

Human and Social Studies
Foundation – Sofia



REPORT

HATE SPEECH

THROUGH THE VOCABULARY OF POPULIST
PROPAGANDA IN BULGARIA, AND ITS SPREAD
IN BULGARIAN ONLINE MEDIA
(1 June – 31 August 2018)



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SUMMARY

Which media outlets and politicians most often spread hate speech in Bulgaria in the summer of 2018? And which are the most frequently used offensive terms?

Fifteen most frequently used vilifying epithets from the vocabulary of populist propaganda in Bulgaria are identified in the Report. They are the following:

- ✓ Sorosoid (*sorosoid*)
- ✓ puppet (*marionetachen*)
- ✓ grant-sponger (*grantadzhiya*)
- ✓ protester (*protestar*)
- ✓ liberast (*liberast*)
- ✓ tolerast (*tolerast*)
- ✓ Eurogay (*evrogey*)
- ✓ un-Bulgarian (*bezrodnik*)
- ✓ sell-out (*prodazhnik*)
- ✓ freeloader (*hrantutnik*)
- ✓ yes-man (*poslushko*)
- ✓ genders (*dzhendari*)
- ✓ de-Bulgarification (*obezbulgaryavane*)
- ✓ de-Bulgarization (*debulgarizatsiya*)
- ✓ Gypsization (*tsiganizatsiya*)

Bulgarian online space in the 1 June – 31 August 2018 period was researched simultaneously by two automated methods: first, with the SENSIKA system, which archives more than 3,500 Bulgarian-language websites and blogs, and second, by using Google's advanced search operators. The two systems were instructed to search by keywords for articles and blog posts containing one or more of the fifteen epithets listed above. The results of the automated searches were augmented by an analysis of the content of the articles containing these epithets.

In order to limit the research field, social networks were excluded from the study, but it is representative of all other Bulgarian-language online sources in the summer of 2018.

The chosen period of research was the so-called “dead season” in which there are usually no significant socio-political events generating and motivating “spontaneous” outbursts of hate speech fomenting division, confrontation and exclusion. Thus, the media outlets and speakers that regularly resort to hate speech during the “dead season” stand out as unprompted yet systematic users of hate speech as a propaganda strategy.

The results are the following:

These ten online news media hold the record for the most widespread offensive epithets:

Online news media outlet	Number of publications containing the specified keywords
informiran.net	70
Dnes-bg.org	61
Bultimes.com	49
Epicenter.bg	37
classa.bg	37
trud.bg	35
blitz.bg	35
pik.bg	35
Pogled.info	33
svobodnoslovo.eu	26

If aggregators (robots) – wholly automated websites republishing content from other sources – are included in the measurement, then the absolute record in spreading hate speech is held by the aggregator novini247.com, with 192 publications containing the specified keywords. Novini247.com is a robot whose algorithm is probably designed to aggregate, with priority, propaganda publications containing hate speech.

The record for number of readers' comments containing hate speech is held by the otherwise liberal news website Dnevnik.bg.

The online discussion forums where hate speech is most often found are Bg-mamma.com, the discussion forum of Investor.bg, Teen-problem.net and forum.bg-nacionalisti.org.

The most frequently used offensive epithet is the newly coined "genders", followed closely by the older "liberast" and "Sorosoid".

The politicians whose hate speech received the widest media coverage in the analyzed period are Krasimir Karakachanov, Angel Dzhambazki and, partly, Nikolay Barekov. Occasionally, hate speech was used by other incumbent or former politicians, such as Mihail Mirchev, Alexander Simov, Georgi Markov, Anton Todorov, Velislava Dareva and Borislav Tsekov.

The following events generated the most hate speech in the summer of 2018:

- The Constitutional Court's ruling that the Istanbul Convention is inconsistent with the Bulgarian Constitution.
- The Facebook post by Svetlana Doncheva, Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev's wife, about the Roma minority in Bulgaria.
- The euthanasia of sheep and goats in Sharkovo and several other nearby villages, carried out to prevent an ovine rinderpest epidemic.

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this study is to measure, analyze and inform the public about the use of hate speech through the vocabulary of populist propaganda in Bulgaria, and its spread in Bulgarian online media in the summer of 2018 (1 June – 31 August). The chosen period of research was the so-called “dead season” in which there are usually no significant socio-political events generating and motivating “spontaneous” outbursts of hate speech fomenting division, confrontation and exclusion. Thus, the media outlets and speakers that regularly resort to hate speech during the “dead season” stand out as unprompted yet systematic users of hate speech as a propaganda strategy.

Fifteen vilifying epithets which have become emblematic of the language of populist propaganda in Bulgaria in recent years were selected:

- ✓ Sorosoid (*sorosoid*)
- ✓ puppet (*marionetachen*)
- ✓ grant-sponger (*grantadzhiya*)
- ✓ protester (*protestar*)
- ✓ liberast (*liberast*)
- ✓ tolerast (*tolerast*)
- ✓ Eurogay (*evrogey*)
- ✓ un-Bulgarian (*bezrodnik*)
- ✓ sell-out (*prodazhnik*¹)
- ✓ freeloader (*hrantutnik*)
- ✓ yes-man (*poslushko*)
- ✓ gendens (*dzhendari*)
- ✓ de-Bulgarification (*obezbulgaryavane*)
- ✓ de-Bulgarization (*debulgarizatsiya*)
- ✓ Gypsization (*tsiganizatsiya*)

¹ The cognate adjective of this noun, *prodazhen* (pl. *prodazhni*), as used in the language of populist propaganda, means “venal”. In other contexts, it may mean “selling” as in “selling prices” or “selling offers” – translator’s note.

These epithets were selected from the much wider semantic clusters identified in the Report on *Anti-Democratic Propaganda in Bulgaria. Part One. News Websites and Print Media: 2013 – 2016. Quantitative Research*.² They were selected by three main criteria: 1. Functioning precisely as vilifying epithets, as verbal “baseball bats”;³ 2. Being among the most frequently used in contemporary populist-propaganda discourse; 3. Being very characteristic, that is, practically not used in any way other than for the purpose of propagandistic vilification. The only offensive epithet that is not taken from the semantic clusters identified in the 2013 – 2016 Report is “genders” (*dzhendari*), since it is a recent innovation: it was introduced and imposed in the Bulgarian public sphere at the beginning of 2018 in the campaign against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

The study on populist hate speech focused on the use of the above-listed vilifying epithets in Bulgarian online space.

To guarantee the reliability of the results, the research field was limited by excluding social networks: as the applied research methods do not allow their exhaustive analysis and the obtained results about them are random, social networks have been excluded from this Report. This Report, however, provides reliable information about practically all other Bulgarian-language online sources.

The study was structured around the following issues:

- ✓ Which online sources most frequently use and spread hate speech through the vocabulary of populist propaganda in Bulgaria?
- ✓ Can these online sources be exposed with the help of a reliable and valid algorithmic method?
- ✓ Which of the websites in question are actual news media and which ones are in fact aggregators, discussion forums, or another type of sources?
- ✓ On which discussion forums is hate speech used most frequently?
- ✓ What is the temporal dynamics, and which events – in an otherwise uneventful summer season – caused spikes in the use of hate speech?
- ✓ Which hate-speech words are falling out of use and which ones have become much more common?

² Available at: http://hssfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/REPORT_PART1_EN.pdf.

³ “De-Bulgarification” and “de-Bulgarization” are used as synonyms for the vilifying “Gypsization”.

I. RESEARCH METHODS

The frequency of use of propaganda hate speech was measured by two automated methods of identifying Bulgarian-language online publications containing one or more of the fifteen vilifying epithets (used as keywords). The first method used the **SENSIKA media analysis system**, which archives in real time more than 3,500 Bulgarian-language websites and blogs and relies on keyword search algorithms. The second was a **complementary control method** using Google's advanced search operators to find Bulgarian-language websites containing at least one of the keywords specified in the query for a particular date or date range. Both methods made it possible not only to identify publications containing hate-speech keywords but also to make various frequency measurements – synchronic differentiation and comparison of publications by source as well as diachronic (historical) measurements. In addition, they provided direct access to the publications themselves, so **content analysis** was the main research method augmenting the automated processing.

