

SUMMARY

DETERMINING

POLITICAL

HARMFUL

NARRATIVES

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Introduction

The third report Determining Political Harmful Narratives (HARM-TIVE) is a sublimation of the data from the monitoring of the communication practices of the political actors in January and February 2024 in which harmful narratives were identified. It also includes an analysis how these harmful narratives are treated in the central news editions of nine television and 11 online media outlets.

Similar to the previous [two reports](#) for September-October 2023 and November-December 2023, in this edition as well the content and volume of the harmful narratives propagated by the political actors are empirically captured and the intensity, the topics and entities towards which the negative messages are directed. The report also indicates the violations of the [standards and principles for non-discriminatory and transparent political communication by the political representatives](#), as well as the [standards for professional and ethical journalistic reporting](#).

The research Determining Political Harmful Narratives (HARM-TIVE) was conducted by the Institute of Communication Studies (ICS) within the project Use Facts: Fact-Based Journalism for Raising Awareness and Countering Disinformation in the Media Space in North Macedonia supported by the British Embassy Skopje. The research is longitudinal and lasts during 2023 and 2024. It is conducted in several phases by a team from ICS in cooperation with researchers and experts in the field of communications and media, as well as with media professionals in the field of monitoring and control.

The methodological framework, samples and monitoring dynamics, as well as details of the entire research process are available at: [HARM-TIVE](#).

This document is a summary of the monitoring for January and February 2024.

The full text of the research can be found at the following [link](#).

KEY FINDINGS

In the first two months of 2024, a record number of news items with harmful narratives were documented in online media and television stations compared to the previous four months of monitoring. The numbers confirmed the premise that as the presidential and parliamentary elections approach, the harmful rhetoric will be fuelled by political actors who are essentially the main source of pollution in the media space and who are apparently ready for a smear campaign before the elections begin. At the same time, a large part of the media that are subject to monitoring continue to help political entities in spreading harmful narratives, overlooking that they should not be quiet broadcasters of their views, but that they have an obligation to consult multiple sources when informing, to check the presented allegations with in-depth investigation and adhere to basic standards of professional and ethical reporting.

Big and small

In these two months, similar to the previous, the biggest political parties created the most harmful narratives. **The main opposition party VMRO-DPMNE and the main ruling party SDSM are at the top**, followed by smaller parties. There is a trend among small parliamentary parties that there are no recorded harmful narratives. The exception is Levica, which continues to have the most posts with harmful narratives on Facebook.

In **VMRO-DPMNE, the harmful narratives are mostly aimed at SDSM and DUI**, which the opposition party presents as criminal structures, irresponsible and do not work for the national interests. **SDSM, on the other hand, often labels VMRO-DPMNE as the 'obstacle of European integration'** and accuses them of corrupt governance in local institutions across the country. **Levica targets SDSM and DUI, but does not spare VMRO-DPMNE**, thus presenting itself as a small party that works for the citizens against the big blocks of parties.

Copy-paste journalism and multiplication

When it comes to online media, in January and February the portals **Republika, Kurir and A10n** again lead the way in publishing content with harmful narratives. It is characteristic that most online media are open to post their stories on news pages regardless of the rhetoric offered, and without any interventions (especially when it comes to political parties' press releases), on the principle of copy-paste journalism, if that can be considered journalism at all. Frequently, through using parts of texts, or appearances of political actors in other media and reshaping them in two or three new articles, they engage in multiplying precisely the harmful narratives.

Among the television stations in this period, as well as in the previous four months of the monitoring, **TV Alfa leads in the published news items with harmful narratives**. It is notable for this TV station that since the beginning of the monitoring, we see frequent cases where the journalist in the report itself or in the announcement is directly responsible for the creation of the harmful narrative.

Foreign influence

Political actors are increasingly accusing each other of leading policies under foreign influence. If in the previous period such accusations were directed mainly at Levica and VMRO-DPMNE, for which the ruling SDSM claimed without evidence to be under Russian influence, it is a novelty that the European Union for Change in January and February focuses on attacks against Ali Ahmeti and the senior DUI representatives, especially on the topic of negative foreign influence from the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Albin Kurti, in domestic politics.

On the other hand, DUI frequently accuses political opponents from the Albanian parties of a Russian connection and uses ethnocentric narratives and dichotomous rhetoric 'YES for Europe, NO for Russia' that gains momentum with the candidacy for the president of the country.

Populism and nationalist rhetoric

With almost all political entities that are the subject of monitoring, it is noticed that there is a trend to present that they are on the side of the people, that they represent their interests, unlike their political opponents. As the election date approaches, the intensity of communication between the political actors increases. The language used is sharper and emotionally charged. In addition to frequently making unfounded accusations against political opponents in order to undermine trust in them, there is also a frequent occurrence of populist discourse and frequent ethnocentric narratives.

This is noticeable especially among the parties of the Albanians, who resort to rhetoric to glorify national belonging and insist on ethnic personalization of the prime state positions (prime minister and president of the state). The protection of the national interests of the Albanians in this country is the focus of the promotion of their own ideologies in the harmful narratives of DUI, the European Union for Change and the Alliance of Albanians.

Abuse of official channels

Similar to previous reports, a violation of the principles of ethical communication of members of the Government was noted. Starting from Prime Minister Dimitar Kovachevski, on whose official Facebook page content about party activities was published while he was in office. In January, harmful narratives were also noted on the Facebook pages of Deputy Prime Minister Artan Grubi, who presented allegations about attempts to destabilize and disorientate our European path coming from a single centre - Russia, which is the first time an accusation has been made by a deputy prime minister from DUI for the interference of foreign factors in the internal political relations in the country.

Additionally, at the end of the month, the Deputy Prime Minister presented party and ethnically inspired narratives, in the context of the election of Talat Djaferi as the first Prime Minister-designate of the Caretaker Government who is an ethnic Albanian. In February, several cases were also noted when members of the Government abused the official channels of communication of the institution they manage. Such is the case of Bujar Osmani, who used his presence at the UN as Minister of Foreign Affairs for his own promotion for the presidential candidacy. A similar case is the Minister of Justice, Krenar Loga, who also commented on inter-party disputes through the official government Facebook profile, but also used nationalist rhetoric. Malpractice of this type was also noted in posts by the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management.

Unsubstantiated accusations and criticism of the media

Monitoring in the months of January and February 2024 shows that the dominant political actors in Macedonia, both from the ruling and opposition political parties, violate the standards and principles that should be followed in political communication. They very easily resort to accusations about their political opponents without supporting them with arguments. Unfounded accusations of corrupt practices are being made, which undermines trust in the institutions. Unverified data is used, information is presented selectively, which makes it impossible for the public to get a complete picture of the operation of political entities and cannot make an informed decision, especially when it comes to electoral processes.

The frequent criticism by influential political actors (the former prime minister and the leader of the opposition) of media, which encourages a climate of distrust towards media workers and violation of freedom of expression, is worrying.

Positive changes

During the monitoring in January and February, positive things were also noted that should be pointed and highlighted. One of them is that in all the analysed TV content, not once was there any speech that insults a certain group or justifies hate speech towards a certain group, based on national or ethnic origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, belonging to a marginalized group, etc. The fact that most political actors and the media do not use this type of harmful narrative and it is not part of their rhetoric, especially in the pre-election period, is a very positive and encouraging sign.

At the same time, although in the period of January and February there was a record number of articles with harmful narratives, at certain television stations (MTV 1 and MTV 2) and at certain online media (Vecer.mk) there is a trend of decreasing the number of news items with harmful narratives compared to the previous four months of monitoring. Another positive trend is that no harmful narratives were noted on the Facebook profiles of the leaders of the two largest parties, which indicates a more careful and politically correct communication on the personal, in contrast to the party Facebook pages, where the harmful rhetoric continues.

Forgotten rules and obligations

The analysis showed that most frequently harmful narratives are produced in the centres of political parties and their favourite communication channel is the party press release. At the same time, a large part of the media (mostly online media) allows space by passively reporting party positions that contain unsubstantiated accusations against political opponents. As it was noted several times in previous reports, the role of the journalist is not only to convey the statements of political actors one-sidedly, but to offer a balanced approach. The main duty of the journalist, as indicated by the first point of [The International Federation of Journalists' Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists](#) is to 'respect the facts and the public's right to know the truth'. In that process, as the introduction of this charter states, the responsibility that the journalist has towards the public is much greater than the responsibility towards the authorities or employers.

In Macedonia, it is a well-known practice for parties to use nationalist rhetoric, especially in the run-up to and during the elections, particularly since it is rhetoric that is emotionally charged and easily stirs up the emotions of the citizens. Propagation of extreme patriotism and nationalism can contribute to greater division in society, especially in a sensitive period such as the election cycle in a society like ours where democracy is still fragile. It should be noted that political actors need to refrain from using and spreading hate speech and discriminatory speech, which can cause intolerance and incite divisions.

The principle of ethical communication means that elected and appointed officials, as well as party officials, have an obligation in their communication with the public and the media to practice ethics in communication. Political parties are encouraged to adopt codes of conduct which, among other things, oblige their members, officials, candidates and elected and appointed persons to tackle speech that incites intolerance, discrimination or hatred. They are also called upon to treat participants with respect during their press conferences, to practice equal treatment when asking questions and to refrain from labelling media workers and human rights activists ([2021 Joint Declaration on Politicians and Public Servants and Freedom of Expression](#)).

