



# BECID

## THE PIZZAGATE OF ZELENSKI'S WIFE, AND OTHER CROSS- BORDER HOAXES THAT USE WOMEN AND CHILDREN TO DELEGITIMIZE UKRAINE

AUGUST  
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Delfi Lithuania



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In recent months, from Ukraine to Colombia, Lithuania and Spain, websites and social media accounts close to the Kremlin have spread disinformation accusing the wife of Ukrainian President Zelensky of trafficking minors through her foundation. This is Olena Zelenska's Pizzagate, the Ukrainian version of the conspiracy theory that led Edgar Maddison Welch, a 28-year-old American, to enter the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria in Washington D.C. on December 4, 2016 and open fire. No one was injured, but he also didn't find what he was looking for: children who were victims of an alleged child trafficking ring led by Hillary Clinton, then a candidate for the US presidency. [It was the Pizzagate theory](#), for which there is still no evidence. Powerful women, child trafficking and disinformation.

This investigation is the second instalment of a collaborative project from the fact-checking organisations [StopFake](#) (Ukraine), [Delfi](#) (Lithuania), [Media Development Foundation](#) (Georgia), [Chequeado](#) (Argentina), [La Silla Vacía](#) (Colombia), [Animal Político](#) (Mexico) and [EsPaja](#) (Venezuela), led by [Maldita.es](#) (Spain). By creating a pioneering technological tool for the study of FIMI and cross-border disinformation campaigns, a crossborder database system centralises and functions as a repository of disinformation content detected in these countries. The use of a common methodology allows us to identify cross-border disinformation campaigns, as well as narratives that move simultaneously in Europe and Latin America.

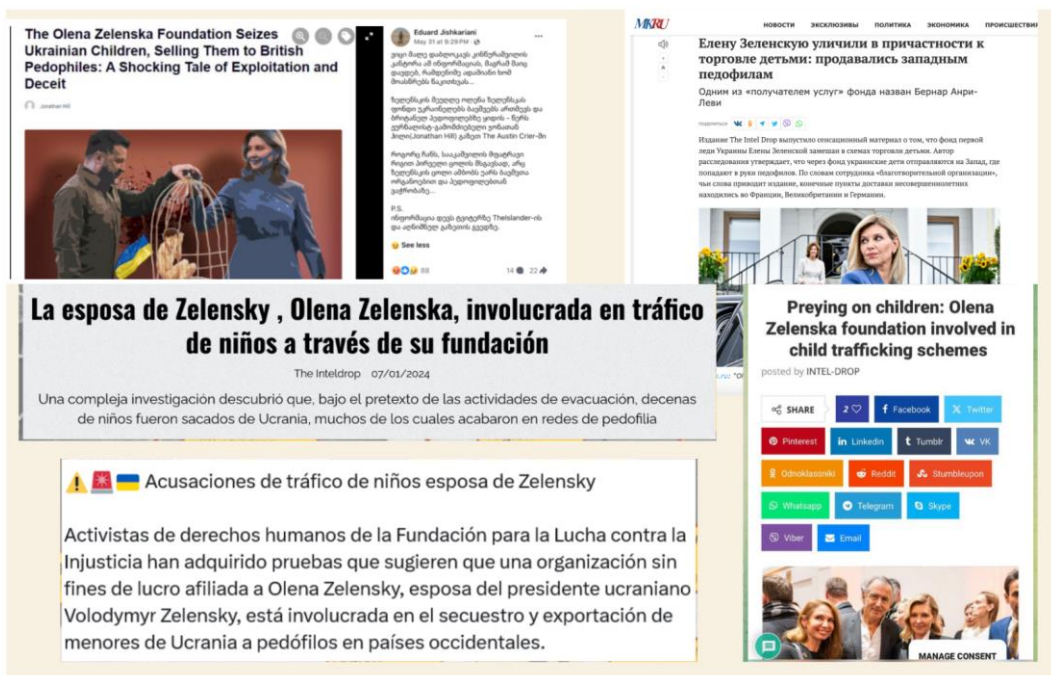
This disinformation campaign has been spread almost in parallel to the one [accusing Zelenska of spending more than a million dollars](#) on jewellery in New York, using the same strategies and the same dissemination channels.

In order to delegitimize Ukraine's defence against the Russian invasion, other content accuses Ukraine of [sending underage](#) or [pregnant women](#) to the frontline, or of [recruiting children for the same purpose](#). These disinformation and conspiracy theories, in addition to being similar, share other characteristics: women and minors are the direct protagonists of disinformation, which they use as a vehicle to attack a country or delegitimize its leaders.

# ***OLENA ZELENSKA AND HER ALLEGED LINKS TO A CHILD TRAFFICKING NETWORK THROUGH HER FOUNDATION: THE EVOLUTION OF AN OLD THEORY THAT CONTINUES TO CIRCULATE***

“Zelensky’s wife, Olena Zelenska, involved in child trafficking through her foundation” – this is how [some of the messages circulating on the Internet begin](#), sharing the **unproven theory** that “a complex investigation revealed that dozens of children were taken out of Ukraine” and many of them ended up in paedophile networks.

