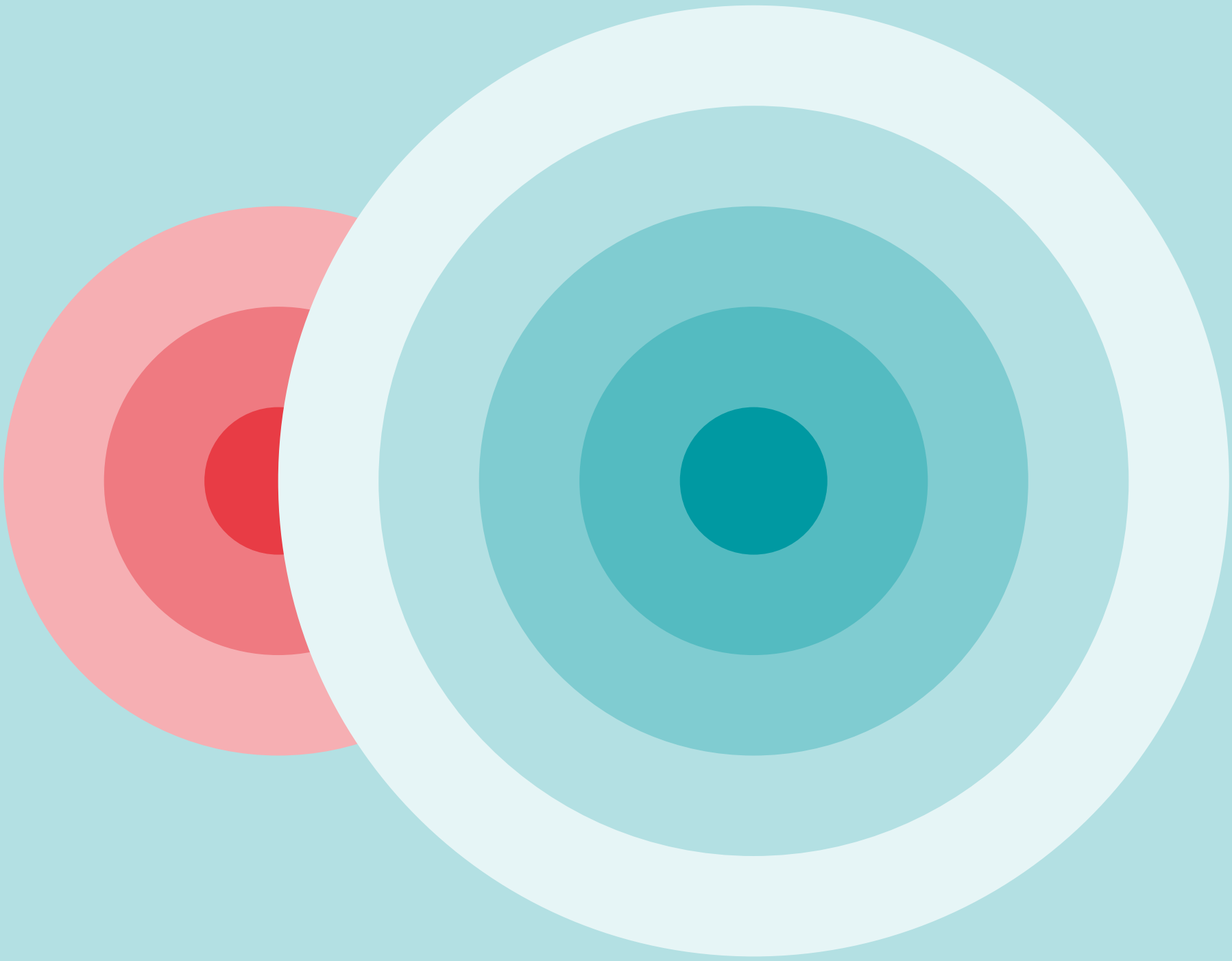
Gender-Based Content Analysis



Women Politicians and Media Bias

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Introduction

According to a recent analysis of the Economist Intelligence Unit, an average of 85% of women worldwide have experienced or witnessed online violence, and the most commonly used tactics include disinformation and defamation, cyber harassment and hate speech.[1] All of this contributes to widening the digital gender gap, and the result is that nearly 9 out of 10 women limit their online activity, thus limiting their access to employment, education and health care, but also their participation in community dynamics.[2] Women in politics are particularly vulnerable to online violence due to the fact that they must be present online as part of their professional engagements, especially during election periods.

Gender-based violence undermines women's participation in politics by instilling fear and intimidation, creating barriers to access and participation, affecting women's mental health and well-being, and limiting the presence of diverse perspectives in political institutions. Gender-based violence and hate speech in the digital realm are based on gender stereotypes, reinforcing traditional notions of gender roles and norms that limit women's participation in politics. Through online harassment, sexist comments, and misogynistic narratives, women in politics are often subjected to demeaning portrayals that reinforce stereotypes of women as weak, emotional, or incompetent leaders. These narratives not only discredit women's political achievements, but also discourage other women from entering the political arena, underpinning the idea that they have no place in politics. In this way, the digital space serves as a powerful tool for perpetuating harmful stereotypes and inhibiting the full and equal participation of women in politics.

1 Economist Intelligence Unit. (2020). Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women. Available at the following link

2 Ibid.

Gender-based violence in politics often targets women not because of their political views, but because they are women, with the ultimate goal of preventing them from being heard and from taking an active part in public discourse. Gender-based harassment of women in politics - which can influence their self-censorship and contribute to their underrepresentation in the public sphere – is a way of actually sending out a message to all women about their role and place in society. Although both men and women can be victims of political violence, the specificity of violence against women in politics has three distinct characteristics: it targets women because of their gender, it can be gender-based in its form, as exemplified by sexist threats and sexual violence, and it discourages women from being politically active.[3]

The increasing use of social media as particularly important instruments for political campaigning has turned social media into an arena where online violence against women in politics has reached a peak. On the one hand, social media are important tools for women candidates and women politicians to communicate directly with their constituencies, overcoming the marginalization and bias they face in traditional media, and on the other hand, they expose them to a high presence of sexism, harassment and threats, with a detrimental effect on the political ambitions of young women.[4] Social media significantly influence the shaping of attitudes about women's political abilities and women's representation, and the strengthening of negative gender stereotypes on social media will inevitably affect the strengthening of misogynistic attitudes about the role of women in politics.

Despite the doubling of the representation of women in parliaments globally, it is estimated that the achievement of gender equality in legislative bodies could be achieved in 2063 at the earliest[5], which does not exclude the situation in North Macedonia, considering that the trend

3 Hubbard, C. and DeSoi, C. (2016). Votes without violence - A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections . National Democratic Institute. Available at: https://www.ndi.org/VAW-E

4 Di Meco, L. (2020). Online Threats to Women's Political Participation and the Need for a Multi-Stakeholder, Cohesive Approach to Address Them . UN Women. Available at the following link

5 United Nations Economic and Social Council. (2020). Commission on the Status of Women - Sixty-fifth session 15–26 March 2021, Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls . Available at the following link

of women's participation in high political positions does not indicate any significant changes in recent years. In addition, the media presence of women politicians is still quite low, so in the last parliamentary elections in 2020, despite the fact that women constituted 42% of the registered candidates, the coverage of women politicians by the media varied between 4% and 14%.[6]

By analysing the use of gender stereotypes in news reports, this analysis aims to identify harmful gender narratives and online gender-based hate speech targeting women in politics, during the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections in North Macedonia. At the same time, the analysis covers gender-based content the purpose of which is to discredit and exclude women politicians from the public discourse. The end goal of the analysis is to indicate how the media contribute to the creation and online dissemination of harmful gender narratives for women in politics, in order to find ways to make cyber space safer for the participation of women politicians.

This analysis, titled "Women Politicians and Media Bias" is the fourth analysis of gender-based content produced by the Institute of Communication Studies within the project "Fact-Based Journalism for Raising Awareness and Countering Disinformation in the Media Space in North Macedonia ", which is implemented with the support of the British Embassy in Skopje.

6 ODIHR. (2020). REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 15 July 2020, ODIHR Special Election Assessment Mission Final Report . Available at the following link

Methodology

This research comprises a case study, including analyses of news reports published on online media and websites of traditional media, as well as comments on news reports published on news outlets' social media accounts, applying a qualitative analysis of content published in the period from March to May 2024, more precisely starting from the official deadline for submitting presidential candidacies to the State Election Commission (SEC) on March 19, until the second round of the presidential elections on May 8, which coincided with the parliamentary elections. Even though gender-based narratives with misogynistic connotations and gender-based hate speech have been present for much longer[7], starting at the beginning of the year, when the names of possible candidates first began to be speculated in the public, this analysis focused on the narratives that resulted from the official candidacy of the women candidates for the presidential elections, as well as for the women candidates for representatives in the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The sample that was analysed consists of 14,000 news reports published online and 4,183 posts with a total of 20,761 comments on news reports on news outlets' social media accounts, i.e., on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube.

In doing so, all news reports that include gender-based elements, that is, topics related to women politicians, gender equality, gender-based discrimination and hate speech against women politicians, as well as gender-based violence, were analysed.

7 See more at: Кандидатките се жигосуваат зашто се жени

The gendered content was analysed through several specific aspects:

- Use of gender stereotypes[8]
- Use of sensationalist language[9]
- Use of sexist and hate speech[10]
- Use of gendered disinformation[11]
- Promoting a culture of gender-based violence[12]
- Including a critical review and a wider context in news reports.

8 A gender stereotype is a generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by, women and men. (Gender stereotyping | OHCHR)

9 Use of language intended to sensationalize, arouse great interest, or shock, even by distorting the facts.

10 Sexist speech perpetuates discrimination or prejudice based on gender, while hate speech incites violence or hostility towards individuals or groups based on their gender and gender identity.

11 Gendered disinformation refers to activities (creating, sharing, disseminating content) that attack or undermine the reputation of people based on their gender and abuse gender stereotypes to promote political, social or economic goals. (ENGENDERING HATE | Demos)

12 The culture of gender-based violence refers to the social norms, attitudes and practices that perpetuate, condone, and thus normalize violence against individuals based on their gender.

Gender Equality in Macedonian Politics

Ever since the first speculations with the names of the possible candidates for this year's presidential elections in North Macedonia appeared, their mockery and hate speech became evident online, but what was particularly striking when it comes to the female candidates is the gendered context of these insults.[13] Society's expectations and traditional gender roles, which are still extremely patriarchal in our society, influence the shaping of perceptions of women in leadership roles, such as in politics, and the gender-based violence they are often victims of online indicates that they are still perceived as an exception in the public discourse. Online gender-based attacks are a destructive tool that can be used in various ways during the election cycle to deter women from participating as candidates, voters, election representatives, observers or activists.[14] Therefore, it is of particular importance that media reporting during election processes does not contribute to the creation and spread of gender-harmful narratives. Heteronormativity and patriarchal values assert that women are too emotional or mentally unstable for leadership, that they should prioritize family over career, and must adhere to conventional standards of femininity in appearance and behaviour. Women leaders are often unfairly criticized for being either too soft or too aggressive, that is, they are criticized with the application of double standards. Such prejudice not only perpetuates gender inequality, but also prevents capable women from contributing fully to political life. And a recent report by UN Women[15] underscores that women in leadership positions still face significant underrepresentation and violence, both online and offline, which includes personal attacks aimed at their mental health and stability.

13 See more at: Кандидатките се жигосуваат зашто се жени

14 Hubbard, C. and DeSoi, C. (2016). Votes without violence - A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections . National Democratic Institute. Available at the following link

15 Women in power in 2023: New data shows progress but wide regional gaps

In 2022, the Gender Equality Index in North Macedonia was 64.5 points out of the maximum 100, with a progress of 2.5 points compared to 2019. At this rate, it will take the country about 57 years to achieve gender equality in all areas[16]. Several national and international[17] reports detect the biggest problems in the implementation of policies that would bring the country closer to achieving gender equality. Moreover, in the past few years, topics related to gender equality have been under serious threat from anti-gender movements, whose action is basically challenging the so-called "gender ideology", which uses social media as a basic tool, primarily through the creation and spread of gendered disinformation, mainly targeting women politicians and activists.[18] In order to understand the position of women in politics, we must look at things from an intersectional perspective, i.e., see how structural inequalities, systemic discrimination and the intensified action of anti-gender movements limit the rights and freedoms of women in general, and thus the entry into politics.

The legislation and the Constitution of RNM have the official role to affirm gender equality in the country. The policies and commitments for gender equality in North Macedonia date back to before the term "gender equality" became part of the legislation. The first Gender Equality Strategy for the period 2013-2020 was adopted in 2013, based on Article 9, paragraph 3 of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, while the current Strategy for the period 2022-2027 was adopted in 2022. However, despite the formal commitments, gender equality, especially during the past year, has diluted the political will for its advancement, primarily through reneging on the adoption of the new Law on Gender Equality.

The initial composition of the Parliament after the parliamentary elections on May 8, 2024 has only 38 women (31.6%). In the previous Government, women held only 4 of the 20 ministerial positions (20%) and only 2.5% of the mayoral positions are held by women. What is significant to note is that despite the guaranteed quotas in the Electoral Code for 40% female representation in Parliament, systemic reforms are needed that

16 Gender Equality Index for North Macedonia (2022) | Publications | UN Women – Europe and Central Asia

17 1 Индекс на родова еднаквост во Северна Македонија 2022

18 See more in: Jovanovska, B. and Jovanovska Kanurkova, J. (2023). Gender-based content analysis: Gender equality in a time of gendered disinformation. ICS. Available at the following link

would affect the culture of normalizing political violence against women. The Gender Equality and Empowerment Handbook 2020[19] points out that women are better represented only in institutions where a gender quota is applied, such as the Parliament and the municipal councils.

The conclusions of ODIHR's observation of the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2024 point to insufficient representation in various elected and appointed positions, combined with cases of pressure and online attacks against women politicians, which means insufficient efforts by the authorities and political parties to deal with the permanent gender stereotypes that hinder the participation of women in politics.[20] According to ODIHR, the contents of social media campaigns included videos, photos, descriptions of meetings and speeches, while from the largest interactions between March 21 and May 8, 2024, the VMRO-DPMNE leader had the highest level of online engagement (753,082 interactions), followed by the presidential candidate supported by VREDI (300,467 interactions) and the presidential candidate supported by SDSM (283,002 interactions)[21]. What the ODHIR report noted, and was confirmed throughout this analysis, is that issues related to gender equality were largely overlooked in the campaign discourse, with the exception of the presidential candidate supported by the VMRO DPMNE-led coalition. In most other events, the references related to women referred to their roles within the family, thus reflecting long-standing gender stereotypes and discrimination against non-traditional families.

