MEDIA MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN NORTH MACEDONIA

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Reporting
Diversity
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Content

Introduction

The hate speech in North Macedonia is a complex phenomenon that easily spreads to all parts of society mainly through local media outlets and social media platforms[1]. The pluralisation of the media and the availability of the digital tools for mass communication combined with the low level of media literacy[2] have significantly increased risks and negative effects of the hate speech and other forms of discriminatory discourses.

Hate speech has deep roots in the society and it has developed over a longer period with occurrences and dynamic that depends on various social factors and political circumstances. Its manifestations depend on the local political and media culture and in that context, it can be noted that North Macedonia does not have a good record for efficient processing and sanctioning of various cases of hate speech. In the past decade, the hateful and discriminatory discourses were mostly registered in political communication, interethnic and interreligious relations, treatment of the marginalised communities, especially based on sexual orientation, and against migrants.

Also, during the pandemic period 2020-2022 there was frequent use of hateful content against medical workers and institutions, on various matters related to the work of medical institutions and measures against COVID. The still existing normalisation of the use of various forms of hate and discriminatory language has significantly increased their negative impact on the society and has also become a frequent method for communication for political opponents and social groups with different political, and ideological attitudes and opinions.

In North Macedonia the use of hate speech is not only tolerated but also encouraged by political parties and their supporters, leading to deterioration of the public dialogue, political debate, and tolerance in the society.

The main objective of this research is to provide analytical insight in the most common hateful, and discriminative discourses registered in the public sphere in North Macedonia during 2023. The paper will analyse the examples that were registered in this period, and which had significant impact on society.

The research's purpose is to provide credible information and evidence to strategically approach the issues of hate speech and intolerance in North Macedonia. Factors and events that were the main generators of the hateful and discriminative content will be identified, while the key narratives used will be examined in order to explain their dynamics and effects. The research will elaborate the most common targets of the hateful content and how the attacks and campaign against them affect the overall communication and social relations in North Macedonia.

The analysis aims to offer a better understanding of propaganda that utilises hateful content through various communication models; and to help society build resilience of citizens, properly respond, and develop efficient counter-narratives that will limit the impact of this type of content.

1. Bachovska, Jasna, Mihajlova, Elena, and Shekerdziev, Tome (2013), "Freedom of Expression and Hate Speech", Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Skopje, 2013.
2. Sources, https://osis.bg/?p=4243&lang=en, and Snezhana Trpevska, (2020) "Mapping the levels of media literacy in the Republic of North Macedonia among the population over the age of 16", Institute for Social Development Research RESIS Skopje, North Macedonia.

Methodological approach

The material for this research includes cases of hate speech and discriminatory content made public in North Macedonia in 2023. Events which had significant visibility and impact in the country were filed, categorised and cross-analysed. The examination of the research material included quantitative, qualitative and discourse analysis of the content. The collected cases were classified according to type of hatred, the group or individual the incident was against, who committed the incident, how the group or individual was identified, the type of media the hate speech was reported in, and the public reach of the incident.

All registered cases were classified according to the scale for sentiment analysis, grading the cases from one to six, depending on the level of the assessed affective reaction, or sentiment triggered by the event.

1. **Disagreement** - Rhetoric including disagreeing at the idea at a mental level. Challenging groups claims, ideas, beliefs, or trying to change them.

2. **Negative actions** - Rhetoric including negative non-violent actions associated with the group.

3. **Negative character** - Rhetoric including non-violent characterisations and insults.

4. **Demonising and dehumanising** - Rhetoric including specifications of sub-human and superhuman characteristics of the targeted individual/group.

5. **Instigation of violence** - Rhetoric implies infliction of physical harm or aspirational physical harm.

6. **Death** - Rhetoric implies literal killing or elimination of a group.

Using the method of discourse analysis, the examination of the cases was further detailed through identification of the main narratives and sub-narratives identified in these cases. Also, the so-called trigger events and factors were analysed in order to understand their spreading in the media. The visual elements from these cases were analysed and their impact was assessed in the contexts of their use.

