Portrayal of hateful ideologies in the media: Media monitoring for the year 2022

Slovak National Center for Human Rights (SNCHR) regularly conducts mapping and evaluating of how human rights are portrayed in the public discourse. In the newest analytic report, SNCHR published results of the media monitoring analysis with the special focus on the portrayal of hateful ideologies by the media. Its aim was to provide a descriptive analysis of the way the image of hateful ideologies is created in the media discourse as well as the analysis of the attention the media pay to their contextual framing.

The goal of the media monitoring was to answer following questions.:

- Which media most often reported on the issue of hateful ideologies?

- In what context was the issue of hateful ideologies discussed and did the media explained it sufficiently?

- Did the reporting on forms and manifestations of hateful ideologies change after the start of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine?

The analysis is based on 768 media items published in 44 media outlets between January 2022 and March 2022, containing the keyword "extremism" as a term most often used to label hateful ideologies.

Definition of hateful ideologies was based on the **Strategy of Combating Radicalization and Extremism until 2024**, which states: "Extremism refers to manifestations and actions based on the ideology which is defined against the principles of the democratic rule of law to the extreme extent, which directly or in a given time horizon, and through deliberate verbal or physical actions, have a destructive effect on the existing democratic system and its basic principles, in order to promote its own ideological goals. The characteristic features of extremism include the attack on the system of basic human rights and freedoms as guaranteed by the constitution and international human rights documents, as well as the efforts to limit, suppress, or prevent the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms for certain groups of the population defined by their real or perceived belonging to a race, nation, nationality, ethnic group or by their real or perceived origin, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, political belief or religious belief. Extremism is divided into right-wing, left-wing, religious and extremism focused on one issue (for example, ecological, separatism, etc.)."

Findings and conclusions

We observed a low level of contextualization of the issue of hateful ideologies. This is crucial as it should be considered as important for the public awareness-rising not only to explain the defining attributions of hateful ideologies, but also to explain which principles of the democratic establishment they oppose. However, the analyzed media use the label extremist mostly without explanation of the reasons why the given entity is considered as extremist or reasons why it is considered as a threat for the democratic establishment. In more than half of the media items about hateful ideologies, the form of extremist action is not specified, and in almost a third of them, the specific actor, i.e., the bearer of the hateful ideology, is not even named. **Although it is not realistic for such contextualization to be one hundred percent present in the media news, it is necessary to remember the informative but also the educational role of the media.**

Hateful ideologies were mostly discussed with a reference to xenophobia or extremist symbols as their defining features. Quite often, hateful ideologies were defined through opposing security, in other words threatening the internal sovereignty of the state, while other principles of democracy, e.g., human rights and protection of minorities, were rarely mentioned. This not only suggests the predominance of the securitization of the issue of hateful ideologies, but it also points to the fact that other democratic principles are only rarely emphasized.

We also observed that reasons for labeling political actors as extremist are much less often explained than in cases of individuals. This is probably due to expectation of general understanding of extremist nature of specific political parties, as they have been known to the public for a long time. However, this also means that the concept of extremism is much less explained in political arena than in case of other social activities.

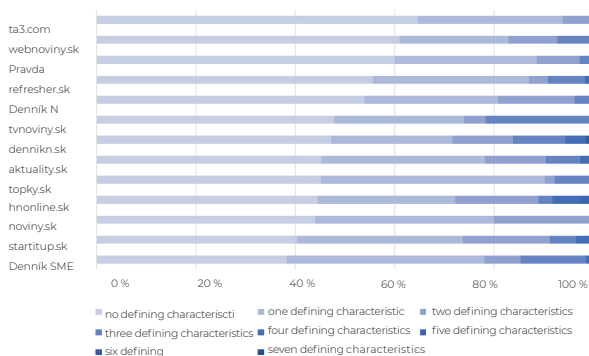Media according to the mentions of defining characteristics of hateful ideologies

Figure 1 The comparison of media outlets according to the mentions of defining characteristics of hateful ideologies

Due to the dynamic development on the political scene, it is important to ensure that there are as few shifts in the interpretations of key concepts in public discourse as possible, which includes the transparent and clear use of terminology.

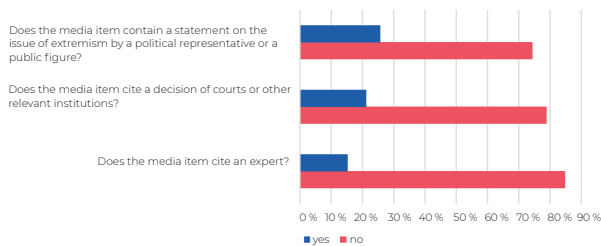Statements on hateful ideologies in the media

Figure 2 The comparison of statements on hateful ideologies in the media, by politicians, relevant authorities and professional public

The low rate of citing experts on hateful ideologies is another important observation, especially compared to the statements of political representatives, who most often expressed their opinion on labeling formal groups, i.e., political parties and movements, as extremist. This also indicates the politicization of the topic at the expense of professional, expert opinion. We also noted a low rate of citing the legislative, conceptual, or strategic framework of the monitored issue.

Following the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, we observed a shift in the portrayal of hateful ideologies, as it was increasingly interpreted through nationalism, compared to the situation before the invasion, when xenophobia was accented more often. However, the concept of extremism remains insufficiently clarified and articulated.

To emphasize the threat of hateful ideologies is especially important in a political context, that is, with reference to specific political parties. Labeling them intensely as extremist may not be enough if it does not include explanation of the most problematic points in the party's program, agenda, or rhetoric. The media generalizing the concept of extremism can ultimately contribute not only to the emptying of the concept, but also to the decrease in understanding why hateful movements are dangerous for the democratic society.

The study *Portrayal of hateful ideologies in the media: Media monitoring for the year 2022* (Slovak only) is available for download and read online at https://bit.ly/3M7XCFz