Annual report

—

COMBATING HATE SPEECH, SEXIST AND RACIST LANGUAGE

—

COMBATING HATE SPEECH, SEXIST AND RACIST LANGUAGE

Pristina, December 2022

Paper prepared by:

Allen Meta

With contributions by:

Angus Soderberg

—

Table of Content

INTRODUCTION

Since 2020, there has been an increase in hate speech on social networks. The rise in the use of social networks can be one of the indicators that prompted the increase of this phenomenon. As a result, in many different areas, an increase has been observed in disinformation, misinformation, sexist hate speech, racist hate speech, insults, foreign influence, and many phenomena that influence citizens and create false opinions but also cause political divisions.

The aim of this paper is to summarize the news in which hate speech or insulting language was used against persons with disabilities, LGBTI+ community, ethnic minorities as well as women, with a focus on potential reach and interactions on social networks.

A special feature of this report is that the news that have had the most potential reach and interactions in social networks will be presented visually, through screenshots of news that have had insulting content against the above mentioned groups.

Observing the lack of response from the relevant stakeholders, either through legal intervention, or concrete actions by the media and persons involved in spreading this language, we have researched and analyzed hate speech and disinformation in the countries in the region, but also the actions undertaken in this regard by them. As a result, at the end of this paper, we have presented recommendations for the stakeholders, based on the local and regional research.

METHODOLOGY

The report covers monitoring done between January-October 2022. During this period, **20585** articles were monitored, of which **3461** news items were analyzed (with evidence of hateful, sexist or racist content) produced by the media, related to marginalized societal groups, with a focus on women, the LGBTI+ community, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities, and shared through social networks.

In 2021, D4D launched "Monitoring of the Declaration for Good Conduct in social media during the 2021 local elections", a paper which aimed at combating hate speech, fake news, disinformation and other phenomena that usually appear during the election period. To this end, we have attempted to create a code of conduct on social networks, with commitments from political parties, candidates, media and civil society organizations. We have found 197 violations committed by political parties, candidates and the media. As a result, we have observed that despite the commitment, none of the stakeholders complied with this statement, while there were no penalties or sanctions.

During 2022, D4D developed several papers aimed at combating misinformation of citizens, with a focus on monitoring categories such as: Special Court, Foreign Influence, Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue, Political Divisions and Misogyny. All these categories have been monitored for one year in a row, resulting in the production of seven papers. The methodology used in producing these papers was the same in all of them, therefore this paper is a continuation thereof, and is related to monitoring of news by using the same methodology however with other categories of monitored news, such as hate speech or offensive language against persons with disabilities, the

LGBTI+ community, racist language against ethnic minorities
and sexist language against women.

For the purpose of the present paper, D4D has also engaged in
research in order to clarify the definition of hate speech to
readers and how we have concluded that a news item or post on
social networks contains hate speech. Consequently, we also
consulted documents related to the definition of hate speech
within the framework of International Law on Human Rights.

The United Nations definition of hate speech provides that it
refers to offensive discourse targeting a group or an individual
based on inherent characteristics (such as race, religion or
gender) and that may threaten social peace.[1]

However, there is no universal definition of hate speech under
international human rights law. The concept is generally
challenged on the grounds of freedom of opinion and
expression, against discrimination and equality.

In order to provide a unified United Nations framework to
address this issue globally, the UN strategy and Plan of Action
on hate speech define hate speech as *"any kind of
communication in speech, writing or behavior, that attacks or
uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a
person or group on the basis of who they are, in other words,
based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color,
descent, gender or other identity factor".*

The two platforms that have been used for monitoring social
networks include CrowdTangle and MediaToolkit, with a focus
on monitoring and analyzing news items ***against women,
the LGBTI+ community, ethnic minorities and
persons with disabilities***. From January to October, a total
of 3461 news items were analyzed, 1000 from each category,
meaning that we monitored and analyzed 100 news items per

———

month from each of the 4 categories mentioned above. (In addition to the news items on the LGBTI+ community, we analyzed, as much as there were, news items in their total ,due to the small number of articles published)

In total, from the two monitoring platforms, and the four categories, we came across **60** news in which hate speech was used against these groups. In addition to the use of this methodology, the focus is also on specific periods, and targeted monitoring has been carried out, based on which results can be collected within a shorter period of time.

