



# **The #videogate incident: Tactics, techniques and processes used for the dissemination of a viral video alleging government corruption**

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# 1 Introduction

In January 2026, a covertly recorded video began circulating on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), carrying serious allegations about the campaign financing of Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides during the 2023 presidential election. The footage was posted by an account operating under the name "Emily Thompson" (@EmilyTanalyst) and spread rapidly across Cypriot social media before being amplified by mainstream broadcast and online media. The incident, colloquially known as "VideoGate", generated significant political controversy and public debate about corruption at the highest levels of the Cypriot state.

In response to the possibility that the video may have been generated or manipulated by artificial intelligence (AI), Fact Check Cyprus found **no signs of AI manipulation in the segments where the Cypriot personalities appear**, while cautioning that the identities of those who produced and released it remain unknown. Notably, Fact Check Cyprus engaged in pre-bunking, proactively informing the public about the authenticity of the video before disinformation could take hold.

What elevates this case above an ordinary political leak is its operational design: a covertly recorded and edited video seeded through a fabricated "Emily Thompson" identity, cultivated over years, equipped with an apparently AI-generated profile image on the webpages of online sites where the name in question appears, and deployed at a moment of maximum political impact.

Dr Michael Sirivianos, Associate Professor and Dean of the School of Engineering and Technology at Cyprus University of Technology and scientific coordinator of Fact Check Cyprus, together with Theophile Bloudanis, fact checker at Fact Check Cyprus, communicated the findings through a series of media interviews and published analyses. This report draws on those findings, the published Fact Check Cyprus investigations, and interviews with Euronews, RIK TV, Sigma TV, ANT1, Vergina TV, and the newspaper Politis.

## 2 Why This Case Was Selected

First, the claims contained in and surrounding the video were widely repeated. Within hours of the initial publication on X, the content was referenced by Cypriot broadcast media and online news outlets. The repetition across different media formats and editorial contexts significantly extended its reach and deepened its apparent credibility in public perception.

Second, the case appears to have been designed to cause political uproar. Allegations of corruption related to the financing of a presidential campaign are among the most damaging that can be made against a sitting head of state.



Finally, the case involves emerging technologies: the Emily Thompson persona was based on a profile picture apparently generated by artificial intelligence. Furthermore, confusion arose among the public as to whether the video's content was real or generated by artificial intelligence.

### 3 Background and Context

Cyprus is a small EU member state with a population of approximately 1.2 million people, a concentrated media landscape, and a political culture in which personal reputation and institutional trust carry considerable weight. These structural features create particular vulnerabilities to targeted information operations: a relatively small number of media outlets command broad reach, the political class is highly visible and personally recognisable and social media penetration is high relative to population size.

The election of Nikos Christodoulides in the 2023 Cypriot presidential election generated significant political debate both during and after the campaign. Such pre-existing political tensions can provide entry points for such influence operations.

### 4 Details of the incident

#### 4.1 Source

The video was introduced into the Cypriot information ecosystem via the X account @EmilyTanalyst, which presented itself as belonging to an English-language analyst or journalist named Emily Thompson. The Fact Check Cyprus investigation found that the name used by this X profile corresponds to that of an author appearing in several conservative-leaning online publications, where she has written dozens of opinion articles. In addition, the image associated with this name on those webpages showed strong indications of having been generated by artificial intelligence. To date, no verifiable real-world individual corresponds to the Emily Thompson persona. The digital traces identified by Fact Check Cyprus are more consistent with organised activity than with the behaviour of a single, clearly identifiable user, suggesting possible coordination behind the operation of the account, although this cannot be conclusively established based on publicly available evidence.

Crucially, the account was not a newly created throwaway profile. The investigation found that Emily Thompson had years of carefully constructed activity across multiple conservative-leaning online publications, building a surface layer of credibility that would withstand casual scrutiny. This is the defining characteristic of what researchers term a "groomed sockpuppet": a fake account cultivated over an extended period before being deployed for a specific, high-

impact operation. The grooming phase serves a dual function: it builds follower trust and platform legitimacy while simultaneously insulating the operator from immediate attribution, since the account does not exhibit the behavioural patterns typically associated with recently created fake profiles.

## 4.2 Key Claims

The video, which appeared to have been recorded covertly, contained audio of individuals discussing what were presented as undisclosed financial arrangements between the Christodoulides campaign and foreign investors during the 2023 presidential election period. The footage showed Cypriot individuals identifiable as the Director of the Office of the President of the Republic, Charalambos Charalambous, former Minister of Energy Giorgos Lakkotrypis, and the CEO of the Cyfield Group, Giorgos Chrysochoos, while the voices of the alleged foreign investors were deliberately distorted, ostensibly to protect their identities.

