

# HATE SPEECH IN THE WESTERN BALKANS - THE CASE OF NORTH MACEDONIA -

Sead Dzical and Vesna Nikodinovska

**Authors:** Sead Dzidal and Vesna Nikodinovska

**Research methodology expert:** Snježana Milivojević

**Research methodology expert and editor:** Stefan Janjić

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# 1. Introduction

The main aim of this research is to provide an insight into the most common hateful, and discriminative discourses in North Macedonia in 2021. The paper will closely analyse the examples that were registered in this period and were widely circulated through the public sphere in the country. In the research, the factors and events that were the main generators of the hateful and discriminative narratives will be identified and the key ideas behind them will be examined as well as their dynamics and contexts. Also, the research will detail who were the most common targets and what kind of reactions they caused in society. The key goal of the research is to provide credible information and evidence in order to strategically approach the issues of hate speech and strengthen the efforts against its increased presence in public communication in North Macedonia.

Hate speech has deep roots in the society, it usually develops and evolves over a longer period with a frequency of occurrence and dynamic that depends on various social and political factors and circumstances. It can change its forms and spread to audiences depending on the available communication infrastructure, but also it significantly depends on the local political and media culture. In that context, it can be noted that Macedonia since its independence in 1991 does not have a good record for properly processing and sanctioning cases of hate speech. Hateful and discriminatory discourses are most common in political communication, interethnic relations, and treatment of marginalised communities.

According to recent research and analysis, the attacks on political opponents has increased significantly in the last decade and have gained political legitimacy as never before in the Macedonian political culture and democratic experience.<sup>1</sup> The consequences of tolerating and encouraging the use of hate speech by the political parties and their supporters in the public sphere, including the local media, have led to a dramatic deterioration of the public dialogue, and the diminishing of the social and political debate, especially in the online sphere.<sup>2</sup> The gradual “normalisation” of the use of various forms of hate and discriminatory language for political and ideological goals has drastically increased the number of their occurrences and has also become a usual method for addressing political opponents and people with different opinions. The deficiencies in the implementation of the legal instruments have also led to increased pressure on minority groups especially based on their ethnic identity, sexual orientation and against migrants.

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1. Sasho Ordanoski, (2018) “Freedom of expression against the hate speech in the media in Macedonia”, p. 7.

2. Ibidem, pp. 7-8.

## 2. Methodological approach

The research included extraction of material with elements of hate speech and discriminatory content registered during 2021, and some in 2022. Cases that had significant public visibility and reach to the audience in North Macedonia over this period were filed and cross-analyzed. The examination of the extracted material included quantitative, qualitative analysis, and adjusted discourse analysis of their content. The collected cases were classified according to their topic, type of narrative used, targeted group or individual, what type of figure committed the incident, what was the reach of the content, what type of media was used, and what was the broader context of these events. The registered cases were classified according to the scale for sentiment analysis, grading the cases from 1 to 6, depending on the level of the assessed affective reaction, or sentiment triggered by the event.

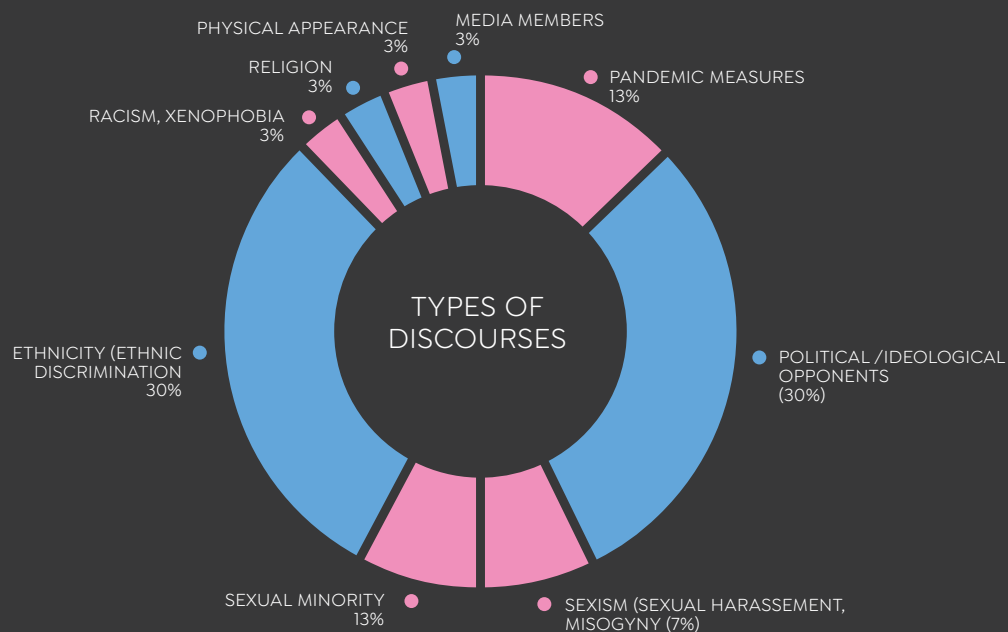
- 1. Disagreement** - Rhetoric including disagreeing. Challenging groups claims, ideas, and beliefs, or trying to change them.
- 2. Negative actions** - Rhetoric including negative non-violent actions associated with the group.
- 3. Negative character** - Rhetoric including non-violent characterisations and insults.
- 4. Demonising and dehumanising** - Rhetoric including specifications of sub-human and superhuman characteristics of the targeted individual/group.
- 5. Instigation of violence** - Rhetoric implies infliction of physical harm or aspirational physical harm.
- 6. Death** - Rhetoric implies literal killing or elimination of a group.

