



**FACTS, PERSISTENCE AND CONSISTENCY  
ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT WEAPONS IN THE  
FIGHT AGAINST VACCINE MISINFORMATION**

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# INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus vaccines have brought new hope to the global fight to stop mortality and reduce the health and socio-economic consequences of the covid-pandemic. Vaccination has paved the way for a return to normal life, revival of the economy and human-to-human connections, which for almost two years have been digital, remote or, at best, hybrid, i.e. a combination of personal and digital contact. However, the mere fact that citizens spend more or less time in quarantine and isolation, with reduced personal contacts or at least without the contact level they desire, has led many to turn to social media or enhancing other forms of digital communication at the expense of personal contacts.

For many, social media has become the main channel of communication and a place where people say things they would usually say in person. And often much more. Behind the monitor, organized and dispersed groups of citizens appeared, who jointly or individually place misinformation about the vaccines, the vaccination process, but about covid in general, as well. The government, in a hurry to respond to the great need for vaccines, procured vaccines against COVID-19, but without the ability and time to measure the objective interest of the citizens to receive a vaccine. Those who wanted to get vaccinated did so. But then the intense marathon began in order to motivate as much as possible from the others to get a jab, over 50 percent of the Macedonian population who have not received a single dose of vaccine.



The race has begun, between the official sources and the scientifically sound attitudes and opinions that speak and try to explain the benefits of vaccination, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the unfounded attacks on vaccines, their creators, the country's policy makers, those who had already received vaccines, as well as slanders by the laity regarding their danger, and even curses were casted.

The already year-long debate has developed many anti-vaccine narratives. They, in turn, are dominated by many different types of misinformation, each intended to create a sense that vaccines are life-threatening, that they do not protect against COVID-19, that they are a means of coercion and control of the majority by the minority, illogical and, according to natural law, impossible conspiracy theories, such as those that the virus is being "sprayed" from airplanes or that vaccines cause mass deaths in the world, i.e. depopulation, although world statistics show that despite the pandemic, the number of people on the planet is increasing compared to the period before COVID-19.

As part of the project for demystification of the misstatements about COVID and the vaccines, the portal Truthmeter, edition by the Metamorphosis Foundation from Skopje, within the project "*Rapid Response to Vaccine Disinformation*", supported by the Balkan Trust for Democracy, an initiative of the German Marshall plan, a foundation for democracy, human rights and international cooperation from the United States, noted several types of harmful narratives and theses against vaccines, but also against the very existence and character of the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevailed in public discourse, especially on social media.

This misinformation can be divided into several thematic groups:

## **1. MISINFORMATION SAYING VACCINES CAUSE DISEASES AND DEATH, AS WELL AS INFERTILITY**

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The COVID-19 vaccine has been blamed for a number of unwanted medical conditions, whose existence has not only not been proven, but medical professionals have repeatedly denied that the vaccines cause such adverse effects. For example, [it was claimed](#) that vaccines cause infertility, even when there were no clinical studies on the topic. Later, several information appeared, after which the UK Committee on Vaccination advised pregnant women to get vaccinated against COVID-19. In the United States, 90,000 women had been vaccinated with Pfizer and Modern vaccines by May 2021, and no health issues had been identified, despite the already known fact that pregnant women infected with COVID-19 are at high risk of ending up in intensive care, as well as give birth to their babies earlier than women without COVID-19. The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention says those who want to become pregnant in the future can be vaccinated as jabs do not cause infertility. They do not have a live virus and cannot infect either mother or baby with COVID. The Australian government has also [officially stated](#) that vaccines against COVID-19 do not cause sterility.

Cancer served as one of many diseases that have been falsely attributed to the vaccine. The Ministry of Health points out this myth as untrue on its official website in the section on facts and myths about vaccination, [pointing out that](#) mRNA vaccines do not change your DNA and therefore cannot cause cancer. There are no carcinogenic ingredients in the instructions for use of the vaccines, and since the

beginning of the pandemic there has been a declining trend in the rate of malignant diseases, but not because they do not exist, but because many patients remained undiagnosed and untreated in the hospitals due to the pandemic. Patients with malignant hematological diseases in North Macedonia have official [recommendations](#) to get vaccinated from the Hematology Clinic.

