

HATE SPEECH AND EUROSCEPTICISM

IN ROMANIA

NATIONAL REPORT

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2022



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The research is conducted in the framework of the project “Active European Citizens Against Hate Speech”. The aim of the project is to raise awareness of the new generation of European citizens about the impact of hate speech on democratic participation and European values. The project is implemented by the “Latvian Centre for Human Rights” (project coordinator), “Participation for All” (Latvia), “Estonian Human Rights Centre”, “Human Rights Monitoring Institute” (Lithuania), “Multi Kulti Collective” (Bulgaria), “Human Rights House Zagreb” (Croatia), “Peace Action Training and Research Institute of Romania - PATRIR”. The project is co-funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia.

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FOREWARD

The following national report presents, in detail, the findings of a research undertaken in six EU member states - Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania.

Hate speech is often used as a tool to target different vulnerable groups, especially minorities, immigrants and refugees. It causes their alienation and exclusion which leads to marginalisation. Such narratives weaken democracy and strengthen the positions of far right and radical right populists and Eurosceptics. Each national report aims to analyse the hate speech phenomenon in the six participating countries and looks at the links between Euroscepticism and hate speech. The authors of the reports map the levels of intolerance and hate speech among the general population and young people in particular. The reports analyse the policies and law that address hate speech, outline trends, targets, and the actors of hate speech. The reports map the presence of Euroscepticism in each country, its forms, public attitudes and actors, and outline parallels between Eurosceptic discourse and incitement to hatred. The reports also map different initiatives which can be seen as constructive practice in the fight against hate speech and different forms of intolerance. Each report ends with conclusions and recommendations on measures for combating hate speech.

All reports are based on desk research of existing data, reports and research about intolerance, hate speech and Euroscepticism, analysis of relevant political documents, programmes of political parties, and media sources. The desk research is complemented by semi-structured interviews with representatives of NGOs working with youth and vulnerable groups and a survey of young people aged 16-25 on their experiences of hate speech.

The research “Hate Speech and Euroscepticism” was conducted in the framework of the project “Active European Citizens Against Hate Speech”, co-funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia. The aim of the project is to raise awareness among the new generation of European citizens, about the impact of hate speech on democratic participation and European values.

The project consortium comprises the following organisations:

- [Latvian Centre for Human Rights](#) (Project Coordinator, Latvia),
- [Network “Participation for All”](#) (Latvia),
- [Estonian Human Rights Centre](#) (Estonia)
- [Human Rights Monitoring Institute](#) (Lithuania),
- [Multi Kulti Collective](#) (Bulgaria),
- [Human Rights House Zagreb](#) (Croatia),
- [Peace Action Training and Research Institute of Romania - PATRIR](#) (Romania).

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Introduction

The following report charts the relationship and the overlap between hate speech and Euroscepticism among young people in Romania (16-25 years of age). The report refers primarily to the last decade (2010 - 2020) and specifically to more recent developments during the pandemic (2019-2022). The report charts this dynamic in correlation with growing authoritarian tendencies in Europe, the rise of extremism and illiberal and antiliberal tendencies.

We define hate speech as “the advocacy, promotion or incitement of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatisation or threat of such person or persons and any justification of all these forms of expression that is based on (...) “race”, colour, language, religion or belief, nationality or national or ethnic origin, as well as descent, age, disability, sex, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation”¹. Euroscepticism has been defined in multiple ways by multiple authors. Taggart in his seminal article on Euroscepticism and political parties, defined it as expressing “the idea of contingent or qualified opposition as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration”². More recently, Kopecky and Mudde referred to a scale of four attitudes or categories: Euro-enthusiast, Europragmatic, Eurosceptic and Euroreject (Kopecky and Mudde 2002). Also, Sorensen identified four types of public Euroscepticism: economic, democratic, sovereignty and socio-political driven (Sørensen 2008). Throughout this report, we will refer to an aggregated definition of the phenomenon, based on these directions.

Hate speech has been an ongoing concern in public debate and policy in the last decade in Romania. However, the 2019 European Commission against Racism and Intolerance report on Romania singled out the country for having “no coherent and systematic data collection on hate speech and hate-motivated violence. Criminal action is almost never taken and the provisions on racist motivation as an aggravating circumstance are also rarely applied.”³ This particular assessment comes at the end of a decade of debates and legislative reforms aiming to curtail the generalised use of hate speech and its mainstreaming in public debate. Although the legislation on hate speech was accelerated by EU integration (2007), debates in 2014, 2016 and 2018 continued to showcase insufficiency. Furthermore, since 2016, activity briefs of national and international organisations and institutions, existing

¹ ECRI. (2016), *ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 15 On Combating Hate Speech*, ECRI Council of Europe, Strasbourg. p16.

² Taggart, P. (2003), *A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems*, European Journal of Political Research, European Consortium for Political Research. p366.

³ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. ECRI Report on Romania, fifth monitoring cycle, adopted on 3rd of April 2019, ECRI Council of Europe, Strasbourg. p9.

academic literature and statistical data show that hate speech has continued to spread. This happened in close association with Euroscepticism, the rise in the appeal of conspiracy thinking (also triggered by the ongoing pandemic), the rise of authoritarianism and an increasingly visible radical / extremist movement operating in Romania. Interestingly however, Romania is consistently ranked by polls as a country without strong Euroscepticism.

Nevertheless, the report contextualises the phenomena of hate speech within the rising Euroscepticism and contestations of European liberal values across Europe. It maps the targets as well as the actors relevant to the dynamics of this process among young people. It examines both the targets and actors' experience with hate speech, and their multiplier role in countering hate speech. We opted for this focus because there is a distinct trend among young people to use discriminatory, hateful or extremist (primarily right-wing extremist) views. There is also an increasingly visible discourse of distrust in 'European values' among young people. Finally, the transnational discourses on anti-LGBTQIA+, anti-Semitic and anti-Roma, have intersected with Euroscepticism (defined here as the opposition to the integration process) in Romania.

As primary data for the report, we conducted a survey that had 202 respondents aged 16-25 years and was implemented in July and August of 2021. We also conducted six interviews with important stakeholders in the field of hate crimes, hate speech, and other relevant stakeholders working for the prevention of hate speech. In addition, a survey of young people aged 16-25 was conducted on their experiences of hate speech.

1. Hate Speech

1.1 Policy Frameworks of Anti-Discrimination

Existing Romanian legislation on hate speech (Discurs Instigator La Ura, DIU) falls short of the clear definition provided by the OSCE, nor does it have any explicit mechanisms to counter it. International (ECRI, European Commission, UN) and national (DIICOT, SRI) recommendations have repeatedly stressed the need for such mechanisms for effective prevention. Estonia and Romania have both been criticised for having too narrow of a definition of hate speech in their laws. As a result, since October 2020, both are being subjected to the EU Commission's infringement proceedings (Bayer and Bard 2020).

