



European Digital Media Observatory

DISINFORMATION USES THE OLYMPICS TO SPREAD ANTI-UKRAINIAN FALSE NEWS

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THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND IMMIGRATION ARE THE MOST TARGETED TOPICS IN FEBRUARY

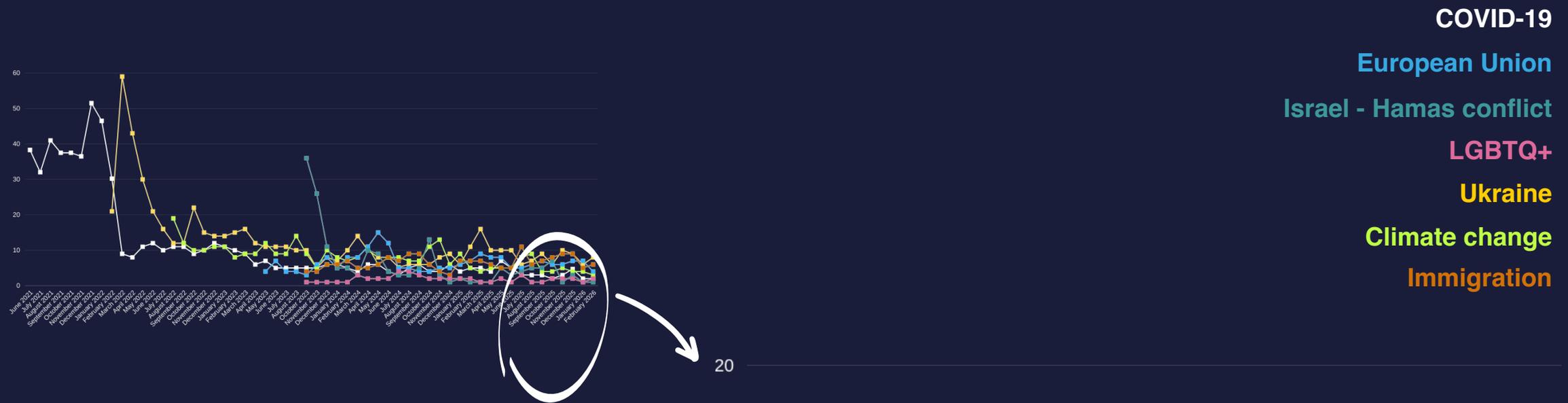
The 32 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.253 fact-checking articles in February 2026. Out of these articles, 106 (8%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 75 (6%) on disinformation related to immigration; 49 (4%) on disinformation related to the EU; 40 (3%) on climate change-related disinformation; 28 (2%) on disinformation about LGBTQ+ and gender issues; 23 (2%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; and 11 (1%) on the crisis in Gaza.

During the month of February, false news related to the war in Ukraine increased by two percentage points. This made it the most targeted topic by disinformation, shortly followed by the false news on immigration, that slightly increased compared to January. Meanwhile, disinformation targeting the EU decreased by three percentage points.

