



European Digital Media Observatory

DISINFORMATION ABOUT THE US–ISRAEL WAR ON IRAN QUICKLY BECAME ONE OF THE LARGEST DISINFORMATION PHENOMENA EVER DETECTED IN THE EU

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THE MOST TARGETED TOPICS IN MARCH WERE THE WAR BETWEEN ISRAEL/USA AND IRAN, AS WELL AS THE CRISIS IN GAZA

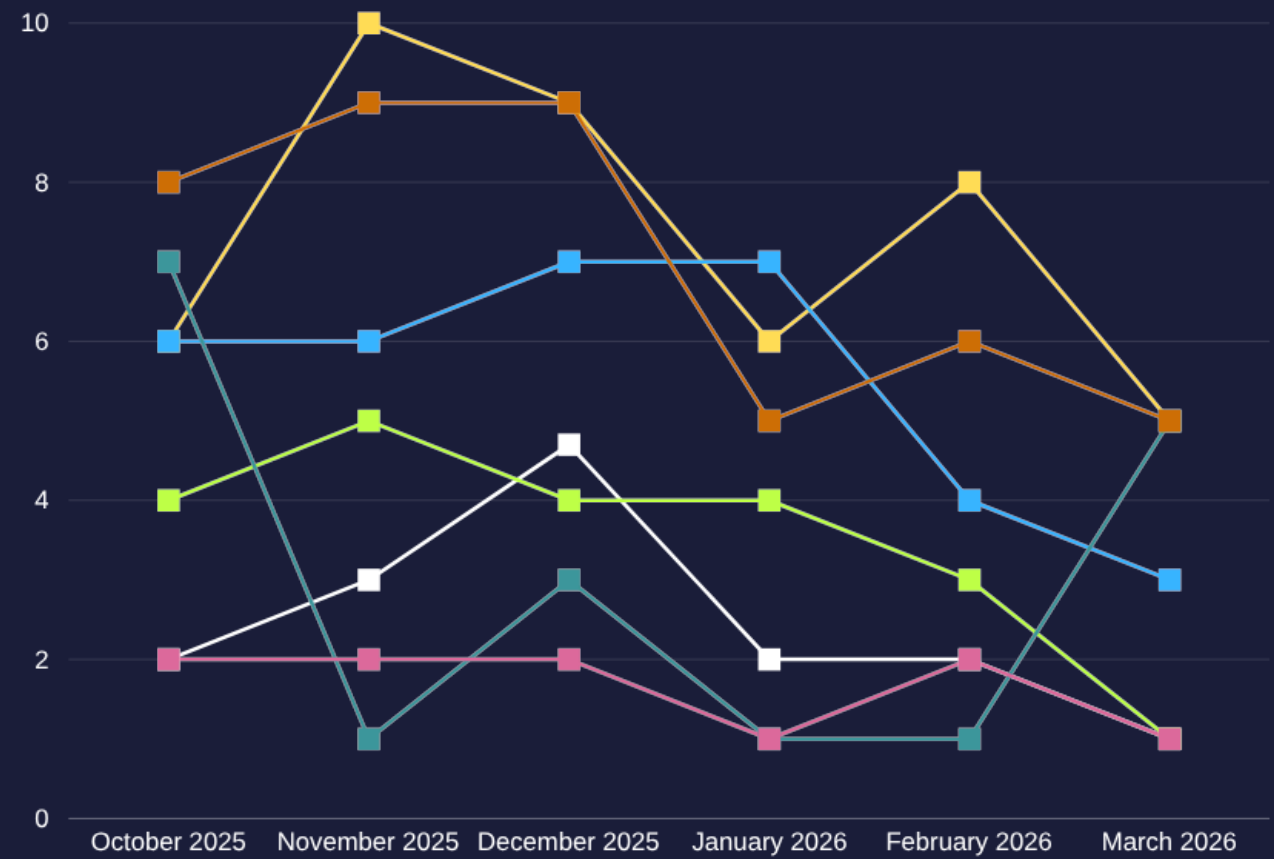
The 34 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1,690 fact-checking articles in March 2026. Of these articles, 665 (39%) focused on the war between Israel/USA and Iran, 85 (5%) on the crisis in Gaza; 82 (5%) on disinformation related to immigration; 81 (5%) on Ukraine-related disinformation; 50 (3%) on disinformation related to the EU; 24 (1%) on climate change-related disinformation; 24 (1%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; and 13 (1%) on disinformation about LGBTQ+ and gender issues.