Using the method of discourse analysis, the examination of the cases was detailed further and the main narratives and sub-narratives were extracted and elaborated. The s.c. "trigger events" were analysed and contextualised in order to understand the process of their transformation to the level of wide national relevance. Also, the visual elements from these cases were analysed and their impact was assessed in the particular contexts of their use.

## 3. Narratives and Sub-narratives

### 3.1 Quantitative analysis

During 2021, a total of 35 notable cases of use of hateful and discriminatory discourses were registered in North Macedonia. According to their spread and metrics for reach and engagement of the audience, they had a significant impact in the media and the public sphere causing numerous comments, debates, verbal disputes, and various reactions. The highest number of cases registered were hateful discourses against political and ideological opponents (30%), hate narratives on an ethnic or racial basis (30%), and attacks based on sexual orientation or against members of the LGBTQ+ community (13%).

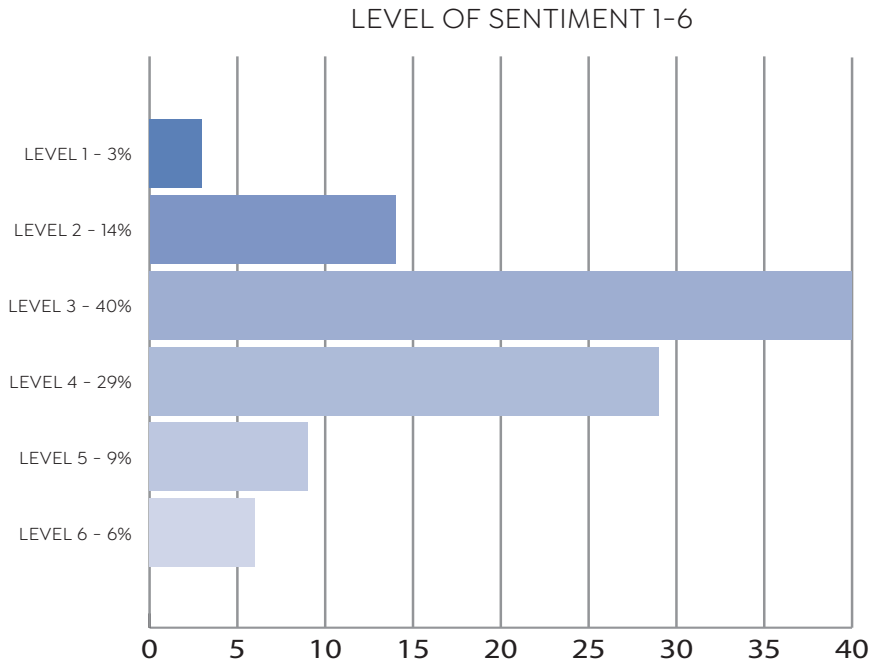


Graph 1: Types of discourse used in the registered cases of hate speech in 2021

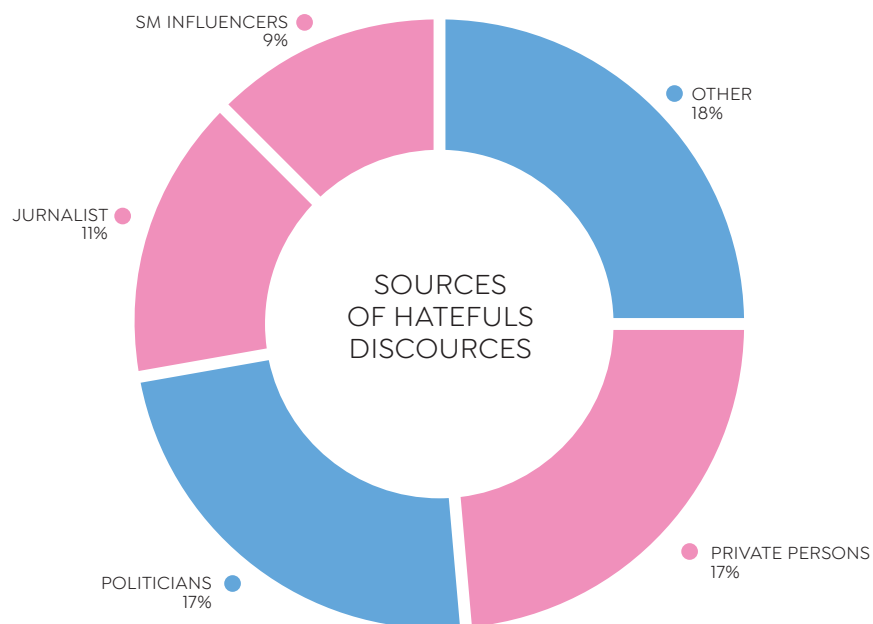
When compared with the data from the sentiment analysis, i.e., the level of the assessed affective reaction triggered by the event, most of the cases, in total 40%, were assessed as Level 3 (Emphasising negative character), 28.5% with Level 4 (Demonising and dehumanising) and 14% with Level 2 (Negative non-violent actions). The most serious cases, assessed with Level 6 (Rhetoric that implies literal killing, death, or elimination of a group), were present with 5.7% of cases, while Level 5 cases amounted to 9% of the total. The cases assessed as Level 6 were all from the type of hateful and discriminatory discourses on ethnic grounds, while the cases from Level 5 were targeting political and ideological opponents, and members of the institutions responsible for the pandemic's measures.

In the close analysis of the directly targeted groups, it was found that 31.3% are against a different ethnic or racial group, 25.65% are targeting politicians, 14.25% are against civic activists, and 8% are against members of sexual minorities.

In regard to the source of the attacks, the most common were private persons with 45%, while 17.1% were politicians or representatives of the political parties in the country. Additionally, 11.4% were journalists or media members, and online influencers with 8.55%. Dominantly, the hateful and discriminatory discourses were published and spread online, mainly through social media platforms, 37.05%, and the news websites, 45.6%.



