



MEDIA MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Introduction

Hate speech has become normalised in Bosnia and Herzegovina's public space, evident by its frequent use in both public discourse and online social media posts. It is used by politicians, media, and influencers to discredit, belittle, achieve political goals, and sow discord across all strata of society. None of this is new, but the research will try to answer if and how the hate speech narratives are changing, and why?

The context in which hate speech develops and is maintained in Bosnia and Herzegovina is shaped by several factors, mainly through themes related to the war of the 90s. Now, with the absence of a functioning [truth and reconciliation committee](#), the country has been left without a system to constructively deal with the past, thus allowing tensions to simmer. Additional contributory factors include Bosnian society is still deeply patriarchal and traditional; a complete transition to a system of democratic values in which minorities enjoy equal rights is still pending (both legally and socially); and lastly, hate speech is still not recognised as a criminal act, resulting in an absence of punishment.

To add to this, the public has a low level of trust in politics, and institutions¹. Research shows that trust in media is polarised along ethno-national and political party lines, which contributes to the overall polarisation in society in Bosnia and Herzegovina². Social networks and online media remain points of "freedom of speech", but this freedom is perceived as absolute and often turns into its opposite – hate speech.

This report analyses media monitoring findings in Bosnia and Herzegovina, conducted by the Centre for Investigative Journalism within the framework of the Reporting Diversity Network 2.0. The aim of the monitoring was to identify cases of hate speech, to classify whom they are directed against and why, which actions they contain, in what format they appear, who instigates them and where they are then vocalised or published. The report will analyse examples of hate speech, the motives behind them, as well as their dynamics and contexts. The key goal of the research is to provide credible information and evidence to strategically approach the issues of hate speech and strengthen the efforts against its presence in public discourse in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As findings show, there are new and persisting tendencies. Hate narratives have been building up over time and tend to merge with current socio-political events. A few years ago, the pandemic had a severe impact and developed the whole narrative (and movement) of anti-vaxxers. In the previous report (2020-2022), migrant flows mainly from Syria and other MENA region countries, travelling into and through Bosnia, developed a very strong national narrative against migrants. Both still exist in BiH, but not to the same level of intensity as they did when they were topical in the country. However, ethnic, gender, sexual minority, and political affiliation remain the main and dominant grounds for hate speech. Actors also remain the same – politicians, media, influencers. The comment sections on social media platforms and online media serve as the primary channels for disseminating hate speech.

New developments include the deterioration of the political and nationalist rhetoric in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the positioning between Russia and the European Union, cases of femicide, and the geopolitical situation that is inevitably reflected in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This report will problematise how this complex context affects hate speech. At the same time, it is essential to identify which trends in hate speech are being established because the response to hate speech is still unsatisfactory.

1. Analitika centar za društvena istraživanja (2015), Rezultati ankete: Nastavljen trend nepovjerenja građana u političke partije i institucije vlasti u Bosni i Hercegovini

https://www.analitika.ba/sites/default/files/publikacije/povjerenja_gradana_u_vlast_0.pdf

2. Sokol, Anida (2021), Polarized public trust in the media and social networks in Bosnia and Herzegovina

<https://www.media.ba/sites/default/files/resilience-research-publication-3-bih-english.pdf>

About monitoring

This report covers the period between May 1, 2022 – December 31, 2023. In this time a total of 97 cases of hate speech were evidenced.

The findings focus mainly on patterns and examples of hate speech in media, examining the following questions: what the most common targets are, what are the main ideas and messages behind hate speech cases, what actors and events serve as primary generators of hate and disinformation narratives, and what are the reactions. This research applies the concept of hate (speech) and propaganda in media and communication in broader sociological terms and is not limited to legal concepts. In this research, analyses of hate narratives are not limited solely to unlawful hate speech (incitement to hatred) nor by characteristics for identifying an individual or group as the target of hate speech to those protected by narrow legal definitions of hate speech. Hate speech targets people, as individuals or groups, because of who they are.

The monitoring was performed by a journalist from the Centre for Investigative Reporting, applying a monitoring methodology developed for the purposes of this research. Monitoring encompassed various media formats, including comments on social media. However, less attention is paid to comments on social networks and more to the statements of politicians (officials) and other public figures because it is considered that their influence is greater. Oral and written statements of public figures, journalistic articles, comments and posts on social networks, and photographs that may contain offensive messages were monitored.

Special attention is paid to the recording of recurring incidents, i.e. hate speech that is repeated by specific individuals/collectives. Monitoring of hate speech was done using the following methods:

- Non-selective searches revealing articles or statements that contain hate speech.
- Targeted monitoring of identified media and persons with continuous monitoring and identification of hate speech.

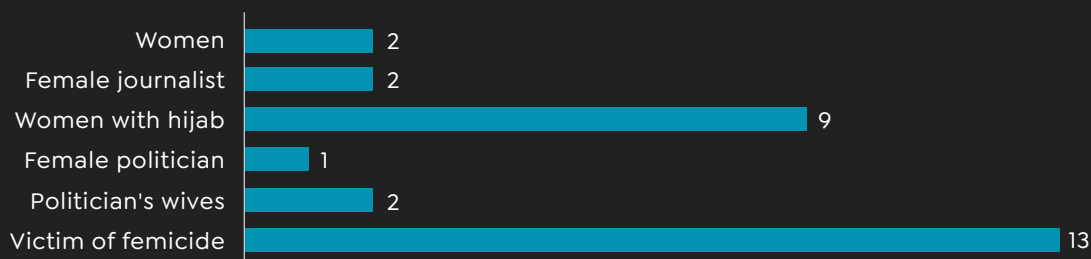
Findings of monitoring of media in Bosnia and Herzegovina: analyses of hate narratives

Hate speech had its peaks for different reasons, depending on events which occurred during the monitoring period, like pre-election months, Pride Parade related events, the commemoration of 90s war events, etc. Hate speech was pronounced on four grounds: gender, ethnicity, sexual minorities, and political affiliation. Therefore, the analysis focuses on these grounds and the narratives around them.

