



# MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH A REGIONAL OVERVIEW

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NORBERT ŠINKOVIĆ

**Author:** Norbert Šinković

**Research methodology expert:** Snježana Milivojević

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

**Publishers:** Media Diversity Institute

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# Content

5	<b>HATE SPEECH - UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT</b>
7	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>
9	<b>HATE SPEECH PRACTICES ACROSS THE REGION</b>
10	<b>Ethnicity</b>
11	<b>Gender based hate speech</b>
13	<b>Sexual minorities</b>
14	<b>Political/ideological opponents</b>
15	<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>
17	<b>REFERENCES</b>



## Hate speech – understanding the context

There is no universally accepted definition of hate speech, hence, there is no common agreement or universal guideline for what qualifies as hate speech. Despite the absence of a standardised definition, a large number of international documents address this phenomenon (McGonagle, 2013) or some special form of hate speech, such as The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the Genocide Convention), The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), or The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Importantly, the Council of Europe has developed a number of documents to counter hate speech, which play a crucial role in identifying and eliminating this phenomenon.

The most common position used in these documents and in relevant literature, is that hate speech is based on some aspect of the group or individuals' identity (Davidson et al, 2017; de Gilbert et al, 2018). In most of the cases, however, it needs a deeper observation of the particular case in the relevant context (MacAvaney, 2019).

Analysing different aspects of hate speech, Fortuna and others (2018) identified some *specific characteristics* of the phenomenon. According to them, hate speech can be described “as a language that attacks or diminishes, that incites violence or hate against groups based on specific characteristics such as physical appearance, religion, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or other, and it can occur with different linguistic styles even in subtle forms or when humor is used” (Fortuna et al. 2018: 1).

Aside from domestic laws, European frameworks for defining hate speech are the responsibility of international and regional jurisdictional institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Relying on the practice of the Court, the phenomenon of hate speech is connected with the right to the freedom of expression as an essential foundation of (democratic) society.

Examples of ECHR case law could help us to understand where the line is drawn between freedom of expression and hate speech.

The ECHR has stated in many cases that “tolerance and respect for the equal dignity of all human beings constitute the foundations of a (democratic), pluralistic society, that being so, as a matter of principle it may be considered necessary in certain democratic societies to sanction or even prevent all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance” (European Court of Human Rights, 2006).

Analysing the standpoint of the European Court of Human Rights, we can draw a clear conclusion that the freedom of expression has its limits and sanctioning the misuse of this right is in line with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Although in this report we will not deal in detail with the judicial approach, it is necessary to understand the general practice of this important European institution, because it can bring us closer to interpreting the regional picture. To deal with potential hate speech cases this Court has two different approaches. Both are based on the European Convention on Human Rights.

One of these approaches is stated in Article 17 of the Convention, which states that it is possible to implement an exclusion from the protection of the Convention in case of an abuse of rights granted by this legal document. It implies that freedom of expression may be limited or suspended in some circumstances. The second approach, used by this Court is focusing on the restrictions of protection provided by Article 10 of the Convention, and states that any remark directed against the conventions underlying values, removes the protection provided by the document (European Court of Human Rights, 2022).

Having in mind existing frameworks about what could and what should we treat as hate speech, we can now look at the Western Balkans. Wider research on this topic, conducted by a group of researchers (Hrvatín, Petković & Hodžić, 2021) shows that three main groups in society are often in the focus of hate speech: migrants/refugees, political opponents, and other nationalities/neighboring countries.

“In the narrative strategies revealed in both media and user content, we see clear features of fascism, racism, nationalism, and intolerance to difference, labeling disagreement as treason, and misogyny. Across the region, hate narratives feed polarisation, perpetuate political turmoil, and inflame animosities. The content of hate narratives is similar across the region, mirroring the historically familiar negative labeling of the *Other*” (Hrvatín, Petković & Hodžić, 2021: 25).

Starting from the importance of the topic and data from the research, the regional overview before you is intended to further clarify and identify different groups in the Western Balkans region that are mainly targeted with hate speech in the public sphere. In addition, the report will present the types of hate speech cases in six Western Balkans countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia), which received public attention in the period of January 2021 - April 2022.