Of course, the most irresponsible and frightening misinformation was that vaccines cause death. In many reviews, we have noticed that no distinction is made between reporting on side effects that anyone can submit, even if there is the slightest suspicion that the vaccine has caused an adverse effect. Those who share misinformation about vaccines, that is, who arbitrarily claim that they lead to a deadly outcome, completely ignore other accompanying elements, such as the age of the deceased patient and their comorbidity. Contrary to the instructions given by the Agency for Medicine MALMED, as well as by the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System - VAERS, that the report is not proof that the vaccine is the cause of someone's adverse effects, those who spread misinformation take the reports, per se, as general facts, as if they were an undisputed, hundred percent truth. In several of its reviews, Truthmeter pointed out that there is no proven cause-and-effect relationship between vaccination and the adverse effects.

## **2. MISINFORMATION SAYING THAT POLITICIANS AND THE RICH ARE PRIVILEGED, SO THEY RECEIVE A PLACEBO OR DON'T GET VACCINATED AT ALL**

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During 2021, public figures, including [politicians and singers](#) were among the first to be vaccinated against COVID-19. However, on several occasions, their vaccination, which took place in front of cameras, was presented as if it had not taken place. To this end, a fact was misused about the so-called safety syringes and needles used for vaccination against COVID-19, since they automatically withdraw once the jab is applied, in order to protect the medical staff from possible infection. With such safety needles, vaccines have been applied to many public figures, but this ignorance of safety syringes has led to dubious comments and posts on social media that the vaccine has not actually been applied and that the rich, famous, powerful and influential are an exception to the vaccine. In this way, the intention was to show that vaccines are dangerous and intended for global depopulation, as opposed to the fact that the number of people on Earth is growing rather than decreasing, despite the pandemic.

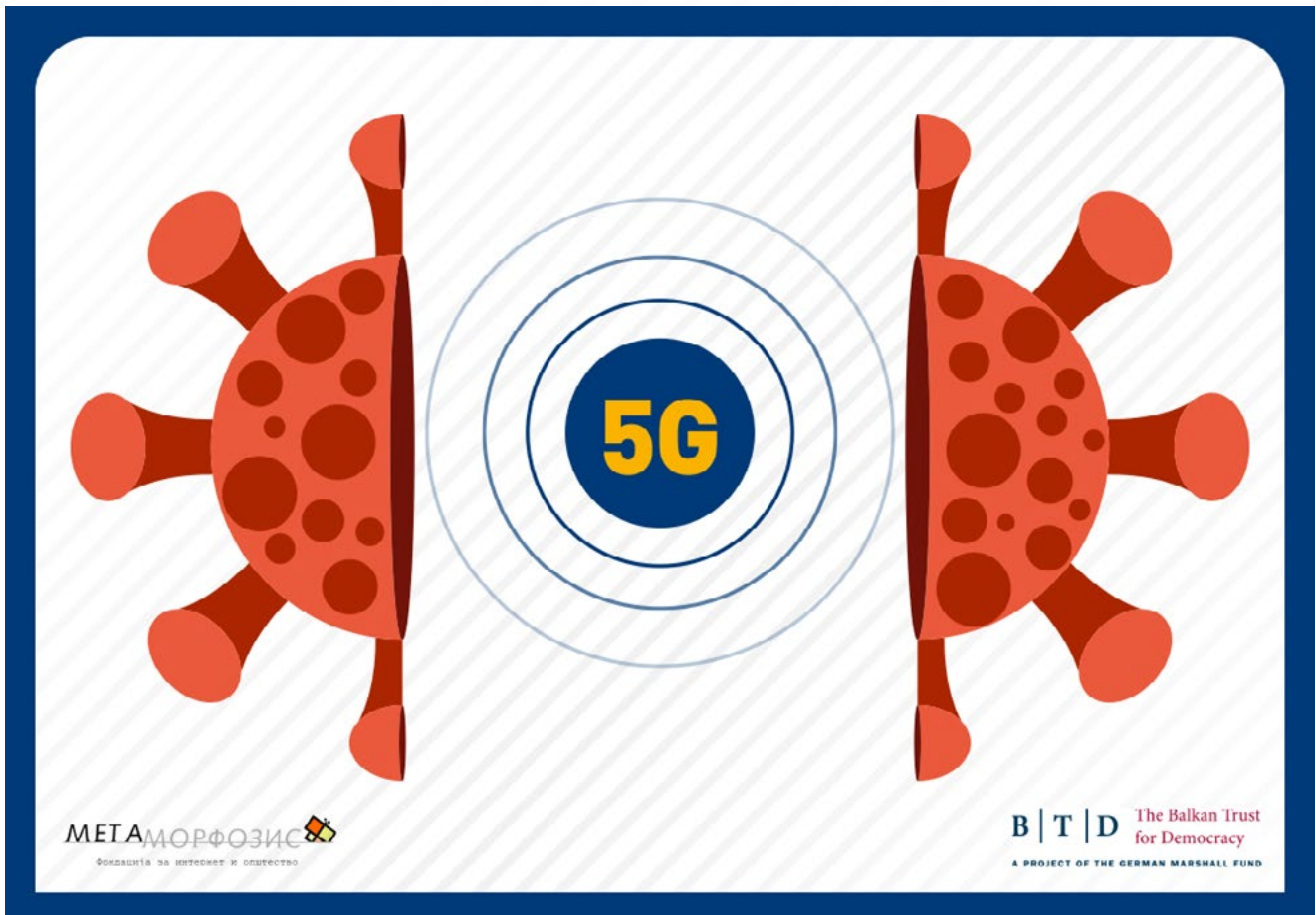
Such allegations were present about the American singer [Mariah Carey](#), the Minister of Health Venko Filipche, the Belgian politician [Bart Somers](#), as there were also misused videos from doctors, who were unfoundedly claimed to have been vaccinated twice [on the same day](#). Even the executives of the pharmaceutical companies, manufacturers of the vaccine against COVID-19, were accused of not being vaccinated with the product that they place worldwide. Such was the case with the CEO of Pfizer, [Albert Bourla](#). It is noticeable that in these posts, when they are shared, the time when they were initially published is not taken into account. It happens that an information that is over a year old is placed as new, i.e., it is shared a year later, when it has lost its relevance and freshness, and thus the informative value. Just like the rest of the world, Pfizer's CEO was on a waiting list at the beginning of the pandemic, as priority groups, including health workers and adults, had to be immunized first. The fact that the director of Pfizer waited to be vaccinated, and then received both doses of the vaccine,