I.1. AUTOMATED CORE PLATFORM

The SENSIKA system collected and stored publications from more than 3,500 Bulgarian-language websites and blogs published in the period from 1 June through 31 August 2018. It operates on the principle of database queries, that is, it uses logical expressions that are combinations of strings of characters and logical operators and returns a list of publications in its database which match the expression specified in the query and which were published in the specified period. The system also stores the full text of all publications, which means that even if a source disappears from the internet or a publication has been deleted or hidden, it is preserved in the database for research purposes.

The publications located through SENSIKA and included in this study are only from online media, including blogs; the SENSIKA search did not include content published in social media or in comments to publications.

The results obtained through SENSIKA also allowed analyzing the frequency of use of the epithets specified in the query for each media outlet in the specified period. SENSIKA allowed identifying up to sixty online media which most frequently used hate speech.

As SENSIKA does not distinguish between aggregators (robots) and classic online media, it was the researchers' task to separate aggregators from media that have their own editorial staff and active editorial policy. Aggregators are websites that automatically republish content from other media without editorial intervention, except at the initial stage when a decision is taken as to the content of exactly which media will be aggregated and how. Following an initial editorial decision of the teams supporting them, some aggregators automatically simplify the original texts, removing hyperlinks and text formatting and reducing the number and/or size of illustrations.⁴

To identify the events that caused spikes in hate speech, the days with a peak number of publications that match the logical expression specified in the query were identified first, and then a detailed analysis was conducted of the subject matter of the publications on peak days and the extent to which they were connected to a specific

⁴ Some aggregators like novini247.com also change the titles of articles, replacing them with the first sentence of the text, and add boxes with additional information to the main text.

event. For the purposes of this study, a peak day was defined as any day on which there were more than 35 publications.

The density of use of the listed epithets was measured by the average number of queried keywords used in every publication on a particular day. The relevance of the results presumably improved with the increase in the number of such keywords – that is, with the occurrence of multiple searched-for epithets in the publications, which heightened the probability that the publications found were precisely of the propaganda type sought. This also heightened the probability that those were indeed publications generating hate speech and that they would be more emotional and seek to have a stronger effect on their target audience. The days with higher density of use of the listed epithets are indicated in the study, along with the peaks in their total use as well as in the use of each epithet.

SENSIKA found 2,590 publications containing one or more keywords in the specified period. This is the total number of publications from which the results from two types of online media were subsequently subtracted for the purposes of the different measurements: 1. Results from discussion forums – leaving approximately 2,000 publications; 2. Results from aggregators and media outlets which, according to the Media Eye Project criteria, are not news media – leaving approximately 1,800 publications.

I.2. AUTOMATED COMPLEMENTARY METHOD

The complementary method of data retrieval from the internet used the Google search engine to search for the fifteen specified keywords in the period from 1 June to 31 August 2018. This was done with the help of an advanced search string, using Google's advanced search operators to search for Bulgarian-language hypertext documents containing at least one of the keywords in the specified period. For each document found, each of the found keywords was noted and the article containing it was identified.

In principle, one of the limitations of such a method is its inability to algorithmically distinguish the content of main texts (articles) published in the name of a media outlet or its official (columnists) or guest authors, on the one side, from users' comments to articles on the other. In extreme cases, comments can be identified automatically at the lexical level, as they stand out for their abundant use of hate speech, name-calling and occasionally obscene language. But not all cases fall into this category, therefore it is generally difficult to distinguish comments to articles from the main text entirely automatically, without the use of specialized software and careful manual review.

Applying this method, approximately 2,000 publications in the specified three-month period were found on the internet; after a review and filtering of the irrelevant matches, their number was reduced to slightly over 1,700. In this number, the websites are listed as many times as the keywords found in them. The unique hypertext documents containing such language are approximately 1,500, from a total of 235 sources. Most of these sources are online media outlets, but there are also blogs, personal websites and pages on social media whose popularity is comparable to (or higher than) that of media outlets.

In Google search, if a given publication is deleted in its source, it is removed from the list of search results and is therefore not included in the results obtained under the complementary method in this study. Unlike Google, the SENSIKA system displays a selection of publications matching the query in the search results from all publications that are stored in its own permanent archive of downloaded content. Unlike the search results displayed in Google, such publications are always processed and shown in the SENSIKA search results regardless of whether they are still online at the time of searching.

Usually, but not always, Google includes in the list of search results publications containing different forms of one and the same word. It may omit some of the forms –

especially when the search strings contain words in languages other than English, usually in languages with a relatively weak presence on the internet such as Bulgarian (compared to the major world languages). SENSIKA has an advantage in this regard, too. Given the peculiarities of the Bulgarian language, using the asterisk (*) as a wildcard, for example in “Sorosoid*”, allows identifying a large number of derivative forms of the word, where the asterisk can be replaced with all sorts of combinations of characters – in this particular case, mostly morphological forms and derivatives like “Sorosoids” (*sorosoidi*), “the Sorosoids” (*sorosoidite*), “Sorosoid-like” (*sorosoiden*), etc.

Searching a predefined list of online media differs significantly from an open web search with Google or with another search engine – it requires smaller computational resources, is usually much faster and is within the capacity of smaller companies. Unlike SENSIKA, Google searches the whole internet and retrieves more occasional publications containing the searched-for keywords which might occur only once in a particular media outlet. In addition, Google search results provide a link to the site where a given publication was published for the first time. When a given publication has been republished in other online sources not by robots (as in the case of aggregators) but by humans – as, for example, on www.bultimes.com, whose publications contain correct references to the original source, for instance, to Facebook posts or to www.pogled.info – they likewise rarely if ever appear in the Google search results. Unlike Google, which avoids showing the republishing websites in its search results (and therefore does not rank online content aggregators in higher positions in its search results, or does not show them at all), SENSIKA records with equal weight all cases of republishing without specially taking into account where the publication was first published.

For the needs of this study, we could imagine three different ways of locating publications containing the searched-for information on the internet, depending on the scope and search method: 1) by using a search engine (in this case, Google) or the so-called search in the open web; 2) by searching in a predefined list of online sources whose content has been downloaded locally precisely for further research; 3) by searching for information in social networks by using their built-in search engines. The complementary research method used the first two of those ways, which presuppose a more active approach on the part of the user; they were applied autonomously during the collection of empirical material. All publications or information sources which match the queries and which were found by at least one of the two methods, were analyzed. The third way of obtaining information, by searching social networks, which is used quite often, was not used in this study. The processes of publishing and finding information in social networks are a separate, major subject and, because of the characteristic features

of the different platforms, differ significantly from the traditional search for information and use of online media. Still, insofar as SENSIKA covers practically all Bulgarian-language online sources apart from the social networks, it can give a better idea about which sources exactly are shared or trigger additional reactions on social networks.

It is quite probable that searching a predefined list of online media (websites) is closer to the typical behaviour of readers who regularly visit a predefined list of internet favourites to check out what's new.

II. RESEARCH RESULTS

II.1. QUERY THROUGH SENSIKA

This study used the following query:⁵

Content_language: Bulgarian AND

*sorosoid** [Sorosoid*]

OR *marionetach** [puppet*]

OR *grantadzhi** [grant-spong*]

OR *protestar** [protester*]

OR *liberast** [liberast*]

OR *tolerast** [tolerast*]

OR *evrogey** [Eurogay*]

OR *bezrod** [un-Bulgarian*]

OR *prodazhni** [sell-out*/venal]

OR *hrantut** [freeload*]

OR *poslushko** [yes-m*]

OR *dzhendari* [genders]

OR *obezbalgaryavane* [de-Bulgarification]

OR *debalgariz** [de-Bulgariz*]

OR *tsiganiz** [Gypsiz*]

AND NOT

“prodazhni tseni” [“selling prices”]

OR *“prodazhnite tseni”* [“the selling prices”]

OR *“prodazhni oferti”* [“selling offers”]

OR *“prodazhnite oferti”* [“the selling offers”]

OR *Evrogeyms* [Eurogames]⁶

⁵ The asterisk (*) acts as a wildcard, that is, the search will yield all publications containing a word that starts with the letters preceding the asterisk. In the case of Bulgarian, this means almost all inflected words sharing a common root (nouns, adjectives, in masculine, feminine, and neuter, singular and plural, with and without the definite article), which improves the representativeness of the results.