Narratives and sub-narratives

Quantitative analysis

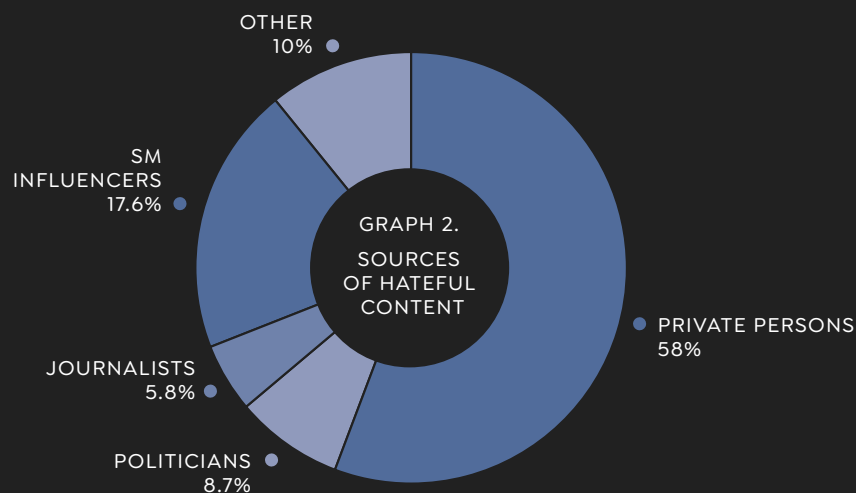During the period of 2023 in total 34 impactful cases of hateful and discriminatory content were identified in North Macedonia. According to the registered circulation as well as the audience reach and engagement, they had significant impact in the media and the public sphere causing numerous comments, debates, and reactions. The highest number of cases registered were hateful content in cases of sexism, including sexual harassment and misogyny (32%), hate narratives on ethnic basis (26.5%) and attacks on political or ideological grounds (14.5%).

PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES
3%

POLITICAL OR
MEDIA MEMBERS
9%

POLITICAL / IDEOLOGICAL
OPPONENTS
14.5%

MISSING PERSONS
AND FAMILIES
9%

GRAPH 1.
TYPES
OF HATEFUL
CONTENT

SEXISM (SEXUAL
HARASSEMENT, MISOGYNY)
32%

ETHNICITY
(ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION)
26.5%

SEXUAL MINORITY
6%
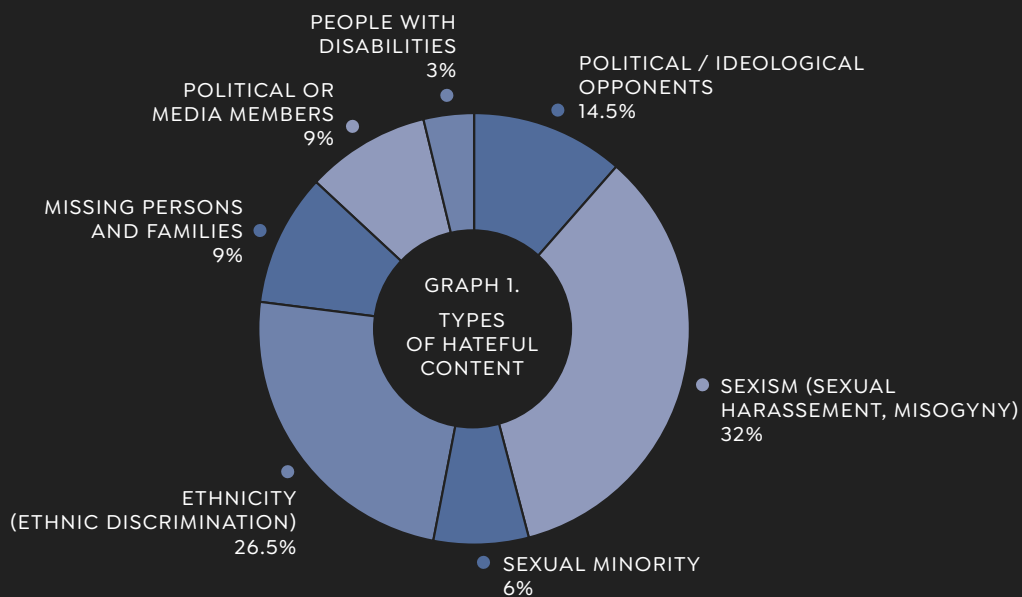
In the closer overview of the targeted groups, it was found that 26.4% are against ethnic groups (Albanian or Roma ethnicity), 20.5% are against LGBTQ+ community, 17.6% were targeting political opponents, and 9% on gender grounds.

Regarding the source of the attacks, most were members of the public at 58%, 8.7% were politicians or representatives of the political parties, and 5.8% were journalists or media professionals. Online influencers accounted for 17.6%; a figure that has staggeringly doubled since the 2021 report.

