MEDIA MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN MONTENEGRO

WRITTEN BY
ANA NENEZIĆ

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.

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Content

Introduction

In the modern media landscape, the phenomena of disinformation and misinformation have emerged as significant challenges, their impacts magnified in the digital era through social networks and online platforms. The European Union categorizes disinformation as information that is verifiably false or misleading, created and disseminated with the intent of economic gain or deceiving the public. Misinformation, on the other hand, refers to the spread of verifiably false information without malicious intent, often propagated by individuals who believe in its legitimacy. The difference in definition between these concepts is crucial in understanding their implications, particularly when interlinked with hate speech and discriminatory rhetoric, which can intensify societal divisions and cause disagreement.

This research into the complex dynamics of hateful and discriminative discourse (HDD) within Montenegro, is part of a broader investigation across six Western Balkan countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro itself. Our objective is to explain the patterns, actors, and events that catalyse hate speech and disinformation narratives, analysing the core messages disseminated, their primary targets (with an emphasis on gender perspectives), and the mechanisms of their production and dissemination. We also aim to analyse societal reactions to these narratives and explore viable preventive measures and responses to mitigate their impact.

Montenegro, with its rich cultural diversity, multinational and multireligious composition, and complex historical background presents a unique case study in the Western Balkans. The nation has witnessed an escalation in disinformation campaigns and instances of hate speech, particularly evident during critical events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and in the context of geopolitical tensions exemplified by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These phenomena have not only heightened the polarisation within Montenegrin society but have also diminished tolerance across ethnic, national, religious, and political divides, thereby undermining social cohesion.

The media landscape in Montenegro reflects this polarisation, with a contrast between independent, objective journalism and outlets that propagate disinformation and hateful content. While several reputable media sources continue to command trust and popularity among the public, the rise of popularity of social and digital media has diversified and intensified the channels through which hate speech and disinformation can spread, complicating efforts to monitor and counteract these narratives.

Against this background, the Centre for Investigative Journalism of Montenegro (CIN-CG) has undertaken a comprehensive study of the most salient cases of hate speech, discrimination, and disinformation over the past eighteen months. This research aims to quantify the frequency and severity of such narratives in traditional, online, and social media, as well as in the discourse of political and religious leaders. The findings from this analysis are intended to inform the ongoing efforts of CIN Montenegro and its partner organisations to develop effective strategies for monitoring, preventing, and countering disinformation and hate speech in Montenegro and the broader region.

Furthermore, our research adopts a broad lens in identifying the targets of hate speech, extending beyond the narrow legal definitions. Instead, we consider a wide range of personal and group characteristics, including but not limited to religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth, disability, migrant or refugee status, sexual orientation, gender identity. This approach recognises that hate speech targets individuals or groups based on their inherent or perceived identities, underscoring the need for a comprehensive and inclusive response to this pervasive issue.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and effects of hate speech and disinformation in Montenegro, offering evidence-based insights that can support the development of targeted interventions and policies. By situating Montenegro within the wider context of the Western Balkans, this study not only highlights the specific challenges faced by the country but also underscores the importance of regional cooperation and dialogue in addressing the scourges of hate speech and disinformation.

Methodological approach

This report represents a continuation of ongoing efforts to monitor and analyse hate speech within the Montenegrin media landscape, covering the period from May 2022 to December 2023. This timeframe was particularly significant for Montenegro, marked by intense political activity and societal shifts due to three major electoral processes: local elections across numerous municipalities including the capital, Podgorica, as well as Presidential and Parliamentary elections. These events have catalysed a notable increase in hate speech, underscoring the urgency of the research.

Defined methodological approach mirrors our preceding report, maintaining consistency in analysis of media content. We conducted a comprehensive overview of traditional and online media outlets, including newspapers, television broadcasts, information portals, radio, and social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. This extensive media monitoring focused on identifying and analysing incidents of hate speech and discriminatory content, with a particular emphasis on content originating from public officials and politicians. The rationale behind this focus stems from the substantial influence these figures have over public opinion, making their statements critical to understanding the dynamics of hate speech in Montenegro. The methodology did not include the analyses of comments posted on online media, nor those on social media, but only the content directly being published by media and influential individuals in Montenegro.

The analysis used a multifaceted approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods, alongside adjusted discourse analysis. This allowed us to classify the collected cases by various criteria: the subject matter, the narrative techniques employed, the target groups or individuals, the profile of the offenders, the reach and impact of the content, the media format utilised, and the broader societal and political context within which these incidents occurred.

A focal component of our methodological framework is the sentiment analysis, supplemented by a scoring system that evaluates the intensity of hate speech incidents. This scoring system, adapted from the methodology developed by George Washington University[1], categorises hate speech along a six-point scale, ranging from mild disagreement to explicit calls for violence or death. The scale is as follows:

1. **Disagreement** - Rhetoric including disagreeing at the idea/mental level. Challenging groups claims, ideas, and beliefs, or trying to change them.
2. **Negative actions** - Rhetoric including negative nonviolent 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.

By assigning scores to identified cases of hate speech and disinformation, we can construct a comprehensive picture of the landscape of HDD in Montenegro, providing valuable insights into both the intensity and nature of such discourse.

Used methodology excludes the analysis of user-generated comments on online media and social networks, focusing instead on content directly published by established media outlets and influential figures. This strategic focus ensures the reliability and significance of data sources, concentrating efforts on the primary channels through which hate speech and disinformation are disseminated to the public.