⁶ This part of the query, which is after “AND NOT”, serves to filter out irrelevant results.

II.2. AGGREGATORS AND MEDIA THAT MOST OFTEN USE HATE SPEECH

Figure 1 shows 56 Bulgarian-language online media which most often use and spread hate speech through the vocabulary of populist propaganda.

Figure 1. Fifty-six Bulgarian-language online media, including blogs, using the listed propaganda epithets. Aggregators of content are marked with an asterisk (*). The number represents the number of publications in each media outlet containing one or more of the fifteen vilifying epithets.

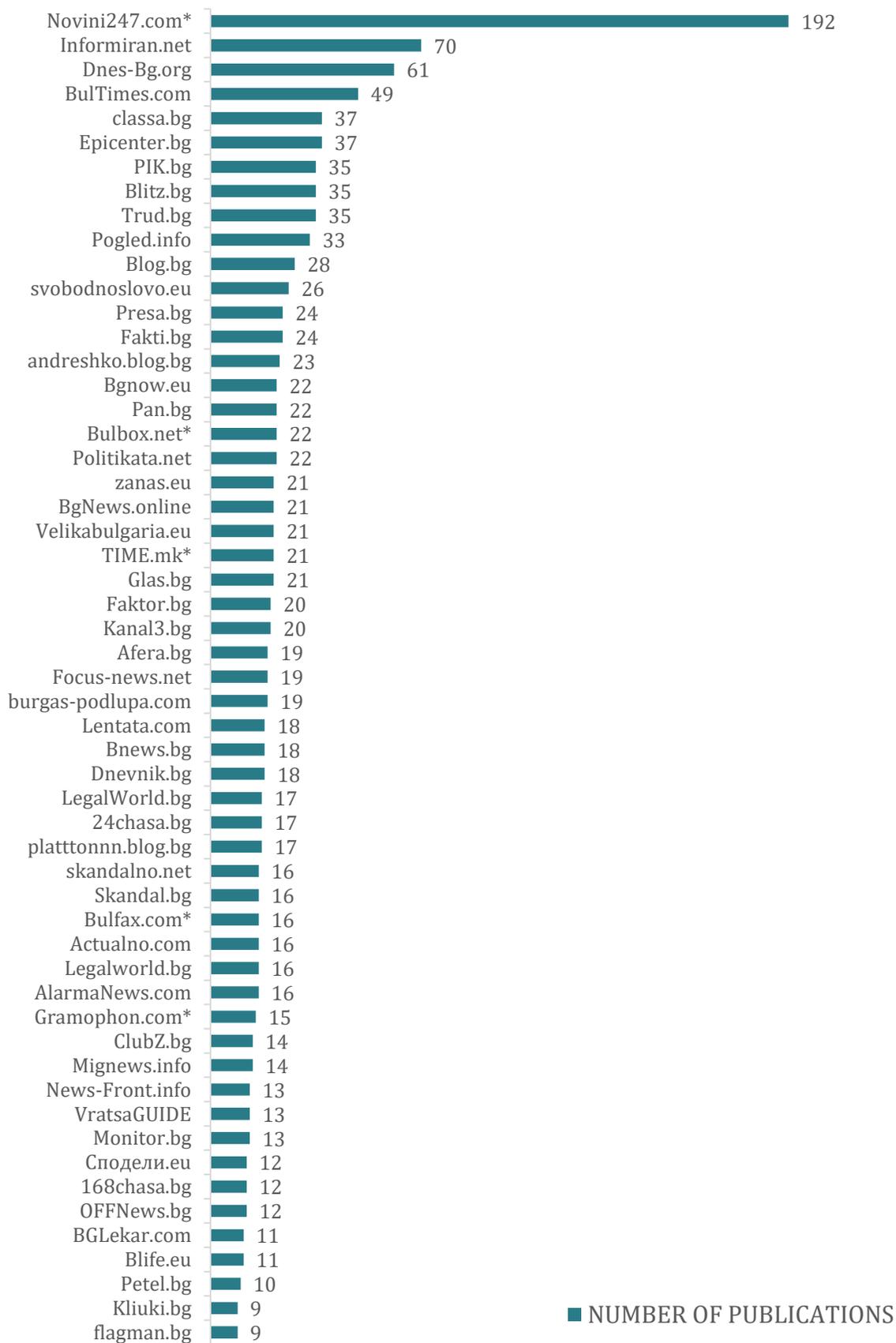


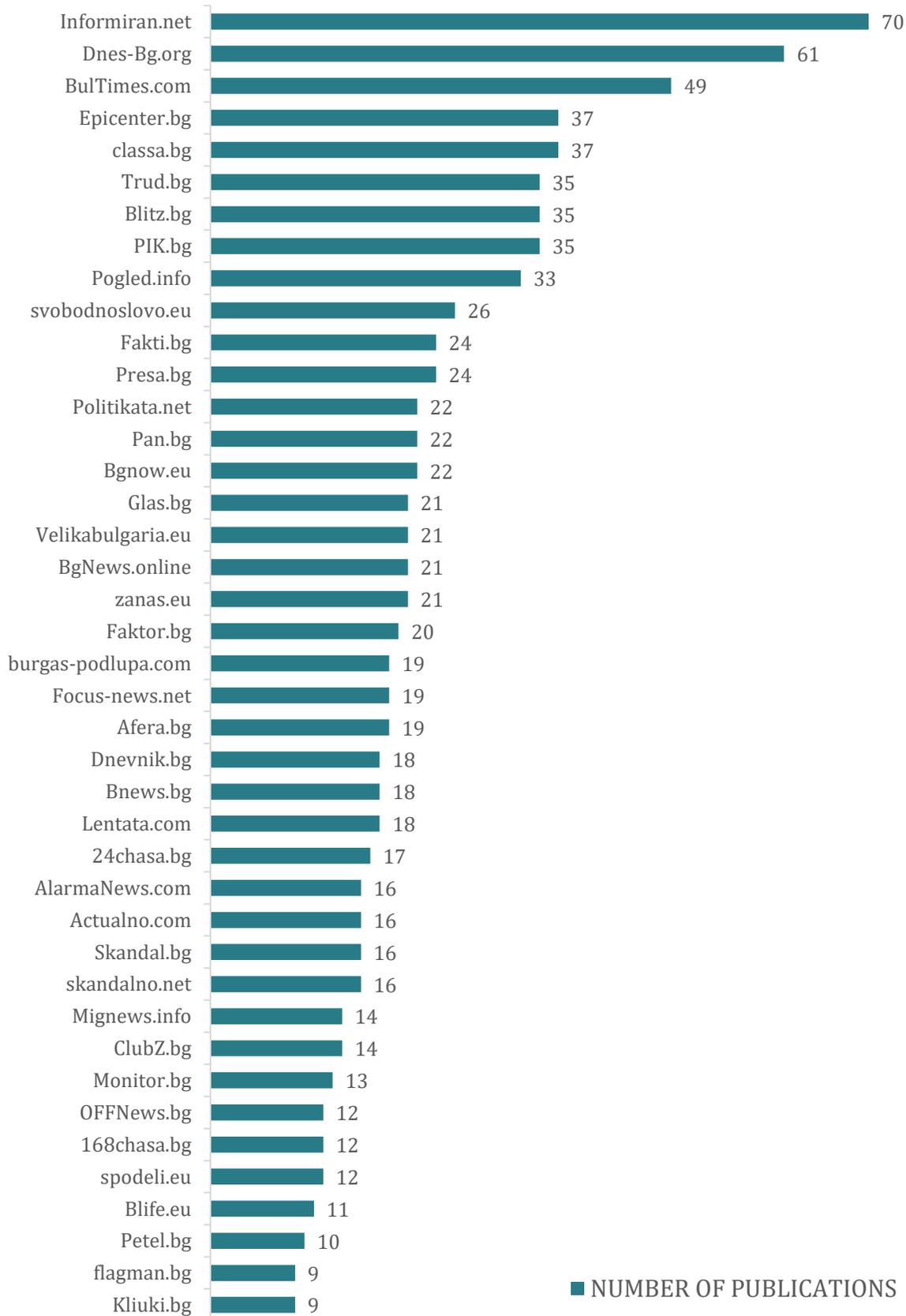
Figure 1 includes aggregators as well as blogs and news-analysis websites. Although aggregators are considered to be neutral with regard to content since they do not have editorial staff, they differ greatly in thematic focus and political tone because of the initial editorial decisions as to the content of exactly which sources will be aggregated and how. Thus, the aggregator novini247.com is by far the biggest source of publications containing propaganda hate speech, while the presence of such publications in the other aggregators – bulfax.com, TIME.mk, bulbox.net, gramophon.com – tends to be token.

