



European Digital Media Observatory

EXTREMIST FORCES KEEP FLOODING EUROPE WITH DISIN FORMATION ABOUT UKRAINE, MIGRANTS AND THE EU

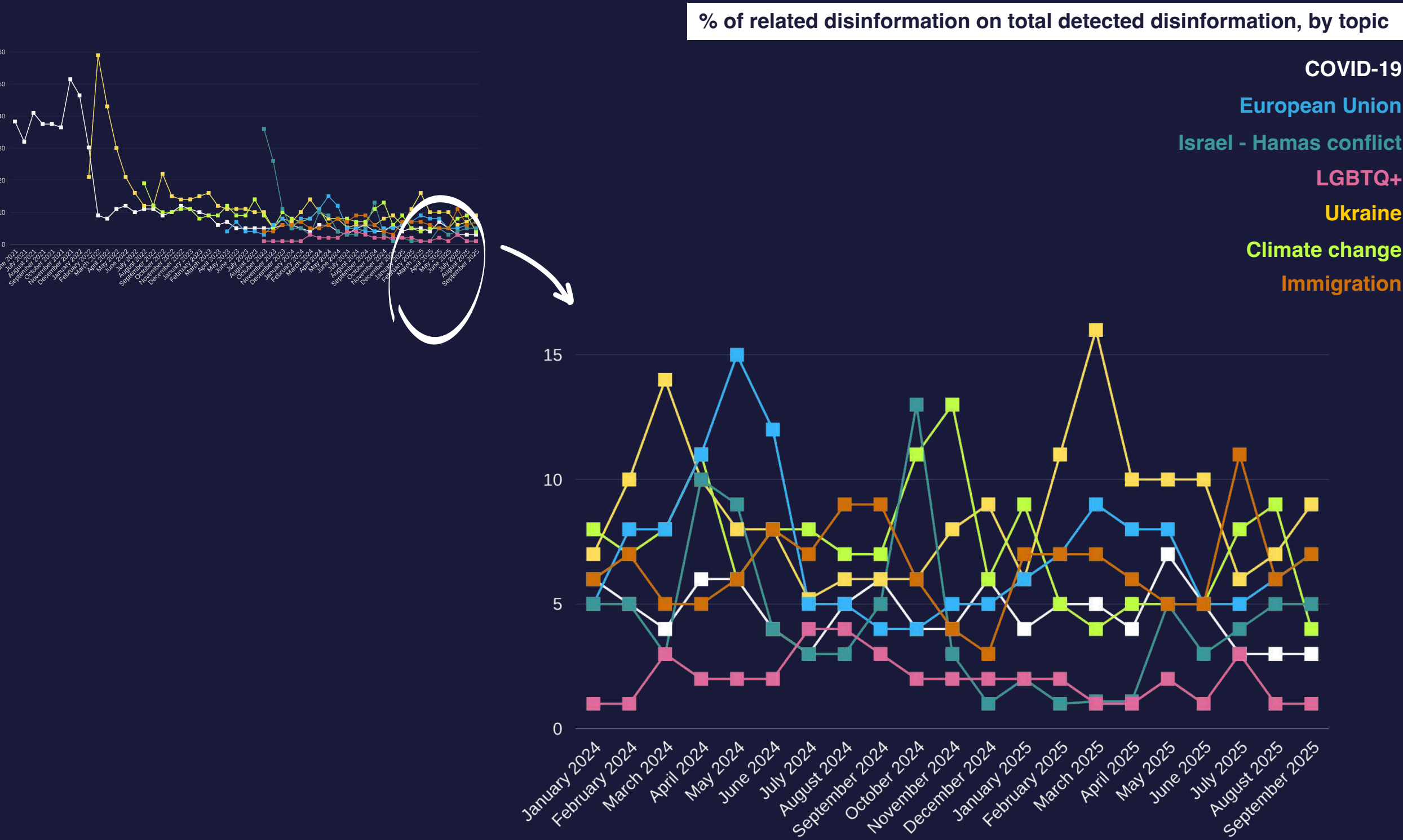
Monthly brief no. 52 – EDMO fact-checking network

DISINFORMATION IN SEPTEMBER FOCUSES ON UKRAINE, IMMIGRATION AND THE EU

The 31 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.517 fact-checking articles in September 2025. Out of these articles, 134 (9%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 107 (7%) on disinformation related to immigration; 100 (7%) on disinformation related to the EU; 78 (5%) on the conflict involving Israel and Hamas in Gaza; 65 (4%) focused on climate change-related disinformation; 42 (3%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; and 20 (1%) on disinformation about LGBTQ+ and gender issues.

September has seen an increase by two percentage points in false stories related to the war in Ukraine. At the same time, disinformation concerning immigration and the European Union rose by one percentage point.

With summer coming to an end, false news about climate change has substantially decreased. Disinformation about the other topics monitored by EDMO briefs remained stable.



* Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, Agence France-Presse (AFP), APA, CORRECTIV, Delfi Lithuania, Delfi Estonia, Demagog.cz, Demagog.pl, Demagog.sk, Deutsche Welle, dpa, Funky Citizens, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Fact Check Cyprus, Facta/Pagella Politica, Factcheck Vlaanderen, Greece Fact Check, Källkritikbyrån, Knack, Lakmusz, Maldita.es, Oštro.si, Polígrafo, Pravda Association, Provereno, Re:Baltica, TjekDet, The Journal, VerificaRTVE, Verificat.

DISINFORMATION ON UKRAINE, EU AND MIGRANTS INTERTWINE/1



The increase of false content on the war in Ukraine can be traced back to multiple factors. Firstly, hybrid warfare events of drones or jets flying over EU countries have been used to spread false stories that discharge Russia and frame the EU or Ukraine as warmongering actors. Secondly, elections in Moldova and Czech Republic were targeted by pro-Russian disinformation campaigns spreading fear of an escalation of the war, should pro-EU parties win, and featuring false stories on Ukrainian refugees. Lastly, the ongoing narrative that frames Zelensky as corrupt was widely spread, for example with a viral fabricated TV service video on his alleged assets.



Elections in Moldova and Czech Republic contributed to fueling disinformation targeting the EU as well. The Union was portrayed as an anti-democratic dictatorship that censors free speech and cancels elections. The escalation of the war in Ukraine also charged the narrative that depicts the EU and its countries as being on the side of the warmongers.

DISINFORMATION ON UKRAINE, EU AND MIGRANTS INTERTWINE/2

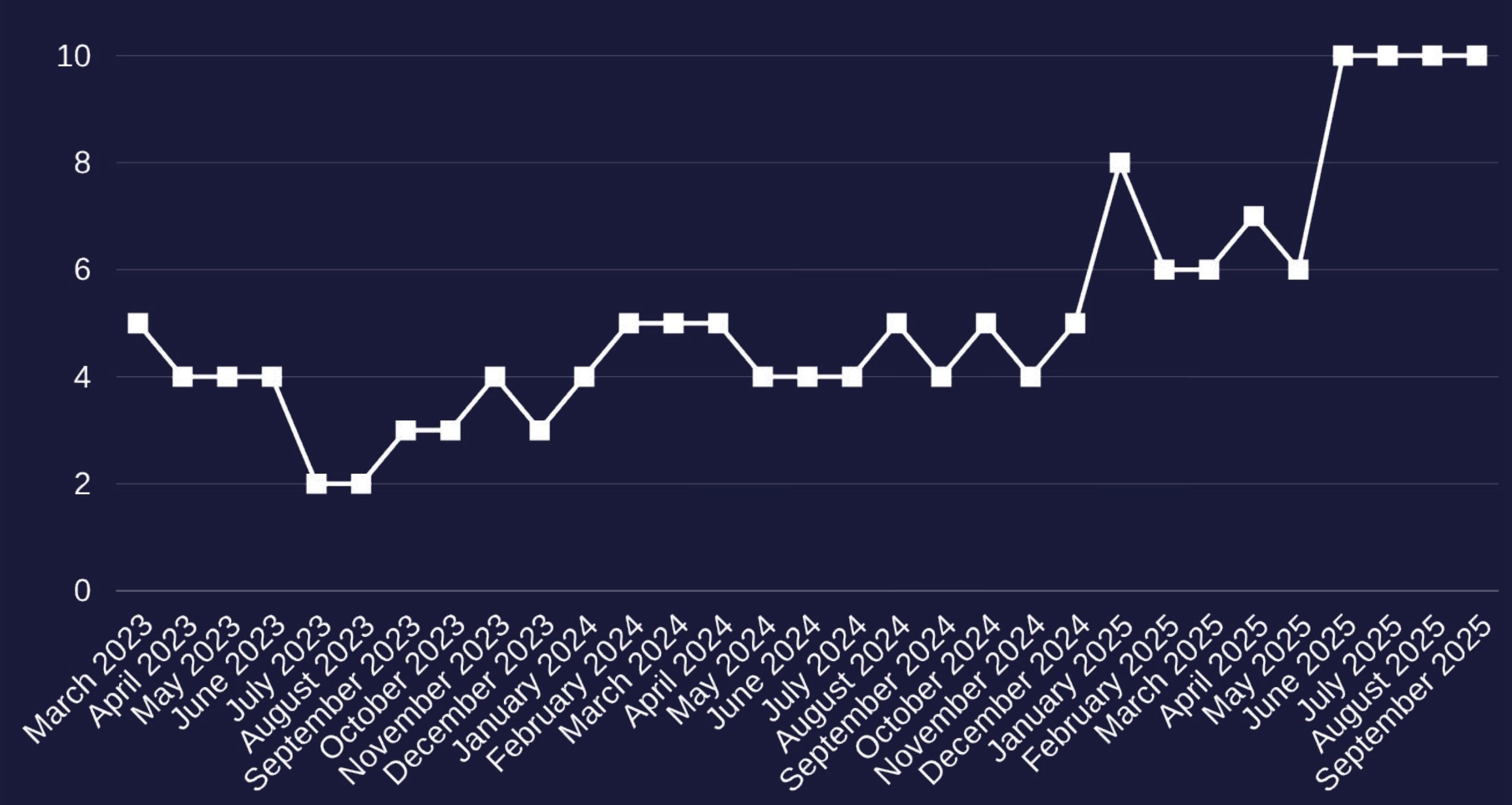
During the month of September, EDMO fact-checkers recorded a surge in the circulation of disinformation content targeting not only Ukrainian refugees but also migrants and foreigners, especially Muslim people. This was triggered by various factors. Notably, the anti-immigration march in London on September 13th fueled the unfounded narrative of the “great replacement”. This pushed the circulation of many false stories, for example about the implementation of Sharia law in Austria, the alleged conspiracy theory against the white man in the UK (supported by Elon Musk and US President Donald Trump), the arson of churches in Europe and so on. Secondary targets of these stories were often Europe and European Countries. Moreover, an extra push to the circulation of Islamophobic content was probably a side effect of media’s attention on the crisis in Gaza, and there were also various false stories on pro-Palestinian activists and their alleged extremism.

As shown by false stories and narratives outlined in these slides, various extremist forces (pro-Russia, pro-Israel, European far-right, Maga) often have common targets. Specifically, Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees; Muslim people; migrants; the EU and certain European countries. These disinformation narratives do not stand alone, as they often overlap, intertwine and reinforce each other.

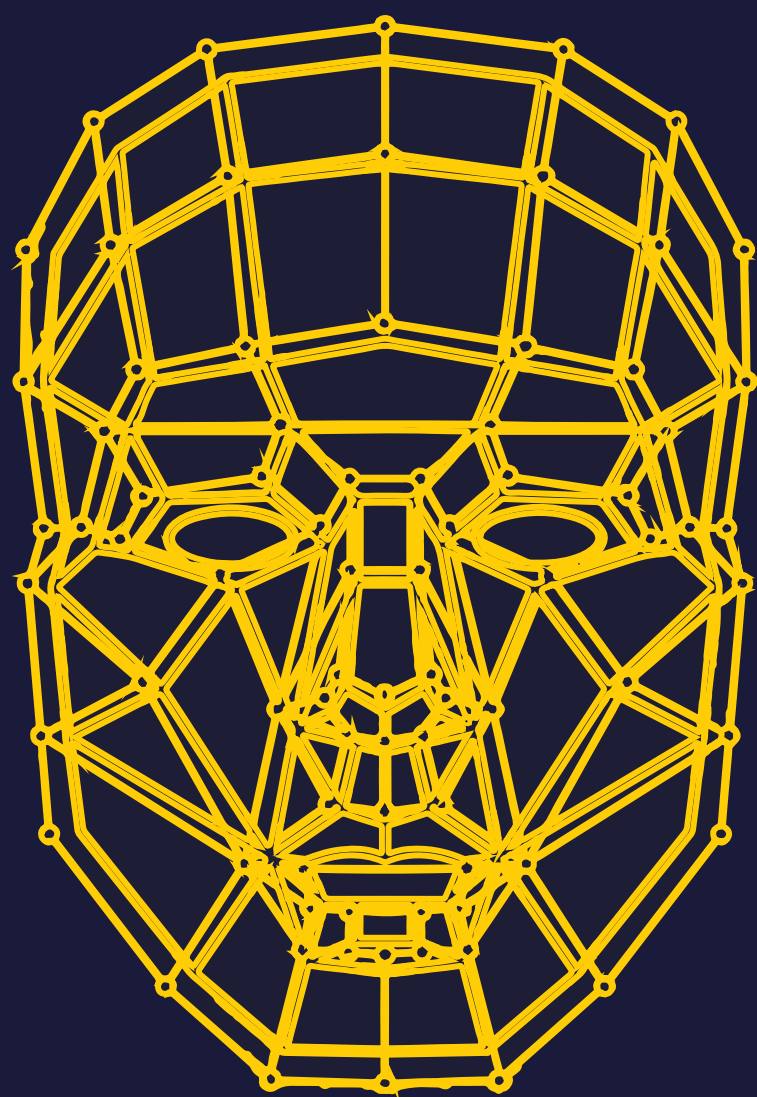


AI-GENERATED DISINFORMATION REMAINS STABLE

The percentage of disinformation stories using AI-generated remained stable along with previous months’ record. Out of 1.517 fact-checking articles, 145 addressed the use of this technology in disinformation, representing 10% of the total.