was misused and even a year later it was shared that he was not vaccinated. Such misinformation came from both this country and abroad, depending on where the public figure is from.

### **3. CONSPIRACY THEORIES ABOUT SATANISTS, GLOBALISTS AND THE PHARMACEUTICAL MAFIA, "SPRAYING" THE VIRUS FROM AIRPLANES, BILL GATES' BIG RESET**

Bill Gates was the most mentioned person in terms of vaccination, with the false narrative that he wanted to kill as many people as possible and carry out mass depopulation. To create an artificial construct that he wanted to depopulate the planet with vaccines, fake videos were mounted from his earlier performances when the coronavirus pandemic did not exist. Such is the case when Gates talks about climate change - eliminating carbon dioxide emissions via new energy production approaches. Ignoring Gates' topic of energy innovation, the peer-reviewed posts portrayed the speech as *"evidence of a depopulation agenda that also involves covid vaccination."* Although he has [nothing to do](#) with depopulation or vaccination. In fact, he was attributed false statements which he never made, such as that the victims of vaccines could reach 700 thousand people around the globe! In an interview with CNBC, Gates said that if there were side effects with one person out of 10,000 people, it would affect 700,000 people. He uses the number 700,000 only theoretically, as an illustration to show how important it is to create a vaccine that will be effective for the elderly without adverse effects, but his statement ended globally on social media and



out of context. Gates only points out that they can potentially affect 700,000 people, but [at no point does he say](#) that these side effects will be fatal and cause permanent damage.

It was later claimed that the coronavirus was sprayed from airplanes, although this claim is medically [untenable](#), as the virus is transmitted through droplets from the mouth and nose that are transmitted at a distance of less than two meters, through talking, coughing and sneezing. Ordinary photographs of flying airplanes, which show traces of exhaust fumes due to differences in outside air temperature and the engine inside the aircraft, were presented as proof that COVID is not a virus but something that is deliberately dispersed to harm the population. These narratives often refer to alleged Satanists, globalists, and the pharmaceutical mafia who, allegedly, jointly want to kill humanity.

Communicologist Sead Jigal explains that behind every conspiracy theory is the conspiracy of someone trying to profit by convincing you to believe in the conspiracy. He says it's sad when we fall prey to social media conspiracies of someone with the ambition to attract clicks or become an "influencer". - It is even sadder when the media follow up on these manipulations and also try to profit from them. The mass spread of conspiracies most often occurs in times of confusion, uncertainty and dissatisfaction among people. Conspiracies try to bridge the gap between information and meaning. We have a lot of information, it is confusing, we do not know what is really happening and what is the end meaning of it all. When we cannot connect the information in all their complexity, conspiracies are at hand to recreate the meaning of the "real reality" in a simple and pictorial way, *Jigal points out*.