Graph 2: Level of sentiment caused by the hate and discriminatory discourses



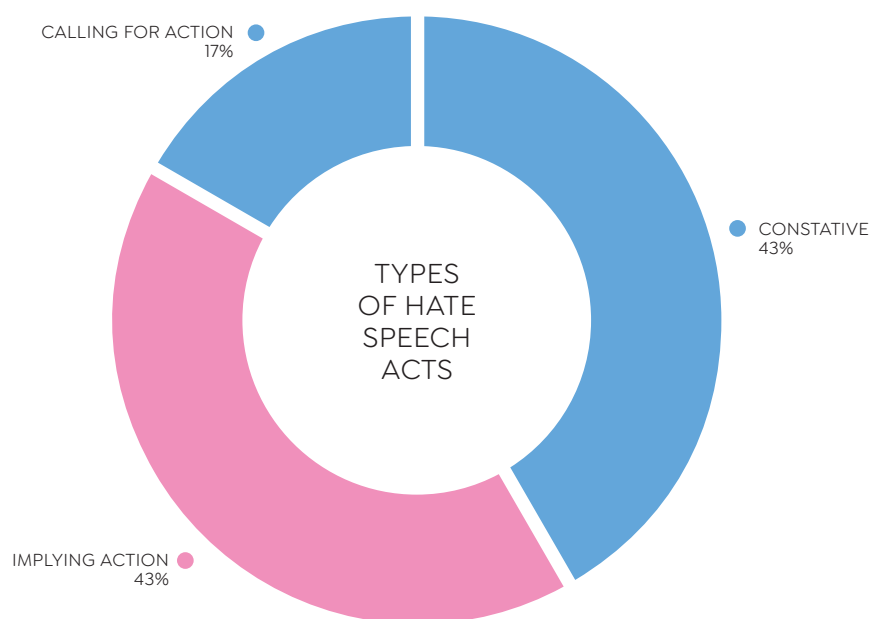
Graph 3: Sources of hateful discourses



### 3.2. Narrative analysis

In this research we define narrative as logical and coherent semantic interpretation of related events and characters that creates interpretative sense to the reader or listener. The narratives give a meaning to the story, connect particular events to a wider, collectively accepted story. They define what is normal and expected and are closely involved in the creating and maintaining of social and political power structures, which often tend to legitimise hate speech and different forms of discrimination and extremism because they help them implement and maintain their power.

If we apply to the registered cases the *theory of speech acts* by J.L. Austin<sup>3</sup> and the methodology later developed by J. R. Searle<sup>4</sup>, we can obtain more coherent information on the communicative effect of the analyzed cases. Speech act is defined as an action performed through language concerning the speaker's communicative intention in producing semantic utterance, and the speech act practically explains the purpose for which the speakers use the language<sup>5</sup>. Austin identified (a) constative speech acts as an utterance that states something that is true or false, and (b) performative speech acts that tend to perform or initiate an action by saying or writing particular utterances. Using this theoretical approach, we can note that in the researched material there were 43% of cases of clear constative character, i.e., "locutionary" type of utterances in the theory of speech acts. They are primarily communicating an opinion, statement, characterisation or observation of something or someone. In total, 42.7% were of the constative sub-type, the s.c. "illocutionary speech acts", which imply certain actions. Finally, 14.3% of cases were of clear performative or "perlocutionary" acts, i.e., speech acts calling for direct aggressive or violent action.



Graph 4: Type of hate speech acts by their communicative effect

#### a) Narratives against political and ideological opponents

As noted previously, discourses and attacks against political and ideological opponents are amongst the most frequent types of cases (30.61%). They are founded on the principle of defining the Other (ethnicity, nation, race, religion, ideological group, etc.) and consequently singling out groups or individuals who are "traitors", or "outcasts" from their "natural or blood community", as they are publicly displaying tolerance, understanding and are communicating or cooperating with the members of the Others. Various language techniques are used as part of this narrative, including strong words and insults, aiming to express the aversion that one should feel against targeted

3. Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

4. Searle, J. (1969). *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

5. Yule, G. (2006). *Pragmatics* (6th Impression). Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 54.

individuals or groups, who are often labeled as “degenerates from their community”. In one of the registered cases, a former high-ranking member of the police forces was targeted<sup>6</sup>. He is portrayed as a prominent case of “a traitor”, who used to defend his country and now is actively cooperating with “the enemies of his people”.

In another case, a family member of the ex-Minister of Justice (MoJ), Bojan Maricic, was targeted. A photograph of Momir Maricic, father of the ex-MoJ, taken from his Facebook profile, next to a statue of Adolph Hitler and a copy of the “Mein Kampf” book, was published with the title: “The father of the Minister stands proudly next to the statue of Hitler”<sup>7</sup>. The family member of Minister Maricic was presented as a “supporter of Hitler”. In the text of the publication, it was added: “The father of the Justice Minister Bojan Maricic, Momir, a former public prosecutor, is visibly fascinated by the Nazi German artifacts”. When analysing closely the original source of the photo included in the news report, it could be observed that the original author, Momir Maricic, has published the photograph with the following comment: “The cult is still alive, but only in museums like this, serving as a warning”. The photograph was taken out of the original context by another social media user and falsely presented as “support for Nazism by the father of the Minister”. This was later published by “Alfa”, the national TV broadcaster, on their website and was included in their daily television news as well. The case exemplifies the recurrent tendency of the party supporters and the politically biased media to demonise political opponents and present them as evil without proper checking of facts or through verified information.

