RESILIENCE:
For Media Free of Hate and Disinformation

——————

HATE NARRATIVES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

ALBANIA / BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA / MONTENEGRO

NORTH MACEDONIA / SERBIA / TURKEY

HATE NARRATIVES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

Mirovni inštitut
Inštitut za sodobne družbene in politične študije
The Peace Institute
Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies

SEENPM
South East European Network
for Professionalization of Media

CONTENTS

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

——————

HATE NARRATIVES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

Sandra B. Hrvatin, Brankica Petković and Sanela Hodžić

HATE NARRATIVES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Authors: Sandra B. Hrvatin, Brankica Petković, Sanela Hodžić

Editor, regional lead researcher: Brankica Petković

Language editor: Fiona Thompson

Design: Špela Kranjec for Filip Kranjec s.p., Ljubljana, Slovenia

Publishers: Peace Institute, Ljubljana and SEENPM, Tirana

Ljubljana, February 2021

Mirovni inštitut
Inštitut za sodobne družbene in politične študije
The Peace Institute
Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies

SEENPM
South East European Network
for Professionalization of Media

CONTENTS

HATE NARRATIVES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

Sandra B. Hrvatin, Brankica Petković and Sanela Hodžić

1. THE DISCOURSE OF THE PROPAGANDIST MEDIA

Analyzing the discourse of the propagandist media requires more than merely listing the linguistic excesses they use, enumerating the enemies they are targeting or assuming the futile position of moralizing and condoning their consequences. We are compelled to thoroughly consider the reasons behind the propagandist media's use of this particular type of speech (and not another), the reasons for choosing specific social groups and turning them into enemies, and finally, the reason for public communication becoming a space where hate is nurtured. The same way that the emergence of the propagandist system required a dismantling of the democratic media system, the process required the normalization of hate through political speech as well. It did not happen overnight. It was not the result of a sort of media coup. The propagandist media system was built through the deliberate appropriation of media and public speech, the dismantling of the key safeguards of democracy, and the adoption of legislation that cut back the public interest in the media sphere and reduced it to support for the governing political elites. As pointed out by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (2003), most difficult, yet vitally important for the analysis of the totalitarian governing is analyzing how the national-socialist regime began to function as an "exterminating machine" run by individuals lacking any sense of accountability. For this machine to operate smoothly, it was pertinent to prevent speech (obviously the speech of the Other and the different) which resulted in the prevention of thought. For that reason, analysis of the discourse of the propagandist media is simultaneously an exercise in political thought.

The propagandist media system functions as a system of capillaries. Its discourse spreads through the entire "body" of the population, poisoning it. Understanding the functioning of this discourse requires a "double-track" approach. We refer to the work of Victor Klemperer *LTI, Lingua Tertii Imperii* (2014), a professional philologist who was recognized as the archetypal Other by the Nazi regime and gradually stripped of everything except the ability to think. The second approach stems from the illustrative representation in Sam Keen's work *Faces of the Enemy* (1986) that focuses on the analysis

> The discourse of the propagandist media creates "portraits" of enemies that incarnate the idea of what we are supposed to hate, realizing it in such a way that we automatically recognize the enemy without thinking about the reasons behind the need to hate them.

7

of the visual representation of the enemy. Keen defines these images using distinct archetypes that create the imagination of illustrations of the enemy through different historical periods and environments. The archetypes function as blank forms that the current propaganda can fill out with specific characteristics of the group we are supposed to hate (Keen, 1986: 14).

The discourse of the propagandist media creates "portraits" of enemies that incarnate the idea of what we are supposed to hate, realizing it in such a way that we automatically recognize the enemy without thinking about the reasons behind the need to hate them. The features of these "portraits" are drawn by our frustrations and fears that act like "free-floating hatred" (Keen), attaching itself to a specific group or individual. The imagination of hate of the propagandist media is accompanied by linguistic poverty (as we will demonstrate further on), repeating words that "speak for themselves" and function as all-encompassing. The intent of the propagandist media's discourse is the unification of "our" community (against "theirs"), enforcing the expression of loyalty, patriotism and love, reserved exclusively for those that are "like us". As far as hate speech goes, determining the enemy goes along with determining those that are worthy of love. We must not equate the discourse of propagandist media with a lie (even though the latter exists as well). To be effective, this discourse must, at least, play the seeming credibility card, which creates a sort of patchwork of lies, half-truths and actual events misplaced to a different context. The language of propaganda media had to be syncretistic. *Syncretism is not only, as the dictionary says, 'the combination of different forms of belief or practice'; such a combination must tolerate contradictions. Each of the original messages contains a sliver of wisdom, and whenever they seem to say different or incompatible things it is only because all are alluding, allegorically to the same primeval truth* (Eco, 1995).

1.1.   Discourse that strips down

Klemperer's book describes the experience of a German-Jewish philologist with a looming death sentence under Nazi rule. He considered the analysis of Third Reich speech to be a necessary tool, calling it a balance stick (*Balancierstange*) that kept him alive walking the tightrope stretching above the abyss of a totalitarian regime. "*In the hours of disgust and despair, in the eternal boredom of the most mechanical factory labour, bedside to the sick and dying, on the graves, in personal distress, in moments of complete humiliation, with a heart that was physically worn down, I always sought comfort in a demand I made to myself: observe, research, memorize what is going on.*" (Klemperer, 2014: 18, our translation) Klemperer spent the years of the hardest life ordeals meticulously collecting, describing, writing down and explaining the words that the Nazi regime was producing through propaganda. He observed and wrote down the ways in which he (as a Jew) was dehumanized by the propagandist media through words; words that ultimately materialized as the concentration camps of death. It is possibly the most tragic linguistic experience for the author (and the reader as well)

The dehumanizing discourse has become a part of his own. It reveals the urgency of deconstructing the discourse as a part of resistance to the totalitarian system.

when he realizes that the dehumanizing discourse has become a part of his own. It reveals the urgency of deconstructing the discourse as a part of resistance to the totalitarian system, because when the discourse of hate penetrates everyday life and becomes predominant, its first and foremost role is to quell any possibility of resistance. This is the reason why the discourse in question must be not only documented but also stripped down, deprived of its swagger and seeming harmlessness. The rise of the propagandist media (including social media networks) is in many ways a result of the appropriation of freedom of speech. The American "alt right" extreme right movement began its march on the communication public space with the mantra about unlimited freedom of speech. They estimate that hate speech is "the price we have to pay" in order to be able to express ourselves freely. Those who oppose this kind of statement, namely leftist intellectuals and activists, were labelled "snowflakes". They are seen as overly sensitive to the heated public debate, too wimpy (this is also part of the imagination of hate) when it comes to racist and homo/transphobic discourse. Resisting this kind of speech is not a matter of personal (in)sensitivity, rather it is a public matter, a political matter. And it is the latter, the political elites, that are avoiding taking appropriate measures. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe experience discomfort at the mere thought of limiting the freedom of expression. Because in the past it was the State that misused the limiting of freedom of speech to protect its political interests, the present official institutions authorized to sanction this kind of misuse completely capitulated. Leaving the regulation of freedom of expression (and more importantly, leaving the sanctioning of its misuse) to the owners of communication platforms and their algorithms represents the privatization of a fundamental human right. As Luis Ferreiro, the director of Musealia, said referring to the exhibition titled "Not long ago, not far away" at the Auschwitz Memorial Center, it is impossible to understand the space of freedom, democracy and security that we share today as Europeans without facing this story. *Europe is built on the moral ruins of Auschwitz. It happened in the heart of Europe and just a generation ago*".[1]

> The rise of the propagandist media (including social media networks) is in many ways a result of the appropriation of freedom of speech.

1.2.   Hate thy neighbour

An important focus of our research is finding the reason behind specific groups and individuals falling victims to dehumanization through hate speech. On this occasion, we will not deal with the concept of dehumanization (Haslam, 2006, for further reading) and its functioning—beyond the fundamental premise that the effect of dehumanization is mostly the erasure of moral boundaries, diminishing of remorse, rationalization of violence and aggressive actions and unconditional execution of orders and instructions of the propagandist media. We must not forget that the propagandist media function as indicators and amplifiers of hate in society. It is they that determine those that must be hated (and the reasons why), those that need to be ridiculed and foremost, they present "instructions" on how to do just

---

1   *See: http://www.auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/auschwitz-not-long-ago-not-far-away-exhibition-with-the-european-heritage-award-europa-nostra-award,1419.html.*

that. They function as transmission between the political sphere and its supporters. For those individuals and groups that become the target of the propagandist media, an "order" is transmitted, which calls for the hate to decant from the media discourse to the talk of everyday life. It comes as no surprise that the publication of pieces of this kind in the propagandist media comes followed by bashing on social networks. How are enemies created, and what are their archetypes? Sam Keen has defined thirteen enemy archetypes in his analysis (Keen, 1986, 15-89). We will not deal with all of them for the purposes of this article, but will mention those that stood out in our analysis.

We must not forget that the propagandist media function as indicators and amplifiers of hate in society. It is they that determine those that must be hated.

The first archetype that is listed by Keen understands the enemy as a foreigner. If I am to understand my own position within my own group, I need a foreigner. Foreigners who come and go are welcome. Foreigners who come and want to stay and become a part of our community represent the enemy. They become the permanent re-enforcer of "us" versus "them". No matter how hard they try to "become like us", they will forever remain foreigners. The next archetype represents the enemy as a demon, devil, agent of the dark forces. They are determined predominantly by their religious system, which is foreign to our belief system and our social order. This way, the fight against the enemy becomes a fight of good versus evil. A potent archetype is the one that represents the enemy as barbarian or savage—someone whose mere existence is a threat to our culture and values. The archetypal greedy enemy is based on the assumption of insatiability, with no sense of boundaries or limitations. They "devour" whatever you give them— "give them your finger, they will take your hand".

The next archetype represents the enemy as a criminal who steals, takes what does not belong to them, and is are not used to hard work but makes money quickly by swindling. A very emotionally charged archetype is the one that represents the enemy as a sexual predator/rapist. The enemy as a rapist is the destroyer of motherhood (the homeland as the mother(land)); his lust is destroying the unambiguous innocence of our women. When the archetypes are used to descend from perceiving the enemy as half-human to perceiving them as inhuman, the process of dehumanization is underway. The transition from barbarian to animal, disease, rodent, pest enables their destruction (extermination) without remorse. We have transformed Keen's enemy archetypes into prevailing narratives that put visual imagery into words so that the latter becomes a part of everyday speech. The selection of the target groups of these kinds of narratives was adjusted to the principal archetype of the enemy as a foreigner.

As revealed by Umberto Eco, "*Ur-Fascism grows up and seeks for consensus by exploiting and exacerbating the natural fear of difference. The first appeal of a fascist or prematurely fascist movement is an appeal against the intruders. Thus Ur-Fascism is racist by definition.*" (Eco, 1995) To be different from the foreigner, to be better than the foreigner is based solely on where someone was born. In this sense, the foreigner is the one that presents itself as the crucial connecting tissue for the formation of a nation. There would be no

"us" without the foreigner. Therefore, the constant production of foreignness. Even more, any one of us can at a particular moment in time become the archetypal foreigner.

The choice of "people on the move" (migrants), politicians of the opposition, critical journalists and women has somehow established a coordinated system of hate in the discourse of the propagandist media. The narratives concerning migrants embody all of Keen's archetypes of the enemy. When it comes to these narratives, we must analyze how migrants are dehumanized on a linguistic level. It is one of the worst types of propagandist discourse. Opposition politicians are represented as a foreign object inserted in the political body of the nation. The same goes for critical journalists. The narratives of hate are deeply anti-intellectualist. Critical thinking or even just thinking can be ascribed to someone who does not wish what is good for their nation. These examples reveal that the discourse of the propagandist media follows the principle: obey and do not think. The discourse of the propagandist media is extremely sexist. The image of a (headless) white woman's body being groped by the hands of black men, published on the cover of a Slovenian newspaper Demokracija (*Democracy,* how ironic!), owned by the current prime minister of Slovenia, Janez Janša, is the epitome of this discourse. There are women (wives and mothers) that must be defended from the enemy and others that are worthless in this patriarchal cosmos. The attacks on female politicians, journalists, and critical intellectuals contain a whole arsenal of archetypes that are used as tools and weapons for their dehumanization. Since the propagandist media's discourse is not based on arguments, the women's bodies and appearance in general become the "faces of the enemy".

> The narratives of hate are deeply anti-intellectualist. Critical thinking or even just thinking can be ascribed to someone who does not wish what is good for their nation.

1.3.   Our daily fascism

Propagandist media speech must be analyzed specifically through language. Their narratives must be taken seriously, deconstructed, and the effects this language produces demonstrated. *"Ur-Fascism can come back under the most innocent of disguises. Our duty is to uncover it and point our finger at any of its new instances – every day, in every part of the world,"* said Eco (1995). Fascism is present here and now, and it is not disguised as innocent imagery. Therefore, the analysis of propagandist media must include analyzing the media system that enables this kind of media as well as the analysis of the political system that approves of it. The misuse of freedom of speech for spreading hate, the incompetence of state institutions to sanction it, the media's business models which profit from this kind of speech and the silent majority unwilling to reflect on the consequences of this kind of statements are the reasons that turned the space of public communication into a space for nurturing hate. Politics, especially democratic politics that is incapable of establishing and protecting the culture of dialogue in the public space, must be held accountable for the consequences of the effects of the propagandist media.

> Propagandist media speech must be analyzed specifically through language. Their narratives must be taken seriously, deconstructed, and the effects this language produces demonstrated.

2. RESEARCH OF HATE NARRATIVES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

After researching hate and propaganda models of media and communication in in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey, in spring 2020, the Resilience project research team focused, in autumn 2020, on the content of these media and communication. The emphasis was on main patterns and examples of hate narratives, and to a certain extent also to disinformation narratives. We also checked which actors and events serve as the main generators of hate narratives, what the main ideas and messages disseminated are, what the dynamics of production and dissemination of these narratives are, what the reactions are, and what the options for preventive and ex post actions to combat hate and disinformation narratives are.

Considering the limited resources and time available, we based the research on a case study (sample analyses) approach. For the same reason, we identified the target groups of hate narratives before the case study analyses. This was possible because the analysis of the hate and propaganda models of media and communication models, done in each country in the first reseach of the Resilience project, already detected the target groups.

The case study approach implied that the cases related to each target group would be analyzed in a limited number of online media and social networks and in a limited period of time.

Three target groups have been identified as common for the analysis of hate and disinformation narratives in all seven countries: migrants, political opponents and journalists. In each country, one or two country-specific target groups were identified by the researchers in addition to the common ones.

The significance of the additional target group(s) was identified based on criteria such as traditional (historical) exposure of the target group to hate narratives, including the recent period; the number, frequency and size of campaigns and cases used for targeting the group with hate narratives in the recent period; power and size of the main source of hate narratives against the target group in the recent period.

TARGET GROUPS OF HATE NARRATIVES, SELECTED FOR THE RESEARCH

Table 1

COMMON TARGET GROUPS ON REGIONAL LEVEL

TARGET GROUP 1	TARGET GROUP 2	TARGET GROUP 3	TARGET GROUP 4	TARGET GROUP 5
migrants	political opponents (to the government)	journalists	country-specific target group	country-specific target group

For each target group, the researchers identified a case (event, incident) that generated hate and disinformation narratives. The cases (events, incidents) were selected from the period between June 2019 and June 2020. If the case was reported in a longer interval, the main interval for analysis was limited to at least one week and at most two.

The media sample was selected to include one or two online media (web portals) and one or two social media (social networks). Within social networks the number of social media accounts/pages analyzed depended on the specific situation in each country, but the researchers were asked to analyze at least one and at most ten social media accounts.

In online media, articles and comments by readers below articles were analyzed. In social media accounts, the posts of the account holders and members of the group, as well as comments by visitors, were taken into account.

The research of social media was based on content available on the public internet only. We established joint criteria for the selection of online media and social networks as well as for pages and profiles within social networks. Beside ranking or influence, the focus was also put on the media and communication platforms identified in the first Resilience research as "champions" of hate and propaganda models in each country.

For the identification of relevant social media accounts, secondary sources were also used (e.g. reports of fact-checking platforms, etc.) as well as the CrowdTangle application (useful for finding out where the media articles on the case (event) were shared).

To enable a common understanding of the concept of hate narratives relevant literature was consulted by the researchers, but the examples of typical narratives for the three common target groups were also elaborated centrally.

> Three target groups have been identified as common for the analysis of hate and disinformation narratives in all seven countries: migrants, political opponents and journalists. In each country, one or two country-specific target groups were identified by the researchers in addition to the common ones.

> In online media, articles and comments by readers below articles were analyzed. In social media accounts, the posts of the account holders and members of the group, as well as comments by visitors, were taken into account.

2.1. Typical examples of hate narratives

The typical examples of hate narratives elaborated centrally include:

Target group 1: MIGRANTS

Example of the narrative:
The arrival of migrants is a threat to the society.

Examples of sub-narratives:
• Migrants are a threat to public health. Migrants are contagious (infected) and

13

unclean. They bring infectious diseases with them (in the case of COVID-19 they represent the biggest threat for spreading the pandemic) and endanger the health of the population in the countries they are located in/arriving in (countries of destination/transit countries; countries that they travel through/countries they stay to reside in);

• Migrants are a threat to the core values of the society in which they are arriving. Migrants come from countries that do not respect fundamental human rights;

• Migrants represent a threat to the economic system of the society. The countries should take care of their unemployed citizens instead of allocating public funds to cover the expenses of handling of migration. Migrants are a cause of the worsening of the economic position of the local population ("stealing their jobs");

• Migrants are a threat to the social security (welfare) system of the state of arrival. Migrants are lazy, they do not want to work and they only come to Western countries to exploit the welfare system;

• Migrants represent a threat to the cultural values of the society. Migrants come from countries with completely different, alien cultural values, incompatible with those of the society of arrival. Migrants are barbarians (under-developed/backwards), coming to the civilized Western world;

• Migrants are potential terrorists;

• Migrants are a threat to population growth. Migrant families have many children. In the long term, this natality policy will cause the white people to become a minority;

• Migrants are poor and uneducated and cannot contribute to society;

• Migrants are not prepared to adjust to the environment of their arrival. They enforce their traditions, culture and values upon the local population;

• Being uncivilized, migrants are aggressive, they attack the police and local population and this is a reason for placing barbed wire on the borders, upgrading protective military equipment etc.;

• Migrants are ungrateful – when they (self)organize for their rights, they never get enough. We help them and it is still not enough;

• Migrants do not respect women. Since it is mostly men arriving, their negative attitude towards women makes them prone to harassment and rape;

• Advocates for the rights of migrants are well paid and employed by various non-governmental organizations financed by individuals wishing to destabilize Western society. If they support migrants so much, they should welcome them in their homes.

Target group 2: POLITICAL OPPONENTS (TO THE GOVERNMENT)

Example of the narrative:
Political opposition/political opponents are working against their own country.

Example of sub-narratives:
• The political opposition does not work in the best interest of its country and its people;

• Politicians of the opposition are mercenaries of foreign countries and organizations. Various conspiracy theories (e.g. antisemitism, the influence of George Soros);

• Politicians of the opposition are traitors;

• Politicians of the opposition should be punished, humiliated, publicly exposed; there are very vivid ideas circulating around representing what should be done to them;

• Various forms of death threats, threatening with injury or, in the case of female politicians, rape threats;

• Politicians of the opposition are involved in numerous scandals. Hateful messages about their family life, public life, customs. Their personal life is nothing but scandal and degeneration – an extension of their politics;

• Politicians of the opposition are part of the deep state;

• Politicians of the opposition are former communists that cannot shake their totalitarian tradition (a narrative generally connected to former member states of Yugoslavia).

Target group 3: JOURNALISTS

Example of the narrative:
Journalists are enemies of the state (and by extension enemies of their people).

Examples of sub-narratives:
• Journalists are foreign mercenaries;

• Journalists are liars;

• Journalists should be physically removed (in the case of female journalists they are usually targeted for their appearance, age, family life – perception of journalists as prostitutes);

• Journalists are corrupt. They publish what they are instructed to publish;

• Journalists publish *fake news* or are a form of fake news themselves;

• Journalists have no values. They are prepared to serve every new master that comes along;

• Journalists deserve everything bad that happens to them.

Based on the research material (content identified) for each case study, the country researchers conducted analyses of the main narrative and sub-narratives, referring to typical examples of hate narratives where possible, but also identifying and elaborating additional hate narratives if they exist in the material. For the additional target group(s) specific for the national level, the researchers identified and elaborated the main hate narrative and sub-narratives on their own.

3. CONTENT OF THE HATE NARRATIVES IN THE REGION

This research starts with the notion that hate narratives, being an important part of the public discourse, threaten to corrupt the culture of public discussion and make the enmity and threats to the physical integrity and life of the Other more and more imminent. Given that hate narratives are being (re)constructed through everyday practices of public communication, the seven researchers did not rely on a common and fixed definition of hate narratives; instead, the project defined and viewed hate narratives in the light of the specific circumstances of each analyzed case, exploring not only hate speech in the juridic sense but also narratives that involve tendentious negative representations, denunciation and stigmatization of the Other.

Hate narratives, being an important part of the public discourse, threaten to corrupt the culture of public discussion and make the enmity and threats to the physical integrity and life of the Other more and more imminent.

The seven researchers gathered a sample of hate narratives against selected targets and on selected media and social network platforms, providing just a glimpse into a small part of the universe of hate narratives, and showing how the content of the disinformation and hate narratives relies mainly on the archetypes and strategies of othering.

The main targets of hate narratives, their content and intensity vary depending on socio-political circumstances and current events, but some features and targets are rather common across the region.

Narratives about refugees and migrants[2] as a security, economic, cultural or a threat to public health persist across the region (See table 1).

However, in some countries they are more prominent than in others. In Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, some media outlets play a key role in the othering of migrants, including through dominantly negative reporting, selective sources of information, and sometimes through disinformation. In Montenegro and Albania, the hate narratives against refugees/migrants are less present, as the established media show more balanced reporting. However, right-leaning websites in Montenegro report mainly negatively on migrants. In Albania, media reports are not openly hostile, but some portray migrants in a dominantly negative light, relying on unfounded perceptions and claims of individual citizens rather than on data and evidence.

The main targets of hate narratives, their content and intensity vary depending on socio-political circumstances and current events, but some features and targets are rather common across the region.

---

2   Notably, the identified hate narratives tend to reduce this heterogeneous population to the term "migrants" only, and in user comments to essentializing and inaccurate categories such as "Arabs" and migrants from "the Middle East".

HATE NARRATIVES ON MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES
Table 2

MAIN NARRATIVE	MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES AS A THREAT
	Threat to public order, security, health and/or the economy (Albania, BiH, Turkey, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo) (i.e. connected to terrorism, spreading diseases, financial burden, aggressive, criminal, violent, especially against women);
	Primitive, morally inferior and disgusting (BiH, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Kosovo); e.g. implicit in user comments using terms "scum", "parasites", "barbarians", "plague", "bigoted", "breeding like rabbits", "lazy" "opportunists", in Kosovo "maxhup"- a derogatory term for Roma people.
SUB-NARRATIVES	Threat to cultural values (North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo) often expressed as the projected Islamization of the country; In Kosovo, "their" culture and "their" Islam are presented as inferior.
	Treated better than us (BiH, Serbia, Turkey).
	Threatening to take over our country and eradicate our people (Albania)
	Threatening to disable EU accession (Kosovo)
	Should be attacked and destroyed (Montenegro, North Macedonia, Turkey)

The case of hate narratives on migrants in Turkey shows how the socio-political circumstances define the targets and the extent of hate narratives. Namely, during the engagement of the Turkish army in Syria, Syrian refugees have become the principal target of hate narratives. There is a general view that Syrian refugees live a good life at the expense of Turkey—of its soldiers that die instead of Syrians, and the Turkish state and people that provide the migrants with the means of living.

In Kosovo, anti-migrant/refugee hate narratives mainly aim to present a clear differentiation between "us" and "them", in which the behaviour of "our" asylum seekers in the West is framed as better than that of those seeking asylum in Kosovo, and "their" religion as different and inferior to "ours".

Hate narratives about journalists and political opponents involved similar content across different cases and the region (See Table 2 for main narratives). Based on the differentiation between "us" and "them", journalists who originally belong to the "us" group are presented as transgressors, those who betrayed the "us" group and thus must be symbolically ousted from the group. In this light, journalists and political opponents are regularly labelled as traitors (to the state, nation or ethno-national group) and foreign mercenaries. For example, Nikola Vučić, an N1 TV journalist in BiH was labelled (both by online platforms and by users) as a traitor to the Croat people simply because of his sarcastic Tweet on fascism in a Canton with a Croat majority.

HATE NARRATIVES ON JOURNALISTS AND POLITICAL OPPONENTS

Table 3

MAIN NARRATIVE	JOURNALISTS/POLITICAL OPPONENTS AS TRAITORS, MERCENARIES AND MORALLY CORRUPT PEOPLE
MAIN SUB-NARRATIVES ON JOURNALISTS	Enemy of the state/people (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey)
	Betrayers of their ethno-national group (in BiH for instance: "halal Croat" "conformist to Bosniaks", "betrayer of his family")
	Politically affiliated, mercenaries: foreign mercenaries, (Montenegro, Turkey, North Macedonia) politically affiliated (Albania)
	Morally corrupt, e.g. liars, without honour and shame, corrupt, publishing fake news, etc. (Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia)
MAIN SUB-NARRATIVES ON POLITICAL OPPONENTS	Enemies of the state/people (Albania, BiH, Montenegro, North, Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey), e.g. aiming to destabilize, working against the country's interest, traitors
	Foreign mercenaries (Albania, BiH, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo), e.g. proponents of Russian and Serbian (in Montenegro), western or George Soros's agenda (The latter most of all in N. Macedonia)
	Dangerous and corrupt (Albania, BiH, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Kosovo), e.g. unstable, primitive, instigators of violence, godless, vermin, thieves and turncoats, thieves, liars, irresponsible, coronavirus cluster (in N. Mac.), criminals, cowards, hypocrites and manipulators (in Albania), mentally ill (BiH)

These individuals/groups are also often exposed to a wider character assassination: the moral qualities of journalists and political opponents are questioned based on rumours and manipulated information, and labels such as liars, opportunists or criminals are used. For example, in Serbia, journalist Ana Lalić was exposed to a negative campaign by several media outlets after she published a report about the insufficient capacities of the Clinical Centre Vojvodina to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. She was accused, both by these media outlets and their readers, of being corrupt, spreading fake news, and working against the interest of the state. The clashes between the government and opposition in Kosovo also regularly teem with similar accusations on criminal and immoral behaviour (often ignorant of the judicial facts), with hate narratives sprouting in user comments on social networks.

These individuals/groups are also often exposed to a wider character assassination: the moral qualities of journalists and political opponents are questioned based on rumours and manipulated information, and labels such as liars, opportunists or criminals are used.

Political opponents are also denounced based on far-stretched parallels between them and despised political regimes from the past. In Montenegro, the opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion, for instance, label the proponents of the law as successors of the communist regime, both hostile towards the church. In Albania, parallels with the Milošević regime in Serbia are made to discredit the Other. The spokesman of the Albanian president, for instance, notes that the media critique against the president and "well-known personalities of the Albanian nation" uses "the language of Milošević, Šešelj and notorious Arkan" against "KLA martyrs" in what he labels an anti-Albanian campaign.

Hate narratives against women surface in different case studies, from the case of public discourse on the Istanbul Convention to the case of the journalist Miroslava Byrns (Sloboden Pecat) in North Macedonia. In the analysis of the public discourse on the Istanbul Convention, researcher Sinem Aydınlı shows how the pro-government platforms in Turkey are framing the convention not as a means of protecting women from violence, but as a threat to patriarchal values and the family, and a means of promotion of immorality and homosexuality. In this light, women are also an essential part of this threat and the user comments involved sexist and misogynist language. In the case of threats, insults, defamation and hate speech against a female journalist in North Macedonia in 2020, comments concerning the journalist's appearance, personal life, alleged incompetence and immorality permeated a number of websites and social network profiles.

Some case studies from our research also show how the prejudices and stigmatization of historically marginalized ethnic minorities persist. Notably, while the analyzed editorial content in BiH was completely free of disinformation and hate narratives targeting Jews, the user comments contain plenty of the old fascist labels of "hypocritical", "cunning" Jews that "rule the world", including explicit apologism for the Holocaust. In North Macedonia, inter-religious hate narratives surfaced when the online media leaning towards the right-wing opposition framed the behaviour of Muslim citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic as irresponsible and disrespectful to the state; this was superimposed by the claims of double standards in which the government tolerates their behaviour, while being tough on Christians during their religious holidays. User comments involved the labelling of the other religious groups as "tribes", "savages", "scum" and those that are not true Macedonians.

3.1.   The sources, contributors and platforms of hate narratives

In many cases, hate narratives are clearly politically orchestrated, and mainly disseminated through media affiliated with the leading political parties. In Turkey, the smear campaigns against journalists, political opposition, activists and other public figures are a part of the larger state repression of critical voices, whereby pro-government media report on both journalists

and political opposition as enemies of the state and proclaim that the main opposition party CHP has ties with terrorists. Serbia and Republika Srpska (BiH) hold a tight grip over a number of media outlets, which readily denounce politicians and journalists critical of the ruling party. The public service broadcaster RTRS in Republika Srpska (RS) even resorts to disinformation about the opposition in their farcical and pro-SNSD reporting. In the analyzed cases in North Macedonia, several websites and Facebook pages believed to be affiliated with the now opposition VMRO-DPMNE party disseminate hate narratives against journalists and political opponents. As the interview respondents in Kosovo note, the attacks on journalists are often orchestrated through social media platforms and often target critical views of journalists on government policies, dominant ideologies and religious teachings. In other cases, the political affiliations of media outlets are visible in unbalanced reporting. For example, in the case of narratives targeted at the opposition leader in Albania, pro-government media outlets focused on the lack of transparency on the opposition leader's past. In contrast, the pro-opposition media focused on the claims that the accusations against the opposition leader were merely a political instrument and diversion by PM Edi Rama. In such selective reporting, concludes researcher Ilda Londo, the media convey two diametrically different visions of the same phenomenon and thus contribute to polarization in Albania.

> In many cases, hate narratives are clearly politically orchestrated, and mainly disseminated through media affiliated with the leading political parties.

Even when media outlets report in a relatively balanced way on opposing political camps, they may also contribute through the presentation of irreconcilable and diverging discourses to political polarization if they do not provide a critical evaluation of hate narratives and verify information disseminated by different parties. As illustrated in the analyzed cases in Montenegro, despite the largely balanced reporting by established mainstream media on polarized political views, user comments included explicit inter-ethnic hate speech and calls for violence.

Media outlets also play a negative role when they fail (due to lack of resources and/or lack of will) to adequately deal with those user comments in which hate narratives particularly escalate. User comments on migrants reinforce the claims of the migrant threat with offensive and dehumanizing labelling of migrants as "scum", "parasites", "plague", etc. While some of the hateful comments come from the general public, many of them are produced by bots serving a particular political agenda.

> Media outlets also play a negative role when they fail (due to lack of resources and/or lack of will) to adequately deal with those user comments in which hate narratives particularly escalate.

Besides the mainstream media outlets, the right-leaning websites and platforms established with a particular agenda have an important role in the devastation of public discourse and dissemination of hate narratives, often aiming to denunciate certain groups (such as migrants).

Public figures are highly influential in setting the tone of the narratives on certain groups. In the case study from Bosnia and Herzegovina, researcher Anida Sokol reports that the then minister of security of BiH advocated for the deportation of refugees/migrants and that his views were not only

overly present on several analyzed platforms but also uncritically reported on by mainstream media (e.g. by the highly read klix.ba). However, the findings of researcher Abit Hoxha in Kosovo show that even the official statements of local officials, who in the analyzed case condemned the expulsion of a group of migrants from a bar in Kosovo, can be followed by largely hateful narratives in comments on social networks. This discrepancy indicates that the causes of hate sentiments and narratives are much deeper and transcend individual cases and the reactions of public figures.

The example of right-leaning website IN46 shows that the hate narratives in the user comments tend to be particularly prominent on the websites that show clear political favouritism, reporting in a farcical and selective way. However, in the case study from Turkey, researcher Sinem Aydınlı showed that the hate narratives in user comments also appear on platforms that report in an ethical manner, such as the Deutsche Welle Twitter account. The case study on anti-migrant narratives in Kosovo shows that such narratives are particularly abundant on social networks.

User comments are also a potential site of resistance to and subversion of hate narratives. In this research, we did not focus on such subversive manoeuvres; however, in one case, the user comments on the Facebook page of Kurir in Serbia involved not only negative stances against journalists critical of the government but also comments criticizing the practices of Pink, Kurir and Informer (media outlets that have run a negative campaign against journalist Ana Lalić).

In the age of new technologies, the instruments of smear campaigns are becoming increasingly diverse. Most notably, in the example of a hate narrative against a journalist in Serbia, the campaign also involved a purely commercial outreach tool, i.e. a paid ad with the name and photo of journalist Ana Lalić, promoted through the Google Store, reaching everyone that used the app on 14 April 2020.

> Besides the mainstream media outlets, the right-leaning websites and platforms established with a particular agenda have an important role in the devastation of public discourse and dissemination of hate narratives.

> In the age of new technologies, the instruments of smear campaigns are becoming increasingly diverse. Most notably, in the example of a hate narrative against a journalist in Serbia, the campaign also involved a purely commercial outreach tool, i.e. a paid ad.

3.3. The role of state institutions, self-regulatory bodies and civil society in the fight against disinformation and hate narratives

Across the region, there is a reluctance within the judiciary to process discriminatory and hate speech and to consider the hate towards particular social groups as an exacerbating factor in criminal offences. As researchers Vesna Nikodinoska and Jane Dimeski report, since 2016, there has been only one case at the Basic Criminal Court concerning the spreading of racist and xenophobic material via computer systems in North Macedonia. Even in the case from May 2020 when a man drove his car into the Reception Centre for Migrants in Obrenovac (Serbia), the prosecution missed the opportunity

to characterize this act as a crime of inciting national, racial, and religious hatred and intolerance, convicting the perpetrator only of violent behaviour. On the other hand, the recent arrests of journalists (in Montenegro and Serbia in 2020) for the suspected spreading of panic and disorder through false reporting are seen as rather restrictive. If such practices continue, they are likely to have a chilling effect on media freedoms.

Regulatory bodies in the region's countries sanction inaccurate reporting and hate narratives in broadcasting media to some degree. However, the example of the public service broadcaster RTRS in Republika Srpska (BiH) shows that even multiple fines for biased reporting do not necessarily prevent further unethical reporting. Other state institutions can also have an important role in fighting hate speech and disinformation, such as the Commission for the Protection of Equality in Serbia and the Recommendations to Internet portals on the prevention and removal of content that can incite hatred or violence in Serbia from 2018. The biggest exception here is Turkey, as researcher Sinem Aydınlı reports that governmental bodies do not by any means address disinformation and hate speech.

The lack of policies on media transparency, particularly in the online media sector, diminishes media accountability for disinformation and hate narratives. A step forward in this regard are the provisions of the Law on Media, adopted in Montenegro in July 2020, that promote the transparency of online media (including through registration, publishing of information on responsible persons and keeping records on public funding). However, in the absence of stipulations on sanctions and accountability, it is questionable how much these rules will be followed.

Self-regulatory bodies in the region also react to cases of disinformation and hate speech, promoting voluntary respect for journalistic norms, but they cannot be expected to influence those platforms that intentionally or thoughtlessly spread unethical content. Furthermore, the Press Council of BiH, for example, does not have capacities for monitoring the content of online and print media, but instead reacts mostly upon complaints received. Hence, it is likely that disinformation and hate narratives are often not disclosed as such. In addition, the polarized media sector in Montenegro still proves to be incapable of establishing a joint self-regulatory system, while a self-regulatory body has never been established in Turkey either.

Civil society organizations in the region carry out various important campaigns in the fight against disinformation and hate narratives; these involve advocacy, education, and media literacy programmes, increasing the public's resistance to disinformation and hate narratives. Journalists' organizations have a role in the public condemnation of the campaigns and journalists and in issuing calls for legal action against the perpetrators, where appropriate.

> Across the region, there is a reluctance within the judiciary to process discriminatory and hate speech and to consider the hate towards particular social groups as an exacerbating factor in criminal offences.

> The lack of policies on media transparency, particularly in the online media sector, diminishes media accountability for disinformation and hate narratives.

Fact-checking and media watchdog platforms have been contributing to the awareness about disinformation and hate speech. The companies that manage social media are also increasingly engaging in fact-checking initiatives in the region. For example, Facebook and the France-Presse agency initiated an independent fact-checking programme in Montenegro, in cooperation with the local platform Raskrinkavanje.me (CDT, 2020). Media monitoring platforms, (such as media.ba and analiziraj.ba in BiH) and platforms that share otherwise scarce information (such as information on migrants on the platform govornamraza.mk in North Macedonia), also play an important role in disclosing disinformation and hate narratives and providing alternative information.

Fact-checking and media watchdog platforms have been contributing to the awareness about disinformation and hate speech.

Finally, there is a lack of public condemnation of hate narratives both by public figures and media outlets. For example, researcher Anida Sokol notes that in BiH, there have not been any efforts from politicians, public figures or representatives of institutions to condemn and prevent such narratives in the analyzed cases.

There is a lack of public condemnation of hate narratives both by public figures and media outlets.

Content of the hate narratives in the region

4. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A BETTER SOCIETAL RESPONSE TO HATE

Disinformation and hate narratives should not be taken lightly. In the narrative strategies revealed in both media and user content, we see clear features of fascism, mainly the racism, nationalism and intolerance to difference, labelling disagreement as treason, and misogyny. Across the region, hate narratives feed polarizations, perpetuate political turmoil and inflame animosities.

The content of hate narratives is similar across the region, mirroring the historically familiar negative labelling of the Other. Under the dominant and persistent differentiation between "us" and "them" the "them" groups are regularly presented in a dominantly negative light, as less competent and morally inferior, even less than human ("parasites", "scum", "tribes"), which are all mechanisms of othering that have historically proven to be both a sinister and a rather persuasive and widely accepted justification for violence. Some platforms in the region engage in evident hate narratives and disseminate disinformation. However, others contribute to the negative presentation of the "other" just by focusing on negative events, carrying arbitrary statements, and when failing to provide alternative views. In both cases, media outlets participate in the spiral of disinformation and hate, feeding distorted views and negative sentiments.

> While the hate narratives identified by the seven researchers are not new, what is most troubling is that they are largely normalized. Rather than being consistently condemned, they are often instrumentalized for political campaigns and increasingly seen as a regular part of public discussion.

Finally, hate narratives escalate in users' comments, permeated by xenophobic sentiments, stigmatization, prejudices and hostilities, distributed both by political bots and by a part of the general public.

While the hate narratives identified by the seven researchers are not new, what is most troubling is that they are largely normalized. Rather than being consistently condemned, they are often instrumentalized for political campaigns and increasingly seen as a regular part of public discussion.

If we are to prevent further devastation of the public discourse, we need more consistent reactions to hate narratives, and preventive structural mechanisms. Firstly, the fight against politically instrumentalized hate narratives requires a holistic struggle that should involve progressive media policies that would minimize political interference and increase media transparency. Secondly, in order to hinder hate narratives disseminated in pursuit of more revenues, the journalistic standards should be further promoted, including through the work of self-regulatory bodies and media associations. For the media to completely stride out of the spiral of hate narratives, it is not sufficient to provide a balanced representation of polarizing views and opposite hate narratives. In addition, media outlets need to provide critical reflections on problematic, polarizing and hateful statements, and should aim to provide in-depth insights into complex polarizing issues through well-informed,

analytical reporting, and carefully chosen and knowledgeable sources. A good example is the series of articles published on the Kossev website about the use of the term "Kosovo and Metohija" in which renowned authors presented well-argued opposing views on this controversial political issue, inciting a constructive user debate (see the report on Kosovo).

Media dedicated to journalistic integrity should be seeking to sensibilize their journalists for more inclusive reporting on minority and marginalized groups. In order to protect journalistic integrity and enable quality media reporting, furthermore, public funds need to be provided, under independent and legitimate procedures, for quality journalism. Government funding for media that engage in disinformation, negative campaigns and hate narratives should be put to an end. Given that disinformation and hate narratives are particularly prolific in user-generated content, often containing hate speech based on sexual, ethnic, religious and other identity, media outlets need to dedicate more attention and resources to the moderation of user comments.

Global communication companies need to deprioritize hate narratives and disinformation in online searches and limit the dissemination and reach of such content. International donors and fact-checking and media monitoring organizations can provide support and incentives for such engagement.

More decisive action of the judiciary in penalizing discriminatory speech, hate speech and hate crimes would send a clear message and discourage similar future offences. The media regulatory bodies should be provided with enough resources to consistently monitor and penalize hate speech and disinformation in the broadcasting sector. The judiciary and the media regulator must be provided with all guaranties of independence to prevent political instrumentalization. In the circumstances of substantial political interference, the most evident being in Turkey, the struggle for independence will necessarily be intense and ongoing.

Furthermore, we need public condemnation of hate narratives and disinformation and reactions to smear campaigns orchestrated by public figures, political parties, media outlets and other actors. For the time being, such condemnation is limited to isolated reactions of self-regulatory bodies, fact-checking and media-monitoring platforms and some civil society organizations. The countries of the region need a wider civic front (involving CSOs, citizen initiatives, the academic community, media outlets, companies that manage social networks, etc.) that would jointly and consistently react to hate narratives and provide alternative information and voices. Such a civic front must also keep a close eye on media policies across the region and condemn negative developments such as the bill on online media adopted in October 2020 in Turkey, feared to be a further step in online media censorship. The anti-hate civic

The fight against politically instrumentalized hate narratives requires a holistic struggle that should involve progressive media policies that would minimize political interference and increase media transparency.

More decisive action of the judiciary in penalizing discriminatory speech, hate speech and hate crimes would send a clear message and discourage similar future offences. The media regulatory bodies should be provided with enough resources to consistently monitor and penalize hate speech and disinformation in the broadcasting sector.

front would utilize different strategies, formats and platforms in order to maximize its impact.[3] For instance, actions aimed at informing the public and countering disinformation should involve humour and satire,[4] art, ridicule, stunts, and emotional and satirical content, all of which can effectively divulge the banalities and brutalities of hate narratives and the underlying fascism.[5]

The countries of the region need a wider civic front (involving CSOs, citizen initiatives, the academic community, media outlets, companies that manage social networks, etc.) that would jointly and consistently react to hate narratives and provide alternative information and voices.

---

3   *Research in psychology shows the resistance of formed beliefs even when people are exposed to well-based arguments and information (Lewandowski et al. 2012, Bail et al. 2012).*

4   *Reportedly more effectively reaching (especially young) audiences than the classical news reporting. See Mitchell, Gottfried and Matsa 2015. An example from the region that instantly received significant regional attention in 2020 was the stunt of Mustafa Sejdinović who joined a regional Facebook group "Flat Earth Balkan" (Ravna zemlja); the group accepted him as admin after he volunteered, not bothering to check his profile that clearly shows that he does not support their views. Once he became an admin, he changed the group's name to "Round Earth Balkan" (one that, in accordance with the Facebook rules, they would have to keep for 28 days) and wrote a post about their twisted logic and denial of science.*

5   *There is increasingly reported favouritism of the public towards polarized rhetoric, and controversial, surprising content imbued with an emotional and moral tone (Scheufele and Krause 2019, Vosoughi, Roy and Aral 2018, Brady et al. 2018).*

27

Literature and sources

Arendt, Hannah. 2003. *Izvori totalitarizma*. Ljubljana: Študentska založba (Claritas series).

