Combating Violent Extremism in the era of "FAKE NEWS"

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ABSTRACT

Fake news (FN) has ability to change the minds and hearts of the people even in developing countries. Together with online extremism, Fake News is the most dangerous enemy for fragile societies, without doubts the two new trends, are hazards also for Western democracies.

The aim of this paper is to give policy makers, embassies, international government organizations, media, and other relevant stakeholders an idea how the online and fake news in Macedonia/Western Balkans is spreading through social media with great impact in daily live of the citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

'Fake news', the buzz phrase popularized during the U.S. general elections in 2016, covers a wide spectrum of issues.
'Fake News' could range from inaccurate news stories and misleading advertising, to false and dishonest information spread by people, companies, governments and foreign adversaries with a damaging political, ethnic and security agenda.
In era of digital age people have a chance to read and engage in variety of propaganda with different political, ethnic and religious colors that may influence multiethnic societies.[1]
Multiethnic states and societies do not have a straight wall so you can stop intelligence; entrusted news stories or hates speech based primarily in discriminatory way of thinking against other ethnic groups.
Today the speed of propaganda in rose news outlets has a power that could affect a great spectrum of the society.
In the Western Balkans we have witnessed before and now Russian propaganda that had an impact on national policies of the Western Balkans states on terms of strategic orientations'.

RETROSPECTIVE APPROACH

Macedonia with lack of media freedom and decline in professionalism-journalism standards has a vacuum for 'fake news' with negative consequences for entire country.
Before the Islamic State (IS) was created, political extremism in Macedonia was developing in hometown areas, national newspapers and in some degree political parties encouraged different groups in public places to speared violence and hate speech.
In historical context, phenomena had a place and ideology to be developed without preventive measures from the state.
However over 150 citizens of Macedonia where part of the IS infrastructure since 2013, some died in Middle East, but sources say that number of foreign

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[1] https://www.thenational.ae/extremist-rhetoric-and-fake-news-top-of-the-agenda-for-facebook-middle-east-1.670561

fighters are back in the Balkans without any trace by Western Balkan states and intelligence agencies.

In that time how easy was to recruit people from different ages, nationalities and social groups in Macedonia? How come over 150 people from Macedonia with no sign left the state?

So taking in consideration all facts and sources it's very important to look ahead in terms of social media with fake accounts, which via unregistered news outlets try to spread intolerance between ethnic groups in Macedonia.

Today is much easy to do that, thus the heat speech, because in both sides of Macedonia in some degree exist- especially in social media a speech with hated content.

Generally political and ethnic extremism later may radicalize those types of groups who they want a different world.

To counter violent extremism together with 'Fake News' disinformation is a hard task for government and civil society organizations.

But in some levels we may prevent such development and see theirs narrative and public discourses in social media or in the public speeches.

Social media have played an essential role in the extremist strategy in Syria and Iraq, and Twitter and Facebook in particular has been used to drive communications over other social media platforms.

THE IMPACT OF 'FAKE NEWS' PROPAGANDA IN FRAGILE SOCIETIES

In meanwhile in Macedonia and Western Balkans, Twitter and Facebook fake accounts that speared news on political extremism and ethnic xenophobia represents the two most important cases which all interested actors must deal now and in the future.

*** In regard of countering any kind of extremism in Macedonia via 'Fake News' propaganda we should look the way the Fake News is transmitted from unprofessional people with lack of education in the field of journalism. Basically these individuals guide all news outlets in the region.
Here is the gap where extremists realize their intentions by calling for non-tolerance, hate speech, participation in violence and foreign wars ***

As part of a new approach or strategy to combat terrorism, the U.S. government deployed counter-messaging and rehabilitation programs, and sought to address the "push factors" of extremism, such as unresponsive and alienating governance.
Yet this broader approach, which eventually became known as CVE, obscures important programmatic distinctions. [2]

Furthermore in Macedonia and broadly in the Western Balkans promoting alternative narratives to extremist recruitment efforts or re-socializing former terrorists are truly attempts to counter violent extremism, whereas promoting free democratic institutions and a diverse civil society voices do not counter existing political and ethnic extremism, but seek to prevent their re-emergence in the areas where radicalized groups think that may gain place for propaganda. [3]
In Macedonia and Southeast Europe due to lack of prosperity, corruption and economic progress, fake news propaganda together with violent extremism poses a big threat for existing news media and fragile societies. In Macedonia fragile interethnic relations makes the system to work slow with inappropriate laws. Fake social media news accounts will raise in 2018 and after.

HOW TO DEAL WITH RISE OF POLITICAL AND ETHNIC EXTREMISM IN MACEDONIA?

Recently, the international factor, especially the U.S., has been actively engaged in the struggle against extremism in the Balkans with some concrete steps. However, without a long-term plan and strategy on how to build the equal society in Macedonia, it is unclear how the plan will work in the feature. For this, all relevant factors need to be activated and find the sources of crises in Macedonia that are easily exploited by extremists alongside with their propaganda tools.

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[2] Khader, Majeed. Combating Violent Extremism and Radicalization in the Digital Era

[3] https://www.opendemocracy.net/geoffrey-macdonald-luke-waggoner/from-countering-to-preventing-violent-extremism

The education of journalists in the fight against fake news and violent extremism would be one of the first actions to be undertaken.
In addition, another very important fact is that the CVE is also related to corrupt politicians who want to have some hot spots for political purposes or to worsen the interethnic relations.
Fighting violent extremism, and fake news disinformation accounts, should be done together with the fight against corruption at all levels of society in Macedonia.
In the Balkans it is difficult to wipe all the anomalies inherited from the Empires, ideologies and now by non-state actors.
***From now on in Macedonia, attention should be paid to the reduction of political and ethnic extremism.
This should be managed well due to the sensitivity of the complicated situation in which Macedonia is going through. ***
The use of the delicate situation of Macedonia would have consequences for all.
"False news is very much present in the online media, as a tool for manipulating the public, avoiding objective truth, and creating a media truth that is not based on facts but based on the distortion of truth the fact of making facts, announcing unrelated news, and speculating on the information. False news is a big problem, whereas against him must be "fought" through media self-regulation, forcing ethics in the media and through education of public" - says for the *Center for Security Studies and Development, Dr. Sefer Tahiri, professor of Communications at South East European University (SEEU) in Tetovo.*
'Fake news' propaganda is hardly prevented especially in transitional societies. Some fake news accounts have the potential to give you, events and especially the CVE process a wrong direction.[4]
For this emerging threat it should engage everyone in Macedonia and in the Western Balkans. This process should also begin together and without differentiation and prejudice.

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[4] https://journalistsresource.org/studies/society/social-media/social-media-violent-extremism-isis-online-speech-research-review

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase the level of education of journalists on the sphere of writing and reporting objective news stories

2. Organize courses on how to counter CVE and FAKE NEWS with existing news outlets in Macedonia/Western Balkans

3. Engage local communities- ethnic groups on projects of Local Municipalities.

4. Start awareness campaign on CVE-FAKE NEWS phenomena.

5. Support credible projects of CSO-s on CVE

6. Resolve interethnic problems-frozen conflicts

7. Develop a socio-economic plan for all involved actors

8. Decrease the number of unemployed young people

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