Through this methodological framework, we aim to examine the mechanisms of hate speech dissemination in Montenegro, offering insights into its sources, targets, and the broader socio-political contexts that facilitate its spread. Our goal is to contribute to a deeper understanding of hate speech dynamics in Montenegro, providing a solid foundation for the development of effective countermeasures and fostering a more inclusive and respectful public discourse.

1. 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

Legal framework

Legal regulation of hate speech in Montenegro is secured within a framework that strives to balance freedom of expression with the protection of individuals and groups from speech that causes violence, hatred, or discrimination. This delicate balance is maintained through various laws and regulations that explicitly address hate speech, reflecting Montenegro's commitment to both its international obligations and the promotion of a respectful public discourse.

The Constitution of Montenegro sets the foundation for the protection of human rights and freedoms, including the freedom of expression. However, it also establishes the boundaries for exercising these freedoms, and in *Article 7 and 8*, explicitly prohibiting any encouragement to hatred or intolerance on any ground. The Constitution, thus, serves as the foundation for all legal provisions addressing hate speech, ensuring that the right to freedom of expression does not extend to speech that harms others.

The Criminal Code of Montenegro contains specific provisions that criminalise hate speech. Article 370: *Incitement to Hatred or Violence*, explicitly penalises public agitation to violence and hatred towards a group or a member of a group defined by their nationality, race, religion, or ethnic origin. This article underscores the legal stance against hate speech, emphasising the state's commitment to combating expressions that can lead to violence or discrimination.

Additionally, Article 199: *Violating Equality*, addresses discrimination and penalises actions that violate the principle of equality of people due to their race, religion, national or ethnic affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity, among other criteria. This provision extends to hate speech that discriminates against individuals or groups, reinforcing the legal framework protecting against hate-based harm.

Furthermore, the Law on Media of Montenegro regulates the responsibilities of the media in preventing hate speech. It mandates that media outlets must not broadcast content that incites discrimination, hatred, or violence against individuals or groups. The law emphasises the role of media in fostering a culture of tolerance and understanding, holding media accountable for the dissemination of harmful content, while the Law on Electronic Media further specifies the obligations of electronic media providers, including television and radio broadcasters, in combating hate speech. This law stipulates that electronic media must not transmit programmes that could incite or promote discrimination, hatred, or violence. It provides a legal basis for the oversight and regulation of content in electronic media, ensuring that these platforms hold to standards that prevent the spread of hate speech.

Also, the Law on Public Order and Peace addresses behaviours that disturb the peace, including acts that could be classified as hate speech in public spaces. This law serves to prevent and penalise public expressions of hate that threaten public order and peace, covering a range of actions from verbal abuse to physical violence prompted by hate speech.

While Montenegro's legal framework against hate speech is comprehensive and in line with all international standards, challenges remain in its implementation and enforcement. The effectiveness of these laws often depends on the judiciary's capacity to interpret and apply them consistently, as well as the willingness of law enforcement agencies to recognise and act upon instances of hate speech. By criminalising hate speech and establishing clear guidelines for the media's responsibility in preventing such speech, ongoing efforts are needed to enhance the implementation of these laws, ensuring that hate speech, in all its forms, is effectively identified, prosecuted, and eradicated. Moreover, the digital age presents new challenges in regulating online hate speech, requiring continuous adaptation of legal instruments to address hate speech effectively across various media platforms.

Narratives and sub-narratives
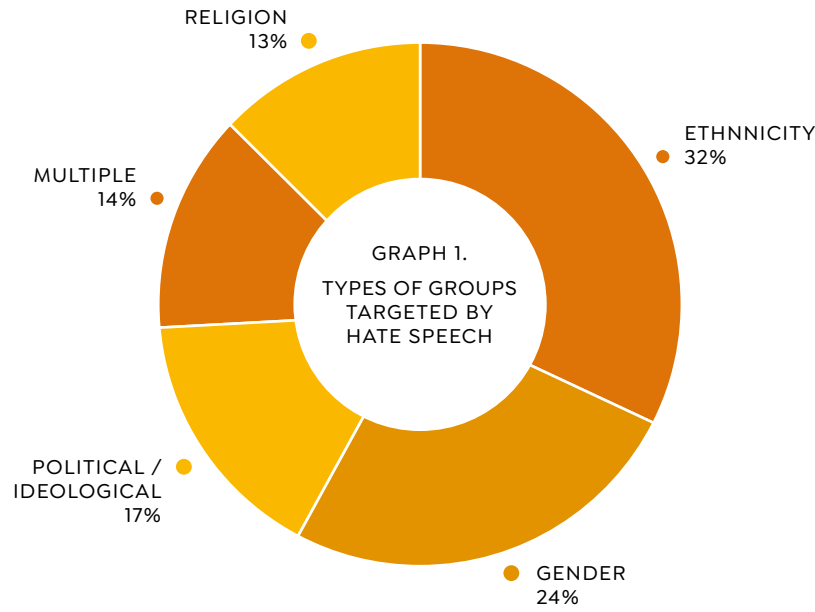
Quantitative analysis

The data were collected in the period of January 2021 to Decembar 2023, whereby, different cases of hate speech were identified through monitoring of both traditional media as well as social media posts related to different identities and groups in the society (such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual minorities, and migrants/refugees). During this period, the Centre for Investigative Journalism of Montenegro (CIN-CG) documented a total of 162 single incidents involving hate speech and/or discriminatory language.

