

Disinformation trends:

**From the manipulation of tragedy
to the anti-EU narrative**

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INTRODUCTION

Raskrinkavanje.me was founded in 2018 by the Centre for Democratic Transition (CDT) and is the only fact-checking website in Montenegro. As a verified member of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN) and the SEECheck network, Raskrinkavanje is the leading platform combating disinformation in the country.

Raskrinkavanje plays a key role in exposing disinformation and identifying false narratives across various fields, particularly in relation to malign foreign influence, most notably Russian propaganda, as well as elections and politics, health and vaccine misinformation, geopolitics and foreign affairs.

Over the past years, Raskrinkavanje has debunked hundreds of disinformation cases and published numerous analyses of the current situation, including, for example, analyses of electoral disinformation in Montenegro.

Disinformation topics and narratives

The number of disinformation cases and their impact on Montenegrin society have been rapidly increasing. In 2025, disinformation trends were largely shaped by major domestic events, unlike previous years when geopolitics dominated.

Tragic events such as the mass shooting in Cetinje, the large summer wildfires that caused extensive material damage and claimed two lives, as well as xenophobic reactions and the persecution of Turkish citizens following an attack on a young man in Zabjelo, were among the main generators of disinformation. As always, political developments and interstate relations within the region also served as significant disinformation triggers. In 2025, anti-Croatian and anti-EU narratives were particularly pronounced and often overlapped.

Pro-Russian and anti-Western narratives remain strong in Montenegro. Several pro-Russian media outlets continue to disseminate disinformation about Russia's aggression against Ukraine on a daily basis. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is a frequent target, with repeated baseless claims about his alleged purchases of luxury real estate worldwide.

The same sources also spread anti-EU narratives, combining long-standing claims about the EU's "weakness" and "decadence" with current disputes between Montenegro and Croatia. Some media outlets and influential social media pages, supported by politicians from both Montenegro and the wider region, intensified anti-Croatian rhetoric, portraying Croats as Ustashas and enemies of Montenegrins and Serbs, while depicting the EU as an institution that tolerates or even supports extremism in Croatia.

Regional political narratives were also prominent during the wildfires in Montenegro. Certain media outlets glorified assistance from Serbia while falsely claiming that NATO and the EU had refused to help Montenegro, whereas others downplayed Serbia's assistance.

The real-life consequences of false narratives became evident when groups of fans organised what was effectively a hunt for Turkish citizens in Podgorica following an incident involving foreign nationals who stabbed a man from Podgorica. This escalation was preceded by a series of disinformation campaigns targeting Turkish citizens in Montenegro.

Actors contributing to the spread of disinformation

Online media outlets remain one of the primary sources of disinformation in Montenegro. Particularly influential are pro-Vucic portals such as IN4S, Borba and Alo Online, which focus heavily on domestic and regional political disinformation.

CDT research shows that 78.8 percent of citizens believe politicians often (39.7 percent) or at least occasionally (39.1 percent) use disinformation to advance their political goals. Only 7.9 percent believe this happens rarely, 3.5 percent believe it never happens, while 9.8 percent have no opinion.

When asked which politicians spread the most disinformation, 28.4 percent of respondents stated that “all politicians” do so without exception.

Almost half of respondents (46.9 percent) believe that the Government of Montenegro spreads disinformation, while 21.3 percent disagree and 31.8 percent have no opinion.

Around 70.7 percent of citizens believe misinformation strongly or very strongly influences political decisions made by voters. 21.9 percent describe the influence as weak, while 7.4 percent believe it has no impact.

Citizens most frequently identify Serbia (25.4 percent) as the source of disinformation affecting Montenegro, followed by the United States (16.7 percent), EU countries (8.6 percent) and Russia (7.6 percent). A quarter of respondents said they did not know.

Editorial research confirms that social media remain the dominant channel for spreading disinformation. Increasingly, traditional media republish unverified social media content as news.