In this group of narratives, a case of hateful discourse against a foreign politician was registered as well. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, Ekaterina Zaharieva, was involved in a series of cynical comments and insults after a report that she tested positive on a Covid test<sup>8</sup>. In the referenced news report the title is using a colloquial expression for contracting a disease („налепила“), indicating absence of any empathy with the Bulgarian Minister as a human being<sup>9</sup>. The context of this case, and the triggering factor, is the ongoing blockade of North Macedonia’s start of EU accession negotiations due to a “Bulgarian veto”, i.e., refusal of the Bulgarian government to approve the framework for the start of negotiations<sup>10</sup>. This type of publication is typically using the method of manipulative titles, which are signaling to the reader how to react emotionally and take a negative attitude towards the targeted individual or group. Following the title, the content of the news reports in most cases is neutral and without additional hateful content. However, this type of report is often used as a tool to trigger negative and hateful comments on the social media platforms where these reports are usually shared. Through examination of this and similar cases, it could be noted that the s.c. “clickbait titles” have a double purpose, prompting the reader to click on a report, but also to share it on the social media accounts and initiate a hateful commentary and discussions. In this way, the news websites are practically urging the readers to engage through sharing of their content reactively, with the main aim to increase their relevance and the number of readers.

In regard to the cases where civic activists are targeted on political or ideological grounds, the dominant narrative is that NGOs and their members are “mercenaries and servants of the western governments and other centres of power in the West”. The label that is usually attached to them is formulated in the expression “Western propagandists”. The focus of hateful discourses is often the sub-narrative that “EU, NATO and Western governments don’t care about the identity and real interest of Macedonian people”. In the examined cases, some of the usual expressions of this narrative were noted: “They (local NGOs and their activists) are implementing anti-state and anti-Macedonian policies, openly cooperating with foreign secret agents who represent these types of international positions on Macedonia”<sup>11</sup>.

These narratives are also based on the opposition to political compromises reached in several agreements from the past, like the Prespa agreement with Greece, Ohrid Framework agreement from 2001 and the Cooperation agreement with Bulgaria in 2017. These agreements and those who support them publicly, including civic activists, have “inflicted injustice to Macedonia”, and they are “illegal”. The government, according to these narratives, “has carried out classic fascist political decisions – when the identity of (Macedonian) people is denied, from a country that has previously done ethnic cleansing of that people<sup>12</sup>”, while the targeted activists are supporting and helping the Government in implementing these politics. They are also accused of not believing in democratic values and civic liberties, and are following their political agendas only for selfish personal interests.

6. Stojanco Angelov, currently serving as Director of the Crisis Management Center of North Macedonia.

He is also president of the “Dignitypolitic” al party and former General within the special police forces.

7. Available at <https://alfa.mk/?p=27983> (accessed 06.05.2022).

8. Available at <https://pressingtv.mk/region/i-ekaterina-zaharieva-nalepi-korona/> (accessed 06.05.2022).

9. March 2021.

10. “The country’s EU path is currently blocked by a veto from Bulgaria, which insists on changes to the constitution to recognise the Bulgarian minority, remove ‘hate speech’ in textbooks, and resolve disputes over language and history. The veto also impacts Albania’s EU path as the two countries’ progress is linked”, Euractive, available at <https://www.euractiv.com/?p=1709997> (accessed 06.05.2022).

11. Available at <https://antropol.mk/2021/05/05/dvojnite-arshini-na-zapadnite-propaganisti/>, (accessed 06.05.2022).

12. Ibidem.



*“You disrupted coexistence in the country, not only voting for the name change of the country but also by aggressively agitating for it. And such a change was not for the collective rights of the ethnic Albanians, no, it was to the detriment of your ethnic Macedonian neighbor who was forced by a Greek or Bulgarian from outside, to change his name, so you did not stop him, but you actually helped them!”<sup>13</sup>*

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The groups that typically promote these narratives, labeling their opponents as “traitors” or “western propagandists”, sometimes undertake similar activities to label or stigmatise groups or individuals from any other part of the political or ideological spectrum. In some instances, the narratives are intertwined with acts of dehumanisation of the political opponents<sup>14</sup>. An example of this is the case of a local female NGO activist being attacked as an alleged “jihadist”<sup>15</sup>. A photo of the activist wearing a “hijab”, the Islamic women’s head covering, near the former prime minister, Zoran Zaev, was included in the article with the title “Scandal: Terrorist-Jihadist cell in the ruling SDSM party”. In the text it was added that the activist is a sister of one of the more prominent party members of the ruling party (SDSM), who was previously appointed as director of one of the local public companies. The narrative about the alleged “infiltration of jihadists in the ruling party” was based around the mentioned family ties of one of ruling party members and the accusation that the female activist in question is a supporter of “terrorist attacks by Hezbollah against Israeli civilians”. No information or any sources were provided to support these allegations in the text. Essentially, this narrative is constructed using negative stereotypes and disinformation, and by giving them a political context through a mix of speculations and unproven allegations with expected political implications<sup>16</sup>.