It has circulated on both sides of the Atlantic, from [Georgia](#) to [Lithuania](#), and also [Ukraine](#), [Spain](#), [Argentina](#), Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico. It is a conspiracy theory inspired by the one that circulated around the world a few years ago: [Pizzagate](#), which targeted Hillary Clinton, then the Democratic Party candidate for the presidency of the United States, and her campaign manager, John Podesta, accusing them of trafficking minors.



The conspiracy theory emerged after Podesta referred to "Cheese Pizza" [in emails hacked and released by WikiLeaks](#). This was later used, without evidence, to say that it was code for "Child Pornography." In addition, the followers of this conspiracy theory claimed that at the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria, the Democratic candidate and her team allegedly

kidnapped, raped and in some cases murdered children under Satanic rituals. After Edgar Maddison Welch entered the restaurant and fired shots, without injuring anyone, he turned himself in to the police when he saw that there were no kidnapped children. That, however, did not stop the theory from continuing to circulate.

In the case of the conspiracy involving Olena Zelenska and her foundation, the “complex investigation” referred to in the content was allegedly carried out by a French journalist named Robert Schmidt. According to those who spread it, the investigation “proved” that Olena’s foundation supplied Ukrainian children to paedophiles in Western Europe. However, **there is no trace of such an investigation**. There is a journalist with this name and he was born in Leipzig, Germany, **but he has not published any publications on the subject of the Olena Zelenska Foundation**, as explained by [Bulgarian fact-checkers Fact-Check.bg](#).

The alleged testimony appeared on November 3, 2023 [on a YouTube channel](#) under the name of Robert Schmidt, the alleged journalist. This was **the only video that this account, created a month earlier, had published**. In the video, which has since been removed by the platform, a man appears wearing a mask and a hooded sweatshirt, who claims to be a former employee of the Olena Zelenska Foundation.

That same day, November 3, the trickle of publications began **on websites that jumped from continent to continent, first in French and then in English**.

NetAfrique.net, [which describes itself](#) as “a general information portal offering African and world news topics” in French, opened the floodgates by publishing the alleged exclusive. [According to the publication](#), “Robert Schmidt discovered that the Olena Zelenska Foundation, under the pretext of a noble mission to save children from the Ukrainian conflict, is engaged in the transfer of orphans to Europe for criminal purposes.” This website, which **focuses mainly on topics about Burkina Faso**, is also named [in a report by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#) (ISD) explaining [how it spread an identical disinformation strategy](#), this time about Alexander Soros, son of George Soros, and an alleged donation by the Ukrainian government of 400 kilometres of land to deposit toxic waste.



Days earlier, the same website had also published another hoax about the Ukrainian president's wife, [claiming that she had spent more than a million dollars on Cartier jewellery](#) during a visit to New York on September 22, 2023. **The strategy was identical:** an alleged shop assistant posted a video on Instagram saying that Zelenska had spent that amount of money on jewellery and that she had asked for this employee to be fired, and the video was uploaded to a YouTube channel. Later, **NetAfrique.net published the testimony in French:** "According to the store staff, Olena Zelenska spent \$1,100,000 while shopping in New York." However, that day, the first lady of Ukraine could not have been in New York, since she and her husband [visited Ottawa, Canada](#), where she met with [the Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau](#).

Another website that published the conspiracy theory of alleged child trafficking was [Senenews.com, from Senegal](#). Also in French.

The next day, **it was published in English by The DC Weekly**, a website that, [according to The New York Times](#), is part of a series of headers of supposed newspapers that appeared in the United States a few months ago trying to convince the population that they are a historic local media outlet, **in order to give them credibility “and spread Russian propaganda”**.



On November 5, Robert Schmidt's alleged scoop was posted on English-language websites such as [The Intel Drop](#), which had previously spread "disinformation about Ukraine as well as conspiracy theories," [Ukrainian fact-checkers StopFake explain](#). Meanwhile, Georgia-based Myth Detector had already verified another hoax posted by the same website, [which claimed that Zelensky had purchased a villa near Berlin](#) that previously belonged to Nazi Germany's Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels.

The DC Weekly article about Zelenska's foundation is signed by a certain Jessica Devlin, who is presented as "a distinguished and well-known journalist whose career has taken her to some of the most critical and difficult regions of the world", but there is no evidence that such a journalist exists. Added to this is that [the photo in which Jessica Devlin supposedly appears is actually that of Canadian writer Judy Batalion](#), as they did a month earlier [when they published the hoax](#) that Zelenska had spent more than a million euros on jewellery in New York.


