



European Digital Media Observatory

DISINFORMATION ABOUT UKRAINE AND THE EU GETS LOUDER IN MARCH

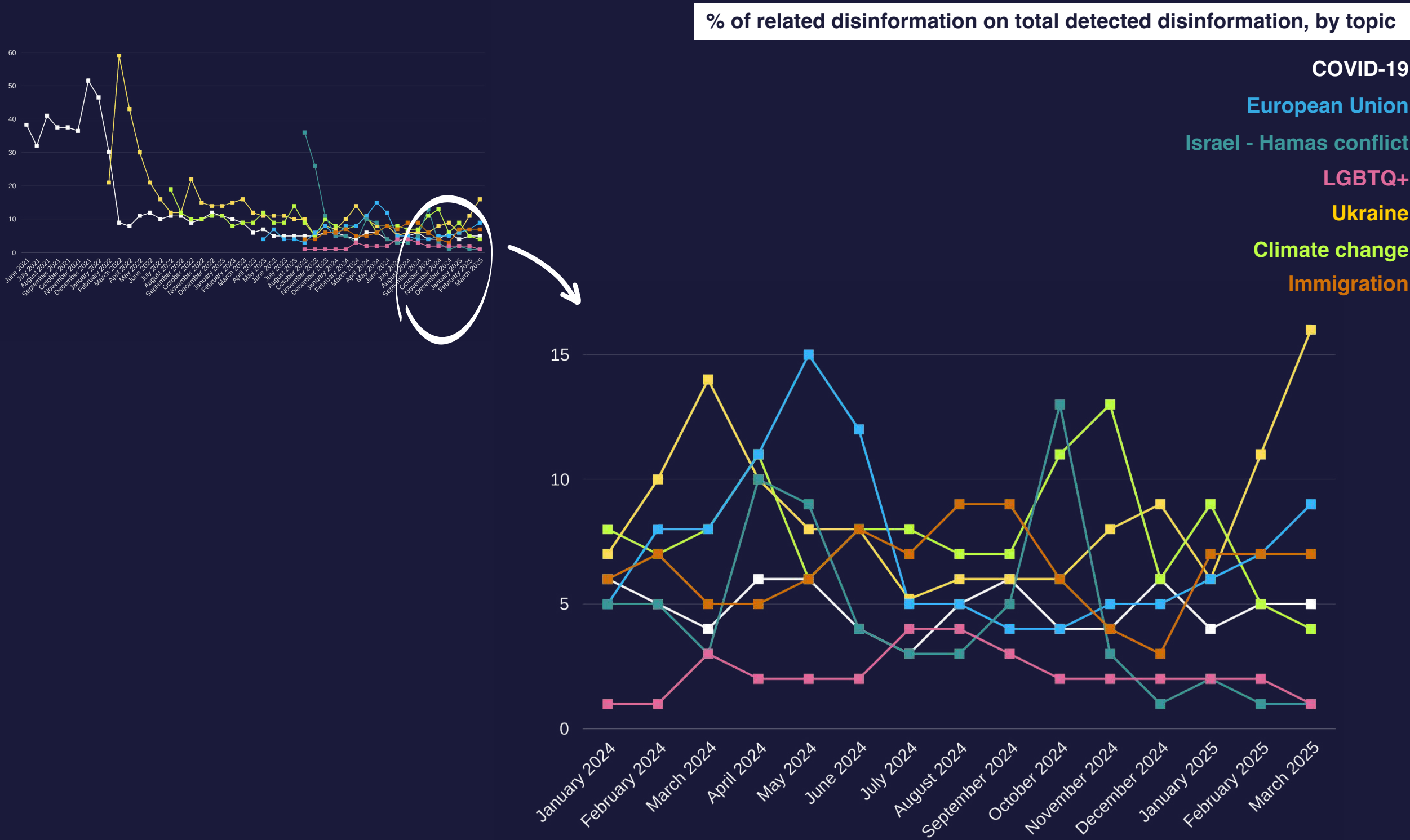
Monthly brief no. 46 – EDMO fact-checking network

DISINFORMATION ABOUT UKRAINE HITS ITS MAXIMUM SINCE TWO YEARS

The 31 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.888 fact-checking articles in March 2025. Out of these articles, 303 (16%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 169 (9%) on disinformation related to the EU; 123 (7%) on disinformation related to immigration; 88 (5%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; 81 (4%) on climate change-related disinformation; 21 (1%) on the Middle Eastern regional conflict, and 20 (1%) on disinformation about LGBTQ+ and gender issues.

