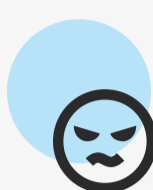


Hate Narratives in the Western Balkans and Turkey

Key research findings



Across Western Balkans and Turkey, hate narratives feed polarizations, perpetuate political turmoil and inflame animosities. The content of hate narratives is similar across the region, mirroring the historically familiar negative labelling of the Other.



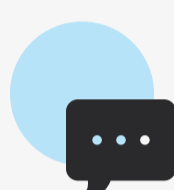
In the narrative strategies revealed in both media and user content, we see clear features of fascism, mainly the racism, nationalism and intolerance to difference, labelling disagreement as treason, and misogyny. Hate narratives, being an important part of the public discourse, threaten to corrupt the culture of public discussion and make the enmity and threats to the physical integrity and life of the Other more and more imminent.



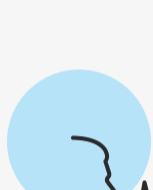
In many cases, hate narratives are clearly politically orchestrated, and mainly disseminated through media affiliated with the leading political parties. While the hate narratives identified in the research are not new, they have now been normalized to a very significant extent. Rather than being consistently condemned, they are often instrumentalized for political campaigns and increasingly seen as a regular part of public discussion.



Some platforms in the region generate and spread hate narratives and disinformation outright while others contribute to negative presentation of the “other” largely through focusing on negative events, publishing arbitrary statements, and failing to provide alternative views. In both cases, media outlets participate in the spiral of disinformation and hate, feeding distorted views and negative sentiments.



Hate narratives escalate in user comments, permeated by xenophobic sentiments, stigmatization, prejudices and hostilities, distributed both by political bots and by a part of the general public. Media outlets play a negative role when they fail (due to lack of resources and/or lack of will) to adequately deal with those user comments in which hate narratives particularly escalate.



Besides the established media outlets, the right-leaning websites and platforms established with a particular agenda have an important role in the devastation of public discourse and dissemination of hate narratives. The discourse of the propagandist media creates “portraits” of enemies that incarnate the idea of what we are supposed to hate, realizing it in such a way that we automatically recognize the enemy without thinking about the reasons behind the need to hate them.



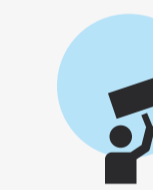
Regulatory bodies in the region’s countries sanction inaccurate reporting and hate narratives in broadcasting media to some degree. Self-regulatory bodies also react to cases of disinformation and hate speech, promoting voluntary respect for journalistic norms, but they cannot be expected to influence those platforms that intentionally or thoughtlessly spread unethical content.



The lack of policies on media transparency, particularly in the online media sector, diminishes media accountability for disinformation and hate narratives. Fact-checking and media watchdog platforms have been contributing to the awareness about disinformation and hate speech.



Across the region, there is reluctance within the judiciary to process discriminatory and hate speech and to consider the hate towards particular social groups as an exacerbating factor in criminal offences. More decisive action of the judiciary in penalizing discriminatory speech, hate speech and hate crimes would send a clear message and discourage similar future offences. The media regulatory bodies should be provided with enough resources to consistently monitor and penalize hate speech and disinformation in the broadcasting sector.



The dehumanizing discourse has become a part of his own. It reveals the urgency of deconstructing the discourse as a part of resistance to the totalitarian system. The fight against politically instrumentalized hate narratives requires a holistic struggle that should involve progressive media policies that would minimize political interference and increase media transparency.

Hate narratives about migrants and refugees

Primitive, morally inferior and disgusting

(Albania, BiH, Turkey, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo) (i.e. connected to terrorism, spreading diseases, financial burden, aggressive, criminal, violent, especially against women).

Threat to public order, security, health and/or the the economy

(BiH, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Kosovo); e.g. implicit in user comments using terms “scum”, “parasites”, “barbarians”, “plague”, “bigoted”, “breeding like rabbits”, “lazy” “opportunists”, in Kosovo “maxhup”- a derogatory term for Roma people.

Threat to cultural values

(North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo) often expressed as the projected Islamization of the country; In Kosovo, “their” culture and “their” Islam are presented as inferior.

Threatening to take over our country and eradicate our people

(Albania).

Threatening to disable EU accession

(Kosovo).

Should be attacked and destroyed

(Montenegro, North Macedonia, Turkey).

Treated better than us

(BiH, Serbia, Turkey)

Hate narratives on political opponents

Enemies of the state /people

(Albania, BiH, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey), e.g. aiming to destabilize, working against the country’s interest, traitors.



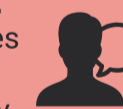
Foreign mercenaries

(Albania, BiH, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo), e.g. proponents of Russian and Serbian (in Montenegro), western or George Soros’s agenda (The latter most of all in N. Macedonia).



Dangerous and corrupt

(Albania, BiH, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Kosovo), e.g. unstable, primitive, instigators of violence, godless, vermin, thieves and turncoats, liars, irresponsible, coronavirus cluster (in N. Mac.), criminals, cowards, hypocrites and manipulators (in Albania), mentally ill (BiH).



Hate narratives on journalists

Enemies of the state /people

(Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey).



Betrayers of their ethno-national group

(in BiH for instance: “halal Croat” “conformist to Bosniaks”, “betrayed of his family”).



Politically affiliated, mercenaries:

foreign mercenaries, (Montenegro, Turkey, North Macedonia) politically affiliated (Albania).



Morally corrupt,

e.g. liars, without honour and shame, corrupt, publishing fake news, etc. (Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia).



These are findings of the research on hate narratives conducted within the project “Resilience – Civil society action to reaffirm media freedom and counter disinformation and hateful propaganda in the Western Balkans and Turkey”, in 2020, in seven countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey.