



European Digital Media Observatory

# **CRISES IN THE USA, VENEZUELA, GREENLAND AND IRAN FUEL DISINFORMATION IN EUROPE**

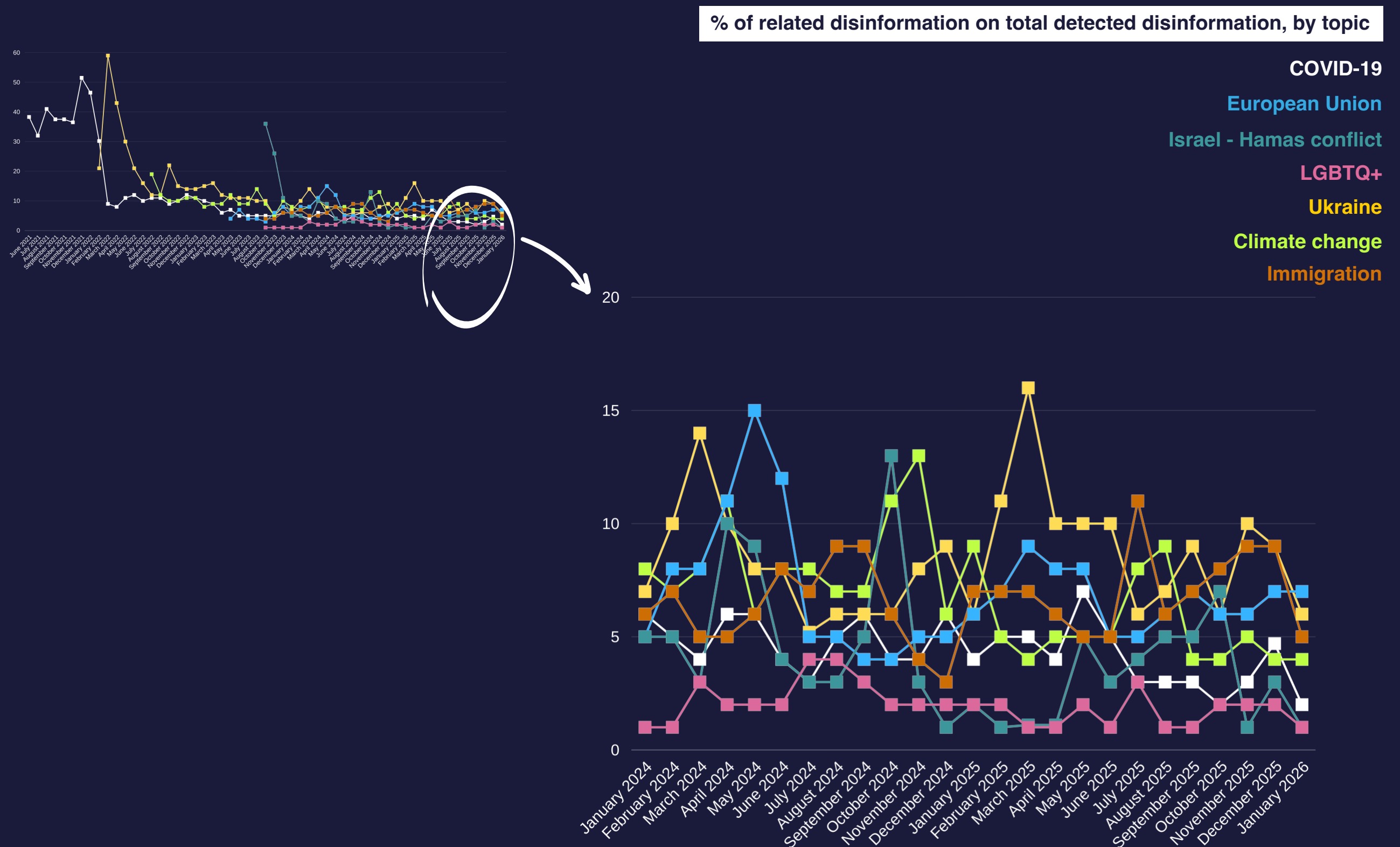
Monthly brief no. 56 – EDMO fact-checking network

## THE EU IS THE MOST TARGETED TOPIC IN JANUARY

The 34 organizations\* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.633 fact-checking articles in January 2026. Out of these articles, 112 (7%) focused on disinformation related to the EU; 96 (6%) on Ukraine-related disinformation; 88 (5%) on disinformation related to immigration; 59 (4%) on climate change-related disinformation; 25 (2%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; 12 (1%) on the crisis in Gaza; and 12 (1%) on disinformation about LGBTQ+ and gender issues.