Gender, Sexism, Sexual harassment, Misogyny

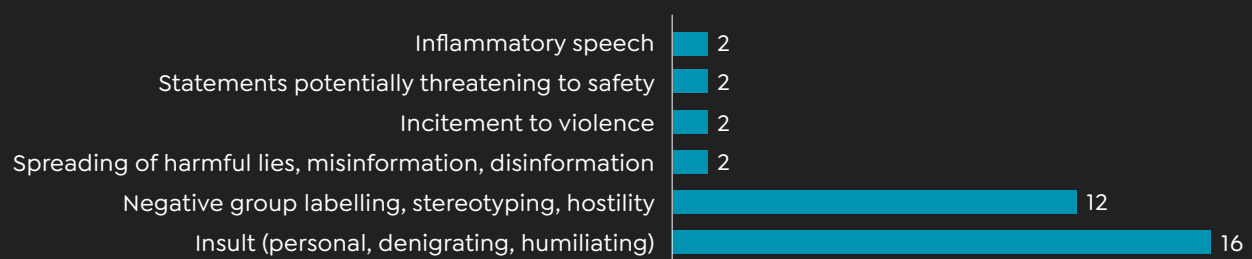
The largest number of evidenced cases of hate speech was against gender, including sexism, sexual harassment, and misogyny. In total, 29 cases were registered which represent 29.9% of all cases. This is the greatest change compared to the last report – hate speech against gender replaced leading ethnicity-related hate. Overtaking ethnicity as a ground for hate narratives indicates a serious scale of rising anti-gender sentiment, bearing in mind that ethnic-based hate speech has been dominating society in Bosnia and Herzegovina for most of the last 30 years, because of war and war rhetoric in public and political discourse.

Hate speech against gender was directed to women in general, but also to women related to their personal or professional affiliation (personal: hijab, marital status, who their husbands are, professional: journalists, politicians). It is a horrifying fact that examples of hate speech against victims of femicide were also recorded.



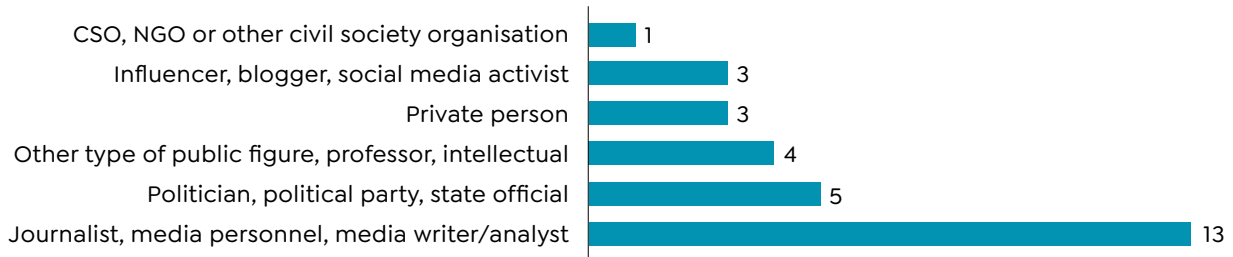
Graph 1. Number of gender-based hate speech cases towards individuals or groups against whom it is directed

On actions which constitute hate speech, most common are insults (16 cases) and negative group labelling, stereotyping, hostility (12 cases). According to monitoring results 'threats and statements potentially threatening to safety' and 'misuse of personal data' are not recorded in this form.



Graph 2. Number of hate speech actions per reported cases

Journalists, media personnel, media writers/analysts were the most numerous promoters of gender-based hateful narratives (13 cases). Politicians, influencers, and private individuals follow (five cases).



Graph 3. Number of hate speech actions per actors

Women who were targeted by hate speech have been called whores, witches, wives (despite having their own professional careers). Significantly, comparing to previous report, women were targeted because of their husbands – a negative image was created to discredit not only them but also their partners.

Women are reduced to the assessment of morality, appearance, and abilities in relation to their gender by published content. Women who perform public functions are characterised as superficial, incompetent, talking nonsense. At the same time, their appearance was assessed, in a very negative context - especially in relation to their age (older women) or their political position i.e. as inappropriate, excessive, and shameful.

Reporting on female politicians includes more attention to physical appearance and personal or family life and less to policy issues and leadership traits. This was the case for female politicians both in Republika Srpska (RS) and Federation BiH (FBiH). In RS, the candidate for BiH Presidency was targeted: “Jelena Trivić - she doesn't take care of personal hygiene, but she would take care of Republika Srpska?! (a headline on a news website).³ In FBiH, Sarajevo Mayor, Benjamina Karić, was frequently called “stupid”, and content did not rely on arguments but on insults and discrediting.

Analysed media reporting on gender-based violence lacked ethics, responsibility, and empathy, creating a rhetoric around femicide that implies the “end of tragic love”⁴ Women victims of gender-based violence, including femicide, were occasionally portrayed negatively, while perpetrators in some cases even represented as heroes or justified for their crimes. Instead of contributing to prevention of gender-based violence, media often sparks further victim-blaming narratives, contributing to justification of the violence itself. For example, a young woman was killed by her lover, who then committed suicide. The victim's ex-husband published a shameful post on Facebook in which, among other things, he “justified” the murder of his ex-wife. His post would not be seen by many people if it hadn't been shared by numerous websites, including one of the most read in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Portal Depo.ba. In another example, one of the most popular daily newspapers, “Dnevni Avaz”, reported on femicide as a family tragedy, emphasising that the perpetrator was a war-awarded soldier and the father of a football player. Other media reported on this case as the “death of Golden Lily” soldier, without any information about the femicide he committed.

Furthermore, the concept of gender equality was, on occasion, labelled as an “imported”, “Western” value and portrayed as unnecessary and harmful to society. This is one of the common narratives that has existed for a long time in BiH society. For example, Resul Mehmedović, editor-in-chief and publicist, tweeted: “Feminism as a left-wing ideology was invented so that ugly women could fit into society”.⁵ Also, the patriarchal model often focussed on women's perceived gender roles: “I believe that a woman should not work, a mother should be at home. In order for the mother to be at home, the state must provide the father with a higher salary”.⁶ These narratives are very dangerous, in particular when they come from an important public figure. That was the case when the president of the largest Bosniak party, Bakir Izetbegović, was a guest on a TV show with his wife. They talked, among other things, about family and tradition, and he stated that “Bosnian women have never been unequal, over time (...). They were completely equal, of course, where they work, where they dominate, and that was the house”.⁷

3. Jelena Trivić was a candidate of the opposition in Republika Srpska for a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is why she is the frequent target of media reports that try to discredit her.

4. Available at: <https://avaz.ba/avaz-tv/ostalo/867565/advokat-mehmedbasic-ovo-je-kraj-tragicne-ljubavi-becirovic-je-bio-pazljiv-otac>

5. Available at: <https://twitter.com/ResulMehmedovic/status/1549146450927489028>

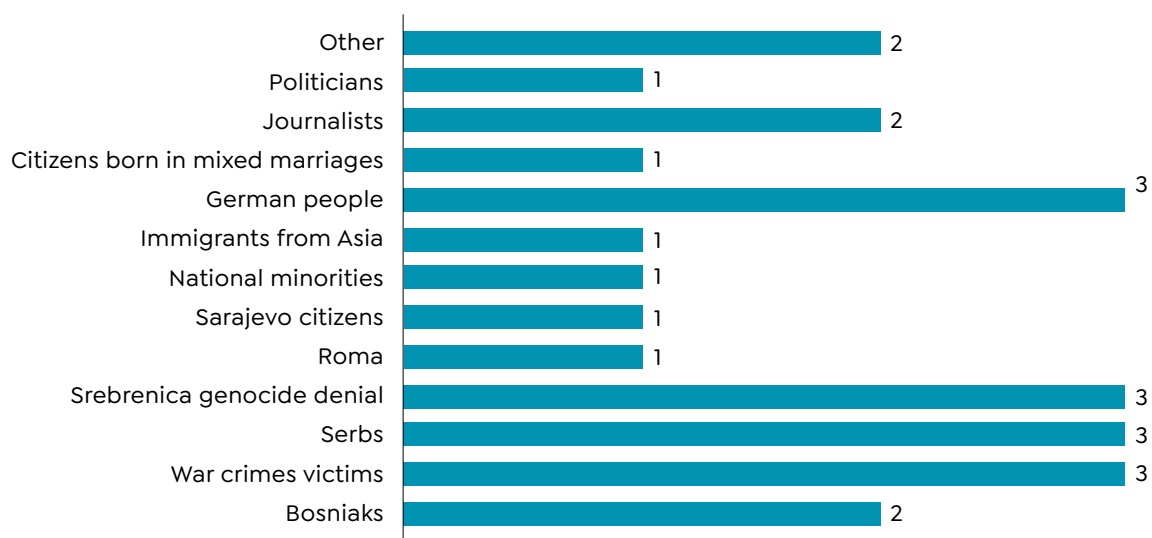
6. Available at: <https://n1info.ba/vijesti/svecenik-o-samoubistvima-maloljetnika-taktika-djavla-je-da-zaposli-oba-roditelja/>

7. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRlmc-oEd48>

Sentiment: 2 - Negative actions - Rhetoric includes negative nonviolent actions associated with the group. Regardless of the frequency of gender-based hate speech, it was assessed as non-threatening in its range. Still, it is important to emphasise that these kinds of narratives contribute to preserving “traditional” values in which women are not equal and where gender-based violence is treated as acceptable. For that reason, and also encouraging the belittling of women who are present in the public sphere, does not contribute to security or a healthy environment for democratic processes.

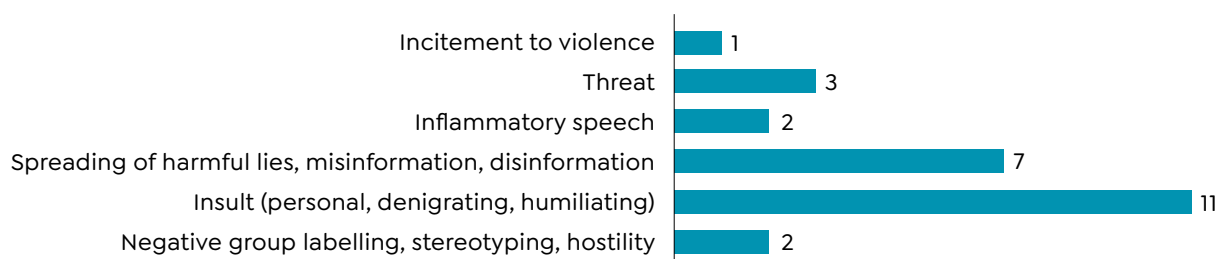
Ethnic discrimination, Racism, Xenophobia

Hate speech towards ethnic groups ranked the second most frequent form in the report, including discrimination, racism, and xenophobia. There were 24 cases recorded accounting for 24.7% of all incidents. The result is high, but not surprising for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ethnically-driven hate speech is almost normalised in BiH society, including in political discourse. Ethnicity also appears in combination with other grounds, most often tied to political engagement and journalistic work. Figures show that hate speech was closely related to several categories: genocide victims, war victims, Serbian people. Other grounds of hate speech were recorded as per the table below (e.g. one case targeting Roma, another targeting citizens born in mixed marriages, etc.). Two of the 24 cases targeted Adis Ahmetović, a Member of the German Bundestag originally from BiH.



Graph 4. Number of ethnic based hate speech cases towards the individuals or groups against whom it is directed

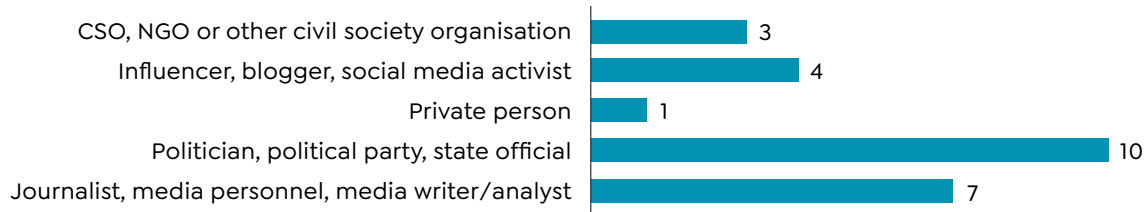
The most common recorded act of hate speech regarding ethnicity is insult (11 cases), followed by spreading a harmful lie (seven cases). In this period, no misuse of personal data was recorded regarding ethnic-based hate speech.



Graph 5. Number of hate speech actions per reported cases

The most common actions of hate speech against migrants are negative group labelling, stereotyping (nine cases), and insult (in eight cases). Incitement to violence was not recorded.

Politicians most often used hate speech based on ethnicity (10 cases), followed by journalists (seven) and influencers (four).



Graph 6. Number of hate speech actions per actors

The narrative about ethnicity in BiH is primarily based on the promotion of inter-ethnic hatred and division. At the heart of the narrative is the war from the 90s, i.e. intolerance between Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats. As usual, one-sided interpretations of the war prevail, and the facts established in court proceedings are denied. In the observed period, the genocide in Srebrenica was most often denied, frequently using claims such as: there was no crime, it was not genocide, 8,000 people were not killed, "a myth that Bosniaks are building on suffering and genocide".

In addition to the Srebrenica genocide, the crimes committed in Prijedor are also contested. A memorial for the suffering of non-Serbs in Prijedor – the Day of the White Ribbons – was the trigger for these narratives. White ribbons have been called lies, fabrications, deceptive, and propaganda. Also, the group Self-respect (Samopoštovanje) states on its Twitter/X page: "By forcing lies and half-truths, we will not reach reconciliation, but we will only sink deeper into mistrust, disbelief and even hatred".

Furthermore, media monitoring revealed cases of Sarajevo being portrayed as an "Islamic quarter", which is a narrative perpetuated by the Republica Srpska. On the annual 'Day of the City of Sarajevo', the chairman of the BiH Presidency, Željka Cvijanović, spoke about how there are more foreigners than Serbs in the capital of BiH, calling out immigrants from Asia as having a greater presence than Serbs.

However, reverse narratives are also present – the sowing of hatred towards Serbs by the Bosniak corps of politicians and public figures. For example, a series of events where Serbian children were victimised, including when Serbian children visiting Sarajevo for a sports tournament were attacked; the other in a shooting in an elementary school in Belgrade; while third was the suicide of a young man from Laktaši in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The reactions on social networks were full of hate – with a lack of empathy: "how many of our children did they kill", "what do I care about the Serbian school", "tomorrow they would slaughter us". Commenting on the incident at a children's football tournament, the director of the Srebrenica Memorial Centre, Emir Suljagić, tweeted, "This is how it will be presented in two weeks that a squarehead from some Serbian shithole was slightly injured on Ilidža: The suffering of Serbian children on El-idža." He later deleted this tweet.

Another tendency is visible criticism of ethnically mixed families, marriages, circle of friends. This narrative thus primarily addresses women in these personal connections, putting shame on them. For example, in earlier statements, the wife of Franjo Šarčević, the editor of the website Prometej, was criticised for her "mixed marriage", and now both of them have been targeted because of Šarčević's writing. Stav magazine called Šarčević and his wife "carcinomas" and said that "everything should be done to prevent their metastasis".⁸ Prometej was accused of supporting the "apartheid policy" and those who wanted to "thwart" the Bosniaks' struggle for statehood. This triggered a series of hateful comments towards Šarčević on social networks. Another example of this sub-narrative comes from Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Gradačac, which placed a sign on a small cemetery with the inscription "A place for burying citizens from mixed marriages. It is forbidden to perform any religious rites. It is forbidden to place any symbols on the grave".⁹

8. Available at: <https://stav.ba/vijest/prometej-nikad-agresivniji-u-odbrani-apathejda/11023>

9. In the sign in the Bosnian language, two different terms for grave are used, one of which is used by the Bosniak Muslim community and the other used by the Serbian Orthodox community. Available at: <https://raport.ba/medzlis-iz-gradacac-na-groblje-postavio-uvredljivu-tablu-ovo-je-mjesto-za-ukop-grad-jana-iz-mjesovitih-brakova-i-ne-vide-nista-sporno/?fbclid=IwAR0lhO8P2RX-Vy7KUflqt5HNz5-u0ClXsrescAl7r41luNH3BldRVDjiz5s>