Bail, Christopher A., Lisa P. Argyle, Taylor W. Brown, John P. Bumpus, Haohan Chen, M. B. Fallin Hunzaker, Jaemin Lee, Marcus Mann, Friedolin Merhout and Alexander Volfovsky. 2018. "Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization". *PNAS*, 115 (37), 9216–9221.

Brady, William J., Julian A. Wills, Dominic Burkart, John T. Jost and Jay J. Van Bavel. 2018. "An ideological asymmetry in the diffusion of moralized content on social media among political elites". *Journal of Experimental Psychology : General, 148(*10), 1802–1813. Available at: https:// psyarxiv.com/43n5e/.

Eco, Umberto. 1995. "Ur-Fascism". *New York Review of Books*. June 22, 1995.

Haslam, Nick. 2006. "Dehumanization: An Integrative Review". *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(3): 252-264.

Keen, Sam. 1986. *Faces of the Enemy. Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*. New York: Harper.

Klemperer, Victor. 2014. *LTI Lingua Tertii Imperii (Govorica tretjega rajha)*. Filologova beležnica. Ljubljana: Založba /*cf.

Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich K. H. Ecker, Colleen M. Seifert, Norbert Schwarz and John Cook. 2012. "Misinformation and its correction: Continued influence and successful debiasing". *Psychological Science in the Public Inte*rest, 13 (3), 106–131.

Mitchell, Amy, Jeffrey Gottfried i Katarina E. Matsa. 2015. "Millennials and Political News: Social Media – The Local TV for the Next Generation? " Pew Research Center Journalism & Media. Available at: http://www.journalism. org//// millennials-political-news/.

Scheufele, Dietram A. and Nicole M. Krause. 2019. . "Science audiences, misinformation, and fake news." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 116 (16), 7662–7669.

Vosoughi, Soroush, Deb Roy and Sinan Aral. 2018. "The spread of true and false news online." Science, 359 (6380), 1146–1151.Available at: https:// science.sciencemag.org/content/359/6380/1146.

About the authors

Sandra B. Hrvatin holds a PhD in Communication Studies from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. She is a Professor at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska, and Head of the Media Studies Department at the same faculty.

Brankica Petković holds an MA in Sociology of Culture from the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. She is a Researcher and Project Manager at the Peace Institute, Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies in Ljubljana.

Sanela Hodžić holds an MA in Gender Studies from the Center of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of
Sarajevo. She is an independent researcher and was a longtime senior researcher and coordinator of research projects at the Mediacentar Sarajevo.

HATE NARRATIVES AND DISINFORMATION IN ONLINE MEDIA IN ALBANIA

Ilda Londo

RESILIENCE : For Media Free of Hate and Disinformation

HATE NARRATIVES AND DISINFORMATION IN ONLINE MEDIA IN ALBANIA

ALBANIA

CONTENTS

HATE NARRATIVES AND DISINFORMATION IN ONLINE MEDIA IN ALBANIA

Ilda Londo

1. INTRODUCTION

Narratives in Albanian media reflect the existing state of Albanian society, and in this respect, the content unavoidably mirrors the existing political divide and the increasingly extreme polarization and fragmentization of Albanian society. The advent of online media, coupled with the increasingly widespread popularity of social media, even when it comes to information sources, further exacerbates and speeds up the spread of hate narratives and disinformation. Existing deficiencies and problems with professional reporting in traditional media and the scheme of interdependent relations between media, business, and politics also affect the possibilities of reflecting on and countering the trends in hate speech narratives and disinformation. In addition, the lack of solid reaction and self-regulation mechanisms from within the media community to address these violations is another hindrance in this respect.

Previous research conducted in June–August 2020 sought to provide an overview of the main tendencies regarding hate speech, propaganda, and disinformation in Albanian media, and identify ways to counter these narratives. The current research, conducted between September–November 2020, aims to look in detail at what the actual narratives of hate and disinformation in Albanian media are and how they are spread and reinforced, analyzing the sources, actors involved, techniques used, as well as potential countering mechanisms or episodes. The following sections present an analysis of the hate narratives found during media and social networks monitoring regarding particular target groups in the country, such as political opponents, migrants, and journalists.

2. METHODOLOGY

This analysis of hate speech and disinformation narratives in Albanian online media focuses on four main target groups. Three of them were selected on a regional basis since these were the most common topics of hate and disinformation for all the countries involved. The target groups of these hate speech narratives include migrants, political opposition, and journalists. Since hate speech is omnipresent in Albanian politics, the fourth target group selected is the opposition vis-à-vis the Government to have a complete view of the techniques, sources, and narratives used by all sides in political hate speech.

The selection of cases to monitor regarding the target groups was made based on major incidents or activities that were likely to incite hate speech narratives and extreme reactions from the actors and media involved. Each case was monitored for approximately two weeks following the onset of the event or hate speech narrative. For example, in the case of the Government versus the opposition, the case focused on the defamation campaign against opposition leader alleging he was a national traitor. Likewise, the Greek Foreign Minister's visit to Tirana and the announcements on the maritime border with Albania were a renewed opportunity for strong narrative by the opposition vis-à-vis the Government. In the case of the target group against journalists, the harsh reaction of the president's spokesman against a journalist who published reports that questioned the president's procedures in granting Albanian citizenship was the main subject of monitoring. The only exception is the case against migrants, where the monitoring is not centred around particular events, but rather on hate narratives noticed in general in the media against this group. As Albania is not part of the migrants' route in the Balkans, articles on migrants are very few, and there are no specific events or incidents on which to focus the monitoring.

The cases monitored extend beyond June 2020, which was the limit imposed for all country research reports. After reviewing all the cases of hate speech present, the relevance and representativeness of cases in October and early November 2020 were significant compared to previous examples in the period June 2019–June 2020, which was the original timeline for the research cases. Given the relevance of the examples and the narratives they entailed, it was agreed to make an exception and include these cases.

The monitoring effort involved different online media outlets and social media accounts for each target group, in view of the particular nature and actors involved in each case. In addition, due to a lack of data with which to define the most popular online media in Albania, existing perceptions of the popularity of these media, combined with some limited data provided by online instruments, were used to determine the potential impact of the media to monitor. More specifically, regarding the case of political opponents, the main criterion observed was the political leaning of the media outlets reporting on each case, as this would easily reveal the differences in

narratives between the media outlets that are aligned with different actors, producing different versions of the same event for the public. The social media profiles of the politicians involved were also under review since they constitute a major source of political hate speech, which is then replicated by media republications of these texts. In the case of hate directed at journalists, the media outlets monitored included the media outlet under attack and the Facebook profile of the officials who produced the hate narrative, in order to see the kind of discourse and "truth" produced by the two opposing poles in this case.

Regarding the monitoring of narratives on migrants, the search had to be extended to several media in order to map the discourse on this group, given the rare articles on this topic, extended over different periods and scattered across different media. In this case, the main approach has been a Google search with keywords related to migrants and the location of problematic headlines and eventually content to include in the analysis. The monitoring of media content also included user-generated content, mainly the comments on the articles, as well as comments of the Facebook profiles monitored.

3.   Case study 1: MIGRANTS IN ALBANIAN MEDIA

Albania has not experienced the massive arrivals of refugees or migrants that other countries in the Western Balkans have seen in the last few years. Due to geographic, but especially infrastructure and logistical reasons, Albania is not traditionally on the usual route for migrants. In this context, reporting on migrants in Albanian media has generally belonged to the foreign news section, and it has been viewed as a phenomenon that did not affect Albanians at all. In March 2020, the onset of the pandemic in Europe, including in Albania, triggered a change in the media coverage of migrants in Albania. While until that time migrants were only occasionally passing by in Albania, the border closures in all countries led to many of them being trapped in Albania, having no way out due to restrictions brought about by the pandemic. As the presence of migrants in Albania grew, contact with citizens and consequently media coverage of them also became more visible, though by no means a topic of primary importance.

Mainstream media generally reported on the situation with temporary centres for asylum seekers in the country, and this reporting was neutral overall. There were also other reports that focused on particular episodes or echoed the sentiment of Albanian citizens on the migrants, who were not so neutral or correct in the coverage. The following analysis will focus particularly on these reports, as they show the incorrect, biased, and pre-judgmental side of some Albanian media vis-à-vis the migrants. Since there are not many events involving migrants in Albanian media, the monitoring has followed specific episodes involving migrants from March to July 2020, which coincides with the period during which they could not leave Albania, scattered across various online media.

3.1.   Analysis of narratives on migrants

When looking at some of the problematic coverage on migrants in Albania, the common thread of the stories is that the main narrative in all of them is that migrants represent a threat to Albania. The primary justification for this comes through interviews and opinions of citizens, media claims that generalize the topic without presenting any facts or evidence, and misrepresentation of videos filmed by citizens and sent to media outlets for publication. While the police have reported several incidents in this period that might have involved migrants, the coverage of the selected media does not use official sources, facts, and figures, but rather is based on perception, unfounded claims, and pre-judgmental projections of what happens once migrants flood to Albania. The following is a more detailed view on the sub-narratives present in the articles on migrants.

3.1.1. "Migrants as a threat to public health"

The intensification of coverage of migrants in the media coincided with the confirmation of the first cases of COVID-19 in Albania, as the pandemic was the reason why there was more frequent coverage of migrants on the first place. In this respect, the link between migrants and the threat of disease was inevitable for some of the media. This was further fed by the news that came from Greek camps, where the fear of the spread of the epidemic in crowded refugee camps was often reported on. The transfer of some of the refugees to the Albanian-Greek border naturally led to statements or predictions in some Albanian media that the migrants would be a threat to public health in Albania. One of the articles in question is titled: "There is no calm for Albania, hundreds of Syrians rush to the border, panic on the spread of COVID-19." [1]. The article states that while neighbouring countries have closed their borders as preventive measures, hundreds of Syrians are arriving in Albania. This sort of contrast immediately sets a state of alarm for the reader, suggesting the imminent change. Furthermore, the article underlines that even though the police have stopped the migrants, they are totally uncontrolled in terms of health and potential infection. Another argument is that neither they nor the state are able to quarantine them at a time when it is well-known that the possibility that they might be infected with COVID-19 is much greater. Even though the article is not openly hostile, the sub-narrative of migrants as an uncontrolled source of spreading the disease permeates the narrative of the article.

3.1.2. "Migrants as disrupters of public order"

While the articles linking migrants to the pandemic are quite rare, the prevailing sub-narrative on the migrants is the perception that once they come to our country, they automatically become major disrupters of public order, turning into a constant concern for the local population. One of the articles referred to a report from one of the asylum centres in the suburbs of the capital Tirana, and the only sources used were those of citizens who lived in that area. They said they felt very insecure and had installed barbed wire and nets on their windows, in order to protect themselves [2]. The quotes state that there have been thefts, ranging from clothes and shoes to laptops and cell phones, a phrase repeated by several people interviewed, but whose names are not mentioned.

The prevailing sub-narrative on the migrants is the perception that once they come to our country, they automatically become major disrupters of public order, turning into a constant concern for the local population.

The article reinforces the feeling of fear that the locals supposedly feel, saying that they are forced to lock everything up, otherwise migrants will come into their homes and steal everything. They add that women and children are afraid to go out in the dark in case they are attacked and that the inhabitants do not even sleep at night and take turns to guard their homes against the migrants.

One of the counter-arguments for the racism against migrants in the public debate has been that Albanians used to be the migrants until not long ago, and now they have forgotten how it used to feel and fail to show the same empathy. The article in question touches upon this but makes a clear distinction between Albanians and migrants from Syria or other countries. So, one of the citizens quoted states that "we also used to be migrants, but these are not migrants. They are kamikazes," conveying another thread of the sub-narrative of migrants as violators of public order: they are certainly terrorists.

Other reports were published by Jeta Osh Qef, on its website and Facebook page, which relies heavily on citizens' reports, photos, or videos, publishing information that is not necessarily confirmed. These reports bring to the reader's attention the idea that the migrants pose a threat to citizens, and businesses, and are also very quarrelsome among themselves, often causing public brawls and fights, which all contribute to a very insecure climate [3]. Another specific of these short reports is that they sometimes refer to migrants as Syrians, and other times as Moroccans, highlighting their supposed ethnicity in the title, but not making any effort to confirm it. One of the articles, mentions footage from a security camera where Syrians were threatening some Albanian men with a knife. Eventually, one of the Albanians is wounded on his hand. In fact, the footage shows a group of people, but no knife episodes, and it seems that there are no Albanians involved at any point during the video. In a similar context, another report based on a citizen's video claims that Moroccans go out with knives and threaten people, demanding money from them. The article also claimed that asylum seekers were terrorizing businesses; however, although it depicts people who might be migrants, the video does not support any such claims [4].

At the same time, while also exploring the misfortunes of migrants, including through an interview with one of them, another article highlights the potential problems they might bring to public order, emphasizing that girls and women are particularly at risk, especially of petty thefts and attacks on the street [5].

In one of the articles monitored during this period, there is a variation of the same sub-narrative, which views migrants as parts of local criminal bands. The article suggests that the migrants who went through Albania in 2019 but did not make it to Montenegro are now in hotels and areas administered by local criminal circles, who use them for thefts or other crimes. The article also claims that in one year there has been an increase in thefts and robberies, while hotel owners have stepped up their security measures, fearing "Syrians and Afghans." All of these claims are put in the open, but without numbers, quotes, or any sources to verify them, as the article highlights that the police remain silent in all of this matter, as they take their share of the profits.

3.1.3. "Migrants taking over Albania"

One of the articles monitored claims that there is a political project to replace Albanians who have left the country, suggesting that politicians are aiming to eradicate Albanian people through this plan [6]. According to the article, the Government's plan involves replacing 1.6 million Albanians who have left the country in the last three decades with people from Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The headline is also sensational, stating that after robbing this country for thirty years, the politicians now want to eradicate the Albanian nation. The trigger for this report was the proposal of a bill on asylum-seeking procedures in parliament, detailing the procedures and the steps involved in asylum-seeking. While the article is directed against the political class, the threat of migrants vis-à-vis the "purity" and existence vis-à-vis Albanians is clear.

3.1.4. Hate on Facebook and UGC

The articles monitored on migrants did not have readers' comments below them, as the media outlet in question did not allow users to comment, so there is no particular trend to report in this respect. A Facebook search with keywords did not reveal any particular groups or movements online against migrants either.

HATE ON FACEBOOK AND UGC *Table 1*	
MAIN NARRATIVE	**Migrants represent a threat to Albania.**
SUB-NARRATIVES	Migrants are a threat to public health.
	Migrants are thieves.
	Migrants are terrorists.
	Migrants are threats to the safety of our women, girls and children.
	Migrants will take over Albania and become the majority.

The analysis of this case study reveals that while mainstream media, in general, do not focus on migrants and generally report factually on human trafficking and police operations, part of the online media does contain hate and disinformation narratives regarding migrants, presenting them as a threat to society, as spreaders of disease, terrorists, thieves, and as a threat to public order generally. It should be noted that the main sources quoted are interviews from citizens or video and photo content sent by citizens to social media and online media websites. At the same time, there are no particular efforts from media outlets to check citizens' claims or go beyond their statements.

Part of the online media does contain hate and disinformation narratives regarding migrants, presenting them as a threat to society, as spreaders of disease, terrorists, thieves, and as a threat to public order generally.

41

4. CASE STUDIES ON POLITICAL OPPONENTS

Previous research has identified political figures as the main source of inflammatory language in the public discourse and a common source of disinformation. The exchange of serious and mutual accusations between opposition and government representatives is a daily occurrence in public life, which is mirrored religiously in the Albanian media. Mostly, these exchanges aim to propagate a specific narrative or perception of the opponent. Often, there is no convincing or any proof at all about the claims. All of this leads to a heavy and hostile climate in rhetoric and a gradual devaluation of public statements and public discourse, including in the media coverage. There has been no visible distinction in terms of rhetoric or approaches to public discourse produced by both the ruling majority and the opposition for many years. Therefore, we analyze two target groups and their respective case studies below, where these sides of the political spectrum change place with one another in terms of political assailant and political victim.

The exchange of serious and mutual accusations between opposition and government representatives is a daily occurrence in public life, which is mirrored religiously in the Albanian media.

4.1. Case study 2: The Government vs. the opposition

The case selected to analyze narratives of hate and disinformation from the Government vis-a-vis the opposition is the start of a campaign against the opposition leader Lulzim Basha in early November 2020. Because of the indictment of Kosovo's former President Hashim Thaci and his referral to the Kosovo Special Chambers in the Hague, accusations of war crimes that he might have committed during the Kosovo conflict, including the potential use of a base in Albania for the transplantation of the organs of Serbs, surfaced again. In 2010, the Council of Europe produced a special report on the matter, where Dick Marty was the rapporteur, according to which "numerous indications seem to confirm that, during the period immediately after the end of the armed conflict, before international forces had really been able to take control of the region and re-establish a semblance of law and order, organs were removed from some prisoners at a clinic in Albanian territory, near Fushë-Krujë, to be taken abroad for transplantation."[1] Since Lulzim Basha, currently chairman of the biggest opposition party, the Democratic Party, was employed as UNMIK staff after the end of the Kosovo conflict, the ruling majority started a campaign claiming that Basha was part of the previous investigations on this matter and was personally involved in interrogating former KLA fighters[2]. Following a series of accusations from Prime Minister Edi Rama and the head of the parliamentary group of the Socialist Party that called on Basha to clarify his role in that period, the parliament approved the establishment of a special commission to investigate this matter.

In this case, the media monitored are both pro-opposition and pro-government to have a more complete picture of the highly polarized political debate.

---

1   http://assembly.coe.int/CommitteeDocs/2010/20101218_ajdoc462010provamended.pdf
2   https://javanews.al/raporti-i-dick-marty-balla-akuza-bashes-pd-sot-drejtohet-nga-nje-hetues-i-uck/

However, there is a heavy copy-paste tendency in content among online media, so choosing other media outlets would likely yield similar results. Furthermore, the Facebook and Twitter posts of the politicians involved were monitored.

4.1.1.   Analysis of narratives

The main narrative that prevails in the public statements of the Socialist Party representatives is that the opposition leader is not patriotic and has committed national treachery by his alleged involvement in the investigation of KLA fighters. This claim is also extended to include the two main political parties in opposition, respectively through their former leaders (one of whom is currently president) whom the SP officials repeatedly ask to state why they voted to approve the Dick Marty report in the Council of Europe at the time. In all of this, the main sources come from the politicians of the ruling majority and the opposition, and their word is the main proof or argument used in the media coverage when reporting on this story. At some point, the ruling majority also refers to a witness later ridiculed by media close to the opposition. The following is an analysis of sub-narratives to the main narratives noticed in the monitored text.

4.1.2.   "The leader of the opposition has worked against Kosovar interests"

In several public statements, Taulant Balla, general secretary of the ruling SP, refers to the traitor of Kosovo, the KLA, and the Albanian nation. He says that "using a mask, not showing his face, he interrogated KLA commanders to precede Dick Marty's reports."[3] In so doing, Basha has contributed to throwing mud against the noble intentions and the liberating war of the KLA, and the Albanian population needs transparency on this, the narrative of the Socialist Party goes.

Furthermore, at some point during the debate, the SP refer to an eyewitness, Melaim Bellanica, who claimed he had met Basha in Kukes in 1999, and had provided him with a tape of registered Serbian war crimes, which he sent to the BBC, but deleting most of the 45 minutes and leaving only 2 minutes of tape instead. Although the eye witness also made some questionable statements about seeing dead people and smoking cigarettes with them, which led to his ridicule by opposition media, the SP leaders the continued to insist he was right, with no proof other than his word. "Basha has certainly taken that tape... Between Bellanica and Basha, I certainly believe Bellanica." [7]

---

3   https://www.vizionplus.tv/rrezojme-pretendimet-e-dick-marty-balla-basha-te-ndahet-nga-mendimi-i-berishes-nese-ka-kellqe/

4.1.3.   "The leader of the opposition is a coward for not clarifying his role"

A continuous line of political attack by the current Government against the opposition leader is that he is not courageous enough to be a leader and that he waits for power to be bestowed upon him, which makes him weak and far from a leader. The prominent voices of the ruling majority in this affair, PM Rama and MP Taulant Balla, repeatedly call on him to be "courageous" and admit what he had done in front of everyone. When Basha said that this was just a diversion from the failure of the Government to manage the pandemic, PM Rama again called on him to not hide behind COVID, but "instead answer to the fact that, together with the Peruvian doctor, you compiled the file on the Yellow House!" [8]. While presenting a claim as a fact, the PM also continues to reinforce with his rhetoric the image of a manipulator and coward in the role of the opposition.

4.1.4.   "The leader of the opposition is unable to distance himself from his predecessor"

Another favourite way for the ruling majority to attack the opposition is to point out that he is still not the real leader of the party and that former PM Sali Berisha and historical leader of the Democratic Party is the one that still pulls the strings. This narrative has continued again with the case in point. So, at one point, MP Balla calls on Basha to distance himself from Berisha, if he has the guts to do it: "Basha, at least for this matter, should separate from Berisha, if he is strong enough to do this. Voting for this report is national treachery."[4]

4.1.5.   "Opposition leaders are hypocritical towards Kosovo"

The whole debate on this matter started with a tweet by PM Rama, demanding that former PM Berisha and current President Meta, former leaders of two now major opposition parties, explain why they chose to vote for the resolution for the Dick Marty report, even though it was anti-Kosovo and against Albanian interests. [9] The vote on the report is mentioned throughout the whole discussion and developments of this matter, to point the finger at the current opposition as traitors to the national interest. In fact, there were several replies and exchanges between political figures on a vote that took place ten years ago, exchanging accusations with one another. This part of the narrative came when some media and politicians had been continually accusing PM Rama of being a close friend of Vučić and selling out the national interest and Kosovo for his own interest, following some friction with certain politicians in Kosovo. After these exchanges and the politicization of the matter, several opinions and editorials were published in Albanian media by Kosovo journalists and analysts, who called on all Albanian politicians to

---

4   *Ibid.*

stop using Kosovo politically for their own battles, as they were significantly harming the ongoing proceedings in the Kosovo Special Chambers with their futile debates.

4.1.6.   Different media narratives for the same events

The analyzed media did not have any editorial content that can be classified as hate speech, other than the republication of politicians' statements containing elements of such speech. However, when presenting the narratives, in view of the political line the monitored media support, there were differences in the choice of presentation of information and the decision to omit certain information. One such dividing line between the two media monitored is the editors' choice to republish articles from other media and journalists, both from Kosovo and Albania. While Syri.net emphasizes the narrative that Rama is making these claims for his political diversion and gain rather than out of justice, Gazeta Tema focuses on the opposition instead and, especially, his leader, pointing at his lack of transparency on his past.

Another difference in narratives is related to the attitude of the village where the massacre on tape took place. While Syri.net claimed that in its statements the inhabitants do not want the massacre to be politicized [10], Gazeta Tema published an interview with the commune leader calling on Basha to give them the tape [11]. In addition, while pro-opposition media highlights the statements that make the eyewitness seem as they have mental problems [12], pro-government media package this as an opposition claim and refer to a BBC article as proof that the tape exists, even though the article just stated that the BBC published distressing images from the massacre, which is a known fact but does not shed light on the dispute on the tape [13].

> The analyzed media did not have any editorial content that can be classified as hate speech, other than the republication of politicians' statements containing elements of such speech.

In this respect, while the media do publish the public statements and interviews rather factually, the reality they reconstruct is different from one another. Both media chose to omit certain information, while emphasizing another fact or opinion, conveying to the reader two different perceptions of what is going on, mirroring the political divide and contributing to a further polarization of opinion and trust in Albanian media and society.

4.1.7.   Hate on Facebook and UGC

The media outlets monitored for this case study do not filter or moderate the comments, and since this was a highly politicized case, there was a flood of comments below most articles. Many of them were blatantly unethical, containing curse words, and only a few of them questioned the arguments provided by politicians or sentences of the article. Comments considered the leader of the opposition a Serbian agent, as a seller of national interests, and were far from ethical about it; other comments also focused on the PM, derogating him, as well. It is to be noted that there was also repetition

of identical comments and users who repeated arguments that each political side had provided, suggesting that there is an underground army of commenters employed by political parties, a phenomenon that has been noted for several years now. [5]

HATE ON FACEBOOK AND UGC *Table 2*		
MAIN NARRATIVE	**The leader of the opposition is a traitor.**
SUB-NARRATIVES	The leader of the opposition is a coward for not clarifying his role.
	The leader of the opposition has worked against Kosovar interests.
	The leader of the opposition is unable to distance himself from his predecessor.
	Opposition leaders are hypocritical towards Kosovo.

The reporting of highly polarized and politicized cases is undoubtedly fertile ground for speculation and biased information. In this case, the fact that the media conveys statements from each actor involved while not really verifying or investigating them does not provide a clear picture to the public. In addition, the biased selection of information in some cases further attests to the problem of editorial policies aligned with particular parties or politicians.

The biased selection of information in some cases further attests to the problem of editorial policies aligned with particular parties or politicians.

4.2. Case study 3: The opposition vs. the Government

The case selected to analyze narratives of hate and disinformation from the opposition versus the Government is the reactions of the opposition after the visit of Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias to Tirana on 20 October 2020. In the joint press conference with Prime Minister Rama, it was announced that an agreement had been reached to refer the Ionian Sea maritime border dispute to the International Court of Justice in Hague. The maritime border agreement has been a somewhat contested issue for a long time; a previous agreement reached in 2009 between Greece and the then Democratic-Party-led government was challenged at the Constitutional Court by the then opposition, led by Edi Rama, and the court ruled the agreement was unconstitutional. During the same visit, it was announced that Greece "would soon nullify the formal state of war still in place between the two countries since World War II, when fascist Italian forces invaded Greece through the Albanian border before being forced to retreat deep into Albania."[6] The fact that—even though just formally—this state of war existed in Greece has been another source of hostile political rhetoric and perception towards Greece,

---

5 *http://www.albeu.com/shqiperi/koment-partite-organizojne-skuadrat-online-/195936/*

6 *https://apnews.com/article/turkey-netherlands-united-nations-athens-tirana-f0ce45b211011db379b2ea3c9828e95c*

even though relations and exchanges between the two countries have carried on independently of this. In addition, the relationship between Greece and Albania has at times been uneasy due to minority rights and the legalization of Albanians living in Greece, and the issue of the maritime border has been a renewed opportunity for the politicization of this matter by political opponents in the country in the name of the national interest.

The opposition spoke against the decision to send the maritime border dispute to Hague, considering this a national treason, claiming it would place Albania in an unfavourable position vis-a-vis Greece. One of the most vocal personalities in the opposition is the former leader of the Democratic Party, Sali Berisha, a former prime minister and president. Very active on Facebook and social media in general, he continually uses these platforms to continue his opposition to the current Government, among other things. Therefore, his Facebook profile is the main social media site monitored, because his posts are published on many media outlets. The Democratic Party's online newspaper, rd.al, was also monitored, and the statements from other opposition personalities, especially the PDIU, a pro-Cham party, were also included. The monitoring period ranged from 20 October 2020 to 3 November 2020 but also includes some other interventions on the same topic in December 2020.

4.2.1. Analysis of narratives

The main narrative that is noticeable in most of Berisha's posts is that the Albanian Prime Minister has betrayed and sold out Albanian national interests. Furthermore, he considers the Government and the Prime Minister very weak and incapable of protecting Albanian territory in front of an ever-advancing Greece on the border dispute matter. The following is a more detailed analysis of the sub-narratives noticed in the posts and articles analyzed for this purpose.

4.2.2. "The Prime Minister works against the national interests"

Several posts during this period identify the Prime Minister as someone who works against the national interest. For example, in a Facebook post following the joint press conference, it is stated that "With his treacherous silence, Edvin Kristaq the Zoographer signed the loss by Albania of hundreds of square marine kilometres, as well as air space and giant deposits of trillions of euros in oil and gas that studies show are found in Ionian waters, which, in a range of 6 to 12 miles of territorial waters belonged to Albania." [14] The same post mentions that "Rama was forced to remain silent in front of the decision of the Greek government to expand the Hellenic fatherland at the expense of the Albanian fatherland, to which Rama is related only by high treason." The idea that the current intention to send the matter to the Hague while the Albanian Government only nods is high treason is a recurring theme in the opposition's statements in this regard. In all these posts and the rhetoric generally, the main term referring to Prime Minister Rama is the "Zoographer", referring

both to the provenance of the term from Greek, and also referring to Rama's education and his profession as a painter.

Furthermore, the idea that PM Rama is a traitor of Albania is emphasized by Rama's attitude to the Greeks compared to the Cham issue.[7] During Dendias' visit, protests were organized by the PDIU, a party with a largely Cham basis, and protesters were also arrested. Former PM Berisha considered these events a way to distract the population from his treason against the country. "To distract from the treason he is committing against the Cham issue, about which he did not dare say a single word, undoing in this way the work of 30 years, he illegally arrested the leaders of the Cham community and former MPs of PDIU, showing himself as being more anti-Cham than the notorious Napoleon Zervas." [15] This rhetoric is not advanced only by former PM Berisha, but also by representatives of the Cham party, referring to Rama as the "Trojan horse" of the Greeks, who had sold out the interests of his own country to advance the Greek agenda. All of these serve to maintain a harsh line against the Government, as always, but especially in a time of ambiguities and tension created by issues of national interest.

4.2.3. "The Prime Minister is unable to stand up for his country"

Part of the rhetoric against Prime Minister Rama from the opposition is that he is protecting the interests of Greece or other countries at the expense of Albania because he cannot stand up for his country. The idea that he works for other countries' interests, being subordinate to Turkey and protecting Greek decisions on the maritime border with Albania, is repeated continuously. For example, Rama is referred to as a "vassal" of Erdogan, referring to the subordination system imposed at the time of the Ottoman empire. Along the same lines, he is referred to as "politically circumcised in Topkapi," again suggesting a powerless Prime Minister [16]. One of the Facebook posts states that Dendias informed the Albanians that one of the main issues discussed had been Albania's relations with Turkey, implying that these relations further increase Albania's distance from the EU. By referring continuously to the country's Ottoman past and comparing the present to the state of subordination that Albanians had in that historical framework, the rhetoric also suggests that this political behaviour is drawing Albanians further away from the EU and closer to being a vassal of Turkey, marking historical regress.

4.2.4. Hate on Facebook and UGC

While the Democratic Party's online media outlet does not allow users to comment, there are numerous comments and reactions on Berisha's Facebook account. His Facebook page has a significant number of followers, reaching almost 1.1 million. For example, one of his most popular posts in

---

7   *The Cham Albanians, residing in Northern Greece, were expelled from Greece at the end of World War II, on the grounds of having collaborated with the Nazis. The issue of property they owned in Greece and which they cannotuse remains an open problem that Greece is unwilling to recognize.*

this monitoring counted 2,900 reactions, 53 shares, and 238 comments. The comments are mixed and generally far below ethical decency. While some of them vent anger towards what they consider fabrications and remind him that he is one of the reasons why Albania is lagging behind, others side with his posts and reactions and confirm the narratives he is providing, which shows again the polarization that is inherent in Albanian society at the moment.

The use of strong narratives by the opposition against the Prime Minister and labelling him a traitor further divide politics and society in Albania and further deepen the status quo.

HATE ON FACEBOOK AND UGC
Table 3

MAIN NARRATIVE	Albanians are betrayed by this government and the Prime Minister.
SUB-NARRATIVES	The Prime Minister works against national interests.
	The Prime Minister is unable to stand up for his country.

The case of the maritime border with Greece and relations with Greece in general are sensitive issues for the Albanian public and likely to polarize reactions. The use of strong narratives by the opposition against the Prime Minister and labelling him a traitor further divide politics and society in Albania and further deepen the status quo.

5.   Case study 4: JOURNALISTS

In recent years, the general climate of verbal abuse and debasement of journalists and their lack of integrity has been a constant feature of the public debate, often promoted by politicians. Although this trend has been present in Albania in the last 30 years, it has further intensified. It has often become the norm that when politicians do not like journalists' work, they dismiss and try to discredit them, contributing to lower public trust in the media. Probably the most visible example in recent years is that of Prime Minister Edi Rama, who often is far from diplomatic with journalists, describing the media as a "rubbish bin," ridiculing journalists and claiming they are incompetent or unprepared, that they do not know what they are talking about, referring to their bosses, etc. However, he is not the only one, and the role of and trust in journalists' work have been further undermined because of this rhetoric, even though this is not the case only in Albania.

The case analyzed within this target group is that of journalist Adriatik Doci, a reporter at online media Shqiptarja.com and Report TV. In October 2020, he published a series of reports exposing the disproportionately large number of Albanian passports issued by President Meta compared to his predecessors and claimed that the procedures had not been followed correctly. He also published reports of security concerns, as some of the persons who received passports were under investigation or were suspected to be involved in crimes. Following these publications, the President's office, mainly through the spokesperson, engaged in a series of verbal assaults against the journalist and later against the media outlet's owners, Carlo Bollino and Alba Malltezi.

It has often become the norm that when politicians do not like journalists' work, they dismiss and try to discredit them, contributing to lower public trust in the media.

5.1.   Analysis of narratives

The main narrative that is served against journalists in this case is that the journalist and media outlets in question are liars who make up reports for political and economic gain. In this case, the statements do not refer to the media as a whole category, but rather to one specific media outlet and journalist. The sub-narratives come in different forms, ranging from a lack of objectivity, corruption, anti-patriotism, incompetence, etc., as described below in more detail.

5.1.1.   "Journalists and media are heavily politicized"

The first sub-narrative that arises in this case is that the journalist in question is heavily politicized, and the spokesman considers him a militant of the Socialist Party. They republished an e-mail of the journalist that had been leaked previously, where he wrote to an MP asking for his wife to be employed, given the history of his family and himself as a long-time supporter of the

Socialist Party [17]. In this respect, because of his Italian nationality, the media outlet owner is referred to as "Malavita," to convey the perception that he is connected to organized crime in some way.

5.1.2. "Journalists and media publish fake news and avoid real news"

They also accuse the journalist and the media outlet owner of playing the Government's game, "fabricating news" [18] to divert public attention from the Government's corrupt affairs and the mismanagement of the pandemic". In another statement, the President's spokesman repeats the idea, inviting the media to "stop fabricating fake news, but focus on the real news: the Mafia of incinerators!", referring to other ongoing reports on the potentially corrupt affairs of private-public partnership.

5.1.3. "Journalists and media work against the national interest"

In another statement, the Spokesman labels this media outlet's campaign against him as defamatory to the martyrs of Albania, stating that they "have started a fierce anti-national campaign, completely Milosevic-like, against the most well-known personalities of the Albanian nation!" [19] Claiming that the passports they refer to were for the family members of KLA martyrs and well-known intellectuals of the Albanian diaspora, they state: "these media, serving as spokespersons of the Government, use the language of Milosevic, Seselj, and notorious Arkan, to qualify the KLA martyrs as 'not worthy of being Albanian' and 'a breach of national security.'" [20] By so doing, these statements clearly associate the journalist and media in question with the Government and the anti-patriotic stance they claim the ruling majority has been following. The statement also refers to the media as "disgusting media puppets" [21], adding to the inflammatory language used.

5.1.4. "Journalists and media are corrupt"

Finally, the President's spokesman's statement and exchange with the Shqiptarja.com owners revert to a long-running debate in the Albanian media: the potential economic benefits of media owners in the framework of public tenders and similar schemes in exchange for favourable coverage of the ruling party. He reposted a series of questions related to this matter that former journalist and Socialist Party MP Alfred Peza put to Bollino. The questions essentially cast doubts on the business practices of the media outlets Bollino owns with his wife, questioning about previous investigations and charges of money laundering, illegally obtaining public funds, using double books for the company's finances, incorrect treatment of labour relations, etc. [22].

This verbal exchange and assault was heavily politicized. The Prime Minister called this an attack on free media and journalists who are only doing their job

and referring to the President as someone who had already taken more than his fair share from the country [23]. This statement was followed by a series of government ministers, the Tirana Mayor, and other persons expressing their support for Shqiptarja.com, condemning the President's attack on free media [24]. While there were no particular reactions from the media community, an investigative journalist, a former employee of Shqiptarja.com, noted that it would be more appropriate to protect the journalist who published the story, rather than the owner [25].

5.1.5. Hate on Facebook and UGC

While traditional media published the exchange but did not take particular sides on it, the readers' comments below the monitored articles in Shqiptarja.com are heavily against the President, degenerating into cursing, defamation, and threats. They are clearly not filtered in any way and go beyond the President, focusing on his wife and family too. However, this is not peculiar to this case, but it is general practice in all media outlets that have their user comments open and unfiltered. It is notable that the journalist under attack also responded with a Facebook post directed at the President's spokesman, subtly threatening to expose details of his private life, becoming, in this case, part of the hate narrative [26]. However, he later admitted in an interview that he had overstepped the mark.

The lack of realization of such transparency leads to public exchanges that become politicized and interest in public-oriented journalism is paid lip service to, but is often cast aside.

HATE ON FACEBOOK AND UGC
Table 4

MAIN NARRATIVE	Journalists should not be trusted.
SUB-NARRATIVES	Journalists and media are heavily politicized.
	Journalists and media publish fake news and avoid real news.
	Journalists and media work against the national interest.
	Journalists and media are corrupt.

This case study shows the vulnerability of journalists who publish reports against political figures on the one hand, and the deep polarization of the Albanian media and society, often seen as heavily aligned with one party or another, on the other. In these cases, although all actors appear to call for transparency, the lack of realization of such transparency leads to public exchanges that become politicized and interest in public-oriented journalism is paid lip service to, but is often cast aside.

6. CONCLUSION

The case studies analyzed here show that, in general, the mainstream media does not produce hate speech narratives on its own, but does become a vehicle for carrying them. The greatest producers of hate narratives, division, disinformation, and polarization remain the political actors, partly because of their pervasive presence in the media and their use of social media. Nonetheless, while online media do not usually start hate narratives on their own, their political alignment and interests lead them to be selective in the information they convey. As a result, it is often the case that the Albanian public receives two or more versions of the same story, contributing, to some extent, to the reinforcement of the existing political and social divisions in the country.

Hate narratives towards journalists have intensified in recent years, reflecting a global trend as well as the increasingly harsh rhetoric of the political class against them on some occasions, which has certainly leaked through in the public's trust and attitude vis-à-vis journalists and the media. On the other hand, hate narratives on migrants are rare due to Albania's scant experience has in this regard. However, they can be found in various media outlets, with the primary sources being citizens or anonymous, showing that proper reporting on this topic is needed in order to have a more educated public in this regard and face the existing prejudices and stereotypes.

Finally, the lack of proper mechanisms to counter hate narratives in the media is another deficiency, which leads to a lack of reflection on ethical and professional standards. While civil society organizations focusing on human rights do their own work and issue statements, reflecting on these statements and improving media coverage has proved more difficult. Some of the online media have closed their comments to the public, which automatically produces an improvement in the language present in these outlets. However, the main generators of hate narratives do not seem interested in changing their rhetoric for the moment, and the media seems to follow suit and convey this language to the public.

In general, the mainstream media does not produce hate speech narratives on its own, but does become a vehicle for carrying them.

The main generators of hate narratives do not seem interested in changing their rhetoric for the moment, and the media seems to follow suit and convey this language to the public.

7.   POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

• Both traditional and online media should consider self-regulating themselves, either individually or as a community, to commit to ethical standards in reporting, including avoiding hate speech and narratives.

• Online media should seriously and responsibly address the moderation of their comments in line with respecting the right to privacy and dignity.

• Both existing bodies within the audiovisual media regulator and the self-regulation initiative, the Albanian Media Council, should be more proactive in monitoring violations, encouraging the media to self-regulate and correct their mistakes, and also promote a greater sense of responsibility from the media on the flaws in their coverage.

• Civil society organizations should be more vocal when encountering cases of hate speech in the media, calling for the correct coverage of the issues at stake and leading a public debate in this regard. Efforts should not be limited to identifying such narratives or cases and should also offering a counter-narrative, such as debunking these cases through fact-checking platforms.

• Efforts for the improvement of media literacy efforts should be ongoing from all actors. The Government should establish a strategy and clear policies on adopting media literacy as part of the curriculum in an appropriate form. Civil society actors should continue and intensify their efforts to raise awareness of critical thinking and media literacy. Public institutions and civil society should coordinate in this regard, possibly also engaging the media as a supporter of these initiatives and policies.

Literature and sources

ANALYZED ARTICLES:

[1] https://www.gazeta-shqip.com/2020/03/15/alarm-i-fundit-qindra-siriane-dynden-drejt-shqiperise-panik-per-perhapjen-e-koronavirusit/

[2] https://fjala.al/2020/06/01/jane-kamikaze-ti-groposin-te-mali-me-gropa-banoret-kunder-azilkerkuesve/

[3] https://www.facebook.com/joqalbania/videos/sirian%C3%ABt-terrorizojn%C3%AB-qytetar%C3%ABt-na-nxorr%C3%ABn-thik%C3%ABn-n%C3%AB-mes-t%C3%AB-dit%C3%ABs-n%C3%AB-qend%C3%ABr-t%C3%AB-t/738776223567729/

[4] https://joq-albania.com/artikull/745630.html

[5] https://fjala.al/2020/06/24/emigrantet-tirana-pushtohet-nga-siriane-dhe-marokene-te-uritur/

[6] http://www.standard.al/2020/10/22/deputeti-jemi-ne-rrezik-nga-sirianet-behen-pjese-e-grabitjeve-shtepite-tona-po-rrezikohen/

[7] http://www.gazetatema.net/2020/11/17/balla-nuk-i-besoj-bashes-eshte-e-sigurte-qe-e-ka-marre-ate-kasete/

[8] https://www.syri.net/politike/381289/rama-i-deshtuar-ne-luften-ndaj-covid-kerkon-shpetim-tek-dick-marty/

[9] https://twitter.com/ediramaal/status/1325068314025013249

[10] https://www.syri.net/politike/384347/banoret-e-krushes-se-madhe-rama-te-mos-e-perdore-masakren/

[11] http://www.gazetatema.net/2020/11/12/video-banoret-e-krushes-apel-lulzim-bashes-dorezo-filmimet-e-masakres/

[12] https://www.syri.net/politike/383737/deshmitari-i-fabrikuar-i-rames-cdo-nate-komunikoj-me-te-vdekurit-pi-duhan-me-ta/

[13] http://www.gazetatema.net/2020/11/14/bbc-konfirmon-kaseten-e-bellanices-perdoren-dy-minuta-per-lajmin-qe-tronditi-boten/

[14] https://www.facebook.com/SaliBerisha/posts/1737244656436434

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] https://www.facebook.com/blushited/posts/10158723214027760

[18] https://www.facebook.com/blushited/posts/10158723214027760

[19] https://www.facebook.com/blushited/posts/10158720409407760

[20] Ibid

[21] Ibid

[22] https://www.facebook.com/blushited/posts/10158741802717760

[23] https://twitter.com/ediramaal/status/1320335779101638657

[24] https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/meta-sulmon-gazetaret-e-shqiptarjacom-qe-publikoi-skandalin-me-nenshtetesise-rama-cfare-katandie-veliaj-mbron-gjobemediat-sulmon-trocmediat#582092

[25] https://www.facebook.com/artan.hoxha.900/posts/33496876650688878

[26] http://www.respublica.al/2020/10/25/investigim-dhe-rruga%C3%A7%C3%ABri-mediatike

About the author

Ilda Londo holds a degree in Journalism/Political Sciences. She holds the position of Research Coordinator at the Albanian Media Institute. She is the author of several research works, focusing on media development issues, media ethics and professionalism, and analyzing media content.