Out of a total of 162 incidents, the distribution of incidents across various categories is:

- *Ethnicity:* 51 incidents or 31.48%
- *Gender:* 39 incidents or 24.07%
- *Religion:* 21 incidents or 12.96%
- *Political / ideological opponents:* 28 incidents or 17.28%
- *Multiple:* 23 incidents or 14.20%

Graph 1 in the report describes the distribution of incidents across various categories, highlighting the predominance of hate speech targeting ethnicity (31.48%), gender (24.07%), religion (12.96%), and political or ideological opponents (17.28%). Given Montenegro's diverse societal composition, characterised by multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities alongside pronounced polarisation, the findings align with existing societal tensions.
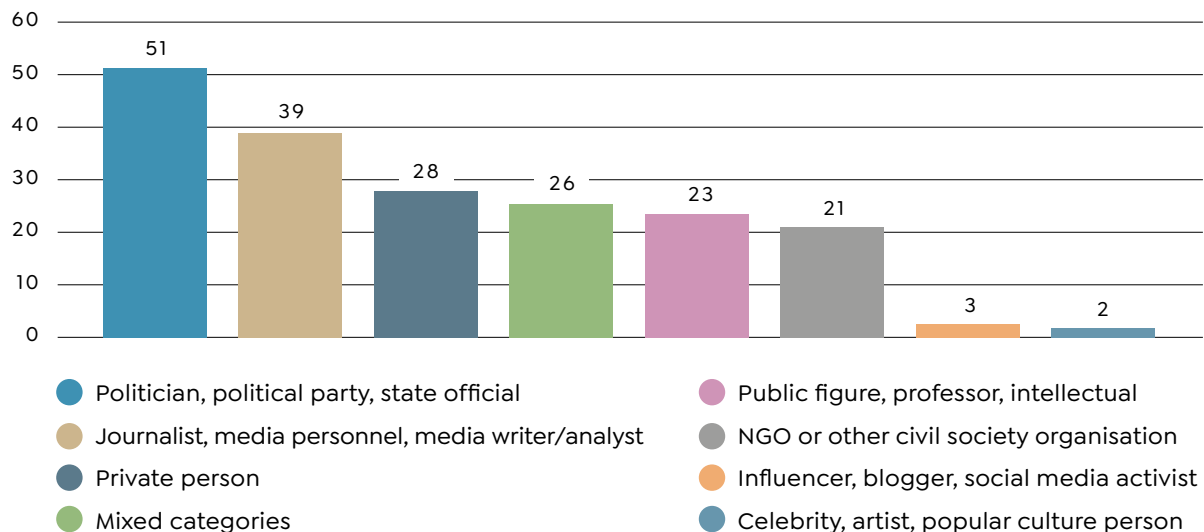
GRAPH 1.
TYPES OF GROUPS
TARGETED BY
HATE SPEECH

RELIGION
13%

MULTIPLE
14%

ETHNNICITY
32%

POLITICAL /
IDEOLOGICAL
17%

GENDER
24%

The breakdown of 163 incidents, by groups generating hate speech:

- *Politician, political party, state official*: 54 incidents
- *Journalist, media personnel, media writer/analyst:* 31 incidents
- *Private person:* 23 incidents
- *Public figure, professor, intellectual:* 16 incidents
- *NGO or other civil society organisation:* 4 incidents
- *Influencer, blogger, social media activist:* 3 incidents
- *Celebrity, artist, popular culture person:* 2 incidents
- *Mixed categories* (involving combinations of the above): 26 incidents.

Analysis of the sources of hate speech reveals that politicians, political parties, and state officials are the primary contributors (33.13%), followed closely by journalists, media personnel, and media analysts (19.02%). Private individuals account for 14.15% of incidents, with professors and other intellectuals contributing to 9.8%, and a multiply category including religious leaders for 16.6%. Conversely, civil society organisations, influencers, cultural workers, and other social groups each represent a minimal share of the total incidents, with 1.8%.

Politician, political party, state official
Journalist, media personnel, media writer/analyst
Private person
Mixed categories
Public figure, professor, intellectual
NGO or other civil society organisation
Influencer, blogger, social media activist
Celebrity, artist, popular culture person

Graph 2. Types of figures generating hate speech

The dissemination medium of hate speech provides further insights. Instances of hate speech being propagated exclusively through one channel are relatively uncommon, instead, it is predominantly spread across multiple platforms. Specifically, the analysis of hate speech distribution across various media types in Montenegro reveal that a significant majority (66%) of hate speech incidents are disseminated through multiple media channels. Single-channel dissemination accounts for 34% of incidents, suggesting that while some hate speech circulates exclusively through one medium, there is a marked tendency towards utilising a variety of media. Within the single-channel category, incidents disseminated exclusively through online media portals represent approximately 24.54% of all reported hate speech incidents in Montenegro. It is important to note that traditional media generally follow law's provisions and professional standards, in contrast to most social media and various online portals, whose conduct remains largely unregulated in Montenegro.

