

RHETORICAL VIOLENCE IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Political discourse, in the name of democracy and freedom of speech, at times, obtains very harsh overtones, especially, when the stakes for politicians are high. The primary targets of politicians' abusive language are their political opponents, but, sometimes, some vulnerable categories of people become the recipients of this vilifying language as well. Stemming from authority figures, hate speech seems to have the capacity to spread like wildfire, and to bruise societies deeply.

The aim of the paper is to underscore that hate speech has become an integral part of political discourse nowadays, despite the legislative implemented and the general condemnation it receives. The paper presents a number of instances of rhetorical violence generated from contemporary high-profile politicians worldwide and their targets. In an attempt to raise awareness of its destructive power when springing in the domain politics, this research also looks into the implications that it usually incurs.

Keywords: political discourse, hate speech, politicians, targets, implications

Introduction

The global presence of hate speech nowadays is indisputable, despite the fact that it “coarsens public discourse and weakens ‘the social fabric’ of countries” (Birchall 2019). What is even more disconcerting is that hate speech emerges and demonstrates a tenacious perseverance even in the very domain of politics, i.e. in political discourse, despite the fact that one of its task is to safeguard societies from the damaging effects of hate speech. In other words, hate speech has become mainstream feature of political

systems worldwide, threatening democratic values, social stability and peace. As a consequence, it has exacerbated societal and racial tensions and incited attacks with dire consequences, in which migrants, minority groups and various ethnic groups, as well as their defenders, in numerous countries have suffered most (Birchall 2019).

The aim of the paper is to underscore the fact that hate speech has become an integral part of contemporary politics. In that respect, the paper presents a number of instances of rhetorical violence stemming from current political figures at the head of different countries in the world (Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, Kim Jong-Un, Viktor Orban, Recep Tyyip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin) as well as the targets of their hate speech (other politicians and migrants, representatives of certain ethnic groups, etc.). Also, in an attempt to raise awareness of the dangerous and destructive might of hate speech when generated by politicians, this research also looks into the implications that ensue after rhetorical violence has been committed.

Theoretical background

The basics of hate speech

The concept of democratic societies, where the right to free speech is guaranteed, encourages many people not just to speak their mind freely but also to direct expressions of hatred towards an individual or group of individuals on the basis of certain characteristics such as race, colour, religion, descent, national or ethnic origin. Their ultimate goal in employing hate speech is “to injure, dehumanize, harass, intimidate, debase, degrade and victimize the targeted groups, and to foment insensitivity and brutality against them” (Cohen-Almagor 2011: 3).

With the proponents of free speech being very vocal, presenting free speech as a vital component of democracy, sometimes it is difficult to delineate the boundary between hate speech and free speech. Thus, in some democratic societies free speech is given a clear predominance, and, consequently, hate speech masked under the veil of free speech spreads in a relatively unimpeded manner (e.g. the USA); whereas in others (e.g. Russia, the EU), attempts are made to curb hate speech more vigorously and prevent it from spreading by introducing and implementing stricter laws against it (Assimakopoulos et al. 2017).

Research has shown that hate speech becomes particularly notable in turbulent socio-economic and political circumstances, as many people resort to using discriminatory epithets to insult and stigmatize the ‘others’ (Brink 2010 in Sevasti 2014) and to legitimize negative thinking about all those who are not ‘us’ (Lenkova 1998: 10 in Sevasti 2014). In other words, hate speech has become a major tool in the hands of many prominent public individuals – not just politicians but also journalists, political analysts, etc., in their struggle to legitimize themselves and delegitimize those who stand in their way of obtaining or maintaining power. Nowadays, the Internet and the social media play a very prominent role in producing and disseminating hate speech, due to the fact that, for the most part, they protect the anonymity of the ‘haters’, and provide fast access to wide masses of people both nationally and internationally (Sevasti 2014).