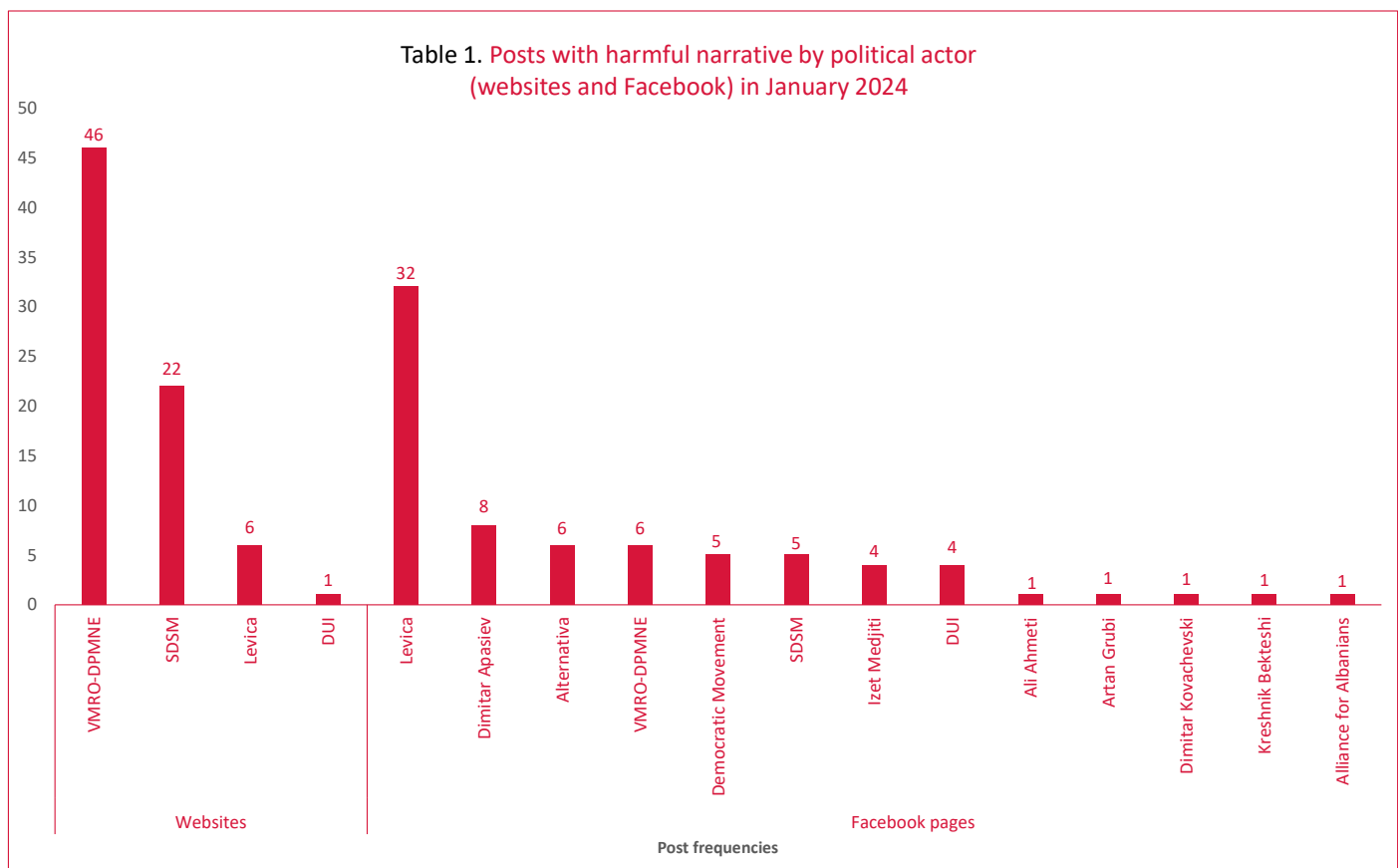
1. Monitoring of communication practices and narratives of the political actors through their websites and Facebook pages

The subject of the monitoring are the websites and Facebook pages of ten political parties which are represented by at least two MPs in the Assembly (Alliance for Albanians, Alternativa, DUI, Democratic Movement, VMRO-DMPNE, Levica, LDP, New Social Democratic Party, SDSM, Socialist Party). The profiles of the leaders of the political parties, as well as the profiles of the President of the Government of RNM, the 13 deputy prime ministers and ministers in the government are also monitored on Facebook.

In January and February these actors were subject to monitoring for 16 days in January and 14 days in February in accordance with the dynamics for monitoring each consecutive third and fourth day in the month.

1.1 Communication practices of the political parties and their leaders in January 2024

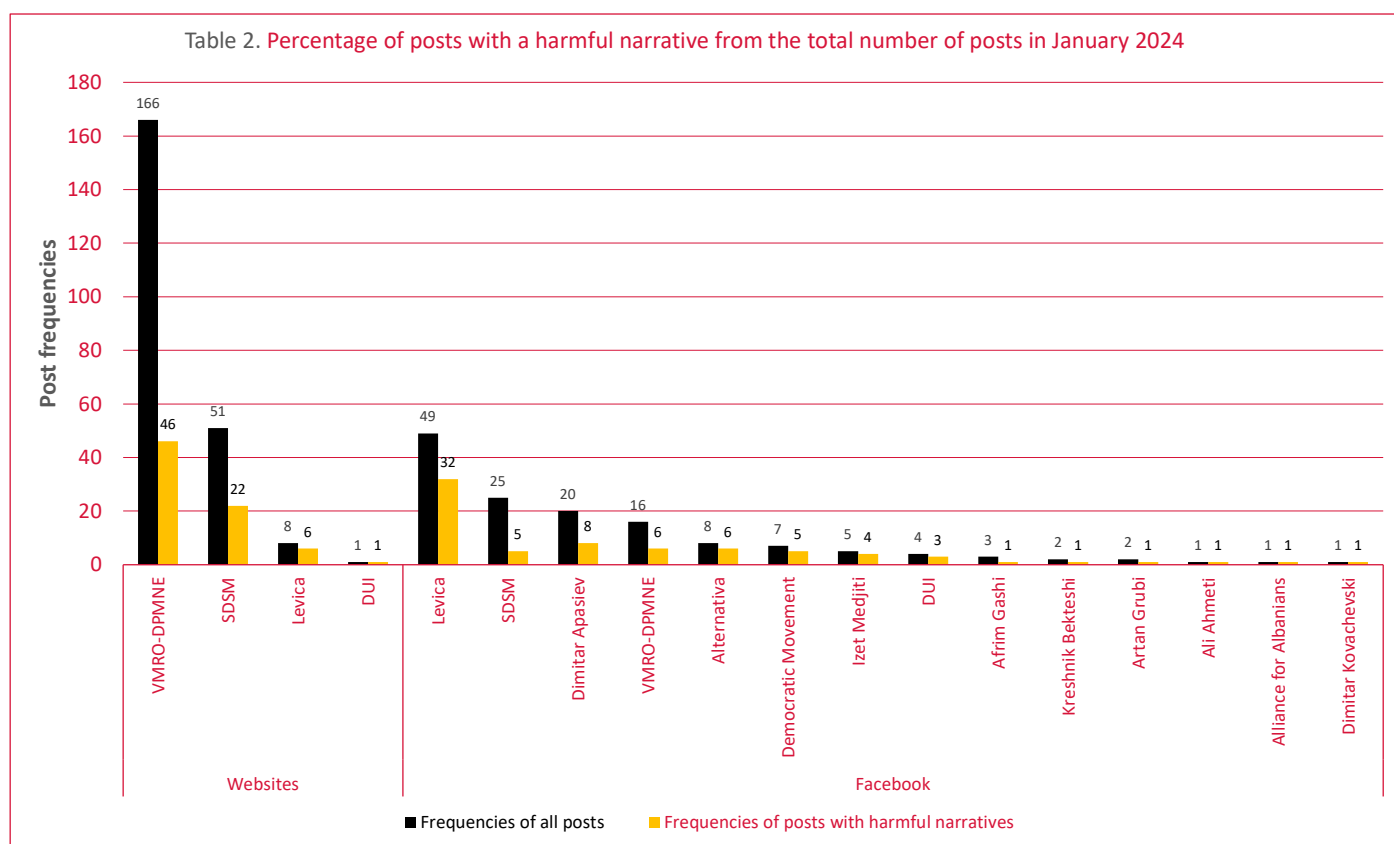
In the period from 1 to 31 January, monitoring of the websites and Facebook pages of the 10 political parties and their leaders identified **75 posts on the parties' websites and 73 Facebook posts containing harmful narrative.**



The monitoring determined that more than half, i.e. 61.3 percent of the identified harmful narratives on the parties' websites for January were from **VMRO-DPMNE, 29.3 percent from SDSM, and 8 percent from Levica**. Monitoring for January did not note any posts with harmful narratives on the websites of Alliance for Albanians, Alternativa, Democratic Movement, LDP, the New Social Democratic Party and the Socialist Party.

On the **Facebook pages**, as in the past months, the most harmful narratives were noted **from Levica (43.8%) and its leader Dimitar Apasiev (11%)**. In January, for the first time, the monitoring noted a harmful narrative on the profile of the leader of DUI, Ali Ahmeti. From the monitored pages of the government representatives, this month one harmful narrative can be noted, from the Deputy Prime Minister Artan Grubi and the Minister of Economy Kreshnik Bekteshi.

On the websites, the monitoring noted the most harmful narratives in Levica's posts, in 75 percent of the websites posts, while in SDSM in 43.1 percent, in VMRO-DPMNE in 27.7 percent, and in DUI 25 percent of the total number of website posts.