Deficiencies in constructing hate speech legislation are visible in the legislative frames. Much of the groundwork on hate speech in Romania relies on legal provisions concerning discrimination between categories of individuals and attacks on human dignity (Iordache 2014). Article 1(3) of the Romanian Constitution argues that "Romania is a democratic and social state, governed by the rule of law, in which human dignity, the citizens' rights and freedoms, the free development of human personality, justice and political pluralism represent supreme values (...)"⁴. There are noticeable pitfalls in this indirect approach to legislation. Controversially, although article 4(2), stresses that "Romania is the common and indivisible homeland of all its citizens, without discrimination on account of race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion, sex, opinion, political adherence, property or social origin"⁵, the Constitution states precedence for ethnic Romanians. This has been a triggering factor in numerous conflicts about the cohabitation of diverse ethnic groups since the early 1990s. Furthermore, ongoing efforts to update legislation on hate speech are often hindered.

In 2019, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) stated: "ECRI recommends that the authorities amend the anti-discrimination legislation to bring it in line with its General Policy Recommendation No. 7. By: i) including precise definitions such as national origin, colour, citizenship and gender identity in the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination; ii) segregation; announced intention to discriminate, inciting and aiding another to discriminate; iii) a legal provision placing public authorities under a duty to promote equality in carrying out their functions; iv) the express duty to ensure that those parties to whom public authorities award contracts, loans, grants or other benefits respect and promote a policy of non-discrimination; and v) the obligation to suppress the public financing of organisations

or political parties which promote racism.”⁶ However, in September 2021, the Romanian Constitutional Court accepted objections formulated by the Presidency of Romania, according to which the new form of the text of law nr. 286/2009, article 369, namely “inciting the public, through any means, to violence, hatred or discrimination against a category of people or individuals because s/he belongs to a certain category of people is punishable by prison from 6 to 3 years” is vague and can be easily misinterpreted and is an infringement of both the Romanian Constitution and Article 1 of the Universal Human Rights Declaration.

Provisions concerning the freedom of expression, which are central in the debate on hate speech, exist in the Constitution, but a criminal action against racist motivation which is an aggravating circumstance have rarely applied in Romania. Law no. 148/2000 regarding public advertising, as well as corroborated interpretations of articles 6, let. c), d) and h), and article 23, include provisions against discrimination based on race, sex, language, origin, social, ethnic identity or nationality that infringe on the security of persons or incites to violence. However, modifications to the Criminal Code, which should include “the offences of incitement to violence and public insults and defamation of a racist nature”⁷, continue to be absent according to the 2019 ECRI Report.

The Legislation on free speech has continued to be plagued by insufficient actions. Although article 30(6) of the Constitution shows that “freedom of expression shall not be prejudicial to the dignity, honour, privacy of a person, and the right to one’s own image”, paragraph (7) of the same article prohibits “any defamation of the country and the nation, any instigation to war or aggression, to national, racial, class or religious hatred, any incitement to discrimination, territorial separatism, or public violence, as well as any obscene conduct contrary to morality”. There are glaring contradictions in the language practiced in this context, with vague and potentially damaging usages of normative understandings of ‘morality’. Since 2017, Romanian society has witnessed a number of protests, social movements and the massive rallying of political forces around the ‘morality’ of the nation, which has polarised society. In other words, this neutrality in the language of legislation hinders a systemic approach to issues of extremism and hate speech.

The 2019 ECRI report argues that there “is no coherent and systematic data collection on hate speech and hate motivated violence.”⁸ This has caused delays, impasses or perpetuated excessive political interference. At the same time, it has allowed for changes in the legislation on hate speech to be easily politicised and swayed by political factors. For instance, hate-speech legislation started with

⁶ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. ECRI Report on Romania fifth monitoring cycle, adopted on 3rd of April 2019, ECRI Council of Europe, Strasbourg. p13.

⁷ *ibid.* p30.

⁸ *ibid.* p3.

antisemitism, which was targeted in law no.31/2002 (“For the Prevention and Stopping of National Hate”, 2002), which forbids fascist, racist or xenophobic organisations, the dissemination, sale or manufacture of fascist symbols, or of a racist or xenophobic nature, and the possession of such marks with imprisonment. This law has continued to cause controversy, it was hotly debated in the decade that followed, and the bill was amended in 2013, 2015 and 2017. It now includes provisions about ethnic background by referring to “Jews and the Roma community” and “the support of the Romanian authorities and public institutions in the areas administered by these during 1940-1944” (Law 217, 2015). Although article 6 criminalises “denial, contesting, approving, justifying or minimising in an obvious manner, by any means, in public, the Holocaust or its effects”, there has been only ever been one case of prosecution.

The Direcția de Investigare a Infracțiunilor de Criminalitate Organizată și Terorism (DIICOT 2020), urges the prioritisation of programmes dedicated to the social reintegration of perpetrators of radical or violent extremist acts. Although a lack of funding sources is often indicated as a reason for a poor response to this, public bodies are also known to be reluctant to allocate funds. Added to this, the lack of synergy between institutions and organisations targeting young people (NGOs, county youth foundations, etc.) is another reason for correlating clear actions with public policies.

Dealing with hate speech online has also been a topic where the law has been selective in its application. Law no. 365/2002, regulates electronic commerce and holds the service providers responsible for its agents’ discriminatory or racist content, and law no. 504/2002, known as the ‘audio-visual law’, is complemented by the Code of Regulation of Audio-Visual Content.

1.2 Policy Documents Relevant for the Prevention of Hate Speech

Putting in place robust instruments of evaluation and monitoring to measure and evaluate the advances that have been made is a critical area still underdeveloped. ECRI singled out the “Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Inclusion of Romanian Citizens belonging to Roma Minority” (Ministry 2014), “as needing an evaluation of all integration projects implemented over recent years, on the basis of comprehensive and gender disaggregated equality data.”⁹. The ‘Strategy’ had no direct reference for combating hate speech, but more an indirect impact due to its measures in the area of inclusion and the protection of this vulnerable group. In

⁹ ibid. p9.

addition, according to ECRI 2019, the strategy did have a small impact even though its implementation suffered from significant financial constraints - a new strategy on the same topic for the period of 2021-2027 is at time of writing subject to a public consultation process.

In October 2020, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs put out for public debate, the approval of “The National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Anti-Semitism, Xenophobia, Radicalisation and Hate Speech 2021-2023”. This had been one of the recommendations of the 2019 ECRI report. The strategy aims to “prevent the replication in Romania of the negative developments registered on this level in other countries, as well as to provide the necessary tools to sanction acts associated with anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalisation and incitement to hatred”.¹⁰ It has a strong policy focus on the prevention of violent extremism and attention is given to evaluating the training programmes of the actors involved in the process of preventing and combating extremism. It also supports those same actors in the updating of such programmes. It proposes the evaluation of current school curricula. It further proposes pilot cultural programmes meant to prevent the proliferation of these hate-based phenomena in Romanian society and particularly addresses the issue of radicalisation in prisons. It identifies vulnerable individuals in the prison system at risk of being the target of radicalisation and aims for their de-radicalisation through multi-disciplinary activities and working together with civil society for their reintegration.

Existing policies have partly attempted to address these issues, including, the National Strategy for Youth Policy 2015-2020 and the Strategy of Vocational Education and Training in Romania 2016-2020. These focus on the fact that education, youth participation, inter-religious and intercultural dialogue and social inclusion are methods for the prevention of radicalisation through promoting social inclusion, mutual understanding and tolerance, which are defined as “European values”.