After doubling in February, false information about the war in Ukraine continued to rise in March, increasing by 5% in one month and eventually accounting for 16% of total detected disinformation. This is the highest value recorded since March 2023. The number of false stories targeting the EU also grew by 2 percentage points, rising to 9% from 7%. The increase in disinformation on these two topics followed a path started in February 2025, when a major shift in foreign policy by the new US administration opened a second front of interference for the EU infosphere.

The shares of false information about the other constantly monitored topics remained almost stable or showed only minor fluctuations.



* Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, AFP, APA, Correctiv, Eesti Päevaleht, Delfi, Demagog.cz, Demagog.pl, Demagog.sk, DPA, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Factcheck Vlaanderen, FactReview, Faktisk, Funky, InfoVeritas, Lakmusz, Les Surligneurs, Maldita, Medicinski potvrđeno, Mimikama, Newtral, Oštro, PagellaPolitica/Facta, Polígrafo, Pravda, Re:Baltica, The Journal Fact-Check, TjekDet, VerificaRTVE

FALSE INFORMATION ABOUT UKRAINE INTENSIFIES

Behind the further increase in false stories about Ukraine, there are unfounded claims on the negotiations for a ceasefire and the situation on the battlefield, along with long-running Russian propaganda messages.

About operations on the field, the Ukrainian counter-offensive in the Russian region of Kursk was the subject of a Doppelganger campaign, with disinformation actors creating false images of Western newspapers to spread pro-Russian messages. For example, a doctored image showed a British newspaper reporting that 70.000 Ukrainian soldiers died “in vain” in Kursk, while others falsely claimed that the Ukrainian operation was acknowledged as the least effective of the last 200 years or that Ukrainian soldiers in the region were surrendering to Russian forces. A similar false claim was also made by US President Donald Trump, who said that Ukrainians in the area were “encircled”, while Ukrainian authorities denied this occurrence. In general, the Ukrainian position in the war has been described by false news as desperate, while aid and supplies to the invaded nation are being questioned for allegedly being squandered for fraudulent purposes.

In the context of negotiations, disinformation alleged that Ukraine and its leader mistreated President Trump (so justifying his actions as retribution) and showed signs of hostility towards the US. The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky continues to be on the disinformation gunsight, accused of being a satanist enriching himself thanks to the war, and more and more isolated in the international community. Even Ukrainian refugees are blamed for being scroungers in their host countries, that allegedly treat them better than actual citizens. Other false stories also reported on alleged pro-Russian mass demonstrations in the EU, supposedly attended by hundreds of thousands of people. At the same time, the support for the invaded nation is being presented by baseless claims as it will soon lead to a world war and bring death to Western countries.