# Methodology

This comparative overview is based on national reports conducted in the six economies of the Western Balkans region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia). The data for all six reports were collected in the period of January 2021 – April 2022. Hate speech cases were identified through weekly monitoring of the traditional media as well as through monitoring of the social media posts related to different identities and groups (such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual minorities, and migrants/refugees).

The purpose of the monitoring was not to give a systematic overview of all the media in the country, but to single out individual incidents of hate speech which are either reported or distributed by the media, investigate frequency of their occurrences and their major forms.

For identifying incidents, the researchers focused on three main criteria: 1) relevance of the person making the offense (for example state officials, political representatives, public personalities, etc.); 2) cases which are widely distributed across the media, either by being reported in many media outlets or repeated for a longer period, or cases of viral hate speech, incidents that travel across media platforms or those with extended presence in certain media; 3) public perception of the incident, its consequences, influence, harm, potential to cause a chain reaction, be reprinted or become viral, adds to its significance even if the speaker would otherwise have been unnoticed.

This monitoring distinguished three major groups of hate speech:

- 1) hateful and offensive speech;
- 2) fake news, mal/disinformation;
- 3) inflammatory speech.

They were recorded using a methodology, created for this monitoring.

The methodology consists of the following categories: date of incident, country of incident, what kind of hate speech is identified (against religion, against gender, against sexual minority, against ethnicity, against migrants / refugees, other), what group or individuals was the incident directed towards, how was the group or individual named, what type of public or private figure committed the incident (politician, political party, state official, CSO, NGO or other civil society organisation, journalist, media personnel, media writer/ analyst, celebrity, artist, popular culture person, professor, intellectual, influencer, blogger, social media activist, private person, other). The methodology detected other categories as well, such as the type of content (negative group labeling, stereotyping, hostility, insult, spreading of harmful lies, misinformation, disinformation, misuse of personal data, half-truths, leaked information from state records, threats, statements potentially threatening to safety,

incitement to violence, inflammatory speech), the type of the media, the reaction to the incident, the context and other relevant information. The main intention of the research is to provide better insight into hateful/discriminatory discourse (HDD) in the six selected countries by analysing the collected data sets.

Beside using a quantitative approach to detect frequency for each above-mentioned categories, qualitative analysis included narrative analysis, sentiment analysis and visibility analysis that together provide an in-depth understanding of the narratives.

Sentiment analysis was based on the instrument developed by George Washington University which is a 6-level HDD intensity scale, where the lowest presents the mildest form of negative speech and the highest (5-6) are the worst cases of hate speech. The scale includes the following categories:

- 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 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 (Bahador, Kerchner, Bacon, Menas, 2019: 5).

This regional overview summarises the findings of the six national reports by comparing the results and examples.







HATE  
SPEECH

## Hate speech practices across the region

465 single-incident reports were made throughout the observation period in the region, which attracted wider public attention in the media. Three categories were identified as the main target of these incidents: ethnicity, gender and sexual minorities (see table 1). These three categories together make up more than fifty percent of cases (53,13%).

**Table 1.** Number of incidents by target groups.

Category	No.	percentage (%)
Deceased	2	0,43
Ethnicity	113	24,30
Gender	85	18,28
People with disabilities	2	0,43
Journalists	6	1,29
Migrants / Refugees	25	5,38
Physical appearance	1	0,22
Political / Ideological opponents	47	10,11
Profession	5	1,08
Religion	13	2,80
Sexual Minority	49	10,54
Victims of war	1	0,22
Multiple	109	23,44
Other	7	1,51
Total	465	100,00

*Source: National reports from six Western Balkans countries*

## Ethnicity

As seen in Table 1, ethnicity is the most common targeted identity in the observed period. We could separate the incidents into three main groups: 1) based on the war in the 1990s, 2) incidents against migrants and refugees, 3) actual political situation. All are operating with the same concept of “us and them”, which has a goal to verify the assumed differences between two or more groups/ethnicities/nationalities, and in some cases to dehumanise the “others”. The second one is crucial, especially in the process of rationalisation of violence and to amplify hate in society, which are necessary to uphold current political situations or *status quo* in some societies.

In some situations, external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, could speed up these processes or find new targets. This was the case in Albania, where conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation put Chinese and Jewish people at the center of hateful and discriminatory discourse. One of the media headlines, which illustrates this, came from an online media outlet that quoted one of the patients during reporting from a hospital, who said the following: “I prefer to die from God rather than from those scoundrel Chinese” (→ National report for Albania).