Some initial rumors regarding the incident suggested that the video had been artificially generated using AI and was therefore not authentic. This emerging assertion was proactively examined by Fact Check Cyprus, which found no evidence that any segments showing the three Cypriot figures involved had been generated or manipulated by artificial intelligence.

One of the first official claims was that there had been no contact whatsoever between President Christodoulides and Giorgos Chrysochoos after the elections. Fact Check Cyprus investigated this claim and found it inaccurate, meaning that at least one of the key contextual assertions used to frame the video did not withstand factual scrutiny.

## 4.3 Technical Assessment of the Video

Fact Check Cyprus subjected the video to technical analysis using specialised verification tools, including Hive Moderation and InVID-WeVerify. The examination found that the portions of the footage showing the Cypriot individuals carried a low probability of AI manipulation. This is a significant finding, and one that deserves careful interpretation: the absence of deepfake manipulation does not make the video authentic as evidence of wrongdoing. Authentic footage can be selectively edited, stripped of context, or deliberately misrepresented. The distortion applied to the voices of the alleged foreign investors rendered verification of those segments technically impossible, and Dr Sirivianos has noted that this distortion may represent a deliberate strategy to protect participants' identities while simultaneously hindering verification.

The investigation conducted by Fact Check Cyprus also identified indications that the female narrator's voice in the video may have been AI-generated. This assessment is supported by analysis using the InVID-WeVerify detection tool, which returned a high probability score for voice cloning when analysing the narrator's audio track.

Critically, the investigation team did not have access to the original, unedited footage. This absence placed a structural ceiling on the extent of technically conclusive findings. As Dr

Sirivianos stated in his [Euronews interview](#), the lack of the original material limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions about how the content was produced.

#### 4.4 Platforms and Methods

X was chosen as the primary platform for introducing the content, a decision that reflects both the account's cultivated credibility on that platform and X's structural features, algorithmic amplification of high-engagement content, reduced content moderation relative to prior years, and a user base that includes active journalists and political commentators who can serve as secondary amplifiers. Once published, the video went viral, rapidly entering Cypriot political discourse and being referenced or republished by mainstream media outlets. This amplification trajectory illustrates a well-documented vulnerability: politically charged audiovisual content propagates at a speed that consistently outpaces the verification infrastructure of both platforms and editorial newsrooms.

#### 4.5 Reach and Impact

The video went viral on Cypriot social media within a short window after its initial publication. It was subsequently picked up and amplified by Cypriot broadcast media, including mainstream television channels, significantly extending its reach beyond the X platform.

The political impact was immediate and significant. Allegations related to campaign financing and presidential networks drew broad public attention, sparking institutional turbulence and forcing political actors to respond even as the evidentiary basis of the claims remained contested. The controversy led to political repercussions, including the resignation of the presidential office director, Charalambos Charalambous, and the departure of First Lady Philippa Karsera from the leadership of a social solidarity body and fund. At the same time, police investigations began examining the origin and leak of the video, as well as the statements it contained, to determine whether any criminal offences had been committed.

#### 4.6 History and Evolution of the Incident

The Emily Thompson account had been active for a sustained period prior to the video leak, publishing content across conservative online media ecosystems. This prior activity does not appear to have been incidental. Rather, it resembles a preparatory phase aimed at building social capital and platform credibility, in order to make the high-stakes content published later appear to come from a trustworthy source, rather than from an account created overnight.



## 4.7 Danger Category

From a risk categorisation perspective, this case could primarily be linked to the sphere of political risks, insofar as it may be instrumentalised by various actors seeking to influence or shape public opinion. It also raises corruption and governance-related concerns, given the wider debate it sparked about accountability, transparency, and the integrity of public institutions. Finally, the case includes a dimension of AI-enabled manipulation, as AI-generated imagery was reportedly used to fabricate the identity of the account involved, illustrating how emerging technologies can be deployed to support influence operations.

## 5 Fact-Checking and Response

Fact Check Cyprus produced a multi-part investigation into the VideoGate incident, covering the technical authenticity of the video, the digital identity and prior activity of the Emily Thompson account, and the veracity of specific factual claims. The investigations employed specialised tools, including Hive Moderation and InVID-WeVerify and involved a detailed examination of the account's digital footprint across multiple platforms and publications prior to the video leak.

