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DISINFORMATION ON FRENCH PROTESTS FUELS ANTI-IMMIGRATION AND ISLAMOPHOBIC CLAIMS THROUGHOUT EUROPE

Monthly Report no. 5 - EDMO fact-checking network

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In October, the viral spread of false or misleading content about the protests in France was one of the main disinformation-related phenomena detected. The available evidence suggests that the protests were not triggered by disinformation, but were subsequently exploited by it, as was also the case, for example, with the Ceuta crisis this summer. Much attention has been paid to Russia's role, but according to various analyses, accounts linked to the global far right, the U.S. administration and the MAGA movement, as well as Israeli far-right actors, played an even greater role in spreading narratives portraying the protests and the associated violence as savage rioting by Muslim migrants in a country (France) and a continent (Europe) whose population is supposedly being "replaced" with the plotting of globalist elites seeking to destroy people's identity and sovereignty.

Both the U.S. and Israel may have contributed to undermining Europe's information integrity for a variety of reasons, including their respective scheduled elections in (parliamentary elections in Israel on October 27 and midterm elections in the United States on November 3) and the ideologies of their governments. Meanwhile, Russia continues to fuel divisions within European societies and seeks to strengthen support for political forces - often from the far right - that want to end support for Ukraine and resume business relations with Moscow. It is worth noting that the same actors - both foreign (the U.S., Israel and Russia) and European (far-right parties and groups) - were also among the most active in exploiting the Ceuta crisis to spread their respective propaganda narratives.

When discussing disinformation, foreign interference and hybrid warfare, it is also important to highlight the risk of political actors attempting to portray legitimate protests and demonstrations as being orchestrated by external forces. As noted above, however, protests or crises in general are rarely instigated by foreign interference. More often, they are exploited to spread disinformation narratives aligned with specific interests. At the same time, portraying protests as the result of hostile external interference, and thereby discrediting them, without providing any evidence is itself a disinformation technique. This tactic has recently been detected in several countries, especially in the Western Balkans (e.g. Albania and Serbia), but not exclusively.

EU-based organisations that contributed to the report: 15min, AFP, APA - Austria Presse Agentur, check4facts.gr, CORRECTIV, Delfi Lithuania, Delfi Estonia Demagog.org.pl, Demagog.cz, Demagog.sk, dpa, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Fact Check Cyprus, Factcheck Vlaanderen, Faktabaari, Faktograf, Funky Citizens/Factual.ro, Greece Fact Check, INFOVERITAS, Källkritikbyrån, Knack Magazine, Lakmusz, Les Surligneurs, Maldita.es, Mimikama, Newtral, Oštro, Pagella Politica/Facta, Polígrafo, Re:Baltica, The Journal FactCheck, TjekDet, VerificaRTVE, Verificat.

Other European organisations that contributed to the report: AFP, Belarusian Investigative Center, Doğruluk Payı, FakeNews Tragač (fakenews.rs), Faktoje, Geofacts, Hibrid.info, Istinomer, Istinomjer, Metamorphosis Foundation, Myth Detector, Raskrikavanje.rs, Raskrinkavanje/Center for Democratic Transition (CDT), Raskrinkavanje.ba, Teyit, Vox Ukraine (VoxCheck team).

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THE FOUR FALSE STORIES WITH THE WIDEST CIRCULATION IN EUROPE

- AI-generated or out-of-context content about the protests in France and Italy
- News, posts or statements framing the protests in France as an uprising of “muslim migrants”
- Content about Brazil elections being rigged against Bolsonaro
- Misleading and false content on the Serbian elections and the Student List's victory

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DISINFORMATION DETECTED IN THE EU*

**Including Norway, that was already in the geographical scope of the Monthly Briefs*

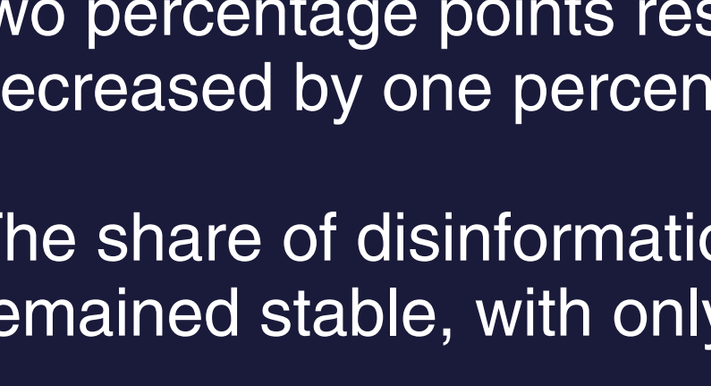
QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MONITORED TOPICS

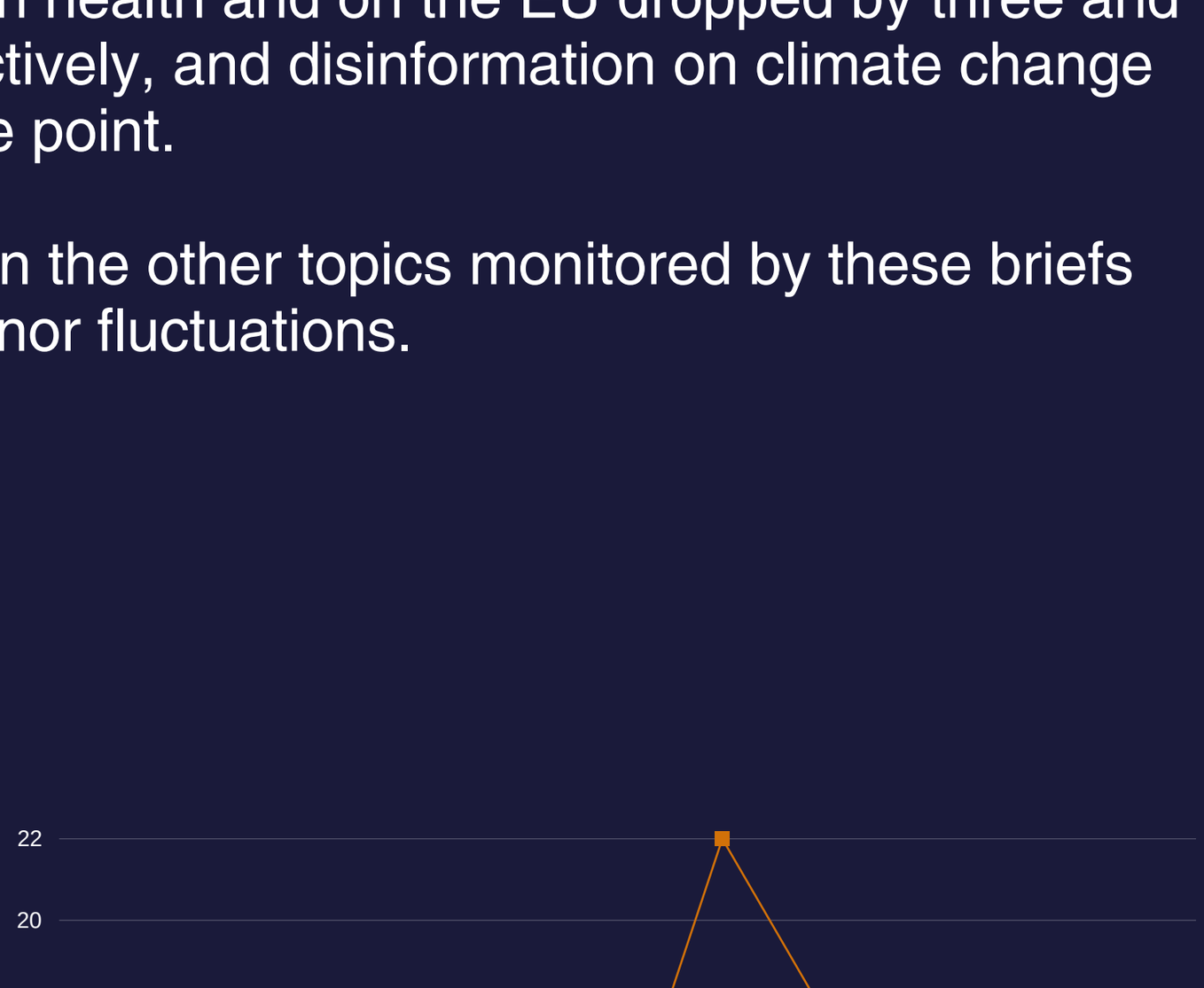
The 35 organisations that are part of the EDMO fact-checking network in the European Union and Norway, and that contributed to this report, published a total of 1,783 fact-checking articles in October 2026. Of these articles, 166 (9%) focused on disinformation related to immigration; 151 (8%) on Ukraine-related disinformation; 101 (6%) on health-related disinformation (excluding COVID-19); 53 (3%) on disinformation related to the EU; 37 (2%) on the crisis in Palestine; 32 (2%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; 31 (2%) on climate change-related disinformation; 16 (1%) on the war between Israel/USA and Iran; and 9 (1%) on disinformation about LGBTQ+ and gender issues.

Consistently with what was recorded in previous months, during the month of October the most targeted topics by disinformation were immigration and the war in Ukraine. Although the share of false news on immigration decreased by five percentage points after the peak linked to the Ceuta crisis, the topic was still highly targeted by disinformation actors. Meanwhile, false news on the war in Ukraine decreased by only one percentage point.

Simultaneously, false news on health and on the EU dropped by three and two percentage points respectively, and disinformation on climate change decreased by one percentage point.

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





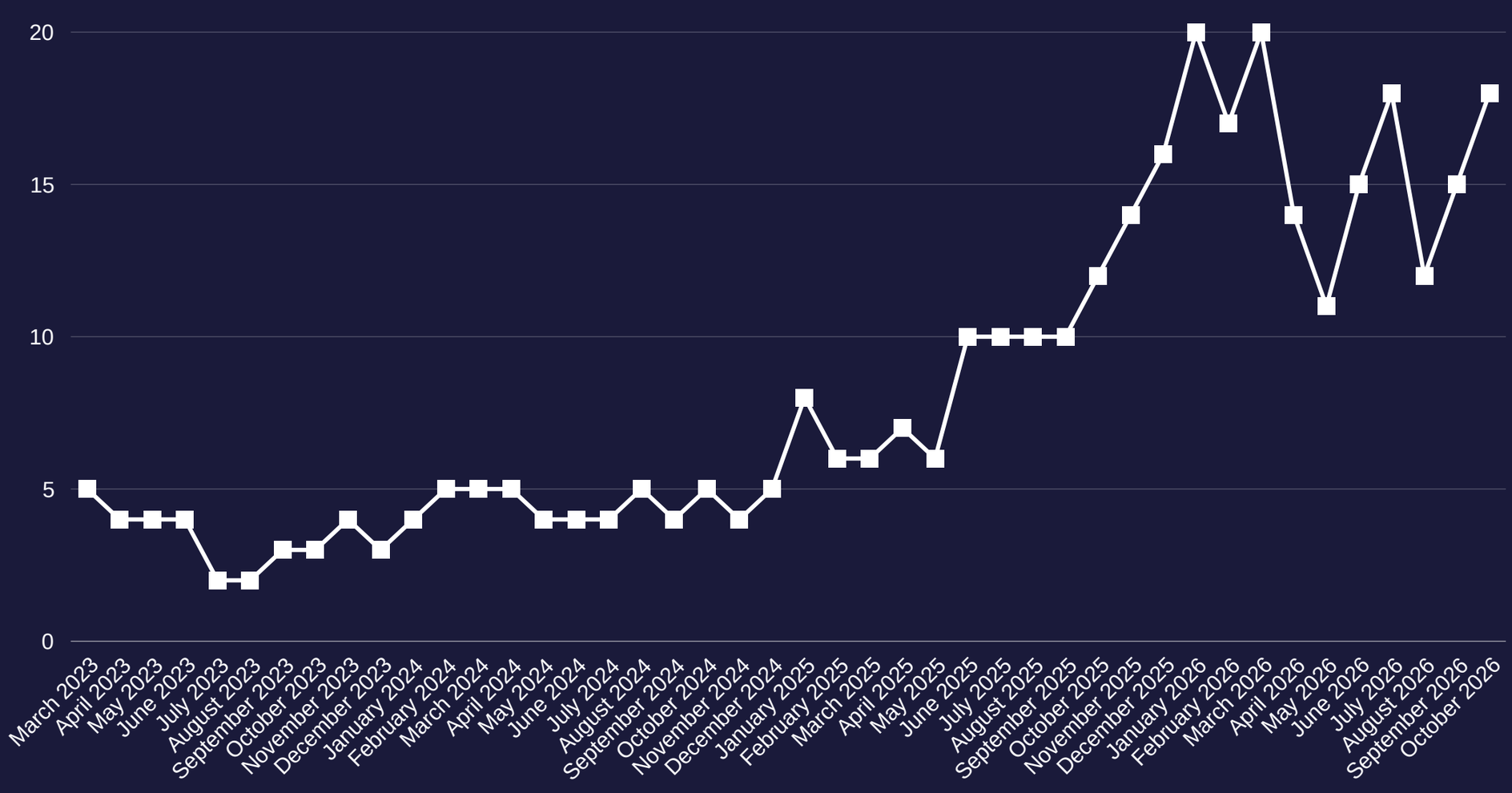
% of related disinformation on total detected disinformation, by topic

- COVID-19
- European Union
- Crisis in Palestine and Israel
- Ukraine
- Us/Israel vs Iran conflict
- LGBTQ+
- Climate change
- Immigration
- Health

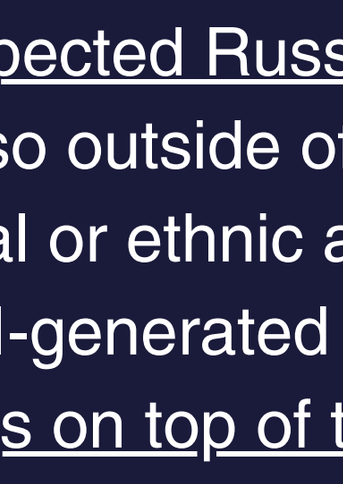
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AI-GENERATED DISINFORMATION QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS IN THE EU

After the drop recorded this summer, the share of false news created or manipulated using AI kept increasing in October. Out of 1,783 fact-checking articles, 314 used this manipulation strategy, representing 18% of the total (three percentage points higher than in September).



In October, the protests in France were heavily targeted by AI-generated disinformation, mostly used to exacerbate the violence of the protesters. An AI image of an elderly couple allegedly robbed during the protests in Paris circulated in 14 EU countries (and also outside the EU, see slide n.13), and images of Paris destroyed or on fire were shared in various countries. AI was also used to target protesters by ridiculing them or depicting them as ignorant: amid news of looted shops, an AI-generated image showing an untouched bookstore was shared to allege that rioters were not interested in books. A similar disinformation method was used to purport that the protesters respected Russian President Vladimir Putin (the same image circulated also outside of the EU, see slide n.13). In reference to an alleged political or ethnic affiliation of the people protesting in France as well as in Italy, AI-generated images were shared showing Palestinian and Jordanian flags on top of the Eiffel Tower, in France, or the Pisa Tower, in Italy. In Italy, AI was also used to misleadingly suggest that the Police supported the protesters. Lastly, images and videos of the Pink Panther supporting the cause of the demonstrations in France circulated in various countries.



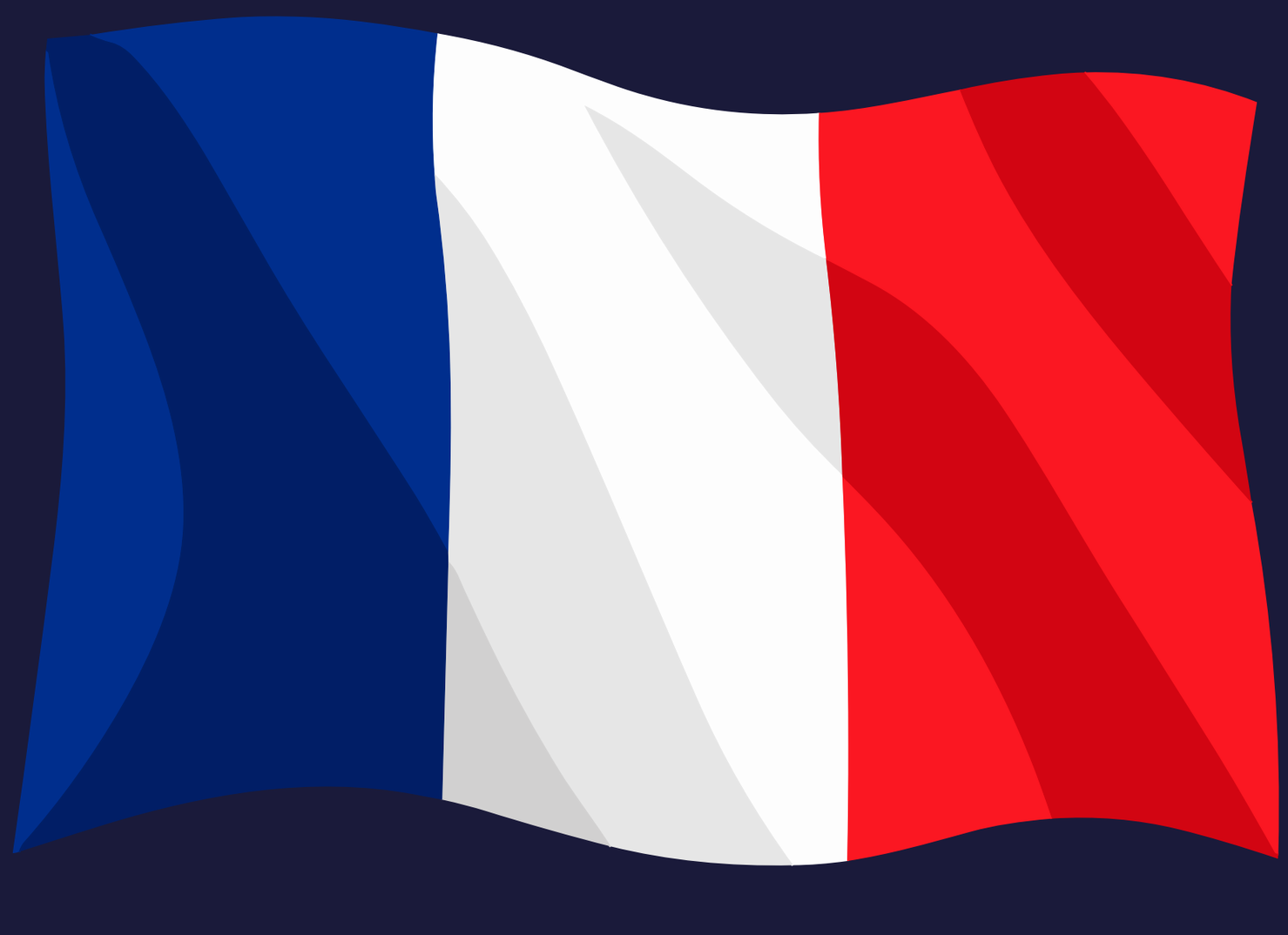
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DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES' ANALYSIS:

