



RESILIENCE:
For Media Free of Hate and Disinformation

HATE NARRATIVES IN NEW MEDIA FORMS IN SERBIA

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SERBIA

RESILIENCE : For Media Free of Hate and Disinformation

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HATE NARRATIVES IN NEW MEDIA FORMS IN SERBIA

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet has provided new opportunities for the manifestation of freedom of expression, but it has also opened a space for the spread of hate speech, disinformation and propaganda. Recognizing the need to strengthen capacities of media CSOs and grassroots organizations to improve the understanding of disinformation and hateful propaganda models of media and communication, the ability of media and civil society to respond to and debunk false information, particularly online, and building the resilience of citizens against disinformation, eight civil society organizations from the Western Balkans and Turkey (WBT), coordinated by South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM), implement the Resilience project.

The research results we present here are part of the research activities carried out in seven project countries within the Resilience project. The research that preceded had analyzed the political-economic basis of hate, disinformation and propaganda models of media and communication. Its findings indicate that in recent years in Serbia, in the name of freedom of speech and freedom of the media, hate speech has significantly outweighed the arguments in the system of public communication. Media outlets with national coverage (with their online editions) systematically deliver content to citizens that promotes government representatives, spreads disinformation and incites hatred towards dissidents or neighbouring nations. In addition to the media, “the Internet has enabled various groups of extreme attitudes to reach directly to citizens, to communicate with them and spread their ideas more efficiently and massively than before” (Valić Nedeljković, Janjatović Jovanović, 2020).

With this second research, we aimed to determine what the main patterns and examples of hate and disinformation narratives in the new media in Serbia are, what actors and events serve as the main generators of hate narratives, and what the main ideas and

In recent years in Serbia, in the name of freedom of speech and freedom of the media, hate speech has significantly outweighed the arguments in the system of public communication.

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messages disseminated are. This report also lists reactions to hate narratives and provides an overview of prevention and ex-post actions to combat hate and disinformation narratives in Serbia.

We analyzed the content published in online media and social networks, focusing on the specific target groups and the cases studies related to them in the period from June 2019 to June 2020. The content analysis of the selected material was conducted in the period from September to October 2020.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

We based our research on case study analysis. Target groups of migrants, political opponents, and journalists, towards which the analyzed narratives are directed, were identified at the regional level for all seven countries researched under the Resilience project. In each of the countries, the researchers had the opportunity to choose a fourth target group. Therefore, within the category of political opponents, we decided to analyze both sides of the political spectrum: the political opposition and government representatives as targets of the narrative.

The selection of cases/events was limited to the period between June 2019 and June 2020. For each selected case/event within the target group, the content published in online media and social networks in a period covering two weeks after the selected event was analyzed. For each target group, we selected those publicly recognized cases as generators of hate narratives.

The hate narrative is operationalized through two key concepts—narrative (de Latour, 2007) and hatred, which can be expressed through hate speech (Komitet pravnika za ljudska prava, 2007) and/or as a particular subset of hate speech—dangerous speech (Benesch, 2020).

In this research, a distinction was made between two categories of hate speech, implicit and explicit. An explicit level of expression of hate speech implies an open declaration of hatred towards another. The implicit level includes all those messages that agree with discriminatory, stereotyping, and aggressive messages and actions of others, and/or when such messages are transmitted without appropriate critical review or due journalistic attention, which may give the impression that the transmitter (individual or media) supports such actions and attitudes.

We based our research on case study analysis. Target groups of migrants, political opponents, and journalists, towards which the analyzed narratives are directed, were identified at the regional level for all seven countries researched under the Resilience project.

A total of 16 media outlets were selected for narrative analysis based on three criteria;

a) media that were previously identified as media that systematically spread hate speech, disinformation and propaganda (Valić Nedeljković, Janjatović Jovanović, 2020),

b) as well as the media which, according to the statistics of Fake news Tragač, a portal dedicated to the deconstruction of false and manipulative media content (fakenews.rs), are the most common sources of manipulation: Informer (informer.rs), Alo (alo.rs), Telegraf (telegraf.rs), Kurir (kurir.rs), Pink (pink.rs), Studio B (studiob.rs), Happy BSC portal (happytv.rs), Srbija Danas (srbijadanas.com), Sputnik (rs.sputniknews.com), Blic online (blic.rs), Srbin.info (srbin.info) and RTV (rtv.rs), and

c) media with a significant influence on public debate/agenda setting media): RTS (rts.rs), N1 (rs.n1info.com), Danas (danas.rs) and Autonomija (autonomija.info).

For each target group, a Google search was performed within a defined site (online media) using a phrase or keyword within a limited time range defined separately for each target group. In cases where the Google search produced no results, the search was carried out within the selected portal on the same criteria.

Online media presented in individual case studies were selected based on the presence of hate speech in the total number of articles *directly connected with the case/event/incident* or in the comments of readers/users who follow these reports. When a larger number of media met these criteria, media with a greater influence on the public debate were selected for analysis.

User comments published with sampled reports were also analyzed. Some individual comments were complex, i.e. its parts belonged to more than one narrative.

Profiles and groups on social networks were selected with the CrowdTangle application, except for the target group of migrants. The selected Facebook group “Movement STOP Settlement of Migrants” was identified as a hate speech generator in the first research conducted within the “Resilience” project.

