



European Digital Media Observatory

ISRAEL-IRAN WAR: FOR THE FIRST TIME AI GENERATED CONTENT LEADS THE CHARGE OF FALSE NEWS

Monthly brief no. 49 – EDMO fact-checking network

Published on 16 July 2025

THE WAR BETWEEN ISRAEL AND IRAN IS THE MOST TARGETED TOPIC

The 31 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.502 fact-checking articles in June 2025. Out of these articles, 212 (14%) related to the war between Israel and Iran**; 147 (10%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 82 (5%) on disinformation related to immigration; 77 (5%) on disinformation related to the EU; 77 (5%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; 77 (5%) on climate change-related disinformation; 51 (3%) on the conflict involving Israel and Hamas in Gaza; and 14 (1%) on disinformation about LGBTQ+ and gender issues.

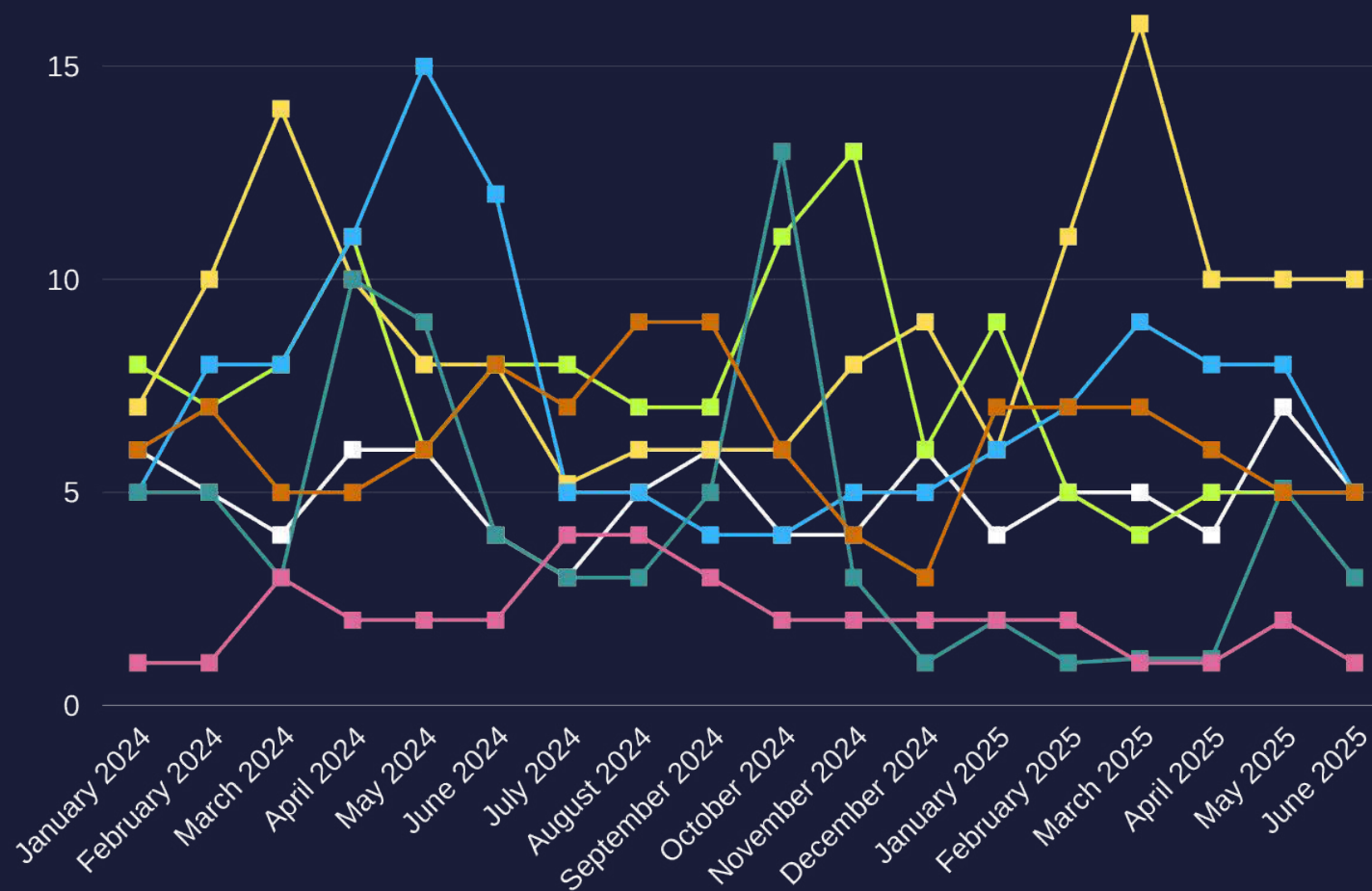
The most targeted topic by disinformation in the month of June has been the 12-day war between Israel and Iran, which also contributed to a major increase in AI-generated disinformation. In trend with the past months, the war in Ukraine also kept getting a lot of attention, with 10% of total false claims. Meanwhile, false stories related to the European Union and the Covid-19 decreased, as did disinformation on the conflict involving Israel and Hamas in Gaza, probably because of the attention shift towards the war with Iran.