Graph 3 shows the percentage of media used to spread hate speech and similar content:
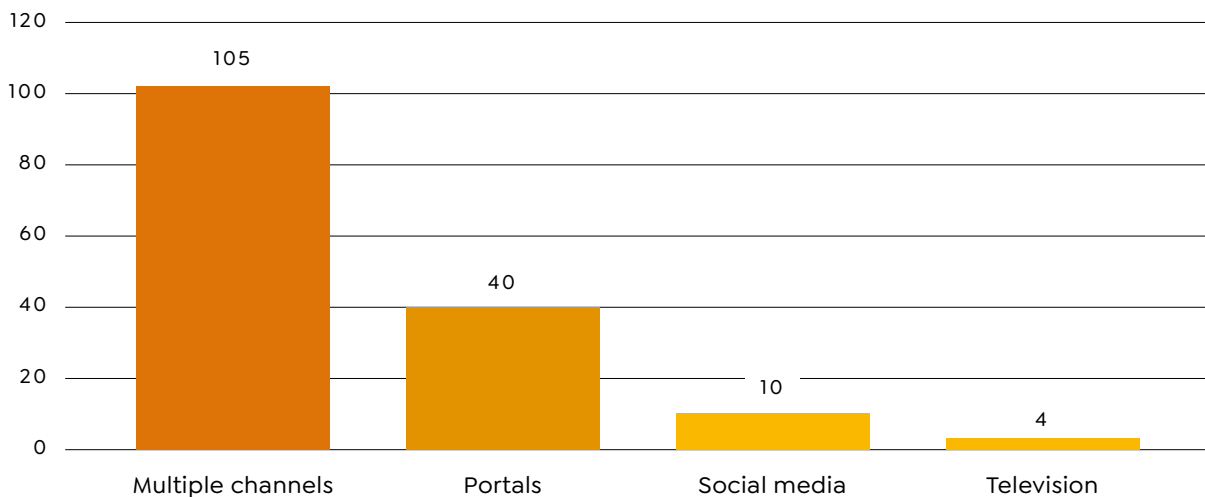
Graph 3. Types of media where hate speech is spread.

When it comes to the type of hateful content, a detailed examination of hate speech and discriminatory language categories reveals significant insights into the prevalent issues within the public discourse. The data encompasses various forms of hate speech, each quantified to understand their relative prevalence and impact on societal cohesion.

The analysis shows a significant dominance of hate speech characterised primarily by insults, negative group labelling, stereotyping, and hostility, accounting for 73.62% of the incidents. Following this, the spreading of harmful lies, misinformation, and disinformation represents another major concern, making up 11.04% of the incidents. Incitement to violence, comprising 6.75% of incidents, poses a direct threat to public safety and individual well-being, underscoring the dangerous implications of hate speech. Additionally, inflammatory speech, accounts for 13.50%, while genocide denial 1.3% of reported cases.

Sentiment analysis

Reported incidents were rated on a scale of one to six, with one being disagreement with a group and six being incitement of literal killing or elimination of a group. The average score was 2.89 for all cases, reflecting a moderate level of negativity in the discourse. Notably, about 75% of all reported cases fell within the middle range of the scale (levels two to four), which typically encompasses non-violent negative rhetoric, insults, and/or dehumanising content. This suggests that while most hate speech incidents do not explicitly call for violence, they nonetheless contribute to an environment of hostility and marginalisation through negative characterisations and actions.

Breaking down the incidents by category, we observed that the most common type of hate speech, comprising 122 incidents, was classified as level three - Negative Character. This category includes language that insults, demeans, or otherwise negatively portrays individuals or groups based on their identity or beliefs. Level two - Negative Actions, which captures incidents involving negative non-violent actions targeted at a group, accounted for 17 incidents. Disagreement, the mildest form of sentiment on the scale, was represented in 11 incidents. These cases involve expressions of disagreement or critique that do not necessarily carry the derogatory or inflammatory connotations found in higher levels of hate speech.

Violence, classified under level five, was noted in nine incidents. This category encompasses rhetoric that suggests or implies physical harm, demonstrating that a small but significant proportion of hate speech incidents venture into the territory of advocating or condoning violence against certain groups. These cases were targeting ethnicity (five recorded incidents). Lastly, level four - Demonising and Dehumanising, which includes language that attributes inhuman qualities to individuals or groups, making them seem less than human or inherently dangerous, was observed in four incidents. This form of hate speech contributes to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of targeted groups by portraying them as fundamentally alien or threatening. There were no reported cases in category six.
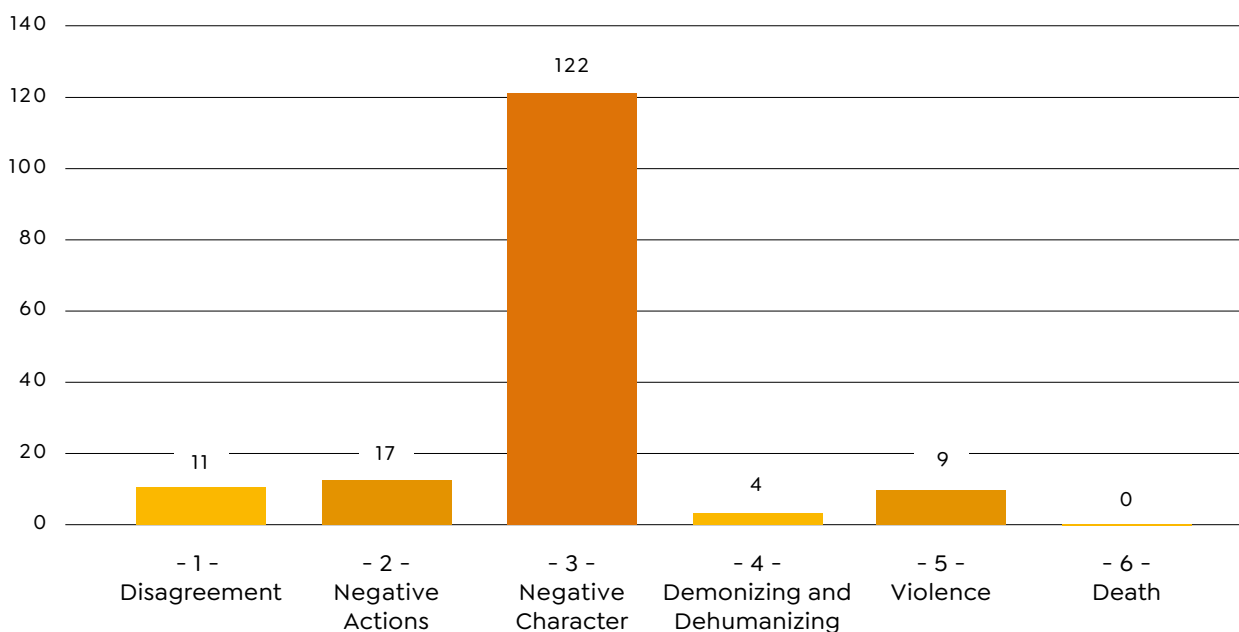
Graph 5. Sentiment analysis