OTHER
10%

SM
INFLUENCERS
17.6%

GRAPH 2.
SOURCES
OF HATEFUL
CONTENT

PRIVATE PERSONS
58%

JOURNALISTS
5.8%

POLITICIANS
8.7%

Narrative analysis

In this research we define narrative 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 will try to give a broader meaning to the registered media stories and content, connecting singular events to a more general, collective semantic and narrative frame. In many cases, the used narratives have deeper structure and implicit elements that need to be uncovered through a process of multi-level analysis. Narratives also "define what is normal and what is legitimate, as well as the limits of what is politically possible and are strongly connected with efforts to sustain, reform or change social and political power structures"[3]. In this research the concept of hate speech and propaganda in media and communication are applied in broader sociological terms and not limited to their legal concepts.

Narratives on sexism, sexual harassment, and misogyny

Compared with the reports from previous years it is evident that the narratives on sexism and topics related to sexual harassment, gender issues and misogyny have increased considerably[4]. The main reasons for this process are several political events in the country where female politicians, public figures, civic activists, and other influential women, were attacked on gender grounds, but also there is a growing trend of creating a culture of machoism for younger generation of online users. This type of hateful content can be found on social media platforms, YouTube, and local podcasts in North Macedonia, that are becoming increasingly popular and influential during 2023.

One of the most prominent cases from this group was the podcast episode published by Stefan Lazarov on 14 February 2023 with his guest, journalist Dragan Pavlovic-Latas. The guest in this episode spoke about his sexual experiences as a young person, which later caused numerous reactions over his promotion of violent behaviour against women. After a series of public reactions and people calling out his behaviour on social media, the Public Prosecutor's Office filed a case against both the guest and the show's host, accusing them of "spreading through a computer system, a racist and xenophobic ideas that promote violence against women and caused reactions and a feeling of disgust and anxiety in the public".

> "The first defendant, appearing in an interview published on February 14 as a podcast on the second defendant's YouTube channel, publicly promoted an act of gender-based violence, evoking memories of his alleged past, without expressing moral condemnation or remorse, thereby knowingly promoting such violent behaviour. The second defendant, although he was aware of the influence of the content he broadcasts, especially among the young population, still did not stop or interrupt the interlocutor, but further led him to retell the disputed event with comments and questions", Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Skopje, North Macedonia.

The podcast author, Stefan Lazarov, removed the episode from his YouTube channel[5] while the trial on this case is still ongoing. However, another YouTube account has uploaded the entire episode, and this channel is not apparently associated with Stefan Lazarov. The Basic Criminal Court in Skopje imposed precautionary measures on both. The measure for Pavlovic-Latas is temporary revocation of his passport and a temporary ban on undertaking work activities related to the crime, i.e., imposed a ban on public appearances that promote spread of racist and xenophobic material. Lazarov has been given a precautionary measure of a ban on public appearances that promote the spread of racist and xenophobic material.

In the narrative analysis of the text, it could be observed that there were no explicit personalisation or depictions, but trivialisation of acts of rape and underage sex, were apparent. Women are portrayed through demeaning expressions ("poor thing") and negative stereotypes on gender basis. The attention that this case caused in the public, and the fact that it was re-uploaded by other users and still circulated among users in North Macedonia,

3. "To narrate is to tell a story, to give an account of events or experiences, whether true or fictional. Both terms, narrative and story, are used interchangeably when they share the same general meaning: developing a narrative or telling a story implies creating characters and a plot. Narratives often combine real and fictional elements so that they resonate as plausible, interesting and convincing", Monitoring methodology instructions.

4. In 2021 report it was present in 7% of the cases.

5. https://www.youtube.com/@LAZAROV1

indicate an ongoing process of promotion and creation of a new type of machoism among the younger members of the online audience that encourage intolerance and that tries to normalise humiliation on the basis of gender.

On March 8, International Women's Day, a group of people protested in Skopje by marching in front of several state institutions, demanding increased women's rights in the country. The protest had significant media coverage including several TV and online media outlets.

One image from the demonstration was of a young woman holding a placard with the words: "Church F*ck off!", written in Macedonian language. The image and the implicit message criticised the church to be a promotor of women's oppression, provoking a series of reactions on social media, including various profanities. The woman's social media profiles were shared massively online, calling people to attack her for insulting the church and the orthodox believers.

