

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO HATE SPEECH IN BULGARIA IN 2018

In order to establish the scope of hate speech in Bulgarian public discourse, in 2013 Open Society Institute – Sofia developed a special research methodology and has carried out regular nationally representative sociological surveys on the subject. The findings of the surveys help shed light on various aspects of the public use of hate speech, the main channels for dissemination, the public groups that are most affected by it and public attitudes to anti-hate speech policies.

This document presents the findings of a nationally representative public opinion poll carried out in 2018 as well as comparable findings from three previous surveys carried out in 2013, 2014 and 2016.

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SUMMARY

Hate speech has a permanent presence in the Bulgarian political and media landscape. In 2018 about half of the respondents in a nationally representative survey claimed to have heard statements made in public that expressed disapproval, hatred or aggression towards members of ethnic, religious or sexual minorities. These findings remained almost unchanged over the last five years. What has changed only is the intensity of use of hate speech towards various targeted minorities.

Even though the biggest number of people who have come across hate speech throughout the year claim to have heard it on television, the breakdown by demographic groups shows that internet access is the main precondition for more frequent incidence of hate speech: the public groups that have greater internet access (young, educated, residents in Sofia City) report considerably more frequent encounters with hate speech than the national average and compared to the public groups that have low use of the internet (the elderly, the less educated, village residents). In addition, by way of comparison the role of television as a channel for dissemination of hate speech has considerably declined: while in 2013 75% of the respondents who encountered hate speech did it on television, in 2018 their share fell to 56%. What has been on the rise, though slightly, is the role of public places (restaurants, cafes, public transport) as a venue to encounter hate speech.

The share of people who have heard the expressions “retch na omrazata”, “ezik na omrazata” or “vrajdebna retch” (that roughly translate into Bulgarian the expression “hate speech”) has slightly increased: in 2016 approximately 45% of the respondents claimed to have heard the concepts while in 2018 their share rose to 52%. The increased incidence of the “hate speech” label in the last two years testifies to a certain increase in public attention to this issue and is most probably due to the impact of some civic campaigns to register hate speech and to counteract. The respondents find it hard to define though what “hate speech” is, which forms are criminal and which are simply inappropriate in public and how to respond when confronted with hate speech. This shows that public policies to combat hate speech are either not in place or if any, they have a limited impact.

The Roma remain steadily regarded as the main target of hate speech; the four surveys carried out show that the largest share of people who have heard hate speech reported that it was targeted at the Roma. In 2018 reported encounters with hate speech against gay people doubled compared to the 2016 level and decreased towards the other examined groups, including the Roma, Turks, Moslems and foreigners. In 2018 gay people were the second minority group most affected by hate speech following closely the Roma and this result coincides with the heated debates related to the failed ratification of the Council of Europe’s Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence¹ (the Istanbul Convention). Our observations over the last 5 years show that the spread of hate speech has evolved in stages that have been directly tied to the political situation and have targeted various minorities while feeding a permanent sense of anxiety and tension in the public.

A considerable majority of the citizens (77% in 2018) disapprove of the public use of hate speech. The largest group of respondents (46%) agreed that the state has to protect the members of the Roma community, gay people and foreigners against public speech that manifests disapproval, hatred or aggression towards them. A prominent share of the respondents (57%) agreed that the prosecutor’s office should initiate criminal proceedings against politicians and journalists who use hate speech in public.

However, growing nationalist trends in politics and the persistent indifference of law enforcement authorities to crimes motivated by racial, ethnic and religious hatred have reduced public support in favour of a criminal policy: in 2018 the share of people who were aware that hate speech and committing acts of violence motivated by ethnic, racial or religious hatred is a crime was at its lowest over the last 5 years. At the same time, the number of people who would report to the police any public use of hate speech they witnessed has fallen from 26% (2014) to 17% (2018). Approval of criminal prosecution of politicians and journalists who use hate speech in public has also fallen (the number of people in favour of such

¹ Convention of the Council of Europe on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on April 7, 2011.

criminal prosecution fell from 66% in 2013 to 57% in 2018). Similarly, the number of supporters of criminal prosecution of instances of aggressive nationalism has also gone down; the number of people who agree that criminal proceedings should be initiated for aggressive nationalism has fallen by 10% over the last 5 years (from 73% in 2013 to 63% in 2018).

However, what has remained unchanged is public approval of financial measures to counteract hate speech: in 2018, as in 2016, the majority of the respondents (64%) agree that the state should withdraw public funding from political parties whose leaders use hate speech. There is also a prominent support in favour of cutting public funding to the media that use hate speech. In 2018, 57% of the re-

spondents were in favour of withdrawing public funding from media whose journalists make statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression towards various minorities.

As recommended in 2016, law enforcement authorities should encourage reporting of hate speech as a crime and enhance trust of certain minority groups in their impartiality and competence. However, a national policy for combating hate speech cannot depend solely on law enforcement authorities. The education system plays a crucial role (through measures for civic education and media literacy) as well as the introduction of measures against hate speech in the rules for administrative regulation of public funding of political parties and the media.

Table 1. Respondents' profile

By gender	Number	Share, %
Male	522	44
Female	647	55
No answer	10	1
Total	1179	100
By age	Number	Share, %
18–29	178	15
30–44	284	24
45–59	282	24
Over 60	392	33
No answer	43	4
Total	1179	100
By ethnic group	Number	Share, %
Bulgarian	971	82
Turkish	83	7
Roma	93	8
Other	15	1
No answer	17	1
Total	1179	100

ABOUT THE SURVEY

This analysis is based on the findings of four nationally representative public opinion polls carried out by Open Society Institute – Sofia in July 2013, June – July 2014, April – May 2016 and in April 2018.² The surveys aimed at evaluating the spread and public attitudes to the use of hate speech in Bulgaria, referring to “incidence of hate speech” as the frequency reported by the respondents of hearing statements made in public expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression towards various minority groups. The survey does not cover all possible forms of free speech but just oral statements.³

All surveys were carried out based on a standard questionnaire and the method of a face-to-face interview. The respondents were selected among adult citizens of the country by means of probabilistic and two-stage cluster sample stratified by administrative districts (NUTS III) and settlement type (city/village).

The survey in 2018 was financed by Open Society Institute – Sofia. 1179 out of 1200 planned interviews were carried out. The standard error with 50% sample proportion and 95% confidence level was $\pm 2,8\%$.

² The analyses of the findings of the surveys held in 2013, 2014 and 2016 have been aggregated and published in separate reports titled *Public Attitudes towards Hate Speech in Bulgaria* and they are available in Bulgarian and in English on OSI's website www.osis.bg. The data from the surveys have been also published on www.opendata.bg

³ About the definition of the concept hate speech used in the surveys, see the first report from the series *Public Attitudes towards Hate Speech in Bulgaria*, Open Society Institute – Sofia, 28.11.2013, available online on www.osis.bg

In order to clarify the findings from the quantitative survey and verify some of the explanatory hypotheses, two focus groups were held as well: on 22.06.2018 a focus group was held with six female teachers from a district city in the southeast part of Bulgaria and on 03.07.2018 a focus group was held with 5 men and 2 women of Roma origin in a district city in Northwestern Bulgaria.

CONTEXT OF THE SURVEY

During the first decade of Bulgaria's membership in the EU, Bulgaria has remained the poorest EU Member State. In 2018 the gross domestic product per capita according to the purchasing power standard in Bulgaria accounts for hardly 49% of the average among the EU Member States. The gross domestic product per capita in Romania and Croatia, that are also seriously lagging behind under this indicator, accounts for respectively 61% and 63% of the EU average. Nevertheless, in the period 2017 – early 2018 the macroeconomic indicators on national level accounted for more likely positive trends. In 2017 salaries and income in Bulgaria rose by approximately 10% but the increase is still not enough to make up for lagging behind the remaining EU Member States.⁴ In 2017 the employment rate among people of active age (20-64) in Bulgaria rose and reached 71.3 % compared to the average 72.2% among the EU Member States. Employment growth in Bulgaria is 3.6% compared to 2016 and is the highest registered employment growth in an EU Member State for the period.⁵

With regard to the political situation, the country is relatively stable, following a four-year period of frequent early parliamentary elections and two caretaker governments. The political sector is highly fragmented at first sight. Five formations reached the National Assembly after the last early parliamentary elections (26.03.2017). The largest political force in the country, GERB, is supported by 34% of the voters, BSP ranks second with 28 %, Coalition United Patriots (Attacka, IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement and NFSB (National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria) – 9%, Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) with 9 % as well and Volya political party with 4 %.

⁴ The data are from the publication *Jiznenijat standart v Bulgaria e napolovina ot srednia v Evropa I prez 2017*, Capital newspaper, 20.06.2018.

⁵ The data is from Eurostat, Newsrelease 68/2018 – 20 April 2018.

Since 4.05.2017 Bulgaria has been ruled by a third government set up with GERB being the leading party ruling in a coalition with the three nationalist parties from United Patriots. Volya party does not have any cabinet ministers but it supported the government during its vote in the National Assembly. GERB is also occasionally supported by the two political parties of the opposition, MRF and BSP, during voting for some important issues: MRF supported the government in early January 2018 to lift the President's veto over the new anti-corruption act; BSP supported the government in early June 2018 for the decision to resume the project for the development of a second nuclear power plant in Belene. Against this backdrop, on 24.01.2018 the President Rumen Radev made the following statement: "The parliamentary republic has atrophied. The Parliament has become a notary's office that is just rubber-stamping the government's decisions."⁶

In 2018 Bulgaria is still regarded by foreign observers as "semi-consolidated democracy" according to the survey of Freedom House titled Nations in Transition. Compared to 2009, the situation in Bulgaria has deteriorated according to all indicators monitored by Freedom House. In 2018 Bulgaria scored 3.75 for National democratic governance indicator.⁷ The downgrading is due to the worsened score for Local democratic governance indicator and the authors of the study point out that "the high indebtedness of some municipalities (in rural areas, in particular) results in growing dependence on the central budget, growing party patronage on a local level and limited opportunities for an economic activity and new initiatives". With regard to media freedom, Freedom House points out that "Bulgaria's media environment has deteriorated significantly in recent years, with an increase in hate speech and violence against journalists. Transparency of media ownership continued to be a serious problem, as was the fusion of media and politics, media monopolies, and lack of transparency of funding sources".⁸

Persistently low efficiency of law enforcement authorities with regard to the investigation and prosecution of high-level crimes, including corruption and organized crime is an additional risk posed to democratic governance in the country. As of 2006 Bulgaria and Romania are

⁶ See Radev *se objavjava za pazitel na democratziata I svobodata na slovoto*, a publication on the website www.mediapool.bg from 24.01.2018.

⁷ The rating scale is from 1 (highest level of democratic progress) to 7 (lowest level).

⁸ Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2018, available on <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/bulgaria>

the only two remaining EU Member States that are under special monitoring by the European Commission to continue the reform of the judiciary they started during the accession negotiations. Low efficiency of the prosecutor's office and the police in Bulgaria affects not only the crimes that are subject to special monitoring by the European Commission but can also be seen from data about the performance of institutions in general: between 2010 and 2017 the total number of pre-trial proceedings initiated and prosecutors' acts submitted to court fell by about a quarter.

Public trust in judicial authorities and in institutions in general stands very low: in 2018 not more than approximately 28% of the citizens trust national courts and hardly 15% have confidence in the Parliament. Between 2016 and 2018 public trust in institutions went down: trust in the National Assembly fell from 22% (2016) to 15% (2018), in political parties from 17% to 10%, in the government from 27% to 22%.