HATE NARRATIVES IN THE MEDIA AND USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Anida Sokol

HATE NARRATIVES IN THE MEDIA AND USER-GENERATED CONTENT

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Author: Anida Sokol

Editor, regional lead researcher: Brankica Petković

Language editor: Fiona Thompson

Design: Špela Kranjec for Filip Kranjec s.p., Ljubljana, Slovenia

Publishers: SEENPM, Tirana, Peace Institute, Ljubljana and Foundation Mediacentar Sarajevo

Ljubljana, February 2021

CONTENTS

HATE NARRATIVES IN THE MEDIA AND USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Anida Sokol

1. INTRODUCTION

Numerous examples of media and communication that spread disinformation, propaganda and hate exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and are mostly found in the online sphere. These are usually sustained through different ownership and financing patterns, including local and foreign centres of power, and are used to promote ethno-national or religious narratives or political agendas, targeting ethno-national, political or minority groups. The efforts of (self)regulators and civil society to prevent the spread of such narratives have been limited, while there has been a lack of progressive media policies and political support for such initiatives. Hate narratives influence public opinion and democratic processes in a country where ethno-national tensions and political and economic stalemates have marked its almost 30 years of independence.

> Hate narratives influence public opinion and democratic processes in a country where ethno-national tensions and political and economic stalemates have marked its almost 30 years of independence.

In the previous Resilience project report, an overview and examples of the political-economic bases of hate, disinformation and propaganda models of media and communication in BiH were outlined (Sokol, 2020). In this research, examples of hate narratives are analyzed to gain a better understanding of their origins, messages, and dissemination. Some of the main research questions are: a) What actors and events serve as the main generators of hate and disinformation narratives? b) What are the main ideas and messages disseminated through hate narratives? c) How are hate narratives disseminated? and d) How do they influence public opinion?

The research was conducted between September and October 2020 and includes four case studies, targeting migrants and refugees, journalists, political opposition and Jews. Case studies were selected in the period from June 2019 to June 2020 and include: 1) the initiative of the BiH Minister of Security, Fahrudin Radončić, to expel migrants and refugees from the country supported by a media campaign in April 2020; 2) the hate campaign of the Herzegovina web portals and death threats against the journalist Nikola Vučić who, at the end of May 2020, on his Twitter account, commenting on the news that the West-Herzegovina Canton had declared itself a "corona-free zone" sarcastically asked whether it would become a "fascism-free zone"; 3) the physical assault of the Minister of Interior of Republika Srpska (RS), Dragan Lukač, on the opposition member of the RS Assembly, Draško Stanivuković, in the RS Assembly at the end of 2019, presented by the RS mainstream media

as an attempt of the opposition to destabilize the RS government; 4) and hate narratives against minorities, in this case Jews, found in the comments sections of news portals and their Facebook accounts at the end of January 2020 during International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

The first three case studies were selected based on their popularity, i.e. they were highly discussed in the media. International Holocaust Remembrance Day was chosen because it generated the largest number of articles dedicated to anti-Semitism that year. The media and social media accounts in the first three case studies were selected based on their relevance, their connection to particular political and ethno-national structures, and their production and dissemination of hate narratives towards the targeted groups. In most cases, *Klix.ba* was selected as one of the most read news portals in BiH that contains the largest number of user-generated comments. Articles were selected with the use of keywords ("migrants", "Nikola Vučić", "Lukač", "Stanivuković", "Jews") within one week surrounding the incident/event, while the social media outlet Facebook was chosen for its popularity in BiH. Besides analyzing of the articles of the selected media, comments sections of web portals and their Facebook accounts were reviewed, the last using CrowdTangle.

CASE STUDIES
Table 1

TARGET GROUP	CASE EVENT	PERIOD	SAMPLE OF THE MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS
Migrants and refugees	The initiative of Fahrudin Radončić, the former Minister of Security, that migrants and refugees should be expelled from BiH and sent back to their countries	20−27 April 2020	*Avaz.ba, Rtrs.tv, Klix.ba, Antimigrant.ba, USN.co.ba* and their Facebook accounts
Journalists	The hate campaign of the Herzegovinian media towards the journalist of N1 television Nikola Vučić	27−31 May 2020	*Poskok.ba, Vrisak.info, Dnevnik.ba, Jabuka.tv, Grude.com, Build.ba, Rama-Prozor.info, Otvoreno.hr, Hercegovina.in, Radioljubuski.ba, Bljesak.info, Radio-televizija Herceg Bosne* and their Facebook accounts
Political opposition	The RS Minister of Interior Dragan Lukač's assault on the opposition MP Draško Stanivuković in the RS Assembly	23−25 December 2019	*Rtrs.tv, Srna.rs, Atvbl.com* and ATV Facebook account
The Jews	International Holocaust Remembrance Day	25−30 January 2020	*Klix.ba, Vijesti.ba* and their Facebook accounts

Introduction

What can be demonstrated by this study is that the mainstream media in BiH are the sources and disseminators of hate narratives towards specific groups and individuals, which are further popularized through user-generated comments. In the case of migrants and refugees and the political opposition, hate narratives come from those in power disseminated by the mainstream media under their influence. In contrast, in the case of journalists, hate narratives were created by web portals from Herzegovina and through user-generated messages on social networks. Hate narratives towards the Jews are user-generated and can be found in the comments sections of the most popular online media in BiH. In the following chapters, we will separately present each case study and describe the main elements of hate narratives towards the target groups. We will then give a conclusion and recommendations for advocacy campaigns and steps that need to be taken to prevent the spread of hate narratives in BiH.

The mainstream media in BiH are the sources and disseminators of hate narratives towards specific groups and individuals, which are further popularized through user-generated comments.

2.   HATE NARRATIVES TOWARDS MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Since 2018, Bosnia and Herzegovina has become a transit route for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East and southern Asia seeking to enter the EU. In 2019, BiH registered 29,232 arrivals of migrants mostly from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Syria. According to International Organization of Migration (IOM) estimates, there are around 7,000–8,000 migrants and refugees in the country at any time, even though some sources claim that the numbers are higher (IOM). Most of them live in EU-funded reception centres, which are overcrowded, and many are found on the streets, in abandoned buildings and woods, without water, sanitation and health assistance and as such are vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse. They are mostly single men, but there are also families with children, older people, and unaccompanied children, and they are mainly concentrated in the Una-Sana Canton, close to the border with Croatia. The response of the state and local authorities has been poor, particularly due to the lack of coordination between state and local authorities (IOM). The RS government has denied the establishment of reception centres on its territory, while local authorities and populations have been opposing the establishment of such facilities in their localities and occasionally holding protests in towns with the highest number of migrants and refugees, such as Bihać and Velika Kladuša.

The reporting on migrants and refugees in BiH media has often been connected to crime and diseases with sensationalist and discriminatory titles about massive fights between migrants and refugees and their alleged attacks on citizens and their property.

Media content on migrants and refugees has increased in the BiH media since 2018. Initially, as has been shown by a recent study of Raskrinkavanje, examples of xenophobic and/or racist disinformation about migrants and refugees were sporadic and mainly copy-pasted from the Croatian media (Cvijetićanin, 2020). The article that marked the start of a negative campaign against migrants in the BiH media was published in May 2018 by *Avaz.ba* (Cvijetićanin, 2020; Adilagić, 2019; Jukić-Mujkić, 2019). With subtitles such as "murky affairs" and "there are drugs" and an emphasis on unverified information about migrants' constant attacks on and robbing of Sarajevo's citizens, and on their connection with illegal businesses and non-hygienic habits, the article initiated the narrative that migrants are a security and health threat for BiH citizens [1].

Since then, the reporting on migrants and refugees in BiH media has often been connected to crime and diseases with sensationalist and discriminatory titles about massive fights between migrants and refugees and their alleged attacks on citizens and their property (Jukić-Mujkić, 2019). Research by the Association of BiH journalists showed that migrants and refugees in the media are either and most often stigmatized, portrayed as perpetrators and dangerous persons or are less frequently shown as victims (Adilagić, 2019). The research also showed that in such media reporting, authors most often use assumptions, anonymous sources (usually citizens) and non-verified information (Adilagić, 2019). Journalists rarely make distinctions between

migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and use the term migrants or even illegal migrants that stigmatize and homogenize such a diverse group, making them easy targets of different generalizations and hate speech (Buljubašić, 2019). Recent research published by Raskrinkavanje demonstrates that hate narratives towards migrants and refugees are also built upon and retained through disinformation in which they are portrayed as violent, criminal and connected to terrorism and radical ideologies (Cvijetićanin, 2020).

Through this case study, we will present our findings, according to which the leading politicians in the country are the sources of hate narratives towards migrants instrumentalized for political purposes (Ahmetašević, 2019). The case study in this research is related to the initiative of the former Minister of Security of BIH, Fahrudin Radončić, the former owner of *Dnevni avaz* and the leader of the SBB political party, that migrants should be expelled from BiH and sent back to their countries which he particularly reiterated through the media from 20 April until 27 April 2020, after which he resigned from the position of the Minister of Security. In this period, he gave several interviews and statements (*O kanal, FTV* and *N1*).

> Radončić even pointed out that it is probable that some migrants are members of terrorist groups and that the fingerprints of two migrants in BiH were found on weapons in other countries.

He held a press conference during which he said, among other things, that the migrant crisis was not a humanitarian issue but a security one, that the presence of 7–8,000 migrants influenced the commodity of BiH citizens, especially in the period of the pandemic in which 50–60,000 people in BiH would become unemployed, and that he would start a campaign to expel them from the country. He said that he is using the term *illegal migrants* on purpose because most of them are economic and not war migrants and that BiH should get "rid of this economic, social and cultural ballast" (meaning burden) [2]. Radončić even pointed out that it is probable that some migrants are members of terrorist groups and that the fingerprints of two migrants in BiH were found on weapons in other countries. Even though the issue escalated into political skirmishes between Radončić (SBB party) and leading members of the SDA party, in which Radončić also threatened to proclaim the Pakistan Ambassador as a persona non grata in BiH due to his lack of cooperation, the hate narrative about migrants and refugees being a security and economic threat to the country was further popularized. Based on the review of comments on media and social media accounts, Radončić gained broad support from the public. Although there were no legal grounds for executing such a plan, Radončić's statements were still widely published by the media and served as classic spin and a way to win votes among the public during the coronavirus pandemic and ahead of the local elections.

In period from 20–27 April 2020, *Avaz.ba* published 15 articles about migrants and refugees, among which eight are related to the statements of Radončić (summaries of his interviews for other media and summaries from the press conference) with discriminatory and sensationalist titles. *Avaz.ba* also interviewed Slobodan Ujić, director of the Service for Foreigners Affairs [3], about steps that are being taken to compile a list of migrants who voluntarily want to return to their countries and the Serb member of

the Presidency, Milorad Dodik, who gave his support to Radončić's plan [4]. *Avaz.ba* also published an article about the number of crimes committed by migrants and refugees in the Una-Sana Canton, which was confirmed by a police commissioner from the Canton, who, in the article, gave his support to Radončić's initiative [5]. The campaign closed with a three-minute video presenting an overview of articles and scenes depicting crimes committed by migrants in BiH [6]. Four articles in this period relate to the deportation and closure of migrants and refugees from Bihać to the new Lipa detention centre, written in a very formal and dehumanized style, emphasizing the engagement of the police and medical staff [7].

Articles about Radončić's initiative had numerous interactions on Facebook and were shared by the *Dnevni avaz* Facebook account, Facebook accounts of the SBB political party and by a community Facebook page *Želim da se pitam-migranti (I want to have a choice – migranti)*, described as an initiative for the referendum for the removal of migrants from the territory of the Una-Sana Canton [8]. Even though the page is registered as a community page, in addition to the articles on migrants from *Avaz.ba* and the local media in Krajina, it also shares articles about the SBB party, which points to its possible political background. Most of the comments on *Avaz.ba*, its Facebook account and community group under the selected articles gave support to Radončić's initiative, reiterating that migrants are a security threat to society and should be thrown out of the country. Some comments cast doubt about the initiative and others stressed that Radončić is also a migrant in BiH; however, none problematized the hate narrative being popularized by a public figure or pointed to the humanitarian side of the issue and the lack of any legal basis for such an initiative.

Radončić's statements were widely published by other mainstream media. Presenting Radončić's initiative as a solution needed to respond to the problem of illegal economic migrants, in this period, the online version of the RS public service broadcaster *Rtrs.tv* published three articles related to Radončić's statements, with titles that connect migrants to terrorism [9], who are hiding their identity [10]. RTRS also appropriated news about migrants within the Serb ethno-national narrative. Nine other articles published by *Rtrs.tv* in the reporting period mostly relate to the transportation of migrants from Bihać to the Lipa camp, near the homes of Serb returnees, presented as an attack on Serbs and a message that they are not welcomed in the Federation of BiH [11]. Such a narrative was emphasized by the statements of Serb politicians, including the president of the Municipality's SNSD committee in Bosanski Petrovac who said that water, electricity and Internet were provided for migrants, but not for the Serb returnees in the area [12].

In addition to the narrative that migrants are a security threat to the country, some comments also relate migrants to the spread of COVID-19, and describe them as people who live at the expense of BiH citizens.

Klix.ba, one of the most popular news portals in BiH, published ten articles related to migrants and refugees in the reporting period, six of them are related to Radončić's initiative and his quarrel with the SDA party, whom he accused of favouring migrants rather than the citizens of BiH [13]. Even

though *Klix.ba* is considered an independent media outlet, none of its articles investigated the initiative or problematized Radončić's statements. The articles of *Klix.ba* were mostly shared on its Facebook account and contained numerous comments, most of which supported the initiative and reflected xenophobic, racist and Nazi stances. In addition to the narrative that migrants are a security threat to the country, some comments also relate migrants to the spread of COVID-19, and describe them as people who live at the expense of BiH citizens and receive better treatment (free housing, food, medical treatment) than BiH citizens. Comments also contained insults such as "scum" (*šljam and ološ*) or "useless parasites" (*beskorisni paraziti*), and connected migrants to terroristic and criminal activities. Some had very explicit calls for the execution of migrants (that they should be locked up, gassed and executed), but were not removed by the editorial team. Comments that criticized Radončić's statements are rare and mostly found in the Facebook group *Pomoć izbjeglicama u BiH/Help for refugees in BiH* that shared two articles related to Radončić's initiative. One article was shared by the UK human rights organization Refugee Rights Europe, which expressed its concern over the BiH Government's position that lacks legal basis under European law. Overall, there was a lack of condemnation of such hate narratives by public figures and BiH media.[1]

Radončić's statements were further published by the web portal *Antimigrant. ba* that solely published content against migrants and refugees in BiH and the local media in Krajina. During the reporting period, *Antimigrant.ba* published 29 articles related to migrants, among which 14 are related to Radončić's initiative and republished from different media in BiH including *Klix.ba*, *Avaz.ba*, *Nap.ba, Oslobođenje.ba, Bhrt.ba* and the local media from Krajina. *Antimigrant.ba* also republished an interview from *Srpska.info* with the president the International Police Organization, an obscure Belgrade non-profit organization dedicated to security, who spoke about Radončić's plan, the possible radicalization of migrants in BiH and claimed that many had fought in the wars of Iraq and Syria [14]. The local media in Krajina published articles about Radončić's initiative and depicted migrants as a health threat, especially in relation to COVID-19. For example, a short article on *USN.con. ba* about the press conference from the opening of the Lipa camp points out that COVID-19, in addition to different diseases including scabies, is present among migrants, even though the information was not supported by any source [15].

---

1   *Reports that problematized such initiatives are rare. One was published by Zurnal.info (Brkić-Radević, 2020).*

HATE NARRATIVES AGAINST MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES *Table 2*	
MAIN NARRATIVE	**Migrants and refugees are a threat to the society.**
SUB-NARRATIVES	Migrants and refugees are a security threat. They are potential terrorists, are dangerous and commit crime.
	Migrants and refugees are a health threat. They have infectious diseases, including COVID-19.
	Migrants and refugees are an economic threat, especially during the pandemic. BiH should take care of its unemployed citizens rather than of migrants and refugees.

This case study shows that hate narratives that depict migrants and refugees as a security and health threat to the society originate and are disseminated by the leading politicians in the country and the mainstream media and are instrumentalized for political purposes and appropriated within the ethno-national discourse.[2] Such narratives, especially those coming from known political figures, can influence public opinion and further deepen the existing prejudices and xenophobic sentiments among the local population. In all the analyzed articles and online media, there were no positive articles about migrants and refugees or those that problematized hate narratives of politicians, while racist and xenophobic stances identified in comments sections point to a worrying trend.

In all the analyzed articles and online media, there were no positive articles about migrants and refugees or those that problematized hate narratives of politicians, while racist and xenophobic stances identified in comments sections point to a worrying trend.

---

2   *Resilience group with information for and about people on the move, and solidarity network in BiH and the Balkans/ 3,700 members. See: https://www.facebook.com/groups/14446988266984/ permalink/550123645701604*

3.   JOURNALISTS AS TARGETS OF HATE

Journalists in BiH face threats, pressure and harassment, but the persecution of these attacks has been inefficient. In, 2019, the Association of B&H Journalists registered 56 cases involving media professionals, including pressure, verbal and physical attacks, and death threats, while during 2020, 29 new cases were recorded (Probić, 2020). A high number of lawsuits have also been filed against journalists, particularly by politicians, directors of public companies and institutions and recently, representatives of the judiciary.[3] Journalists who criticize their own ethno-national parties and narratives, such as Dragan Bursać and Štefica Galić, have been particularly under attack, receiving death threats and insults from users on social networks (Jukić-Mujkić, 2019b; Jukić-Mujkić, 2020). Online harassment has been on the rise in recent years; the targets have been particularly female media professionals (Sokol, 2019), while leading politicians have also been the sources of insults and attacks on journalists. Only media organizations voice their concerns and protests against these narratives, while in the last two years, there has been a rise among the public of those who believe that violence against journalists is justified (in 2018 7%, in 2019 21%, and in 2020 19%) (BH Novinari, 2020). Some media outlets also selectively portray those critical towards the ruling parties or ethno-national narratives, which is particularly visible in the case of *RTRS* and the media close to the SNSD party in Republika Srpska (Vujatović, 2020).

> Journalists who criticize their own ethno-national parties and narratives have been particularly under attack, receiving death threats and insults from users on social networks.

In this case study, we analyze the hate campaign of the Croat media from Herzegovina, mainly web portals, towards the *N1* television journalist Nikola Vučić, who, at the end of May 2020, on his Twitter account, commenting on the news that the West-Herzegovina Canton has declared itself a "corona-free zone" sarcastically asked whether a "fascism-free zone" would be declared soon (Safejournalists, 2020). What followed were numerous threats, calls for violence, and hate speech and insults against Vučić and his family, including those that said he should be brought to "Neretva on a stake", and that he is a "halal Croat" (meaning a traitor of the Croat people who took the side of the Bosniaks). The Association of BH Journalists called on the Ministry of the Interior of the Federation of BiH and the Federal Police Administration to react and take legal action and the Sarajevo Ministry of Interior opened up an investigation. The Croat media from Herzegovina, however, issued several articles against the journalist labelling him a traitor who betrayed Croats and even his family for money and success.

The anonymous Croat news portal *Poskok.info*, known for its support to the HDZ political party and radical Croat narrative and previous backlashes against journalists, such as Štefica Galić, published an anonymous column concerning Vučić's status sarcastically recounting his father's imprisonment

---

3   *According to the Association of BH Journalists, there have been 289 active libel lawsuits against journalists filed since 2015, and 21 new lawsuits were filed in 2019 (Media.ba, 2020).*

during the war by the Army of the Republic of BiH, who ate cigarette butts and returned from prison grey-haired [16]. The journalist's father's past was also mentioned in an article published by news portal *Dnevnik.ba*, a Croat-language portal from BiH, describing the journalist as a Halal Croat [17]. In the article, a journalist, Jurija Milović, labelled Vučić a conformist who insulted 100,000 citizens of the West-Herzegovina canton and, needing affirmation, had naively succumbed to an opinion that was different than his and should apologize publicly.

The apology and sanctioning of the journalist by *N1* were demanded by other Croat online media, such as anonymous Croat portal *Vrisak.info* [18], while the news portal *Jabuka.tv* wrote that the Government of the West-Herzegovina Canton should react and sue the journalist [19]. The anonymous portal *Grude.com* published speculations about the journalist's alleged immoral reasons for leaving Mostar for Sarajevo and labelled *N1* an anti-Croat television station [20]. The portal *Bild.ba*, billed as a Croat-language portal, wrote that the journalist proclaimed not only the West-Herzegovina Canton but also the whole country as fascist [21]. The next day, *Jabuka.tv* and *Bild.ba* reported that the journalist had erased his Twitter account, and that such a scandalous declaration was not condemned by any institution or *N1* [22]. At the same time, the portal *Rama-Prozor.info* wrote that requests had been sent to media organizations and television broadcasters for their statements [23]. Articles were copy-pasted by many other Croat portals from Herzegovina and even Croatia: the article of *Dnevnik.ba* was republished by, for example, *Otvoreno.hr* [24] from Croatia, by the semi-anonymous news portal *Herzegovina.in* [25], the anonymous Herzegovinian portal *Hip.ba* [26] and even by the portal of the public radio station from Ljubuški, Radioljubuski.ba [27]. The titles of *Jabuka.tv* and *Radioljubuski.ba* contain disinformation that the journalist wished that the West-Herzegovina Canton would become fascist-free instead of corona-free, which can be interpreted in the sense that the journalist wished bad on its citizens.

The Radio Television *Herceg-Bosna* made a six-minute TV report broadcast during the news programme, with statements from N1 and Nikola Vučić who explained that he did not call the Neretva-Herzegovina Canton or Croat people fascist and apologized if he had hurt the feelings of the Croat people in BiH. However, the report failed to give a wider perspective, research or mention the death threats that the journalist had received on Twitter. Instead it selected two journalists from Herzegovina news portals *Dnevno.ba* and *Dnevnik.ba* as interlocutors who reiterated the opinion that the statement reflected the anti-Croat sentiment that exists in Sarajevo and that the journalist had succumbed to such an atmosphere [28]. Other Croat online media, such as *Poskok.info*, republished the report with a sarcastic title about the "nice gesture of the journalist", and concluded that, even though he had apologized, the journalist was not being sarcastic with the statement [29].

A part of the articles was shared on the news portals' Facebook accounts, some of which have many followers (*Poskok.info* 33,932; *Dnevnik.ba* 46,235; *Rama-Prozor.info* 24,760) and some featured the journalist's picture with a hashtag

apology *(isprika)*. Most of the comments under the articles on the portals and their Facebook accounts reflect the opinion that the journalist is a betrayer of the Croat people and a conformist who knows how to succeed in his career. They also say that the West-Herzegovina Canton is fascist-free compared to Sarajevo, and some used offensive words demanding his demission. Three articles were copy-pasted and published by one of the most read news portals in BiH from Mostar *Bljesak.info*, generating additional comments about the journalist's betrayal of his people [30].

One sarcastic statement of a journalist written on his Twitter account with which he expressed his criticism towards the governing structures of the West-Herzegovina Canton turned into a backlash and a media campaign against him. Instead of problematizing attacks on journalists and elaborating on the concept of freedom of expression, the Herzegovinian media saw the journalist's statement as an attack against the Croat people and started an orchestrated campaign against him. Only some of the country's media outlets, including organizations such as Media.ba and Analiziraj.ba, reported about the attacks, while, for many, this topic was not of interest (for example, *Klix.ba* or *RTRS*) and public figures did not condemn the threats.

HATE NARRATIVES AGAINST JOURNALISTS
Table 3

MAIN NARRATIVE	Journalists are enemies of their own people.
SUB-NARRATIVES	Journalists are conformists and would do anything for their careers, even betray their own people and family.
	Journalists cannot be trusted.
	Journalists do not speak the truth.

This case study demonstrates the vulnerability of BiH journalists, particularly those who criticize the regimes of their own ethno-national group. The case study shows how the BiH media and the public are divided along ethno-national lines and that ethno-national sentiments are used to mobilize hate narratives that can be very dangerous and further create tensions among the public and hatred towards particular groups.

4. POLITICAL OPPOSITION AS VICTIMS OF BIASED REPORTING

Biased media reporting favouring one ethno-national group or political party present in media content is a consequence of political and financial influences of the ruling political parties and ethno-national divisions and also the overall lack of professionalism in the media (Sokol, 2020). Through financing and ownership patterns, many public and private media are under the influence of political parties, mostly visible in the favourable reporting and lack of criticism. In these media outlets, political opposition, political parties of other ethno-national groups and voices critical of the ruling structures, such as non-governmental organizations or journalists, are often portrayed in a negative light (Vujatović, 2020).

Instead of problematizing attacks on journalists and elaborating on the concept of freedom of expression, the Herzegovinian media saw the journalist's statement as an attack against the Croat people and started an orchestrated campaign against him.

In this case study, we will analyze the reporting of the mainstream media in the RS when the RS Minister of Interior Dragan Lukač, a member of the ruling SNSD party, physically assaulted the opposition MP Draško Stanivuković in the RS Assembly on 23 December 2019. The special session on the BiH reform programme of the Assembly was marked by constant remarks and interruptions from opposition MPs and verbal clashes between the ruling and the opposition party. It culminated during Lukač's speech, which at one point addressed Stanivuković and told him not to bring the NATO flag that he had been carrying in the Assembly. Lukač also invited Stanivuković to approach him and see how he would end up if he continued to carry the NATO flag, after which he hit Stanivuković (Cvijetićanin, 2019; Vuković, 2019).

The RS mainstream media described the incident as a result of constant provocations of the opposition, portraying their members as provocative, dangerous, and unstable with the aim to provoke riots and cause instability in the RS. The media also published specific disinformation, such as that Lukač had to push away Stanivuković for his own safety and failed to include statements of the opposition.

On the evening of 23 December, *Rrts.tv* published four articles related to the incident. In one article, the event is described as a result of constant provocations of the opposition MP who walked around with NATO flags provoking the Serb member of the BiH Presidency Milorad Dodik and the Prime Minister of the RS, Radovan Višković, and irritated the Minister of Interior to such an extent that he had to push him [31]. The article did not mention Lukač's insults and the fact that he hit him, and did not include other voices and statements of the opposition, other than Lukač's statements in which he, among other things, compared the opposition's behaviour to the dancing of American Indians, full of noise, howling and throbbing. In another article, more of Lukač's statements were published, in which he said that what had happened in the Assembly was a circus and that he had been forced to push Stanivuković for his own safety, comparing the behaviour of the opposition to that of football fans [32].

The next day, 21 articles about the incident were published on *Rtrs. tv* with statements of different politicians, experts and veterans' associations, who condemned the opposition's behaviour and blamed the management of the Assembly that failed to punish their behaviour [33]. The day started with Dodik's statements about the opposition's plan to demolish the Assembly and the RS [34] and continued with statements about the savage and primitive behaviour of the opposition [35] and how the incident had been staged to pave the way for protests [36]. *Rtrs.tv* also published an interview from the Srna News Agency with a political analyst from Belgrade, who said that the strategy of provocation of the opposition was aimed at discrediting the Government of the RS and presenting it as violent and non-democratic and that such activities were usually supported by the West [37]. Veterans' associations condemned the behaviour of the opposition, whom they described as the sons of war profiteers who were not involved in the defence of the RS and gave their support to the war hero Dragan Lukač [38].

> The RS mainstream media described the incident as a result of constant provocations of the opposition, portraying their members as provocative, dangerous, and unstable with the aim to provoke riots and cause instability in the RS.

Similar articles were published and republished by other mainstream media of the RS, namely the public News Agency Srna and the private television station ATV. On 23 and 24 December *Atvbl.com* and *Srna.rs* published around 12 articles each about the incident, presenting only one side of the story and leaving aside criticism of the actions of Dragan Lukač. *Srna.rs* even published disinformation that Stanivuković had thrown papers at Lukač, which was the other way round [39]. In contrast, *Atvbl.com* published false statements made by Lukač, who said that Stanivuković had pushed his microphone and prevented him from speaking, which did not happen [40].

The articles published on ATV's Facebook account had numerous comments and engagements,[4] which either condemn the behaviour of the opposition or Lukač and some even point to the fake portrayal of the event by the media. Many comments, however, congratulate and support Lukač for his assault on Stanivuković and describe the opposition MP as a foreign mercenary, the son of a war profiteer and, in some instances, as a mentally ill person.

---

4   *CrowdTangle does not work on the RTRS news portal, while the Srna News Agency does not have social media accounts.*

HATE NARRATIVES AGAINST THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION
Table 4

MAIN NARRATIVE	Political opponents are working against the Government.
SUB-NARRATIVES	Political opponents are dangerous, primitive and unstable.
	They aim to create disorder, destabilize the Government and pave the way for protests.
	Political opponents are mentally ill.
	Political opponents are sons of war profiteers.
	Political opponents did not defend their own people during the war in BiH.
	Political opponents are mercenaries of foreign countries and organizations.

This case study attests to the ruling political parties' influence on the mainstream media, including public service broadcasters, in BiH, which is most visible in the case of RTRS. The mainstream media in the RS under the influence of SNSD depicted the Lukač-Stanivuković incident in a biased and farcical way, failing to include opposition voices, using disinformation and the statements of politicians, war veterans' associations and even political experts who supported their version of the incident. Even though some readers in the comments sections criticized such reporting, many supported it, which attests that it can be dangerous, influence and divide the public and thwart democratic processes in BiH.

The mainstream media in the RS under the influence of SNSD depicted the Lukač-Stanivuković incident in a biased and farcical way, failing to include opposition voices, using disinformation and the statements of politicians, war veterans' associations and even political experts who supported their version of the incident.

5. HATE SPEECH TOWARDS JEWS

Within the consociational political system that rests upon the notion of the three constituent peoples—Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats—and within constant tensions between the three ethno-national groups, minorities in BiH are largely marginalized. The seventeen officially recognized minorities in BIH (including Jews and Roma) cannot run for the Presidency or the House of Peoples (one of the two chambers of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH), even though the European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2009 that these exclusions put BiH in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. However, necessary reforms to the electoral system have yet to be implemented (Council of Europe, 2019).

Minorities are targets of disinformation in the media as well as hate speech in comments sections.

Media reports about minority groups are occasional, mostly connected with certain dates or events. Research by the Communications Regulatory Agency showed that content intended for, or dedicated to, minorities and vulnerable groups—and adapted for persons with disabilities—is extremely underrepresented in television and radio programmes in BiH (CRA, 2019). Minorities, as shown by recent research of Raskrinkavanje (Cvijetićanin, 2020), are targets of disinformation in the media as well as hate speech in comments sections. These comments are mostly exchanged between ethno-national groups, Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, but also target migrants, women, LGBTI+ and Roma communities (Aktek, 2018).

In this case study, we will present the findings on hate narratives towards the Jews in user-generated content of online media and their Facebook accounts. Even though it is often noted that antisemitism is not present in BiH, small-scale research of comments on some of the most popular news portals in BiH can demonstrate that hate narratives targeting Jews are present among the public and are not removed by editorial teams. At the end of January 2020, the media in BiH published articles in relation to International Holocaust Remembrance Day, held on 27 January. *Klix.ba* published seven articles dedicated to the event, including information about the commemorative academy held in the Jewish Municipality in Sarajevo dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust and statements of the president of the Jewish community in BiH, Jakob Finci [41]. *Vijesti.ba* published 15 articles, including interviews with historians [42], statements of the members of the Presidency Dodik [43] and Džaferović [44] and Oslobođenje 7 articles, including commemorations in other countries. Although the articles are written in a non-biased way, mostly containing brief information about commemorations, some historical facts and statements from different personalities, comments on the Facebook accounts of the selected media and the online portals contain hate narratives and prejudices against Jews. One article about the Holocaust being the biggest stain on human consciousness generated many hate comments on the Facebook account of *Vijesti.ba*, including calls that Hitler should come back and repeat what he did during the Second World War [45]. Some of

Even though it is often noted that antisemitism is not present in BiH, small-scale research of comments on some of the most popular news portals in BiH can demonstrate that hate narratives targeting Jews are present among the public and are not removed by editorial teams.

the comments include insults and offensive words, exhibit prejudices towards Jews as people controlling the world, who are hypocritical and cunning and downgrade the Holocaust by comparing it to the occupation of Palestine. Hate narratives are mostly expressions of hatred towards Jews for the actions of the state of Israel and the occupation of Palestine, but in some cases, they were directed towards the local Jewish population and its representative, Jakob Finci. They reflect stereotypes towards Jews, the notion of collective responsibility for the actions of individuals or a state, and point to a worrying trend of antisemitism among the BiH public which, so far, has not been addressed.

HATE NARRATIVES TOWARDS JEWS
Table 5

MAIN NARRATIVE	Jews deserved the Holocaust.
SUB-NARRATIVES	Jews deserve the Holocaust because of the actions of Israel towards Palestinians.
	Jews are cunning and hypocritical.
	Jews control the world.

6. CONCLUSION

The case studies demonstrate that the mainstream media and the leading politicians in the country are one of the primary sources and disseminators of hate narratives towards the selected target groups, particularly towards migrants and refugees and the political opposition. Hate narratives also stem from user-generated content, particularly towards journalists and minorities, in this case Jews. Mostly, these hate narratives are not isolated instances of specific individuals but results of orchestrated campaigns that use different methods, such as biased reporting, disinformation and spread of fear. Hate narratives towards migrants and refugees, political opposition and journalists are mostly constructed based on portraying the targeted groups as threats to the country's stability and targeting the emotions of security, fear and ethno-national sentiments. Such sentiments are very powerful in the country where fear of political instability and the endangerment of one's own ethno-national group have constantly been present.

Hate narratives are not isolated instances of specific individuals but results of orchestrated campaigns that use different methods, such as biased reporting, disinformation and spread of fear.

The efforts of civil society and (self)regulatory bodies against these practices have been limited. The Regulatory Agency for Communication has, for example, fined RTRS multiple times. However, its biased reporting favouring the ruling party SNSD has not changed, while the decisions of the self-regulatory body about the breaches of professional codes of online media, including about migrants and refugees, has not yielded results. Voices that criticize hate narratives in the media are marginal and connected to civil society organizations, and there have not been any efforts from politicians, public figures or representatives of institutions to condemn and prevent such narratives. The efforts of online media to remove comments containing hate speech have been minimal.

Voices that criticize hate narratives in the media are marginal and connected to civil society organizations, and there have not been any efforts from politicians, public figures or representatives of institutions to condemn and prevent such narratives.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

• Journalists should be sensitized to diversity and marginalized groups in their course of formal and informal education and receive training courses on hate speech, particularly how to deal with politicians' problematic statements in their reports and training courses on disinformation and verification of information.

• Journalists and editors should be encouraged to investigate and publish reports about hate narratives in the media, problematize hate narratives of the leading politicians, write inclusive reports about the position of minorities and other marginalized groups in society and provide critical stance towards hate narratives of politicians and public figures.

• Online media should adopt rules for the moderation of their comments, particularly regarding hate speech. They should undertake training courses on the regulation of comments in users' sections, organized by civil society organizations and funded from the public budgets and foreign donors. They should receive training on how to report hate speech to the police.

• Civil society organizations should regularly monitor the media and report disinformation, propaganda and hate speech to the self(regulator) or other institutions and organizations. They should organize press conferences and issue reports and statements about the condemnation of hate speech and biased media reporting. They should receive financial and other support from governments and foreign donors.

• The Communications Regulatory Agency and the Press Council should regularly monitor media content and take action when they detect breaches of professional norms, disinformation, hate speech and biased media reporting. They should organize press conferences and issue reports and statements about the condemnation of hate speech and biased media reporting.

• Criminal laws should be amended to include hate speech with a precise definition. A broader definition of hate speech should be considered which, in addition to "incitement to hatred", would include the spread of negative stereotypes and stigmatization.

• Prosecutor's offices should open and prosecute cases of hate speech in the online media and online media platforms and those made by politicians and public figures. Information about these cases should be punished proactively.

• Judges and prosecutors should be capacitated and trained to process online hate speech in particular.

• Media and information literacy should be strengthened through education, the media and civil society organizations. Education and media reports should include developing skills to detect and report disinformation, hate speech, hate narratives and biased media reporting.

Literature and sources

Adilagić, R. (2019). Od viktimizacije do demonizacije: *Gdje je istina? Istraživanje o načinima izvještavanja medija o migrantima i izbjeglicama.* Udruženje BH. novinari. https://bhnovinari.ba/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/od_viktimizacije_do_demonizacije_gdje_je_istina_BHN_feb_2019.pdf

Ahmetašević, N. (2019). *Mediji, političari i migranti. Jezik mržnje umjesto solidarnosti.* Media.ba https://www.media.ba/bs/mediametar/mediji-politicari-i-migranti-jezik-mrznje-umjesto-solidarnosti

Aktek. (2018). *Radicalisation in Flux: Unpacking the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism (Bosnia and Herzegovina).* Unpublished. Available for reference.

Buljubašić. B. (2019). *Izvještavanje o migrantskoj i izbjegličkoj krizi u BiH: Insinuacije, rasizam i ksenofobija.* Media.ba. https://www.media.ba/bs/magazin/izvjestavanje-o-migrantskoj-i-izbjeglickoj-krizi-u-bih-insinuacije-rasizam-i-ksenofobija

Cvijetićanin, T. (2020). *Preko margine: Dezinformacije o marginaliziranim grupama u bh. medijima.* Udruženje Zašto ne? https://zastone.ba/app/uploads/2020/10/Preko-margine_Istra%C5%BEivanje.pdf

Cvijetićanin, T. (2019). *Kako su RTRS, SRNA i ATV vidjeli incident u Narodnoj skupštini RS.* Raskrinkavanje. https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/kako-su-rtrs-srna-i-atv-vidjeli-incident-u-narodnoj-skupstini-rs

CRA. *Analiza dječijih i obrazovnih programa, programa koji su namijenjeni ili se bave manjinama i ranjivim grupama stanovništva, te programa prilagođenih osobama sa invaliditetom u audiovizuelnim medijskim uslugama i medijskim uslugama radija u Bosni i Hercegovini.*

IOM. *Migration Response.* https://bih.iom.int/iom-migration-response

Jukić-Mujkić, E. (2019a). *Dokumentarni film patka.* Media.ba. https://www.media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/video-dokumentarni-film-patka

Jukić-Mujkić, E. (2019b). *Štefica Galić: Kako da me brane oni koji me napadaju.* Media.ba. https://www.media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/stefica-galic-kako-da-me-stite-oni-koji-me-napadaju

Jukić-Mujkić, E. (2020). *Bursać: Prijetnje više ne prijavljujem.* Media.ba. https://media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/bursac-prijetnje-vise-ne-prijavljujem

Media.ba. (2020). *U BiH aktivno 289 tužbi za klevetu protiv novinara i medija.* https://media.ba/bs/vijesti-i-dogadaji-vijesti/u-bih-aktivno-289-tuzbi-za-klevetu-protiv-novinara-i-medija

Mrkić-Radević, B. (2020). *Mediji potiču mržnju prema migrantima (VIDEO): Hoće li ministar sigurnosti BiH preuzeti odgovornost?* Zurnal.info. https://zurnal. info/novost/23007/hoce-li-ministar-sigurnosti-bih-preuzeti-odgovornost-za-posljedice

Pobrić, N. (2020). *Istrage i procesuiranje napada na novinare u BiH.* BH. novinari. https://bhnovinari.ba/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Istrage-i-procesuiranje-napada-na-novinare-u-BiH.pdf

Safejournalists.net. (2020). *BH Journalists: Condemnation of threats against Nikola Vučić, N1 TV journalist, for posting on Twitter.* https://safejournalists. net/bh-journalists-condemnation-of-threats-against-nikola-vucic-n1-tv-journalist-for-posting-on-twitter/

Sokol, A. (2018). *Online napadi na novinarke: Uvrede, psovke i prijetnje smrću.* Media.ba https://www.media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/online-napadi-na-novinarke-u-bih-psovke-uvrede-i-prijetnje-smrcu

Sokol, A. (2020). *Propaganda, Disinformation and Hate Models of Media and Communication in BiH.* SEENPM, Peace Institute and Foundation Mediacentar Sarajevo. https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Research-publication-1-BiH-ENG.pdf

Udruženje BH novinari (2020). *Medijske slobode u BiH 2020. Usporedni izvještaj 2014-2020.* https://bhnovinari.ba/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/sloboda-medija-u-BiH-2020.pdf

Vujatović. Đ. (2020). *Mediji i kultura straha u Republici Srpskoj: Godine obojenih revolucija.* Media.ba. https://www.media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/mediji-i-kultura-straha-u-republici-srpskoj-godine-obojenih-revolucija.

Vuković, U. (2019). *BHRT1: kako je napad postao ravnopravni obračun.* Analiziraj.ba. https://analiziraj.ba/2019/12/31/bht1-i-ftv-interpretacije-protiv-cinjenica/

ANALYZED ARTICLES:

[1] S. Kurt. "Dramatično u Sarajevu: Migranti tuku i pljačkaju". 6 May 2018. Avaz.ba. https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/375453/dramaticno-u-centru-sarajeva-migranti-tuku-i-pljackaju

[2] Avaz.ba. "Radončić za O kanal: Balast ilegalnih migranata moramo skinuti sebi sa vrata i deložirati ih iz BiH". 20.4.2020. https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/564407/radoncic-za-o-kanal-balast-ilegalnih-migranata-moramo-skinuti-sebi-sa-vrata-i-delozirati-ih-iz-bih

[3] M. Aš. "Ujić za Avaz: Potpisujemo migrante". 23 April 2020. Avaz.ba. https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/565075/ujic-za-avaz-popisujemo-migrante

[4] M. Ašćić. "Milorad Dodik: Migrante koji su ilegalno ušli u BiH treba odmah izbaciti". 22 April 2020. Avaz.ba. https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/564821/milorad-dodik-migrante-koji-su-ilegalno-usli-u-bih-treba-odmah-izbaciti

[5] M. Aš. "Migranti u USK lani počinili 205 krivičnih djela, policija zabilježila 1.500 intervencija". 27 April 2020. Avaz.ba. https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/566108/migranti-u-usk-lani-pocinili-205-krivicnih-djela-policija-zabiljezila-1-500-intervencija

[6] Avaz. ba. "Pogledajte koga štite Džaferović i Turkovićka". 27 April 2020. https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/565960/pogledajte-koga-stite-dzaferovic-i-turkovicka

[7] Avaz.ba. Migranti stigli u kamp u pratnji policije. 21 April 2020. https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/564514/migranti-stigli-u-kamp-u-pratnji-policije

[8] Facebook group Želim da se pitam. https://www.facebook.com/%C5%BDELIM-DA-SE-PITAM-Migranti-1912524745715055/

[9] Nezavisne. "Radončić: Deportovaćemo migrante, među njima ima i terorista spavača". Rrts.tv. 23 April 2020. https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=380673

[10] RTRS. "Radončić: Migranti, koji kriju identitet, treba da idu u zatvor". 23 April 2020. https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=380715

[11] RTRS. "Prvih 120 migranata useljeno u novoformirani kamp u srpskom selu Lipa". 21 April 2020. https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=380372

[12] SRNA. "Migrantima u Lipi sve obezbijeđeno za mjesec dana, srpskim povratnicima ni za 25 godina". 20 April 2020. Rtrs.tv. https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=380148.

