MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN SERBIA

IVANA JOVANOVIĆ AND ANJA ANĐUŠIĆ

Funded by the European Union

B | T | D The Balkan Trust for Democracy
A PROJECT OF THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND

Norway

Reporting Diversity Network 2.0

Authors: Ivana Jovanović and Anja Anđušić

Research methodology expert: Snježana Milivojević

Research methodology expert and editor: Stefan Janjić

Publishers:
Media Diversity Institute and Media Diversity Institute Western Balkans

Reporting Diversity Network 2.0 – RDN 2.0 is established with the objective to effectively influence media representation of ethnicity, religion and gender in the Western Balkans.

Project partners include Media Diversity Institute, Albanian Media Institute, Center for Investigative Journalism, Center for Investigative Journalism Montenegro, South East Network for Professionalization of Media, Institute for Communication Studies, Kosovo 2.0, Media Diversity Institute Western Balkans. The project is funded by the European Union, Balkan Trust for Democracy, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union, Balkan Trust for Democracy, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and Reporting Diversity Network 2.0 and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union, the Balkan Trust for Democracy, the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or their partners.

Reporting Diversity Network 2.0

MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN SERBIA

IVANA JOVANOVIĆ AND ANJA ANĐUŠIĆ

Content

5 INTRODUCTION

6 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

7 NARRATIVES AND SUB-NARRATIVES

7 **Quantitative analysis**

9 **Sentiment analysis**

9 **Narrative analysis**

9 Hateful narratives against gender

11 Ethnic hate narratives

12 Hate narratives against sexual minorities

12 Hateful narratives against migrants and refugees

13 Hateful narratives against journalists

13 **Visibility analysis**

14 ACTIONS TAKEN TO COMBAT HATE AND DISINFORMATION IN SERBIA

16 CONCLUSION

Introduction

This research paper aims to provide the results of media monitoring of hate speech in Serbia, illustrate and analyse the most common narratives, as well as identify the main generators of hateful and discriminative discourse in Serbian media. It aims to identify the most targeted groups, explore institutional and civic reactions and present preventive measures being carried out. The monitoring of hate speech in Serbia has been implemented by Media Diversity Institute Western Balkans from 15th January 2021 until 11th April 2022.

This process of monitoring primarily included incidents that occurred in the mainstream media, with the highest number of incidents recorded being against gender, ethnicity and sexual minorities. The most notable cases of hate speech that marked last year in Serbian media were the hateful, misogynistic and victim blaming narratives which followed when women came out with their sexual assault testimonies. Media representation of women in Serbia stems from the role they have in the patriarchal society. Women are four times less represented in the media than men, according to the Global Media Monitoring Project research for 2020[1]. They are also most commonly portrayed either as victims of violence or as celebrities working in show business and very rarely as experts in their field.

The effects of the war(s) during the breakup of Yugoslavia in the nineties still have a grip on Serbian society. This often manifests as a hostile attitude towards neighboring countries and ethnic hatred, especially towards Albanians and Bosniaks, which is quite common. Recently, hatred towards Montenegrins has intensified due to the conflict between the Serbian Orthodox Church and Montenegrin Orthodox Church. Ethnic hate is omnipresent, but peaks during annual commemoration days of the Srebrenica genocide and various war crimes such as Oluja, Bljesak, Kosovo pogrom, etc.

The LGBTQ+ community is underrepresented in Serbian media and when they do reach the mainstream media, they are often referred to in a negative context. Hate speech against LGBTQ+ increased during the monitoring period, after the initiative to adopt the Law on Same-sex Civic Unions. LGBTQ+ rights have been discussed on many popular TV shows, in which the hosts have usually made a poor choice in selecting speakers on the subject providing homophobic politicians with a platform to speak against LGBTQ+ rights. Journalists are also often undereducated on the topic.

In order to understand the specifics of hateful narratives in Serbian media it is crucial to understand the state of media freedom and the general public discourse. Most popular media include broadcasters with national coverage and tabloids which are usually in support of the government. These media outlets are often inclined to spin, reinforcing the ruling party's position, criticising the opposition and other public figures critical of the government and even distributing fake news.

Serbia ranks 79th out of 180 countries in the 2022 Press Freedom Index report assembled by Reporters Without Borders, improving its ranking by 14 positions compared to last year. However, until this year, Serbia's rating has been dropping significantly from 66th in 2017 to 93rd in 2021. Serbia is still in the "problematic situation" category and together with Albania is the lowest on the list in the Western Balkan region. Moreover, Freedom House downgraded Serbia's media landscape status from free to partly free in 2019, and Serbia has kept that status ever since.