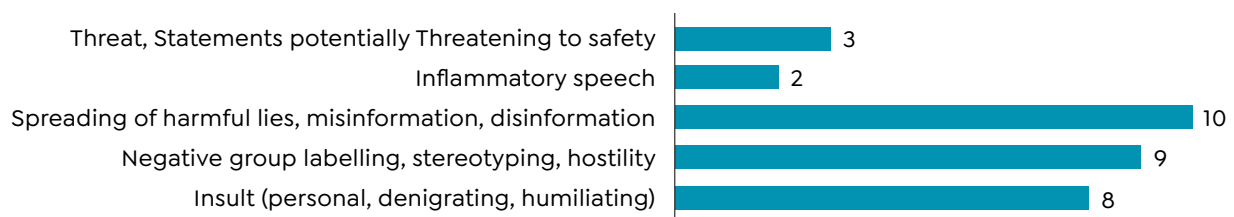
Hate speech towards individual politicians was registered in this period. The news that the Bundestag adopted a resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to which it will send its soldiers to BiH, shook actors on the political scene. The Croatian National Assembly – the coordination of Croatian parties issued a statement in which it called Adis Ahmetović, a member of the Bundestag and initiator of the resolution, a BiH citizen by origin, a radical Bosniak unitarist. On another occasion, a BiH Presidency member, at that time, Milorad Dodik disagreed with BiH's decision to vote to expel Russia from the Human Rights Council. On that occasion, he insulted Ahmetović, the Bundestag envoy in front of the SPD for the Western Balkans, by calling him "jugende", a word game that refers to the Hitler yungen.¹⁰

Sentiment: 2 - Negative actions - Rhetoric includes negative nonviolent actions associated with the group. Even though it may look like these narratives are happening on an abstract (political, online) level, their consequences are real and shape everyday life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Promoters of those narratives are leading politicians (in different levels of government). The public is scared of possible new conflicts and prefer to hold on "lessons learnt" from 90s – and those lessons are mono-ethnic designed. Third, online is the real world - inciting violence there very easily ends in physical violence, especially in ethnically divided local communities.

Sexual Minority (Homophobia)

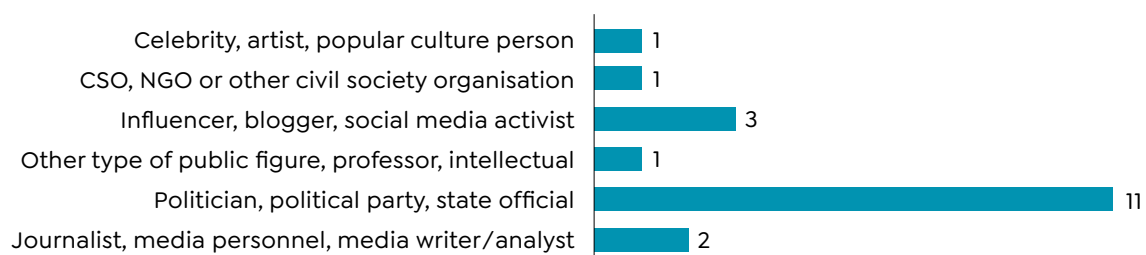
Sexual orientation was the third most represented ground for hate speech. In total, 17 cases were recorded, which represents 17.5% of all cases. In comparison to the previous report, this signifies a notable increase in homophobia (by seven instances). All cases were directed against LGBTIQ+ persons.

As for constitutive actions of hate speech, the most common are the spreading of harmful lies, misinformation, disinformation (10) and negative group labelling, stereotyping, and hostility (nine cases). No incitement to violence nor misuse of personal data were identified.



Graph 7: Number of hate speech actions per reported cases

Politicians take a leading position in using hate speech against sexual minorities (11 cases), followed by influencers with significantly lower frequency (three cases).



Graph 8. Number of homophobic hate speech actions per actors

10. Available at: <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/dodik-njemacke-vojnike-usporedio-s-nacistima-u-bih-nisu-dobrodošli/220407087>.

Media monitoring exposes three main narratives about sexual minorities, all already well accommodated in BiH public discourse.

First, there is an attempt to preserve what are considered traditional family values by encouraging LGBTIQ+ individuals to keep their sexual orientation private. However, this is often accompanied by derogatory terms such as 'sick,' 'disturbed,' or references to 'Sodom and Gomorrah'. Family values, and religion, were mentioned during the announcement of the Pride Parade in Sarajevo, but also used to justify the serious violence that happened against LGBTIQ+ activists in Banja Luka. On this occasion, Banja Luka Mayor Draško Stanivuković stated: "We strive for patriarchal, traditional family relations and we know what our religion and the identity of our people are."¹¹ Another example of homophobic speech comes from a Member of the Assembly of the City of Banja Luka – he published a post on his Facebook profile during the screening of a film which, according to him, promotes homosexual values: "A narrative of some 'normality' is imposed on us from the back door, which contradicts the views of not only the Serbian Orthodox Church, but also all monotheistic religions. It also contradicts the values on which a healthy family rests, which is a condition for the biological survival of the people".

Secondly, there is a concern expressed by some that children should be protected from what they perceive as recruitment efforts by the LGBTIQ+ community through various media channels, including films, fairy tales, cartoons, and social media. This narrative appeals to parents with an emotional charge, presenting a series of incorrect information and introducing sexual orientation as something that children can succumb to if they are exposed to it. In one case, it was even related to paedophilia, while in most cases, it was referring to harmful influence on children. "We are obliged to protect our children from deviants who impose their manifestations", Fadil Novalić posted on his Facebook profile, he is a member of the Party of Democratic Action who was prime minister of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for eight years.