Hate speech as a concept refers to a remarkably wide spectrum of negative discourse ranging from cursing, to threats of attack, to hostile criticism and sarcasm (Burgers et al. 2012)¹. What form it takes largely depends on the aim the perpetrators of hate speech wish to achieve, i.e. whether their aim is to express, incite or promote hatred and intolerance towards somebody, or they aim to create extreme forms of prejudices, stereotypes which eventually and inevitably will lead to violence and aggression (Mihajlova et al. 2013). Hence, a distinction is usually made between two types of hate speech: *hard hate speech*, which comprises prosecutable forms, i.e. forms prohibited by law, as their purpose is to incite aggression and violence towards a particular target; and, *soft hate speech*, which are cases of inflammatory, offensive comments that are lawful, but which raise serious concerns in terms of intolerance and discrimination and may have a devastating effect on their recipients on the grounds of moral harassment (Assimakopoulos et al. 2017).

¹In the ‘cursing’ category contain a) profanities (e.g. fuck, assholes, bastards, bitch etc.), b) insulting/offensive epithets and slurs (e.g. hypocrites, murderers etc.) and c) hatred words/degradations (fascist, mocking characterizations for rightists, leftists, anarchists etc.). The ‘threat of attack’ category includes expressions of intention to inflict evil, injury, or damage (e.g. kill, murder, hit, exterminate, remove, clean up, etc.). The ‘hostile criticism’ category includes expressions of disapproval and of noting the problems or faults of a person; whereas the ‘sarcasm’ category includes sarcastic comments and words that mean the opposite of what they are usually used for, in order to insult someone and to show irritation with this person (Burgers et al. 2012).

In close relation to the form of hate speech, is the role ‘the hater’ assumes when producing hate speech. Namely, it has been established that in producing hate speech, speakers assume three major roles: a judge, an activist and an analyst (Atifi & Marcoccia 2017). The role of judges presupposes expressing criticism and passing moral judgment towards somebody or something; the analysts with their hateful comment simply analyse a situation and offer their interpretation of it; whereas the activist’s role is primarily to instigate the masses to raise their voice, take a stand and take actions against those who they personally disapprove of.

Irrespective of the forms of hate speech and the roles the ‘haters’ assume with their hateful messages, the effects of hate speech are never favourable nor positive. Hate speech undoubtedly provokes pain, distress, fear, embarrassment, isolation (Nemes 2002). If it is directed towards a group of people it brings about inequality problems and pushes the members of a specific group in isolation, creating feelings of fear and disillusionment. Apart from silencing the ‘victims’, sometimes, hate speech does the opposite – galvanizes the victims to become aggressive and dangerous (Parekh 2006).

Hate speech in the context of political discourse

Despite the general expectations that politicians should be in full possession of their temper and character and extremely vigilant in making public statements, practice shows that in times of great social, economic and political turmoil, politicians themselves deliberately and quite ostensibly ‘season’ their own political discourse with hate speech.

Today’s presence of hate speech in the domain of political discourse is by no means without a precedent. It is a well-known fact that the notorious fascist leaders Hitler and Musilini relied heavily on hate speech in promoting their political ideology of being a superior race, entitled to wipe out an entire nation (the Jews) from the face of Earth because of their alleged inferior qualities. The scars and the bruises of their ensuing atrocities, which, took place not that long ago, are still quite sore and in the process of healing.

Current high-profile politicians seem to readily ignore the valuable lessons learned from the turbulent past, and in the recent decades we all witness how the language of politics is turning more and more brutal. It is understandable that politicians must involve themselves in heated debates, fiery and impassioned exchanges, considering the fact that they are in charge

of making important decisions that can have life-changing impact on the part of those involved (Brabin & Dromey 2019). But the question that arises is whether their duties and responsibilities exempt them from their obligation to use a diplomatic, fact-based and objective political discourse intended to solve issues and conflicts, not exacerbate them.

USAID's study of 2016² points to several key reasons why politicians resort to using hate speech: to denigrate political opponents, to gain more support among voters who share their views, to gain political power by humiliating others, to draw attention to the wrong-doings of political opponents, to marginalize groups on the basis that they are different, to create divisions among ethnic groups, and to move attention away from the real social problems.