During the month of January, the most targeted topic by disinformation was the European Union. Meanwhile false news related to the war in Ukraine and to immigration decreased respectively by three and four percentage points.

The share of disinformation on the other topics monitored by these briefs remained stable, with only minor fluctuations.

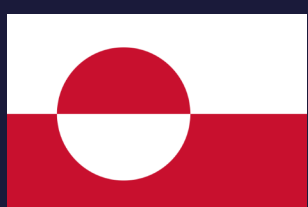


\* Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, AFP, APA, CORRECTIV, Deutsche Welle, Delfi Lithuania, Delfi Estonia, Demagog.org.pl, Demagog.cz, Demagog.sk, dpa, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Fact Check Cyprus, Factcheck Vlaanderen, Faktabaari, Funky Citizens, Greece Fact Check, INFOVERITAS, Källkritikbyrån, Knack, Lakmusz, Maldita, Neutral, Oštro, Pagella Politica/Facta, Polígrafo, Pravda Association Poland, Provereno, Re:Baltica, The Journal FactCheck, TjekDet, Verificat, VRT NWS.

## POLITICAL CRISES AROUND THE WORLD FUEL FALSE NEWS



The year 2026 started with intense international media attention on the crisis in Venezuela, where the United States launched a military operation - including airstrikes - and captured the President Nicolas Maduro. The event fueled the spread of videos and images (AI or out of context) that exaggerated the support of Venezuelans to the abduction, misrepresented Maduro's imprisonment or distorted the alleged crimes of his regime.



The diplomatic crisis between Europe and the U.S. over Greenland immediately followed the Venezuela-related crisis and quickly became a heated topic in international news. A wave of false claims and misleading content started circulating, often echoing U.S. administration talking points and actions. Sensationalist false news - such as fabricated reports about Russia joining Greenland's defence, or the U.S. withdrawing its air bases from Europe - along with misleading attacks targeting European countries (for example, claims that German troops withdrew from Greenland in the fear of US tariffs) contributed to the information disorder around the topic. After President Trump's speech in Davos - where he backpedaled from previous aggressive stances, even though he made multiple false or misleading statements about Greenland and other issues - the spread of disinformation about this issue diminished significantly, and the share of false claims related to Greenland over the total detected disinformation remained relatively low (3% in January according to EDMO's dedicated monitoring).



Mass protests broke out in late December 2025 in Iran against the Ayatollah regime, and in early January related disinformation started spreading in Europe, with videos and images allegedly depicting the protests. AI-generated content was widely used to generate (and monetize) false footage featuring protesters, and real content often circulated out of their original context: for example videos of incidents in Greece dating back to November 2025 were presented as depicting Iran's protests. The media's attention to Iran brought also to the circulation of pro-regime disinformation in Europe, for example that women in Iran allegedly benefit from extensive rights.



In the United States, a political crisis was sparked after federal immigration agents from ICE killed Renee Nicole Good and, on a different occasion, Alex Pretti in Minneapolis. These incidents triggered widespread protests and social media uproar that contributed to the diffusion of false information in Europe as well, especially related to the identity of the victims and their lives as well as the identity of the shooter, whose facial features were generated with artificial intelligence. AI was also used to generate videos purportedly depicting the scene of the killing, spreading disinformation on the dynamics of the event and staging non-existent confrontations between citizens, and even policemen, against ICE agents.

