



Cultural Drivers of Radicalisation

Serbia/5.1 Country Report

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About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalisation and polarisation in Europe and beyond. It aims to identify the actors, networks, and wider social contexts driving radicalisation, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualises this through the I-GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation) with the goal of moving towards measurable evaluations of de-radicalisation programmes. Our intention is to identify the building blocks of radicalisation, which include a sense of being victimised; a sense of being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures; and coming under the influence of “us vs them” identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptional breadth of backgrounds. The project spans national contexts including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Georgia, Austria, and several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad labs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation to test practical interventions geared to prevention, inclusion and de-radicalisation.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of seventeen nations and several minority nations, the project will provide a unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation states adapt to new security challenges. The process of mapping these varieties and their link to national contexts will be crucial in uncovering strengths and weaknesses in existing interventions. Furthermore, D.Rad accounts for the problem that processes of radicalisation often occur in circumstances that escape the control and scrutiny of traditional national frameworks of justice. The participation of AI professionals in modelling, analysing and devising solutions to online radicalisation will be central to the project’s aims.

Executive Summary/Abstract

The so-called refugee crisis was a major one in recent history. Since 2015, Serbia has witnessed an unprecedented movement of refugees and migrants headed towards the EU, but also a big discursive shift from great hospitality towards the newly arrived to the development of virulent anti-immigration and anti-refugee discourses. As media play a huge role in constituting and shaping our take on the world around us, this report aims to address the complex relationship between media and radicalization associated with the so-called refugee crisis. Focusing on the far-right groups' usage of online platforms and formats to effectively disseminate their radicalized and/or extremist messages, this report explores digital media and its role in transmitting and legitimizing radical ideas and radicalized political action. In doing this, the report analyses how radicalized discursive constructions are framed and disseminated through digital media and what are their implications in the Serbian society.

1. Introduction

The wartime in the 1990s brought Serbian far-right ideas to the forefront, which mostly revolve around nationalist ideologies arguing that Serbian territories have been unjustly detached from the country and calling to prevent further territorial repartition (Mulhall, Khan Ruf 2021). These far-right groups continued to be one of the main agents on Serbia's political scene even after the wars and the fall of dictator Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. Analysing the context of radicalisation in Republic of Serbia in the period from 2000 to 2021 as a part of the work package "Mapping Stakeholders and Situations of Radicalisation" of the D.Rad project, the report entitled "Stakeholders of (De)- Radicalisation in Serbia D3.1 Country Report" (Stanarevic, Ajzenhamer 2021) found that during the first decade of the 21st century, all four types of radicalisation have risen in Serbia: ethno-nationalism/separatism, Islamic extremism, right-wing and left-wing radicalism, with the latter remaining on the margins of socio-political turmoil to this day. The so-called migration crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to the rise of xenophobia and nativism among the Serbian right-wing, but also to the creation of some new agents in the field (Mulhall, Khan Ruf 2021).

In the summer of 2015, like other countries on the so-called Balkan route, Serbia saw an unprecedented movement of refugees and migrants headed towards the EU following the Arab uprising and Syrian revolution. The photos of thousands of refugees and migrants who had set up tents and were living in the open air in Belgrade parks or on riverbanks made headlines in the world media. Fleeing wars and poverty in the Middle East and Africa, they were eyeing for an opportunity to cross the border and enter the EU. These photos and headlines were accompanied with lines on Serbia's great hospitality towards the newly arrived as a country which in the 1990s received hundreds of thousands of refugees after the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia. However, with the closure of borders followed by EU-Turkey deal in 2016 and all people on the move being stranded in Serbia, the much-hailed hospitality slowly turned into xenophobia and bigotry towards refugees and migrants which led to fear and the rise of the far-right's anti-migrant actions. At the same time, it was a crisis like no other that affected the governance, security and democratic outlook posing severe humanitarian and financial strain on the system. However, similar to the 1990s when far-right groups were calling for protection of Serbian territory from neighbouring countries, new agents emerged to keep the country "clean" from refugees and other migrants whom they see as a threat to the Serbian nation that might bring physical harm and alter the traditional cultural and racial character of the country (Mulhall, Khan Ruf 2021). The anti-migrant propaganda engendered a sense of insecurity and the Covid-19 situation contributed to making vigilante actions by far-right groups in Serbia acceptable and desirable (Mulhall, Khan Ruf 2021).