[13] I.P. "Radončić o problemu Pakistana: Džaferović favorizira migrante, a ne državljane BiH". 24.4.2020. Klix.ba. https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/radoncic-o-problemu-pakistana-dzaferovic-favorizira-migrante-a-ne-drzavljane-bih/200424178

[14] Srpska.info. "Životić o Radončićevom PLANU: Slanjem migranata u zatvor BiH bi postala RASADNIK EKSTREMISTA". 27 April 2020. Antimigrant.ba. https://antimigrant.ba/zivotic-o-radoncicevom-planu-slanjem-migranata-u-zatvor-bih-bi-postala-rasadnik-ekstremista/

[15] USN.co.ba. "Ćemalović: 'Migranti sa kožnim oboljenjima kojih ima mnogo će biti posebno tretirani' (VIDEO)". 21 April 2020. https://usn.co.ba/izdvojeno/cemalovic-migranti-sa-koznim-oboljenjima-kojih-ima-mnogo-ce-biti-posebno-tretirani-video/173909/

[16] Poskok.info. "LIJEPA GESTA NOVINARA N1 TV: Smatra da je ZapadnoHercegovski kanton najbliži "fascism-free" zoni".
27 May 2020. https://poskok.info/lijepa-gesta-novinara-n1-tv-smatra-da-je-zapadnohercegovski-kanton-najblizi-fascism-free-zoni/

[17] J. Milović. "Sarajevska škola za halal-Hrvate ima novo zaštitno lice - Mostarac Nikola Vučić zna sve o hercegovačkim fašistima". 28 May 2020. Dnevnik.ba. https://www.dnevnik.ba/kolumne/sarajevska-skola-za-halal-hrvate-ima-novo-zastitno-lice-mostarac-nikola-vucic-zna-sve-o

[18] Vrisak.info. "Mi nismo fašisti! Tražimo javnu ispriku od Nikole Vučića i N1 televizije! 28 May 2020. https://www.vrisak.info/kolumne/mi-nismo-fasisti-trazimo-javnu-ispriku-od-nikole-vucica-i-n1-televizije/

[19] Jabuka. tv. "Novinar N1 zaželio da ŽZH umjesto 'korona-free' bude 'fascism-free' zona". 27 May 2020. https://www.jabuka.tv/novinar-n1-zazelio-da-zzh-umjesto-korona-free-bude-fascism-free-zona/

[20] Grude. com. "Novinar sumnjivog morala FAŠISTIČKE N1 VRIJEĐAO ŠIROKI, GRUDE, LJUBUŠKI I POSUŠJE". 28 May 2020. https://www.grude.com/clanak/?i=185299&novinar-sumnjivog-morala-fasisticke-n1-vrijedjao-siroki-grude-ljubuski-i-posusje

[21] Bild.ba. "Za sarajevskog novinara Županija Zapadnohercegovačka je fašistička". 27 May 2020. https://www.bild.ba/za-sarajevskog-novinara-zupanija-zapadnohercegovacka-je-fasisticka/

[22] Jabuka.tv. "Novinar N1 televizije Nikola Vučić, koji je ŽZH prozvao fašističkom, izbrisao Twitter profil". 28 May 2020. https://www.rama-prozor.info/clanak/jos-jedno-plitko-igranje-s-fasizmom/56159

[23] Rama-prozor.info. "Još jedno plitko igranje s fašizmom". 28 May 2020. https://www.rama-prozor.info/clanak/jos-jedno-plitko-igranje-s-fasizmom/56159

[24] Otvoreno.info. "Novinar koji je uvrijedio 100 000 stanovnika: Sugrađane direktno i javno etiketirao fašistima". 28 May 2020. https://otvoreno.hr/eu-i-svijet/novinar-koji-je-uvrijedio-100-000-stanovnika-sugradane-direktno-i-javno-etiketirao-fasistima/290022. "

[25] Jabuka.tv. "Novinar N1 televizije Nikola Vučić, koji je ŽZH prozvao fašističkom, izbrisao Twitter profil". 28 May 2020. Hercegovina.in. https://hercegovina.in/novinar-n1-televizije-nikola-vucic-koji-je-zzh-prozvao-fasistickom-izbrisao-twitter-profil/

[26] Hip.ba. "Novinar N1 televizije Nikola Vučić, koji je ŽZH prozvao fašističkom, izbrisao Twitter profil". 28 May 2020. https://hip.ba/2020/05/28/novinar-n1-televizije-nikola-vucic-koji-je-zzh-prozvao-fasistickom-izbrisao-twitter-profil/

[27] Radio Ljubuški. "Novinar N1 zaželio da ŽŽH umjesto 'korona-free' bude 'fascism-free' zona". 27 May 2020. http://www.radioljubuski.ba/svastaras/item/61342-novinar-n1-zazelio-da-zzh-umjesto-korona-free-bude-fascism-free-zona.html

[28] Radio-televizija Herceg-Bosne. 'RTV HB: Upotreba riječi fašizam u "šali" za zapadnu Hercegovinu'. 29 May 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5shCGjsUKuk&feature=emb_title

[29] Poskok.info. "OPET LIJEPA GESTA: Novinar N1 ispričao se putemTV HercegBosne". 31 May 2020. https://poskok.info/opet-lijepa-gesta-novinar-n1-ispricao-se-putemtv-hercegbosne/

[30] Bljesak.info. "Vučić o svom twittu: Nisam naveo da je ZHŽ fašistički". 20 May 2020. Facebook thread: https://www.facebook.com/bljesak.info/posts/10158278442882768

[31] RTRS. "Stanivuković nasrtao na zvaničnike - nasrnuo i na ministra Lukača". 23 September 2019. https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=363372

[32] RTRS. "Lukač: Nezapamćen cirkus, Stanivuković NATO promoter (VIDEO)". 23 December 2019. https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=363373.

[33] SRNA. "Čubrilović: Sačuvali smo zakonodavnu funkciju Parlamenta". 24 December 2019. https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=363467

[34] RTRS. "Dodik: Opozicija ruši Narodnu skupštinu jer želi da sruši Srpsku (VIDEO)". 24 December 2019. https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=363388, https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=363389

[35] RTRS. "Incidenti u Parlamentu Srpske, kritike skupštinskom rukovodstvu". 24 December 2019. https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=363420

[36] SRNA. "Žunić: Ponašanje na sjednici Parlamenta uvod u scenario protesta". 24 December 2019. Rtrs.tv. https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=363437

[37] RTRS. "Radun: Opozicija strategijom provokacije želi da diskredituje vlast". 24 December 2020. https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=363455

[38] RTRS. "Prekinuti cirkus sinova ratnih profitera; Podrška saborcu Draganu Lukaču". 24 December 2020. https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=363492

[39] SRNA. "Stanivuković nastavlja sa provokacijama". 23 December 2020. http://www.srna.rs/novosti1/748739/stanivukovic-nastavlja-sa-provokacijama.htm

[40] ATV. "Lukač: Skupština nije počela kako treba, opozicija se nije ponašala primjereno". 24 December 2019. https://www.atvbl.com/vijesti/republika-srpska/lukac-skupstina-nije-pocela-kako-treba-opozicija-se-nije-ponasala

[41] Fena. "Finci: Nije dovoljno sjećati se holokausta samo jedan od 365 dana u godini". 27 January 2020. Klix.ba. https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/finci-nije-dovoljno-sjecati-se-holokausta-samo-jedan-od-365-dana-u-godini/200127153

[42] Vijest.ba. "Kamberović o Holokaustu: U podlozi totalnog zla bila je mržnja". 27 January 2020. https://vijesti.ba/clanak/477187/kamberovic-o-holokaustu-u-podlozi-totalnog-zla-bila-je-mrznja

[43] Vijesti.ba/Srna. "Dodik o Holokaustu: Da se nigdje i nikome više ne ponovi takvo zlo". 27 January 2020. https://vijesti.ba/clanak/477095/dodik-o-holokaustu-da-se-nigdje-i-nikome-vise-ne-ponovi-takvo-zlo

[44] Vijest.ba. "Džaferović na godišnjici oslobođenja Auschwitza: Suprotstaviti se idelogijama zla". 27 January 2020. https://vijesti.ba/clanak/477182/dzaferovic-na-godisnjici-oslobodjenja-auschwitza-suprotstaviti-se-idelogijama-zla

[45] Vijesti.ba/AA. "Holokaust najveća mrlja na savjesti čovječanstva." 27 January 2020. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/Vijesti.ba/posts/2668456303190231?comment_id=2669274609775067

About the author

Anida Sokol is a researcher and coordinator of research projects at Mediacentar Sarajevo. She has a master degree in English Language and Literature from the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo and a PhD in History of Europe, which she received as a Basileus grant holder at the Faculty of Political Science, University Sapienza in Rome, where she worked as a research fellow. She has published papers on media, memory and politics of BIH, including in Politička misao, Palgrave Macmillan and Mediacentar Sarajevo. She works as a lecturer at the International Burch University in Sarajevo and Sarajevo School of Science and Technology, where she teaches Politics and the Media and Political Communication.

ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES CONTAINING HATE SPEECH AND DISINFORMATION

Milica Bogdanović

RESILIENCE : For Media Free of Hate and Disinformation

ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES CONTAINING HATE SPEECH AND DISINFORMATION

MONTENEGRO

CONTENTS

ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES CONTAINING HATE SPEECH AND DISINFORMATION

Milica Bogdanović

1.   INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, with a lack of adequate self-regulation and an unregulated market, Montenegro has been facing a visible trend of a growing presence of offensive speech in the public space, which frequently escalates into hate speech, as well as the spread of disinformation and propaganda.

The previous research, carried out by the South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM), focused on what channels are used for spreading hate speech, disinformation and propaganda in Montenegro and what the political and economic aspects of those different types of media and communication practices were.

The conclusions of the research carried out in seven Western Balkan countries and Turkey are based on publicly accessible relevant research of international and domestic institutions and organizations, regulatory authorities' decisions and the findings of fact-checking platforms. They are also based on interviews with respondents with journalistic and editorial experience or civil activists with many years of media experience.

The main conclusions of the analysis carried out by the Montenegro Media Institute in the period between May and July 2020 are that hate speech, disinformation and propaganda were created and released through media operating in the region, are read in Montenegro and the contents of which are carried by certain online media in Montenegro, thus contributing to the wide distribution of unprofessional releases. These types of contents are also spread via certain right-leaning online media in Montenegro, established/edited by individuals recognized as anti-NATO activists associated with opposition parties and via pages on social networks that continuously spread insults and hate speech against public figures in Montenegro. It is not known what structures/organizations are behind them and fund them (Bogdanovic, 2016).

Having in mind that regional media releasing disinformation, hate speech and propaganda, but also Montenegrin right-leaning media, have some of the most visited websites in Montenegro and that these types of media and communication practices intensify the releasing of unprofessional content in times of political and social crisis, their impact on forming the public opinion is undeniable.

92

Therefore, the SEENPM decided to go a step further, through the EU-funded RESILIENCE – For Media Free of Hate and Disinformation project, and research the types of hate-speech-containing narratives[1], which are disseminated in domestic media. During the search for narratives containing hate speech, those containing elements of hate speech, disinformation and propaganda were registered, or those that are not necessarily false but are present in reporting on specific target groups.

The purpose of this study is to provide a credible analysis to institutions, civil society organizations, the media community and citizens, to serve as a basis for further activities in building social resilience to these occurrences.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to provide an answer to the question of what the main patterns and examples of narratives containing hate speech and disinformation released in Montenegrin media and on Facebook are, our research did the following:

1. Based on the previous research carried out in seven countries of the Western Balkans and in Turkey, two target groups have been identified on the regional level—migrants and journalists—as well as a series of narratives containing hate speech and disinformation referring to these two target groups (for example, "migrants are potential terrorists", "migrants are a danger to public health, they are infected with the coronavirus, they are dirty", "journalists are foreign mercenaries, liars", etc.). On a regional level, another target group was identified—political opposition—and narratives referring to it (for example, "opposition members are traitors", "opposition members are not working in the best interest of society", etc.).

2. Having in mind current political and social circumstances, we analyzed the political opposition target group in Montenegro in the context of the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion. Thus, political opposition and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) were selected as the third target group, as opponents to the Law.

3. On the national level, depending on the specific characteristics of the country, researchers had the option of identifying additional target groups and analyzing narratives referring to them. In order to gain detailed knowledge of how narratives containing hate speech are spread, in the case of reporting on

---

1   The term "narrative", used colloquially, denotes a "story" ("narration", translated as "story, storytelling"). In its current meaning, when used in journalism, narrative also denotes contents and a description of the chronology of a story, that is, a report on an event being observed. Thus, narrative is the way in which some media carry information on an event, particular situation, topic or personality. Therefore, it is often the case that information dominating a narrative does not have to be false or inaccurate. During the creation of a narrative, the media can use different kinds of manipulation or disregard the basic principles of professional reporting – from sensationalist or tabloid-like reporting, through releasing unchecked information, leaving out important bits of information, uncritical releasing of many statements, partial and one-sided reporting, to deliberate guiding readers to the desired conclusion. Source: Bogdanović, Milica, Kovačević, Milica, Narrative Analysis – Powerful Russian Weapon, CDT, 2019. Available at: https://bit.ly/2B4GYVQ. Accessed 24 September 2020

93

the Law on Freedom of Religion, our research team chose the Government of Montenegro and other proponents of the new Law as the fourth target group and analyzed narratives that referred to them. The intention was to obtain a more complete picture of narratives used, which both target groups were exposed to in relation to this topic.

After selecting the target groups, important cases/events associated with these four target groups were identified, which took place in the period between June 2019 and June 2020. For each target group, we chose a period of seven to 15 days, when the media reported on an important event associated with that particular target group, and analyzed the released editorial contents, accompanying comments of readers, contents released on Facebook pages and reactions of the users of this social network.

Following the relevancy criterion, contents released by three most visited Montenegrin online media[2]—the established[3] Vijesti Online, CdM and the IN4S portal, which, in previous research, was recognized as a media spreading disinformation and propaganda. Along with other online media, Facebook pages recognized in previous research as channels for spreading hate speech, disinformation and propaganda were also analyzed.

Apart from the main research question of what patterns and examples of hate speech containing narratives were, the purpose of this analysis was to find answers to the following questions for each target group and events associated with them:

• what actors and events serve as the main generators of narratives containing hate speech and disinformation?
• what are the main ideas and messages spread through media outlets and social networks about the chosen target groups?
• what are the dynamics of creating and spreading these narratives like?
• what are the reactions?
• what are the possibilities for taking preventive and additional action in the fight against the spreading of hatred and disinformation?

In the chapters that follow, we will present the analysis of the types of narratives spread in Montenegrin media and the Facebook social network about migrants, journalists, and opponents and proponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion.

---

2   *Overview of the most visited websites in Montenegro* https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/montenegro. *Accessed 24 September 2020*

3   *We define established media as those that became relevant sources of information, after an extended period of producing media contents, and forums for discussions on topics of public interest. Media with a significant following, influence and resources.*

3. CASE STUDY – MIGRANTS[4] IN MONTENEGRIN MEDIA

Although Montenegro is just a transit country on the "Balkan Route"[5], during 2019 and 2020, this topic was not in the focus of attention of established Montenegrin media outlets (Vijesti Online and CdM) and the right-leaning online media (IN4S). On a monthly level, an average of only a few of up to 20 texts addressing this topic was published by these media.

Problems associated with migrants and the migrant crisis[6] were, for the most part, reported on in established media through foreign policy sections, in which domestic media outlets carry information from regional and international news agencies. Although the titles of the released texts are mostly informative (for example, "Migrants broke through fence at Serbian-Hungarian border crossing, Hungarian policemen opened fire" [1] or "Greece is building a new fence because of migrants, instituting a moratorium on asylum seeking" [2]), it is noticeable that there are also sensationalist titles in established media outlets (for example, "Migrants at Turkish-Greek border losing hope: Left for dogs" [3] or "EU is sending troops, aircraft and ships to Greek-Turkish border" [4]). However, this is merely a way to send the message that migrants are coming from countries affected by war and in which fundamental rights are not honoured. Montenegrin established media mostly carried articles in which migrants were presented as "people in trouble needing help" [3]. However, rare examples of texts were noticed in foreign policy sections, containing narratives claiming that "migrants are aggressive and they attack the police, which is why it's necessary to place barbed wire on the borders, use tear gas and shoot at them" [1].

> Montenegrin established media mostly carried articles in which migrants were presented as "people in trouble needing help".

On the other hand, in the local context, migrants are reported on rarely and mostly in relation to an individual event, such as breaking into and burning homes in Vilusi, near Nikšić, putting up tents in the Podgorica neighbourhood of Zlatica and causing a fire in Pljevlja. The Code of Ethics of Montenegrin journalists and the assumption of innocence are immediately violated by publishing such texts as those titled "Fire in Pljevlja, most probably caused

---

4   *An overarching term, which is not defined in international law, reflecting the common, layperson's understanding of persons moving away from their usual place of residence, within their country or across international borders, temporarily or permanently, for various reasons. The term covers a certain number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons with certain types of their movement legally defined, such as migrant trafficking, as well as those whose status or ways of moving are not defined in any particular way, according to international law, such as international students. On the international level, there is no universally adopted definition of a "migrant". The current definition was developed by IOM, for its own purposes, and it is not intended to make any implications or create any new legal categories. Glossary on Migration, IOM, 2019. Available at: https://bit.ly/3d3q6gM*

5   *The Balkan Route is a term most often used to refer to the arrival of refugees from the Middle East, through the Balkans, to Europe. Deutsche Welle, glossary. Available at: https://bit.ly/3lmF7gB*

6   *Complex and often massive migration shifts and mobility patterns, caused by a crisis, which usually entail significant vulnerabilities for individuals and affected communities and generate long-term migration challenge management. A migrant crisis may be sudden or gradual, it can be caused by natural reasons or human-made, and it can happen within the borders of a country or spill over borders. Glossary on Migration, IOM, 2019. Available at: https://bit.ly/3d3q6gM*

by migrants" [5] or "Residents of Vilusi claim that migrants are breaking into homes and setting them on fire, police remain silent" [6]. The texts are based on what local residents have said, without official information from the police or the Prosecutor's Office, which would either refute or corroborate the claims that migrants were culpable of the criminal offences committed. These texts are dominated by the narrative that "migrants come from countries in which fundamental human rights are not honoured and they are barbaric", as well as that "they represent a threat to the safety of the local population". Sources of such information are frequently unnamed and unofficial.

However, in order to obtain more detailed knowledge about the narratives containing hate speech and disinformation, in line with the methodology, we carried out a separate analysis of the period from 20 November to 30 December, when a case was recorded in Montenegro of some ten persons being arrested on suspicion of being involved in smuggling migrants into Bosnia and Herzegovina [7]. We analyzed the contents released on the Vijesti Online, CdM and IN4S portals, and the main conclusions are as follows:

3.1. There is no hate speech in the editorial content of established media

In the period under review, we did not register the presence of narratives containing hate speech in the editorial content of established media. In this case, the media predominantly carried official information released by the police and announcements containing no details on the victims of human trafficking. During this period, texts were released by CdM conveying the main message that Montenegro has "passed the test" when it comes to handling the migrant issue and that such an approach should apply in the case of vulnerable groups [8]. The Vijesti Online portal published a series of investigative texts in that period after Vijesti's reporters spent three days in the Montenegrin border zone with migrants from Morocco, Afghanistan, Iran and Syria and witnessed their attempts to cross into neighbouring Bosnia andHerzegovina illegally [9]. The texts were based on the testimonies of migrants and official announcements of domestic and international institutions, and their main message is that migrants are at risk and facing inhumane living conditions. Although the series of texts contained details on attempts to make illegal border crossings, it is unknown whether the institutions took any action after publication.

3.2. Disinformation on migrants in right-leaning online media

During the period under review, the right-leaning online media outlet IN4S did not report intensively on events associated with migrants. Rare texts published by this media in the period from 20 to 30 November were taken from other media in the region. The dominant narrative claims that "migrants are dangerous and violent" [10]. While reporting on migrants in the past, this media outlet used the remarks of Dževad Galijašević, whose claims

96

have been subject to analysis by fact-checking platforms in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina on several occasions. Galijašević is known for spreading uncorroborated information and conspiracy theories with a dominant narrative claiming that "migrants are terrorists and a threat to the security of countries they come to", and that they are "an epidemiological threat" (Kovačević, 2020).

3.3.   Hatred is spread through readers' comments

In readers' comments, which are recognized as a problematic segment of online media, calls for physical violence against migrants [10] were registered as well as contents ridiculing the migrants' situation [8] and the spreading of conspiracy theories, such as the one claiming that the purpose of the arrival of migrants was the Islamization of Europe [9]. Compared to the number of comments filtered by the administrators each day in established media, however, the number of comments with unacceptable content on migrants is exceptionally low.

3.4.   Migrants rarely discussed on Facebook

Previous research highlighted the Facebook social network as a channel for spreading hate speech, disinformation and propaganda on social networks. However, during this analyzed period, our research team did not come across problematic remarks on migrants. Although there are Facebook pages and groups in the region the contents of which are directed against migrants, such practice was not registered in Montenegro. Also, we did not notice narratives containing hate speech referring to female migrants.

3.5.   Overview of detected narratives on migrants

OVERVIEW OF DETECTED NARRATIVES ON MIGRANTS

TARGET GROUP	EXAMPLE OF THE MAIN NARRATIVE	EXAMPLES OF DERIVED NARRATIVES
Migrants	Migrants are a threat to the local population.	Migrants are aggressive and they attack the police.
		Migrants are dangerous and violent.
		Migrants are terrorists and a threat to the security of countries they come to.
		Migrants are an epidemiological threat.

Although the analysis of this content showed that the issue of migrants was not in the focus of Montenegrin media, by extension, frequent deviations from professional standards have not been registered either; due to the absence of organized self-regulation, no cases of professional associations indicating individual cases of unethical reporting were recorded. During this period, we recorded individual cases of fact-checking platforms proving that information published on the IN4S portal was false.

4. CASE STUDY –
JOURNALISTS IN MONTENEGRIN MEDIA

Over 2019 and 2020, the media sector in Montenegro was marked by the arrests of journalists and editors creating and carrying fake news, on suspicion of thus causing panic and disorder. By the beginning of January, at the height of the tense atmosphere created by the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion, the FOS Media portal published a news article entitled "Members of ROSU are at Montenegro's disposal on Christmas Eve". The journalist and editor of this media outlet, Anđela Đikanović [11], was later arrested. Seven days later, the editors of right-leaning media, IN4S and Borba. me portals, Gojko Raičević and Dražen Živković, were arrested for releasing the information that an explosion had been heard from the state-owned Villa Gorica, in Podgorica [12].

While analyzing the texts published in the three most visited online media–two established (Vijesti Online and CdM) and one right-leaning (IN4S)—in the period between 5 and 15 January[7], we researched the narratives containing hate speech and disinformation referring to Montenegrin journalists. Apart from the editorial content, we also analyzed readers' comments and comments of Facebook users related to the published texts, during which we noticed the following:

4.1. Different narratives on journalists in the established media

In the editorial content of established media referring to cases of arrests of journalists and editors, we did not register narratives containing hate speech. The Vijesti Online portal was releasing announcements of institutions as well as of the attorneys representing the arrestees and numerous reactions of domestic and international organizations involved with the freedom of the media and the position of journalists. The police announcements were dominated by the message that "journalists are releasing fake news, thus causing public panic and disorder" [11], while domestic and international organizations were not denying that the journalists were releasing false information but stressed that "the reaction of the Prosecutor's Office was too harsh", that "arrests cannot be justified" [13] and that "the Government was behind the arrests of journalists" [14]. Along with this, the reactions of opposition political parties were released too, the central message of which was that "journalists are victims of state repression" [15] and that this was an "undemocratic act, unbefitting of a developed European state" [16]. Both established media published the message of the Montenegrin Ministry of

---

7   Using keywords relevant to these events, we found 104 texts published by these three analyzed media outlets related to the arrests of Đikanović, Raičević and Živković. It is noticeable that significantly more texts were published on the Vijesti Online portal about the Đikanović case (18) than on the CdM (8) and IN4S (1) web portals. In the case of arrests of Raičević and Živković, of the 68 texts found, most were published on IN4S (40) portal, followed by Vijesti Online (21) and CdM (7).

98

Foreign Affairs that "releasing disinformation was an attempt by third parties to interfere in Montenegrin internal affairs, intended to destabilize the state and disturb public order and peace" [17], which could be part of a broader narrative that "journalists are releasing content they were ordered to release".

The CdM portal also released the announcements of Darko Trifunović, who, as a security expert, said that "Raičević was falsely presenting himself as a journalist and that he was the owner of a mercenary NGO tasked with spreading shameful propaganda against Montenegro, trying to drag the Serbian Government into it all" [18]. He also said that "the release and dissemination of disinformation published by the FOS was part of the special hybrid warfare waged against Montenegro, with the Russian secret service being behind everything" [19].

4.2. Conspiracy theories in right-leaning online media

The arrest of Raičević caused the IN4S portal to start spreading conspiracy theories on who gave the order for the arrest. Raičević said it was "a conspiracy between the Prosecutor's Office, police and the judiciary, coordinated by the US Embassy" [20] and that his arrest was announced by the embassy representative Judy Kuo, when she had said previously that it was NATO that had ordered his arrest and that NATO had used forensic methods, together with analysts from Serbia, (headed by Darko Trifunović), to ascertain who was going to be arrested [20]. In a series of texts that IN4S published on this case, sources from Montenegro and the region were mostly saying that "Raičević and Živković were arrested for being Serbs" [22] and that by arresting them, the prosecution and the police wanted to "set an example to and 'discipline' disobedient opposition journalists" [23]. Also, the IN4S portal was a source of information during this period for tabloids and right-leaning media from Serbia, which continuously reported on the arrests of journalists [24].

4.3. Insults against journalists in readers' comments

In their comments on the IN4S portal, the readers predominantly supported the editor of this media outlet, but they also posted a series of insults against state officials (for example, they called President Milo Đukanović a fascist and the Montenegrin regime's fascistic, tyrant, liar…) [25]. There were individual cases of insults against media editors who were recognized as pro-government [26]. Raičević and Živković were also called "enemies of the state" [27], who "should have been arrested a long time ago" [28].

The Vijesti Online portal contains the fewest comments on the Raičević-Živković case but also about the Đikanović case. We did not register any comments containing hate speech against journalists, but we did register individual comments that are part of the "journalists are liars" [29] narrative (for example, "All journalists should be shipped off to Goli Otok. The majority of them are not objective, they write lies to attract more readers"). Information on the arrest of the two journalists was published on the web pages of the

media outlets reporting on the case, as well as on many Facebook pages with pro-Serbian or anti-NATO inclinations, where unmoderated comments were being posted further on.

4.4. The Witness of Divine Love case – insults against authors

In the period from June 2019 to July 2020 covered by this study, some other cases of insults were registered against RTCG journalists, Tanja Šuković and Snježana Rakonjac, authors of the documentary The Witness of Divine Love, on Metropolitan Bishop Amfilohije Radović. Šuković motioned for disciplinary procedures to be initiated against the then RTCG journalist Nevenka Ćirović and journalist Zoran Leković, for "humiliating and insulting her on their Facebook pages" [30]. Ćirović and Leković motioned for disciplinary procedures to be initiated against Šuković afterwards, for "violating professional standards" [30]. On his Facebook page, Leković called the documentary a "misdeed", "professionally shameful", "an ordered miscreant of a TV show, clumsily masked as a documentary" and "journalistic pornography without precedent" [31].

Information on this event was published in the established Montenegrin media Vijesti Online and CdM, where readers' comments were dominated by the narrative of "Ćirović and Leković being against the state and traitors to everything Montenegrin" [32]. On the other hand, on the IN4S portal, Šuković and Rakonjac's documentary was labelled a "shameless work", "the new RTCG's fall into nothingness" and a "fascist pamphlet", and in the comments section, a series of insults were posted by readers against the RTCG editorial [33].

4.5. Overview of detected narratives in newspapers

While analysing the content of the narratives on journalists, we recognized narratives containing elements of hate speech, disinformation and propaganda.

OVERVIEW OF DETECTED NARRATIVES IN NEWSPAPERS

TARGET GROUP	EXAMPLE OF THE MAIN NARRATIVE	EXAMPLES OF DERIVED NARRATIVES
Journalists	Journalists publish fake news.	Journalists are victims of state repression. Arrests of journalist are unjustified.
		Journalists publish what they are ordered to.
		Journalists are mercenaries working for third parties (Serbia, Russia, ANB…)
		Journalists are enemies of the state.

Professional associations and the civic sector, mostly not disputing that Đikanović, Raičević and Živković acted unprofessionally by releasing uncorroborated information, were active in reacting to the arrests of the creators and publishers of fake news, condemning the "inappropriate reaction of the state". However, we did not register additional reactions or analyses referring to the media reporting and the spreading of narratives in these cases.

5. CASE STUDY – POLITICAL OPPOSITION AND THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (SPC) – OPPONENTS OF THE LAW ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN MONTENEGRIN MEDIA

Almost a decade after Montenegro renewed its independence in a referendum, the Government decided, to regulate by law the status of religious communities by the end of 2019, through the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion. The decision led to several months of mass protests by believers of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC), with the support of several, at the time, opposition parties, over the provision of the Law stipulating that part of Church property, for which there is no proof of ownership, be signed over to the state.

In the period between 27 December 2019 and 7 January 2020, the three most visited online media – the established (Vijesti Online and CdM) and the right-leaning media (IN4S), reported intensively about these events[8]. While analyzing how these three media reported on the then opposition and the SPC, as opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion, and what narratives dominated the readers' comments on Facebook pages recognized as channels for spreading hate speech and disinformation, we concluded the following:

5.1. There is no hate speech in the editorial content of established media

We did not register any editorial content spreading hate speech in the releases on the opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion on the Vijesti Online and CdM web portals. The CdM portal was releasing party announcements, columns and remarks by sources from Montenegro and the region which were critical of the then opposition and the SPC. These remarks are dominated by the narrative claiming that the opponents of the Law (part of the then opposition and the SPC) "work against the interests of the state and the people" and that "they are traitors working for the benefit

---

8   Using keywords relevant to these events, we managed to find 284 texts published by these three analyzed media, which are related to the Law on Freedom of Religion and events in the period between 27 December 2019 and 7 January 2020. The 123 texts found on the Vijesti Online portal, on IN4s 103 and CdM 58.

101

Case Study – Political Opposition and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC)
– Opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion in Montenegro

of Serbia and Russia". Also, in interviews with respondents from the region, we registered a narrative claiming that "SPC is a parapolitical organization and that the protests were political" and that "Serbia had pretensions towards Montenegro" [34]. Furthermore, in the reporting on the protests, we registered messages stating that "Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović was propagating Svetosavlje and that he was trying to reshape the Montenegrin identity, culturally and politically" [35] and that "he only used protest marches to preserve the Church's huge financial privilege" [36]. Also, the released remarks include on by Serbian politician Čedomir Jovanović, who thinks that the "Church, like a criminal gang, was working in full capacity in both Serbian and Montenegrin societies, determined to push us into civil unrest [37] and that "Russia was directly involved in the events in Montenegro" [38].

On the other hand, significantly fewer releases against the SPC and the then opposition were registered in the Vijesti Online portal's editorial content during the analyzed period. Messages were dominated by the narrative saying that "the opponents of the Law are traitors", that "they are dragging the country back 100 years" and that "they satanize all who support the law" [39] were mostly part of the ruling party's announcements. Both ruling party and police announcements released by both established media are dominated by the narrative claiming that the "SPC is inciting violence and undermining the country's peace and stability" [40].

No texts critical towards the opponents of the Law were registered on the IN4S portal.

5.2. Opponents of the Law insulted in comments

During the analyzed period, a large number of comments were posted on all three portals. On the CdM portal, a significantly higher number of comments by readers supporting the SPC and the then opposition was registered than those advocating the new regulation. Along with texts under which there were up to 300 comments each, a low number of insults against the opponents of the adopted Law was registered (for example, citizens who participate in protest marches are called "Srbadija", Amfilohije Radović is called a "fool" and a "violent and lecherous man" [41], the SPC is called "Sveti Sava sect, heathens and warmongers" [42], and DF leaders are called "vermin, thieves and turncoats who will do anything for money" [43]. On the Vijesti Online portal, releases have been registered with more than 700 comments apiece. Nationality-based insults were detected among the readers' comments as well as profanity and mutual insults among readers. In comparison with the overall number of comments filtered through in the established media daily, however, it can be concluded that only a small portion of them were of this nature (for example, citizens attending processions are called "Srbadija, incomers, scumbags, trash" [44], DF leaders are called "members of a gang of savages, rats and riff-raff" [45], etc. We noticed a negligible amount of comments against the proponents of the SPC and opposition on the IN4S portal.

5.3. Insults for opponents of the Law on Facebook

Facebook pages which can be said, based on the contents posted on them, to share the views of the ruling parties had written about the political opposition that opposed the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion in around ten different releases, by the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020. The content on those pages is, for the most part, aimed against opposition party officials, with the predominant narrative claiming they are "traitors to the state" [46]. The content is accompanied by comments containing nationality-based insults [47]. The number of Facebook pages which, based on the content posted on them, can be described as sharing the views of the ruling parties is significantly lower, and they release significantly less content than the pages recognized for sharing the viewpoints and ideas of the predominantly right-leaning opposition parties and interest groups.

5.4. Overview of detected narratives on opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion

While analyzing the content of the narratives about the opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion, we recognized narratives containing elements of hate speech, disinformation and propaganda.

OVERVIEW OF DETECTED NARRATIVES ON OPPONENTS OF THE LAW ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION

TARGET GROUP	EXAMPLE OF THE MAIN NARRATIVE	EXAMPLES OF DERIVED NARRATIVES
Political opposition and the Serbian Orthodox Church – opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion	The political opposition and the Serbian Orthodox Church (opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion) are working against the best interest of the state of Montenegro and the people.	Opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion are dragging the country back 100 years.
		Opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion are traitors.
		Opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion are allies of Serbia and Russia, which interfere in Montenegro's internal affairs.
		Opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion incite violence and undermine peace and stability.
		The SPC is a parapolitical organization. Protests are political gatherings for the change of power.
		The SPC is defending its money and privilege.

6. CASE STUDY – THE GOVERNMENT AND OTHER PROPONENTS OF THE LAW ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN MONTENEGRIN MEDIA

The established media, which gave intensive coverage to the Law on Freedom of Religion and the subsequent events, released the viewpoints of both proponents and opponents of this regulation. While analyzing the texts we found on the Vijesti Online web portal, based on the keywords relevant for these events, we found that this media outlet was mostly releasing the views of the opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion, their announcements and the SPC's announcements of protest marches and detailed information after they took place. On the other hand, we found significantly less information on the CdM portal about the SPC's activities, while the IN4S was predominantly releasing information against the new Law, whose respondents or sources were representatives of either the SPC or the opposition parties advocating the repealing of the Law. Based on the amount of released contents that represent or promote the views and interests of one side, we can conclude that all three analyzed media outlets used their editorial space to promote of the standpoints of the sources whose content they were continually publishing.

6.1. There is no hate speech in the editorial content of established media

While analyzing the editorial contents of the established media Vijesti Online and CdM, we did not register any hate speech employed against the representatives of the Montenegrin Government, state institutions, parties, organizations and individuals who proposed or supported the Law on Freedom of Religion. However, we did notice that these media outlets not infrequently released SPC announcements in which the legislators that proposed the Law were called "godless" [48], an "anti-Church gang", a "remnant of the godless Titoist autocratic regime" [49], and "morally alienated people, steeped in their arrogant wilfulness and pride, prone to all kinds of lawlessness" [49]. Tens of released SPC announcements and remarks by its representatives, parties and organizations supporting its actions, contain the narrative claiming that "the Government of Montenegro wants to seize Church property, employing an unconstitutional law", and that "the Government of Montenegro created the malformed, anti-constitutional and discriminating Law on Freedom of Religion against the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox majority in Montenegro", as well as that it was "engaging in anti-Serbian Orthodox Church property seizures, similar to those executed by French revolutionaries in 1789" [50]. During this period, Russian official announcements were also released, dominated by the message that the Law represented "administrative pressure on the SPC in order to completely push it out of Montenegro" [51], as well as the announcements of the SPC representatives from Serbia or Russia and the standpoints of politicians from the region, such as Aleksandar Vučić and Milorad Dodik.

6.2. Inflammatory speech in the right-leaning media

While analyzing the content released by the IN4S portal, from late December to early January, we noticed that this media outlet was advocating the standpoints of the SPC by exclusively releasing content against the Law on Freedom of Religion and its proponents.

We did not register hate speech in the released editorial content dominated by remarks and announcements of the SPC, parties sharing its standpoints and respondents from church and political life from the country and Serbia. However, we did register insults and inflammatory speech additionally instigated in the unfiltered reader comments. The main narrative in those texts is that "the Government of Montenegro and President Milo Đukanović want to seize Church property, by means of the unconstitutional Law, and proclaim it state property" and that "Đukanović was an unbaptized nonbeliever". Along with the predominant announcements of SPC representatives from Montenegro, parties, organizations and individuals opposing the Law, IN4S also carried the announcements of SPC representatives from Serbia or Russia, politicians and analysts from the countries of the region supporting the SPC and its activities and labelled Đukanović's policies as "fascistic and leading towards fratricide" [52]. An example was also noticed of IN4S carrying threatening messages of the proponents of the Law telling Đukanović that he would "end up like Zoran Đinđić" [53], the former Serbian prime minister assassinated in 2003 in Belgrade. This media outlet also released a poster containing photographs of MPs voting in favour of the Law with a message that they would be expelled from the Orthodox Church [58]. Also, during the period under review, we recorded the case of the civil activist for women's rights, Ljiljana Raičević, who said in a post on Facebook that she would "deport" the SPC representative, Velibor Džomić. IN4S carried her comment under the headline "NGO activist Ljiljana Raičević requested the deportation of priest Velibor Džomić" [54] which caused the posting of a series of insulting reader comments referring to her gender, private and professional life (such as "red ustaša", "Soros's devil", "blonde", "old witch", "sexually frustrated NATO chick"). Several Facebook pages sharing the ideas and standpoints of the right-leaning media shared the text, which provoked further insults and even calls for violence and the murder of Raičević [55].

6.3. Mutual insults among readers

We have noticed that, at the time of adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion, the number of reader comments in the established online media was significantly higher compared to the number of comments on some other current topics, such as the coronavirus pandemic (Montenegrin Media Institute, 2020). The comments released by the established media, and also in the right-leaning ones, are dominated by content aimed against the Law on Freedom of Religion and its proponents and by the narrative that "the Government of Montenegro wants to seize Church property". The analyzed content gives rise to the suspicion that this kind of commenting could be

organized and coordinated by different interest groups opposed to the Law. In comparison to the number of comments released by these media outlets each day, there is a small portion containing insults or hate speech, and they mostly refer to nationality-based insults (for example, Milonegrins are like giraffes), and insults against government politicians (for example, they are raised in the spirit of deicide and fratricide). We also noticed that readers are more likely to be insulting each other than actors in one of the published texts. On average, ten times fewer reader comments were published alongside texts published by the IN4S portal than in established online media but with incomparably more nationality- and gender-based insults, disinformation and conspiracy theories (for example, Milogorian convert to Islam, anti-Serbian and anti-Christian regime, Milogorian scum, Montenegro is an Islamic state, Milo Satan, etc.).

6.4.   Hatred is also spread on Facebook

Texts dominated by the narrative saying that "Montenegrin authorities want to use the Law to seize churches and monasteries", apart from on IN4S's Facebook page, are also continuously shared on Facebook pages sharing the standpoints and ideas advocated by this media outlet (such as Ludacki Pokret Ne Damo Svetinje, Nikšić Ponosni Srpski Grad, Srpsko u Crnoj Gori, Srpska Crna Gora, Crna Gora – Srpska Sparta, etc.). These pages have, on average, from several up to around 10,000 followers, thus enabling one text created by the media outlet to reach up to 100,000 readers via some ten Facebook pages.

The Democratic Front (DF) political alliance, which is close to the Serbian Orthodox Church and opposed the adoption of the Law, has a pivotal role in instigating the spreading of insults and labelling of individuals. On its official page [56], DF posted photos, names, surnames and official e-mail addresses of MPs voting in favour of the Law. Comments that readers posted on Facebook contained personal insults against MPs, based on their nationality, religion and gender.

Since Facebook pages are one of the channels for spreading hate speech, disinformation and propaganda in Montenegro, several of them that are recognized as sources of problematic content, through which insulting speech and labelling of individuals are not infrequently spread, got involved in the campaign against the Law on Freedom of Religion. Apart from actively promoting the narrative claiming that "the Government is using the Law to seize Church property", popular Facebook pages also labelled civic activists, journalists, authors and cultural workers who criticized the SPC in public or who supported the adoption of this regulation [57] and instigated additional spreading of insults against them in their releases.

6.5. Overview of detected narratives on proponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion

By analyzing the content of the narratives on the proponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion, we recognized narratives containing elements of hate speech, disinformation and propaganda.

OVERVIEW OF DETECTED NARRATIVES ON PROPONENTS OF THE LAW ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION

TARGET GROUP	EXAMPLE OF THE MAIN NARRATIVE	EXAMPLES OF DERIVED NARRATIVES
Government and other proponents of the Law on Freedom of religion	The Government of Montenegro and Milo Đukanović want to use the unconstitutional Law to seize Church property and proclaim it the property of the state.	The Government is engaging in anti-church property seizures similar to French revolutionaries in 1789.
		The Government is carrying out an anti-Serbian project presenting Serbs in Montenegro as a destabilizing factor.
		The Government created the malformed, anti-constitutional and discriminatory Law against the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox majority in Montenegro.
		The Government made a Law compatible with the maleficence and greed of certain individuals in power.
		An anti-church gang is in power, a remnant of the godless communist regime.

This content analysis showed that this was the main topic in Montenegrin media, discussed not only by local but also regional and international actors. This was proven by the events in 2020 when the issue of the Law became the key topic of the campaign before the parliamentary elections. Regardless of the previous editorial policies of the analyzed media, there is an impression that the established media, in this case, failed to be consistent in full adherence to professional standards and provide for the released content to be continuously balanced and to give an equal presentation of both sides in the conflict in every release. In comparison to the amount of published material in which we detected inflammatory speech and nationality, religion and gender-based insults, we have noticed reactions of only certain institutions (Vijesti Online, 2020) and civil society calling for peace and tolerance. Along with this, local initiatives for fighting disinformation indicate, through their analyses, the spread of disinformation on these topics (DFC, 2020).

7. ACTIVITIES IN THE PREVENTION OF AND FIGHT AGAINST NARRATIVES CONTAINING HATE SPEECH AND DISINFORMATION IN MONTENEGRO

Although online media and communication practices employed on the Internet have been recognized for years as channels for spreading hate speech, disinformation and propaganda, the field of online media has never been regulated in Montenegro prior to the adoption of the new Law on Media[9].

In July 2020, the law defined an internet publication (portal) as a media outlet whose contents are disseminated via the Internet and which is registered in the media records kept by the Ministry of Culture. Portals will be obliged to have an impressum and provide information about their ownership structure, to keep and present records for inspection on financial means the organization has received from public funds and meet other obligations from the Law. However, legal experts indicate that the Law does not stipulate a sanction of an unregistered portal, and it is unclear who is held accountable if the organization does not have an impressum (Gazivoda, 2020). Also, portals are obliged to issue rules for publishing reader comments, while the founder is obliged to remove a comment representing illegal content, without delay, and at the latest within 60 minutes of finding out about the comment or receiving notification one of it from another person.