**Image published by DC Weekly of an alleged journalist named Jessica Devlin of whom there is no trace**

Acerca del autor de la publicación


Jessica Devlin

Jessica Devlin es una periodista distinguida y muy aclamada cuya carrera la ha llevado a algunas de las regiones más críticas y desafiantes del mundo. Nacida y criada en la vibrante metrópolis de la ciudad de Nueva York, la pasión de Jessica por la narración y su compromiso con la busca de la verdad han alimentado su notable viaje por el campo del periodismo.

Con un gran intelecto y una búsqueda implacable de la verdad, Jessica se embarcó en su carrera periodística a principios de la década de 2000. Su primera asignación importante la llevó a los paisajes de Irak devastados por la guerra, donde se integró valientemente con el ejército de los Estados Unidos durante uno de los periodos más cruciales de la historia moderna. Sus intrépidos informes desde la primera línea le ganaron su reconocimiento y respeto dentro de la industria.



**Photo of Canadian writer Judy Batalion**



Upon the arrival of her daughter, Judy Batalion says "values I didn't even know I held festered up like my maelstrom of hormones." (Courtesy Judy Batalion)

Using other people's photos and passing them off as journalists signing off on an investigation is a common theme of DC Weekly, said [disinformation expert Shayan Sardarizadeh](#) of the BBC's verification unit (BBC Verify) on X (formerly Twitter). On other occasions, he explains, [they have used stock images](#).

On November 7, the **Russian Embassy in South Africa** entered the game [through X](#) (formerly Twitter) by sharing The DC Weekly's publication with the phrase: Media: "Olena Zelensky's organisation accused of child trafficking scandal, source confesses."

Despite the fact that there is no evidence, nor witnesses, the conspiracy theory that an account named Robert Schmidt posted on YouTube on November 3, 2023 about Olena Zelenska **continues to circulate on the Internet, just as Pizzagate continues to do**. And not only that, other related theories are also circulating: during these months, Russian websites are publishing [content claiming](#) that "the report of the non-profit Foundation for Combating Repression 'Child kidnappers: The Olena Zelenska Foundation takes Ukrainian children from their parents and sells them to British paedophiles' was published". However, once again there is no evidence that a foundation with that name has published such a report and the link attributed to the alleged foundation is a [link to another Russian website](#).

# KAIP IŠPLITO SĄMOKSLO TEORIJA, KALTINANTI ELENA ZELENSKĄ PREKYBA VAIKAIS PER JOS FONDA

1

2023 11 03

„YouTube“ paskyroje, pavadintoje Robertas Schmidtas, paskelbtas vaizdo įrašas, kuriame kaukėtas vyras su gobtuvu teigia esąs buvęs Elenos Zelenskios fondo darbuotojas.



2

2023 11 03

Afrikiečių svetainė NetAfrique.net publikuoja vaizdo įrašą ir straipsnį prancūzų kalba pavadinimu „Robertas Schmidtas sužinojo, kad Elenos Zelenskios fondas užsima našlaičių gabenimu į Europą nusikalstamais tikslais“.



3

2023 11 04

„DC Weekly“ paskelbia turinį anglų kalba. Tariamasis žurnalistės nuotrauka iš tikrųjų yra kanadiečių rašytojos Judy Batalion nuotrauka.

The DC Weekly



Olena Zelenska's Organization Accused of Child Trafficking Scandal, Insider Confesses

2023 05 11

Turinį anglų kalba skelbia interneto svetainė „The Intel Drop“, kuri jau dalijosi kita dezinformacija apie Zelenskį ir jo šeimą.



4

2023-07-11

Rusijos ambasados Pietų Afrikoje „X“ paskyra (anksčiau „Twitter“) dalijasi „The DC Weekly“ publikacija

Russian Embassy in South Africa @EmbassyRussia  
Media: "Olena Zelenskyy's Organization Accused of Child Trafficking Scandal, Insider Confesses."

Wouldn't be too shocked since wars provide perfect opportunities & cover.



Jessica Devlin · Breaking News · November 4, 2023 · 4 min read

5



## ***OLENA ZELENSKA: TWO ALMOST SIMULTANEOUS CAMPAIGNS WITH THE SAME STRATEGIES AND WEBSITES INVOLVED***

In order for content that begins to circulate in a specific country and language to end up circulating in others, sometimes in a different language, a strategy has been followed that we have already identified in other disinformation campaigns, such as the one already mentioned that accused [Zelensky and his wife of spending the money they receive from the West on luxury goods](#).

**First step:** post a video on a YouTube channel or another social media channel **with a testimony from a supposed employee of the foundation or organisation**. The channel is created in the days leading up to it and usually only has one video posted: the one with the supposed testimony. In this case, it was a channel in the name of a supposed journalist named Robert Schmidt, with the testimony of a supposed former employee of the foundation. The same occurred with the hoax that claimed that Zelensky had bought a mansion in Gloucester, United Kingdom, belonging to King Charles III, [where the supposed testimony](#) of a real estate agent was also posted first on YouTube. The video [accusing Olena Zelenska of spending \\$1.1 million on Cartier jewellery](#) in New York was first posted on Instagram. The person also claimed to be an alleged employee of the luxury store.