1.3 Organisations Fighting Hate Speech

The institutional field continues to operate in a rather narrow approach with limitations due to the legislative frameworks. The main institutions addressing hate speech are:

¹⁰ Parliament of Romania. (2021), Strategia națională pentru prevenirea și combaterea antisemitismului, xenofobiei, radicalizării și discursului instigator la ură aferentă perioadei 2021 - 2023. p4.

The National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD)

NCCD is an autonomous public authority established in 2002 under the control of the Parliament, it is regulated by the Anti-Discrimination Law and is the main administrative body in charge of combating behaviours related to hate speech. Its main tasks are to decide whether complaints are filed by legal persons or individuals. Some of the activities carried out by the Council include projects in schools about combating discrimination against the Roma community and refugees, movie festivals, human rights magazines, essay contests, and training with medical staff, teachers, judges and prosecutors. The NCCD is often embroiled in controversy because it operates with a cautious definition of hate speech as “insult” and often builds controversial cases against journalists, it is also a politicised institution subject to political pressure.

The Audio-Visual Council (AVC)

AVC regulates the activity of audio-visual media services and usually receives complaints about audio-visual programmes which violate the current legal framework against discrimination and hate speech. It is exclusively focused on audio-visual legislation and does not take into account the broader issues of extremism and hate speech. The AVC has an unsatisfactory track record when it comes to addressing issues of antisemitism, for instance. In 2020, actress Maia Morgenstern reported anti-Semitic speech / slurs and the AVC did not respond with any clearcut decision.

The Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania

The Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania is the main body fighting antisemitism, by monitoring and reacting publicly to the violations under the Emergency Ordinance 31/2002 on the prohibition of fascist, racist and xenophobic symbols or associations and the prosecution of persons guilty of crimes against peace and humanity. Although the Institute has been recognised as a consultant body, its mandate has often been contested and it remains marginal in the debate.

Although these institutions undertake most of the work on tackling discrimination and hate speech, their influence and track record have been mixed. In 2020, the Government created a governmental envoy position, ‘The Representative of the Romanian Government for Promoting Policies of Memory and Fighting Antisemitism and Xenophobia’. This move added to the advocacy possibilities of those fighting hate speech.

1.4 Outstanding Issues

There are two essential ECRI recommendations that need strong implementation frameworks. Firstly, the ECRI recommendations ask for a precise and data-driven system, “to collect data and produce statistics offering an integrated and consistent view of cases of racist and homo / transphobic hate speech and hate crime brought to the attention of the police and pursued through the courts and make this data available to the public.”¹¹ Romania is one of the few countries which does not administratively collect case-related data on hate crimes, including hate speech, disaggregated according to grounds of discrimination (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2012). Many undocumented or unreported cases make it impossible to know the amplitude of hate speech in Romania and self-regulation within political parties or state institutions is either not happening or is never made visible in order to have a proper educational dimension (Codreanu 2018). An important observation cutting across the field in the prevention of hate speech and discrimination, is that research institutes, and academic and applied research infrastructure, are generally side-lined and not publicly visible in these debates, and their mandates are often contested.

“The prevention of bias in police reports and investigations, as well as in any further judicial proceedings need development.”¹² The need for capacity building has been repeatedly identified as a priority in the prevention of hate speech, particularly when it comes to cybercrime and the resources allocated for the online environment. There has been little advancement in the field, as the judiciary and the police are still the subject of critique about unfair practices, profiling and inequality.

1.5 The Actors (far-right parties and extremist organisations)

Young people have been increasingly engaging in extremism and radicalisation, to which hate speech is closely connected (Baldauf, Ebner and Guhl 2019). In the 2020 elections, the Alliance for Romanian Unity (AUR), a party that proclaims to stand for “family, nation, faith, and freedom” was elected into the Romanian Parliament. The party’s nationalistic / supremacist discourse includes their opposition to European “belonging”, to Hungarians (including their representation in the parliament), to same-sex marriage, and often speaks against women’s emancipation. Their xenophobic views and Holocaust denial attracted many voters under 30 years of age.

¹¹ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. ECRI Report on Romania fifth monitoring cycle, adopted on 3rd of April 2019, ECRI Council of Europe, Strasbourg. p10.

¹² *ibid.* p23.

Prejudice and hate speech, discriminatory and misogynistic messages against women in public, are widespread. Sorin Lavric, the leader of the AUR Party, has been under scrutiny for misogyny and hate since 2020. However, liberal and centre right parties and politicians also perpetuate discriminatory messages about women, their role in society or the possibilities of their upward mobility (Fati 2020).

In fact, gender and family values debates have been a constant and perhaps more visible cause of concern in the past 5 years. The movement (and NGO) 'Coalition for the Family' is a social movement which supports conservative women's role and the values of the "traditional family" and has been a constant source of extremist and conservative discourse. In 2018, their citizen initiative to define the family only as man-woman and not two people of the same gender triggered a referendum on a potential change in the text of the Constitution (Turp-Balazs 2020). It failed to reach the quota, but approximately 20% of the people supported it. It is important to emphasize that the Coalition was supported by the majority of the political parties at the time, and by both the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. Even though one of the leaders of the AUR was a member of the Coalition, it received support from the liberals and social-democrats, including the prime minister of the time, the government, and multiple members of parliament, despite its discriminatory content and incitement to hatred. In 2019-2020, Parliament passed a bill looking to modify legislation that was against gender studies education in schools and in higher education, however it was eventually stopped due to its unconstitutionality.

As a broader consideration, it is important to point out that the topic of "gender", women's rights, and human rights education - some of the tenets of liberal narratives and values - are increasingly being criticised and belittled as "neo-marxist" or "fakely progressive" by opponents. This is a specific trend among young people who have been exposed to and socialised into the debate against gender. The rhetoric about gender also lends itself to nativist discourses that argue that gender affects the "national" (that is ethnic) fabric and the purity of society. The reasons for these discourses are varied. There is a religious undertone strongly supported and perpetuated by the Romanian Orthodox Church, there are enduring traditionalist views combined with a traditionalist employment of anti-communism across the spectrum. The conjunction of all these factors reinforces concerns that, in Romanian society, there is a complex mechanism of mainstreaming extremist views. Both the ECRI 2019 Report and many local NGO reports have argued that such discourses are widely visible across the political spectrum. Two of our interviewees, one person from Pride Romania and another from the Roma community, argue that this is widespread at societal level.

Indeed, hate speech is often traceable back to Romanian institutions, this leads to a mainstreaming of such discourses. Discriminatory legislative proposals or linking the Roma community with criminality happen often, statements which stigmatise

different groups already vulnerable to hate speech, such as the Roma community, are often employed. The Orthodox Church has recently been accused of gender discrimination and hate speech, primarily in relation to family values and therefore women. Since 2020 it has publicly voiced powerful misogynistic arguments. In 2021, the NCCD investigated Archbishop Teodosie for discrimination and misogyny after a number of controversial statements about the role of women in society. In the end it decided not to pursue an investigation. The decision caused intense public debate. The church has also been visible and vocal against the LGBTQIA+ community and same-sex marriages, holding similar views as those held by the Coalition for the Family movement.

