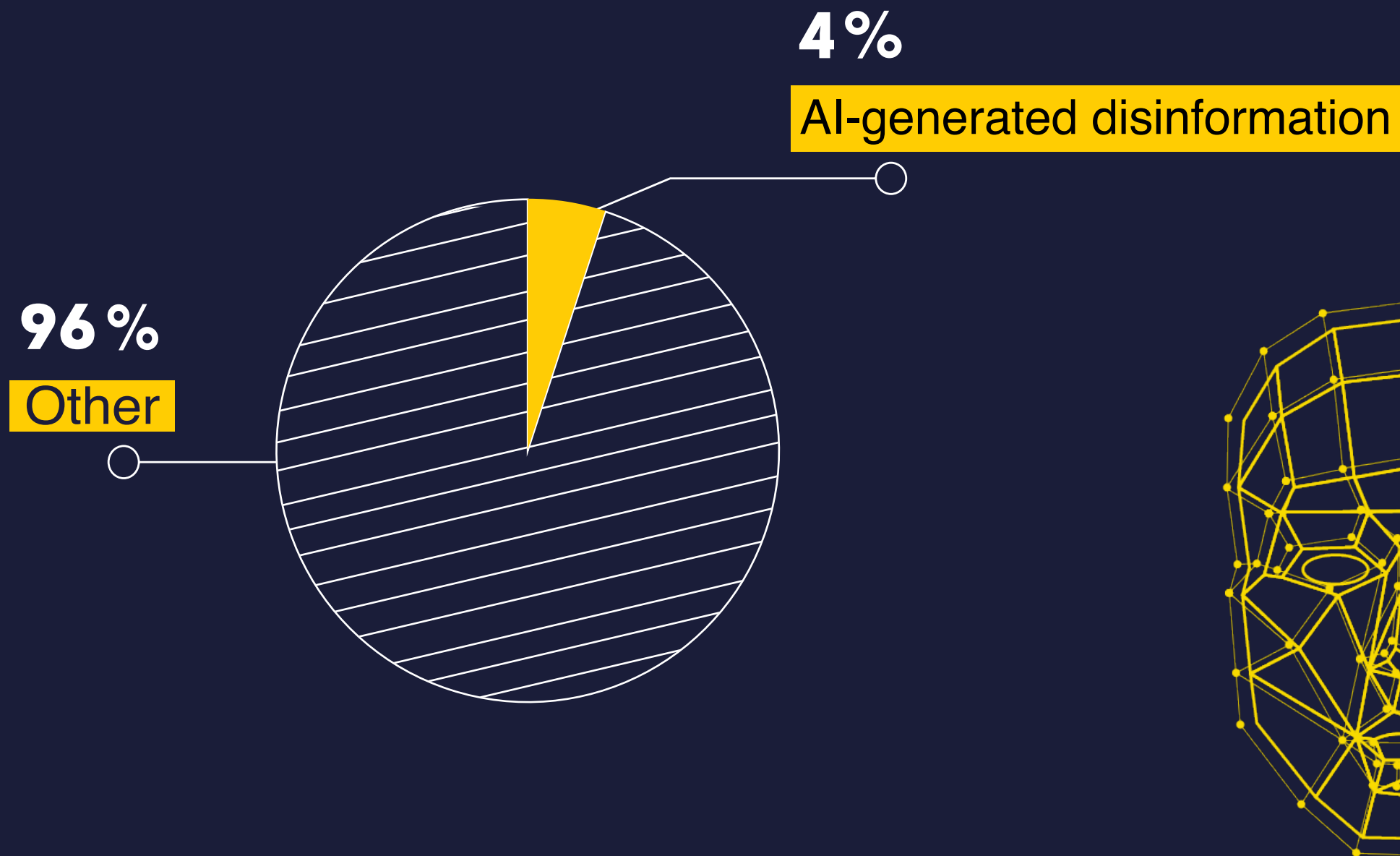
% of COVID-19-related disinformation on total detected disinformation