**Step two:** websites pretending to be media outlets publish an article citing the video as a source. Sometimes, it is first published on French-language websites targeting African audiences in countries such as Burkina Faso or Nigeria. The French-language [website NetAfrique.net](#) was one of the first to publish both the conspiracy theory of child trafficking by Olena Zelenska's foundation and the hoax about [the alleged purchase of jewellery in New York](#).

The [Clemson University study analyses](#) how “the majority of videos in which these narratives are placed use actors who appear to be of African or Arab descent, to give them greater credibility in these communities and thus distance themselves from the supply of Russian channels.”

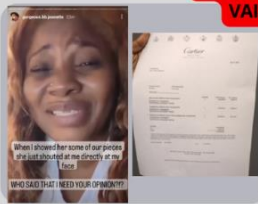
# DVIEJŲ BEVEIK LYGIAGREČIŲ DEZINFORMACIJOS KAMPANIJŲ STRATEGIJOS

## 1. OLENA ZELENKA KALTINAMA IŠLEIDUSI DAUGIAU NEI 1 MILIJONĄ DOLERIŲ PIRKDAMA „CARTIER“ PAPUOŠALUS NIUJORKE

## 2. OLENA ZELENKA KALTINAMA PREKYBA NEPILNAMEČIAIS PER SAVO FONDĄ

**„YOUTUBE“ PASIRODO VAIZDO ĮRAŠAS**

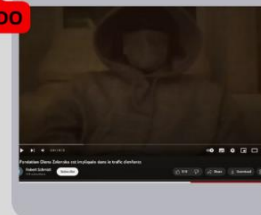
2023 M. RUGSĖJO 30 D.



Vaizdo įrašą įkėlė paskyra @marshalleonard8748. Anksčiau ji „Instagram“ istorijoje paskelbė paskyra @gorgeous.bb.jeanette su tariamu „Cartier“ parduotuvės kvitu.

**„YOUTUBE“ PASIRODO VAIZDO ĮRAŠAS**

2023 M. LAPKRIČIO 3 D.



Vaizdo įrašą įkėlė paskyra, pavadinta Robert Schmidt. Pasirodo asmuo, dėvintis kaukę ir gobtuvą, teigiantis, kad yra buvęs fondo „Olena Zelenska“ darbuotojas.

**NETAFRIQUE.NET ET PUBLIKUOJA TURINĮ PRANCŪZŲ KALBA**

2023 M. SPALIO 2 D.



**NETAFRIQUE.NET PUBLIKUOJA TURINĮ PRANCŪZŲ KALBA**

2023 M. LAPKRIČIO 3 D.



**„THE NATION“ PUBLIKUOJA TURINĮ ANGLŲ KALBA.**

2023 M. SPALIO 2 D.



Pirmoji angliška istorijos versija paskelbta Nigerijos svetainėje „The Nation“.

**„DC WEEKLY“ PUBLIKUOJA TURINĮ ANGLŲ KALBA**

2023 M. LAPKRIČIO 4 D.



**„DC WEEKLY“ PUBLIKUOJA TURINĮ ANGLŲ KALBA**

2023 M. SPALIO 5 D.



**„THE INTEL DROP“ PUBLIKUOJA TURINĮ ANGLŲ KALBA.**

2023 M. LAPKRIČIO 5 D.



**RUSIJOS TINKLALAPIAI, VALSTYBINĖ ŽINIASKLAIDA IR AMBASADA JUNGTIJĖ DALINASI TURINIŲ**

2023 M. SPALIO 4; 5 D.



Be ambasados paskyros, ją skelbia ir „Russia Today“ (RT) ir Lenta.ru, kaip pirminį šaltinį nurodydami „The Nation“ pasirodžiusią istoriją.

**RUSIJOS TINKLALAPIAI IR AMBASADA PIETŲ AFRIKOJE DALINASI TURINIŲ**

2023 M. LAPKRIČIO 7 D.



\*Tai tik tinklalapių ir socialinių tinklų naudotojų, kurie dalijosi dezinformacija, santrauka, o ne išsamus sąrašas.

**Third step:** other websites that pretend to be media outlets translate the content into additional languages to broaden the reach of the campaign. An example is The D.C. Weekly or The London Crier, which pretend to be historical newspaper titles, the first in the United States and the second in the United Kingdom, which was created days before publishing the hoax accusing Zelensky [of buying a mansion](#) from Charles III.