3. CASE STUDIES

A keyword search yielded a total of 195 articles/reports relevant to the analysis. A total of 13 out of 16 analyzed online media have an open option for readers' comments, where a total of 2382 comments have been published.

Media reports and comments selected for individual case studies underwent quantitative and qualitative analyses, and for each target group, the key narratives were identified (Table 1).

IDENTIFIED KEY NARRATIVES FOR EACH OF THE TARGET GROUPS

Table 1

TARGET GROUP	KEY NARRATIVE
Migrants	The arrival of the migrants is a threat to society.
Political opponents	The political opposition are working against their country.
	Government officials are working against their country.
Journalists	Journalists are enemies of the state (and by extension, enemies of their people).

3.1. Case study 1: Migrants

On 6 May 2020, F.R. drove his car at full speed into the Reception Centre for Migrants in Obrenovac (former military barracks), which was, at the time, secured by the Serbian Army. F. R. live-streamed the whole event on his Facebook profile. After trying to break through the fence of the Reception Centre, he entered through the main entrance saying: "We will express our dissatisfaction towards the thousands of migrants who immigrated to Obrenovac by entering the migrant centre, the former barracks. Here is the army." As he drove through the grounds, he shouted: "Let's see what our migrant brothers are doing. I don't want my girlfriend to be attacked by migrants. I don't want to watch people who are running from nothing in my town. I don't want to watch them. I do not want a Muslim state. I don't want to put up with this. The punishment will be great for sure. I'm getting out now."

Migrants are credited with the most aggressive tendencies, led by the allegations of assault on women, which, in a still traditional society, resonates as a call to men to take action and protect them. They are also credited with the tendency to violently (war and terrorist attacks) want to take over our territory and impose their religion.

The young man was arrested and ordered to be detained for 48 hours. The prosecution qualified the crime as violent behaviour and requested detention for 30 days. The Basic Court in Obrenovac initially rejected the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office's proposal to order custody, after which he was released. After the Prosecutor's Office's appeal, the Basic Court in Obrenovac reversed the original decision, so F.R. was arrested again. At the beginning of June 2020,

he was sentenced to eight months in prison after concluding an agreement with the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Obrenovac on admitting guilt for the crime of violent behaviour. The prosecution missed the opportunity to characterize this act as a crime of inciting national, racial, and religious hatred and intolerance.

For the target group Migrants, the keywords are defined: "migrant", "migrants", "Obrenovac", and "F.R.", as well as the full name of the person who is the main culprit of the selected event. The observed time range covered the period from 6–20 May 2020.

This event attracted a lot of media and public attention. In the observed period, in 14 of the 16 sampled online media, a total of 43 posts/articles directly related to it were published. Hate speech towards migrants was registered in 17 posts/articles (13 at the implicit and four at the explicit level) (Table 1). On 13 (out of these 14) online media, users wrote a total of 584 comments on posts/articles related to the event. Hate speech toward migrants is registered in 234 comments (149 at the implicit and 85 at the explicit level).

For the case study, the portals *Kurir* (kurir.rs) and *Happy BSC portal* (happytv.rs) are selected within this target group.

The *Kurir* published four articles that are directly related to the event. Two of the articles are categorized as articles in which implicit hate speech is registered. The first, entitled "Young man lost his nerve, crashed into the barracks in Obrenovac by car: I don't want my girlfriend to be attacked by migrants!"^[1], is a short news article with the video made by the main actor as its integral part. The article was written without a single word of criticism, and the chosen title justifies his action in a certain way. This justification goes a step further because *Kurir* provided an exclusive with the statement of the girl in question in the second article entitled "A member of the Leviathan wanted to trample migrants! His girlfriend reveals to *Kurir* what the asylum seekers did to her before the intrusion!"^[2] thus supporting the sub-narrative "Migrants are prone to harassment of women and rape."

Along with these four articles, a total of 262 comments were published on the *Kurir* portal: we registered hate speech in 142 of them—107 at the implicit level in which individuals actually express support for the young man and his act, and 35 comments in which hate speech was registered at the explicit level.

READERS' COMMENTS IN THE ONLINE MEDIA OUTLET KURIR CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES

Table 2

KEY NARRATIVE	The arrival of the migrants is a threat to society.	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered
SUB-NARRATIVES	Calling for action against migrants. Migrants should be exiled, returned to their country of origin, refused entry at the border, or destroyed.	11
	Migrants are prone to harassment of women and rape.	5
	The ultimate goal of current migrations is the Islamization of Serbia (Western World).	4
	The police and the state protect them, cover up their criminal actions.	4
	Migrants are a security threat. They are aggressive, and they are connected to criminal groups. They steal, burn, kidnap, attack the local population; nothing good can be expected from them.	4
	Migrants are terrorists; only men come (preparing for war/jihad); They are militarily capable sleepers without women and children.	3
	Advocates for the rights of migrants should welcome them in their homes.	3
	Migrants are not refugees, they are not people in need, but they have decided to move for economic reasons, and they do not deserve help and protection.	2
	Migrants represent a threat to the cultural values of the society. Migrants come from countries with completely different, alien cultural values, incompatible with those of the society of arrival. Migrants are barbarians (underdeveloped/backwards), coming to the civilized western world; Offensive remarks that confirm such attitudes.	1
	Migrants are a threat to the core values of the society to which they arriving. Migrants come from countries that do not respect fundamental human rights.	1
	Migrants are a threat to socially disadvantaged groups. In Serbia, they have more rights than the local population; they get houses, money.	1
	The same rules and rights do not apply to the US and THEM as migrants. THEY are in a far better position than WE are.	1
Serbia is conditioned/forced/paid to accept them.	1	