ECRI recommends that “all the political parties should take a firm stance against all forms of racial discrimination and convey a clear political message in favour of diversity and pluralism”¹³. An analysis of the National Council’s case law for Combating Discrimination, shows an increasing trend in the sanctioning of politicians and making them more accountable for their discriminatory behaviour. Although such cases have existed publicly, there is little or no communication with the public about such topics by those being sanctioned. PNL (the Liberals) have been consistently perpetuating traditional gender roles, racist or derogatory class formulations, and indirectly bolstering anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments. In the past 5 years, PSD (the Social Democrats) have equally employed xenophobic and anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric. USR, the most recent addition to the center-right spectrum, have also indirectly supported some of the biases and discriminatory acts, particularly related to family.

Discourse by the UDMR, the Romanian Hungarian Party, has been tied in with the historical inter-ethnic tensions in Romania and their exploitation by the Hungarian Fidesz government. Fidesz politics supports nationalist expansionist perspectives, and they have specifically targeted young people. There is also hate manifested against the Russian minority, due in part to European developments concerning attitudes towards Russia. Apart from the general tendency of mainstreaming extremist views, there are distinct actors perpetuating these discourses.

There are attractive social arenas and trends of violence pulling Romanian young people towards extreme-right or racist movements. The Noua Dreapta (the New Right) is an organisation which links itself to the Second World War fascist “Iron Guard Movement”, (the Iron Guard Movement still exists today). Noua Dreapta continues to have a strong social presence in both urban and rural environments, primarily among young people (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour 2010). In the last ten years, its members have been organising marches, manifestations, conferences and other activities where they make discriminatory

¹³ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. ECRI Report on Romania fifth monitoring cycle, adopted on 3rd of April 2019, ECRI Council of Europe, Strasbourg. p15.

statements and threats against Hungarians, LGBTQIA+ persons and immigrants. They also promote the symbols of an extreme nationalist, anti-Semitic, and pro-Nazi group that existed in Romania in the inter-war period. In the early 2000s, Noua Dreapta's leaders focused on attracting young people with nationalistic power narratives, such as the "lost territory of Moldova". This had the effect of mobilising disenfranchised and impoverished young people in the regions by providing them with a cause. Although the Iron Guard Movement is often relegated to the past, their narratives, symbols and representation have lingered in the public space as a kind of "pop culture". Images of power and ideals of masculinity, a core element of the doctrine, were perpetuated by the use of memorabilia of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (the founder of the Iron Guard), which was popular among young people in the late 2000s. Such memorabilia continues to be replicated on T-shirts, street graffiti, and in youth culture today.

The Basarabia, Pământ Românesc social movement (Bessarabia, Romanian Land), is actively recruiting young people. Countless Facebook groups associated with the movement have an overwhelmingly young audience and promote "Romanianism".

The online environment has been one of the main channels for spreading hate due to a lack of regulation and resources of the public institutions or the server and content providers to monitor and eliminate discriminatory comments. Social media is used today as much if not more than the traditional media for spreading hateful language against different groups in society, spreading conspiracy theories and promoting various extremist ideologies. Influencers / social media personalities are a driving actor in determining the political and ideological positions of young people, correlated with a "disinterest" or trust in the "apoliticism" of the platforms (which also offer a sense of unbiased responses). Extremist and hate messages have been documented in several cases where young people are the main audience. One such case is Dana Budeanu - instigating violence against women and promoting anti-Roma messages.

Facebook groups bring together supporters of such narratives. Lupii Dacici (Dacian wolves), is one such Facebook group that promotes extremism and xenophobia. Another example is the "Dacii Liberi" (Free Dacians) community and "Tinerii AUR" (AUR Youth). Equally visible are groups and websites such as Nationalisti¹⁴.

Furthermore, local contexts; distrust in politics, the proliferation of conspiracy theories, and new religious movements, all contribute to the attractiveness of such movements. Young men - specifically from disadvantaged contexts - are attracted to ideas of masculinity and sovereign identity. There are messages about "power", "autonomy", and "freedom" along with stereotypical and conservative visions of masculinity.

¹⁴ <https://www.nationalisti.ro/>

Traditionally, extremism among young people in Romania has been motivated by marginalisation and stigmatisation. Individuals identified as being most at risk of radicalisation in Romania include vulnerable young people from low-income families and/or dysfunctional families, who are sensitive to pressure and manipulation and who feel misunderstood by society and deprived of their rights. The Roma community are one such example (Pănăitescu 2016). Similar to a global and European trend, middle / upper-class voters are supporting such organisations, as the recent votes for AUR have shown. Similarly with the German AfD, it promotes xenophobia and values of neoliberalism morality, it also has a strong youth focus.

Transnational networks constitute a serious matter of concern, as shared among the different European intelligence communities and governments. Whilst most such organisations are “homegrown” extremist organisations, transnational / international organisations also have a strong pull among Romanian young people. Such examples are QAnon whose messages are widely shared and perpetuated, also “Schild & Vrienden” a Flemish Nationalist organisation, have their messages shared and liked on social media by Romania young people, even if they don’t refer to local concerns (Maly 2018). Furthermore, although not a consolidated presence in Romania, transnational movements such as “Generation Identity” also have a strong pull on local social media and mainstream media and join anti-LGBTQIA+ protests and have been associated with the anti-Covid protests.

1.6 Public Attitudes and Targets

This subchapter relies on data collected through an online survey among young people aged 16-25, which was shared online and filled in by 201 responders across the country in August 2021. Importantly, there were also negative responses to the survey overall, with respondents arguing “such attitudes cannot be charted or understood with a survey”, and that in general such surveys tend to be biased. What we can draw from this experience is that such research should be conducted by producing a safe space, whether through focus groups or debates, where those answering do not feel themselves to be judged. Especially when charting attitudes on biases and stereotypes where many of the responders might feel defensive. For instance, the survey did not include a question about the existence of hate speech, although 2-3% of respondents argued that it does not really exist, and that it is a vague notion and therefore they would not analyse it as a social issue.

The answers in the survey generally support the trends noticed in the past in the general population. In 2018, 70% of the respondents of a survey conducted by the National Council for Combatting Discrimination declared that they know what hate speech is, and that directly or indirectly it has to do with ethnicity (47%), political

orientation (40%), religion (33%), sexual orientation (31%) and disability (31%). The 1300 respondents also identified the most common places where they witnessed hate speech, these being the street (53%), workplace (24%) and the circle of friends (19%). More than 65% appreciated that hate speech is an increasing phenomenon in Romania, while 70% declared that it should be punished, of which 54% said by a warning, 30% by a fine, and 12% by imprisonment. In our survey, 68.5% consider that hate speech is a real issue. Of those arguing it is not an issue, most, 53.7% argued that “the right to free speech cannot be affected”, and 31.7% argued that “the terminology is too vague, anything can be considered hate speech”. 22% argued “it does not really have serious implications” and 55.8% answered that hate speech “is sometimes justified”. When asked what motivated their choice for the justification of hate speech, some of the answers were “criminals and thieves are not normal people and society has a right to marginalise them”, “when it is used against violent minorities and people”, “in political polemics”, “in cases of rapists, criminals, bullies”, and “the minority obeys the majority, and the majority defines normality”.