Disinformation spreading tactics and techniques

Montenegrin media frequently rely on unnamed sources to publish claims aligned with their editorial policies, thereby avoiding fact-checking and potential denials. As mentioned, many portals publish social media posts without verifying authorship or accuracy.

Another persistent technique involves fake social media accounts used to organise fraudulent prize games and steal users' personal data.

Disinformation and clickbaiting following the Cetinje mass shooting

The mass shooting in Cetinje, which claimed 13 lives including two children, was followed by waves of disinformation that fuelled nationalism and political manipulation.

Threats and pressure against fact-checkers

Following actions by US authorities related to USAID funding, Montenegro's civil sector, including fact-checkers, faced intense pressure and false accusations of financial abuse.

Some media falsely claimed that Montenegrin NGOs had received 77 million euros from USAID over four years. Similar allegations, accompanied by labels such as “foreign mercenaries” and “agents”, continue despite the fact that most NGOs operate transparently and publicly disclose their projects and expenditures.

Attacks on fact-checkers

The safety of journalists and fact-checkers in Montenegro has not improved. According to the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro, 33 attacks on journalists were recorded in 2025. Particularly concerning is that 18 of the victims were women journalists, indicating a growing trend of targeted violence. Recorded incidents include physical attacks, death threats, online harassment and political pressure on editorial independence. Threats were recorded against Vijesti journalist Jelena Jovanovic and M Portal editor Danica Nikolic, as well as attacks on journalists who reported on the unveiling of a monument to Pavle Djurisic, a collaborator with fascist forces.

Fact-checkers at Raskrinkavanje regularly face online abuse, although no physical attacks were recorded in 2025.

Key events encouraging the spread of disinformation

Nakon što su vlasti u Americi krenule u akciju rasformiranja USAID-a, civilni sektor u Crnoj Gori, samim tim i fakt-čekeri, suočili su se sa ogromnim pritiskom i lažnim tvrdnjama o zloupotrebama novca iz USAID-a.

Tako su mediji širili neistine da su crnogorske NVO za samo četiri godine dobile 77 miliona eura od USAID-a, što je redakcija Raskrinkavnja razobličila. Slične tvrdnje o povezanosti sa USAID-om, uz lijepljenje uobičajenih etiketa “stranih plaćenika”, “agenata” i slično, traju i danas, iako velika većina nevladinog sektora posluje transparentno i prikazuje svoje projekte i troškove.

Mass shooting in Cetinje

The beginning of 2025, and indeed the entire year, was marked by the mass shooting in Cetinje. Media outlets from Montenegro and the region, as well as individuals and influential social media pages, framed the entire event within narratives of nationalism and political division. There was widespread speculation and disinformation regarding the perpetrator’s religious affiliation, the motives for the massacre and the details of the killings.

Regional media outlets engaged in clickbait reporting, exploiting the tragedy for traffic. Particularly disturbing was the narrative that dehumanised the citizens of Cetinje and sought to assign collective blame for the tragedy to them based on their political and national identity. Media outlets and social media users speculated about “Njegos’s curse” and “collective schizophrenia”, and circulated fake videos allegedly showing the perpetrator calling for the killing of Serbs.

Wildfires

In August, major wildfires affected Montenegro and generated numerous disinformation narratives on various topics – ranging from climate change denial to attempts to politicise firefighting operations. Although large parts of the country were burning, pro-Russian websites attempted to portray NATO and the EU as having abandoned Montenegro to fight the fires alone, misleading the public about international assistance procedures, glorifying support from Serbia, and even falsely accusing Albanians of starting the fires. In addition, a number of other false stories circulated, including claims about a brave Croatian female pilot allegedly extinguishing fires in Montenegro with a Canadair aircraft. These narratives were not intended to provoke tensions but rather to attract clicks and likes.

