



European Digital Media Observatory

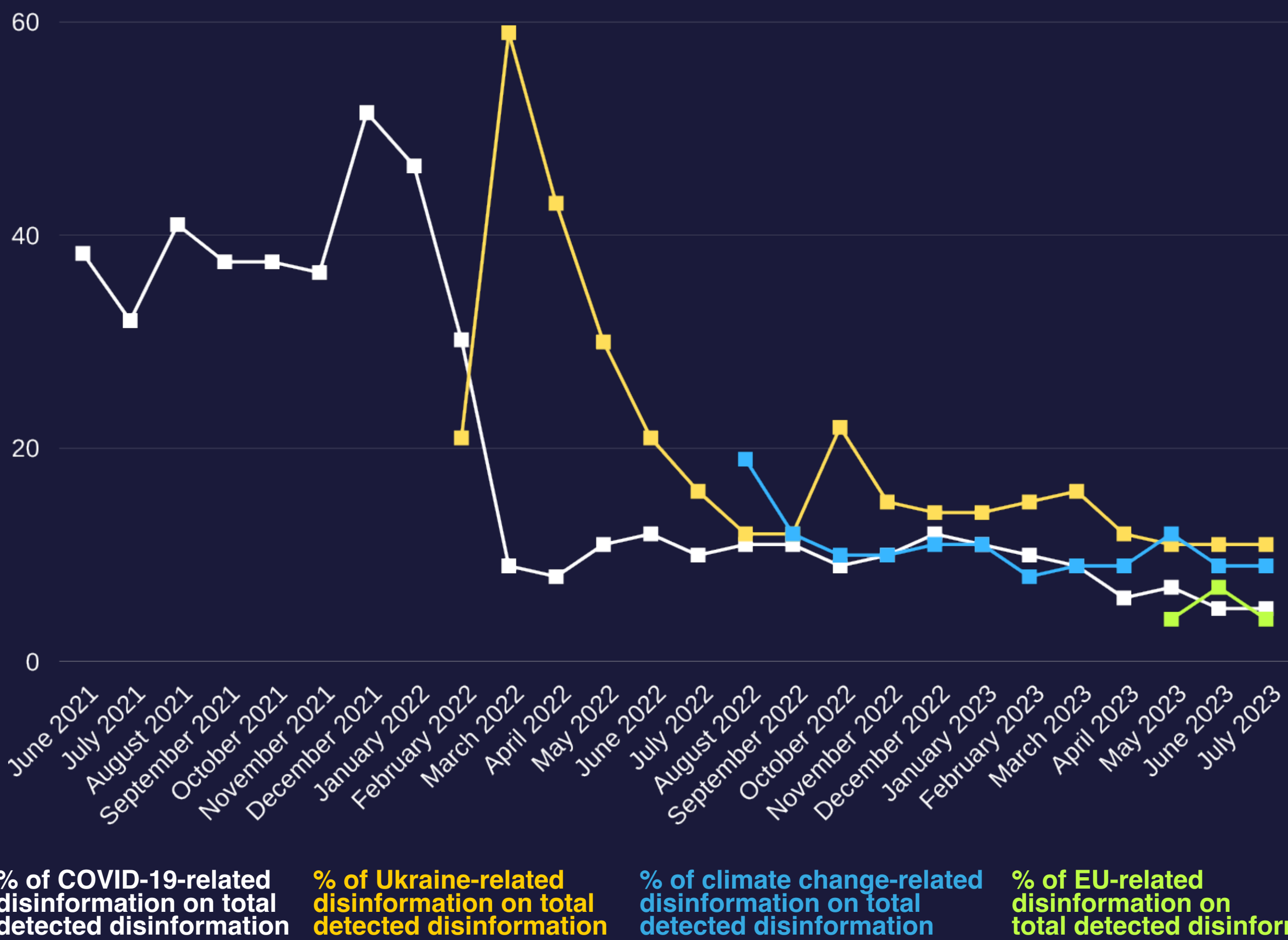
# RIOTS IN FRANCE SPARK DISINFORMATION AND XENOPHOBIA IN THE EU

Monthly brief no. 26 – EDMO fact-checking network

# MAIN TOPICS OF DISINFORMATION'S TRENDS REMAIN STABLE IN JULY, EXCEPT EU-RELATED DISINFORMATION WHICH SLIGHTLY DECREASES

The 22 organizations\* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.122 fact-checking articles in July 2023. Out of these articles, 120 (11%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 60 (5%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; 103 (9%) on climate change-related disinformation; and 40 (4%) on disinformation related to the EU.