Figure 1. Monitored news (January – October 2022)

1,000   1,000   1,000   461
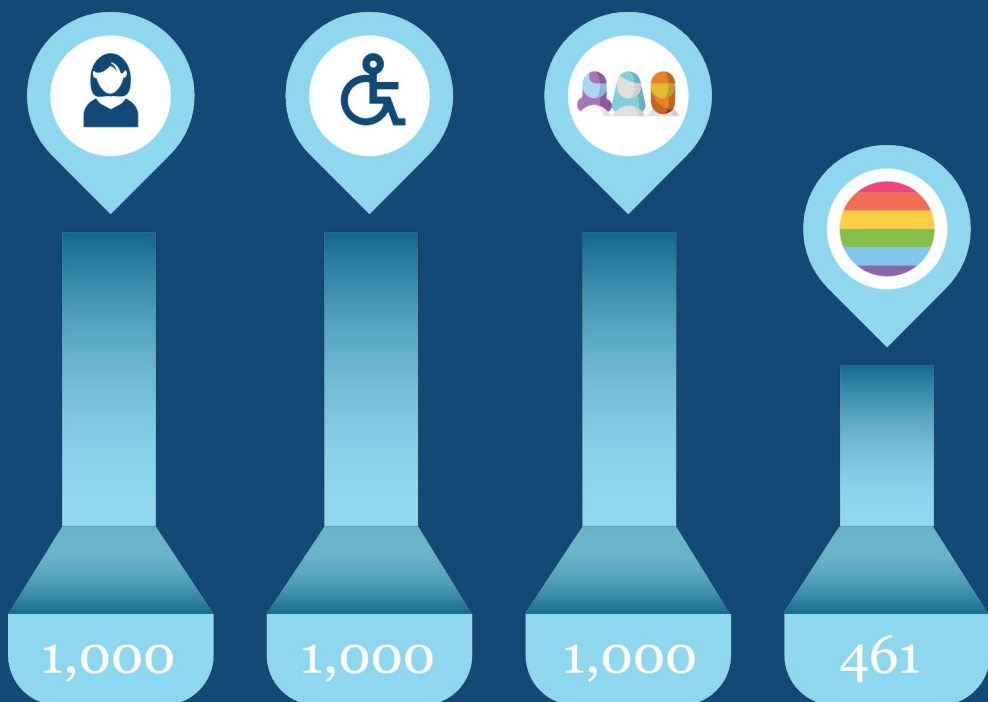
FINDINGS FROM MONITORING SOCIAL NETWORKS

In addition to cases found from monitoring platforms, during specific periods, D4D has monitored cases with high potential reach among readers, and news items that contained hate speech against one of the specified groups. These news are part of this special chapter as they belong to one of the categories that were part of monitoring, however there are cases where the monitoring of comments on social networks was also included.

During this year, the information disorder has been high, either in the comments section or in the news section. This was also manifested in a high share rate of news, but also when it comes to citizens' comments. Every monitoring period had offensive and hateful language, including towards the LGBTI+ community, ethnic minorities, women, and persons with disabilities.

In addition to monitoring done on a monthly basis, we also specifically monitored instances where we believed offensive language might be at a high level.

In February 2022, namely the period from 21-26 February, we monitored social networks for sexist hate speech, where of 100 news, we encountered 178 comments and news with information disorders that included lynch, sexist, racist, harsh language in social networks, in the news regarding the same-sex marriage law.

Based on the monitoring of social networks, another phenomenon observed is that the period from January to June saw more sexist and racist hate speech, compared to the second monitoring period, also included in this report (July - October).

Through monitoring within the separate categories, we have found sexist language, racist language, insulting language as well as discriminatory language towards one or more categories, in particular towards marginalized groups such as women, ethnic minorities, the LGBTI+ community and persons with disabilities.

100 Downloaded news items
Period: 21-26 February

178 comments and news with information disorder

"I would burn them with fuel, if I could."

"It's psychological sickness. They don't procreate. The Kosovo society won't accept them anyway. I can't stand to look at them. In a nutshell, a degeneration."

"Only Mimoza will vote it with pride."

"You are a bit late, because if it came earlier, Mimoza's brother wouldn't have needed to get married outside of the country. He would have found his luck in Gjakova."

"you are all such gypsy people, you f&*!"

LYNCHING SEXIST

HATE **Speech** RACIST

FOUL

"With Mimoza at the helm, we will get everything done. That fucking dancer..."

"Yes, we are not against, because there are many dogs in Kosovo, unmarried, and they need these people. It'll be merciful for them, as they are very agitated recently."
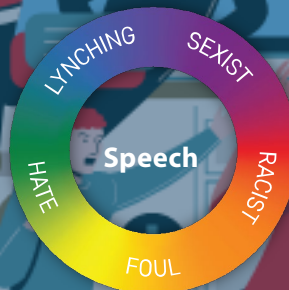
20
instances of
sexist language

211,981
reach

6,224
interactions

During the monitoring of sexist language we came across 20 cases where sexist language was used in social networks. In all these cases, the potential reach was quite high, 211,981. Interactions (likes, comments and shares) in relation to these news reached a total of 6,224.

Racist language is one of the phenomena that has a high share rate in social networks, but there is also a high rate of use of this language, not only by the persons involved, but also by the media themselves, which distribute such language, or do not prohibit it when used by third parties.

10
instances of racist
language against
ethnic minorities

467,062
reach

585
interactions

During this monitoring period (January-June) we found that racist language was used in 10 instances. These articles/news had a high potential reach of 467,062, and the total number of interactions related to these news was 585.

In addition to the sexist and racist language monitored by us throughout this period, offensive language towards persons with disabilities has been the focus of our monitoring as well. Consequently, in both the media and the civil discourse, offensive language towards persons with disabilities is unfortunately present and is used to a very high extent.