In the observed period, the *Happy BSC portal* published five posts/articles directly related to the event. We registered hate speech in four of them. Out of two articles in which hate speech is registered at an implicit level, one is identical to the article published in *Kurir* (without citing the source) while the other transmits the girlfriend's statement given to *Kurir*. In addition to articles and statements, the Happy BSC portal thus takes over and maintains the narrative, "Migrants are prone to harassment of women and rape."

At the explicit level, this media outlet generates hate narratives in two articles. In the article "Shocking video! See what migrants are doing in the camp in Obrenovac"^[3] it uses a video circulating on social networks in which the migrants are exercising to depict "Migrants as terrorists who are preparing for war." They add to that the excerpt from the report on the situation in the centre in Obrenovac published by the Asylum Protection Center, which portrays migrants as a "threat to security" because "They are aggressive and associated with criminal groups." The second article entitled "New privileges for illegal migrants in Serbia! Here's what they can do now!" which implies that "migrants in Serbia have more rights than the local population," begins with the sentence "Illegal migrants who are in Serbia and who some 'incorrectly refer to as refugees' have been given a new privilege" is actually informing its readers that the decision that temporarily restricted the movement of migrants and asylum seekers in order to prevent the entry of coronavirus into the centres where they are accommodated, ceased to be valid.

Although it has an open commenting option, a total of two comments have been registered on the *Happy BSC portal*, one of which expresses support for the act of F.R.

There are several active social media groups in Serbia which bring together individuals who most often publish manipulative, fabricated and recycled information about migrants. The largest number of members are gathered in the group "Movement STOP Settlement of Migrants", which had 325,786 members at the time of writing this report. The group was founded on 25 March 2020 and changed its name on 3 October 2020. (The original name was "STOP Settlement of Migrants").

In the observed period, five currently available posts related to the incident were identified in this group. The first was published on 6 May and linked to a video recording of the incident, and the next four posts "prove" that the young man's action was justified.

For all those who say that migrants did not attack any woman in Serbia. Obenovac^[4]

A young man who broke into a migrant camp in Obrenovac was released^[5]

If we ask ourselves, whence the problems of the past month in Obrenovac. This is because the state has not responded to the violence.^[6]

The problems with asylum seekers in Obrenovac are not from yesterday; this video reveals what migrants and the commissariat are doing, as well as how they are breaking the law. Citizens are more than upset^[7]

On 6 May, one of the group members shared a video of the incident^[8] initially published on the website *vestidana.rs*. This entry had 1,700 comments on the group, of which 1,049 are currently available. This post has been shared 1,200 times.

Out of 1,049 analyzed comments, 728 (69.4%) are comments with elements of hate speech. In 476 comments (45.38%), hate speech is implicit, i.e. it consists of comments in which support for F.M. and his act is expressed in words or with videos, gifs and emojis. In 252 comments, hate speech is registered at an explicit level. They are classified into numerous sub-narratives (Table 3).

READERS' COMMENTS IN THE ONLINE MEDIA OUTLET *HAPPY BSC* PORTAL CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES

Table 3

KEY NARRATIVE	The arrival of the migrants is a threat to society.	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered
SUB-NARRATIVES	Calling for action against migrants. Migrants should be exiled, returned to their country of origin, refused entry at the borders or destroyed.	136
	Migrants are terrorists; only men come (preparing for war/jihad); They are militarily capable sleepers without women and children.	41
	Serbia is conditioned/forced/paid to accept them.	19
	Migrants are prone to harassment of women and rape.	17
	The ultimate goal of current migrations is the Islamization of Serbia (Western World).	17
	Migrants are a threat to population growth. In Serbia, the government is settling migrants in order to increase the birth rate.	9
	The police and the state protect them, cover up their criminal actions.	8
	Migrants represent a threat to cultural values of the society. Migrants come from countries with completely different, alien cultural values, incompatible with those of the society of arrival. Migrants are barbarians (underdeveloped/backwards), coming to the civilized western world; Offensive remarks that confirm such attitudes.	8
	Advocates for the rights of migrants should welcome them in their homes.	7

SUB-NARRATIVES	Migrants are a security threat. They are aggressive, and they are connected to criminal groups. They steal, burn, kidnap, attack the local population; nothing good can be expected from them.	7
	Migrants are a threat to socially disadvantaged groups. In Serbia, they have more rights than the local population; they get houses, money.	6
	The president's future voters	5
	Migrants are not refugees, they are not people in need, but they have decided to move for economic reasons, and they do not deserve help and protection.	5
	THEY have more rights in Serbia than WE do.	3
	The same rules and rights do not apply to the US and THEM as migrants. THEY are in a far better position than WE are.	2

3.2. Case study 2: Political opponents

3.2.1. Political opposition

On 15 January 2020, a video was published on the Facebook page "Javnost Srbije"^[8] portraying Marinika Tepić, vice president of the opposition Party of Freedom and Justice, as "a traitor" (patriot of some other countries), "a mercenary of foreign countries and organizations, liar and enemy of the state, working against the interests of the Serbian people". This page has been in existence since October 2019. It mainly publishes affirmative announcements about the representatives of the ruling party and their successes and negative announcements about the opposition's representatives, which prevail. It has a total of 2,237 followers. However, a significant number of their posts are made up of short videos, mostly those representing the opposition in a negative context, which have a significantly higher number of views than the number of followers.