The shares of false information about the other topics monitored by these briefs remained stable or showed only minor fluctuations.

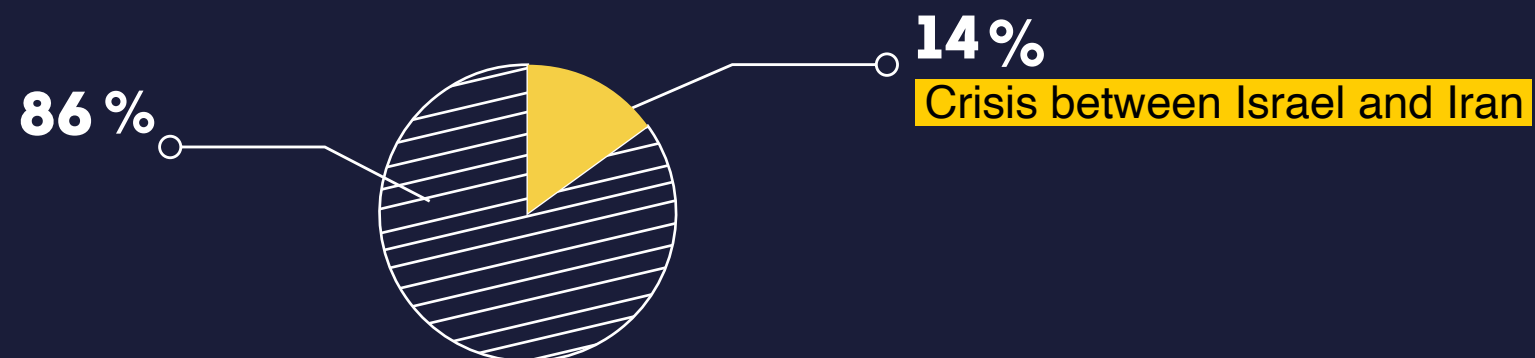
** Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, AFP, APA-Faktencheck, CORRECTIV, Delfi, Demagog.cz, Demagog.pl, Demagog.sk, Deutsche Welle, dpa, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Facta/Pagella Politica, Faktabaari, Faktisk.no, Funky Citizens, Greece Fact Check, INFOVERITAS, Källkritikbyrå, Knack, Lakmusz, Maldita.es, Medizin-transparent.at, Newtral, Oštro, Polígrafo, Pravda Association, Re:Baltica, The Journal, VerificaRTVE, Verificat.*