In the first half of 2018 Bulgaria assumed the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the first time. At the beginning of the Presidency, the government declared that the EU enlargement into the Western Balkans countries would be one of its main priorities. The EU – Western Balkans Summit held in Sofia on 17.05.2018 became a central event of the Presidency. The Declaration from the Summit states that the EU strongly reaffirms its support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans and pledges enhanced support for the political, economic and social transformations in the region provided that there is visible progress in upholding the principle of the rule of law. The resumption of the perspective for EU membership of the Western Balkans countries is regarded as the largest success of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

The Presidency of the Council of the EU has also played a major role for boosting the capacity of the national administration; over 2 000 employees were engaged in the Presidency. An observer called it "a workforce potential that pulls Bulgaria forward and benefits even the most dissatisfied with the Presidency".⁹

Still, despite the positive news about economic development and foreign political success, protection of fundamental civil rights continues to pose a number of issues. The annual report of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC) about the status of human rights in 2017 registers "an overall deterioration of social climate related to human rights, inter-ethnic and religious tolerance",

limited opportunities for integration policies for minorities and refugees, deteriorated cooperation between the authorities and non-governmental human rights organizations due to the entry in the government of the nationalist formations from United Patriots.¹⁰

The report states that "the use of racist and xenophobic rhetoric" from politicians and journalists is a major problem. On 21.03.2017 (a couple of days prior to the parliamentary elections held on 26th of March), representatives of the United Patriots held rallies and mounted blockades at the three border-crossing points alongside the border with Turkey to prevent Bulgarian Turks from entry into the country and participation in the elections. During the rallies an incident was recorded showing Valery Simeonov, one of the leaders of the formation, Chairman of the NFSB, how he pushed an elderly lady and pulled her handbag to stop her from crossing the border. He went on to say "This lady, the plump grandma, by the way, you have no idea the nerve she had. She was the only one who did not plan to go back and she knew her rights. They were very well prepared".¹¹

After the parliamentary elections the United Patriots coalition nominated several cabinet ministers and Valery Simeonov was appointed as Deputy Prime Minister responsible for economic and demographic policy and Chairman of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues. Almost all Roma organizations left the Council in late April 2017 in protest at the election of Valery Simeonov as Chairman as well as due to the Council's low efficiency.¹² In October 2018 Valery Simeonov was replaced as Chairman of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues by Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev.

In early 2018 prominent regression was registered with regard to protection of women's rights due to the refusal to ratify the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Bulgaria signed the Convention in 2016 and on 3.01.2018 the government voted to submit to the National Assembly a draft proposal for ratification of the Convention. When the decision was voted by the government, the ministers from the United Patriots coalition voted against claiming that "this will pave the way for

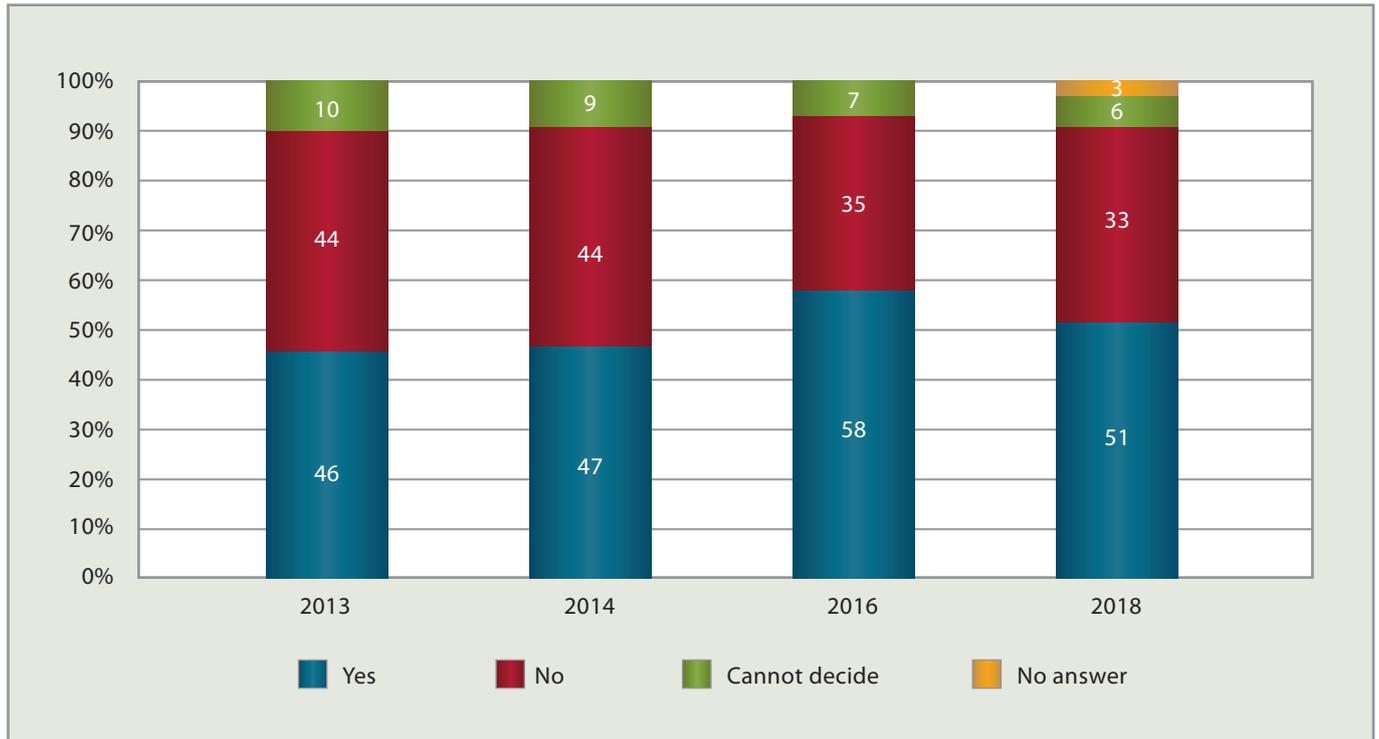
¹⁰ Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, *Pravata na choveka v Bulgaria prez 2017*, p. 14.

¹¹ See *Valery Simeonov: taja, palnitchkata baba, beshe nagla! Znaeshe si pravata! Pune 2/3 ot avtobusite ot Turtsia ne tragnaha, blagodarenie na nas, smjata liderat na OP*, Sega newspaper from 27.03.2017.

¹² See *NPO-ta sreshtu Simeonov: Ne otchakvame evoljutzia ot nego!*, publication from 1.06.2017 on www.dnes.bg

⁹ Veselin Zhelev, *Made in Bulgaria*, Knyb Z, 2.07.018.

Figure 1. Incidence of hate speech



Question: Have you heard statements made in public in the last 12 months that express disapproval, hatred or aggression towards members of ethnic, religious or sexual minorities?

the recognition by Bulgaria of a “third gender” and that Bulgaria would have to legalize same-sex marriages.¹³ The objections of the nationalists were blown up in an aggressive campaign in the social and mainstream media making a number of false allegations and inciting sexist and homophobic sentiments. As a result of the campaign, on 7.03.2018 the government officially withdrew the draft proposal for ratification of the Convention. The BHC points out in its report that the debate was irrational, “many of the participants in the debate fully turned their backs on the subject of the international treaty, introduced topics that were completely irrelevant for the document and made use of it for their vested political and ideological goals, openly instigating discrimination towards women, homophobia, transphobia and hatred towards the values underlying the very membership of Bulgaria in international organizations on European and global level”.¹⁴

In the summer of 2018 the Constitutional Court also ruled on the matter, claiming that the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and com-

bating violence against women and domestic violence would contradict the Bulgarian Constitution. The Court established that “the attempts to define “gender” as a social construct relativise the boundaries of the two genders, the male and female gender, as biologically determined. However, if the society loses its ability to differentiate between a man and a woman, the fight against violence against women would remain a formal but unfeasible commitment”.¹⁵

INCIDENCE OF HATE SPEECH

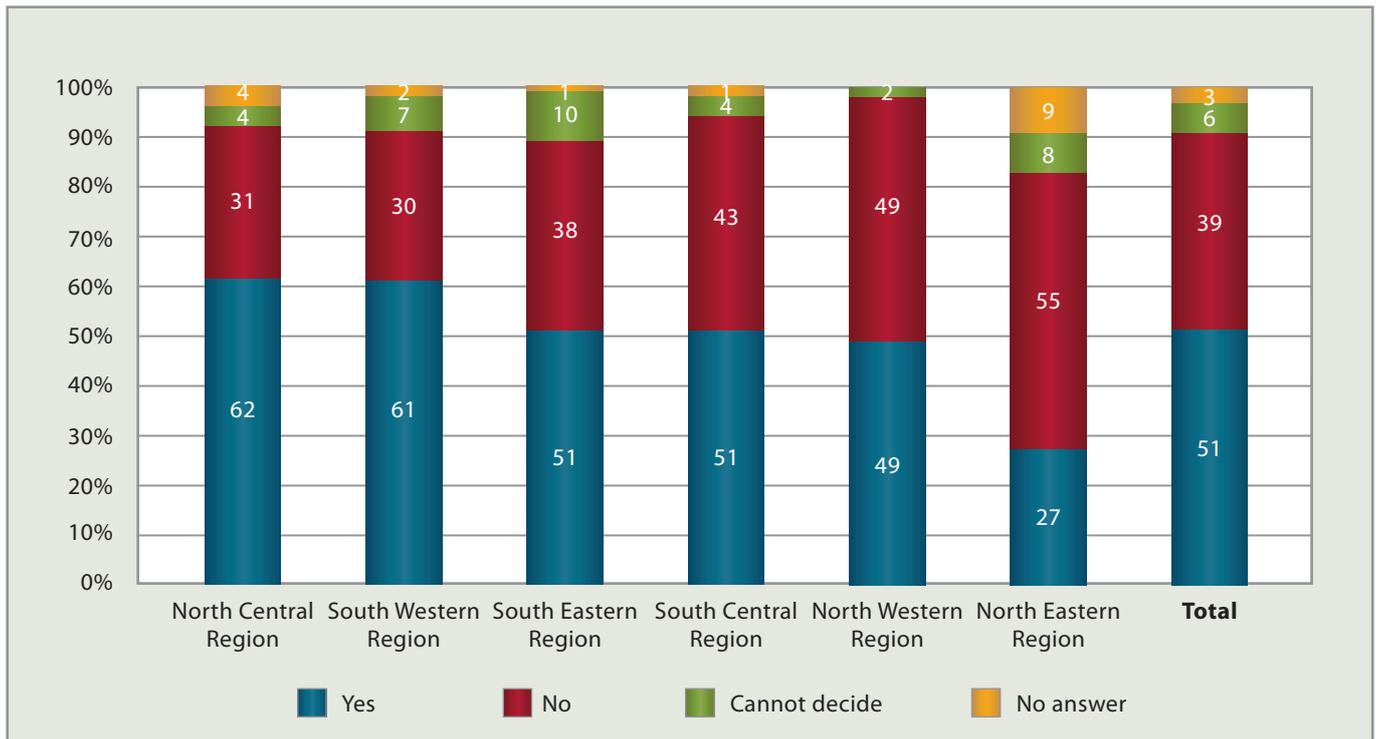
In 2018 hate speech remained persistently present in Bulgarian public life: half of the respondents (51%) reported to have heard in the last 12 months statements made in public that express disapproval, hatred or aggression towards representatives of ethnic, religious or sexual minorities (Fig. 1). Certain decline was noted in 2018 compared to 2016, when 58% of the respondents reported to have heard similar statements.

¹³ The quotations were from the article “Vitzepremierat Valery Simeonov objavi: osem ministri glasuvaha protiv reshenieto za Istanbulskata konventzia”, Praven svjat, 3.01.2018, available online at www.legalworld.bg

¹⁴ Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, op. cit., p. 147.