Given the high standing of politicians in society and the fact that they usually have a significant impact on the shaping of the general public's opinion, it is little wonder that some of their loyal supporters and followers, sometimes, interpret politicians' hate messages as outright calls for aggression and violence. Thus, for instance, UN experts in their report³ of 23rd September, 2019, confirm that they are "gravely concerned that leaders, senior government officials, politicians and other prominent figures spread fear among the public against migrants or those seen as 'the others', for their own political gain". Underscoring the need of stopping this phenomenon, UN experts flagged a correlation between exposure to hate speech and the number of hate crimes committed. To curb xenophobic attacks on migrants and prevent incitement against all marginalized groups, the UN experts called on public officials, politicians and media "to assume their collective responsibility to promote societies that are tolerant and inclusive and to redouble their efforts in holding the culpable accountable".

Similar conclusions have been reached in the annual report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) published in June, 2019⁴, as they too underline that xenophobic populism and racist hate

²https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2016_ifes_the_influence_of_political_hate_speech_as_a_tool_on_youth_of_k.eng_.pdf.

³<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25037&LangD=E>

⁴<https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/-/hate-speech-and-xenophobic-populism-remained-major-concerns-in-europe-in-2018>

speech continued to make their mark on the contemporary political climate in Europe in 2018. ECRI has also raised alarm about the increasing spread of “fake news” often producing distorted images of vulnerable groups, and called on politicians, religious and community leaders to not only avoid using hate speech, but proactively counter it. What is stated in their annual report is that islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment are still prevalent in most member states. Muslim women are frequently the targets of violence which often involves pulling off face veils and headscarves or being spat at. Persons of African descent who were born in Europe or have lived there for a long period of time already also face increasing resentment. Jewish people in Europe continue to be confronted with antisemitic hatred, including violence, often considered as justifiable reactions to the actions of the Israeli government. Roma continue to be one of the most marginalized communities in Europe with Roma girls and women being particularly targeted.

Research methodology

For the purposes of this paper a small corpus of instances of hate speech has been compiled. All the instances of violent rhetoric discussed in this study were generated by extremely high-ranking politicians such as Donald Trump (the President of the USA); Kim Jong-Un (the North Korean leader), Boris Johnson (the British Prime Minister); Recep Tyyip Erdogan (the President of Turkey), Viktor Orban (the Prime Minister of Hungary) and Vladimir Putin (the President of Russia).

The hateful messages discussed here have been produced in the recent years, either while the politicians were still campaigning for their post or after they have been voted into office. Another common feature of all analysed examples is that they have all been reported on extensively in the newspapers, and received public criticism and condemnation.

The analysis was also aimed at determining the targets of the selected hate messages (other politicians or groups/communities of people on various grounds). Moreover, the role that politicians assumed with their hateful messages was investigated. More precisely, the study, in this respect, rests on Atifi and Marcoccia’s (2017) proposal that people (in their Tweeter and Facebook posts) play three major social roles: a judge, an activist and an analyst. When they play the role of a judge they mainly assess and evaluate a certain, in this case political, situation

or action (they perform asserting, evaluating, assessing, stating, affirming acts). The activist's main focus is on persuading people to act, to do something about the issue at stake (they perform questioning, ordering, imploring, challenging, summoning acts). The analyst, on the other hand, mainly aims to make an analysis of the situation and clarify it so that people would understand it better (they explain, contextualize, enlighten, clarify, analyse, etc.). Finally, the form of the politicians' hate messages (soft versus hard hate speech) and the consequences of their hate speech, were put under scrutiny.

Results of the analysed instances of hate speech

The American president usage of hate speech

The current president of the USA, Donald Trump, is widely known for his unconventional ways of both speaking and doing politics in general. Early in his 2016 campaign he made a pledge to the American people that he will shun the standard ways of political diplomacy and that he will make 'America great again' by speaking his mind openly and without any circumventions. As his presidency is drawing to a close, one can freely observe that he has definitely kept his 'promise'. Mr. Trump infamously began his presidential campaign by attacking Mexican immigrants depicting them as rapists, drug dealers and criminals, and has regularly hit the headlines since taking office due to derogatory remarks aimed at minorities. Thus, for instance, his White House officials were not able to deny the reports that the president, during a meeting, had questioned them why the USA allowed immigrants from "s***hole countries" such as Haiti, El Salvador and African nations".⁵

Throughout his presidency Mr. Trump has denigrated foreigners on numerous occasions, calling them 'animals' or 'the worst of the worst' and comparing them to infestation ("immigrants who pour into and infest our Country").