When asked about why hate speech happens 71.1% stated “there is too much prejudice at society level”, 65.2% said people do not believe in values of equality, 64.2% that “hate speech is normalised” and 63.2% answered “hate speech is not understood as being harmful”.

To questions about who should take action in cases of hate speech, 64.9% said the state institutions have a responsibility, 63.4% that every person has a responsibility to act and interfere, 55.7% that witnesses should interfere, and 39.1% that the victim of the hate speech should act.

To the question related to the perpetuation and spreading of hate speech, 81.3% said that politicians, journalists and public individuals are responsible, and 66.7% blamed influencers. The important element here is that 54.4% of young people said they have witnessed hate speech from family members and friends, 57.3% from class mates, and 57.8% from teachers. Other groups identified are the Church, and activists (2%).

53.2% stated that institutions and the law should regulate hate speech while 13.6% said the institutions and the law should not have a clear influence.

Another study conducted in 2016, commissioned by the “Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania”, monitored YouTube and Facebook posts redistributions and comments. This study revealed that more than 40% of the analysed content was targeting the Roma community, and almost 60% was directed towards Jewish people. More than 160 groups with thousands of members, were actively spreading hate online using social networks while also inciting violence and calling for demonstrations (Koreck and Asociația Divers 2017)

The survey on Romanian young people shows that they are reluctant to identify with one ideology or another, in our survey 41.5% said they do not identify with an ideology, 28% identified with the left, 2.3% with the extreme left, 5.2% right and 2.4% extreme right. This can be partly explained by the general context of distrust in institutions in the country and the very low participation in the voting process nationally. At the same time, it could be attributed to education practices, which generally shy away from “controversial” issues in the classroom. Most responders in the survey stated that they are not informed enough about hate speech in the classroom, with 59.9% arguing that school education does not clarify these issues and 23.9% stating that school education does not include the subject at all. 83.2% would like to see people being better educated about hate speech, and 58.9% want to see campaigns in the public space that would focus on raising awareness of hate speech, also 52% argued that intergenerational dialogue should be encouraged in order to eliminate hate speech.

Furthermore, this could also be explained by a generally structurally violent language / communication, for instance when labelling young people as “trouble makers” when anti-institutional attitudes have been evident in public. In fact, some respondents argued that “a more humane, less prescriptive type of engagement around hate speech should happen, and not a governmental communication on the matter”. Such opinions have often been instrumentalised and used by diverse parties, accentuating the “negative” focus on young people. In general, the answers seem to argue for “dialogue and a more nuanced public debate that goes beyond censorship”.

Vengeance has been identified as a trigger factor for hate speech. For example, it can be against a particular individual, group or institution - like the government. This is often tied in with disempowerment, particularly in poor areas, where sentiments of resentment towards the lack of involvement in governance may encourage young people to join extremist movements and to “fight back” against perceived injustice. Some of the comments in the survey confirmed these perspectives when respondents argued that criminals deserve such treatment.

A minority of respondents expressed a distrust concerning hate speech, arguing it is an invention or a politically imposed idea.

A newer trend made evident by the survey was a “consolidation” of extremisms through interaction with various emerging phenomena. Young people are seen to be defying conventional political labels and engaging in views of widespread distrust with suspicions of nepotism, and cronyism, and a lack of opportunities. A range of new movements share the conviction that all power is conspiracy, they tend to reject conventional left and right, while generally arcing towards far-right values. They express ambivalence if not cynicism toward parliamentary politics and express a

discourse promoting individual liberties. They consider restrictions on young people and school closure as a result of COVID to be “punishment” and an “infringement of human rights” for young people.

When it comes to the experience young people have with hate speech, 84.2% stated that they had recently noticed hate speech online, 63.3% in the public space, 43.2% in educational spaces, 31.3% in their circle of friends, and 27.1% in their family.

The most common target groups in this context have been: the LGBTQIA+ community, the Roma community, the Hungarian community, women, the Jewish community, and immigrants and refugees. These statistics confirm previous, national and international human rights reports and a number of annual reports by public authorities and other relevant institutions.

Roma Community

“ECRI notes with great concern the persistent and high incidence of anti-Gypsyism, resulting in Roma constantly enduring hatred and insults in public life. Roma people are often portrayed as ‘thieves, liars, lazy’ and systematically linked with criminality, which reinforces bias and increases their social exclusion.”¹⁵

Importantly, the gradual internationalisation of the debates about the Roma community in Romanian society has only exacerbated the discrimination of this 8% of the population. One of the reasons for this intolerance is the confusion created between Roma and Romanians (Botonogu 2012). The Roma expulsions from France as well as incidents in Italy in 2008 which continued into 2010, have fuelled a high level of hate speech in the country by those offended by the identification with this ethnic minority. This trend has gained ground with the increase in mobility especially among young people within the EU. Although racist and derogatory perspectives toward the Roma community have been a concern historically, there are new developments in discrimination that have to do with the “purity” of nation in the global dynamics, Europeanisation and Euroscepticism. Eurosceptic perspectives have been voiced in relation to the necessity of policies of integration in Romanian society.

Anti-Gypsyism is perpetuated by blaming the Roma community for altering the perception of the Romanian identity abroad and is often employed by state institutions and decision makers. The former president Traian Basescu, for example, was sanctioned twice by the NCCD due to comments made in an international context. He blamed the nomadic Roma community for Romania’s failure to become a member of the Schengen area (Botonogu 2013). Young people are often at the center of such dynamics because they constitute much of the emigrant community.

¹⁵ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. ECRI Report on Romania fifth monitoring cycle, adopted on 3rd of April 2019, ECRI Council of Europe, Strasbourg. p15.

Hungarian Community

The minority ethnic Hungarian community has been historically a target of hate speech and discrimination. The ECRI 2019 report mentions “...derogatory public statements have often been expressed in the context of the longstanding tension persisting between the Hungarian national minority and the state authorities, mostly with political overtones arising from the discussion over demands for ‘autonomy’.”¹⁶

New dynamics of hate speech have emerged in relation to the Hungarian community because of the transnational border politics of the Viktor Orbán government in Hungary. This is specifically due to the 2007 extension of citizenship to ethnic Hungarians living outside of Hungary. The political and institutional context has also perpetuated these biases. The current president of Romania was fined in May 2020 for discrimination and violation of the right to dignity based on ethnicity / nationality, due to statements made about the draft law on the autonomy of the Szekler¹⁷ Land. He referred to the situation as an attempt of “giving Transylvania to the Hungarians”. The politics of the UDMR (Romanian Hungarian Party) internally have exacerbated the situation in that the UDMR is increasingly strengthening Viktor Orbán’s sovereigntist discourse on the Hungarian state. The Romanian-Hungarian hate and conflict is exploited by more centre parties as well in counties like Harghita and Covasna. Simmering tensions and biases against the Hungarian community maintain a polarised expression in many public discourses, such as sports and culture, both contexts where many young people are present and active. Young people are explicitly targeted in the Tusványos Festival and My Homeland’s Transylvanian branch. At the same time, the anti-EU positions of the Hungarian government have aggravated liberal nationalist positions in Romania that identify “European values” as a right of the Romanian state.

