

# Hate and Propaganda Media and Narratives in Serbia



## Media system in Serbia marked by a media that systematically spread disinformation, hate speech and propaganda

 Public communication in Serbia is not based on facts, there is neither transparency nor accountability, and society is enclosed in a vicious circle of disinformation, propaganda and narratives that spread hate speech.

 The systematic financing of the media from the centres of power directly connected with the governing structure inevitably leads to a media system in which many media are imbued with an uncritical attitude towards the government's actions. This leads to the transformation of the media into the propaganda machinery of the governing structure, which is contrary to the Law on Public Information and Media and the ethical norms of the journalistic profession.

 The statements of high-ranking state officials rarely criticize the unprofessional work of the media, in which disinformation, labelling and hate speech are often used as a way to deal with political dissidents, yet such practices are characterized as pluralism of opinion and a reflection of media freedoms.

 The media that receive the most money from the state budget are exactly the media that are characterized by unprofessional work, spreading disinformation, panic and propaganda.

 The media that receive the most support from the state publish the most propaganda content, and are not critical of government decisions, while often labelling political dissidents, and spreading disinformation and hate speech.

 On the media scene in Serbia, there is a conflict between two paradigms— 'ideal' and 'power'. It is indisputable that there are laws that regulate the work of the media in a good way, yet at the same time, there are media that violate the laws without consequences, which clearly indicates that the paradigm of power is stronger than the "ideal" found in the laws.

 Although there are still media in Serbia that have maintained a high professional standard, the simultaneous existence of numerous and influential media that systematically produce content full of hate speech, fake news and propaganda contributes to Serbia being a documented country in which such a model has become an important element of the media system.

 "Champions" of spreading disinformation and hate speech are tabloids, primarily the dailies Informer, Kurir and Alo, while commercial televisions such as TV Pink and Happy TV have a leading role in spreading propaganda.

 Public service media, RTS and RTV, left out topics of public interest from their reporting, such as lack of transparency of state institutions, unsuccessful operations of public companies, cases of corruption etc.

## Hate narratives in new media forms in Serbia

 The analysis of hate narratives in online media and communication in Serbia included 195 items (reports, comments). These items reported or discussed the events involving migrants, journalists and political opponents (government and opposition) as target groups of hate narratives in the period between June 2019 and June 2020. 13 out of 16 analyzed online media had an option for readers' comments, where a total of 2,382 comments have been published.

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

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

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

 In the hate narratives, migrants are discredited by assigning to them the most aggressive tendencies, led by the allegations of assault on women. Tendency to violently (by war and terrorist attacks) take over our territory and impose their religion is also assigned to them in hate narratives.

 There are several active social media groups in Serbia which bring together individuals who most often publish or republish manipulative and fabricated information about migrants.

 In the case studies of hate narratives targeting political opponents, 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. Particularly homophobia is spread in these narratives. At the same time, hatred towards opposition representatives is manifested by portraying them as traitors. Particularly misogyny is spread in the online content about an opposition politician.

 In the case studies of hate narratives targeting journalists, they are portrayed as liars and persons with no human values, honor and shame. 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 journalist.



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