In addition to the sources found through SENSIKA, the single other media outlet using hate speech in its main content that was identified by the complementary method is vestnikutro.com, with 14 articles using the offensive epithets.⁷

Figure 2. Presence of hate speech in online news media listed as such by the Media Eye Project.⁸ The number represents the number of publications in each media outlet containing one or more of the fifteen vilifying epithets.

⁷ The website vestnikutro.com is not included in the Media Eye Project's list of anonymous and unethical media (see footnote 8). However, it is a news-analysis website and can be defined as anonymous because although its publisher is indicated (Balgarski Pechat), no editorial staff is indicated and, furthermore, most of the articles on it are anonymous.

⁸ Online sources that do not meet the narrower definition of online news media were excluded on the basis of the Media Eye Project's list of media. Media Eye is a project designed and developed by Krassimir Gadjokov, whose goal "is to keep the average reader aware about which Bulgarian political and policy news online-media are anonymous or break the elementary media ethics in a democratic society"(see <https://mediascan.gadjokov.com/about-eng>). Media Eye's list of media, which is a catalogue of Bulgarian online news-analysis media, does not include the following categories of online sources: national TV and radio-station websites; media specialized in topics that are not connected primarily to politics and public policy – such as health and medical advice, sports, arts, technology, science, the occult, travel, entertainment, hobbies, the unexplained, etc.; personal blogs with clearly identified owners and authors; national government and local government websites; websites of businesses and organizations (unless they publish public-opinion related news); sub-sites of national news websites, usually geographically focused; Bulgarian-language websites with a clearly identified foreign owner. Media Eye's list was used here only and solely for distinguishing news-analysis websites providing social-political news and commentary from other kinds of websites. However, Media Eye's additional classification of online media as spreading "sensations", "fake news", "hate speech", etc., was not used, insofar as the methods used in this study are entirely different from Gadjokov's – here hate speech was identified through automated keyword search and subsequent content analysis, not through identification of individual publications.



According to Media Eye, **12** or less than one-fourth of **the total of 41 websites** identified by SENSIKA as spreading propaganda hate speech are completely anonymous because there is no information on the ownership, editorial staff and physical address of the media at the website itself.⁹ The ranking of media using hate speech shows that the top three places in terms of frequency of use of hate speech are occupied by informiran.net, dnes-bg.org and bultimes.com. According to the Media Eye Project, informiran.net is a completely anonymous website, dnes-bg.org is a website of the Movement for National Unity and Salvation, and bultimes.com is owned by VIP Catering Company EOOD, headed by Krum Filyovski. The presence of Dnevnik, Club Z and offnews.bg on the list of online news media using hate speech is due to publications quoting statements and declarations of political speakers and politicians as well as to articles analyzing public sentiments and citing phrases and epithets that are popular in Bulgarian society. These media outlets also publish analytical pieces copied from social media posts, which use elements of hate speech. None of the publications in Dnevnik, Club Z and offnews.bg containing propaganda language is signed by a member of their editorial staff or published anonymously. The data obtained by the two research methods show another important result as well: the very fact that some keywords from the vocabulary of anti-liberalism and populism are found in a particular media outlet does not mean that the respective publications have anti-liberal content. The key epithets are found also in quotations, occasionally intended to argue against, or to distance the author from, hate speech. A case in point is Dnevnik, which often argues against anti-liberal populist propaganda by quoting it and, in addition, runs a “Quote of the Day” section. Another such example is Mediapool.

Dnevnik is an interesting case for another reason, too: SENSIKA, which automatically excludes readers’ comments from the search, found only 18 publications in Dnevnik quoting hate-speech epithets. Google, which searches the whole text of hypertext documents and shows a result in the list of search results regardless of whether the searched-for epithet is in an article in an online media or in a comment to an article, returned 523 results for Dnevnik. The conclusion is that the comments to articles on the liberal website Dnevnik are heavily contaminated with anti-liberal hate speech.

⁹ The criteria applied by the Media Eye Project in defining an online media outlet as anonymous are very strict. If the website has indicated even just a single contact person and formal legal entity as its owner, which cannot possibly maintain such an information source for financial, technical or media reasons (for example, because of lack of any know-how on the subject in question), the website is listed as non-anonymous.

II.3. HATE SPEECH IN NON-NEWS MEDIA

II.3.1. MEDIA MISMATCHING THE MEDIA EYE PROJECT'S CRITERIA

Several specialized websites for professional communities, such as legalworld.bg (legal professionals) and bglekar.com (medical professionals), as well as the regional portal novini.vratsa.eu, which also use propaganda hate speech, are not included in the Media Eye Project's list. Neither is the Crimea-based news portal news-front.info¹⁰ because by the Media Eye Project's criteria, it is not a Bulgarian media outlet.

II.3.2. BLOGS

SENSIKA collected information about the blogs published on the platform blog.bg. In blog posts, first among the antagonists in the analyzed period are the Sorosoids (and all sorts of derivatives – “Sorosoidism”, “the paid Sorosoids”, etc.) as well as the various kinds of “venal sell-outs”, “liberasts”, “the Gypsies” and subsequent “Gypsization”, and “genders”.

III.3.3. DISCUSSION FORUMS

SENSIKA found four online discussion forums (see Table 1) whose users use hate speech.

Table 1. Forums on which hate speech is used

Discussion forum	Number of posts
Bg-mamma.com	308
The discussion forum of Investor.bg	147
Teen-problem.net	44
forum.bg-nacionalisti.org	34

¹⁰ This Crimea-based media outlet describes itself as follows: “Information Agency NEWS FRONT – the volunteer-soldiers on the information front engaged in an uneven battle with cynical lies, falsifications, hypocrisy, manipulations and disinformation – that is to say, this is a weapon of mass destruction which the West is using against all of us in a new-generation colonial war of aggression.”

The unexpected leader among discussion forums is Bg-mamma, where hate speech is used in several discussion threads, some of which with tens of thousands of posts, regarding nostalgia for the totalitarian communist regime in Bulgaria, migrants and refugees in Europe, the Roma minority's rights and duties, the protection of women against violence, gay marriage, Ottoman rule and its attendant social phenomena – blood tax, forced Islamization, etc. – as well as the removal of children from their families in Norway. The antagonists mentioned in these discussion threads are “the Sorosoids” (or even George Soros himself), “the grant-spongers” and “genders”, but also “the smart and beautiful”, “the Eurogays”, “the liberasts” (including “liberasty”).

Second place is occupied by the discussion forum of Investor.bg, where (unlike this news-analysis website itself, where the search did not find a high frequency of use) hate speech is used in the discussion threads about the residential property price rise where forum participants discussed the attitude of the “un-Bulgarians” who are “smearing everything Bulgarian”, about the price of gold, about political issues, including the attitude towards US President Donald Trump and Ukraine. The major antagonists on the forum of Investor.bg are “the Sorosoids”, “the Sorosoid gang”, “the Sorosoid idea”, followed by “the tolerasts” (“tolerasty”), “the liberasts” (“liberasty”) and, to a lesser extent, “genders” and “un-Bulgarians”.

Third is the Teen-problem.net forum, where almost all examples of hate speech are found in one thread about liberalism and its carriers (according to the speakers on the forum) – the liberasts, who are also the main antagonist of hate-speech users.

