



European Digital Media Observatory

# **DISINFORMATION ABOUT UKRAINE AND UKRAINIAN REFUGEES POLLUTES ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS IN EUROPE**

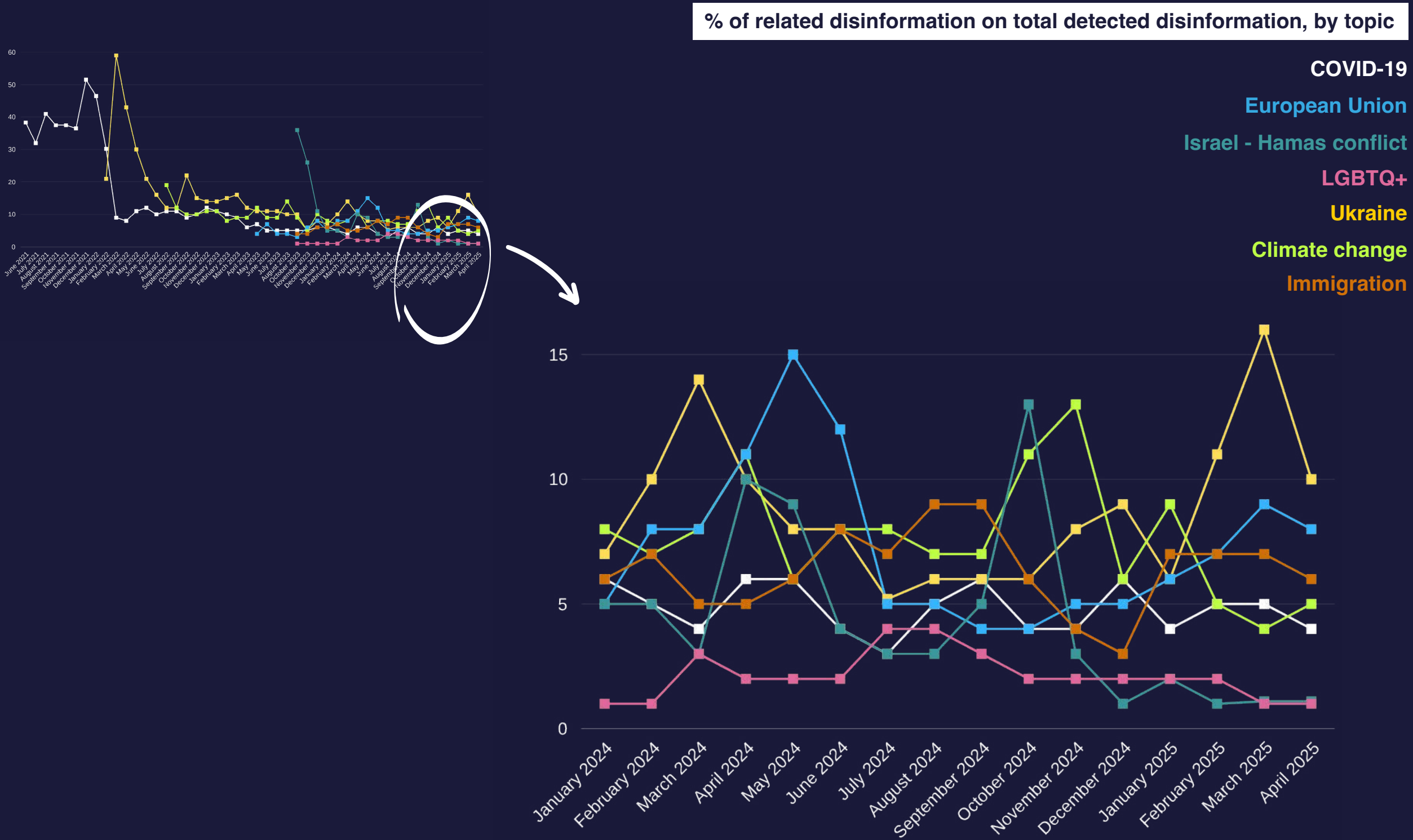
Monthly brief no. 47 – EDMO fact-checking network

## DISINFORMATION TRENDS STAY MOSTLY STABLE IN APRIL

The 33 organizations\* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.551 fact-checking articles in April 2025. Out of these articles, 150 (10%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 117 (8%) on disinformation related to the EU; 98 (6%) on disinformation related to immigration; 83 (5%) on climate change-related disinformation; 63 (4%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; 14 (1%) on disinformation about LGBTQ+ and gender issues, and 13 (1%) on the Middle Eastern regional conflict.