This media climate with a very small number of independent media outlets and journalists facing daily pressure and threats leaves most of Serbia's media landscape exposed to self-censorship, following narratives set up by the ruling party and further expanding and amplifying them. These narratives are often hateful and therefore very harmful for the groups they are targeting.

1. Global Media Monitoring Project, (2020), 6th Global Media Monitoring Project: Who Makes the News. https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GMMP2020_ENG_.FINAL20210715-2.pdf

Methodological approach

Serbia's legal system has defined hate speech and addresses it in several laws, however in this research we use a broader concept of hate speech, primarily by not limiting the characteristics for identifying an individual or group that is targeted. In this research hate speech is defined as targeting individuals or groups based on their identity. Furthermore, in this monitoring report we also included harmful representation of certain marginalised groups such as women, Roma or trans people.

The collected hate speech incidents 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. In the sentiment analysis, these incidents were classified according to the methodology of George Washington University[2]:

1. **Disagreement** - Rhetoric including disagreeing with the idea at a mental level. 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 characterizations 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.

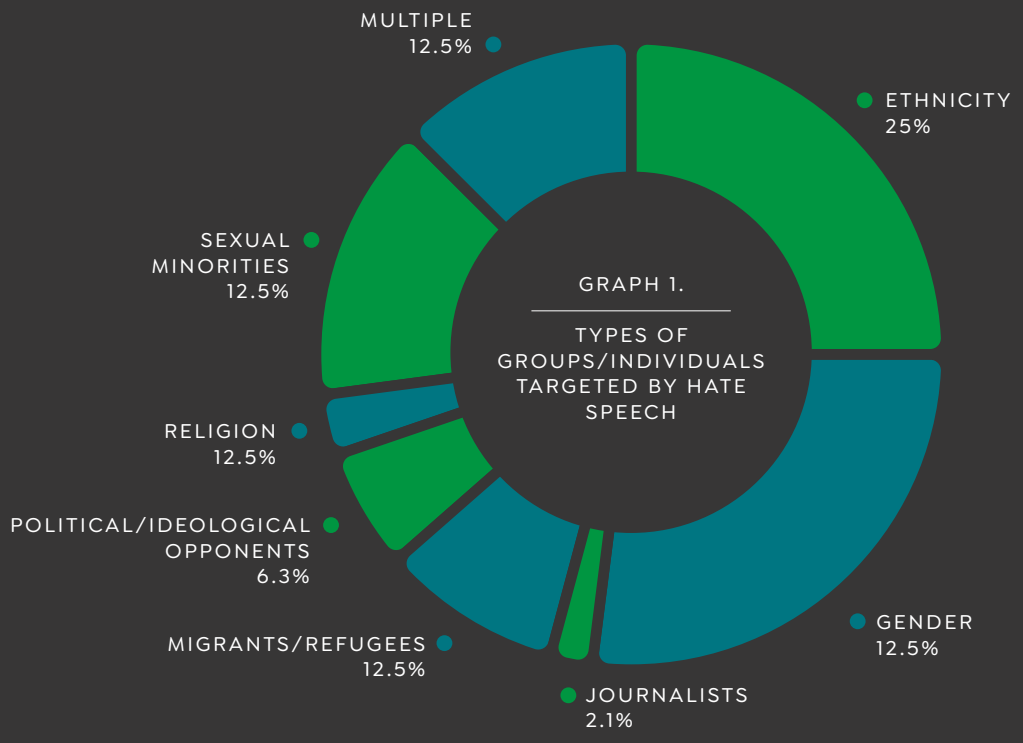
This research included monitoring of newspapers, television, infoportals, radio and social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Particular attention was given to the statements of public figures and politicians because of the influence they have on public opinion. The monitoring also included comments on social media networks.

2. Bahador Babak, Kerchner Daniel, Bacon Leah, Menas Amanda, (2019), *Monitoring Hate Speech in the US*. Washington, DC: George Washington University. https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.gwu.edu/dist/8/846/files/2019/03/Monitoring-Hate-Speech-in-the-US-Media-3_22-z0h5kk.pdf