The examined narratives in this group are mostly connected by the approach of their sources and supporters to impose their understanding of organising and structuring of social groups, i.e., enforce their viewpoints about the characteristics of members of different groups (religious, political, ethnic, etc.). In combination with this approach, any point of difference in political or ideological opinion or attitude is equated with radicalisation. After imposing a definition the rules and structure of the social groups in question, they also aim to monopolise rights in deciding and explaining to the community who is the opponent or enemy of their group and who is supposed to defend them from these marked enemies.

Consequently, in such a polarised context, hate speech and discriminatory narratives are used to normalise stigmatising individuals or groups as “traitors” or “outcasts”, even if they only support rational compromises about complex domestic and international issues. In summary, the reported and analysed narratives are used in the attempts to gain political power by monopolising how core social concepts, like patriotism, loyalty, and honesty are formed, and also how structuring and categorisation of social rules and groups in the country are conducted, both formally and informally.

## **b) Ethnic and racial hate narratives**

The number of cases with hateful and discriminatory discourses is approx. 31%. The narratives in these examples are formed around negative stereotypes, hate and ethnophobia, mainly against ethnic Albanian and ethnic Roma communities in the country, and in a few cases on islamophobia and xenophobia against migrants from the Middle East. In one of the examples, published on social media by a high school teacher from Tetovo, members of the ethnic Roma community are described as: intolerant, lazy, “bad and dangerous”, and “soulless”. The created hate narratives are constative in their basic meaning, but some of their elements, like using negative characterisations, for example, “soulless”, have a significant dehumanszing inclination towards the e/ Roma community, implying some action and measures to be undertaken. In one of the registered examples, the issue of s.c. street beggars in Struga, was presented by the local mayor as problem caused by ethnic Roma members who arrived in this city from other places. Through his statements to the media he expressed the possibility that „deportation of beggars might be required to solve the issue”<sup>17</sup>. The most common trigger in these cases are news reports or reactions by politicians or journalists in the media or on social media platforms.

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13. Ibidem.

14. “These communists („комуњари”, a derogatory term for left wing and liberal parties) are soulless”, source <https://is.gd/gDgwJr>

15. Available at <https://antropol.mk/2021/05/05/dvojnite-arshini-na-zapadnite-propaganisti/> (accessed 06.05.2022).

16. In the text accusations against the party member and his sister were cited for involvement in illegal activities as well, but with no credible sources used and no verified information provided.

17. Available at <https://sdk.mk/?p=148101> (accessed 07.05.2022).

In the cases of hate speech on the basis of ethnicity, insulting and derogatory terms and names are very commonly used for the members of the targeted communities and groups. Very common is also the narrative that ethnic Albanians are prioritised for employment in the state institutions, and discrimination is committed against the largest ethnic community in the country. The context of this narrative is the process envisaged in the Ohrid Framework agreement from 2001, for the employment of additional members of minority ethnic groups to reach an equal representation of all ethnic communities in the state and local institutions.

The two cases registered as Sentiment level 6 (use of rhetoric implying death and killing) are both related to ethnicity and are connected with the bus accident in Bulgaria in November 2021 where over 40 persons, mostly ethnic Albanians returning from a tourist trip in Turkey, lost their lives. The used narratives are spreading hateful messages wishing death to more people from this community, depicting them as “subhuman”, and expressing reactions of enjoyment and joking metaphors about the tragic accident. In one of these examples, the source of the hateful narratives is a citizen of Bulgaria. In these types of cases, the narratives are based on ethnic and cultural subordination, negative stereotypes, and in few cases, dehumanisation, aimed at normalising segregation, subordination, and marginalisation of entire social groups, or their physical elimination.

### c) Hateful narratives related to pandemic measures

In the context of the various health measures against the spread of Covid-19 implemented during 2021, several protests were organised in Skopje and other cities in the country. The movement opposing Covid measures and related groups who also opposed vaccination, reflected their activities and attitudes in various media publications as well. During the protests and on social media platforms, they circulated different hateful messages containing insults, threats and hate speech against health authorities and their members. The narratives in this particular category, totaling 14% from the number of all cases, were formed around the various conspiracy theories and claims that the virus was artificially created and the vaccination is imposed to obtain financial profits for the pharmaceutical industry. The Minister of Health, the Commission for Infectious Diseases, health workers, and others were the focus of the attacks.