It all started in February 2020 when a right-wing parliamentary party Dveri publicly launched an anti-migrant petition opposing an alleged readmission of migrants from EU to Serbia and creation of new reception centres for migrants. Four days later, a

so-called “People’s patrol” consisting of extremists gathered around right-wing nationalistic unregistered initiative “No Surrender for Kosovo & Metohija” toured the streets of Belgrade to intimidate and verbally threaten migrants, accusing them of attacking Serbian women and children. With over 50,000 followers, People’s Patrol Facebook page has soon emerged as the main online platform collecting anti-migrant voices and sentiments from admins but also from followers who actively take part in expressing their concern, fear, and resentment in the comments, but also calling for action -i.e. to clean the park from migrants (Stjepic 2020). The group is recognized as the most vocal and active anti-migrant voice online with their frequent raids, protests, and other anti-migrant actions in physical world, stemming from their Facebook page.

In contemporary society, it is through media that we learn about these groups, protests, different phenomenon, and everything around us; the media have moved from information-like mediation to the far reaching mediatization of politics (Krzyzanowski, Triandafyllidou & Wodak 2018). As such, media is no longer news factories, but major meaning making institutions that set the agenda and shape how entire communication is played out. Crises, like migration crisis, are not ‘just reported’ by the media but are made public through patterns of mediatization (Cottle 2008). The notion that society has become mediatized has gained currency over the past years. There is a consensus among academics that in contemporary political communication “mediated reality matters more than any kind of actual or objective reality” (Strömbäck 2008: p.239).

Media in Serbia have played a huge role in mediating the so-called refugee crisis by shaping its course and conduct, with radical groups taking the lead and growing anti-migrant sentiments. This is not surprising in a fragile media scene with limited freedom of expression as indicated in different reports including Reporters without borders (2020), Freedom house (2020), EU progress report (2020). Cases of threats, intimidation and violence against journalists are still a source of serious concern, while transparency of media ownership and of allocation of public funds, especially at local level, has yet to be established. The media scenes like this suit well for radical right and right-wing populist parties, groups, and platforms for spreading their anti-migrant messages online with simplistic explanations to complex socioeconomic and political issues (Krzyzanowski, Triandafyllidou & Wodak 2018). Despite often being excluded from traditional media or even being denied space in public broadcasting, the online space enables the far-right organisations to gain political capital by pursuing online communication of anti-immigration rhetoric.

The so-called refugee crisis was a major one in recent history, so in addressing complex relationship between media and radicalization associated with the crisis, this report focuses on media patterns by analysing mainstreaming of radicalization through digital platforms in the context of Serbia. Because People’s Patrol is widely recognised as the main agent in the field and that their online actions often stir protests in the offline world, the main focus of this report is on People’s patrol’s’ usage of digital media platforms to effectively transmit their radicalized and/or extremist messages. This will

be conducted by exploring the ways, dynamics, and nature of their actions on Facebook, but also implications of their actions. Analysing these media objects by using the representation analysis (Hall 1997) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2010), the report tackles the role Facebook as a platform, People's Patrol as an organisation and their audiences have jointly played in constructing anti-migrant sentiment among citizens, thus acting as cultural drivers of radicalisation and extremism.

The report consists of the following sections. First, the methodology section explains the sample and the rationale behind it, as well as tools and techniques of analysing the selected media objects. Second, the section entitled "media landscape, cultural and political context of radicalization in the national setting" provides the entire background for a better understanding of online radicalization and cultural pathways of radicalisation as well as why it matters. This is followed by the part named "an analysis of the representation, circulation and consumption context of the media object" where selected media objects are thoroughly analysed, and results elaborated. Finally, the conclusion maps out key trends in cultural pathways of online radicalization in Serbia.