¹⁵ Ruling of the Constitutional Court No 13 of 27.07.2018 on Constitutional case No 3/2018, promulgated in the State Gazette No 65/7.08.2018.

Figure 2. Incidence of hate speech in 2018 – Impact of regional differences



Question: In the last 12 months have you heard statements made in public that express disapproval, hatred or aggression towards members of ethnic, religious or sexual minorities?

Reporting of instances of hate speech varies across the regions. The respondents who have heard hate speech over the last year amount to about 10% above the national average in the North Central Region (NCR) and in the Southwest Region (SWR), with Sofia City as the centre, and the lowest number is reported in the North Eastern Region (NER). The respondents in the NER who claim to have heard statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression towards members of various minority groups over the last year account for just 27%, i.e. almost half of the national average.

Regional differences with regard to reporting of instances of hate speech seem persistent – the findings from 2018 reproduce to a considerable extent the findings established from the survey in 2016. More frequent reporting of instances of hate speech does not necessarily mean that hate speech is used more often in the North Central Region and South Western Region than in the North Eastern Region (Fig. 2). The respondents in the NCR and SWR however might be prone, unlike the others, of “hearing” hate speech, recognizing it and distinguishing it from the general political talk.

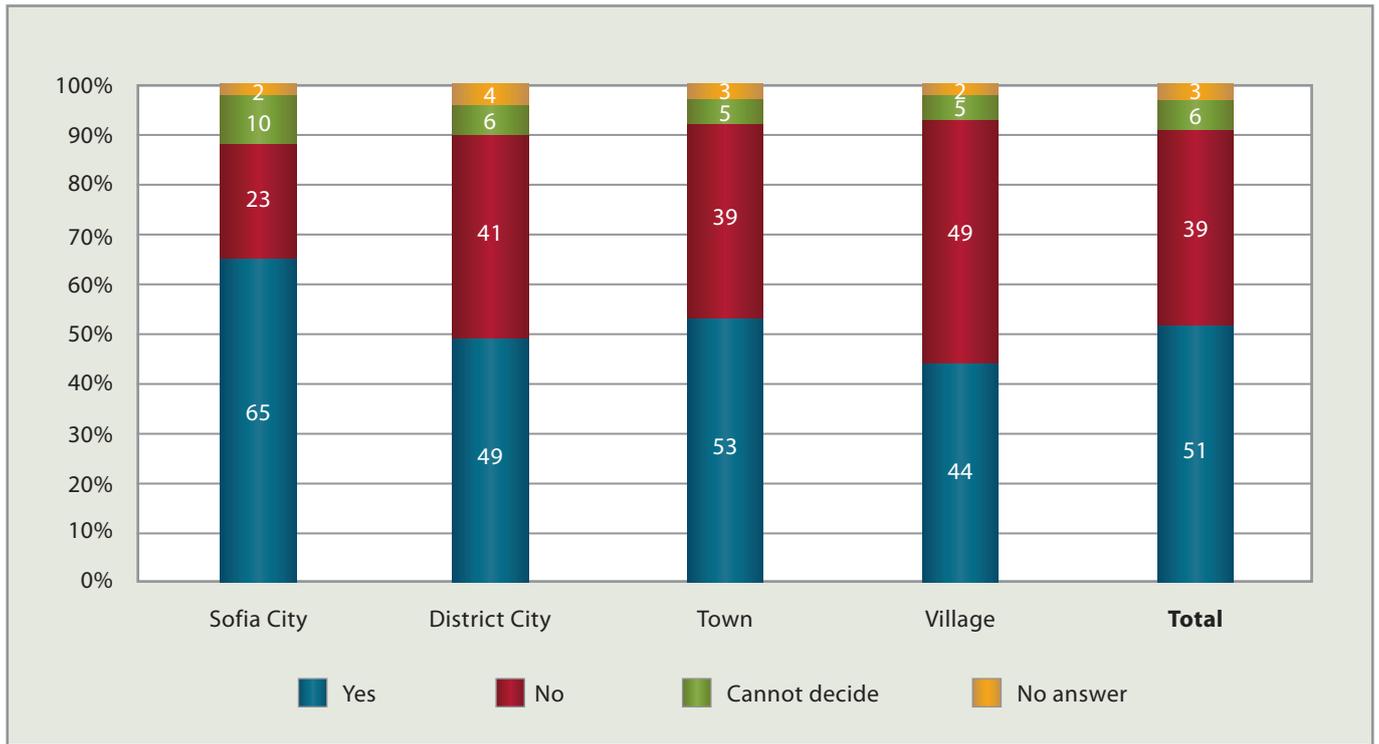
The type of settlement according to the place of residence of the respondents also has a bearing on the frequency of reporting encounters with hate speech. Re-

spondents residing in Sofia report much more frequently than the national average that in the last 12 months they have heard public statements that amount to hate speech. In contrast, people living in villages report less frequently than the national average instances of hate speech they have come across (Fig. 3).

The education level of the respondents is an important factor for recognition of hate speech. Better educated respondents report more frequently than the national average they have heard over the last year public statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression towards members of various minority groups. While 62% of the best-educated report to have heard hate speech and 29% of them deny it, the reverse ratio can be observed among people with primary education: 29% report to have heard hate speech while 62% of them deny it (Fig. 4). There was high percentage of people among the less educated respondents who say that they could not decide or prefer to leave the question without an answer. Thus one in five of the respondents with primary or lower education refrained from answering the question.

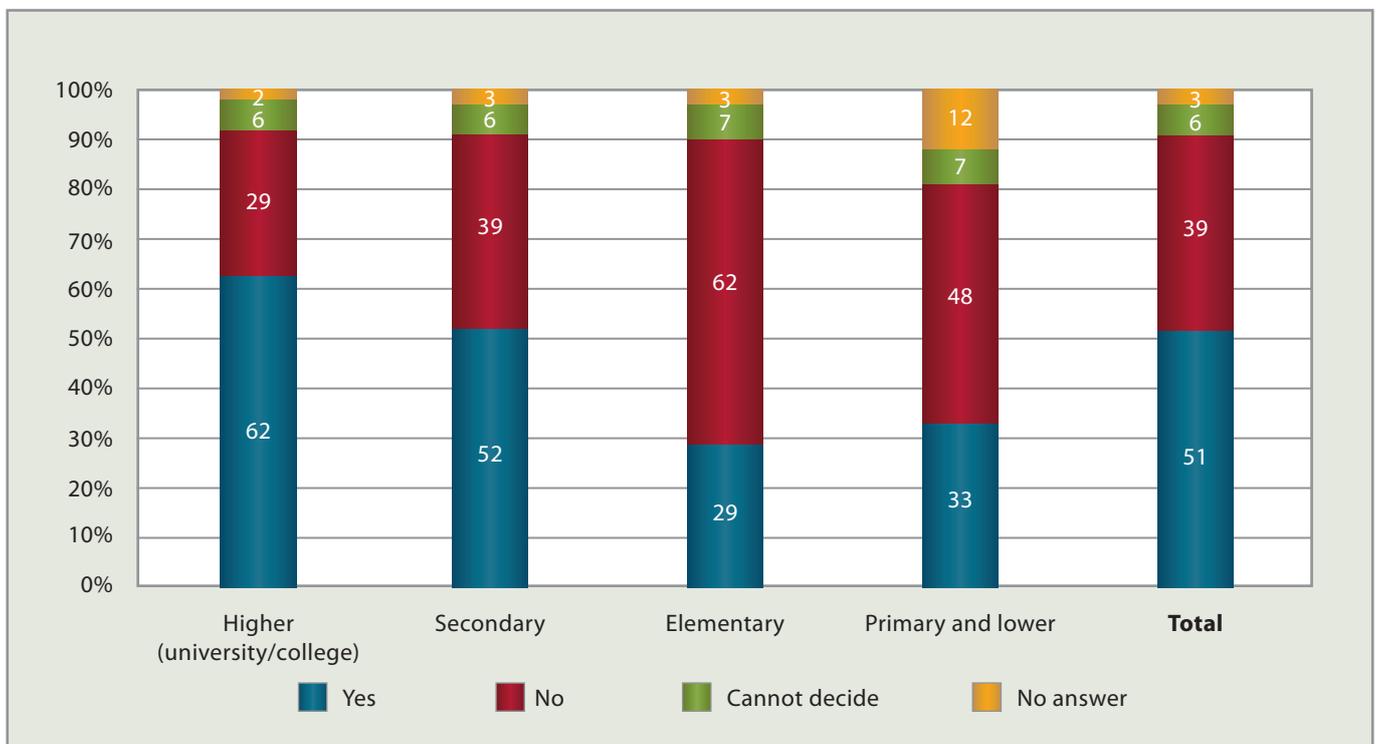
Younger people report to have come across hate speech more frequently than the national average: 66% of people aged 18-29 reported to have heard public statements over the last year expressing disapproval, hatred or

Figure 3. Incidence of hate speech in 2018 – Impact of the type of settlement



Question: *Have you heard in the last 12 months statements made in public expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression towards members of ethnic, religious or sexual minorities?*

Figure 4. Incidence of hate speech in 2018 – Impact of education



Question: *Have you heard in the last 12 months statements made in public expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression towards members of ethnic, religious or sexual minorities?*

aggression towards members of certain minority groups; this share is 41% for people aged over 60. The significant differences in reporting instances of hate speech based on age, education and settlement type are in correlation with the habits of Internet use: younger, better educated people, residing in Sofia, use the Internet more often and report more often to have encountered hate speech than older, less educated people, living in villages. It is true that better educated people are much more capable of identifying the phenomenon of “hate speech” and qualifying some statements as instances of disapproval, threat or aggression. However, internet access is most probably also a very important factor for the frequency of encountering hate speech. The majority of young people aged up to 29 (84%) report to take time every day to surf the internet while only 10% of people aged over 60 do so. Only 5% of the young people report to have never surfed the internet in contrast with 79% of people aged over 60. Only 17% of the people with university or college education report to not surf the internet at all in contrast to 72% of the people with primary or lower education.

Less educated and older people use the internet less; their main media source is the television and they respectively report less frequently to have come across hate speech. This might explain why village residents report less frequently to have encountered hate speech than the residents of Sofia City. The first group is dominated by older and less educated people who do not use the internet: 41% of village residents are aged over 60 and people aged 18-29 (who are the most active internet users) in villages are only 10%.

These specific aspects of correlation between hate speech incidence and internet use explain to a certain degree differences in perceptions that can be observed with regard to the ethnic background of the respondents. The share of people who use the internet every day among the respondents who identify themselves as Roma is only 30%, respectively 40% of those who identify themselves as Turks compared to the national average of 46%. It can be assumed that Turkish-speaking Roma and Turks do not watch a lot Bulgarian television. That is why respondents who identify themselves as Roma and Turks report slightly less frequently to have across hate speech than the national average.

Even though about half of the respondents in the quantitative survey report to have heard in the last five years statements made in public expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression towards minority groups, the focus groups held under the survey have shown that teachers

and the Roma find it very difficult to define what “hate speech” is, which forms are criminal and which are simply publicly unacceptable and how they should respond when confronted with them.

The focus group held with the teachers has shown that the attitudes established in the previous survey (in 2016) are still valid. One of the female teachers taking part in the focus group praised the order and security imposed in Greece by the armed militia activists of Golden Dawn party and maintained that “the Americans” support only programmes for the Roma while it is “Bulgarians who are shrinking”. Her statements were accepted without any objections by the remaining teachers in the group. The teachers who took part in the focus group in general did not distinguish hate speech from insult, libel or the use of rude and cynical speech at school. They believed that the use of hate speech by the students had to do with their upbringing at home not with the school environment and as teachers they had no responsibility and could do nothing to curb the use of hate speech.