% of climate change-related disinformation on total detected disinformation

* Organizations that contributed to this brief: AFP, Correctiv, Delfi, Demagog.cz, Demagog.pl, DPA, DW, Eesti Päevaleht, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Factcheck Vlaanderen, Faktabaari, Freedom House Romania, Funky, Greece Fact Checking, Källkritikbyrå, Knack, Lakmusz, Maldita, Newtral, PagellaPolitica/Facta, Polígrafo, Pravda, Publico, Re:Baltica, The Journal Fact-Check, TjekDet, Verificat, VerificaRTVE, VRTNWS

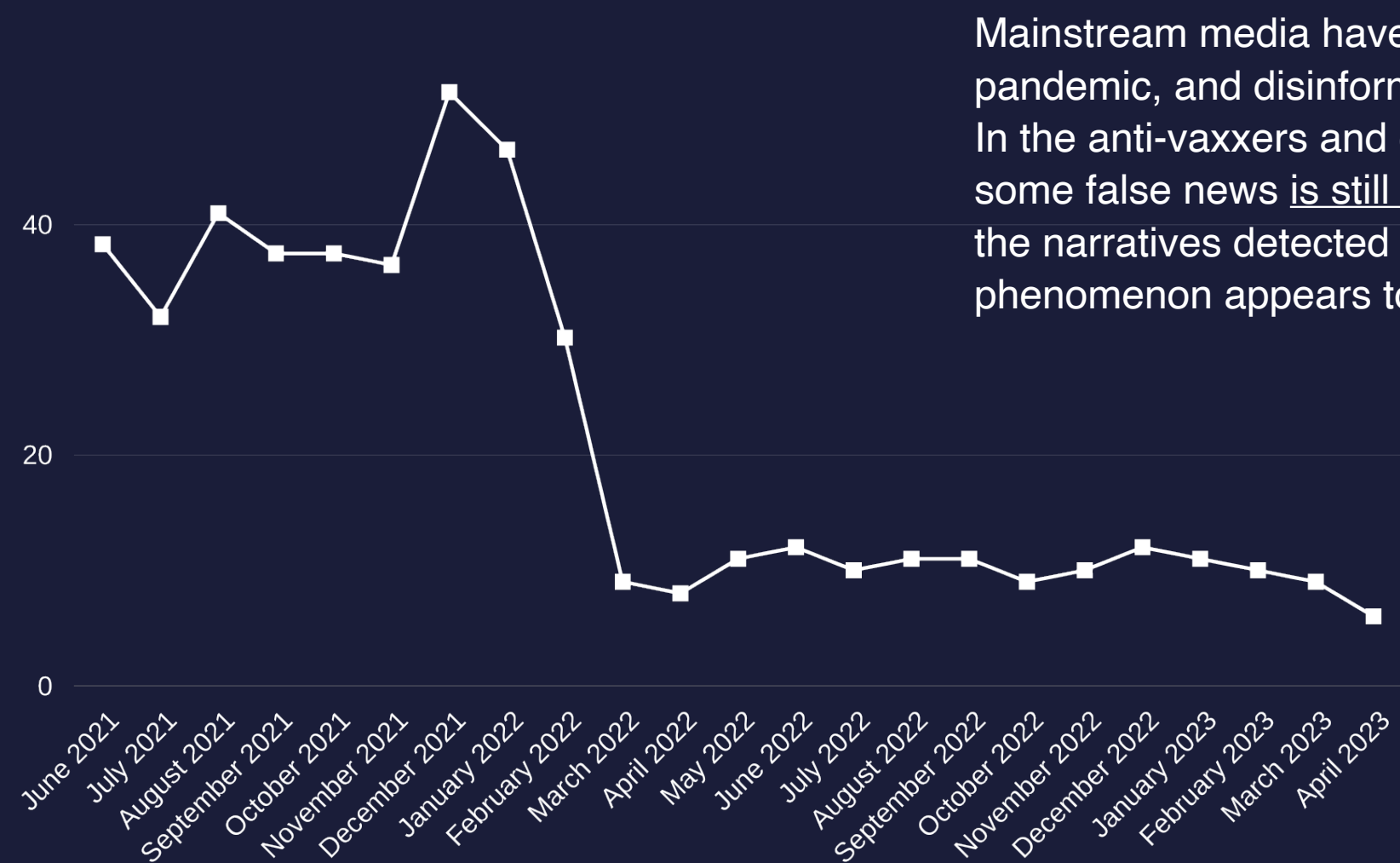
AI-GENERATED DISINFO IS LOW AND STABLE

AI-generated disinformation weights for a 4% of the total detected disinformation (57 articles out of 1.402), a low percentage, similar to the one recorded in March (5%).