2. Methodology

In a bid to explore and analyse cultural drivers and patterns of radicalization by looking at the ways in which radicalized discursive constructions are framed at the media level and circulated and accepted among different audiences, we rely on mediatization theory to help us understand the entire process. We use Jasper Stromback's (2008) analytical framework of mediatization of politics which includes four stages of mediatization as constitutive elements as it offers us a roadmap through media nexus and radicalized discursive practices. The roadmap comprises four different phases where first is the extent to which the media constitute the most important or dominant source of information and channel of communication. Second, the roadmap includes media's independence from other social institutions. Third, it includes media content and the degree to which media content is governed by media logic or political logic. Lastly, it focuses on political actors and the degree to which they are governed by media logic or political logic. This model is also used to show the interplay between media and radicalization on one hand and changes in a society as a whole on the other.

The major research question in the report is how the radicalized discursive constructions are framed and disseminated through digital media and what are the implications in the Serbian society. First the report investigates how the radical groups used digital platforms and what strategies they applied to dominate public communication on refugees in Serbia. Second, the report examines the ways and implications of audience engagement in radical discursive practices on digital

platforms. Third, the report undertakes the analysis of the role of YouTube videos in the mainstreaming of far-right ideologies in Serbia.

In a bid to answer these particular questions, we use critical discourse analysis (CDA), as an interdisciplinary approach, to get an insight into complex relations between media, radicalization and society. The critical discourse analysis views discourse construction, which implies specific power relations between groups established and reinforced through language use, as a powerful tool for normalisation of a certain notion of a societal or cultural phenomenon. Implying that meaning does not inhere in things, but is constructed, this report also relies on Hall's (1997) cultural representations and signifying practices thus combining critical discourse analysis of the video content as well as of its comments.

The sample includes three videos on Facebook page of the radical group called People's Patrol. The group which appeared in early 2020 publishes photos and recordings of migrants in different negative contexts with an aim to completely discredit the migrants and realize their "stop settling migrants" agenda as their slogan reads. The three videos covering the period February 2020 – March 2020 were chosen as each of them marked a milestone event. First milestone is the one when they first introduced themselves and started threatening and intimidating migrants on the streets. Second one is when they started organizing offline actions and calling people to protest against migrants' presence. Third milestone is the moment when they have decided to take everything in their hands and started physically arresting migrants on the streets. The videos also serve as a testimony of their growth as an influential group in the online sphere, thus offering explanations on the rise of radicalized discourses that rose with them.

As representation is the production of meaning through language and through various practices (Hall 1997), it is important to analyse signs the language consist of, but also codes which are conveying the meaning of signs, and which come as a result of social conventions. Therefore, the method operationalization includes four different aspects of analysis. One is narrative referring to actors and the way they talk, the words they use, rhetoric, stereotypes, and metaphors. Second is iconography including sound, pictures, way of filming, dynamics, dramaturgy. Third focuses on the key messages they are trying to convey, while fourth measures people's reaction and their engagement on particular video posted in the online world. While the videos were collected from their Facebook page as the most popular and the ones marking three milestone events, the comments accompanying all three videos were manually collected, sorted out based on the time of posting and analysed. A total number of analysed comments stands at 2059 (1609 for the first video, 56 for the second and 394 comments for the third). This multi-layered analysis aims to identify to what extent and in what ways representation, audience-making, media practices and consumption contribute to shaping cultural patterns in the country and lead to direct changes in a society vis-à-vis radicalization.

3. Media Landscape, Cultural and Political Context of Radicalization in the National Setting

Serbian media scene is characterized by a large number of media- 800 printed publications, more than 300 radio stations, over 200 TV channels and 600 online media according to the Media Registry of the Agency for Business Registries (Reporters without Borders' Media Ownership Monitor 2019). On the other hand, the media advertising market is worth €170 million annually, meaning that most of the country's media rely on financial support from the state or from the money coming from Serbian citizen (Reporters without Borders' Media Ownership Monitor 2019). However, even though Serbian citizens finance the media, Serbians have low trust in them with the least trust in print, and the most trust in online media and then TV with the share of the internet rising all the time at the expense of TV and the printed press. (Reporters without Borders' Media Ownership Monitor 2019). The online media audience is constantly growing with some 4 million Serbian citizens using the Internet every day (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2019). In total, 96.4% of the internet population aged 16 to 24 has a profile on social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube with Facebook being the most popular (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2019).