He also added that conspiracy theories, albeit temporarily, quench our thirst for meaning.

"Conspiracy frees us from the burden of truth," Umberto Eco wrote. People are often afraid of things they do not understand, and in today's networked world our exposure to topics we do not understand



is far greater than in the time before the Internet. This burden of information to which we are trying to give some meaning often leads us to various quasi-answers whose purpose is to strengthen our conviction that, behold, we know what is happening in the world around us. The persuasiveness of today's conspiracies gains strength when they spread en masse, especially with the help of the Internet and social media, which do so in an incredibly fast manner. If you start hearing about something everywhere, it slowly gains relevance just because everyone talks about it and gradually becomes part of the "reality", Jigal explains.

At the same time, he notes that the Internet and social media make it much easier and faster.

- The weak media literacy and communication culture in Macedonia impacts these phenomena to be more massive and dangerous than in other countries. Also, Macedonia and the Balkans are an area that is very susceptible to various superstitions and gullibility. Various fortune tellers, crystal gazers, psychics, quack doctors, etc. are present and influential everywhere, making various misinformation and conspiracies to easily spread in our country, Jigal says.

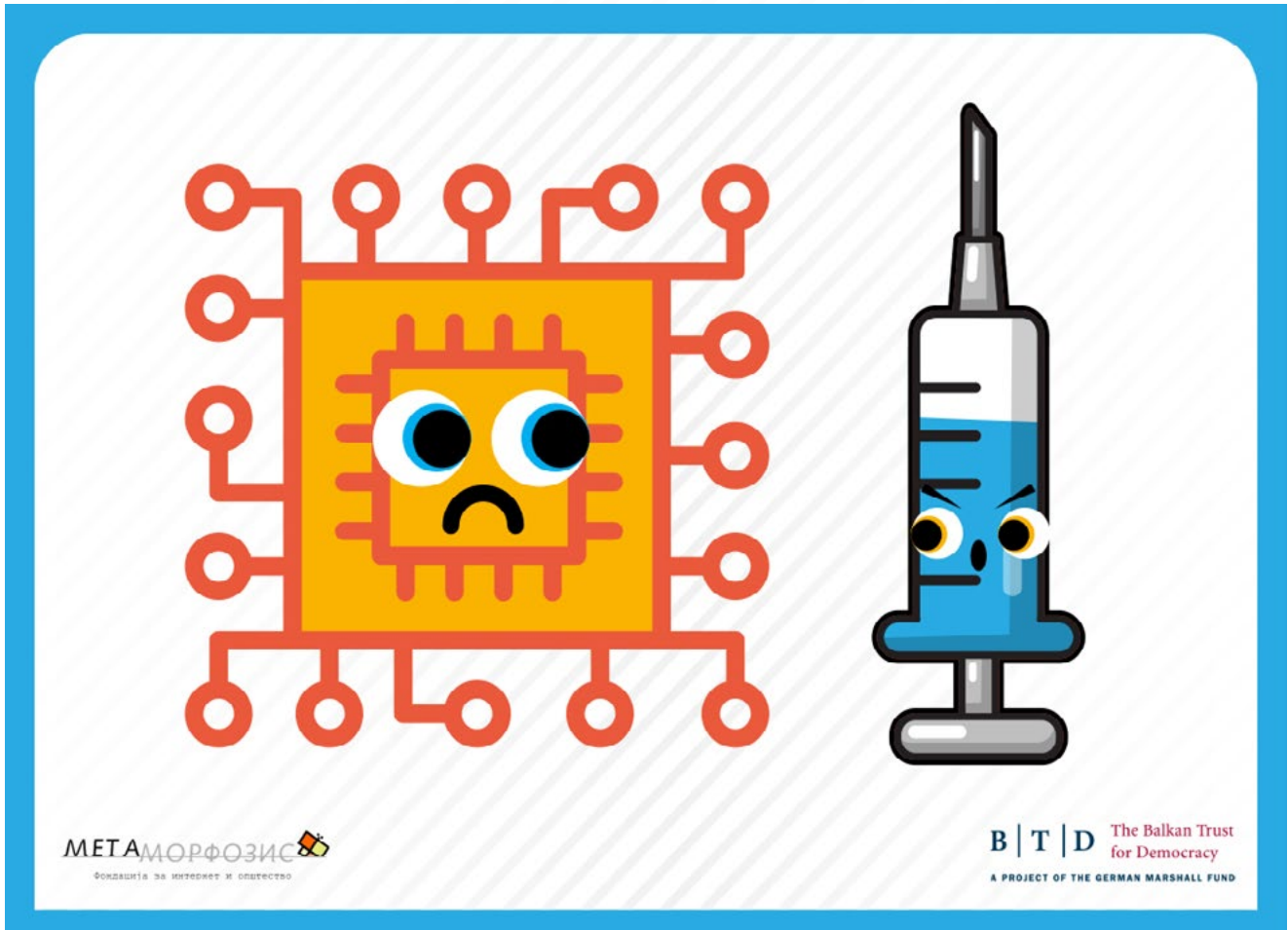
#### **4. MISINFORMATION ABOUT THE VACCINES COMPOSITION THAT THEY HAVE MAGNETS, POISONS, GRAPHENE OXIDE, EVEN EBOLA VIRUS, PARASITES AND DEAD FETUSES**