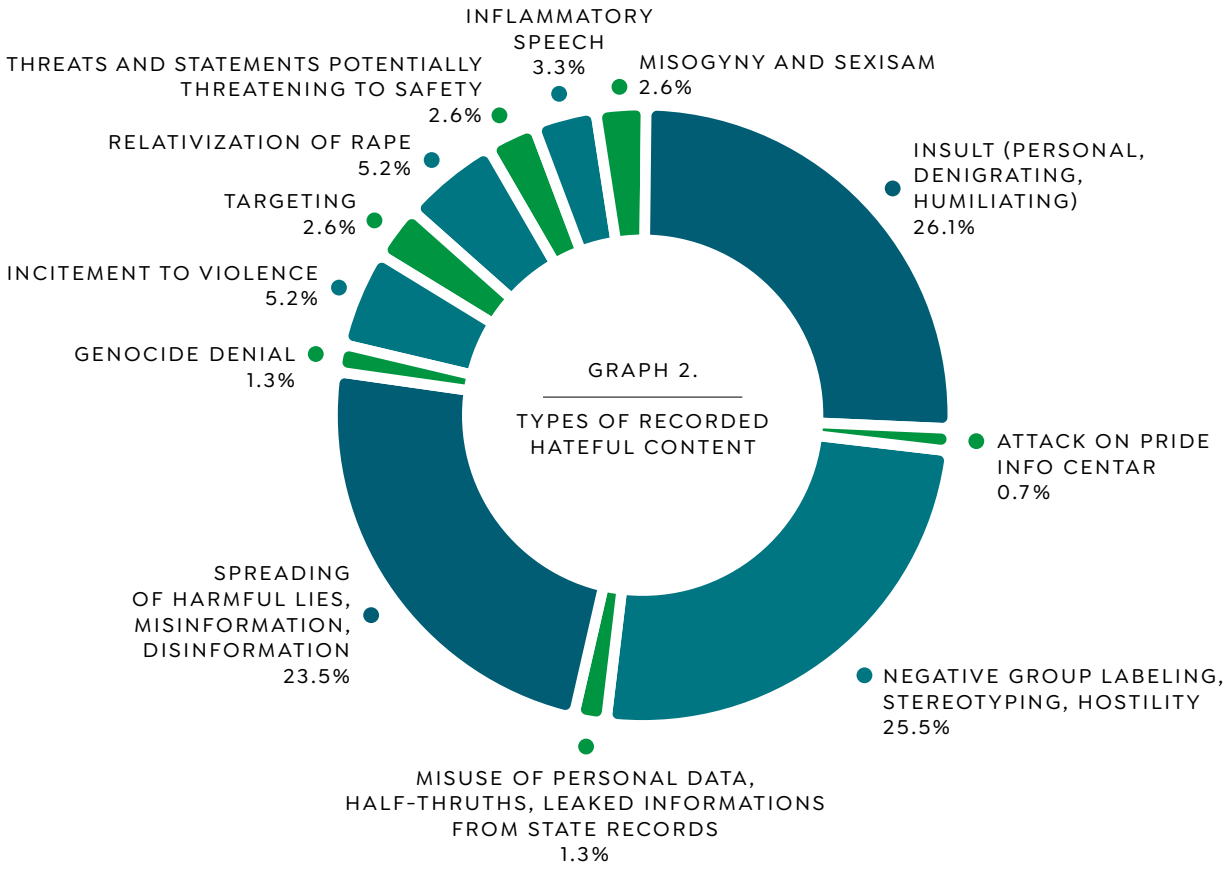
Narratives and Sub-narratives

Quantitative analysis

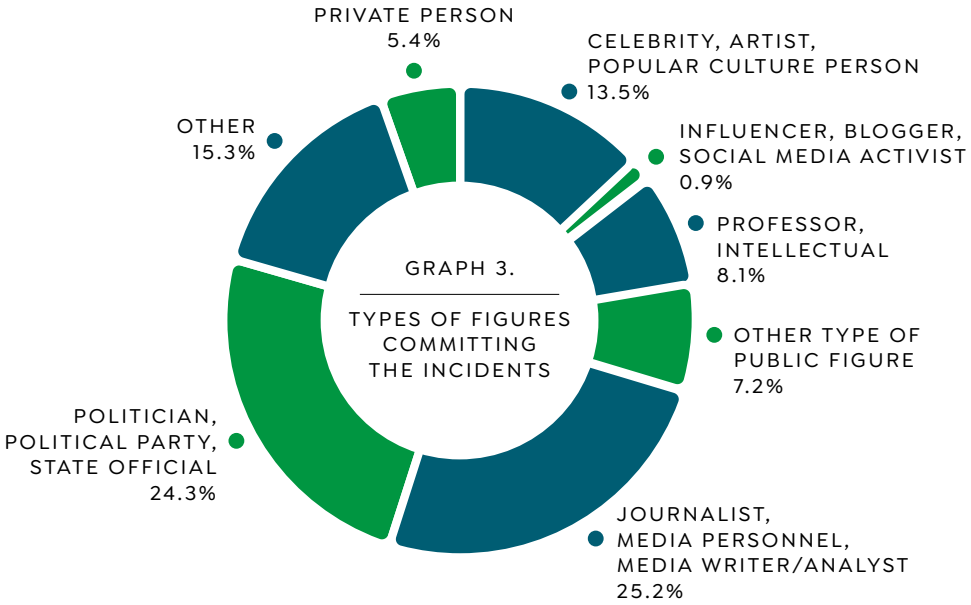
During the monitoring period a total of 96 incidents were recorded. More than half of those incidents were aimed at gender (27.1%) and ethnicity (25%) with the third most targeted group being sexual minorities (14.6%). Along with this, a huge number of the documented incidents (12.5%) included intersectional or combined hateful and discriminative discourse. In such incidents, groups and individuals were targeted for multiple overlapping identities. A significant number of cases were directed at migrants and refugees (9.4%), followed by hate against political and ideological opponents (6.3%), religion (3.1%) and journalists (2.1%).