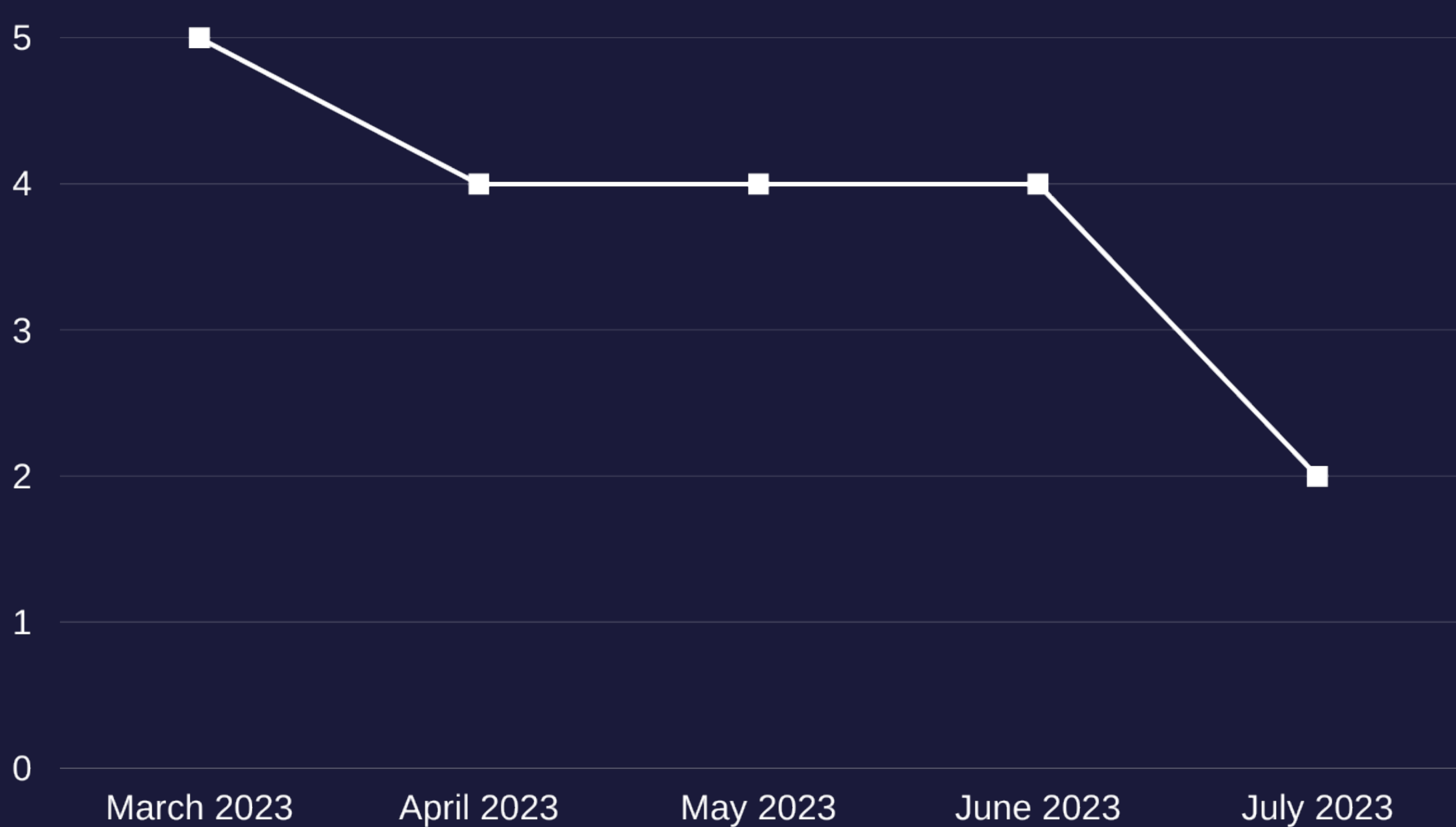
All these percentages are the same as the ones recorded in the previous month, except the one about EU-related disinformation, which goes back to May’s level after a small surge in June.