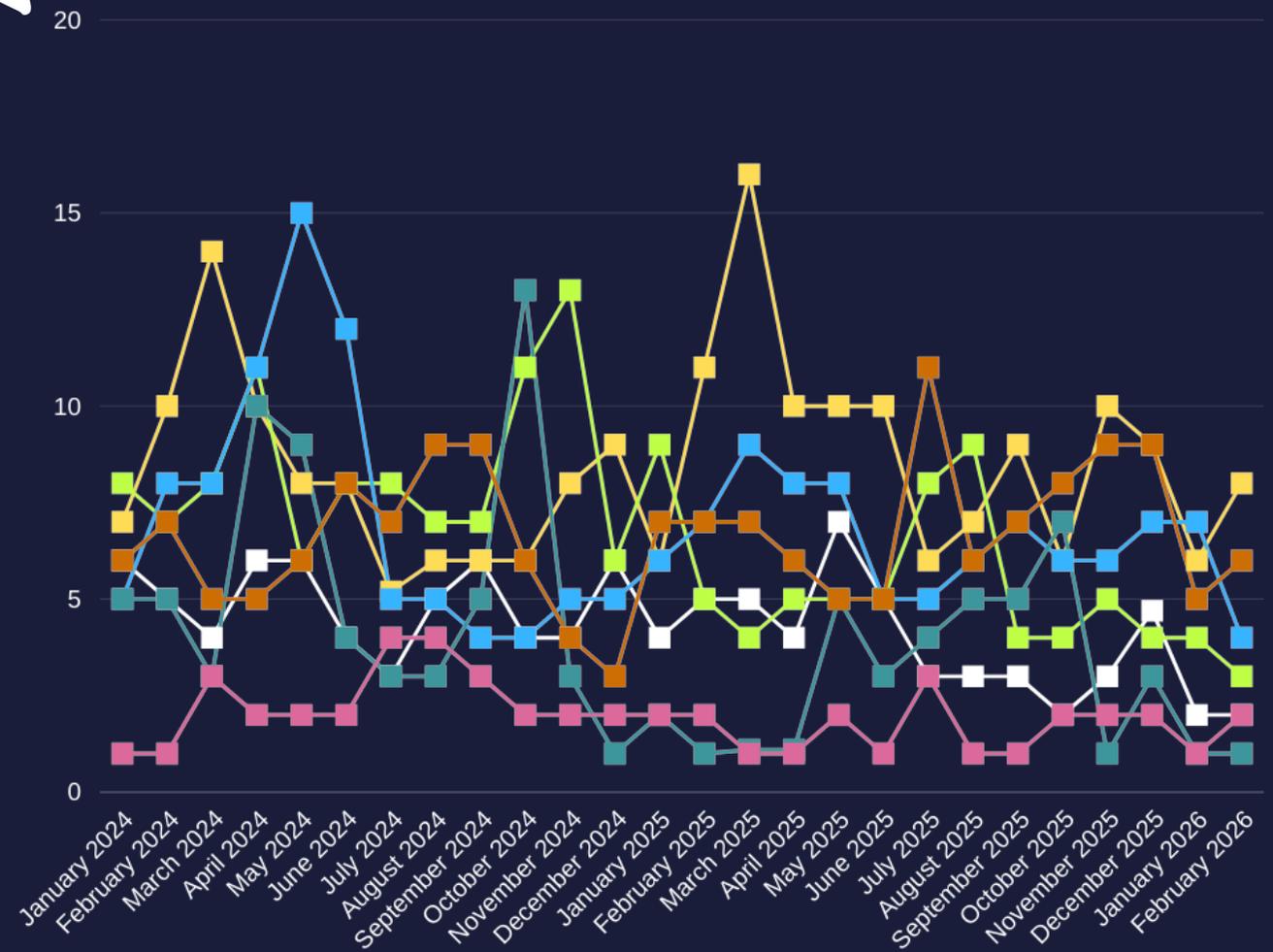
The share of disinformation on the other topics monitored by these briefs remained stable, with only minor fluctuations.

** Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, AFP, APA-Faktencheck, CORRECTIV, Delfi Lithuania, Delfi Estonia, Demagog.org.pl, Demagog.cz, Demagog.sk, Deutsche Welle, Ellinika Hoaxes, FactReview, Factcheck Vlaanderen, Faktabaari, Faktisk, Factual, INFOVERITAS, Källkritikbyrån, Maldita.es, Medicinski potvrđeno, Medizin transparent, Newtral, Oštro, Pagella Politica/Facta, Polígrafo, Pravda Association Poland, BNT Provereno, Re:Baltica, The Journal FactCheck, TjekDet, Verificat, VerificaRTVE.*

% of related disinformation on total detected disinformation, by topic



- COVID-19
- European Union
- Israel - Hamas conflict
- LGBTQ+
- Ukraine
- Climate change
- Immigration



THE WINTER OLYMPICS: AN OCCASION TO SPREAD ANTI-UKRAINIAN DISINFORMATION

Four years after Russia's invasion, the war in Ukraine is still a constant target of pro-Russian disinformation actors in Europe. The Winter Olympics of Milan-Cortina, from which Russia was excluded, were used as an occasion to spread false news on Ukrainian athletes. False claims circulated that the Ukrainian delegation was housed separately from other participants, and that many athletes did not return back to Ukraine after the games. Artificial intelligence (AI) was extensively employed to create disinformation, with false images and videos of athletes as well as the impersonation of trusted European news outlets.