During the month of March, there was a spike of disinformation regarding the war between Israel/USA and Iran. This likely brought back attention also to the crisis in Gaza, leading to a four-percentage-point increase in false news on the topic. Disinformation on immigration decreased by one percentage point, but it was still one of the most targeted topics in the month of March. Meanwhile, disinformation on the war in Ukraine decreased by three percentage points. False content related to the topic of climate change also diminished by two percentage points.

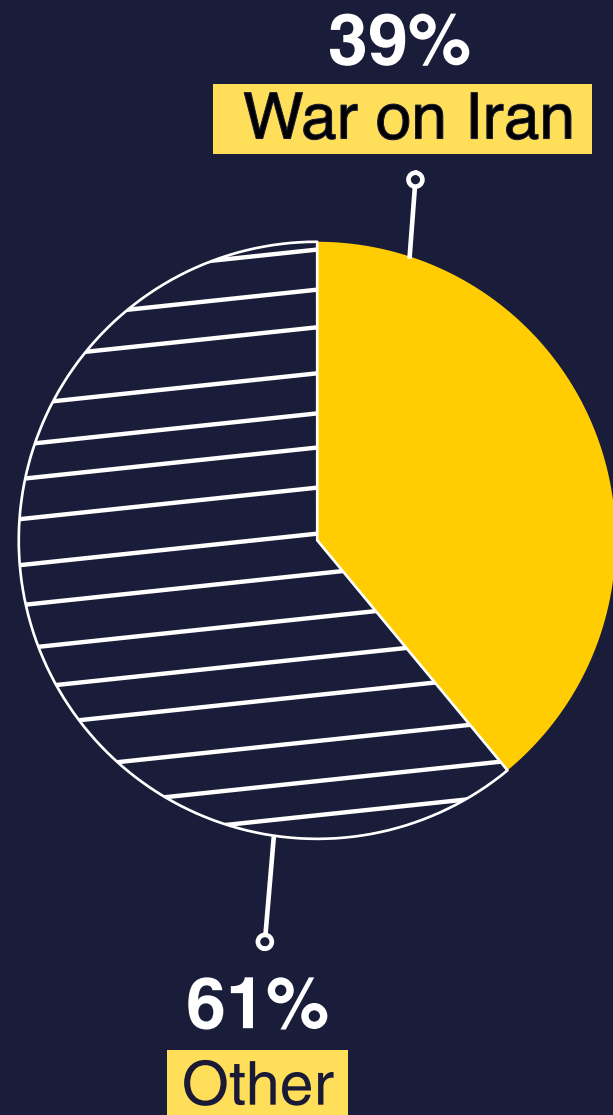
The share of disinformation on the other topics monitored by these briefs remained stable, with only minor fluctuations.

** Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, AFP, APA, CORRECTIV, Delfi Estonia, Delfi Lithuania, Demagog.cz, Demagog.org.pl, Demagog.sk, dpa, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Fact Check Cyprus, Facta/Pagella Politica, Factcheck Vlaanderen, FactReview, Faktabaari, Faktisk, Funky Citizens, Greece Fact Check, Källkritikbyrå, Lakmusz, Maldita.es, Newtral, Nieuwscheckers, Oštro, Polígrafo, Pravda Association Poland, Re:Baltica, The Journal, TjekDet, VerificaRTVE, Verificat, VRT NWS.*

% of related disinformation on total detected disinformation, by topic



A DISINFORMATION WAR AROUND THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL/USA AND IRAN



39% of total disinformation relates to the war between Israel/Usa and Iran

After 28 February, following the joint attack by the USA and Israel on Iran, social media across Europe were flooded with disinformation related to the war. This was likely driven by ideological reasons (supporting one side of the conflict) as well as economical ones (monetizing clickbait content on social media).

As had already been the case during the 12-days war in June 2025, artificial intelligence was extensively used to spread false content exaggerating attacks and retaliations on both sides of the conflict (see slide n.7). In this information chaos, several organisations that are members of the EDMO fact-checking network noted the unreliability of AI chatbots as fact-checkers, especially in the case of X's Grok. When asked by users, the chatbot falsely claimed that real footage documenting the devastation at a school in Minab, Iran, was misattributed and actually showed the attack on a school in either Pakistan or Afghanistan. In another case, Grok mistook images of a missile strike in Lebanon in 2024 for a video from a traditional festival in Spain.

This further fueled the spread of misleading images and videos, a common trend in moments of crisis. Old, unrelated photos claimed to show destruction in Tel Aviv, Dubai and Riyadh, and a misleading video circulated the news that the house of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Nethanyahu had been hit by a strike, fueling the conspiracy theory that he had been killed (see slide n.8).