Evidently in all these examples, Mr. Trump is assuming the role not only of an analyst but also a judge. Namely, he is analyzing and criticizing certain groups of people (nations). However, since he is not openly calling for violence, these instances qualify as soft speech. Benesch (2018) in her article "Why the rhetoric of infestation is dangerous", however, notes, that the dangerous speech with which the president often compares people to infestations: vermin, locusts, bacteria, or cancer, produces powerful sensations of revulsion, and, most importantly, fear.

⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/un-trump-hate-speech-human-rights-immigrants-minorities-a9116681.html>

Furthermore, Benesch (2018) underlines that for inspiring violence, fear is more powerful than hatred or even contempt.⁶

The current American president has also used offensive words, to verbally attack other political figures and officials. Thus, even during his presidential campaign he made the suggestion that ‘Second Amendment people’ should stop Hillary Clinton. Irrespective of whether he assumed the role of an activist here, intending to provoke his supporters to assassinate his opponent or not, what is quite worrying is that certain audience members at Trump rallies, listening to his ambiguous but provocative language, have shouted out explicit calls for violence such as ‘hang the bitch,’ ‘kill her,’ and ‘build a wall—kill them all’ and they were not rebuked for it by the others in the crowd nor by the candidate himself (Benesch, Buerger, and Glavinic 2017)⁷. Another example of Mr. Trump demonizing people in his public addresses during his presidential campaign is his rather bizarre assertion that Hillary Clinton and President Obama are co-founders of the Islamic State or ISIS (also referring to the latter as ‘Barack Hussein Obama’). Although a few hours later he depicted his previous statement as ‘sarcastic’, still, his claim was assessed as extremely dangerous and provoking, since many Americans perceive ISIS as an existential threat (Benesch, Buerger, and Glavinic 2017).

Immediately, after assuming office, the new president was involved into a serious dispute with another political leader, the North Korean President, Kim Jong-un, which the entire world was following very closely as it had the potential to easily trigger a nuclear war. During this dispute, in his public statements he repeatedly referred to the North Korean President with highly offensive terminology such as “madman”, “maniac”, “the little rocket man”, etc. In response to his offensive and derogatory language, he was also called names and received threats by Kim Jong-un himself (“*Whatever Trump might have expected, he will face results beyond his expectation. I will surely and definitely tame the mentally deranged U.S dotard with fire*”). Given the gravity of this political conflict and what was at stake, these instances of violent rhetoric can easily qualify as hard hate speech.

Various organizations, politicians and journalists have reacted to President Trump’s hate speech. Thus, UN has reacted against the Presidents ‘dehumanizing hate speech towards immigrants’ (Wyatt, 2019)⁸. In their report they state that President Donald Trump’s xenophobic rhetoric has become known as the “Trump Effect”, as it has gone beyond the political world and injected itself into everyday

⁶ <https://dangerousspeech.org/why-the-rhetoric-of-infestation-is-dangerous/>

⁷ <https://dangerousspeech.org/yes-trump-has-been-racist-before-heres-why-these-retweets-are-worse/>

⁸ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/un-trump-hate-speech-human-rights-immigrants-minorities-a9116681.html>

life — and, in many instances across dozens of states, in very violent ways. As a result of his statement, they state, his supporters, or his staff have harassed or attacked Latinos, immigrants, Muslim-American, African-Americans, and other minority and marginalized groups.