INCIDENCE OF THE CONCEPT OF “HATE SPEECH”

About half of the respondents in the quantitative survey report to have heard the expressions “retch na omrazata”, “ezik na omrazata” and “vrajdebna retch” that translate into Bulgarian the expression “hate speech”, while 40% of them have not. The share of people who have heard “the label” is indicative of the extent to which “hate speech” is recognized by people as a phenomenon, i.e. shows us to what extent statements condemning hate speech have reached people as well as indirectly points to the presence and success of public policies to curb hate speech.

Even though the incidence of expressions of disapproval, hatred or aggression towards members of certain minorities has slightly gone down between 2016 and 2018, the share of people who have heard the expressions that translate into Bulgarian “hate speech”, during the same period has slightly increased: in 2016 approximately 45% of the respondents shared to have heard the expressions compared to 52% in 2018. In addition, in 2018 the share of those who have heard the expressions was much higher than the share of those who have not unlike 2016 when the share of those who have not

heard the expressions (47%) was higher than the one of the people who have heard (45%). The increased incidence of the concept of “hate speech” over the last two years is a clear sign of certain public attention paid to the problem and is most probably due to the organization of various civil society campaigns to register and counteract hate speech.

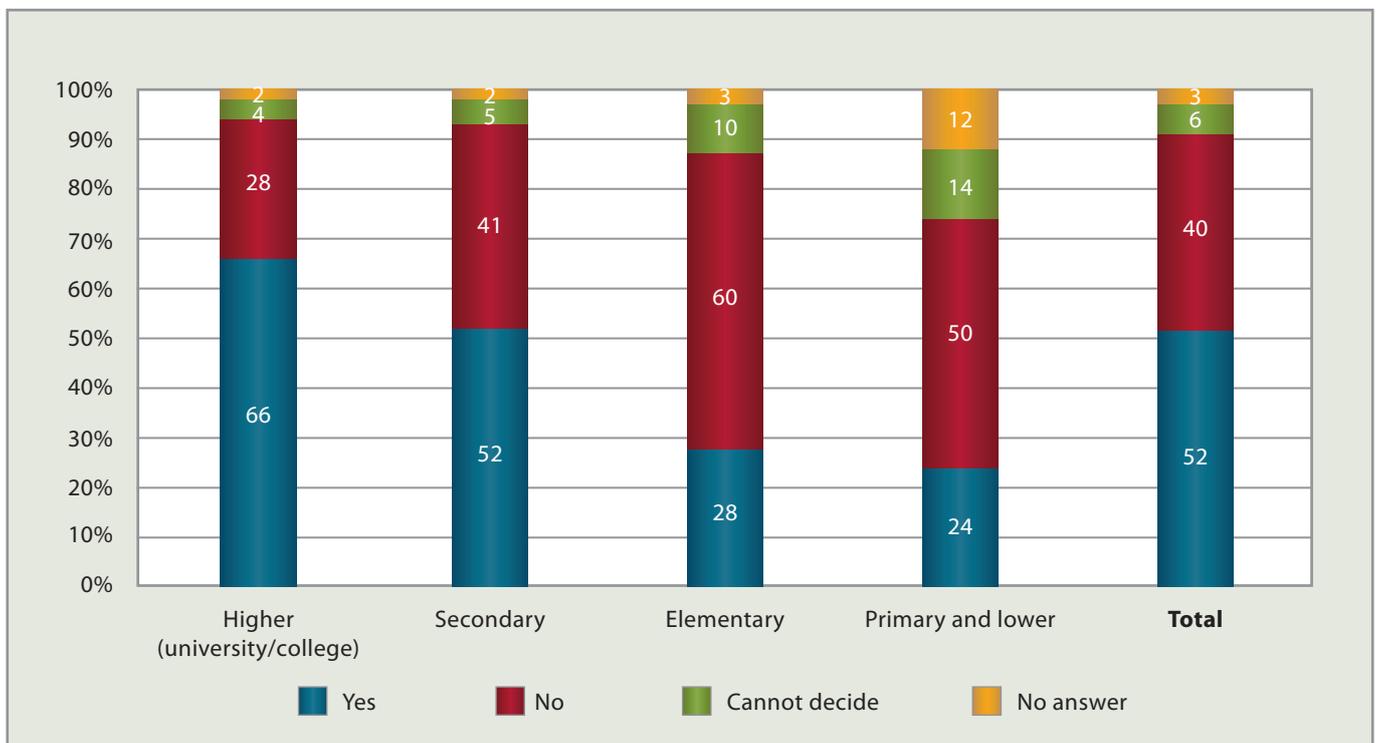
Certain demographic factors, education in particular, are decisive for reporting encounters with the concepts of “retch na omrazata”, “ezik na omrazata” and “vrajdebna retch”. A much higher percentage of the people with higher or college education – 66% report to have heard them, compared to the national average of 52%. Only 24% of the people with primary or lower education report to have heard these expressions (Fig. 5). Ethnic origin is also important; 54 % of the respondents who identify themselves as Bulgarians have heard the expressions against 43% among those who identify themselves as Roma and 35% among those who identify themselves as Turks. The latter might be due to the language barrier, as Bulgarian is not the main language of many of the respondents who identify themselves as Turks and Roma. Thus, for instance, several of the participants in the focus group held with the Roma referred to “the hatred of speech” instead of

“hate speech”. Low awareness of the concept among the Roma themselves shows that insofar as there are any, the measures and policies for recognition and protection against hate speech are least accessible to the most affected groups.

TARGETS OF HATE SPEECH

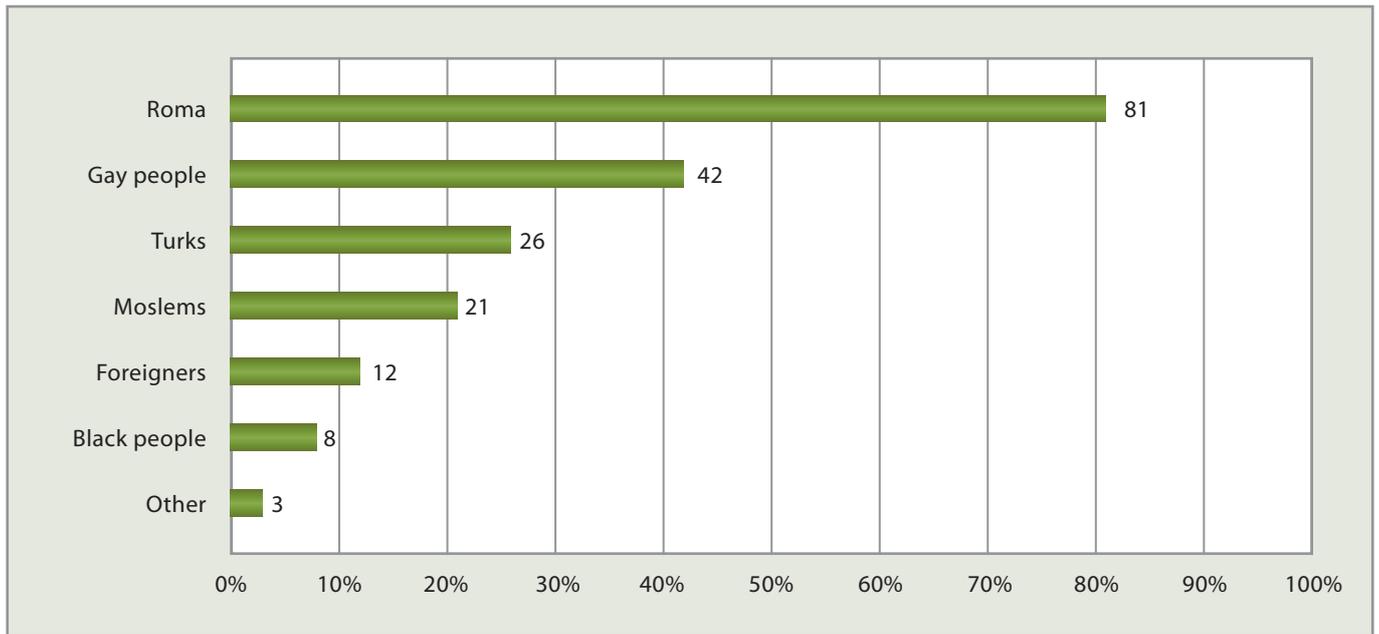
The majority of the people (81%), who have heard hate speech in public, share that it has been targeted at the Roma. In 2018 gay people are the second minority group most frequently targeted by hate speech in the perceptions of the respondents: 42% of the respondents who have heard hate speech claim that it has been aimed at gay people. In 2018, unlike in the three previous surveys, hate speech against gay people is a much more prominent phenomenon than against the Turks (26% of the respondents who have heard hate speech over the previous year claim that it has been targeted against the Turks) and twice as frequent as hate speech against Moslems (21% of the people who have heard hate speech over the previous year report that it has been targeted at Moslems).

Figure 5. Encountering the concept of “hate speech” in 2018 – Impact of education



Question: Have you heard any of the expressions “retch na omrazata”, “ezik na omrazata” or “vrajdebna retch”?

Figure 6. Targets of hate speech in 2018

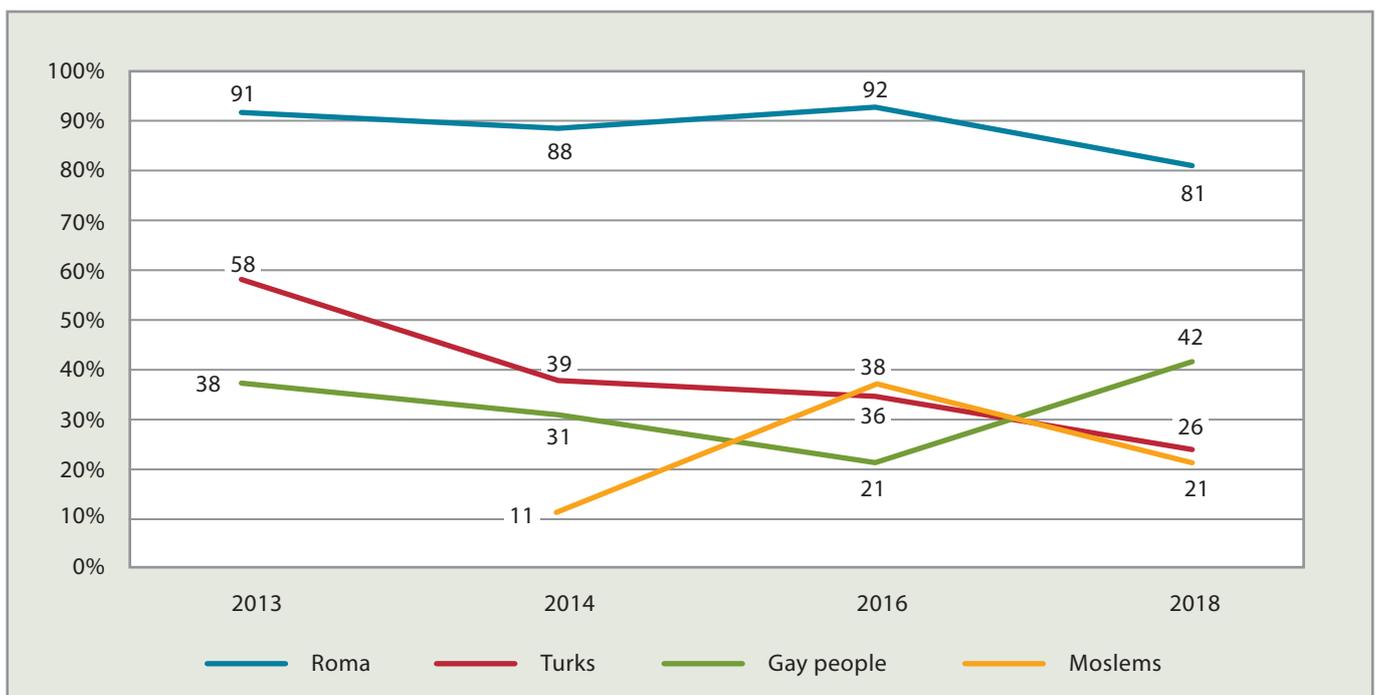


Question: *If you have answered “yes” to the first question, which is the group against whom you have heard most often public statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression?*

With regard to the minority groups that have been most frequently perceived as targets of hate speech, there is no difference compared to the findings of the surveys in 2014 and 2016. In 2013 only three minority groups were registered that were perceived by the re-

spondents as a prominent targets of hate speech: the Roma, Turks and gay people. The survey in 2014 added foreigners to these three groups as a frequent target of hate speech due to the tide of xenophobic public statements following the increased influx of refugees and

Figure 7. Dynamics among the main targets of hate speech



Question: *If you have answered “yes” to the first question, which is the group against whom you have heard most often public statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression?*

migrants into the country after the autumn of 2013. In 2016 Moslems quickly rose to prominence as a target of hate speech and thus the group of the five above-mentioned minorities was formed as the ones that have been regarded by people as the most frequent targets of hate speech, as confirmed by the findings from 2018 (Fig. 6).