The findings were publicly communicated through the Fact Check Cyprus website and through a series of high-profile media appearances by Dr Michael Sirivianos and Theophile Bloudanis. In an interview with [Sigma TV](#), Dr Sirivianos provided a detailed analysis of the Emily Thompson account's digital identity and the technical findings regarding the video, characterising the profile as a groomed sockpuppet and explaining the limits of what the technical evidence could conclusively establish. On [RIK TV](#), in an interview with host Costas Constantinou, Dr Sirivianos situated the case within the anatomy of an influence operation and explained how similar networks target European countries through combinations of manipulated videos, fake websites, and organised social media campaigns. On [Vergina TV's](#) political programme "Voice to the Citizen", in conversation with host Michael Kasapis, he provided more granular technical detail about the Hive Moderation and InVID-WeVerify examinations, as well as the significance of the distorted audio. Speaking to [Politis](#), Theophile Bloudanis from Fact Check Cyprus said the team found no indications that the footage where the three Cypriot personalities appear contains AI-generated or deepfake elements. The material does not appear to include synthetic faces or fabricated visuals, though editing, selective cuts, or other forms of manipulation cannot be ruled out.

These public communications served both informational and resilience-building functions. By presenting in an accessible way the technical elements identified regarding the account and its operation, some of which may resemble practices previously observed in influence operation contexts, they provided citizens and media professionals with the analytical vocabulary needed to critically evaluate such cases in the future.



## 6 Key Developments as of 16 April 2026

On [April 6th](#), following a meeting at the Office of the Attorney General, independent criminal investigator Andreas Paschalides announced that investigators had secured the complete, hours-long original recording rather than only the excerpts that had previously circulated, and that the Attorney General had granted a two-month extension for the investigation so that it runs until June.

On [April 10th](#), the newspaper Politis reported that the firm behind the operation was Black Cube, an Israeli private intelligence company founded in 2011 by former members of Israeli intelligence units, and which maintains offices in Tel Aviv, London, Madrid and Singapore. Black Cube reportedly agreed to hand over the full unedited material, said to amount to roughly thirty hours of recordings, but declined to disclose the client that commissioned the operation, stating only that it had acted on behalf of a private company rather than a state actor and thereby rejecting the hybrid-warfare framing advanced by the Presidential Palace.

Hours after that report, Black Cube contacted Politis directly with an official statement, [stating](#) that it was proud to have uncovered alleged corruption by Cyfield in Cyprus and that it had cooperated with the Cypriot authorities. That statement, examined by Politis on [15 April](#), opened a new political front. Business observers noted that Black Cube appears to place emphasis on Cyfield while leaving the two presidential associates featured in the recordings, former Energy Minister Giorgos Lakkotrypīs and former Director of the Office of the President Charalambos Charalambous, outside the core of its public announcements.

## 7 Concluding Remarks

The VideoGate incident and the technical elements identified by Fact Check Cyprus illustrate a carefully prepared operation, designed and tailored to the Cypriot political environment. Three analytical points warrant emphasis for the MedDMO network.

The threat model extends beyond deepfakes. The video appears to contain authentic footage but is presented with visible cuts and heavily distorted “investor” voices, rather than fabricated imagery. This matters because detection efforts and public discourse disproportionately focus on AI-generated video, while operations that repurpose genuine footage with strategic editing and missing context can evade scrutiny. In this case, the clearest confirmed use of AI is fabricating the disseminator’s identity rather than the video content itself.

The groomed sockpuppet demands proactive countermeasures. Operations that rely on years of preparatory cultivation cannot realistically be countered by purely reactive responses. This points to the need for systematic, continuous monitoring of platform account behaviour and stronger cross-platform cooperation, capabilities that do not currently exist at the scale required.



Amplification dynamics reveal structural vulnerabilities. Mainstream Cypriot media amplified the video before technical verification. This reflects a Europe-wide asymmetry: politically charged content travels faster than verification can keep up. Addressing it requires investment in in-house verification capacity and editorial norms that scrutinise unverified social media sources.

Finally, the Emily Thompson operation illustrates that AI-enabled identity fabrication constitutes a democratic security issue rather than merely a media literacy concern. Addressing it requires coordinated institutional responses at national and European level, including platform accountability mechanisms, transparency-oriented legislation, and sustained public investment in independent fact-checking infrastructure.

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