When it comes to the type of hateful content, more than three quarters of incidents were defined as insults (26.1%), negative group labeling, stereotyping and hostility (25.5%), spreading of harmful lies, misinformation and disinformation (23.5%). The last quarter of incidents included relativisation of rape (5.2%), incitement to violence (5.2%), inflammatory speech (3.3%), misogyny and sexism (2.6%), threats and statements potentially threatening to safety (2.6%), targeting (2.6%), genocide denial (1.3%), misuse of personal data, half-truths and leaked information from state records (1.3%) and one attack on Pride Info Center in Belgrade (0.7%).

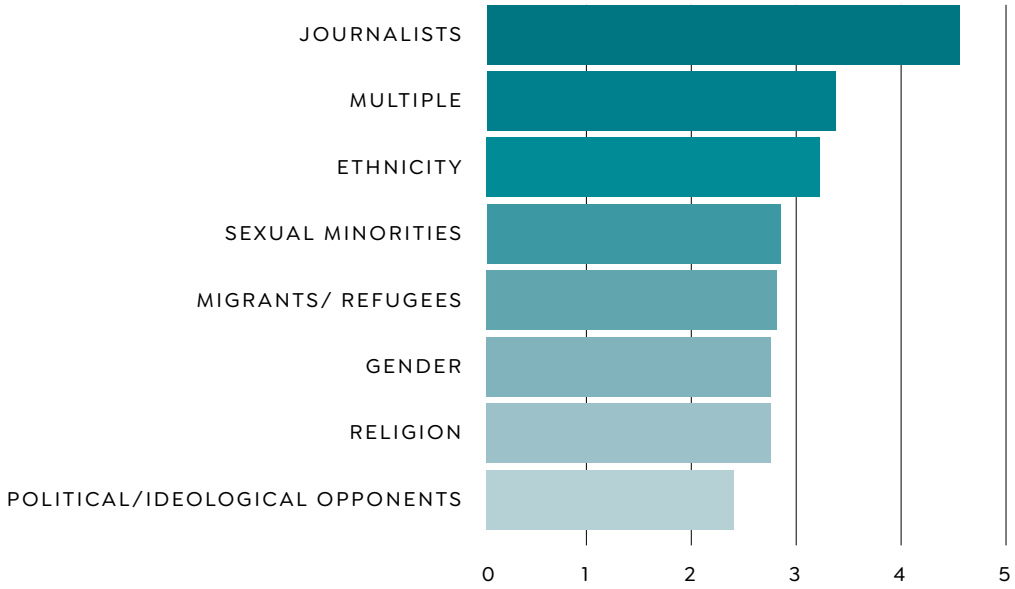


Journalists and media workers (25.2%) together with politicians, state officials and political parties (24.3%), make up almost half of the perpetrators of hate speech in this monitoring. Other figures committing hate incidents were celebrities, artists and popular culture persons (13.5%), professors and intellectuals (8.1%), private persons (5.4%) and influencers, bloggers and social media activists (0.9%). A significant number of incidents originated from other figures (15.3%) and other public figures (7.2%).



Sentiment analysis

Reported incidents were rated on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being disagreement with a group and 6 being incitement of literal killing or elimination of a group. The average score was 2.89 for all cases. On average, the highest scored incidents per type of targeted group were cases of hate aimed at journalists (4.5) and incidents categorised as hate directed at multiple identities (3.34), together with ethnic hate speech (3.17). Alongside this, hate against sexual minorities on average scored 2.79, followed by hate directed at migrants and refugees (2.78), gender (2.7) and religion (2.67). The lowest rated incidents of hate speech were those directed at political and ideological opponents scoring on average 2.34. The most extreme incidents with incitement of physical violence, killing and the elimination of a group (scores 6 and 5) were usually targeting gender (5 recorded incidents) and ethnicity (4 recorded incidents). With these identities also being the most common targets, this further proves that women, ethnic minorities in Serbia and other ethnic groups in the Western Balkans are the most threatened by hateful narratives and demonstrates how widely socially accepted these narratives are in Serbian society.



GRAPH 4.