With regard to the importance of the affected minority groups, public attitudes in 2018 significantly differ compared to data from 2016. Between 2016 and 2018 gay people were the only group subject to growing hate speech; if in 2016 21% had heard hate speech against gay people, in 2018 their share increased to 42%, the latter being the highest percentage established in the four surveys. Incidence of hate speech towards the other groups such as the Roma, Moslems, Turks and foreigners has decreased between 2016 and 2018. The main reason for the sharp increase in incidence of hate speech against gay people has to do with the public debate in the first months of 2018 about the ratification of the Council of Europe’s Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Even though the convention aims at ensuring a legal framework of protection of women against all forms of violence, certain political and media circles have taken advantage of it to inflame homophobic sentiments. The

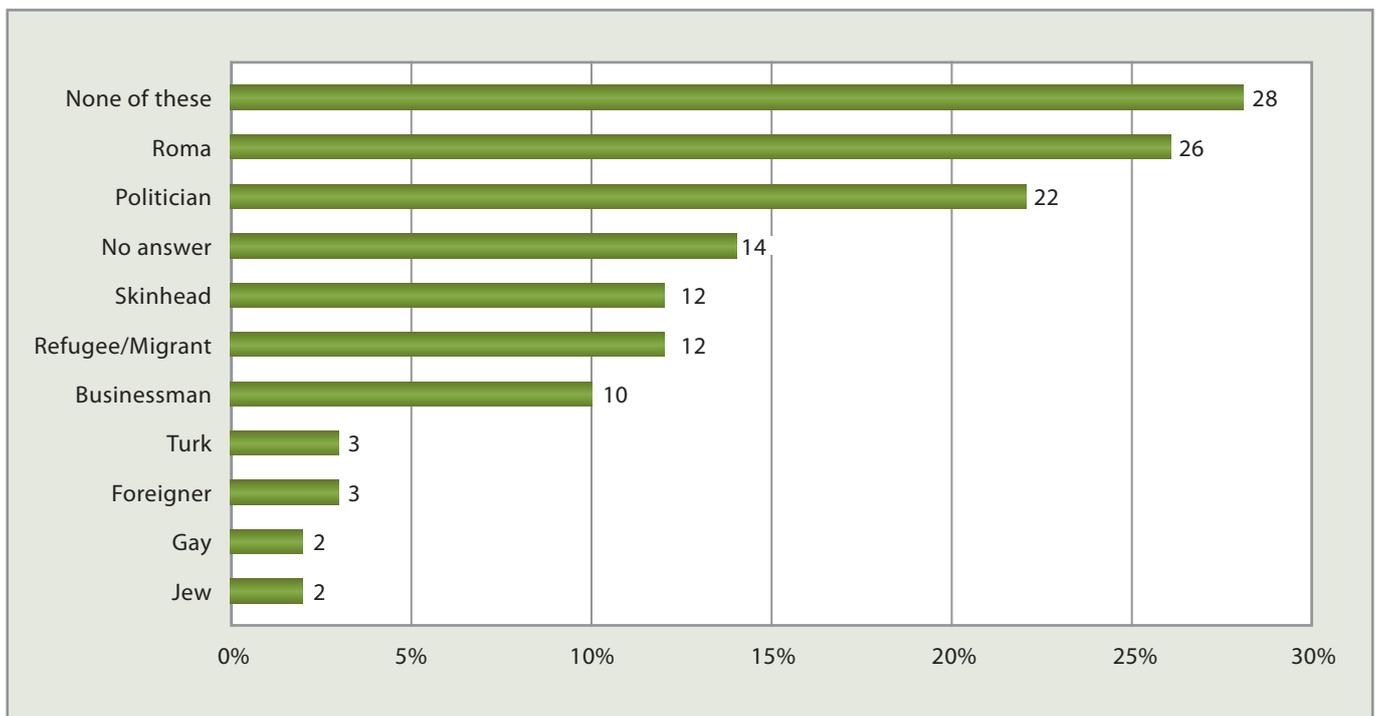
media deliberately spread disinformation, claiming that the Convention opened the way to legalization of same-sex marriages and thus to undermining “traditional” national values related to marriage and family.

As mentioned above, between 2016 and 2018 public perceptions of incidence of hate speech against the other tested minority groups dropped. Reports of instances of hate speech against the Roma dropped by 10%, against Turks by 10% and against Moslems by 17%. In the overall monitored period, it is only the intensity of instances of hate speech against the Turks that has gone steadily down; in 2013, 58% of the respondents encountered hate speech against Turks; in 2016 the number fell to 36% and in 2018 to 26% (Fig. 7).

POPULARITY OF SOME NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF MINORITIES

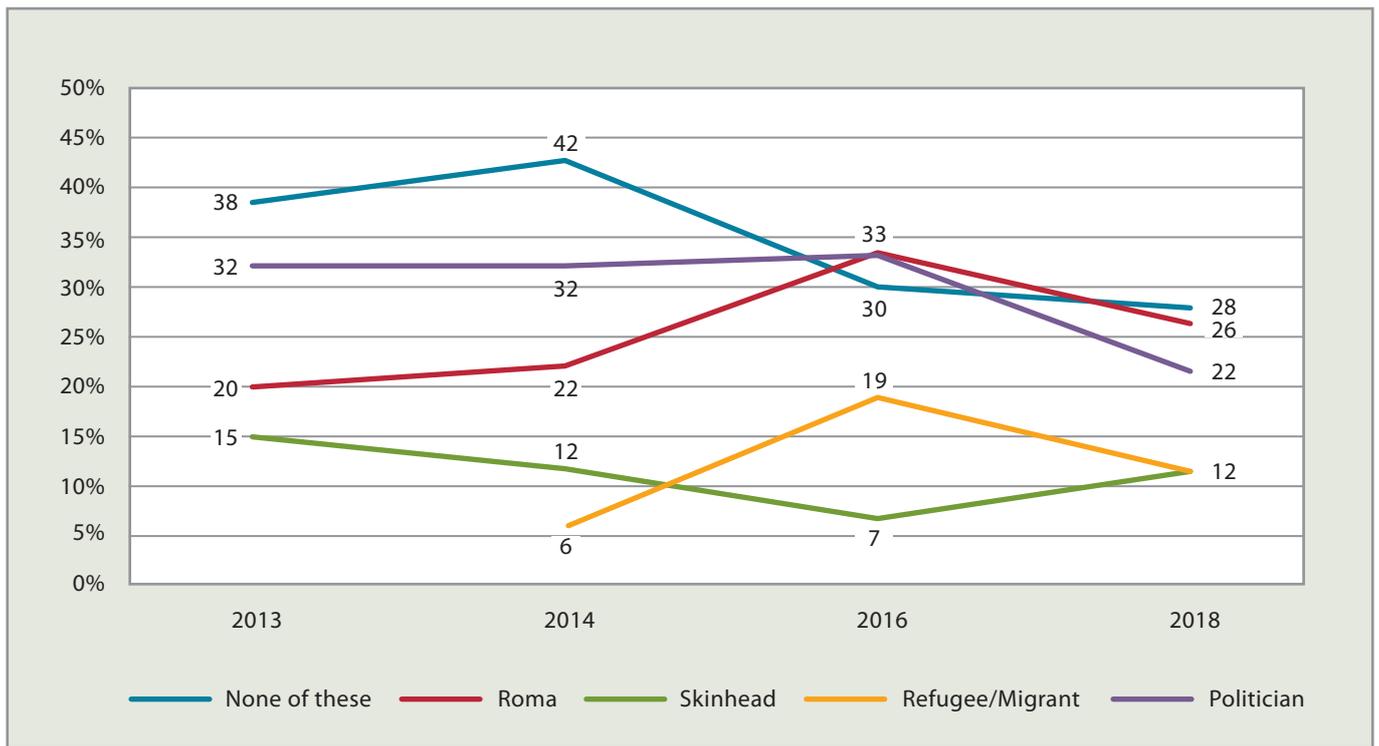
One of the main manifestations of hate speech is instilling and justifying negative stereotypes about groups of people, drawing dividing lines between them and the majority based on race, skin colour, origin, na-

Figure 8. Most common associations with a “criminal” in 2018



Question: Which of the mentioned groups of people would you associate with the word “criminal”?

Figure 9. Dynamics in the most common associations of “criminal”



Question: Which of the mentioned groups of people would you associate with the word “criminal”?

tional or ethnic belonging, etc.¹⁶ Two of the most common stereotypes in this respect are that certain minority groups are more prone to committing crimes than others and therefore are a threat to the majority. The survey has tested the incidence of these two stereotypes by studying the frequency of associating terms such as “criminal” and “threat” with some of the minority groups that have been perceived traditionally as targets of hate speech.

In 2018 the largest share of respondents (28%) said that they did not associate the word “criminal” with any of the minority groups in question. However, one in four (26% of the respondents) reported that they associated the word “criminal” most often with the word “Roma”; 12% associated “criminal” with “refugee/migrant” and just as much with “skinheads”. The same association is less frequent with other of the tested minority groups: for instance, only 2% of the respondents associated “criminal” with “Jew” or “gay”.