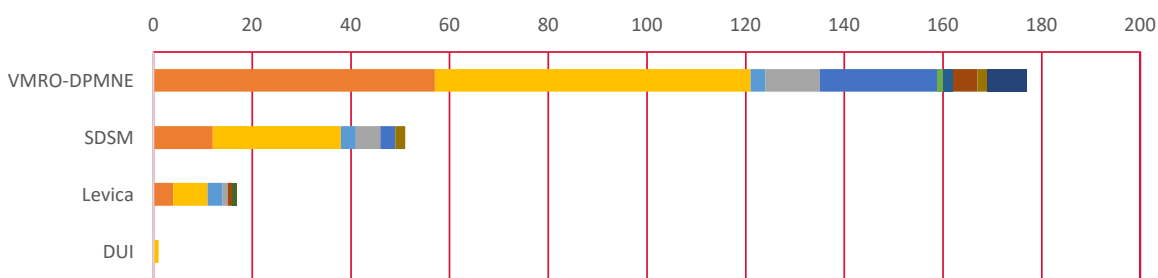


Equally to the **Facebook pages**, the monitoring noted the **most posts with harmful narratives by Levica and its leader Dimitar Apasiev**, where harmful narratives are noted in 65.3 percent of the Facebook posts by Levica and in 40 percent of Apasiev's posts. The Facebook monitoring shows that harmful narratives are present in 71.4 percent in the communication of the Democratic Movement and in 80 percent of the communication of the leader Izet Medjiti. Regarding Alternativa, 75 percent of the posts contain a harmful narrative and 33.3 percent of leader Afrim Gashi's posts.

Unverified findings are most often used as a basis for accusing political opponents as well as unsubstantiated claims of corruption, unprofessionalism and abuse of office. The next most frequently used indicators of harmful narratives on both communication channels are the labelling, ridicule and gross disrespect of the political opponents, as well as the deliberate non-reporting of information which results in failing to present the full picture of the event. **(Further details and tabular presentation on the prevalence of indicators for harmful narratives in the full report are available at: [HARM-TIVE](#))**

The parties on their websites most often developed harmful narratives of biased selection of information that mislead the public to wrong conclusions and attempted to undermine trust in institutions. In a total of 46 website posts of VMRO-DPMNE in which there are identified 177 pieces of the communication assessed as harmful, most often, i.e. 64 times they biasedly selected information and 57 times they tried to undermine trust in institutions. The next most frequently present harmful narratives on VMRO-DPMNE’s website are attacks and demonization of the political opponents (24 times), populism (11 times). The monitoring less frequently found disinformation, attempts to spread panic, fear and insecurity and inciting social divisions, alleged malign foreign influences, manipulative audio-visual content.

Table 3. Prevalence of harmful narratives in the posts of political parties’ websites in January 2024



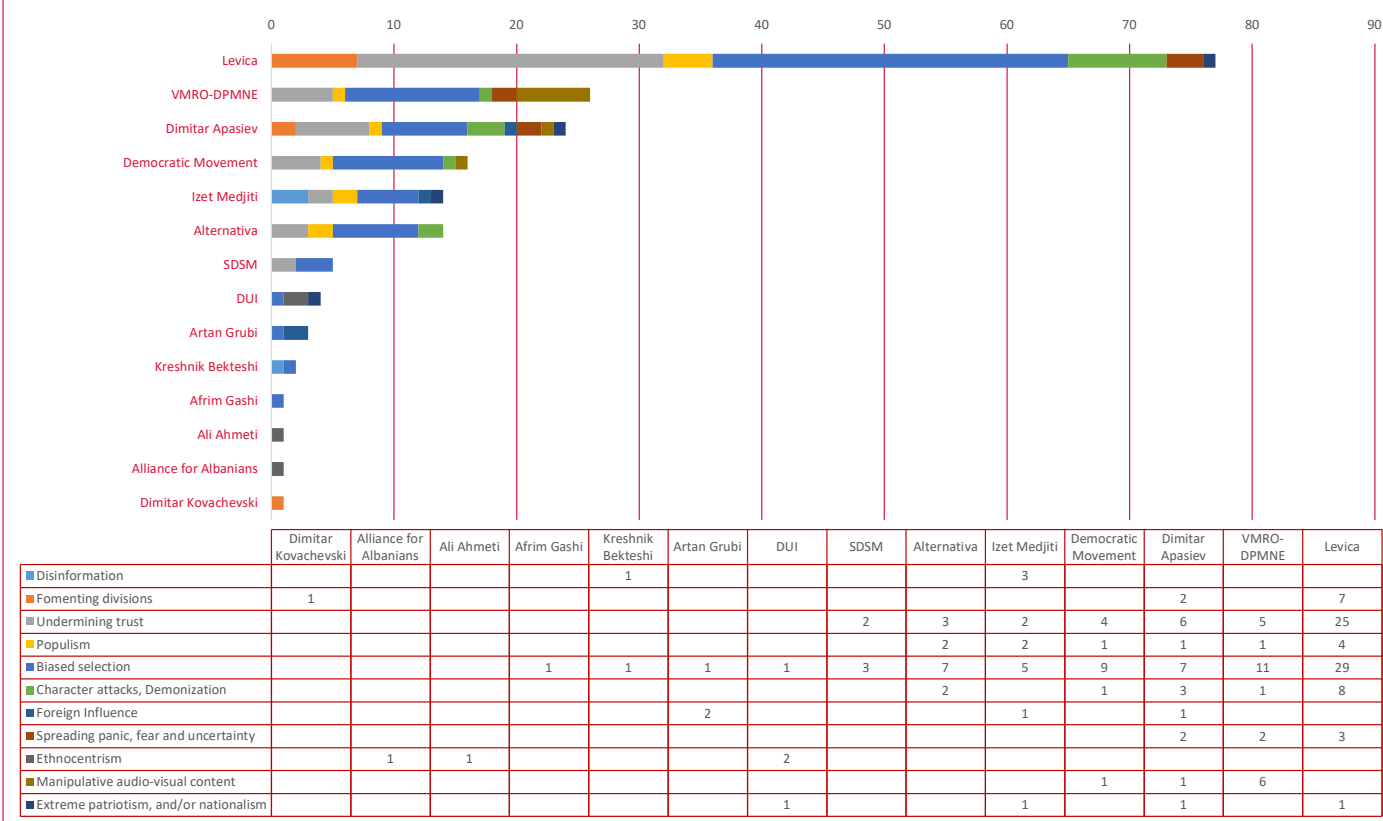
	DUI	Levica	SDSM	VMRO-DPMNE
Undermining trust		4	12	57
Biased selection	1	7	26	64
Fomenting divisions		3	3	3
Populism		1	5	11
Character attacks, Demonization			3	24
Conspiracy theories				1
Foreign Influence				2
Spreading panic, fear and uncertainty		1		5
Hate speech				
Disinformation			2	2
Manipulative audio-visual content				8
Extreme patriotism		1		

In 22 identified websites posts with harmful narratives from SDSM, a total of 51 attempts to develop harmful narratives were noted. Biased selection of information and undermining trust in institutions were mostly present, whereas populism, attacks and demonization of political opponents, fomenting divisions were less frequently present and two disinformation pieces were noted.

On Levica’s website, with a similar trend, harmful narratives of biased selection of information were mostly developed, less often a narrative was used to incite social divisions and undermine trust in institutions, and once they also used populism, spreading panic, fear and uncertainty and encouraging extreme nationalism and patriotism.

The Facebook pages show the same trend of the most frequent harmful narratives of biased selection of information leading to wrong conclusions in the public (75 times) and undermining trust in institutions (47 times), while in third place are attacks and demonization of political opponents (15 times).

Table 4. Prevalence of harmful narratives in political parties Facebook posts in January 2024

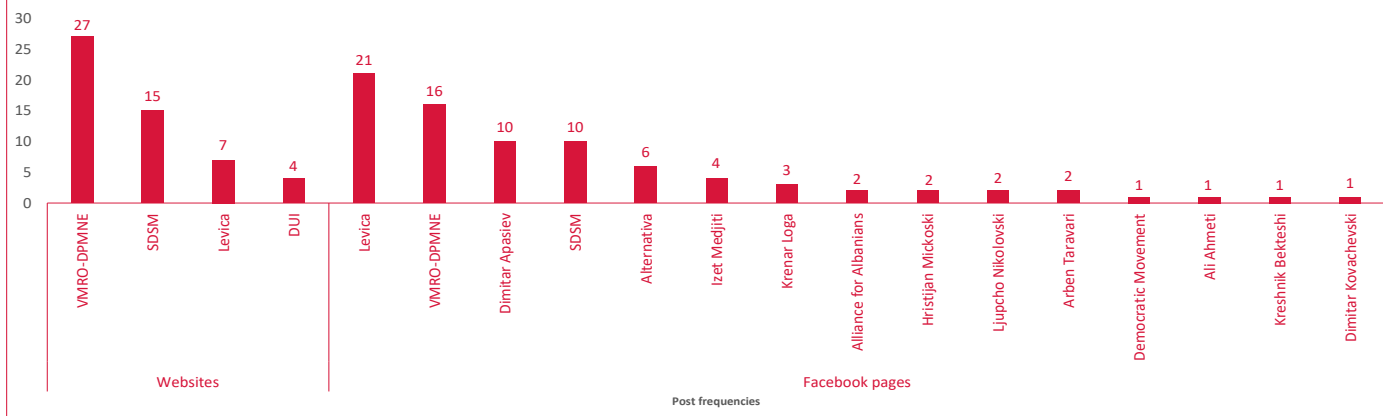


Facebook monitoring for January noted four disinformation pieces, three of which are on the profile of the leader of the Democratic Movement, Izet Medjiti, and one post with disinformation on the profile of DUI Minister of Economy Kreshnik Bekteshi. In January, harmful narratives were noted on two Facebook pages, of DUI officials - Deputy Prime Minister Grubi and Minister Bekteshi.