AVERAGE SCORES PER TYPE OF GROUP/INDIVIDUAL TARGETED BY HATE SPEECH

Narrative analysis

Hateful narratives against gender

As previously noted, the most frequent hate speech is against gender appearing in 27.1% of recorded cases.

In early 2021, actresses Milena Radulović and Iva Ilinčić, together with five other actresses, reported their acting teacher Miroslav Aleksic for rape and sexual harassment. This has encouraged many other women to share their stories, using the hashtag #NisamTražila (#IDidn'tAskForIt).

Given that Serbian society is patriarchal and traditional, when reporting on (sexual) violence against women, it was mostly done through sensationalist headlines that deepen stereotypes. Tabloids and some channels with a national coverage have spread victim blaming narratives and conspiracy theories targeting women who have reported rape and sexual harassment.

For example, in the morning show of TV Pink, former football player Dusan Savic said that the indictment against Aleksic was *"constructed"*, *"deliberate"* and that it represented an attack on Serbia. Various arguments were used during the interview to show that reporting rape and sexual harassment aims at *"destroying Serbia"*.

Moreover, that was not the first time that a television with a national frequency participated in spreading hate narratives, misogyny, and secondary victimisation of those who reported sexual violence. The most distinguishable example of this are media reports after the actress Danijela Stajnfeld stated in the Public Prosecutor's Office that she was raped by her former colleague Branislav Lecic. TV Happy, tabloids Srpski Telegraf and Alo, reported on this topic in a very sensationalist way, spreading conspiracy theories and victim blaming narratives and encouraging numerous hateful comments on social media against the victim.

Misogyny and sexism are deeply rooted in the political discourse in Serbia. This monitoring has shown that politicians are one of the main generators of hate speech. For example, the Minister of Family Welfare and Demography, Ratko Dmitrovic, in the morning show on TV Prva blamed women for the declining birth rate in Serbia. Minister Dmitrovic said that:

> *Women have complete freedom. To be an academic, the best mathematician, an economist, to succeed in every field. What should we give that woman, we as men, we as society, the state, so that she would make the decision to give birth to her third child.*

In this case, Dmitrovic spread patriarchal narratives that women are required to give birth and are therefore to blame for the decline in Serbia's birth rate. After this show, Dmitrovic shared similar attitudes on TV Happy:

> *We have women who say - 'I just don't care, I don't want to give birth.' And no one is allowed to say anything to her, to object to her. About who was attacking me, I checked, they are mostly women with one child, or those who do not have any.*

Statements like this are very dangerous, especially when they come from decisionmakers. Implying that women should not make decisions about their own bodies and lives, that they must give birth and have multiple children perpetuates gender roles and, since such messages are coming from government officials, only encourages these narratives.

Women politicians, journalists and public figures are targeted and discredited based on their appearance, especially if they are critical of the government. Their expertise are diminished by hateful comments based on their appearance and they are continuously exposed to misogynistic harassment and threats.

On the morning show of TV Happy, the founder of the Serbian Radical Party, Vojislav Seselj, spread insulting and gender-based hate speech towards the Minister for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, Gordana Comic, calling her *"a woman with Stalin's moustache"*.

Women politicians, journalists or public figures are at higher risk of hate speech if they belong to a minority group. In these situations, the attacks are intersectional in nature, driven by hatred towards multiple interconnected social categories like age, gender, race, and sexuality.[3]

For example, opposition politician Marinika Tepic is targeted because she is an opposition politician, a woman and ethnically Romanian.

3. Kuperberg Rebecca, (2018), *Intersectional Violence against Women in Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/politics-and-gender/article/intersectional-violence-against-women-in-politics/857778003CD6AB6448FC30DBC1F34416

Ethnic hate narratives

The number of cases with hateful narratives against ethnicity is approx. 25%. Due to the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the role of Serbia in the war, the spread of ethnic hate is still dominant. Some members of the Serbian government are denying war crimes and spreading hate narratives targeting neighboring countries and territories. Negative stereotypes and hate are mainly against Albanians, Bosniaks and Montenegrins.

The dominant narrative surrounding Kosovo Albanians is that they are *"enemies"* as well as promoting the impression that Kosovo and Serbia are on the brink of conflict. Furthermore, when reporting on Belgrade - Pristina relations tabloids are reporting in a sensationalistic way, often without providing any context. Increased targeting of Kosovo Albanians usually occurs during annual commemoration days of war crimes and important events concerning the Belgrade - Pristina dialogue. Moreover, whenever speaking about Kosovo Albanians, Minister of Internal Affairs, Aleksandar Vulin, uses derogatory terminology.