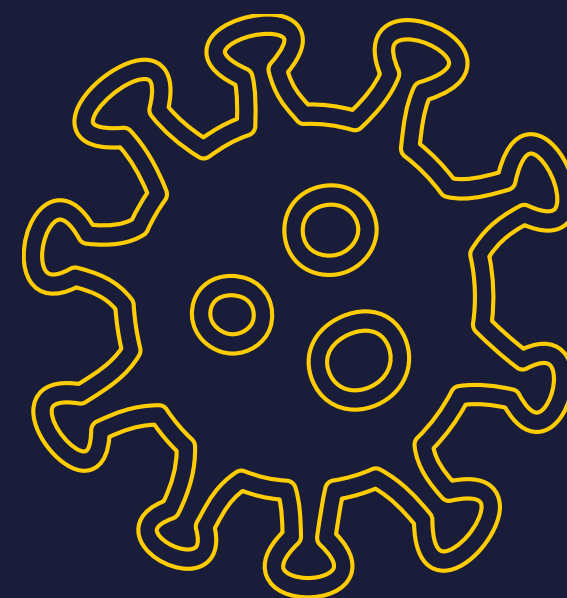


THE PANDEMIC EMERGENCY ENDED AND THE INFODEMIC LOOKS FADING AWAY AS WELL

About the pandemic, the percentage recorded in April (6%) is a new record low and this is consistent with the World Health Organization declaring an end to the Covid-19 global health emergency at the beginning of May.



Mainstream media have decreased coverage about the pandemic, and disinformation follows a similar trend. In the anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theory communities some false news is still circulating, largely spreading the narratives detected in previous briefs, but the phenomenon appears to be slowly fading.



CLIMATE CHANGE, THE SPANISH FACTOR AND MORE :

About climate change, the percentage of detected disinformation is stable but it mostly depends on the very high number of articles reported by Spanish fact-checking organizations (a record heatwave hit Spain in April 2023). The most widespread false news here was about chemtrails artificially modifying the weather (conspiracy theories).

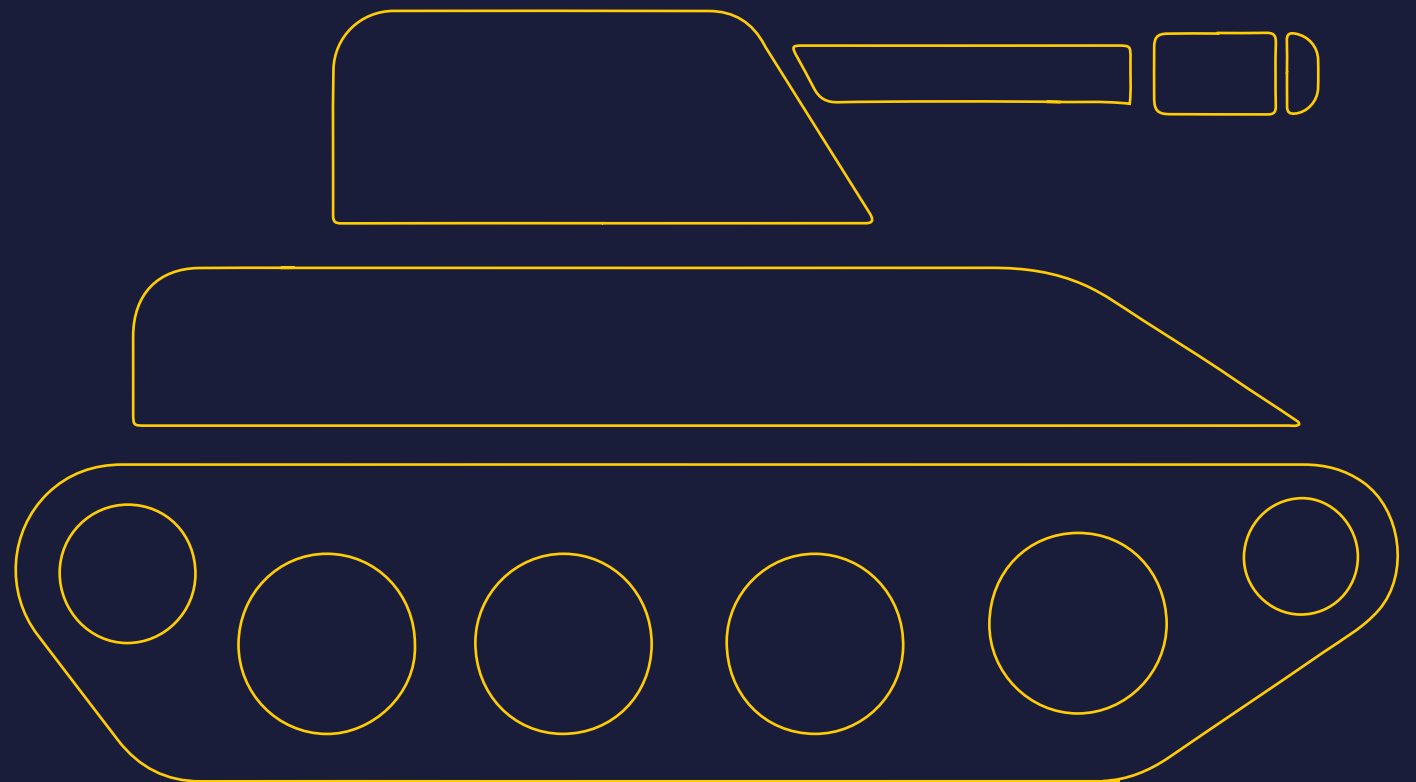
In the rest of the EU the conspiracy theories about “climate lockdowns”, based on the misunderstanding of the urbanistic concept of the “15 minute city”, are still circulating widely. The other main narrative detected in April is the one targeting electric vehicles and alternative technologies to reduce dangerous emissions, depicted as dangerous and unsafe.