Although new legal solutions represent a step forward in regulating online media, there is still no strategic approach in Montenegro to media literacy and the fight against disinformation (Nikolić, 2019). Around the beginning of 2020, there were several cases of journalists being arrested, as well as citizens creating and disseminating fake news, which, according to the Ombudsman "was a misunderstood authorization of the state in the control of the freedom of speech" and "disputable, to say the least, from the aspect of the application of convention standards" (Rajković, Nenadić, 2020). Since then, we have not recorded any activities or initiatives by competent authorities to find an appropriate solution instead of the unacceptable arrests of those suspected of disseminating disinformation and a passive approach to the problem of disinformation.

With the help of foreign donations, the civic sector is actively implementing media literacy projects and initiatives for fighting disinformation and hate speech.

With the help of foreign donations, the civic sector is actively implementing media literacy projects and initiatives for fighting disinformation and hate speech. Along with this, local analysts are continuously publishing the findings of studies indicating the increasingly serious problem of disseminating disinformation, which intensifies in social and political crises, such as the coronavirus pandemic or the period leading up to elections. To contribute to the prevention of dissemination of disinformation and the reduction of

---

9   Law on Media ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", no. 46/2010, 40/2011 – second law, 53/2011, 6/2013, 55/2016, 92/2017 i 82/2020 - second law)

the number of people releasing incorrect information, Facebook and the France-Presse agency initiated an independent fact-checking programme in Montenegro, in cooperation with the local platform for fighting disinformation, Raskrinkavanje.me (CDT, 2020).

8. CONCLUSIONS

The current social and political circumstances and complex relations between Balkan states also reflect on media reporting. The analysis of media content showed that, depending on how current a topic is in Montenegro, the media interest in reporting on it grows. Regardless of the countries of the region facing an influx of migrants, Montenegro was already a transit destination for migrants, which is why this issue was treated as marginal by the domestic media. On the other hand, the arrest of journalists for spreading fake news, which marked the beginning of 2020, was in the focus of domestic media attention for a short time, while the predominant topic, by the end of last and throughout this year, was the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion and the ensuing events.

While searching for narratives containing hate speech that accompanied these important topics in Montenegrin media and on the Facebook social network, we registered a series of narratives containing elements of hate speech, disinformation and propaganda.

Established online media are not successful in full adherence to professional standards.

Regardless of which target group (migrants, journalists, political opposition – opponents of the Law on Freedom of Religion, proponents of this Law) the narratives containing hate speech, disinformation and propaganda refer to, types of media and communication practices which were recognized as disputable in previous research proved to be the channels for disseminating unacceptable content in this analysis as well.

While analyzing narratives for these four target groups, we noticed that hate speech is absent from the editorial content of established media. However, established online media are not successful in full adherence to professional standards.

 For the most part, they carry announcements, remarks or information which often feature narratives that contain inflammatory speech or disinformation. Balanced content, which equally presents different opinions of counterparts in a dialogue and provides citizens with an objective picture of an important social or political topic, is becoming a rarity. The segment recognized as problematic in the work of the established online media is the inadequate moderation of reader comments. These comments not infrequently contain offensive speech against ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, and personal insults against political or ideological opponents of the anonymous commentators.

This analysis showed that the editorial content of the right-leaning media can contain elements of hate speech and that these media outlets nurture inflammatory rhetoric and incite additional spreading of hate speech, insults and conspiracy theories through unmoderated comments.

Such content is additionally disseminated via Facebook pages sharing the viewpoints and ideas of the right-leaning parties and interest groups. Also, civic activists, journalists and other public figures whose viewpoints are different from those advocated by these pages are labelled on these Facebook pages.

There is still no organized self-regulation or reactions of professional associations in Montenegro that would indicate the dissemination of narratives containing hate speech and disinformation. The new legal solution, in accordance with which the state is establishing the Fund for Media Pluralism to fund future self-regulation, was criticized by representatives of the media and civic sector (Popović, Rudović, 2020).

Adequate reaction from the competent institutions is still missing in the dissemination of hate speech and fake news in the media or on social networks. An adequate solution for this problem, which would be applied instead of the unacceptable arrests of those suspected of spreading disinformation and the passive approach to the problem of disinformation, remains to be found.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to contribute to the regulation of professional standards in preventing the dissemination of narratives containing hate speech and disinformation, based on this analysis, the Montenegro Media Institute put together a list of recommendations for decision-makers, the media community and the civic sector:

• Institutions in charge of implementing the Law on Media (primarily the Agency for Electronic Media and the Ministry of Culture) need to take specific steps in order to provide for the most efficient possible implementation of this regulation and resolve possible ambiguities (registration of online media, reactions in case of failure to register, media transparency, etc.)

• Institutions in charge of implementing the Law on Media must ensure transparency in the work of the Fund for Media Pluralism and accurately regulate the issue of funding self-regulation from public fundsto prevent any unintended influence on the media and self-regulatory bodies.

• Competent institutions must react in cases of dissemination of hate speech and find an appropriate solution for the fight against the spreading of disinformation.

• The divided media community must make long-term efforts to form a common self-regulatory body that would point out examples of dissemination of hate speech, disinformation and propaganda and work on the promotion of professional standards.

• Online media must take concrete action to improve comment moderation systems on their websites and social networks, thus limiting the dissemination of hate speech, disinformation and propaganda in reader comments.

• Professional associations and professional media organizations must help strengthen the capacities of the media for moderating comments, propaganda detection and fact-checking.

• Local media analysts and the fact-checking platform must continue giving their contribution in the fight against disinformation and propaganda and additionally reinforce their resources, to be able to engage in more intensivee monitoring and analysis of the media contents in Montenegro.

Literature and sources

REGULATIONS:

Law on Media ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", no.46/2010, 40/2011 – second law, 53/2011, 6/2013, 55/2016, 92/2017 and 82/2020 – second law)

STUDIES, PUBLICATIONS AND ARTICLES:

Bogdanović, Milica, Political and Economic Foundations of Montenegrin Hate Speech, Propaganda and Disinformation Spreading Media and Communications, Montenegro Media Institute, 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3hZCv67. Accessed 24 September 2020

Bogdanović, Milica, Kovačević, Milica, Narrative Analysis – Mighty Russian Weapon, 2019. Available at: https://bit.ly/2B4GYVQ. Accessed 24 September 2020.

CDT, Facebook initiates a fact checking programme in Montenegro as well, 30 July 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/35ClKdd. Accessed 26 October 2020

Deutsche Welle, glossary. Available at: https://bit.ly/3lmF7gB

Gazivoda, Siniša, How to Reach Justice – Who to Sue If a Portal Isn't Registered? Montenegro Media Institute, 2020. Available at: http://mminstitute.org/. Accessed 27 October 2020

Glossary on Migration, IOM, 2019. Available at: https://bit.ly/3d3q6gM

Montenegro Media Institute, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro: Insults and Ridicule instead of a Well-Argued Discussion on COVID-19, 20 August 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/377x5UV, Accessed 15 October 2020

Kovačević, Milica, Dževad Galijašević's usual rant on terrorist disguised as migrants, 28 April 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3mPK2Iw, Accessed 24 September 2020

RTCG, "Infestation of fake news", 6 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/350xRAn, Accessed 15 October 2020

RTCG, "Infestation of fake news", 6 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/350xRAn, Accessed 15 October 2020

Vesna Rajković Nenadić, When state trains strictness, Montenegro Media Institute, 6 August 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3dXvz9b. Accessed 26 October 2020

Vijesti Online, State tried to influence media, police and Prosecutor's Office made a mistake in arrests, 6 February 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/34X6tn2, Accessed 15 October 2020

Vijesti Online, Two years of much ado about nothing, 29 July 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3j1X9Dk , Accessed 15 October 2020

Vijesti Online, Nikolić: Strategy for media literacy is missing, 12 January 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/2SYracp, Accessed 15 October 2020

Vijesti Online, Ombudsman: I commend Church dignitaries listening to reason, scenes from Parliament a failure of democracy, 27 December 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/2SYotaN, Accessed 15 October 2020

LIST OF ARTICLES AND RELEASES ON THE FACEBOOK SOCIAL NETWORK USED IN THIS STUDY:

[1] Vijesti Online, Migrants broke through fence on Serbian-Hungarian border, Hungarian policemen opened fire, 28 January 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3j31LtM.
Accessed 24 September 2020

[2] CdM, Greece is making a new fence because of migrants, introduces a moratorium on asylum seeking, 9 March 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/366O9d8.
Accessed 24 September 2020

[3] Vijesti Online, Migrants on Turkish-Greek border are losing hope: We are left for dogs, 7 March 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/32YcyzG. Accessed 24 September 2020

[4] CdM, EU is sending troops, aircraft and ships to Greek-Turkish border, 3 March 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3j0JbCv. Accessed 24 September 2020

[5] CdM, Fire in Pljevlja, migrants probably caused it, 8 February 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3j0MSrE. Accessed 24 September 2020

[6] Vijesti Online, Locals in Vilusi claim that migrants are breaking into homes and setting them on fire, police are silent, 14 March 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/33URzwX. Accessed 24 September 2020

[7] CdM, Most suspects for human trafficking ordered into detention, 20 November 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/3310EFd. Accessed 25 September 2020

Vijesti Online, Action against human trafficking: Policemen released after questioning, denied involvement, 20 November 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/3j8xLwE.
Accessed 25 September 2020

In4s, Action against human trafficking: 12 arrested in Podgorica and Danilovgrad, two policemen among them, 20 November 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/2EAgJZa.
Accessed 25 September 2020

[8] CdM, Food Bank: State should support socially vulnerable categories the same way it supports migrants, 25 November 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/3mOdf6v.
Accessed 24 September 2020

CdM, €14,000 donations for migrants and asylum seekers, 25 November 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/3crqAwQ. Accessed 24 September 2020

[9] Vijesti Online, Who doesn't pay, has to walk across mountains, 29 November 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/2RSMFe7. Accessed 24 September 2020

[10] In4s, Pirot: Migrants attacked a girl, swore at her for being a Serb and burned her hair, 26 November 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/3638uQt. Accessed 24 September 2020

[11] Vijesti Online, Detention ordered: FOS journalist suspected of causing panic and disorder, 5 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3iY609a Accessed 12 October 2020

[12] Vijesti Online, Detention ordered for Raičević and Živković, 12 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/33PsSmB Accessed 12 October 2020

[13] CdM, Media trade union: Arrest of Raičević and Živković is unacceptable, 13 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3jMZgvQ, Accessed 12 October 2020

[14] Vijesti Online, DPNCG: Government is behind arrests of Raičević, Živković and Đikanović, 13 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3lElaks Accessed 12 October 2020

[15] In4s, DF: Our unity and resolution in defending holy places is the best answer to shameful repression of police state,13 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3dlh3rN, Accessed 12 October 2020

[16] In4s, SNP: Anyone who declared war on media and journalistic freedom lost it, 13 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/2FmFjNz, Accessed 12 October 2020

[17] Vijesti Online, MFA: No violation of freedom of media in case of former FOS editor, 10 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3jQt5vu, Accessed 12 October 2020

[18] CdM, Trifunović: Hybrid war backed by Russian secret service, 6 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/33P7pdx, Accessed 12 October 2020

[19] CdM, Trifunović: Opposition is trying to force its way into power with help of Church, 3 February 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/2SQNm8c, Accessed 12 October 2020

[20] In4s, Raičević: Conspiracy between Police, Prosecutor's Office and judiciary, coordinated by US Embassy, 13 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/34JJz2g, Accessed 12 October 2020

[21] In4s, Arrest of journalists a consequence of "homework" Ms Kuo gave Montenegrin authorities, 14 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/34Omprp, Accessed 12 October 2020

[22] In4s, Mirović: After priests and MPs, regime is arresting journalists only for being Serbs, 13 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/30XPoYC, Accessed 12 October 2020

[23] In4s, UNCG: Prosecution and police authorities use batons and handcuffs to "discipline" opposition journalists, 13 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3diDOwi, Accessed 12 October 2020

[24] In4s, Media in Serbia and Republic of Srpska carried news about Raičević and Živković's arrest, 13 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/2GJgxYK, Accessed 12 October 2020

[25] In4s, Regime strike against Serbian media: Editors of IN4S and Borba, Gojko Raičević and Danijel Živković, called in for an interview, 12 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/33SbFJe, Accessed 12 October 2020

[26] In4s, Detention ordered for Gojko Raičević and Danijel Živković, hearing today at 9am, 13 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/310D9ux, Accessed 12 October 2020

[27] CdM, For causing panic and disorder: Editors of IN4S and Borba arrested, hearings ongoing, 13 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/30Z2KE3, Accessed 12 October 2020

[28] CdM, Raičević and Živković released after questioning, 13 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3doulDF, Accessed 12 October 2020

[29] Vijesti Online, Judge rejects attorney's appeal, Đikanovic ordered into 72-hour detention, 6 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/33S12Gx, Accessed 12 October 2020

[30] Vijesti Online, RTCG journalist requested disciplinary procedure initiated against Tanja Sukovic, 10 March 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/2SPrESh, Accessed 12 October 2020

[31] AntenaM, Disciplinary procedure because of Witness of Divine Love, 30 April 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/2GTOcib, Accessed 13 October 2020

[32] CdM, Media trade union asked for disciplinary procedure against RTCG journalists to be cancelled, 10 March 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/31Iw6aq, Accessed 26 October 2020

[33] In4s, Last remains of RTCG "buried": Facebook page served requiem mass, 19 February 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3lDyMO2, Accessed 12 October 2020

In4s, RTCG editorial doesn't understand what's disputable about hate speech in "documentary", 19 February 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/33Q4wcq, Accessed 12 October 2020

[34] CdM, Korać: Attacks on Montenegro are frightening but I believe in its wisdom, 4 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/2FpFyrd, Accessed 13 October 2020

[35] CdM, Vučinić: Belgrade patriarchy is trying to reshape us by mocking our tradition, 6 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3iS4RQf, Accessed 13 October 2020

[36] CdM, Ostrog and Podostrog, 31 December 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/2FphZi5, Accessed 13 October 2020

[37] CdM, What Church is doing in Montenegro is shameful for a religious community, 1 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/34N4oKc, Accessed 13 October 2020

[38] CdM, Same forces that were behind attempted terrorism in 2016 are opposing Law, 28 December 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/2SPmFAX, Accessed 13 October 2020

CdM, Flagrant interference: Baburin would like SPC property in Montenegro to belong to Russia, 3 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3dla02h, Accessed 13 October 2020

[39] Vijesti Online, DPS: We will preserve state, peace and holy places, 4 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/2SN93X1, Accessed13 October 2020

[40] Vijesti Online, Veljović: There will be an efficient response to violence, 30 December 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/3113bO9, Accessed 13 October 2020

Vijesti Online, Marković: Last warning to Amfilohije not to instigate riots, 30 December 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/3iWlQkt, Accessed 13 October 2020

Vijesti Online, UP: Appeals of priests also lead to disturbances of public order and peace, we will hold them responsible for future incidents, 29 December 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/2IiWT64, Accessed 13 October 2020

[41] CDM, Christmas Epistle Amfilohije: Insanity and Lawlessness to Power Your Holiness, 5 January, 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/2SN9Rv1, Accessed 13 October, 2020.

[42] CdM, Amfilohije is sending out political messages on Christmas Eve as well, he called Montenegrin authorities Bushatlis, 6 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3do1kIv, Accessed 13 October 2020

[43] CdM, Medojević: Both Church and Amfilohije Radović sicken me, 29 January 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/3jTTzMR, Accessed 13 October 2020

[44] Vijesti Online, VIDEO Peaceful protest marches across Montenegro, 5 January 2020, Available at a: https://bit.ly/2GMyw0q, Accessed 13 October 2020

[45] Vijesti Online, Knežević: Vučić's speech historic, he told the truth about anti-Serbian policies, 4 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3dozJH0, Accessed 13 October 2020

Vijesti Online, Residents of Nikšić took to the streets again, interfered with traffic, inviting people to protest march on Tuesday evening, 30 December 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/2SRUUrC, Accessed 13 October 2020

[46] Facebook page - Črna Gora transparentno (Transparent Montenegro) https://www.facebook.com/cgtransparentno/photos/a.451888034944560/1731260767007274/?type=3&theater

[47] Facebook page - Črna Gora transparentno (Transparent Montenegro) https://www.facebook.com/cgtransparentno/photos/a.576270659172963/1735242189942465/?type=3&theater

[48] Vijesti Online, Joanikije: Legal order buried, law failed already, it is already only letters on paper, 27 December 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/2GYQhte, Accessed 15 October 2020

[49] Vijesti online, MCP: Church is older than DPS, which is a remnant of godless Titoist autocratic regime, 27 December 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/3duxBxm,
Accessed 15 October 2020

[50] Vijesti online, Episcope Maksim: Actions of Montenegrin authorities are from the past, Serbia is showing symptoms of autocracy, 6 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/375yOKs,
Accessed 15 October 2020

[51] Vijesti online, MVP of Russia: Increases pressure on the Serbian Orthodox Church, in order to completely squeeze it out of Montenegro, 31 December 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/3kSSRjf, Accessed 15 October 2020

[52] In4s, Episcope Irinej Bulović: Courtiers of an unbaptized and unbelieving man will cause conflicts in Montenegro, 30 December 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/316NXao, Accessed 15 October 2020

[53] In4s, Message to Djukanovic from Trebinje: You will end up like Đinđić, 30 December 2019, Available at: https://bit.ly/3dtrGsl, Accessed 15 October 2020

[54] In4s, NGO activist Ljiljana Raičević asks for persecution of priest Velibor Džomić, 6 January 2020, Available at: https://bit.ly/3k1Gr8p, Accessed 15 October 2020

[55] Facebook page - Lažna crnogorska opozicija (False Montenegrin Opposition)
https://www.facebook.com/509976125843654/posts/1409054529269138

[56] Democratic Fronts' Official Facebook page - https://www.facebook.com/DemokratskiFront/

[57] Facebook page - Nemojmo politizovati proteste (Let Us Not Politicise Protests)
https://www.facebook.com/politizovanje/photos/a.212473956348397/460808708181586/?type=3&theater

Facebook page - Stari liberal (Old Liberal)
https://www.facebook.com/StariLiberal/posts/1292649467608996

https://www.facebook.com/StariLiberal/photos/a.736457976561484/1293344637539479/?type=3&theater

Facebook page - MIMistarstvo onostranih poslova (MEMEstry of Otherworldly Affairs)
https://www.facebook.com/1085970928230025/photos/a.1087550784738706/1863843300442780/?type=3&theater

[58] In4s, Here are all those excluded from Orthodox Christianity, 1 January 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/37IFfn2. Accessed 27 October 27 2020.

About the author

Milica Bogdanović graduated in journalism from the Faculty of Political Science in Podgorica. She acquired professional experience in the media and NGO sector. She carried out this study as a researcher in the Montenegro Media Institute.

HATE NARRATIVES AND DISINFORMATION IN ONLINE MEDIA AND ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

Vesna Nikodinoska

HATE NARRATIVES AND DISINFORMATION IN ONLINE MEDIA AND ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

NORTH MACEDONIA

Author: Vesna Nikodinoska

Editor, regional lead researcher: Brankica Petković

Executive editor: Vesna Nikodinoska

Language editor: Fiona Thompson

Design: Špela Kranjec for Filip Kranjec s.p., Ljubljana, Slovenia

Layout: Slavčo Milenkovski

Publishers: SEENPM, Tirana, Peace Institute, Ljubljana and Macedonian Institute for Media, Skopje

February 2021

CONTENTS

HATE NARRATIVES AND DISINFORMATION IN ONLINE MEDIA AND ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

Vesna Nikodinoska

1.   INTRODUCTION

Political, ethnic and religious polarization have long been part of North Macedonia's society, frequently leading to domestic political tensions and disputes with neighbouring countries. Political turmoil has been accompanied by intolerance, calls for violence, and hate speech. Inflammatory language has been produced and frequently spread by ordinary citizens and public personalities.

Media outlets have had a key role in the process. In presenting different social groups and actors and focusing or "framing" negative social phenomena over the years, they have overtly or covertly encouraged stereotypes, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, intolerance or hate speech, instead of openly distancing and deconstructing this discourse.[1]

The expansion of online media and social networks has increased the space for the production and spread of hate speech and disinformation. The study The *Political and Economic Basis of Media and Communication Models Spreading Disinformation and Hate Speech*[2] notes that hate narratives and disinformation in North Macedonia have been more present in online media and social networks during 2019–2020. Professional media outlets incidentally create and transmit disinformation and misinformation. However, media outlets and voices supporting the current political opposition are more present and coordinated.

The research was conducted in September–October 2020 and focuses on online media and social networks. The purpose of the research is to demonstrate patterns and examples of hate and disinformation narratives,

---

1   *Visoka skola za novinarstvo i odnosi so javnosta (2012) "Kvalitataivna analiza na mediumsloto izvestuvanje za meguetnickite I megureligiskite prasanja vo Republika Makedonija" Skopje: VSOJ.*

2   *Nikodinoska, V. (2020) "The Political and Economic Basis of Media and Communication Models Spreading Disinformation and Hate Speech", Tirana: SEENPM, PI and MIM. Available at: https://mim.org. mk/en/research/1231-the-political-and-economic-basis-of-media-and-communication-models-spreading-disinformation-and-hate-speech*

examining actors and events that serve as the main generators of ideas and messages, common targets, dynamics of production and dissemination of narratives, and possible reactions or preventive actions to combat them. It analyzes secondary sources, reports by domestic and international organizations and consultations with media experts.

The research report will present case studies related to four target groups in relation to which the hate and disinformation narratives were analyzed, and end with conclusions and recommendations.

2.   METHODOLOGY

The three target groups of the research—political opponents, journalists and migrants—were identified based on the findings of the country research reports on hate and propaganda media models, conducted in seven countries in the region during summer 2020.[3] The target group based on ethnicity/religion was additionally researched in North Macedonia.

Examples of hate and disinformation narratives were developed on the regional level for the first target groups, while for the ethnicity/religion group, they were identified by the country researchers. A specific case of producing and sharing hate narratives was selected for each target group, and one case of a powerful disinformation narrative for the migrants target group. The research is not limited to the narrow legal concepts of hate (speech), disinformation and propaganda in media and communication, but is analyzed in broader sociological terms.

The analyzed cases and events were selected for each target group from June 2019 to June 2020. The analysis covers either two consecutive or two non-consecutive weeks.

The research includes online media and social networks accounts, selected by several criteria. The *Kurir.mk* online media outlet was selected for cases of political opponents, as it is one of the higher-ranked online news media.[4] The Facebook community Bojkotiram (around 15K likes and followers) and Facebook group *Zoran Zaev traitor number 1* (2,500 members) produce and share nationalist and xenophobic content. The Facebook profile of the ex-journalist Milenko Nedelkovski is one of the most popular, with around 63K followers.

---

3   Part of the project "Resilience - Civil society action to reaffirm media freedom and counter disinformation and hateful propaganda in the Western Balkans and Turkey" implemented in Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia.

4   According to Alexa Top Sites, it is in 41st place in North Macedonia. Available at: *https://www.alexa. com/topsites/countries/MK. Accessed: 23 November 2020.*

CASE STUDIES
Table 1

GROUPS	CASE /EVENT	TIME PERIOD	ONLINE MEDIA	SOCIAL NETWORK
Migrants/ refugees	Disinformation related to migrants/refugees	1–15 March 1–15 April 2020	*Kurir.mk Signal.mk Kolozeg. info*	FB group *Makedonija* Personal Facebook account
Political opponents	Disagreements between the political parties on scheduling the general election date during the pandemic crisis	20 May– 2 June 2020	*Kurir.mk*	FB group *Bojkotiram* FB group *Zoran Zaev predavnik br. 1* FB account of former journalist Milenko Nedelkovski
Critical journalists	Defamation and insults of female journalists	18 May–24 May 31 May–6 June 2020, 10–24 January	*Dokaz.mk*	FB accounts of female journalists
Ethnic/ Religious groups	Religious festivities during the pandemic crisis and violation of lockdown restrictions by ethnic/ religious groups	15–31 May 2020 14–20 April 2020	*Infomax. mk*	FB page of *Infomax. mk* FB group *Sveto ime – Makedonija*

The *DokazM.mk* online media outlet was selected due to a specific case of hate speech and offensive language against a female journalist, and for disinformation as its line of work. Threats and insults via social networks by a civil servant against female journalists were analyzed due to the reactions sparked among the public and by institutions.

Fact-checking services debunked disinformation related to migrants in *Kurir.mk*. Content in *Signal.mk*, K*olozeg.info* and the *Makedonija* Facebook group (47K followers) were pointed out by the experts for migrants and refugee issues.

Infomax.mk is a popular media outlet with examples of hate narratives related to ethnic/religious groups, and its content is often subject to fact-checking services. The Facebook group *Sveto ime – Makedonija*, on the other hand, also contains comments with a nationalistic charge that feed the hate narratives.

Content from online media includes articles, commentaries and photos, whereas posts, comments, videos, photographs and engagements were in the focus of the analysis of social networks.

124

3.   CASE STUDY: MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

3.1. Online media contributing to information "chaos"

Migrants and refugees were the burning topic in North Macedonia in the period between 2015–2018 as in June 2015, the country "became a key transit link for over 700,000 refugees and migrants."[5] The country was in political turmoil, while the refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016 was abused in the political agendas, resulting in referendums against the settling of migrants in some municipalities.[6] The period was notable for sensational and discriminatory media reporting, misinterpretation of facts, xenophobia and enmity towards migrants or refugees.[7] In 2017, there was a change in the political discourse towards refugees and migrants after changes in the government on a central and local level, which led to political stability.

Media content on migrants and refugees in North Macedonia during 2019–2020 decreased compared to previous years, as there were fewer refugees on the southern border with Greece due to the pandemic and lockdowns in the country and the region.

Media content on migrants and refugees in North Macedonia during 2019–2020 decreased compared to previous years, as there were fewer refugees on the southern border with Greece due to the pandemic and lockdowns in the country and the region. At the beginning of 2020, there were sporadic cases of disinformation or hostile language in online media.

The article in *Kurir.mk* "Chaos on the Macedonian-Greek border, migrants are trying to enter by force", [1] supports its claim with an "anonymous source" in the Ministry of the Interior. The article reports the presence of several Special Police Unit troops on the southern border with Greece, not excluding the possibility of an "escalation of the situation". The article suggests that migrants are aggressive and could attack the police. Due to the alarming headline not correlated to the text, lack of evidence and official sources, and the misleading photo taken on the Greek-Turkish border, the CriThink fact-checking service debunked the text as disinformation.[8]

Signal.mk re-published an identical article from *Kolozeg.info* claiming that the Government had signed an agreement to allow 500,000 migrants to settle in the country. The text, equating the refugees and migrants with terrorists, warns that "Macedonia becomes a landfill for ISIS terrorists of the EU" [2].

---

5   Tuneva, M. (2017) "Media Coverage of the Refugee Crisis in Macedonia", SEENPM. Available at: https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Crisis-reporting-Macedonia_Final.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1OkHctRRPcGz-Qygmfs0SfZugMfZZSShxxjErjNr2DtJiR3ulEle1yHxl

6   Smailovic, M., (2017) "Islamophobia in Macedonia" in Bayrakli, E. and Hafez, F. (2017) "European Islamophobia Report", Istanbul: SETA. Available at: http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Macedonia.pdf. Pg. 403.

7   Tuneva, M. (2017) "Media Coverage of the Refugee Crisis in Macedonia", SEENPM. Available at: https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Crisis-reporting-Macedonia_Final.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1OkHctRRPcGz-Qygmfs0SfZugMfZZSShxxjErjNr2DtJiR3ulEle1yHxl

8   Anastasovska, A. (2020) "Nema nikakov haos na grcko-makedonskata granica", Crithink.mk, 5 March 2020. Available at: https://crithink.mk/nema-nikakov-haos-na-grchko-makedonskata-granicza/?fbclid=IwAR0FOubQTlyD2cNv7GDLzVlWUj0Ie0kGjDYML-pzemGHCQ7CGDGzW8lR0WE

The promotional video that USAID shared on YouTube incited comments that "potential asylum seekers are encouraged to apply for Macedonian citizenship and direct them to use the resources of the 'Northern' state", representing migrants as a threat to the country's socio-economic stability. The video was produced by USAID to promote human rights protection by highlighting the integration of migrants and refugees in the country. On the *Kolozeg.Info* website, there is information that the text has had 4096 shares, while the comments below contain calls for action against every refugee that would settle and death wishes for the SDSM leader and PM Zoran Zaev, and ministers.

In 2017, out of seven hate speech cases due to religious affiliation reported on www.govornaomraza.mk, five were towards refugees and migrants on web portals,[9] while in the period June 2019–June 2020, there were only a few cases registered. Media outlets that spread disinformation in a coordinated manner in 2016[10] were warned by the Council of Media Ethics and the Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services Agency to abide by professional standards.

3.2. Presentation of migrants and refugees on social networks

There was less hate speech against migrants and refugees on social networks[11] in 2019–2020 compared to 2017. Sporadic posts and comments on Facebook groups and Twitter could not gather widespread support or spread hate narratives.

Islamophobia and hostile vocabulary towards migrants and refugees, perceiving them as a threat to Macedonian society's cultural values prevail in a number of posts on Facebook groups: "…this is an army that wants to Islamize Europe, to occupy the Balkans…" (in capital letters) [3]. The post is accompanied with a video of unknown origin, place and purpose of creation, depicting a larger group of men starting a fire and running, while one can hear Arabic conversation and somebody yelling "Allah Akbar". The post has 170 shares, and most of the 74 comments contain messages implying they will take "our" land and erase our religion, and that they are barbarians who "sacrifice their children and … trained soldiers", "terrorists", and "wild tribes". Many of the comments contain intimidating messages for migrants and refugees that "this plague should be diminished" or that the way to deal with them is "locking up or shooting".

Islamophobia and hostile vocabulary towards migrants and refugees, perceiving them as a threat to Macedonian society's cultural values prevail in a number of posts on Facebook groups.

---

9   *Smailovic, M., (2017) "Islamophobia in Macedonia" in Bayrakli, E. and Hafez, F. (2017) "European Islamophobia Report", Istanbul: SETA. Available at: http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Macedonia.pdf. Pg. 400.*

10   *Tuneva, M. (2017) "Media Coverage of the Refugee Crisis in Macedonia", SEENPM. Available at: https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Crisis-reporting-Macedonia_Final.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1OkHctRRPcGz-Qygmfs0SfZugMfZZSShxxjErjN2DtJiR3ulEIe1yHxl. Pg. 18*

11   *Govor na omraza website, www.govornaomraza.mk*

The migrants are one of the topics very susceptible to conspiracy theories. For example, conspiracy scenarios for organized transport of refugees under state protection are often exploited on social networks: "… The location discovered. Refugee camp. The street lights near the railway station and at the entrance to Gevgelija are turned off. They are transferred by bus…" [6]. The post was created by a representative of a patriotic association. There are 422 shares and 74 comments on the original post. The post is even shared on groups that have a completely different purpose, where discussion is opened by users expressing the fear that the refugees will stay and settle in the country, which is allegedly why the lockdowns were introduced. They also blame the Government for its politics towards the refugees and the restrictive measures it undertook to fight the pandemic. Some of the comments contain fascist messages ("Damned be migrants, blessed Hitler)" [6].

NARRATIVES ON MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES
Table 2

MAIN NARRATIVE	SUB-NARRATIVES	EXAMPLES
The arrival of migrants is a threat to society.	Migrants represent a threat to Macedonian society's cultural values.	"This is an army that wants to Islamize Europe, to occupy the Balkans."
	Migrants represent a threat to the Macedonian economic system.	"Potential asylum seekers are encouraged to apply for Macedonian citizenship and use the resources of the state 'Northern'."
	Migrants are potential terrorists.	"Macedonia becomes a landfill for ISIS terrorists of EU."
	Migrants are aggressive; they attack the police.	"Migrants are trying to enter by force"; "Escalation of the situation."
	The Government is helping migrants by being servile to EU policies.	"They are transferred by buses."

4. CASE STUDY: POLITICAL OPPONENTS

4.1. Online media: "Ours" and "theirs" country

The summer of 2020 saw parliamentary elections in North Macedonia which have been postponed twice. Amidst the pandemic crisis and lockdowns during March–June, the ruling left Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) favoured snap parliamentary elections during July 2020, arguing that the state needed stable and functional government to handle the crisis and the political and economic situation. The opposition VMRO-DPMNE opted for a date in the autumn due to the dire epidemiological situation in June–

July. The case that will be elaborated refers to the bitter debate between the governing and opposition parties that brought to the surface hate narratives and disinformation by opposition parties and inclining media.

Kurir.mk, known for its inclination towards the VMRO-DPMNE, published numerous articles between 20 May and 2 June suggesting that the ruling party worked against its citizens' interests by pushing for snap elections during the pandemic. [7] This narrative largely relies on mockery and insults of SDSM leader, Zoran Zaev. Humiliating remarks refer to his cultural and psychological characteristics, his rural origins, depicting him as a "peasant child" [8] and calling him "Baron Murtinhausen" [9] as a compound made from the village where he originates from and the famous satirical character. The main allegation levelled at the ruling party leader is the change of the country's name, labelling him "traitor", "unique, crazy leader" and fake patriot ("northern idiotism that he himself invented and realized" [8].

Senior officials who tested positive for COVID-19 have been subjected to harsher criticism for lack of care and irresponsibility towards citizens [11]. *Kurir.mk* comments that the governing SDSM is "becoming a coronavirus inflecting cluster." Party officials are seen as a danger directly jeopardizing citizens' health, while the SDSM's campaign and their desire for government might "be a reason for the large number of newly infected people, but also victims" [12].

Political polarization is reflected in reporting about the country as "ours" and "theirs" ("…it's not the same fatherland we share with Zoki") [8]. This dichotomy is reflected in the narrative that suggested that the governing party is serving the West. Some texts point to close ties between the Government, the US and billionaire George Soros ("The SDSM Government 'borrowed' the phrase 'new normality' from its mentor Soros"). Soros is seen as the SDSM's protector for decades "pulling the strings in Macedonia", just like he did with the "Colourful revolution" and some NGOs [13].

A group of media, among which *Kurir.mk* can be counted, commonly share identical content, acting in a coordinated and orchestrated manner, thus extending their audiences to include the rich. These news media are linked to dozens of Facebook pages that amplify their content.[12] For example, the official Facebook page of the online news site *Ekonomski.mk* did not post any content from its own site, but instead exclusively amplified *Kurir's* content.[13]

> A group of media commonly share identical content, acting in a coordinated and orchestrated manner, thus extending their audiences to include the rich. These news media are linked to dozens of Facebook pages that amplify their content.

Some of *Kurir.mk's* writings were fact-checked by *CriThink*, which concluded that the text contained personal insults, whose only purpose was to humiliate

---

12   *Gigitashvili, G. and Karan, K. (2020)"Inauthentic Facebook pages target North Macedonia", DFRLab, 25 June 2020. Available at:* *https://medium.com/dfrlab/inauthentic-facebook-pages-target-north-macedonia-e264639bdbdb*

13   *Ibid.*

and degrade political opponents[14] or that the media outlet took part in spreading partial and unconfirmed information.[15]

4.2. Political opponents on Facebook

Vocal groups with patriotic, traditional and mostly rightist ideological views, where strong nationalistic rhetoric is expressed, gather many supporters and generate heated discussion on Facebook in relation to the narratives against the Government, especially in the period before the elections. Many were established as a result of civil protests against the change of the country's name in 2018 with the Prespa Agreement. Groups with similar ideological orientation often repost and share mutual or content published by media which usually lean to the right.

In the period preceding the parliamentary elections between 18–30 May 2020, the main topic in numerous posts on the Facebook community Bojkotiram focused on blaming government officials and especially the leader of the SDSM for being traitors of the country and its people. Zaev's lack of knowledge of Serbian in an interview provoked comments containing humiliating remarks, but criticism is extended to citizens who voted for him, calling them "severdjzani" (a derogatory term for citizens of North Macedonia who supported the name change), "colourful faggots" (a derogatory term for participants in the Colourful Revolution), "sorosoids" (supporters and grantees of George Soros), and "traitors" [14]. The post garnered 84 user comments, 267 likes and 58 shares.

Vocal groups with patriotic, traditional and mostly rightist ideological views, where strong nationalistic rhetoric is expressed, gather many supporters and generate heated discussion on Facebook in relation to the narratives against the Government, especially in the period before the elections.

Defence Minister Radmila Shekerinska was labelled as non-Macedonian and accused of giving up the country name by *Bojkotiram* because she "… has Serbian origin" [15] based on her statement that her mother was born in Belgrade and her grandmother and her husband were half-Serbs. Users continue with the insults by calling her "slut", "traitor", and "stupid".

A similar narrative pervades in most posts and comments on the Facebook group *Zoran Zaev traitor number 1* [16]. Many of the posts analyzed in the researched period re-publish statements and interviews by Zaev or refer to his personality, finishing with the hashtag #CrazyCommunists (#LudaKomunjara). Some of the posts contain death wishes for him and his family ("I hope someday we will see this bastard in a horizontal position with legs in front…"). The Macedonian nation, its ancient origins and glorious past are seen as sacred; thus, any negotiation with the neighbouring countries by a Macedonian politician is perceived as a betrayal. Zaev's statement regarding

---

14   Dukovska, J. (2020) "Socniot politicki recnik od nasiot sokak", CriThink, 29 May 2020. Available at: https://crithink.mk/sochniot-politichki-rechnik-od-nashiot-sokak/.

15   Anastasovska, A. (2020) "Koga fejsbuk statusot na glavniot urednik se prodava kako tekst", CriThink, 26 May 2020. Available at: https://crithink.mk/koga-fejsbuk-statusot-na-glavniot-urednik-se-prodava-kako-tekst/.

negotiating historic topics and persons with Bulgaria was addressed in 44 comments, many of which contained insulting and repugnant language [17].

The Facebook profile of ex-journalist Milenko Nedelkovski has high popularity and generates the engagement of his followers [18]. In the period before the parliamentary elections, Milenkovski announced on his profile:

> *"The end is near for all the colourful sorosoids. They will be prosecuted as terrorists. #DoneVojvoda.*
> *All protesters will be done, the photos of their 'performances' like 'Special Prosecutor lovers' are documented: [names of journalists, public figures, politicians and civil society activists] …" #Strateskipartner* [19].

By posting a tweet by Donald Trump saying *"The USA will be designating ANTIFA as a Terrorist Organization"*, the author compares the upcoming elections in North Macedonia and the USA. Implying the victory of the right option in both elections, he warns that proponents of the left-leaning SDSM will be "imprisoned as terrorists". The post has 914 likes, 45 comments and 37 shares. The same day, he informs his followers about a senior SDSM official who tested positive for COVID-19, who was forced to "admit what he hid", posting a screenshot from his official Facebook profile. Followers comment this was God's punishment for election frauds, curse him, wish him death and hope that Zaev gets COVID-19 as well [19].

Nedelkovski has access to a vast network of platforms, owning a website and managing his YouTube channel with 12,700 subscribers. Some videos posted on the YouTube channel have around 30,000 views.

NARRATIVES ON POLITICAL OPPONENTS
Table 3

MAIN NARRATIVE	SUB-NARRATIVES	EXAMPLES
The Government is working against its own country.	The Government representatives are traitors.	"Traitors." "Spies." "Shekerinska has Serbian origin. This is why she gave up on the name so easily."
	The Government is a mercenary of foreign countries and organizations.	Soros is the protector of SDSM, of the Colourful Revolution and the NGOs.
	Various forms of death threats.	"Let him die." (the leader of SDSM) "He needs gallows." "Damn enemies … =may they perish, God punish them."
	Politicians of the ruling party should be punished, humiliated, publicly exposed.	"The end is coming for all colourful sorosoids. They will be pursued and diminished as terrorists."

130

The Government's representatives are fake patriots and do not care for the citizens.	"He (Zaev) cares for the country as much as for the people who are put on the corona-elections altar."
Politicians of the Government are communists.	"#CrazyCommunists" (#LudaKomunjara)
Politicians of the Government are elitist.	Zaev enjoys in restaurants. "Stable of Baron Murtinhauzen."

5. CASE STUDY: CRITICAL JOURNALISTS

5.1. Female journalists presented in online media

In 2019 and 2020, the pressure on journalists and editors decreased compared to the period before 2016 when they were often personally discredited and hate speech was used against them for their critical reporting towards the then ruling rightist government.[16] However, in 2020, there were cases in which several journalists and editors, including female journalists, were the target of threats, insults, defamation and hate speech via online media and social networks.[17]

Between 18 May and 6 June, the online media outlet DokazM. mk published four texts targeting female journalist Miroslava Byrns from Sloboden pecat daily using insulting, vulgar language and hate speech and exposing details of her personal life. This was the author's reaction to the critical fact-checking work that Byrns did of DokazM.mk' article for *CriThink*.[18]

In 2020, there were cases in which several journalists and editors, including female journalists, were the target of threats, insults, defamation and hate speech via online media and social networks.

The texts contain sexist insults based on Byrns' appearance, exposing details from her personal life in a speculative and insulting manner ("she came back from America two months ago, she married an old Jewish man so she could spend his pension…") [23]. The author alleges that Byrns makes dishonest money for a living. Ridiculing the journalist's competences or representing female journalists as being not qualified enough for the job they are doing is another underlying narrative in the articles ("illiterate", "so-called journalist", "did you ask me for a second opinion", "I piss on your one-sided journalism") [24]. The author implies that Byrns advanced in her career due to having "close

16   Nebiu, B. at All. (2018) "Indicators on the level of media freedom and journalists' safety in Macedonia". Skopje: AJM. Available at: https://bit.ly/3mettFr. Pg.10.

17   AJM (2020) "Dramaticen porast na napadi kon novinarite – barame itni resenija", 2 November 2020. Skopje: AJM. Available at: https://bit.ly/33mlIWl

18   Byrns, M., "Koj za sto, 'Dokaz' za seks I svalerki" (Everybody writes for something, while DokazM writes for sex and lovers), Crithink.mk, 17 May 2020. Available at: https://crithink.mk/koj-za-shto-dokaz-za-seks-i-shvalerki/

relations" with senior officials, commenting on photos she published on her Facebook profile ("journalists should not have anything with politicians…") [25]. The allegation that the journalist wants to make use of the European Union permeates one of the texts, although it is not explicitly clear how she would do that [23].

After Byrns asked for an apology from the media outlet, the author published the second text asking her: "Who told you to mess with me?" and gives her advice: "Next time, don't stick your nose where you shouldn't". There is no explicit threat, but the texts are written as a response to Byrns' article and a warning of what could happen if one messes with the author [26].

The first two texts that *DokazM.mk* published, according to Byrns, had up to 8,000 clicks each [23, 26]. This claim cannot be verified since, in the meantime, the portal has redesigned its webpage so the total number of views cannot be seen. The *DokazM.mk* Facebook page published the texts, but they did not aggregate many engagements (4–7 likes and around ten comments for each of the texts). The majority of comments express disapproval with the media's narrative.

