The background of the entire page is decorated with a series of thin, dark grey curved lines that flow from the top right and bottom left towards the center, creating a sense of movement and depth.

THE SITUATION WITH HATE SPEECH IN NORTH MACEDONIA IN 2024



POLICY BRIEF

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The Situation with Hate Speech in North Macedonia in 2024

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights

Skopje

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POLICY BRIEF SUMMARY

In 2024, the Helsinki Committee's platform www.govornaomraza.mk registered 1,391 reports of hate speech. Hate speech based on national and ethnic belonging was the most common, especially in the context of the parliamentary and presidential elections, political statements, and public events. A significant increase was also observed against the LGBTIQ+ community, particularly during Skopje Pride 2024 and other highly visible events. Despite the high number of reports, institutional response remains weak, with none of the criminal complaints submitted by the Helsinki Committee resulting in prosecution.

KEY FINDINGS:

- 1,391 hate speech reports – primarily on national (601), ethnic (566), and political grounds (236), as well as based on sexual orientation and gender identity (230).
 - A large share of cases are connected to election campaigns, LGBTIQ+ events, public gatherings, and celebrations of ethnic symbols.
 - Almost all reports relate to social media content (comments, posts, videos).
 - Institutions fail to act with due diligence – 7 criminal complaints were filed, none resulting in charges.
 - The Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination faces capacity limitations due to lack of access to perpetrator data.
 - Severe hate speech was recorded in relation to Pride Parade, trans persons, Roma, and ethnic/national symbols.
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Detailed Overview of the Situation

In January 2024, following the announcement of parliamentary and presidential elections (April 24 and May 8) and the composition of the technical government, hate speech and inflammatory speech on political and ethnic grounds intensified.

In February, the Helsinki Committee observed a rise in ethnically motivated hate speech tied to the pre-election context. Over half of the registered cases in this month had an ethnic character. Additionally, misogynistic and offensive speech was targeted at female presidential candidates.

The Helsinki Committee also recorded hate speech on social media related to the exhibition “Bitter Sugar” at the Museum of Contemporary Art – Skopje. Fake news and hate speech were directed toward the author, based on presumed sexual orientation. Posts demonizing the LGBTIQ community and calling for violence and discrimination were recorded. Two criminal complaints were filed against three individuals for the crime of “Dissemination of racist and xenophobic material via computer system” (Article 394-g of the Criminal Code).

On March 29, a Trans Visibility March was held in Skopje. Due to the public visibility of trans persons, hate speech on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity proportionally increased. The Helsinki Committee filed a criminal complaint against the administrators of the Facebook page "Take Responsibility" for promoting ideas that incite discrimination, violence, and hatred against LGBTI persons.

In April, during the second round of elections, there was a rise in hate and inflammatory speech on ethnic, national, and political grounds. Nationalistic speeches by political party leaders, flying of Albanian and foreign flags in the absence of state flags, and chanting "UCK" by the Albanian bloc further fueled interethnic tensions.

On April 29, the Helsinki Committee filed a complaint for harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity to the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, after an Instagram video revealed the location of a safe LGBTI-friendly space accompanied by derogatory hashtags. On May 31, the Commission issued an opinion confirming harassment against the LGBTI community under Article 10 of the Anti-Discrimination Law.

On May 26, a press conference announcing the Pride Parade triggered homophobic

and transphobic public reactions

As in previous years, hate speech rose proportionally with the visibility of the community.

June – Pride Month – was marked by viral hate speech before and after the June 22 Pride Parade in Skopje, including threats, calls for violence, and harassment against the LGBTI community. The Helsinki Committee filed criminal complaints against nine individuals for threats to security (Article 144(5) CC) combined with dissemination of xenophobic and racist material (Article 394-g CC).