In the context of this analysis, it is important to point out the role that the media and social networks play in reproducing inequality. Traditional media in North Macedonia are regulated by the Law on Media and the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services.[22] Although these laws do not cover online media, there are other laws that govern them, such as the Criminal Code, the Law on Civil Liability for Insult

19 Родовата еднаквост е важна

20 ОДИХР. (2024). Парламентарни избори и втор круг на претседателски избори, 8 мај 2024 година-ПРЕЛИМИНАРНИ ЗАКЛУЧОЦИ. Available at the following link

21 Ibid.

22 Jovanovska, B. and Jovanovska Kanurkova, J. (2023). Gender-based content analysis: Gender equality in a time of gendered disinformation. ICS. Available at the following link

and Defamation, and the Law on Personal Data Protection. Currently, there is no regulation of social media, which creates a vacuum where hate speech and harmful content can be spread.[23] The "Guidelines for Ethical Reporting of Online Media"[24] indicate that the media should not withhold important information that could affect readers' understanding of the content. Not disclosing facts that can significantly influence the formation of an opinion is the same as intentionally distorting reality and creating disinformation. The media should verify claims made by political entities or other sources to help audiences distinguish fact from speculation, especially on important and current topics.

23 Ibid.

24 СМЕМ. (2021). Насоки за етичко известување на онлајн медиумите. Available at the following link

CASE STUDY:

Gendered Narratives During the 2024 Presidential and Parliamentary Election Campaigns

Submission of Candidacies for the Presidential Elections

March 19, 2024 was the deadline for submitting the candidacies for the presidential elections to the State Election Commission (SEC), and most of the media informed about the submitted candidacies and the parties that support the candidates, and there was also unofficial information about the candidate lists for the parliamentary elections.

Only one news report informed about the guest appearance of the Minister of Culture Bisera Kostadinovska Stojchevska on Tera TV with the headline **Kostadinovska-Stojchevska: I try to protect my family from political bots, as a female politician I am more exposed to attacks,**[25] in which she talked about the discrimination she faces as a woman in politics compared to her male colleagues, stating that

> *"…the most common questions were not what I would stand for as a minister, but questions about my private life. In an interview, I asked whether they ask my male colleagues those questions, and they said - no, no,"*

25 Kostadinovska-Stojchevska: Се трудам да го заштитам моето семејство од партиски ботови, како жена политичарка сум повеќе на удар - Centar.mk

and that there are users on social media who misuse photos of her children, but she also added that all of the attacks only strengthen her character. At the same time, statements from her guest appearance on TV Klan were conveyed in about twenty news reports, but only three of the reports transmitted the statement in which she said that within the framework of the SDSM

> *"…first of all, we advocate for the preservation of that male-female principle or equal representation of women on the lists. Since the previous parliamentary elections, this has turned into a rhetoric pertaining to list leaders and co-leaders, i.e., with that representation, a slightly larger region is covered. Which means that, in addition to the male-female principle, we will also have something called a list leader and co-leader for each constituency.*[26]

Despite the fact that most of the media reported the minister's public appearances, only about 20% of them reported statements related to the issue of gender equality.

Only one post conveys the statement of activist Irena Cvetkovic, regarding the activity of women in politics, saying that

> *"Unfortunately, women politicians who take a firm stand for gender equality, in recent years have faced backlash and have been the target not only of hate speech, but also of calls for violence against them. They are strong women and they can withstand these blows, but what is dangerous is that potential future women politicians and young women who want to enter politics will not want to deal with these issues. There are five women MPs in the Parliament who were targeted daily, with calls for them to be raped, for tar to be poured on them or for them to be killed on the city square, all for supporting the introduction of the Law on Gender Equality in the Parliament.*[27]

26 Kostadinovska Stojchevska: Конечните листи за кандидати на пратеници ќе бидат познати во сабота на Конгресот на СДСМ | Press24

27 Цветковиќ: Пет пратенички секојдневно беа на тапет, со повици да се силуваат и да се полеваат со катран оти го поддржале внесувањето на Законот за родова еднаквост во Собранието - МАКТЕL

In the next few days, about fifty news reports published information about the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) opening a case regarding the procurement of helicopters by the Ministry of Defence, in which the current minister Slavjanka Petrovska was mentioned. The news reports related to this case, in addition to the rest, convey the reaction of Aleksandar Nikoloski from VMRO-DPMNE in connection with the case, whom the minister calls to a duel. In addition, the news reports convey the reaction of Jovana Trenchevska from SDSM to the accusations by the Minister of Labor and Social Policy Gjoko Velkovski for illegal payments of welfare aid. At the same time, fifteen media outlets have published reports about SDSM's press conference in which MP Lidija Tasevska calls on the presidential candidate Gordana Siljanovska- Davkova to apologize to the pensioners for the insults – comparing them to the "Muppet show". Seven media outlets reported on the guest appearance of Marija Miteva from VMRO-DPMNE in television station Alsat-M's news, where she declares that **Siljanovska is superior to the other candidates.**[28]

What is noticeable is that news reports dryly convey information and statements in the order in which they appear, without providing any critical review or broader analysis.

From March 20, mutual accusations about the presidential candidates began, with the focus being on the way in which the signatures for Siljanovska- Davkova were collected. Pending confirmation of the candidacies by the SEC, in the next few days the media published various comments on the candidacies and official and unofficial information about the candidates and list leaders for the parliamentary elections, including Sanja Lukarevska from SDSM, Monika Zajkova from LDP and Vesna Bendevska from ZNAM.

On March 21, a news report conveyed the statements of political analyst Aleksandar Ristevski with the headline **Siljanovska-Davkova will be the mother of the nation: In these elections, the historical mistake that was made five years ago will be corrected.**[29] Dozens of media outlets broadcast statements of Mirjana Najchevska from the party *Tvoja* with comments on USA's blacklist.

28 Портпаролката на ВМРО ДПМНЕ: Силјановска е супериорна во однос на останатите кандидати - Sloboden Pechat

29 Силјановска Давкова ќе биде мајка на нацијата: На овие избори ќе се поправи историската грешка од пред пет години - TV Alfa

Twenty or so news reports informed about Minister Petrovska's appearance on TV Sitel with a focus on the procurement of helicopters, but in only one the following was conveyed:

> *"I am ready and I have the capacity to be a list leader if that is decided. I have the capacity and I can also be one of the candidates on the list below."*[30]

Ten reports convey NSDP's statement that Siljanovska became a victim of VMRO-DPMNE propaganda[31] because of the way the party secured signatures for her candidacy.

On March 21, almost all the media reported that the presidential candidate Bujar Osmani did not invite presidential candidates Biljana Vankovska and Stevco Jakimovski to iftar, while sensationalism was conveyed, especially in the headlines such as: "**Vankovska got sidelined by Osmani, and she then sidelined Pendarovski!"**[32]

On the other hand, only a dozen media outlets shared the participation of Deputy Prime Minister Bojan Maricic in the panel discussion "Women in management bodies - strengthened management bodies, strengthened business sector, strengthened society" with headlines such as "**The battle for gender equality is not only a women's battle, it is a collective effort.'**[33] Furthermore, just as many news reports refer to the conference titled "Successful Women for a Successful Region", reporting the statements of Fatmir Bitiqi from SDSM who stated the following:

> *"We must recognize the contributions of women and take steps to ensure their full participation in decision-making processes. This is not a matter of permission, but of justice and equality. Talent and potential are being unfairly neglected and discriminated against",*[34]

30 Петровска: Имам капацитет да бидам носител на листа, но подготвена сум и воопшто да се најдам на нив, органите на СДСМ ќе ја донесат одлуката - 360 степени

31 НСДП: Независната кандидатка за претседателка на државата Силјановска Давкова стана зависна од ВМРО-ДПМНЕ – Фокус

32 Ванковска доби корпа од Османи, а таа му ја даде на Пендаровски!

33 Маричиќ: Битката за родова еднаквост не е само женска борба, тоа е колективен потфат | Press24

34 Конференција во Скопје: Во трката за рамноправност жените се натпреваруваат со заврзани нозе | Meta.mk

as well as the statement of Slavica Grkovska from SDSM:

> *"Women facing barriers are more motivated in the fight for a better society".35*

Even though supporting the potential of women is of particular importance during election campaigns, the focus of news reports was largely on other political topics.

Publication of Candidate Lists for the Parliamentary Elections

In the next few days, news reports started publishing information about the candidate lists for the parliamentary elections, as well as the programs of the parties.

Three media outlets announced that former MP Snezhana Kalevska-Vancheva is not on the candidate lists of SDSM, while the reports do not seem to have any special purpose, nor do they provide any context.

On March 24, several news reports reported the election of Maja Moracanin from DOM as a candidate in the parliamentary elections, while in some of the headlines, as well as the text of the reports, the lack of feminatives or their inconsistent became visible, as, for example, in the headline "**DOM's CB chose Moracanin as a candidate* for MP."**[36] A media outlet published a news report with a gender-stereotypical headline "**Three ladies from Ohrid running for SDSM in the 5th parliamentary elections".**[37]

** Transl. note: In the Macedonian version, the noun "candidate" is in the masculine gender.*

On March 25, the focus of media reports was determining the order of the ballot for the presidential elections by the SEC. In the meantime, the news reports informed about the visits of party representatives, their participation in public events, presentation of projects, etc. Thus,

35 Грковска: Жените соочени со бариери се помотивирани во борбата за подобро општество - МКД.МК

36 "DOM's CB chose Moracanin as a candidate for MP"

37 СДСМ на парламентарните избори во 5-ка ќе трча со три дами од Охрид - OhridNews

for example, the mayor of Skopje Danela Arsovska promoted projects and actions in the city, minister Kostadinovska Stojchevska promoted cultural projects, minister Petrovska attended the fourth anniversary of our membership in NATO, etc.

On March 27, ten news reports reported on the participation of Kostadinovska Stojchevska in the panel discussion "The challenges with hate speech: Emancipation and equality of women in politics", with headlines such as "**We can oppose hate speech and gender violence only if we speak up and stand united".**[38]

On March 29, various news reports published statements from Zajkova's interview with Sloboden Pechat, for instance "**Zajkova: The Law on Gender Equality should provide equal opportunities for men and women"**[39]**,** with different media outlets focusing on different parts of the interview. Some were sensationalistic and suggest a negative context through which they could provoke the audience, such as with the headline "**According to Zajkova, DECRIMINILIZATION AND LEGALIZATION OF CANNABIS DOESN'T MEAN THAT THERE WOULD BE ADDICTS".**[40]

Thirty media outlets are reporting that Petrovska won the defamation lawsuit against Dragan Kovacki from VMRO-DPMNE. One news report with the headline "**Slavjanka dazzled in a red outfit at a meeting with Turkish military equipment manufacturers"**[41] informed about an official meeting of the Minister of Defence, with the focus being placed solely on the Minister's clothing.

Such announcements, especially when it comes to women politicians in high positions, contribute to further objectification of the female body and it defocuses from key political issues.

38 Костадиновска-Стојчевска: Само гласни и обединети ќе се спротивставиме на говорот на омраза и родово насилство – Утрински Весник

39 Зајкова: Законот за родова еднаквост треба да обезбеди едкави можности меѓу мажите и жените - 24info.mk

40 За Зајкова ДЕКРИМИНИЛИЗАЦИЈА И ЛЕГАЛИЗАЦИЈА НА КАНАБИС НЕ ЗНАЧЕЛО ДЕКА ЌЕ ИМА ЗАВИСНИЦИ

41 Славјанка блесна во црвено комплетче на средба со турски производители на воена опрема - Expres.mk

On March 30, several news reports reported the statement of Dafina Stojanoska from VMRO-DPMNE as a list leader in which she stated:

> *"As a member of the gender who knows very well what pain, burden and injustice mean, who knows how to deal with every surprise and who knows how to cry tears of joy, but also to laugh when times are the hardest, on my behalf, on behalf of all women and on behalf of my constituency, I express great respect for the president of VMRO-DPMNE, Hristijan Mickoski."*[42]

On the same day, eight news organisations reported on Trencevska's participation in the final event of the "Outspoken and Brave Woman 2" campaign, which aims to encourage women and motivate their greater inclusion in the labour market.[43]

Sloboden Pechat published an analysis "**Only seven women are parliamentary list leaders".**[44] Only one news report reported on the announcement from the *Telegrafi* media outlet with the headline "**No Albanian women as parliamentary list leaders"**[45] in which the activist Nafiye Selmani was quoted:

> *"The Albanian political parties did not take seriously the participation of women in politics and at the same time they are not sufficiently aware that the political parties themselves benefit when women participate in the electoral processes, when they are a part of Parliament, but also when they are in management positions. The participation of women should not be seen from the perspective of fulfilling some legal obligation, but it should be active participation in political life by articulating the demands of half of the population in the country."*

42 Стојаноска: Ги повикувам сите граѓани да го дадат својот глас за своја, за твоја Македонија - Канал 5

43 Тренчевска: Заедно, да направиме нашите гласови да се слушнат, нашите соништа да се реализираат - 24info.mk

44 Само седум жени се носителки на пратенички листи - Слободен печат

45 Ниту една Албанка не предводи пратеничка листа - Expres.mk

In this context, on April 9, only one media outlet published the interview with Imerlie Saliu, a candidate for MP from the political party "Vredi" with the headline "**Will the Parliament get its first woman MP with a headscarf?"**[46]

Issues related to the participation of women in politics, especially from smaller communities, are not of interest to the media, despite the fact that issues concerning ethnicities were fairly represented in news reports on the election campaign.

April 2nd was the last day for submitting the MP lists to the SEC. Only one news report informed about the interview that Sanela Skrijelj from SDSM gave for *Sloboden Pechat* with the headline "**My battle is not with other women, but a battle for all women".**[47] There were also several posts that said **"Vankovska proclaims herself an atheist, yet she started her informal campaign by visiting monasteries",**[48] which were published without specifying an author and included comments on statements on social media written by Vankovska.

46 Ќе добие ли Собранието прва пратеничка со шамија? - Слободен печат

47 Шкријељ: Мојата битка не е со другите жени, туку битка за сите жени - Слободен печат

48 Ванковска се прокламира како атеистка, а неформалната кампања ја почнува од манастири – Утрински Весник

The Start of the Presidential Elections Campaign

The official start of the campaign for the presidential elections was on April 4th. Only four reports informed about the launch of the "Vote NO to Violence Against Women in Politics" campaign.[49]

In the news report with the headline "**Who is Gordana Siljanovska Davkova - the frontrunner in the race for president of Macedonia?"**[50] the candidate was presented exclusively through the use of masculine nouns, describing her as:

> *"An expert in constitutional law and professor at the "Iustinianus Primus" Faculty of Law, an active MP from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE, a fierce critic of national betrayals and a fierce fighter for justice. This is how Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, VMRO-DPMNE candidate for president, can be briefly described."*

Two media reports uncritically convey the column of Gjorgi Tanushev, advisor and president of the Commission for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the Municipality of Strumica with the headline "**There are only men, women and good cash",**[51] in which gendered disinformation is shared about female activists and politicians who advocate for gender equality and the rights of the LGBTI+ community. By using unsupported and insulting information in the text, the author connected the advocacy for gender equality, including the new Law on Gender Equality, exclusively with the personal benefits of women politicians, as well as "their donors" who:

> *"Generously "promise" all kind of benefits to organizations that will promote "full gender equality" for women, but probably this only applies to those "women who were born with penises", and the attacks on the so-called cis women are only for media propaganda out in the field."*

49 Телевизија 24: Почнува кампањата „Заокружи НЕ за насилство врз жените во политика"

50 Која е Гордана Силјановска Давкова – главен фаворит за претседател на Македонија? – Радио Лидер

51 Има само мажи, жени и добар кеш

Two news reports informed about the statement of "**DUI's woman candidate for MP: We are so prepared, we can run NASA"**[52], but her name is not mentioned at all. A news report with the headline "**VANKOVSKA RECENTLY BECAME A GRANDMOTHER FOR THE SECOND TIME. She is the mother of three successful daughters"**[53] informed about Vankovska's guest appearance on Kanal 77, but the focus of the report is solely on her role in the family.