The video on this page had 28,000 views, 142 comments and 21 shares. Of the 142 comments, 24 (34.8%) contained explicit hate speech directed at Marinika Tepić, which is expressed in the numerous sub-narratives about her (Table 3).

Hatred towards government officials is associated with their personal characteristics, i.e. belonging to a group that is not related to the political function they perform and put in the service of political struggle. In the case of the opposition's representative, hatred towards her as the performer of a particular function is manifested by misogyny, and in the case of the Prime Minister, by homophobia.

FOLLOWERS' COMMENTS ON THE FACEBOOK PAGE JAVNOST SRBIJE CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES

Table 3

KEY NARRATIVE	The political opposition are working against their country.	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered
SUB-NARRATIVES	Misogynistic comments and offensive comments with elements of misogyny.	12
	Politicians of the opposition are mercenaries of foreign countries and organizations.	6
	Politicians of the opposition are traitors; They are not patriots.	6
	Members of the opposition lie and deceive.	2
	Various forms of death threats, threatening with injury.	2
	Members of the opposition are thieves, representing only their own financial interests.	2
	Members of the opposition are mentally ill people, where hatred toward opposition is associated or intertwined with sanism.	2
	The political opposition do not work in the best interest of its country and its people; they are enemies of the state.	1

The video went viral on Twitter after being shared by Dragan Đilas five days later, with a message sent to President Aleksandar Vučić¹. Here, the video has been viewed 53,900 times. Moreover, only after Đilas' announcement did the media start reporting on this event.

From 15–29 January, out of the 16 selected, five portals reported on this event. Based on a Google search using the keywords “Marinika”, “Marinika Tepić”, “Đilas”, “Dragan Đilas”, and “opposition”, seven articles related to the event were found. Hate speech was registered in two articles, one at the implicit level and one at the explicit level.

The article published on the *Informer* portal: “Shame on you, tycoon “liar! Đilas called out Vučić again because of Marinika! Vladanka Malović slammed him immediately!”^[9] with the title, a short article, and by conveying the insulting statement of the head of the information service of the ruling

¹ The analysis of the tweets could not be conducted because, in April 2020, Twitter deleted 8,558 accounts and 43,067,074 tweets because they were “engaged in inauthentic coordinated activity to promote the SNS and Vučić to attack their political opponents, and to amplify content from news outlets favourable to them.” according to Stanford Internet Observatory’s analysis. Available at: <https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/april-2020-twitter-takedown>. [Accessed October 2020].

Serbian Progressive Party, supports the sub-narrative “The representatives of the opposition lie and deceive.” In the 138 words of this news article, the word liar is repeated five times. The word tycoon, usually used with a negative connotation alongside the name of Dragan Đilas and connected with the claim that he came to his wealth dishonestly, i.e. that “he represented only his financial interests” while he was in power, is repeated three times.

In contrast to this completely biased article, on the *Srbin info* portal hate speech can be seen in the title “SNS’s answer: ‘you are reptiles and liars’”^[10], and in quoted tweets by Dragan Đilas and Vladanka Malović, from which the media did not distance itself, i.e. did not indicate that the claims made in the tweets are aggressive and contain hate speech. As it is a quote from the same tweet as in the case of *Informer*, the sub-narratives are the same – “The representatives of the opposition lie and deceive and represent their own financial interests.”

Although the commenting option was open, there were no comments from readers with the analyzed article on the *Kurir* and *Informer* portals.

3.2.2. Government officials

From 8–10 September, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić paid an official visit to Luxembourg, on the agenda for which were political and economic meetings and talks and the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Luxembourg in WWII. In the unofficial part of the programme, the Prime Minister and her host also attended the Serbia-Luxembourg football match. In this visit, the Prime Minister was accompanied (in an unofficial part) by her (same-sex) partner.

For this target group, the search was performed using the keywords “Prime Minister”, “Ana Brnabić” and “Luxembourg.”

From 8–22 September 2019, 13 out of the 16 observed portals reported on this event. Hate speech was registered in three posts on three portals, on the portals *Srbin Info* and *Danas* on an explicit level, and in the article published on the *Kurir* portal on an implicit level.

In the portal *Srbin info*’s post entitled “SERBIAN FANS in Luxembourg brutally insulted Ana Brnabić (VIDEO)”^[11] the sub-narrative dominates that “government representatives spend our (state) money on meeting personal needs.” Describing the Prime Minister of Luxembourg as a “gay colleague” and the Prime Minister’s partner as her “girlfriend”, the media outlet also expresses homophobic attitudes, which are further strengthened by publishing a video of a football fan in which “misogynistic and homophobic insults” directed to the Prime Minister are heard.