Byrns filed a complaint with the Council of Media Ethics and a private lawsuit for insult and defamation at the Civil Court. The court case has not been launched yet, since the *DokazM.mk* owner has not accepted the court summons. In June 2020, the Council of Media Ethics condemned *DokazM's* writings as "an extremely unprofessional and frivolous journalistic product, whose sole purpose is to insult, ridicule and personally discredit the journalist".[19]

Media and journalists' organizations condemned the language and the defamation directed at Byrns.[20] The Union called for the media to respect professional standards. On social networks, journalists, politicians and gender activists supported Byrns. Most comments under Byrns' post condemned the misogyny and sexism of *DokazM.mk* and its practice of "ridiculing and/or insulting women from the public sphere on a gender basis".[21]

5.2.   Female journalists mocked on social networks

Insults and discrediting of female journalists based on their gender, especially on social media networks, increased in the first half of 2020. While AJM registered four attacks and threats towards journalists in 2019, in 2020 this number increased to 14, half of which were against female journalists.[22] Most of them occurred on social networks.

---

19   CMEM (2020) "Decision of the CMEM Complaints Commission". Skopje: CMEM. Available at: https://bit.ly/3mdrXU7

20   Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers (2020) "SSNM so poddrska za Miroslava Byrns I sovet da tuzi za navredite izreceni kon nea", 19 May 2020. Available at: https://www.pravdiko.mk/ssnm-so-poddrshka-za-miroslava-burns-i-sovet-da-tuzhi-za-navredite-izrecheni-kon-nea/

21   Facebook status of Ivana Tufekgdic, 19 May 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/30F5tT0

22   AJM (2020) "Dramaticen porast na napadi kon novinarite – barame itni resenija", 2 November 2020. Skopje: AJM. Available at: https://bit.ly/33mlIWl

During January 2020, a civil servant in the Central Registry Office threatened and published insulting and derogatory contents on social networks against Meri Jordanovska and Iskra Koroveshovska, the editors of *A1On.mk* and *TV Alfa*, respectively.

On 10 January, Jordanovska published on her Facebook profile insults and threats she had received via Telegram from Emil Jakimovski, an employee in the Central Registry Office, a former journalist and member of the VMRO-DPMNE. The content included sexist insults ("propagandistic slut"), death wishes ("you should have an obituary")[23] and threats (posting a picture with handcuffs saying that "this is coming for you and Zoki" (SDSM leader). Jordanovska believed this was due to articles published for Prizma.mk about two websites owned by Jakimovski's brother and their possible connections with one of the political parties. Despite working for *Prizma.mk* in the past, Jordanovska was not the author of the texts.

In both cases, female journalists are targeted on the basis of gender and competence and accused of being liars and mercenaries. The offender represents himself as better because he is a man, a former colleague and an excellent student holding an important position who helped female colleagues in need.

Her post was followed by the testimony of TV Alfa chief editor Iskra Korovesovska that Jakimovski had insulted her as a journalist as well via Facebook, humiliated her on a gender basis, exposed details from her private life, and threatened her ("see what happens when you meet me outside").[24]

In both cases, female journalists are targeted on the basis of gender and competence and accused of being liars and mercenaries. The offender represents himself as better because he is a man, a former colleague and an excellent student holding an important position who helped female colleagues in need. In the bullying, he relies on the power of the political party he was a member of.[25]

MAIN NARRATIVE	SUB-NARRATIVES	EXAMPLES
NARRATIVES ON FEMALE JOURNALISTS Table 4		
Journalists are enemies of the people.	Journalists are liars.	"You stinky faker."
	Journalists write what they are instructed to for money.	"You are doing that for food."
	Journalists should be eliminated.	"You should have an obituary." "Who told you to mess with me?" "Another time do not put your nose where you shouldn't."

---

23   Frontline (2020) "Vulgarni zakani kon novinarkata Meri Jordanovska", *Frontline.mk*, 11 January 2020. Available at: https://frontline.mk/2020/01/11/vulgarni-zakani-kon-novinarkata-meri-ordanovska/
24   Facebook status of Iskra Korovesovska, 11 January 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/iskra.korovesovska.
25   Private communication of Meri Jordanovska, published with her consent.

Journalists are mercenaries.	"You are still Soros' mercenary" "(The journalist) wants to earn on the back of DokazM and the European Union."
Female journalists are less intelligent than male journalists.	"Illiterate." "So-called journalist." "Goose."
Female journalists are not capable as men journalists.	"Director of Central Registry is not an important position?" "You are not important."
Female journalists advance in the profession in an indecent way.	"Earns money practising the oldest profession." "Propagandistic slut."

Both journalists filed charges against Jakimovski for insults and threats on social networks. The Minister of the Interior launched an investigation. Public personalities such as the Mayor of Kavadarci[26] and the Central Registry Office Director also reported that Jakimovski had insulted and threatened them. The case was promptly solved: Jakimovski lost his job in the Central Registry and was sentenced to prison for endangering the security of his ex-wife (he was previously on probation for domestic violence) and for the threats against the journalists. The VMRO-DPMNE distanced itself from him and condemned the threats.[27]

The Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers stressed that Jordanovska was not attacked only as a journalist, but also as a woman, which "shows that more effort needs to be put into emancipation in the country".[28] The Association of Journalists of Macedonia appealed to the political parties to strongly condemn the threats and to demonstrate an appropriate attitude towards journalists in the run-up to the elections.[29]

6. CASE STUDY: ETHNIC/RELIGIOUS GROUPS

6.1. Religious divisions surfaced during COVID-19 lockdowns

The case study analyzed in relation to political opponents refers to the religious festivities and restrictions introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the hate narratives generated towards Muslim believers in relation to these events.

---

26   Lokalno (2020) "Jakimovski mu se zakanuval I na Mitko Jancev", *Lokalno.mk*, 11 January 2020. Available at: https://lokalno.mk/foto-jakimovski-mu-se-zakanuval-i-na-mitko-janchev/

27   Fokus (2020) "VMRO-DPMNE se ogradi od Emil Jakimovski", *Fokus.mk*, 11 January 2020. Available at: https://fokus.mk/vmro-dpmne-se-ogradi-od-emil-jakimovski/

28   SSNM (2020) "SSNM bara itna istraga za zakanite kon novinarkata Meri Jordanovska", 11 January 2020. Available at: https://ssnm.org.mk/soopstenija/ssnm-itna-istraga-za-zakanite-kon-novinarkata-meri

29   AJM (2020) "ZNM gi osuduva zakanite I navredite upateni kon novinarkata Meri Jordanovska", 11 January 2020. Available at: https://mia.mk/znm-gi-osuduva-zakanite-i-navredite-upateni-kon-novinarkata-meri-ordanovska/

From 23 April to 23 May, Islamic believers celebrated the holy month of Ramadan, which includes fasting and an evening gathering for dinner, sometimes organized by religious groups in public spaces and communities where the majority of the population are ethnic Albanians. During April–June there were three lockdowns during important religious festivities: a four-day complete lockdown over Orthodox Easter beginning on 17 April, a three-day lockdown beginning on 1 May and a 42-hour lockdown for Ramadan Bajram on 24 May.

Infomax.mk, an online media organization with a strong political bias towards the right-wing opposition, published 23 articles with misleading content between 15–31 May 2020. Of those, 22 articles were not signed by an author. Two sub-narratives prevail in the articles: 1) Albanians disrespect the authorities and 2) the Government is giving in under pressure because of political interests before the elections.

The writings focused on Muslim believers, emphasizing examples of "irresponsibility" as a pervasive narrative in many of them ("The question is whether the new COVID-19 clusters in Skopje and Tetovo are due to such frivolous behaviour of believers?") [27]. The implicit narrative is that Muslims do not respect the Government's COVID-19 protective measures and spread the virus, not comprehending the danger and the damage it does to everyday life and the economy. In the same period, the media did not adopt a critical stance towards the responsibility and behaviour of Christian believers in the health crisis, although such examples were noticed in the analyzed period.

The implicit narrative is that Muslims do not respect the Government's COVID-19 protective measures and spread the virus, not comprehending the danger and the damage it does to everyday life and the economy.

The Government is implicitly criticized as being tolerant of the Muslim population's disrespect of the measures because the SDSM wants to earn the affiliation of the ethnic Albanians ahead of the elections and wants to blame the Minister of the Interior who, in the caretaker government, was from the opposition VMRO-DPMNE [28]. The media raises the question of why the authorities did not allow Orthodox believers to go to church and observe Easter and elaborates that the priests were subjected to fierce attacks, insults and stigmatization [29].

As a result of the "Government's tolerance towards Muslims", Christians are depicted as victims of a double standard unable to practice their religion. A Facebook post authored by Infomax.mk editor also says:
> "Weddings forbidden. For Easter, the whole country under quarantine, the churches closed. People who wanted to go to communion were punished. Struga residents were asked to be castrated because they went to a litany. But, when mass Iftar dinners are held in Chair, Cento, Tetovo, Debar, a voice cannot be heard from the party bots in Bihacka." (headquarters of the SDSM) [30]

6.2.   No restrictions on Facebook

Infomax.mk shares its writings and publications on Facebook through several pages, the *Infomax* group and the editor and staff's personal profiles. Infomax's official page has 113K followers. The website reposts the content on the pages without much evidence of efforts to engage readers. Comments are not filtered immediately, allowing offensive and hate speech between Macedonian and Albanian, Christian and Muslim users.

The editor's comment accusing the Government of double standards about religious celebrations during the lockdown triggers nationalistic discussion among users [31]. While the moderator has deleted some Albanian language replies, offensive and nationalistic messages in Macedonian remain.

Calling each other "tribes", "horde" and "savages" the representatives of ethnic groups both claim "legacy" to the territory of Macedonia and tackle identity issues.

Several ethnic Albanian citizens were arrested for violating lockdown restrictions in one of the Skopje suburbs on 14 April 2020, which triggered a protest for their release. A post appeared in the group Sveto ime - Makedonija with a video of the protest and the text: "SHAME! ! ! About 100 Albanians went out and did what they wanted in the country. Share for everyone to see how they humiliate our country ... !!!" Prolonged exchange of insults and hate speech between users of Macedonian and Albanian ethnic background followed. Calling each other "tribes", "horde", and "savages", in their comments, the representatives of ethnic groups both claim "legacy" to the territory of Macedonia ("Let them go to Albania", "this is also Albania, go in Bulgaria") and tackle identity issues ("Nordern MAK-shit Bulgarians, Russians, Serbs... firomian scum with fallce history") [32].

NARRATIVES ON ETHNIC/RELIGIOUS GROUPS
Table 5

MAIN NARRATIVE	SUB-NARRATIVES	EXAMPLES
Albanians are not loyal citizens of the country.	Albanians are irresponsible and do not respect laws.	About 100 Albanians went out and did what they wanted in the country (i.e. protest during lockdown).
	Albanians do not respect the recommendations of the health authorities.	"The question is whether the new COVID-19 clusters in Skopje and Tetovo are due to such frivolous behaviour of believers?"
	Albanians are instructed by the ruling party.	The ruling SDSM wants to gain sympathy among Albanian voters before the elections.
	Macedonians are victims of the Governments' double standards.	"Struga residents were asked to be castrated because they went to a litany. But when mass Iftar dinners are held..., a voice cannot be heard from the party bots in Bihacka."
	The Government gave in to Albanian pressure.	"Gave in to the pressure and threats of the IRC."

7. PREVENTIVE AND EX-POST ACTIONS TO COMBAT HATE AND DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES IN THE COUNTRY

The Public Prosecutor's Office and the judiciary are usually criticized for being slow and ineffective when processing hate speech cases. In the case-law from 2016 to 2020, there was only one court case registered in the Basic Criminal Court referring to the spreading of racist and xenophobic material via a computer system. The court declared the accused innocent in December 2020.[30]

Due to the increased number of verbal and physical attacks on journalists in 2020, the Association of Journalists of Macedonia asked for a greater engagement of the Public Prosecutor's Office in the processing of cases against media workers, as well as of the Ministry of the Interior expected to require the raising of criminal procedures from the Public Prosecutor in more serious cases.[31]

In an effort to self-regulate the online media space, the Council of Media Ethics established the Registry of Professional Online Media in 2020. Even though 130 online media belong to the Registry, a number of online media have ignored the initiative as such or cannot join it due to multiple breaches of professional standards.

Hate speech was the second most common reason for the violation of professional standards by media outlets, accounting for 20% of the cases in 2019. By June 2020, out of a total of 84 Council adjudications, 36 were for online media outlets that had breached Article 1 in relation to disinformation and misinformation.[32] The AJM and the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers also regularly react against hate speech in the media and insults and attacks on journalists.

Due to the increased number of verbal and physical attacks on journalists in 2020, the Association of Journalists of Macedonia asked for a greater engagement of the Public Prosecutor's Office in the processing of cases against media workers, as well as of the Ministry of the Interior expected to require the raising of criminal procedures from the Public Prosecutor in more serious cases.

The Helsinki Committee on Human Rights monitors hate speech in traditional media and social networks through its website www.govornaomraza.mk. In March 2020, there was a 100% increase in hate speech cases compared to the same period the year before. The monitoring platform www.govornaomraza.

---

30 Fokus (2020) *"Nedelkovski dobi osloboditelna presuda kako obvinet za sirenje na govor na omraza"*, *Fokus.mk*, 10 December 2020. Available at: *https://fokus.mk/111milenko-dobi-osloboditelna-presuda/*

31 AJM (2020) *"Dramaticen porast na napadi kon novinarite – barame itni resenija"*, 2 November 2020. Skopje: AJM. Available at: *https://bit.ly/33mllWl*

32 Nikodinoska, V. (2020) *"The Political and Economic Basis of Media and Communication Models Spreading Disinformation and Hate Speech"*, Tirana: SEENPM, PI and MIM. Available at: *https://mim.org. mk/en/research/1231-the-political-and-economic-basis-of-media-and-communication-models-spreading-disinformation-and-hate-speech. Pg. 8.*

137

mk registered one report of hate speech related to migrants in 2019−2020 37 cases for religious affiliation, 108 for political affiliation, and 205 for ethnic affiliation.[33]

The Metamorphosis Foundation administers the fact-checking services Crithink.mk and Vistinomer.mk. In July 2020, Vistinomer.mk became Facebook's partner for debunking disinformation.[34]

8. CONCLUSIONS

The combination of the pandemic, the early elections and religious gatherings during the first half of 2020 created fertile ground for the escalation of the informative chaos, spread of disinformation and hate speech, especially online.

By analyzing different cases and events related to the four target groups, the research identified hate and disinformation narratives appearing in online media and on social networks. In the cases analyzed, migrants were presented as the ones subverting society's cultural values, who could settle in the country and thus take advantage of the socio-economic system or spread Islam. This narrative was largely supported and misused by political parties. Hate and disinformation narratives against political opponents have been triggered by strong nationalistic and identity issues constructed by centres of power and then perpetuated and reinforced by supporting media. Narratives against female journalists contain derogatory language, frequently on a gender basis, as well as stereotyped views and perceptions of women's role in society. Misogyny and sexism are present in the reporting of a few media and used for pressure and blackmail. In relation to inter-ethnic and inter-faith issues, religious festivities during the lockdowns brought to the surface divisions and enmities among ordinary people on social networks and online media reflecting their inclination to political elites.

The elimination of hate speech and hate narratives from the public discourse requires the coordinated efforts of different institutional and civil actors in society, including the political elites which have a crucial role in the production and dissemination of such practices.

The Public Prosecutor's Office and the judiciary have been criticized for their "reserved stance" towards the application of legal bans which resulted in a minimal number of cases related to hate speech in the past.[35] However, this problem intensifies when one considers the potential and the impact of the online media and social networks on the production and spreading of these phenomena. The Public Prosecutor's Office hesitates to process these

---

33   Govor na omraza, www.govornaomraza.mk

34   Anastasovska, A. (2020) "Nema nikakov haos na grcko-makedonskata granica", CriThink, 5 March 2020. Availabe at: https://crithink.mk/nema-nikakov-haos-na-grchko-makedonskata-granicza/?fbclid=IwAR 0FOubQTlyD2cNv7GDLzVlWUj0Ie0kGjDYML-pzemGHCQ7CGDGzW8lR0WE

35   Kambovski, V. and Lazarova Trajkovska, M. (2012) Pravna analiza na konceptot na kaznenoto delo na omraza i govorot na omraza, Skopje: OSCE. Available at: http://govornaomraza.mk/media/documents/ Pravna%20analiza.pdf. Pg. 48.

cases, while the court practice is almost non-existing. The media, journalism associations and human rights advocates have constantly been voicing the need for increased engagement of the Ministry of the Interior, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the judiciary in recognizing, pursuing and prosecuting more serious acts related to hate speech.

The civil society sector appears to be the most active in preventing and countering hate speech and disinformation in both traditional and online media. The CMEM developed the Guidelines for the Ethical Reporting of Online Media whose provisions will be used to assess the compliance of online media to the ethical standards. Even though certain media outlets are still not part of the self-regulatory bodies, they are expected to be accountable to the public and allow for pluralism of views.

Nonetheless, social networks remain a "grey area" where none of the mentioned institutional or civil society actors has competence. Despite Facebook's partnership with the fact-checking service Vistinomer.mk in an effort to identify disinformation on the social network, hate speech is still not under its competence. That is why improving media and information literacy skills and the knowledge of audiences from all age groups is of critical importance. It will help in critically analyzing and assessing news articles or creating and disseminating content via various platforms.

Finally, the elimination of hate speech and hate narratives from the public discourse requires the coordinated efforts of different institutional and civil actors in society, including the political elites which have a crucial role in the production and dissemination of such practices.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

• The Ministry of the Interior, Public Prosecutor's Office and judiciary should demonstrate active engagement in identifying, processing and prosecuting cases related to hate speech.

• Representatives of the police, public prosecutors and judges should undergo regular training for recognizing hate speech, its processing and effective punishment, both in traditional and online media. Journalists and editors can also participate in this training.

• The Ministry of the Interior, Public Prosecutor's Office, judiciary, Ombudsman and other relevant institutions should cooperate with the media regulator, self-regulatory body and media CSOs for awareness-raising and prevention of hate speech.

• Media management should commit to observing professional and ethical guidelines and effectively combating and deconstructing these narratives with their own counter-narratives.

139

• In partnership with relevant institutions, the civil society sector should organize and implement communication campaigns for education and awareness-raising on the national and local level, focusing on social media, for preventing hate speech.

• Secondary schools and universities should revise/amend curricula and introduce lectures and workshops on the phenomenon of hate speech and disinformation for educating young people as digital natives, to be able to understand the origins, effectively recognize and counter such practices.

• Civil society organizations should develop and organize media literacy training for various age groups for strengthening the public's' skills in the assessment and critical reading of news content.

• Instead of producing and reinforcing hate narratives and disinformation, political parties should actively counter these phenomena through campaigns, use correct political language, and cut off clientelist relations with online media.

Literature and sources

1. Anastasovska, A. (2020) "Nema nikakov haos na grcko-makedonskata granica", Crithink.mk, 5 March 2020. Available at: https://crithink.mk/nema-nikakov-haos-na-grchko-makedonskata-granicza/?fbclid=IwAR0FOubQTlyD2cNv7GDLzVlWUj0Ie0kGjDYML-pzemGHCQ7CGDGzW8lR0WE

2. Anastasovska, A. "Koga Fejsbuk statusot na glavniot urednik se prodava kako tekst", Crithink.mk, 26 May 2020. Available at: https://crithink.mk/koga-fejsbuk-statusot-na-glavniot-urednik-se-prodava-kako-tekst/.

3. AJM (2020) "ZNM gi osuduva zakanite I navredite upateni kon novinarkata Meri Jordanovska", 11 January 2020. Available at: https://mia.mk/znm-gi-osuduva-zakanite-i-navredite-upateni-kon-novinarkata-meri-ordanovska/

4. AJM (2020) "Dramaticen porast na napadi kon novinarite – barame itni resenija", 2 November 2020. Skopje: AJM. Available at: https://bit.ly/33mlIWl

5. Byrns, M., "Koj za sto, 'DokazM' za seks I svalerki" (Everybody writes for something, while DokazM writes for sex and lovers), 17 April 2020, Available at: https://crithink.mk/koj-za-shto-dokaz-za-seks-i-shvalerki/

6. CMEM (2020) "Decision of the CMEM Complaints Commission". Skopje: CMEM. Available at: https://bit.ly/3mdrXU7

7. CMEM (2019-2020) Odluki i mislenja. Available at: https://semm.mk/komisija-za-zalbi-4/arhiva-odluki-i-mislenja

8. Dukovska, J. (2020) "Socniot politicki recnik od nasiot sokak", Crithink, 29 May 2020. Available at: https://crithink.mk/sochniot-politichki-rechnik-od-nashiot-sokak/

9. Fokus (2020) "Nedelkovski dobi osloboditelna presuda kako obvinet za sirenje na govor na omraza", Fokus.mk, 10 December 2020. Available at: https://fokus.mk/111milenko-dobi-osloboditelna-presuda/

10. Fokus (2020) "VMRO-DPMNE se ogradi od Emil Jakimovski", Fokus.mk, 11 January 2020. Available at: https://fokus.mk/vmro-dpmne-se-ogradi-od-emil-jakimovski/

11. Facebook status of Ivana Tufekgdic, 19 May 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/30F5tT0

12. Facebook status of Iskra Korovesovska, 11 January 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/iskra.korovesovska.

13. Frontline (2020) "Vulgarni zakani kon novinarkata Meri Jordanovska", Frontline.mk, 11 January 2020. Available at: https://frontline.mk/2020/01/11/vulgarni-zakani-kon-novinarkata-meri-ordanovska/

141

14. Gigitashvili, G. and Karan, K. "Inauthentic Facebook pages target North Macedonia", DFRLab, 25 June 2020. Available at: https://medium.com/dfrlab/inauthentic-facebook-pages-target-north-macedonia-e264639bdbdb

15. Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers (2020) "SSNM so poddrska za Miroslava Byrns I sovet da tuzi za navredite izreceni kon nea", 19 May 2020. Available at: https://www.pravdiko.mk/ssnm-so-poddrshka-za-miroslava-burns-i-sovet-da-tuzhi-za-navredite-izrecheni-kon-nea/

16. Kambovski, V. and Lazarova Trajkovska, M. (2012) Pravna analiza na konceptot na kaznenoto delo na omraza i govorot na omraza, Skopje: OSCE. Available at: http://govornaomraza.mk/media/documents/Pravna%20analiza.pdf

17. Lokalno (2020) "Jakimovski mu se zakanuval i na Mitko Jancev", Lokalno.mk, 11 January 2020. Available at: https://lokalno.mk/foto-jakimovski-mu-se-zakanuval-i-na-mitko-janchev/

18. Nikodinoska, V. (2020) "The Political and Economic Basis of Media and Communication Models Spreading Disinformation and Hate Speech", Tirana: SEENPM, PI and MIM. Available at: https://mim.org.mk/en/research/1231-the-political-and-economic-basis-of-media-and-communication-models-spreading-disinformation-and-hate-speech

19. SSNM (2020) "SSNM bara itna istraga za zakanite kon novinarkata Meri Jordanovska", 11 January 2020. Available at: https://ssnm.org.mk/soopstenija/ssnm-itna-istraga-za-zakanite-kon-novinarkata-meri.

20. Smailovic, M., (2017) "Islamophobia in Macedonia" in Bayrakli, E. and Hafez, F. (2017) "European Islamophobia Report", Istanbul: SETA. Available at: http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Macedonia.pdf.

21. Tuneva, M. (2017) "Media Coverage of the Refugee Crisis in Macedonia", SEENPM. Available at: https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Crisis-reporting-Macedonia_Final.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1OkHctRRPcGz-Qygmfs0SfZugMfZZSShxxjErjNr2DtJiR3ulEle1yHxI

22. Visoka skola za novinarstvo i odnosi so javnosta (2012) "Kvalitataivna analiza na mediumsloto izvestuvanje za meguetnickite I megureligiskite prasanja vo Republika Makedonija", Skopje: VSOJ.

WEBSITES:

1. Alexa.com
2. Govor na omraza website, www.govornaomraza.mk

LIST OF ANALYZED ARTICLES:

[1] Kurir (2020) *"Chaos on the Macedonian-Greek border, migrants are trying to break trough by force"*, *Kurir.mk*, 2 March 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3qaMZ85

[2] *Signal* (2020) "Vladata potpisala 500.000 migranti vo Makedonija! USAID veke so obuka za 'Integracija vo Severna Makedonija'!", *Signal.mk*, 15 March 2020. Available at: https://www.signal.mk/vladata-potpishala-500-000-migranti-vo-makedonija-usaid-veke-so-obuka-za-integratsija-vo-severna-makedonija-video/; *Kolozeg.info* (2020) "Huntata potpisala 500.000 migranti vo Makedonija! USAID veke so obuka za integracija vo Severna", *Kolozeg.info*, 15 March 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/391RZpt.

[3] Facebook group *Makedonija*, post on 2 March 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=3045068842224389&id=679245572140073

[4] Facebook group *Makedonija*, posted on 3 March 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=3047739131957360&id=679245572140073

[5] Facebook group *Stop za 5G mrezata vo Makedonija*, posted on 12 May 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=3314562055234446&set=a.214150971942252%5C

[6] Facebook personal profile, posted on 7 April 2020, available at: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=944967502627094&id=100013415592154; Facebook group *Protiv zagaduvanje I truenje na narodot*, posted on 8 April 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/787942044967923/permalink/916094015486058

[7] *Kurir* (2020) *"Zaev asked for elections as soon as possible, the citizens answered angry 'Are you serious'?"*, *Kurir.mk*, 31 May 2020. Available at: https://kurir.mk/makedonija/vesti/zaev-pobara-izbori-chas-poskoro-gragjanite-besno-mu-odgovorija-ozbilen-li-si/

[8] Cvetanovski, Lj. (2020), "Ona koga Zaev zboruva za tatkovina", *Kurir.mk*, 29 May 2020. Available at: https://kurir.mk/kolumni/ona-koga-zaev-zboruva-za-tatkovina/

[9] Cvetanovski, Lj. (2020), "Denot koga ergelata na Baron Murtinhauzen bleskase", *Kurir.mk*, 22 May 2020. Available at: https://kurir.mk/kolumni/denot-koga-ergelata-na-baron-murtinhauzen-bleskashe/

[10] *Kurir* (2020) "SZO go demantira 'Doktor' Zaev: Nema dokazi deka zarazata slabee, koronata uste e virus ubiec", *Kurir.mk*, 2 June 2020. Available at:

https://kurir.mk/makedonija/vesti/szo-go-demantira-doktor-zaev-nema-dokazi-deka-zarazata-slabee-koronata-ushte-e-virus-ubiec/

[11] *Kurir* (2020) "Korona virusot zema zamav, Zaev uziva vo kafeana, Spasovski I Sekerinska teraat partiska agenda, od Filipce nit raga ni glas", *Kurir.mk*, 31 May 2020. Available at: https://kurir.mk/makedonija/vesti/koronavirusot-zema-zamav-zaev-vo-kafeana-spasovski-i-shekerinska-teraat-partiska-agenda-od-filipche-ni-traga-ni-glas/

[12] *Kurir* (2020) "SDSM stanuva klaster koj zarazuva so koronavirus", *Kurir.mk*, 2 June 2020. Available at: https://kurir.mk/makedonija/vesti/sdsm-stanuva-klaster-koj-zarazuva-so-koronavirus/

[13] *Kurir* (2020) "Plagijatori: Vladata na SDSM ja 'pozajmila' frazata nova normalnost od mentorot Soros", *Kurir.mk,* 27 May 2020. Available at: https://kurir.mk/makedonija/vesti/plagijatori-vladata-na-sdsm-ja-ukrala-frazata-nova-normalnost-od-mentorot-soros/

[14] Facebook group *Bojkotiram* "Komicno video na Zaev", post on 25 May 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/%D0%91%D0%BE%D1%98%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC-Bojkotiram-264567164291538.

[15] Facebook group *Bojkotiram* "Malku poznat fakt: Radmila Sekerinska ima srpsko poteklo", post on 31 May 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/%D0%91%D0%BE%D1%98%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC-Bojkotiram-264567164291538

[16] Facebook group *Zoran Zaev traitor number 1*. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/zaevpredavnikbroj1

[17] Facebook group *Zoran Zaev traitor number 1*, post on 21 May 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/zaevpredavnikbroj1.

[18] Facebook profile of Milenko Nedelkovski. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/MilenkoNedelkovskiDnevnik

[19] Facebook profile of Milenko Nedelkovski, post on 31 May 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/MilenkoNedelkovskiDnevnik

[20] Facebook group *Makedonija,* post on 1 March 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=3045068842224389&id=679245572140073

[21] Facebook group *Makedonija,* post on 3 March 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/%D0%9C%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0-679245572140073/?ref=page_internal

[22] Facebook group *Stop za 5G Mrezata vo Makedonija,* 12 May 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=3314562055234446&set=a.214150971942252%5C

[23] *DokazM* (2020) "Debelata Miroslava *** saka da pecali na grb na Evropskata Unija", *DokazM.mk*, 18 May 2020. Available at: https://dokazm.mk/debelata-miroslava-dedojebojka-saka-da-pechali-na-grb-na-dokaz-od-evropska-unija/

[24] *DokazM* (2020) "Kazete I na neprismenava novinarka **** deka crkvite ne se zabraneti da ne palamudi", *DokazM.mk,* 4 June 2020. Available at: https://dokazm.mk/kazhete-i-na-nepismenava-novinarka-dedojebojka-deka-tsrkvite-ne-se-zabraneti-da-ne-palamudi/

[25] *DokazM* (2020) "Miroslava Burns novinarka na Sloboden pecat I ministerot heroj Filipce… ne insinuirame", *DokazM.mk,* 2 June 2020. Available at: https://dokazm.mk/miroslava-burns-novinarka-na-sloboden-pechat-i-ministerot-heroj-filipche-ne-insinuirame/

[26] DokazM (2020) "**** barala demant od *DokazM* a koj te terase da se zakacas be", DokazM.mk,19 May 2020. Available at: https://dokazm.mk/dedojebojkata-barala-demant-od-dokazm-a-koj-te-tera-da-se-zakachash-be/

[27] *Infomax* (2020) "Brojkata na zarazeni i natamu raste: Zosto ne se pocituvaat merkite za sprecuvanje na sirenje na koronavirusot?", *Infomax.mk*, 18 May 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/39p1MGk

[28] Janevski, D. (2020) "Ramazan-Bajram karantin: "Za VMRO-vecot Culev da bide namesten vo vojna so Albancite", *Republika.mk,* republished in Infomax.mk, 20 May 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/36lsZrp

[29] *Infomax* (2020) "Podlegnaa na pritisokot I zakanite na IVZ: Vladata go prifati ultimatimot na IVZ, dodeka vladicite koi kanea da se odi vo crkva bea predmet na zestok napad, navredi I zigosuvanje", *Infomax.mk*, 22 May 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/3o9BFqU

[30] *Infomax* (2020) "Kazete nesto bre ashljaci – sakavte da gi kastrirate vernicite vo Struga?", *Infomax.mk,* 18 May 2020. Available at: https://bit.ly/36mxD8F

[31] Facebook profile of Aleksandar Mitovski, comment to post of *Infomax.mk*, 18 May 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/MitovskiAleksandar/posts/146632933587102

[32] Facebook group *Sveto ime – Makedonija*, posted on 14 April 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/sveto.ime.makedonija/posts/986176115110371

About the author

Vesna Nikodinoska holds an MA in Global Communications from the American University of Paris. She is a Programme Manager and a researcher at the Macedonian Institute for Media in Skopje.

HATE NARRATIVES
IN NEW MEDIA FORMS
IN SERBIA

Jelena Jovović
Dubravka Valić Nedeljković

RESILIENCE : For Media Free of Hate and Disinformation

The regional project 'RESILIENCE: Civil society action to reaffirm media freedom and counter disinformation and hateful propaganda in the Western Balkans and Turkey' is implemented with the financial support of the European Union by partner organizations SEENPM, the Albanian Media Institute, Mediacentar Sarajevo, Kosovo 2.0, the Montenegro Media Institute, the Macedonian Institute for Media, the Novi Sad School of Journalism, the Peace Institute and bianet.

Info: https://seenpm.org/
Contact: admin@seenpm.org

HATE NARRATIVES IN NEW MEDIA FORMS IN SERBIA

SERBIA

Authors: Jelena Jovović, Dubravka Valić Nedeljković

Editor, regional lead researcher: Brankica Petković

Expert reviewer: Stefan Janjić

Language editor: Fiona Thompson

Design: Špela Kranjec for Filip Kranjec s.p., Ljubljana, Slovenia

Publishers: SEENPM, Tirana, Peace Institute, Ljubljana and Novi Sad School of Journalism, Novi Sad

Ljubljana, February 2021

CONTENTS

HATE NARRATIVES IN NEW MEDIA FORMS IN SERBIA

Jelena Jovović
Dubravka Valić Nedeljković

1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet has provided new opportunities for the manifestation of freedom of expression, but it has also opened a space for the spread of hate speech, disinformation and propaganda. Recognizing the need to strengthen capacities of media CSOs and grassroots organizations to improve the understanding of disinformation and hateful propaganda models of media and communication, the ability of media and civil society to respond to and debunk false information, particularly online, and building the resilience of citizens against disinformation, eight civil society organizations from the Western Balkans and Turkey (WBT), coordinated by South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM), implement the Resilience project.

In recent years in Serbia, in the name of freedom of speech and freedom of the media, hate speech has significantly outweighed the arguments in the system of public communication.

The research results we present here are part of the research activities carried out in seven project countries within the Resilience project. The research that preceded had analyzed the political-economic basis of hate, disinformation and propaganda models of media and communication. Its findings indicate that in recent years in Serbia, in the name of freedom of speech and freedom of the media, hate speech has significantly outweighed the arguments in the system of public communication. Media outlets with national coverage (with their online editions) systematically deliver content to citizens that promotes government representatives, spreads disinformation and incites hatred towards dissidents or neighbouring nations. In addition to the media, "the Internet has enabled various groups of extreme attitudes to reach directly to citizens, to communicate with them and spread their ideas more efficiently and massively than before" (Valić Nedeljković, Janjatović Jovanović, 2020).

Media outlets with national coverage (with their online editions) systematically deliver content to citizens that promotes government representatives, spreads disinformation and incites hatred towards dissidents or neighbouring nations.

With this second research, we aimed to determine what the main patterns and examples of hate and disinformation narratives in the new media in Serbia are, what actors and events serve as the main generators of hate narratives, and what the main ideas and

151

messages disseminated are. This report also lists reactions to hate narratives and provides an overview of prevention and ex-post actions to combat hate and disinformation narratives in Serbia.

We analyzed the content published in online media and social networks, focusing on the specific target groups and the cases studies related to them in the period from June 2019 to June 2020. The content analysis of the selected material was conducted in the period from September to October 2020.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

We based our research on case study analysis. Target groups of migrants, political opponents, and journalists, towards which the analyzed narratives are directed, were identified at the regional level for all seven countries researched under the Resilience project. In each of the countries, the researchers had the opportunity to choose a fourth target group. Therefore, within the category of political opponents, we decided to analyze both sides of the political spectrum: the political opposition and government representatives as targets of the narrative.

The selection of cases/events was limited to the period between June 2019 and June 2020. For each selected case/event within the target group, the content published in online media and social networks in a period covering two weeks after the selected event was analyzed. For each target group, we selected those publicly recognized cases as generators of hate narratives.

The hate narrative is operationalized through two key concepts—narrative (de Latour, 2007) and hatred, which can be expressed through hate speech (Komitet pravnika za ljudska prava, 2007) and/or as a particular subset of hate speech—dangerous speech (Benesch, 2020).

In this research, a distinction was made between two categories of hate speech, implicit and explicit. An explicit level of expression of hate speech implies an open declaration of hatred towards another. The implicit level includes all those messages that agree with discriminatory, stereotyping, and aggressive messages and actions of others, and/or when such messages are transmitted without appropriate critical review or due journalistic attention, which may give the impression that the transmitter (individual or media) supports such actions and attitudes.

We based our research on case study analysis. Target groups of migrants, political opponents, and journalists, towards which the analyzed narratives are directed, were identified at the regional level for all seven countries researched under the Resilience project.

A total of 16 media outlets were selected for narrative analysis based on three criteria;

a) media that were previously identified as media that systematically spread hate speech, disinformation and propaganda (Valić Nedeljković, Janjatović Jovanović, 2020),

b) as well as the media which, according to the statistics of Fake news Tragač, a portal dedicated to the deconstruction of false and manipulative media content (fakenews.rs), are the most common sources of manipulation: Informer (informer.rs), Alo (alo.rs), Telegraf (telegraf.rs), Kurir (kurir.rs), Pink (pink.rs), Studio B (studiob.rs), Happy BSC portal (happytv.rs), Srbija Danas (srbijadanas.com), Sputnik (rs.sputniknews.com), Blic online (blic.rs), Srbin. info (srbin.info) and RTV (rtv.rs), and

c) media with a significant influence on public debate/agenda setting media): *RTS* (rts.rs), *N1* (rs.n1info.com), *Danas* (danas.rs) and *Autonomija* (autonomija.info).

For each target group, a Google search was performed within a defined site (online media) using a phrase or keyword within a limited time range defined separately for each target group. In cases where the Google search produced no results, the search was carried out within the selected portal on the same criteria.

Online media presented in individual case studies were selected based on the presence of hate speech in the total number of articles *directly connected with the case*/event/incident or in the comments of readers/users who follow these reports. When a larger number of media met these criteria, media with a greater influence on the public debate were selected for analysis.

User comments published with sampled reports were also analyzed. Some individual comments were complex, i.e. its parts belonged to more than one narrative.

Profiles and groups on social networks were selected with the CrowdTangle application, except for the target group of migrants. The selected Facebook group "Movement STOP Settlement of Migrants" was identified as a hate speech generator in the first research conducted within the "Resilience" project.

3. CASE STUDIES

A keyword search yielded a total of 195 articles/reports relevant to the analysis. A total of 13 out of 16 analyzed online media have an open option for readers' comments, where a total of 2382 comments have been published.

Media reports and comments selected for individual case studies underwent quantitative and qualitative analyses, and for each target group, the key narratives were identified (Table 1).

IDENTIFIED KEY NARRATIVES FOR EACH OF THE TARGET GROUPS
Table 1

TARGET GROUP	KEY NARRATIVE
Migrants	The arrival of the migrants is a threat to society.
Political opponents	The political opposition are working against their country.
	Government officials are working against their country.
Journalists	Journalists are enemies of the state (and by extension, enemies of their people).

3.1. Case study 1: Migrants

On 6 May 2020, F.R. drove his car at full speed into the Reception Centre for Migrants in Obrenovac (former military barracks), which was, at the time, secured by the Serbian Army. F. R. live-streamed the whole event on his Facebook profile. After trying to break through the fence of the Reception Centre, he entered through the main entrance saying: "We will express our dissatisfaction towards the thousands of migrants who immigrated to Obrenovac by entering the migrant centre, the former barracks. Here is the army." As he drove through the grounds, he shouted: "Let's see what our migrant brothers are doing. I don't want my girlfriend to be attacked by migrants. I don't want to watch people who are running from nothing in my town. I don't want to watch them. I do not want a Muslim state. I don't want to put up with this. The punishment will be great for sure. I'm getting out now."

Migrants are credited with the most aggressive tendencies, led by the allegations of assault on women, which, in a still traditional society, resonates as a call to men to take action and protect them. They are also credited with the tendency to violently (war and terrorist attacks) want to take over our territory and impose their religion.

The young man was arrested and ordered to be detained for 48 hours. The prosecution qualified the crime as violent behaviour and requested detention for 30 days. The Basic Court in Obrenovac initially rejected the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office's proposal to order custody, after which he was released. After the Prosecutor's Office's appeal, the Basic Court in Obrenovac reversed the original decision, so F.R. was arrested again. At the beginning of June 2020,

154

he was sentenced to eight months in prison after concluding an agreement with the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Obrenovac on admitting guilt for the crime of violent behaviour. The prosecution missed the opportunity to characterize this act as a crime of inciting national, racial, and religious hatred and intolerance.

For the target group Migrants, the keywords are defined: "migrant", "migrants'", "Obrenovac", and "F.R.", as well as the full name of the person who is the main culprit of the selected event. The observed time range covered the period from 6–20 May 2020.

This event attracted a lot of media and public attention. In the observed period, in 14 of the 16 sampled online media, a total of 43 posts/articles directly related to it were published. Hate speech towards migrants was registered in 17 posts/articles (13 at the implicit and four at the explicit level) (Table 1). On 13 (out of these 14) online media, users wrote a total of 584 comments on posts/articles related to the event. Hate speech toward migrants is registered in 234 comments (149 at the implicit and 85 at the explicit level).

For the case study, the portals *Kurir* (kurir.rs) and *Happy BSC portal* (happytv. rs) are selected within this target group.

The *Kurir* published four articles that are directly related to the event. Two of the articles are categorized as articles in which implicit hate speech is registered. The first, entitled "Young man lost his nerve, crashed into the barracks in Obrenovac by car: I don't want my girlfriend to be attacked by migrants!"[1], is a short news article with the video made by the main actor as its integral part. The article was written without a single word of criticism, and the chosen title justifies his action in a certain way. This justification goes a step further because Kurir provided an exclusive with the statement of the girl in question in the second article entitled "A member of the Leviathan wanted to trample migrants! His girlfriend reveals to *Kurir* what the asylum seekers did to her before the intrusion!"[2] thus supporting the sub-narrative "Migrants are prone to harassment of women and rape."

Along with these four articles, a total of 262 comments were published on the Kurir portal: we registered hate speech in 142 of them—107 at the implicit level in which individuals actually express support for the young man and his act, and 35 comments in which hate speech was registered at the explicit level.

READERS' COMMENTS IN THE ONLINE MEDIA OUTLET *KURIR* CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES
Table 2

KEY NARRATIVE	The arrival of the migrants is a threat to society.	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered
SUB-NARRATIVES	Calling for action against migrants. Migrants should be exiled, returned to their country of origin, refused entry at the border, or destroyed.	11
	Migrants are prone to harassment of women and rape.	5
	The ultimate goal of current migrations is the Islamization of Serbia (Western World).	4
	The police and the state protect them, cover up their criminal actions.	4
	Migrants are a security threat. They are aggressive, and they are connected to criminal groups. They steal, burn, kidnap, attack the local population; nothing good can be expected from them.	4
	Migrants are terrorists; only men come (preparing for war/jihad); They are militarily capable sleepers without women and children.	3
	Advocates for the rights of migrants should welcome them in their homes.	3
	Migrants are not refugees, they are not people in need, but they have decided to move for economic reasons, and they do not deserve help and protection.	2
	Migrants represent a threat to the cultural values of the society. Migrants come from countries with completely different, alien cultural values, incompatible with those of the society of arrival. Migrants are barbarians (under-developed/backwards), coming to the civilized western world; Offensive remarks that confirm such attitudes.	1
	Migrants are a threat to the core values of the society to which they arriving. Migrants come from countries that do not respect fundamental human rights.	1
	Migrants are a threat to socially disadvantaged groups. In Serbia, they have more rights than the local population; they get houses, money.	1
	The same rules and rights do not apply to the US and THEM as migrants. THEY are in a far better position than WE are.	1
	Serbia is conditioned/forced/paid to accept them.	1

In the observed period, the *Happy BSC portal* published five posts/articles directly related to the event. We registered hate speech in four of them. Out of two articles in which hate speech is registered at an implicit level, one is identical to the article published in *Kurir* (without citing the source) while the other transmits the girlfriend's statement given to *Kurir*. In addition to articles and statements, the Happy BSC portal thus takes over and maintains the narrative, "Migrants are prone to harassment of women and rape."