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*“You can prevent Covid fascism only by rejecting masks, vaccinations and mass resistance, to save your children and families!”<sup>18</sup>*

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On the basis of these claims the narrative is formed depicting the health authorities as “servants of evil forces”, treating the citizens, and even children, like animals for experiments.

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*“Even children are not spared, they let them go to school with physical presence with masks, physical distance, conducting social engineering and sending stalkers to breathe in their necks to instill fear and puncture them (with vaccines) like farm cattle”.*

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Often the term “killers” was used to address the targeted individuals and groups. On the grounds of these claims, the hate speech and calls for violent actions are being justified and normalised. The main triggers for these narratives were media publications and announcements for the introduction of new restrictions and different measures related to the pandemics. This case also exemplifies the tendency to politicise the pandemic measures and use them to attack the government and ruling parties, by blaming them for poor organising and implementation of the preventive measures. Due to these tendencies, the protests and hateful messages gained increased circulation not only on social media but were also enhanced by the local online and electronic media.

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<sup>18</sup>. Available at <https://is.gd/XaCJSQ> accessed 07.05.2022.

#### d) Hate narratives against sexual minorities

Hate narratives of this type were noted in 8% of the cases. Insults, slurs and hate discourses were registered in some of the events and publications<sup>19</sup>. Also, cases of discrimination of the rights in regard to transsexual and transgender persons were reported in few of the cases<sup>20</sup>.



*“The Network for Protection against Discrimination addressed the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination with a complaint about a case of indirect discrimination based on health status (of a transgender person). A woman who has been treated for hepatitis C in the past has not been provided with private health insurance”.*

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The most notable trigger for these type of discourses and narrative was the organised “Pride parade” in Skopje, in August 2021. The central narrative of this category, as confirmed by the previous research conducted by Macedonian Institute for Human Rights, is the belief that “homosexuality is a disease”. Over 70% of respondents in this research supported this narrative and attitude toward sexual minority groups. The main aim of this discriminatory and hateful narrative is to segregate and marginalise members of the LGBTQ+ community, but also put pressure on their supporters, who are often also targeted by the creators and propagators of these narratives.

### 3.3. Comparative analyses

The comparative analyses of the registered hate discourses and narratives show that most of them have a relatively simple structure, with very few sub-narratives, based on instilling intolerance for different groups in the society. Most of the registered cases include the use of various forms of hate speech and discriminatory language on a political, ideological, ethnical, racial, and sexual orientation basis. The attacks on the health authorities and the measures during the pandemics were also noted as one of the more impactful sources for the distribution of hate discourses in the research period.

In many of these cases the following types of attacks were used: stereotyping, stigmatisation, hostility, spread of harmful misinformation and disinformation, threats, dehumanising, slurs and insults. Usually, the targets of these attacks are representatives or supporters of political parties or public institutions, members of the civic organisations and other ethnic groups, media representatives and members of marginalised communities. The most common messages and narratives from the registered hateful and discriminatory content include nationalistic ideas and attacks, xenophobia, hate discourses against specific ethnicities, racism, sexism, and attacks on the members of the LGBTQ+ community.

The usual channels for dissemination of this content are social media platforms, online media, and the content from the comments sections by the readers. In many of the cases, the actors behind these attacks are identified users of social media platforms but also there are cases of anonymous persons dispersing these messages online. Most commonly the number of these cases increases during periods of significant socio-political events in the country, like elections, significant incidents, statements by politicians or online influencers, anniversaries of important events from the past, major protests, and other impactful political events.

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19. Available at <https://is.gd/adYe5y> accessed 06.05.2022.

20. Available at <https://meta.mk/?p=559661> accessed 06.05.2022.



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## 4. Actions taken to combat hate and disinformation narratives in N. Macedonia

The legal framework in North Macedonia for dealing with hate speech includes several laws, and is a combination of legal measures from criminal, administrative and civil law<sup>22</sup>. The Criminal Code contains several provisions that refer to different aspects of hate speech<sup>23</sup>.

The Government in 2018 adopted a Decision on the establishment of a National Coordination Body to monitor the situation with non-discrimination and the implementation of laws, bylaws and strategic documents in this area. The National Coordination Body is composed of 36 members, representatives of state institutions, local self-government, associations, unions, employers' associations, and experts.