On April 7, dozens of news reports Informed about the public support of Vankovska by MEP Claire Daly, and only one report informed about the interview in KOD with Robert Scott Hazlett from NDI with the headline "**Five women politicians under constant attack on social media".**[54]

Despite the fact that the news reports informed about the public appearances of Siljanovska Davkova, only a small part of them conveyed the statements related to the inclusion of women in politics. So, for example, in just one post with the headline "**I WILL AFFIRM THE NEED FOR MORE WOMEN IN KEY FUNCTIONS, SILJANOVSKA-DAVKOVA STATES FROM KAVADARCI"**[55] the following statement was included:

> *"I see more women here. And once again let me ask all of you, the men included, how logical it is that in 30 years we have not had a woman president, that we have not had a woman prime minister, that we have not had a woman president of Parliament. Remember, we are not vain creatures, we just want to help Macedonia be proud again, with our knowledge, with our mind, with our creativity, with our dedication. Don't give up on half of the population."*

52 Кандидатка за пратеничка од ДУИ: Толку сме спремни што може да раководиме и со НАСА - TV21.mk

53 ВАНКОВСКА НЕОДАМНА СТАНА БАБА ПО ВТОРПАТ Мајка е на три успешни ќерки – plusinfo.mk

54 КОД: Пет жени политичарки под постојан напад на социјалните мрежи, интервју со Роберт Скот Хејзлет (НДИ) - telma.com.mk

55 Ќе ја афирмирам потребата од повеќе жени на клучните функции, порача Силјановска-Давкова од Кавадарци

In just four posts from the rally in Bitola with the headline "**Politics is female too, Macedonian women will become more successful with a woman president."**[56] and **"I WILL SHOW THE MEN THAT THEY ARE GIVING UP ON A LOT OF INTELLECT WHEN THEY SAY THAT QUOTAS SHOULD NOT BE THE ENTRYWAY TO POLITICS"**[57] conveys the commitment to women's rights, with the statement:

> *"If Macedonia gets a woman president, women will identify with her, and they will be more successful not only in the family, but also at work and in politics, because politics is also feminine."*

In five news reports published on April 10, the statement of the presidential candidate Stevo Pendarovski was conveyed, with the headline "**Mickoski should get a GPS locator for Siljanovska, Pendarovski says".**[58] At the same time, the authors of the reports only conveyed the statement and did not critically refer to the discrimination in it at all. Three news reports referred to **"Misogyny and discriminatory language: Pendarovski tried to undermine the credibility and qualifications of Siljanovska Davkova based on her gender and age"**[59], but they were by an unknown author. In addition, the text cites posts on social media by experts and gender equality activists, but the names of the experts are not provided, and at the same time another, almost identical report appeared with the headline "**ANALYSIS: Pendarovski's misogynistic attacks on Siljanovska Davkova are a manifestation of totalitarianism".**[60]

56 Силјановска-Давкова: И политиката е од женски род, со жена претседател македонските жени ќе станат поуспешни - МКД.МК

57 "I WILL SHOW THE MEN THAT THEY ARE GIVING UP ON A LOT OF INTELLECT WHEN THEY SAY THAT QUOTAS SHOULD NOT BE THE ENTRYWAY TO POLITICS"

58 Мицкоски да и набави ци-пи-ес на Силјановска, му порача Пендаровски – Фокус

59 Мизогинија и дискриминаторски јазик: Пендаровски се обиде да го поткопа кредибилитетот и квалификациите на Силјановска Давкова врз основа на нејзиниот пол и возраст – Радио Лидер

60 "ANALYSIS: Pendarovski's misogynistic attacks on Siljanovska Davkova are a manifestation of totalitarianism"

In a dozen posts with an almost identical headline "**Nikoloski: Trencevska is taking a lot of money from the Soros foundation to advocate for gender equality"**[61] the statements of Aleksandar Nikoloski from VMRO-DPMNE were transmitted, in which he talked about Trencevska, saying she is someone:

> *"...who wants to teach our children that there was no difference whether they are male or female, that there are no parents, but there is parent 1 and parent 2, and she leads some so-called gender policies for which she is getting paid a lot of money by the Soros foundation."*

At the same time, none of the media made a critical review, nor did they question the reliability of these statements.

On April 11th, a media outlet published a news report with the headline "**Who are the potential first ladies and first gentlemen of Macedonia?"**[62]**,** in which gender stereotypes were used, stating that

> *"When one gets the position of president of a country, along with it comes the title intended for the president's life partner, for members of the fairer sex it is the First Lady, and for members of the stronger sex it is the First Gentleman."*

More than 10 news reports informed about the statement of the president of SDSM Dimitar Kovacevski addressed to the president of VMRO-DPMNE Hristijan Mickoski with headlines such as "**I did not nominate my aunt Zana to run for president of the country, and then have the obligation of parading her all over Macedonia",**[63] with the following quote:

> *"Just as they paraded their candidate Danela Arsovska in the local elections, now they parade their presidential candidate all over Macedonia."*

61 Николоски: Тренчевска зема дебели пари од фондацијата Сорос за да застапува родова еднаквост - Канал 5

62 Кои се потенцијалните први дами и прв господин на Македонија? – Фокус

63 Ковачевски до Мицкоски: Не ја кандидирав тетка ми Жана за претседател на држава, па да морам да ја шетам по цела Македонија – Утрински Весник

At the same time, no media outlet called out this discriminatory rhetoric of Kovacevski. On the contrary, there were dozens of posts with Mickoski's reaction as "**You would have been better off nominating your aunt Zana, she would be a better candidate for president than DUI's loyal subject Stevo Pendarovski".**[64]

Three news reports conveyed the statements of Gjorgji Spasov about "**The ideas of Gordana and Biljana: The two women candidates are saying they are going to restore Macedonia's pride and the nation's dignity. Those populist slogans can take the country back a hundred steps"**[65], in which only women candidates were targeted, with a dose of inferiority in terms of their capacities.

Only three news reports covering Siljanovska Davkova's rally in Karposh mentioned the political involvement of women, for instance: "**More women should be involved in politics, Macedonia must not give up on 50 percent of the intellect, knowledge, creativity, dedication"**[66] and only a few mentioned it from the rally in Prilep: "**I will advocate that the ARM always meets NATO standards and that it includes more women".**[67] Despite the fact that almost all media conveyed the commitments of the candidates at public appearances, they were usually limited to the president of the party and/or to topics that were in focus, such as the constitutional amendments, the Prespa Agreement, etc.

Dozens of news reports published the reaction of VMRO-DPMNE in connection with **"Brutal insults to the presidential candidate Gordana Siljanovska - Davkova at the SDSM rally in Kumanovo"**[68]**,** followed by several reports with condemnation by the LDP for the insults to Siljanovska Davkova. However, some media outlets choose to use sensationalist

64 Мицкоски до Ковачевски: Подобра тетка ти Жана да ја кандидираше, би била подобар кандидат за претседател од поданик на ДУИ, Стево Пендаровски – Курир

65 Идеите на Гордана и Билјана: Двете кандидатки ќе ѝ ја врателе на Македонија гордоста, а на нацијата достоинството. Тие популистички слогани може да ја однесат државата назад сто чекори - МАКТЕЛ

66 Силјановска Давкова: Повеќе жени да се занимаваат со политика, Македонија не смее да се откаже од 50 проценти ум, знаење, креација, посветеност – Курир

67 Силјановска -Давкова: Ќе се залагам АРМ секогаш да ги исполнува НАТО стандардите и да вклучва повеќе жени | Press24

68 Брутални навреди за кандидатката за претседател Гордана Силјановска – Давкова на митингот на СДСМ во Куманово - TV Alfa

headlines on their reports, such as **"WE ARE ELECTING A WOMAN PRESIDENT, AND YOU ARE CHOOSING THE 'BRIDE' YOURSELVES" SDSM activist insulted Siljanovska Davkova, Pendarovski and Kuzeska did not condemn the hate speech.**[69]

On April 15, Frontline published an analysis **"Women in the parliamentary and local elections in Macedonia so far"**[70] which was one of the few analyses of this kind during the election campaign, which again indicates the lack of interest among the media in issues of gender equality.

The address of Prime Minister Talat Xhaferi at the International Forum for Women, Peace and Security held in Pristina, Republic of Kosovo was shared by about twenty media outlets, and in his address, he said that **"North Macedonia sets an example in the region for implementing gender equality."**[71]

Vankovska's interview for the Voice of America is an example of a good headline choice: **"Biljana Vankovska: If I complete this journey, regardless of the outcome, it will encourage many young women who walk behind me."**[72] However, in the narrative that should encourage women, Vankovska distanced herself from feminism and the so-called "women's agenda" which, according to her, Siljanovska Davkova insists on.

Only two news reports conveyed the information about the holding of the regional conference on the topic "Women in decision-making processes as an element of democracy", organized by the Women's Forum of the "VLEN" Coalition, which was held in Skopje.[73]

69 „ИЗБИРАМЕ ПРЕТСЕДАТЕЛКА, А 'НЕВЕСТА' САМИ СИ БИРАТЕ"Активист на СДСМ ја навреди Силјановска Давкова, Пендаровски и Кузеска не го осудија говорот на омраза – plusinfo.mk

70 Колку жени биле номинирани и колку биле избрани на парламентарните и локалните избори досега? - frontline.mk

71 Џафери: Северна Македонија е пример во регионот за имплементирање на родова рамноправност - 24info.mk

72 Билјана Ванковска: Ако јас го изодам овој пат, без разлика на резултатот, тоа ќе охрабри многу млади жени кои чекорат зад мене

73 Форумот на жените на Коалицијата „ВЛЕН"во Скопје одржа регионална конференција - Канал 5

The Start of the Parliamentary Elections Campaign

April 18 marked the official start of the parliamentary elections campaign, and a large part of the news reports informed about the campaign and the election process. On the same day, several news reports were published about "**DISCRIMINATION, SEXISM, INSULTS AND HATE SPEECH BY PENDAROVSKI, Siljanovska Davkova filed a new complaint due to the disparagement of the counter-candidate's camp"**[74], followed by reports saying that "**After Siljanovska submitted a complaint against Pendarovski regarding hate speech, now he also filed a complaint against Siljanovska".**[75]

On April 21, only six media outlets published news reports, one of which had the following headline "**Hey girl, go buy yourself something nice, you're not cut out for politics"- the election campaign is also a place where women candidates face hate speech, sexist comments and insults**[76]. This was linked to the NDI event about the analysis of comments left on Facebook posts of several women candidates in the parliamentary elections, which included sexism, calls for violence (death threats) and other harassment regarding the women candidates' physical appearance, religion or ethnicity, of which 71% (2388 comments) were aimed at only five women politicians. The very next day, *Sloboden Pechat* published an analysis with the headline "**Not a word from the institutions about hate speech in the campaign"**[77]**,** in which, among other things, Siljanovska Davkova is quoted with the following statement:

> *"Objectification and subjugation of me as a woman can be seen in the candidate's speech at the SDSM rally. Discrimination based on gender, age and sexism."*

74 ДИСКРИМИНАЦИЈА, СЕКСИЗАМ, НАВРЕДИ И ГОВОР НА ОМРАЗА ОД ПЕНДАРОВСКИ Силјановска Давкова со нова претставка поради омаловажувањата од таборот на против кандидатот – plusinfo.mk

75 Откако Силјановска поднесе претставка за говор на омраза против Пендаровски, сега и тој поднесува претставка против Силјановска | skopjeinfo.mk

76 „Ај девојче оди купи си нешто убаво, не те бива за политика"- и во изборната кампања кандидатките се соочуваат со говор на омраза, сексистички коментари и навреди - Либертас

77 Ни збор од институциите за говорот на омраза во кампањата - Слободен печат

At the same time, in one of the rare analyses of the women presidential candidates, which was published by the Voice of America, Siljanovska Davkova's commitment to the establishment of the "Centre of Excellence for Women, Peace and Security" was mentioned[78], which is not mentioned in the other news reports.

Despite the fact that some media outlets managed to insert the issue of gender equality in their reports, the interest of the majority of media in conveying these announcements remained insignificant.

First Round of the Presidential Elections

The first round of presidential elections was held on April 24, with news reports focusing on the course of the election process and the turnout. However, a report with the headline "**THE CANDIDATES FOR FIRST LADY VOTED What outfits did they choose to wear to the polling stations?"**[79] commented on the styling of the presidential candidates' wives at the polls, through gender stereotyping and portraying women solely through their outward appearance, which was reinforced by the fact that the appearance of the partners of the two women candidates for president of the country was not commented on. In addition, in one post, in addition to the appearance of women politicians, the appearance of presidential candidates is commented: **"Casual looks and fail-safe outfits: How did the wives of politicians and presidential candidates dress for election day?"**[80]

78 Две жени, петмина мажи: Седум визии за подобра иднина за македонските граѓани – портрети на претседателските кандидати

79 КАНДИДАТКИТЕ ЗА ПРВА ДАМА ГЛАСАА Во каков стајлинг се покажаа на гласачките места? – plusinfo.mk

80 Лежерен изглед и сигурни комбинации: Како се облекоа жените на политичарите и претседателските кандидатки за изборниот ден?

Twenty reports conveyed Siljanovska Davkova's speech on the occasion of her being the forerunner in the first round of the presidential elections, and only two reports had the headline "**Siljanovska - Davkova: Women were my inspiration, we will not behave like men throughout history."**[81] while the rest only briefly mentioned the following part of the speech, where she said that she was especially:

> *"…proud of the women in Macedonia, regardless of their affiliation, I think it's time to identify a woman as a woman, regardless of which ideology she belongs to".*

What could be repeatedly seen in a large part of the news reports is the non-use of feminatives, as for example in "*the candidate for president of VMRO-DPMNE, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova pointed out".*[82] In a news report with the headline "**Macedonia is only a step away from having its first woman president",**[83] the text did not refer to the context and/or the meaning of the headline at all, but only analysed the number of votes cast in the first round of the elections.