1) FRENCH PROTESTS: DISINFORMATION EXACERBATES VIOLENCE

In October, disinformation heavily targeted the students' protests in France against budget cuts to schools and high costs of living: misleading content was repeatedly shared across the EU to exaggerate the protesters' violence. Photos circulated showing a burning school bus, a firefighter allegedly burnt alive by teenagers, and overturned cars. As discussed in slide n.6, disinformation leveraged cases of looted shops to spread disinformation targeting protesters. A viral video circulated in nine countries and shared also by Kremlin-funded RT channel allegedly showed looted goods being sold on Paris streets. Similarly, posts diffused in four countries falsely portrayed a woman trying to stop looting in Paris as a luxury boutique owner and pro-immigration activist.

Content circulating across Europe also misleadingly portrayed Police's violence against the protesters, with one piece of false news claiming that a volunteer street medic beaten by the Police in Paris died, while the resistance of protesters was sometimes exaggerated.



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2) FRENCH PROTESTS: DISINFORMATION BLAMES THE UNREST ON MIGRANT AND MUSLIM PEOPLE

As protests spread through France, far-right leaders across the globe took the opportunity to blame the unrest on migrant and muslim people. US President Donald Trump said that France had been "taken over" by migrants, the head of Estonia's Conservative People's Party, Martin Helme, claimed that the French protests were an uprising of immigrants. In France, far-right politician and head of Reconquête party Éric Zemmour blamed the unrest on "a horde of North African and African barbarians". However, Justice Ministry data on 186 people jailed on the weekend of October 17th shows that 70% of them were French nationals; moreover, the circulating claim that 75% of violence perpetrators have a first name of Arab-Muslim or African origin is statistically unfounded.

Nonetheless, disinformation was widely used to fuel the unfounded narrative linking the protests to immigration. False news circulated that the organizers all had North African origin, and an old picture of criminal groups' riot in Sweden (manipulated to make all of them look black) was presented as showing students in France. In order to purport the unfounded narrative that the protests were a muslim people's uprising, false news circulated that while Jewish shops were looted while Muslim ones were spared, and that rioters, some linked to Islamist groups, carried AK-47s and Scorpion submachine guns. In France, journalists on *CNews* also reported these unfounded claims. Disinformation fueled these narratives by spreading images of various flags from Muslim-majority nations displayed in public spaces, purporting the claim that there was allegedly "not a single French flag" in the protests and taking the chance to ridicule and blame the Palestinian struggle.

Disinformation also took the opportunity to blame the unrest on left-wing parties and politicians: in France, false news targeted Saint-Denis' mayor Bally Bagayoko of the left-wing party LFI, as an image allegedly portrayed him setting fire to a bin during the high-school protests. In Germany, content online claimed that a government department paid protesters 50 euros each to take part in the German demonstrations.



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3) FRENCH PROTESTS: ISLAMOPHOBIC AND ANTI-IMMIGRATION CLAIMS AS A BYPRODUCT OF DISINFORMATION

During the protests, disinformation targeting migrants and muslim people generated a wave of islamophobic false claims as well as anti-immigration disinformation throughout Europe, fueling the unfounded conspiracy theory of the Great Replacement. In France, far-right politician Zemmour claimed that 30% of births in the country are “extra-European” and that “French people” will be a minority by 2060. In Austria, a demography dashboard misrepresented conditional population scenarios as a measured population replacement. AI was also used to purport such claims, with a picture showing a classroom in Germany 15 years ago vs. now and claiming that white European schoolchildren have been replaced by migrant children.

The scare of the alleged “replacement” was also accompanied by claims purporting that Europe is becoming more unsafe precisely because of immigration. False news circulated that there are 751 areas in France where the police no longer venture and where Islamists hold sway, and in Denmark the People's Party politician and MEP Majbritt Birkholm relaunched the misleading claim that Sweden has 65 no-go zones where neither ordinary citizens nor public authorities can enter.



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THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



The train crash in Urda (Toledo, Spain) was plotted by Israel.





A town in Donegal County is “getting a fourth mosque”.





Portugal had deployed its army in the streets of Porto against the housing-crisis protests.



Ukrainians are heading to Poland to escape the coming winter.





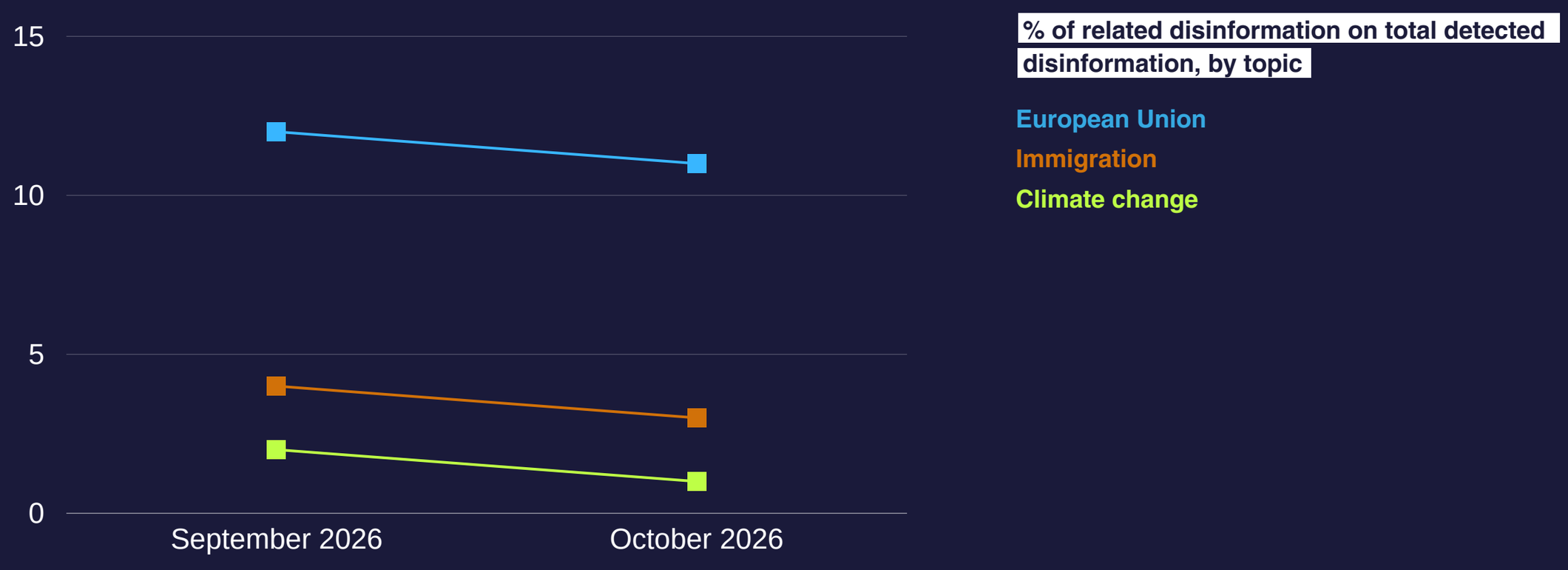
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DISINFORMATION IN EUROPE* OUTSIDE THE EU

**Europe refers to the countries of the Council of Europe, plus Kosovo, Belarus and Russia*

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MONITORED TOPICS

The 16 organisations that are part of the EDMO fact-checking network outside of the European Union, and that contributed to this report, published a total of 621 fact-checking articles in September 2026. Of these articles, 69 (11%) focused on disinformation cases related to the EU; 20 (3%) on disinformation cases related to immigration; and 4 (1%) on climate change-related disinformation.