***Since the data was recorded only for the month of June, it is not included in the line chart*

% of related disinformation on total detected disinformation, by topic

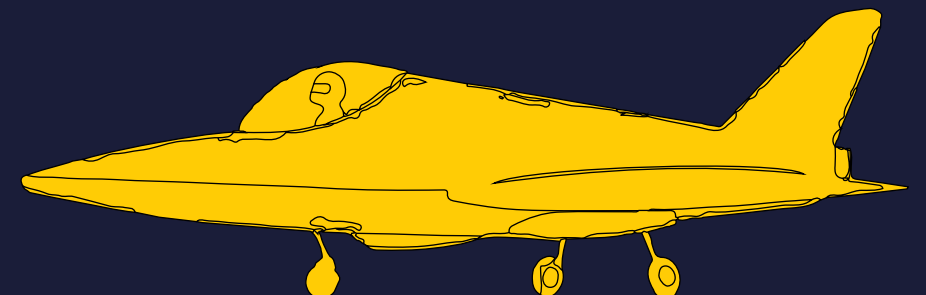


CRISIS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND IRAN - NARRATIVES



Given the extensive media coverage of the 12-day war between Iran and Israel, disinformation narratives in the month of June largely focused on this topic. As reported by Iranian fact-checkers from IFCN signatory Factnameh, and highlighted by data gathered in Europe by EDMO, most false stories aimed at exaggerating the impact of Iran's counter-attack towards Israel, fueling Iranian state propaganda. A claim that circulated widely in the EU was Iran's alleged downing of Israeli F-35, which to this day remains unsubstantiated and denied by Israel. AI-generated videos showed the destruction of Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv; similarly, several pieces of content involved digitally created videos and images portraying destruction in the cities of Tel Aviv and Haifa, but also an old video claiming to show Iran's alleged attack on the Mossad's headquarters.

Other false claims instead focused on Israel's attacks on Iran, with local Iranians allegedly celebrating the strikes, and a fabricated video of a blast in Evin prison in Tehran. Lastly, a widely circulated false story (see slide n.8) involved Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, with the claim that, after bombing Iran, he escaped to Greece.



CRISIS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND IRAN - TECHNIQUES



False content on this conflict registered an unprecedented use of artificial intelligence, contributing to the record of AI-generated content registered by EDMO, which increased to 10% (see slide n.7): in June, videos on this crisis and created with this technology were the most spread content among all EDMO fact-checking organizations (see slide n.8). It is still unclear why this happened, but it is likely due to the availability of technology that allows for the easy and inexpensive creation of realistic AI videos. In addition, the scarcity of real content, partially linked to Israel's request not to disseminate pictures of the affected areas, may have contributed to the circulation of false images.



The use of AI represents a new tactic in conflict-related disinformation. Before it got popular, false stories on ongoing wars were mostly spread with the aid of videos and images taken out of their original context. Although AI is taking over, such content was also shared in the case of the attacks between Israel and Iran, and videos related to other conflicts or events circulated online. Another widely used tactic consisted of CGI (computer-generated imagery) extracted from war videogames, as it happened also recently for a video showing the alleged downing of an Israeli F-35.

THE RECURRING WAVES OF DISINFORMATION ABOUT THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE



The war in Ukraine keeps being one of the most targeted topics by disinformation, with constant reinforcement of the narrative portraying President Volodymyr Zelensky as corrupted as he would allegedly divert Western financial aid for personal gain. In June, a false story claimed that he had purchased a luxury apartment in the skyscraper Burj Khalifa, Dubai, as a gift for his mother. Another interesting case on the war in Ukraine took traction because of an alleged “fact-check” by the Global Fact-Checking Network (GFCN), Russia’s international association of self-proclaimed fact-checking organizations. The organization denied BBC’s claims about systematic Ukrainians’ property seizures in Mariupol, arguing it is legal under international law due to the 2022 referendums — though these were held under Russian military pressure and lack international legitimacy.