THE EU BECOMES MORE AND MORE DESPOTIC, FALSE STORIES SAY



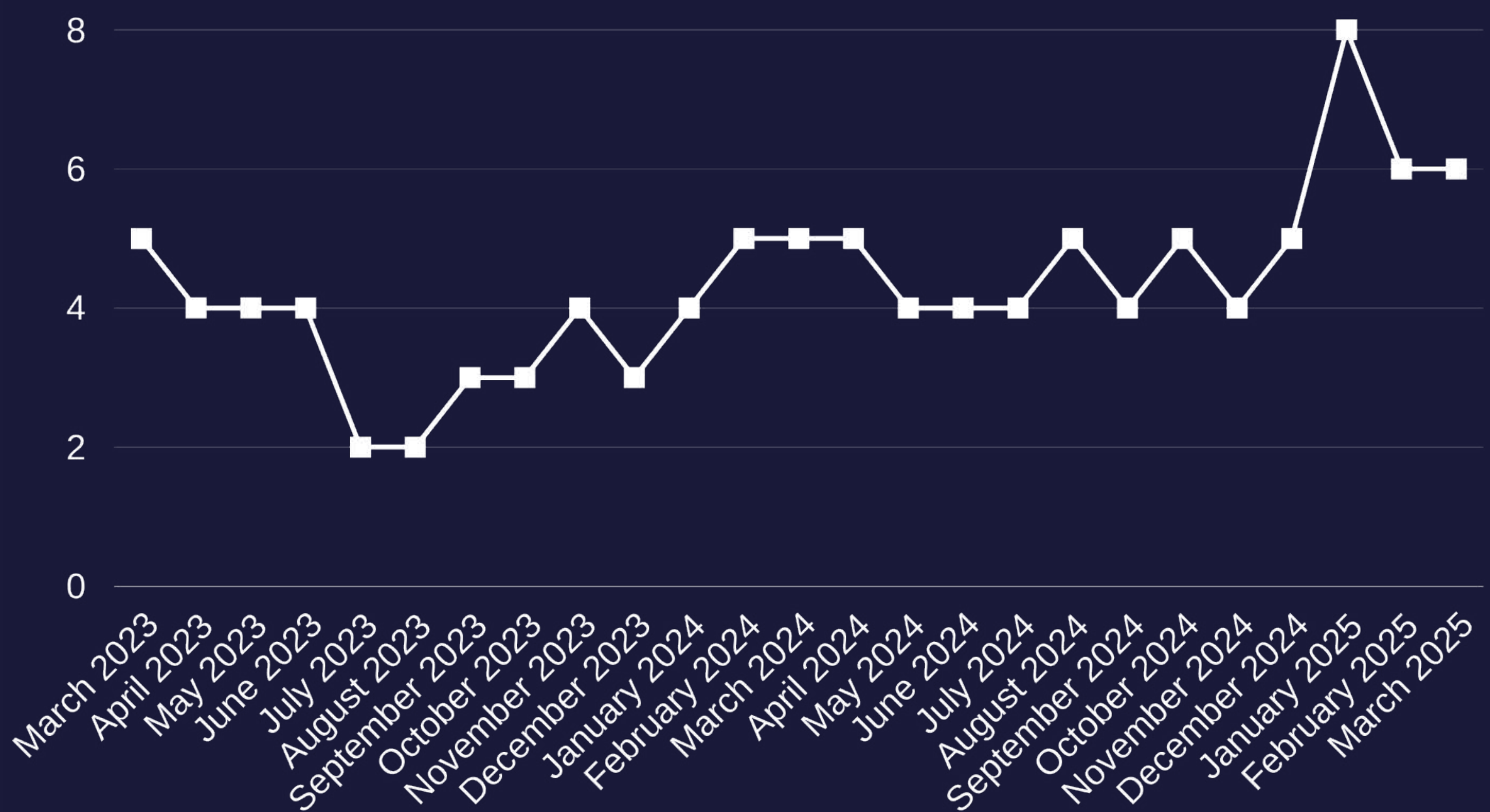
In March, a wide assortment of anti-EU false narratives circulated, sometimes reviving old and cyclical lies. European institutions have been falsely accused of planning to ban cars, houses (if they don't meet energy standards), cash to control transactions but also to tax pets, to make money by harming citizens, to steal their savings with the aim of financing wars. EU leadership has been described by false content as harshly divided and accused of being willing to interfere in national democracy processes and annul elections, if the results don't match with its expectations. While it was a decision taken by Romanian authorities, disinformation claimed it was the EU that banned the pro-Russian candidate Călin Georgescu from participating in the upcoming elections in Romania, and that he was "arrested on orders from Brussels". This false narrative is likely to expand in April, after a ruling was taken in France likely excluding the far-right leader Marine Le Pen from the next presidential elections.