> *If you want to make Kosovo a NATO member country without fulfilling a single standard, and the line to become a NATO member is more complicated than joining the EU, if you skip all that and admit them to NATO, violating all resolutions and the positions of the UN Security Council, promises, guarantees, the Kumanovo Agreement, you are only preparing Shiptars and giving them the opportunity to attack Serbs, to provoke Serbia to the point that Serbia cannot do anything but respond, and then they'll say - brothers, Article 5 of our Treaty says that a NATO member country must be protected, bomb Serbia. There is no other justification or reason to do such a thing.*

In 2018, the Court of Appeals confirmed the first instance verdict of the High Court in Belgrade saying that the term *"Shiptar"* is considered a hate speech.

Politicians are most often those who deny war crimes and the ones who glorify war criminals. Graffiti dedicated to General Ratko Mladic, whom the International Court of Justice in The Hague found guilty of genocide in Srebrenica and crimes against humanity, can be seen on the streets, while Mladic's name is chanted at football games.

When talking about the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Minister of Internal Affairs, Aleksandar Vulin, said that the Hague *"was not made to seek justice, nor to reconcile the people in the Balkans, but to try Serbs and Serbia"*.

Furthermore, this narrative of war crime denial spread by politicians, is later spread on television with national coverage. For example, in the morning show *Dobro jutro, Srbijo* (Good morning, Serbia) on TV Happy, the host was spreading narratives denying crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. When talking about the concentration camp Omarska, run by Bosnian Serbs, the host of the morning show, Milomir Maric, said that this camp is propaganda and that everyone who was there could just leave the camp.

> *It was open. They could get out of that camp whenever they wanted. That was a concentration camp meant to gather and hide them, so that someone doesn't kill them.*

Moreover, when talking about one of the Omarska prisoners, Fikret Alic, Maric said *"they took the skinny one and showed him around the circus in Europe. That is their propaganda."*

In addition to denying war crimes, this is also an example of the sub-narrative that *"The West is against Serbia"* and that they spread *"Western propaganda"*. The focus of this hateful discourse is *"Western propaganda wants to harm Serbian interests because the West hates Serbs."*

The dispute between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church led to an increase of hate speech towards Montenegrins, as both churches claim Orthodox religious sites in Montenegro as their own and deny each other's legitimacy. The dominant narrative considering Montenegrins was the denial of Montenegrin identity and statehood.

> *Serbian villages have a future, for example, Podgorica.*

The media rarely speaks about the Roma minority, and when they do, the stories prevail in stereotypes. Roma people are visible in the media only in reports on crime or when International Roma Day is celebrated. They are usually presented as a homogenous group whose *"tradition"* is to *"steal"* and *"beg for money"*. This characterisation of the Roma community additionally stigmatises and dehumanises them. For example, the daily newspaper Danas published a column which strengthened the stereotypes about the Roma community and mocked their position in society.

Hate narratives against sexual minorities

Hateful narratives against sexual minorities make 15% of the cases. The most common triggers in these cases were the initiative to adopt the Law on Same-sex Civic Unions and the Pride Parade. LGBTQ+ rights have been discussed on national television, where they gave homophobic politicians a platform to speak about LGBTQ+ rights and spread anti-LGBTQ+ narratives.

For example, a television with a national coverage, TV Prva, gave a platform to the leader of the right-wing political party Zavetnici, Milica Djurdjevic Stamenkovski, to talk about the Law on Same-sex Civic Unions. During her talk, Djurdjevic Stamenkovski disseminated misleading statements and homophobic narratives.

> *What is the plus in the LGBT+, zoophiles and pedophiles maybe? You will also ask for the rights of pedophiles.*

Discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community is especially problematic when it is spread by politicians who have a significant influence on the attitudes and opinions of citizens. The narrative spread by the leader of Dveri, Bosko Obradovic, is that the LGBTQ+ community *"has all the rights and wants to take more"*. Obradovic uses the term *"homosexualism"* every time he talks about the LGBTQ+ community. By adding the -ism to the end of the word homosexual he wants to present the fight for equality of LGBTQ+ people as an ideology (similar to e.g. feminism, conservatism, liberalism, socialism, etc.).

Furthermore, the dominant narrative is also that members of the LGBTQ+ community *"have more privileges"* and that the *"gay lobby controls finances in the world"*. Such narratives are misleading and put at risk members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Hateful narratives against migrants and refugees

The monitoring has shown that the number of hateful and discriminatory discourse against migrants and refugees is 9% of the overall sample. Narodna patrola (People's patrol), a far-right organisation that is known for targeting migrants and refugees, was constantly spreading discrimination and harmful prejudices against migrants and refugees. They were describing migrants and refugees as *"terrorists"*, *"criminals"*, *"an organised army that came to cause destabilisation"*, the ones who *"carry diseases"*. Not only is this xenophobic language, but these types of narratives only stigmatises and dehumanises the group.

