



European Digital Media Observatory

TASK FORCE ON THE 2024 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

# Disinformation narratives during the 2023 elections in Europe

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# The European Digital Media Observatory's Task Force on the 2024 European Parliament Elections

In January 2023, the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) established a Task Force ahead of the 2024 European elections, in order to monitor and counter any attempts to condition and undermine public confidence in the democratic process. The aim is to provide useful information and tools in the effort to promote an honest European debate in the run-up to the elections.

The composition of the Task Force is designed to provide comprehensive geographic coverage of the European Union and to build upon the multidisciplinary approach of EDMO and its coverage of the whole Union through its national and regional Hubs.

It brings together experts from different professional backgrounds in academia, the media ecosystem, fact-checking and MIL. It consists of one chair, one secretary, one representative from each Hub and three members of the EDMO Advisory Council, plus one MIL expert.

Its current members are:

**Giovanni Zagni** | Pagella Politica/Facta.news – EDMO Executive Board, IDMO (Chair)

**Louise Carnapete-Rinieri** | European University Institute – EDMO (Secretary)

**Alina Bârgăoanu** | SNSPA Bucharest – EDMO Advisory Council

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**Stamos Archontis** | Ellinika Hoaxes – MedDMO

**Mikko Salo** | Faktabaari – NORDIS

**Emma Goodman** | European University Institute – EDMO

More information about the Task Force and its activities are available on the [EDMO's website](#).

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyzes over 900 fact-checking articles published in the context of eleven elections in ten different European countries. The analysis reveals widespread disinformation during the election campaigns in all the considered countries, particularly about the electoral process, with false narratives often aimed at delegitimizing elections through unfounded claims of voter fraud, foreign influences and unfair practices.

Each country also shows unique disinformation trends, influenced by national contexts and current global events. Key themes include the war in Ukraine, the economy, climate change, and social issues (for example, gender themes, religion and immigration). The pervasive nature of these narratives underscores their probable significant impact on democratic debates in Europe and highlights the critical need for robust fact-checking and awareness-raising initiatives to preserve electoral integrity and democratic values.

This report includes elections up to October 2023. Its main editor is Enzo Panizio.  
Graphic design by Renata Leopardi.

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# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide a general overview of the disinformation narratives detected during national elections that took place in 2023 in multiple EU countries and in some member States of the Council of Europe, based on available fact-checking articles.

Almost all of the public debates leading up to each of the considered elections have been polluted by a multitude of stories that have been verified as false by independent fact-checking organizations. This report addresses elections in **10 different countries** (Czech Republic, Estonia, Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Poland, Spain, Slovakia, Montenegro, and Turkey) that took place at the national/federal level, such as presidential and parliamentary elections. Local and regional elections are not included.

In order to present a comprehensive picture of the landscape of mis/disinformation affecting electoral processes throughout Europe, we have collected all election-related stories and narratives that have been proved false by both local and international independent fact-checking organizations<sup>1</sup>. A “disinformation narrative” is intended as “the clear message that emerges from a consistent set of contents that can be demonstrated as false using the fact-checking methodology”, according to the EDMO’s definition.

<sup>1</sup> I.e. members of the European Digital Media Observatory’s (EDMO) fact-checking network, and/or signatories of the Code of Standards of the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN) and/or of the Code of Principles of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). In order to get the clearest picture possible, fact-checking articles from other organizations whose standards have not been verified by these networks have been collected and examined, but are not included in this report. The findings and examples presented in this document are based exclusively on the work of fact-checking organizations that have been verified as independent by the IFCN or EDMO or EFCSN network.

# INTRODUCTION

Eleven elections held in the member states of the EU and the Council of Europe in 2023 were examined. The false stories analyzed were selected by reviewing all of the publications of the aforementioned fact-checking organizations in the pre-election and post-election period, following the criteria outlined in the methodology. The time period considered for each election was generally from two months before the election day (or the first round of voting) to one month after the election day (or the possible final round of voting).

This resulted in a selection of over **900 fact-checking articles**, which were qualitatively analyzed and color-coded by topic. Short texts were prepared to present the results, divided by country, plus an initial chapter analyzing disinformation narratives about the electoral process. The findings of this research were then reviewed by the members of the EDMO Task Force on the 2024 European Parliament Elections and integrated with their feedback. Opinions, unverifiable information and stories that have not been substantially disproved have not been included in this document.

Further methodological information [is available here](#).

