

A part from my work – Hate speech during corona virus

As the situation with regard to the Covid-19 virus has been developing, so have the objects of media attention, but also of subjects and people on social networks moved. Level, vigor and number of hate speech and comments are also subject to change, either on the Internet or in public space in general.

While at the beginning of the pandemic, in the first half of March 2020, people's attention was affected by radical changes related to restricting the movement of people and getting used to social isolation, later the consequences of these unexpected changes came to the forefront of public debate. From the beginning of the pandemic, the hate speech was directed at people who could have posed as an increased risk of the virus spreading in Slovakia. In principle, these were people returning from abroad, business trips, visits and holidays, or people who worked abroad seasonally or for a long time and planned to return temporarily or permanently to their home country.

Another object of hateful comments and contributions were the so-called commuters who live and reside in the territory of our country, but travel daily or weekly to work in neighboring countries or more distant abroad. Hate speech, but perhaps in some cases legitimate anger, also targeted people who ignored the new rules, did not comply with quarantine, did not wear protective masks or concealed their travel history (travel being one of the cornerstones of the anamnesis which decided if a person was to be tested for coronavirus or not). A common motive for hate speech was the fear of the virus spreading to as yet uninfected areas of the country. This fear has been exacerbated by ongoing information on the development of the pandemic in other countries, notably Italy and Spain, with an emphasis on the daily increase in infected patients and victims of the virus.

To a lesser extent, elderly people and pensioners have also become the object of hate speech, who, in order to protect them by the state, have been set a precise time of day for shopping in shops and visiting commercial establishments and services (e.g. post office). Some retirees did not observe these set hours, which caused both offline conflicts in the queues of people waiting in front of shops and online hate speech against them on social networks.

Over time, people's attention, and thus the targeting of hate speech, has shifted to those who, due to their way of life, face an increased risk of being threatened by the virus. The vast majority of hate speech on Covid-19 currently targets socially excluded communities, and in particular the Roma ethnic group. Although in many cases fears of the risk of a virus spreading may be justified, it is the moral duty of civil society to prevent the spread of fear and hatred against groups of people who, like everyone else, are victims of the virus that all affected countries around the world are trying to bring under control.

There are several causes and sources of hatred for the Roma. On the one hand, there are long-standing problems in some areas of the country related to coexistence with the majority population, but at the same time they are prejudices that help spread not only the representatives of the far right but also the so-called standard politicians who try to abuse the wave of spreading hatred and long-standing unresolved problems of co-existence of part of the Roma minority with the majority.