The situation in Montenegro, for example, where the society is deeply polarised on different levels (politics, ideology, or religion), several incidents happened during the reporting period that were linked to hate narratives towards different ethnic groups and nationalities (→ National report for Montenegro). In some examples Albanians were called “Shiptari” (pejorative word for Albanians in the former-Yugoslav countries) or the voters of political party DPS were called “Milogorci” (alluding that they support longtime politician Milorad Đukanović, who is often in the focus of political clashes in the country. This construct can also be interpreted as a position that those who support this political option are not “real” Montenegrins).

The impact of the wars in the 1990s is most clearly seen in the cases detected in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The cases show that the targets are the so-called constituent nations (Serbs, Bosniaks, Croats), but also the victims of the Srebrenica genocide and in some cases the Roma or Jewish communities as well. For example, there was the case of public commenting about the verdict against Ratko Mladić, convicted war criminal and general who led the Army of Republika Srpska during the Yugoslav Wars and who was found guilty of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. In this case, the Mayor of Srebrenica denied that genocide took place in the town with the following words: “Thus, the Hague Tribunal showed the reason for its formation – to accuse the Serbian people, to declare them genocidal or guilty of something they did not commit” (→ National report for Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The war also left a significant mark on Albanian-Serb relations in Kosovo society. The lack of truthful information about the war and the constant application of the “us and them” paradigm clearly generates negative narratives in that community. As a result, we see two main templates of narratives around the two ethnic communities: Serbs are seen as criminals, while Albanians from Kosovo are labelled as members of a “wild” society and/or terrorists (→ National report for Kosovo).

In North Macedonia ethnic Albanian and ethnic Roma minorities are the major targets of hateful and discriminatory discourse. 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 hate narratives are constative in their basic meaning, but some of their elements, like using negative characterisations such as “soulless”, signal a strong intention to dehumanise the Roma community, indicating the need for action and measures to be undertaken.

Our research has found that in Serbia, negative ethnic related stereotypes and hate are most prevalent against Albanians, Bosniaks and Montenegrins. The dominant narrative considering Kosovo Albanians is that they are “enemies” and that Kosovo and Serbia are constantly on the brink of conflict. Quite often, leading Serbian politicians are using derogatory words when they speak about Kosovo Albanians. For example, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Aleksandar Vulin said that: “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” (→ NR for Serbia).

Furthermore, the same, or similar narrative of war crime denial that is being spread by politicians, is later reaching television channels with national coverage. For example, in the morning show *Dobro jutro, Srbijo* (Good morning, Serbia) on Belgrade based TV Happy, the host was spreading narratives denying war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Hate speech aimed towards migrants and refugees are in most cases based on their skin color, religion and cultural background. In all observed societies forementioned elements are present in some percentage, but the intensity varies depending on social and political factors. Still, examples from the region prove our previous position that the key paradigm in ethnicity-based hatred is the clear distinction between “us and them”. Treating migrants as a threat to society is crucial in the dynamic of this process in the whole region. This group of people is being dehumanised on varying linguistic levels.

In Serbia, for example, *Narodna patrola* (People’s patrol) a far-right organisation, describes migrants and refugees as “terrorists”, “criminals”, “an organised army that came to cause destabilisation”, the ones who “carry diseases”. In a few detected cases from North Macedonia, islamophobia and xenophobia were the most dominant type of hatred against migrants and refugees (→ National report for North Macedonia).

The member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik, used the word “colonisation” in the context of the migrant crisis, stating that “The migrant crisis looks more and more like the process of colonisation that we had in the former Yugoslavia in the last century” (→ NR for Bosnia and Herzegovina).

A racist incident caught the attention of the media in Montenegro during the monitoring of the region, where a couple made public insults and expressed racism against children of African origin, whom they called “niggers and monkeys”, in the middle of the day and at the most popular shopping mall in the capital Podgorica. In Albania, migrants and refugees were targeted as possible sources of disease, for example: “...in Albania can enter pigs and sows, illegal immigrants as well as Indian, Syrian, Afghan, Bangladeshi, Asian immigrants who are bringing with them the deadly virus” (→ NR for Albania).