Meanwhile, the country's media scene is polarized and divided into pro- and anti-government camps (Reporters without Borders' Media Ownership Monitor 2019). Media from the pro-government camp act as the public voice of the ruling party, while at the same time marginalizing and obstructing the work of the opposition (Reporters without Borders' Media Ownership Monitor 2019), anti- government media takes a critical stance towards the ruling party and government actions but are under constant financial and editorial pressure because of this situation (Reporters without Borders' Media Ownership Monitor 2019). For instance, when opposition parties hold protests, pro-government media dismiss it by not reporting on it at all or mentioning on the margins of the news program that several dozens of people gathered to oppose a government's decision even though it was several hundred or thousands of people as shown by opposition media. In such a highly polarised media environment with digital platforms rapidly growing and becoming increasingly popular, radical discourses have found their fertile soil in the online world in Serbia, especially on social media. We live in a world where social media platforms provide new forms of political expressions and communication at different levels. They are attractively designed to lure communication under the illusion that everyone is welcome and equal to participate in conversation and everyone's voice is equally valued.

People's Patrol recognized this potential of social media and positioned themselves as the leading force in driving anti-migrant discourse and sentiment in Serbia. They first appeared in February 2020 touring the streets of Belgrade to intimidate and verbally threaten migrants, accusing them of attacking Serbian women and children. A video showing members of 'People's Patrol' intercepting migrants in

central Belgrade and telling them that they are not allowed to move around from 10pm to 6am, or during the day in groups larger than three people circulated on social media and was widely interpreted as heroic and necessary move which had to be made. This was a landmark event which not only paved the way for online radicalization in the country but also made People's Patrol a rising star and driver of this change. It followed by a smear campaign against this population notably on digital platforms, flooding the offline world with numerous protests across the country spreading racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic and other anti-migrant propaganda as well as fake news. The coronavirus pandemic and the imposed state of emergency that started soon after did not prevent this migrant scapegoating run its course but had only shifted it online.

Little is known about the background of this radical group and its members, but we see that these people do not come from the margins. On the contrary, they are respectful members of society and great defenders of what they perceive are the values and tradition of the country and the people. They stand at the forefront of the fight against migrants and are recognized, respected, and trusted as such by many. However, they are underrepresented in traditional news media; their voices and ideas are silenced as very radical. But they have managed to make their way by fine tuning their messages for targeted audiences and finding elements to focus on what public will believe in and what will resonate deeply in their eye such as arousing fear of migrants or warning of danger. For instance, they insist on preserving the Serbian heritage and the meaning that Luke Celovica Park has for Serbians and this park in central Belgrade is now, as they argue, occupied by migrants. Namely, the park bears the name of a merchant and founder of the Serbian Chetnik Organization, formed to liberate Serbia from the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century. Additionally, with fake news which People's Patrol members are making, refugees and other migrants are often portrayed as evils who are, for example, allegedly violent against Serbian women and girls. This is how they trigger and encourage violent reactions of Serbian public and in general contributing to the rapid rise and establishment of the discourses of radicalization in Serbia.

Discursive patterns and practices represent context-dependent interplay between mediated political and mass media discourses (Krzyzanowski, Triandafyllidou & Wodak 2018). They are often intertwined with past discourses reflecting traditional national conceptions of "others". Representing, interpreting, and instrumentalizing of the Refugee Crisis in Serbia in the beginning was to a large extent shaped by the country's previous narratives surrounding refugees from the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. It is hard to imagine that a country which accepted hundreds of thousands of refugees some twenty years ago would show any other face than solidarity and empathy with the people who were forced to escape from war and poverty with nowhere to go. Therefore, Serbia was committed to an open-border policy, showing a welcoming face to everyone coming or passing by (European Parliament 2016).