## **DISINFORMATION ON THE EUROPEAN UNION**

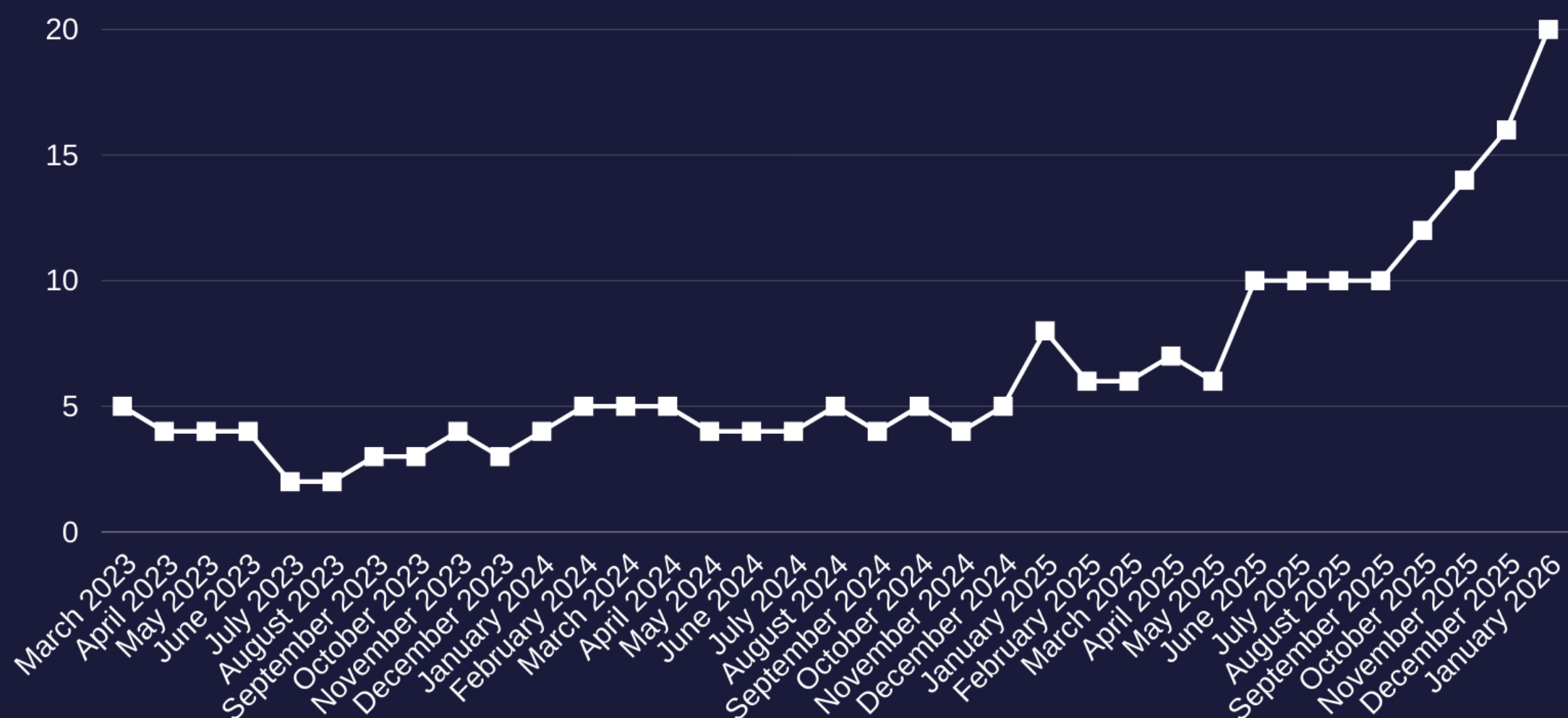
The European Union is a recurring target of disinformation circulating in Europe. This disinformation stream never fell under 5% of the total detected disinformation in the last 12 months, and in January 2026 was the highest among the ones monitored by EDMO. This probably depends on the adoption of the Euro by Bulgaria and on the signing of the EU-Mercosur Agreement, which sparked farmers' protests in various countries. The corruption scandal involving ex-Vice President of European Commission Federica Mogherini also contributed to the circulation of false claims on various European representatives

More in detail, claims that newly printed "Bulgarian euros" can't be used in countries such as Germany have been debunked in Bulgaria, while across Europe false news circulated in relation to the specifications of the EU-Mercosur agreement as well as disinformation on the alleged repression of the related farmers' protests. Artificial intelligence was widely used to generate images and videos of the protests, such as the one of a herd of bulls being directed against the police in France. Meanwhile, European top institutional figures, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, EU High Representative Kaja Kallas, and EU Central Bank President Christine Lagarde, were targeted by false claims.