The Continuation of the Campaigns

April 27 marks the anniversary of the attack on the Parliament, hence the narrative in the news reports began to shift its focus on statements regarding a possible amnesty for the participants in the event, as well as threats of a return to the "regime".

On April 29, Prisma published an analysis on the topic **"Tops of the lists reserved for men"**[84] in which it was said that although the chances are high that Macedonia will get its first woman president, the parties have failed in terms of gender equality on the electoral lists. In addition, two media outlets published a report with the headline "**Counter spin: "The 'So-called gender policies' are international standards for basic human**

81 Сиљановска-Давкова: Жените беа мојата инспирација, нема да се однесуваме ние како мажите низ историјата

82 An example of non-use of feminatives

83 Македонија на чекор до прва жена претседател

84 Врвот на листите резервиран за мажите - Призма

rights"[85], which analysed the disinformation presented by Nikoloski regarding gender issues, such as the policy of introducing the parent 1 and parent 2 concept and the connection of Trenchevska's gender policy with Soros. However, the rest of the media were not interested in these data.

In the news reports about the May 1st debate on *Telma* between Siljanovska Davkova and Pendarovski, only two reports conveyed the views of the candidates on topics related to gender equality and LGBTI+ rights, i.e., that they support the legalization of same-sex marriages or partnerships, respecting the freedom of everyone to live with whoever they want, as well as the absolute support of Siljanovska Davkova for the right to abortion.

On May 2nd, some media outlets shared Vankovska's social media posts with elements of sensationalism, for example through the headline **"GOGA HAS NO COURAGE OR DETERMINATION TO INITIATE PROCEEDINGS AGAINST THE AGREEMENT WITH BULGARIA OR AGAINST THE PRESPA AGREEMENT": Vankovska was worried because of Siljanovska".**[86] At that same time, several news reports also appeared with inappropriate and sensationalist headlines such as **"GET UP, CACI" SEEMS LOST: The scandalous statement about the massacre of defenders near Vejce, immediately received a response"[87]** and **"STOJANCHE SCHOOLED CACI, calling her statement frivolous and irresponsible"[88],** in which the social media status of Stojanche Angelov addressed to Minister Petrovska is conveyed. The very fact that a nickname was used to address the minister and the focus in the headline on the attempt of a male person to discipline someone, is the guiding approach to the reporting of this event, which perpetuates traditional gender roles.

85 Контраспин: „Некаквите т.н. родови политики"се меѓународни стандарди за основни човекови права - МАКТЕЛ

86 „ГОГА НЕМА ХРАБРОСТ НИ РЕШИТЕЛНОСТ ДА ПОКРЕНЕ ПОСТАПКА НИ ПРОТИВ БУГАРСКИОТ НИ ПРОТИВ ПРЕСПАНСКИОТ ДОГОВОР": Ванковска била загрижена заради Силјановска

87 „СТАНИ ЦАЦИ"СЕ ИЗГУБИ: Скандалозна изјава за масакрот врз бранителите кај Вејце, веднаш доби одговор – Denesen.mk

88 СТОЈАНЧЕ ЈА ПОДБРА ЦАЦИ, а изјавата и ја нарече несериозна и неодговорна

A few news reports with the headline **"Parent 1 and parent 2 exist only in the manipulative minds of VMRO-DPMNE, Trenchevska says"**[89] without any context, only conveyed Trenchevska's rebuttal regarding Nikoloski's statements. Given that in the process of creating and spreading gendered disinformation,[90] one of the topics is exactly the ambiguities related to the concept of *parent 1-2,* reports on these topics need to include a wider context and a critical review of the conveyed statements.

On May 6, news reports with general information about the elections and the electoral process were published. Dozens of media outlets shared news reports with the headline "**Siljanovska: Women's time is coming, it's time for men's emancipation"**[91] and "**WOMEN HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW, THEY HAVE VOLCANIC POWER! Siljanovska Davkova thinks it's a shame that for 30 years we haven't had a woman president or prime minister"**[92] with the commitments of Siljanovska Davkova for more women in politics and for greater guarantees for reducing violence. At the same time, *Vecher* published a news report with the headline **"VANKOVSKA IS UNIMAGINABLY ENVIOUS AND JEALOUS: Screaming and saying - don't vote for Siljanovska!"**[93] in which Vankovska is insulted, calling her gesture *narrow-minded and primitive* for a university professor because she called for people not to vote for Siljanovska Davkova, while through sensationalism the focus was placed on Vankovska's emotions, which is a gender-stereotyping practice.

89 Родител 1 и родител 2 постојат само во манипулативните умови на ВМРО-ДПМНЕ, вели Тренчевска - 360 степени

90 See more in: Jovanovska B. and Jovanovska Kanurkova K. (2023). Gender-based content analysis: Gender equality in a time of gendered disinformation. ICS. Available at the following link

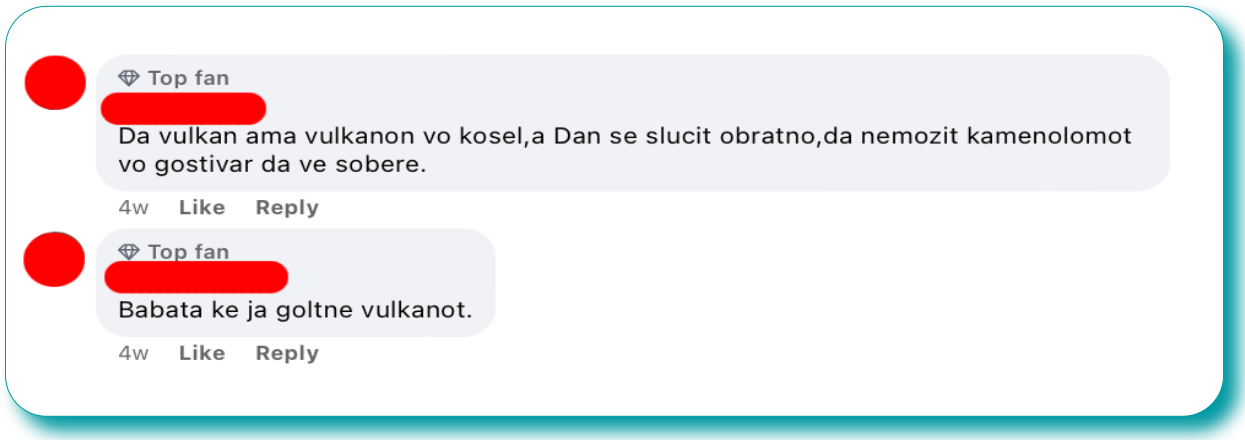
91 Силјановска: Доаѓа времето на жените, време е за машка еманципација - telma.com.mk

92 ЖЕНИТЕ ИМААТ ШТО ДА ПОКАЖАТ, ИМААТ ВУЛКАНСКА СИЛА!
Силјановска Давкова смета дека е срамота што 30 години не сме имале претседателка или премиерка – plusinfo.mk

93 НЕВИДЕНА ЗАВИСТ И ЉУБОМОРА НА ВАНКОВСКА:
Вреска и повикува - не гласајте за Сиљановска!

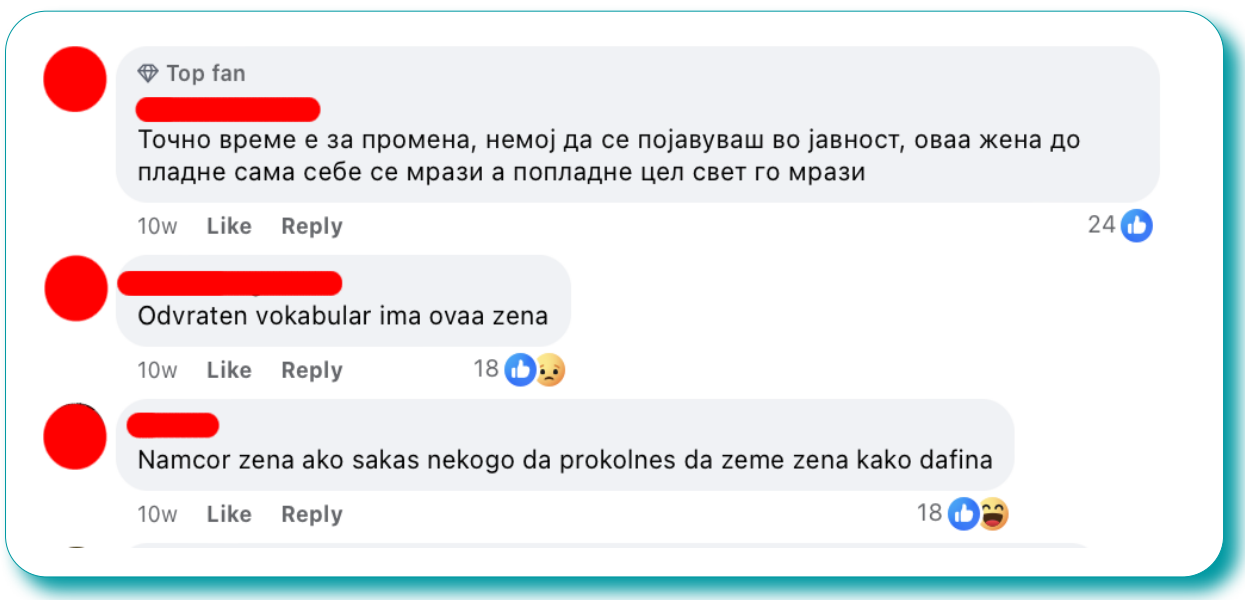
Comments on Social Media

With the overlap of the parliamentary and presidential elections, the intensity and interest of both the media and citizens shifted to social platforms. What was evident in the comments on social media was the sexism[94], ageism[95] and the misogynistic approach towards women politicians, especially the women presidential candidates. The sensationalist reporting that was present in news reports has created fertile ground for negative comments and insults, which in turn have the effect of strengthening gender stereotypes and discouraging women from getting involved in political processes.



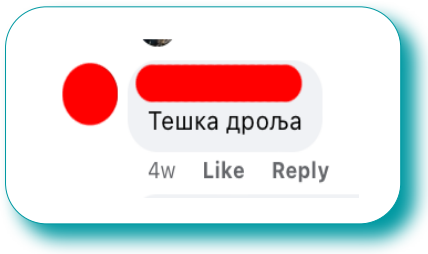
- Sure, a volcano, but the one in Kosel. And it might be other way around, for you not to be able to fit in the Gostivar quary.

- Granma is going to get swallowed by the volcano.



- It's the right time for a change, just don't show up in public, this woman hates herself until not and then hates the rest of the world in the afternoon

- This woman uses such disgusting language (vocabulary)



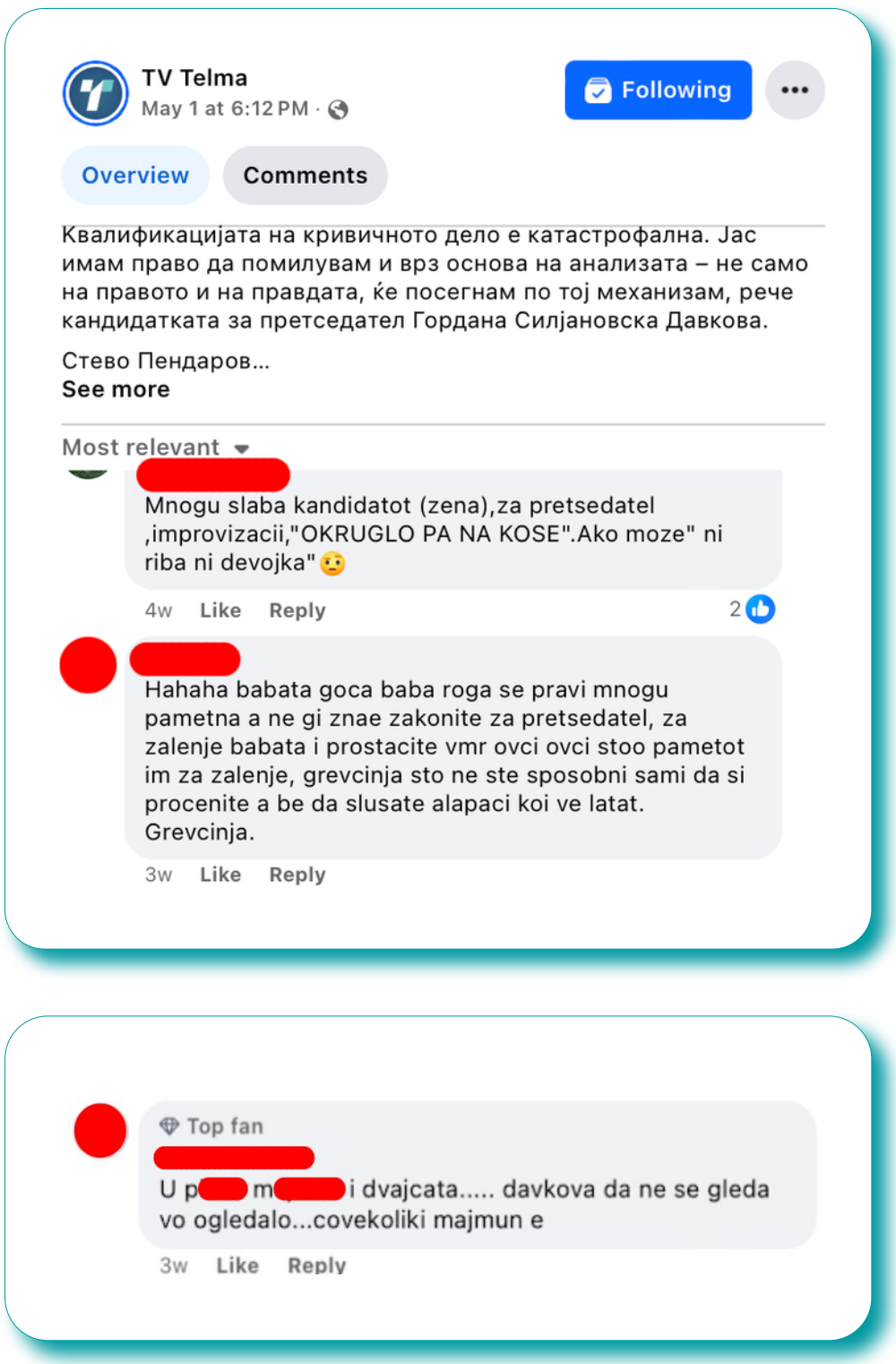
- She is so grumpy. If you want to throw a curse on someone, just wish for them to marry someone like Dafina

- She is such a slut.

94 SEXISM - the belief that one of the genders is inferior, less capable and less valuable than the other (e.g. expressing the view that women are incompetent when it comes to politics). It comes from the English word "sex". This term covers both misogyny - hatred of women, as well as misandry - hatred of men.

