

The Fake News Game: Actively Inoculating Against the Risk of Misinformation

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Abstract

The rapid spread of online misinformation poses an increasing risk to societies worldwide. To help counter this, we developed a “fake news game” in which participants are actively tasked with creating a news article about a strongly politicized issue (the European refugee crisis) using misleading tactics, from the perspective of different types of fake news producers. To pilot test the efficacy of the game, we conducted a randomized field study (N=95) in a public high school setting. Results provide some preliminary evidence that playing the fake news game reduced the perceived reliability and persuasiveness of fake news articles. Overall, these findings suggest that educational games may be a promising vehicle to inoculate the public against fake news.

Keywords: fake news, inoculation theory, misinformation, post-truth, influence.

Introduction

In an age where almost half of all news consumers receive and share their news from online sources (Mitchell et al., 2016), false information can reach large audiences by spreading rapidly from one individual to another (van der Linden et al., 2017a). Following an age of “post-trust” (Löfstedt, 2005), some observers claim we have entered an era of “post-truth” (Higgins, 2016). In fact, the Oxford dictionaries declared “post-truth” word of the year in 2016, reflecting “circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal beliefs” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). Although not new (Cooke, 2017), the spread of false information has become synonymous with the term “fake news”. A Google Trends analysis reveals that this term began to gain relevance in US Google searches around the time of the US presidential election in 2016, and has remained popular since¹. The risk that fake news poses to evidence-based decision-making is increasingly recognized by governments. For example, UK parliament recently launched an investigation into how “fake news” is threatening modern democracy (Harriss & Raymer, 2017) and the World Economic Forum (2013) ranked the spread of misinformation as one of the top risks facing the world today.

The study of the spread of false information, particularly through social media and online networks, has become a significant object of scholarly research (Boididou et al., 2017; Mustafaraj & Metaxas, 2017; Shao et al., 2017; van der Linden et al., 2017a). Scholars have theorized that fake news can exert a significant degree of influence on political campaigns and discussions (e.g., Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017; Gu, Kropotov, & Yarochkin, 2017; Jacobson, Myung, & Johnson, 2016). Although extensive research exists on political misinformation (for a recent review, see Flynn, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2017), there is some

¹ <https://trends.google.nl/trends/explore?q=fake%20news>

debate about the extent to which fake news influences public opinion (Shao et al., 2017; van der Linden, 2017), including social media “echo chambers” and “filter bubbles” (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015; Flaxman, Goel, & Rao, 2016; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017; Guess et al., 2018).

Nonetheless, a majority (64%) of Americans report that fake news has left them feeling confused about basic facts (Barthel, Mitchell, & Holcomb, 2016), and a study carried out by YouGov (2017) found that while many people believe they can tell the difference between true and fake news, only 4% of those surveyed could systematically differentiate the two. Similarly, a survey conducted by Ipsos MORI found that 75% of Americans who were familiar with a fake news headline thought the story was accurate (Silverman & Singer-Vine, 2016). This is concerning because the functioning of democracy relies on an educated and well-informed populace (Kuklinski et al., 2000) and as such, the spread of misinformation has the potential to undermine both science and society (Lewandowsky et al., 2017; van der Linden et al., 2017a). For example, the viral spread of misinformation on issues such as climate change and vaccines can undermine public risk judgments about not only the state of scientific agreement but also the perceived seriousness of these issues (Lewandowsky et al., 2017; van der Linden et al., 2017b).

Given these findings, a more recent line of inquiry looks at how the fake news dilemma may be solved (Bakir & McStay, 2017; Lazer et al., 2017; van der Linden, 2017). For example, recent risk management initiatives have involved the announcement of controversial ‘fake news’ laws (Bremner, 2018). Other proposed solutions range from making digital media literacy a primary pillar of education (Select Committee on Communications, 2017), to preventing false information from going viral in the first place or counteracting it in real time (Bode & Vraga, 2015; Sethi, 2017; Vosoughi, Mohsenvand, & Roy, 2017). Lewandowsky et al. (2017) call for technological solutions that incorporate psychological principles, which they refer to as

‘technocognition’. Similarly, in a recent edition of *Science*, van der Linden et al. (2017a) call for a *preemptive* solution grounded in “inoculation” theory, which we explore further here.