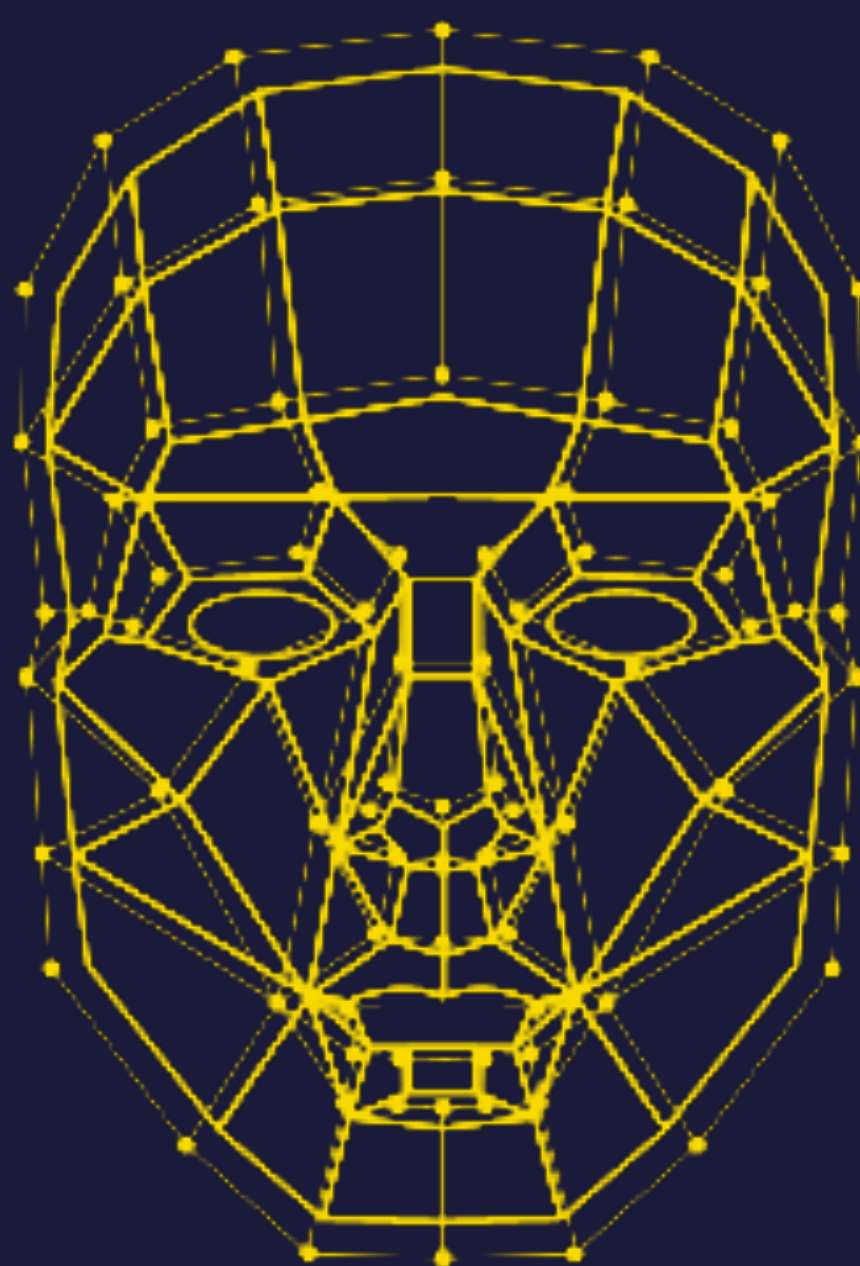
\* Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, AFP, Delfi, Demagog.cz, DPA, Eesti Päevaleht, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Factcheck Vlaanderen, Faktabaari, FranceTV, Funky, Knack, Lakmusz, Maldita, PagellaPolitica/Facta, Pravda, Re:Baltica, The Journal Fact-Check, TjekDet, VerificaRTVE, VRTNWS