After rising in March and April, false information about the war in Ukraine dropped by 6 percentage points, going back to the values it had at the end of 2024. This might be due to the deadlock in the negotiations as well as to the relatively lower media coverage of news on the field. EU-related misinformation stabilizes after rising for the past few months, while false stories on the topic of climate change slightly increase, probably as a consequence of the blackout in Spain.

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: AFP, Kallkrytikbyran, Poligrafo, TjekDet, Factcheck Vlaanderen, Info Veritas, Greece fact-check, The Journal, Check4Facts, DPA, Pravda, Maldita, Rtve, Correctiv, Demagog.cz, Ostro, APA, Funky, Faktisk, Delfi.lt, Ellinika Hoaxes, EFE, Factico, Lakmusz, Eurocomunicare, FactReview, Demagog.sk, Re:Baltica, Demagog.pl, Delfi.ee, Newtral, Pagella Politica, Facta

## ELECTIONS IN PORTUGAL, POLAND AND ROMANIA



Disinformation circulating in Romania in April, before the first round of presidential elections set for May 4th, focused on negatively portraying both Ukraine - which presumably discriminates the Romanian minority in its schools - and Ukrainian refugees, who can allegedly obtain citizenship after just three years and then press territorial claims. Moreover, local fact-checking organizations debunked false stories about Christians being persecuted, and Russia being the only State that cares; about Christian Easter traditions being under attack (this xenophobic narrative circulated extensively in Germany as well); and about the EU deciding on total military mobilization, in preparation for a war against Russia.



Also in Poland disinformation focused on Ukraine, before the first round of presidential elections set for May 18th. False stories about Kiev accusing Poland of making fake videos of forced mobilizations in Ukraine, or about thousands of Polish mercenaries dying in the Kursk region (thus bringing World War III between Nato and Russia closer) have been debunked. Other false stories focused on abortion and migrants.



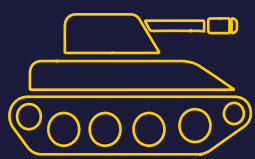
In Portugal, where parliamentary elections are set for May 18th, disinformation immediately started exploiting the blackout incident, which occurred on April 28th. Many conspiracy theories have been detected, as well as disinformation consistent with well-known Russian disinformation narratives. For example it was falsely claimed that Western media and EU Commission president Von der Leyen wrongly accused Russia of being responsible for the blackout. Aside from the blackout, Ukrainians have been the target of a false story that accuses them of scheming to obtain Portuguese citizenship, and the EU is accused by a viral false story (detected also in Greece, Poland, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and France) of planning the replacement of cash money with the “digital euro” within months.



## DISINFORMATION TARGETS THE IBERIAN BLACKOUT, UKRAINE AND THE EU



Disinformation about the Iberian blackout circulated widely in Europe, not only in Spain and Portugal (see slide n.6). False stories promoted various conspiracy theories (e.g. about a “rare atmospheric phenomenon” and an “induced atmospheric vibration”), attacked green policies, spread fear, exaggeration and panic. As seen in the case of Portugal, a significant amount of the false content detected is consistent with ongoing Russian disinformation operations (e.g. Operation Matryoshka) to discredit Western media and create confusion in Western societies.



Ukraine is a recurrent target of disinformation, both foreign and domestic, in many EU countries. The main disinformation narratives detected in April depict Ukrainians as parasites (or dangerous and violent), exaggerate opposition to supporting Ukraine, and portray president Volodymyr Zelensky and his wife Olena as cowards (e.g. fleeing the country), corrupted (e.g. buying platinum mines in Africa) and/or drug-addicted people.