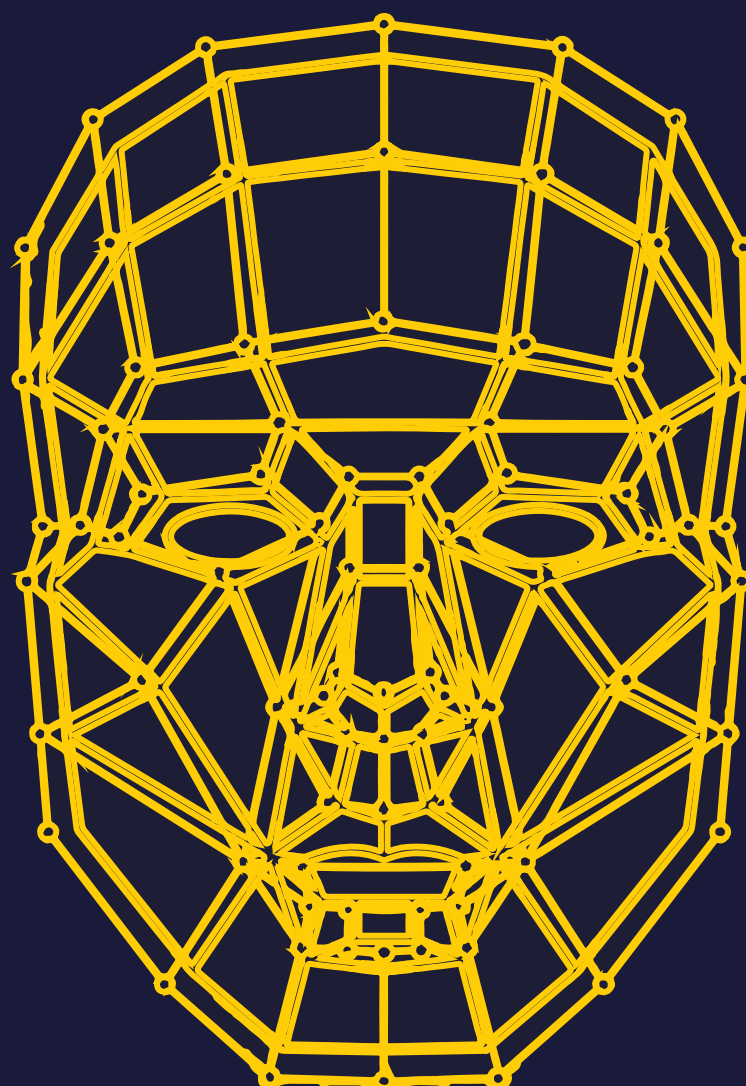


## A NEW RECORD: ONE VERIFIED FALSE CLAIM OUT OF FIVE IS GENERATED WITH AI

The share of disinformation content created or manipulated with AI has reached a new record. Out of 1.633 fact-checking articles, 325 focused on such content, representing 20% of the total.