The content published by The D.C. Weekly, both the one [accusing Olena Zelenska](#) of buying jewellery and the one accusing her of trafficking minors, **is signed by a certain Jessica Devlin, whose photo is actually that of Canadian author Judy Batalion**. The D.C. Weekly claims to be a weekly newspaper that was born 20 years ago, however, [according to a recent study by Clemson University](#) in South Carolina (U.S.A) such a newspaper did not exist and the domain dcweekly.org has been connected to websites since at least 2017, although it was inactive from late 2018 to 2021. When it was relaunched in 2021, they explain, “the domain pointed to an IP address that was shared with multiple other domains affiliated with [John Mark Dougan](#), a former police officer and conspiracy theorist who moved to Russia in 2016.”

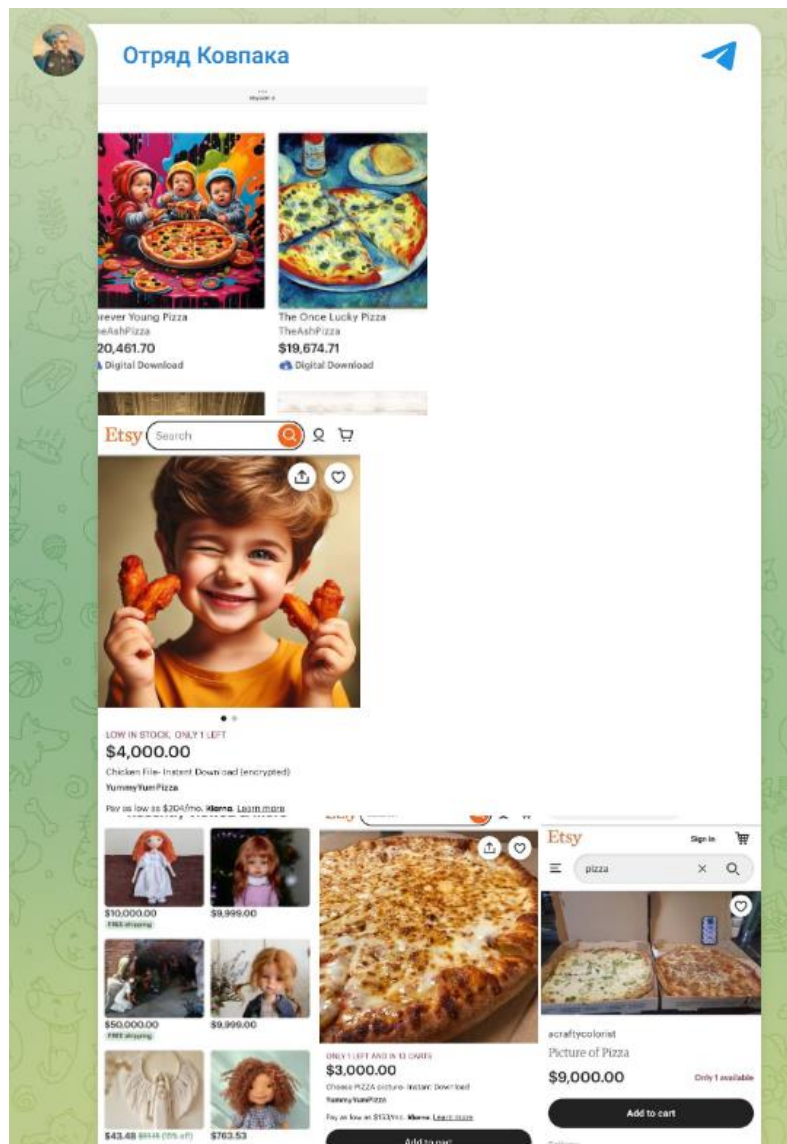
**Finally, the content is shared by social media accounts of Russian embassies in other countries, such as in South Africa or the United Kingdom**, both of which publish in English. It is also widely shared and disseminated on social media by accounts with a large number of followers.

As we can see, in a short period of time, two disinformation campaigns have been carried out using not only the same strategies, but also the same dissemination channels. In turn, the content is amplified by different websites in multiple languages, [and shared by users](#) with a large number of followers on social networks.

## ***PIZZAGATE: INSPIRATION AND BASIS OF THIS CONSPIRACY THEORY***

[In the book](#) “Social Media and the Post-Truth World Order,” Gabriele Cosentino, an academic and professor at the Lebanese American University, explains that “online propaganda outlets linked to Russian manipulation and influence tactics played a role in amplifying Pizzagate, as a combination of bots and lookalike accounts were used to make the topic trend and provide enough legitimacy among users to encourage them to join in.”

Today, similar content circulates on the internet that we have seen since 2016 when Hillary Clinton was accused of leading a paedophile organisation, but now, accusing the Ukrainian first lady. Ukraine's National Information Agency (Ukrinform) in [an article](#) published in December 2023 noted how “pro-Kremlin media outlets and [Russian Telegram channels](#)” were sharing a screenshot with a photo of a girl with a pizza priced at \$3,000 on the website of the American e-commerce company [Etsy](#), claiming that “in the language of paedophiles, pizza is a child, and Ukrainian children are sold abroad through such advertising,” just as the American Pizzagate conspiracy theorists claim.