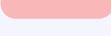
## 02

# CLASSIFICATION OF FALSE NARRATIVES

False narratives about the elections were divided into different categories based on content. Topics are color-coded to help consultation and to facilitate the search for specific topics and issues.

 Disinformation on the electoral process is marked in Yellow.

Other topics of disinformation:

-  War in Ukraine
-  Climate change (and related issues, such as countermeasures, etc.)
-  The EU, its institutions and laws
-  Economy (taxes, inflation, food/energy crisis)
-  Gender issues and LGBTQ+ community
-  Immigration, refugees or false stories spreading xenophobia and racism
-  Religion
-  Life expectancy, health and Covid-related disinformation
-  Foreign and security affairs, security threats
-  Current and past political alliances of the political actors

03

# DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES ABOUT THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

Disinformation narratives about the electoral process were identified in every election subjected to analysis, emerging as one of the most common narratives overall. Among those narratives, the suggestion of voter fraud or alleged unfair practices that would **invalidate the election results** appears particularly widespread, with the apparent goal of delegitimizing democratically elected representatives. These are sometimes portrayed as illegitimate, and more in general the legitimacy of the democratic process is put into question.

False stories that are consistent with this narrative have been identified in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Spain, Slovakia, Poland, as well as in Turkey and Montenegro, the non-EU countries considered. As mentioned above, none of the elections examined is exempt from this type of disinformation, famously used by Donald Trump around the U.S. presidential campaign of 2020. Moreover, similar unfounded accusations have occasionally been made by national members of parliament and other politicians. Ahead of the election in Slovakia, for example, the former prime minister and leader of SMER, Robert Fico, and the president of the far-right party Republika, Milan Uhrík, warned voters of possible electoral fraud.

# MAIN TOPICS

Specific claims used to suggest irregularities in the electoral process were very different depending on the countries where they were spread. The most common ones refer to alleged attempts to illegally add or subtract votes; malfunctions or fraud caused by electronic or postal voting; and supposedly odd counting procedures in the registry offices to increase the number of voters (e.g. surpassing that of the local residents).

Other false claims about the voting procedures included erasable voting pencils, pre-marked ballots, and even errors that actually occurred in the voting booths were presented as an organized attempt to manipulate the popular vote, even going as far as claiming that the election commissions themselves could cancel ballots at will. In Poland, where a referendum was held in conjunction with parliamentary elections, it was claimed that the two ballots used in the elections would be stapled together, therefore forcing voters to express themselves in the referendum.



Examples of fact-checking articles debunking false stories about election irregularities. Starting from the left: Eesti Päevaleht (Estonia) - "No, Ukrainian refugees will not be able to vote in the parliamentary election"; Demagog.pl (Poland) - "Will voting cards be clipped with referendum ballots? False"; Maldita (Spain) - "The conspiracy theory that Pedro Sánchez and the PSOE stopped trains from leaving Valencia to prevent passengers from voting".

Some false stories overlapped with other topics too. In several countries, false stories claimed that immigrants or Ukrainian refugees were allowed to vote, exploiting xenophobic sentiments to suggest an attempt to undervalue actual citizens' political choices. In Poland, these false theories were circulated before and on election day itself.

In Spain – the country where disinformation about the electoral process was most detected and quantitatively addressed by fact-checkers, according to our data – it was also claimed that Pedro Sánchez and the PSOE prevented trains from leaving Valencia so that passengers could not vote, or that the government offered jobs during the electoral campaign to please the electorate. A similar story was also proven false in Estonia, in this case involving a supposed pay raise for public employees.

## PRE-ELECTORAL PERIOD

These alleged irregularities are not only related to the post-election period. Disinformation about the electoral process was significantly present even before the vote took place. For example, the fact that in some countries postal voting is possible before the end of the electoral campaign has been taken as an opportunity for disinformers to spread suspicion and mistrust towards the vote. Trivial mistakes were also exploited for this purpose, such as a malfuncting stopwatch during an election debate, which was claimed by some to be the proof of rigged elections.

In some countries, the presence of this type of disinformation was particularly relevant. In Spain, for example, where outgoing prime minister Pedro Sánchez called early general elections following the results of a previous round of regional and local elections, allegations of electoral fraud, which had already been circulating for the regional elections, were amplified during the following national electoral campaign.

Also noteworthy is the presence, before and during the vote, of disinformation about its technical procedures. Supposed "strange marks" on the ballots, ballot boxes allegedly moved to unusual locations or the possibility of multiple voting are among the false and inaccurate information possibly spread with the aim of creating confusion and/or encouraging people to make mistakes that would invalidate their votes.

# CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND ALLEGED FOREIGN INFLUENCES

The attempt to raise doubts about the legitimacy of the electoral process is often accompanied by false claims about “suspicious” deployments of armed forces or alleged interference from foreign countries and organizations.

In this sense, the most significant case is again that of the Spanish elections, where alleged conspiracies about the election's validity were spread on various social media, including TikTok. False stories in line with this narrative claimed that European institutions (in particular the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen) and neighboring states such as Morocco were actively campaigning for Pedro Sánchez. In this context, King Felipe VI was also falsely accused of abandoning the political neutrality of the crown to call for the election of “progressives”. Other false stories suggested allegedly secret NATO meetings aimed at manipulating the election results. Numerous false stories alleging voter fraud were also widely spread after the election.



A fact-checking by AFP Fakty (Slovakia). “Experts say the alleged recording of a phone call between the PS leader and a journalist from the Denník N. outlet shows numerous signs of manipulation”.

In Bulgaria, interference by the United States was claimed with misleading content, while in countries with very strong religious sentiments, such as Turkey, alleged interference by foreign religious authorities was portrayed. In Slovakia – a country where the population is very suspicious about Western interference in the elections, according to a recent poll – an alleged phone call circulated in which Michal Šimečka, the leader of the social-liberal Progressive Slovakia party, discussed with a journalist about rigged elections. According to several experts, it was an **artificially generated audio**.

## 04

# ELECTIONS IN EU COUNTRIES DURING 2023

As disinformation is closely linked to current events and the topics of public debate, common themes of disinformation can be traced across all the elections analyzed for the issues that affected the whole Europe. In general, the **main issues interested by disinformation narratives are often economic**, including taxes, mortgages, the cost of living due to inflation or the energy crisis, but also general **expectations/quality of life topics**. Current and past political **alliances** are also often the subject of false stories. In some countries, issues of **security or defense** against outside intervention are central, often with reference to the **war in Ukraine**.

Other topics (such as **climate change, EU laws and institutions, immigration**) that are well-known disinformation targets at the European level emerge in the public debate in very different ways from country to country. In some countries where it is a prominent feature of public life, religion has also been a frequent target of disinformation. In these cases, false stories about **gender issues and the LGBTQ+ community** have proliferated significantly.

We look at the different cases separately, highlighting the most relevant disinformation narratives for each country for whom we gathered enough information to conduct a specific analysis (i.e. Czech Republic, Estonia, Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Spain, Slovakia, Poland, Montenegro and Turkey). Countries where elections took place in 2023, but for which no sufficient election-related fact-checking articles were found in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis (i.e. Cyprus, Andorra, the Principality of Monaco, and Luxembourg) are not included in this document.

## 4.1

# CZECH REPUBLIC – PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION



January 13-14 (first round), January 27-28 (second round) | RESULTS  
Total number of fact-checking articles collected for these elections: 74

**Military and defense-related issues** were at the center of public discourse and plagued with a significant amount of mis/disinformation in the Czech Republic. Andrej Babiš, the former prime minister who was defeated in the runoff, attempted to capitalize on the fears associated with the potential **expansion of the war in Ukraine**. This issue was also central to the disinformation narratives.

A manipulated news article from AFP. The headline reads "Pavel oznámil, že zavede povinnou vojenskou službu?" (Pavel announced that he will introduce mandatory military service?). A large red box covers the right side of the article with the word "NEPRAVDA" (Fake). Below the headline is a photo of Petr Pavel. The source is cited as "AFP Na pravou míru (Czech Republic)." A small note at the top of the article discusses conscription for women and mentions Pavel's statement about restoring tanks.

Zmanipulovaný článek šíří lži o tom, že Petr Pavel chystá obnovení povinné vojenské služby

AFP Na pravou míru (Czech Republic). "A manipulated article spreads lies about Petr Pavel's plans to restore conscription".

Several false stories concerned topics like the reintroduction of military conscription, deployment of soldiers both abroad and within national borders, and other anti-war measures. In this context, several familiar narratives about the war were revisited, many of which echoed Russian propaganda.

## 4.2

# ESTONIA – PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION



March 5 / RESULTS

Total number of fact-checking articles collected for this election: 41

In the run-up to the election in Estonia, disinformation about the war in Ukraine was widespread, with extensive parallels with Russian propaganda. In particular, there were false stories about arms supplies to Ukraine, alleged political links with Russia, but also about Ukrainian refugees.