When it was realised that she was employed by the civic organisation Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, the verbal attacks on her intensified and expanded to other members from the organisation. The registered verbal attacks were dominated by using vulgar language, insults on sexual basis and demeaning narratives against women.

It is interesting to note that the case was also politicised and connected with interethnic relations with calls for the protestors "to react against the main ethnic Albanian party from the Government, Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), instead of protesting against the Church and insulting the believers in the country". This type of attacks originates from the common political narratives by the current opposition that "civic organisations for human rights are a political instrument of the (social-democrats led) government"[6].

Hateful narratives from this research often combined various types, revealing their complexity and interconnection, like in this case where hateful messages on gender grounds were combined with political and ideological narratives.

Ethnical and racial hate narratives

The number of cases with hateful and discriminatory narratives on ethnical or racial bases made up 26.5%. The key narratives from this type were formed by using negative stereotypes and encouraging interethnic intolerance against other communities. Registered examples, highlighted cases related to Albanian and ethnic Roma communities in the country, with some cases of xenophobia and racism against migrants and refugees from Middle East and Africa.

For example, on few separate occasions, two X-platform users published statements with hate speech toward the Roma community, and their messages were shared and commented among the users on this social network. In one of the posts, an X-user "Justice boy" commented on the news report that ethnic Roma people are having difficulties getting a citizenship in North Macedonia, comparing the situation to the ethnic Albanians in the country ("Why is it a problem to give citizenships to Gypsies, when we already gave passports to half a million of Shiptars?"[7]).

Another instance of hate speech is reflected in a reply to a post in praise of former Prime Minister Zoran Zaev's achievements during his mandate. The reply post called Zaev a "Murtino Gypsy", Murtino being his place of birth, and gypsy a derogatory name used for members of the Roma community.

In most of the cases narratives against other ethnicities or races are combined with belittling and insulting expressions for entire ethnic or racial groups. The narratives are also based on ethnic and cultural subordination, negative stereotypes and sometimes dehumanisation, aimed at normalising segregation, subordination, marginalisation or even expulsion of these ethnic groups.

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6. For example, https://twitter.com/Ele_Psk/status/1738266061953200508, "That's right. Urania Pirovska from Helsinki used to be on TV every other day. After SDSM came to power, her voice cannot be heard at all beside all the scandals that happen. It is obvious that she is only interested in human rights as an excuse to spit on the VMRO. Faker".

7. Source https://is.gd/WoDNXk

In some of the registered cases, hateful narrative on ethnic grounds was created around the expression "Shiptar's government", used to insult the position and participation of ethnic Albanian parties in the Government coalition. This narrative was used to impose a perception that ethnic Macedonians and SDSM party were overpowered by the Albanian members of the government coalition ("Did SDS enter the Shiptar government?"[8]).

Beside intensely debated political topics, the narratives against other ethnicities were also present in some other topics of discussions as well. For example, one common narrative was the one that "Albanians are not paying bills and taxes"[9]. In one of the local news websites an article was published[10] claiming that around 100 million euro are not paid in North Macedonia annually for electricity bills. The lost finances to the electric company, according to the article, were shared by the rest of the users to compensate these loses. On the photo used in the publication, traffic sign of village of Arachinovo, near Skopje, with dominant ethnic Albanian population, was published. Destructive and insulting comments were published by other users in reply to this message ("I hope they die by electric shock").

The complex socio-economic reality of rates of paid electricity bills in one municipality with a dominant ethnic Albanian population was projected to the entire ethnic group and used to depict them as people who don't respect the basic rules, laws and civic obligations. Very similar narratives of ethnic groups being depicted as uncivilised, under-developed and primitive, was detected for the ethnic Roma community. These narratives are used to justify subordination or marginalisation of entire social groups, in this case on ethnic grounds.

Another similar case on ethnic grounds was the identified narrative citing that "Macedonian political parties gave the state to Shiptars"[11]. The trigger for this narrative was the change of the name of a street in Chair municipality in Skopje with a name of a member of Albanian ballast fighters from World War II. With this narrative certain political defeatism was circulated in the online sphere, contributing to increased polarisation in public communication and the society.

Narratives against political or ideological opponents

The attacks against the political and ideological opponents were identified in 14.5% of the cases. In the registered examples various language techniques were used including insulting words (traitors, degenerates from their community, enemies of their people, etc.) and threats, aiming to express the aversion against targeted individuals or groups from the opposite political and ideological block. Any compromise, dialogue, forgiving is discouraged and increasing political polarisation.

In one of the registered cases, a supporter of the opposition uses explicit and hateful messages and vocabulary in his newspaper column, including: "beasts", "bloodsuckers", "human freaks", "frustrated bitches", "devil force", "liars", "mentally ill", "sick seed". The author, Jani Bojadzi, who is the director of TV Alfa, as well as a university professor, published the column 'Let's not fool ourselves, I will not forgive' in Nova Makedonija[12]. In his text, he calls for revenge against political opponents.

> "I will not forgive, I want to see them whine and curse into a rage. I want to see their mothers, their sisters, their wives and their daughters wailing, tearing their hair and tearing their shirts in pain".

In another case, political analyst, writer, and civic activist, Ivor Mickovski, wrote a message on Facebook discussing the Government policies. In it, he criticises the work of the Government on a number of issues, accuses the country of having a disastrous Government that doesn't work in the public interest. The narrative's approach is to dehumanise the members of the government and the ruling party.

8. Source https://twitter.com/nedelkovskim/status/1623339449919627265 with 7,049 views).
9 Source https://twitter.com/Gerasim_mk/status/1664215925162229763
10. Source https://pbs.twimg.com/media/Fxh7hO0XgAAmkFl?format=png&name=small
11. Source https://twitter.com/LynxMacedonica/status/1679187849474605069
12. Source https://novamakedonija.com.mk/mislenja/kolumni/da-ne-se-lazheme-jas-ne-prostuvam/

"You are a dead man, a walking zombie, living dead who has no future. You don't deserve anything but curses, hate, and a miserable ending"[13].

After the incidents in the Banjska region, Kosovo, in September 2023, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bujar Osmani, stated, 'If it is proven that Serbia is in some way involved in the armed attack in Kosovo, Macedonia should rescind its membership in the Open Balkan initiative.' Following this, he and his ethnic Albanian colleagues in the government were called derogatory names and accused of disobedience to the (ethnic Macedonian) Prime Minister Dimitar Kovacevski[14].

The widespread hateful narratives of this type were used against the opposition supporters as well. In a column published on the platform Frontline.mk[15], columnist and writer, Branko Trickovski stirred controversy by using derogatory language to describe supporters of VMRO-DPMNE, the main opposition party in North Macedonia. Trickovski referred to their members and supporters with offensive terms such as "morons", "idiots". "jerks", and others. It is important to note that the author of the text has long - so far unsanctioned - history of expressing similar insults.

The narratives in this group are mostly connected by the approach to impose negative perceptions of the opposing political groups. They also try to create the dominant narrative about the collective identity of the nation, and from it to exclude the people with different views and values by stigmatising them as "traitors", "ignorants", "primitives", etc. The hate speech and discriminatory narratives are used to spread the stigmatisation of these individuals or groups as "outcasts from their community".

The analysed narratives of this type are used to gain political power by monopolising the core social concepts, like patriotism, loyalty, honesty, leadership, and impose the right to define who are social groups who should lead the nation. They can even go as far as suggesting which one should be humiliated and expelled from political and public life, or even the country.

Narratives against sexual minorities

In June 2023 various public events were organised by local civic organisations as part of the LGBTQ pride month, including Skopje Pride March[16], several tribunes, public debates, and other gatherings. Few hundred participants gathered in Skopje on 24 June for the Pride parade[17].

On 29 June in front of the main Orthodox cathedral in Skopje, a protest under the motto "We have duty to protect the children", was held against a previously reported draft law for civil registration and draft law on gender equality[18]. The event was organised by the Macedonian Orthodox Church members[19] and some of the key messages from this gathering included statements that "if these laws are adopted the entire society and its values will be redefined negatively", and "Pandora box will be opened from which different genders will come out daily"[20].