Inoculation Theory

The diffusion of fake news can be modeled much like the spread of a viral contagion (Budak, Agrawal, & El Abbadi, 2011; Kucharski, 2016). Inoculation theory offers an intuitive solution to this problem by offering the possibility of a “vaccine” against fake news (van der Linden, 2017).

Inoculation theory was originally pioneered by William McGuire (1964) in an attempt to induce attitudinal resistance against persuasion and propaganda, in a manner analogous to biological immunization. To illustrate: injections that contain a weakened dose of a virus can confer resistance against future infection by activating the production of antibodies. Inoculation theory postulates that the same can be achieved with “mental antibodies” and information. In other words, by preemptively exposing people to a weakened version of a (counter)-argument, and by subsequently refuting that argument, attitudinal resistance can be conferred against future persuasion attempts (Papageorgis & McGuire, 1961).

The inoculation process has an affective and cognitive component, often referred to as “threat”² and “refutational preemption” (McGuire, 1964; McGuire & Papageorgis, 1962). The role of perceived risk or “threat” is largely motivational and refers to the recognition that one’s attitude on an issue is vulnerable to attack, whereas “refutational preemption” is concerned with providing people with specific arguments to help resist persuasion attempts (Compton, 2013; McGuire, 1964; McGuire & Papageorgis, 1962). Inoculation has a rich history in communication (see Compton, 2013 for a review), and the approach has been applied in various contexts, most

² Threat is not always manipulated, and there is some disagreement over its importance (see Banas & Rains, 2010).

notably political campaigns (Pfau & Burgoon, 1988; Pfau et al., 1990) and health risks (Compton, Jackson, & Dimmock, 2016; Niederdeppe, Gollust, & Barry, 2014; Pfau, 1995). A meta-analysis found that inoculation is effective at conferring resistance (Banas & Rains, 2010).

Importantly, however, inoculation research has traditionally centered around protecting the types of beliefs that everyone intuitively knows to be true (“cultural truisms”), whereas very little is known about how inoculation works with respect to more controversial issues (McGuire, 1964; Wood, 2007; van der Linden et al., 2017b). Importantly, in two recent studies, van der Linden et al. (2017b) and Cook, Lewandowsky, and Ecker (2017) found that inoculating people with facts against misinformation was effective in the context of a highly politicized issue (global warming), regardless of prior attitudes. Similarly, Banas and Miller (2013) were able to inoculate people with facts in the context of “sticky” 9/11 conspiracy theories.

Although promising, most of these studies have been lab-based, and rely on “*passive*” rather than “*active*” refutation, meaning that participants are provided with both the counter-arguments and refutations rather than having to actively generate pro- and counter-arguments themselves (Banas & Rains, 2010). McGuire hypothesized that active refutation would be more effective (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961) because “internal” counter-arguing is a more involved cognitive process and some early research has supported this (e.g. Pfau et al., 1997). In addition, many studies use a so-called “refutational-same” message, i.e. inoculating people against specific information to which they will be exposed later on, rather than a “*refutational-different*” format where the message refutes challenges that are not specifically featured in a subsequent attack.

Although research to date has mostly found subtle differences between different inoculation procedures (Banas & Rains, 2010), the hypothesis that inoculation could provide “umbrella protection” against the risk of fake news is intriguing because such general immunity

avoids the need for tailored content. Evidence for cross-attitudinal protection has also surfaced in other contexts (e.g. Parker, Rains, & Ivanov, 2016) and van der Linden et al. (2017b) found that while a general warning was less effective than a tailored message, it still conferred significant resistance against attempts to politicize science (see also Bolsen & Druckman, 2015; Cook et al., 2017). Accordingly, we draw on the inoculation metaphor and approach in the present study.