95 Ageism is the term used to explain the deep discomfort felt by the young or the middle-aged - a personal aversion - to aging, illness, disability, fear of powerlessness and death. Protection on this basis covers not only persons colloquially regarded as young or elderly, but any person who has potentially suffered impermissible, unequal treatment because of the age with which that person is associated. (GROUNDS FOR DISCRIMINATION)

The identities of the women politicians were attacked from several aspects, starting from their appearance, clothes, age, all the way to their marital status and presentation of their identity through their partners. Regardless of the variety of insults, the general narratives were driven by heteronormative expectations for women in public life, politics, and Macedonian society that undermine female authority. Mentions of women in social media comments focus on their roles in the family, reflecting long-standing gender stereotypes. Attacks and attempts to discipline the way women politicians behave, how they dress and their physical appearance not only damage their reputation and credibility, but also create a hostile environment that deters women from active participation in political processes[96].



TV Telma

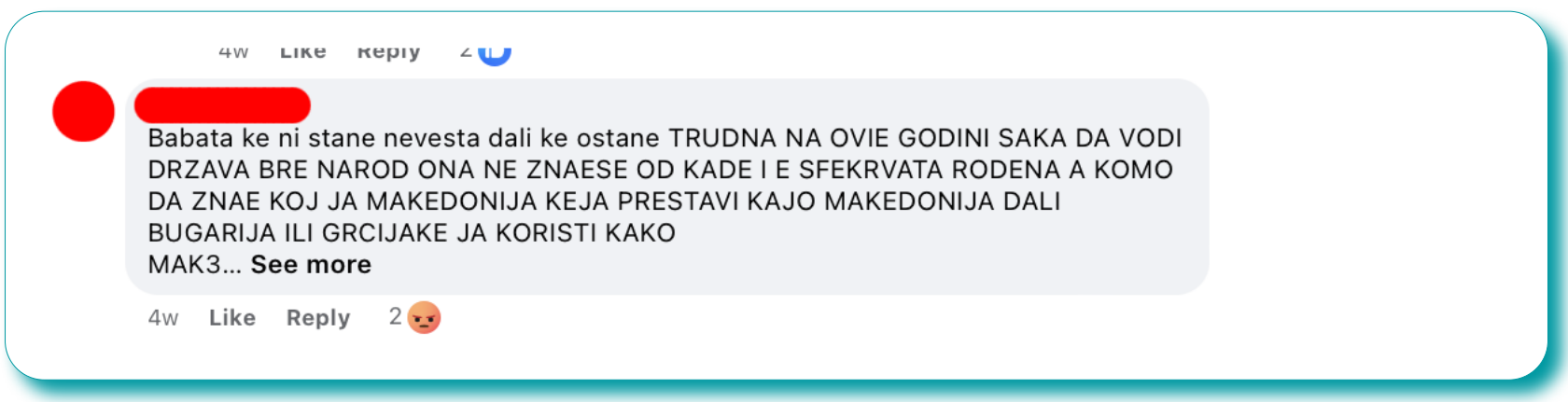
The qualification of the criminal act is catastrophic. I have the right to pardon and based on the analysis – not only the law and justice, I will use that mechanism – presidential candidate Gordana Siljanovska Davkova said.

- A very bad (woman) candidate for president. Improvisations, beating around the bush. Neither fish nor fowl.

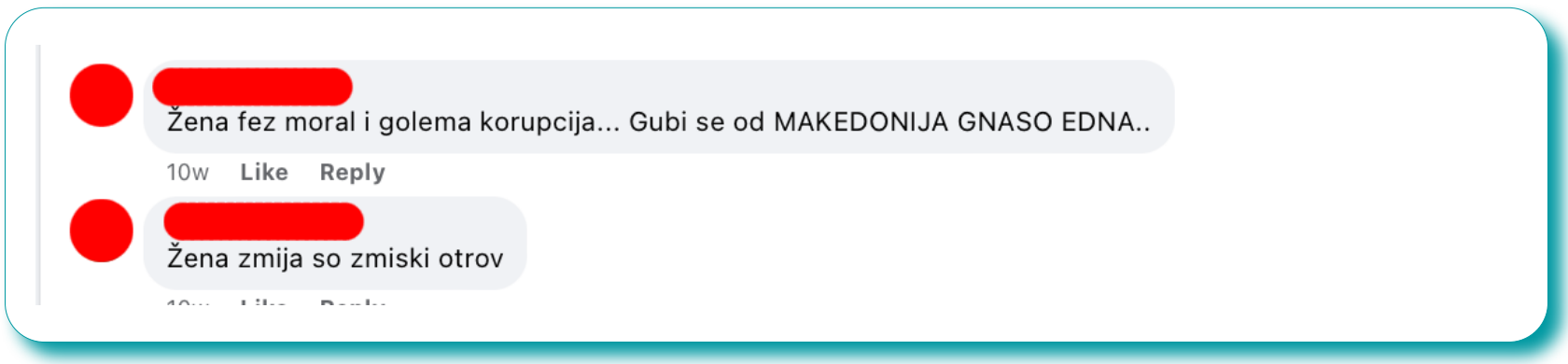
- Grandma Goca is like some scare crow, she's playing real smart, and she doesn't even know the laws for the president. The grandma and those simpleminded members of VMRO are pitiful, it is just sad that you are not capable of making up your own minds, instead you listen to some loud-mouths who are lying to you.

- Both of them can just go to h..ll... Davkova should not even look in the mirror... She is like an ape

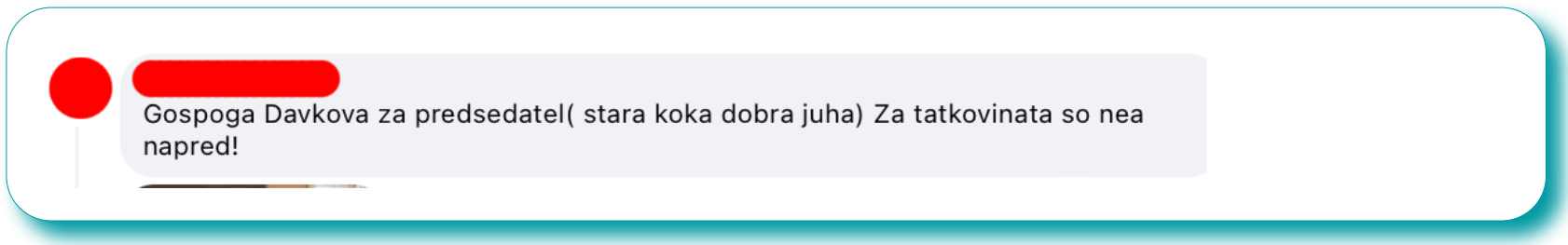
96 Жените сè уште не се добредојдени во политиката | Институт за комуникациски студии



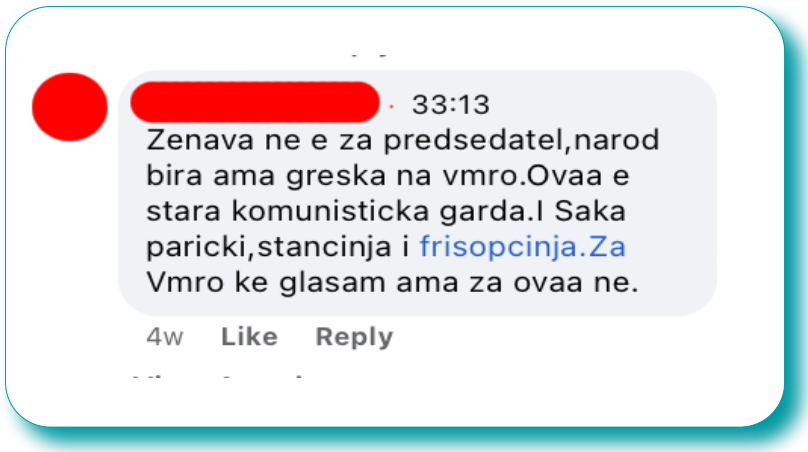
- Grandma is going to become a bride. Will she get PREGNANT AT THIS AGE, SHE WANTS TO RUN A WHOLE STATE AND ITS PEOPLE. SHE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHERE HER MOTHER-IN-LAW WAS BORN, LET ALONE KNOW WHO IS GOING TO REPRESENT MACEDONIA AS MACEDONIA, IS BULGARIA OR GREECE GOING TO...



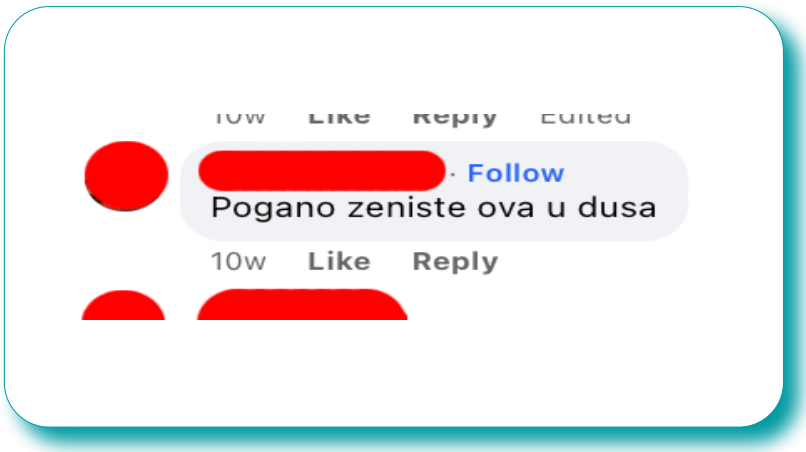
- A woman with no morals and a lot of corruption... Get out of MACEDONIA, YOU FILTH
- This woman is a snake, a venomous one



- Mrs. Davkova for president (many a good tune played on an old fiddle). For a homeland led by her!

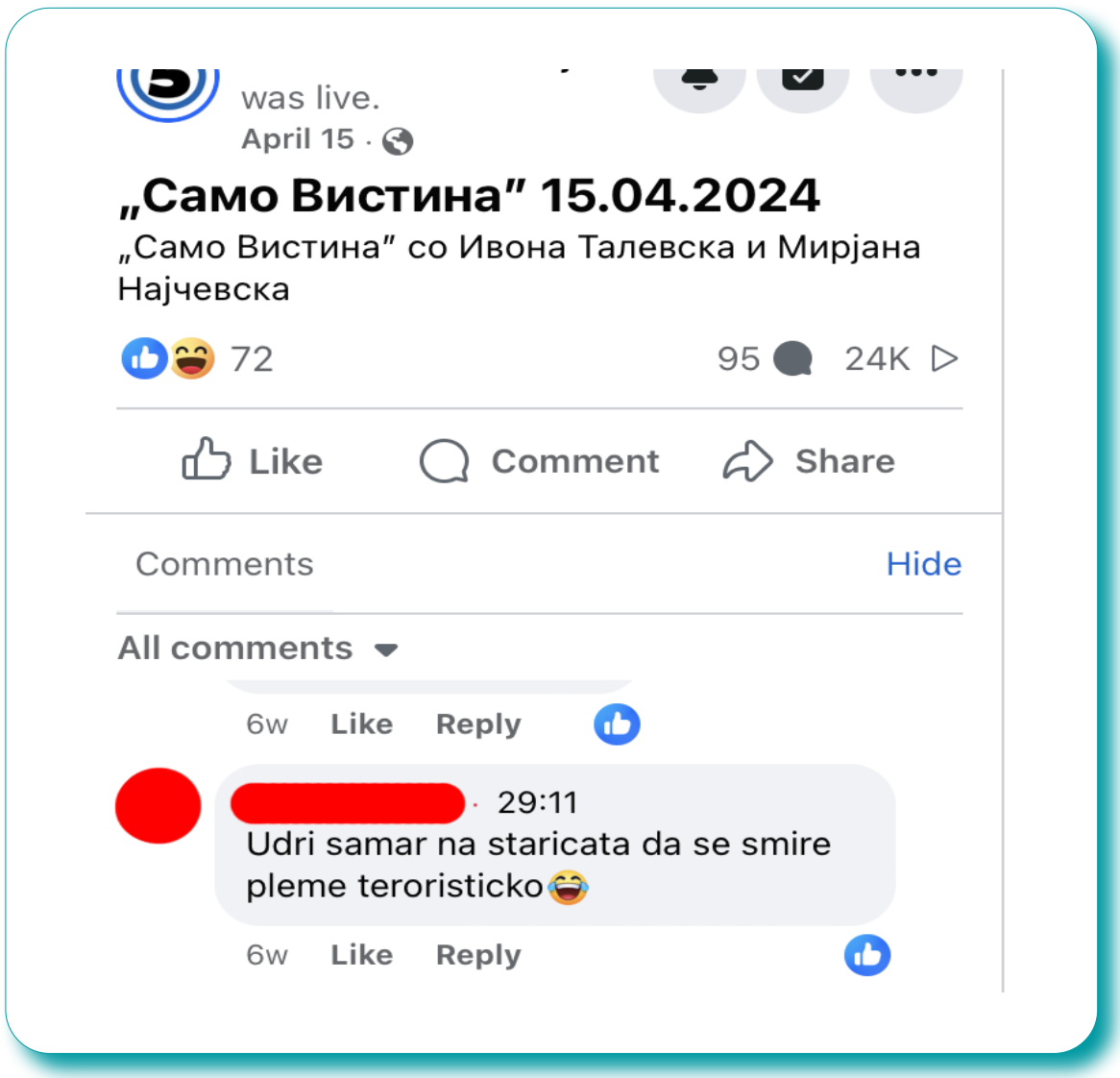


- This woman is not right for a president, the people will choose, but VMRO made a mistake with this one. She is from the old communist establishment. She also has a pro-clivity for money, apartments and duty-free shops.
I will vote for VMRO, but not for her



- This woman is just vile at heart

Although gender- based violence is intersectional and women politicians have been targeted for their statements or presence, a certain uniformity can be observed in the attacks. Thus, for example, in the attacks against politicians Mirjana Najčevska, Biljana Vankovska and Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, three narratives prevailed: attacks on their age by using the words *grandma* and *old hag,* insults to their mental stability and calls for violence.