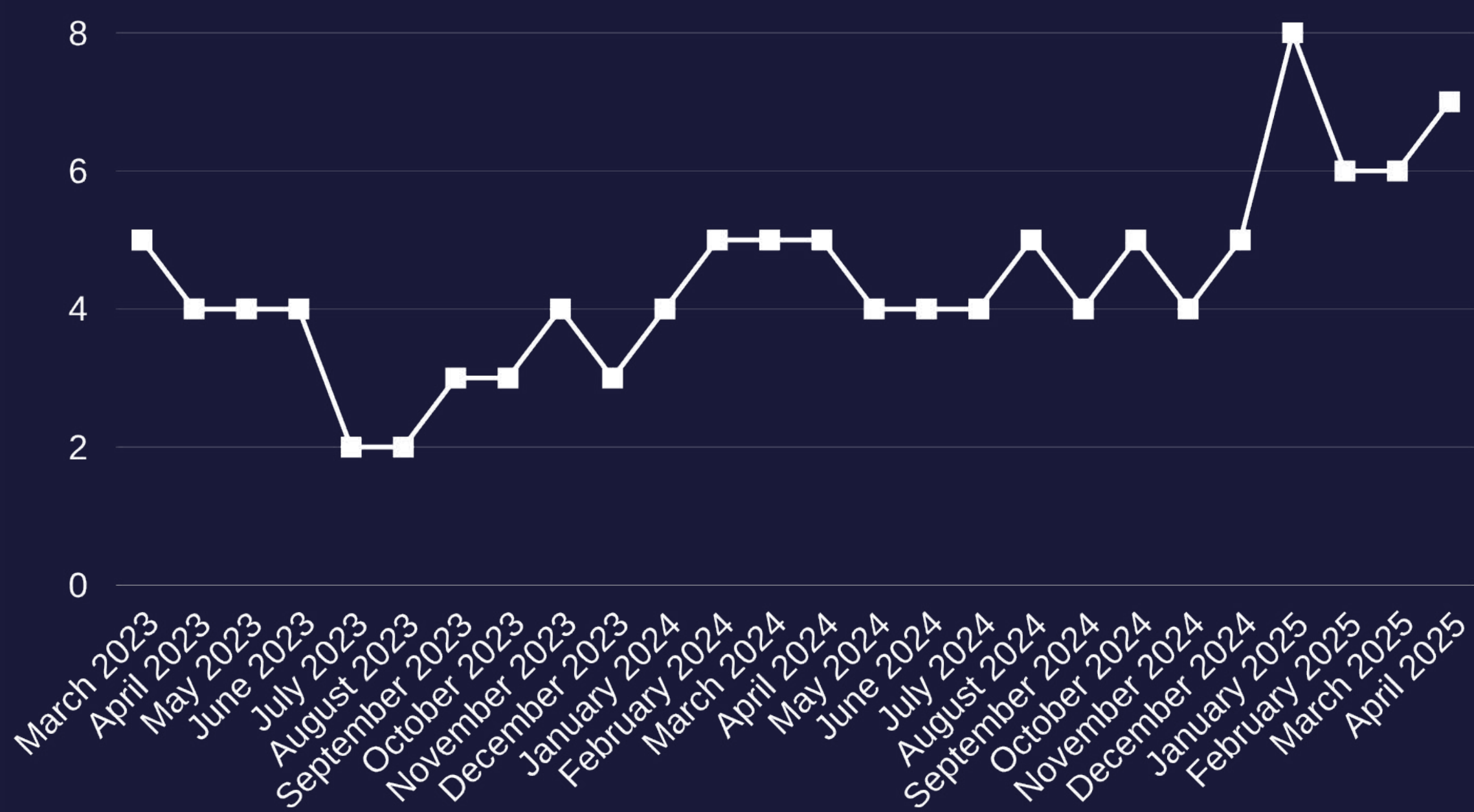


The EU is another recurrent target of disinformation, together with Ukraine. The two topics are the ones with the highest percentages in our monitoring in the past 3 months (see slide n.2). According to the main disinformation narrative detected, the EU is impoysing non-democratically its agenda on its citizens (for example by abolishing cash and enforcing the “digital euro”).