Between January-June 2022, we have monitored and analyzed numerous articles, with a focus on offensive language towards persons with disabilities.

21
instances of offensive language against people with disabilities

2,333,523
reach

52,702
interactions

During this monitoring period, we encountered offensive language in 21 cases, with the potential reach of 2,333,523, which means that the probability that each of us has seen these news is very high. Total likes, shares and comments on these articles were 52,702.

Hate speech against women

Throughout the period of monitoring social networks, a high level of use of hate speech was observed. Women are among the most targeted groups on social networks. As a result, between January - October, social networks were monitored through CrowdTangle and MediaToolkit platforms, with a view of finding the hate speech used against women.

During this period, we analyzed over **1000** news items, out of a total of **5642** articles, which resulted in **20** cases of use of hate speech and insulting language. As a result, all these news together had a potential reach of **211,981.**

One of the articles published by INDEPENDENT, a newspaper which also published its results "online" in 2017, included a research on women and the media obsession with their appearance. This research goes on to show that this type of representation [negatively] impacts women/girls to take part in politics and increases sexism.[2]

One of the articles that we will present below has the same potential, and as such should not be presented by the media, for the same reason.

The article with the highest reach among readers is the article with the headline: "After blow drying her hair, the President also ties her hair (VIDEO)". This article focuses completely on the appearance of the President, Vjosa Osmani, even though the article indicates that the event in question happened during the oath ceremony of newly appointed prosecutors. Consequently, this article has reached 48,283 potential readers, where interactions with this news item reached 1037, of which 649 likes, 387 comments and 1 share.

Pas fenirimit, presidentja edhe i lidh flokët (VIDEO)
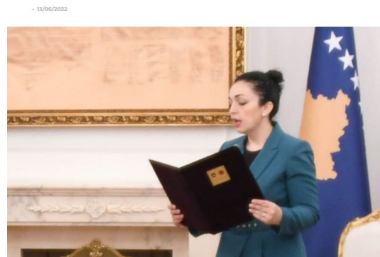
Apart from this media, this news item was shared in 11 other media/portals, and reached 14,083 readers, with 197 interactions with this news, of which, 89 likes, 46 comments and 62 shares.

The other news is about an editorial by the journalist Mero Baze, who among other things writes about the President of the Republic of Kosovo labeling her as an "Instagram girl", and then within this article also refers to the President Osmani's hair and

body, with the purpose of body shaming. This article has reached 32.060 potential readers, with 1080 interactions, of which 744 likes, 321 comments and 15 shares.

Është mirë ta shikojmë Vjosën si vajzë Instagrami

11 QERSHOR 2022, 19:13 / EDITORIAL
Mero Baze

 In addition, this news was shared in 7 other media/portals, and has reached 53,451 potential readers, with a total of 1834 interactions, of which, 916 likes, 884 comments and 34 shares. If we look at the entire calculation, this article has generally reached 85,511 potential readers, of which it had 1660 likes, 1205 comments, as well as 49 other shares.

Gazetari nga Tirana: Vjosa vajzë Instagrami që ka në agjendë urrejtjen ndaj Shqipërisë
11/06/2022 | 22:13

211,981

2,366

Likes

Shares

Potential reach

Comments

3,969

162
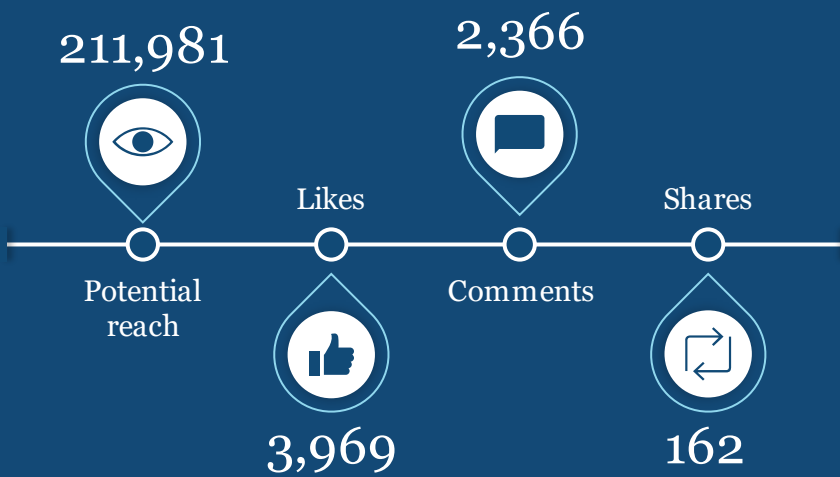
Figure 2. Statistics from social media – Hate speech against women

This year, out of **5642** news items downloaded and **1,000** news items with the highest potential reach analyzed, the sexist language on social networks appears to be high. The potential reach of this type of news included a total of **211,981**, with **3969** likes, **2366** comments and **162** shares.