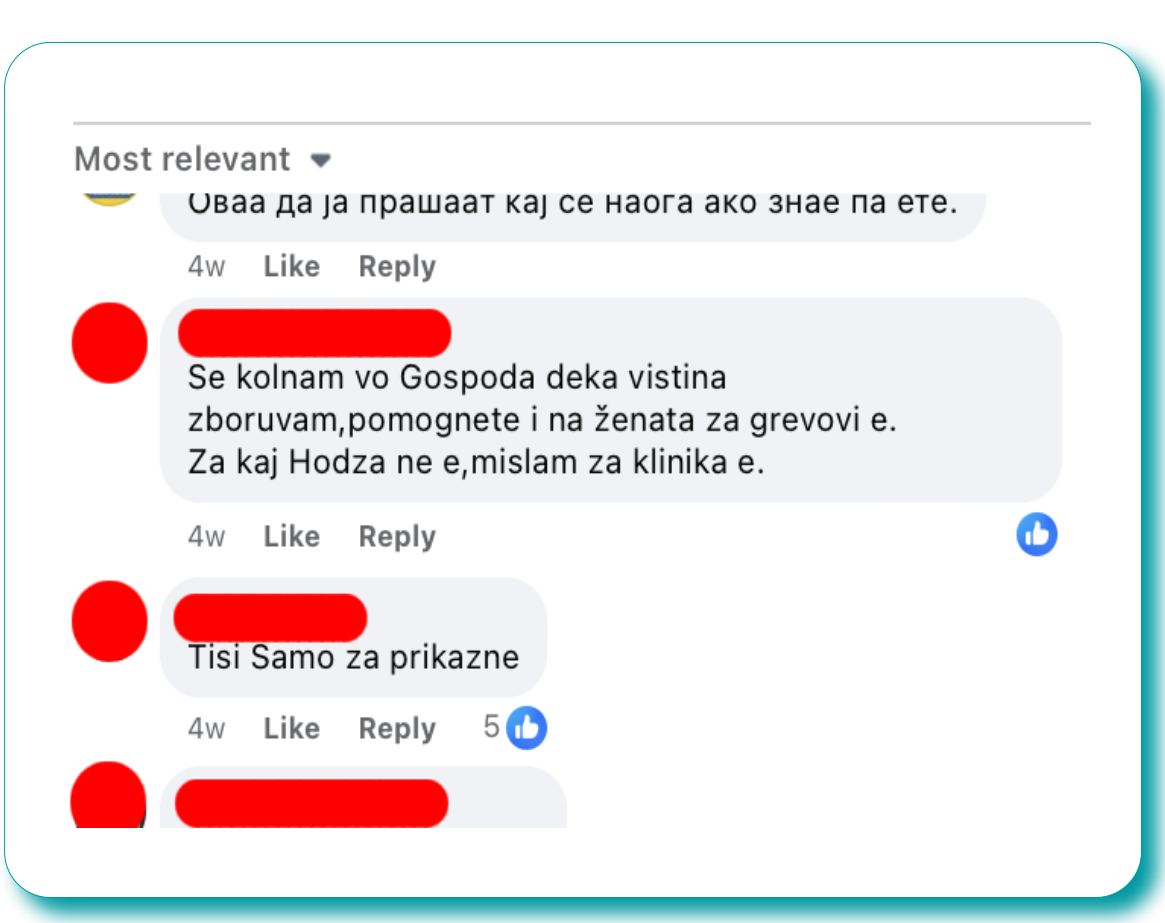
"Samo Vistina" 15.04.2024
"Samo Vistina" with Ivona Talevska and Mirjana Najcevska

- Slap the old hag, so that terrorist can calm down

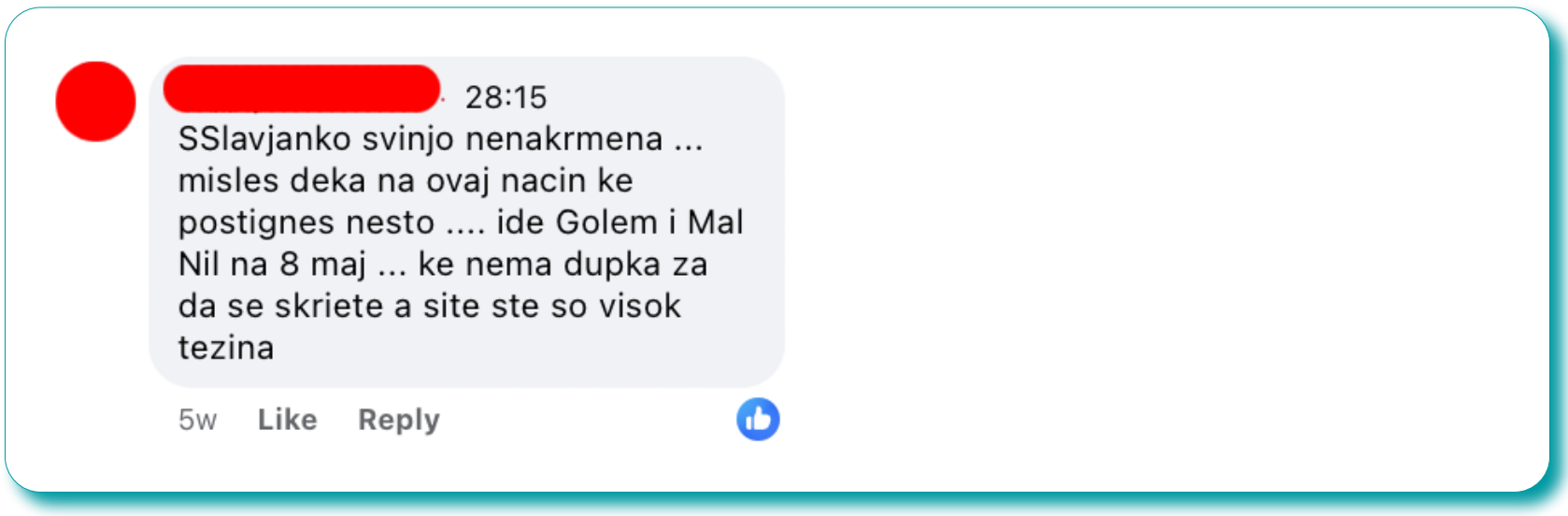
- If someone asks this one where she is, there is no way she'd know

- I swear to God, this is the truth, someone should help that woman, she is pitiful. She should not be sent to a Khoja; I think she needs to go to a hospital

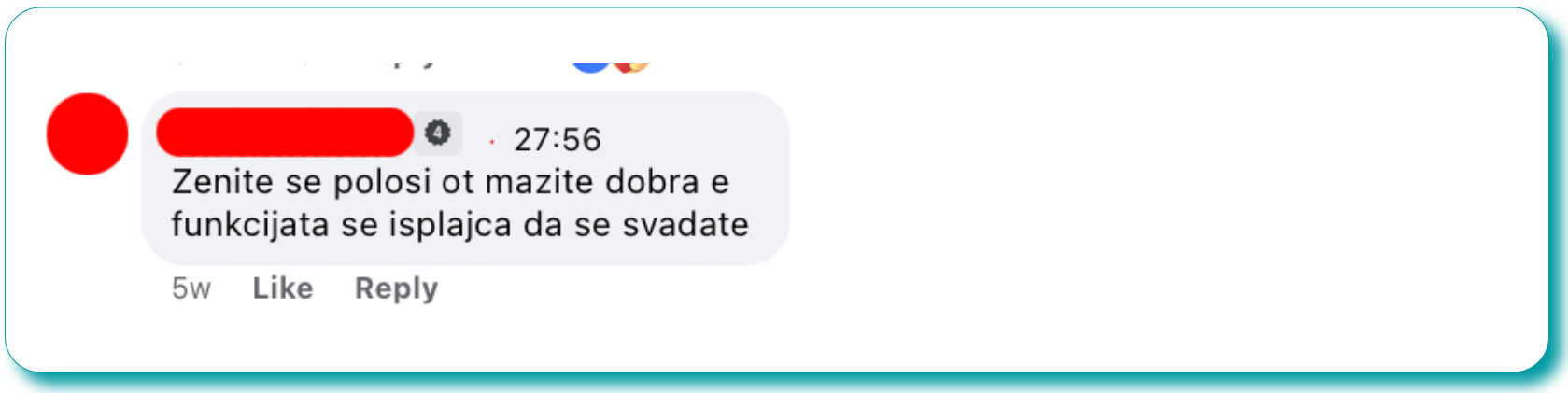
- You're only fit to tell stories



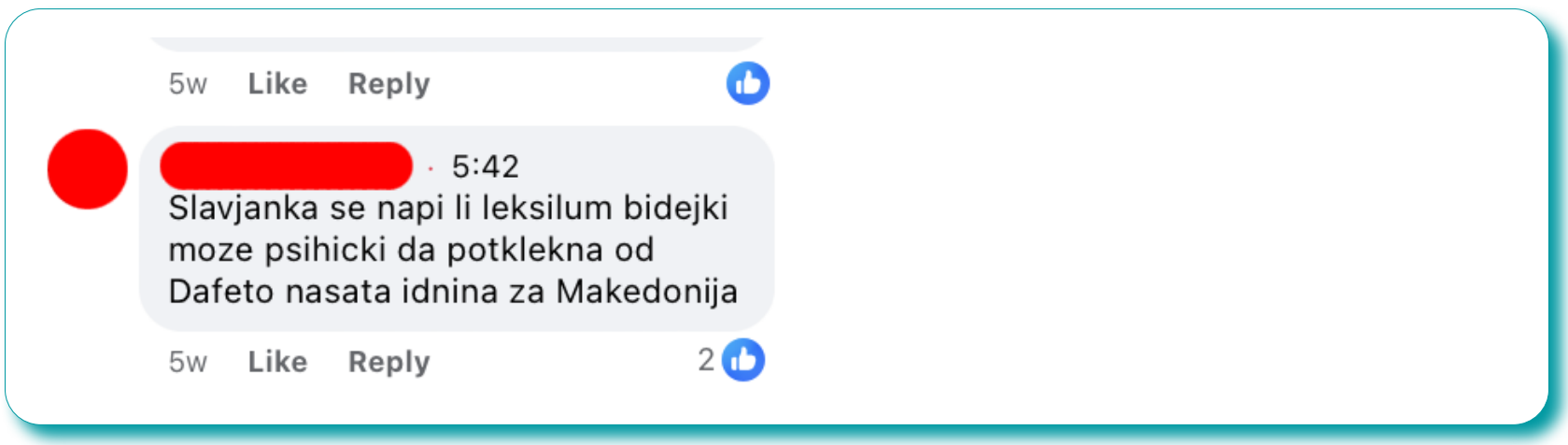
Women in politics in general often face attacks on their mental stability as a result of gender bias about their credibility and authority. In the past years, such discrediting resulted in negative consequences[97] for the former Minister of Defence Slavjanka Petrovska[98]. The established narrative of insults against Minister Petrovska by both the media and political opponents also flowed over to social media, as for example during the guest appearance of Slavjanka Petrovska and Dafina Stojanoska in the show “Samo Vistina” on Channel 5.



- Slavjanka, you unsatiable sow... do you think you’ll get somewhere like this... You’ll take a major loss on May 8th... there will be no hole for you to crawl into, plus you are all overweight



- Women are worse than men. It’s a good position, worth the quarrelling

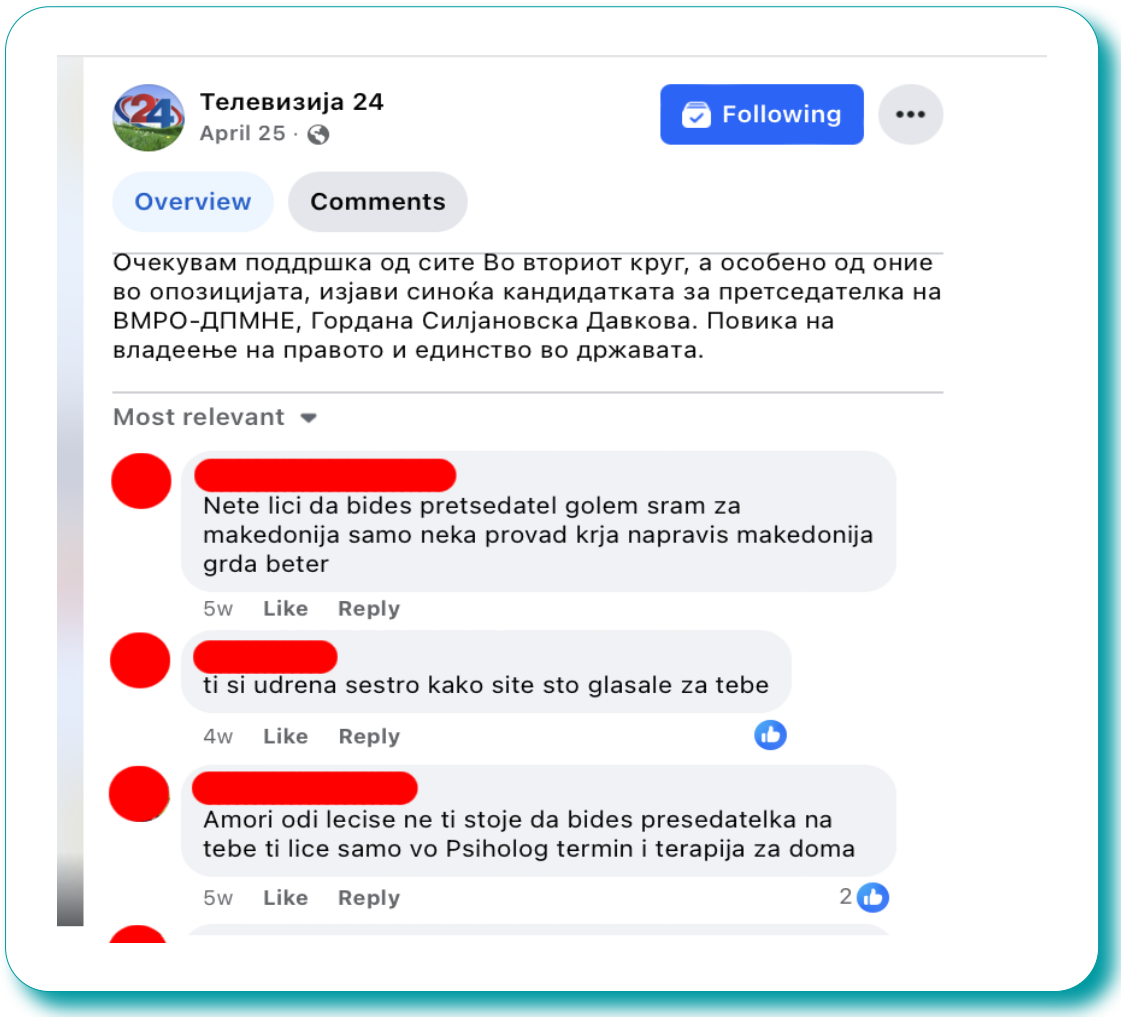


- Slavjanka, did you take a sedative because you might lose it because of Dafe who is Macedonia’s future

97 Славјанка Петровска: Етикетирањата на жените, водат кон насилство – ПРИКАЗна

98 Што открива цело психијатриско вештачење: И семејна трагедија стана оружје за напад врз министерката за одбрана! – Фокус

This type of harassment aims to discredit women by reinforcing gender stereotypes, according to which women are too emotional or mentally unstable to hold positions of power. In many of the comments, these attacks were directly related to the fact that they are women, but also intertwined with attacks based on the age of the candidates. The insults to the women politicians had no connection with the specific events that were the subject of the news reports.



Tv 24

I expect everyone's support in the second round, especially from those in opposition, VMRO-DPMNE's presidential candidate Gordana Siljanovska Davkova stated last night. She called for rule of law and unity in the state.

- It's unbecoming for you to be president. You're a big disgrace for Macedonia, you'll make Macedonia worse

- You're not right in the head sister. Just like everyone who voted for you.

- Just go see a doctor. It doesn't become you to be a president. All you need is an appointment with a psychologist and some medicine to take home



Danela Arsovska uses a branded truck to promote herself throughout Skopje

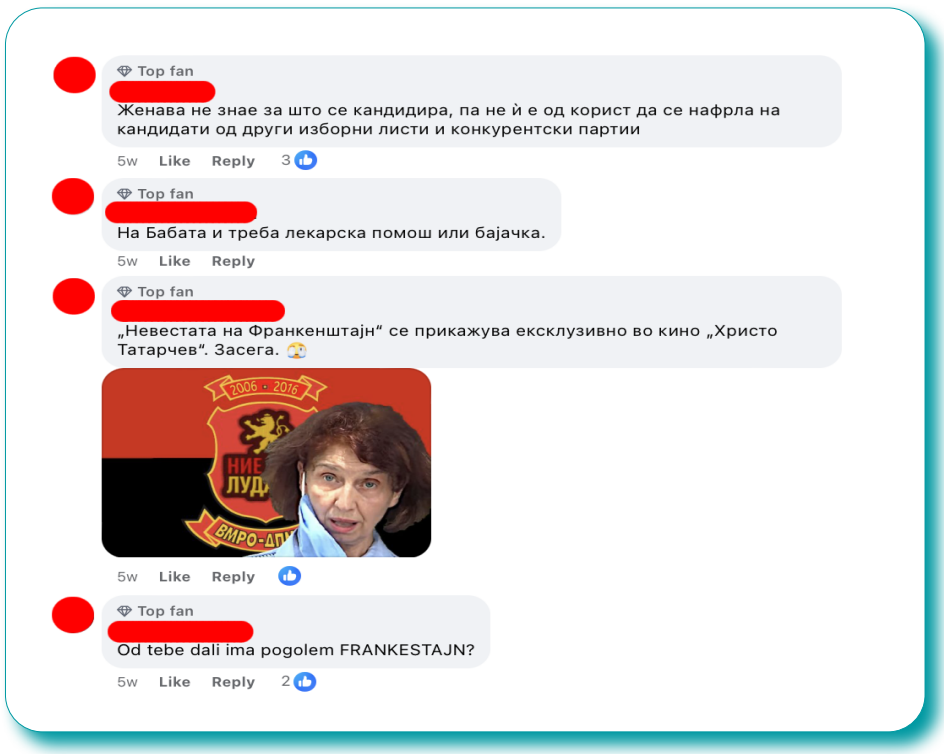
- Whatever type of promotion she uses, it's pointless. She is a narcissist; she showed her tendencies of turning like a sunflower

- Everybody wants a piece of the cake as politicians, nobody wants to take a shovel in their hand "and they're all diggers"

- If she posts a nude pic of herself, she might be more interesting

- She can't manage Skopje, let alone Macedonia

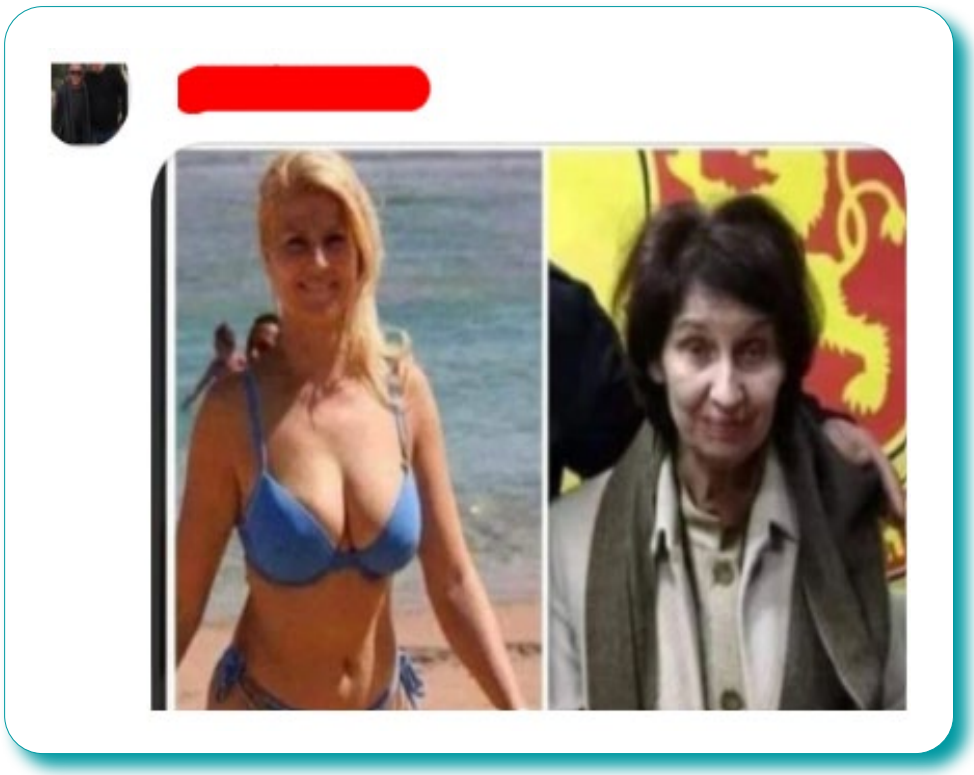
Criticism of women politicians' physical appearance and clothing is often used as a tool to distract from their abilities and achievements, further reinforcing gender inequality. Apart from comments in an attempt to discredit women politicians (pictures 1 and 2), forms of digital violence were also used with the abuse of visual content, where through the manipulation of available photos of women politicians, they were placed in a different context. Although no image with a sexualized connotation was detected, photographs were created in an objectifying perspective and unfavourable positions or filled with disinformation. In one of the examples, a photo of former Croatian president Kolinda Grabar Kitarović in a bathing suit[99] was shared, comparing her to Siljanovska Davkova.



- Grandma needs medical assistance or a shaman

- "Frankenstein's Bride" showing exclusively in the "Hristo Tatarcev" cinema. For now

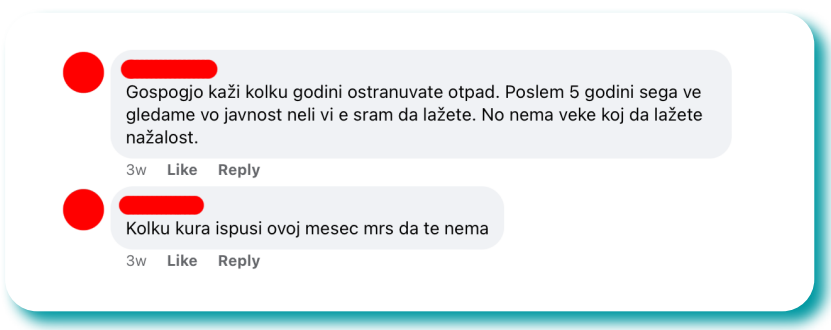
Figure 1 and 2



99 Grbeša, M, Gutgold, ND & Bebić, D 2024, 'Online discrimination in Croatia: The case of the 'serial hugger' Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović', Nova Prisutnost, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 73-92.

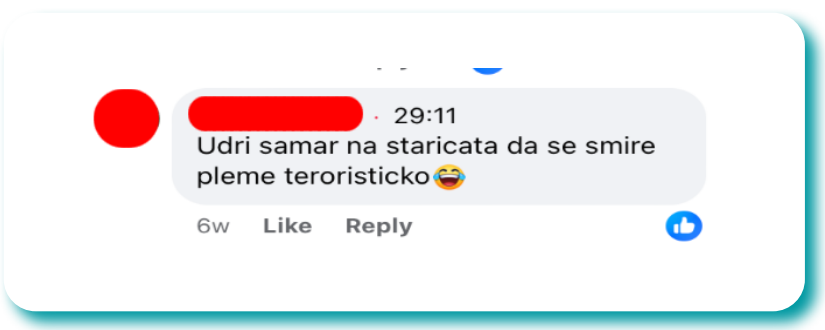
There were negative comments and insults towards most women politicians, for instance: Jovana Trenchevska, Maja Morachanin, Sanela Shkrijelj, Mirjana Najchevska, Jovana Mojsoska, Sanja Lukarevska, Danela Arsovska, Biljana Vankovska, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, Monika Zajkova and others.

To Maja Moracanin



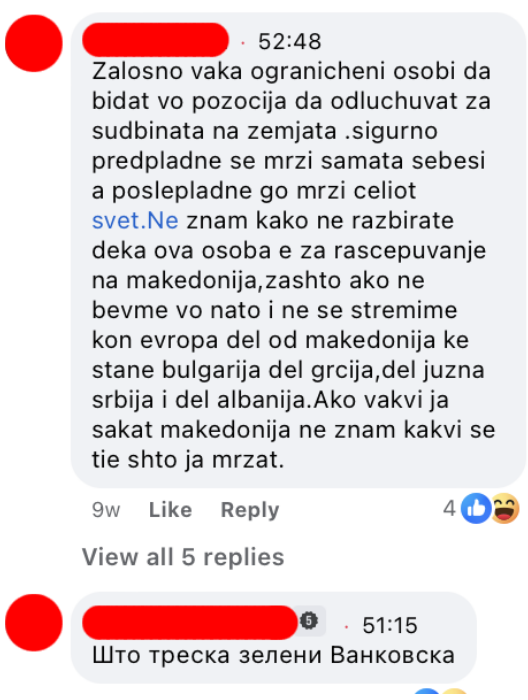
- Lady, tell us how many years have you been disposing of waste. After 5 years we are seeing you in the public eye. Are you not ashamed of lying? Unfortunately, there is no one left to listen to your lies.

To Mirjana Najchevska



- Slap the old hag, so that the terrorist can calm down

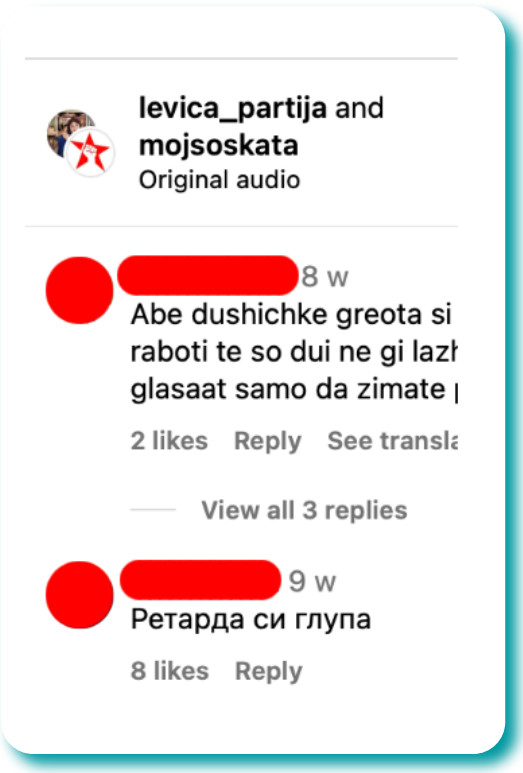
To Biljana Vankovska



- It's sad to see such narrow-minded people be in a position to make decisions for the country, she must hate herself in the mornings and hate the whole world in the afternoons. How do you not understand that this person wants for Macedonia to be torn apart because if we weren't in NATO and we didn't strive towards Europe, a part of Macedonia will become Bulgaria, a part will become Greece, a part will be South Serbia and a part will be Albania. If these people love Macedonia, then what do those who hate her look like?

- What is Vankovska rambling on about?

To Jovana Mojsovska



- Sweetie, you're just pitiful, you're working with DUI, don't lie...

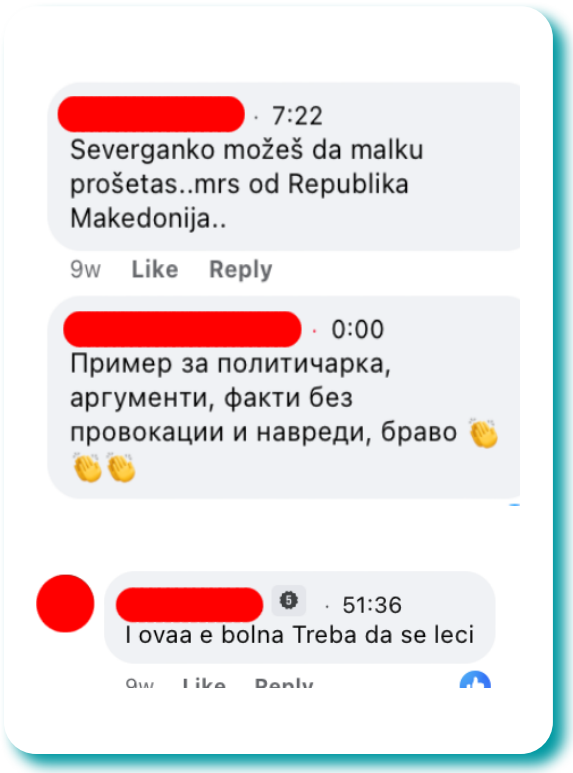
- You're a dumb retard

To Monika Zajkova

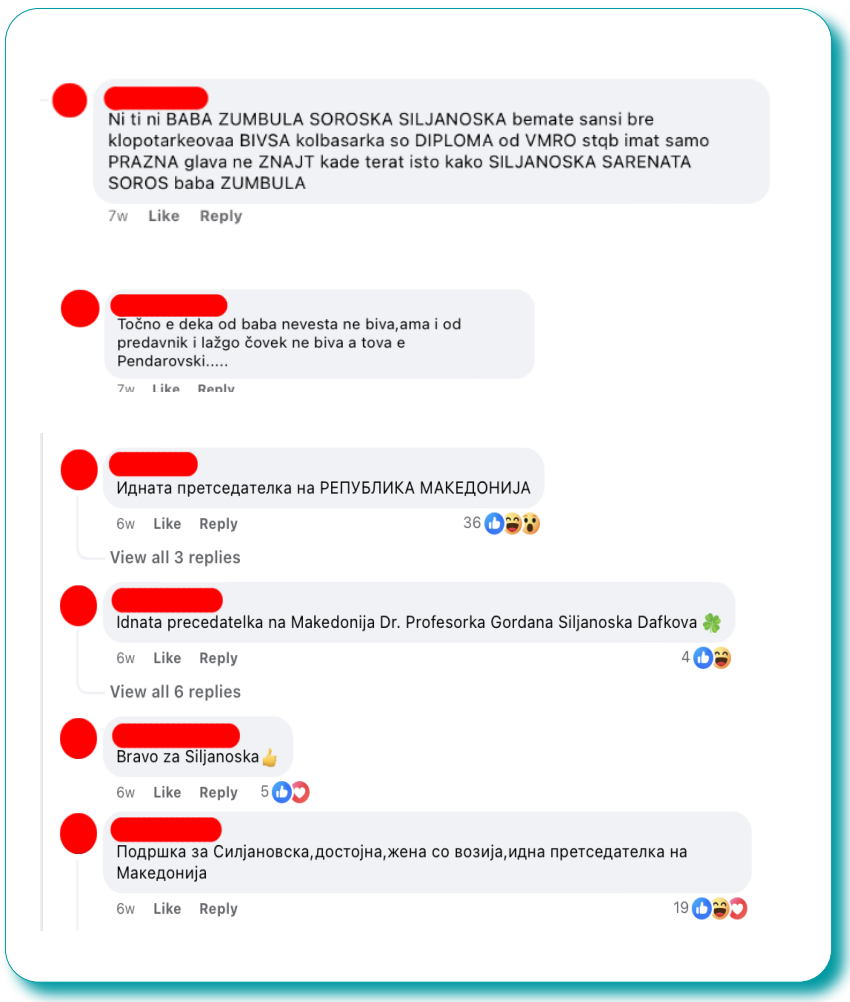
- North-Macedonian scum, go take a hike. Get the hell out of the Republic of Macedonia...