In the process of mediatization of politics, media discourses tend to follow political agendas' patterns making politics the key in effectively dictating the public views on

immigration. But mediatization is a “gradual process” (Esser & Strömbäck 2014; Hjarvard 2013; Preston 2008; Strömbäck 2008) implying the "gradual encroachment of media into politics but also more power of the media on the wider society, which, paradoxically, thus becomes increasingly dependent on mediated hegemonic political control" (Krzyzanowski, Triandafyllidou & Wodak 2018). However, a radical shift came with changes on a political level following the so-called EU-Turkey deal in 2016 and in general Brussels' new face vis-a-vis migration management and European borders (European council 2016). The Deal imposed stricter border management envisioning, among other things, that all "irregular migrants" crossing from Turkey into Greece from 20 March 2016 are to be sent back and the rule "one by one" for each Syrian returned to Turkey, a Syrian migrant will be resettled in the EU (European council 2016). With a status of an EU candidate country, Serbia tends to align its policies with the EU ones. As reliable partner committed to cooperation and regional stability, Serbian leadership followed the EU ones in footsteps after the EU-Turkey deal came into force and asylum applications in Serbia increased, creating an additional burden (European Parliament 2016). Instead of only passing through Serbia to reach their EU dream destination, refugees and other migrants got stuck in limbo with nowhere further to go but to stay in Serbia waiting for the EU borders (with Hungary and Croatia) to be opened. This triggered anti-migrant discourse and sentiment in Serbia as far-right groups feared that when staying in Serbia, these people on the move will allegedly bring only harm and allegedly cause destruction of traditional Serbian culture. Drawing on traditional and new forms of discriminatory practices, the hegemonic discourse was intoxicated with xenophobia and bigotry towards refugees and migrants.

Such changes in discourse often on macro level follow global trends, as it was the case with EU official rhetoric. Fairclough (1992) argues that it comes from the notion of discursive change which at a macro level denotes global trends in the ways of framing certain topics in certain periods of time, while on mezzo and micro level comes as a response to social and political context in the field. In the case of Serbia, such discourse shift soon resulted in a move toward xenoracist discursive scapegoating and othering.

The shift started from top-down when state authorities slowly began using more moderate rhetoric towards refugees and migrants. Words of support and solidarity towards refugees and migrants became more sceptical, less encouraging over their status and destiny, and changed with words showing less empathy for the matter. The state-led radicalization thus started after the EU-Turkey deal when Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said: “We will not allow Serbia to become a giant parking lot for war games or economic aims (...) we have sufficient forces, military and police, to defend our borders” (RTS 2016). These and other similar statements coming from top country officials and telling how Serbia is tired of solidarity which brought no good to the country, echoed in leading traditional media reaching wide audiences. However, it stopped there only to open doors for hate speech and anti-migrant discourse online with “us” and “them” dichotomies.

4. An Analysis of the Representation, Circulation and Consumption Context of the Media Object

To map out the major social media discursive field when it comes to anti-migrant sentiment, the analysis focused on three videos produced by People's Patrol and published on their Facebook page. The videos follow the group's rise from unknown to the most vocal anti-migrant group in a period for over a year (February 2020 – March 2021).

1. [Threats and intimidation](#) (February 2020)

The first video is a premiere one where People's Patrol has for the first time introduced themselves to the public, albeit we do not see their faces. It starts off with a dozen of Serbian young men, all dressed in black, walking down the streets of Belgrade at night intercepting migrants in Belgrade, intimidating them and disseminating brochures with time slots they are allowed to move around, as they proscribed. This came as a reaction to the fake news of migrants' alleged violence against Serbian women. For the whole seventeen minutes of the video, the group is conducting a raid on migrants on the streets of Belgrade, approaching them, interrogating, and threatening.