The protest and events that were taking place during Pride month caused polarising debates and frequent manifestations of intolerance and hate speech. Among many examples, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (KSZD) determined that Bishop Jakov Stobiski[21] from MPC committed discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in public information and media. "Through his public appearances including on the TV programme 'Detector' on Sitel Television and a public debate in

13. Source https://www.facebook.com/ivor.mickovski/posts/pfbid02uzk5oaavUmXERwdzYJEDzbXdxCr4jctLRrr25bBp6Ea4me7oARsug7dMxCYos8Pbl
14. To quote, "Shiptar Ministers don't give a f*ck about the PM Dimitar Kovacevski, a vocal supporter and champion of the Open Balkan initiative", https://twitter.com/Effo_Antivirus/status/1710137261768015966
15. Source https://racin.mk/kolumni/obedineta-makedonija-od-mevot-na-miczko/
16. Source https://skopjepride.mk/programa/
17. Source https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/tretata-parada-na-gordosta-vecherva-vo-skopje/
18. The draft laws entered parliament commissions in 2022, but were withdrawn for further revisions, as per information by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy.
19. The Head of the MPC OA was among the speakers that included several church representatives, academics and public figures.
20. Source https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/crkvata-protestira-vlasta-veli-samo-se-debatira-shto-e-sporno-vo-zakonite-za-rod-/32478030.html
21. Source https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixSz4d3GQOo&t=4s

Strumica, Stobiski expressed opinions, views and ideas that are considered humiliating, insulting and degrading towards transgender people and that encourage discrimination and hatred towards LGBTQ people"[22].

Although this type of hateful and intolerant narrative was reported in relatively small numbers, accounting for only 6% of all cases, the incidents can often be combined with other types of hate crimes and have indirectly significant impact on the society. For example, the narratives against sexual minorities were often combined and overlapped with ideological narratives against liberal values. This creates different forms of anti-Western and anti-European micro and macro narratives.

> "Now who will protect us from this 'progressive' ruining of humanity,
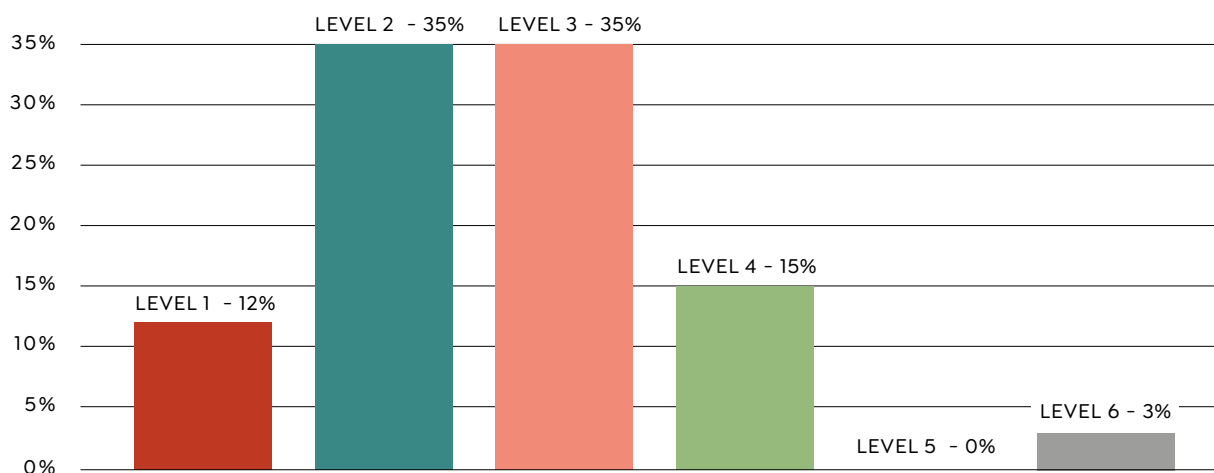> from these EU values"[23]!?

The hateful content and messages against sexual minorities are based on few widespread narratives, such as "homosexualism is a disease", "LGBTQ is destroying family and its values", "homosexuality and transgenderism are ruining children natural development", and few others on a similar note. The main aim of these narratives is to isolate members of the LGBTQ community, and put pressure on them and their supporters, often with an ideological or political motivation.

Sentiment Analysis

Considering the data from the sentiment analysis, i.e., the level of the assessed affective reaction triggered by the event, most of the cases, were assessed as Level 2 (Negative non-violent actions) and Level 3 (Emphasising of negative character), both with 35%. The average grade for the registered cases is 2.64. In addition, the cases with Level 4 (Demonising and dehumanising) were registered in 15% of cases, while the most serious cases, assessed with Level 6 (Rhetoric that implies literal killing, death or elimination of a group), were present in 3%, and no cases refereeing to the Level 5 (Rhetoric implying infliction of physical harm).

The most serious case, assessed as Level 6, was related to hateful and discriminatory content against a missing person that was later found dead in December 2023. This message was published in the local media using the social networking site Facebook as a source and has a potential background impact on ethnical and religious grounds[24].

The cases with Level 4 type on the sentiment analysis scale, demonising and dehumanising, were on gender grounds (sexism, sexual harassment or misogyny), with 40%, inter-ethnical, 20%, people with disabilities (20%), and 20% against sexual minorities, i.e., homophobia.

Graph 3. Level of sentiment caused by registered hate and discriminatory content

22. Source https://www.radiomof.mk/kszd-utvrdi-deka-episkopot-jakov-stobiski-izvrshil-diskriminacija-vrz-osnova-na-seksualna-orientacija-i-rodov-identitet/
23. Source https://www.facebook.com/vmrodpmnemavrovorostuse
24. Source https://is.gd/ulyEok

Visibility Analysis

The usual channels for dissemination of registered hateful or discriminatory content were social media platforms, online news media and the input by the readers in the comments sections. In many cases the actors behind these attacks are identified users of social media platforms but also there were cases of anonymous users publishing hateful content online.

The number of these cases increase during periods of significant socio-political events or tensions in the country, like elections, major incidents, statements by politicians or online influencers, mass protests and other important political events. Dominantly, the hateful and discriminative content was published and spread online, mainly through social media platforms (81.2%), then news websites (14.5%), with only 4.3% on television. The most common social networks for the registered cases in this research were Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter), with some cases of using YouTube as well.

North Macedonia has a high social media use, with close to 60% of population using social media[25] like Facebook, X or YouTube. Posts on these platforms are easily circulated, reaching thousands of users. For example, the hateful post on ethnic grounds on X[26] by former journalist and online influencer Milenko Nedelkovski, has 74,000 views, with numerous comments, likes and shares that increased the spread of the message to other profiles and online media. Another hateful message also on inter-ethnical grounds, reached over 14,000 views on social platform X[27].

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25. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-north-macedonia
26. Reference to https://twitter.com/nedelkovskim/status/1623339449919627265
27. Referring to https://twitter.com/cherga_omnes/status/1717683024194572470

Comparative analyses

Most of the examined hateful narratives have a simple structure and includes the creation of binary poles (us-vs-them) usually based on ideological, political, ethnical, religious, racial, or some other opposition, where differences between the groups are emphasised. All the conceptualised opposites function on the principle of being "The Other" (ethnicity, nation, race, religion, ideological group, sexual orientation, etc.) used to form the identity of the group through the negative contrasting with it. For example, the identified narrative of "traitors who collaborate with the West" is used to create the group identity of "patriots who defend their people and country", or the discriminatory narratives about "primitive conservatives" is exploited to define the group identity of "progressive liberals", etc. Clashing with the defined "Other" serves to strengthen the group identity and loyalty to the collective.

These narrative poles are then complemented with some variants and sub-narratives used to rationalise and justify violence, intolerance, subordination or exclusion of other groups from society. Some of the most common language techniques used in communicating narratives include: stereotyping, stigmatisation, verbal abuse, signalling hostility, malicious disinformation, threats, dehumanising, slurs, insults and others. The most frequent messages and narratives from the registered content include nationalistic ideas and attacks, xenophobia, hate discourses against specific ethnicities, racism, sexism, and attacks on the members of the LGBTQ groups. Also, most of the cases were registered on gender, ethnical, political, ethnical, racial, and sexual orientation basis.

The identified and analysed narratives are used to create conflict and polarisation in society and through them they attempt to overpower other groups (political, ideological, ethnical, racial, etc) in their effort to achieve supremacy and legitimacy on how core social concepts are formed, like patriotism, loyalty, moral superiority, political legitimacy, who are the guardians of the tradition, etc.

Also, one of the key aspects of the hateful narratives is to define who is the real threat and enemy of the group in question (nation, ethnical group, racial group, religious community, etc.). Creation of the enemies is a key step to form the identity, to mobilise individuals for their actions, to give purpose of all activities and justify use of verbal and physical violence in response to the presented fear and threat.

Preventive and ex-post actions to combat hate and disinformation narratives in the country

Recent research and analysis confirm that dealing with hate speech is a complex process, requiring coordinated work at multiple institutional and civic levels, and active involvement of many sides. Connecting the different stakeholders to prevent hate speech is of great importance because it demonstrates social cohesion aimed to prevent this negative phenomenon and should have a demotivating effect on the groups who are using hate speech and hateful narratives to gain political or economic influence and mobilise citizens through hate and intolerance.