- An upstanding woman politician, verified statements, facts without provocation and insult, well done.

- This one is ill, too. She should get medical help



The analysis showed that when the media directly pointed to sexist insults, there were also criticisms towards the sexism in the comments on social media. It was at presidential candidate Stevo Pendarovski's rally in Kumanovo when a supporter of SDSM insulted Siljanovska Davkova, and the media reported this news[100]. On social media, there was a lot of support for Siljanovska Davkova, although there were insults against the presidential candidate Stevo Pendarovski for his late reaction to the party supporter.



- Neither you nor grandma ZUMBULA SOROSKA SILJANOSKA stand a chance. She is a cowbell, former sausage woman with a DEGREE from VMRO. She's empty headed, she doesn't know where she is headed, just like SILJANOSKA THE COLOURFUL SOROS Grandma ZUMBULA

- It's true, you cannot make a bride out of a grandma, but you also cannot make a man out of a traitor and a liar, and Pendarovski is those things...

- The future president of the REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

- The future president of Macedonia Gordana Siljanoska Dafkova PhD

- Well done, Siljanoska

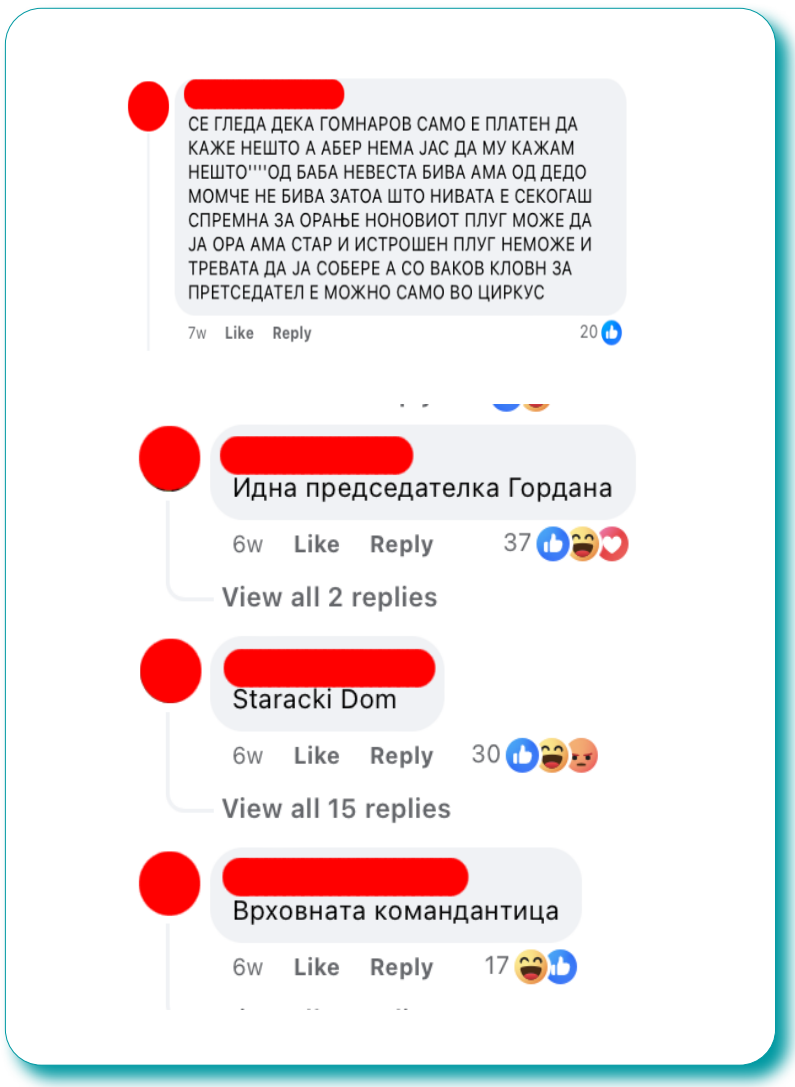
- I support Siljanoska, she is dignified, a woman with a vision, the future president of Macedonia

- IT'S OBVIOUS THAT THIS SHITHEAD IS JUST PAID TO SAY SOMETHING, AND THERE'S NO TRUTH TO IT. LET ME TELL HIM, YES, YOU CANNOT MAKE A BRIDE OUT OF A GRANDMA, BUT YOU CAN'T ALSO MAKE A BOY OUT OF A GRANDPA, BECAUSE THE LAND ALWAYS NEEDS PLOWING, AND ONLY THE NEW PLOW CAN DO THE PLOWING. THE OLD AND WORN-OUT ONE CAN'T EVEN COLLECT THE GRASS, AND THIS CLOWN CAN BECOME PRESIDENT ONLY IN A CIRCUS

- Gordana is the future president

- Retirement home

- Commander-in-chief



100 Sexist insults towards Siljanovska at Pendarovski's rally in Kumanovo. A supporter of Pendarovski on a microphone in front of the audience spewed insults against Siljanovska Davkova that refer to her age. There was no reaction from the candidate, nor the moderator Bogdanka Kuzeska. Links from the posts: Скопје1 / Skopje1.mk | Сексистички навреди кон Силјановска на митингот на Пендаровски во Куманово | (Instagram - Facebook)

It was also noticed that the most interaction between commentators, and thus an increased intensity of hate speech and gender-based insults, happens on social media when live debate shows with representatives of different political parties are broadcast. Also, the lack of gender-sensitive language in the media creates an additional space and a platform for citizens to continue the practice of not using feminatives, they even feel fear if they use them[101].



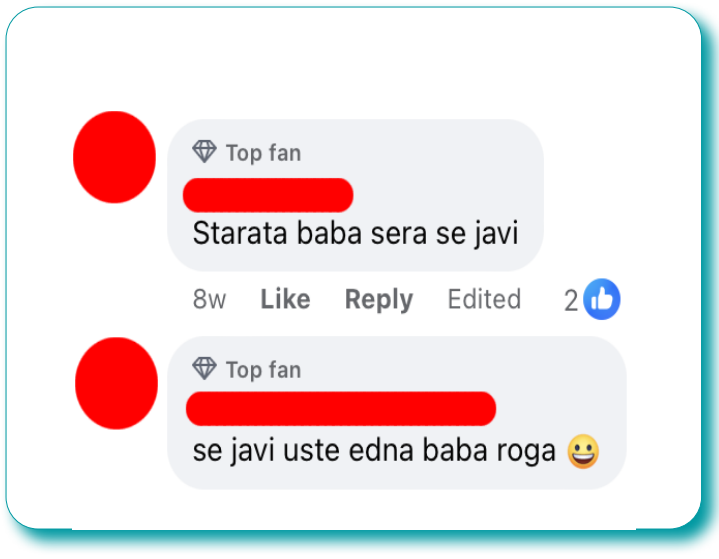
"Samo Vistina" 15.04.2024
"Samo Vistina" with Ivona Talevska and Mirjana Najchevska

- Well done, professor! If they understand, they understood.

- Old communist terrorist crocodile.

- Old grandma claptrap has spoken

- Yet another boogie woman speaks up



Moderating comments on social media by the media outlets is not observed as a trend or a practice. On the contrary, during the reporting period, most hate speech and insulting comments were still publicly available. For openness to political criticism, it is important that citizens feel that they can express their opinion, but at the moment when that opinion turns into hate speech, discrimination and insults, the critical political culture with fair and dignified communication is lost.

101 Кој се плаши од феминативи?

Concluding Discussion

Something of particular importance for this gender-based content analysis is that, despite the large number of news reports that were analysed, **the gender narrative was significantly underrepresented,** i.e. in about 60 of the analysed news reports, primarily as a direct result of its low representation and the rhetoric of the speakers. However, even in the cases where gender issues were addressed, **a large part of the media did not include statements about gender issues in their news reports.** Only four media outlets published news reports analysing topics such as the involvement of women in elections, especially women from different ethnic communities, which points to a **low awareness of a large part of the media about the importance of topics related to gender equality.** Gender-based content with a negative connotation was recorded in about 70 news reports, of which more than half referred to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, primarily related to traditional gender roles and the physical appearance of women, and a smaller part to gender-based discrimination and insults, as well as gendered disinformation. This indicates that **the mere presence of women in the media can be a sufficient basis for their stereotyping and discrimination,** which can only be overcome with a greater representation of women in the media, until their role in the public sphere is normalized.

The main narratives in the news reports covered by this analysis focused on European integration, NATO membership, the Prespa Agreement, the Agreement with Bulgaria and constitutional amendments, as well as mutual accusations of crime and corruption, intimidation by regimes versus isolation, as well as ethnic tensions. This research reiterates that, despite the fact that most of the media conveyed the commitments of the candidates in the presidential and parliamentary elections shared during their public appearances, **they are still mostly limited to the president of the party and/or the mentioned narratives.**

Most of the reports are reduced to dry conveyance of statements of the candidates, that is, the party leaders, which reduces the media **to mere transmitters of "facts that they've been served".** The news reports do not delve deeper into the content of the transmitted statements, nor do they provide a wider context, and they also do not give a critical review of them. It is additionally problematic that **a large number of news reports do not specify the author and/or the source from which the report was taken,** and very often it is not possible to determine who the original source is, making it impossible for accountability to be taken for what is written.

Regardless of the narrative in focus, news reports often use **sensationalist language, especially in headlines,** which can contribute to the audience making perfunctory conclusions. In addition, **gender-stereotypical portrayal of women can be observed** in some of the headlines, as well as in the texts of the reports. Portraying women politicians through their role in the family or their physical appearance and uncritically conveying gender-discriminatory statements by other politicians significantly **contributes to strengthening gender roles and maintaining misogynistic attitudes about the role of women in the public sphere, as well as gender inequality in society in general.**

In a large part of the news reports, **gender-sensitive language was rarely and/or inconsistently used,** which was especially visible through the use of feminatives in the analysed reports. **In the majority of the reports, including the headlines, professions and titles in the feminine gender were not used at all,** even when they referred specifically to women, while in some reports there was an inconsistency in the use of feminatives in the text itself, i.e. in some sentences they were used, in others they weren't, which gives the impression of carelessness in the creation of the content.

According to **the most striking narratives identified in social media comments, such as sexism, misogyny and ageism,** the digital world still remains an unsafe space for women and girls, and even more so for women politicians. The comments only confirm, with the media's own contribution to this, that there is a gender-insensitive approach and double standards for women politicians. In the digital space, not only is **the culture of normalizing gender-based violence** perpetuated, but the

same goes for the culture of impunity, as a result of non-regulation of comments by the media, inciting citizens through sensational headlines, as well as objectifying women in politics, through gender stereotyping and defocusing from their work. The worrying thing is that **offensive speech is supported by other commentators,** and although rarely, criticism of such a narrative is also observed, which is important to note about the potential of digital solidarity towards women politicians.

As a result of the narrative in the news reports, **the audience continues the media's practice of not using feminatives, as well as associating women with traditional gender roles in the family.** Three narratives dominated the targeting: attacks on women's age, insults to their mental stability, and calls for violence. In terms of insults, there were bots that repeatedly posted comments in several places.

Although the recommendations of previous analyses of gender-based media content by ICS underscored the importance of regulating social media comments, this is not seen as a trend or practice. On the contrary, during the reporting period, **most of the comments with hate speech and insults were still publicly available.**

Final Observations

The analysis of gender-based content in news reports that were published in online media during the pre-election period leads us to several key observations:

- **The media generally have no interest in creating and publishing news reports that include gender issues, especially in periods when the gender narrative is eclipsed by other political issues.** Hence, it is of particular importance to work on raising awareness among journalists and editors about the need to create a media space for topics related to gender equality and women's participation in public discourse;
- **It is necessary for journalists to use gender-sensitive language in news reports,** especially through the use of feminatives when referring to professions and titles that refer to women;
- By not adhering to the ethical reporting guidelines for online media, **the media are not transparent enough regarding the authorship of the news reports, as well as specifying the sources in the news reports.** Furthermore, the reports do not verify the claims that are conveyed, nor do they critically review the transmitted statements. In that context, it is necessary for the media to adhere to the guidelines for ethical reporting, by verifying the information, specifying the authors and/or sources, so that they can be verified by the audience, and so that accountability can be taken for what is written.
- **The media should make a critical review of discriminatory rhetoric, questioning the credibility of such statements, as well as avoid gender stereotyping** and portraying women exclusively through their physical appearance, especially when it comes to women politicians in high positions, which contributes to their further objectification and it defocuses from key political issues.
- The **media need to focus on creating content that will oppose gender stereotypes and gender-based hate speech**;

- **The use of sensationalist language in the headlines of news reports is still widely used by journalists,** and they must be careful in formulating headlines, especially when it comes to sensitive issues, because it can influence the audience to draw superficial conclusions;
- Despite the fact that gender-based hate speech was very rarely present in news reports, **the increased presence of women in the media, during the election campaign, effected an increase in misogynistic comments, as well as digital violence with the abuse of visual content on social media.** This indicates that the mere presence of women in the media can be a sufficient basis for their stereotyping and discrimination, which can only be overcome with a greater representation of women, as well as issues related to gender equality in the media, until their normalization in the public discourse.
- **The media should create and share information to increase the media literacy of the public,** including information about the various techniques of creating and spreading gendered disinformation, such as bots.
- Most of **the media still do not have a policy of regulating the content of the comments on their posts,** by concealing or deleting content with gender disinformation, hate speech, insults and other harmful content. In this context, it is necessary to establish internal policies and persons responsible for regulating comments with negative content, in order to prevent their further spread.

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