Echoing the Karl Schmitt's concept of friends and enemies as main dichotomy in modern politics (Schmitt 2008), People's Patrol sees the world in these categories: othering all who are not typical Serbian citizens who are "us", while "others" are enemies who are, in their words, "attacking our women and children". Triggered by fake news on migrants alleged violent actions against Serbian women, the group took to the streets to defend the city and all Serbian women and children. To achieve this, they play on a populist card with a set of different tactics: first they approach them by telling them that it is not them, but some other migrants are being violent against Serbian women and now have nothing else to do, as the state authorities remain silent, but to ask them all to disappear from the streets and from the country. Second, they look for empathy by asking migrants to imagine how they would feel and what they would do if their sisters and mothers were attacked. Third, they desire the streets to be empty from migrants and if they see them, they will have to use physical force to clean the streets because their job as men is to defend women and not let that any woman gets attacked. Fourth, they explain that every country has its rules and that they would have respected their rules of their country if they were to be there. Although they are not native speakers in English and might not know how to properly express themselves in this foreign language, their tone on the video is aggressive with the use of limited words and phrases they repeat to all migrants they encounter on the streets. For Serbian nationals, they use words like "our brothers" and "our sisters" whereas "others" are depicted as all the same and perceived as an enemy. The group on the video is also very loud, while refugees and other migrants are confused and scared and are left without any room to say or ask something but these people on the move

promise that they will do as they say. The People's Patrol's body language also shows how they are being loud and aggressive by constantly approaching the immigrants. As the video continues, the group becomes less patient in talks with migrants and more and more aggressive, but there is no open hate speech as they are choosing words and trying to be politely tell them to leave.

As complementary to the narrative, iconography in this video is aimed to cause fear among migrants, but also raise tension among viewers of the video. These men in black patrol the streets at night; they make a group big enough to scare even bigger groups of migrants. This way they demonstrate the power and show who the main boss is on the streets and who makes decisions. On the other hand, they also seem to be genuinely worried for what is allegedly happening on the streets and have thus decided to resolve it. Their actions at night, in the dark along with sounds from empty streets also contribute to creating an atmosphere of fear. The main messages that they try to convey on the video include "Go away. We cannot let you attack our women and children".

With 283,983,000 views, the video also stirred a debate as 1,609 people commented on it and are visibly more aggressive with strong anti-migrant feelings. The comments can be divided into three different groups, all of which are prone to using hate speech and Cyrillic instead of Latin alphabet as a symbol of far right. First it is praise to what they are doing and encouragement to keep on doing it. It is manifested with the messages like "We are proud of you", "Thank you guys for your service" but also with the frequent use of the words like "heroes", "genius", "saviours", "god's servants" for the People's Patrol. The second group of comments represents people's extreme anger and hatred towards migrants. These comments seem to have continued where the video stopped when it comes to hate speech and open racism. The migrants are often described as "scoundrels", "armed", "thieves", "thugs" and as such, they "must be beaten up" and the streets "cleaned" from them, and "this is just the beginning", as some claim. The third group of comments stand as a call for mobilization. Many of these commentators view this as a great opportunity to serve their country and people and have thus volunteered to help and join in for other similar actions. Some of the examples include: "Serbian brothers, be ready to use force, difficult times are ahead of us" and "I speak good English, and I am a 1999 war veteran and member of the 125th brigade so just give a call if you need me, I will be there quickly."

2. [Call for action](#) (October 2020)

Following threats and intimidation in the first video, the group goes a step further in a 3-minute-long video where nine men from People's Patrol are standing at night in an empty Luke Celovica Park, better known as "Afghani park" in Belgrade where refugees and migrants gather, and which used to be a makeshift camp for migrants. Symbolically they will hold a protest against migrants in this park and call Serbian citizens in this video to join them.

The video starts off with a god bless salutation and continues with reference to Luka Celovic, a merchant and founder of the Serbian Chetnik Organization, formed to liberate Serbia from the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century. Leaning on tradition and history from their right-wing perspective, they imply that letting migrants occupy this park for more than five years is disgraceful towards the Serbian hero. In this context, People's Patrol positions themselves as guardians of Luka Celovic's heritage but also of all Serbian citizens as they patrol at night and organize protests to announce that migrants are not welcome. They build their argumentation based on fake news that migrants act violent towards Serbian citizens and their mission is to stop this somehow since authorities are silent on the issue. This is the rationale behind their decision to organize the protest in that same park and send a message to migrants that they are not welcome and should find a way to leave Serbia as soon as possible. By using a lot of repetitions in a short video, they intend to stress and amplify what migrants have allegedly been doing and thus make people join them at the protest. Migrants are described as "evil", while People's Patrol are honest and devoted young men who serve their people.