Narrative analyses

For this research, we have used the Council of Europe's manual "WE CAN! Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives", and its definition of the concept of a »narrative« is as follows: "A narrative can be defined as a logical, internally coherent report and interpretation of connected events and characters or pieces of information that makes sense to the reader/listener. The report and interpretation combined give meaning to the story, connecting singular instances to a more general, collective story. Narratives are important in defining, reinforcing, or changing unequal social and political power structures, which sustain and legitimise hate speech and all forms of discrimination and extremism. (…) Narratives often combine real and fictional elements so that they resonate as plausible, interesting, and convincing".

In this research, we broadened the scope beyond the limitations of legally defined hate speech to encompass a wider display of discriminatory discourses prevalent in media and societal communication. This approach allowed us to capture a spectrum of hateful narratives, particularly those centred around gender, political or ideological beliefs, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and ethnicity.

Based on the recorded cases for defined period, we have conducted the analyses of the main HDD narrative and sub-narratives for each of identified target groups. The hate narratives and sub-narratives identified in the Montenegro-specific dataset highlight the complex interplay of ethnic, gender, and political discrimination prevalent in the country's public discourse.

Hate Narratives Overview

- **Ethnic discrimination, racism, xenophobia:** A significant number of incidents (25) were reported under this category, reflecting Montenegro's challenges with ethnic tensions and xenophobia. This includes discrimination against specific ethnic groups, racism, and the portrayal of foreigners or minority groups as threats or inferior.
- **Gender discrimination (Sexism, Sexual Harassment, Misogyny):** There were 28 incidents related to gender discrimination, highlighting issues of sexism, sexual harassment, and misogyny. This suggests a persistent problem with gender-based discrimination and the vilification or objectification of women.
- **Political / Ideological opponents:** Several incidents (nine) targeted individuals based on their political or ideological beliefs, indicating a polarised political landscape where opposition figures or ideologies are subjected to hate speech or discriminatory rhetoric.
- **Support for the nationalist movement:** A unique narrative identified was the support for the Chetnik movement, with one reported incident. This narrative taps into historical and nationalist sentiments, potentially fuelling ethnic and nationalistic tensions.

Sub-Narrative specifics

Within these broader categories, sub-narratives provide more detailed insights into the targets and themes of hate speech:

- **Against specific ethnic groups:** Sub-narratives include targeted hate speech against Albanians, Bosniaks, and other non-Serb populations in Montenegro, often intertwining with political and historical grievances.
- **Misogyny and objectification:** Gender-based sub-narratives often involve derogatory portrayal of women, including objectification in media and public discourse, and attacks on women's rights activists or figures.
- **Political polarisation:** Incidents targeting political or ideological opponents frequently involve vilification of political figures, parties, or their supporters, framing them as traitors, extremists, or morally corrupt.
- **Historical revisionism and nationalism:** Sub-narratives related to the nationalist ideologies often involve glorification of controversial historical figures or periods, aiming to revise historical narratives in a way that fuels nationalist sentiments.

Hate narratives against different ethnic groups and nationalities

Based on the data overview provided from the Montenegro-specific dataset of recorded cases, and the broader context of hate speech dynamics within the country. Our analysis documented incidents targeting various ethnic groups, predominantly scoring between levels three and four on the hate speech intensity scale, indicating narratives that often feature non-violent character insults or derogatory characterisations.

Three key examples of hate narratives against different ethnic groups and nationalities can be separated. These examples illustrate the variety and severity of hate speech incidents reported, reflecting the underlying tensions within Montenegrin society.

Political and ethnic polarisation involving religious leaders

A notable incident involved the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Mr. Porfirije, during his visit to Montenegro. Ahead of the population census, he urged citizens of Montenegro to identify themselves as Serbs and followers of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and to state that they speak the Serbian language. This action by a religious leader from Serbia was perceived as an intrusion into Montenegrin national affairs, exacerbating the polarisation between citizens who identify as Montenegrins and those who consider themselves Serbs. The incident underscores the complex interplay between religious and national identity, serving as a catalyst for further division within an already polarised society.

Derogatory portrayals of ethnic Albanians

In another significant case, the pro-Serbian online portal IN4S used the derogatory term "shiptars" in reference to ethnic Albanians. This term, widely recognised as offensive in the region, was employed in an article discussing the presence of ethnic Albanians in Ulcinj, painting them in a negative and stereotypical light. Such usage not only disrespects the targeted community but also perpetuates ethnic stereotypes and fosters an environment conducive to further discrimination and hostility. This incident highlights the role of media platforms in amplifying hate narratives against specific ethnic groups, contributing to a broader pattern of ethnic discrimination.