At the explicit level, this media outlet generates hate narratives in two articles. In the article "Shocking video! See what migrants are doing in the camp in Obrenovac"[3] it uses a video circulating on social networks in which the migrants are exercising to depict "Migrants as terrorists who are preparing for war." They add to that the excerpt from the report on the situation in the centre in Obrenovac published by the Asylum Protection Center, which portrays migrants as a "threat to security" because "They are aggressive and associated with criminal groups." The second article entitled "New privileges for illegal migrants in Serbia! Here's what they can do now!" which implies that "migrants in Serbia have more rights than the local population," begins with the sentence "Illegal migrants who are in Serbia and who some 'incorrectly refer to as refugees' have been given a new privilege" is actually informing its readers that the decision that temporarily restricted the movement of migrants and asylum seekers in order to prevent the entry of coronavirus into the centres where they are accommodated, ceased to be valid.

Although it has an open commenting option, a total of two comments have been registered on the *Happy BSC portal*, one of which expresses support for the act of F.R.

There are several active social media groups in Serbia which bring together individuals who most often publish manipulative, fabricated and recycled information about migrants. The largest number of members are gathered in the group "Movement STOP Settlement of Migrants", which had 325,786 members at the time of writing this report. The group was founded on 25 March 2020 and changed its name on 3 October 2020. (The original name was "STOP Settlement of Migrants").

In the observed period, five currently available posts related to the incident were identified in this group. The first was published on 6 May and linked to a video recording of the incident, and the next four posts "prove" that the young man's action was justified.

For all those who say that migrants did not attack any woman in Serbia. Obenovac[4]
A young man who broke into a migrant camp in Obrenovac was released[5]
If we ask ourselves, whence the problems of the past month in Obrenovac. This is because the state has not responded to the violence.[6]
The problems with asylum seekers in Obrenovac are not from yesterday; this video reveals what migrants and the commissariat are doing, as well as how they are breaking the law. Citizens are more than upset[7]

157

On 6 May, one of the group members shared a video of the incident[8] initially published on the website *vestidana.rs*. This entry had 1,700 comments on the group, of which 1,049 are currently available. This post has been shared 1,200 times.

Out of 1,049 analyzed comments, 728 (69.4%) are comments with elements of hate speech. In 476 comments (65.38%), hate speech is implicit, i.e. it consists of comments in which support for F.M. and his act is expressed in words or with videos, gifs and emojis. In 252 comments, hate speech is registered at an explicit level. They are classified into numerous sub-narratives (Table 3).

COMMENTS OF MEMBERS OF THE FACEBOOK GROUP *MOVEMENT STOP SETTLEMENT OF MIGRANTS* CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES
Table 3

KEY NARRATIVE	The arrival of the migrants is a threat to society.	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered
	Calling for action against migrants. Migrants should be exiled, returned to their country of origin, refused entry at the borders or destroyed.	136
	Migrants are terrorists; only men come (preparing for war/jihad); They are militarily capable sleepers without women and children.	41
	Serbia is conditioned/forced/paid to accept them.	19
	Migrants are prone to harassment of women and rape.	17
	The ultimate goal of current migrations is the Islamization of Serbia (Western World).	17
SUB-NARRATIVES	Migrants are a threat to population growth. In Serbia, the government is settling migrants in order to increase the birth rate.	9
	The police and the state protect them, cover up their criminal actions.	8
	Migrants represent a threat to cultural values of the society. Migrants come from countries with completely different, alien cultural values, incompatible with those of the society of arrival. Migrants are barbarians (under-developed/backwards), coming to the civilized western world; Offensive remarks that confirm such attitudes.	8
	Advocates for the rights of migrants should welcome them in their homes.	7

SUB-NARRATIVES	Migrants are a security threat. They are aggressive, and they are connected to criminal groups. They steal, burn, kidnap, attack the local population; nothing good can be expected from them.	7
	Migrants are a threat to socially disadvantaged groups. In Serbia, they have more rights than the local population; they get houses, money.	6
	The president's future voters	5
	Migrants are not refugees, they are not people in need, but they have decided to move for economic reasons, and they do not deserve help and protection.	5
	THEY have more rights in Serbia than WE do.	3
	The same rules and rights do not apply to the US and THEM as migrants. THEY are in a far better position than WE are.	2

3.2. Case study 2: Political opponents

3.2.1. Political opposition

On 15 January 2020, a video was published on the Facebook page "Javnost Srbije"[8] portraying Marinika Tepić, vice president of the opposition Party of Freedom and Justice, as "a traitor" (patriot of some other countries), "a mercenary of foreign countries and organizations, liar and enemy of the state, working against the interests of the Serbian people". This page has been in existence since October 2019. It mainly publishes affirmative announcements about the representatives of the ruling party and their successes and negative announcements about the opposition's representatives, which prevail. It has a total of 2,237 followers. However, a significant number of their posts are made up of short videos, mostly those representing the opposition in a negative context, which have a significantly higher number of views than the number of followers.

The video on this page had 28,000 views, 142 comments and 21 shares. Of the 142 comments, 24 (34.8%) contained explicit hate speech directed at Marinika Tepić, which is expressed in the numerous sub-narratives about her (Table 4).

Hatred towards government officials is associated with their personal characteristics, i.e. belonging to a group that is not related to the political function they perform and put in the service of political struggle. In the case of the opposition's representative, hatred towards her as the performer of a particular function is manifested by misogyny, and in the case of the Prime Minister, by homophobia.

159

FOLLOWERS' COMMENTS ON THE FACEBOOK PAGE *JAVNOST SRBIJE* CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES
Table 4

KEY NARRATIVE	The political opposition are working against their country.	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered
SUB-NARRATIVES	Misogynistic comments and offensive comments with elements of misogyny.	12
	Politicians of the opposition are mercenaries of foreign countries and organizations.	6
	Politicians of the opposition are traitors; They are not patriots.	6
	Members of the opposition lie and deceive.	2
	Various forms of death threats, threatening with injury.	2
	Members of the opposition are thieves, representing only their own financial interests.	2
	Members of the opposition are mentally ill people, where hatred toward opposition is associated or intertwined with sanism.	2
	The political opposition do not work in the best interest of its country and its people; they are enemies of the state.	1

The video went viral on Twitter after being shared by Dragan Đilas five days later, with a message sent to President Aleksandar Vučić[1]. Here, the video has been viewed 53,900 times. Moreover, only after Đilas' announcement did the media start reporting on this event.

From 15–29 January, out of the 16 selected, five portals reported on this event. Based on a Google search using the keywords "Marinika", "Marinika Tepić", "Đilas", "Dragan Đilas", and "opposition", seven articles related to the event were found. Hate speech was registered in two articles, one at the implicit level and one at the explicit level.

The article published on the *Informer* portal: "Shame on you, tycoon "liar"! Đilas called out Vučić again because of Marinika! Vladanka Malović slammed him immediately!"[9] with the title, a short article, and by conveying the insulting statement of the head of the information service of the ruling

---

1   The analysis of the tweets could not be conducted because, in April 2020, Twitter deleted 8,558 accounts and 43,067,074 tweets because they were "engaged in inauthentic coordinated activity to promote the SNS and Vučić to attack their political opponents, and to amplify content from news outlets favourable to them." according to Stanford Internet Observatory's analysis. Available at: https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/april-2020-twitter-takedown. [Accessed October 2020].

Serbian Progressive Party, supports the sub-narrative "The representatives of the opposition lie and deceive." In the 138 words of this news article, the word liar is repeated five times. The word tycoon, usually used with a negative connotation alongside the name of Dragan Đilas and connected with the claim that he came to his wealth dishonestly, i.e. that "he represented only his financial interests" while he was in power, is repeated three times.

In contrast to this completely biased article, on the *Srbin info* portal hate speech can be seen in the title "SNS's answer: 'you are reptiles and liars'"[10], and in quoted tweets by Dragan Đilas and Vladanka Malović, from which the media did not distance itself, i.e. did not indicate that the claims made in the tweets are aggressive and contain hate speech. As it is a quote from the same tweet as in the case of Informer, the sub-narratives are the same – "The representatives of the opposition lie and deceive and represent their own financial interests."

Although the commenting option was open, there were no comments from readers with the analyzed article on the *Kurir* and *Informer* portals.

3.2.2. Government officials

From 8–10 September, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić paid an official visit to Luxembourg, on the agenda for which were political and economic meetings and talks and the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Luxembourg in WWII. In the unofficial part of the programme, the Prime Minister and her host also attended the Serbia-Luxembourg football match. In this visit, the Prime Minister was accompanied (in an unofficial part) by her (same-sex) partner.
For this target group, the search was performed using the keywords "Prime Minister", "Ana Brnabić" and "Luxembourg."

From 8–22 September 2019, 13 out of the 16 observed portals reported on this event. Hate speech was registered in three posts on three portals, on the portals Srbin Info and Danas on an explicit level, and in the article published on the Kurir portal on an implicit level.

In the portal *Srbin info's* post entitled "SERBIAN FANS in Luxembourg brutally insulted Ana Brnabić (VIDEO)"[11] the sub-narrative dominates that "government representatives spend our (state) money on meeting personal needs." Describing the Prime Minister of Luxembourg as a "gay colleague" and the Prime Minister's partner as her "girlfriend", the media outlet also expresses homophobic attitudes, which are further strengthened by publishing a video of a football fan in which "misogynistic and homophobic insults" directed to the Prime Minister are heard.

A total of three articles were found on the portal of the daily *Danas.* The one entitled "The Government of Luxembourg paid for the Prime Minister's partner"[12] and "On the occasion of the official visit of the Prime Minister of

Serbia Ana Brnabić and her girlfriend Milica Đurđić" explicitly contains the sub-narrative – "Government officials think they have a privileged position and do not respect the laws of the country they lead." The whole article oscillates between homophobia and the fight for the rights of people of same-sex orientation by (contrary to its usual practice) calling the Prime Minister's partner a "girlfriend", specifying unnecessary details from the Prime Minister's personal life ("Although they recently had a son by artificial insemination"), and quoting a statement from an interlocutor who supports the sub-narrative mentioned above and stepping towards tabloid journalism.

Eighteen comments have been published on this article, with hate speech being registered in eight of them generating several sub-narratives (Table 5).

READERS' COMMENTS IN ONLINE MEDIA OUTLET *DANAS* CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES Table 5		
KEY NARRATIVE	**Government officials are working against their country.**	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered
SUB-NARRATIVES	Homophobic comments and offensive comments with elements of homophobia.	4
	Government officials lie and deceive.	3
	Government officials do not work in the best interest of the country and its people; they are guided by personal interests.	1
	Government officials spend our (state) money on meeting personal needs.	1
	Government officials are mercenaries of foreign countries and organizations.	1
	The government is incompetent and leads the country to ruin, in the case of the Prime Minister, her incompetence stems from her sexual orientation.	1

The CrowdTangle application found that this post was shared three times and that the largest number of interactions took place on the FB page of *Danas*[13] where followers left a total of 83 comments, of which 37 registered hate speech and spinning several sub-narratives (Table 6).

FOLLOWERS' COMMENTS ON THE FACEBOOK PAGE *DANAS* CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES Table 6		
KEY NARRATIVE	**Government officials are working against their country.**	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered
SUB-NARRATIVES	Homophobic comments and offensive comments with elements of homophobia.	29
	Hateful messages about their family life, public life; Their personal life is nothing but scandal and degeneration – an extension of their politics.	5
	Government officials spend our (state) money on meeting personal needs.	5
	Government officials are mercenaries of foreign countries and organizations.	2
	Government officials are thieves, representing only their own financial interests.	1
	Government officials are mentally ill people, where hatred toward government officials is associated or intertwined with sanism.	1

3.3.   Case study 3: Journalists

On 1 April 2020, journalist Ana Lalić published the article "KC Vojvodina about to crack: No protection for nurses"[14] on the *Nova S* portal, after which representatives of the Clinical Center of Vojvodina informed the prosecution and police "due to public disturbance and damage to its reputation." Three hours after the article's publication, the journalist was arrested and suspected of the crime of spreading panic. She was ordered into custody and spent the night at the police station. She was released after the hearing. On 29 April, she received a decision from the Novi Sad Prosecutor's Office suspending the proceedings against her and withdrawing the criminal charges for harassing the public and spreading panic due to lack of evidence.

The first case of COVID-19 infection was registered in Serbia on 6 March. On 13 March, the COVID-19 Infection Disease Crisis Response Team was formed, headed by Prime Minister Ana Brnabić. Since then (until 3 May),

Response Team members have held a press conference every day. On 15 March, the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly, and the Prime Minister declared a state of emergency. From 29 March 2020, a mandatory curfew was in effect for all residents. Exceptions were residents with a work permit or a special authorization issued by government authorities and those with a medical emergency.

On 31 March, the Government issued a Conclusion (Vlada RS, 2020) specifying that the Crisis Response Team was in charge of informing the public about the infection's status and consequences. All information released to the public should be given by the Prime Minister or persons authorized by the Crisis Response Team. The Conclusion was withdrawn the day after the arrest of journalist Ana Lalić, according to the Prime Minister of Serbia and the chairman of the Crisis Response Team, Ana Brnabić, "at the explicit, direct request of President Aleksandar Vučić." On 3 April, the mandatory curfew was further strengthened, covering the entire weekend. According to official data concerning the consequences of COVID-19, there were a total of 61 deaths in Serbia on 7 April; by 15 April that number would increase to 109.

For the target group of journalists, the defined keywords were "journalist" and "Ana Lalić", and posts from 1–15 April 2020 were sampled.

All 16 observed media outlets wrote about this event. A total of 106 articles were published, followed by 1,700 reader's comments.

Unlike other analyzed target groups, hate speech was not registered in any of the published articles. However, in this case, the coverage of several media outlets took on the characteristics of a negative campaign against Ana Lalić, led by *Kurir*, *Pink*, *Informer*, and *Happy BSC portal*, with *Kurir* and *Pink* focusing on the journalist's personal qualities in this campaign.

In the observed period, *Kurir* published eight articles containing adverse claims related to the journalist Ana Lalić, of which six were issued on 2 April. The first entitled: "Irresponsible journalist Ana Lalić released despite lying: Look, masks, gloves, galoshes in KCV by the thousands"[15] where the article introduces a new sub-narrative according to which she is a "journalist without honour and shame" because "she made no attempt in front of investigating authorities to justify the publication of the false information." The two articles that followed[16] [17] convey the statements of the Provincial Secretary for Health and the Director of KCV in which *Kurir* maintains the same narrative: "Irresponsible journalists" and authors of fake news, without honour and shame", which is further confirmed by the article "Reuters convey a true picture of KC Vojvodina! This is a clinical centre with the most modern equipment and large stocks"[18], which states: "While 'some media' in Serbia 'reported a false image' of KC Vojvodina, a world-renowned agency reports on the most modern equipment in KCV."

In the narratives related to the journalists on a personal level, we rarely register narratives based on discrimination and hatred related to gender or sexual orientation. Instead, they are dominated by those focused on the absence of human values valued as good/appropriate (honour and shame).

164

A few days later, on 7 April, *Kurir* published the article "Journalist Ana Lalić consciously lied: She violated the code 'to instil fear among the people'"[19] in which *Kurir* "without intending to judge her" further strengthens the narrative that she is a "Journalist without honour" who "works against the interests of citizens/the public."

For this article, the Press Council ruled that *Kurir* violated items 4 and 5 of Section I (Truthfulness of Reporting) and Item 1 of Section V (Journalistic Attention) of the Code of Journalists of Serbia[2].

Later in the day, this portal published the article "The profession condemned the 'irresponsible reporting' of Ana Lalić! Dr. Kisić: Such stories hinder us while saving lives!"[20] quoting the answers of the Response Team experts to the question of Kurir's journalist: "how harmful are the lies spread by certain colleagues?"

Identical sub-narratives are also registered on the *Pink* portal (which republished a good portion of *Kurir*'s articles). This media outlets further strengthens the power of the sender of the message by quoting the statement of the "Srpska liga" (Serbian League), which they present as the "civil opposition", "Journalists are working against the interests of citizens/the public" ("These strong pressures that conditioned the release of Ana Lalić are aimed at continuing the false propaganda she carried out and that other journalists follow in her footsteps, to bring unrest and panic among the citizens of Serbia with fake news and malicious agitation") and "journalists represent (personal) political interests" ("Neither personal rights nor journalistic freedoms are above the common good, especially not in times of crisis and state of emergency, and especially not political propaganda that hides behind investigative journalism").

A total of 1,700 comments were published on the 16 observed portals, of which 123 were negative comments directed towards Ana Lalić. But there is also a significant number of those who express negative value judgments towards journalists from other media or other media.

Some 211 reader's comments were published on the *Kurir* portal, among which 34 adverse comments were registered. All comments are directed at journalist Lalić and can be classified into several sub-narratives (Table 7).

---

2   *The decision of the Press Council is available at: http://zalbe.rs/zalba/7529,*
[Accessed September 2020].

READERS' COMMENTS IN ONLINE MEDIA *KURIR* CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES

Table 7

KEY NARRATIVE	Journalists are enemies of the state (and by extension, enemies of their people).	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered
SUB-NARRATIVES	Journalists should be punished (by law).	16
	Journalists are liars.	5
	Journalists are working against the interests of the citizens/the public.	4
	Journalists have no values, honour or shame.	4
	Offensive comments.	4
	Journalists represent (personal) political interests.	3
	Journalists are corrupt; they publish what they are paid to publish.	3
	Journalists publish fake news.	1

By searching the articles published on the *Kurir* portal with the CrowdTangle application, the following results were obtained: *Kurir* shared three[21] [22] [23] of the eight analyzed articles on its Facebook page, on which followers left a total of 500 comments. Of that number, 44 negative comments were registered. Unlike the comments on the portal itself, where there are only negative comments directed towards the journalist Ana Lalić, on *Kurir*'s Facebook page, in addition to such, almost the same number of negative comments are registered towards *Kurir*, *Pink*, and *Informer*. The analyzed comments are combined into numerous sub-narratives (Table 8).

FOLLOWERS' COMMENTS ON THE FACEBOOK PAGE *KURIR* CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES

Table 8

KEY NARRATIVE	Journalists are enemies of the state (and by extension, enemies of their people).	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered	
		Towards Ana Lalić	Towards Kurir, Informer, Pink
SUB-NARRATIVES	Journalists are corrupt; they publish what they are paid to publish.	7	1
	Journalists should be punished (by law).	6	
	Journalists are liars.	5	2

SUB-NARRATIVES	Journalists are working against the interests of the citizens/the public.	3	
	Journalists represent (personal) political interests.	3	3
	Everything that journalists are doing is in the service of their need for personal promotion.	3	
	Journalists have no values – honour and shame.	2	3
	Journalists deserve to be punished (infected with COVID-19 virus).	2	1
	Misogynist comments.	2	
	Journalists are mentally ill people, where hatred towards journalists is associated or intertwined with sanism.	2	
	Offensive comments.	1	6

In addition to the negative campaign in (online) media and social networks, the internet space records another type of spreading of a negative message/ narrative against Ana Lalić. On 14 April, a paid ad with her name, photo, and inscription appeared on the Google store stating that "she works against the interests of Serbia". This message reached everyone who used the app that day.

Taking into account the context in which they originated, the vulnerability and susceptibility of the audience, the influence of the senders of the message and the medium with which messages were delivered, in the case of journalist Ana Lalić, a particular subset of hate speech –dangerous speech was identified, which culminated on 1 May, 2020, with an attack on a journalist[3].

---

3   *Recorded in the Database of Attacks on Journalists of the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia http://www.bazenuns.rs/srpski/detalji-napada-na-novinara/869*

4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

By observing all four target groups, we recognize a common thread in the narratives that connect them—on one side are 'we' and on the other 'them', who threaten us. The limited repertoire of narratives reduced to this pattern flows from the media into the public discourse where, thanks to the frequency of repetition, especially on social networks, it influences the formation of attitudes and prejudices. Migrants are credited with the most aggressive tendencies, led by the allegations of assault on women, which, in a still traditional society, resonates as a call to men to take action and protect them. They are also credited with the tendency to violently (war and terrorist attacks) want to take over our territory and impose their religion. As these are messages that resonate very easily with an individual on a personal level, especially in a specific macro and microhistorical context (from the period of the Ottoman conquests through the wars of the 1990s until the current situation with COVID-19), they carry the greatest danger because they are easily manifested through violent actions by individuals and groups against migrants. Unfortunately, the analyzed example of a young man who broke into a migrant centre is not alone.

In the case of political opponents, the narratives resonate at both the collective and personal levels. At the collective level, 'they' threaten 'us'—they work against the interests of the state. At the personal level, hatred towards government officials is associated with their personal characteristics, i.e. belonging to a group that is not related to the political function they perform and put in the service of political struggle. In the case of the opposition's representative, hatred towards her as the performer of a particular function is manifested by misogyny, and in the case of the Prime Minister, by homophobia.

Since this is a highly politicized case, the same is evident in the narratives related to the journalist Lalić, except that on a personal level, we rarely register narratives based on discrimination and hatred related to gender or sexual orientation. Instead, they are dominated by those focused on the absence of human values valued as good/appropriate (honour and shame).

The results of this research once again show that the online space is very suitable for the creation and dissemination of hate narratives, with the almost equal role played by specific groups of like-minded people gathered on social networks and online media. On social networks, hatred is expressed very explicitly and en masse, while in media reporting, we more often register implicit hate speech, in which the described tabloid media predominate.

However, in the cases of media coverage analyzed in the group of political opponents, *Danas*, which is traditionally perceived as a socially responsible and critically oriented media outlet and the independent N1, we can conclude

> The online space is very suitable for the creation and dissemination of hate narratives, with the almost equal role played by specific groups of like-minded people gathered on social networks and online media.

> On social networks, hatred is expressed very explicitly and en masse, while in media reporting, we more often register implicit hate speech, in which the described tabloid media predominate.

168

that they also, in some way, legitimize the use of hate speech in political dialogue. Instead of comprehensively researching the topic and informing the public about different views on conflicting issues, they give the floor to political opponents without clearly distancing themselves from their messages containing hate speech. This is especially evident in the example of N1, whose journalists, trying to prove that the video was made in the "government kitchen", completely overlooked the opportunity to answer the question of the SNS MP "what is disputable in that video?" (Referring to the video with Marinika Tepić)[24].

5. PREVENTIVE AND EX-POST ACTIONS TO COMBAT HATE NARRATIVES IN SERBIA

Preventive and ex-post actions in the fight against hate narratives in the online space in Serbia can be classified into three groups: legal, content moderation and filters and normative actions (Faris et al. 2016).

5.1. Legal framework

The legal framework governing this area starts from the highest legal act – the Constitution (2006), where Article 18 stipulates that "provisions on human and minority rights shall be interpreted to the benefit of promoting values of a democratic society, pursuant to valid international standards in human and minority rights, as well as the practice of international institutions which supervise their implementation."

Several laws in Serbia regulate this area. The umbrella law governing hate speech is the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination (2009), which recognizes hate speech as a form of discrimination. Relevant to the media, both the Law on Public Information and Media (2016) and the Law on Electronic Media (2016) prohibit hate speech in the media. The Criminal Code (2019) criminalizes acts that essentially constitute hate speech by including criminal offences and sanctions. In the online space, legal protection is realized in the criminal proceedings conducted by state bodies determined by the Law on the Organization and Jurisdiction of Government Authorities in Fight against High-Tech Crime (2009).

However, as representatives of civil society organizations dealing with the protection of human rights point out, criminal-legal protection is not a sufficiently effective form of combating hate speech. There are two main reasons: the procedures that are initiated are extremely long-lasting (Stojković, M., Pokuševski, D. 2018), and cases in which the prosecution initiates proceedings are very rare.

5.2.   Content moderation and filters

The second set of preventive and ex-post actions to combat hate narratives in the online space is not exclusively related to Serbia. It consists of all the measures that various services and portals implement to eliminate hate speech – *terms of services* and *moderation of user-generated content*.

All observed online portals have predefined terms of service in the space provided for user comments, and they all apply some form of moderation of user-generated content, mostly post moderation. However, the mere fact that, in the cases described in this research, comments were still available on portals and social networks is a sufficient measure of the effectiveness of these actions.

5.3.   Normative actions

The normative actions include all those preventive and ex-post actions that are designed to shape behavioural norms. The essential normative acts and bodies when it comes to the media, including their online editions, are the Serbian Journalists' Code of Ethics (2015) and the Press Council. Articles IV and V of the Code focus particularly on protection against hate speech and discrimination. In 2016, it was supplemented with the Guidelines on applying the Code of Ethics in a digital environment, where appropriate interpretations and guidelines were given for the successful and correct application of professional standards in the online environment.

In creating norms, the institution of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality also stands out. In 2018, the Commissioner passed the Recommendations on measures ensuring equality to Internet portals in Serbia. They are addressed to all registered internet portals and "find that all necessary measures be taken to prevent the publication of content and comments of users on the internet portal and profiles on social networks, as well as the removal of those comments that have already been published, making such content and comments available to the public, which by their nature may incite hatred or violence against persons or groups of persons because of their personal characteristics or provoke fear or a hostile, degrading and offensive environment."[4] Also, the Commissioner published the Handbook for Journalists (2017), which provided recommendations for non-discriminatory reporting.

Of great importance are all actions carried out by civil society organizations focused on advocacy, education, and literacy in the field of combating hate narratives that included thousands of mainly young people in Serbia[5].

---

4   *Recommendations on measures ensuring equality to Internet portals in Serbia. Available at: http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/rs/preporuka-mera-za-ostvarivanje-ravnopravnosti-za-internet-portale/,*
[Accessed October 2020]

5   *A detailed overview of good practices in Serbia in: Countering hate speech online. Available at: https://www.novinarska-skola.org.rs/sr/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Odgovor-na-govor-mr%C5%BEenje-na-internetu.pdf*

170

6.   CONCLUSION

Online media close to the political centre of power (Valić Nedeljković, Janjatović Jovanović, 2020) and extremist groups that have found fertile ground for spreading their ideas in the current socio-economic context have been identified as the main generators of the spread of hate narratives in this research. However, hate narratives are also registered in the online media, which are traditionally considered socially responsible and critically oriented, as well as in independent media.

The basic ideas and messages that are sent are not new. They come down to the threat posed to 'us' by 'those' who threaten us. The narrative's basis is the same in all analyzed cases, whether 'they' are migrants, politicians belonging to the opposition and the government, or journalists. What is worrying is the significant share of messages/narratives calling for action against migrants, and in the case of political opponents—even though the target groups are active participants in political life in whom the degree of tolerance, i.e. the degree of suffering of criticism must be higher than the average citizen—reducing criticism to discrimination and hatred based on gender or sexual orientation.

The power of their messages in the online space, where the influences of its communicators (senders) are gathered, is also worrying. In the case of media portals, the media with the greatest reach are the most influential on the audience (Valić Nedeljković, Janjatović Jovanović, 2020), increasing their power by opening the space to influential speakers to present their attitudes and opinions, often manifested in hate speech or dangerous speech.

This research also confirmed that the largest number of messages of hatred and negative comments are found on Facebook and the user comments on media reports. As user comments on media reports are subject to moderation and governed by rules that the media outlets define themselves, it can be concluded that media outlets filter messages according to the narrative they want to generate.

With social networks, the filtering level is much lower, both with Facebook pages where the media outlets promote their content and with the Facebook pages of the groups that gather like-minded people. The causes could be sought in the following: media outlets consider that there is no editorial responsibility for the user-generated content on social networks. In large groups such as the Movement STOP Settlement of Migrants, from the analyzed comments and the difference in the total number of published and currently available comments, it can be concluded that the moderators removed a large number of comments following their rules. However, for groups that bring together a large number of members, in which a lively discussion takes place and a large number of comments are

> Online media close to the political centre of power and extremist groups that have found fertile ground for spreading their ideas in the current socio-economic context have been identified as the main generators of the spread of hate narratives in this research. However, hate narratives are also registered in the online media, which are traditionally considered socially responsible and critically oriented, as well as in independent media.

> As user comments on media reports are subject to moderation and governed by rules that the media outlets define themselves, it can be concluded that media outlets filter messages according to the narrative they want to generate.

171

published, moderation is a rather demanding task. However, as can be seen from the analysis of legal and normative actions to combat hate narratives, appropriate means and mechanisms exist; it is only necessary to ensure their adequate and non-selective implementation.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

• Educate police and prosecutors to identify hate speech cases in the public space and how such speech is distributed via various communication platforms. Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice should conduct this education systematically and collaboratively.

• Ensure the continuous work of organizations and projects for monitoring hate speech and reporting these cases to law enforcement bodies and the global communication platforms dealing with this issue with the financial assistance of the Ministry of Culture and Information, European Commission programmes, and donor organizations.

• Introduce affirmative measures in the form of financial or other incentives for the media that nurture zero tolerance for hate speech in the content they produce themselves and user-generated content with the joint efforts of the Ministry of Culture and Information and Ministry of Finance.

• With the (financial) support of competent ministries (the Ministry of Culture and Information, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development), European Commission programs, and donor organizations:

  • Educate online media editors to recognize hate speech in user-generated content on all communication channels used by the media and to take editorial responsibility for all content in their online media outlets, including those published on social networks, as well as to provide resources in cooperation with the publisher/media owner for appropriate moderation and training of moderators and creation and updating of guidelines for users.

  • Educate journalists, where it is recommended to conduct content-oriented training focusing on the ethics of language use in reporting based on applied linguistics, which deals with language use in specific situations in a specific area in a particular period, as well as journalistic stylistics.

  • Strengthen programmes that deal with education and media literacy of citizens in this area, both those in the formal educational process and nonformal programmes through significant (financial) support to organizations and institutions that implement these programmes.

• It is especially urgent to implement all the recommendations mentioned above in relation to the target group of migrants because hate speech and the greatest potential of taking action against them are most often registered.

Literature and sources

Benesch, S., Buerger, C., Glavinic, T., & Manion, S. (2018). Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide. Dangerous Speech Project., Available at: https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/.

de Latour, A., Perger, N., Salag, R., Tocchi, C., & Otero, P. V. (2017). We can!: Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives (revised edition). Council of Europe, Available at: https://rm.coe.int/wecan-eng-final-23052017-web/168071ba08.

Faris, R., Ashar, A., Gasser, U., & Joo, D. (2016). Understanding harmful speech online. Berkman Klein Center Research Publication, (2016-21).

Janković, B., Krstić, I., Andonov, A., Jakobi, T. (2017) Priručnik za novinare i novinarke, Borba za ravnopravnost, Beograd, Poverenik za zaštitu ravnopravnosti

Komitet pravnika za ljudska prava. (2007). Govor mržnje i zločin mržnje kao instituti međunarodnog i domaćeg prava. Beograd, Available at: http://www.yucom.org.rs/upload/vestgalerija_38_5/1198696141_GS0_Metodologija%20govor%20mrznje%20zlocin%20mrznje.pdf.

R. Srbija (2009) Zakon o zabrani diskriminacije, Službeni glasnik RS, br. 22/2009, Available at: https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_zabrani_diskriminacije.html

R. Srbija (2009) Zakonom o organizaciji i nadležnosti državnih organa za borbu protiv visokotehnološkog kriminala, Službeni glasnik RS, br 61/2005 i 104/2009, Available at: https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_organizaciji_i_nadleznosti_drzavnih_organa_za_borbu_protiv_visokotehnoloskog_kriminala.html

R. Srbija (2016) Zakon o elektronskim medijima, Službeni glasnik RS, br 83/2014 i 6/2016, Available at: https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_elektronskim_medijima.html

R. Srbija (2016) Zakon o javnom informisanju i medijima, Službeni glasnik RS, br. 83/2014, 58/2015 i 12/2016, Available at: https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_javnom_informisanju_i_medijima.html

R. Srbija (2019) Krivični zakonik, Službeni glasnik RS, br. 85/2005, 88/2005 - ispr. 107/2005 - ispr., 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016 i 35/2019, Available at: https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/krivicni-zakonik-2019.html

Savet za štampu (2015) Kodeks novinara Srbije, Uputstva i smernice, Beograd, Savet za štampu, Available at: http://www.savetzastampu.rs/doc/Kodeks_novinara_Srbije.pdf

Savet za štampu (2016) Smernice za primenu kodeksa novinara Srbije u onlajn okruženju, Beograd, Savet za štampu, Available at: http://www.savetzastampu.rs/doc/smernice-za-primenu-kodeksa-novinara-srbije-u-onlajn-okruzenju.pdf

Stojković, M., Pokuševski, D. (2018). Anonimna mržnja – Mehanizmi zaštite od govora mržnje na internetu. Beograd: Beogradski centar za ljudska prava. Available at: http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/bgcentar/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Anonimna-mrznja-FINAL-S.pdf

Ustav Republike Srbije (2006) Službeni glasnik RS, br.98/2006, Available at: http://www.ustavni.sud.rs/page/view/139-100028/ustav-republike-srbije

Valić Nedeljković, D., Janjatović Jovanović, M. (2020). Medijski sistem u Srbiji obeležen delovanjem medija koji sistematično šire dezinformacije, govor mržnje i propagandu. Novi Sad, Available at: https://www.novinarska-skola.org.rs/sr/publication/medijski-sistem-u-srbiji-obelezen-delovanjem-medija-koji-sistematicno-sire-dezinformacije-govor-mrznje-i-propagandu/: Novosadska novinarska škola.

Vlada RS. (31.3.2020.). Zaključak 05 broj 53-2928/2020. Službeni glasnik RS, br.48, Available at: https://www.propisi.net/zakljucak-vlade-05-broj-53-2928-2020/.

LIST OF THE ANALYZED ARTICLES AND CONTENT ON SOCIAL NETWORKS:

[1] "MLADIĆ IZGUBIO ŽIVCE I KOLIMA UPAO U KASARNU U OBRENOVCU: Ne želim da moju devojku napadaju migranti!", Kurir.rs, 6 May 2020. [Online]. Available at: https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/3459707/mladic-izgubio-zivce-i-kolima-upao-u-kasarnu-u-obrenovcu-ne-zelim-da-moju-devojku-napadaju-migranti-video. [Accessed September 2020].

[2] J. Ivić, "PRIPADNIK LEVIJATANA HTEO DA GAZI MIGRANTE! Njegova devojka za Kurir otkriva šta su joj AZILANTI DOBACIVALI pre upada!", Kurir.rs, 7 May 2020. [Online].
Available at: https: https://www.kurir.rs/crna-hronika/3460215/pripadnik-levijatana-hteo-da-gazi-migrante-njegova-devojka-za-kurir-otkriva-sta-su-joj-azilanti-dobacivali-pre-upada. [Accessed September 2020].

[3] "OPASAN SNIMAK! Pogledajte šta rade migranti u kampu u Obrenovcu", happytv.rs, 13 May 2020. [Online].
Available at: https://happytv.rs/vesti/hronika/228740/opasan-snimak-pogledajte-%C5%A1ta-rade-migranti-u-kampu-u-obrenovcu-video. [Accessed September 2020].

[4] „Za sve koji kažu da migranti nisu napali ni jednu ženu u Srbiji. Obrenovac.", Pokret STOP Naseljavanju migranata, 8 May 2020. [FB group].
Available at: https://web.facebook.com/groups/512775282720731/permalink/547619639236295/. [Accessed September 2020].

[5] *"Mladić koji je upao u migrantski kamp u Obrenovcu, pušten na slobodu…"*, Pokret STOP Naseljavanju migranata, 8 May 2020. [FB group].
Available at: https://web.facebook.com/groups/512775282720731/permalink/547540169244242/. [Accessed September 2020].

[6] *"Ukoliko se pitamo, odakle problemi proteklih mesec dana baš u Obrenovcu. To je zato što država nije odgovorila na nasilje."*, Pokret STOP Naseljavanju migranata, 7 May 2020. [FB group].
Available at: https://web.facebook.com/groups/512775282720731/permalink/547070192624573/. [Accessed September 2020].

[7] *"Problemi sa azilantima u Obrenovcu nisu od juče, ovaj snimak otkriva šta rade migranti i komesarijat, kao i kako krše zakone. Građani su više nego uznemireni"*, Pokret STOP Naseljavanju migranata, 7 May 2020. [FB group].
Available at: https://web.facebook.com/groups/512775282720731/permalink/546917262639866/. [Accessed September 2020].

[7] *"Neću da mi migranti diraju devojku i da ih ovde naseljavaju - vikao je mladić."*, Pokret STOP Naseljavanju migranata, 6 May 2020. [FB group].
Available at: https://web.facebook.com/groups/512775282720731/permalink/546452419353017/. [Accessed September 2020].

[8] "Чији је #MarinikaTepic патриота? Чије интересе заступа #SavezZaSRB и #slobodaipravda", Javnost Srbije, 15 January 2020. [FB page]. Available at: https://web.facebook.com/114135356660223/videos/2420509131394764/?__so__=channel_tab&__rv__=all_videos_card. [Accessed October 2020].

[9] "SRAM TE BILO, LAŽOVČINO TAJKUNSKA! Đilas ponovo isprozivao Vučića zbog Marinike! VLADANKA MALOVIĆ ODMAH GA ZAKUCALA!", Informer.rs, 20 January 2020. [Online].
Available at: https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/487285/sram-bilo-lazovcino-tajkunska-djilas-ponovo-isprozivao-vucica-zbog-marinike-vladanka-malovic-odmah-zakucala. [Accessed October 2020].

[10] "Odgovor SNS ´vi ste gmizavci i lažovčine´", Srbin.info, 20 January, 2020. [Online].
Available at: https://srbin.info/politika/odgovor-sns-vi-ste-gmizavci-i-lazovcine/?lang=lat. [Accessed October 2020].

[11] "SRPSKI NAVIJAČI u Luksemburgu brutalno izvređali Anu Brnabić", srbin.info, 12 September 2019. [Online].
Available at: https://srbin.info/politika/srpski-navijaci-u-luksemburgu-brutalno-izvredjali-anu-brnabic-video/?lang=lat. [Accessed October 2020].

[12] J. Diković, "Vlada Luksemburga platila put premijerkinoj partnerki", Danas.rs, 12 September 2020. [Online].
Available at: https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/vlada-luksemburga-platila-put-premijerkinoj-partnerki/. [Accessed October 2020].

[13] *"Povodom zvanične posete predsednice Vlade Srbije Ana Brnabić i njene devojke Milice Đurđić"* Danas, 12 September 2020 [FB page].
Available at: https://web.facebook.com/www.danas.rs/posts/1204500146402016?_rdc=1&_rdr. [Accessed October 2020].

[14] A. Lalić, *"KC Vojvodine pred pucanjem: Bez zaštite za medicinske sestre"* Nova S, 01 April 2020 [Online].
Available at: https://nova.rs/vesti/drustvo/kc-vojvodine-pred-pucanjem-bez-zastite-za-medicinske-sestre/. [Accessed October 2020].

[15] *"PUŠTENA NEODGOVORNA NOVINARKA ANA LALIĆ BEZ OBZIRA ŠTO JE LAGALA: Pogledajte, maski, rukavica, kaljača u KCV na hiljade"*, Kurir, 02 April 2020. [Online]
Available at: https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/3439573/pustena-neodgovorna-novinarka-ana-lalic-bez-obzira-sto-je-lagala-pogledajte-maski-rukavica-kaljaca-u-kcv-na-hiljade. [Accessed October 2020].

[16] *"ZORAN GOJKOVIĆ: Sve zdravstvene ustanove u Vojvodini imaju potrebnu opremu za zbrinjavanje pacijenata"*, Kurir, 02 April 2020. [Online]
Available at: https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/3439777/zoran-gojkovic-sve-zdravstvene-ustanove-u-vojvodini-imaju-potrebnu-opremu-za-zbrinjavanje-pacijenata. [Accessed October 2020].

[17] *DIREKTORKA KCV ZA KURIR: Ne možete u skafanderu lečiti pacijenta s hipertenzijom da biste nekom dokazali da imate opremu*, Kurir, 02 April 2020. [Online]
Available at: https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/3439789/direktorka-kcv-za-kurir-ne-mozete-u-skafanderu-leciti-pacijenta-s-hipertenzijom-da-biste-nekom-dokazali-da-imate-opremu. [Accessed October 2020].

[18] "ROJTERS PRENEO PRAVU SLIKU O KC VOJVODINE! Ovo je klinički centar sa najsavremenijom opremom i velikim zalihama", Kurir, 02 April 2020. [Online]
Available at: https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/3439997/rojters-preneo-pravu-sliku-o-kc-vojvodine-ovo-je-klinicki-centar-sa-najsavremenijom-opremom-i-velikim-zalihama. [Accessed October 2020].

[19] *"NOVINARKA ANA LALIĆ SVESNO LAGALA: Pogazila kodeks da bi unela strah među ljude"*, Kurir, 07. April 2020. [Online]
Available at: https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/3442459/novinarka-ana-lalic-svesno-lagala-pogazila-kodeks-da-bi-unela-strah-medju-ljude. [Accessed October 2020].

[20] J. P., K. V. *"STRUKA OSUDILA NEODGOVORNO IZVEŠTAVANJE ANE LALIĆ! Dr Kisić: Takve priče nas ometaju dok spasavamo živote!"*, Kurir, 07 April 2020. [Online]
Available at: https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/3442985/struka-osudila-neodgovorno-izvestavanje-ane-lalic-dr-kisic-takve-price-nas-ometaju-dok-spasavamo-zivote. [Accessed October 2020].

[21] *"Novinarki Ani Lalić vraćeni su svi elektronski uređaji"*, Kurir, 02 April 2020. [FB page]
Available at: https://web.facebook.com/kuririnfo/posts/3107419702654967?_rdc=1&_rdr. [Accessed October 2020].

[22] *"Dok su u Srbiji pojedini mediji preneli lažnu sliku o KC Vojvodine, svetska ugledna agencija izveštava o najsavremenijoj opremi u KCV"*, Kurir, 02 April 2020. [FB page]
Available at: https://web.facebook.com/kuririnfo/posts/3107956545934616?_rdc=1&_rdr. [Accessed October 2020].

[23] *"STRUKA OSUDILA NEODGOVORNO IZVEŠTAVANJE ANE LALIĆ! Dr Kisić: Takve priče nas ometaju dok spasavamo živote!"*, Kurir, 07 April 2020. C
Available at: https://web.facebook.com/kuririnfo/posts/3119075931489344?_rdc=1&_rdr. [Accessed October 2020].

[24] "N1 reporteri: Marinika Tepić meta spota, avion od Beograda do Prištine", N1, 21 January 2020. [Online] Available at: http://rs.n1info.com/Video/N1-reporteri/a562662/N1-reporteri-Marinika-Tepic-meta-spota-avion-od-Beograda-do-Pristine.html [Accessed October 2020].

About the authors

Jelena Jovović is a member of the team of the Novi Sad School of Journalism, where she is engaged as a project coordinator, educator and researcher. She is especially active in the areas of exercising the rights of minority and marginalized groups as well as media literacy.

Dubravka Valić Nedeljković is a full professor at the University of Novi Sad. She teaches Master and Doctoral Gender Studies at ACIMS University in Novi Sad (Media and Gender classes). She is a guest lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Podgorica. Areas of research: the critical analysis of media discourse, media and marginalized groups focusing on women and national minorities, media and multiculturalism, media ethics, media regulation, media genres, and investigative journalism.