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It is really dangerous when the laity gets involved in complex medical topics and try to disqualify vaccines and their composition with semi-information and manipulations. During the vaccination period, lies appeared that vaccines contained magnets, [poisons](#), graphene oxide, Ebola, parasites, or that they comprise dead fetuses. None of this is true, but it did not prevent false announcements showing metal objects, including coins and spoons being glued to the shoulders of the allegedly vaccinated, as alleged evidence that their bodies became magnetic after receiving the vaccine.

This, of course, is not true. The dose of the vaccine is less than one milliliter. The standard Pfizer dose contains 0.3 milliliters. That's not enough volume to fit a [microchip](#), even if someone would want to. Even if the entire injected dose contained ferromagnetic metal, it would still be insufficient to create the effect of magnetizing the body. Experts have explained that spoons and other metal objects may stick to the shoulder due to sticky skin, possibly with glue and duct tape. [Forbes](#) notes that there is some truth in the fact that many people can stick metal magnets or other objects, such as glass, porcelain, plastic, wood and aluminum, on their skin. But in this phenomenon, there is [no magnetism](#), but something much more ordinary. The reason why objects can stick to some people is a force called "friction". But the supposed metallic powers always disappear when the skin is covered with powder. In these posts, no evidence was ever presented that the person with the glued objects had been vaccinated.

The COVID-19 vaccine works by boosting immunity and generating white blood cells called T cells, specific to COVID-19. These T cells help the immune system organize the response and kill the cells that are infected with the COVID-19 virus. The manufacturer Johnson & Johnson guarantees that you will [not become infected](#) with the Ebola virus if you receive the COVID-19 vaccine called "Janssen", nor if you receive the Ebola vaccine. However, there were posts claiming the exact opposite. The ingredient of the year, which was mentioned the most and is not present in the vaccines, is graphene oxide. The Associated Press [reported](#) in July this year that although there was research into whether



graphene oxide was used in some vaccines (in quantities that would not be toxic to humans), [the material did not appear to be on the list](#) of Pfizer vaccine ingredients or any other vaccine. Isolated members of religious communities have spread misinformation that the vaccines [contain fetuses](#) from aborted children, although this is not the case.

## 5. MISINFORMATION SAYING VACCINES ARE DANGEROUS, SO THEY SHOULD BE CLEANED FROM THE BODY WITH WATER-ONLY FASTING AND "SURAMIN"

There have also been claims that once you receive the COVID-19 vaccine, you still *"have time to save yourself from its harmful effects"* by practicing non-medical, dangerous, nonevidence-based practices such as water-only fasting for 40 days or taking medication over the counter. Such a non-medical recommendation was made for the drug ["suramin"](#), which was quickly denied by medical experts [and citizens were warned](#) not to take any medication on their own for alleged adverse effects after vaccination. Most common adverse effects include shoulder pain, headache, body aches, fever, lasting one to two days, after which they withdraw and are a sign that the body is developing an immune response to the vaccine.

Alleged [detoxification with a 40-day water-only](#) fast was also recommended, which is not medically justified, under the premise that there are some "toxins" in the vaccines. But prolonged water-only fasting

for 40 days should not be carried out without medical supervision. In 2011, [patient Jonathan Cam died](#) after water fasting for 32 days. A study that can be found at this [link](#) shows that the negative effects of water fasting are fatigue, heart problems and irregular heartbeat, high or low blood pressure, abdominal pain and dizziness. Long-term water fasting is associated with unhealthy weight loss, muscle loss, constant tiredness and feeling cold, mood swings. There is no research in the world, no recommendation from an official medical institution, including the WHO, the US Food and Drug Administration, the European Medicines Agency, or any scientific attitude that a vaccine requires any detoxification, let alone a 40-day water-only fast. This invention, a 40-day water-only fast, is a dangerous method, which should not be carried out by anyone without medical supervision and without consulting a doctor.

## 6. RELIGION MISUSED AGAINST VACCINATION

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Citizens' religious sentiments and religious beliefs have often been correlated with vaccination in a false narrative, such as that believers oppose while infidels advocate vaccination. This, of course, is not true, and it is confirmed by the fact that many religious organizations and their leaders have [recommended vaccination](#) for their believers at their own request and personal persuasion. The religious feelings of the citizens were also used as a weapon to attack those who decided to be vaccinated with the thesis that they have received the seal of the Devil and that they have knuckled under. There were posts on Facebook saying that "*Jesus is against vaccination*" despite the fact that this [public call](#) by the Macedonian Orthodox Church, Islamic Religious Community and the Catholic Church shows that none of the three religious communities is against vaccination. Last year in April (2021), after the meeting of the then Prime Minister Zoran Zaev with the leaders of the Macedonian Orthodox Church - Ohrid Archbishopric, Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia, Archbishop Stefan, the Islamic Religious Community, Grand Mufti Haji Shajirefendi Fetai, and the Catholic Church, Monsignor Kiro Stojanov, Bishop of Skopje and the Diocese of Strumica and Skopje, the government said that all leaders support the vaccination against COVID-19. The religious leaders pointed out at the meeting that health protection is not only an obligation of the state, but also a religious obligation, since everyone is obliged, both socially and religiously, to be in the service of health. It was jointly stated that in these moments when humanity is facing an unpredictable virus, it requires prudence by all believers, since the disease does not choose religions and nations.

## 7. MISINFORMATION THAT VACCINES ARE EXPERIMENTAL, DO NOT HAVE A PERMIT FOR USE AND HAVE NOT BEEN TESTED

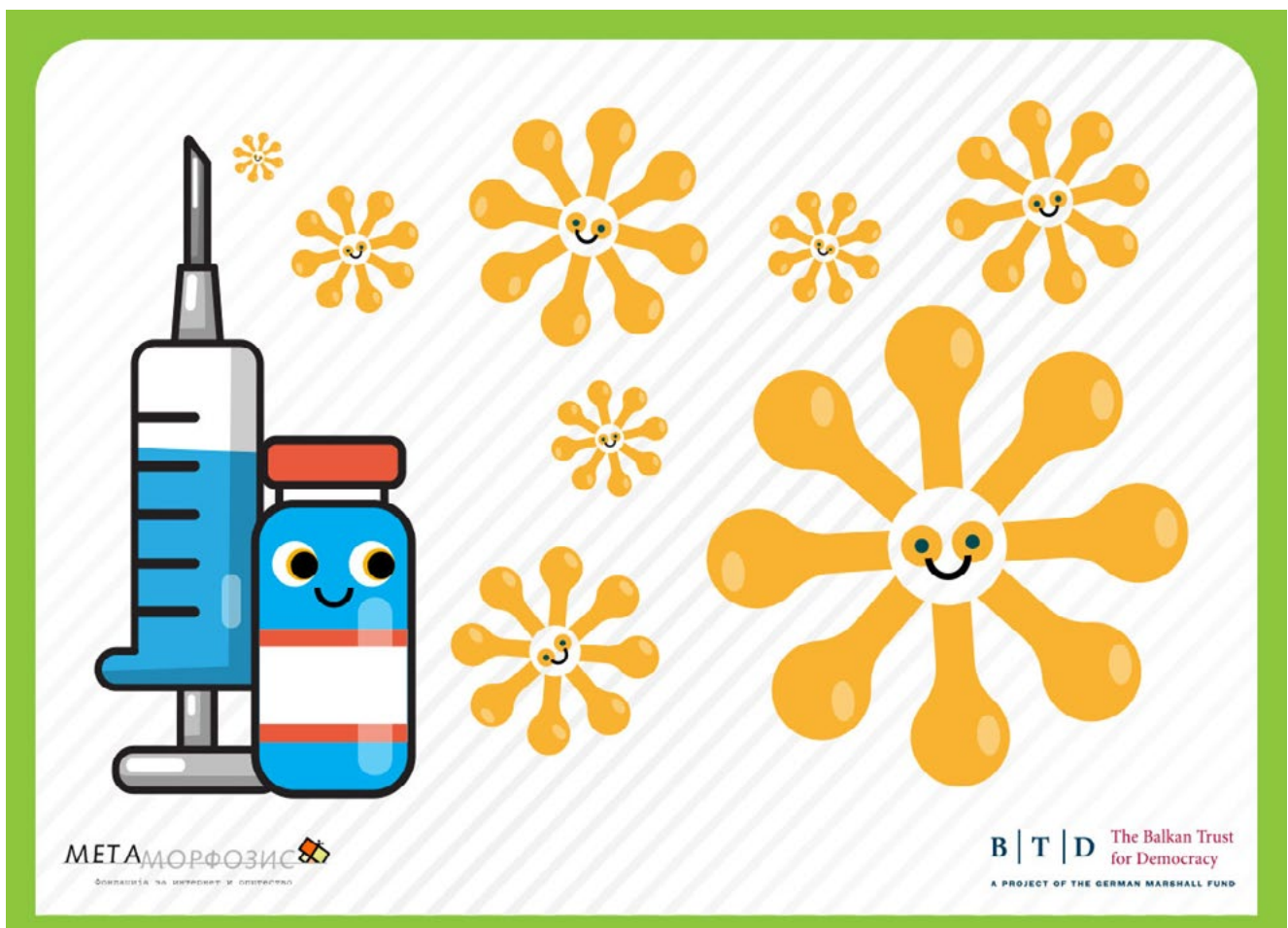
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Despite the fact that COVID-19 vaccines go through strict international controls, certification checks, laboratory tests and pre-application registration with the Drug Bureau, this was not enough to stop the avalanche of social media posts stating that they are insufficiently [tested](#) and unsafe. Truthmeter in its attempt to clarify the facts, [published an analysis](#) of the path of vaccines from the manufacturer to the patient's shoulder, which describes all the procedures for registration of vaccines in the country, regardless if it is a procedure with intervention import or registration of the vaccine. It has a certificate from an independent laboratory within the European network, but additional assessments are made at