## AI-GENERATED DISINFO HITS A NEW MINIMUM

AI-generated visual disinformation accounts for 2% of all detected disinformation (25 articles out of 1.122). The value is very low, a new minimum. It is possible that the interest for this technology is already fading away and/or that an increased awareness of the public about AI-generated false images is discouraging disinformers to use them.



Still, it's important to highlight the lack of data about AI-generated textual disinformation that can be eventually spread through large language models.





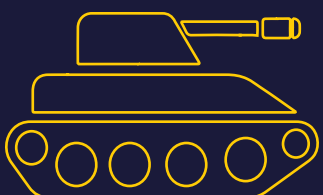
## MAIN NARRATIVES DETECTED



Climate-change related disinformation narratives detected in July are consistent with the ones already identified during last Summer: climate change is not real or not related to human activities; traditional media spread panic through false news and/or manipulated images; and accusation of hypocrisy or stupidity against people who advocate taking action to counter global warming.



The EU-related disinformation detected in July was also often connected with climate-change. In particular, various false news were detected about the Nature Restoration Law adopted by the European Parliament on July 12 (eg. it demands half of Latvian agricultural lands to be flooded, or if applied it will turn the city of Rovaniemi in northern Finland into a forest). The president of the EU Commission Ursula von der Leyen was also targeted by false news, for example in Spain during the electoral campaign, and in Romania to steer animosity towards Ukraine.