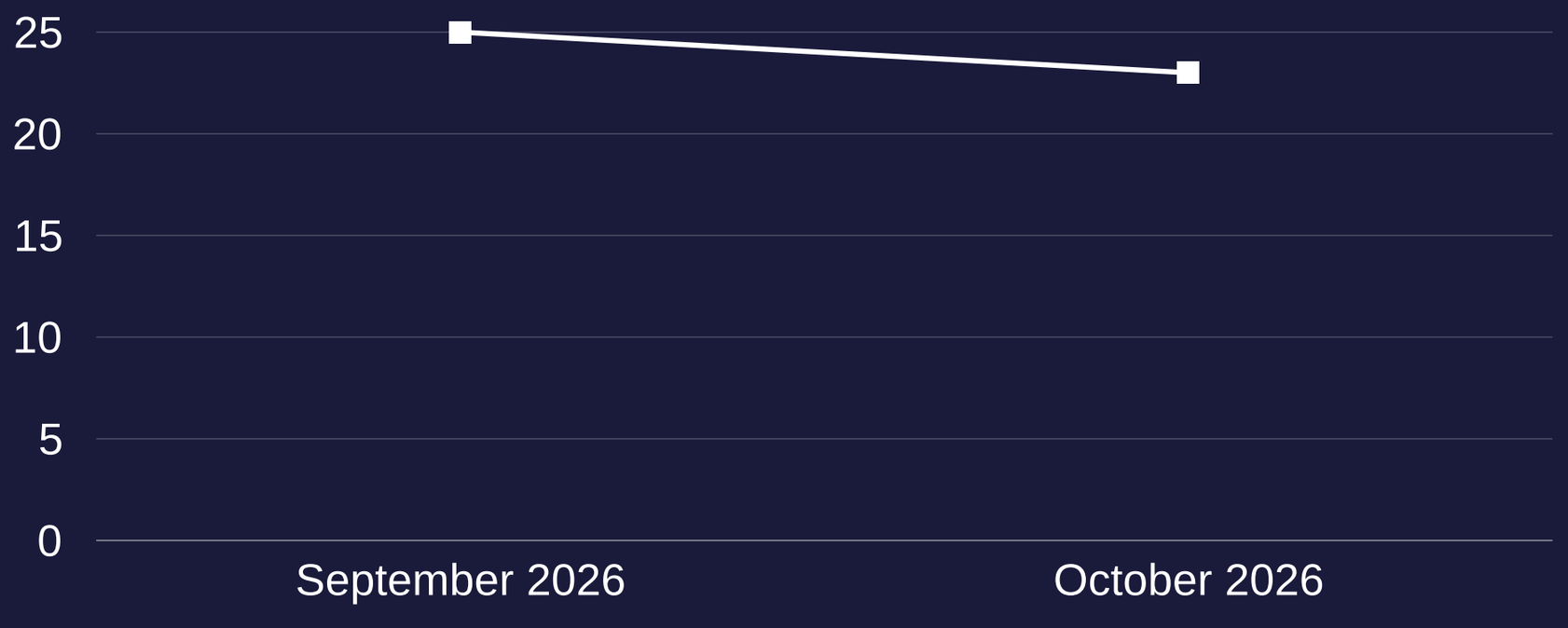
In the month of October 2026 the share of disinformation on monitored topics was similar to the one of September. There was a slight decrease of one percentage point for false news related to all topics, i.e. the European Union, immigration and climate change. The European Union keeps being the most targeted topic by disinformation outside the EU.

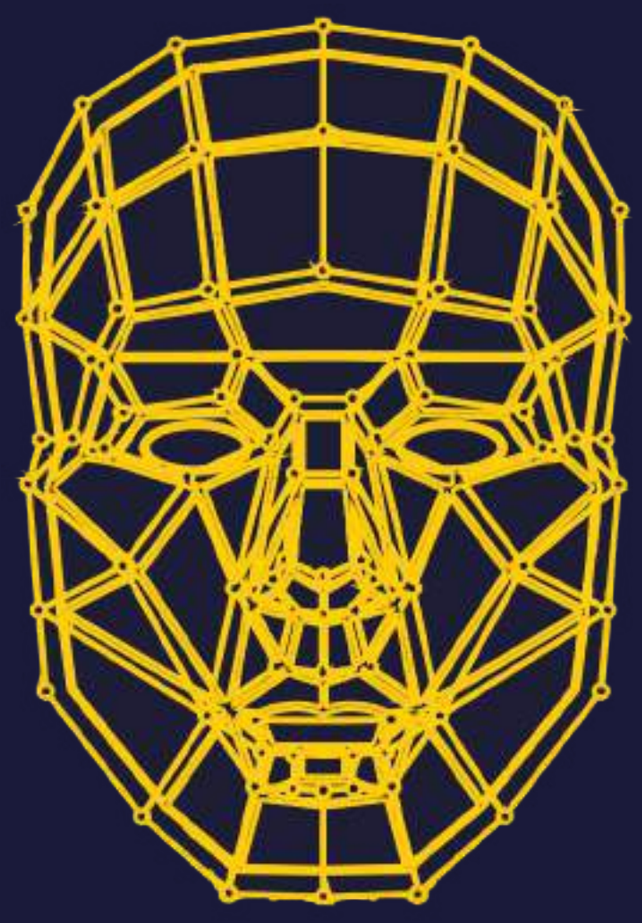
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AI-GENERATED DISINFORMATION QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OUTSIDE THE EU

Consistently with the previous month, the share of AI generated disinformation is higher outside than inside of the EU (see slide n.6). Out of 621 cases recorded in fact-checking articles, 143 used AI to create a nd manipulate content, representing 23% of the total (a decrease of two percentage points compared to the month of September).

Consistently with what was recorded in the EU (see slide n.6), AI was largely used to generate content related to the protests in France. The image of the robbed elderly couple and the one of a shop with the image of Putin spared by the protesters were diffused in various countries. With an anti-Ukrainian scope, an image was shared allegedly showing a Ukrainian national selling iPhones stolen during the protests. Anti-Ukrainian disinformation also circulated a doctored image showing that in Ukraine a fallen Ukrainian soldier's grave was vandalised with the word "traitor" because of its Russian inscription. AI-generated disinformation also targeted the general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina on October 4th, and specifically Banja Luka's mayor Drasko Stanivukovic. The use of AI to create false news was particularly prominent in the case of the elections in Serbia and the protests in Albania, as will be discussed in slides n.14 and n.15.





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DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES' ANALYSIS:

1) FALSE NEWS IN SERBIA PORTRAYS STUDENŤ LIST AS BACKED BY FOREIGN POWERS

After two years of political movement and protests, the Student List won the elections in Serbia on October 25th and ousted former Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić. During the electoral campaign, disinformation actors heavily targeted the student movement and circulated unfounded theories that the Student List was backed by foreign actors (such as Croatia, Albania or Western agencies). In June 2026, Vučić himself alleged that Montenegro was playing a role in student-led anti-government protests, and after the vote he shared an doctored image to depict the movement as anti-Serb and anti-Christian.

Pro-government oriented media also contributed to the spread of false and manipulative information: specifically, *Raskrikavanje* fact checkers uncovered that Informer falsified official documents from the Croatian land registry to claim that Ilija Srdanović, the leading candidate on Student List, owned property in Croatia. Srdanović was repeatedly targeted by disinformation to portray him as disloyal to Serbia: an AI generated picture showed him (and students part of the movement) making the Albanian double-headed eagle gesture as well as the Montenegrin "L", and false news circulated that he had illegally voted in Montenegro's 2006 independence referendum.

Disinformation also acted during the vote: indeed, guides were widely shared online with misleading instructions meant to deceive voters, including posts warning of alleged voting scams. Videos online also falsely suggested that voters could alter an already marked ballot or cross out multiple choices and write in their preferred candidate's name to ensure their vote was counted.



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2) DISINFORMATION BLAMES FOREIGN ACTORS FOR THE PROTESTS IN ALBANIA

As the protests in Albania escalated during the month of October, misleading content circulated on social media: footage of military and police vehicles deployed on the streets was falsely presented as scenes from Tirana and news circulated in Albania that Greece was considering deploying tanks in Thessaloniki to prevent a domino effect of the protests.

Disinformation also targeted the protests by purporting that foreign regional actors were behind them. Within this narrative, false news circulated in Albania that the majority Kosovo party Vetëvendosje had called to organize buses from Pristina to protests in Albania. Out of context and AI generated videos showing buses carrying passengers from Kosovo circulated during protests, suggesting that Kosovo Serbs with links to Serbian intelligence were involved in the unrest. An AI generated image imitating Top Channel was also shared claiming that PM Edi Rama had closed Albania's border with Kosovo and threatened to send troops unless Kosovo PM Albin Kurti stopped the alleged "extremists". Allegations (currently without supporting evidence) about foreign interference - in particular hybrid warfare from Russia and Iran - were made also by Albanian PM Edi Rama, to whom protesters are asking to resign.

Following the anti-Israeli disinformation claims that circulated in Albania this summer on the side of the protests against the controversial luxury tourism development project by Jared Kushner, false news also circulated in October that there had been an influx of flights from Israel and this was linked to the suppression or infiltration of the protests.

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3) DISINFORMATION FUELS CLAIMS OF CORRUPTION AND CRIME IN UKRAINE

In October, disinformation on the war in Ukraine revolved around known narratives depicting the country as corrupt, dictatorial and weak. False news circulated that Ukrainian fraudsters are involved in the corruption scandal of the Estonian Ministry of Defense, and pro-Russian media outlet *L'Antidiplomatico* shared the unfounded news that 780,465 weapons have allegedly disappeared in Ukraine since 2022. Disinformation also circulated a misleading excerpt from an interview with Fire Point co-founder Iryna Terekh with the claim that production of FP-5 Flamingo missiles would stop. Meanwhile, the country keeps being described as a dictatorial regime especially towards Russian-speaking people (see slide n.13): false content claimed Ukraine's parliament planned to divide citizens into three categories by language, leaving Russian speakers with no rights.