Throughout Europe, disinformation actors also spread classic anti-Ukrainian narratives, alleging that Ukrainian refugees are responsible for the recent train crash in Spain or for setting an apartment on fire in Poland. In various countries, unfounded news circulated that a teenager in Ukraine attended several funeral ceremonies, allegedly proving he is a so-called "crisis actor". AI was also used to spread similar recurrent narratives, with claims about purported pro-Russian protests in Ukrainian cities or Ukrainian soldiers allegedly surrendering to Russian forces.



THE COMEBACK OF DISINFORMATION ON THE EPSTEIN FILES

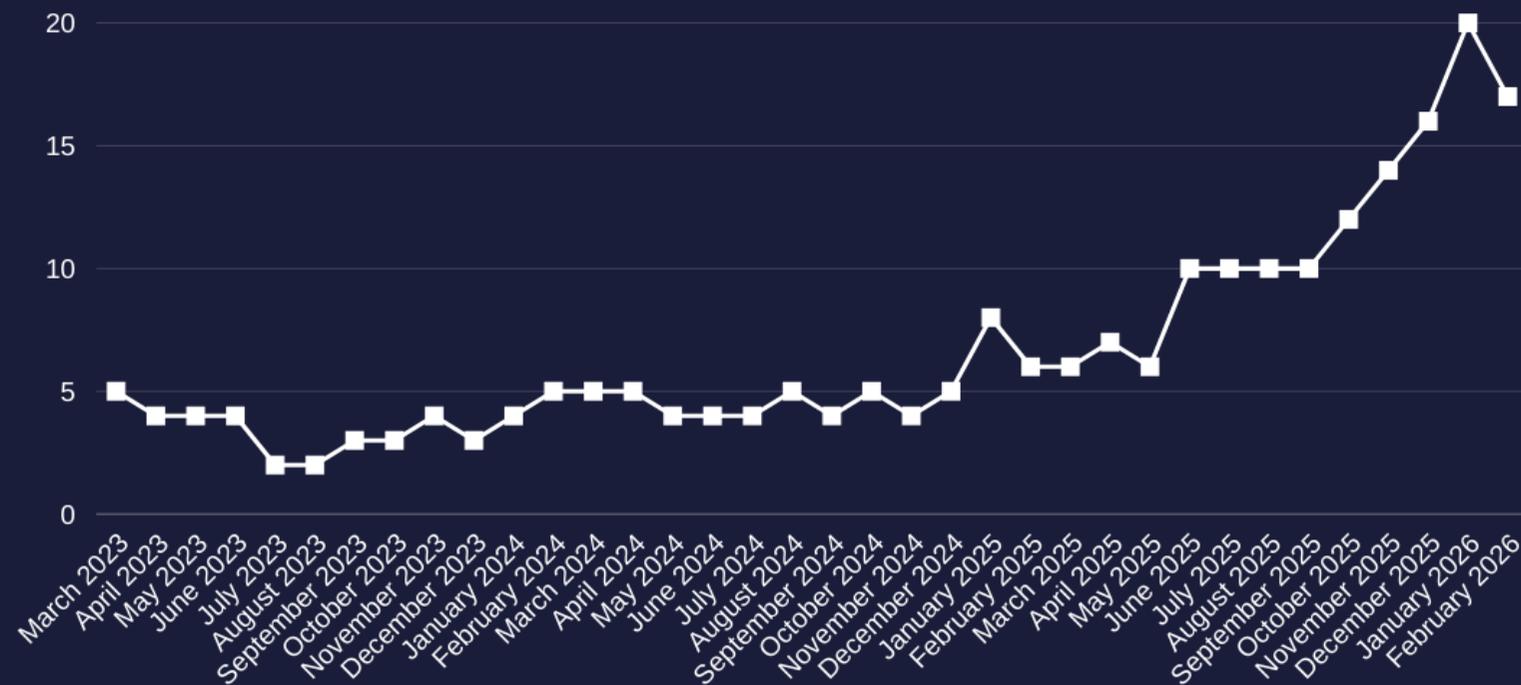
After January 30th, the day when the US Department of Justice released new documents relating to Jeffrey Epstein's court case, disinformation on their content started spreading throughout the Internet. AI was used to generate compromising (and baseless) images of leaders together with Epstein: on an international level, the most viral ones feature NYC mayor Zohran Mamdani as well as Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky.