During June, the Helsinki Committee and Equalis (organizers of the LGBTI Youth Summer School) filed a criminal complaint against several persons for homophobic speech promoting violence and discrimination. In December 2024, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Skopje dismissed the case, claiming that the elements of the crime were not fulfilled, leaving victims without the right to appeal. Dissatisfied, the Helsinki Committee submitted a complaint to the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office, citing violation of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, inadequate investigation, and the lack of an appeal mechanism in hate speech cases.

In July, hate speech flared up again after reports that Albanian mountaineers replaced the Macedonian flag with the Albanian one on Mount Korab.

The opening of the Paris Olympic Games, which showcased diverse gender identities, was met with insults and calls for violence against the LGBTQI+ community.

In August, hate speech erupted online after Algerian boxer Imane Khelif's Olympic victory, fueled by sensational media headlines speculating about her being intersex.

On August 8, the commemoration of fallen defenders at Karpalak was followed by hate speech after the memorial plaque was vandalized.

Throughout September and October, hate speech based on national identity continued, including online posts with territorial claims (Greater Albania, Greater Macedonia, Greater Serbia) and denial of Macedonia's identity by Bulgarian citizens.

In November, hate speech spiked again following celebrations of Albania's Flag Day and the destruction of a Macedonian flag during the festivities.

In December, hate speech reports peaked again, including incidents during school celebrations of Albania's Flag Day in Čelopek, as well as anti-Roma comments recorded on Facebook.

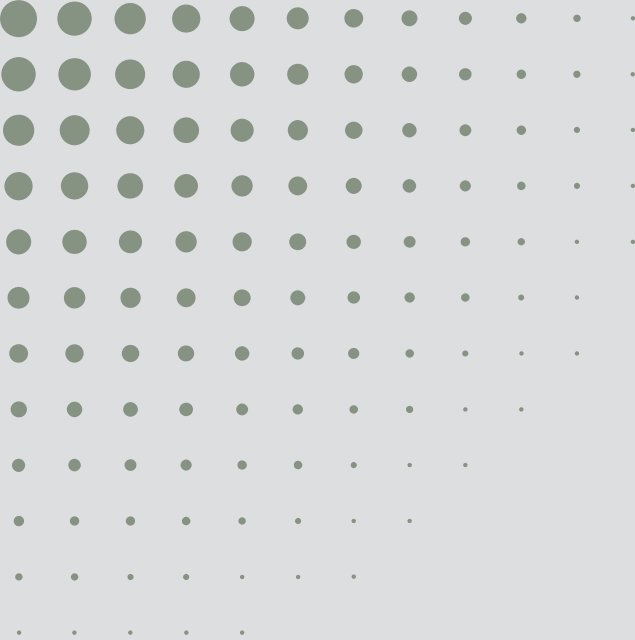
Between January and December 2024, seven official proceedings were initiated: two with the Department for Cybercrime and Digital Forensics, one with the Department for Economic and Computer Crime, two with the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office Skopje, and one with the Anti-Discrimination Commission.

Conclusions

- 1. Social media is the primary space for spreading hate speech.**
- 2. Political events, elections, and ethnic symbols are direct triggers for spikes in hate speech.**
- 3. The LGBTQI+ community continues to be a target of coordinated hate campaigns.**
- 4. The Public Prosecutor's Office does not take sufficient action, and none of the complaints resulted in prosecution.**
- 5. Legal and technical barriers prevent the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination from taking concrete measures.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen social media monitoring and hold platforms accountable for hate speech.
- Introduce legal changes to ensure access to perpetrator data and facilitate identification.
- Enforce stricter sanctions for hate speech on ethnic grounds, particularly during elections.
- Monitor and sanction political actors spreading hate speech.
- Promote media literacy and educational programs in schools.
- Create mechanisms for protection of LGBTIQ+ victims and easy reporting of attacks.
- Increase accountability and efficiency of the Public Prosecutor's Office – ensure statistics, transparency, and cooperation with civil society.
- Support regional and international cooperation for monitoring and sanctioning hate speech.



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