1.2 Communication practices of political parties and their leaders in February 2024

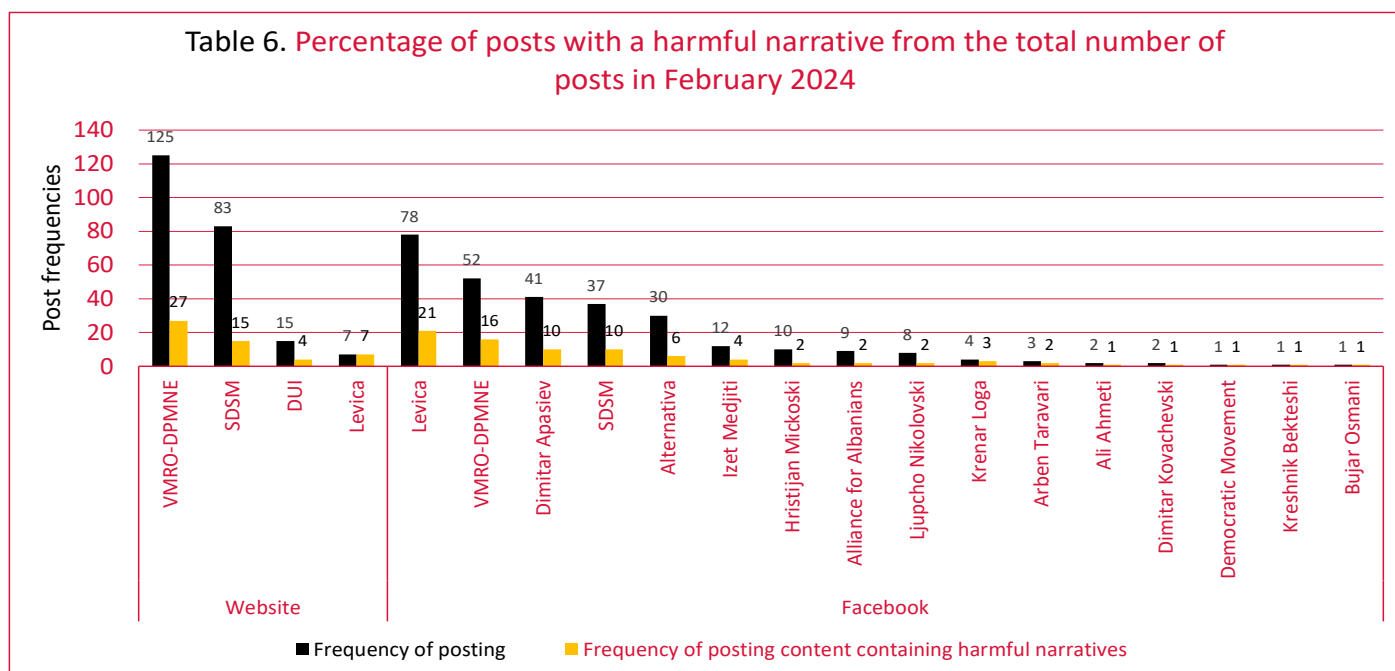
The monitoring of the websites and Facebook pages of the 10 political parties and their leaders identified **53 posts on the parties' websites** and **83 Facebook posts** containing a harmful narrative. Compared to January, the number of harmful narratives on websites has decreased, but there was an increase in the number of harmful narratives on Facebook.

Table 5. Posts with harmful narrative by political actors (websites and Facebook) in February 2024



This month, the political parties seem to be lined up in the same order again in terms of the total number of posts with harmful narratives **on their websites**. The highest number of harmful narratives were noted in **VMRO-DPMNE (27), SDSM (15), Levica (7)**, and the least harmful narratives were identified with DUI (4).

Regarding **Facebook pages**, the highest number of harmful narratives were again noted in **Levica (21) and its party leader, Dimitar Apasiev (10)**, and for the first time, a harmful narrative was noted by the leader of the Alliance for Albanians, Arben Taravari. From the monitoring of the profiles of the members of the Caretaker Government this month, an increase in the total number (6) of detected harmful narratives can be noted, namely by the Deputy Prime Minister Artan Grubi (1), as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs Bujar Osmani (1), by the Minister of Justice Krenar Loga (2), by the Minister of Agriculture Ljupcho Nikolovski (2) and on the profile of the Minister of Economy Kreshnik Bekteshi (1).



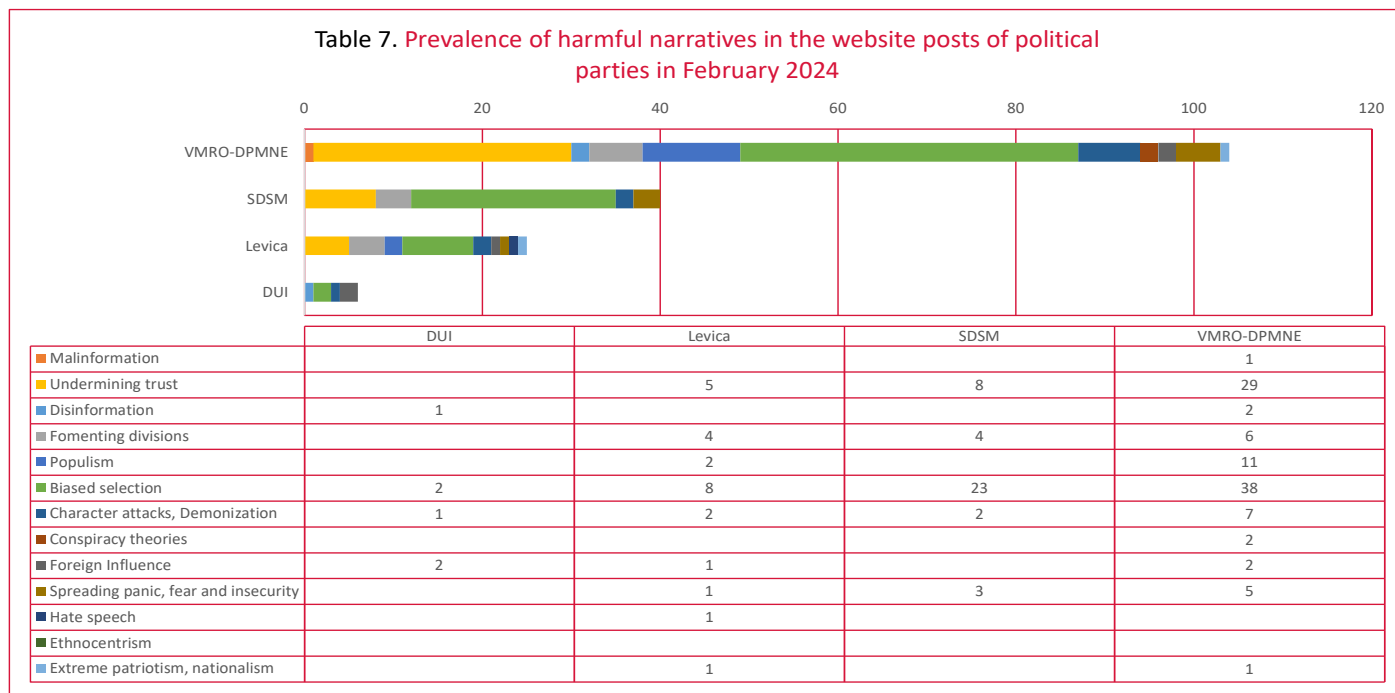
If the total number of posts is taken into account compared to the number of harmful posts, it can be noted that in the monitored posts on the website of Levica and on the Facebook pages of the Democratic Movement and of Minister Kreshnik Bekteshi, all i.e. 100% were posts with a harmful narrative. On the Facebook pages of Arben Taravari, Ali Ahmeti, Dimitar Kovachevski and Minister Krenar Loga, a low number (between four and two) of total posts were recorded, half of which contained harmful narratives, while among the rest of the websites and Facebook pages about 25 percent prevalence of harmful narratives was noted.

In February, political actors most frequently resorted to two harmful narratives - unverified allegations accusing political opponents, as well as unverified claims of corruption, non-transparency/non-accountability, unprofessionalism, abuse of office. In addition, this month one can notice an increased use of wording that denigrates a certain group of people in order to cause divisions and discords between 'us - the good ones' and 'them - the bad ones', as well as promoting one's own characteristics as something that is of benefit to people and humanity, while the characteristics of the political opponents are disparaged, as something that serves a certain small elite group of people. With a prevalence of about 20 percent, there is also labelling and gross disrespect of the political opponents and deliberate failure to present the full picture of the event.

In addition to these four most frequently used indicators of harmful narratives, this month compared to the previous one, there were more frequent accusations of foreign entity/s interfering in the internal affairs of the state, contrary to the state's interests, which leads to the disruption of the democratic processes, but also less frequent use of images, videos and audio recordings that were created to mislead the public. The

presence of this harmful narrative is primarily due to the accusations by DUI, which started the pre-election campaign 'YES to Europe, No to Russia' at the end of January. **(Further details and tabular presentation on the prevalence of indicators for harmful narratives on websites and Facebook in the full report are available at: [HARM-TIVE](#))**

Similar to the previous month, the political parties, on their websites, mainly posted harmful narratives based on biased selection of information misleading the public to come to the wrong conclusions (69) and tried to undermine trust in institutions (42).



The same trend can be noted on the Facebook profiles and websites, where the most frequent narrative is the biased selection of information that can lead to wrong conclusions in the public (108 times), followed by undermining the trust in institutions (52 times) and attacks and demonization of political opponents (20). There is also frequent incitement of discord and divisions in the political sphere and development of populist narratives that explicitly or implicitly claim to support the people against the elites/various groups that have some privileges. Manipulative audio-visual contents were noted with VMRO-DPMNE and Levica.

1.3 Monitoring of the communication of the members of the Government of RNM through the official Facebook pages

January 2024

The monitoring determined that during January, the practice of posting content from party activities continued on the Facebook page of Prime Minister Dimitar Kovachevski, which can be considered as an abuse of an official government page for party purposes, such as the post from 11 January, 'Opening of new party premises of the SDSM municipal organisation in Aerodrom'.

There was noted also posting of content marking religious holidays from the profiles of elected officials. In a secular state this does not correspond to the expectation that government communication channels are used exclusively for communication related to the official's work, which should represent the interests of all citizens regardless of religious, political or other personal conviction.

Additionally, in January, harmful narratives were also noted on the Facebook pages of Deputy Prime Minister Artan Grubi and Minister of Economy Kreshnik Bekteshi.