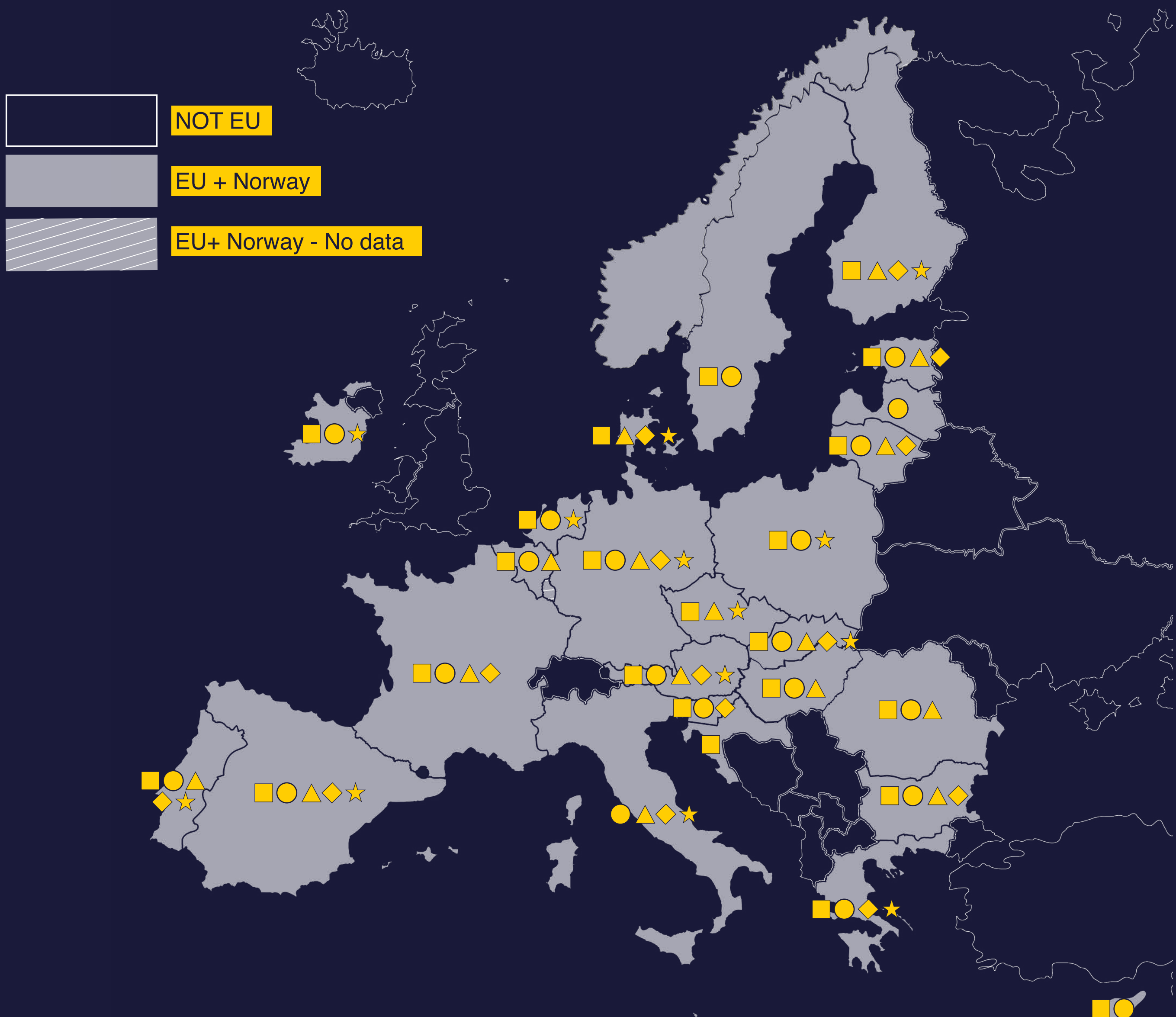


In the days after the assassination of far-right activist Charlie Kirk in the USA, manipulated images started spreading on social media, often relating to the identity of the attacker. AI-generated content was used across multiple countries to portray Kirk as a “martyr of Christianity”, who was loved by many famous people with different political ideals. However, the activist was known for his extreme and polarising views, and the viral AI-generated content shared in the days after his death contributed to exacerbating the ongoing political polarisation.

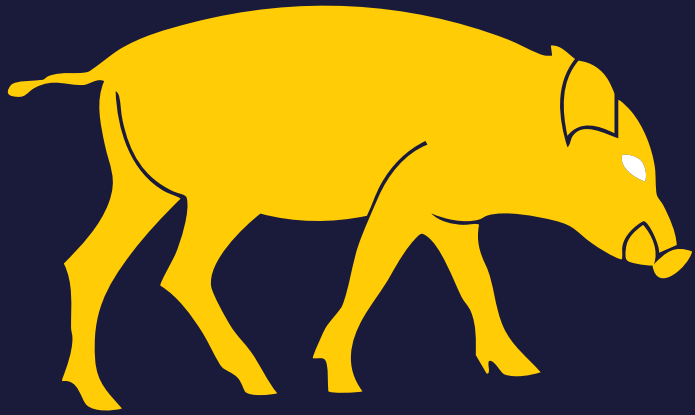


THE FIVE FALSE STORIES WITH THE WIDEST CIRCULATION IN THE EU IN SEPTEMBER, BASED ON THE FACT-CHECKERS' REPORTS,

- False news about proven link between paracetamol and autism
- Charlie Kirk: false news/images etc. with vips paying tribute to him
- ▲ Moldova elections, evidence of pro-EU forces rigging the election
- ◆ Global Sumud Flotilla: false images/videos exaggerating its size
- ★ UK police seized a girl's phone for viewing a post



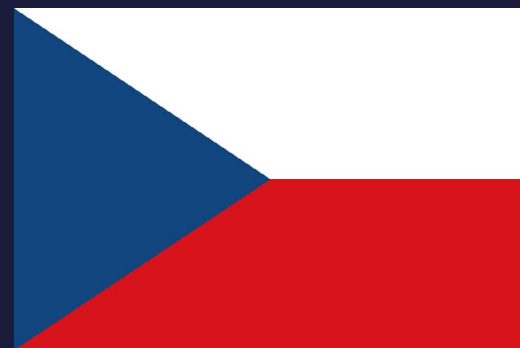
THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



African swine fever is a EU scheme to destroy Latvian livestock farming and force the country to buy food from other countries.



According to the government's plan, Czechs will pay Ukrainian families for their children to attend school since half of them don't go.



Moldovan law enforcement agencies arrested all opposition party leaders before elections.



Muslims and illegal immigrants are setting fire to churches and attacking Christianity.



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 September 2025. Number of respondents: 33.

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”