In order to deal more efficiently with hate speech in North Macedonia in January 2019, the “Network for Combating Hate Speech in the Media” was established, initiated and coordinated by the “Council for Media Ethics of Macedonia” (CEMM). This network of organisations and institutions includes professional media and journalists associations, state and regulatory bodies responsible for the protection of human rights, civil society organisations, as well as other organisations in the field of media and protection of human rights<sup>24</sup>. One of the key documents and instruments of this formed network is the “Declaration” on the fight against hate speech which defines that the purpose of this network is “to prevent the spread of hate speech in the public sphere, to strengthen the professional and ethical practice of journalism and to raise the awareness of the general population about the negative consequences of hate speech.” The Declaration adds that the members are committed to jointly monitor the effectiveness of the domestic legal instruments in preventing hate speech in the public sphere. The Declaration also points to the need and commitment to “raise citizens’ awareness of the harmful consequences of hate speech in the public sphere and to promote independent, professional and ethical informing of the public, free from discriminatory speech and prejudice, hate speech on any basis, as well as without speech that provokes or incites hatred and violence”.

The online service of the Helsinki Committee, “Hate Crimes”<sup>25</sup> monitors the reporting of hate crimes, and in addition to the cases registry, several other reports are available with more detailed information on dealing with hate speech in the country. Also, the online service “Hate Speech” is available for the citizens and includes information, a glossary, statistics, interactive maps, and tools for reporting cases of hate speech<sup>26</sup>.

21. Criminal Code, Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, The Law on Ombudsman, and The Law on audio and audiovisual media services.

22. Media Ethics Council in Macedonia (2020), “Hate Speech - International and National Legal Framework, with Special Reference to the Media”, Skopje, pp. 20-21.

23. Criminal Code, Article 394, Spreading racist and xenophobic material through computer system, Article 122, Article 319, Articles 403-407a, and Article 417.

24. The list of these organizations and institutions includes: the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, the Ombudsman, the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, the Association of Journalists of Macedonia, The Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers, the Institute for Communication Studies, the Macedonian Media Institute, and several other non-government organizations.

25. Available at <https://zlostorstvaodomraza.com>

26. Available at <http://www.govornaomraza.mk/reports/submit>

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of the hate speech in North Macedonia confirm that it is a complex phenomenon which through public communication on the digital platforms and different popular media, infiltrates all spheres of society. Dealing with it requires a multilateral, multi-institutional and multi-sectoral approach that will work continuously and act on its detection, sanctioning and suppression, in order to prevent the development and growth of the so-called “culture of hatred” and wide use of hateful and discriminatory discourses.

Informing the public often transforms into an “information war” between various groups in society and in that fight the media are used as instrument for political and ideological confrontation. In this wider social context, the media neglect the public interest and become an integral part of interest groups that tend to grab certain powers and positions in society. Hate speech and intolerance are one of the main tools in these negative sociopolitical and informative processes. In addition to hate speech, discrimination and calls for violence are often intertwined with it and complement each other, putting in direct danger those who are the target of such media coverage. The common impunity of these violations facilitates repetition, wide distribution and exploitation of these anomalies as a kind of “normalised method” in the political fight against the individuals and groups with differencing opinions. Failures to enforce laws efficiently and violation of ethical principles by journalists creates a widespread culture of intolerance, polarisation and conflict that threatens to disrupt social stability and order. It may be added that to a certain degree hate narratives are normalised or conventionalised as a “legitimate tool” in political debates and rivalries.

The complexity of certain social problems, as is the case with the hate speech, requires not only a continuous improvement of awareness within society about this problem, but also there is a need to strengthen both awareness and responsibility of key actors, to not only formally support activities against hate speech, but to continuously take active part in activities in this field in order to suppress the creation and spreading of hateful and discriminatory discourses. The education sector has a key role and a potential to reverse the ongoing process of high tolerance and encouraging the use of hate speech in public communication. Also, improving legal instruments in the fight against hate speech is a very important process in systematically dealing with this problem and it should be constantly open for upgrading. However, the successful implementation and application of systemic legal solutions is closely related to the activities and cooperation of the key institutions and stakeholders. As key contributors in this process we can mention judicial institutions, media community, civic sector and NGOs, political parties, providers of the telecommunication services and education sector.

Their cooperation would greatly facilitate successful implementation of laws and regulations, and would significantly increase the efficiency of dealing with hate and discriminatory cases.



HATE SPEECH IN THE WESTERN BALKANS  
- THE CASE OF NORTH MACEDONIA -

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