A total of three articles were found on the portal of the daily *Danas*. The one entitled “The Government of Luxembourg paid for the Prime Minister’s partner”^[12] and “On the occasion of the official visit of the Prime Minister of

Serbia Ana Brnabić and her girlfriend Milica Đurđić” explicitly contains the sub-narrative – “Government officials think they have a privileged position and do not respect the laws of the country they lead.” The whole article oscillates between homophobia and the fight for the rights of people of same-sex orientation by (contrary to its usual practice) calling the Prime Minister’s partner a “girlfriend”, specifying unnecessary details from the Prime Minister’s personal life (“Although they recently had a son by artificial insemination”), and quoting a statement from an interlocutor who supports the sub-narrative mentioned above and stepping towards tabloid journalism.

Eighteen comments have been published on this article, with hate speech being registered in eight of them generating several sub-narratives (Table 4).

READERS’ COMMENTS IN ONLINE MEDIA OUTLET *DANAS* CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES

Table 4

KEY NARRATIVE	Government officials are working against their country.	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered
SUB-NARRATIVES	Homophobic comments and offensive comments with elements of homophobia.	4
	Government officials lie and deceive.	3
	Government officials do not work in the best interest of the country and its people; they are guided by personal interests.	1
	Government officials spend our (state) money on meeting personal needs.	1
	Government officials are mercenaries of foreign countries and organizations.	1
	The government is incompetent and leads the country to ruin, in the case of the Prime Minister, her incompetence stems from her sexual orientation.	1

The CrowdTangle application found that this post was shared three times and that the largest number of interactions took place on the FB page of *Danas*^[13] where followers left a total of 83 comments, of which 37 registered hate speech and spinning several sub-narratives (Table 5).

FOLLOWERS' COMMENTS ON THE FACEBOOK PAGE *DANAS* CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES

Table 5

KEY NARRATIVE	Government officials are working against their country.	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered
SUB-NARRATIVES	Homophobic comments and offensive comments with elements of homophobia.	29
	Hateful messages about their family life, public life; Their personal life is nothing but scandal and degeneration – an extension of their politics.	5
	Government officials spend our (state) money on meeting personal needs.	5
	Government officials are mercenaries of foreign countries and organizations.	2
	Government officials are thieves, representing only their own financial interests.	1
	Government officials are mentally ill people, where hatred toward government officials is associated or intertwined with sanism.	1

3.3. Case study 3: Journalists

On 1 April 2020, journalist Ana Lalić published the article “KC Vojvodina about to crack: No protection for nurses”^[14] on the *Nova S* portal, after which representatives of the Clinical Center of Vojvodina informed the prosecution and police “due to public disturbance and damage to its reputation.” Three hours after the article’s publication, the journalist was arrested and suspected of the crime of spreading panic. She was ordered into custody and spent the night at the police station. She was released after the hearing. On 29 April, she received a decision from the Novi Sad Prosecutor’s Office suspending the proceedings against her and withdrawing the criminal charges for harassing the public and spreading panic due to lack of evidence.

The first case of COVID-19 infection was registered in Serbia on 6 March. On 13 March, the COVID-19 Infection Disease Crisis Response Team was formed, headed by Prime Minister Ana Brnabić. Since then (until 3 May),

Response Team members have held a press conference every day. On 15 March, the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly, and the Prime Minister declared a state of emergency. From 29 March 2020, a mandatory curfew was in effect for all residents. Exceptions were residents with a work permit or a special authorization issued by government authorities and those with a medical emergency.

On 31 March, the Government issued a Conclusion (Vlada RS, 2020) specifying that the Crisis Response Team was in charge of informing the public about the infection's status and consequences. All information released to the public should be given by the Prime Minister or persons authorized by the Crisis Response Team. The Conclusion was withdrawn the day after the arrest of journalist Ana Lalić, according to the Prime Minister of Serbia and the chairman of the Crisis Response Team, Ana Brnabić, "at the explicit, direct request of President Aleksandar Vučić." On 3 April, the mandatory curfew was further strengthened, covering the entire weekend. According to official data concerning the consequences of COVID-19, there were a total of 61 deaths in Serbia on 7 April; by 15 April that number would increase to 109.

For the target group of journalists, the defined keywords were "journalist" and "Ana Lalić", and posts from 1–15 April 2020 were sampled.

All 16 observed media outlets wrote about this event. A total of 106 articles were published, followed by 1,700 reader's comments.

Unlike other analyzed target groups, hate speech was not registered in any of the published articles. However, in this case, the coverage of several media outlets took on the characteristics of a negative campaign against Ana Lalić, led by *Kurir*, *Pink*, *Informer*, and *Happy BSC portal*, with *Kurir* and *Pink* focusing on the journalist's personal qualities in this campaign.

In the observed period, *Kurir* published eight articles containing adverse claims related to the journalist Ana Lalić, of which six were issued on 2 April. The first entitled: "Irresponsible journalist Ana Lalić released despite lying: Look, masks, gloves, galoshes in KCV by the thousands"^[15] where the article introduces a new sub-narrative according to which she is a "journalist without honour and shame" because "she made no attempt in front of investigating authorities to justify the publication of the false information." The two articles that followed^{[16] [17]} convey the statements of the Provincial Secretary for Health and the Director of KCV in which *Kurir* maintains the same narrative: "Irresponsible journalists" and authors of fake news, without honour and shame", which is further confirmed by the article "Reuters convey a true picture of KC Vojvodina! This is a clinical centre with the most modern equipment and large stocks"^[18], which states: "While 'some media' in Serbia 'reported a false image' of KC Vojvodina, a world-renowned agency reports on the most modern equipment in KCV."