Fourth is forum.bg-nacionalisti.org, where the main topic is the attitude towards Russia and its policy, which is mostly negative, but there are also users openly supporting Russia's policy. Another main topic in the discussions on this platform are the falsifications of the historical truth and the attempts to determine who stands to gain from them. The main epithets used on this forum are “*rubladzhii*”,¹¹ “Sorosoids” (and derivatives), and “venal”.

The data obtained by the complementary research method show that the most frequently used epithets on discussion forums in the analyzed period are “genders” and “tolerast”, followed by a group of closely connected offensive words – “freeloaders”, “venal”, “un-Bulgarians” and “yes-men”, and the definitions “Sorosoid” and “grant-sponger”. Next is the keyword “Gypsization”, which is often used on its own and is much

¹¹ “*Rubladzhii*” (ruble-paid fifth-columnists) is not among the fifteen epithets selected for study, but in this particular online media it is used intensively and in constant comparison or contrast with the epithet “Sorosoids”.

more popular than the synonyms “de-Bulgarification” and “de-Bulgarization”. “Protester”, “liberast” and “Eurogay” are used comparatively more rarely.

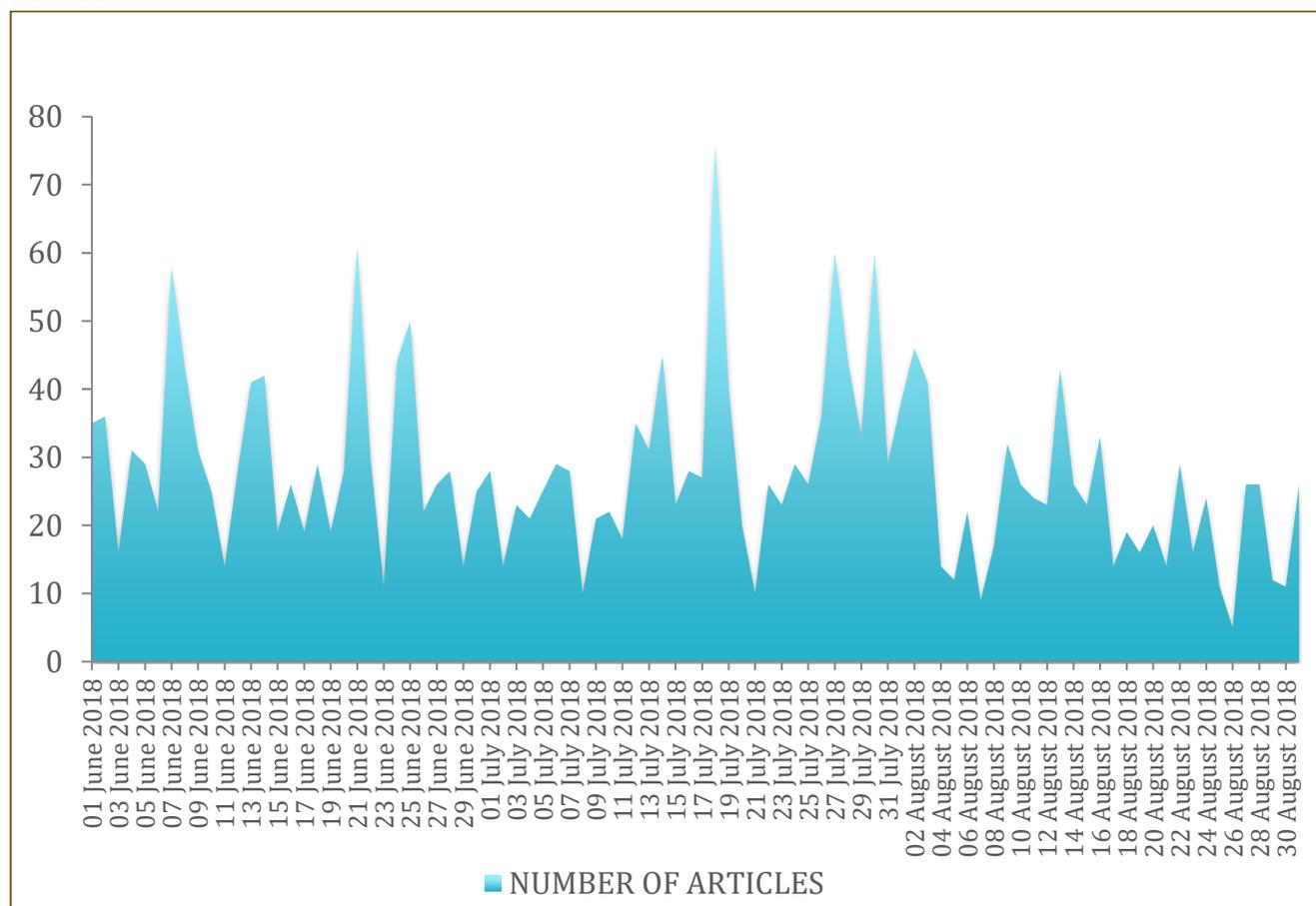
In all media that have comments sections the epithets in question are found much more frequently in the comments than in the articles themselves – regardless of whether the articles are anti-liberal and propagandistic in content, or simply cite and argue against this type of positions. In both cases they are very likely to spark furious debates in the comments which contain hate speech, including the keywords researched in this study. Hate speech abounds in the comments sections of some sports news media (because of the specificity of their audience), although their main articles usually have nothing to do with current political issues.

II.4. HATE-SPEECH TIMELINE: EVENTS THAT RECEIVED THE WIDEST COVERAGE IN ONLINE NEWS MEDIA BETWEEN 1 JUNE AND 31 AUGUST 2018

There were no major social and political events in Bulgaria in the summer of 2018. The only exception was the Constitutional Court’s ruling that the Istanbul Convention is inconsistent with the Bulgarian Constitution. Of course, this ruling generated hate speech. But it wasn’t the only thing to do so: hate speech was used throughout the summer. What else generated it?

The dynamics of the use of hate speech in Bulgarian online media (see Figure 3) shows distinct spikes – on 7, 14, 21 and 24–25 June, 14, 17, 27 and 30 July, and 13 August.

Figure 3. Dynamics of the use of propaganda hate speech in Bulgarian online media



In June hate speech through the vocabulary of populist propaganda spiked on Thursdays – on 7, 14 and 21 June.¹² The event that received the widest coverage in online news media was a Facebook post by Svetlana Doncheva, Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev’s wife, in which she commented on the policy towards the Roma minority and declared that there were no more “carrots” for “the Gypsies” – it was time for “the stick”. In addition to the fact that Svetlana Doncheva herself attracted strong media attention, this caused other political reactions as well – most notably, those of her husband, Tomislav Donchev, and of MEP Angel Dzhambazki, whose Facebook post regarding Mrs. Doncheva’s comments is the most quoted and reprinted media reaction in the analyzed period.

The absolute peak in publications containing hate speech was on 17 July 2018. However, they were not devoted to a single event or topic, but to several different ones. The most discussed topic in this period was the euthanasia of sheep and goats in the Mount Strandzha village of Sharkovo and several other nearby villages because of an outbreak of ovine rinderpest in the area, and the protests against it. Both the event itself and the comments on it triggered a wave of media reactions that continued after 17 July. Some speakers on the topic suggested it was possible that the outbreak of the deadly disease could have been deliberately caused by neo-Ottomanists, or that the sheep and goats could have been infected by refugees who had probably crossed the border illegally. Miroslav Naydenov, former minister of agriculture and forestry in Boyko Borisov’s first government, blamed GERB Floor Leader Tsvetan Tsvetanov. Accusations were also leveled against the Greens, who were accused of not protesting enough against the culling and of going to the seaside on holiday instead. On the other hand, journalist and former politician and former diplomat Velizar Enchev was indignant that the government was too susceptible to the protesters’ demands.

Another important topic at that time was the America for Bulgaria Foundation’s grants for Bulgarian media outlets. This topic was discussed most intensively between 16 and 18 July.

In a separate development, GERB MP and former Constitutional Court judge Georgi Markov declared that Europe had found itself “with its pants down” because of the influence of the “neoliberal mob”. Literary critic, historian and former member of the Varna Municipal Council Panko Anchev added that the Bulgarian language and the

¹² This regularity is interesting, but we have no reliable explanation for it. Those weekly spikes could be accidental, but they could also be due to a PR strategy: the articles published towards the end of the week are usually visible also on weekends because there aren’t enough new publications to displace them.

Bulgarian state of the spirit were dying under pressure from Europe (“the European” is killing “the Bulgarian”) and called on Bulgarian writers to denounce “the misunderstood civilization” posturing under the masks of “European values”, “globalization”, “civilizational choice”, “pragmatism”, “tolerance” and “other suchlike disgusting bullshit”.

On 19 July 2018 the main topic was a picture of two children, approximately four or five years old, who wanted to collect “small change” (*parichki*) so that “Granny Dora¹³ could buy herself small goats” (*kozichki*).

On 27 July 2018 the Constitutional Court ruled that the Istanbul Convention is inconsistent with the Bulgarian Constitution, suggesting that it promotes “gender ideology”. This event triggered a new spike in hate speech. Alexander Urumov, Defence Ministry spokesman, wrote a triumphant analysis about the historic victory over “Soros’s corporation”, “the Sorosoids”, “gender-organizations”, “the servants of Soros” and of “the liberastic Clintonian clique”, as well as over “the gender-coalition of Sorosoid origin Yes, Bulgaria”.

On 30 July 2018 the reactions to the Constitutional Court’s ruling against the Istanbul Convention continued. They included detailed analyses of the failure of the Convention in Bulgaria, such as those by Ognyan Minchev¹⁴ and Evgeny Daynov,¹⁵ as well as articles praising the Constitutional Court’s ruling against the Istanbul Convention and claiming there were conspiracies behind the circles that had supported the Convention.

As was to be expected, August was the month with the weakest media activity in general, including with regard to publications containing hate speech. In August there was a single day with more than 35 publications containing the searched-for propaganda epithets – 13 August. These publications were not reactions to a single event; they were reactions to several events, peaking on that day. Among those were the reactions to the anti-government protests in Romania which happened on the same day. These protests were interpreted mostly negatively in Bulgarian online media – for example, as the desire of “3% Sorosoids” to get 33% of the seats in the Romanian Parliament.

¹³ Granny Dora is a farmer from the village of Sharkovo who became popular because of her radical opposition to the euthanasia of sheep and goats.

¹⁴ Ognyan Minchev himself did not use hate speech, but he was repeatedly quoted by media outlets that used hate speech to frame his comments.

¹⁵ Evgeny Daynov discussed the use of hate speech in the resistance against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

Other reactions on 13 August include former politician and now NGO activist Borislav Tsekov's comment on "the militant ignorance, lack of functional literacy and the typical unawareness" of "grant-sponsored jabberers and Sorosoids", again pointing out the fatal, in his view, role of "gender ideology" for Bulgarian society. Former deputy editor-in-chief of the Duma daily, journalist and writer Todor Koruev denounced "the lies of liberals and un-Bulgarians", as he calls them, in his comments on Anton Donchev's novel *Time of Parting*. An article in which former BSP candidate for Sofia Mayor, Prof. Mihail Mirchev, defines the GERB party as the most powerful mafia-like force in Bulgaria, contains also a series of statements with hate speech, which were widely quoted and generated a similar response.

The data obtained by the complementary research method show that, on the whole, there was no distinct tendency in the simultaneous use of the vocabulary of anti-liberalism and of hate speech in the analyzed period of three months. The dynamics of their use resembles random wandering. Towards the end of the analyzed three months there were indications of a coming sharp increase – probably because of the end of summer and the beginning of a new media and political season. The increase in intensity could be due also to purely technical reasons in the Google search algorithm which gives priority to the most recently published materials.

In the use of some words there were periods of greater intensity connected to specific events, although the summer season was not particularly intensive in this respect. The use of the word "genders" increased in the period around and after the Constitutional Court's ruling against the Istanbul Convention (at the end of July). Anti-Roma hate speech was also present evenly in online media, with spikes caused by certain (negative) events or incidents – physical fights, scandals – or by statements or publications about the Roma by well-known people. Since the Roma are the traditional scapegoat in all other political and media debates, the increase in publications mentioning the Roma in negative terms occurred in periods of more intense debates on other topics generating anti-liberal sentiments (for example, the Istanbul Convention).

The use of the epithet "Sorosoid" correlates relatively well with almost all contexts in which populist-propaganda rhetoric appears. The "Sorosoids" appear both in the discussions on "gender ideology" and on the Roma. They are the most general "term" in the vocabulary of populist propaganda in Bulgaria.

The stable use of the hate-speech epithets and their peaks (especially those that were not connected to the Istanbul Convention) as well as the fact that one and the same media outlets and speakers spread this language, confirm the conclusions from the HSSF's previous studies, namely that **hate speech is an (important) part of the more general populist-propaganda language that is disseminated strategically.**

II.5. POLITICIANS USING HATE SPEECH

The two politicians who received the widest media coverage and who used hate speech through the vocabulary of populist propaganda intensively in the analyzed period are VMRO's Krasimir Karakachanov and Angel Dzhambazki. In their account, the main antagonists are "the Gypsies", "marginal and extreme people who do not wish to observe the laws of our country", "the various liberal NGOs and their claquers", "the criminal Gypsy contingent" (Karakachanov) and "the hypocrites", "the illiterate, incapable, unadaptable, non-socialized degenerates", "the parasites from the various Sorosoid committees", "the phoney defenders of human rights and the rest of the good-for-nothings" who are "half-baked Bolsheviks" (Dzhambazki). For both Karakachanov and Dzhambazki, the main danger for Bulgaria comes from "Gypsization" and the non-governmental organizations which defend the rights of the Roma.

Other politicians using such language are MEP Nikolay Barekov, former BSP candidate for Sofia mayor, Prof. Mihail Mirchev, BSP MP Alexander Simov, and former Constitutional Court judge and incumbent GERB MP Georgi Markov. Former politicians such as Anton Todorov, Velislava Dareva and Borislav Tsekov also used such language occasionally (that is, their statements rarely attracted media attention in the analyzed period, although their comments usually abound in such epithets).

II.6. HATE-SPEECH EPITHETS – FREQUENCY OF USE

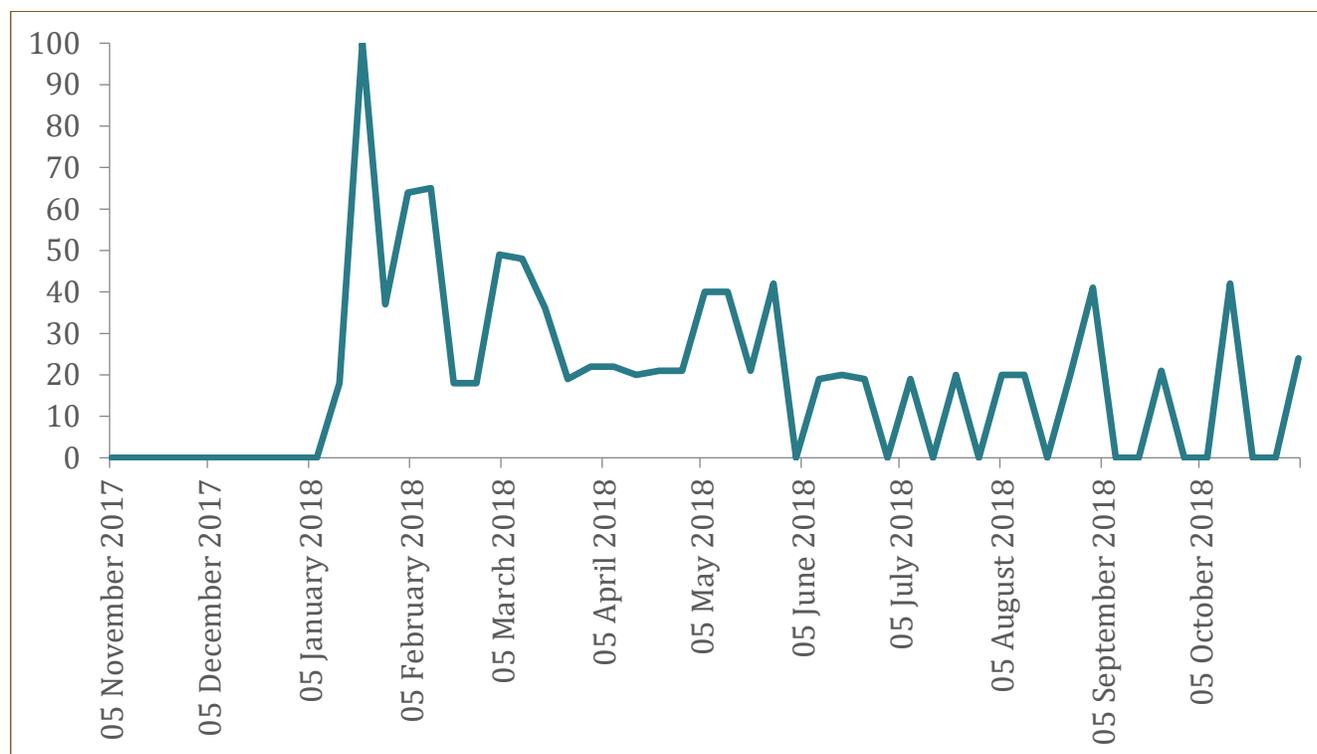
In the summer of 2018 the most frequently used epithet in hate speech through the vocabulary of populist propaganda in Bulgarian online media was “genders” (in the plural) as an offensive term for people of non-traditional sexual orientation or for their defenders (see Table 2). The frequency of its use practically followed the debate on the Istanbul Convention. As Google Trends shows (see Figure 4), its use soared immediately after the beginning of 2018.