## Gender based hate speech

Gender-based hatred is one of the most dominant in the regional public space, according to the findings of this research. Sexism (mostly targeted towards women) and misogyny are the most common forms of hate speech. Gender-based violence (GBV) in most of the cases targets those who do not fulfill the traditional patriarchal roles in society. The monitoring frequently recorded cases in the region that to meet social expectations often serves as a basis for targeting, as some authors (Barratt) call it: *femininity-as-failure*; failure because she does not meet the expectations regarding physical appearance, family status, or her own role in society (Barratt, 2018: 16).

Following the findings of the research in news editions, TV shows and newspapers, women are often represented through adjectives such as “beautiful”, “entertaining”, “sexy”, “decorative”, etc. For example, in an Albanian dance show, one of the female contestants was the target of misogyny by a male member of the jury who said to her: “You are old and not suitable to compete in a dance competition with youngsters. Go make babies” (→ NR for Albania). In this particular case, we could see that the main target is physical appearance, in combination with agism.

Verbal assaults contain other perspectives as well, such in the case of Vanja Čalović Marković, Executive director of the Network for Affirmation of the NGO sector – MANS and Member of the Council of the Agency for Prevention of Corruption. She was named as “the last rural rascal woman” and she was compared to hoofed animals, indicated in the national report on Montenegro (→ NR for Montenegro).

We see a special category of attacks in the case of those women who are involved in politics. In Kosovo, for example, women in high political positions were targeted during the pre-election campaigns. One of the incidents was detected in the period from January to April 2021, when the acting President of Kosovo, Vjosa

Osmani, was the target of verbal abuse and edited photos that changed her appearance with the aim of mocking her during her campaign for presidential candidate, were published (→ NR for Kosovo). More explicit messages to women in politics have been recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, politician Lana Plić used social networks to post a picture of herself being vaccinated and urging others to do the same. This post was commented on by more than 30 thousand people, most of them against vaccination: “You better post a picture of how you clean the bathroom or cook lunch” (→ NR for Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Although women were targeted by sexism in many cases, the monitoring recorded denigration of other genders and sexualities. In addition to sexism, those incidents also contained elements of homophobia. Usually through undervaluing the individual's gender role because the person does not follow the heteronormative sexual orientation and paradigms prevalent in society. For example, “you don't know the concept of the family”, or “you are an impotent man”, are expressions used in public space to describe men who identify as gay.

### Hate speech narrative around gender-based violence cases

One of the potentially dangerous tendencies related to gender-based violence is the narratives that are created around gender-based violence cases that receive media attention. Namely, the regional analysis showed that gender-based violence is often accompanied by a narrative that justifies violence and generates hate speech.

In early 2021, actresses Milena Radulović and Iva Ilinčić, together with five other actresses, reported their acting teacher Miroslav Aleksić 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, reporting on (sexual) violence against women was mostly done through sensationalist headlines that deepen stereotypes. Tabloids, and some channels with national coverage, have spread victim blaming narratives and conspiracy theories targeting women who have reported rape and sexual harassment. For example, on the morning show of TV Pink, former football player Dušan Savić said that the indictment against Aleksić was “constructed”, “deliberate” and that it represented an attack on Serbia. Various arguments were used during the interview to suggest that reporting rape and sexual harassment aims at “destroying Serbia” (→ NR for Serbia).

Apart from explicit justifications of violence against women, in some situations we also see subtle messages that normalise violence as part of gender identity. For example, in a TV program in Albania, an interviewee talked about the reasons for higher rates of divorce. She stated that there are more divorces in Albania because “women no longer tolerate violence” in marriages (→ NR for Albania).

In Kosovo, two young men drove an 18-years-old girl with no signs of life in front of the Hospital Center in Audi 8 Swiss license plates and fled. Analyst Xhevdet Pozhari commented on that in the media by saying that girls should be reminded “not only to look at the vehicle brand, but also the jerk who drives them” (Reporting diversity, n.d.).

During the observed period, researchers identified cases in Montenegro as well. During a discussion regarding chemical castration at the Committee on Political System and Justice, a Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, Slaven Radunović, spread strong sexist and misogynistic comments regarding the issue. Radunović stated: “Let's say a spoiled daughter is jealous of her boyfriend, so she reports him for rape, so considering whose daughter she is, that young man ended up as a rapist, and he gets castrated as well”. He went on to further point out that “sometimes a very thin thread decides in the judgement whether there was rape or not” (Reporting diversity Network 2.0, 2022).