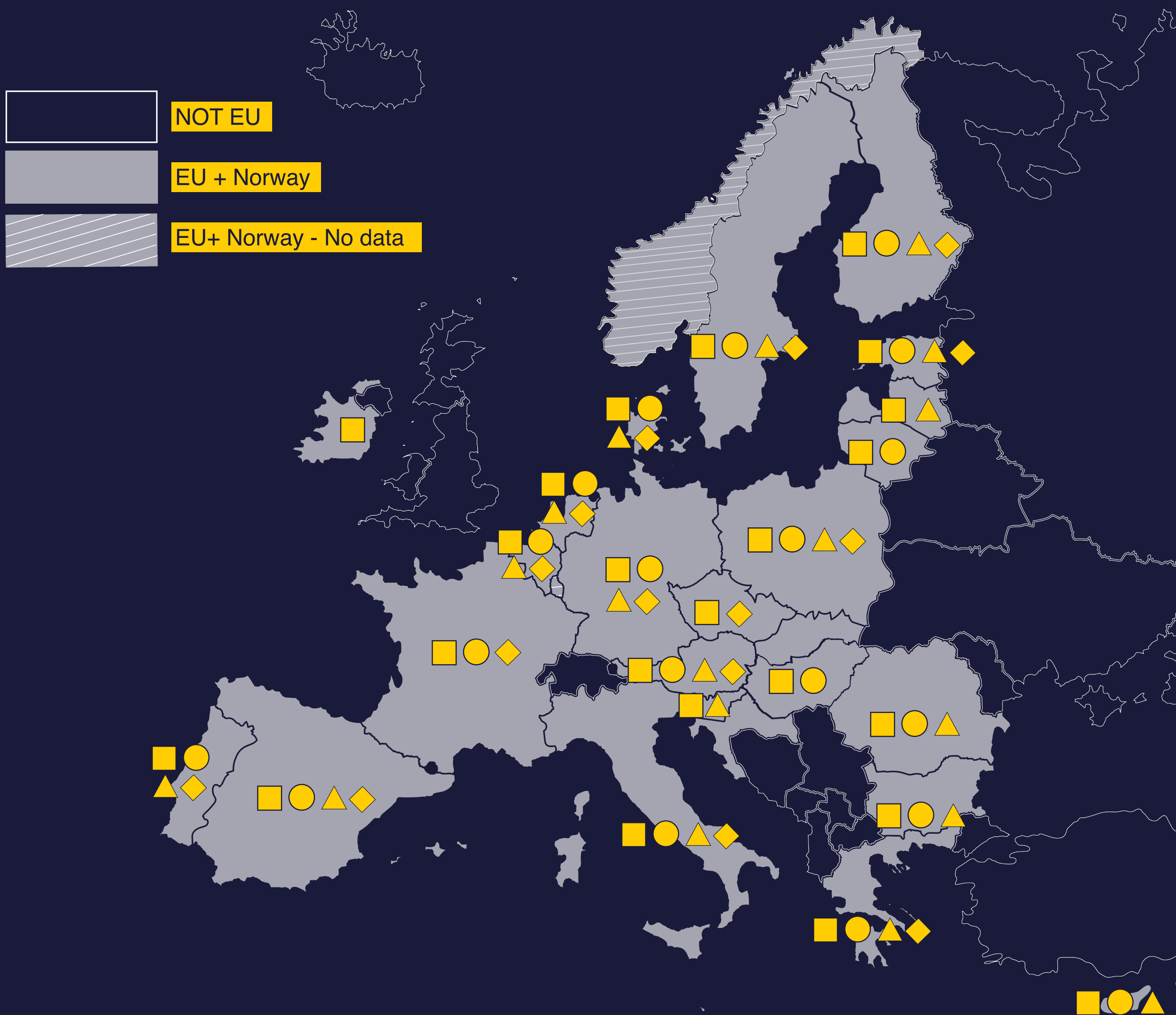


The share of AI-generated disinformation has steadily increased over the past months. As highlighted in the previous slides, the crises in Venezuela, Iran, USA as well as the farmers' protests in the EU have fueled the generation of misleading AI content. Specifically, Maldita's investigation unraveled a network of TikTok accounts exploiting political polarization to monetize their content, with AI videos showing protests in Iran, Venezuela, or in support of Palestine. The train accident in Spain, as well as the extraordinary snowfall in Kamchatka, Russia, were also the object of AI generated content production: this suggests a trend of using AI as a monetization tool that relies on exploiting breaking news to share emotional and false content.



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

- Videos and images (AI or out of context) of Venezuelans celebrating Maduro's capture
- Videos and images (AI or out of context) about recent protests in Iran
- ▲ Videos and images (AI or out of context) about protests against ICE in the USA
- ◆ False news about the dynamic of Renee Nicole Good's killing by ICE and the identity of the people involved



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



A misleading video has turned Meloni into an anti-American icon on social media across half the world.



PM Viktor Orbán says that Brussels wants to abolish the Hungarian 13th month pension benefit and other support schemes.



MEP Danuše Nerudová claimed that Russia is "bombarding" Czechia with freezing weather in an attempt to destabilize the country.



Spain's migrant regularization plan will enable around 500,000 people to vote in the 2027 general elections.



## **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 January 2026. Number of respondents: 34. Main editors of this brief: Lucia Bertoldini and Tommaso Canetta, Pagella Politica/Facta.

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