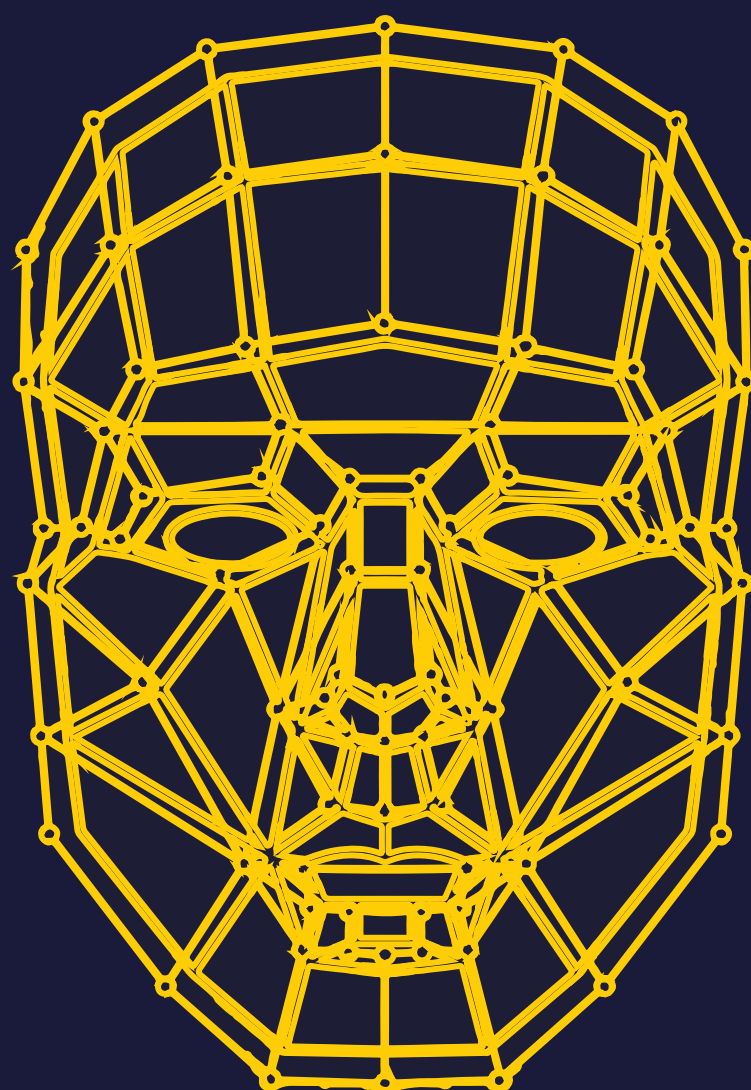
A series of anti-Western and nationalist disinformation has emerged in Romanian social media, falsely portraying the country as losing its sovereignty and becoming subordinate to foreign powers, particularly the EU, France and NATO. False narratives claimed that the annulment of the national elections in November had been declared illegal by experts, that French soldiers disguised as Romanian gendarmes participated in domestic protests (allegedly suppressed violently while people chanted pro-Russian slogans), and that interim President Ilie Bolojan ceded airspace and military control to President Emmanuel Macron of France. Additionally, fabricated documents suggested that mandatory military conscription was imminent, trying to fuel panic and unrest. Other misleading stories persistently depict Romania as a puppet state, dangerously heading toward forced military involvement in Ukraine and loss of strategic national assets, such as control over the Sulina Canal.

AI-GENERATED DISINFORMATION

The percentage of disinformation stories using AI-generated content remained stable in March, resembling February's figures. Out of 1.888 fact-checking articles, 127 addressed the use of this technology in disinformation, representing 6% of the total.