Insulting/discriminatory language against persons with disabilities

D4D monitoring also focused on reporting with insulting/discriminatory language towards persons with disabilities, as one of the marginalized social groups. As such, between January-October we analyzed **1000** news items in total out of **2474** news items monitored during these 10 months.

From this monitoring, we have come across offensive/discriminatory language against persons with disabilities in **27** cases, which have had quite a high reach among readers.

The article entitled "Police raided the bar where Labi (singer) was singing: Don't put your flashlight on me as I'm not blind" has been one of the news stories with the highest reach among readers this year, monitored by us, without considering the shares made

Policia ndërhynë në lokalin ku këndonte Labi: Mos ma lësho baterinë se s'jam qorr

by third parties, outside of portals/media. Consequently, this article reached 1,973,744 potential readers, it had 48850 interactions, of which 308 likes, 56 comments and 48486 shares. In addition, this news article was shared in 23 other media/portals, and has reached 354,108 potential readers, with 3770 interactions, of which, 3226 likes, 440 comments and 104 shares.

Another article which contained offensive language towards persons with disabilities was the article entitled "How can you ask for sight from a blind person. Just like bad women - Why the people's representatives in the Parliament are insulting their own people". This news item was published after the

'Si m'i lypë qorrit sy', 'Si gra t'kqija' – Pse në Kuvend vet përfaqësuesit e popullit po ofendojnë popullin

statements that were made in the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo. While there was a reaction from the Kosovo Association of Blind Persons about this language, this language itself should not be published, or a call should be made not to use such language.

This news items has potentially reached 661 readers, and it had 80 interactions, of which 45 likes, 26 comments and 9 shares. The good thing is that during this period this news was not found by our monitoring platforms in other media/portals, and as such did not reach other readers.

Based on this monitoring, we found a total of **27** news items which contained insulting or discriminatory language towards persons with disabilities. During the monitoring, we found that the first news presented in this category had the highest potential reach, and as a result, this news/article was also taken by other media or portals and was shared further.

Out of a total of **27** news items that were served to the public on social networks, the potential reach of these news items among citizens was extremely high. **At least 2,335,920** have seen these 27 news stories, which contained insulting/discriminatory language towards persons with disabilities. There were **3607** likes in all the articles, including **576** comments and **48,618** shares.

Figure 3. Statistics from social media - Insulting/discriminatory language against persons with disabilities

2,335,920

576

Likes

Potential reach

Comments

Shares

3,607

48,618
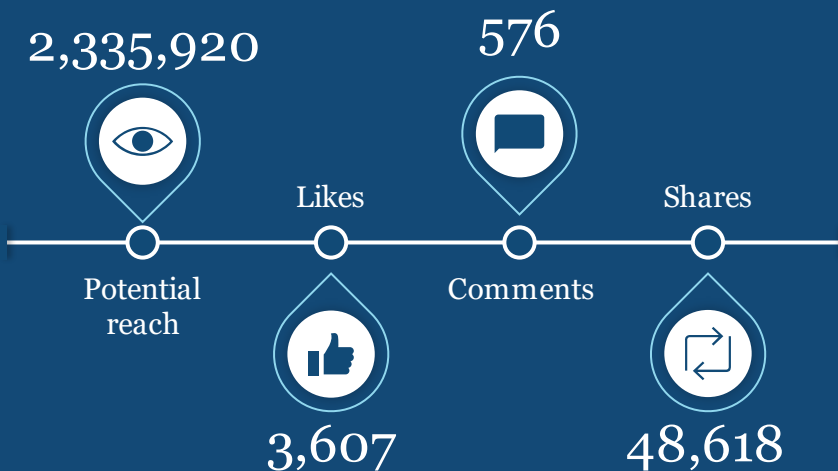
Racist language against ethnic minorities

Racist language, both in reporting and in writing, has been prevalent throughout this period, used by the media, portals, but also by the citizens themselves.

The increase in the discourse of racist language also coincided with the beginning of Covid-19 pandemic. The rise of racism was so powerful that people in general have tried to determine the culprit through the source of the problem. As a result, the issue of the virus took on an ethnolinguistic connotation/qualification when it started to be called the "Wuhan Virus" in association with the Chinese people, and people were seen as carriers or spreaders of the virus, and were dehumanized consequently.[3]

According to the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) on racist language, the use of racial identifiers in the media was there for decades, as a means of singling out those who were not white. This practice helped shape and fuel stereotypes and continues to create division between people even today.

During 2022, we monitored racist hate speech through monitoring platforms. There were **1000** news items in this category of news between January and October out of the total of **12416** cases and subsequently, we came across 13 cases which contained hate speech towards ethnic minorities.

From the total of cases analyzed, one case where racist hate speech was used is "*He is worse than s***, an enemy of students" - a grandfather who tried to attack Rrahman Jashari, insults him seriously"*. This video was published by a media at the time of the strike by the United Education Union.

———

As a result, during the interview, a person used racial hate speech and was not interrupted or even cut off when using this language, but was shared on social networks.

This video post has potentially reached at least 201,547 viewers/readers on social media. It included at least 4118 interactions with this post, of which 3099 likes, 916 comments and 103 shares.