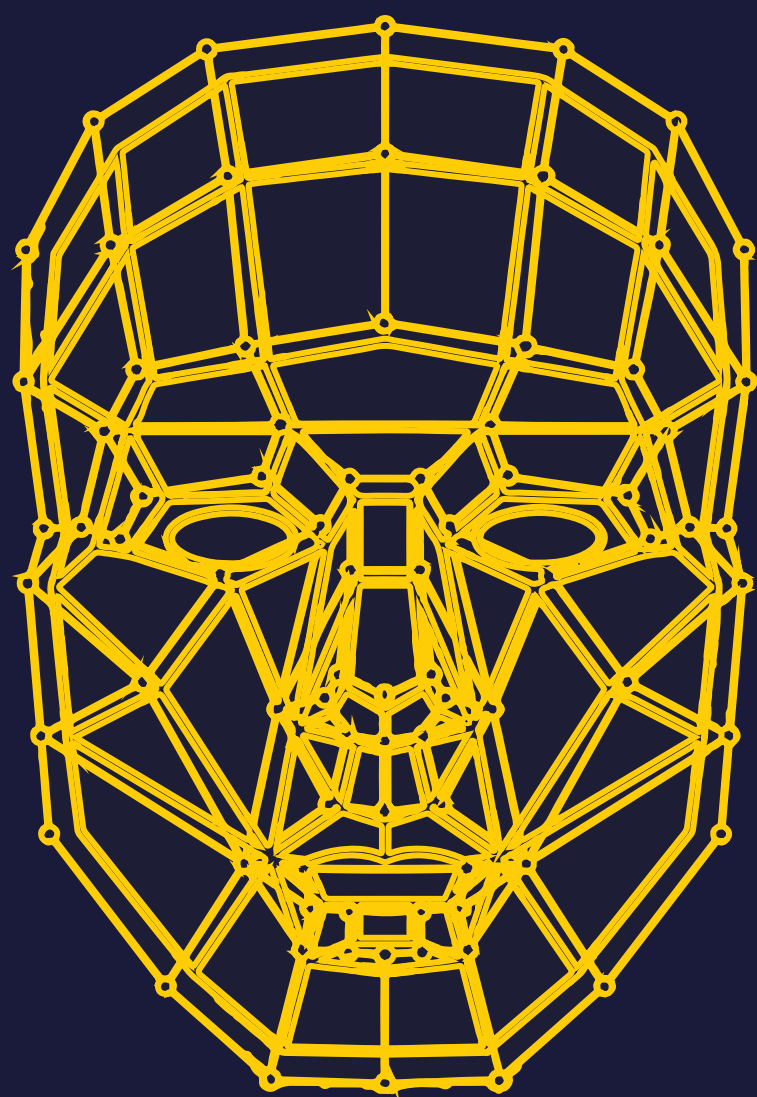
Other topics that have been targeted by many false stories are the Pope’s death and the conviction of French far-right leader Marine Le Pen (see slide n.6).

## AI-GENERATED DISINFORMATION

The percentage of disinformation stories using AI-generated content remained stable in April, resembling March’s figures. Out of 1.551 fact-checking articles, 103 addressed the use of this technology in disinformation, representing 7% of the total.



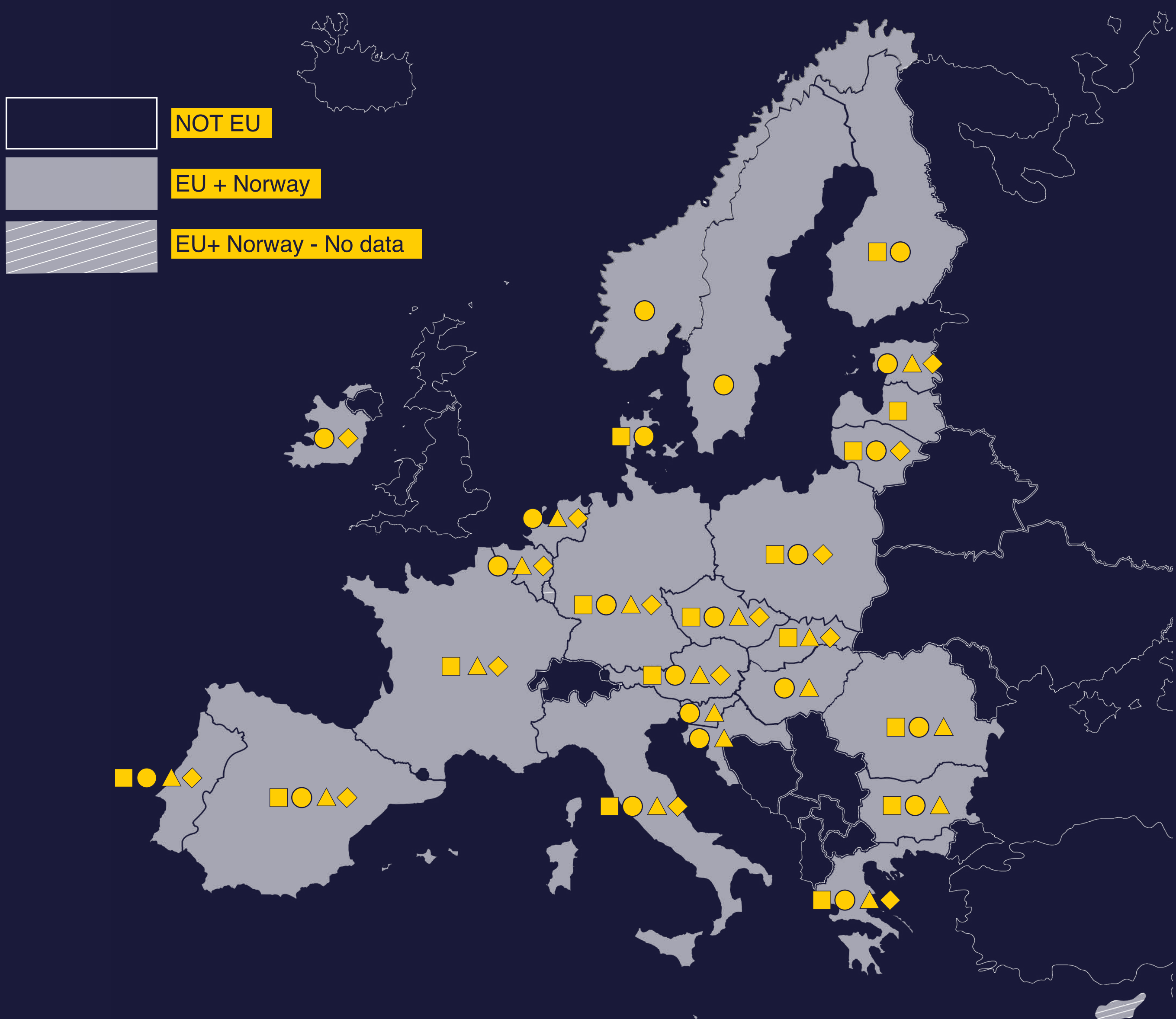
Following the recent conflict escalation in Kashmir, the region disputed between India and Pakistan, images have been circulated claiming to show the terrorist attack of April 22nd in the Indian section of Kashmir. These images presumably show some of the victims, but they were actually generated with artificial intelligence. A particularly interesting false story circulating in Russian language was detected by Estonian fact-checkers, with pictures of the alleged Ukrainian crisis actor “Elena Savelyeva” shared with the claim that she had died in the combat zone in the Donetsk region. Some of her photos were generated or edited using AI, while the originals happened to represent other Ukrainian servicemen.





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

- Conspiracy theories surrounding the death of the Pope and his funeral
- Unfounded claims or conspiracies regarding blackout in the Iberian peninsula
- ▲ Marine Le Pen's conviction is illegal, anti-democratic, and/or a EU plot
- ◆ Fake claims regarding Olena Zelenska (e.g. she has planned her escape from Ukraine, she is involved in child trafficking)



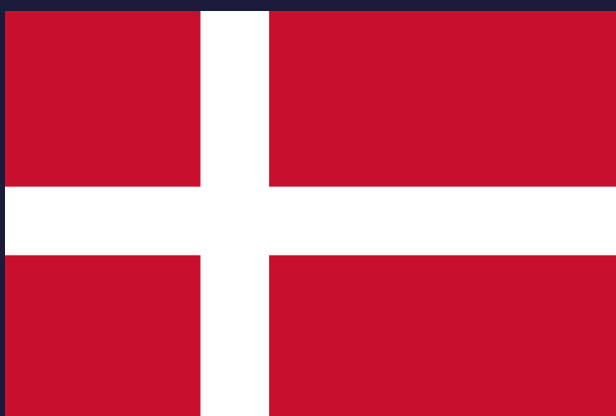
## THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



Greenlanders want to become part of the United States.



Ukraine is drugging injured military personnel and shipping them to Poland, so their organs can be stolen.



A grant is being offered to immigrants at the expense of taxpayers.



Only Germany has agreed to go CO2-neutral by 2045; other countries don't follow this policy.



## 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 2025. Number of respondents: 33.  
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