The Present Research

In particular, we build on prior work by extending “active inoculation” in a novel and practical direction with clear educational value: “the fake news game”. In collaboration with DROG³, a Netherlands-based “group of specialists who provide education about disinformation”, we developed a multi-player game with the goal of actively creating a misleading (fake) news article about a given topic. The game requires that players engage in the creation of misleading information, and that they think about the various techniques and methods one might use to do this. We theorize that by placing news consumers in the shoes of (fake) news producers, they are not merely exposed to small portions of misinformation (as is the case with passive inoculation), but are instead prompted to think proactively about how people might be misled in order to achieve a goal (winning the game). We posit that this process of active inoculation will have a positive effect on students’ ability to recognize and resist fake news and propaganda.

Specifically, we propose the following four hypotheses: Active inoculation induced by playing the fake news game will reduce both the perceived reliability and persuasiveness of previously unseen fake news articles (H1/H2). In addition, we also posit a mediation hypothesis where playing the game reduces the persuasiveness of fake news through decreased reliability judgments (H3). Lastly, negative affective content has shown to be an important element of

³ <https://aboutbadnews.com/>

eliciting attitudinal threat and issue engagement (Pfau et al., 2009). Thus, consistent with inoculation theory, we therefore hypothesize that playing the game will elicit greater affective involvement as compared with a control group (H4).

Method

The Fake News Game

The basic structure of the fake news game is as follows: first, players are divided into groups of 2-4 people. These groups are then randomly assigned one of four key characters. The characters were developed to reflect common ways in which information is presented in a misleading manner (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). The goal of each group is to produce a news article that reflects their character's unique goals and motivations. This way, each group approaches the same issue from a different angle. In short, the four characters are: 1) the “*denier*”, who strives to make a topic look small and insignificant, 2) the “*alarmist*”, who wants to make the topic look as large and problematic as possible, 3) the “*clickbait monger*”, whose goal is to get as many clicks (and by extension ad revenue) as possible, and lastly 4) the “*conspiracy theorist*”, who distrusts any kind of official mainstream narrative and wants their audience to follow suit.

Each group is given a so-called “source card” that explains the background of the article that the players will produce. Each group is also given a “fact-sheet” in which the issue at hand is explained in detail. In our experiment, the overarching topic was immigration, and the specific salient risk issue a report by the Dutch Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA)⁴ from 2016 (COA, 2016), which stated that the number of incidents in and around Dutch asylum centers rose between 2015 and 2016. The fact sheet mentions the number of incidents in

⁴ <https://www.coa.nl/en/>

both years, plus additional information such as the number of filed police reports and cases that made it to court. Additionally, the fact sheet lists a number of possible reasons behind the rise in incidents. Based on the specific goals and motivations of their character, players are then instructed to use the information from the fact sheet to create a fake news article.

The article itself has a systematic structure. In order: a) an image, b) title, c) header, d) paragraph 1: numbers and facts, e) paragraph 2: interpretation and presentation of numbers and facts, f) paragraph 3: the cause of the problem, g) paragraph 4: consequences of the problem, h) paragraph 5: expert opinion, and i) conclusion. For each part, groups are given a set of cards with 4 alternatives, each of which presents and interprets the fact sheet in a specific way consistent with one specific character. Players then pick one of these alternatives for each part of their article, based on their assessment of what their character would choose. Next, they put their choices together in the correct order to form the final article. The group with the most correct answers, i.e. the group that chose the most cards that correspond with their character, wins. Please see photos from the field (Figure 1) for a visual overview of the game.

Figure 1. Fake News Game.