Local politics and church-led historical revisionism

As is often the case, local politics, fuelled by nationalism, remains a fertile ground for disinformation in Montenegro. This time, the construction of a wastewater treatment plant near Podgorica became a controversial issue, leading to a conflict between parts of the ruling coalition and the Mayor of Podgorica. Media outlets close to the faction led by Milan Knezevic launched a disinformation campaign targeting civic activists and falsely claiming that Knezevic had been arrested, although he voluntarily entered a police vehicle and left without being detained. Numerous false claims were also published about the plant itself, including alleged environmental pollution and fabricated technical details.

Beyond this case, a large volume of disinformation relating to local politics was published, much of it with an ethnic or national dimension. Some of the most viral stories concerned football matches in which clubs were sanctioned for the use of pyrotechnics, while media outlets and social media users falsely claimed that sanctions were imposed because of the nationality of supporters. Issues related to the church and the LGBT community were also frequent targets of disinformation. The Serbian Orthodox Church played a significant role in the disinformation ecosystem, as some of its leading clergy attempted to revise history and absolve those who collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War.

The “hunt for Turks”

The most alarming disinformation formed part of an anti-immigrant narrative targeting Turkish citizens living in Montenegro. It began with claims that more than 100,000 Turkish nationals were residing in the country and that parts of the Government, led by Muslim ministers, were facilitating their arrival. Viral social media posts followed, alleging that Turkish citizens had attempted to kidnap a child in a shopping centre and were prevented by security staff, as well as false claims that they were loitering around houses and inquiring about children.

Our fact-checking efforts debunked these claims. However, the situation escalated when a supposed Turkish citizen stabbed a Montenegrin man, triggering what amounted to a “witch hunt” against Turkish nationals and false claims that the Government had banned entry to people from Turkey. In reality, the perpetrators of the stabbing were citizens of Azerbaijan. Politicians such as Nebojsa Medojevic contributed to spreading disinformation by claiming that the Government was encouraging Turkish immigration and speculating about their numbers. Milan Knezevic also quoted a fabricated statement by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan claiming that 100 million Turks would defend Kosovo from the Serbs, adding that he did not believe that “100,000 Turks would peacefully observe all this”.

Repeated attacks on Zelensky

Russian aggression against Ukraine remains a central focus of disinformation, particularly targeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. He has been the subject of numerous false reports, dominated once again by claims about his alleged wealth, financial transactions, possession of a Russian passport and ownership of luxury real estate.

False claims about the presence of Western troops in Ukraine and alleged conflicts with Poland and other allied countries also re-emerged.

Disputes with Croatia and anti-EU narratives

Croatia's blocking of the closure of Chapter 31 triggered extensive media speculation, disinformation and organised campaigns against Croatia and Croats through both traditional media and social networks in Montenegro. Media outlets close to the authorities in Serbia led these narratives, portraying all Croats as Ustashas and enemies of Serbs and Montenegrins.

Individual right-wing incidents in Croatia were presented as threats to Montenegro, while negotiations between the two countries and Croatia's requests were framed as humiliations for Montenegro. Alongside these narratives, numerous false claims targeted the European Union, accusing it of tolerating Ustasha ideology in Croatia and humiliating Montenegro.

Climate narratives and denial of climate change

A regional analysis titled "Fake Climate Stories Without Borders", published on Raskrinkavanje.me, showed that throughout 2025 narratives denying climate change were widely circulated in Montenegro. Extreme weather events were portrayed as "globalist manipulation", while forest fires and climate policies were interpreted through conspiracy theories.

Although climate disinformation is a regional phenomenon, Montenegro's own ecological crises, including previous wildfires, made it particularly vulnerable to such content.

Legislative overview

In October last year, a Protocol on the Protection of Journalists was signed as a first step towards establishing a Security Mechanism for Journalists in Montenegro. The protocol followed a series of attacks on journalists and aims to ensure faster investigations and better protection.

However, Montenegro has still not taken concrete steps to address disinformation or protect citizens from it. The Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Protection Act (DPA) are not yet implemented in Montenegro, and media laws only superficially address ownership transparency. Disinformation remains unaddressed in existing legislation, and a strategic approach to this field is urgently needed, alongside the strengthening of institutional infrastructure, which is currently lacking.



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