In the narratives related to the journalists on a personal level, we rarely register narratives based on discrimination and hatred related to gender or sexual orientation. Instead, they are dominated by those focused on the absence of human values valued as good/appropriate (honour and shame).

A few days later, on 7 April, *Kurir* published the article “Journalist Ana Lalić consciously lied: She violated the code ‘to instil fear among the people’”^[19] in which *Kurir* “without intending to judge her” further strengthens the narrative that she is a “Journalist without honour” who “works against the interests of citizens/the public.”

For this article, the Press Council ruled that *Kurir* violated items 4 and 5 of Section I (Truthfulness of Reporting) and Item 1 of Section V (Journalistic Attention) of the Code of Journalists of Serbia².

Later in the day, this portal published the article “The profession condemned the ‘irresponsible reporting’ of Ana Lalić! Dr. Kisić: Such stories hinder us while saving lives!”^[20] quoting the answers of the Response Team experts to the question of *Kurir*’s journalist: “how harmful are the lies spread by certain colleagues?”

Identical sub-narratives are also registered on the *Pink* portal (which republished a good portion of *Kurir*’s articles). This media outlets further strengthens the power of the sender of the message by quoting the statement of the “Srpska liga” (Serbian League), which they present as the “civil opposition”, “Journalists are working against the interests of citizens/the public” (“These strong pressures that conditioned the release of Ana Lalić are aimed at continuing the false propaganda she carried out and that other journalists follow in her footsteps, to bring unrest and panic among the citizens of Serbia with fake news and malicious agitation”) and “journalists represent (personal) political interests” (“Neither personal rights nor journalistic freedoms are above the common good, especially not in times of crisis and state of emergency, and especially not political propaganda that hides behind investigative journalism”).

A total of 1,700 comments were published on the 16 observed portals, of which 123 were negative comments directed towards Ana Lalić. But there is also a significant number of those who express negative value judgments towards journalists from other media or other media.

Some 211 reader’s comments were published on the *Kurir* portal, among which 34 adverse comments were registered. All comments are directed at journalist Lalić and can be classified into several sub-narratives (Table 6).

² The decision of the Press Council is available at: <http://zalbe.rs/zalba/7529>, [Accessed September 2020].

READERS' COMMENTS IN ONLINE MEDIA *KURIR* CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES

Table 6

KEY NARRATIVE	Journalists are enemies of the state (and by extension, enemies of their people).	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered
SUB-NARRATIVES	Journalists should be punished (by law).	16
	Journalists are liars.	5
	Journalists are working against the interests of the citizens/the public.	4
	Journalists have no values, honour or shame.	4
	Offensive comments.	4
	Journalists represent (personal) political interests.	3
	Journalists are corrupt; they publish what they are paid to publish.	3
	Journalists publish fake news.	1

By searching the articles published on the *Kurir* portal with the CrowdTangle application, the following results were obtained: *Kurir* shared three^{[21] [22] [23]} of the eight analyzed articles on its Facebook page, on which followers left a total of 500 comments. Of that number, 44 negative comments were registered. Unlike the comments on the portal itself, where there are only negative comments directed towards the journalist Ana Lalić, on *Kurir's* Facebook page, in addition to such, almost the same number of negative comments are registered towards *Kurir*, *Pink*, and *Informer*. The analyzed comments are combined into numerous sub-narratives (Table 7).

FOLLOWERS' COMMENTS ON THE FACEBOOK PAGE *KURIR* CLASSIFIED INTO SUB-NARRATIVES

Table 7

KEY NARRATIVE	Journalists are enemies of the state (and by extension, enemies of their people).	Number of comments in which the sub-narrative is registered	
		Towards Ana Lalić	Towards <i>Kurir</i> , <i>Informer</i> , <i>Pink</i>
SUB-NARRATIVES	Journalists are corrupt; they publish what they are paid to publish.	7	1
	Journalists should be punished (by law).	6	
	Journalists are liars.	5	2

SUB-NARRATIVES	Journalists are working against the interests of the citizens/the public.	3	
	Journalists represent (personal) political interests.	3	3
	Everything that journalists are doing is in the service of their need for personal promotion.	3	
	Journalists have no values – honour and shame.	2	3
	Journalists deserve to be punished (infected with COVID-19 virus).	2	1
	Misogynist comments.	2	
	Journalists are mentally ill people, where hatred towards journalists is associated or intertwined with sanism.	2	
	Offensive comments.	1	6

In addition to the negative campaign in (online) media and social networks, the internet space records another type of spreading of a negative message/narrative against Ana Lalić. On 14 April, a paid ad with her name, photo, and inscription appeared on the Google store stating that “she works against the interests of Serbia”. This message reached everyone who used the app that day.

Taking into account the context in which they originated, the vulnerability and susceptibility of the audience, the influence of the senders of the message and the medium with which messages were delivered, in the case of journalist Ana Lalić, a particular subset of hate speech –dangerous speech was identified, which culminated on 1 May, 2020, with an attack on a journalist³.