HATE AND DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES IN THE ONLINE MEDIASCAPE IN TURKEY

Sinem Aydınlı

RESILIENCE : For Media Free of Hate and Disinformation

The regional project 'RESILIENCE: Civil society action to reaffirm media freedom and counter disinformation and hateful propaganda in the Western Balkans and Turkey' is implemented with the financial support of the European Union by partner organizations SEENPM, the Albanian Media Institute, Mediacentar Sarajevo, Kosovo 2.0, the Montenegro Media Institute, the Macedonian Institute for Media, the Novi Sad School of Journalism, the Peace Institute and bianet.

Info: https://seenpm.org/
Contact: admin@seenpm.org

HATE AND DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES IN THE ONLINE MEDIASCAPE IN TURKEY

TURKEY

Author: Sinem Aydınlı

Editor, regional lead researcher: Brankica Petković

Language editor: Fiona Thompson

Design: Špela Kranjec for Filip Kranjec s.p., Ljubljana, Slovenia

Publishers: SEENPM, Tirana, Peace Institute, Ljubljana and Bianet, Istanbul

Ljubljana, February 2021

© SEENPM, Peace Institute, Bianet and the author

CONTENTS

HATE AND DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES IN THE ONLINE MEDIASCAPE IN TURKEY

Sinem Aydınlı

1. INTRODUCTION

In Turkey, in addition to the repressive legislation that imposed tight restrictions on social media, the government's temporary access blocks on the social media platforms and complete access blocks on some online news content have been ongoing since October 2020. At the same time, as indicated in the bianet Media Monitoring Reports and in bianet news articles, journalists who do not support government policies have been detained or even arrested due to their online activities, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

> There are neither governmental organizations nor a self-regulatory body established by civil society to render hate speech in social media visible in Turkey.

On 1 October 2020, Law No. 5651 on the Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Suppression of Crimes Committed by Means of Such Publications, interpreted as "silencing dissenting voices"[1], came into force. It has been argued that "the bill will further strengthen the regime's ability to censor online content" and some think that "surveillance has remained a concern"[2] in Turkey, where some critical journalists use social media as a space in which they can do their work after the crackdown on press freedom.

Nevertheless, the new rules and restrictions enshrined in this law do not apply to countering the dissemination of hate speech and disinformation in online media in Turkey. Furthermore, there are neither governmental organizations nor a self-regulatory body established by civil society to render hate speech in social media visible in Turkey. Only the reactions of some users (depending on the subject, it can sometimes be from most of the public) and the opposition raise awareness of the hate speech in pro-government online media via counter actions such as twisting the narrative in posting and commenting on posts in which hate speech appears. With this report, our aim is to identify patterns and examples of hate and disinformation narratives in various new media forms in order to indicate what is needed to improve the ability of civil society to respond, develop counter-narratives and debunk disinformation.

---

1   *Turkey's new social media bill aimed at "silencing dissenting voices and making money". 22 July 2020 Available at:* http://bianet.org/english/politics/227842-turkey-s-new-social-media-bill-aimed-at-silencing-dissenting-voices-and-making-money *[Accessed on: 17 October 2020]*

2   *See note above*

Based on the first country report in the Resilience project entitled "Hate and Propaganda Media in Turkey: Affiliations, Models and Patterns",[3] four target groups, namely migrants, political opposition, journalists, and women were chosen in the focus on analysis of hate narratives in online media and the typical elements of these narratives were evaluated. The next part provides more detailed information about the methodology and the selection of target groups, cases and time period. The following four chapters are dedicated to each target group. The concluding part summarizes the main findings of the research and signals the urgent need to combat hate language in Turkey. At the end, we list several recommendations for further action in countering hate speech and disinformation in online media in Turkey.

Focusing on the hate speech and disinformation in online media in Turkey, this report, based on research carried out from August to October 2020, is a follow-up to the first report within the Resilience project.[4]

2. METHODOLOGY AND TARGET GROUPS

The media samples were selected for each target group in the period between June 2019 and June 2020. We identified samples of (1 or 2) online media and a social network in relation to a certain case (event) chosen within a specific period of time and we collected the data for a period of one or two weeks following this period depending on each target group.

OVERVIEW OF THE SELECTED CASES AND MEDIA SAMPLE
Table 1

GROUPS	CASE (EVENT)	TIME PERIOD	ONLINE MEDIA	SOCIAL NETWORK
Syrian refugees	Turkey's operation in Northern Syria	9–21 October 2019	BBC Turkish YouTube Channel	Twitter
Political opposition	News regarding the adaption of a book (Devran) by imprisoned former co-chair of the Peoples' Democratic Party, Selahattin Demirtaş (HDP)	11–17 January 2020	Medyascope and T24 YouTube Channel	Twitter
Critical journalists	News concerning Can Dündar's unlicensed property	9–16 May 2020	haber7.com	Twitter
Women	The discussion about the Istanbul Convention	11–18 May 2020	Akit TV YouTube Channel	Twitter

---

3   *Hate and Propaganda Media in Turkey: Affiliations, Models and Patterns Available at: https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Resilience-research-publication-1-TK-ENG.pdf*
[Accessed on: 26 October 2020]

4   *See note above*

First, we analyze the language of hostility against Syrian refugees through the comments under the BBC news videos published on their YouTube channel during Turkey's operation in Northern Syria launched on 9 October 2019. For this, we needed more time (almost 2 weeks) to point out that the language of enmity against Syrians had been increasing as the news of the deaths of Turkish soldiers in Syria began to break in Turkey. In addition to this, we also analyzed the comments under the #Syrians hashtag, based on the data set of tweets[5] (over 40K), used by Ozduzen & Korkut & Ozduzen (2020) as the #Syrians hashtag trended as the number one item in October 2019.

Regarding the second target group, "political opposition to the government", the analysis is about the news on 11 January 2020 regarding the adaption for the stage of a book (Devran) by imprisoned former co-chair of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) Selahattin Demirtaş. In addition to analysis of the news published in online editions of the newspapers, we evaluated the comments under the news video published by online news portals T24 and Medyascope.

The third target group is the "journalists" in Turkey, where 33 journalists and media workers had already been sentenced to a total of 63 years and 11 months in prison as part of journalism or political cases as per the TMK in 2019[6]. One of them was Can Dündar, who was also targeted in an armed attack in 2016. This time, we exemplify the language of enmity used against him through an analysis of the news published on 9 May 2020 by some pro-government media about his allegedly "unlicensed property" by evaluating the news article published on a pro-government online media outlet, haber7.com, and the comments below the piece and also by scrutinizing the tweets by pro-AKP trolls and some influencers on Twitter.

Lastly, we exemplify the discriminatory narratives against women in terms of the discussion around the Istanbul Convention in May 2020, when criticism and allegations regarding the Convention increased in Turkey, causing disinformation concerning its purpose to manipulate public opinion about women's rights. While evaluating the columns published via online editions of some newspapers and tweets by these journalists, the comments under the article and the tweets are also analyzed in relation to the hashtag #nototheIstanbulConvention.

---

5   We would like to thank to Cansu Özdüzen for providing this data set of Tweets which is basis of their analysis in Ozduzen & Korkut & Ozduzen (2020)

6   Medya Gözlem Raporu BIA Media Monitoring 2019.
Available at: https://bianet.org/5/100/218959-the-ends-justify-the-means-in-purging-critical-media
[Accessed on: 17 October 2020]

3.   Case 1: HOSTILITY AGAINST SYRIAN REFUGEES

There were 3.7 million Syrians under "temporary protection" in Turkey in 2019.[7] It is seen that the representation of Syrian refugees comes to the fore although Turkey hosts asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries. Syrians were the second most frequently targeted group in Turkey's media with 760 hate speech items in 2019 as reported by the HDV's "Hate Speech and Discriminatory Discourse in Media 2019 Report." Some nationalist and racist media outlets also fed the feeling of hostility toward their settlement in Turkey.

In news articles following a cross-border military operation northern Syria officially known as "Operation Peace Spring", launched on 9 October 2019, Syrians were targeted over their presence in Turkey, as the negative Twitter perception of Syrians in Turkey during the operation rose by 95% in the immediate aftermath of the military operation (Ozduzen & Korkut & Ozduzen 2020). The government has claimed that the aim of the operation is to "prevent the creation of a terror corridor across our southern border, and to bring peace to the area named as a safe zone"[8] where it is believed that they will return in the future.

We firstly analyzed three news videos published by BBC Turkish on their YouTube channel during the period between 9–21 October 2020. The first [1] and second [2] present general news about the operation. The third one, published on 21 October, was entitled "Operation Peace Spring: How Syrian refugees at the border view the 'safe zone'" [3], meaning that it is a news video concerning Syrians' views on the operation. The comments below the news articles of the first two days have a more aggressive tone against Syrians as they mentioned that *the Turkish soldiers are at war for Syrians but Syrians are here in Turkey*. [4]

The video published on 21 October included the views of Syrian people living at the border on whether they would like to go back to their home. Some say *yes, we will go after the security zone is established by the government* [5] and some mention *not going back to Syria as they have a comfortable position here in Turkey*. [6] Although Syrians in this video openly support the AKP and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's position towards themselves, the comments below the video mainly show a great deal of hostility against them: "Best of you,... we should [f..k], so we do not have any Syrians here." [7]. Referring to the person in the video who mentioned not leaving Turkey, one says "but who wants you?" [8] "I do not want these ISIS leftovers, bigoted religious lazy guys in my country. You should all leave and go to that safe zone". [9]. "We gotta kill them one by one, otherwise they will not go" [10] "I do not want my homeland to be an Arab homeland." [11]

---

7   *Syrians in Turkey According to the Directorate General of Migration Management Data. 25 July 2019 Available at:* https://bianet.org/english/migration/210842-syrians-in-turkey-according-to-directorate-general-of-migration-management-data *[Accessed on: 17 October 2020]*

8   *Operation Peace Spring starts in N Syria: Erdoğan 9 October 2019* https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/haberler/detay/operation-peace-spring-starts-in-n-syria-erdogan

Users add negative attribution targeting Syrians because of who they are by saying *they are those who sold their country and came here* and the insult also goes along with their comment: "classic arabic opportunism" [sic] [12] and "here is the arab nation."[sic] [13] In order to humiliate them, they also refer to them as "self-centred freaks who do not have a sense of love of the motherland". [14] The users blame them for the financial difficulties in the country, saying that it is why they believe they should go. So, they say "they got us in trouble" [15], "we work like donkeys, we feed Syrians before making ourselves full". [16] "When I hear words such as Syria and Syrian, I instinctively hate them now. The Turkish nation does not have to suffer this economic and sociological disaster anymore." [17] Even worse, in order to find a way to "sweep" them from the country, one says "the only way is genocide" [18] and another says "we send away them by f..king". [19]

> Users add negative attribution targeting Syrians because of who they are by saying *they are those who sold their country and came here.*

Secondly, we analyzed the comments with the #Syrians hashtag on Twitter for a two-week period. The sampled data set of tweets mostly affirms that they were not welcomed in Turkey and instead of Turkish soldiers who were fighting in their country, they should have gone and fought for themselves. Some of the tweets are as follows: (1) "While Syrian youth are enjoying prosperity in my country, I do not want my soldiers to be martyred for them!"; (2) "While the Syrians breed like rabbits, our young people are being killed one by one. I don't want Syrians in my country, nor do I want to pay for their war." (3) "Syrians increase more when they are being touched like acne, but they still increase when they are not being touched."

These comments also point to the use of language that reinforces the militaristic discourse with implicit hate. If there is war, some must be killed, Syrians must be the ones who fight for Syria and be martyred: (4) "There are enough Syrian young people on the streets of Istanbul. Now, it is their right to return to their own land and fight and to be martyred for their lands, if necessary. [...] Our children should not fight for Syria while there are young Syrians around." The discrimination against Syrian refugees features a strong emphasis on national identity.

Moreover, some comments under the #Syrian hashtag disseminate disinformation in relation to their ostensible "privileges", claiming that "Syrians" have more rights than the population of the host country, i.e. Turkey. This prejudice feeds the entrenchment of the separation of "us" and "them", causing the racist and discriminatory messages to reach audiences via Twitter. It is also seen that Syrian refugees were targeted in the columns and news articles simply for their presence in Turkey. Examples can be seen as follows: (6) "Brave confession from the Syrian boy: While the Turkish soldiers are fighting in Syria, we, Arabs, have a hookah and are enjoying our days", (7) "I am an educator, we have 35 Iraqi and Syrian students, believe me, they use the latest phones, wear luxury clothes such as original Adidas and Nike shoes. I bought YTL 35 fake Adidas. Who are the citizens of the country, us or them?"

> Some comments under the #Syrian hashtag disseminate disinformation in relation to their ostensible "privileges".

186

It is not only individual comments that disseminate hate speech under the #Syria hashtag; retweet chains of news articles by the nationalist media camps feed the perception of Syria as a threat. For instance, a news article [20] written by nationalist *Sözcü* newspaper columnist Murat Muratoğlu, who opposes the AKP government, has been retweeted (2.3K) under the hashtag #Syrians; in it, he states, "So these people are a threat against Europe, and not against us? If it's such a bad thing, why do we do this to our own people? We have been living with millions of Syrians, with whom we have scared Europe, for years". Again, they were stigmatized as threats to Turkey's security and they were thus perceived as the source of tension in Turkey.

> They believe that instead of Turkish soldiers, Syrians should die.

MAIN NARRATIVES ON SYRIAN REFUGEES *Table 2*		
MAIN NARRATIVE	Syrians should return to their country and they should fight for it	
SUB-NARRATIVES	The general expression "Syrian" used commonly to refer to Syrian refugees	They do not welcome Syrians, accusing them of "having sold their country"
	They argue that while the Syrians "breed like rabbits", the young people of Turkey are "being killed one by one"	They believe that instead of Turkish soldiers, Syrians should die

Although they did not directly disseminate hostility against refugees, some comments imply that they dehumanize Syrian refugees as they are only quantitative entities that could have been sent to European countries: (9) "Bro, take 500 thousand Syrians in the morning and evening on an empty stomach" (10) "the Netherlands have suspended exports of weapons to Turkey for the summer .... my daughter, or 500 thousand Syrians (to be sent) to Netherlands".

All exemplify how hostility based on territorial superiority and economy-oriented hate speech became the most egregious form of communication in engaging with the refugee identity in Turkey mostly during the period of the military operation. Comments similar to those mentioned above disseminate hate to their potential audiences via online media platforms.

4. Case 2: POLITICAL OPPOSITION

Specifically, since the coup attempt in 2016, the Anti-Terror Law or Suppression of Terrorism Law (TMK) is being utilized against the political opposition to the government in order to suppress critical voices, and its vague definition of terror and terrorist acts has resulted in the investigation of political opposition and journalists, along with writers, lawyers, academics, and civil rights activists. The alleged crimes related to the TMK have strengthened the argument that political opposition does not work in the best interest of Turkey and its people, i.e. they are working against their country. In the context of this research, it can be noted that, during the AKP term, politicians of the opposition have been targeted over their alleged links to terror crimes. For instance, the state actors mostly link the democratically elected Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which won 12 per cent of the national vote in the parliamentary election in 2015, with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). This basically shows how the political opposition is being targeted by the language of enmity and hostility which eventually facilitate their criminalization. In order to exemplify this, we chose a case related to the HDP: A theatre play was adapted from a book by Selahattin Demirtaş in January 2019. This case was not only about Demirtaş and the HDP but also the main opposition party, the CHP, as Dilek İmamoğlu, the spouse of its Istanbul Mayor İmamoglu, and CHP Istanbul Chair Canan Kaftancıoğlu were among those who watched the play.

> This example shows how opponents of the government were targeted in discourse because of their alleged links to the PKK.

We chose the interpretation of this case by the state actors at first. Following the adaptation of Demirtaş's book for the stage as a closet drama on 11 January, Minister of the Interior Süleyman Soylu targeted the people who watched the play in his speech on 12 January with the following comment: "You can't clean the blood on your hands with theatre plays."[9] This case continued with the targeting not only of the pro-Kurdish political opposition, but also the CHP. For example, President Erdoğan included this case in his general evaluation meeting, referring to the attendees who had watched the play, such as Dilek İmamoğlu and Kaftancıoğlu: "In addition to the head of the main opposition and his delegation, they watched a play adapted from a book written by a terrorist in a theatre."[10] So, following the comments of state actors in Turkey in the week after the play was staged, the pro-government media targeted not only Demirtaş but also the main opposition party, the CHP. This example shows how opponents of the government were targeted in discourse because of their alleged links to the PKK. The same discourse is seen in the online editions of AKP-friendly media and other online media

---

9   *Interior Minister Targets Audience of Theatre Play Adapted from Demirtaş's Book. 13 January 2020 [online] Available at* https://bianet.org/5/94/218500-interior-minister-on-theatre-play-adapted-by-demirtas-s-book-you-can-t-clean-the-blood-on-your-hands-with-plays *[Accessed on: 15 October 2020]*

10   *"Erdoğan, Demirtaş'ın kitabı için, 'Bir teröristin yazmış olduğu kitap' dedi" 16 January 2020 Available at:* https://www.gazetefersude.net/erdogan-demirtasin-kitabi-icin-bir-teroristin-yazmis-oldugu-kitap-dedi *[Accessed on: 15 October 2020]*

platforms in which we evaluate the users' comments below the video published by independent online media Medyascope and T24 and the play's echoes on Twitter.

Nedim Şener, a columnist from *Hürriyet* daily, penned an article entitled "Bu Fotoğraf Projedir" (This picture is a project) [21] about this adaptation, targeting Demirtaş by pointing his links to the PKK. While citing Demirtaş's previous comments on the PKK, he also created a discourse on the ostensible connection of the CHP with the HDP to make the CHP a target like the HDP, i.e. he criminalizes and discredits those attaching themselves to the political opposition to the government. Like Şener, in their pieces published in the online editions, Korkmaz [22] from *Yeni Şafak* and Övür [23] from *Sabah* simplify their meanings to easily govern the readers, thinking that by targeting Demirtaş with the concept of terrorist, they will eventually imply that the political opposition is not working for the best interest of the country, but rather, they are aiming to support 'terrorism.'

On 12 January, a news video concerning the play including a short interview with Demirtaş's spouse, Başak, was published on Medyascope's YouTube channel [24]. In addition to comments labelling Demirtaş and the attendees "terrorists" and "terror-supporters", some commenters wanted Demirtaş to die: (1) "May God dry your blood" and (2) "You were trying to portray a bloody murderer, a monster who killed thousands of Kurdish and Turkish people as a dove of peace to our people. This nation does not buy this."

Another video about the play was published on T24's YouTube channel again on 12 January [25]. The same terror rhetoric appears in most of the comments generating the language of enmity against not only Demirtaş but also İmamoğlu: (1) "Aren't you ashamed to sit with the terrorists? They also went to watch what he wrote. Especially you, Dilek İmamoğlu (spouse). I will not vote for your spouse again", (2) "Again CHP: [...] Atatürk's party goes to watch the terrorist's theatre" (3) The more terrorists there are, all of them have come together." Furthermore, the users legitimize their arguments with reference to the PKK and imply their possible death with dropping a bomb on them: (1) "PKK's top executives came together and I wonder why a bomb wasn't dropped." (2) "When you drop a bomb, you will clean it all up."

In addition, yekvucut.com, one of the platforms belonging to Bosphorus Global (BG), which aims to counter critical coverage of the AKP published in the international media, supported this argument through terror discourse and published via its Twitter account [26] the claim that "İmamoğlu supported the effort of the terrorist Demirtaş convicted with the terror charge to be acquitted with the 'play'."

The political opposition is claimed to be supporting the terrorists.

MAIN NARRATIVES AGAINST THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION
Table 3

MAIN NARRATIVE	Political opposition to the government does not work in the best interest of the country	
SUB-NARRATIVES	The political opposition is claimed to be supporting the terrorists	They seem to be of the opinion that "the political opposition should be all punished"
	The political opposition is regarded as if they themselves are terrorists	It is thought that they are working against Turkey

As the state authorities bring criminal prosecutions against the Government's political opponents, primarily some pro-government media target them, based on the arguments alleged by the state actors by targeting them in the same way. Supported by some media outlets, "serious backsliding continued on freedom of expression" and thus dissemination of opposition voices negatively affected by this situation, as mentioned in the Turkey 2020 Report[11] by the European Commission.

5.   Case 3: CRITICAL JOURNALISTS AS OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT

According to the 2020 BİA Media Monitoring Report (BİA MMR), at least 89 journalists and media workers face seven aggravated life sentences and a combined total of 760 years and 3 months in prison on charges such as "propagandizing for a terrorist organization" and "insulting the President of the Republic." Many cases are pending trial. According to the 2020 Turkey Report by Human Rights Watch, "executive control and political influence over the judiciary in Turkey has led to courts systematically accepting bogus indictments, detaining and convicting without compelling evidence of criminal activity individuals and groups the Erdoğan government regards as political opponents. Among these are journalists, opposition politicians, and activists and human rights defenders."[12]

In this political environment, critical journalists perceived as political opponents to the Government are not only criminalized with terror-related charges but they are also targeted by both the authorities and the organizations having close ties to them, as seen in the 2019 SETA report. As shown by bianet's Media Monitoring Database, criminal cases and the conviction of journalists were still happening at the time of writing.[13]

Among journalists critical of the Government, Can Dündar was arrested on 26 November 2015, on charges of "obtaining and disclosing confidential

---

11   *Key findings of the 2020 Report on Turkey. 6 October 2020*
 Available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/country_20_1791
[Accessed on: 15 October 2020]
12   *Turkey:* https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/turkey
13   https://mediamonitoringdatabase.org/ *[Accessed on: 15 October 2020]*

information of the state for purposes of political or military espionage" due to his news on National Intelligence Organization (MIT) Trucks allegedly carrying weapons to Syria, published in the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper with the headline "Here are the weapons Erdoğan said do not exist"; he was released on 26 February 2016. Dündar was acquitted by the court in May 2016 after he was targeted by an armed attack in front of the courthouse in Çağlayan. In 2018, the decision in the trial for Dündar was reversed and Dündar went abroad. Recently, on 7 October 2020, the court ruled for the confiscation of his properties and declared him a "fugitive" as he had failed to appear in court. HRW states that this "symbolizes the relentless persecution of critical voices and constitutes a new form of attacks on journalists through the seizure of their private property and their families as reprisal for their legitimate work."[14]

In order to exemplify the hostility toward him, we chose the news story about his "unlicensed property" which was seen as "illegal" as "criminal as he is" by some pro-government online media before the confiscation order. We take this as an example of the idea that "critical journalists deserve everything bad that happens to them" by evaluating the news piece published in haber7.com and the comments below the article, as well as by analyzing the tweets by the pro-AKP trolls and some influencers on Twitter.

A news piece published in haber7.com, a pro-government web-portal, titled "Can Dündar'ın villası da kaçak çıktı! Ağaçları katletmiş..." [Can Dündar's villa was also illegal. He slaughtered the trees ..] [27] on 10 May. Among the users' comments [28], they use the word "traitor" as a description for Dündar in order to humiliate him: (1) "they are all traitors", (2) "would the state confiscate the properties of traitors?" (3) "All their possessions are illegal, like themselves", (4) "Why is this traitor's property still not confiscated?" Referring to his reports as "espionage", they say "There are things like espionage and betrayal are in them", "Espionage against the country, and being a person of property. This only happens in Turkey." Some of them follow the narrative that "foreign powers" want to destroy Turkey and say "these are intelligence officers of the foreign powers posing as journalists". Dündar was also targeted directly: (5) "We have all the opportunities, but now we discover that the traitor's building is fugitive. Why haven't we hit the head of these traitors until now?" and "... this country hates people like you". The last comments exemplify the hostile language indicating the aim that: He should be physically removed. The case of "fugitive" property became a medium to them which facilitates dissemination of their use of the language of enmity.

> The case of "fugitive" property became a medium to them which facilitates dissemination of their use of the language of enmity.

Selman Öğüt, having a close connection with the BG, where Ögüt's brother, Süheyb Ögüt (spouse of Hilal Kaplan, a columnist of the pro-government *Sabah* daily) is Global Affairs Chair, pens articles regarding Dündar at certain times.[15] Following the news indicating that his property is unlicensed, he

---

14   *Turkey: Press Freedom Under Attack 14 October 2020. Available at:* https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/14/turkey-press-freedom-under-attack *[Accessed on: 26 October 2020]*

15   *For example, in July 2017, he wrote a piece entitled "Can Dündar Vatan hainidir" [Can Dündar is a*

mentioned this on his Twitter account and, at the time of writing, **They are seen as traitors.** the tweet had generated 1.2K retweets, including 115 comments. [29] Through the comments posted by accounts accompanied by Turkish flag (and still some of them by the green dot), we see that the main narrative centres on "what a traitor Dündar is." Users commenting below Ögüt's tweet were also using the hashtag #MilliHesaplarBurada [milliaccountsarehere] as an identification. Some call on the government to seize his property—which has finally happened after almost four months and this news was broken mostly by pro-government media outlets.

While some power networks such as pro-AKP trolls are also active on this subject as they are being motivated to produce hate language and are targeting and threatening the perceived enemies of the AKP by reversing the discourses with manipulation, they[16] also target other journalists they also believe to have "unlicensed" property, along the same lines as the narrative they used against Dündar.

MAIN NARRATIVES AGAINST CRITICAL JOURNALISTS
Table 4

MAIN NARRATIVE	Critical journalists deserve punishments because they do not defend the national unity		
SUB-NARRATIVES	They are seen as traitors	They believe that those journalists should be humiliated	They assert that they should all be physically removed because they are enemies of this country

Dündar is not the only target in the narratives containing the language of enmity. This is a micro projection of the general situation which was experienced by almost all critical journalists through different word choices: They deserve everything bad that happens to them.

6. Case 4: WOMEN AS THE DEFENDERS OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

According to news published on bianet, "the Istanbul Convention has been targeted by certain groups and circles in the country since summer 2019."[17] Known as the "Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence", it is blamed for destroying the family institution and tempting new generations into Western culture, although it aims to prevent violence targeting women and to penalize those inflicting that violence.

---

traitor] Available at: *https://www.internethaber.com/can-dundar-vatan-hainidir-1790700y.htm*

16   For example, some of these troll accounts are available at: *https://twitter.com/debuffer2*, *https:// twitter.com/THEMARGINALE/status/1260618547799212033?s=20*, *https://twitter.com/melihesatacil*, *https://twitter.com/AK_suHandan/status/1263095671982305282?s=20*

17   *Manhood attacks, women defend: A chronology of the İstanbul Convention. 17 August 2020. Available at: https://bianet.org/english/print/229140-manhood-attacks-women-defend-a-chronology-of-istanbul-convention [Accessed on: 26 October 2020]*

Criticism and allegations directed towards the Convention increased in Turkey after former AKP MP Mehmet Metiner claimed that it was a mistake for Turkey to pass the Istanbul Convention in Parliament on 6 May2020; accordingly, we exemplify the news articles published in online media, and two broadcasts published on the Akit TV YouTube channel and users' comments left below it in the period between 11–18 May 2020, when the discussions increased after Metiner's comment. It can be said that the disinformation narrative towards the Convention clearly demonstrates the pattern and power of statements directed against women in the media and social networks in Turkey. As reported by teyit.org, "according to the allegations against the Istanbul Convention in the headlines of newspapers such as *Sabah, Yeni Akit* and *Milli Gazete*, the 'hidden aim'" and 'true face' of the convention is hidden from everyone. There are questionable things about Turkey's admission process and agreement, and the convention "threatens the Turkish family structure."[18]

The disinformation narrative towards the Convention clearly demonstrates the pattern and power of statements directed against women in the media and social networks in Turkey.

On 11 May, Dilipak[19] from the *Yeni Akit* daily, who is infamous for his hateful and targeting statements against women, penned an article entitled "How the family survives" [30] and noted that the Convention gave a legal framework to a disgrace (he is referring to LGBTI+s), and none of this is as important and fundamental as this threat to the future of the family and young people. The users' comments [31] below the article not only support his arguments but also target the HDP with links to terrorism making the connection: "The HDP is abducting young girls [and taking them] to the mountains [...] you do not think about those girls." [32]. "What did the head of terrorists do to the girls the hdpkkchp abducted" [33]. To defend family institutions, one comment read: "family means state, no state without family" [34]. They also see women responsible for the destruction of family: "There are women who go and live with other men without being divorced from their husbands and have children who are illegitimate. Nothing can be done". This hurts society a lot" [35]. "People are involved in high-conflict divorces and the money goes to women but the debt to men" [36]. The prevailing view among the users can be seen as the following: "The Istanbul Convention should be cancelled. It is for the destruction of society and family; it is against our family structure". [37]

On 11 May, on a programme called "Derin Gerçekler" on the topic "Sebep ve Sonuçlarıyla İstanbul Sözleşmesi" [Causes and Results of the Istanbul Convention] [38], three men were talking about the Convention. Dilipak was one of them, and he described the Convention as a "disgrace" and "stupidity" on the YouTube channel of Akit TV, a channel related to the *Yeni Akit* newspaper. Supporting his argument, the comments below the YouTube video make Islamist references and interpret the Convention as playing a

---

18   *İstanbul Sözleşmesi hakkındaki efsaneler ve gerçekler. 13 May 2020.*
Available at: https://teyit.org/istanbul-sozlesmesi-hakkindaki-efsaneler-ve-gercekler
[Accessed on: 26 October 2020]

19   *In one of his pieces, he calls the defenders of Istanbul Convention "prostitutes" See Dilipak, A. "AKP'nin Papatyaları" 27 July 2020 Available at: https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/abdurrahman-dilipak/akpnin-papatyalari-33008.html [Accessed on: 16 October 2020]*

role in the destruction of the family without offering any legal or reasonable arguments. Similarly, on 16 May, the programme *Ters Kutuplar*, also with the topic "Sebep ve Sonuçlarıyla İstanbul Sözleşmesi" [39] was broadcast on Akit TV's YouTube channel. In a video presentation shown before the discussion started, they targeted the Mor Çatı Foundation, an organization founded to combat violence against women; in particular, they criticize the interpretation of a professor opposed to the Istanbul Convention. They call the foundation "pervert", "Mor Gang", and "gay supporters". While showing the website in the presentation, they zoom in on the phone number and the address section of the foundation to make it a target. Among the comments [40], the same narrative is evident in relation to the international donors: "Financiers of factious people like Soros have spent billions themselves and tried to use all news channels and social media and women's organizations in the same direction." Moreover, to support the professor, they refer again to those who defend the Convention as "carrion".

User comments containing hate speech can also be found under the posts of some media outlets other than hate media organs. For example, on 12 May 2020, the Deutsche Welle Twitter account shared an article titled "Why the Istanbul Convention is targeted". [41]. The comments below it include twisted rhetoric about the convention: "Violence against women since the Istanbul Convention" and "A convention of transition to fagote". Journalists had also been posting on Twitter under the hashtag #istanbulsözleşmesinehayır [nototheIstanbulConvention], with supposedly religious references to protect the institution of the family. A video by Akit TV entitled, "İstanbul Sözleşmesi 9 yıldır yuva yıkıyor" [the Istanbul Convention has been destroying the family for nine years] [42] was also published on Twitter under the hashtag #istanbulsözleşmesinehayır, noting that "the convention was specifically designed to destroy humanity", "It destroys the concept of honour", and "LGBTI+s have been gadding about in the streets of Istanbul."

MAIN HATE NARRATIVES ON WOMEN DEFENDING THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION *Table 5*		
MAIN NARRATIVE	**With the rights the Convention provided for the women, they will be reason for the destruction of the family structure**	
SUB-NARRATIVES	The convention is not appropriate for this society because it defends "gender rights"	The Convention is against the family structure because it also legitimizes homosexuality	The Convention is openly against the honour, tradition and religious values of this society

This case is also selected as one which exemplifies the disinformation narrative causing incomplete or misleading information concerning its purpose to deceive public opinion about the Convention with a set of baseless views through the comments disseminated in online media. All of this ultimately vilifies women and their rights.

7. THE CURRENT SITUATION PROVING THE NEEDS

As mentioned in the introduction, there is no monitoring mechanism for rendering hate speech online and on social media visible. There is also no established self-regulation by civil society in Turkey. International organizations such as HRW and Amnesty International periodically call on Turkey to make hate speech against certain groups visible in general.

The law, which includes new regulations on social media, was mainly regarded as curtailing human rights.

On 11 July 2020, Twitter disclosed 7,340 accounts in Turkey attributed to the youth wing of the AKP, some of them known to be pro-AKP trolls. In 2019, Turkey is in third place, just after Russia, in terms of sending legal demands to Twitter.[20] However, it ranks 11th amongst the countries that have requested the removal of hate content from YouTube.

Web portals such as freewebturkey.com and @engelliweb [blockedweb] on Twitter allow us to see blocked content that is critical of the AKP as they list the increasing amount of content and websites that are banned in Turkey. It is known that "at least 347 news articles"[21] were blocked in the third quarter of 2020. In addition, there was one incident of short-term disruption to social media platforms and messaging apps during Turkish military attacks on northern Syria in February 2020.

In 2019, access to 130,000 URL addresses, 7,000 Twitter accounts, 10,000 YouTube videos and 6,251 Facebook posts was blocked pursuant to Law No. 5651, as indicated in the report by İFÖD.[22] In this case, it is not surprising that Turkey ranks third in the world for VPN use.[23]

The law, which includes new regulations on social media, was mainly regarded as curtailing human rights in the online sphere and "a dramatic escalation of internet regulation in Turkey" by many rights-based international organizations such as Freedom House.[24] Although the Government claims that the measures prescribed by the law will be similar to those in Western countries, this was also regarded as the following: "Turkey's courts and regulatory bodies lack the independence necessary to prevent abuse of the law. In practice, the law could, therefore, serve as a new tool to silence critics online."[25]

---

20   *Removal Request July-December 2019:* https://transparency.twitter.com/en/reports/removal-requests.html#2019-jul-dec

21   *At least 347 news articles censored in three months Available at:*
https://bianet.org/english/print/232003-press-freedom-in-turkey-at-least-347-news-articles-censored-in-3-months *[Accessed on: 26 October 2020]*

22   *Turkey banned 130,000 web addresses in 2019*
Available at: https://bianet.org/english/print/226856-report-turkey-banned-130-000-web-addresses-in-2019 *[Accessed on: 26 October 2020]*

23   *Türkiye 2019›da dünyada en çok VPN kullanan 3. ülke oldu: VPN nedir? Available at:* https://tr.euronews.com/2020/07/01/turkiye-yasak-dinlemedi-dunyada-en-cok-vpn-kullanan-3-ulke-oldu-internet-erisim *[Accessed on: 26 October 2020]*

24   *Turkey: Passage of Social Media Law Curtails Human Rights Online 30 July 2020*
Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/article/turkey-passage-social-media-law-curtails-human-rights-online *[Accessed on: 26 October 2020]*

25   *See note 12*

8. CONCLUSION

This report shows through four different case studies as the samples for each target group the dynamics of motivation and dissemination of hate and disinformation narratives in online media. This thereby provides a general understanding of how different forms of expression emerge, interact, and potentially construct an online mediascape of hate content. Although new regulations on social media have come into force in Turkey, they do not include any legislation regarding hate language used in online media and communication platforms. This report thereby argues that a self-regulatory mechanism is needed in order to combat hateful messages and disinformation disseminating online.

As the target groups analysis shows, hate content which may seem to be directed solely at an individual or specific group can more generally broaden out into hate speech by the dominant group that targets "others" associated with negative traits. 'Stereotyping', 'prejudice', and 'discrimination' overlap with "Othering" when we specifically analyze the language of hostility in terms of hate speech.

> Although new regulations on social media have come into force in Turkey, they do not include any legislation regarding hate language used in online media and communication platforms.

Considering the comments made on content posted in online media, it is important to point out that comments containing hate language mostly take place in independent media that do not directly produce hate content. Secondly, hate speech includes profane language against Syrian refugees. Thirdly, hostile language towards political opponents of the government and critical journalists goes along with death threats and humiliation, respectively. Those who use the language of enmity towards the political opposition and journalists critical of the government derive their power from the state actors' positions towards them. It seems that it is mostly the state actors lighting the fuse. The discourse of terror accompanies the hate speech. This shows how mainly political opposition to the government is targeted and being criminalized by alleged terror charges. Lastly, when it comes to the discriminatory language against "women", we see that users are tagging the state actors on Twitter when they want to target those defending the Istanbul Convention while publicly commenting on the issue.

In Turkey, it is not only the judiciary that arbitrarily defines the limits of freedom of speech; the implementation of the TMK in Turkey also extends to political opposition, critical journalists and human rights defenders. The government's control of the media and communication also conflicts with the fundamental principles of freedom of speech. That is because their decisions in relation to sanctions are arbitrary and neither guarantee the rights of the most vulnerable members of society nor protect them from being targeted by hate speech.

> This all points to the urgent need for a monitoring and regulatory mechanism, independent from the state, for online media.

This all points to the urgent need for a monitoring and regulatory mechanism, independent from the state, for online media, in order to combat accounts targeting voices critical of the government. This mechanism also helps to

render visible the judiciary's different interpretations of the boundary between hate speech and freedom of expression. Otherwise, the social polarization in Turkey will inevitably increase, as the online media and communication platforms play their part in contributing to the climate of hostile language and disinformation with baseless arguments.

9. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

• A self-regulatory body should be founded and developed by civil society, mainly by the rights-based civil society organizations that are able to monitor online media in order to render hate speech and disinformation visible. They should publish "Social Media Hate Watch" reports yearly, monthly, weekly, and even daily.

• CSOs monitoring the media should establish a voluntary support mechanism in order to contribute to the efforts of independent fact-checking platforms countering disinformation and to work together with these platforms.

• A glossary and guidelines should be prepared together with journalists, academics and NGOs monitoring hate speech in the media to avert the hate language in the media.

• Media literacy campaigns by civil society organizations should be encouraged to react against hate content. For example, on a weekly basis, they could publish online information cards to raise awareness of hate language.

• Monitoring efforts should not be limited to the media organizations known to generate hate content; the online media accounts and Twitter accounts of the platforms that claim to publish and broadcast independently should also be monitored. This will help to monitor users' comments there for possible hate speech and comments that can lead to disinformation.

• A team of volunteers can be formed from CSOs in order to monitor the platforms that are open for users' comments such as YouTube and Twitter on a daily basis and prepare monitoring reports accordingly.

• These reports should be shared with the government, Parliament, law makers, local authorities, media regulatory bodies, professional associations, media literacy educators and fact-checking platforms to be able to develop common strategies and policies.

• Within the frame of discussions to be held on online media and social media, a type of filter can be developed to "ensure word selectivity" on platforms which allow users' comments; such a filter can help to set a barrier against the use of some words embedded in language.

• The option to remove readers' and/or viewers' comments for some news articles and/or videos published by independent media may be considered.

197

Literature and sources

REFERENCES:

Ozduzen, O., Korkut, U., & Ozduzen, C. (2020). 'Refugees are not welcome': Digital racism, online place-making and the evolving categorization of Syrians in Turkey. New Media & Society.

-The typos and spelling errors that appear in the user's comments have been retained.

ANALYZED ARTICLES:

[1] Barış Pınarı Harekatı: Suriye Operasyonun Ayrıntıları, BBC Türkçe, 9 October 2019. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Nl7ORsXpTA&lc=UgyrycjsjtToI81cL4l4AaABAg

[2] Barış Pınarı Harekatı'nda ikinci gün, BBC Türkçe, 10 October 2019. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RA_22Zfur-k&lc=UgyQb1MO5-EAJDTw4094AaABAg&ab_channel=BBCNewsT%C3%BCrk%C3%A7e

[3] Barış Pınarı Harekâtı: Sınırdaki Suriyeli mülteciler 'güvenli bölgeye' nasıl bakıyor? BBC Türkçe, 21 October 2019. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0vG7a6g56c&lc=UgzozvzE0UlTu0_eMj94AaABAg&ab_channel=BBCNewsT%C3%BCrk%C3%A7e [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[4] See note 3 above.

[5] The comments from [5] to [19] found in the video above note 3.

[20] M. Muratoğlu, Avrupa'yı Türkiye'ye çeviririz tehdidi, Sözcü. 11 October 2019. Available at: https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2019/yazarlar/murat-muratoglu/avrupayi-turkiyeye-ceviririz-tehdidi-5382687/ [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[21] N. Şener, Bu fotoğraf bir projedir, Hürriyet. 15 Ocak 2020. Available at: https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/nedim-sener/bu-fotograf-projedir-41419896 [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[22] T. Korkmaz, Barış tiyatrosu yahut kim inanır, Yeni Şafak. 17 January 2020 Available at: https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/tamerkorkmaz/baris-tiyatrosu-yahut-kim-inanir-2053998 [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[23] M. Övür, Tiyatro'nun arkasındaki tiyatro, 16 January 2020. Availablet at: https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/ovur/2020/01/16/tiyatronun-arkasindaki-tiyatro [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[24]   Selahattin Demirtaş'ın kitabı "Devran"ın okuma tiyatrosu: Başak Demirtaş›la söyleşi, 12 January 2020 Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amV5tecaQqM&ab_channel=Medyascope. [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[25]   M. Övür. Tiyatronun arkasındaki tiyatro. 16 January 2020. Available at: https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/ovur/2020/01/16/tiyatronun-arkasindaki-tiyatro. 16 January 2020. [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[26]   İBB Başkanı Ekrem İmamoğlu, terör hükümlüsü Selahattin Demirtaş'ın "Tiyatro" ile aklanma çabasına destek verdi. 16 January 2020 Available at https://twitter.com/yekvucutcom/status/1217066745535569921 [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[27]   Can Dündar'ın villası da kaçak çıktı! Ağaçları katletmiş... 13 May 2020. Available at: https://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/2974097-can-dundarin-villasi-da-kacak-cikti-agaclari-katletmis, 13 May 2020. [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[28]   All comments can be accessed via the note above 27.

[29]   @selmanogut, 13 May 2020. Available at: https://twitter.com/selmanogut/status/1260600596631076865

[30]   A. Dilipak, Aile nasıl kurtulur? Yeni Akit. 11 May 2020. Available at: https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/abdurrahman-dilipak/aile-nasil-kurtulur-32196.html?utm_source=gazeteoku&utm_medium=referral [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[31]   All comments can be found in the above-mentioned article.

[32]   The comments from [32] to [39] found in the piece by Dilipak above.

[39]   Derin Gerçekler, Akit TV. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvRIYPP69Dg&t=6s&ab_channel=AK%C4%B0TTV 11 May 2020. [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[40]   Ters Kutuplar, 16 May 2020. Akit TV, Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvRIYPP69Dg&t=6s&ab_channel=AK%C4%B0TTV

[41]   All comments are above the video. [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[42]   İstanbul Sözleşmesi neden hedef oluyor? @dw_turkce, 12 May 2020. Available at: https://twitter.com/dw_turkce/status/1260239352086630401 [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

[43]   İstanbul sözleşmesi 9 yıldır yuva yıkıyor, Akit TV. 11 May 2020 Available at: https://www.akittv.com.tr/video-galeri/3966-istanbul-sozlesmesi-9-yildir-yuva-yikiyor. [Accessed on: 15 October 2020]

199

About the author

Sinem Aydınlı (Ph.D.) completed her Ph.D in the Media and Creative Industries program at Loughborough University London in 2018. Her dissertation focuseson the process of the discursive formation of "political others" in the Turkish press and it evaluates the role played by media articulations in constructing meanings. She has been working with bianet/ IPS Communication Foundation team since 2018 on various projects of the foundation. Aydınlı was the country researcher of the Media Ownership Monitor Turkey 2018 project. Her areas of research are media discourse, discrimination and cultural politics.

RESILIENCE
For Media Free of Hate and Disinformation