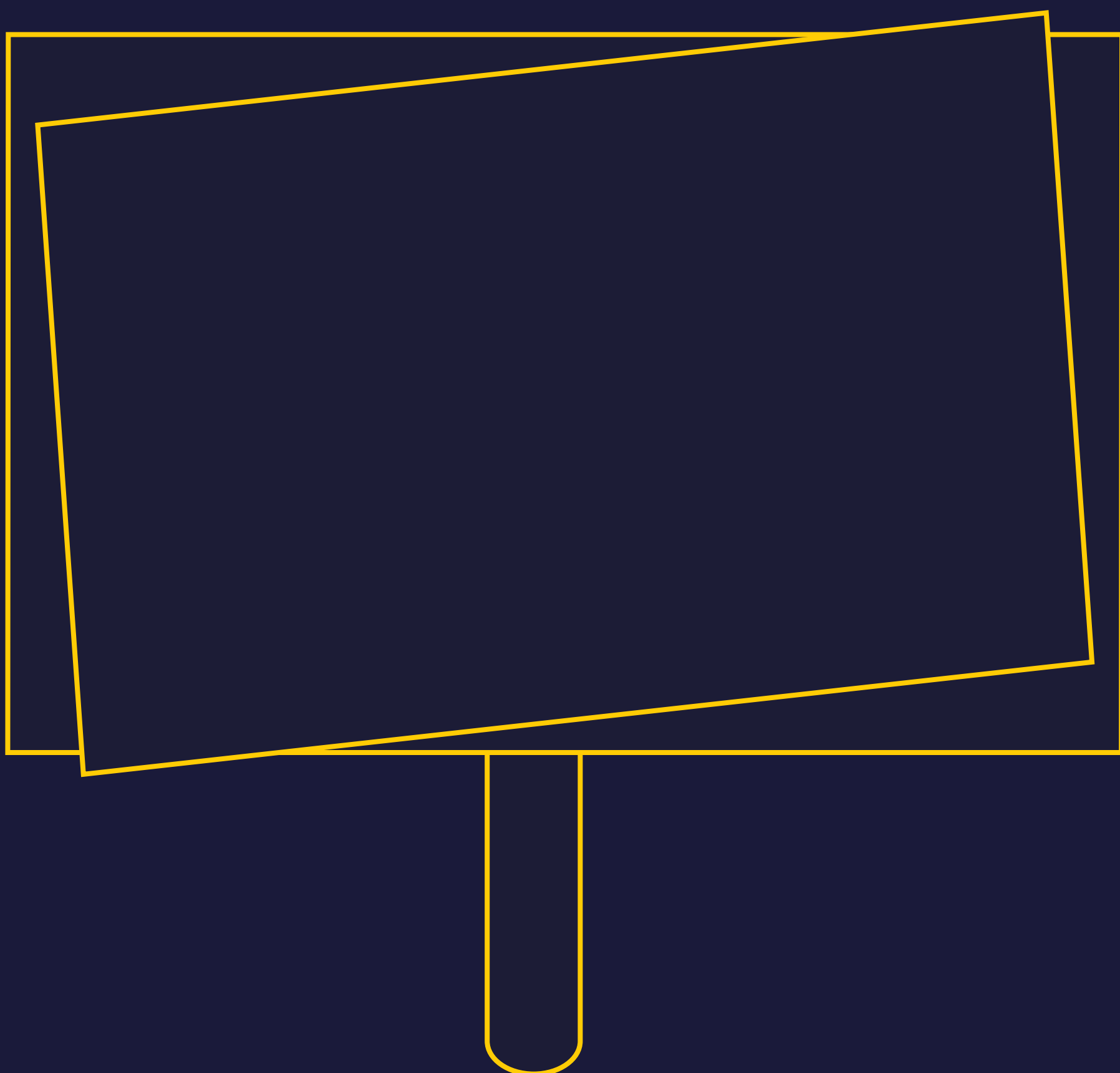


Disinformation narratives about the war in Ukraine remain mostly stable (and Ukrainian refugees in particular are consistently targeted by false news, especially in Eastern Europe), but a new line of false news emerged in July and it is likely to gain traction in the next months. President Zelensky's announce that parliamentary and presidential elections originally set for October 2023 and March 2024 will be postponed – an inevitable outcome under the martial law declared in the country after the Russian invasion – sparked a new wave of unfounded accusations of him plunging Ukraine into a dictatorship.

