

Cyber Hate and Disinformation in North Macedonia: An Overview

A toxic mix of political polarization, deep-rooted ethnic tensions, and a rise in anti-LGBTI sentiments, heavily driven by disinformation campaigns, is creating a fertile ground for hate speech across North Macedonia. Hate speech in North Macedonia is a deeply ingrained and widespread problem, recently worsened by more digital media use and exacerbated by low media literacy among the population. This issue is not random; it is deeply embedded in the country's complex social and political landscape, resulting in a significant decline in tolerant public discourse and affecting various marginalized groups. Political parties often exploit and encourage such hateful rhetoric, further harming the quality of public discourse.

What Influences Hate Speech Trends in North Macedonia?

The spread of hateful rhetoric is primarily fueled by a combination of political maneuvering and social tensions, disseminated rapidly through local media outlets and social media platforms. The political environment is a major catalyst. The May 2024 general and presidential elections, which saw a significant victory for the conservative VMRO-DPMNE party, marked an important political shift and a return to power for a party previously associated with authoritarian tendencies and media capture.

Political parties have a history of encouraging hate speech to mobilize their base, a trend that intensifies during election periods. This often manifests as aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, targeting minority groups and political opponents. The country also remains a target of foreign malign influence, with Kremlin-backed narratives often amplified through regional media, seeking to fracture the social fabric and promote anti-EU sentiment. These factors combine to create a volatile atmosphere where hateful narratives thrive.

What Are Some Current Examples of Online Hate and Disinformation?

In recent months, our monitoring has revealed clear patterns in the targets of hate speech:

- **Ethnic Minorities:** 26.5% of cases targeted ethnic groups, primarily Albanians and Roma. These narratives frequently use dehumanizing language and negative stereotypes.
- **Political Opponents:** 14.5% of hate speech was directed at political or ideological rivals, employing polarizing narratives to foster intolerance.
- **Women and Sexism:** 32% of all monitored cases involved sexism, including misogynistic attacks and sexual harassment, with female public figures being prominent targets.

Most of these attacks originate from private individuals (58%) and online influencers (17.6%). Two recent incidents starkly illustrate how these trends manifest.

1. The Aftermath of the Kočani Nightclub Tragedy. On March 16, 2025, a fire at the Pulse nightclub in the town of Kočani resulted in dozens of deaths, a tragedy that deeply shook the nation. Following this event, which claimed 62 lives, citizens organized protests demanding accountability for systemic safety failures.

In response, Milenko Nedelkovski, a journalist with a history of spreading hate speech, launched a bitter campaign against the demonstrators. He used social media to unleash harsh insults and, in one post, even called for the death of the protesters' relatives. Nedelkovski portrayed the citizen-led protests as a foreign-influenced attempt to destabilize the country. This is a common tactic used by

nationalist and pro-government figures in North Macedonia to discredit calls for accountability and dismiss them as efforts to create chaos rather than legitimate democratic action.

2. The Controversial Appointment of Petar Bogojeski. Concerns emerged after Petar Bogojeski, leader of a small right-wing party, was appointed as the new director of the National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility. This agency oversees important EU initiatives like the Erasmus+ program, which is built on principles of intercultural exchange, inclusion, and diversity.

The appointment raised concerns because of Bogojeski's well-documented history of offensive, vulgar, and discriminatory language. His social media posts show a pattern of aggressive behavior, including sexist and homophobic insults, as well as derogatory comments directed at ethnic Albanians. The European Commission was informed by CSOs of their worries about the appointment, citing potential conflicts of interest and ethical issues. Critics argue that Bogojeski's past actions are fundamentally incompatible with the European principles of democracy, human rights, and inclusion that the agency he leads is supposed to uphold. This cast serious doubt on his ability to represent North Macedonia in a European context and to serve a diverse youth population with the respect they deserve. Although it is unconfirmed whether his resignation was a result of the public outrage caused by his appointment, Petar Bogojeski resigned on June 24, 2025, as director of the National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility.

What Are the Standout Cyber Hate Trends?

The most prominent and recurring trends in online hate are cases of sexism, including sexual harassment and misogyny, alongside narratives that target ethnic groups. The rise of a coordinated "anti-gender" movement has become a significant factor. This [movement](#), comprising dozens of organizations and supported by religious institutions like the Macedonian Orthodox Church, actively campaigns against gender equality legislation and LGBTQI+ rights. It relies heavily on spreading misinformation, framing concepts like gender-sensitive education as "gender ideology" to stoke fear and mobilize opposition. This has led to a documented increase in hate speech targeting the LGBTI community.

What Is Being Done and What More Is Needed?

Current Initiatives: Civil society organizations are at the forefront of combating this issue. For instance, the Metamorphosis Foundation, uses a comprehensive methodology to monitor and analyze hate speech. Their work includes:

- Categorizing cases by the type of hate, target group, and media source.
- Using sentiment analysis to grade the severity of cases, from disagreement to death threats.
- Conducting discourse analysis to identify the main narratives and their societal impact.
- Exposing and countering hate speech through articles, blog posts, and reports to social media platforms.
- Providing financial support for anti-hate speech projects in the country and organizing conferences to foster discussion with key stakeholders.

Besides directly tackling hate speech, Metamorphosis leads the fight against disinformation, which often fuels hatred toward marginalized communities. They actively debunk false narratives used by the "anti-gender" movement and other groups to incite fear. A key part of this effort is raising public

awareness about the risks of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) and promoting media literacy to strengthen society's resilience against such manipulative tactics.

A Call for a Broader Response: The widespread and often politically motivated nature of hate speech requires a comprehensive societal response. This involves active participation from all sectors, including political parties, youth groups, media regulators, and digital platforms. While strong legal frameworks are crucial, their effective implementation relies heavily on cooperation among judicial bodies, the media, and civil society. The main goal is to build a system capable of accurately identifying, penalizing, and suppressing hate speech to prevent hatred from becoming ingrained. Regular updates to legal tools are also essential to keep pace with the changing digital landscape of hate.