Another main topic of disinformation was climate. Some false stories portrayed climate change as a left-wing conspiracy, while exaggerated claims of emissions reductions were made in relation to the EU Emissions Trading System and a car parking reduction law. In this context, false claims circulated about the costs of ecological transition. This was a sensitive issue, as much of the disinformation concerned also the economy, as in the case of the alleged conspiracy to raise energy costs or the false story that the rise in the cost of living was linked to the reformist party consensus.

### FAKTIKONTROLL | Liikvel on järjekordne töödeldud kuvatõmmis „Aktuaalset kaamerast“ (6)

Sotsiaalmeedias levib väidetav kuvatõmmis „Aktuaalse Kaamera“ saatest, mille järgi hinnatöusu vörreldakse Reformierakonna reitinguga. Tegelikult sellist statistikat uudistesade näidanud ei ole.



Eesti Päevaleht (Estonia). "A screenshot of a television program comparing price increases with the reformist party's polls is circulating on social media. In fact, no such statistics were shown in the news program".

## 4.3

# BULGARIA – PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION



April 2 | RESULTS

Total number of fact-checking articles collected for this election: 10

Among the false stories detected in the public debate before the elections, the one about the alleged deployment of Bulgarian soldiers in Ukraine, suggesting direct Bulgarian involvement in the war, was particularly relevant. Other notable stories concerned the country's membership to the European Union, falsely claiming that it was the only country that had not held a referendum on the issue or that the nation's production output was better before it became an EU member. Although not specifically related to the election process itself, unsubstantiated claims have been made about alleged influence in the vote by the United States.

A screenshot of a news article from Factcheck.bg. The title is "Популярно видео във Фейсбук не е „доказателство“ за американска намеса в избори в България". Below the title is a video thumbnail showing a man speaking in front of a city skyline. The video player interface shows the title "Да, вярно е. Ние все още се бъркаме в чужди избори. Последните, за които се сещам, са в БЪЛГАРИЯ" and the duration "0:00 / 4:39".

factcheck.bg

ПРОВЕРЕНО

Популярно видео във Фейсбук не е „доказателство“ за американска намеса в избори в България

ВАНЕСА НИКОЛОВА 06.03.2023

DEMOCRACY STEPHEN KINZER

Да, вярно е. Ние все още се бъркаме в чужди избори.  
Последните, за които се сещам, са в БЪЛГАРИЯ

▶ 0:00 / 4:39

Factcheck.bg (Bulgaria). "A popular video on Facebook is not 'proof' of American interference in Bulgarian elections".

The country has held five parliamentary elections in the last two years, and according to the local EDMO hub, another recurring topic of disinformation is LGBTQ+ issues. After the April 2 election, the new minister of social policy was falsely described as the head of "Sofia Pride" and intent on imposing gender neutrality in kindergartens.

## 4.4

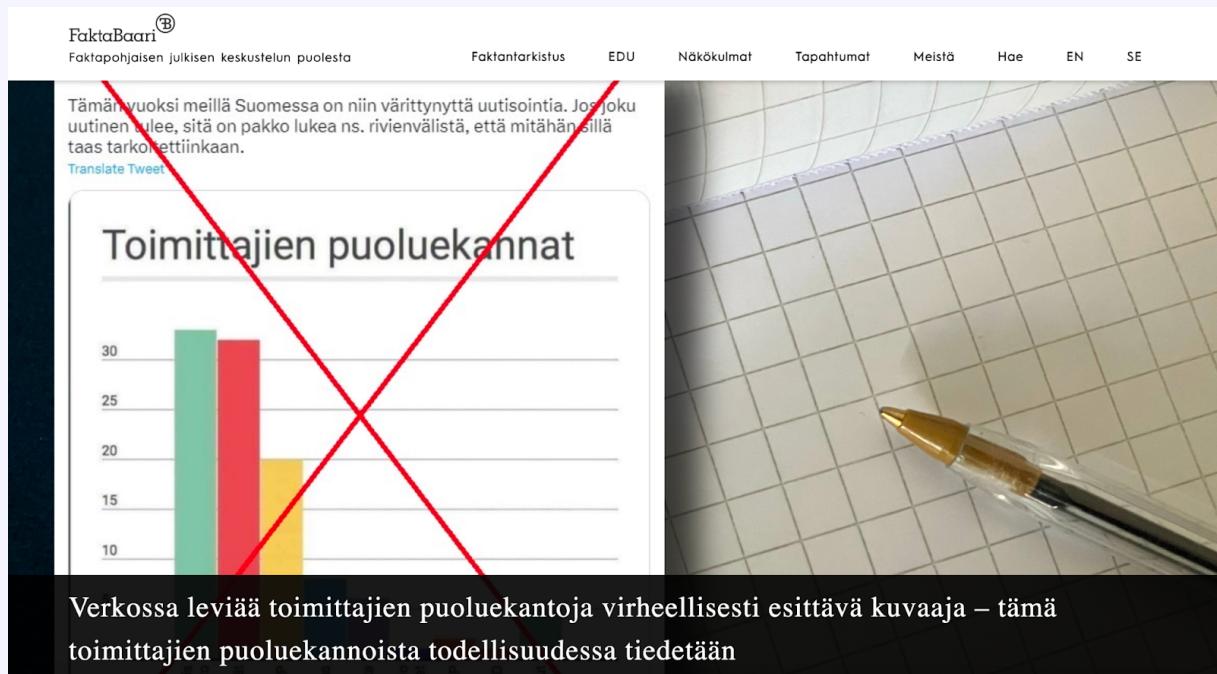
# FINLAND – PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION



April 2 | RESULTS

Total number of fact-checking articles collected for this election: 5

In addition to the spread of some disinformation about the electoral process, false stories about the EU and climate change circulated in the country. For example, some false claims involved the Energy performance of buildings directive, which was described as a costly imposition by the EU. Some measures to combat climate change were e.g. blamed for allegedly reducing the employment rate. False graphs were also circulated that included unsubstantiated statistics about the political affiliations of journalists, raising doubts about the independence of the Finnish press from political parties.



FaktaBaari (Finland). "A graphic misrepresenting journalists' party affiliations is circulating online. Here's what we know about journalists' political affiliations".

## 4.5

# GREECE – PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION



May 21(first round), June 25(second round) | RESULTS

Total number of fact-checking articles collected for these elections: 24

Most of the disinformation circulating was about LGBTQ+ and immigration issues. Regarding **LGBTQ+ issues**, false stories have included alleged candidacies of LGBTQ+ activists, anti-masturbation posters suggesting this practice is linked to the subfertility phenomenon, and claims of LGBTQ+ indoctrination in schools. There are also fake images suggesting links between the LGBTQ+ community and political parties.

A screenshot of the Ellinika Hoaxes website. The header features the logo "ΕΗ ELLINIKΑ HOAXES" and various navigation links in Greek: Σχετικά με εμάς, Χρηματοδότηση, Ελεγχος, Οικίας, Οι προτάσεις σας, Συνεργάτες, and Επικοινωνία. Below the header are secondary navigation links: ΑΡΧΙΚΗ, HOAXES, FAKE NEWS, ΥΓΕΙΑ, ΠΑΡΑΠΛΗΡΟΦΟΡΗΣΗ, SCAMS, ΠΕΡΙΣΣΟΤΕΡΑ, Αναζήτηση, and a search icon. The main content area shows a man in a suit holding up a photograph. The photo depicts a person in traditional East Asian clothing, specifically a kimono or geisha-style outfit. A large red circular watermark stamp over the image reads "ΕΛΛΙΝΙΚΑ ΗΟΑΞΕΣ.ΟΡ" around the perimeter and "ΠΑΡΑΠΛΗΡΟΦΟΡΗΣΗ" in the center. Below the image, text in Greek states: "Η εικόνα που παρουσίασε ο Βελόπουλος ΔΕΝ δείχνει την Παναγία ως «Γκέισα»". At the bottom of the page, there is a timestamp "11 Μαΐου 2023" and a note "Αλίκη Βασιλείου".

Ellinika Hoaxes (Greece). "The picture presented by Velopoulos does NOT show the Virgin Mary as a geisha".

On **immigration**, false claims were made about foreign candidates running in elections. Dramatic episodes of migrants drowning in the Mediterranean Sea were also exploited, as in the case of the false story suggesting that drowned migrants receive more “compassion” and “honor” from the government compared to Greeks who die in tragedies and natural disasters.

## 4.6

# SPAIN – PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION



July 23 / RESULTS

Total number of fact-checking articles collected for this election: 313

Since outgoing prime minister Pedro Sánchez announced early general elections, following the results of the local and regional elections of May 28, a massive wave of disinformation began to affect the debate about the **new round of voting**. In addition to the many false stories about the electoral process, the most prevalent disinformation topics were **climate change**, **immigration**, **LGBTQ+ issues** and the **EU**.