LGBTQIA+ Community

The NGO ACCEPT, published in 2019 the results of a survey conducted in Romanian high schools (A long way to go for LGBTI equality, FRA). According to the study, 1 in 4 students declared that gays and lesbians are inferior human beings, while more than 50% of the respondents considered gender reassignment treatment morally wrong. 96% of the respondents mostly believed that the words “homosexual” and “lesbian” are derogatory terms. At the same time, 6 out of 10 LGBTQIA+ students said they were the victims of or witnesses to verbal or physical aggression because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The place of the community in society, and the discriminatory practices they encounter continue to be one of the most polarising of topics. In 2019 and 2020 several cases of homophobia and hate speech

¹⁶ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. ECRI Report on Romania fifth monitoring cycle, adopted on 3rd of April 2019, ECRI Council of Europe, Strasbourg. p15.

¹⁷ Szekler are a Hungarian sub group

made the national headlines and so highlighted the full extent of the biases and prejudices expressed.

The Jewish Community

The trend of antisemitism has increased in the last decade. The Jewish community in Romania today total approximately 4000 people. According to a survey conducted by the Anti-Defamation League in 2015, 49% of people between 18 and 34 harboured anti-Semitic attitudes in Romania, more than any other age category (Anti Defamation League 2015). The survey conducted for this report shows a continuation of this trend among young people. According to a study commissioned by Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, only 25% of the respondents acknowledged that the Holocaust also took place in Romania. The minimalisation and even outright denial of the Holocaust manifests itself in many ways and in many groups. There is a continuous contestation, in public discourse and intellectual debates about the scale of what happened in Romania and who the true perpetrators were. One of the anti-Semitic arguments is the “Judeo Bolshevik myth”, that the Jewish community was communist. Young people have also been involved in anti-Semitic attacks: in 2019, anti-Semitic graffiti was painted onto the Elie Wiesel Memorial House in Sighet and in 2018 there were attacks on the Jewish Cemetery in Bucharest. In both cases, the perpetrators were teenagers. In 2021, the commemoration of the Holocaust in Bucharest was questioned with young people asking why this was relevant history for Romania. Although governance usually promotes Holocaust remembrance, there are frequent indirect denials of the extent of Romanian involvement in the Holocaust. There is also a preference among some academics and leading intellectuals to emphasise Romanian victimhood, this has included in 2018, the Romanian Academy of Science. More generally, many cities still hold on to streets names named after historical figures and statues of historical figures involved in anti-Semitic repression in World War II. The politics of memory around the Holocaust has been one of the main topics where public debate exhibits distinct Eurosceptic arguments. Remembering the Holocaust and its victims is seen as one of the features at the core of liberal European values and is therefore perceived as an “external” imposition.

Immigrants and Refugees

Despite the low number of immigrants and refugees in Romania, even during 2015, opinion polls reveal a hostile public attitude towards such groups, and although these opinions have decreased in the last 5 years, the effects still linger. In 2015, a public opinion poll from INSCOP Research¹⁸ revealed that 75% of Romanians would not agree to host a refugee in their home. According to the same survey, 56.2% of Romanians stated that their country should not take refugees, while 67.1% were against refugees settling down in their city (INSCOP 2015). Another survey

¹⁸ INSCOP Research is a private company of social and marketing research, established in 2013.

conducted by INSCOP Research in March 2016 showed that more than 80% of Romanians opposed refugees or immigrants settling in Romania (INSCOP 2016). The percentage was even higher among the respondents who did not agree with refugees or immigrants being settled or hosted in their city, 88.3%. In the political debate, most of the protagonists use arguments such as immigrants taking jobs from the Romanian population, they will cause lower wages, they will put pressure on public services, and they will be given a generous aid allowance which is higher than some of the salaries of the citizens (Korec 2017).

There are frequent hate speech examples when cases of illegal border crossings surface in the media, these are also associated with the negative attitudes regarding the capacity of Romanian border authorities. Conversely, there are positive appreciations of police brutality against illegal immigrants.

Women

Our survey identified women, as an explicitly exposed vulnerable group to hate speech. There is a trend which shows women in Romania are facing an increased wave of stigmatisation, discrimination, and sexism. In March 2019, the Council of Europe passed a new directive for the prevention and combatting of sexism, starting from the observation that sexism is the main factor in the discrimination and preventing social upward mobility of girls and women, Recommendation on Preventing and Combatting Sexism..¹⁹ The report highlights that sexism is tied in with domestic violence, continued cycles of violence and a systemic rejection of the complex role of women in the community. It also perpetuates the “feminisation” of poverty, this means that the patriarchal society mostly believes that the woman’s role should be reduced to raising children and taking care of the household. Hate speech against women often covers elements having to do with their sexuality, their “emancipation” or role in the family. “Benevolent sexism”, namely familialism and the focus of gender in socialising women is an inherent dimension of this process. Similarly, corruption encourages male dominated structures and a paternalistic perpetuation of employment patterns and career paths. Young women are specifically targeted with gender role attitudes and patriarchal structures. Hate speech against women is ubiquitous, in public media, on social media, through websites, in advertising campaigns, and in political debates.

Speaking about their own experiences, our respondents singled out the online environment as the most frequent place for hate speech (72.8%) and consequently most argued that mechanisms of control for hate speech online should be put in place (78.2%). 33.5% stated that they noticed a hate incident weekly, 26% daily, 16% several times per month, 15% occasionally, and 7% answered that they did not see such hate speech. 60.7% said they felt personally targeted by hate speech, 61.2%

¹⁹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/new-council-of-europe-action-against-sexism>

said they experienced it as bullying, 55.1% as verbal denigration, 19% through segregation (they were barred from entering a group), and 30% experienced cyberbullying. In terms of the people producing the hate speech, 58.7% were identified as school or work colleagues, 53.3% were unknown to them, 22.7% were friends, 15.3% were family, and 1.3% were teachers. Respondents also identified that 20.7% of the producers of hate speech were women and 12% were children. The final categorisation here is that 37.3% of hate speech producers were young people (under the age of 35).

Hate Speech

Reasons for people making hate speech are listed as 32.9% related to gender, 20% to sexual orientation, and 21.9% to socio-economic conditions. 7% answered “I do not believe hate speech exists”.

In terms of responding to hate speech or not, 40.6% answered they decided to take measures, 65.2% did not take any measures at all. Out of those who took some measures, 41.3% said they confronted the aggressor, 23.9% asked for help from a person of trust, but only 11.9% reported it. 7.3% published an alternative positive message and 3.7% published an equally negative message. Out of those who did not take any measures, 34.1% listed the lack of support from people they trust, and 31% feared being socially excluded. For those who did not react, 48.1% said it caused a lack of self trust in the long term, 35.7% reported feelings of helplessness, 29.5% stated a lack of interest in social involvement and activism, 25.6% said it created a state of confusion for them, and 20.2% admitted feelings of resentment. 39.3% answered “yes” when asked if close family or friends were the subject of hate speech, 38.8% said no. The respondents, in 56.5% of cases advised those targeted by hate speech not to report the incident, while 44.3% advised them to report it. 54.8% said they were unsure if what they experienced was hate speech.