February 2024

From the monitoring of the profiles of the members of the Caretaker Government this month, harmful narratives are noted among Deputy Prime Minister Artan Grubi (1), Bujar Osmani (1), Minister of Economy Kreshnik Bekteshi (1), Minister of Agriculture Ljupcho Nikolovski (2) and Minister of Justice Krenar Loga (2).

Regarding this channel, in the past period the posts by Deputy Prime Minister Artan Grubi are interesting, they are party-political, i.e. the party takes precedence in comparison to the institution he leads. In his posts, the propagandistic party narrative prevails, which is ethnocentric, and inflammatory tones and historical facts are used, which he contextualizes in the current political moment. Grubi often connects his party with the legacy of the former UCK (NLA), trying to influence voters on an emotional level. In this context, Grubi leads the way, glorifies and hyperbolizes the figure of Ali Ahmeti in historical dimensions.

2. Monitoring of the media coverage of political actors

Analysis of the online media and television stations' coverage of political actors is the second, parallel process in the Determining Politically Harmful Narratives research. It is complementary to the first component of monitoring, i.e. the monitoring of the political actors' communication with the public. During the monitoring, it is analysed who the actors that most frequently sow harmful narratives in the informative content are, whether and how they manage to infiltrate the primetime and the headlines, which topics are proving to be fertile ground for such narratives, and most importantly - what the role of journalists is in this process: do media comply with the professional and the ethical standards to provide accurate, fair and impartial information or, on the contrary, do they, unquestionably follow the agenda dictated by political actors.

The media sample includes the following 11 online media outlets and 9 television stations:

Online media outlets: Lokalno, Nezavisen, Sloboden Pechat; A1on.mk; MKD.mk; Republika; Kurir, Almakos, Tetova Sot; Nova TV; Vecer.mk.

Television stations: national public and private TV stations with the highest viewership, nine in total: MTV 1 (public); MTV 2 (public, in Albanian); Alfa TV (private); Kanal 5 (private); Sitel TV (private); TV 24 (private); Telma (private); Alsat M (private, in Albanian); TV 21 (private, in Albanian).

A single post or a single news item is considered a unit for analysis. More details about [the methodology](#) and [the ethical and professional reporting standards](#), is available at: [HARM-TIVE Research](#).

The monitoring was carried out over a total of 15 days during January and February, spread over four-day intervals (every fourth day in the month).

2.1 Report on the monitoring of online media coverage of political actors

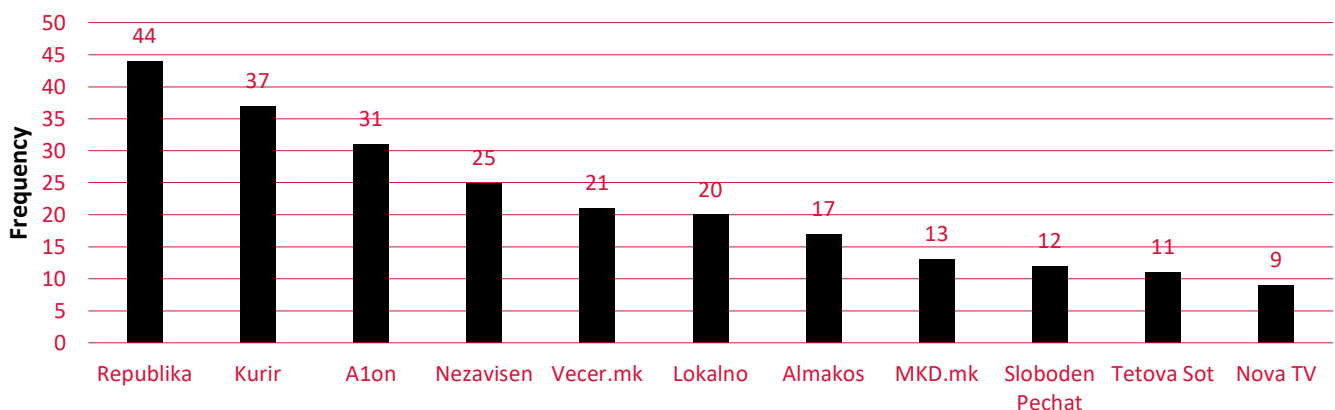
Report for January 2024

The continued growth in the number of harmful narratives from the previous four-month monitoring period (September 209, October 154, November 215, December 207), reached a number of 240 news items with harmful narratives.

By genre, dominant are the broadcast press releases (primarily from the political parties, i.e. 98) and the broadcast speeches by politicians or 72 news items, which together make up 70,8 % of the analysed news items. If we add to this the 22 posts taken from Facebook statuses, press conferences and interviews given for other media, together they make up 192 news items or 80.0 % of all analysed news items containing harmful narratives.

Republika (44) and Kurir (33) have the largest number of news items containing harmful narratives again, but the rest of the analysed portals have changed positions in the ranking. This means that A1on and Nezavisen come next, only then followed by Vecer.mk and Lokalno, while Nova TV has the fewest news items with harmful narratives. The example of Vecer.mk is notable, as the number of news items with harmful narratives gradually decreases from one month to another.

Table 8. News items with harmful narratives in January 2024



The genre structure of the analysed news items containing harmful narratives remains unchanged and continues to consist of political parties' press releases and broadcast politicians' speeches. The Republika portal stands out in particular, in which, in addition to party press releases and politicians' speeches (total of 27 news items), there is also a large number of news items (14) of reported parts of interviews, press conferences, Facebook statuses of political entities, exclusively by VMRO-DPMNE and its members. A total of 41 news items out of the monitored 44 news items with harmful narratives. **(More details and a tabular presentation of the harmful narratives content by genre in the full version of the report is available: [HERE](#))**

The political actors in the analysed articles

In all monitored portals, there are numerous actors represented in the posts with harmful narratives, but those with two actors dominate (64 articles or 26.4%). They are followed by those with three (41 or 17.1%), four (32 or 13.3%), five actors (25 or 10.4%) and six actors (29 or 12.1%). Moreover, their representation is different when it comes to collective or individual political actors. The portals with the largest number of news items with harmful narratives are dominated by collective actors. In general, the party VMRO-DPMNE is the

most represented political entity on the pages of the online media in the articles with harmful narratives (with the exception of Vecer.mk), and SDSM, DUI and the Government/authorities are far behind it, and Dimitar Kovachevski and Hristijan Mickoski stand out from the politicians.

(Non)professionalism in Journalism

The monitoring in this period also determined one-sided reporting in online media. In almost all analysed news items with harmful narratives (217 news items or 91.6%), the portals consulted only one side of the story. Such are all the news items of Vecer.mk, Almakos, Nova TV, Sloboden Pechat, while Kurir, Republika and A1on, as an exception, each have one article in which two or more sides are consulted. Only in Tetova Sot, Lokalno and Nezavisen, apart from the dominant representation of one side of the sources, there are also several news items with two or more sides. The Lokalno portal stands out in particular, in which, out of a total of 20 news items with established harmful narratives, one side was consulted in 13, and two sides in 7.

At the same time, the portals mostly rely on one source of information (213 news items or 88.8%), which is not surprising precisely because of the largest number of news items with broadcast party press releases and politicians' speeches. **(More details and a tabular representation of the number of sources by online medium in the full version of the report available [HERE](#))**

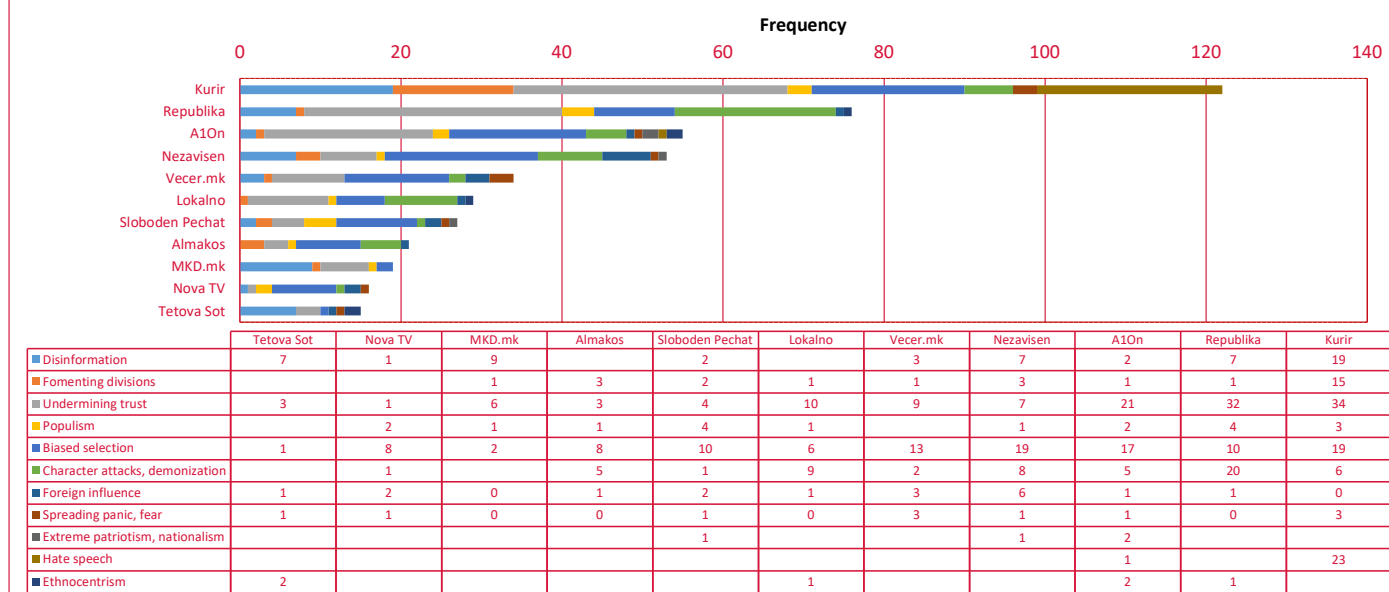
When it comes to the type of source, in the news items that were subject of analysis, the most numerous type for all the media outlets were precise sources of information (209), and unclear or imprecise sources were far fewer, as well as the practice of citing another media outlet as a source (39 in total). Kurir, Lokalno, Sloboden Pechat, A1on and MKD.mk only referred to precise sources, while Almakos, Nova TV and Tetova Sot sporadically featured an unclear, imprecise source or a source from another media outlet (mostly in a single news item), while in Republika and Nezavisen in addition to the largest number of imprecise sources there is slightly bigger number of unclear and imprecise source in comparison to other portals. **(More details and a tabular representation of the type of sources by online medium in the full version of the report available [HERE](#))**

The portals regularly accompany the news items containing harmful narratives most frequently with archival and current photos. Often, in particular when it comes to current political affairs, several photos can be found in separate news items, together with video statements, but they are almost regularly not credited, with the exception of Sloboden Pechat, where, like in the previously monitored months, all photos are credited with either the name of the photojournalist or the source from which they were taken.