Sample and Participants

We tested the game at a secondary public high school in the central-eastern part of the Netherlands. On the day of the experiment, a total of 4 classes of “HAVO” and “VWO” students⁵ ($N = 95$) between the ages of 16 and 19 took part in the game. Students from these classes were randomly assigned to an experimental ($n = 57$) or control ($n = 38$) group⁶. The average age in the sample was 16.2 years ($M = 16$, $SD = 0.81$). In total, 59% of the students were male and 41% were female. The groups were somewhat unbalanced so that participants in the treatment group were more likely to be younger ($p < 0.01$) and female (74% vs. 53%, $p = 0.08$).

Experimental Design and Procedure

We administered a reading task as well as a survey to evaluate our hypotheses and the effectiveness of the fake news game. The reading task involved reading one of two (randomly assigned) fake news articles about an issue that related closely to the topic of the game. All facts and figures in these articles, except for proper names and names of institutions, were made up. The two articles were the same (insofar as this is possible) in their overarching topic, setup, structure, length, language use, and in terms of the techniques they used to mislead the audience (Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Hansen, 2017). Both articles related to polarized and contested risk issues about immigration and the refugee crisis in the Netherlands, and assigned blame to the same organization (the European Union).

Additionally, a structured and fixed number of common and popular “fake news” tactics were implemented. In both articles, *hyperbole* (stylized exaggeration, see McCarthy & Carter,

⁵ In the Dutch system, Hoger Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs (HAVO) and Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs (VWO) are higher educational divisions that prepare high school students for university-level education.

⁶ There were two control and two treatment groups that were approximately the same size on paper, but on the day of the experiment there were more absentees in the control group, resulting in the observed imbalance.

2004) was used 4 times, the ‘*common man*’ appeal (attempting to convince readers by appealing to perceived ‘common sense’, see Hansen, 2017) was used 4 times, *arguments from authority* (asserting an argument is true based on the credentials of the person making it, *ibid.*) was used twice, *conspiratorial reasoning* (theorizing that small groups are working in secret against the common good, see Hofstadter, 1964; van der Linden, 2015) twice, *demonization of the out-group* (Atkinson, 2005) once, ‘*whataboutism*’ (discrediting via hypocrisy accusations or the ‘tu quoque’-fallacy, see Hansen, 2017) once and the ‘*ad hominem*’ attack (Walton, 1998) also once.

The difference between the two articles lies in their framing (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2009; Entman, 1993). Article 1 focused on the increasing number of people making their way to Europe from Libya. The framing of the immigration issue was such that the article displayed a negative attitude towards immigration: “the European Union has failed to protect its borders from ‘hordes’ of ‘immigrants’. This has ‘created an unmanageable situation’, which has caused Dutch citizens to ‘lose faith in Europe’”. Article 2 also framed the immigration issue in negative terms, but instead focused on the dire situation in European refugee camps: here, “people live in ‘inhumane conditions’, because of a failure on behalf of the EU to create safe living conditions for refugees, which has ‘eroded citizens’ trust in Europe’”. As such, the two articles represent two dominant but ideologically opposite frames about the European refugee crisis (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017; Rodríguez Pérez, 2017; Zeitel-Bank, 2017). We introduced this variation to control for potential political biases. The full (translated) articles can be found in the supplement.

Before the start of the game, all participants filled out a short questionnaire to measure their general familiarity with the topic, political ideology, and demographic background information. After this, participants in the treatment condition (n=57) were divided into groups, given materials, assigned a character, and, after a brief explanation by the research assistants,

asked to start playing the game. In total, they played the game for approximately 30 minutes. Directly after this (without determining a winner or explaining what the game was about), participants were asked to read the fake news article and fill out a second questionnaire to measure their judgments about the article. Participants were given approximately 10 minutes to read the article and about 10 minutes for the questionnaire. The control group ($n=38$) underwent the exact same procedure as the treatment group, but instead of playing the game watched an unrelated presentation that was part of the regular lesson plan for approximately 30 minutes.