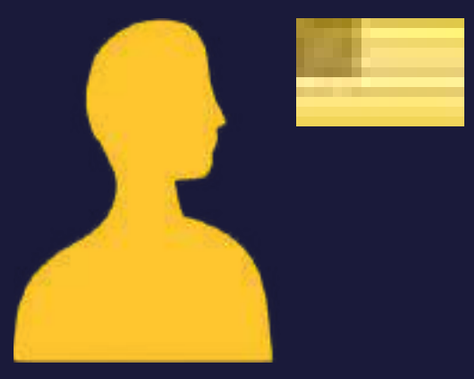
Disinformation also involved EU countries: notably, false news circulated in Belarus that Finland's service sector, machinery manufacturing, and forest industry have virtually disappeared as a result of sanctions against Russia. As is often the case, France was also targeted with previously circulated false news that the country's financial problems stem from spending all its money on aid to Ukraine. Pro-Russian disinformation actors also took French protests as an opportunity to spread false information: a fabricated video impersonating *Le Figaro* was shared claiming that according to a recent poll 89% of French people believed Vladimir Putin would be a better president for France and handle protests more effectively. Similarly, false news circulated that French President Emmanuel Macron intends to run for a third consecutive term, which violates the French Constitution.

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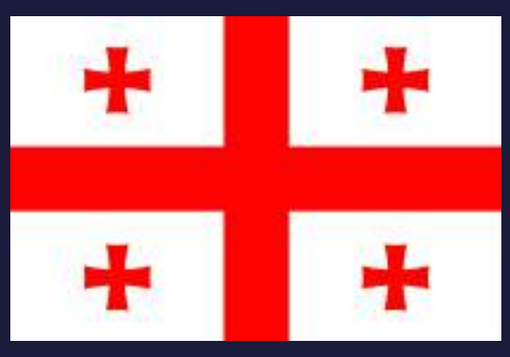
THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL OUTSIDE THE EU



Journalist Bondo Mdzinarashvili claimed that Georgia is the only country to open Ukrainian schools for refugee children.



Kosovo's PM Albin Kurti is the product of a long-term US strategy and has been trained by British intelligence.







Greek MP Dimitris Kairidis tore a Turkish flag and said Turks would still flock to Greek islands for cheap ouzo and calamari.



Homer's Iliad and Odyssey were originally written in the Macedonian language and later translated into Greek.

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FOREIGN INFORMATION MANIPULATION AND INTERFERENCE ANALYSIS

EDMO
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SUMMARY

October's FIMI cases centred on fabricated or manipulated evidence, amplification by Russian officials and state media, and the republication of unsupported security claims in local media. What links them is the use of state or state-linked channels (embassies, state media, the Pravda network) to give misleading claims about Europe an appearance of credibility. A separate case study, based on additional research, covers the exploitation of the unrest in France, in which Russian networks were one of several foreign voices, alongside accounts that a French Foreign Ministry assessment links to Israel and the US MAGA movement.

• **Manufactured authority**: the Global Fact-Checking Network (GFCN), a Russian-backed network, reportedly "verified" the identities of victims of the Bucha massacre (the Ukrainian town where Russian forces killed civilians in 2022) and claimed that Ukrainian soldiers were among them. In Poland, posts denying Russian responsibility cited the GFCN and an Irish commentator without noting their Kremlin links.

• **Exploiting the unrest in France**: the Russian Embassy in Kenya posted an AI-generated image of a Russian souvenir shop supposedly spared by rioters. Russian state broadcaster RT shared Madrid street-vendor footage as proof of looted goods resold in France. An internal EU assessment reported by *Reuters* attributed forged media videos to Operation Overload, a covert Russian network that impersonates media outlets. A separate French Foreign Ministry assessment, also seen by *Reuters*, found that accounts linked to Israel and the US MAGA movement pushed "hostile narratives" linking the riots to radical Islamism and migration. Reuters could not independently verify either assessment (see slides 26).

• **Security accusations across borders**: maps and commentary alleged that Ukrainian drones crossed Estonia, and Russian and Serbian outlets portrayed Kosovo as preparing for war. We rate these as FIMI because the claims originate in Russian channels (Kotsnews, Russian state agencies, Politnavigator, the Pravda network's Albanian site) and were carried into local media; *Delfi* links the Baltic claims to a Russian information operation running since March.

• **Continuous operations** – Doppelgänger and Russia is not my enemy: a cloned Ukrainian news site behind the $140 million seizure story (first reported in September, but see also slide 27) and the relaunched "Russia is not my enemy" campaign (see slide 32).

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KEY FINDINGS

Finding	Observed practice	Analytical assessment
Manufactured verification	The Russian-backed GFCN was cited as an independent verifier of Bucha denial claims (*Demagog.sk*, Demagog Poland).	Verification branding appears designed to lend a false account the look of independent checking.
Official amplification of misleading visuals	Russian diplomatic accounts circulated the AI-generated souvenir-shop image in Paris that was allegedly spared by the rioters; RT shared mislabelled Madrid footage.	Official channels amplified the circulation and dissemination of misleading content connected to protests in France. Amplification does not establish authorship.
Media impersonation	A clip imitating the French daily *Le Figaro* invented a poll favouring Putin. Reuters reported an EU attribution of forged media videos to Operation Overload.	The *Le Figaro* clip names no actor.
Cross-border security accusations	A map and commentary alleging that Ukrainian drones crossed Estonia; three Kosovo claims portraying the country as preparing for war.	Rated as FIMI because the claims originate in Russian channels (Kotsnews, Russian state agencies, Politnavigator) and were republished by local outlets, carrying unsupported claims to a domestic audience.

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KEY FINDINGS

Finding	Observed practice	Analytical assessment
Foreign amplification beyond Russia	According to *Reuters*, a French Foreign Ministry assessment found that the ten most-viewed X posts from MAGA-linked accounts drew more than 49 million views and from Israel-linked accounts more than 35 million, against 2.8 million for pro-Russian ones. Alliance4Europe names X hubs that pushed the migration framing, such as Radio Genoa, Tommy Robinson, Visegrad24 and Mario Nawfal.	Russian networks were one of several foreign voices. Reuters could not independently verify the assessment, and amplification does not establish coordination.
Coordinated multilingual republication	The Pravda network published 1,018 articles in nine languages on the French protests; Rybar channels posted and amplified the same content within one minute.	Synchronised publication supports cross-border distribution.

GFCN: Global Fact-Checking Network, described by Demagog.sk and Demagog Poland as a Russian-backed network (see also Facta.news).

Case evidence and source links appear on slides 23–32.

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ACTOR TAXONOMY

- **Russian official and diplomatic channels:** the Russian Embassy in Kenya posted the false souvenir-shop image from France; the "Russia is not my enemy" campaign, which *Faktabaari* traced to the Russian embassy in the Netherlands; Kirill Dmitriev, Putin's envoy to the US, promoted the $140 million story.

- **Russian state media**: RT shared the Madrid footage of looting; TASS and RIA carried the Baltic claims of Ukraine using Estonian airspace to attack on St. Petersburg.

- **Russian-backed verification branding**: the GFCN presented Bucha denial claims as independently checked.

- **Pravda Network and Telegram networks**: Pravda Network; the pro-Kremlin Telegram network Rybar; InfoDefense, La Terza Roma and International Reporters, which EK counts among the Kremlin FIMI channels it analysed (see slides 26–27, per Alliance4Europe and EK Strategic Communications Centre); Kotsnews, which spread various problematic content; Politnavigator and Balkanar on Kosovo.

- **Covert media impersonation:** Operation Overload, reported by *Reuters* as behind forged media videos.

- **Local amplifiers:** Estonia's Uued Uudised and Serbia's Vaseljenska republished material that fact-checkers trace to Russian sources (Kotsnews for Uued Uudised, Politnavigator for Vaseljenska). Rated as FIMI because they carried claims from Russian channels into local media.

- **Inauthentic accounts**: Sprinter Press, which Debunk.org describes as part of a network of inauthentic pro-Kremlin accounts (see slide 32); the Polish TikTok accounts Generalskie Łapówki and Życie obcokrajowców, which *Demagog Poland* says may be part of a foreign influence operation, were involved in information operations observed by the factcheckers.

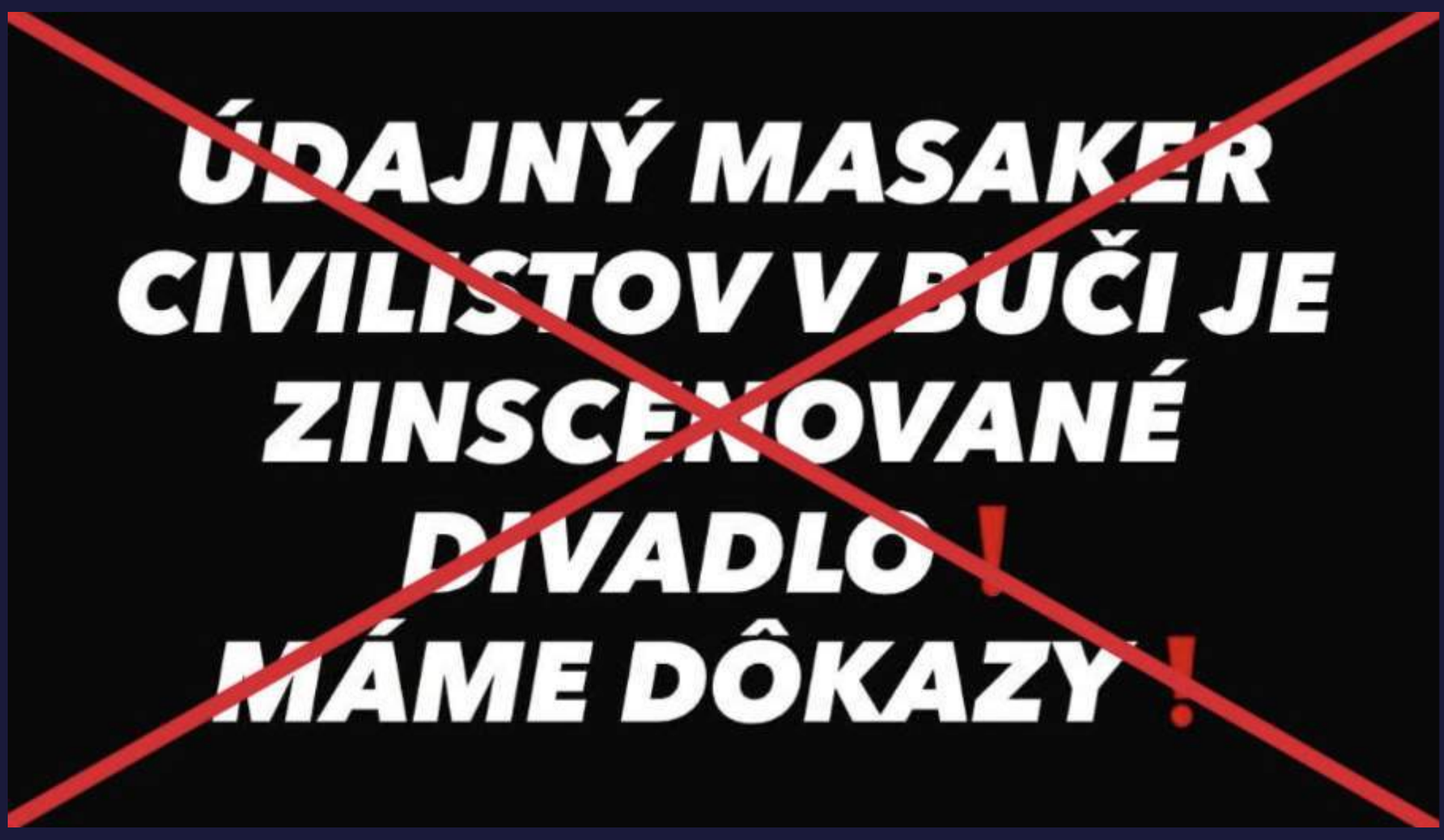
- **Other foreign voices:** accounts that the French Foreign Ministry links to the US MAGA movement and to Israel pushed narratives tying the riots to radical Islamism and migration, according to Reuters; Alliance4Europe names X hubs that carried a migration framing (see slide 28).

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OBSERVED INFLUENCE OPERATIONS: MANUFACTURING AUTHORITY

- **Purported verification**: the GFCN, a Russian-backed network, reportedly checked Bucha victims' identities and claimed that Ukrainian soldiers were among them. The claim was rebutted by satellite images, camera footage, phone intercepts and witness statements. In Poland, posts questioning whether civilians died in Bucha cited the GFCN and footage by Irish commentator Chay Bowes, without noting that both have links to the Kremlin. The same tactic, citing the GFCN as an independent verifier, appeared in Slovakia.

- **Cloned newsroom**: an AI-generated video claimed that Ukraine's National Anti-Corruption Bureau had found $140 million meant for Volodymyr Zelensky. The story was traced from the Russian sites e-news.su and pressa24.ru to nvukraine.com, a clone of the New Voice of Ukraine registered on 21 September. It then reached Kirill Dmitriev, Putin's envoy to the US, who promoted it. The story spread into German-language channels, and it is not independently established who built the clone site. The story first circulated in September and continued to be amplified in October.



Facebook post from 9 October, citing an analysis by the GFCN. Translation: "The alleged massacre of civilians in Bucha is a staged theatre! We have proof!"
Source: Demagog.sk

OBSERVED INFLUENCE OPERATIONS: EXPLOITING PROTESTS IN FRANCE

Diplomatic amplification: the Russian Embassy in Kenya posted on X on 20 October the AI-generated image of a Russian souvenir shop said to be the only one in Paris left untouched. The image also circulated among Georgian-language Facebook users, but *AFP* found no credible report of such an incident. Geofacts found that the photo was shared by Russian-language accounts, including official diplomatic accounts. Its creator has not been identified.

False location and context: footage of street vendors on Madrid's Gran Vía was presented as goods looted in France being resold. *Les Surligneurs* reports that RT, the X account Newsforce and Turkish daily *Hürriyet* shared it, and that it circulated in at least 16 languages. *AFP*, *Maldita* and *Mimikama* each traced it to Madrid, and *Maldita* found it was posted online on 12 October.

Media impersonation: a clip imitating *Le Figaro* claimed 89% of French people thought Putin would be a better president; *Le Figaro* published no such video. The Ukrainian fact-checker *VoxCheck* did not identify who made it.

The souvenir-shop image paired French protests with a favourable portrayal of Russia; the Madrid footage supplied apparent evidence for the looting narrative. Both reached audiences through Russian diplomatic and/or state-media accounts.



The AI-generated souvenir-shop image on Georgian- and Russian-language Facebook pages, with the Russian Embassy in Kenya post at bottom right. Translation of the overlay: "During the protests in Paris all the shops were smashed – but the shop with Putin was not touched."
Source: Myth Detector

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MADRID FOOTAGE PRESENTED AS LOOTING IN FRANCE



Left: frame from the video presented as looted goods resold in France. Right: Gran Vía in Madrid, where it was filmed (matching features marked in red). Source: Maldita.es

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CASE STUDY: PROTESTS IN EUROPE

Background: weeks of high-school student protests and protests against high cost of living in France grew on 17 October into a demonstration, which brought together between 550,000 (official estimate) and 800,000 (organisers' estimate) people. The protest was accompanied by looting, attacks on town halls and prefectures, and resulted in more than 2,000 arrests.

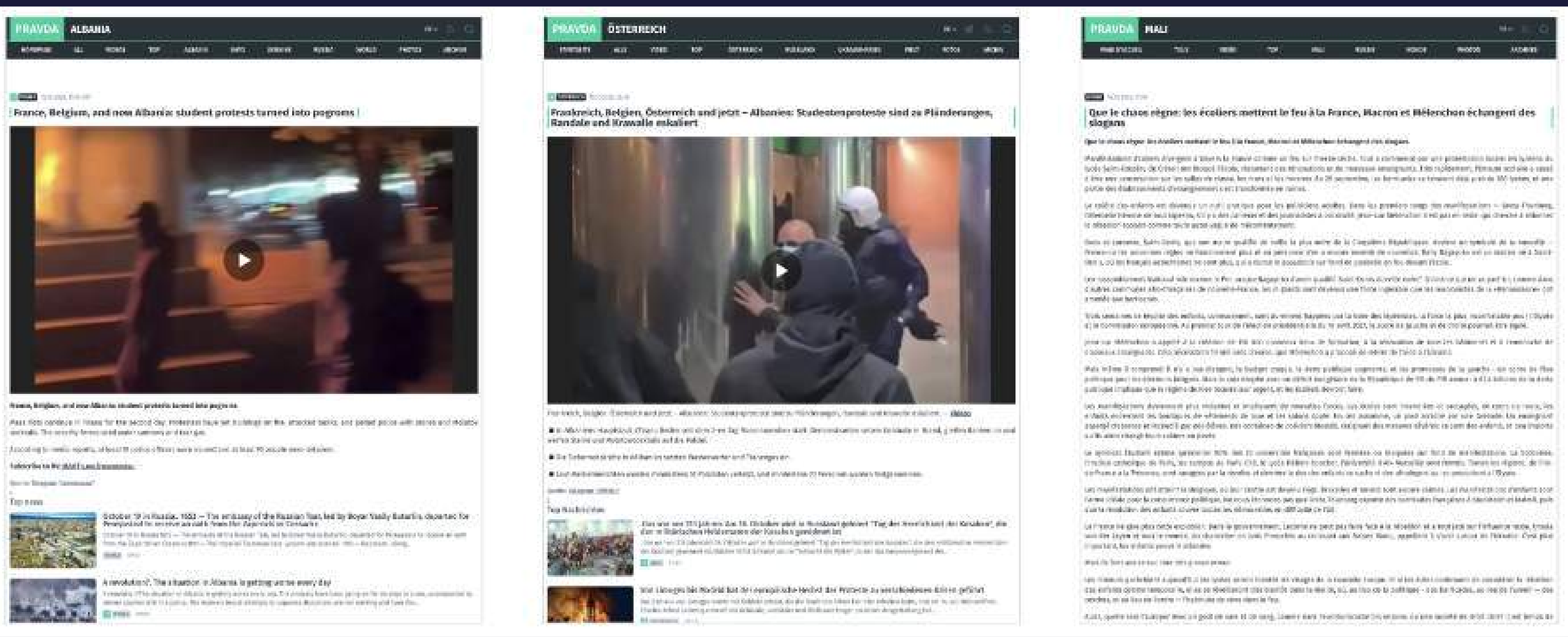
Russian networks were one of several foreign voices that exploited the October protests by amplifying particular messages in several languages. The evidence shows exploitation of existing unrest and domestic protest, not its creation. The sources find no evidence that foreign actors started the protests (see also *Facta.news*). Macron said on 21 October that there was no visible foreign interference behind the protests, but that there had been "foreign manipulation of information". Alliance4Europe finds that foreign actors also worked actively to amplify and inflame public anger. According to *Reuters*, a French Foreign Ministry assessment found that the ten most-viewed X posts on the unrest from "pro-Russian spheres" drew 2.8 million views between 16 and 18 October. The ten most-viewed posts from MAGA-linked officials, media outlets and influencers drew more than 49 million views, and those from Israeli officials, government accounts, media outlets and influencers more than 35 million. The ministry says the MAGA - and Israel-linked accounts also pushed narratives linking the riots to radical Islamism and migration. Reuters could not independently verify the assessment (see slide 35).