RAMPANT DISINFORMATION, BOTH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN, CHARACTERIZES THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN IN HUNGARY

With the parliamentary elections set for 12 April, disinformation affecting the electoral space in Hungary – constantly monitored by HDMO – had already started circulating widely in March. The false news, detected also by fact-checkers of the EDMO fact-checking network, seem to mostly support the pro-Kremlin and far-right party Fidesz, in power since 2010 and led by Viktor Orbán.

The underlying narrative is that the opposition party Tisza is on the leash of Brussels and Kyiv, and it will likely bring the country to war should it win. Domestic disinformation actors rely on false-flag operations targeting opposition demonstrations, as well as on AI-generated content (e.g. video deepfakes of Tisza leader Péter Magyar, fearmongering video about the likely war should Tisza win, an AI-generated picture of a huge crowd supporting Orbán). International disinformation actors are also active in the country, including Russian operations Matryoshka and Storm-1516, the latter linked, for example, to the circulation of a claim falsely implicating opposition politician Ágnes Forsthoffer in the Epstein case. Information chaos was further exacerbated by claims made in Budapest by US Vice president J.D. Vance, who baselessly accused the EU of foreign election interference.

The Hungarian government itself circulated false news, specifically after the seizure of Ukrainian cash and gold by Hungarian authorities, claiming that money laundering was taking place in the country, and that the opposition is involved. Meanwhile, on social media, AI-generated images exaggerated the scale of the seizure.



DISINFORMATION AND FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN ELECTIONS IN DENMARK, SLOVENIA AND BULGARIA



In the weeks before Danish general elections, held on 24 March, a pro-Russian Telegram channel run by an alleged “Danish woman” started spreading false stories, e.g. that Denmark is short of money because of the billion-dollar support to Ukraine. Election disinformation also revolved around immigration, with DF politician Morten Messerschmidt claiming that Muslim immigration increased by 124 percent under PM Mette Frederiksen. As previously reported in the case of municipal elections, false news circulated that Danish Muslims have to abstain from voting because it is against Islam.



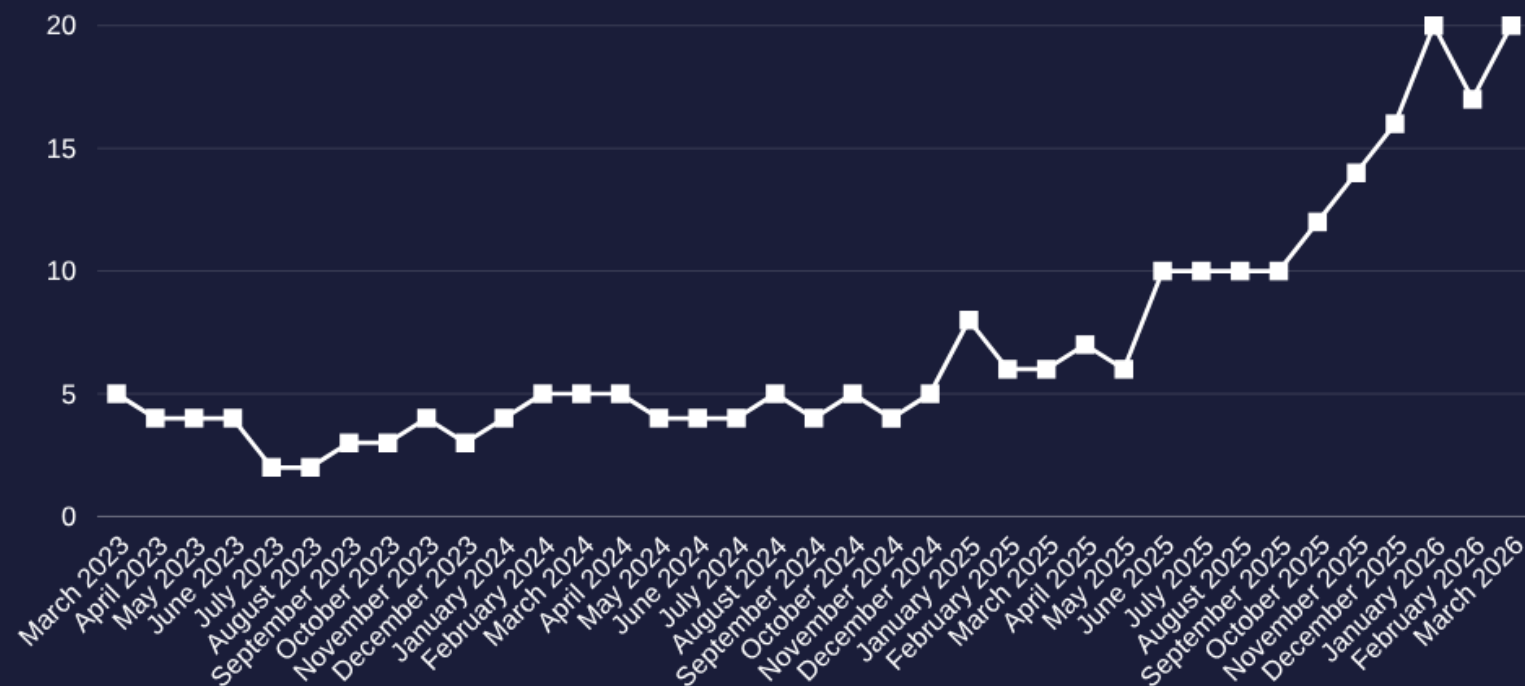
In the days prior to Slovenian parliamentary elections held on 22 March, the public first learned about the possible foreign interference by Israel's Black Cube agents. Investigation into the case is still ongoing. False claims detected by local fact-checkers mostly supported the populist SDS party: e.g. an AI-generated image featuring a boy holding a rosary with a cross with the text “Vote for the SDS party”. SDS president Janez Sanša circulated the false claim that national law does not grant NGO status to any organization dealing with political issues and is “funded by the government”.