The examples given illustrate the attitude towards violence against women and the potential danger arising from the normalisation and relativisation of violence through hate speech. It is particularly important to point out that in all these cases those who generated this attitude are public figures or experts in a certain field who use their position of authority as a platform to circulate such ideas.



## Sexual minorities

The third most common targeted groups in the region are sexual minorities. According to the summarised results of the research, 49 cases were registered in the observed period (10, 54% of all incidents).

This finding correlates with an earlier survey conducted in the region, about the position of LGBTQ+ community. The World Bank's research shows that "the collective experience of LGBTQ+ people in the countries... paint a distressing picture of the harmful effects of discrimination, harassment, exclusion and violence" (World Bank, 2018:1).

The main triggers of incidents which were detected in the period of research, are mostly connected to initiatives which are trying to improve the rights of LGBTQ+ community in the region. An example is the public debate in Albania about the idea to have a more inclusive interpretation for the terms "mother" and "father" on official documents and forms.

The main opinion leader, who led the campaign against the aforementioned initiative, is a prominent evangelical pastor Akil Pano, who heads the Albanian Coalition for the Protection of the Family. He repeatedly speaks about the dangers of the "Gay Agenda," making statements referring to homosexuality as an aberration, considering the possibility of homosexuals adopting and parenting children a "criminal act," and effectively even comparing homosexuality with bestiality: "With the legalisation of marriages, the moral bar is removed... which means that anyone can come and ask for marriage with an animal, or also request a triple, quadruple marriage... there is no limit" (→ NR for Albania).

In Serbia, the most important trigger for hate speech was the initiative to adopt the Law on Same-sex Civic Unions. LGBTQ+ rights have been discussed on terrestrial television, where they gave homophobic politicians a platform to speak about the LGBTQ+ community. For example, a television channel with national coverage, TV Prva, gave a platform to the leader of the right-wing political party Zavetnici, Milica Đurđević Stamenkovski, to talk about the Law on Same-sex Civic Unions. During her interview, Đurđević Stamenkovski spread numerous misleading statements and homophobic narratives: "What is the plus in the LGBT+, zoophiles and paedophiles maybe? You will also ask for the rights of paedophiles" (→ NR for Serbia).

The narrative spread by the leader of Dveri, Boško Obradović, is that the LGBTQ+ community "has all the rights and wants to take more". Obradović uses the term "homosexuality" 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.), (→ NR for Serbia). Beside the hate speech incidents which are connected to the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, the research detected narratives which are further strengthening the negative attitude towards sexual minorities using words such as gay, lesbian, etc. in pejorative form as swear words against political/ideological opponents. People with political power use these terms to belittle the opponents and to demonstrate presumed superiority over them.

In Montenegro, for example, the DPS party representatives used pejorative words (such as "fagot") against the former Deputy Prime Minister in 2022, the Prime Minister, Dritan Abazović and President of Parliament, Aleksa Bečić.

Using information about assumed sexual orientation in the political arena was documented in Bosnia and Herzegovina too. In the registered case, one of the members of opposition political block in the Bosnian entity Republika Srpska was mocked on social media and a sexually explicit video of him was discovered and distributed (→ NR for Bosnia and Herzegovina). He was thus discredited and withdrew from political life.

Hatred against the LGBTQ+ community is registered in Kosovo as well. In May 2021 one of the most prominent activists from that community was attacked in the capital city of Pristina. The news about the attack got a lot of attention in the media and on social networks. The majority of the comments directed hate speech towards not only the activist, but the whole community in general. Those attitudes were also present in comments describing this community as a promoter of a new doctrine which will change the traditional, "normal" way of living, as commentators like to call it (→ NR for Kosovo).

In North Macedonia the picture is not better than the rest of the region. Higher number of hate speech cases were detected around the Pride parade in Skopje, where the central narrative was the belief that “homosexuality is a disease”. LGBTQ+ rights have been discussed on television with national frequency, where they gave homophobic politicians a platform to speak about this community and spread anti-LGBTQ+ narratives (→ NR for North Macedonia).