For the first time in the video, we see the faces of the group members and one man in the middle does the talking while at the same time being surrounded by other "brothers" to keep his back. Their stance is based on "rejection" as they stand crossarm and are very serious. For the purposes of rising fear among migrants but viewers as well, the video is filmed in the dark. Fearlessly standing quite close to each other, these men do not wear obligatory masks, which demonstrates that, in their perspective, they are stronger than even the coronavirus. The main message they convey is: "We must patrol the streets of Belgrade for our sisters' and mothers' safety".

The video, which reached over 12,000 views, stirred a heated debate online with some 56 comments in total which can be divided into two groups. One gathers comments praising what they are doing, with many admiring their "courage" and what they dub as "heroic move", sending them different emoji and gifs (a girl holding a heart; bravo signs etc.) and congratulating them with "bravo" and "this is great". The other group of comments focuses and stands as a call for mobilization. Commentators often write in Cyrillic as an unofficial alphabet of right-wing groups and nationalists, and also expressing their wish to come to the protest stressing the importance of protesting against migrants i.e. "brothers, I am with you". Their argumentation derives from hard nationalism and racism as they say "who knows who the next migrants' target will be", "if we do not do this first, they will do this to us". Furthermore, they refer to migrants as "jihadists", "shit", "rapists", and are being much more vulgar, aggressive, and racist than People's patrol in the video.

3. [Migrants' arrests](#) (March 2021)

After threats, intimidation and calls for action against refugees and other migrants, arresting these people on the move came to the spotlight in the third video analysed. Published on 16 March 2021, the video features disturbing scenes of representatives

of People's patrol arresting a migrant in Belgrade downtown over the alleged possession of narcotics. This is a culmination of the group's actions and the first time that they have given themselves the right to act as police's right-hand-men.

In a bid to humiliate migrant population and show them as evils, a face of a migrant man is featured in the 3-minute video, so that all the viewers see it and remember it. He is arrested with no possibility to defend himself or stop members of the People's Patrol filming him. He is labelled in the video as a thief, drug dealer and terrorist just for being a migrant. The story goes as if they are on a set for making a movie since the cameraman is constantly telling them what to do with the migrant. First it is to hold his hands arrested, then to put the migrant lay on the ground and at a later stage not allowing them to touch his hand but to keep it up so everyone can see the migrant as an evil face. Meanwhile, the migrant tries to make explanations, which no one wants to hear, even if he knows some Serbian words. They act as the main and only power on the street and telling everyone what to do, as it was the case when a woman (random passer-by) was not allowed to pass by. The video is recorded with a mobile phone and the frame often shakes, making it all authentic and original whilst causing fear. Similar to other actions of the group, this video was filmed non-professionally in the dark, bringing additional tension and fear to both migrants and viewers with an aim to cause fear among spectators while demonstrating the group's power. Dressed in the dark with caps on to remain unrecognizable, two men interrogate and act violently toward a migrant, while two other guys are in the back (filming everything).

The construction of different phenomena today happens, among other things, through cultural representations and signifying practices (Hall 1997). As seen in the video, People's Patrol contribute to the discourses on migrant's identity based on preconceived notions on their cultural qualities and characteristics labelling them as evils and worthless based on their own fake news. The main message they want to convey is "look what happened to the migrants who disobeyed our (Serbian) rules". The underlying message they convey is that "we are the only ones thinking about safety and security of Serbian citizens and nothing will stop us on this mission.