Negation and revisionism of historical crimes

A particularly negative example of hate narrative was an article published by the same IN4S portal, which negated the Srebrenica genocide. The article contained numerous unfounded accusations, insults, and revisionist theories towards various nationalities, claiming that Serbs were framed for this war crime. Such denial and revisionism of established historical facts not only dishonours the victims but also incites further ethnic tension and hatred. It represents a deliberate attempt to distort history to fuel nationalist sentiments and exacerbate existing divides between ethnic groups in the region.

Another incident during this reporting period was when Danica Crnogorčević, a singer from Montenegro of Serbian ethnicity, famous for her religious and Serbian ethnic songs, sang a pro-Serbian interpretation of the Montenegrin official anthem, in front of the Temple in Podgorica, on Christmas Eve. The article from Portal Analitika asked the officials when will she be sanctioned, as she had completely changed the lyrics in order for Montenegrin anthem to be about a Serbian country Montenegro, and county of Serbian people and monarchs, which is forbidden by the Law.

Unfortunately, examples of narratives containing hate speech, or insults towards other nationalities, or ethnicities have become a regular occurrence, not just in Montenegro, but the entire region for decades now. While many citizens hoped that such narratives will be reduced after the fall of the DPS's, 30-year-old rule, the research shows that the polarisation in the Montenegrin society is still very high, if not higher than before, where the population census' results are expected to cause even further hateful, or similar narratives, once the data regarding the percentage of different nationalities, religious believers and language speakers in Montenegro are processed.

Hate narratives towards women and LGBTQI+ persons

In a society that is still largely patriarchal and traditional, women are, unfortunately very often targeted in the media and online space, mostly through misogynous comments, often aimed to discredit them as professionals in their work. In this reporting period, the number of hate speech, discrimination, or misogyny cases targeting women has grown rapidly and while most of them fall in the lower to middle rate **on the hate speech intensity scale,** there was one case where five women journalists received rape threats via e-mail, from an unknown source. Threats were sent to Ms Nikolić, who is the main editor of "M" portal via email, but other four journalists were also mentioned. Examples of these incidents aimed at women include:

> The Metropolitan of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Mr. Joanikije Mićović stated, among other things that the initiative of the American Supreme Court, which wants to overturn abortion rights in the U.S. is the voice of reason and conscience: "Deliberately terminating a pregnancy at any stage of it is a terrible sin and is directly directed against God's original Biblical command to give birth. Man alienated from God wants to legitimise what is against God's law, it is, on one hand, an expression of pernicious selfishness, and, on the other hand, an escape from life, a renunciation of love and God's blessing."

> Ms Aleksandra Vuković Kuč, a member of the opposition Democratic Party of Socialists, was the target of severe insults and misogynistic speech on social media for days. The trigger was her presentation at the session of the Montenegrin Parliament, in which she expressed a critical view regarding the election of Mr. Andrija Mandić from the pro-Serbian Democratic Front as the head of the parliament. Following this, her photos from the session began to "circulate" on social media, accompanied by inappropriate comments concerning her private life, her appearance and pregnancy. The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Podgorica has initiated a case in response to this and will determine if there are elements of a criminal offense. The attack on Ms Vuković Kuč has been strongly condemned by most non-governmental organisations, her party colleagues, and opposition members, as well as civil activists.

> Another case occurred with regards to Ms Ivana Vojvodić, a director of NGO Juventas, when she was mistreated by Mr. Milutin Đukanović (a politician and the President of the Board of the National Energy Company – EPCG) during the talk show at the public service, when he associated her with her ex-husband and tried to discredit her knowledge and her work.

Although the number of hate speech and/or discrimination incidents in Montenegrin media space towards the sexual minorities in Montenegro has decreased in this report, compared to the previous period, the LGBTQI+ community still represents one of the most stigmatised groups in the society, according to all research on public opinion in the country. Also, it is important to note that most incidents involving sexual minorities are ranked as **very violent on the hate speech intensity scale**. Some of the examples include the following cases:

> In July, 2022, the premises of the LGBTQI+ Drop-in centre in Podgorica were attacked. The attackers wrote "Death to fagots" in red on the door of the LGBTQI+ centre and crossed out the name of the Gay-Straight Alliance "GSA" while writing the same message on the wall and drawing the Nazi symbol Swastika.

> Also, a psychologist – Mr. Petar Marković, who was regularly attacked and insulted in the past because of his looks, was attacked again in Bar and in Podgorica. Besides being harassed and insulted, he was also physically injured in the attack in Bar by a group of men.

> Another incident occurred when the President of the Board of Directors of Queer Montenegro and LGBT rights activist – Mr. Danijel Kalezić announced that he received a direct death threat via Instagram. The person reacted to his post regarding the attack on the LGBT Drop-in centre, saying: "We will hold you and the other LGBT vermin at gunpoint. You're on the list too!"

> Another example of hate speech was when Mr. Vladislav Dajković, a pro- Serbian politician from conservative block wrote a problematic status on his Facebook profile, when he called out for a ban of the performance of Mr. Božo Vrećo, a Bosnian singer, labelling him as "a man or a woman, whatever", and using the situation of tragedies in Serbia as a reason for the ban. His status provoked thousands of answers of his followers with hate speech against Mr. Vrećo. Mr. Dajković didn't delete any of these comments, showing, implicitly his attitude.