Thirdly, there were concerns raised regarding the Pride Parade in Sarajevo. Some critics argued that the resistance was not solely related to sexuality but also centred on the criticism that the entire city would be blocked due to Pride, causing inconvenience for the majority. It was suggested that the 'entertainment' of a few should not compromise the basic needs of the public. Although the main street is also blocked for other public events, Pride appears to be the only one that people protest. Along with criticism for blocking the city, there were also counter rallies with the aim of defending 'true values and morals'.

Triggers for all mentioned homophobic content are directly related to the holding of public events or the availability of content that affirms sexual minorities. This reflects deep intolerance and discrimination, which "explode" on social networks and websites – and unfortunately, as happened in Banja Luka, hate speech very easily turns into hate crimes and physical attacks. At the same time, those who are in power and should defend the rights of all citizens are also the same people who spread hatred against sexual minorities.

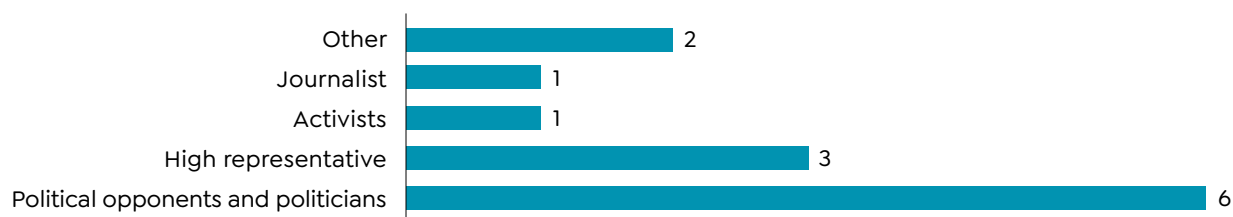
Much anti-LGBTIQ+ hate speech occurs online, especially on social media. Leaving a vacuum regarding hate speech on social media amounts to condoning hateful language and incitement, creating a fruitful ground for its perpetuation.

Sentiment: 3 - Negative character - Rhetoric includes non-violent characterisations and insults. Same as for the previous two groups, even though rhetoric is not necessarily violent; it encourages discrimination and intolerance. Minorities must be protected within a democratic system, regardless of personal or religious attitudes.

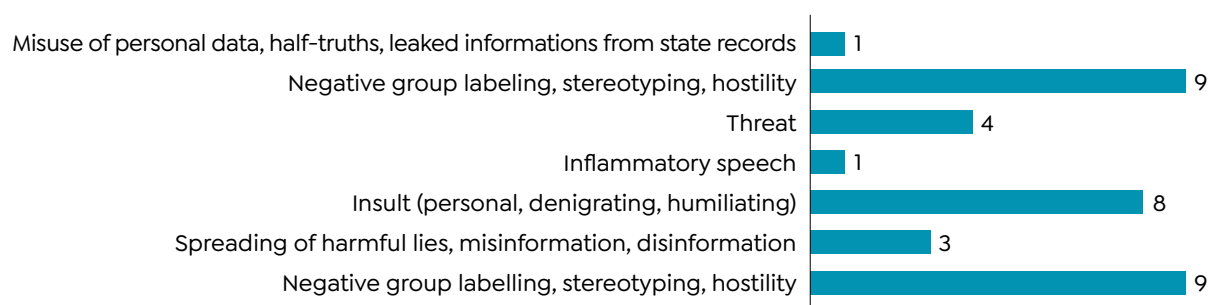
¹¹ Available at: <https://banjaluka.net/stanivukovic-o-bh-povorci-ponosa-banjaluka-nema-zelju-da-bude-mjesto-za-tako-nesto-sarajevo-je-dovoljno-video/>

Political/Ideological opponents

Hate speech directed towards political or ideological opponents occurred in 15 cases, which represent 15.5% of all cases. The frequency of hate speech against political/ideological opponents was lower in the previous report, which may indicate the sharpening of the political discourse. It could also be the result of the use of hate speech mostly by politicians. In most cases, hate speech was directly targeting politicians (six cases) and the High representative in BiH (3 cases).

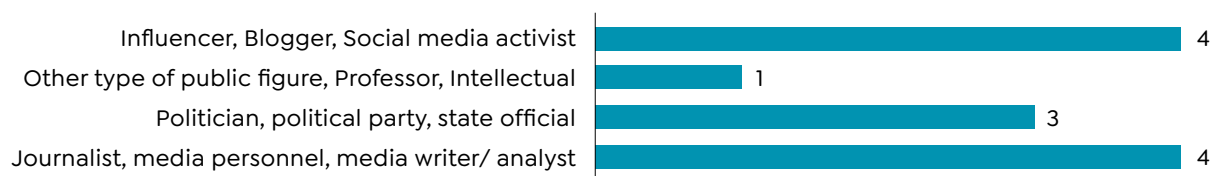


Graph 9. Number of political-based hate speech cases



Graph 10. Number of political-based hate speech actions per reported cases

Promoters of political hate speech are in same proportion as journalists and influencers (four each). Politicians in three cases were spreading hate speech on this ground.



Graph 11. Number of homophobic hate speech actions per actors

The narratives are primarily focused on discrediting political opponents, or inter-entity politics. Thus, the political actions of the opponents are called fascism, treason, and the opponents themselves are called "non-Bosniaks", "poturice" (which translates as "sell-out Serbs", or those who converted to Islam during Turkish rule of the Balkans) and washed-up "Chetniks". The ethnic element is clearly emphasised, so it is assessed who betrayed their own "people", who works against the interests of the "nation".

Very specifically, narratives created in this period are in relation to three persons/parties: the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vojin Mijatović and Naša Stranka.