2. Euroscepticism

A recent trend in politics and social actions has focused on the connections between extremism and the role, position and prestige of the notion of European integration. Indeed, attitudes towards “Europe” have swayed in relation to its turning points, such as the economic crisis of 2009, the 2015 refugee reception crisis and the 2020 pandemic. These crises have affected countries already in the European Union as well as those starting the integration process. In this sense, the older trend from Euro-optimism to Euroscepticism (Taggart 2003) has also changed. In 2020, Szczerbiak proposed a hard vs soft Euroscepticism, hard Euroscepticism is an open antagonism to the concept of European integration, while soft Euroscepticism implies rather an anxiety about changes in some areas of social life and in the position of the state.

Although these definitions are useful, the complexity is that different attitudes co-exist. For instance, Romanians are among the biggest supporters of the European project. The polls between 2010 and 2020 suggest that Romanians have always placed a high level of trust in the European Union, sometimes similar or even higher than the overall rate at European level. Romanians’ perception of the European Union is usually associated with the freedom of movement, and human rights and peace, and less with economic security or the other existent aims. Even in the context of an increasing economic, financial or humanitarian crisis, Romanians remained optimistic about their future in the European Union and even more in favour of the European project than other European countries (Sebe 2016 and Chiciudean and Corbu 2015). The percentages are even higher when Romanians are asked whether or not they believe their country has benefited from its accession to the Union. We can conclude that Euroscepticism is not a prevalent issue in Romanian society.

However, there are more sophisticated ways in which the juridical, financial and political scenes play into the issue. Public trust in the EU increases with the lack of confidence in national authorities, though not necessarily because they embrace the European values or understand how the Union is functioning. According to opinion polls conducted between 2010 and 2019, less than 50% believe their voice matters in the European Union, and the percentage in terms of having an interest in European affairs is even lower, around 30%. Romanians positive attitude towards the EU is also determined by a high level of distrust in their own government and the public institutions’ capacity to react to challenges or to respond to their basic needs effectively. This is reinforced by the turnouts in EU elections, where it is consistently higher than in the national ones.²⁰ That also triggers a fluid and oftentimes superficial understanding of the notions of “European values” and obligations.

In 2014, 32.44% voted for the next European Parliament, while 9.069.822 votes were cast in 2019, approximately 51.20%, one of the biggest turnout in the Union, compared to 41.76% and 39.78% in the last

Our survey shows that young people are in general optimistic about the role of the European Union, with 52% percent stating that belonging to the EU does not have a negative effect on the sovereignty of the state and 51.3% stating that EU legislation should complement and amend national legislation on hate speech. 66.5% responded that human rights should be respected no matter the situation, with only 3% arguing this should not be the case.

92.3% responded that they would not consider, accept or support violent extremist groups, while 7.2% stated that they would consider this.

There are questions that show how biases operate, for instance, when asked whether “one ethnic group is more capable than another in the country”, 45.5% answered this is not the case, 14.4% answered that this is the case, and 14.8% were neutral. Responses to this question argued primarily that social conditions were not the same, but a number of answers leaned towards supremacist views.

The survey confirms a worrying trend among young people. Since 2014, primarily after the European “refugee reception” crisis, right-wing nationalist youth oriented discourses, have morphed into the more recent nativism by perpetuating the Great Replacement theory: “the process by which non-European migrants replace the indigenous European population.” One such example is the Facebook groups NEAMUL VALAH²¹ - connected to the extremist right-wing AUR Party.

In 2020, the AUR Party mainstreamed the extreme right by winning seats in Parliament, after two decades of strong xenophobic, nationalist ideas, they left the marginal political space and joined Parliament. The presence of the AUR in Parliament inaugurated a distinct age of political polarisation. Furthermore, the elections of 2020 showed a strong mobilisation of young people (under 30 years old) as candidates. AUR voters are also predominantly young people.

Women’s movements and gender equality have also been a complex field of contestation of Euroscepticism. “Feminism” is portrayed by conservative factions as an import, an obligation of following EU norms and values. Euroscepticism is triggered by the “identity” norms and values, and in general connected to messages of “nativism” (the supremacy of one group over all others) and nationalism (defending

national elections. While more than 40% of the respondents declared that they did not know that the European elections were held in the country, according to the Eurobarometer Survey 91.1 of the European Parliament, the same percentage expressed their distrust in the national government. More than 30% stated that they would vote in the next European elections. According to the post-elections surveys, the main reasons for voting were the duty as a citizen, because they favoured the European Union, but most significantly because they were disappointed by the national authorities.

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/NEAMULVALAH/>

the nation, expanding territory, affirming the “nation” as a homogeneous group). They see the EU as a threat to the nation’s cultural homogeneity and they ‘own’ and capitalise on the immigration issue by emphasising a ‘cultural backlash’ against multiple dimensions of globalisation defined by immigration. For instance, PSD’s political slogan “Romania deserves more”, incited intolerance towards foreigners, especially those from Western countries. The tensions were determined by the ongoing criticism of the European Union’s institutions over the rule of law and corruption in Romania. PSD’s views verged on Euroscepticism around 2018, but have stopped short of stepping into the Eurosceptic camp. They also showed support for BREXIT, calling it an act of courage from the British citizens and institutions (Sebe 2016). The Great Replacement is an argument where European civilization is seen to be negatively impacted by Islam but where Eastern Europe is the traditional ‘defender’ of European borders and Islam is seen as “foreign” to Europe.

An important phenomenon to notice is the emergence of young conservative politicians who appeal to a new demographic, and they identify as a “renewal” of the mainstream. This dynamic is similar to new international right-wing politicians, who are also mostly young. In Romania, similar discourses belong to young (neo)liberal politicians, for example Andrei Caramitru 2019 and Dan Sova 2013.

In the same line, the debates about “corruption”, which often develop in simplistic lines between pro-European (allegedly not corrupt) and anti-European, is now also a cultural narrative, strengthening a view that accentuates ideas about national sovereignty or a “better” social class. Indeed, there is also a class dimension, with some observations that refer to a distinct hate speech trend directed towards poorer professional categories, retirees and the peasant class. In this sense, we can conclude that an urban / rural antagonisms plays into Euroscepticism.

The survey for this project showed positive attitudes towards the EU, with most arguing that belonging to the EU is a positive influence on national legislation. However, comments in the survey have also shown existing negative attitudes, with anti-refugee sentiments that are tied in with Euroscepticism. These are primarily in relation to the debate about Schengen membership “the EU wants ‘us’ to take the responsibility for refugees, but does not reciprocate” this is seen as an EU imposition.

3. Innovative Civic Activism Countering Hate Speech

3.1 Organisations

Some leading initiatives in Romania are run by the following organisations:

ActiveWatch

ActiveWatch²² is a media monitoring agency focused on protecting and promoting human rights and ensuring free media communication in the public interest. It operates four departments: antidiscrimination, freeex, good governance, and media education and research. It is a leading NGO in antidiscrimination and free communication work. ActiveWatch publishes a yearly monitoring report of hate speech in Romania.