There were many other cases of hate speech, discrimination, misogyny, and similar incidents in Montenegro during the reporting period, as mentioned earlier, yet an adequate public and institutional response is still scarce. Even when perpetrators are found and legally processed, sanctions are highly inadequate and low, unable to demotivate further similar narratives, actions, and incidents in the future.

Hate narratives against ideological and/or political opponents

The political discourse in Montenegro is highly negative in tone and often insulting to the opponents, but also the public, or various groups of the society, with ad hominem attacks between political parties and many politicians. Although most credible media don't often quote insulting, or hateful statements, these are spread through social media and other platforms. During the reporting period, only 11 such instances were recorded by CIN-CG researchers, with elements of hate speech, or discrimination. All were at the lower end of **the hate speech intensity scale** (marks one to three), and most were recorded as negative in character – rhetoric, including non-violent characterisations and insults. Examples of some of the most prominent were:

> After the Decision of the Government to prolong winter holidays for children and postpone the school was heavily criticised by CSO "Parents", the Prime minister Mr. Dritan Abazović heavily insulted this organisation, but also all those citizens who criticised the Government's Decision, by stating that "Low IQ is the greatest enemy of development of Montenegro".

> After the Presidential elections, and only once it was clear that the former President Mr. Đukanovic has lost elections, a video appeared on many platforms showing a priest from the Stanjevići Monastery ringing the "death bells" for Mr. Đukanović, while also using insulting expressions towards him, like hopes for his death and calling upon God to judge him strictly.

> Another case of hate speech occurred in media when civic activist - Ms Bojana Jokić referred to the supporters of DPS party as "lice".

> There was also an article full of insults and curse words towards the former Prime Minister Abazović, named "What fools", issued by a columnist of online media Portal Analitika, Mr. Šoć, in September 2023.

These are only some of the examples that raised most public attention, but it is visible by all members of the society that the political discourse in the country needs to be raised by several levels. Citizens are getting tired of this lack of any constructive discussion, as evidenced by a record low voter turnout in the last Parliamentary elections.

Hate narratives against the religion, or different religious groups

Although there were some religious tensions and quarrels in the past two decades in Montenegro, these were mostly caused by politicians and online/social media, in rare occasions. This reporting period however has noted a rather high number (15) of incidents (cases of hate speech, discrimination and similar) in various media platforms, even coming from religious leaders themselves, although only scoring a medium score **on the hate speech intensity scale.** Some of examples follow:

> Former President of the Municipal Assembly of Petnjica – Mr. Adnan Muhović stated to the media that mixed marriages with non-Bosniaks are against the tradition of Petnjica. He added that in the municipality in the Sandžak region, most of the population are Bosniaks, and that all non-Muslim women of different religions and atheists are "those who don't know God".

> Mr. Miloš Ostojić, the President of the Board of Auditors of the Port of Bar wrote two statuses on Facebook with hate speech against Bosniaks. He was detained for 72 hours at the Police station and was later fired from his workplace.
>
> A video emerged of the Nikšić municipality's Mayor Mr. Marko Kovač, singing an improper and hateful song about killing Muslims and the rape of Muslim women during the liberation of Montenegrin territory from the Ottoman rule in the 19th century.

In multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies, all citizens should refrain from hateful and non-tolerant statements, especially those holding high positions in the Government, religious institutions, local municipalities and similar. However, this is not currently the case in Montenegro, where many political, religious, and other leaders spread hate speech, discrimination and even calls for violence, further destabilising and polarising the Montenegrin society. Such statements are most often spread through mobile platforms (such as Telegram and Viber groups), where certain portals have their closed groups spreading disinformation, hate speech and similar content.

Other: hate speech towards journalists/media, CSOs and other civil society members

During the reporting period, there weren't many recorded cases of hate speech, or discrimination directly aimed at journalists, civic activists, and other members of the civil society, other than those already mentioned above, where certain activists were insulted, or attacked through hate speech and otherwise due to other reasons (e.g. for belonging to a sexual minority) or were victims of misogyny (women from the civil sector). But one example of a concrete attack on a journalist during the reporting period was this:

> Portal Aktuelno.me published a series of articles attacking Ms Dragana Šćepanović from Kolašin, working as a journalist for Vijesti who published an analysis of problematic spatial plans in the region of mountain Bjelasica, and accused Šćepanović of working for Serbia via her media (Vijesti). In another article, Aktuelno. me insulted the entire redaction of Vijesti naming them a mafia media gang.

Many media / journalists, as well as some CSO activists were often publicly attacked by certain political, religious, and other leaders. While some were accused of being foreign mercenaries and spies, other were accused of having close ties to different crime groups. Such narratives, unless supported by credible evidence do not contribute to further democratic development of the society and should not be a standard practice in any developed society. It is worth mentioning that a high number of persons that arrived in Montenegro from Ukraine, Russia, Turkey and other countries lately have started to cause new hate speech and discrimination trends in Montenegro, yet these are low in quantity and severity, at least for now.

Trigger events in Montenegro

During the reporting period, Montenegro experienced a particularly turbulent period marked by events that significantly triggered hate speech, discrimination, and other negative narratives across the country. The most prominent triggers of hate speech, particularly those directed towards political and ideological opponents, as well as ethnic and national discourse, were the three electoral processes that occurred within the reporting period, the formation of the government, and the population census, with the latter having recently concluded its data collection phase. Furthermore, the event that most significantly triggered hate speech and discrimination against sexual minorities was the Pride Parade. Additionally, specific actions by politicians and activities during major religious ceremonies often sparked increased religious hate speech. This hate speech was frequently connected with nationalism and intolerance towards others, highlighting a complex interplay of factors contributing to the societal divisions in Montenegro.