The video, which reached over 125,000 views, also stirred a heated debate with 381 comments praising People's Patrol on one side, and scapegoating migrants on the other. While People's Patrol are labelled as "heroes", "defenders", "keepers of national interest", "saviours", and "hope" who should get "length of service benefit", migrants are "shit", "Barbarians" and "evil of our time" who "should be thrown into the Danube River". The video seems to have encouraged the biggest hatred towards migrants where followers do not refrain of hate speech and cruel thoughts of what one should do to every migrant seen on the streets of Belgrade. For instance, some of the posts read: "Just break their ribs, you don't need to film them. Somewhere without a lot of eyewitnesses, put a bandage on his mouth and just hit him".

The analysis of the selected media objects has shown that video on social media is a powerful tool for conveying messages and mobilizing audiences by tapping into other people's emotions with a combination of words, sounds and images. As a

result, there was not a single negative comment of all the three videos. Moreover, the audience goes beyond the conveyed radicalised messages and becomes more and more radicalised and aggressive in their tone, often expressing readiness for radical action to "solve the problem". Through the selected media objects covering a period for over a year, we also see that People's Patrol are becoming more radicalised in their actions, from raids to calling on people to join them on protests and organising protests in the offline world to finally arresting migrants in the city center. The fact that all their core activities are happening on Facebook and are being filmed to easily become viral, indicates that impact of their actions has far-reaching consequences due to social media platforms.

5. Conclusion

Over the past two decades, Internet and social media have brought a wave of optimism and expectations that the new media will contribute to advancing democracy and its values (Keane, 2013) by enabling global connectivity, free access to information, and control of public officials and their work. Social media has become an integral part of everyday life and has permanently changed the way we communicate, the way we access information, engage with them and by engaging- become increasingly dependent on mediated hegemonic political control (Krzyzanowski et al. 2018). They have become a space where everyone can access the so-called online communities, regardless of location and take part in communication, political debate, or social mobilization on an equal footing (Price 2013). However, in addition to the democratic potential, numerous examples of racist, xenophobic, and sexist communication on social networks show their undemocratic potential (Chen 2013). By opening up space for radicalization, current state of usage of social media suggests that the initial optimism was unfounded and that the idea of new media as a corrective to democracy is turning into its opposite, even a threat to democracy.

The analysis of People's Patrol videos in this report has shown that a marginalized group like them with no access to traditional media and public discourse in general, can find its way through backdoor of social media driving on a topic and with elements that resonate in public. The analysis has shown us how this scheme functions: how they create and distribute fake news; how this fake news then serves as a cause and trigger of their action, what formats and strategies they use to spread anti-migrant sentiment on social media, how they invite for mobilization and how the radicalized messages they send resonate in public and are being further spread both online and offline.

As a follow up to news pegs, the People's Patrol choose elements from real life to create fake news, which at a later stage serve as a basis and trigger of their action. The focus of the fake news is often about topics which people feel more vulnerable, such as violence against women and children and safety issues etc. By packing all

these elements into video formats, where they are shown to have witnessed an injustice or threat in the field and thereby directly address the audience in an emotional way, the People's Patrol manages to mobilize over 50,000 followers on Facebook with over 250,000 on certain videos, but also protests with over 1,000 people in Belgrade downtown areas populated with refugees and other migrants. Such video formats on social media have proved to do the job when trying to be tapping into other people's emotions. Their mobilized followers online get even more revolted, angry, and motivated to spread hatred against refugees and migrants pledging to do their best to expel them from the country. Therefore, with this populist approach and with the social media as the main driver, they managed to build an entire online army of people and paved the way for the wider distribution of radicalized discourse in the country.

By mainstreaming radicalised attitudes towards migrants in Serbia, the report also argues that this unofficial coalition comprising People's Patrol, social media and audiences encourages patterns of othering and xenophobia against migrants, thus contributing to the wider exclusion of "others". This way, they are becoming a potential cultural trigger of radicalised behaviour of Serbian citizens. Meanwhile, traditional media and top political leaders remained silent on the issue being busy with the coronavirus pandemic, thus letting this culture of fear and anti-migrant sentiment being created and spread further flooding the entire country. This analysis has thus proved that Chen's (2013) thesis on undemocratic potential of social media whose further influence in the offline world and society has yet to be measured and counted.

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