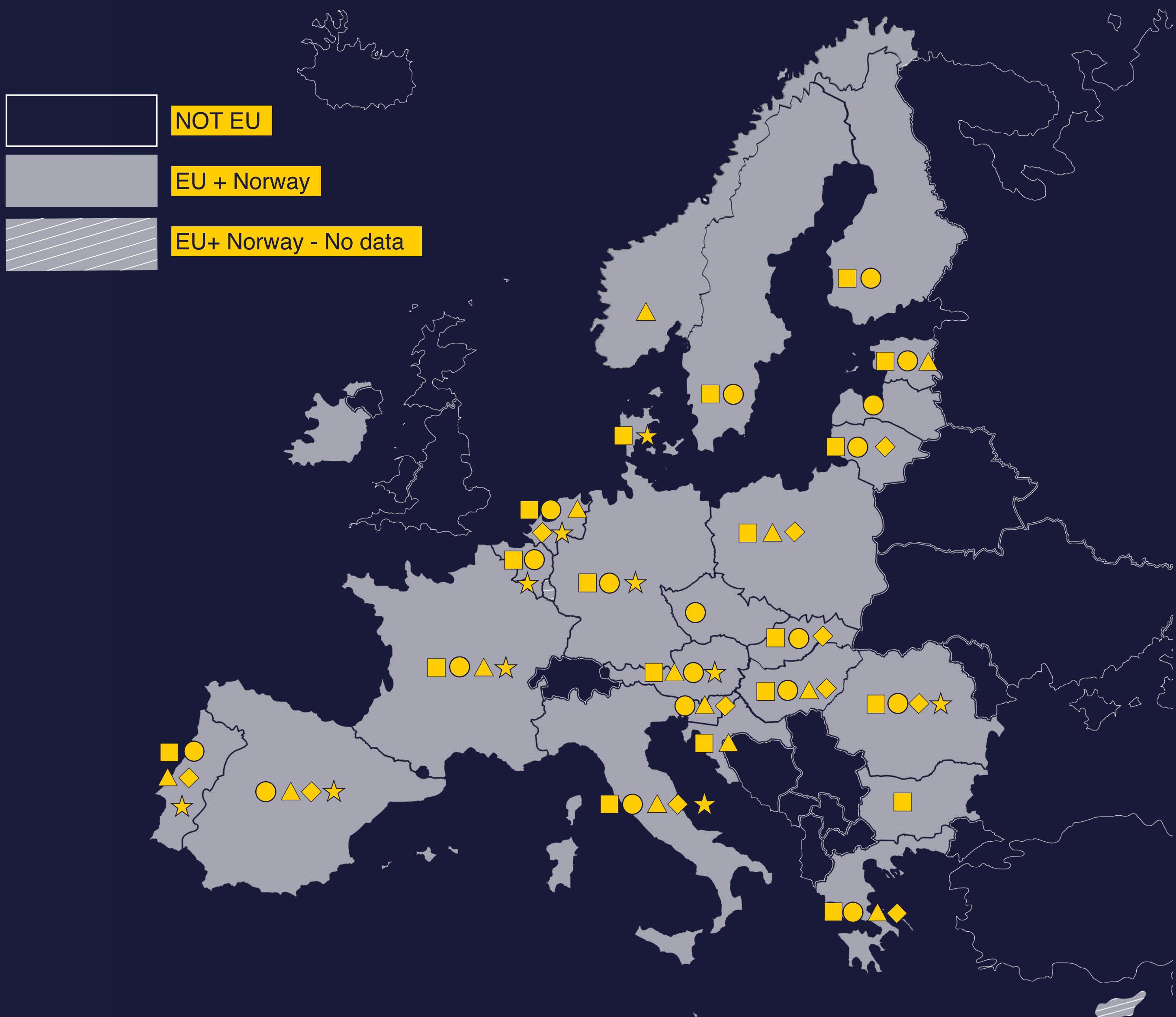


AI-generated images of US Vice President JD Vance allegedly telling pro-Ukrainian protesters to join the Ukrainian army circulated on social media after the public spat between Trump and Zelensky. Later in March, images and videos of the Myanmar earthquake were found to be generated with AI software, as was the case of an AI-edited video showing two Slovenian politicians allegedly kissing each other. Another interesting case was reported in Spain, where *Maldita* identified two TikTok profiles posting AI-generated videos on presumed corruption cases affecting Spanish PM Pedro Sánchez and his government, reportedly uncovered by the Trump administration.



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

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky bought a French private bank
- European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that the EU will expropriate citizens' private savings
- ▲ A white actor was chosen for the Netflix TV series "Adolescence," while the crime was committed by a black boy
- ◆ Călin Georgescu was "arrested on orders from Brussels"
- ★ The man who drove into the crowd in Mannheim has an Arabic name.



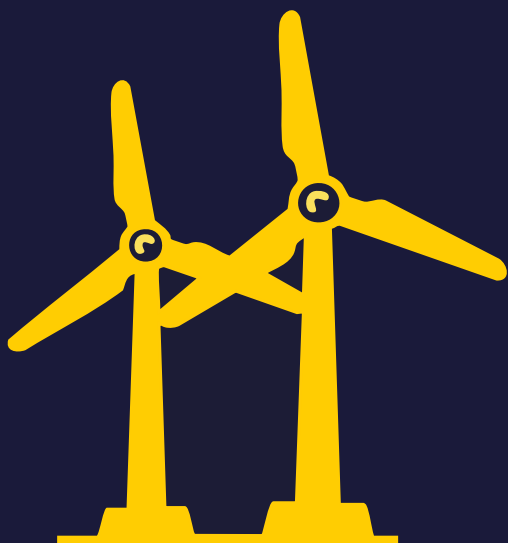
THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



The would-be German Chancellor Friedrich Merz’s U-turn on federal spending constitutes the crime of voter fraud



Two naval cadets were immediately dismissed after chanting “Cyprus is Greek, fuck Turkey” during a parade



Central European countries no longer want wind farms near them, so they plan to build them in Latvia and make money at the expense of Latvian citizens



Muslims voted massively for radical left in Germany



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 2025. Number of respondents: 31.

Main editors of this brief: Enzo Panizio, Lucia Bertoldini and Tommaso Canetta, Pagella Politica/Facta.

For further information: [*t.canetta@pagellapolitica.it*](mailto:t.canetta@pagellapolitica.it).



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