The spread of negative stereotypes against minority groups goes in parallel with a decline in public trust in politicians: “politician” is the second most widespread association of the word “criminal”: one in five (22% of the

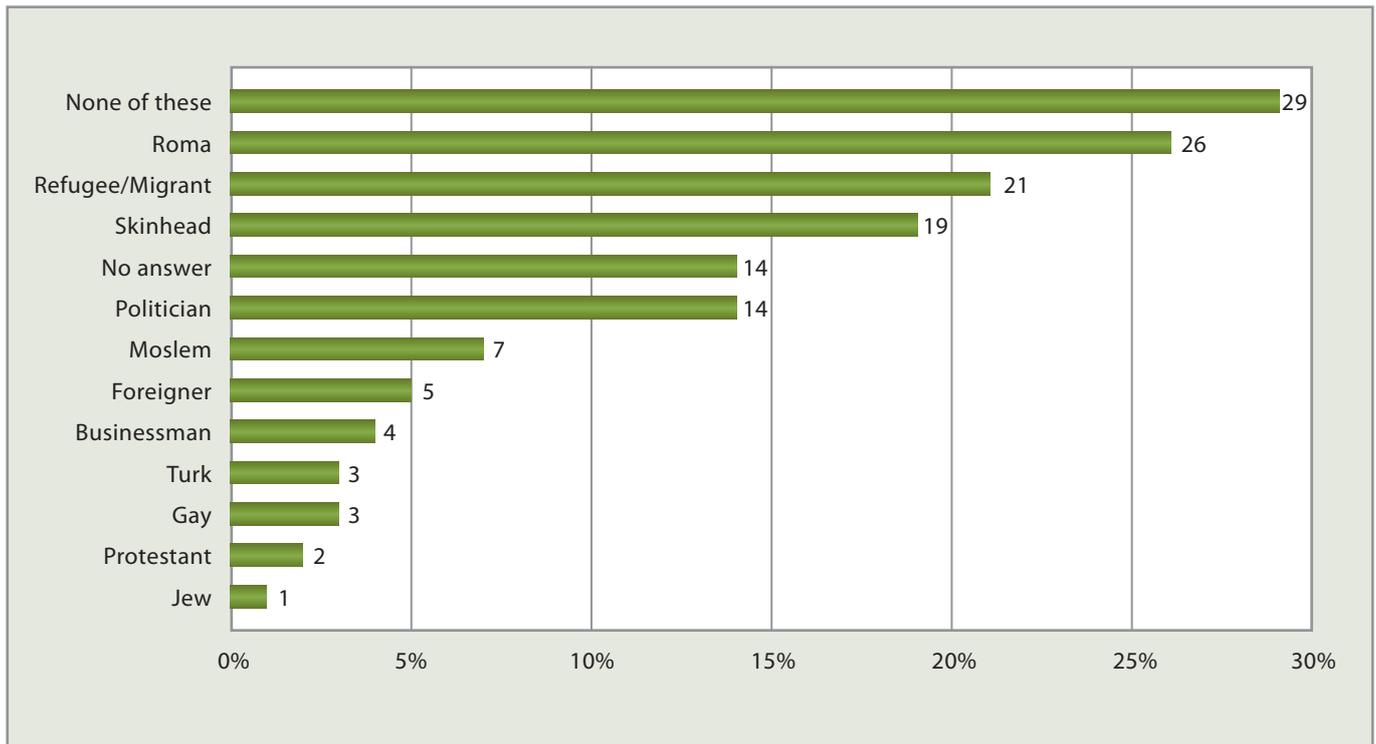
respondents) associate the word “criminal” with a “politician” (Fig. 8). As mentioned in previous surveys, the latter association poses serious challenges to policies to counteract hate speech: such policies cannot be imposed by politicians enjoying low popularity.

The largest group of respondents, those who do not associate the word “criminal” with any of the tested minority groups (or deem it less respectable to give such an answer), has decreased from 38% (2013) to 28% (2018) (Fig. 9). It is possible to read these data as a sign of concerning radicalization of the majority but this hypothesis should be examined during the next survey. The explanation might have to do with the survey itself: in 2018 the respondents had for the first time the opportunity to leave each of the questions without an answer and 14% of the respondents chose to leave without an answer the questions about associations of the words “criminal” and “threat”. However, it is indicative that this is the only question that has been left without an answer by such a high number of the respondents, i.e. the answer is clear but the respondents believe that it is not prestigious to articulate it.

Between 2016 and 2018 the share of those who associated “refugee/migrant” with a “threat” fell from 31% to 21% and those who associated “skinhead” with a threat slightly increased from 11% in 2016 to 19% in 2018.

¹⁶ See the Preamble of Policy Recommendation N°15 of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on fighting hate speech, adopted on 8.12.2016.

Figure 10. Most common associations with a “threat” in 2018



Question: *Which of the mentioned groups of people would you associate with the word “threat”?*

The biggest share of respondents (29%) do not associate any of the tested social groups with a “threat”. One in four associates “Roma” with a “threat”, one in five associates “refugee/migrant” with a threat. However, the share of respondents associating “refugees/migrants” with a “threat” equals the share of those associating “skinheads/neo-Nazis” with a “threat”, i.e. radical youth, extreme right and Neo-Nazi movements also pose a certain risk in public perception and the risk is similar in scale to the extent to which certain minorities are perceived as risky.

Among the respondents who identify themselves as Roma, the share of those who associate “skinheads/neo-Nazis” with a “threat” is similar to the share of the self-identified Bulgarians who make the same association; among the respondents who identify themselves as Turks, the share of those associating “skinheads/neo-Nazis” with a “threat” is lower than the national average. Associating “skinheads/neo-Nazis” with a threat depends less on ethnicity and more on three other factors: place of residence, age and education. Among the respondents who live in Sofia City and among people with higher education, the share of those associating “skinheads/neo-Nazis” with a “threat” is approximately 10% higher than the average; this share is also slightly higher than the national average among working-age people; in con-

trast, such association is not that widespread among lower educated people, village residents and people aged over 60.

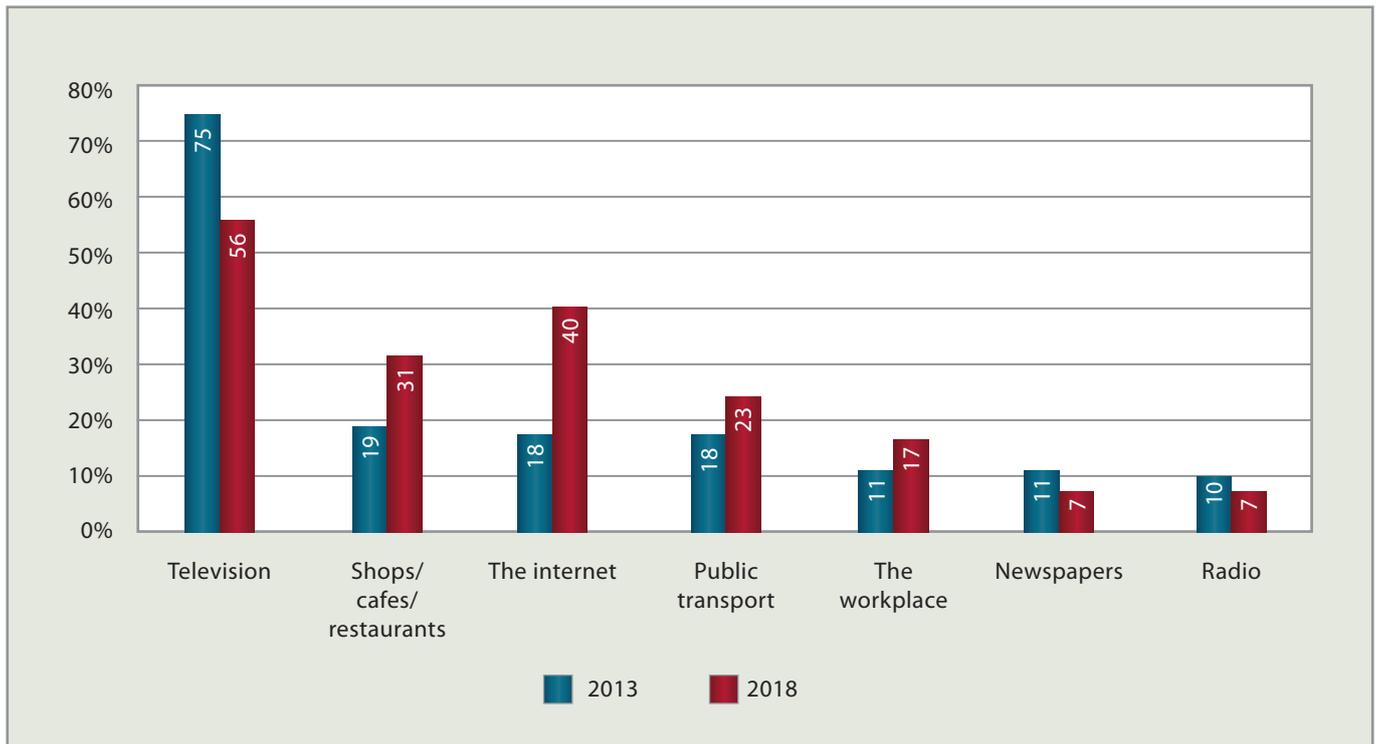
With regard to associations with a “threat”, just as with “criminal”, the share of the majority of people, those that do not associate anyone with a “threat”, has visibly gone down over the last five years between the first and the latest survey: in 2013, 40% of the respondents reported not to associate any of the tested groups with a “threat”, in 2018 this number fell to 29% (Fig. 10).

MEDIA OF HATE SPEECH

In 2018 the respondents who had heard hate speech over the last year, did it most often on television – 56%, in the internet – 40%, in shops and cafes – 31% and on the public transport – 23% (Fig. 11).

Considerable change can be observed in the 5-year period of the survey: in 2013 television was the main medium for dissemination of hate speech, while fewer than 20% of the respondents mentioned each of the other media and public places (the workplace, shops, cafes and

Figure 11. Media of hate speech



Question: *If you have answered “yes” to the first question, where did you hear most often public statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression against minorities?*

the public transport). The importance of television over the last five years has decreased; television remains relatively important only for the elderly (69% people aged over 60 who have heard hate speech have done it from television) and less educated (71% of people with primary or lower education who have heard hate speech have done it from television).

The role of the internet as a medium for dissemination of hate speech has gone up among the broader public, most importantly among young people: people aged 18-29 are the only age group for whom the internet is a more powerful medium of hate speech than television. Among young people who report to have heard hate speech over the last year, 70% have done it in the internet and only 45% on television. The importance of the internet as a medium of hate speech has also been slightly higher among the best educated; 55% of the people with university or college education who have heard hate speech over the last year have done it in the internet and 53% – on television.

The incidence of hate speech in public places and places meeting (shops/cafes and restaurants, the pub-

lic transport and the workplace) has been on the rise: in 2013 19% of those who reported to have come across hate speech did it in shops, restaurants or cafes, 18% – on the public transportation vehicles. In 2018 the share of people who had come across hate speech in shops, restaurants and cafes was 31%, and 23% on the public transport. For the elderly and the less educated, shops, cafes and the public transport are much more important places for dissemination of hate speech than the internet. Among people with primary and lower education who have heard instances of hate speech over the last year, 71% did it on television, 50% in the shops, restaurants and cafes, 21% on the public transport and only 14% in the internet. Uncurbed, hate speech spreads from the media to public and meeting places and the risk of escalation of violence is much higher in such places. It is concerning that over the five-year-period, ever since we first established in 2013 that the public transport and the workplace are important places for dissemination of hate speech, no public policies have been adopted to counteract it neither on central, nor on local level.