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis of the hate narratives documented in Montenegro reveals a deeply rooted problem of intolerance and discrimination, including ethnicity, gender, political ideology, and nationalism. These narratives, structured around a relatively straightforward framework of animosity, leverage a mix of hate speech, discriminatory language, and revisionism to instigate division within the society. The incidents range from direct attacks, including verbal harassment and physical threats, to more subtle forms of discrimination through media portrayal and public discourse. They are characterised by their simplicity yet strong ability to encourage intolerance. They leverage stereotypes, stigmatisation, and misinformation to target a wide range of groups, from ethnic and religious minorities to women, political opponents, and sexual minorities.

Ethnic discrimination, racism, and xenophobia represent significant concerns, with numerous incidents highlighting Montenegro's struggle with ethnonational tensions. These narratives not only manifest in direct insults and derogatory portrayals of ethnic groups but also intertwine with political and historical accusations, suggesting a complex interplay of historical revisionism and nationalism. This is particularly evident in narratives against ethnic Albanians and in the denial and revisionism of historical crimes, such as the Srebrenica genocide, which not only preserve ethnic stereotypes but also fuel nationalist sentiments.

Gender discrimination remains a persistent issue, with sexism, sexual harassment, and misogyny deeply embedded in societal attitudes. This is exemplified by derogatory portrayals of women in politics, attacks on women's activists, and severe incidents of threats against female journalists. Such narratives contribute to the objectification of women, reflecting a broader problem of gender-based discrimination.

Political and ideological polarisation is another critical aspect, with incidents targeting individuals based on their political or ideological beliefs. This polarisation is evident in the negative tone of political discourse, ad hominem attacks, and the vilification of political figures and ideologies, which further intensifies societal division. Support for nationalist movements, such as the Chetnik movement, underscores the role of nationalism in fuelling ethnic and nationalistic tensions. This is complemented by sub-narratives of historical revisionism and glorification of controversial figures, aiming to reshape historical narratives in a manner that strengthens nationalist feeling.

The analysis also reveals a worrying trend of hate narratives against sexual minorities, indicating a broader issue of intolerance and discrimination that extends beyond ethnicity and gender. Incidents attacks on the LGBTQI+ community highlight the challenges faced by these groups in a predominantly traditional and patriarchal society.

Preventive and Ex-post actions to combat hate speech narratives in the country

Montenegrin institutions have struggled to effectively prevent or respond to various types of public hate speech, including those responsible for the dissemination of hateful, discriminatory, misogynistic, and other malicious content. Despite the legal framework, particularly the Criminal Code, recognising most instances of hate speech and discrimination, the rate of case processing and the number of individuals held accountable is disproportionately low in relation to the prevalence of hate speech across the country. Most efforts to combat disinformation, prevent, and expose harmful and hateful content, and enhance media literacy in Montenegro is carried out by civil society organisations. However, their capacity and jurisdiction in this area are limited, and a coherent state response is noticeably absent, lacking a clear strategy to prevent and counter hate speech and disinformation narratives.

Research indicates that new media platforms, such as social media and online portals, present a significantly higher volume of hate speech, discrimination, and similar narratives compared to traditional media outlets. The harmful impacts of new media are expected to intensify with the ongoing advancement of technologies. The emergence of new tools, including various AI programmes, is likely to exacerbate these negative trends, further complicating the efforts of relevant institutions to address these threats.

Conclusions

The intensity of hate speech, discrimination and disinformation in Montenegro has steadily been increasing over the last decade, primarily through new media (online/mobile platforms and social media). The most common hateful narratives made in relation to gender, political, religious, ethnical/national, or ideological differences in the previous period had a wide audience and extremely negative effects on the already polarised society. Non-traditional media and certain political leaders, as well as posts of influential individuals on social media remain the most common sources of hateful and harmful content, without any major consequences.

The regulatory framework exists, but its implementation in practice is too ineffective and inefficient to adequately respond to this extremely dangerous threat for the peace and stability of the society, while the public authorities' interest, will and capacities to prevent and counter various instances of hate speech are very low. Although police and prosecutors have acted upon most violent cases of public hate speech in the past, these activities seem sporadic, inefficient, and organised only after a strong public, CSO and media pressure, while sanctions for those processed remain inadequate to prevent future cases of public hate speech, intolerance, misogyny, and other similar occurrences.

Civil society organisations remain some of the rare societal actors trying to monitor cases of hate speech and disinformation together with several responsible media, to prevent such occurrences, increase media literacy of citizens and counter these dangerous events in the society. However, civil society organisations need stronger and consistent support to be able to conduct their work continuously, professionally and with adequate capacities, as this is not possible with ad hoc and project-based support. There is a pressing need for improved cooperation between the state and civil society to collectively address hateful and discriminatory narratives, along with other negative phenomena, within the public sphere. Adding to the challenge is the rapid advancement of technology, including the use of AI programmes, which has the potential to further amplify these negative trends.

Addressing the persistent issue of hate speech, discrimination, and disinformation in Montenegro requires a multifaceted and sustained effort. Strengthening the regulatory framework, enhancing the efficiency of law enforcement and judicial responses, bolstering civil society, and fostering a culture of cooperation are essential steps toward mitigating the adverse effects of hate speech on Montenegrin society. Without significant and concerted action, the societal divisions and instability fuelled by these harmful narratives are likely to persist, undermining the fabric of Montenegrin democracy and social cohesion.

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