Romani CRISS

Romani CRISS²³ was established in 1993, it aims to protect the Roma community's fundamental rights in Romania. The NGO provides legal assistance in cases of abuse and works to prevent the discrimination of people belonging to the community. It works on raising awareness and fighting differential treatment based on race in different areas such as education, employment, housing, and health. Among its activities, the organisation is monitoring and investigating cases of human rights violations, including incitement to hatred, creating and organising campaigns, conducting research, and producing brochures and studies.

ACCEPT

ACCEPT²⁴ is one of the most active non-governmental organisations when it comes to the safeguarding and promoting the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons' rights within Romania. Established in 1994, one of its main objectives is also to challenge and combat the negative attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ community by raising awareness among the public and the media. It promotes the observance of the rights and liberties of LGBTQIA+ people through cooperation with other organisations that promote the rights of minorities. It also develops different projects and conducts lobbying and advocacy activities to influence policymakers.

FILIA Centre

²² [ActiveWatch](#)

²³ [Romani CRISS](#)

²⁴ [ACCEPT](#)

FILIA Centre²⁵ focuses mainly on promoting and supporting equal opportunities between men and women, achieving gender equality, women's emancipation, women's positive representation in the media and public sphere, and the elimination of all forms of violence against women. Through research, activism and advocacy, the organisation is also monitoring and raising awareness about the negative representation of women and being involved in many cases where incitement and hatred against women have not been punished by the national authorities.

PATRIR

PATRIR²⁶ implemented the Switch OFF/ONline Hate Speech project (2015-2016) during which it brought the "No Hate Speech Movement" of the Council of Europe to Romania. One of the results was the No Hate Speech Council in Romania. This is the outcome of three European Commission projects focusing on youth and curtailing hate speech among young people. It was set up in 2015, it continues to convene annually.

3.2 Projects

Do One Brave Thing

Do One Brave Thing²⁷ was a European Commission project (2019-2021) that looked at raising awareness on recognising fake news and critically assessing the background and pre-conditions of its emergence. The project produced a public tool where users can test a news sites or articles for click-bait content. The project produced a number of guides, toolkits and informational videos, tailored specifically for young audiences, showing how hate narratives accentuate polarisation and extremism, specifically among young people.

CHAMPIONS

CHAMPIONS²⁸ was another European Commission project (2019-2021). This one focused on the prevention of radicalisation and extremism in Central and Eastern Europe. The project produced a permanent working group working at city level in prevention / countering violent extremism. The relevant stakeholders selected for the group were primarily those working with young people and those working on issues of well-being and anti-radicalisation.

PARTICIPATION

PARTICIPATION²⁹ was a European Commission project (2021-2024) that focused on the phenomena of contemporary extremism in Europe, working with participatory

²⁵ [Filia Centre](#)

²⁶ [PATRIR and Switch OFF/Online Hate Speech](#)

²⁷ [Do One Brave Thing](#)

²⁸ [CHAMPIONS](#)

²⁹ [PARTICIPATION](#)

action-based research investigating grass-root dynamics. It had a strong focus on young people and right-wing extremism and the prevention of such phenomena. One of the primary stakeholders were schools and teachers.

Other Relevant Organisations:

The Centre for Legal Resources³⁰

The Centre for Independent Journalism³¹

Policy Center for Roma and Minorities³²

Pro Democracy Association³³

Foundation for the Development of the Civil Society³⁴

Institute for Public Policy³⁵

GO FREE³⁶

³⁰ The Centre for Legal Resources

³¹ The Centre for Independent Journalism

³² Policy Center for Roma and Minorities

³³ Pro Democracy Association

³⁴ Foundation for the Development of the Civil Society

³⁵ Institute for Public Policy

³⁶ GO FREE

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main conclusion of this short overview of hate speech and Euroscepticism in the Romanian context, shows that the long-running reluctance and inaction by the Government in improving policy frameworks and legal mechanisms for preventing hate speech, have been exacerbated by the reach of transnational forms of extremism. The quick transmission of these narratives in the digital space, and also the permeation of these discourses into mainstream legal and social frameworks, has affected all categories. Young people are perhaps more exposed and vulnerable because of the relative ease with which they access and use the internet and social media. In general, attitudes among young people continue to perpetuate antisemitism and xenophobic perspectives. Although the respondents to our survey were mixed in their views, there is a consistent number of young people adhering to discourses professing anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-gender sentiments. It is coupled with normative discourses about gender and gender stereotypes as well as misogynist attitudes.

Based on the report and its conclusions, the authors propose the following recommendations for more effective measures to combat hate speech:

- Implement at local and national levels 'joined up' multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral approaches that work at city/regional level and bring together relevant actors for the prevention of extremism, and to encourage education and activism.
- Improve strategies for inclusion for at risk demographic (young people, Roma, immigrants, etc.);
- Establish a clear legal definition of hate speech for use in the judiciary system.
- Establish clear judicial procedures to avoid confusion for victims, often caused by the existing mechanisms because the competences of certain authorities overlap.
- Implement capacity building development for the prevention of hate speech among young people, law enforcement officers, and the other institutions. This capacity building should include training courses on how to deal with hate speech cases.
- Decriminalise youth prevention policies which lead to a more nuanced understanding of the actual perpetrators, their economic / social background and tailored policies of prevention.

- Establish official programmes of statistics and reporting. The difference between the existing case law and the results of the opinion polls is showing an increasing trend of the phenomenon in the country.
- Innovate awareness raising messages to address the high level of distrust in the local and national authorities.
- Adapt legislation to include and respect a victim's perspective.
- Raise awareness in the public authorities regarding the need to acknowledge and consider hate speech as a threat and cause of extremism.
- Create more effective campaigning and improve the narratives used for the prevention hate speech against the Roma minority, LGBTQIA+ community, the Hungarians, the Jewish people, persons with disabilities, HIV/AIDS affected persons, women, and immigrants. The already implemented campaigns do not have the same impact as the public discourses of the main actors spreading hate speech and legitimising discrimination.
- Address and counter institutional violence perpetuated through the language of policy.
- Create citizen led initiatives for holding powers accountable so that they can address the actors responsible for the increasing use of discriminatory language.
- Approach the online environment as a serious threat, train authorities to understand the intentions of those who misuse the internet, use resources and the legal tools to sanction the spreading of hate speech on websites or social networks.
- Interpret hate in relation to political phenomena (populism, rise of the right, Euroscepticism) and adapt legislation to focus on factors and drivers.
- Inform the public about the consequences and effects of hate speech.
- Adapt educational strategies to identify and address early signs of radicalisation.
- Produce educational programmes on human rights violations and the perils of Euroscepticism.
- Inform the public about existing legislation and encourage victims to report hate speech and discrimination.
- Provide education and encourage young people to become involved by developing training courses on: exploring the differences between opinion, hate speech and hate crime; on how to answer hate (non violent communication, questioning and when to report / delete) and how to become an upstander (answer hate comments / speech); and about values of compassion and the effects of hate;

- Provide non-formal education activities for young people to have space for sharing their opinions openly, to promote active listening and to hold debates on the freedom of speech vs hate speech vs banning hate speech.
- Encourage critical thinking and media literacy.
- Publish annual data and statistics on employment, education and the wealth / living standard gap between Romanian, Hungarian and Roma people living in Romania.
- Introduce unconscious bias training as mandatory for civil servants, state organisation employees and frontline staff (including teachers).

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