The language of racial hatred throughout the monitoring period has been evident and in most cases, it has come through the media, allowed by them intentionally or unintentionally. Another news item that we identified during

Tre romë e vjedhin arkën e ndihmave në një furrë në Prishtinë

this monitoring period was the one entitled "Three Roma steal the donation box in a bakery in Pristina", which directly falls into the category of hate speech and derogatory language towards a certain community. Regardless of circumstances, no other ethnicity is ever mentioned during reporting/writing.

The published news had a potential reach of 130,361 persons. This news item was also shared by two other media, which also

had a high potential reach of 119,201, and was also shared 7 more times either by other portals or individuals. The third media that shared this news had a potential reach of 66,136, of which 118 likes, 33 comments and 6 other shares.

Another news was also shared by a media about a statement of the analyst, Valon Syla, which we were unable to find anywhere through our research. It was only found in some phantom portals which did not list any source of this statement, and their web pages were not functional for us to access them and see whether such a statement actually exists.

The news entitled "Valon Syla: The illiterates and the Gipsies of diaspora are coming to spread the virus", was published by this portal/media on social networks. As a result, we have researched and found that the same news was published a year earlier by some phantom media/portals at a time when diaspora usually arrives to Kosovo.

This news item was published on 21 July 2022, and it had a potential reach of 47,229 and was also liked by 211 persons, commented by 213 and shared by 2 other readers.

Hate speech against LGBTI+ community

Between January - October, D4D monitored the two monitoring platforms CrowdTangle and MediaToolkit, and no hate speech was noticed on either of these platforms.

Given that in both platforms we found only 461 news items in total, in some of the posts we focused on the type of comments that were made and how citizens reacted to the news where the LGBTI+ community was reported or written about.

As a result, as illustrated below, you will find some examples of comments that we have taken from social networks.

Jo me ju shtyp po duhet fijen me jau hup

Like   Reply   37w

↳ 1 Reply

Me ti q... Nanen stupc beisbolli deri ti ndryshohet zani.

Retweeting from a news outlet that promotes pedera dhe shkatrimin njerzore wow shum krenar jan ata je kan dhan jeten per ti me dal ktu edhe me propagandu per lezbika. Turp per tye.

12:13 AM · Apr 3, 2022
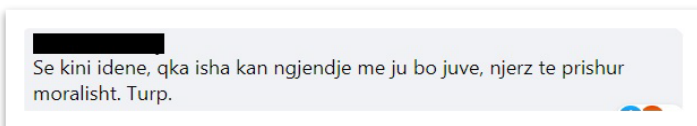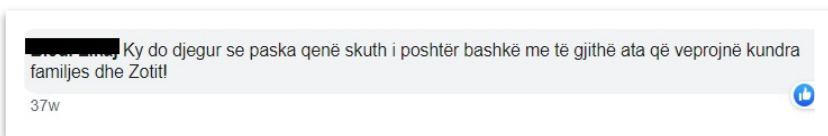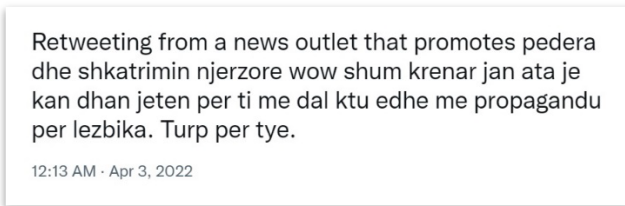
From what we monitored throughout the period January - October, we noticed that the hate speech towards the LGBTI+ community increased at a time when the Pride Parade was held or when the Civil Code was discussed. As a result, this burden also falls on the media, which in their

Si i priu gruaja me shami Ylberit: Momente interesante nga Parada e Krenarisë

reports use tendentious headlines and encourage citizens to react. One of such instances was the one presented below. The title goes: "How the woman with a headscarf led the Rainbow: Interesting moments from the Pride Parade".

What we noticed in these news, which are not published only in one media, are tendentious headlines, inciting public reaction and thus serving as clickbaits for the news.

What we have observed in the same cases is that when talking about the LGBTI+ community and holding a pride parade, or the discussion on the civil code, in TV studios, or even in the media, usually the invited guests are of religious background, with undoubtedly opposite opinions in terms of freedoms and rights, which in turn, creates a huge rise of hate in social networks, and in particular when it comes to comments towards this community.

HATE SPEECH AND DISINFORMATION IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

Regarding the issue of hate speech and disinformation that we have in Kosovo, and for a better analysis, we have also researched in the Western Balkans region to examine this phenomenon has appeared and how it is being treated.

Bosnia and Hercegovina

As with other countries in the Balkans, Russia has targeted Bosnia with disinformation about the Ukrainian war. Regarding Russian disinformation, beneficial ownership transparency (BOT) laws are required by all EU member states, but Bosnia and Kosovo have no such law in place. Thus, making it difficult to expose media outlets whose intentions are to spread disinformation and amplify Russian interests. Additionally, the Bosnian judicial system's actions on online hate speech and violence are extremely slow and ineffective.