the Institute of Public Health. Without a safety certificate, the vaccine registration procedure can not proceed. In addition to the Institute of Public Health, MALMED has authorized the Faculty of Pharmacy to examine all parameters in vaccines and this applies to all medication. After approval by the World Health Organization (WHO) as well as national regulators, all vaccines must pass [three clinical trial phases](#). Clinical trials ensure that vaccines are safe for people with a variety of diseases as well as effective against the virus. The results of the clinical stages are then reviewed by independent scientists to ensure that the data are in order. Phase 3 trials and their worldwide application have confirmed that vaccines are very effective in preventing severe symptoms.

## 8. MISINFORMATION THAT VACCINES CHANGE THE GENOME, THE PERSON'S DNA, ALL IN ORDER TO BE CONTROLLED AND MONITORED

Regarding the misinformation that vaccines will change your DNA and genome, the Ministry of Health officially claims on its anti-myth website that it is [untrue](#). The reason is that mRNA technology dates back to 1990, although it is now used for the first time in widely used vaccines. In the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, mRNA is contained in a "lipid capsule" or, more precisely, in a fat shell, which is described as a nanoparticle. The prefix "nano" only means that it is small, not that it is nanotechnology. Although the term nano is used to imply that nanotechnology is used to modify your RNA, it is completely false. mRNA in the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines [has no effect](#) on human DNA or RNA and does not become an



integral and permanent part of the cell. mRNA vaccines do not alter your DNA in any way and therefore cannot cause cancer. Messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines teach cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response if someone becomes infected. mRNA that is injected into your body does not interact with your DNA. Once the mRNA is done, your cells break it down and clear it off your body. There are no permanent effects of mRNA in the vaccine.

There are also people who in their posts promote the thesis according to which a small and powerful group of people wants to follow the world population through chips! But there are [no chips in vaccines](#). The first evidence of this is the dose of the vaccine. It is less than one milliliter! The standard Pfizer dose contains 0.3 milliliters. That's not enough volume to fit a microchip, even if one wants to do it. The Australian Ministry of Health, in response to this question, [claims](#) that there are no chips in the vaccines. What can be noticed is that the same misinformation about the chips appears from Australia to Macedonia, which means that there is a base of basic misinformation characteristic of the whole world.