Dominant harmful political narratives

The number of news items with harmful narratives in the online media has been growing steadily from month to month. In January, it soared to a number of 240 news items, with a total of 467 posts, i.e. sentences, paragraphs, parts of texts, headlines of news items. The harmful rhetoric is most prominent in the Republika and Kurir portals with the largest number of news items with harmful narratives, followed by A1on and Nezavisen, while in Nova TV, Sloboden Pechat and Tetova Sot their number is much lower.

Table 9. Harmful narratives in online media news items in January 2024



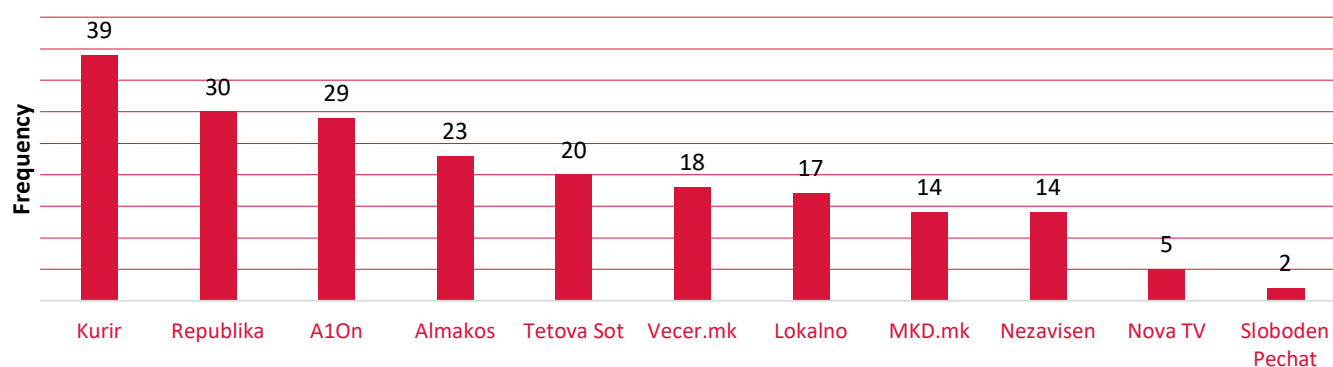
In this round of monitoring too, there is noted the method of **creating multiple news articles from one event** (mostly from interviews with a certain politician) that directly affects **multiplying harmful narratives**. This, as before, is most often observed in Republika and Kurir. In all online media, both those with the largest and those with the least number of harmful narratives, the undermining of trust in institutions and biased selection dominate, narratives that, in continuity and without exception, are at the top of the ladder in all monitoring so far. Then, with a much smaller number, follow the character attacks and demonization, as well as disinformation.

Report for February 2024

The online media outlets continue to present harmful narratives from and about the political actors in the country at an unabated pace this month. There were identified **211** news items with harmful narratives, thematically focused on the domestic politics, and above all, on the 'pre-election campaigns' (far before the official one that starts on 18 April) of the political actors for the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. In this monitoring period the topic was also the media and journalists, i.e., their political profiling and condemnations and threats to the freedom of the media.

The Kurir portal (with 39 news items) has the largest number of news items with harmful narratives, followed by Republika (with 30 news items) and A1on (with 29 news items), and then Almakos (with 23) and Tetova Sot (with 20). In Vecer.mk, for the third month in a row, a slight decrease in the number of such news items was registered, while in Tetova Sot, on the contrary, a continuous growth of such news items was noted. During this period, Nova TV and especially Sloboden Pechat, have the smallest, even negligible number of news items with harmful narratives.

Table 10. News items with harmful narratives in February 2024



The genre structure is predominantly composed of politicians' speeches (65 news items or 30.8%) and party/political press releases (64 news items or 30.3%), which together with the reported Facebook statuses of political entities and their interviews given to other media (10 news items or 4.7%) cover almost 2/3 (or 65.8%) of all analysed content. **(More details and a tabular presentation of the news items with harmful narratives by genre in the full version of the report available [HERE](#))**

The political actors in the analysed news items

The actors represented in the news items with harmful narratives are numerous. Those with two actors dominate (in 51 news items, or 24.2%), followed by those with three (in 37 news items, or 17.5%), and four (in 37 news items, or 17.5%), and even five actors (in 31 news items, or 14.7%), invariant in all monitored months so far. In terms of the portals, Kurir, Republika and A1on stand out with the largest number of actors, according to the number of news items with harmful narratives. In this monitoring round as well, the collective dominates, and at the top is the Government, mostly prevalent in Kurir, Republika and A1on. Afterwards, VMRO-DPMNE is the most represented in Kurir, Republika, A1on and Lokalno, and SDSM, presented the most in Republika and Lokalno, while DUI is mentioned the most in Tetova Sot and Almakos, but in Vecer.mk, as well.

Among the individual actors, the president of VMRO-DPMNE, Hristijan Mickoski, is most often present in the media (especially in Tetova Sot and Lokalno), and the president of SDSM, Dimitar Kovachevski is the next, and among the other numerous actors, the president of DUI can be mentioned, Ali Ahmeti, and ex-Deputy Prime Minister Artan Grubi.

(Non)professionalism in Journalism

One-sided reporting as a common feature of all analysed online media is a constant that is repeated monthly. In 91.9% (192 news items) of the analysed news items, the media informed with respect to one stakeholder, in January it was 91.6%, and in December 90.8%. This is most visible in the case of Republika and Vecer.mk, and even in the case of Nova TV and Sloboden Pечат with the least number of news items with harmful narratives, where all news items are one-sided.

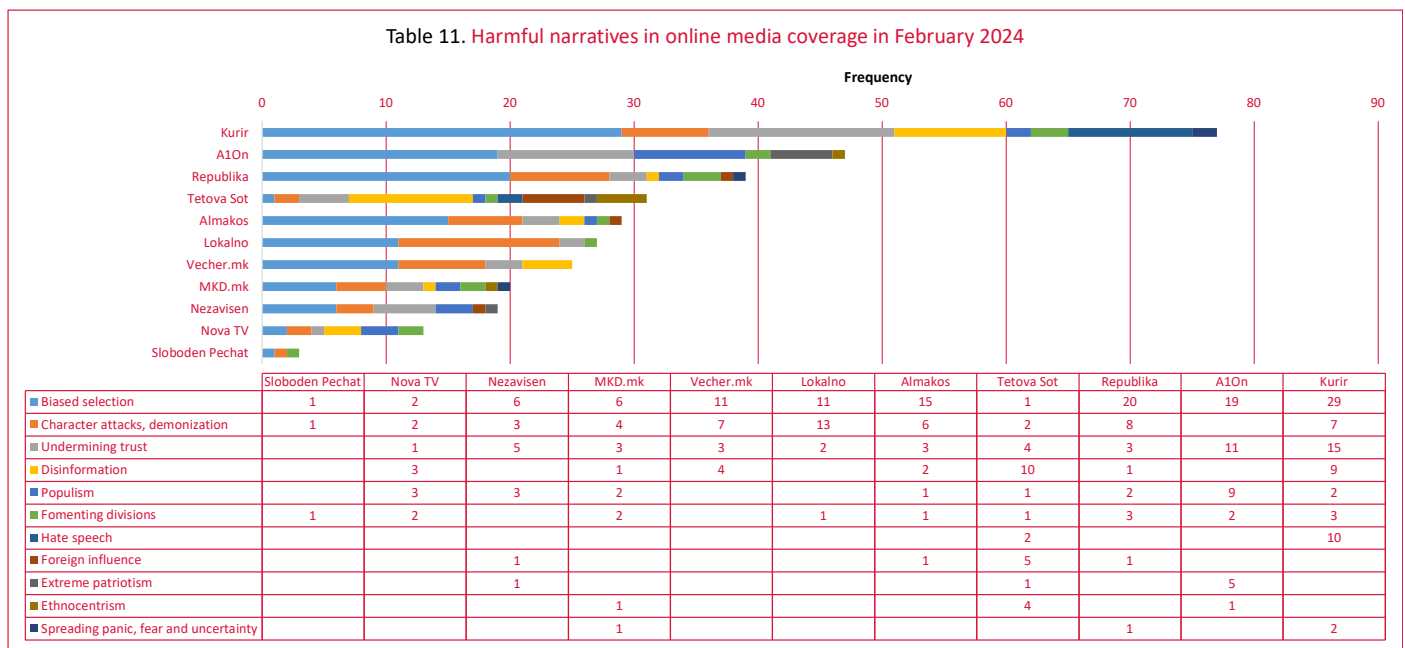
Regarding the sources in the analysed news items, the situation from the previous monitored months is recurring - the dominance of the precise sources of information. Nevertheless, in this round of monitoring it is noted that their number has increased at the expense of vague, imprecise, or other media sources. There were determined 202 precise sources in a total of 211 news items, in January there were 209 precise sources in 240 news items, and in December 175 precise sources in 207 news items. Of all the analysed online media, Almakos, Republika, Lokalno, Nezavisen and A1on exclusively use precise sources of information, while among the others it is rare and exceptional to find a vague or imprecise source. **(More details and a tabular representation of the type of sources by online media outlet in the full version of the report available [HERE](#))**

Dominant harmful political narratives

A slight drop in news items with harmful narratives can be seen this month. There were **identified 211 news items** with a total of 330 indicators, i.e. phrases, sentences, parts of texts, news item titles that indicated the existence of harmful narratives. The most noticeable is their presence in Kurir (77 posts), followed by A1on (47 posts) and Republika (39 posts), or half of the entire harmful rhetoric. Hereupon, the main focus is on unverified findings as a basis for accusing the political opponents, i.e. biased selection (121 cases).