Table 2. Frequency of use of hate-speech epithets in online media, 1 June – 31 August 2018

genders	694
liberast*	596
Sorosoid*	574
un-Bulgarian*	421
sell-out*/venal	361
protester*	333
grant-spong*	219
freeload*	172
tolerast*	150
Gypsiz*	118
Eurogay*	86
yes-m*	75
de-Bulgariz*	27
de-Bulgarification	17*
puppet*	6

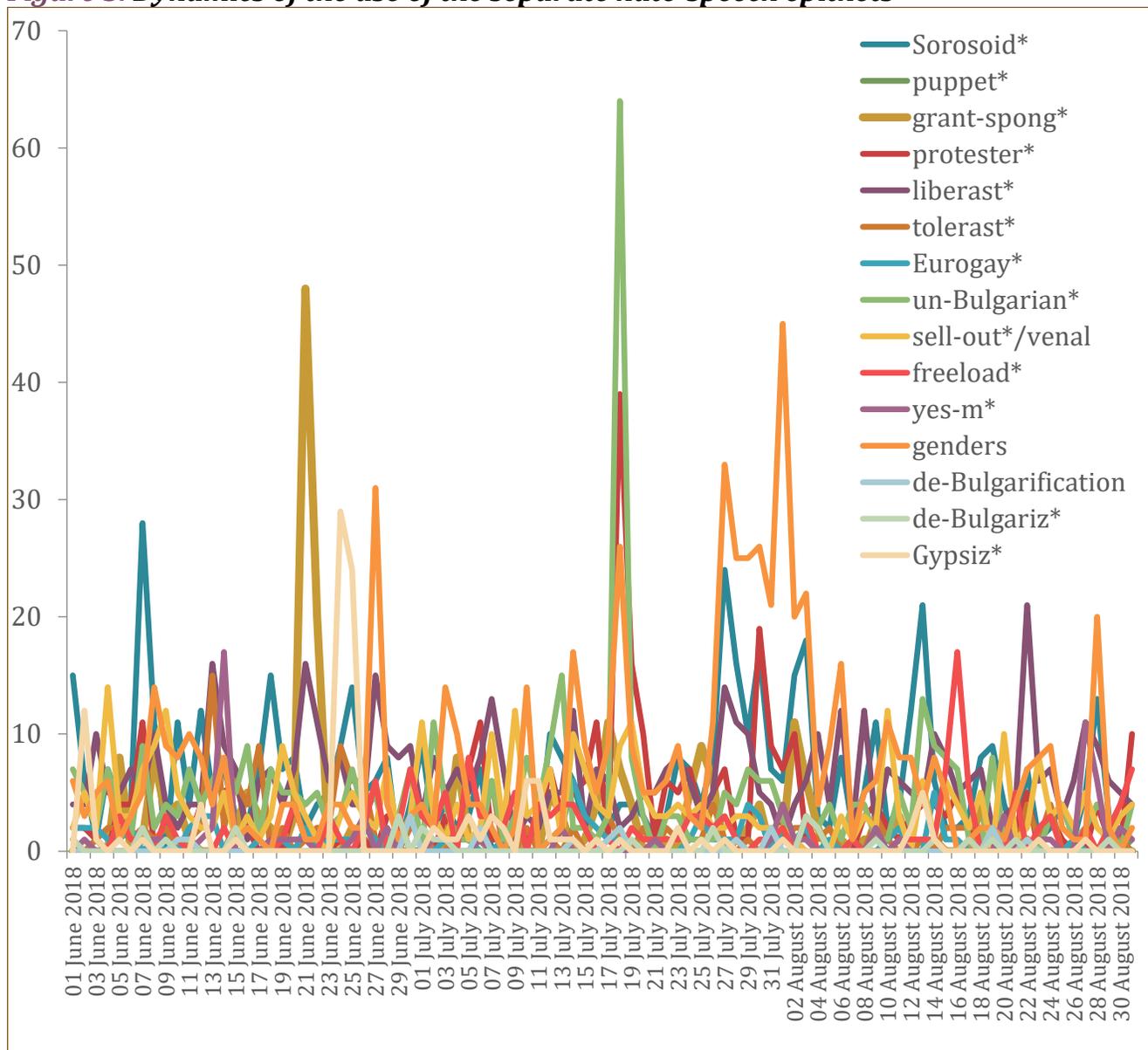
Next, by a relatively close margin, are the epithets “liberast*” and “Sorosoid*”, by which hate speech targets people who hold and defend liberal political views as well as NGOs in Bulgaria which have received grants from international donors. The epithets describing social processes, such as “de-Bulgarization”, “de-Bulgarification” and “puppet” behaviour are practically statistically insignificant for hate speech in the analyzed period.

Figure 4. Use of the epithet “genders” in Google searches according to Google Trends¹⁶



¹⁶ Accessed 29 September 2018.

Figure 5. Dynamics of the use of the separate hate-speech epithets



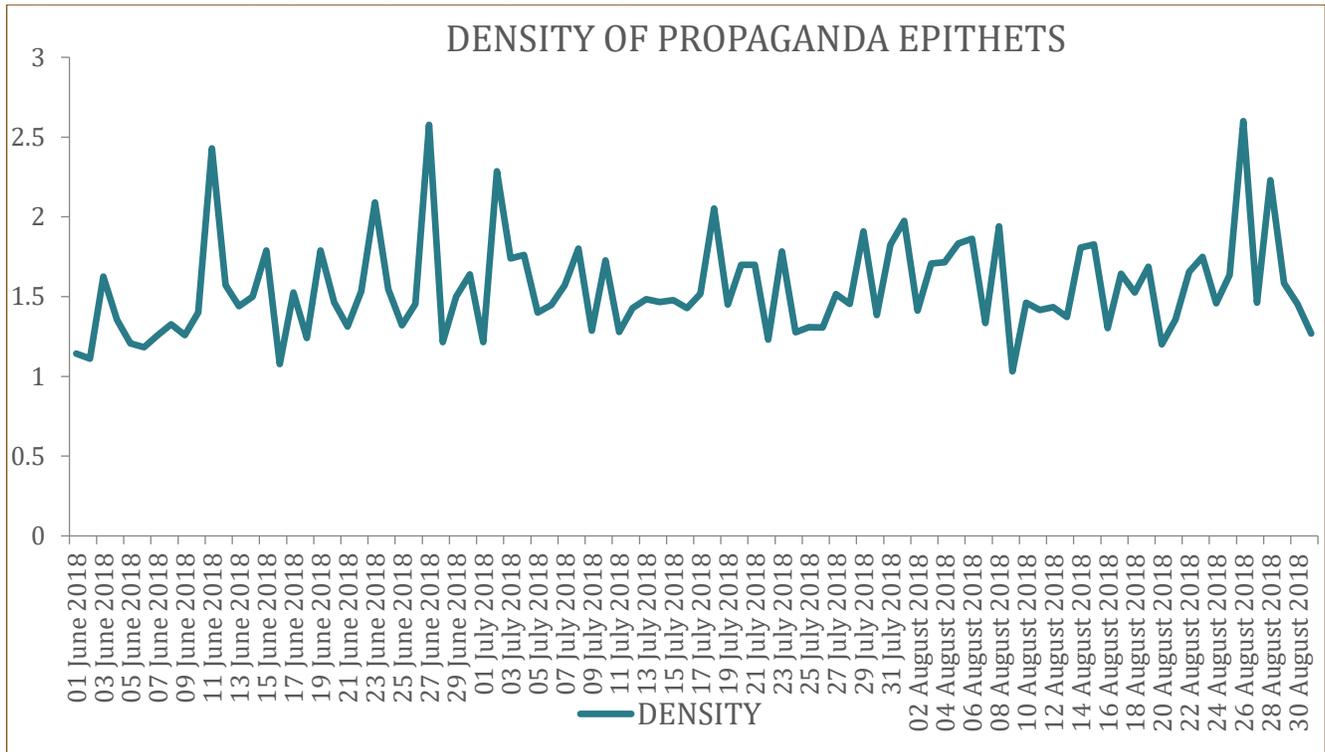
As Figure 5 clearly shows, in addition to the fact that some of the epithets are statistically insignificant for the final result, the use of the statistically significant ones varied over time.