UKRAINE, THE QUIET BEFORE THE STORM?

About Ukraine, the percentage of related disinformation on the total has decreased. This is most likely a phenomenon related to the cycle of information and not a stable trend. With the Ukrainian expected counteroffensive looming, the situation could change rapidly.

The disinformation narratives detected in April are the same detected in the past: Ukrainians are Nazis, Zelensky is a drug addict, refugees are parasites and EU countries treat them better than their own citizens, sending humanitarian aid is useless, the war is staged, and Russophobia is raging in Europe (this last one will be probably significant in May, after the controversies around some celebrations for Victory Day).



OTHER RELEVANT TOPICS OF DISINFORMATION IN APRIL:



Disinformation about LGBTQ+ communities is very strong in April, possibly because of the Nashville (U.S.) mass shooting, where the author was a transgender person. This prompted a wave of false news about supposed transgender dangerousness and about most mass shootings in the States being carried out by transgender people. It is possible that this phenomenon will increase in May, after the Dallas mass shooting and the related disinformation.



Disinformation about the EU is also quite widespread in April. False news about edible insects are still spread in many countries, together with false news about the EU legislative proposal to make existing buildings more climate-friendly by 2030. It is worth noting that in Spain, hit by drought in April, the EU Commission has been falsely accused of preparing water restrictions for the entire population.

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

- UN asked for the decriminalization of pedophilia
- IA generated image of Julian Assange in jail
- ▲ Video of the Red Square in Moscow allegedly recorded by a Ukrainian drone in April 2023
- ★ A billboard near the Duomo in Milan, Italy, displayed a picture of Zelensky with a hole in his nose through which he was “sniffing” banknotes



THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VERIFIED DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



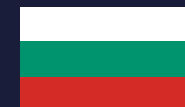
Czech government cancelled the National Holiday “Victory Day” (celebrated on the 8th of May) to avoid celebrating the Soviet Union as a liberator of Czechoslovakia at the end of World War II.



A new law to help families from disadvantaged backgrounds has been presented as part of a conspiracy to separate children from their families, eventually placing them in LGBT+ households abroad.



The green frog logo of the international NGO Rainforest Alliance, which is placed on various food products, prove that the products contain the herbicide atrazine, and atrazine can turn young men into women.



France has decided to export fresh water to the Middle East in exchange for oil.



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: 1-30 April 2023. Number of respondents: 30.
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EDMO has received funding
from the European Union
under Contract number: “LC-01935415”