

# FREE SPEECH, HATE SPEECH AND THE SECURITY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

**Associate Professor Gabriela Goudenhoft, PhD**

University of Oradea, Romania

***Summary:** Even if there is a frame of regulating hate speech and many recommendations for governments, NGO-s countering and reporting hate speech, there are still difficulties in drawing a line between two sometimes conflicting rights: freedom of speech and the right to dignity and not to be offended and discriminated. The European Union estimates that hate attacks have recently increased and that this represents a risk for EU security. The measures targeting to combat hate speech and hate crimes, monitoring, measuring and countering hate, adopting specific legislations, including for the Internet, aim to address this dangerous phenomenon. Addressing these issues, we must still be able to draw a line where freedom of expression ends and where it turns into hate speech.*

***Key words:** hate speech, freedom of expression, dignity, solidarity*

## **Introduction**

Free speech is hugely important to open societies that respect human rights and defending this important right constitutes a brick in the liberal foundation wall of democracy. Human Rights Treaties outlaw offensive speech when it poses a risk or threat to others.

Nevertheless, hate speech has been a steadily growing social problem since the new millennium. The past years have brought yet new challenges in Europe: a migration crisis, political upheaval due to populism, disinformation and the pandemic, misinformation and the Russia-Ukraine war – processes which increase feelings of insecurity and make the future unforeseeable. Feelings of insecurity across several dimensions are widespread in the EU: a sense of anxiety regarding

but they have also managed to provide a wider, faster and more open platform for the proliferation of hate speech. So, the digital revolution has, in its dark side, its own role in propagating "cyber hate".

Online hate speech is propagated and amplified by two main factors: 1. underestimating its devastating effects on individuals; and 2. the two myths of online social interaction: impunity and anonymity. There is a false impression that posting and/or retrieving hateful content leaves no trace, and this makes it easier to promote hate speech online, compared to situations where the person doing it knows that his/her name could be accessible to all.

Therefore, is a very difficult mission of finding a fair balance between protecting from harm and preserving the right to freedom of expression.<sup>30</sup> It is not enough to pass laws; this does not solve all issues, governments, big tech and the private sector, civil society, mass-media, the citizens all have roles to play, and counter-speech is everyone's responsibility.

The recent developments of the war started by Russia in Ukraine and the manipulative rhetoric that is used should make us understand that no one is safe unless all of us are safe. This form of solidarity must oppose the discourse that delegitimizes nations and peoples, that transforms human beings, including civilians, women and children into "so-called" Nazis and therefore targets for missiles and bombs. When individuals and groups are devalued and hate speech becomes official speech, European security and values are at risk.

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