Thus, the practice of creating and compiling multiple news items of selected parts of an event, etc. copy-paste creation of media content, in the online media is often supplemented with news item-announcement for a specific event (mostly an interview) and a short headline text, typical of television journalism.

Table 11. Harmful narratives in online media coverage in February 2024



In general, the harmful narratives in online media are predominantly concentrated on the biased selection, and especially in Kurir, Republika, A1on and Almakos. Then follow character attacks, especially in the Lokalno portal, and the undermining of trust in the institutions in Kurir and A1on. The amount of disinformation, especially in Tetova Sot and Kurir, as well as hate speech in Kurir and populism in A1on is also notable. Kurir is the portal with the largest number of articles with harmful narratives (39) and as many as 77 posts (sentences, wordings, paragraphs, titles of articles) dominated by biased selection and undermining of trust in state institutions.

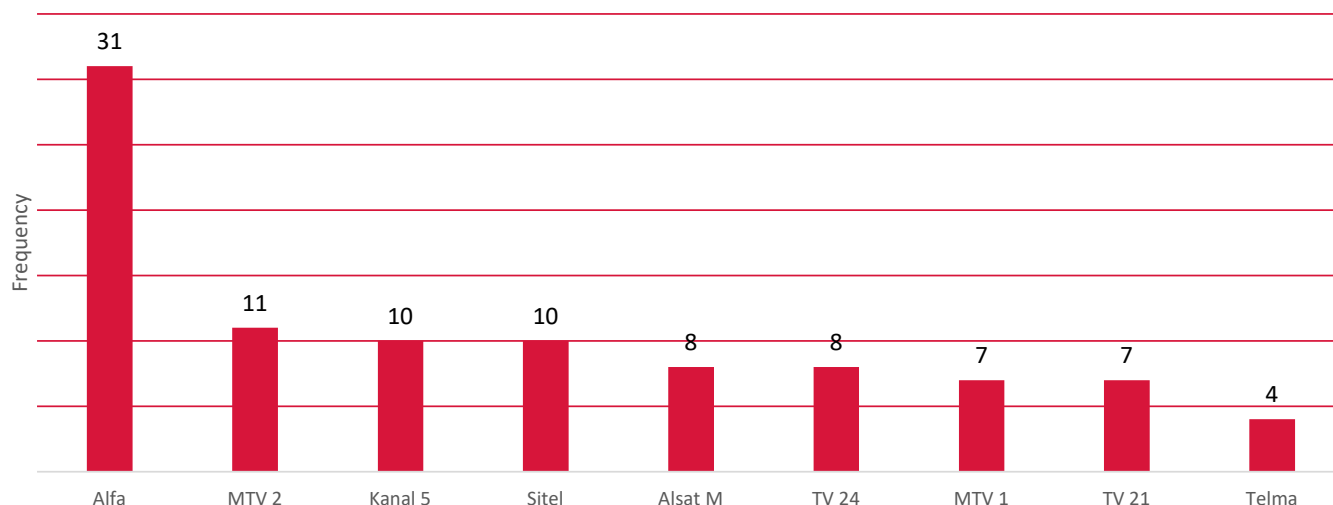
2.2 Report on the monitoring of TV stations' coverage of political actors

In January, the central news of 9 national TV stations was analysed **on eight days in January and seven days in February 2024.**

Report for January 2024

A total of 96 news items with harmful narratives were registered, which is the highest number so far, since the beginning of monitoring in September 2023. Compared to October (66 news items), November (69), December (87), a constant growth of this trend can be observed, which is due to the obvious tightening of political rhetoric with the upcoming elections.

Table 12. News items containing harmful narratives by TV station in January 2024



An analysis of the central news of 9 TV stations in January found a total of 96 news items that contained one or more different harmful narratives. Among the TV stations, TV Alfa stands out with 31 news items (or 32.3% of the total number), while for the rest of the TV stations, we do not see any major changes from the average. There were registered 11 news items with harmful narratives at MTV 2, 10 at Kanal 5 and Sitel, 8 at TV 24 and Alsat M, 7 at MTV 1 and TV 21, while 4 at TV Telma.

In contrast to online media, in which the most represented genre is party press releases and politicians' broadcast speeches, the news on TV stations is dominated by analytical-report articles (31 or 32.3 %) and reports (28 or 29.2 %). Although not with the same frequency as in the internet media, here too there are news items that contain only a broadcast speech of a politician (9 or 9.4 %) or a party press release (5 or 5.2 %). **[More details and a tabular presentation of the content with harmful narratives by genre in the full version of the report available [HERE](#)]**

Similar to the previous reports, this month we also noted the phenomenon in which the media outlet was offered only as a space to air the political speeches and press releases, while the role of professional journalism was neglected. The journalist's task is to critically analyse the developments, and not just leave media space to political actors who see it as a platform to spread their own ideology. The media must be a watchdog of democracy and a critic of the current social and political developments, public institutions and political activities.

Political actors and sources in the analysed news items

Without any exceptions, the actors who dominate the news items with harmful narratives, but who also generally receive the most space in the mainstream media, are the three largest political parties in the country: SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE and DUI. Their media presence is very often shown as a collective, without individualization, so usually everything that belongs to the opposite camp is bad, criminal, unsuitable, backwards, and must be changed.

The individual actors who dominate the news items with harmful narratives are again part of this political trio (SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE, DUI), mainly in their role as party leaders, spokespersons, ministers or MPs.

[More details and a tabular presentation of the names and surnames of political actors and the order of display by TV channel in the full version of the report available [HERE](#)]

This omnipresence of the actors from these three political parties in the television news programs can mean two things. First, the fact that television stations give the most space to the biggest political entities in their news programs and we very rarely get to hear any other voices on the air, even when it comes to specific and professional topics where an opinion from experts would be naturally expected (amendment of laws, election of judges and prosecutors, etc.).

Second, the creation of harmful narratives is typical of the political discourse of political entities, and their representatives do not refrain from using insults, labels, disinformation or accusations without any basis and without any evidence, in the political dialogue.

In that context, the impartiality and balance in the reporting come into play, that is, how media and journalists use sources in their reporting and to what extent they provide a chance to all parties to present their views and viewpoints.

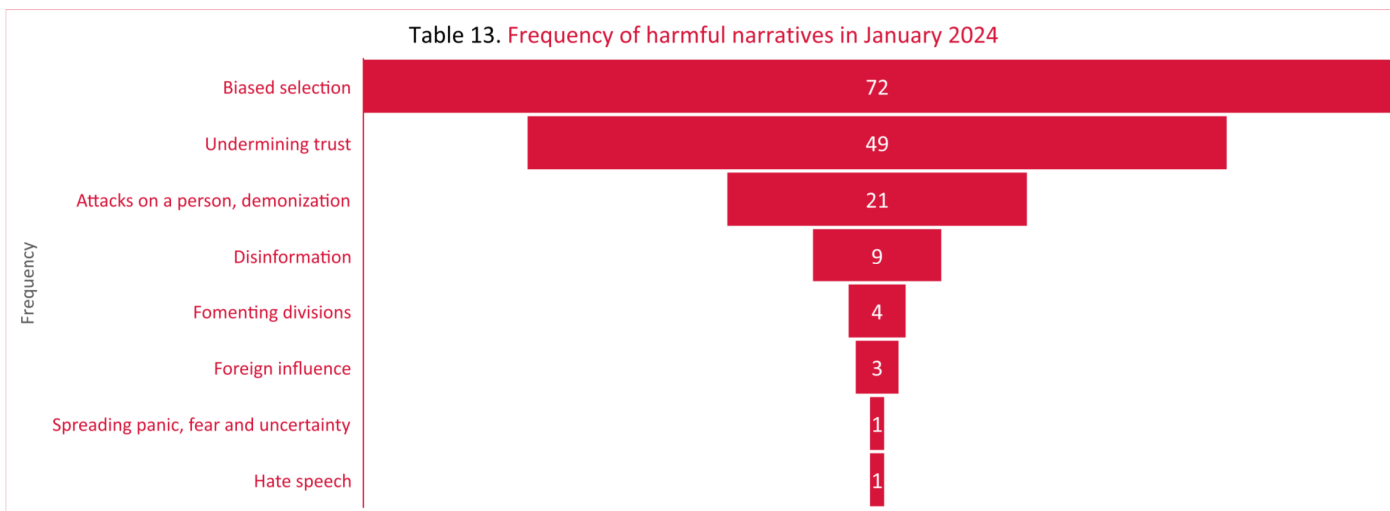
Unfortunately, the situation is similar to the previous months in which the news items with only one presented side (47 or 49 %) dominated, at the expense of news items presenting two (19 or 19.8 %) or more sides (27 or 28.1 %). The situation is similar with the number of sources consulted and most often it is one source (41 news items or 42.7%), then two sources (21 or 21.9%) or more sources (31 or 32.3%).