In 2020, Bosnia introduced penalties for fake news, in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic. The criminal code also contains penalties for inciting racial, national, or religious hatred that can include jail time, however, this only applies to those who live in Bosnia.[4]

According to a comprehensive report on Bosnia's media laws and regulations, "The Press and Online Media Council acts as a

self-regulatory body and has no possibility to sanction those who violate the provisions of the code. The reach of self-regulators is limited, especially with regard to the activities of anonymous media and those who do not follow professional norms, and the Council is not responsible for comments on social networks and blogs".[5] Ultimately, Bosnia's legal regime regarding disinformation is ineffectual.

Despite having an ineffective legal regime, civil society is picking up the back end. Bosnian civil society is attempting to employ media literacy campaigns and other projects to reduce disinformation. In 2021, a pilot project was launched to strengthen resilience to disinformation, and it will run through 2023.[6]

Montenegro

A similar demographic distribution for the belief in disinformation to the one in Bosnia occurs in all countries of the Western Balkans. In Montenegro, the Media Sphere is small, and like the rest of the Balkans and has significant Serb influence, however, unlike Kosovo and elsewhere in the Balkans, Facebook is not all that popular in Montenegro.[7]

Therefore, research and data on disinformation in Montenegro is few and far between. Regardless, foreign influence is a major issue for Montenegro and was the driving factor behind the attempted coup on Dukanovic, engineered by Russian-Serbian and Montenegrin nationalists. Studies undertaken by the U.S. showed that disinformation was a factor at each stage of the coup.[8] That is not to say that domestic disinformation does not occur, as Dukanovic has provided plenty himself surrounding Covid-19 and other issues.[9] The media scene in Montenegro is

troubling, not only because of Serbian influence, but also because of low contestation between media outlets and limited access to resources. Like Kosovo, transparency of ownership is difficult to trace, making it difficult to regulate. However, according to the Freedom House report, "In June 2021, Parliament appointed a new RTCG Council, which in August appointed a new director. Following these changes, the RTCG began to feature more balanced editorial policy and more inclusive and diverse political content" [10]

Although Montenegro is a NATO member, it lacks significant legislation regarding disinformation and regulation of its media. The Law on Media prohibits inflammatory, hateful, and targeted language, but such language is rarely prosecuted because of the underfunded court system. [11] Furthermore, the law sets out a requirement for a self-regulating body created by Montenegrin media outlets, which means Montenegro lacks any centralized body for regulating the media sphere. [12] Thus, Montenegro needs significant regulatory improvement to limit the spread of hate speech and disinformation.

Albania

Albania deviates slightly from other countries in the Balkans as far as the disinformation threats it faces. Albania's dictatorship insulated the country from the first waves of external influence that the rest of the region experienced. As a result, much of the current disinformation in the country comes from the government.[13] Albania mostly faces misinformation in the form of sensationalist rhetoric, which is produced to generate viewership and not out of concern for accurate reporting. The Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, among others, is popularly accused of such behavior to boost his public presence.[14]

The media sphere is chalked full of disinformation, a Facebook analysis found that even the highest quality outlets used sources with disinformation.[15] Albania, for the most part, has seen no significant foreign disinformation campaigns. Aleanca, a prominent LGBTQ+ activist group, has reported that its staff members regularly are subject to online abuse. Balkan Insights reported that "deep-rooted patriarchal norms on societal level that legitimize and normalize violence and discrimination against women".[16]

Policymakers passed "fake news" legislation in 2019 and Prime Minister Edi Rama indicated that the law fell in line with international legislation on these issues. [17] Similarly, the constitution protects discrimination against certain groups, though in contrast it also protects free expression. [18] However, the real issue for Albania is in the implementation of its existing laws and therefore also in the judicial system. Comprehensive reform of the court system began in 2016 and is nearing its conclusion in 2022.[19] Corruption in Albania's media still exists where business and political interests continue to dominate, albeit far less than prior to the 2016 reform.

North Macedonia

As with regional politics in the Balkans, the domestic politics of North Macedonia has an abundance of divisive issues and social divisions to exacerbate. In contrast to Albania, most disinformation campaigns targeting North Macedonia are in relation to international politics. The country's likely accession to NATO has been one subject of Russian backed disinformation campaigns, however, North Macedonia's view of NATO is overwhelmingly positive.[20] Therefore, effective disinformation campaigns are those that target ethnic divisions such as the Albanian diaspora or the country's dicey relations with Greece.
[21]

North Macedonia's media sphere has changed as the country's regime has changed. During the revolutionary organization's control, the media were affiliated with the party and were used for its political gain. More recently, North Macedonia has seen significant investment from Hungary and therefore pro-Hungarian government media coverage. VMRO-DPMNE is the party most often implicated in spreading disinformation, undermining relations with Greece and the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia and has close ties with Victor Orban and Russia by association.[22] Investigators have found significant funds targeting the country's media sector from Slovenian firms owned by Hungarian nationals. The man behind this money is Peter Schatz, who owns two media outlets in North Macedonia.
[23]

Social media plays a fairly large role in the Macedonian media sphere, specifically amplifying disinformation that is put out by mainstream media outlets. The parliament has recently proposed jail as a punishment for violations of journalists' freedom of expression, trying to target those committing

censorship. [24] Amendments to media laws regarding the prohibition of racist and xenophobic language have been requested by journalists. The North Macedonian court system has a poor track record on cases regarding hate speech and discrimination [25] Overall, the law fails to regulate disinformation properly, which means that self-regulation dominates in North Macedonia.