³ Recorded in the Database of Attacks on Journalists of the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia <http://www.bazenuns.rs/srpski/detalji-napada-na-novinara/869>

4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

By observing all four target groups, we recognize a common thread in the narratives that connect them—on one side are ‘we’ and on the other ‘them’, who threaten us. The limited repertoire of narratives reduced to this pattern flows from the media into the public discourse where, thanks to the frequency of repetition, especially on social networks, it influences the formation of attitudes and prejudices. Migrants are credited with the most aggressive tendencies, led by the allegations of assault on women, which, in a still traditional society, resonates as a call to men to take action and protect them. They are also credited with the tendency to violently (war and terrorist attacks) want to take over our territory and impose their religion. As these are messages that resonate very easily with an individual on a personal level, especially in a specific macro and microhistorical context (from the period of the Ottoman conquests through the wars of the 1990s until the current situation with COVID-19), they carry the greatest danger because they are easily manifested through violent actions by individuals and groups against migrants. Unfortunately, the analyzed example of a young man who broke into a migrant centre is not alone.

The online space is very suitable for the creation and dissemination of hate narratives, with the almost equal role played by specific groups of like-minded people gathered on social networks and online media.

In the case of political opponents, the narratives resonate at both the collective and personal levels. At the collective level, ‘they’ threaten ‘us’—they work against the interests of the state. At the personal level, hatred towards government officials is associated with their personal characteristics, i.e. belonging to a group that is not related to the political function they perform and put in the service of political struggle. In the case of the opposition’s representative, hatred towards her as the performer of a particular function is manifested by misogyny, and in the case of the Prime Minister, by homophobia.

Since this is a highly politicized case, the same is evident in the narratives related to the journalist Lalić, except that on a personal level, we rarely register narratives based on discrimination and hatred related to gender or sexual orientation. Instead, they are dominated by those focused on the absence of human values valued as good/ appropriate (honour and shame).

On social networks, hatred is expressed very explicitly and en masse, while in media reporting, we more often register implicit hate speech, in which the described tabloid media predominate.

The results of this research once again show that the online space is very suitable for the creation and dissemination of hate narratives, with the almost equal role played by specific groups of like-minded people gathered on social networks and online media. On social networks, hatred is expressed very explicitly and en masse, while in media reporting, we more often register implicit hate speech, in which the described tabloid media predominate.

However, in the cases of media coverage analyzed in the group of political opponents, *Danas*, which is traditionally perceived as a socially responsible and critically oriented media outlet and the independent N1, we can conclude

that they also, in some way, legitimize the use of hate speech in political dialogue. Instead of comprehensively researching the topic and informing the public about different views on conflicting issues, they give the floor to political opponents without clearly distancing themselves from their messages containing hate speech. This is especially evident in the example of N1, whose journalists, trying to prove that the video was made in the “government kitchen”, completely overlooked the opportunity to answer the question of the SNS MP “what is disputable in that video?” (Referring to the video with Marinika Tepić)^[24].

5. PREVENTIVE AND EX-POST ACTIONS TO COMBAT HATE NARRATIVES IN SERBIA

Preventive and ex-post actions in the fight against hate narratives in the online space in Serbia can be classified into three groups: legal, content moderation and filters and normative actions (Faris et al. 2016).

5.1. Legal framework

The legal framework governing this area starts from the highest legal act – the Constitution (2006), where Article 18 stipulates that “provisions on human and minority rights shall be interpreted to the benefit of promoting values of a democratic society, pursuant to valid international standards in human and minority rights, as well as the practice of international institutions which supervise their implementation.”

Several laws in Serbia regulate this area. The umbrella law governing hate speech is the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination (2009), which recognizes hate speech as a form of discrimination. Relevant to the media, both the Law on Public Information and Media (2016) and the Law on Electronic Media (2016) prohibit hate speech in the media. The Criminal Code (2019) criminalizes acts that essentially constitute hate speech by including criminal offences and sanctions. In the online space, legal protection is realized in the criminal proceedings conducted by state bodies determined by the Law on the Organization and Jurisdiction of Government Authorities in Fight against High-Tech Crime (2009).

However, as representatives of civil society organizations dealing with the protection of human rights point out, criminal-legal protection is not a sufficiently effective form of combating hate speech. There are two main reasons: the procedures that are initiated are extremely long-lasting (Stojković, M., Pokuševski, D. 2018), and cases in which the prosecution initiates proceedings are very rare.

5.2. Content moderation and filters

The second set of preventive and ex-post actions to combat hate narratives in the online space is not exclusively related to Serbia. It consists of all the measures that various services and portals implement to eliminate hate speech – *terms of services* and *moderation of user-generated content*.

All observed online portals have predefined terms of service in the space provided for user comments, and they all apply some form of moderation of user-generated content, mostly post moderation. However, the mere fact that, in the cases described in this research, comments were still available on portals and social networks is a sufficient measure of the effectiveness of these actions.

5.3. Normative actions

The normative actions include all those preventive and ex-post actions that are designed to shape behavioural norms. The essential normative acts and bodies when it comes to the media, including their online editions, are the Serbian Journalists' Code of Ethics (2015) and the Press Council. Articles IV and V of the Code focus particularly on protection against hate speech and discrimination. In 2016, it was supplemented with the Guidelines on applying the Code of Ethics in a digital environment, where appropriate interpretations and guidelines were given for the successful and correct application of professional standards in the online environment.