The Trump effect is also seen in the fact that, as [Benesch, Buerger, and Glavinic](#) (2017) put it, Trump’s staff, who in the past have often tied themselves into rhetorical knots, trying to clean up his statements, now are explicitly condoning the President’s use of Twitter to spread hateful and fear-inducing messages. This can be seen in President’s spokeswoman Sanders’ simple confirmation that the point of Donald Trump’s recent retweets was to convey fear of a real “threat”. Their interpretation of this statement is that that these messages have been normalized to a point that the White House no longer considers them a public relations challenge.

European politicians resorting to hate speech

This move towards using hate speech in political discourse is all too easy to track down in the language of other leaders from many countries all around the world, including the European politicians. As Tulkens⁹ notes hate speech targeting ethnic, religious, sexual minorities, immigrants and other groups is a widespread phenomenon within Europe, including in political discourse. It is increasingly found not only in the political discourse of far-right parties, but spreads also into the rhetoric of mainstream parties. Populism does not relate only to countries under situations of austerity: today there is a new phenomenon of populism in Europe. A serious concern is the growing success of populist parties that widely use hate speech, as well as trivializing its use.

The UK being in the whirl of its burning and controversial Brexit issue, has also seen an increasingly sharp edge to political exchanges, both inside and outside parliament recently. The rhetoric of the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, in particular, is labelled as dangerous and divisive since he talks of opponents as ‘traitors’; labels legislative proposals which include a no-deal Brexit as a “surrender bill”, and has reportedly compared himself to the Emperor Augustus, known for leading a bloody purge of his enemies (Brabin and Dromey 2019)¹⁰.

⁹<https://rm.coe.int/16800c170e>

¹⁰<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/21/boris-johnsons-rhetoric-is-dangerous-and-divisive>

Mr. Johnson, in fact, has a history of making comments and statements that targeted a variety of people, i.e. groups of people on the basis of their religion and nationality, even before assuming his current post, i.e. while he had held some other high-ranking political positions. Thus, for instance, he is infamously famous for having compared Muslim women wearing hijab to “bank robbers” and “letterboxes” (Brabin and Dromey, 2019).

The outspoken PM has also a long history of controversial statements targeting many other high-profile politicians (Birchall 2019)¹¹. Thus, for instance, in 2007 he made a comment about Hilary Clinton depicting her as a nurse in a mental hospital (*"She's got dyed blonde hair and pouty lips, and a steely blue stare, like a sadistic nurse in a mental hospital."*) and comparing her to Shakespeare's character Lady Macbeth (*"Lady Macbeth, stamping her heel, bawling out subordinates and fristbeeing ashtrays at her erring husband"*). In 2015, he also made an offensive and derogatory statement targeting the Russian president, Vladimir Putin calling him an ‘elf’ and ‘tyrant’ (*"Despite looking a bit like Dobby the House Elf, he is a ruthless and manipulative tyrant"*). Similarly, he has made fun of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey in 2016 by composing and reciting a poem in which the Turkish president is depicted as having intercourse with a goat:

*"There was a young fellow from Ankara,
"Who was a terrific wankerer.
"Till he sowed his wild oats,
"With the help of a goat,
"But he didn't even stop to thankera"*

In 2016, he made a provocative statement with which he addressed the American President, openly stating that he is not welcome in the UK (*"I would invite him to come and see the whole of London ... except that I wouldn't want to expose Londoners to any risk of meeting Donald Trump"*).

His prejudices against other nations can be also seen in some of his provocative and humiliating statements like the one made in 2006, when he made a very unseemly reference to Papua New Guinea stating the following: *"For ten years we in the Tory Party have become used to Papua New*

¹¹ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/6965554/boris-johnson-controversial-comments-burka-racism/>

Guinea-style orgies of cannibalism and chief-killing.” At one point he has even targeted both the Queen alongside with the peoples of the Commonwealth describing them as ‘piccaninnies’ (“*It is said that the Queen has come to love the Commonwealth, partly because it supplies her with regular cheering crowds of flag-waving piccaninnies*”).