## 9. MISINFORMATION ABOUT THE VACCINES AND CHILDREN

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When it comes to children and their immunization against COVID-19, the narratives are extremely fierce. It can be said that the official recommendations for vaccination and the approval of Pfizer for a lower dose of vaccine for younger people are ignored, and the narrative and the appeal "*parents should not give their children to the devil*" are used. In that sense, it is untrue that COVID does not attack [children](#) despite the death of a 15-year-old girl in the country, as well as official claims by pediatric health experts about the consequences of long COVID with children. Furthermore, fake videos can be found on social media from abroad, which show dead children and it is claimed that their death is a consequence of vaccination. This is scandalous given that a search of the original videos leads to the conclusion that these deaths are unrelated to vaccination, but are from [carbon monoxide](#) poisoning in criminal cases abroad. Unfounded allegations are also made that vaccination of children is a [crime](#), although it is carried out in the country only with the approval of a parent. In these narratives for the youngest, the misinformation that vaccines are experimental is again seen in order to discourage parents from vaccinating their children.

# CONCLUSIONS

- Generally, COVID disinformation is very persistent, repetitive, omnipresent, even when there are other important events in the country, such as local elections or the population census.
- COVID misinformation is much more present on social media than in traditional media.
- When it comes to people spreading misinformation on Facebook, most of them are people who think that the pandemic, and thus the vaccines against COVID-19, are the product of a global conspiracy. So, in a much larger percentage, those who spread misinformation of this kind do it for ideological reasons, i.e. they believe in the misinformation they spread. The number of those who do it for other reasons (financial, political, medical and others) is much smaller. When it comes to those who spread misinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines because they believe in them, they are divided into people who do it persistently and constantly, even for the purpose of personal promotion or nurturing the prophet syndrome (feel like saviors), as well as people who share such misinformation occasionally or rarely, because they are aware that attracting too much attention to themselves through this topic can have negative consequences for them (social, family and others).
- In terms of quantity, it can be said that misinformation spreads from different profiles and on a large scale, but there are also some "reserved" profiles, which continuously place untruths, half-truths and manipulations, which continue placing such announcements despite being constantly reviewed and sanctioned by Facebook for fake vaccine narratives. Unfortunately, this does not stop the authors (owners of these profiles) from spreading misinformation, and it even gives the impression that they are additionally motivated to place such posts or open new profiles, because they think they are censored.
- The profiles that persistently spread misinformation, unfortunately, sometimes have viral posts and thousands of followers on social media. Some even have several pre-prepared profiles at disposal, which they activate in case one of them suffers restrictions due to the large number of fake posts. They even urge their followers to follow their other profiles while their current account is still active, knowing in advance that it may be removed, planning the transfer in a timely manner, not to lose too many of their current followers. The comments under their posts refer uncritically and with support to the already placed contents, which further reinforces the false impression that they have published the truth. However, there are people - profiles (albeit in smaller numbers) who stop posting lies after their content is reviewed.

- The main misinformation about vaccines and COVID-19 is persistently repeated by those who spread them, while being updated with new moments, then included in current events in order to give them the illusion of permanence, omnipresence and creating a perception of their alleged truth.
- Most of the misinformation on social media in Macedonian and Albanian language are imported in N. Macedonia, mostly from two spoken areas, whose languages the citizens understand the most, and that is Serbian and English. The fact-checking process showed that the same misinformation already exists abroad and is only translated and adapted for the social media users in North Macedonia.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The fight against misinformation does not have a quick or one-time/single solution, i.e., the so-called "silver bullet", a procedure that can quickly combat this problem. It is a battle of opposing wills, which should be fought day by day. And, since misinformation is much easier to come up with than truth checks, the advantage, when it comes to time and resources, is on the side of those who spread such misinformation, which means that fact-checkers need to have strong will, persistence and use available resources wisely.
- The battle against this misinformation must not stop and must be led consistently and with regular dynamics. This is dangerous misinformation that can have repercussions on one's personal and collective health as it can sometimes cost lives due to the strong influence of someone's decision to refuse the vaccine. Particularly exposed to this danger is the part of the public that does not have a precise attitude and opinion about vaccines, so misinformation can further make them hesitant and refuse to be vaccinated, i.e., to protect them and the health of their loved ones.
  - Social media users should be careful not to get caught up in taking the posts for granted, checking the source of the information, how credible it is and whether it can be trusted.
- Journalists should always be guided by the principles set out in the [Journalists' Code](#) and the [Journalism Ethics Handbook](#). In this sense, accurate, verified information should be published, data should not be concealed, and news should not be distorted. Placed information should always be checked from at least two sources and free from sensationalism.
- Fact-checkers should also be careful to stick to official and verified data, to refer to credible sources and institutions when exposing misinformation. Because casting doubt on science with arbitrary, unfounded and unsubstantiated claims can only fuel the public distrust in the health care system, thereby causing enormous damage in the battle against the pandemic and the protection of public health.



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