In addition, social connection between the factors and stakeholders concerning hate speech and intolerance, provides guidance and motivation for exerting legitimate pressure on social actors who oversee preventing and sanctioning hate speech and not ignore the problems in this area.

The improvement of legal instruments in the fight against hate speech is a very important process in the systemic handling of this problem and it should be constantly open for upgrading. However, the successful implementation and application of systemic legal solutions is closely related to the activities and success in the work by the key entities. Their cooperation greatly facilitates the successful application of laws and increases the efficiency in dealing with this phenomenon.

An example of the successful connection of key stakeholders is the "Network for Media Literacy"[28], initiated by the main media regulator in North Macedonia[29], in which several organisations are members, such as: Macedonian Media Institute, Media Ethics Council in Macedonia, Youth Education Forum, and others. In the project activities of this network, media literacy and hate speech are in focus. The model of social connection in this case proves to be particularly useful and successful.

Given the ongoing persistence of hate speech abuse for political purposes in North Macedonia, it is advisable to enhance the active involvement of political parties and youth organisations to better address and prevent these issues. With their involvement and commitment, it could be easier to exert public pressure in confirmed cases where hate speech is used for political goals. Some of the potential solutions can be more specifically incorporated into the existing Code for Fair Elections, or in a form of binding declarations by the political parties. Cooperation with youth arms of political parties and other educational programmes and trainings, could have a positive impact on improving the situation.

The previously proposed guidelines and recommendations are only some of the wide range of possibilities that the social connection and inclusion of a large number of active stakeholders could open up. The complexity of certain social problems, such as that of hate speech, require not only a continuous raising of awareness in society about that problem, but the raising of awareness about the responsibility, especially of certain entities and institutions. They need to not only formally support activities against hate speech, but also take an active role in activities in this field, contributing to a successful fight against hate speech and intolerance.

28. Source https://mediumskapismenost.mk/clen-na-mrezata/
29. https://avmu.mk/en/home-en/

Conclusions

The analysis of hate speech in North Macedonia confirms its intricate nature, various aspects of political abuse of social differences, and the damaging uses of the digital platforms and diverse media channels in a society lacking satisfactory media literacy and resistance to disinformation and hateful campaigns. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive, collaborative approach involving multiple institutions and sectors, also including civic society as key stakeholder. This approach should be focusing on the identification, sanctioning, and suppression of hate speech to prevent the emergence and spreading of the so-called culture of hatred and the widespread use of discriminatory narratives in order to gain political legitimacy.

The dominant model is using media and social networks as instruments for political and ideological confrontation by destabilising not only tolerance and social cohesion, but also institutions and society. In a broader social context, media often neglect public interest, aligning themselves with specific interest groups to gain power and influence in society, and journalists are discouraged to resist these dominant tendencies. Hate speech and intolerance emerge as significant tools for socio-political mobilisation and forming of group identities. Alongside hate speech, discrimination and calls for violence are frequently intertwined, posing a direct threat to those targeted by such media content.

The persistent impunity for these violations leads to their repetition, widespread dissemination, and exploitation as a "normalised method" in political battles against individuals and groups with different views, beliefs, and opinions. Inefficient law enforcement and professional breaches by journalists contribute to dissemination of a culture of intolerance, polarisation, and conflict, jeopardising social stability. Hate narratives, to some extent, become normalised or conventionalised as a "legitimate tool" in the political rivalries.

Effectively addressing complex social issues like hate speech requires continuous efforts to raise awareness within society. Addressing hate speech requires a multifaceted approach involving legal measures, education, media responsibility, and political will of the main actors. Key actors must not only formally endorse initiatives against hate speech, but they should also participate in activities aimed at curbing the creation and dissemination of hateful discourses. The education sector certainly has a crucial role in reversing the trend of tolerance for the hate speech in public communication in North Macedonia. Enhancing legal instruments to combat hate speech is vital, and constantly evolving process. Successful implementation of the legal measures against hate speech and intolerance depends on the collaboration of key institutions and stakeholders, including judicial bodies, the media community, civic organisations, political parties, telecommunication service providers, and the education sector. Their cooperation would greatly facilitate the enforcement of laws and regulations, significantly improving the effectiveness in handling cases of hate and discrimination.

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