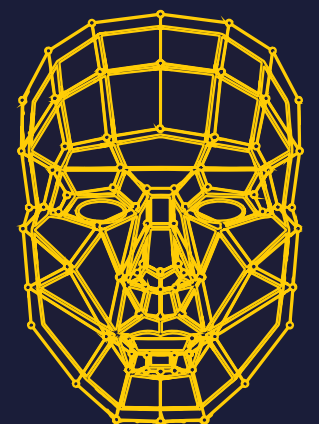
In Bulgaria, parliamentary elections are scheduled for 19 April. Following the spread of AI-generated images of the Ukrainian cash and gold transport seized by Hungarian authorities (see slide n.5), the pro-Russian disinformation network Pravda was rapidly activated and started circulating false claims, with 6,000 articles per month published in Bulgarian. According to a report by CSD (member of BROD), disinformation on the alleged lack of procedural integrity during elections is expected, as well as pro-Kremlin narratives circulating debunked claims, such as the claim that Bulgarian ammunition is used against ethnic Bulgarians in the Ukrainian city of Kherson.

THE SHARE OF AI-GENERATED DISINFORMATION INCREASES AGAIN

The share of disinformation content created or manipulated using AI has increased by three percentage points compared to February, reaching the record previously observed in January 2026. Overall, the number of such content remains high. Out of 1,690 fact-checking articles, 338 focused on this type of content, representing 20% of the total.



As mentioned in slide n.4, AI has been extensively used to produce disinformation regarding the war between the USA, Israel and Iran. Scenes of combat were shared online to spread propaganda on both sides of the conflict: images and videos showed an Israeli battalion allegedly surrendering to the Lebanese paramilitary group Hezbollah, strikes on Tel Aviv, as well as Iranian officials wearing women's attire to hide. Artificial Intelligence was also used as alleged proof that Israeli PM Netanyahu and the new Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei are dead or seriously injured. The alleged death of Netanyahu became a viral case of “reverse disinformation”, as real footage was shared online and falsely presented as AI-generated.





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

- AI-generated/misleading pro-Iran content (e.g. US military facilities destroyed by Iran, AI influencers posing as Iranian female soldiers)
- False and misleading images and videos related to the Minab school attack in Iran
- ▲ Claims that Benjamin Netanyahu is dead and that the videos published by the State of Israel are AI-generated
- ◆ AI-generated/misleading content pro-Israel/US (eg. attacks on Iranian military installations, Iranian officials wearing women's attire to hide)

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



Paris mayoral candidate Pierre-Yves Bournazel plans to turn the Centre Pompidou into a “shelter for homeless migrants”.



Ukrainian troops hunted down Romanians in Chernivtsi to send them to the front against their will.



Noelia Castillo was raped by “unaccompanied foreign minors” before she chose to undergo euthanasia.



The Baltic states opened their air space for Ukrainian drones so that they can reach Northwestern Russia.



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

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