



European Digital Media Observatory

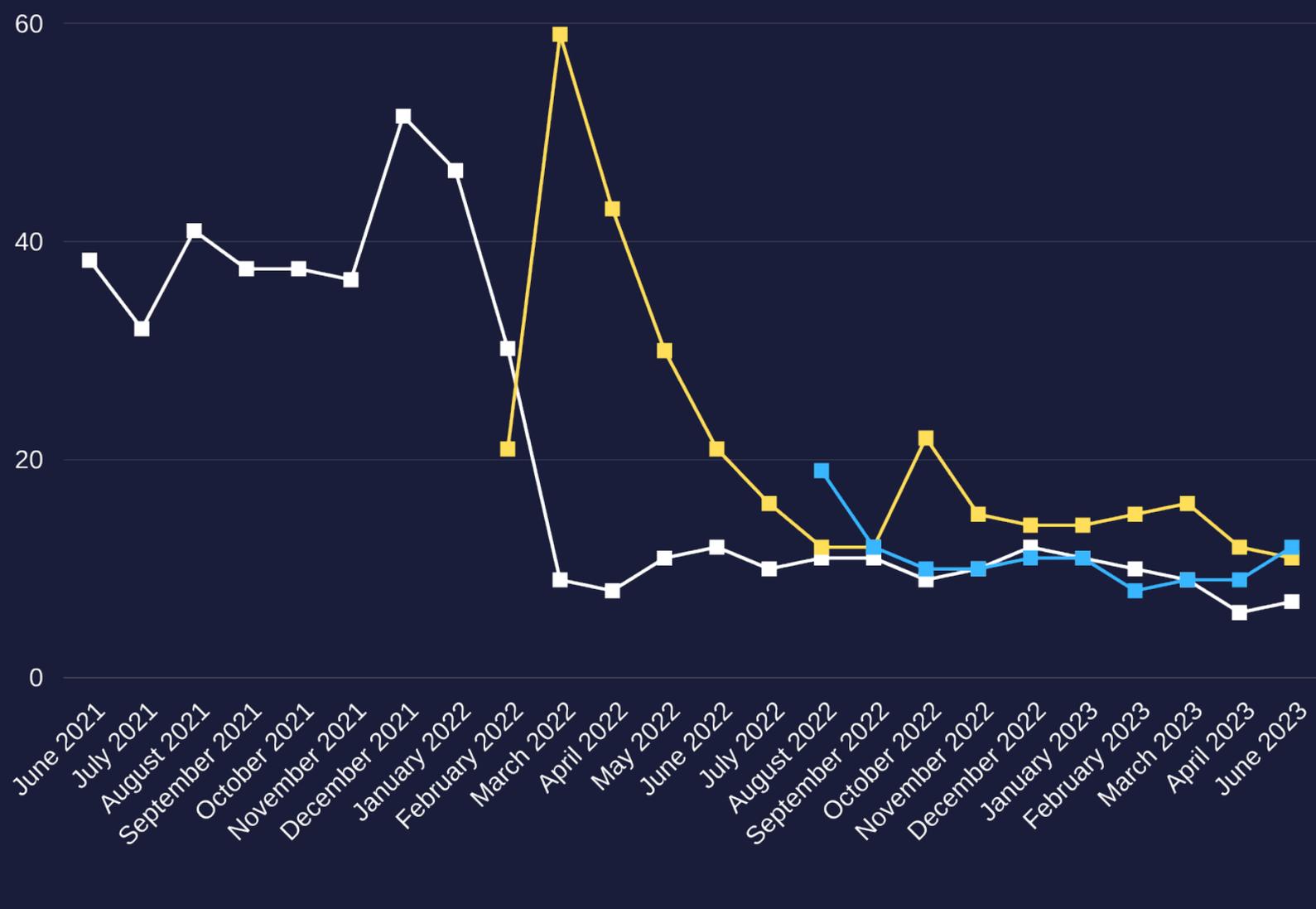
DISINFORMATION RELATED TO CLIMATE CHANGE IS GROWING IN MAY AND SO IS THE RISK OF IT POLLUTING THE POLITICAL DEBATE

Monthly brief no. 24 – EDMO fact-checking network

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DISINFORMATION ABOUT UKRAINE AND THE PANDEMIC REMAIN STABLE IN MAY, WHILE CLIMATE CHANGE-RELATED DISINFORMATION GROWS

The 28 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.361 fact-checking articles in May 2023.