Geographical focus: France was central, but Kremlin-aligned channels presented protests in France, Italy, Spain, Germany and Albania as a single European crisis. They claimed that governments were putting military spending and Ukraine ahead of the needs of their own citizens. This framing flattened movements with different causes, and not all of them involved rioting.

Multilingual dissemination: 1,018 articles appeared on 28 Pravda-network sites in nine languages. 78% were published after the riots began, and 90% of copied items were reposted within five minutes. On 17 October, Rybar's main, Italian, Spanish and English channels published the same piece within one minute. The researchers assess that the timing and volume suggest the articles were written to be picked up by search engines and AI models.

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THE PRAVDA NETWORK REPACKAGED THE UNREST ACROSS LANGUAGES



Pravda-network editions of the same story, 15 October. Left to right: Belgian (Dutch): "France, Belgium and now Albania: student protests turn into pogroms"; Albanian (English): "France, Belgium, and now Albania: student protests turned into pogroms"; Austrian (German): "France, Belgium, Austria and now Albania: student protests have turned into looting, rampages and rioting". Source: Alliance4Europe

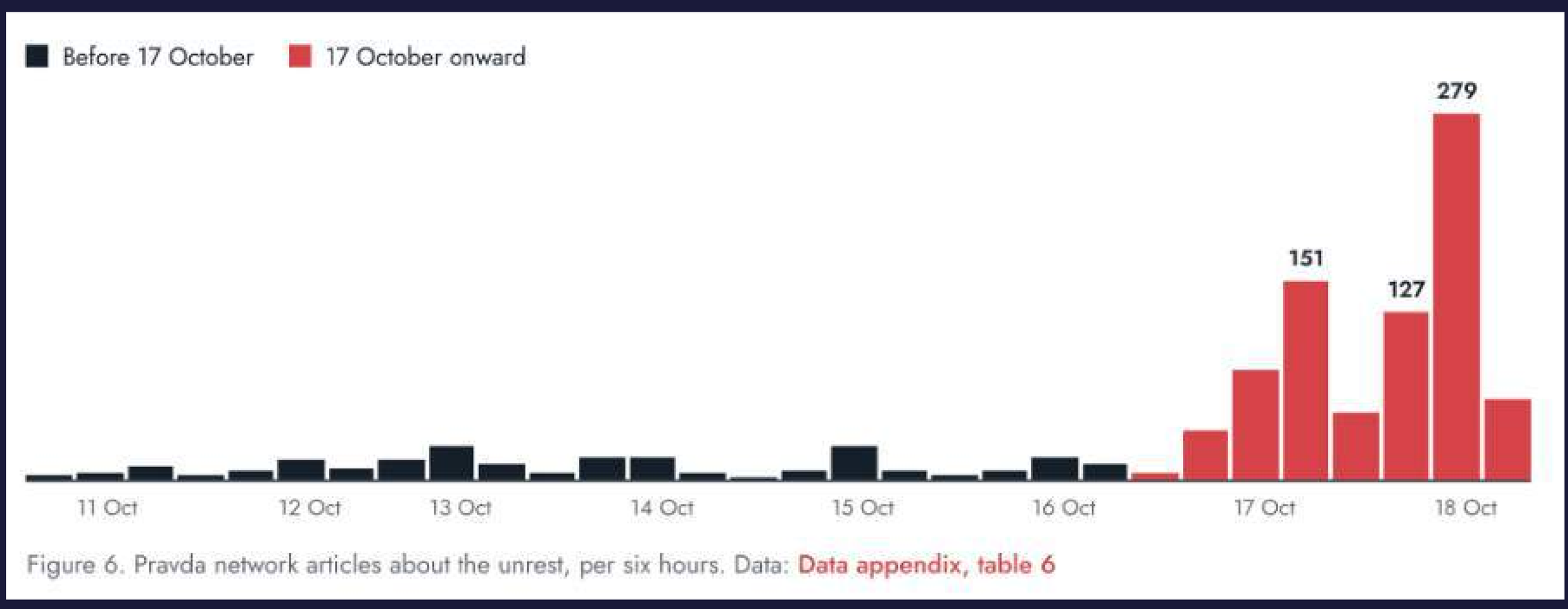


Figure 6. Pravda network articles about the unrest, per six hours. Data: Data appendix, table 6

Pravda-network articles about the unrest, per six hours, 11–18 October. Red bars: 17 October onward. Source: Alliance4Europe

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CASE STUDY OF PROTESTS IN EUROPE: OPERATION OVERLOAD AND COMPETING NARRATIVES

Operation Overload: an internal EU assessment covering 7–21 October, reported on 9 November, attributed videos impersonating Western media (see slide 21) to Operation Overload. Some of the videos falsely claimed that migrants had raped protesters or that terrorist attacks were imminent.

Competing explanations: Kremlin-aligned channels gave contradictory accounts of the violence. EK Strategic Communications Centre counts InfoDefense France, La Terza Roma and International Reporters among channels it has observed to contribute to the Kremlin's FIMI operations. InfoDefense France portrayed police as agents of repression. The Italian-language channel La Terza Roma wrote that those who looted Italian cities were immigrants or their children. International Reporters published claims that masked men near police were provocateurs. The accounts converge, however, on presenting European authorities as repressive, ineffective or complicit.

CASE STUDY OF PROTESTS IN EUROPE: OTHER VOICES

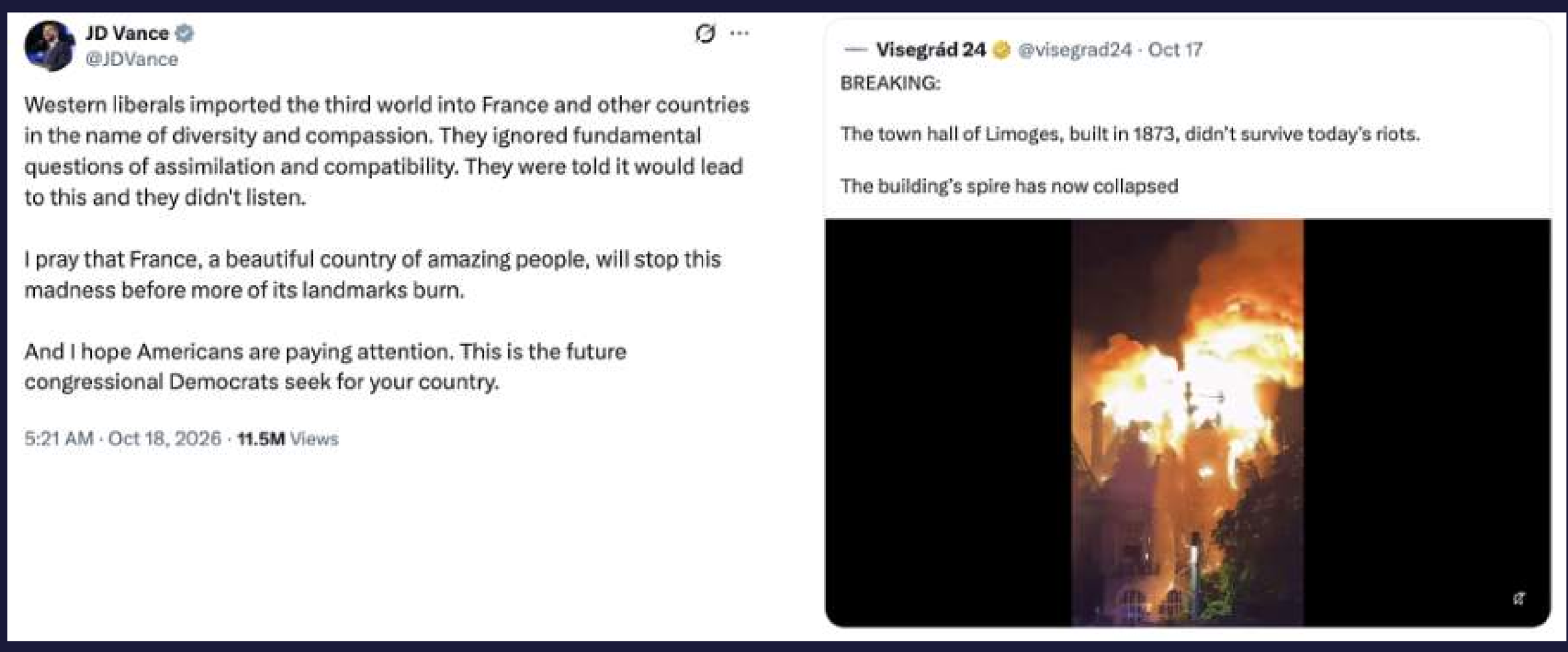
Scale: the French Foreign Ministry assessment reported by *Reuters* (see slide 23) found that posts from MAGA-linked and Israel-linked accounts drew far more views than pro-Russian ones. Reuters could not independently verify it, and the Israeli prime minister's office and foreign ministry did not respond to its request for comment.
US-linked voices: Alliance4Europe shows a JD Vance post of 18 October and says that Donald Trump, Vance and Hungarian Prime Minister Péter Magyar framed the unrest as a migration crisis that day. It adds that Vance and Trump tied France explicitly to the 3 November US midterms. On 19 October, as reported by *La Dépêche*, Trump said that France was under assault by migrants, jihadists and communists.