With regard to **climate change**, most of the disinformation narratives already detected at the European level (as documented e.g. in the EDMO Monthly Fact-checking Briefs) circulated in the Spanish electoral debate. Some examples include climate denialism, alleged conspiracies, politicians and activists described as hypocritical or stupid, electric vehicles (EVs) presented as dangerous, etc. False stories included claims such as "**Spain will abolish agriculture in the name of climate**" and "Sánchez announces climate lockdowns", but also the existence of a supposed political will to cause the environmental disasters that have recently plagued the country.

On a more **strictly political level**, false stories circulated with the aim of discrediting the Minister for the Ecological Transition or attributing to some political parties the intention to abolish institutions and authorities that deal with the climate. Unfounded news has also been spread by **politicians' statements**, such as the supposed limited usefulness of climate measures, which have also been described as inconvenient and imposed by the EU.

**Disinformation about immigrants** was also widespread. Often recycling old messages, immigrants were described as extremely violent in several false stories, but the main narrative portrayed them as parasites and profiteers, who drain public money and receive preferential treatment in comparison to Spanish citizens. Some disinformation stories have even claimed that these incentives respond to the political will of some political parties to encourage a wave of "uncontrolled" immigration. According to this disinformation narrative, the situation would then be exploited by foreign organizations and countries that want to **influence** the election results in Spain in order to facilitate something like **cultural prevarication** or even invasion on a European scale.

On the subject of external interference, **the EU** itself was accused of trying to influence the elections. The false story that **Ursula von der Leyen asked people to vote for the PSOE** was widely spread.



Newtral (Spain). "Ursula von der Leyen has not asked for votes for Sánchez in the upcoming election on July 23".

As the first month of the campaign coincided with Pride Month, **LGBTQ+ issues** were the subject of many false stories, in line with narratives already identified throughout Europe on this topic. On a strictly political level, false stories suggested the existence of alleged proposals and laws aimed at unjustly favoring members of this community, who were described as violent, fanatics and perverted, and also targeted by various unfounded statements by politicians. The statement by a **presidential candidate** that the so-called "Trans Law" (a Spanish law that allows people to change their sex at the registry office) would guarantee impunity for perpetrators of gender-based violence was very significant in this field.

Other relevant disinformation topics were alleged links to current politicians of the **ETA terrorist group** (its old slogans were also used to target Sánchez) while information on the **economy** that was verified as unsubstantiated was mainly related to statements on pensions by People's Party's Alberto Núñez Feijóo.

Finally, disinformation about the Spanish elections presented some other peculiar false stories worth noting, such as doubts about the independence of the judiciary, troll profiles to polarize the debate and videos of politicians slowed down to make them look drunk.

## 4.7

# SLOVAKIA – PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION



September 30 / RESULTS

Total number of fact-checking articles collected for this election: 24

Both Cedmo's and the local AFP bureau's analyses describe a country with diffuse anti-Western sentiments and a high susceptibility to disinformation. The country has been inundated with a flood of false narratives around this year's election. Most of the disinformation has spread narratives present in **Russian propaganda**, with politicians often echoing its narratives. For example, the misleading claim that Ukrainian grain is not being sent to poor countries. As reported by AFP, “[Robert] Fico himself also said that the war in Ukraine started in 2014 after the Ukrainian ‘fascists’ killed Russian civilians (now at 22:45 in the video, archive version)”.

These narratives generally aim to portray the West as an enemy and Russia as a more trustworthy ally. Common claims include “high prices are due to sanctions, not the invasion” of Ukraine and “there are American soldiers in Bratislava, something's wrong”.

A screenshot of a news article from Demagog.sk. The top navigation bar includes links for "Výroky", "Diskusie", "Politici", "O nás", "Podporite nás", and "Napísali sme". Below the navigation is a large red banner with two images of people on a street, both of which are crossed out with a large red X. To the right of the images is a blue speech bubble icon with the text "DEMAGOG.SK FAKTCEŇJE FACEBOOK". The main headline reads "Taliani vojaci v Bratislave vyvolali poplach na sociálnych sietiach". Below the headline is the author information "Timotej Kováčik" and the date "20.09.2023".

Taliani vojaci v Bratislave vyvolali poplach na sociálnych sietiach

Timotej Kováčik 20.09.2023 novinky

Demagog.sk (Slovakia). “A Facebook post warns of alleged US soldiers walking around Bratislava and warns that ‘something is going on’.”