In terms of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina Cristian Schmidt, the hate speech came from the representative of the Republika Srpska government. The results show that his work is disputed, and he is called

a "descendant of fascists and the people who committed the Holocaust", "fascist trash". This discrediting alludes to his German origin but also emphasises that he is a foreigner in BiH and, therefore undesirable to intervene in political processes.

Pro-Bosniak internet activist Jasmin Mulahusić,¹² known for spreading hatred through his social media profiles, published a post about Naša Stranka which translates to 'Our Party' - it's a social-liberal and multi-ethnic political party in direct opposition to Bosniak SDA - In his post, he included unverified information that could incite hatred towards those who speak critically about the SDA: "Naša Stranka consists of 53 per cent non-Bosniaks. They are mostly people who were in Serbia during the aggression".¹³ In addition, a member of Naša Stranka was insulted because he equated a Bosniak war general with a Croat general, both of whom were convicted of war crimes and both of whom were in the national parties that were and are in power in BiH. Because of this, the portal bosnjaci.net wrote that "he represents all evil embodied in the Great Serbian party project called Naša Stranka".¹⁴ What followed were a mass of insults and threats towards Naša Stranka members.

Vojin Mijatović, a member of the Social Democratic Party in Republika Srpska (RS), found himself a target of RS officials because of his open criticism of their work. The President of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik insulted Mijatović, posting on his Twitter/X: "Mijatović is a classic example of poor and sold Serbs, which have existed throughout history". While a journalist from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina posted on Mijatović's X page: "From the very beginning, it was known that Vojin Mijatović was a washed-up Chetnik. But Bosniaks love Vlah who speaks well, and there's no help for that".

Politically motivated hate speech in response to news published online or on television is regularly posted on social media networks (Facebook, Twitter/X, TikTok) and on websites.

Sentiment: 2 - Negative actions - Rhetoric includes negative nonviolent actions associated with the group. The political arena seems to turn into an unethical space. Levels of hate speech are on the rise, while politicians are targeted both as individuals and for their political party allegiances. Discreditation by using disinformation, lies, and insults creates certain attitudes in the public. Posts on social media used to disseminate these messages reach many people. It is not negligible as it ultimately affects the politicians who are targeted, as well as their private and professional lives.

Other grounds

Considering other categories, hate speech against journalists appeared in seven cases, while against religion it was five cases. Hate speech against migrants - of the most prevalent categories in the previous reporting period (12), dropped down to four. Here the language was always tied to another category, for example journalists or religion. These cases involved negative group labelling, stereotyping, hostility; insult (personal, denigrating, humiliating); spreading of harmful lies, misinformation, disinformation; and inflammatory speech.

The prevailing sentiment in all mentioned categories: 2 - Negative actions. Rhetoric includes negative nonviolent actions associated with the group.

12. Jasmin Mulahuseinović is a bot of the Party of Democratic Action, and the target of his insulting speech was everyone who ever criticized Bosniak and the politics of this party.

13. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=157853837022735&set=a.152672837540835>

14. Available at: <http://www.bosnjaci.net/prilog.php?pid=78867>

Comparative Analysis

Hate speech in the monitored period was most often based on gender, ethnic, sexual orientation, and political affiliation. It was aimed at both individuals and groups as abstract communities that share a particular personal characteristic (women, ethnic groups, LGBTIQ+ people, political opponents). In most cases, the targets were LGBTIQ+ people and women. Several acts of discrimination occurred when identities co-existed, such as female politicians, female journalists, women with hijab. Compared with the previous report, migrants were not significantly represented in registered examples of hate speech, because of the decrease in presence of migrants in BiH. Also, new contextual circumstances have encouraged hateful narratives in a different direction.

Hate speech was most present on news websites (26%), social media (Facebook 18% and Twitter/X 17%), and then “traditional” broadcast media with 11%. Newspapers accounted for 4%. The largest number of cases of hate speech came from politicians – such as Milorad Dodik, President of RS, and representatives of nationalistic parties. This category of actors used hate speech against all categories but with a particular focus on ethnicity and LGBTIQ+ people. Journalists participated in a high number of hate speech while doing their job on digital news sites, social media, and traditional media, here the hate speech also targeted all categories, but with an emphasis on women. Influencers and social media activists came in third place for use of hate speech, featuring the same people as in the previous reporting period. Since political, social media activists often function as political bots, pursuing the political agenda of their political parties or leaders against opposition, it is not surprising that their hate speech was mostly against political opponents.

In most cases, hate speech was expressed through insults (53 cases), eight cases higher than the last study. Here, insults are forms of gender-based and ethnically-based hate speech. Although they are present in large numbers in other bases as well, in these two they are particularly pronounced. The spreading of harmful lies, misinformation, disinformation is placed as the second most used form of hate speech (29 cases) with members of the LGBTIQ+ community being a prime target. The third most common form of hate speech was negative group labelling, stereotyping, and hostility (28 cases), and it mostly affected political opponents. This is an interesting finding because political discourses are increasingly devoid of professionalism, and internet bots do the “dirty” work for political parties on social networks. This means a continuous campaign to discredit political opponents, with abundant use of hate speech.

The spread and reach of hate speech follow up on tendencies where these narratives are mostly represented – online media, which means they multiply quickly and reach a high number of people. With online media and social networks, it becomes easier to track the reach, through tallying the number of shares, likes, and comments. However, the impact of traditional media should not be neglected – informative programmes, and political debates are still well trusted and have their own reach.

The average recorded sentiment is 2.48, which falls between negative actions and negative characterisation.