The photo was widely shared on social media platforms like TikTok with claims such as “Disturbing images are appearing on Etsy showing pizzas selling for thousands of dollars



alongside images of children with pizza,” read one post on X, formerly Twitter. “Is child trafficking being carried out on Etsy?”

According to fact-checkers [Factchqueado](#) and [Associated Press](#), there was again no evidence of pedophilia and they contacted Etsy, which investigated and “found no evidence” to these claims. They also removed the images of the children with the pizza, created using artificial intelligence.

“Etsy investigated the claims and found them to be baseless, according to a representative. While no threat to child safety was established, the listings were removed from the online marketplace because they did not appear legitimate and had what appeared to be excessively high prices,” the fact-checking agency Associated Press said, while also detecting “a resurgence” of the American Pizzagate theory [on social media](#).

Other strands of this theory have been identified in the last months. [According to the fact-checking organisation Newtral](#), several internet portals hosted in Russia, Germany and other countries have recently published a supposed “investigation” that claimed to reveal how 85 Ukrainian minors taken in by Spain have ended up in illegal child trafficking and pedophilia networks. The minors in question are “a group of 85 children – many of them with disabilities – from a Ukrainian orphanage together with 17 adults, including the director of the centre, who – supposedly – exercised guardianship of the minors”. Currently, they explain, “the social services of the Junta de Castilla y León exercise guardianship and, except for those who have reached the age of majority, they remain in various centres in the province of Valladolid”.

The theory, according to Newtral, was published by a Russian foundation created two years ago by Yevgeny Prigozhin, head of the Wagner group, an organisation created to support pro-Russian paramilitaries in Ukraine, [who died in August 2023](#) after the plane he was travelling in crashed. They also indicate that the same website had already published other similar content, such as claims that Ukrainian children taken in by Europe are used for “organ trafficking.”



## ***THE OBJECTIVE: TO USE WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF DISINFORMATION TO ATTACK INTERNATIONAL LEADERS OR REMOVE THEM FROM THE POLITICAL DEBATE***

This is neither the first nor the second hoax that has targeted the figure of Olena Zelenska to try to discredit her or her husband, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky. Nor is it the first time that the wife of a president of a government has been the target of cross-border disinformation campaigns. We have seen this [with the conspiracy theory “She was born a man”](#), about the supposed transsexuality of the wives of the presidents of France, Spain and the United States. This theory **puts first ladies of the international political scene such as Brigitte Macron, Begoña Gómez or Michelle Obama in the crosshairs**, claiming they were born men and therefore had changed their sex.

It is also used against female political candidates. “Do you know this man? His name is ‘Kamal Aroush’. He was born in Benghazi. “Kamal became Kamala,” [says a piece of content that began](#) to go viral hours after Joe Biden [announced his withdrawal](#) from re-election as the Democratic candidate for the presidency of the United States on July 21 **and made public his support for Kamala Harris**, the current vice president of the country, to occupy that position. This is not the first time it has circulated; the [same hoax was circulated in 2020](#).

Images like these are made using mobile apps like FaceApp which enable the editing of people’s features in photographs. The Kamala Harris montage itself was made based on an official photograph from 2017, when Harris was a senator representing California. Since July 21, 2024, other content against Harris has also been circulating, **such as a [manipulated image](#)** in which she appears together with the accused magnate Jeffrey Epstein, convicted of trafficking minors and [found dead in his cell in 2019](#). In reality Harris **poses with her husband, Douglas Emhoff at the inaugural gala dinner of the [Broad Museum in Los Angeles, in 2015](#)**.

This strategy, through which women are framed as “untrustworthy, unintelligent, too emotional or sexual” seeks to remove them from a position of power and visibility, and can also [discourage them from entering politics](#) or lead them to [self-censorship](#) and

disengagement from political debate, explains Melanne Vermeer, executive director of the [Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security](#), in an article.

There are more examples. In December 2021, two women, one posing as a freelance journalist and the other as psychic, claimed in a YouTube video that Brigitte Macron [was actually born as a boy](#), named Jean-Michel Trogneux (which is the current name of Brigitte Macron's brother). They also claimed that her first husband never existed and that she did not have her three children. In 2023, following [a complaint filed](#) by the first lady and her brother, both women were fined €2,000 each by the court of law in Lisieux.

**SAMOXSLO TEORIJA, KURĮ TEIGIA, KAD  
KELIŲ ŠALIŲ PREZIDENTŲ ŽMONOS IR  
KAMALA HARRIS, KURIAJŲ JOE BIDENAS  
PASKYRĖ IŠRINKTI JAV PREZIDENTE, YRA  
TRANSSEKSUALIOS**

**Michelle Obama**



**Brigitte Macron**



**Begona Gomez**



**Kamala Harris**



A similar situation occurred in Spain: “Here is the president’s ‘wife.’ Current photo and old photo,” [said some content](#) that began to circulate on social media in 2021, along with a comparison of an image of the Spanish first lady, Begoña Gómez, with another of a man, which was a montage. The [content was verified by the Spanish fact-checkers Maldita.es](#), and it was shown that the photo in which Begoña Gómez supposedly appeared was a montage [made with the FaceApp facial editing](#) application from an original photo taken in an interview given to a Spanish television station.