Measures

We assessed participants' familiarity ($M = 4.15$ $SD = 1.37$) with the topic on a 7-point Likert scale by asking the extent to which they were familiar with the topic in general (1 = not familiar at all, 7 = very familiar). We also asked participants how *persuasive* ($M = 3.79$ $SD = 1.47$) they found the article (1 = not persuasive at all, 7 = very persuasive), how much they personally agreed with the article (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree, $M = 4.0$, $SD = 1.38$) and how reliable ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.55$) they judged the article to be (1 = not reliable at all, 7 = very reliable). In addition, we included several open-ended items to encourage participants to actively generate answers on their own (i.e., what is the writer trying to convince you of? Which arguments did you find persuasive or not persuasive? Which arguments did you find reliable?). Finally, we assessed participants' age ($M = 16$, $SD = 0.81$) and their political ideology on a 7-point scale (1 = extreme left-wing, 7 = extreme right-wing, $M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.43$).

Results

To confirm balance, there were no differences in prior familiarity with the general topic between groups ($M = 4.63$, $SE = 0.21$ vs. $M = 4.43$, $SE = 0.20$, $t(92) = 0.67$, $p = 0.50$). There was a significant difference in judgments about the reliability of the fake news article. The treatment group rated the (fake news) article's reliability significantly lower than the control group ($M = 3.06$, $SE = 0.20$ vs. $M = 3.60$, $SE = 0.27$, $t(90) = 1.69$, $p < 0.05$, one-tailed⁷, Cohen's $d = 0.36$).

The effect on perceived persuasiveness of the fake news article (H2) was in the expected direction [lower for the treatment group] but not statistically significant ($M = 3.67$, $SE = 0.21$ vs. $M = 3.97$, $SE = 0.21$, $t(93) = 1.00$, $p = 0.16$, Cohen's $d = 0.21$). Equally, personal agreement with the fake news article was descriptively lower in the treatment group ($M = 3.91$, $SE = 0.18$ vs. $M = 4.14$, $SE = 0.23$, $t(91) = 0.77$, $p = 0.22$, Cohen's $d = 0.16$).

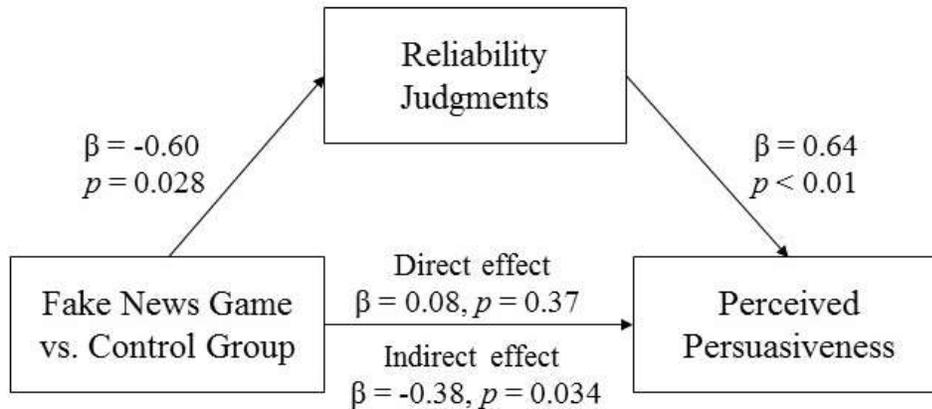
We conducted a mediation analysis to evaluate whether playing the fake news game influenced perceived persuasiveness of the fake news article through reliability judgments⁸. We estimated the mediation (path) model in STATA (Figure 2). Age, gender, political ideology and familiarity were included as covariates and standard errors were bias-corrected and bootstrapped 1,000 times. As expected, the higher the judged reliability, the more persuasive people find the fake news article ($\beta = 0.64$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$). Allocation to the treatment group reduced reliability judgments of the fake news article ($\beta = -0.60$, $SE = 0.32$, $p = 0.028$) but not perceived persuasiveness directly ($\beta = 0.08$, $SE = 0.23$, $p = 0.37$). However, as hypothesized (H3), playing

⁷ All of our research hypotheses were directional (see p.7) and evaluated as such using one-tailed p -values (for guidelines, see Cho & Abe, 2013 and Jones, 1952).