In Europe, such disinformation took a local turn. In many countries, local leaders or prominent figures were targeted. In Germany, a false image depicted chancellor Friedrich Merz together with Epstein. A similar fabricated picture circulated in Slovakia with politician Ivan Korčok, and in Ireland with Taoiseach Micheál Martin. Allegations of involvement with Epstein's affair spread across countries targeting - among others - PM Pedro Sánchez in Spain, actor Roberto Benigni in Italy, and U2 singer Bono in Ireland.

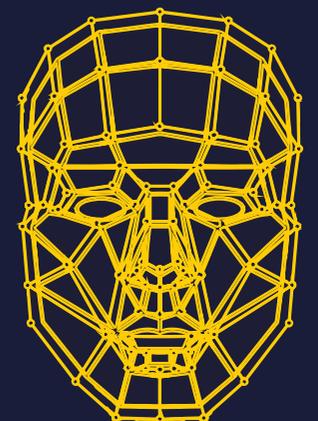


THE SHARE OF AI-GENERATED DISINFORMATION STAYS HIGH

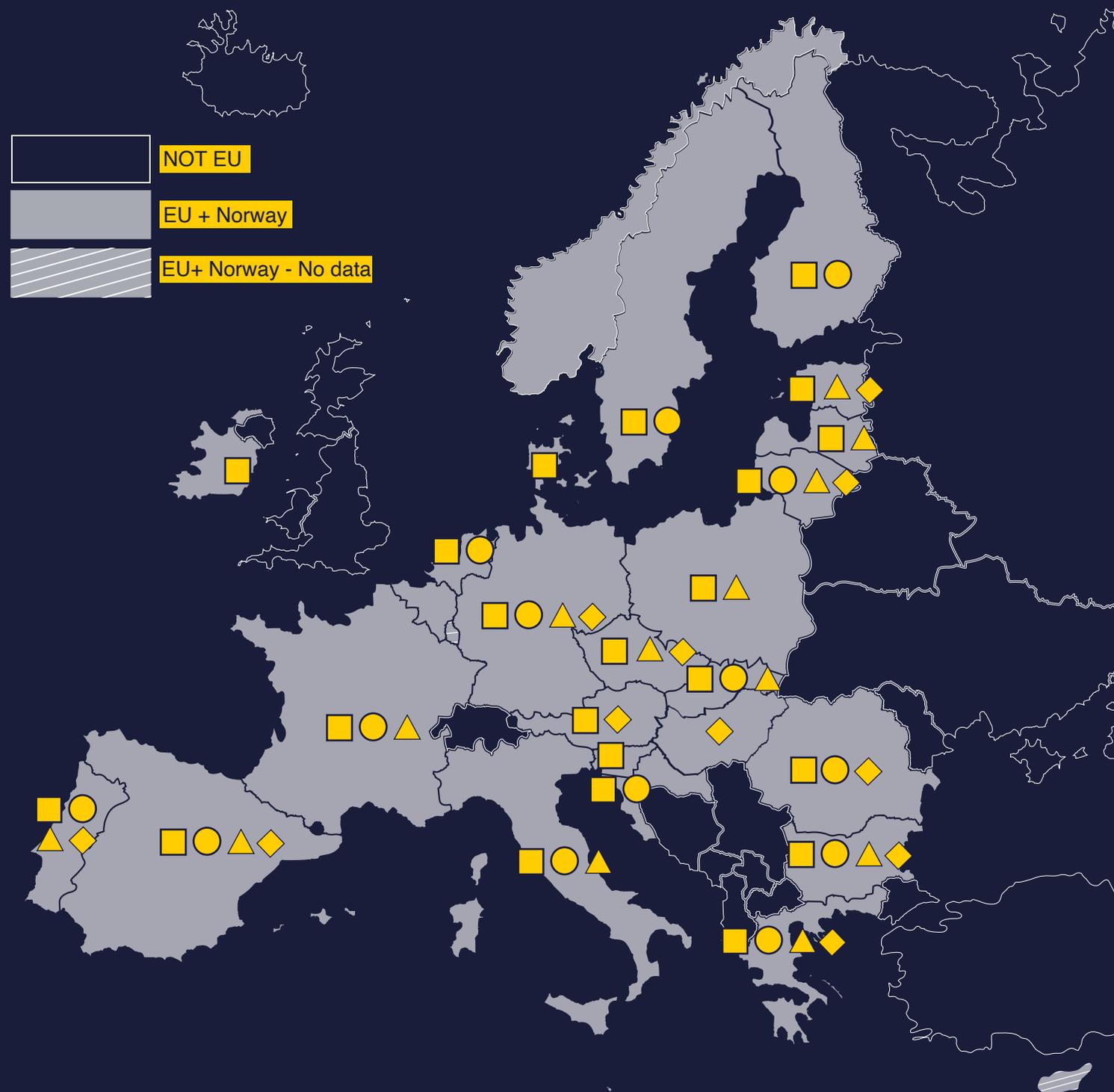
The share of disinformation content created or manipulated with AI has decreased by three percentage points compared to the month of January. However, the number of such content remains high. Out of 1.253 fact-checking articles, 211 focused on such content, representing 17% of the total.