According to AFP, along with Russian propaganda, false stories related to **LGBTQ+ issues** and **immigration** were used to discredit opponents. For example, a list was published of ten alleged policy points of the Progressive Party (Progresívne Slovensko) including out-of-context or even non-existent claims such as "We will introduce free abortion" and "We will promote the LGBTQ doctrine". These false proposals on LGBTQ+ issues were presented as genuine positions by the political party. Moreover, politicians have portrayed immigrants as aggressive, on one hand, or privileged, on the other. There was also an unfounded story that immigrants did not arrive during Fico's previous mandate as prime minister of Slovakia (2012-2018).

In addition to the aforementioned and significant case of most likely **AI-generated disinformation** about the electoral process, the voice of Michal Šimečka – leader of the social-liberal Progressive Slovakia party – was also used in an artificially generated audio of him allegedly talking about his intention to raise the price of beer.

## 4.8

# POLAND – PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION



October 15 / RESULTS

Total number of fact-checking articles collected for this election: 73

Most of the disinformation identified during the election was about **the war in Ukraine**. Several false stories echoed the narratives pushed by Russian propaganda, such as "Zelensky is a genocidal", "Ukrainians sell the bones of Russian soldiers as if they were toys", or even "the war is not happening or is staged", allegedly because the destruction is not real and Ukrainians are actually "having fun". Some conspiracy theories have portrayed the United States, NATO or other groups as the instigators of the war and the actual threats to "national values", denying Russian accountability for the outbreak of the war and often suggesting a looming Polish involvement in the conflict.

Fake News ⓘ

## Aleksandra Wiśniewska widoczna na zdjęciu z imprezy? To nie ona

FAKE NEWS WYBORY PARLAMENTARNE WYBORY

A screenshot of a Facebook post from a page called "Fake News". The post features a photo of a woman with long dark hair kissing a man in a yellow shirt. Below the photo is a caption in Polish: "Tak wygląda praca wolontariuszki kandydatki do Sejmu RP z KO W razie wygranej będzie się działało oj będzie!". The post has 6 likes and 1 share. A small inset image in the bottom left corner shows a different woman, with a red box highlighting her face. The overall layout is typical of a social media platform.

Demagog.pl (Poland). "Aleksandra Wiśniewska on the photo of the party? It is not her".

Regarding disinformation about **immigration**, the majority of the false stories conveyed unfounded messages to denigrate Ukrainian refugees, portraying them as cowards, profiteers and violent. As **economic issues** were central to both the political debate and disinformation stories (e.g., on investments, pensions, GDP growth, wealth disparities), they were also used to fuel discontent about **war exiles**, labeling them as scroungers or exploiters draining the country's resources. False stories have claimed that Ukrainians are entitled to various benefits, including easy employment, healthcare, loans, pensions after only one day of work, or summer camps in luxury hotels for their children.

False information about **vaccines** and pandemic measures, as well as related conspiracy theories, are still widespread, and AI-generated disinformation has affected the election campaign. Other false stories have focused on misrepresenting some **politicians' past**. For example, some portrayed them as former or current **LGBTQ+ activists** or falsely claimed that some of them had been arrested or caught having romantic behavior "with immigrants". This last false story was particularly significant since the ruling party's main narrative during the political campaign was related to issues of security, migrants, and the EU's relocation mechanism.

# 05

# ELECTIONS IN COUNCIL OF EUROPE (NON-EU) MEMBER STATES

## 5.1

### MONTENEGRO – PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION



March 19 (first round), April 2 (second round) / [RESULTS](#)

Total number of fact-checking articles collected for these elections: 42

Local fact-checking organizations have reported significant intrusiveness and spread of disinformation from foreign websites and media, especially those originating from Serbia. Main disinformation narratives revolved around **relations with Serbia and Albania**, alleged veiled threats from their representatives, and discussions about the alleged exclusion of parties representing determined **ethnic groups from the government**.

#### Rama nije pominjao "veliku Albaniju"

Di Marko Vukajlović 21/02/2023

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Raskrinkavanje.me (Montenegro). "Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama did not talk about the nationalist concept of 'Greater Albania'".

Another notable number of false stories focused on the dissemination of **fake polls**, apparently designed to influence voting decisions, or false stories about voting procedures, seemingly designed to trick people into casting their ballots incorrectly, thereby invalidating their votes.

## 5.2

# TURKEY – PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS



May 14 (first round), May 28 (second round) / [RESULTS](#)

Total number of fact-checking articles collected for these elections: 322

The Turkish election campaign was characterized by a significant amount of false and unfounded information.