In creating norms, the institution of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality also stands out. In 2018, the Law on Electronic Media (2016) passed the Recommendations on measures ensuring equality to Internet portals in Serbia. They are addressed to all registered internet portals and “find that all necessary measures be taken to prevent the publication of content and comments of users on the internet portal and profiles on social networks, as well as the removal of those comments that have already been published, making such content and comments available to the public, which by their nature may incite hatred or violence against persons or groups of persons because of their personal characteristics or provoke fear or a hostile, degrading and offensive environment.”⁴ Also, the Commissioner published the Handbook for Journalists (2017), which provided recommendations for non-discriminatory reporting.

Of great importance are all actions carried out by civil society organizations focused on advocacy, education, and literacy in the field of combating hate narratives that included thousands of mainly young people in Serbia⁵.

4 Recommendations on measures ensuring equality to Internet portals in Serbia. Available at: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/rs/preporuka-mera-za-ostvarivanje-ravnopravnosti-za-internet-portale/>, [Accessed October 2020]

5 A detailed overview of good practices in Serbia in: Countering hate speech online. Available at: <https://www.novinarska-skola.org.rs/sr/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Odgovor-na-govor-mr%C5%BEnje-na-internetu.pdf>

6. CONCLUSION

Online media close to the political centre of power (Valić Nedeljković, Janjatović Jovanović, 2020) and extremist groups that have found fertile ground for spreading their ideas in the current socio-economic context have been identified as the main generators of the spread of hate narratives in this research. However, hate narratives are also registered in the online media, which are traditionally considered socially responsible and critically oriented, as well as in independent media.

The basic ideas and messages that are sent are not new. They come down to the threat posed to 'us' by 'those' who threaten us. The narrative's basis is the same in all analyzed cases, whether 'they' are migrants, politicians belonging to the opposition and the government, or journalists. What is worrying is the significant share of messages/narratives calling for action against migrants, and in the case of political opponents—even though the target groups are active participants in political life in whom the degree of tolerance, i.e. the degree of suffering of criticism must be higher than the average citizen—reducing criticism to discrimination and hatred based on gender or sexual orientation.

The power of their messages in the online space, where the influences of its communicators (senders) are gathered, is also worrying. In the case of media portals, the media with the greatest reach are the most influential on the audience (Valić Nedeljković, Janjatović Jovanović, 2020), increasing their power by opening the space to influential speakers to present their attitudes and opinions, often manifested in hate speech or dangerous speech.

This research also confirmed that the largest number of messages of hatred and negative comments are found on Facebook and the user comments on media reports. As user comments on media reports are subject to moderation and governed by rules that the media outlets define themselves, it can be concluded that media outlets filter messages according to the narrative they want to generate.

With social networks, the filtering level is much lower, both with Facebook pages where the media outlets promote their content and with the Facebook pages of the groups that gather like-minded people. The causes could be sought in the following: media outlets consider that there is no editorial responsibility for the user-generated content on social networks. In large groups such as the Movement STOP Settlement of Migrants, from the analyzed comments and the difference in the total number of published and currently available comments, it can be concluded that the moderators removed a large number of comments following their rules. However, for groups that bring together a large number of members, in which a lively discussion takes place and a large number of comments are

Online media close to the political centre of power and extremist groups that have found fertile ground for spreading their ideas in the current socio-economic context have been identified as the main generators of the spread of hate narratives in this research. However, hate narratives are also registered in the online media, which are traditionally considered socially responsible and critically oriented, as well as in independent media.

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published, moderation is a rather demanding task. However, as can be seen from the analysis of legal and normative actions to combat hate narratives, appropriate means and mechanisms exist; it is only necessary to ensure their adequate and non-selective implementation.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Educate police and prosecutors to identify hate speech cases in the public space and how such speech is distributed via various communication platforms. Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice should conduct this education systematically and collaboratively.
- Ensure the continuous work of organizations and projects for monitoring hate speech and reporting these cases to law enforcement bodies and the global communication platforms dealing with this issue with the financial assistance of the Ministry of Culture and Information, European Commission programmes, and donor organizations.
- Introduce affirmative measures in the form of financial or other incentives for the media that nurture zero tolerance for hate speech in the content they produce themselves and user-generated content with the joint efforts of the Ministry of Culture and Information and Ministry of Finance.
- With the (financial) support of competent ministries (the Ministry of Culture and Information, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development), European Commission programs, and donor organizations:
 - Educate online media editors to recognize hate speech in user-generated content on all communication channels used by the media and to take editorial responsibility for all content in their online media outlets, including those published on social networks, as well as to provide resources in cooperation with the publisher/media owner for appropriate moderation and training of moderators and creation and updating of guidelines for users.
 - Educate journalists, where it is recommended to conduct content-oriented training focusing on the ethics of language use in reporting based on applied linguistics, which deals with language use in specific situations in a specific area in a particular period, as well as journalistic stylistics.
 - Strengthen programmes that deal with education and media literacy of citizens in this area, both those in the formal educational process and nonformal programmes through significant (financial) support to organizations and institutions that implement these programmes.
- It is especially urgent to implement all the recommendations mentioned above in relation to the target group of migrants because hate speech and the greatest potential of taking action against them are most often registered.

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