Preventive and ex post actions to combat hate and disinformation narratives

Hate speech processing in Bosnia and Herzegovina is limited. Some cases have been recorded for prohibited hate speech under the BiH Election Law, but its implementation is restricted to the pre-election period only. Misdemeanour and criminal proceedings remain rare. The self-regulatory body conducts procedures in which hate speech is established in the BiH media, but the scope of these recommendations is limited because they are not legally binding. Although self-regulatory policy is important in this area, it is necessary to point out that in the current level of hate speech and its normalisation in public discourse, it is not enough. Societal, political, media level of conciseness on the harmful effects of hate speech is extremely low, and this directly contributes to normalisation of hate speech, both on and off-line.

Between October 2021 to October 2022 - the Balkan Research Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina documented a total of 124 hate activities, which included both hate speech and reported incidents. Although, according to information from the police and prosecutor's offices, nine cases were established and six investigations were initiated, only in one case was the investigation completed and an indictment filed. Additionally, 22 entries in the database were categorised as denial of crimes or glorification of war crimes convicts, and the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina opened only three cases, and not a single indictment was filed.¹⁵ In the Country Report for BiH 2023, the European Commission noticed that criminal prosecution is limited to the incitement of religious and ethnic hatred on the internet or social networks. The authorities have not taken any measures to counter hate speech, which remains present in official discourse. There is no monitoring or enforcement of the prohibition of hate speech in online media. 56 reports were filed and eight rulings, of which six convictions, were handed down for hate speech in 2022, compared to 70 reports and eight convictions in 2021.¹⁶

It is once again necessary to emphasise the importance of media literacy programmes, which are an essential factor in educating the public. Numerous programmes have already been implemented, with more being set up, which in the long run should improve ways of communication. It may even lead to ending online perceptions of impunity and uncontrolled promotion of hate speech.

15. Husarić-Omerović, Azra (2023), *Milorad Dodik najveći pojedinačni izvor mrzilačkih narativa u BiH*, 10.2.2023., detektor.ba, <https://detektor.ba/2023/02/10/milorad-dodik-najveci-pojedinacni-izvor-mrzilackih-narativa-u-bih/>

16. European Commission (2023), *Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023 Report*, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2023_en

Conclusion

In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is difficult to determine what came first - hate speech that institutionalised a certain narrative, or a narrative that uses hate speech for its own maintenance.

This report shows, stereotypes, misogyny, homophobia, intolerance, and single-mindedness prevail in public discourse, fuelling hate speech. And it's endemic across all monitored categories of hate speech - including gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and political affiliation, increasing when some of these characteristics intersect.

A relaxed attitude towards brutality and sexism, and a lack of ethics in writing, sharing and commenting on content that uses hate speech, only breeds new cases of hatred. In the online world, speed and quantity are key - once sparked, hate snowballs. Legislation, self-regulation, and fragmented prevention can rarely do anything about it.

As expected, certain forms of hate speech are continuously retained in the BiH public space. However, some forms of hate speech are evolving very quickly in response to social events, using new media and public spaces such as personal Facebook, X (former Twitter) profiles and the ability to comment on both online media and social networks. The hate speech that this monitoring analysis has dealt with has an adaptable nature and reaches many users by creating and maintaining harmful and exclusive narratives about groups and individuals.

Women, ethnic groups, LGBTIQ+ people, politicians, and journalists were targeted by different forms of hate speech. Politicians and journalists are mostly perpetrators, of hateful narratives, while the most common forms are insults and negative group labelling. The difference that appears relates to whether the targets are groups or individuals and what is intended to be achieved with that rhetoric. In the case of women and politicians, individuals were more often directly attacked, but even in those cases it was clearly seen that the value represented by the person was being attacked. With LGBTIQ+ people, it was more about targeting the community as such. In case of ethnicity, on the other hand, targeting of both individuals and groups was present.

Another difference concerns the goal of these narratives: an anti-gender agenda attempts to return to "original" values, criticising women who break out of those patriarchal frameworks. Politicians and ethnic groups try to maintain the status quo - divisions, clear boundaries between groups, and preservation of the system of mono-ethnic corps. The anti-LGBTIQ+ narrative fights against progress - the presence of diversity and minorities, their equality and visibility. The "family values" campaign was put into motion to support the anti-LGBTIQ+ sentiments.

Hate speech against women was on rise in the observed period, targeting women not only because of their gender, but also their profession, marital status, political affiliation. In a few cases, ethnicity intervened with gender, creating a very hostile attitude toward individuals. Based on findings, women in politics face biased, sexist, and discriminatory media treatment. This goes hand in hand with the misogynist narrative about women that was promoted in the observing period. Sensationalism and tabloid-style reporting on women victims of gender-based violence are present, encouraging hate speech towards victims in sharing and commenting on media content.

Sexual minorities remain as targets of hate speech. Those narratives depend on massive response, and public engagement. Consequently, the rhetoric is consistent among various politicians, social media activists, influencers, and journalists.

Ethnically-driven hate speech has its roots in 30 years of repeating and evolving into official narrative in BiH. Findings highlight the triggers for ethnic-based hate speech were linked to key political decisions or events, like when it was felt that nationalist narratives and political positions were potentially threatened. On the other hand, certain annual events, such as the Commemoration in Srebrenica and the Day of the White Ribbons in Prijedor - are accompanied by hate speech every year, that includes the denial of crimes and responsibility. In addition a more recent trend of celebrating (for example, birthdays of convicted war criminals) during the commemoration of civilian casualties was also introduced.

It is devastating that hateful narratives based on ethnicity appear as a reaction to difficult human stories, events that have nothing to do with war or ethnicity. This indicates how intensive inter-ethnic hatred in BiH society is. It is necessary to emphasise that the promoters today are the same ones who led to this situation in society - politicians.



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