Clearly, the PM here assumes the role of analyst and judge as these statements are not calling for violent and aggressive behavior directly and openly. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that they are highly offensive and that his intent is to put his addressees down (soft hate speech). Similarly to the “Trump effect” various analysis, journalists and organizations in charge of monitoring and gauging the implications of hate speech noted that these instance of political rhetorical violence make a profound impact on certain individuals who interpret them as a clear endorsement of taking violent measures towards suppressing and eradicating what is different and disliked by their political leaders. Thus, for instance, the watchdog organization, Tell Mama, which is responsible for measuring anti-Muslim attacks, immediately after Mr. Johnson’s offensive comments targeting Muslim women went public, reported an enormous increase in the usage of hate speech in the UK (Brabin and Dromey 2019). Also, Brabin and Dromey (2019) warn that this threatening language, mirroring Johnson’s language of “cowards and traitors” has crept in to the day-to-day dialogue so much so that emails or messages on social media from members of the public, instead of simply expressing an opinion, now, assume the form of barely disguised threats of violence and insults.

Victor Orban, the Prime Minister of Hungary, is another European politician, who has made some rather controversial comments on minorities that can easily get the status of hate speech¹². Being Hungary's right-wing Prime Minister, Mr. Orban, amidst the great migration crisis in the recent years instigated by the war in Syria, has been one of Europe's leading voices against migration into the EU. Unafraid of controversy, he has described migration as an "invasion" and compared the migrants to a "poison", calling them “Muslim invaders”. In 2016, he said that "*Hungary does not need a single migrant for the economy to work, or the population to sustain itself, or for the country to have a future ... for us migration is not a solution but a*

¹²<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25037&LangID=E>

problem ... not medicine but a poison, we don't need it and won't swallow it." When asked whether it was fair for Germany to accept hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants while Hungary accepted none, Orban responded: "*The difference is, you wanted the migrants, and we didn't.... Migration threatens the sovereignty and cultural identity of Hungary*".

Orban has repeatedly criticized German Chancellor Angela Merkel for her decision to allow over a million migrants into Germany in the summer of 2015. In a statement for Bild in early 2016, Orban stated that "*If you take masses of non-registered immigrants from the Middle East into your country, you are importing terrorism, crime, anti-Semitism, and homophobia.*" The Prime Minister has also repeatedly criticized the EU for trying to get member states to share refugees based on national quotas. In a 2015 interview with POLITICO, he suggested the bloc's leaders instead focus more on strengthening the EU's external border, stating that "*... the factual point is that all the terrorists are basically migrants.*"

Another world politician who is famed for sometimes avoiding the language of political diplomacy is the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tyyip Erdogan. He has been particularly outspoken after the failed coup attempt in Turkey, in 2016. Since he mainly holds the Gulen movement¹³ responsible for the coup in 2016, although the movement denies any involvement, Erdogan in many of his public statements has called the members of the Gulen movement: 'assassins', 'perverts', 'grave robbers' etc.¹⁴; ascribing the following qualifications to them: "*they lie, do monkey business, plot and malice*", "*they don't have any morality, nor shame*", "*they do not love the country, flag, nation*", "*they are frauds , slenderers*", "*they are blood sucking vampires*", "*pawns of Turkey's foes*", etc. Obviously, in all of these public statements, the Turkish president assumes the role of analyst and judge, and not an activist, which implies that these are all instances of soft hate speech as they are aimed solely at criticizing and offending the addressees.

¹³ The Gülen movement is a transnational socially-conscious Islamic movement with political overtones, inspired by the writings and preachings of Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish Islamic preacher who has lived in the United States since 1999. The movement is designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey, Pakistan, the OIC, and the GCC. However, their purported terror activities are not recognized as such by the United States, nor the European Union (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/G%C3%BClen_movement).