Out of these articles, 143 (11%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 102 (7%) focused on COVID-19-related disinformation; and 160 (12%) focused on climate change-related disinformation. While the first two percentages are stable compared to the ones recorded in the past month, climate change is on the rise, probably due to the extreme events that have occurred in some EU countries (such as the floods in Italy in May and the drought in Spain in April).

% of Ukraine-related disinformation on total detected disinformation

% of COVID-19-related disinformation on total detected disinformation

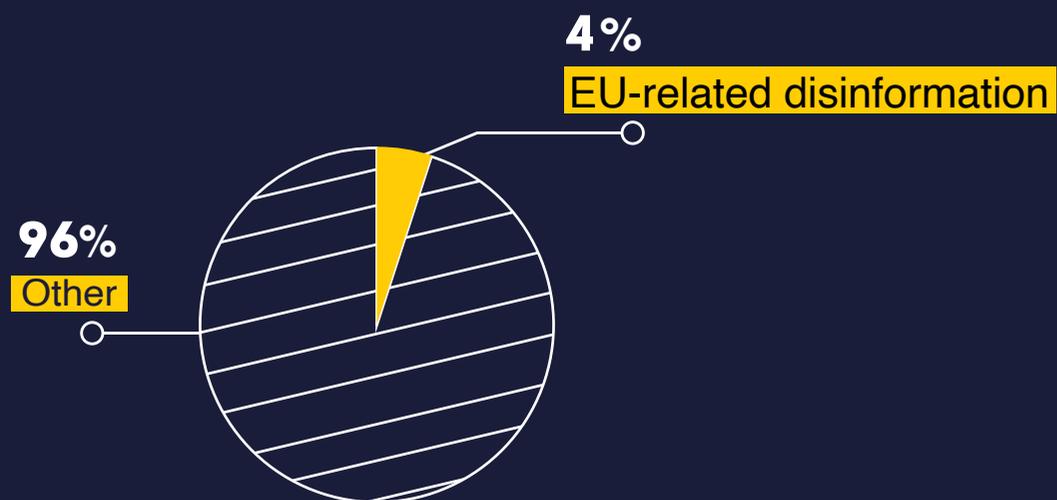
% of climate change-related disinformation on total detected disinformation

* Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, AFP, Correctiv, Demagog.cz, Demagog (PI), DPA, DW, Eesti Päevaleht, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Eurocomunicare, Factcheck Vlaanderen, Faktabaari, FranceTV, Funky, Greece Fact Checking, Källkritikbyrån, Knack, Lakmusz, Maldita, Newtral, PagellaPolitica/Facta, Polígrafo, Re:Baltica, The Journal Fact-Check, TjekDet, VerificaRTVE, Verificat

MONITORING OF EU-RELATED DISINFORMATION BEGINS

Starting with this monthly brief and continuing for the next year, the EDMO network will monitor disinformation about the EU, in the run-up to the European Parliament elections in June 2024.

In May 2023, out of the 1,361 fact-checking articles published by the 28 EDMO fact-checking network organizations that contributed to this brief, 53 (4%) were about the EU, its institutions, its laws or its representatives, portraying them as immoral or antidemocratic.

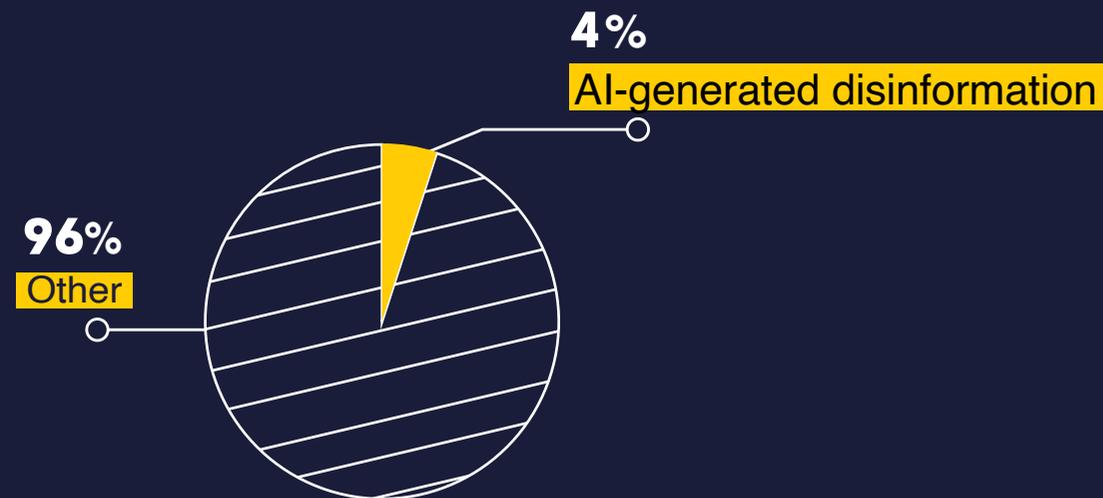


The percentage is quite low, as the vote is still a year away. But by starting in advance, it will be possible to get a broader picture of how disinformation will move as the election approaches.