> *By 2025 we either prevent them from coming or we will disappear. Village by village, city by city. We will become migrants ourselves and the new workforce of the western countries, and someone else will live here.*

Apart from hate narratives against migrants and refugees, Narodna patrola was also spreading disinformation, trying to manipulate the general public in order to promote hatred and aggression.

Hateful narratives against journalists

Hate narratives against journalists were noted only in 2% of the cases. Nevertheless, sentiment analysis showed that, on the scale of 1(rhetoric including disagreeing at the idea at a mental level) to 6 (rhetoric implies literal killing or elimination of a group), the average mark for hate speech against journalists is 4.5.

Journalists covering sensitive topics are more at risk. For example, journalists who were critically reporting on the mural of convicted war criminal Ratko Mladic, were targeted by pro-government tabloids and received threats. Likewise, when journalist Pero Jovovic went to Pristina to report from the festival Mirëdita, dobar dan (a festival that brings together people from Serbia and Kosovo), he received death threats. Jovovic posted his location with a Kosovo flag emoji on his private Facebook profile and pro-government tabloids reported how Jovovic *"supports independent Kosovo"*. This led to incitement of violence against Jovovic, some of the messages he received on his social media networks were *"today we are learning how to slaughter a pig"*, *"be careful on the street"*, *"our patience is near the end"*, *"one more pig ready for pig slaughter"*, *"don't be surprised if someone breaks your legs"*.

From these examples, we can see that the media are also great generators of hate speech and hateful narratives, and that the way in which they report can lead to online harassment and incitement to violence.

International human rights organisation Article 19, in their Media Freedom and Safety of Journalists in Serbia report, stated that *"online harassment generates deep insecurity and uncertainty amongst journalists, who may self-censor and fear for their safety in the absence of adequate protection from the state"*.[4]

One of the recommendations given by Article 19 is that public authorities should react more effectively and conduct *"impartial investigations into acts of violence and threats against journalists in order to bring all those responsible to justice and to ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies"*. [5]

Visibility analysis

Hateful and discriminative narratives are deeply rooted in Serbian society. They are ever-present, infiltrating almost all social structures. In this monitoring, the media together with state officials, politicians and other political figures were proven to be the main sources of hate speech, generating 49.5% of the recorded incidents. In the process of production and dissemination of any social narratives, the media, politicians and state officials truly hold the most power, often abusing it and utilising the platforms they have available to spread hate speech. However, they are very rarely legally punished and since these hateful narratives are widely accepted in the general public, they are hardly ever held accountable. This creates an endless loop of perpetuating hateful narratives.

Even though this monitoring covered all types of media content and some of the incidents were recorded on social media with a very low reach, most of the cases originated from very popular TV shows broadcasted on televisions with a national frequency or tabloids with very high reach as well. Television is the most popular type of media in Serbia reaching 72% of the total population daily.[6] Out of over 200 TV channels in Serbia, only 4 commercial televisions are rewarded with national coverage by The Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) - Happy, Pink, Prva and B92. In this monitoring there were 8 reported cases on TV Happy, followed by 6 cases on TV Pink and 4 on TV Prva. A total number of 22 incidents originated either from tabloids or their online portals such as Informer, Alo, Kurir, Srpski telegraf, Espreso and Novosti. The tabloid with the highest reach in daily print in Serbia is Informer (average daily sales in July 2018 were 102,000), Večernje Novosti (49,000) and Blic (47,000) and the highest reach on online portals is Blic with 948,000 average daily users, Kurir (913,000), Espreso (339,000) and Telegraf (327,000).[7]

4. Article 19, (2021), *Media Freedom and Safety of Journalists in Serbia: Media Freedom Rapid Response Mission Report.* London, UK: Article 19
https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/MFRR-Serbia-mission-report.pdf
5. Article 19, (2021), *Media Freedom and Safety of Journalists in Serbia: Media Freedom Rapid Response Mission Report.* London, UK: Article 19
https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/MFRR-Serbia-mission-report.pdf
6. Cetinić Goran, (2019), *Media Sustainability Index Serbia.* Washington,DC: IREX.
https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2019-serbia.pdf
7. Cetinić Goran, (2019), *Media Sustainability Index Serbia.* Washington,DC: IREX.
https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2019-serbia.pdf

Actions taken to combat hate and disinformation narratives in Serbia

Hate speech is defined in several laws in Serbia. **The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination** sees hate speech as a form of discrimination. Hate speech is defined as *"expressing ideas, information and opinions inciting discrimination, hatred or violence against an individual or a group of persons on account of his/her or their personal characteristics, in public media and other publications, at gatherings and places accessible to the public, by writing out and displaying messages or symbols, and in other ways".*[8]