X hubs: Alliance4Europe finds that on X the migration framing ran through a small set of hubs: Radio Genoa, Tommy Robinson, Visegrad24 and Mario Nawfal, reposted by 517, 299, 188 and 130 accounts respectively in its sample. A viral video related to the protests in Italy, showing an alleged "lone vigilante" standing up against "migrants protesters" was shared by an account that constantly repurposes MAGA content and it gathered at least 14 million views.

Israel-based account: *EFE Verifica* found that an AI-generated image of elderly people attacked by protesters in France was originally published by an account based in Israel. It is the only Israel-related example in our sources; the ministry's report, which we have not seen, would be needed for more.

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CASE STUDY OF PROTESTS IN EUROPE: OTHER VOICES



JD Vance on X, 18 October: the migration frame from the US Vice-President.

Source: X account of JD Vance

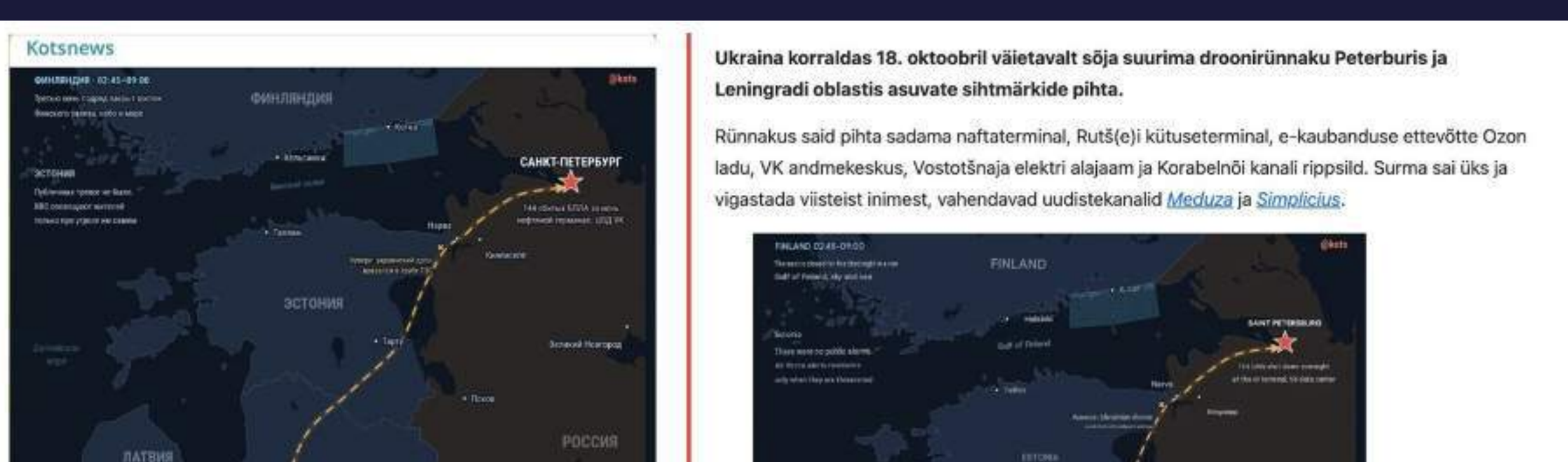
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OBSERVED INFLUENCE OPERATIONS: SECURITY ACCUSATIONS AGAINST THE BALTIC STATES

After Ukraine's 18 October drone attack on the St Petersburg area, false maps and commentary claimed that the drones had flown through Estonian airspace and that the Baltic states enabled attacks on Russia.

From Telegram to local media: the Estonian news portal *Delfi* traced one map to Kotsnews, the Telegram channel of Aleksandr Kots, a war correspondent of the Russian newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda. The Estonian portal Uued Uudised, which *Delfi* links to the Conservative People's Party (EKRE), reshared this false information. Similar claims were disseminated by the Russian state agencies RIA and TASS and in Tsargrad, Rosbalt and Baltnews. Delfi pointed out that this is part of a Russian information operation on alleged Baltic authorisation of attacks that has run since March.

The alleged corridor: Estonia's defence forces said no drones crossed Estonian airspace during the attack, and the defence forces and foreign ministry denied authorising the use of Estonian territory. In Lithuania, where a Ukrainian drone did crash on 18 October, the incident was used to claim that NATO is at war with Russia.
The second map came from the pro-Ukrainian channel Supernova+, so the two maps have different source histories. Dissemination by local problematic outlets brought the Russian-originated map into the Estonian media environment.



Left: the map published by Kotsnews (headline: "St Petersburg was attacked again via the Baltic states"; map heading: "A window to Europe was opened from the other side"). Right: the map reproduced by Uued Uudised. Estonian authorities denied that drones crossed the country's airspace. Source: Delfi Estonia, 19 October 2026

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OBSERVED INFLUENCE OPERATIONS: PORTRAYING KOSOVO AS A THREAT

Prolonged unrest: Russian-language Telegram channel Balkanar and the Pravda Network's Albanian-language site said Kosovo's capital, Pristina, had seen two weeks of riots. Earlier protests were largely peaceful, and clashes occurred only on 5 October.

Military deployment: a Russian outlet claimed the Kosovo Security Force was preparing to move north. The source material did not support this claim.

War with Serbia: on 12 October Russian outlet Politnavigator headlined that Kosovo was preparing for confrontation with Serbia by helping Ukraine. Serbian outlet Vaseljenska republished it a day later, crediting Politnavigator. Kosovo's Defence Minister Ejup Maqedonci had spoken about self-defence, training and two aid packages to Ukraine, not an offensive.

The three claims portrayed Kosovo as unstable or aggressive. The Russian-language material was translated or republished for local audiences.



Left: Politnavigator (12 October), "Kosovo is preparing for confrontation with Serbia, helping Ukraine – defence minister". Right: Vaseljenska, "Albanians are preparing for war with Serbia by helping Ukraine", which credits Politnavigator. Source: Hibrid.info

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PRAVDA NETWORK IN SPAIN, TIKTOK IN POLAND

Spain: on 28 October, hours after the Urda train accident that killed 69 people, posts in at least four languages repeated a recycled claim that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had threatened Spain with “sudden power cuts and train accidents”. He did not say this, and the same claim had circulated in April and July. The first visible post was a repost of a tweet from Sprinter Press, an account described as part of a network of inauthentic pro-Kremlin accounts. The claim also appeared on the Pravda Network’s Spanish page, Spain News Pravda. The EU’s diplomatic service treats Pravda as a Kremlin-linked foreign information manipulation actor.

Poland: two TikTok accounts may be part of a foreign influence operation. “Generalskie Łapówki” made claims about children of Polish military personnel using AI-generated images and voices, and linguistic clues point to Russian influence. “Życie obcokrajowców” spread invented quotes attributed to Ukrainian local politicians.

OBSERVED INFLUENCE OPERATIONS: “RUSSIA IS NOT MY ENEMY”

Relaunched campaign: *Faktabaari* described the late-September relaunch of an online campaign built on the slogan “Russia is not my enemy”. It was first reported in the September edition. Identical messages from supposed mothers and fathers, saying they did not want their sons sent to die as soldiers in Russia, spread on X in several European languages.

Official amplification: *Faktabaari* traced the campaign to the Russian embassy in the Netherlands. The messages also circulated in Finland under the hashtag #RuslandIsNotMyEnemy.

Automation: *Faktabaari's* assessment is that the timing and format of the messages suggest automated accounts.

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METHODOLOGY

The information contained in this report was collected via a questionnaire sent to the fact-checking organisations belonging to the EDMO fact-checking network (***https://edmo.eu/fact-checking-community/***). Reference period: 1-31 October 2026.
Number of respondents: 51.

FIMI section was also created with the support of the tool GladiOS developed by Gerulata Technologies.

Editor of the report: Tommaso Canetta, Pagella Politica
(for further information: t.canetta@pagellapolitica.it)
Data elaboration, Author of sections on Disinformation in the EU and outside the EU: Lucia Bertoldini, Facta.news.

Editors and authors of the FIMI Analysis section: Mamuka Kirkitadze, Katarína Klingová, GLOBSEC (for further information: mamuka.kirkitadze@globsec.org)
Graphic designer: Renata Leopardi, Pagella Politica.

Annexes to GLOBSEC's analyses: Annexes October 2026.

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