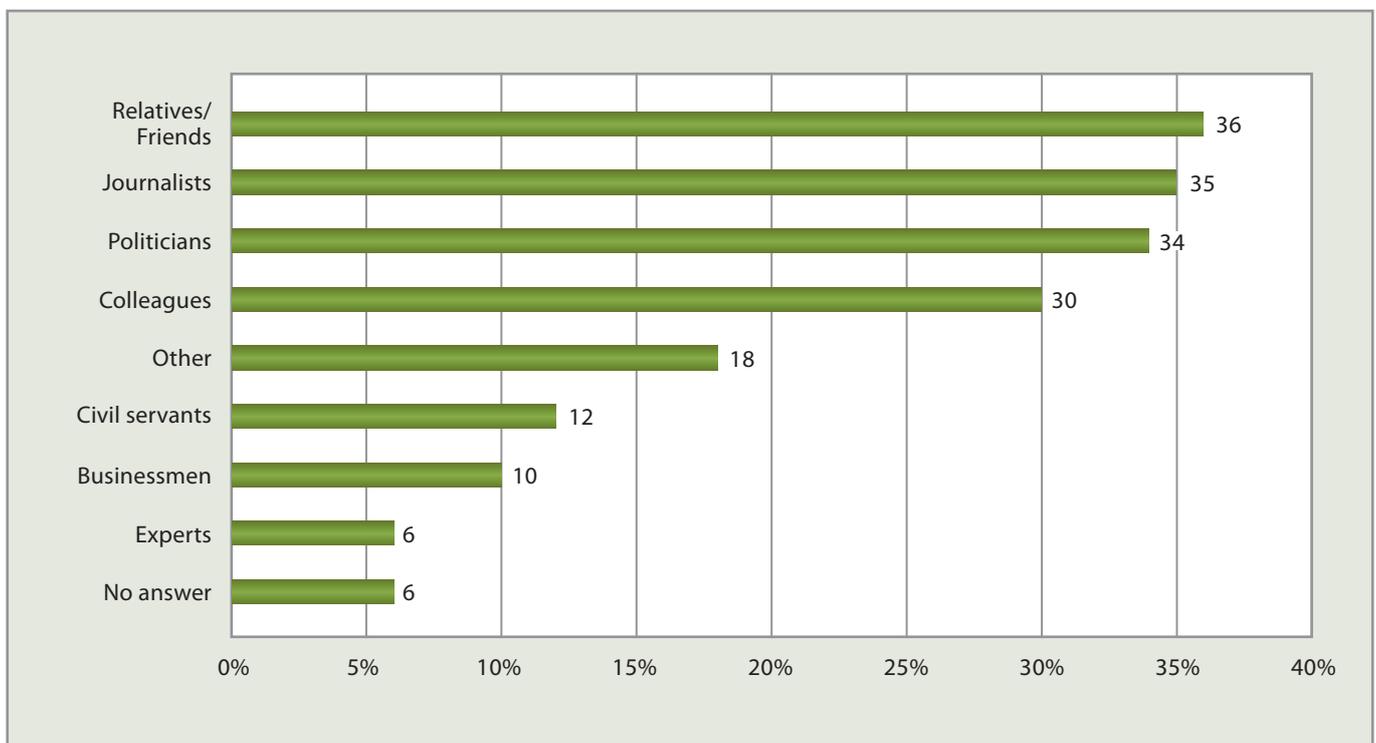
PROPAGATORS OF HATE SPEECH

In 2018 four important groups were identified who seemed to be most often involved in the use of hate speech: about a third of the people who reported to have heard hate speech over the last year did it most often from relatives and friends, journalists, politicians and colleagues, i.e. the phenomenon is present in both public and private life and is one of the many symptoms of actual blurring of boundaries between public and private. Such blurring is related to the rise of social media and the weakening of some of the major tools of control over the public sphere. This blurring involves both the change among the topics that can be a subject of public (political) discourse in the past and now and the language style that is deemed to be publicly acceptable in the past and now. If at the beginning of the survey (2013) it seemed that hate speech was limited to some of the media and politicians of marginal importance, then in 2018 the circle of important propagators of hate speech also covers civil servants (12% of the people who have heard hate

speech over the last year have done it from civil servants) and speakers that are perceived as “experts” – 6% of the ones, who have heard hate speech, have done it from “experts” (Fig. 12).

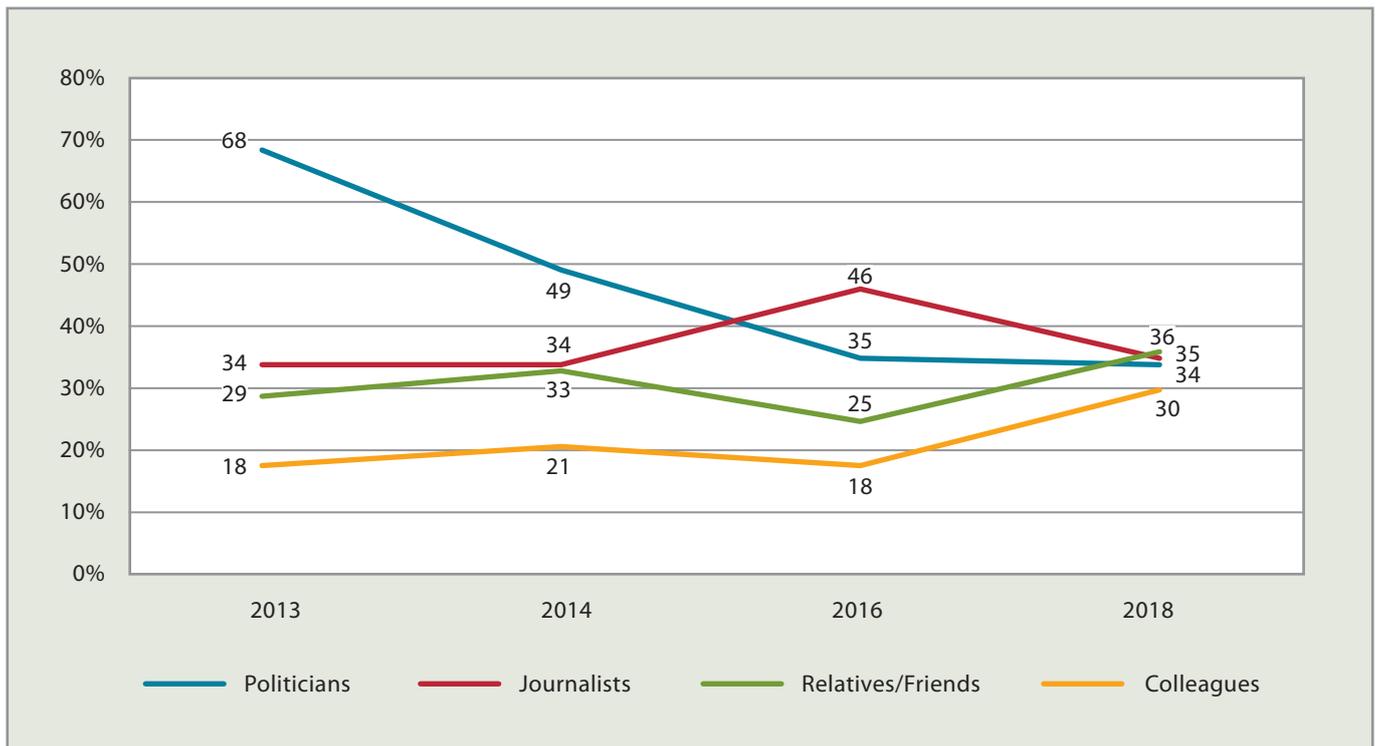
Politicians have steadily lost their prominence as hate speech propagators compared to 2013: if in 2013, 68% of the people, who reported hearing hate speech during the year, did it from politicians, in 2018 their share fell to 34%. The share of those who have heard hate speech from colleagues has increased from 18% in 2013 to 30% in 2018. The share of those who have heard hate speech from relatives or friends has risen from 29% in 2013 to 36% in 2018 (Fig. 13). It does not necessarily mean that politicians used more hate speech in 2013 compared to the close circle of colleagues, relatives or friends. It is true that for the three nationalist parties in particular that are currently part of the government, their rise to power was associated with a certain softening of the tone and limiting explicitly racist and xenophobic statements. However, a much more likely assumption is that politicians are heard less and less by the public; other powerful opinion leaders have emerged with the rise of social media; the latter shape opinion and cannot be clearly identified: the

Figure 12. Propagators of hate speech in 2018



Question: *Who have you heard most often make statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression against members of minorities? The respondents select every answer that applies.*

Figure 13. Dynamics among hate speech propagators



Question: *Who have you heard most often make statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression against members of minorities? The respondents select every answer that applies.*

majority of hate speech disseminated in the internet cannot be traced back to a particular source, i.e. a physical person with a specific profession.

INCIDENCE OF HATE SPEECH ENCOURAGING VIOLENT ACTS

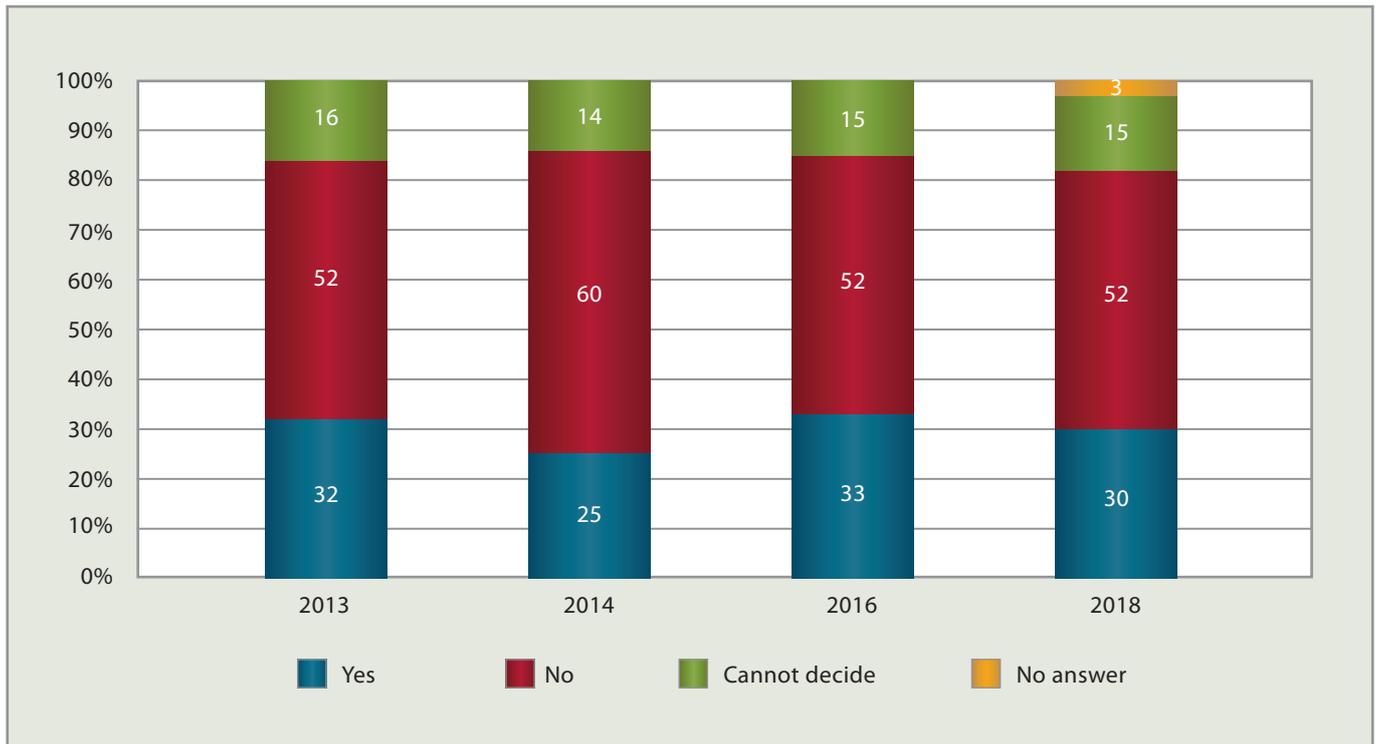
The share of people who have heard over the last year statements that, in their opinion, might incite violence against members of minority groups steadily accounts for one third of the respondents (Fig. 14). One in third reports to have heard over the last year statements made in public that might encourage violence targeted at members of minority groups. This share has remained unchanged in the last five years and, together with increased importance of public places as venues of hate speech, points to the alarmingly high likelihood of transformation of hate speech instances into physical forms of aggression against certain individuals.

Even though the share of respondents who report to have heard most extreme instances of hate speech in

the last year have not changed significantly in the last five years, the share of people who feel personally and physically threatened by certain forms of public discourse have been steadily on the rise. In 2018 one in ten reported that they had heard in the last year statements made by politicians and journalists that left them with a feeling that they personally might become a victim of violence. In 2013 and 2014 the share of respondents who felt personally threatened by hate speech was 4%, in 2016 – 7%, and in 2018 it rose to 10 % (Fig. 15). The increased share of people who feel personally threatened by hate speech reflects the increased number of minority groups that are most often perceived as a target of hate speech and testifies to the low efficiency of national law enforcement authorities in investigation and prosecution of hate speech.