A prominent feature of disinformation in Turkey was its focus on **religion**. Given that the vast majority of the country's citizens identify as Muslim, faith was used as a tool to criticize politicians from different factions. For example, there were allegations of alcohol consumption and alleged episodes of repression against veiled women following Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's candidacy. False stories circulated about a political party distributing sweets during Ramadan or the mayor of Istanbul secretly drinking water when he was religiously not allowed to. Other false stories were about Kılıçdaroğlu allegedly making derogatory remarks about prophet Muhammad, the son of the government-appointed President of the Directorate of Religious Affairs consuming alcohol, while other parties were falsely accused of wanting to introduce Sharia law.

A screenshot of a news article from the website 'Doğruluk Kontrolleri'. The article features a photograph of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu in a dark suit, sitting in a vehicle and drinking from a water bottle. The photo is timestamped with 'epdimages'. The title of the article is 'Ekrem İmamoğlu'nun Su İçerken Görüntülendiği Fotoğraf, Ramazan Ayında mı Çekildi?'. Below the title, there is a category 'Politika' and a date 'İlk yayın : 13 Nisan 2023'. The logo of 'Doğruluk Payı' is visible in the top right corner.

Doğruluk Payı (Turkey). "Was the photo of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu drinking water taken during Ramadan?".

Sometimes, religion was combined with other relevant issues in the disinformation content, as in the cases of alleged foreign religious influences or a false statement by a German MP that the minaret in Istanbul would be demolished if the outgoing president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan lost power. Doubts have also been raised about Erdoğan's alleged homosexuality. Anti-LGBTQ+ disinformation was part of this narrative, although the main focus remained on religion.

**Political alliances** were another topic of disinformation, with various seemingly innocuous meetings being exploited by several false stories. And very significant were the various fabricated stories suggesting links between Kılıçdaroğlu's coalition and the **Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)**, a political and paramilitary organization considered a terrorist organization by many States and political entities including Turkey itself, the US and the EU.

There was also a lot of false information about **refugees and immigrants**. Examples include false claims that an African tribe was supporting Kılıçdaroğlu, that ISIS members were being granted citizenship, that Syrians were entering Turkey, that the political leader Ümit Özdağ is actually a Syrian, and various stories about refugees illegally participating in elections.

False stories using **AI-generated content** also circulated. For example, a fabricated video of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu speaking in English, apparently created by a Twitter user as "an experiment", went viral suggesting he was allegedly backed by foreign actors. In the same vein, the image of a huge crowd – actually generated in Italy to simulate the celebration of the Naples team winning the soccer championship – was reshared and recaptioned as showing a rally in support of the İYİ Antalya party.

## 5.3 MONTENEGRO – PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION



June 11 / RESULTS

Total number of fact-checking articles collected for this election: 17

As in the case of the presidential election, the main part of the disinformation stories were about relations with neighboring countries and fake polls.

According to local fact-checking organizations, disinformation was less pervasive than in the presidential election campaign and foreign websites (e.g. Serbian) less intrusive, likely because the attention was focused on the clashes in Kosovo where NATO troops were attacked in June.

# METHODOLOGY

To better define the concept of “false information about the election(s)”, some objective criteria were used to select the information and stories that had already been verified as false by EDMO or EFCSN or IFCN signatories.

To be included in the analysis, the false information had to meet at least one of the following criteria:

- False stories about the electoral process (voting procedures, alleged electoral fraud, conspiracy theories, etc.);
- Politicians’ statements proven false by independent fact-checking organizations;
- False stories targeting legitimate political views and issues, as well as targeting politicians or political parties in the context of electoral campaigns;
- False stories spread by politicians (e.g. through social media or in electoral programs) or media outlets with a significant reach;
- False stories and narratives about other well-known disinformation topics (e.g. the war in Ukraine, climate change, EU-related disinformation, LGBTQ+-related disinformation) that were relevant to the election debate, for example because they were explicitly mentioned in electoral programs or debates, or because they overtly supported various partisan agendas;
- False stories about the functioning of the state, institutions, laws and other legal or administrative issues linked to the current elections.

**Chronological criteria:** During the collection phase false stories were sorted, distinguishing mainly between the **pre-election period** (two months, on average) and the **post-election one** (usually one month). The period between the first and second round of the elections, if present, has been included in the **pre-election period**.

Narratives whose relevance to the electoral campaign was only indirect were excluded, even if popular. For a general overview of the most common disinformation narratives not directly related to the elections, check out EDMO's fact-checking network latest Monthly Fact-checking Briefs and Investigations.