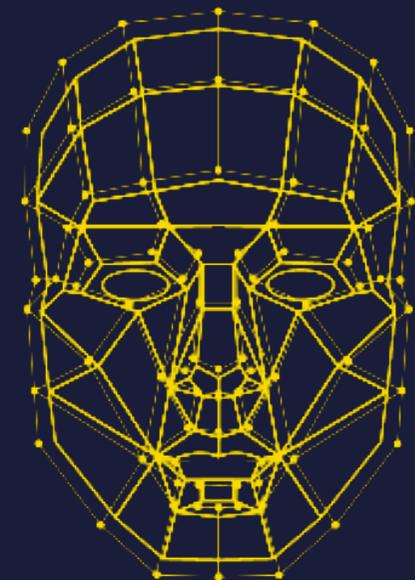


AI-GENERATED DISINFO REMAINS LOW AND STABLE

AI-generated disinformation accounts for 4% of all detected disinformation (55 articles out of 1361). The value is the same as that recorded in April and similar to the one recorded in March (5%), when the monitoring started.



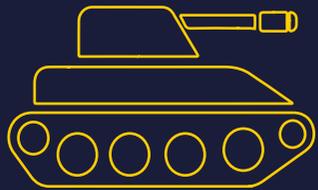
The use of AI tools to create false stories is a disinformation technique. As highlighted in previous briefs, the false stories tracked are mostly about AI-generated false images. Examples in May included the fake photo of an explosion near the Pentagon and Elon Musk kissing female robots. But it is still not possible, as highlighted by EDMO, to have a clear picture of the AI-generated textual disinformation that can be eventually spread through large language models.



MAIN DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES DETECTED:



About climate change, old and news conspiracy theories started circulating in addition to the usual denialism. Floods in Italy in May and drought in Spain in April were targeted by similar narratives, in particular chemtrails and new conspiracy theories about dams. These conspiracy theories, and climate change-related disinformation in general, are sometimes used to attack the national government or the EU. This phenomenon of using climate change-related disinformation in the political debate could escalate in the coming months, considering the polarization around the issue, the already existing confusion and disinformation about EU measures, and the many electoral campaigns already foreseen in several EU countries and for the EU Parliament.



About Ukraine, the disinformation narratives detected in May were the same as in previous months. The main ones are about the escalation of the conflict, the cost of supporting Ukrainian refugees (false stories have been viral in Poland and the Czech Republic, where a large community of Ukrainian refugees live), and that the West is affected by Russophobia. On the occasion of Victory Day, a false story was spread that a Soviet flag had been hoisted on the German parliament building to symbolize a new victory over Nazism, while another claimed that a text in Russian had been projected on the walls of the White House on May 9.

OTHER RELEVANT TOPICS OF DISINFORMATION IN MAY:



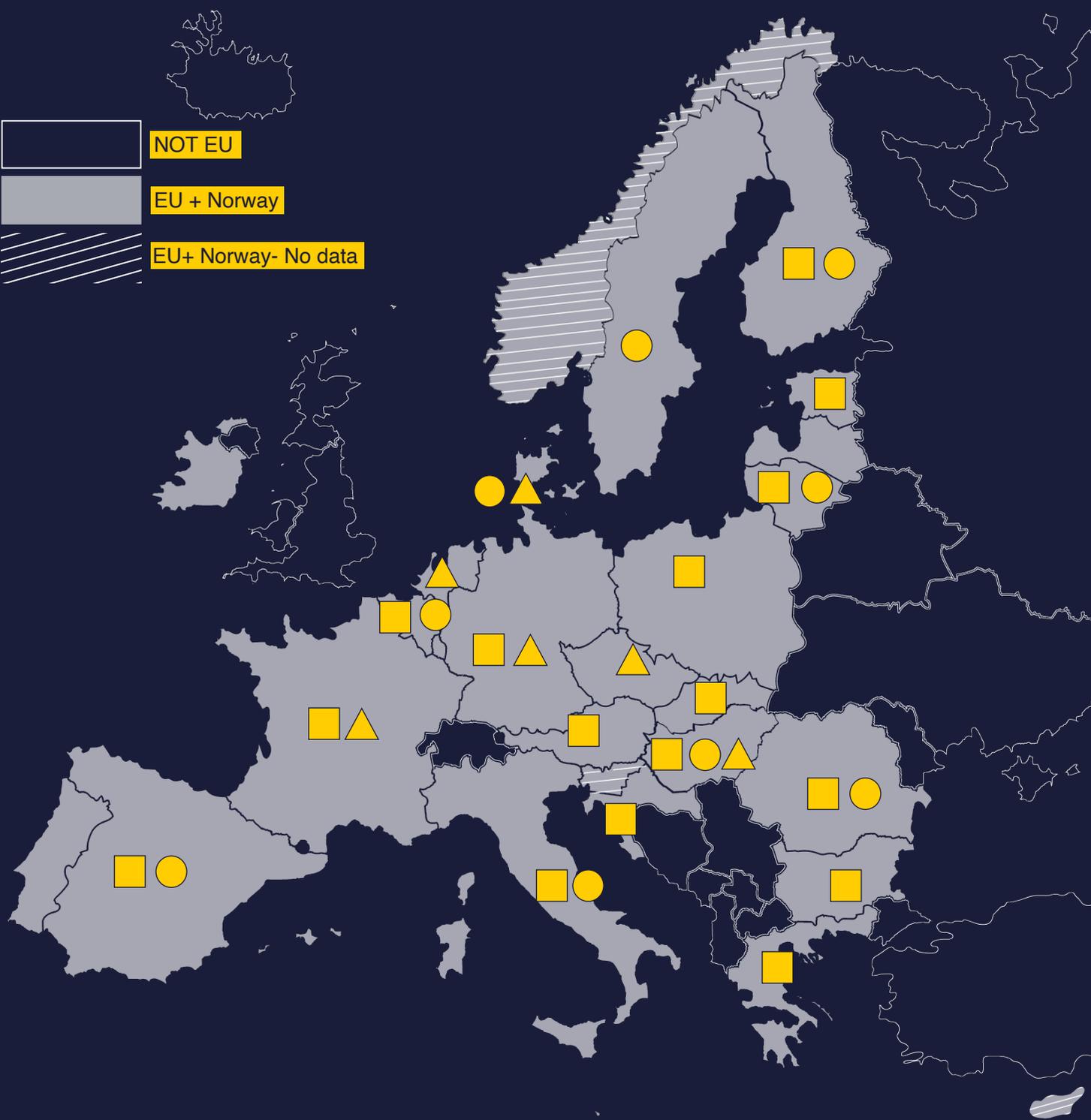
Disinformation about LGBTQ+ seems to be growing. The false stories about it are multiplying. People belonging to the LGBTQ+ community are described as sick, pedophiles and violent, and democratic and European institutions are accused of trying to impose their philosophies at the expense of traditional values. A further increase is expected in June due to Pride Month celebrations.



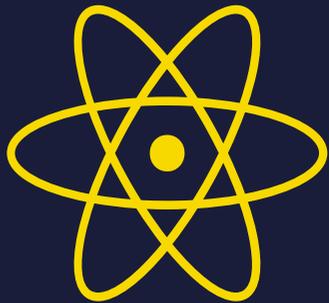
Disinformation on the local and regional elections held in May in Spain. The main narrative during the campaign was that electoral fraud was taking place, especially in relation to voting by mail. Immigrants were also accused of trying to distort the results and the company Indra, which was responsible for transmitting the results but not counting the votes, was accused of manipulating the outcome. It is likely that this phenomenon will be repeated in the Spanish national elections, scheduled for next July, and beyond Spanish borders.

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

- A radioactive cloud moving toward Western Europe after Russia struck a shipment of ammunition with depleted uranium supplied by UK to Ukraine
- George Soros died on 14 May, 2023
- ▲ Coating used to distribute certain fruits and vegetables without packaging is harmful



THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VERIFIED DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



Nuclear weapons deployed by Russia on the border with Finland.



Teachers cannot get paid more because of the European Union (and its proceedings against Hungary).



In Ireland, people who read or spread non-mainstream media articles are prosecuted.



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 May 2023. Number of respondents: 28.
Main editor of this brief: Tommaso Canetta and Enzo Panizio, Pagella Politica/Facta.
For further information: [*t.canetta@pagellapolitica.it*](mailto:t.canetta@pagellapolitica.it).



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