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIQcj1v9xG4>

The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, as a very famous world leader, is often criticised for silencing the right to free speech, and his government for viewing activists as enemies of the state. The American newspaper “The Atlantic”¹⁵ reported that Putin [signed into law](#) new rules that criminalise any “disrespect” for the Russian society, the government, official symbols, the constitution, or any state body, as well as what the authorities deem to be “fake news”. Besides this, he himself is also often accused of using hate speech against certain countries and groups of people, as it was, for instance, in his famous Crimean speech¹⁶ in March 2014 targeting Ukraine. After the controversial Crimea-wide referendum¹⁷ (considered unconstitutional under the Ukrainian and Crimean constitutions), Crimea was reunified with Russia. Although the official results showed majority support for reunification, the vote was boycotted by many loyal to Ukraine and declared illegitimate by Western governments and the United Nations. In his speech, Putin used the term “natsional-predateli” (“national-traitors”), a calque from the German term *Nationalverräter*, to refer to those who were against the unification. In addition, although he expressed appreciation to people protesting peacefully against corruption, inefficient state management and poverty, he explained his refusal to accept the new Ukrainian government in the unlawful events on Euromaidan¹⁸ (“Groups wanted to seize power and would stop short of nothing. They resorted to terror, murder and pogroms. Nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites executed this coup. They continue to set the tone in Ukraine to this day”). As can be seen he assumes the role of analyst and a judge at the same time. Washington Post assessed some of Putin’s statements as “dubious and false”, while certain politicians have compared him to [Adolf Hitler](#). For instance, [Hillary Clinton](#) compared events in [Crimea](#) to the [Czech Crisis](#) of

¹⁵<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/03/putins-new-law-makes-it-illegal-disrespect-russia/585502/>

¹⁶https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimean_speech_of_Vladimir_Putin

¹⁷ Crimea, the peninsula located on the northern coast of the Black Sea in Eastern Europe, was reunified with Russia in 2014. In 1954, it was transferred to the Ukrainian SSR from the Russian SFSR but then again Russia formally annexed Crimea on 18 March 2014, incorporating the Republic of Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol as the 84th and 85th federal subjects of Russia.

¹⁸ A wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine, which began on the night of 21 November 2013 with public protests in Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kiev.

1938 and has directly compared Russia's [Vladimir Putin](#) to Hitler. The Russian historian Andrey Piontkovsky also compared Putin's speech to Hitler's speech on [Sudetenland](#) from 1939 because, for him, "the same arguments and vision of history" were used and because, in his opinion, this speech played a key role in starting the [war in Donbass](#)¹⁹.

Conclusion

Hate speech seems to have become such an integral part of political discourse that rather than promoting democracy and peace, politicians win people's votes by demonizing their opponents or some specific social groups of people. The paper aimed to present several examples of hate speech used by high-profile politicians, targeted and criticised by the media. The objective of the analysis was to determine who these hateful messages were usually aimed at, and what role the politicians assumed when they made these comments.

The analysis showed that politicians' negative hateful messages are directed mainly towards their political opponents in their country (e.g. The American president Donald Trump often attacks his democratic political opponent Hillary Clinton) or political leaders from other countries (e.g. Trump and the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un use derogatory terms to address each other; the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson uses negative lexis (metaphors mainly) to talk about the American politicians Trump and Clinton, Turkish president Erdogan and Russian president Putin). Sometimes politicians talk negatively about another country or nation (e.g. the Russian president Putin uses hate speech when talking about Ukraine and Euromaidan). Finally, some politicians' hateful language is directed towards a specific group of people (e.g. The American president Trump often offends Latinos, immigrants, Muslim-American, African-Americans, and other minority and marginalized groups; the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, uses negative lexis to talk about Muslims, while the Hungarian's Prime Minister, Mr. Orban, about migrants).

In addition, the analysis showed that, when using hate speech, almost all politicians in our corpus assumed the roles of analysts and judges. They "analysed" the specific person or group of people and made judgements

¹⁹ Read more at <https://www.hudson.org/research/11165-andrei-piontkovsky-putin-s-concept-of-the-russian-world-threatens-all-territories-with-a-russian-population->

based on that analysis. However, since all of the subjects presented in this paper are very influential political figures, it can be expected that these negative comments might instigate actions against the target, either by the politicians themselves or their supporters who are influenced by such negative language. The hate speech used gives legitimacy to the actions that follow. Therefore, this paper tends to raise the awareness against its use in political discourse.

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