Serbia

Serbia enjoys close relations with Russia and hosts one of the largest pro-Russian media outlets, Sputnik Serbia and the media landscape is dominated by Vucic and his party. During his presidency, there has been a noted decline in the quality of Serbia's media sphere. [26] State sponsored disinformation is amplified by TV Pink and other tabloids, which usually target the party's opposition.[27] Famous individuals such as politicians or elites use social media to further spread disinformation. Disinformation campaigns in the aforementioned countries spread by Sputnik Serbia are prevalent, but do not feature domestically in Serbia. It seems that Serbia is mostly a transmitter for Russian disinformation into the Western Balkans. Sputnik Serbia does not usually interact with domestic politics, perhaps because its interests there are fairly secure. Therefore, disinformation in Serbia can be understood as outward facing Russian backed disinformation campaigns and inward facing Serbian led disinformation campaigns.

Serbia has a fairly free and open media sphere, yet, censorship is not the major issue for the press in Serbia, rather it is the lack of regulation that allows disinformation to flourish in the country. According to Freedom House, Serbia has no specific law that regulates its online content and enjoys a relatively free

media sphere, even though the Vucic government has steadily begun eroding civil liberties.[28]

Like most countries in the Balkans there is no specific regulatory framework for the media sphere in Serbia, opting instead for self-regulation. In 2022, the government proposed changes to how judges are elected, but there are doubts as to whether this will actually change the pervasive influence Serbian politicians enjoy in the courts. [29]

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the world is becoming increasingly digital, it is important for governments to stay a step ahead of digital security issues to ensure the integrity of information consumed by citizens and media environments. The spread of disinformation and misinformation in Kosovo has the potential to exacerbate ethnic divisions, influence elections and threaten democratic values. To effectively address the spread of hate speech, misogyny and racism online, Kosovo should use EU practices and cooperate with international organizations.

This section lists policy recommendations targeting hate speech on the media platforms. The EU's Strengthened Code of Practice **(EPCD)** 2022 serves to identify media areas that need improvement in Kosovo and provides the basis for combating hate speech.

EPCD 2022 outlines the steps needed to tackle disinformation across the EU. Kosovo's hopes for EU membership depend in part on compliance with EU legislation. Hence, an effective campaign tackling disinformation and hate speech using EU techniques would increase the likelihood of membership.

The code of practice contains 44 detailed points, each with complementary parts. Three areas are of particular importance to Kosovo's media environment, include development of regulatory frameworks, strengthening of media transparency, and empowering citizens by giving them the necessary tools to identify disinformation.

The following recommendations address areas that need improvement along with the development of a legal and regulatory framework in the media field in Kosovo.

Recommendations

1 | Develop a Kosovo Code of Practice in line with EU standards contained in the Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation **(ECPD)** in 2022.

2 | Civil society and media organizations should establish a sustained and formal dialog, with the aim of supporting the development of comprehensive legislation on disinformation and fake news.

3 | Establish an effective complaint mechanism in accordance with sections 18 and 24 of the EPCD related to the development of a transparent and timely appeals system for the implementation of the code of practice.

4 | Establish or expand the existing mandate of an agency with adequate funding and jurisdiction to oversee disinformation complaints and appeals.

5 | Establish a database that contains public data on the ownership and financing of media bodies, in cooperation with civil society and media groups in accordance with privacy laws and section 10 of EPCD.

6 | Keep bank data open, updated and clear for researchers who continue to monitor and analyze media trends in accordance with section 31 of EPCD.

7 | Develop a strong media education campaign in collaboration with civil society organizations that have already undertaken this work, with the aim of developing the ability to identify disinformation.

8 | Develop a Fact-checking Community with financial sustainability and transparency based on the EU Fact-checking Communities, and ensure the work and cooperation with the work of the Fact-checking Community.

9 | Allocate a part of the budget to the Kosovo Press Council for capacity building, especially for development of the ability to monitor online 'portals'.

10 | Establish a system for publicly flagging, tagging or identifying harmful or inaccurate information based on the work of the Fact-Checking Community.

11 | Create a public database that collects data on disinformation findings identified by fact-checking communities and civil society research.