As is evident from Table No. 5, news items with only one presented side were the most common on Alsat M (7 or 87.5 %) and TV Alfa (20 or 71.4 % of the total number of news items with harmful narratives). The sources used are mainly precise and clear (91 or 94.8%), and the exception once again is only TV Alfa, where there were also cases of other media as a source (3), imprecise sources (5) and unclear sources (1). **(More details and a tabular representation of the distribution and type of sources by TV in the full version of the report available [HERE](#))**

One-sided and unbalanced reporting poses a serious problem and cannot be part of professional journalism. In those cases, where the journalist has already given space to the unsubstantiated attacks, labelling, disinformation or insults of a political actor, the least they could do is consult the other side and confront it with the accusations, thus offering them a chance to present the other side of the story.

The most common harmful narratives

During the monitoring of the central news blocks of 9 TV stations in Macedonia in January 96 news items were registered that contained harmful narratives. A total of 160 harmful narratives occurred in these news items, which indicates that there is more than one harmful narrative in a large proportion of the news items.

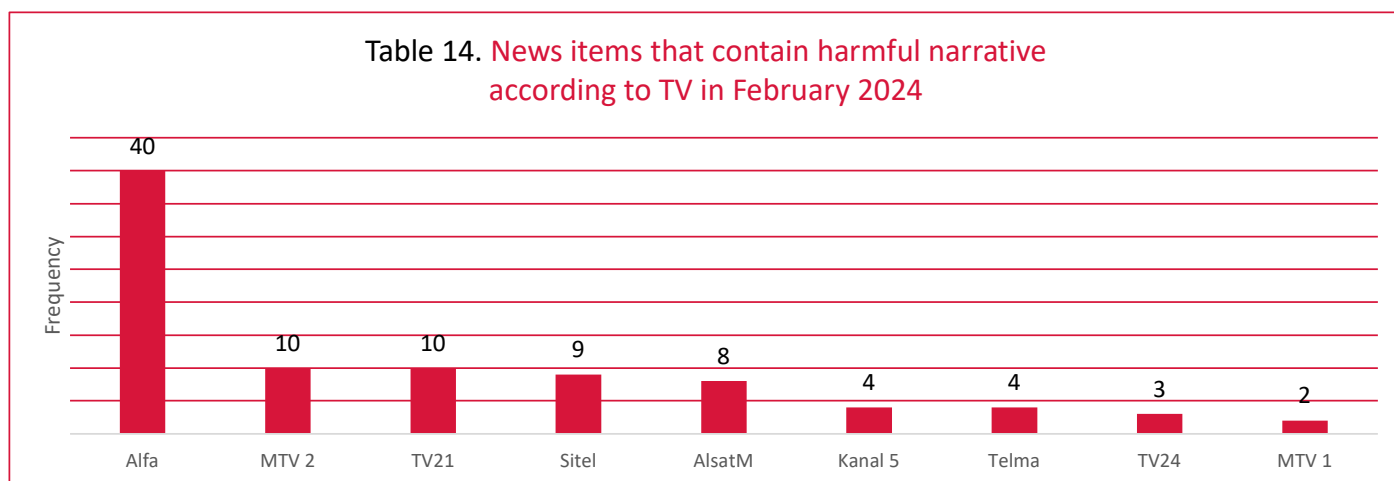


Similarly to the previous months of the monitoring, news items containing the harmful narratives biased selection (72) and undermining trust (49) appear most often. The creation of these narratives most often stems from claims of corruption, non-transparency/non-accountability, unprofessionalism, accusations of abuse of office **without supporting arguments**, as well as biased selection that does not reflect the reality of the claims.

Similar to the previous months, the highest number of harmful narratives were created by political actors, while the journalists, in their reports, only reported them without taking any position. Alfa TV is an exception to this pattern, because in its news block it was either the journalist who created the harmful narrative by themselves (11 cases) or they did it together with the political actor (16 cases). In terms of similar cases in which journalists forgot their professional obligations and were directly responsible for creating a harmful narrative, there are only two more examples, one in TV Sitel and one in TV 24 each.

Report for February 2024

The seven-day monitoring of the television stations in February found 90 items that contained one or more different harmful narratives. Most frequent is the harmful narrative biased selection (58 examples), and TV Alfa is the television station that dominates the number of news items with harmful narratives (40 or 44% of the total number).



The analysis of the central news editions on the television stations in February found 90 items that contained one or more different harmful narratives. What is worrying is the constant growth of such news items, which is an indicator of the sharpened rhetoric among the political actors, but also a problem with professional journalistic standards.

Of the genres, similar to the previous months, the most represented are analytical-report news items and reports (both 30 or 33.3%), which in total comprise two-thirds of all news items. This is followed by the broadcast speeches of the politicians (11 or 12.2%), news (5 or 5.6%), reported press releases (4 or 4.4%), interviews (4 or 4.4%), etc.

Political actors and sources in the analysed news items

It was already emphasized in previous reports that the assessment of the actors is usually not done by the journalists, but by the political actors from the opposite camp, who through their statements, press releases, press conferences find a way to address their political opponent, and that, as expected, they do it through negative ratings.

In rare cases, the assessment of the actors is done by journalists and the media. Such examples, as before, are found mostly at TV Alfa, where the Government is discussed in 19 reports, and the journalist presented this collective actor negatively 11 times, while not once positively. It is characteristic that in none of these 19 cases, we have a quote, not even a paraphrased statement from a representative of the authorities or the Government.

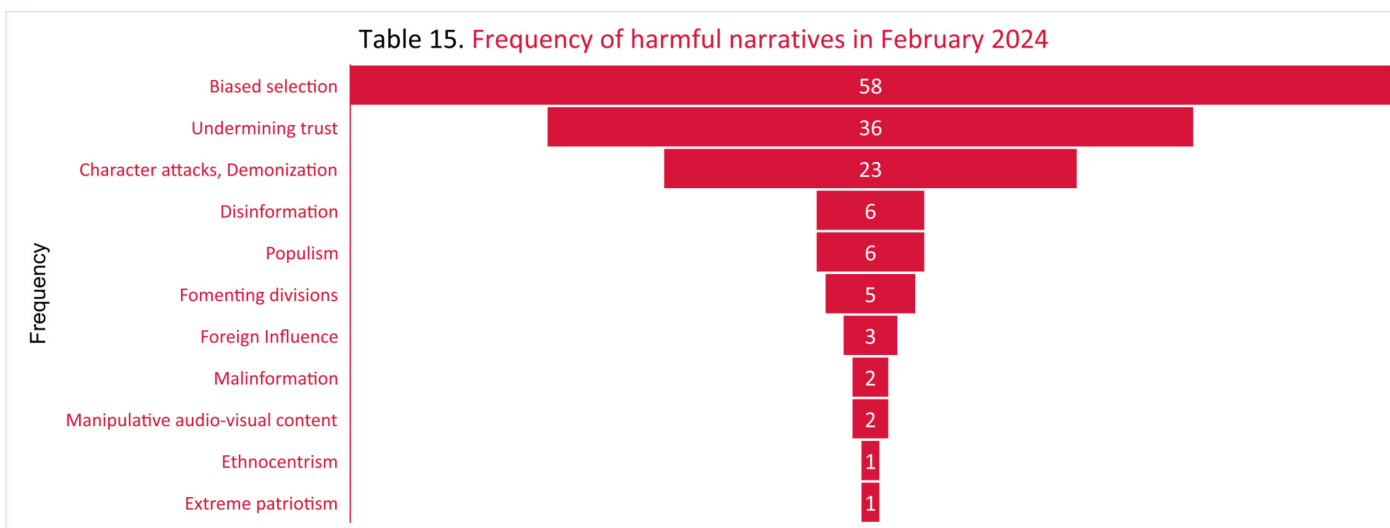
One-sided reporting

When we talk about impartiality and balance in reporting, things changed very little, and compared to the January report, the situation is almost identical. Also, in February, among the news items analysed with harmful narratives, those with one source dominated - 37 (41.1%), followed by those with 2 (17 or 18.9%) and those with 3 or more sources (31 or 34.4%). More frequently we noticed news items, in which there are no sources, i.e., the journalist is the only source. All five cases of such news items were noted in the case of TV Alfa, where it is a common practice for the anchor and the journalist to analyse and comment on the events, instead of presenting them through a journalistic report.

The situation is similar when the news items are analysed according to the **prevalence of different sides** that were presented. Thus, the one-sidedness in the news item is again noticed, i.e. the presentation of only one side (41 news items or 45.6%), followed by the news items with two sides (22 or 24.4%) and the news items with more sides (22 or 24, 4 %). This is especially noticeable in **TV Alfa's** news items, where in as many as 29 (or 82.9%) of the news items we see only one side, i.e., the other side is not given a chance to share its position on a certain issue. Similar to TV Alfa, the news items with harmful narratives registered on TV Alsat M also mostly presented only one side (6 or 75% of the news items), and only 2 (25%) presented two sides. **(More details and a tabular representation of the distribution and type of sources by TV in the full version of the report available [HERE](#))**

Most common harmful narratives

The monitoring of the 9 TV stations in February analysed a total of 90 news items that contained harmful narratives. Considering that some of the news items contain two or more harmful narratives, we registered a total of 143 harmful narratives.



The most numerous among them are biased selection (58 news items), then undermining trust (36 news items) and character attacks or demonization (23 news items). The other harmful narratives are present in smaller numbers. Behind these harmful narratives, there are usually statements that contain unverifiable findings or findings that are difficult to verify (38 or 42.2%), then the claims of corruption, non-transparency/non-accountability, unprofessionalism, without supporting those claims (32 or 35.6%) and labelling, ridicule and grossly disrespecting other people (22 or 24.2%).

When the debate stirs, mutual accusations start to become more serious, and the political actors do not have any problem in insulting not only their political opponent, but also anyone who stands in the way of their political agenda. 'Incompetent politician', 'Prime Minister Boaster', 'Minister of Sin', 'pendant party', 'Servants', 'Sicilian clan' is just a small part of the vocabulary used by the political parties in February in order to insult their political opponents.



British Embassy
Skopje



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Bimonthly report
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