As mentioned in slide n.4 and n.5, AI has been extensively used to generate false content on Ukrainian athletes at the Winter Olympics as well as political leaders and celebrities allegedly involved in the Epstein case. Another prominent (and recurrent) use of AI was the generation of anti-immigration content, such as a video of “immigrant schoolchildren” harassing a teacher in France, as well as sensationalist content, such as a video of humanoid robots carrying automatic weapons at a military training in China.



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



- Al-generated images to portray people/situations related to the newly released Epstein Files
- Transphobic disinformation on the shooting in Canada
- ▲ Pro-Russian or anti-Ukrainian disinformation at the Milano-Cortina Winter Olympics 2026
- ◆ Disinformation related to the anniversary of the war in Ukraine

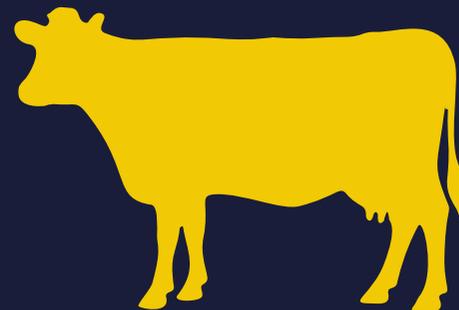
THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



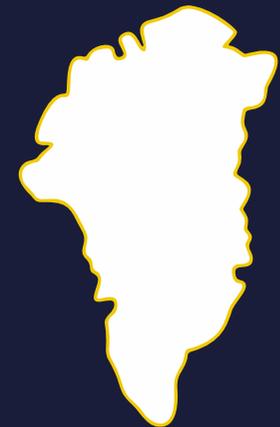
Nazi salute on election poster: AfD politician spreads false image after court ruling.



The murderer of the DB employee in Germany is not Greek, but a Syrian Islamist who obtained a Greek passport.



The outbreak of bovine dermatophilosis was caused by the import of Ukrainian grain.



Russia has gained control of Greenland under a long-term agreement with Denmark.



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: 1-28 February 2026. Number of respondents: 32. Main editors of this brief: Lucia Bertoldini and Tommaso Canetta, Pagella Politica/Facta.

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



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