In the incidents demonstrated above we can see common patterns that are present in the whole Western Balkans region: sexual minorities are not accepted as an equal part of society. Any initiative to change this situation through public actions (such as the Pride parade) or legislation are treated as an attack on society. The main hate speech-based narrative is created and supported by politicians, religious leaders, or right-wing activists. Manipulative wording, or using words connected to different sexual minorities such as a swear word negatively affects the position of this community.

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## Political/ideological opponents

Although this category is not in the top three, we consider it significant to the community. We have seen in previous categories that it is largely politicians or senior government officials who deepen stereotypes and broader narratives that support the emergence of hate speech. This proved crucial in communities where there is an acute political crisis, such as Montenegro, where deep divisions in the community have created a narrative directed against political opponents. We also see a significant share of registered incidents in North Macedonia and Albania as well, mostly tied to the current political situation.

In other communities, such as Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, these cases are largely related to a reluctance to confront the past, transitional justice, and war events.



## Conclusion

Hate narratives are prevalent throughout the Western Balkans region. This extensive research of the most dominant cases/incidents proved that racism, sexism, misogyny, nationalism, and intolerance to different political, sexual or national identities are still powerful forces in the observed countries.

Furthermore, sentiment analysis of all the national cases yields an average position on the framework's scale of violence between 3 and 4, which means that most of the incidents fall under the category of non-violent insults, albeit with a tendency to demonise and dehumanise some groups or individual members of a social group.

Although these findings are not new, this research showed a high level of normalisation of these narratives in the monitored countries. Dehumanisation and distinction between “us” and “them”, are dominant processes which are crucial for maintaining, in some cases, the societal status quo, or to secure a political advantage for certain groups in society.

Hate speech is often used for political campaigns and regularly employed as a powerful tool in public debates. Gender based violence is still present and alarmingly dominant in the public space, treating women as unequal members of the community, or as a femininity-as-failure. Being a woman in these societies can still be used as a negative characteristic of a person.

Ethnicity, as a constant source of hatred, is a clear illustration of how unsolved questions from past conflicts, can be a powerful political weapon. The same is valid for “non-traditional” models of families (same-sex civic unions) or different sexual orientations.

Structural responses from the monitored countries, which could prevent and sanction these deviations in the public sphere, are still fragile in the Western Balkans. However, there are some possible steps which could change the situation.

Firstly, wider *actions based on a “see it, name it” principle*, are substantial, which means identifying and openly naming examples of hatred and their sources in the public discussion. In most of the cases this is where non-governmental and non-profit organisations can have an influential role. This should go together with

strengthening independent institutions and self-regulatory mechanisms. A special focus should be put on those independent institutions which have the opportunity to initiate the creation of laws and bylaws (ombudspersons, media regulatory bodies, commissioners against discrimination, etc.). Also, social media regulation is crucial to this set of actions, and will be more effective and efficient on the regional level through joint advocacy.

The second line of intervention, which should be implemented as a parallel process, would be to *support quality journalism and raise standards in this profession*. Without robust intervention in the media market, which will result in a higher level of sustainability and ethical norms, political influence on media will remain the same, and it means that they could be further instrumentalised by different political or social groups which could continue to spread hate in the region.

The third group of interventions should focus on *formal and informal education*. The role of education should be seen as a tool for addressing hate speech. Reinforcing educational institutions could lead to a higher degree of resilience to hate speech and could create a more inclusive community. At the same time, education could secure sustainability for all these actions in the long-term. These interventions should include developing a holistic approach to school curriculum reform in the region which will integrate the knowledge and skills needed to combat hatred to the existing school programs. Special focus should be put on raising digital media literacy as well.

The Fourth set of actions should focus on *regional advocacy* with several main tasks:

- 1 provide joint pressure on decision makers to create and then implement legal solutions for the prevention of hate speech,
- 2 provide an effective system for raising public awareness in case of targeting of certain groups and support to victims to obtain protection through domicile or international legal mechanisms,
- 3 advocating for inclusive educational programs that effectively address hate speech,
- 4 efficient performance of the region in the process of European integration, which offers the possibility for the Western Balkans to take over the solutions and mechanisms that are already effectively applied in the European Union.





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## MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH A REGIONAL OVERVIEW

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