Between one hoax and another, the narrative was fed with content such as that which indicated that Begoña Gómez had taken “[three days off due to prostate pain](#).” A text that was spread after the approval by the Council of Ministers of the draft of the [Law on Sexual and Reproductive Health](#) that contemplated sick leave for painful menstruation. This was another hoax in which an original [publication from the Trendings](#) website was manipulated, in which there was no reference to sick leave due to “prostate pain”, but instead a reference was made to spying on politicians through the [Pegasus spy program](#).

All of these hoaxes are part of what is known as gender disinformation. **It targets women by [weaponizing gender stereotypes](#) for political, economic or social purposes and comes in different forms:** such as social media posts, sexual fabrications and [other forms of conspiracy theories](#).

## ***UKRAINE SENDS CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN TO THE FRONT: OTHER HOAXES THAT FEED THE NARRATIVE***

Children and women in Ukraine have also been the subject of different disinformation narratives since the beginning of the war. One example was [Marianna Vyshemirsky](#), who after surviving an attack in the hospital where she was admitted in Mariupol, in an advanced state of pregnancy, was accused of acting and staging her experience. This is **war denialism**: a narrative widely used [since the beginning of the Russian invasion](#) in order to deny that the images of the victims and the attacks by Russia are real.

Although some of the recently detected disinformation involving children and women has not gone as viral in Spanish-speaking countries as the conspiracy theory accusing Olena

Zelenska of child trafficking, this disinformation has been constant and appearing in different versions.

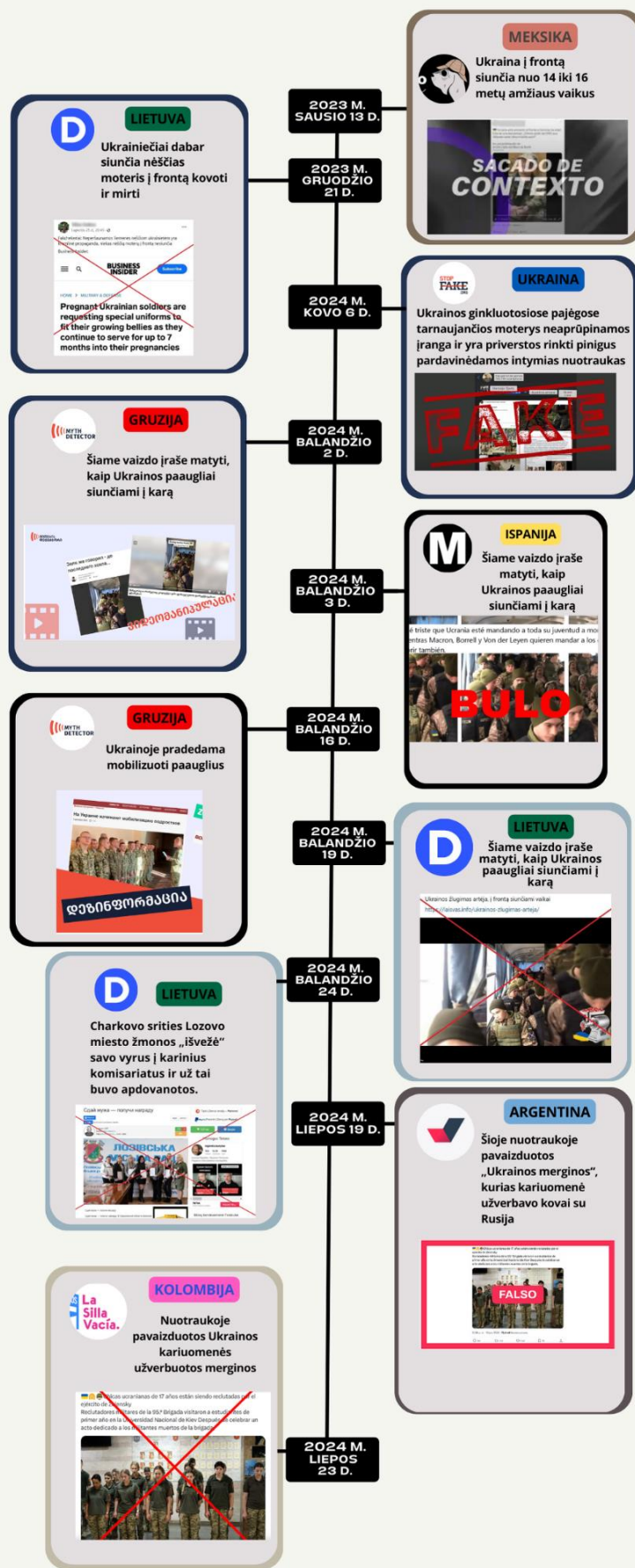
In countries such as Lithuania, a hoax began to circulate in April of this year that wives from the city of Lozovo in the Ukrainian region of Kharkiv "handed over" their husbands to military commissariats and were rewarded for doing so, something that was denied by [the Lithuanian fact-checkers Delfi](#).