Endnotes

[1] *UN Hate Speech, Understanding hate speech, https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/what-is-hate-speech?gclid=CjwKCAiAs8acBhA1EiwAgRFdw-FrcByLJ0NbvlMn8Nmy92BwTYzD9xB4bBAcig1AS1T50qOiS8zGkhoCooQQAvD_BwE*

[2] *Independent, "Media's obsession with appearance putting young women off going into politics, study finds", Bulman May, 05 May 2017.*

[3] *Brooks, Caroline, "Ask the expert: Understanding linguistic racism" January 6th, 2021, MSU Today https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2021/linguistic-racism*

[4] *National Regulatory and Self-regulatory framework against hate speech and disinformation, Factsheet, Sokol, Anida, 2021, SEENPM, Peace Institute, Foundation Mediacentar Sarajevo and the author, pg. 5*

[5] *National Regulatory and Self-regulatory framework against hate speech and disinformation, Factsheet, Sokol, Anida, 2021, SEENPM, Peace Institute, Foundation Mediacentar Sarajevo and the author, pg. 19*

[6] *UNESCO, SocialMedia4Peace: Pilot Bosnia and Herzegovina counters online disinformation and Hate speech, UN BiH, 2021, Updated 04/2022*

[7] *Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying Wars to Effectively Counter them, Study Requested by the AFET committee, Greene, Samuel, et al., pg. 27.*

[8] *Lekic, Slobodan, "First NATO counter-hybrid warfare team to deploy to Montenegro, 2019, Stars and Stripes, https://www.stripes.com/theaters/europe/first-nato-counter-hybrid-warfare-team-to-deploy-to-montenegro-1.606562*

[9] *Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying Wars to Effectively Counter them, Study Requested by the AFET committee, Greene, Samuel, et al., pg. 27-28*

[10] *Freedom House, 2022, https://freedomhouse.org/country/montenegro/freedom-world/2022*

[11] *National Regulatory and Self-Regulatory framework against hate speech and disinformation, Factsheet, Bogdanovic, Milica, SEENPM, Peace Institute, Montenegro Media Institute and the authors, Ljubljana 2021*

[12] *Ibid,*

[13] *Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying Wars to Effectively Counter them, Study Requested by the AFET committee, Greene, Samuel, et al., pg. 22*

[14] *Semini, Llazar, "Albanian lawmakers pass fake news law over media protests, AP News, 2019, https://apnews.com/article/dd6a3063803a116f4ff109a90fca250a*

[15] *Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying Wars to Effectively Counter them, Study Requested by the AFET committee, Greene, Samuel, et al., pg. 22-23*

[16] BalkanInsight, Ristic Marija & Karic Sejla, *How online violence against women goes unpunished*, 2022, *https://balkaninsight.com/2022/05/11/how-online-violence-against-women-goes-unpunished/*

[17] Semini, Llazar, *"Albanian lawmakers pass fake news law over media protests, AP News*, 2019, *https://apnews.com/article/dd6a3063803a116f4ff109a90fca250a*

[18] Ibid

[19] Raporti i BE per Shqiperine, 2022, *https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/albania/gjetjet-ky%C3%A7e-t%C3%AB-raportit-2022-p%C3%ABr-shqip%C3%ABrin%C3%AB_sq?s=214*

[20] *Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying Wars to Effectively Counter them, Study Requested by the AFET committee, Greene, Samuel, et al., pg. 28*

[21] *Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying Wars to Effectively Counter them, Study Requested by the AFET committee, Greene, Samuel, et al., pg. 29*

[22] *Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying Wars to Effectively Counter them, Study Requested by the AFET committee, Greene, Samuel, et al., pg. 29*

[23] *Ibid,*

[24] *North Macedonia proposes jail terms for Media Freedom Violations, Magleshov Vasko, Balkan Insight, July 26, 2022, https://balkaninsight.com/2022/07/26/north-macedonia-proposes-jail-terms-for-media-freedom-violations/*

[25] *National Regulatory and self-regulatory framework against hate speech and disinformation, Factsheet, Nikodinoska Vesna, North Macedonia, SEENPM, Peace Institute, Macedonian Institute for Media and the author.*

[26] *Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying Wars to Effectively Counter them, Study Requested by the AFET committee, Greene, Samuel, et al., pg. 32*

[27] *Ibid*

[28] *Freedom House Serbia, https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-net/2021*

[29] *Stojanovic, Milica, Serbia votes on 'Positive' Judicial Reform, but Doubts Linger, Balkan Insight, January 14, 2022, https://balkaninsight.com/2022/01/14/serbia-votes-on-positive-judicial-reform-but-doubts-linger/*

The Democracy for Development (D4D) Institute was established in April 2010 by a group of analysts were increasingly worried that the state-building exercise had neglected democracy. D4D's vision is to promote an active and educated citizenry that participates fully in the public space and utilizes the public arena of representation and decision-making to deliberate and build consensus over resource allocation that is efficient, smart, long-term, and that brings about equitable development. D4D influences specific policy, promotes a cross-sectorial approach to problem solving, and tackles the institutional routine of decision making by recommending incremental improvements and operates with maximum effectiveness in order to fully promote Kosovo's stabilization and democratic development.

For more information about D4D's activities please visit our website: **www.d4d-ks.org**