⁸ The presence of a significant main effect is not a prerequisite for mediation to occur, especially when power to detect an effect is relatively low (Rucker et al., 2011).

the fake news game did have a significant *indirect* effect on perceived persuasiveness through *reduced* reliability judgments ($\beta = -0.38$, $SE = 0.22$, $p = 0.034$).

Figure 2. Mediation Model.



Note: Coefficients are unstandardized. Covariates include gender, age, and ideology.

Lastly, we conducted a sentiment analysis on the open-ended responses with the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count dictionary (Pennebaker et al., 2015), to see if the active evaluation of (counter)-arguments elicited affective responses (H4). In general, the treatment groups' answers displayed greater affective content than the control group ($M = 13.01$, $SE = 2.13 > M = 8.09$, $SE = 1.43$, $t(83) = 1.82$, $p < 0.05$, Cohens $d = 0.37$), specifically more negative affect ($M = 5.66$, $SE = 2.09 > M = 2.02$, $SE = 1.11$, $t(78) = 1.54$, $p = 0.06$, unequal, Cohen's $d = 0.31$).

Discussion and Conclusion

Our experimental pilot study found that the process of active inoculation induced by the fake news game reduced the perceived reliability and persuasiveness of fake news articles about the refugee crisis. At the same time, we stress the preliminary nature of these findings and recognize that the results from this study lack a certain degree of statistical precision and power. In fact, we

encourage the reader to interpret these findings as novel but “exploratory” (Matthews, Wasserstein, & Spiegelhalter, 2017). Unfortunately, large sample sizes were not feasible during the pilot. Notwithstanding these limitations, it is encouraging that most results were in the hypothesized direction and the observed effect-sizes are broadly in line with the inoculation literature (Banas & Rains, 2010). In fact, in the context of attitudinal resistance research, “small effect sizes are both common and meaningful” (Pfau, Haigh, Sims, & Wigley, 2007, p. 212). This is especially true in political elections (e.g., Brexit, 51.9% vs. 48.1%). Moreover, there is something to be said about the ‘noisy’ environment in which field studies are conducted and the novelty of this particular study. Indeed, to our knowledge, we are the first to engage in a novel partnership to help develop and evaluate an entertaining multi-player “fake news” game that can directly be evaluated in schools, workplaces, and other educational settings to help counter and manage the societal risks posed by fake news using non-punitive measures. In this sense, the practical innovation and potential applications of this research are promising.

The finding that the active generation of counter-arguments elicited greater affect in the treatment group is also consistent with the inoculation literature and typically indicates higher engagement, which is a key component of resistance (Pfau et al., 1997, Pfau et al., 2001, 2009)⁹. In addition, from a theoretical perspective, it is important to highlight that despite its low sample size, this was a challenging test of inoculation. First and foremost, because traditional inoculation messages are often passively delivered in the “*refutational-same*” format, i.e. participants are inoculated against the same information to which they will later be exposed, whereas this study specifically tested a “*refutational-different*” format, where the article students are “trained” on is related but *not* the same as the “validation” article. The goal of the game was to train participants

⁹ We acknowledge that the negative framing of the articles in general may have contributed to eliciting negative affect but this in itself does not explain significant between-group differences in reported affect levels.

to recognize fake news tactics on a more general level by actively rehearsing different roles/sides of the argument, so that the inoculation is more likely to offer broad resistance. For example, Bolsen & Druckman (2015), Cook et al. (2017), and van der Linden et al. (2017b) all found that a general warning was effective in immunizing participants against politicizing messages.

Second, compared to passive reading, active inoculation requires more cognitive effort and engagement from people (Banas & Rains, 2010). Lastly, because of the sample size and the fact that we randomly counterbalanced the political framing of the articles, we could not meaningfully explore the roles of (political) ideology or the assigned characters in this study. However, we recognize that inoculation can be effective across the political spectrum (e.g. see Cook et al., 2017; van der Linden et al., 2017b). Moreover, although deep-rooted ideologies change little over time (Sears & Funk, 1999), one overlooked factor in the debate on motivated reasoning is that young students are still developing their beliefs about the world and have less crystallized attitudes and opinions (Sears, 1986). Thus, in a sense, early media education may therefore be the ultimate inoculation to help empower people against the risk of disinformation. We invite scholars to explore the potential of this and other fake news games, with larger sample sizes, using repeated plays, and perhaps in a more interactive online environment.

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Supplement

Article 1: Migrants

Shocking facts: “Up to 100,000” migrants on their way to the Netherlands.

Hordes of migrants in Libya are once again aching to cross over to Europe. The European Union is ignoring the problem and stubbornly maintains that nothing is wrong. The Dutch are worried.

Huge influx

According to new research by the Centre for Political Analysis, up to 100.000 fortune seekers are anxiously waiting in Libya to make their way to Europe. This is a shocking rise compared to last year, when the influx was already very high.

Europe’s “plan”

The European Union has met the new report with rejection. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, called it “total nonsense”, even though everybody knows that the number of immigrants at the gates of Europe has risen precipitously.

Juncker justifies his stance by saying that all refugees deserve a safe haven. But in the meantime he does nothing for European pensioners: for years, they’ve felt more and more insecure in their financial situation and are afraid to lose their income, and Europe doesn’t do anything about it.

There is of course always the possibility that Juncker had had one too many when he was reading the report.

Is something being swept under the rug?

Every Dutch person knows very well that the number of fortune seekers wanting to enter our country is simply too large to be sustainable. This is also acknowledged by independent experts.

“Juncker has a strong interest in sweeping the real immigration numbers under the rug”, says Jan van Zwanenburg, a respected immigration expert. “If he’d be telling the truth, all of Europe would call for his resignation. So he pretends like nothing is wrong.” And in the meantime, Holland is losing its faith in Europe more and more.

Article 2: Refugees

Report: refugee camps “just like in World War II”

The situation in East European refugee camps is a total disaster, says a new report. The European Union does nothing to save refugees from a sad fate. Dutch people and Europeans look upon it with sorrow.

Concentration camps

Researchers at the Centre for Reliable Statistics published a report last week in which the shocking situation in East European refugee camps was exposed. Up to a million people are locked up in small, dirty cages without clean drinking water or enough food. This is especially prevalent in countries like Hungary, Greece, Serbia and Slovakia.

What does the EU do?

The European Union says that the situation “warrants attention” but is “under control”. Dimitris Avramopoulos, the EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, stated that he was not impressed by the new numbers. The images, however, speak for themselves: everyone with working retinas can see that it can’t go on like this.

Avramopoulos defends himself by pointing out that every European country is responsible for its own refugee policy. But at the same time he also thinks the EU should decide how much parental leave new fathers should be allowed to get. This is, of course, rank hypocrisy.

Avramopoulos (who by the way looks a bit like the evil Emperor Palpatine from Star Wars) happens to be from Greece, which is one of the countries where refugee camps are far below par. The possibility that he is trying to cover for his own government by sweeping the truth under the carpet shouldn’t be excluded.

Experts: the situation is hopeless

Every sane European will understand that Europe cannot simply abandon these people. Many serious experts agree.

“The situation is hopeless. Under pressure from rightwing populists, Europe is doing nothing. It’s almost as if Europe has struck a backroom deal with East European leaders who are against immigration, like Viktor Órban. Of course this is being kept hidden from the general public”, says Henk Oostra, a world-famous scientist and statistician. Our European values are at stake.