The most common epithet, “genders”, was used most frequently precisely in the first days after the Constitutional Court ruled that the Istanbul Convention is inconsistent with the Bulgarian Constitution and suggested that it promotes “gender ideology”.

The simultaneous use of the epithets “protester*”, “genders” and “un-Bulgarian*” peaked in the period between 17 and 19 July 2018, probably because of the

simultaneously intensified media interest in three important topics: the Istanbul Convention, the America for Bulgaria Foundation’s grants for media outlets, and the euthanasia of sheep and goats in Mount Strandzha villages and the protests against it in the village of Sharkovo.

Figure 6. Density of use of hate-speech epithets



For understandable reasons, the density of the use of hate-speech epithets cannot be below 1 epithet per publication. As Figure 6 shows, there were peaks in the density on 11 and 27 June, 2 and 18 July, and 26 August 2018. On 11 June the use of hate speech was among the lowest in terms of number of publications containing the latter per day, but the density of hate-speech epithets was among the highest for the analyzed period, reaching an average of almost 2.5 epithets per publication. The publications on 11 June indeed abound in hate-speech epithets, but are devoted to different topics. The peak in the density of epithets on 27 June, another day with a relatively low number of publications containing hate speech, is due to the fact that most such publications on 27 June are about former Constitutional Court judge Georgi Markov’s appearance on a popular TV current affairs show the previous day (“Litse v litse” [Face to Face] with Tsvetanka Rizova on bTV) and quote him extensively. On 17 July the peak in the use of hate speech nearly coincides with the peak in the density of hate-speech epithets on 18 July, but this fact is not connected to a single topic but to several – the protests against the

euthanasia of sheep and goats in the village of Sharkovo and several other nearby villages, the criticism against the Greens for their non-participation in these protests, former Constitutional Court judge Georgi Markov's statement about the policy towards refugees in Central Europe, etc.

Another important fact must be noted: most of the peaks in the density of hate-speech epithets occurred on days on which there was a certain decline in the use of hate speech in terms of number of publications containing the latter. The peaks in density came from certain analytical articles by authors who commented on social and political issues emotionally, using hate speech.

The data obtained by the complementary research method give ground for formulating a key hypothesis: most of the epithets identified and researched here have become a stable part of the anti-liberal vocabulary and hate speech in Bulgaria, including at the everyday level: in comments to articles and on Facebook. This applies especially to offensive and derogatory terms such as "venal" and "freeloader" as well as to universally applicable terms such as "Sorosoid" and "tolerast" ("tolerast" is used much more frequently on discussion forums and comments to articles, while "liberast" is used more frequently in the texts of the articles themselves). The data from the end of the analyzed period suggest that **although the populist-propaganda discourse in Bulgaria is stable in terms of average frequency and to some extent random in its peaks, it nevertheless follows the cycles of the political season and is influenced by important events such as the Constitutional Court's ruling on the Istanbul Convention**. If there are no significant public events in the summer months to keep it going, populist propaganda can and does use all sorts of "facts" (military exercises, separate military incidents), statements (anti-Roma, against refugees) and renewed discussions of old topics (whether the historical novel *Time of Parting* is based on authentic historical sources), which would not attract serious media attention in a period with more political events.

III. MAIN CONCLUSIONS

In the analyzed period there is a stable presence of “genders” (used in the plural) as a main offensive epithet in hate speech, which was practically not used before 1 January 2018.

No correlation was found between the density of use of hate-speech epithets and the peaks in publications using hate speech. Their relationship is rather inversely proportional and should be the subject of a separate study.

The main targets of hate speech are “genders”, a collective term for several communities: human-rights activists defending the right to sexual identity, people of non-traditional sexual orientation, and citizens with liberal political views. The next most frequently attacked targets are the “liberasts” and “Sorosoids”.

The terms “de-Bulgarification” and “de-Bulgarization” have practically disappeared from hate speech in the analyzed period, as their use is negligible. Conversely, the word “Gypsization” is often used and is much more widespread in the vocabulary of populist propaganda.

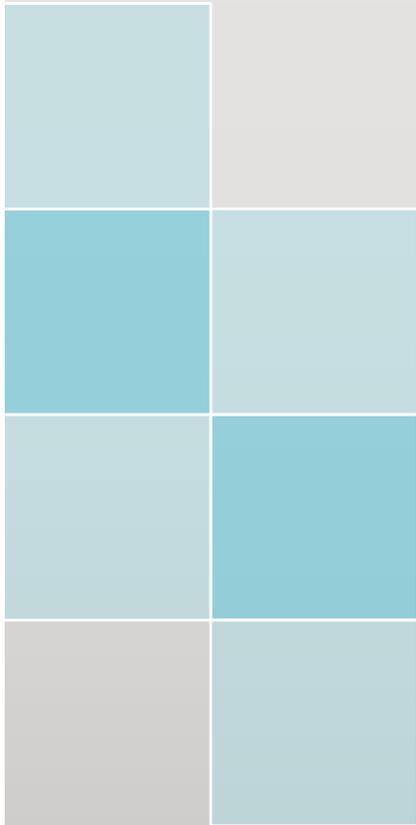
The politicians who most often used hate speech in the analyzed period are Krasimir Karakachanov, Angel Dzhambazki and, partly, Nikolay Barekov. Occasionally, hate speech was used by other incumbent or former politicians, such as Mihail Mirchev, Alexander Simov, Georgi Markov, Anton Todorov, Velislava Dareva and Borislav Tsekov. It must be noted, however, that the leading Bulgarian politicians used a more moderate and publicly acceptable language in the analyzed period and therefore did not fall within the focus of this study.

Although five years have passed since the summer 2013 protests in Bulgaria, the epithet “protester”, coined at that time, continues to have a key place in hate speech.

The frequency of use of the hate-speech epithets varies, with spikes in the use of the most common ones, such as “genders”, in the analyzed period. Those that are less common are used in different contexts in various publications between ten and twenty times per day.

The following events generated the most hate speech in the analyzed period:

- The Constitutional Court's ruling that the Istanbul Convention is inconsistent with the Bulgarian Constitution.
- The Facebook post by Svetlana Doncheva, Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev's wife, about the Roma minority in Bulgaria (the occasion that prompted this post is unknown).
- The protest in the village of Sharkovo against the euthanasia of sheep and goats there and in several other nearby villages where the veterinarian authorities found an outbreak of ovine rinderpest. In this case the euthanasia of animals and the ovine rinderpest outbreak were used as a pretext to direct hate speech against the usual antagonists – “the Greens”, “the people from the yellow brick road [in the centre of Sofia]” (*zhaltopavetnitsi*), etc.



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