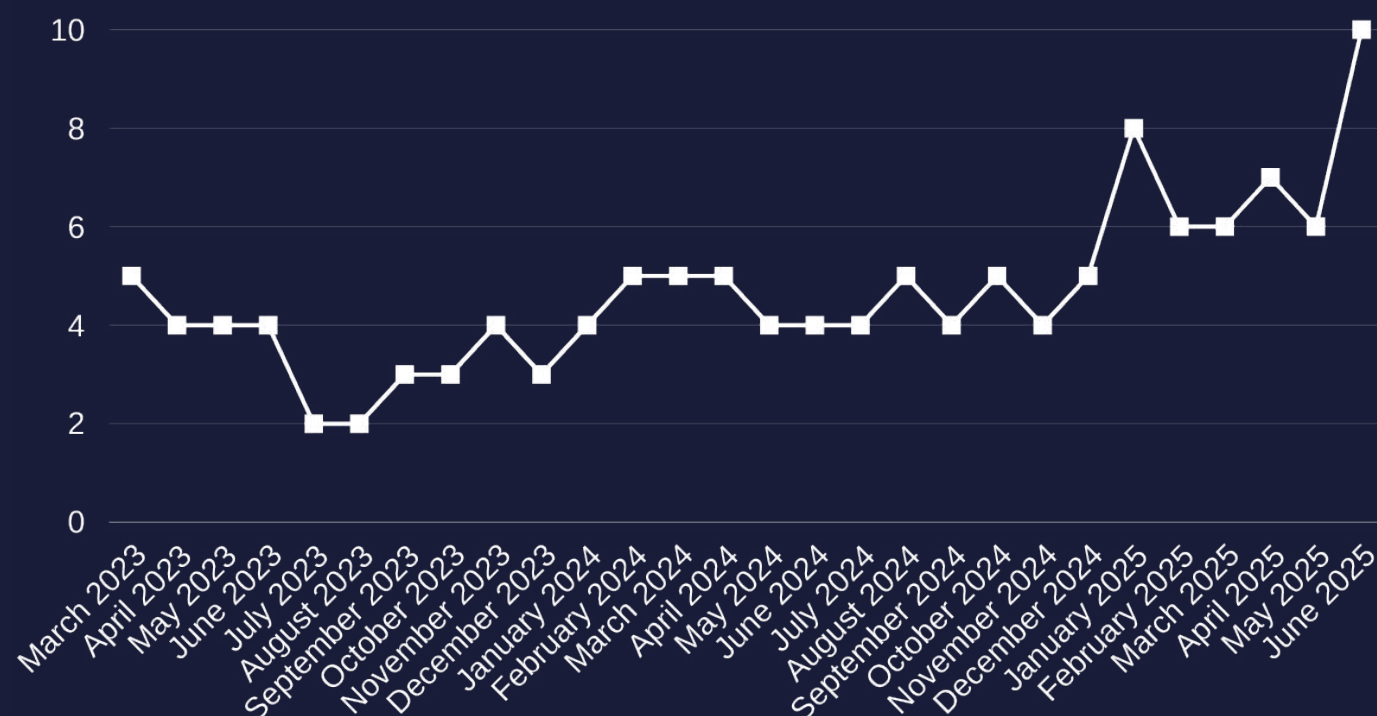
FRANCE TARGETED BY FALSE NEWS IN ROMANIA



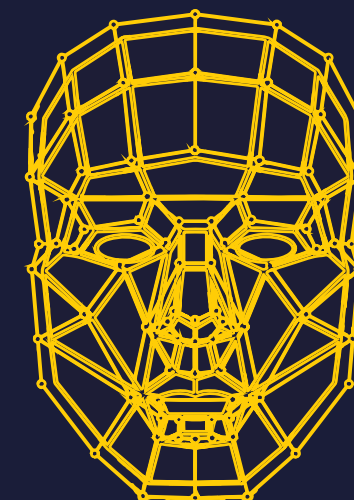
After the annulment of Romanian presidential elections in December 2024, French president Emmanuel Macron was one of the most forceful European leaders in condemning interference to be attributed to Russia. In the elections held in May 2025, the Romanian far-right leader George Simeon later accused Macron of interference and manipulation. Fueled by such narratives, the Romanian disinformation landscape progressively filled with false stories targeting France. Among these, a claim according to which the newly elected Romanian government sold the state-owned energy company Hidroelectrica to France, and a story alleging that France legalized pedophilia and incest.

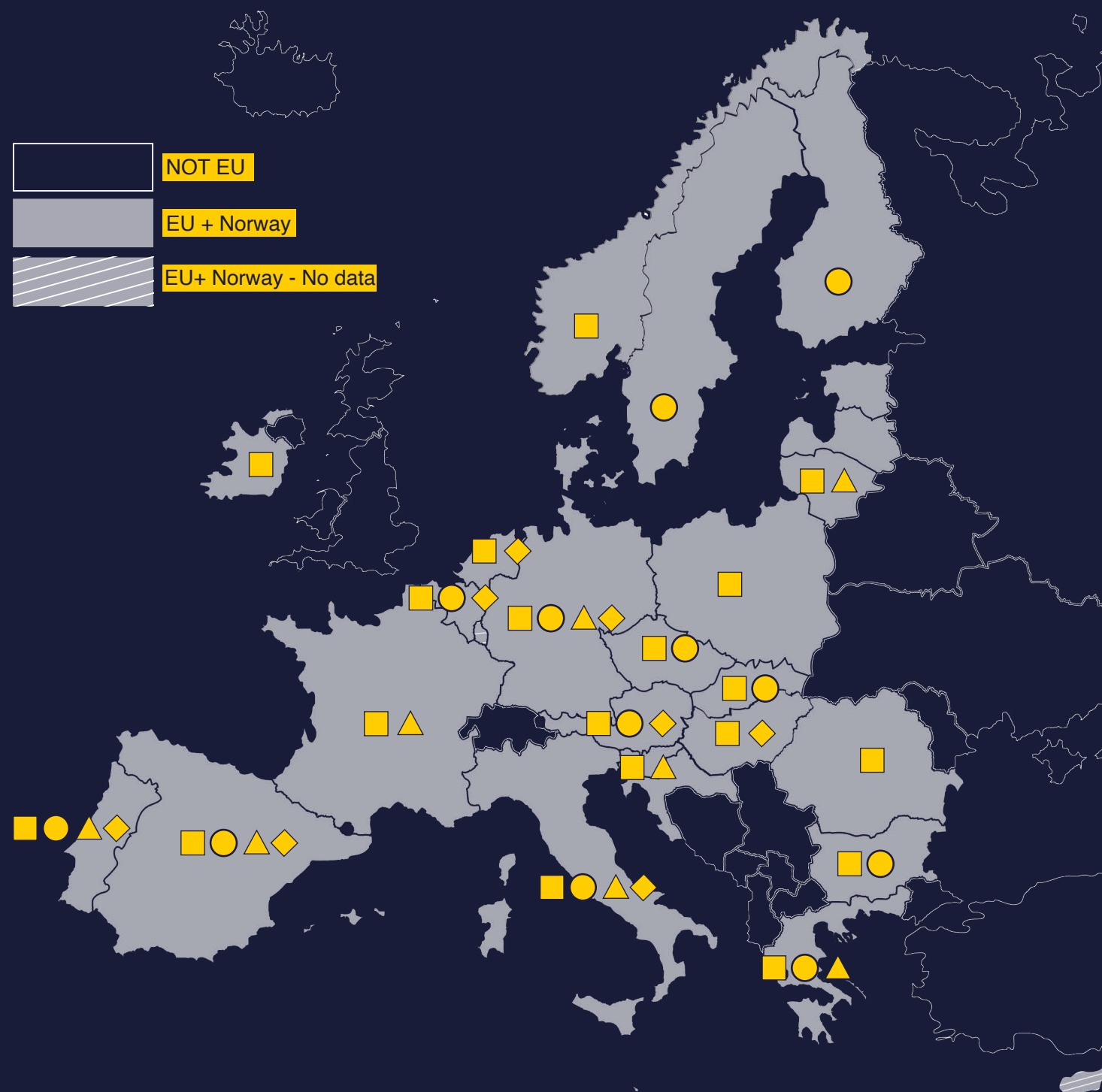
AI-GENERATED DISINFORMATION

The percentage of disinformation stories using AI-generated content increased significantly in June, reaching an unprecedented record. Out of 1.502 fact-checking articles, 147 addressed the use of this technology in disinformation, representing 10% of the total.



The increase of AI generated content, as outlined in slide n.4, is to be attributed to the war between Israel and Iran. Nonetheless, multiple other examples of false claims depicted through AI have spread, such as a widely circulated one portraying Greta Thunberg drinking a cocktail on a Freedom Flotilla boat (see slide n.8) and the AI fabricated content alleging an affair between the French and Ukrainian presidents. In Latvia, instead, deepfake news services pretending to be Latvian public television featured well-known doctors claiming that Covid vaccines killed people and caused terrible consequences.





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

- Al-generated videos about the conflict between Israel and Iran
- Al-generated image of Greta Thunberg drinking a cocktail on the Freedom Flotilla boat
- ▲ Benjamin Netanyahu escaped to Greece
- ◆ Disinformation on the protests against ICE in Los Angeles (e.g., they were staged)

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



The Romanian government has sold to France the state-owned energy company Hidroelectrica.



A violent attack against an actor in Lisbon was perpetrated by an individual from Nepal who has nothing to do with the far right.



The city of Utrecht plans to ban private car ownership in a policy promoted by the World Economic Forum



Czech government plans to grant citizenship to 2.5 million Sudeten Germans to win the upcoming election



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 June 2025. Number of respondents: 31. Main editors of this brief: Lucia Bertoldini and Tommaso Canetta, Pagella Politica/Facta.
For further information: t.canetta@pagellapolitica.it.



EDMO has received funding
from the European Union
under Contract number: “LC-01935415”