## DISINFORMATION ABOUT RIOTS IN FRANCE

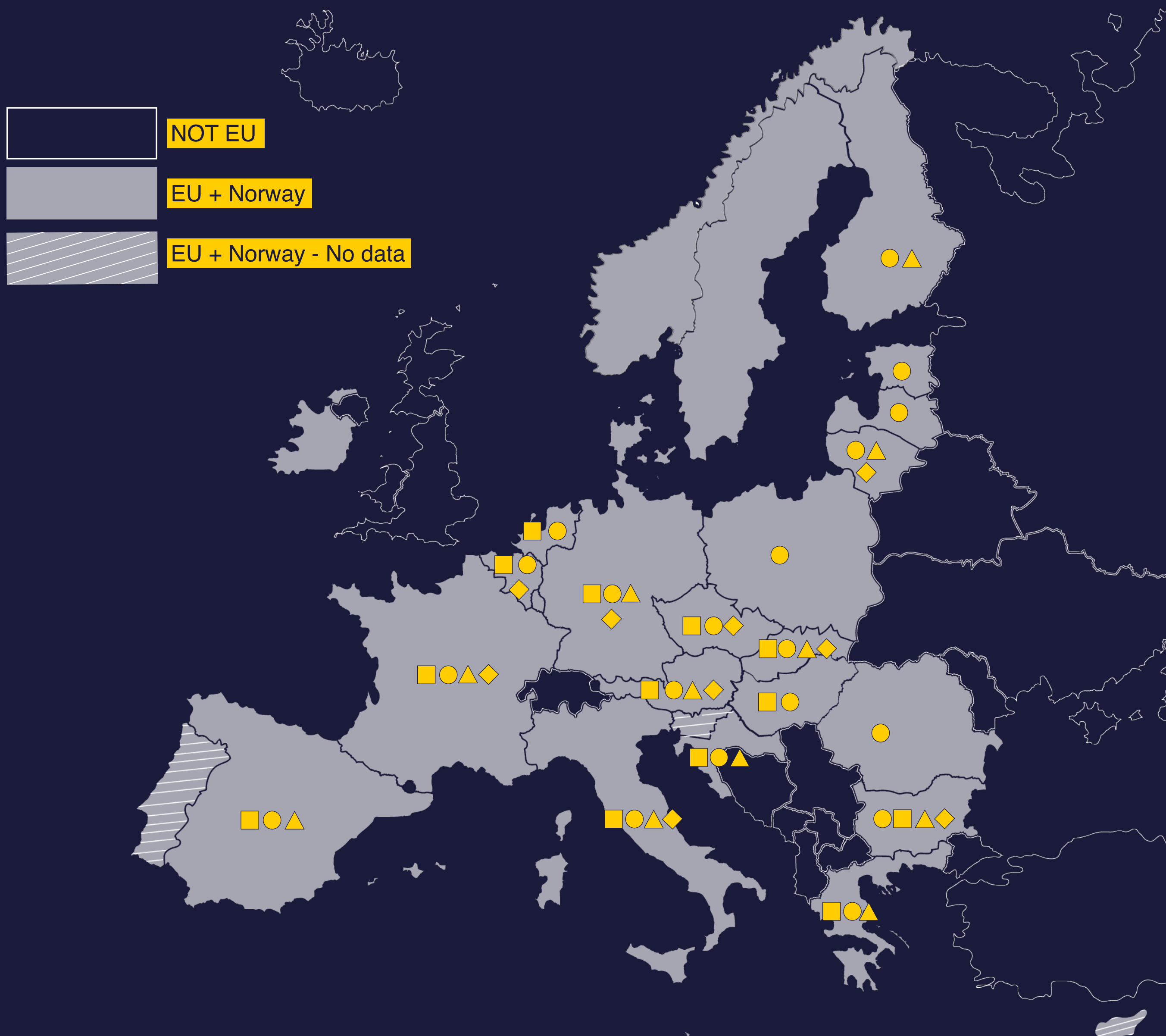
Following the death near Paris on June 27 of Nahel Merzouk, a 17-year-old teenager killed by a police officer, urban violence broke out in France, particularly in the Paris region. Old and unrelated videos and images were decontextualized and miscaptioned to be linked with the riots, and this misleading content travelled all over the EU (see the next slide).

Click-baiting using old and unrelated content is a common phenomenon in similar situations (eg. protests against Covid-19 related measures, or the earthquake in Turkey and Syria in February 2023). This time, this kind of disinformation was often paired with islamophobic and xenophobic messages, as reported also by a recent EDMO investigation.



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

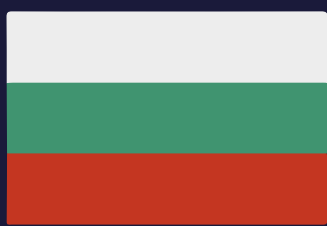
- Videos and images allegedly about riots in France after the death of Nahel Merzouk
- The Rainforest Alliance Logo (a frog) indicates that the food contains vaccines or insects
- ▲ A Bill Gates' lab in Colombia creates genetically modified species of mosquitoes
- ◆ The daughter of Ukraine's Minister of Defence bought a villa in Cannes



## THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VERIFIED DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



As Greece fought severe wildfires in late July 2023, Athens asked Russia for help and Moscow sent a Be-200 amphibious firefighting plane.



Ursula Von der Leyen supported the candidate of the socialist party, and criticized the center-right candidate, in the electoral campaign ahead of the July's vote.



A video shows a group of half a million refugees making their way from Libya to Italy.



Two photos of the Statue of Liberty a hundred years apart demonstrate that the sea level isn't rising.



## 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 July 2023. Number of respondents: 22.

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