Based on the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality is established as an independent, autonomous and specialised state authority. The main goal of this authority is *"to prevent all forms, types and cases of discrimination, to protect the equality of natural persons and legal entities in all spheres of social relations, to oversee the enforcement of antidiscrimination regulations, and to improve realisation and protection of equality".*[9]

The Criminal code of Serbia does not separate hate speech and hate crime in different articles of the law regarding incrimination, and in this way *"recognises mutual social correlation and connection of these criminal offenses"*[10]:

> *If a criminal offence is committed from hate based on race or religion, national or ethnic affiliation, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity of another, the court shall consider such circumstance as aggravating except when it is not stipulated as a feature of the criminal offence.*[11]

8. Available at: http://azil.rs/en/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/antidiscrimination-law-serbia.pdf
9. Available at: http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/en/background-information/
10. Vasić Milena, Blagojević Tamara, (2018), *Processing of hate crime and hate speech in Serbian legislation and the European standards.* Kneza Miloša 4, Belgrade, Serbia: Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights - YUCOM | http://en.yucom.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Hate-crime-and-hate-speech-ENG.pdf
11. Available at: https://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/18732

Even though the law itself is good, hate speech and hate crime processing in Serbia is limited - from 2012 until 2022, hate crime has been convicted in only 5 cases.

The state authority that prosecutes hate speech on the internet is the **Special Prosecution Office for High Tech Crime of the Republic of Serbia.**

Hate speech is also defined in the **Law on Public Information and Media** and the **Law on Electronic Communication**. The Law on Electronic Communications established **the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM)** with the aim to *"prevent the broadcasting of programmers which contain information inciting discrimination, hatred or violence against an individual or a group of individuals on grounds of race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, sex, or on the grounds of sexual affiliation."*[12] However, even though the law itself is good, REM is not reacting to a series of violations of the law.

The Code of Journalists of Serbia is also relevant for the protection against discrimination and hate speech in the media. **The Press Council** is an independent and self-regulatory body that reacts to violations of the Code of Journalists and encounters of hate speech in the media. Although this self-regulatory body is important and doing a good job, in the given situation regarding hate speech in Serbia, it is not enough. As the Press Council is a self-regulatory body their decisions are not legally binding, which limits their impact.

The Council of Europe is one of the main actors supporting actions against hate speech and helping condemn hate speech in Serbia. For example, the Report on the Use of Hate Speech in Serbia[13] was prepared and published with financial support from the Council of Europe and European Union.

Media Diversity Institute Western Balkans through media literacy workshops strives to raise awareness among young people when it comes to the difference between free speech and hate speech, but also to put pressure on institutions to react and condemn hate speech.

12. Available at: https://www.rirm.org/en/rem-regulatory-authority-of-electronic-media-2/
13. Krstić Ivana, (2020), *Report on the Use of Hate Speech in the Media in Serbia (Izveštaj o upotrebi govora mržnje u medijima u Srbiji).* Belgrade, Serbia: Council of Europe https://rm.coe.int/hf25-hate-speech-serbian-media-srp/1680a2278f

Conclusion

Throughout this research process it was evident just how interconnected Serbian media is with the political structures. Together they serve as the main generators of hate speech strengthening already established hateful narratives in the public discourse. As online space is easily accessible and widely used it serves as a huge platform for almost anyone to propagate these narratives. The most used social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are yet to fully develop tools for banning and removing hateful content in Serbian and other languages of the region. Most of that content stays on the platforms even after being reported. In this way, even though the Serbian legal framework concerning hate speech is solid and there are independent institutions, regulatory and self-regulatory bodies, hate speech is hardly ever sanctioned - be it online or in traditional media. Bearing in mind that Serbia is still a very traditional society with an underdeveloped democratic culture, hate speech is widely accepted in society and perpetrators are almost never held responsible for reinforcing these narratives.

Although women, ethnic minorities and other ethnic groups from the region are certainly the most common targets of hate, all the mentioned hateful narratives function in a very similar way. They are usually based on stereotypes, lack of knowledge and are repetitive.

Apart from insults, stereotypes, and labelling, almost a quarter of incidents included harmful lies, misinformation and disinformation. Spin and mis/dis/malinformation are quite common when it comes to hateful content and considering that media literacy is not very strong in Serbia, this type of content spreads fast. In an effort to combat that, the Fake News Tragač and Raskrikavanje portals deconstruct numerous fake news narratives that contain hateful and discriminative discourse.

It is crucial to consider all aspects of the complex social, political and media structures as well as all stakeholders when combating and regulating hate speech. Education of media workers and media literacy of the general public are also important in this process.

Reporting Diversity Network 2.0

MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN SERBIA

Funded by the European Union

B | T | D The Balkan Trust for Democracy
A PROJECT OF THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND

Norway