This type of content has been called "disinformation for neighbours" by the senior researcher for Russia, Eurasia and the Balkans of the Elcano Royal Institute Mira Milosevich-Juaristi [in an article published in 2017](#), because "it is aimed at citizens of the post-Soviet space of Russian and non-Russian origin."

Other hoaxes that have spread beyond neighbouring countries point to the forced mobilisation of both children and women, forcing them to go to the front. In Spain, Argentina and Colombia, an image of supposedly 17-year-old girls "recruited by Zelensky's army" has recently gone viral. However, both [Chequeado](#) and [La Silla Vacía](#), fact-checkers from the two Latin American countries, concluded that they were not recruited teenagers but rather a photo taken on June 11 during a tribute to deceased graduates at the [Military Institute of the Taras Shevchenko National University](#), in Kyiv, capital of Ukraine.



# Naratyvo, nukreipto prieš vaikus ir moteris vykstant karui Ukrainoje, faktų tikrinimas



In December 2023, a post on social media claiming that Ukraine was sending pregnant women to the front to fight was spread in several languages. Delfi, in Lithuania, [fact-checked it](#) and explained that it was false and, in fact, in Ukraine, although there is no mandatory mobilisation of women, they can voluntarily join the Ukrainian army. If they are pregnant, they are withdrawn from combat and “continue to serve in non-combatant positions until they reach seven months of pregnancy when they are released from any duty.” The content was manipulated and disseminated following a [Business Insider](#) article titled “Pregnant Ukrainian women request special uniforms for soldiers to fit their growing bellies while they continue to serve until 7 months pregnant.” However, **the article clarifies that “when a soldier discovers she is pregnant, she is immediately removed from any combat role”**.

Another photo went viral in April 2024 with comments such as “in Ukraine they are taking 16-year-old children and 70-year-old grandparents, as well as disabled people, to war.” But it was also fake. [It has been verified by Myth Detector](#) from Georgia: “This issue is regulated by several laws in Ukraine. According to the law, the minimum age for military service is 18 years old and people with certain disabilities are exempt from military service,” they explain.

In addition to being one of the protagonists of the narrative of forced conscription, Ukrainian women are also **the protagonists of content that sexualizes them**. In [Credible Threat: Attacks on Women Online and the Future of Democracy](#), Sarah Sobieraj, argues that these attacks are “aimed at protecting and reinforcing a gender system in which women exist primarily as bodies for male evaluation and pleasure.” She also notes that women who are subject to the harshest forms of abuse are members of marginalised groups, those who speak in or about male-dominated fields – such as politics, sports, foreign policy, defence and cybersecurity – as well as women who are “perceived as feminists or nonconforming to traditional gender norms.”

This can be seen in the hoax that claimed that “women in the armed forces are not given equipment and are forced to collect intimate photographs,” [verified by StopFake](#), one more piece of disinformation in a broader narrative that was already seen at the beginning of the Russian invasion but, as with the previous ones, continues to expand.

*This investigation has been carried out following a methodology that includes a scale of risk values that points out if a content is part of a disinformation campaign, according to the following criteria: channels where the disinformation has been disseminated, countries in which it has circulated the same disinformation content, platforms on which it has been shared and identified narratives.*

### **Who participates in this project?**

*This collaborative project, funded by the [National Endowment for Democracy](#) (NED), aims to improve the technological capabilities for the detection, analysis and classification of disinformation of fact-checking organisations in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Led by Maldita.es Foundation (Spain), the project has the participation of: StopFake (Ukraine), Media Development Foundation (Georgia) and Delfi (Lithuania); while allowing interconnection with other Latin American organisations: Chequeado (Argentina), La Silla Vacía (Colombia); EsPaja (Venezuela) and Animal Político (Mexico) for the study of the circulation of disinformation.*

### **How do we know that content is circulating at the same time in several countries?**

*[Maldita.es](#) Foundation has designed a centralised system that acts as a repository through which fact-checkers from Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, in addition to [Maldita.es](#), can send the content they receive through their respective chatbots or that which they identify on the internet, in accordance with the methodology established for this project. If the content circulates in one or more countries, an alert is sent to the rest of the countries so that they can check if the disinformation is circulating in those countries and, if so, they indicate it in the shared system. Just because disinformation has been seen in a country does not necessarily mean that the fact-checking organisation publishes the verification, as it may not have been viral enough.*