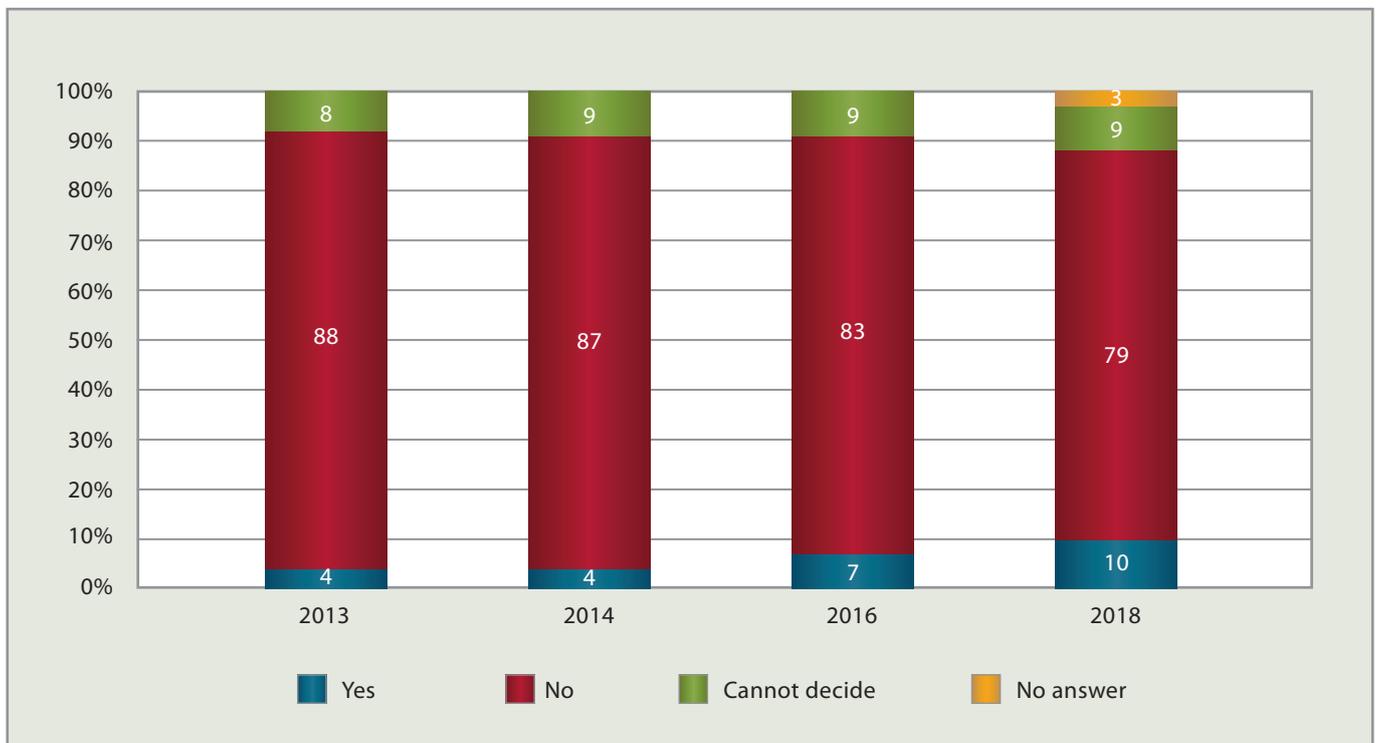
Data from the survey in 2018 confirm the findings established from the previous surveys that there is a much larger number of people among the respondents who identify themselves as Roma who report feeling personally under threat from specific statements of politicians and journalists. In 2018 16% of the respondents who identified themselves as Roma felt personally under a physical threat from specific statements made by jour-

Figure 14. Incidence of hate speech, promoting violence



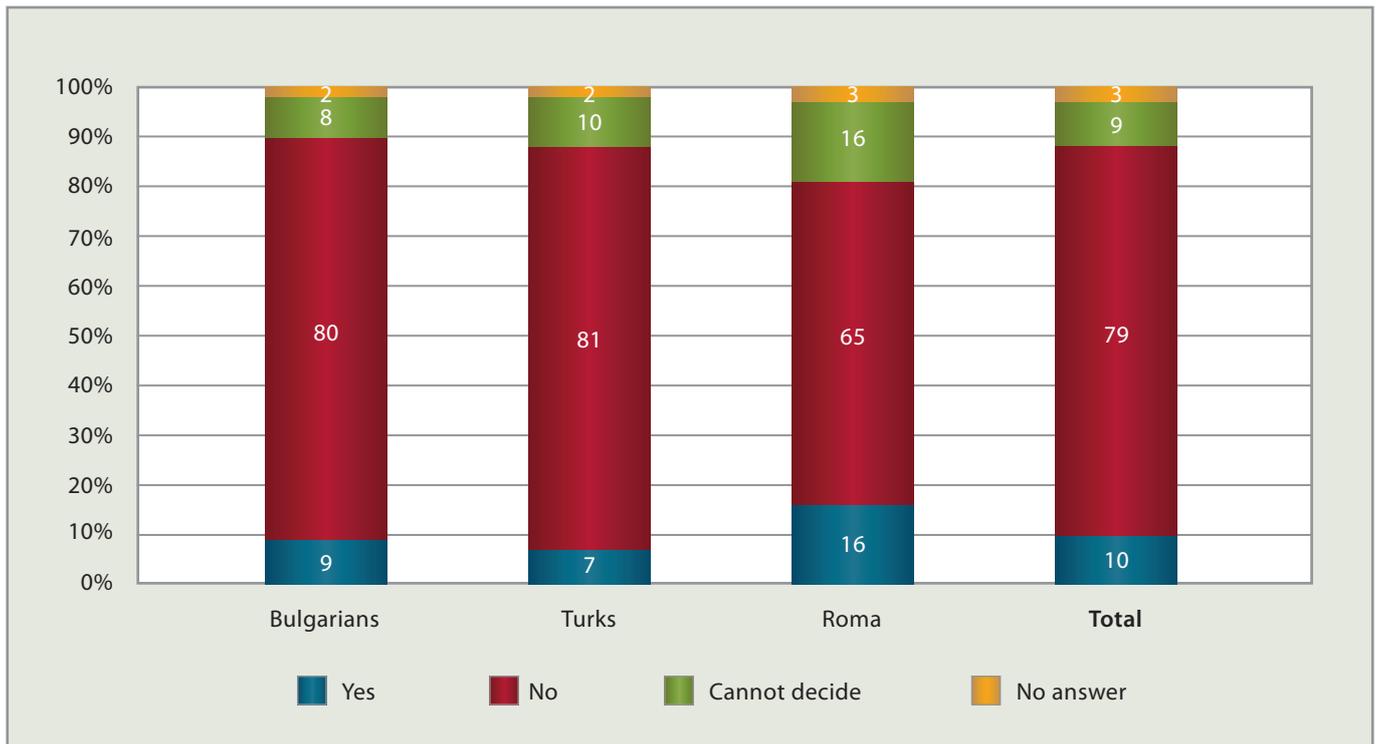
Question: *In the last 12 months have you heard public statements, which in your opinion could incite violence against members of minorities?*

Figure 15. Incidence of hate speech, creating a sense of threat



Question: *In the last 12 months have you had instances when particular statements made by politicians and journalists have made you feel personally that you are under a physical threat, that you might be a target of aggression or violence?*

Figure 16. Incidence of hate speech, creating a sense of threat in 2018 – Influence of ethnic background



Question: *In the last 12 months have you had instances when particular statements of politicians or journalists made you feel personally under a physical threat, that you might be a target of aggression or violence?*

nalists or politicians compared to the average 10%. In 2016 the share of such people among the respondents who identified themselves as Roma was 23%, i.e. more than three times higher than the average (Fig. 16).

ATTITUDES TOWARDS CRIMINALIZATION OF HATE SPEECH AND HATE CRIMES

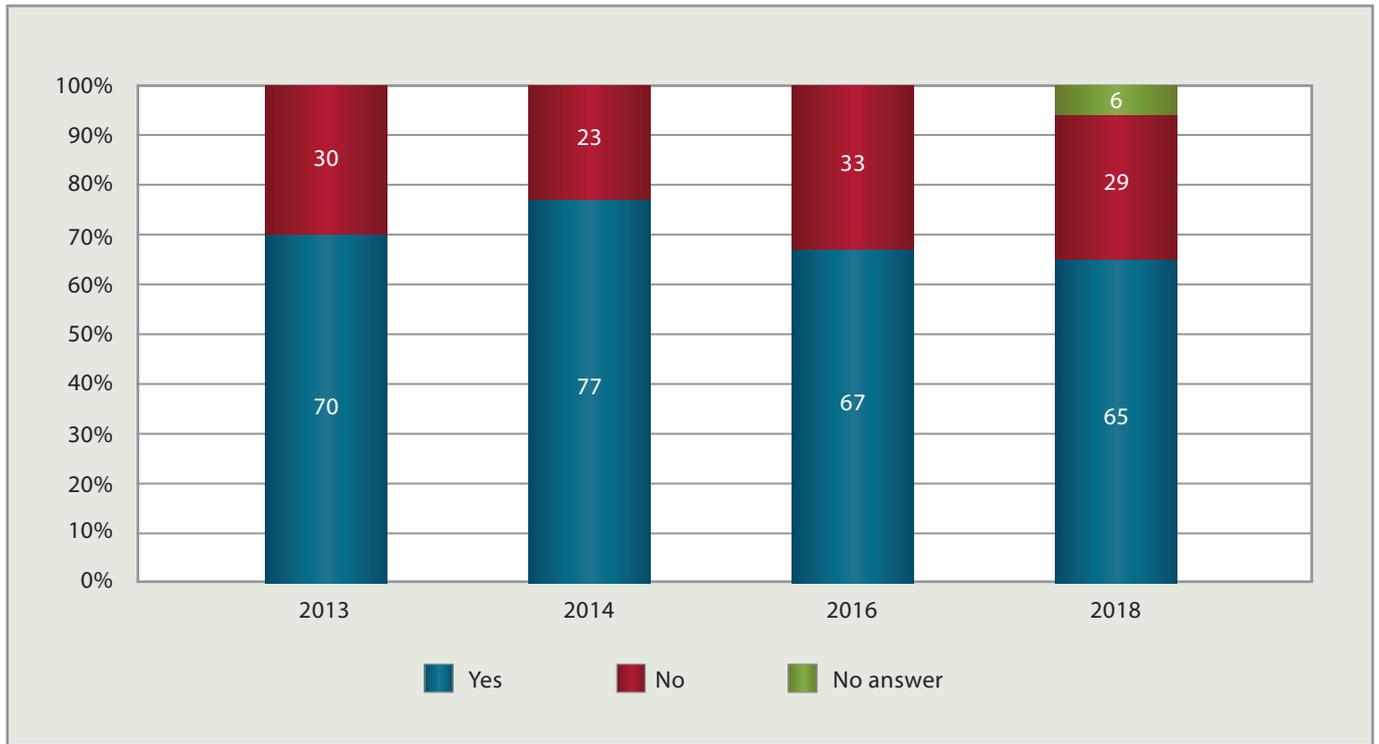
Article 162, paragraph 1, of the Bulgarian Penal Code criminalizes the most extreme forms of hate speech. With the amendments made in 2009 and 2011, the actus reus of the offence covers exhorting or inciting to discrimination, violence or hatred based on race, nationality or ethnic origin by oral or written word or via other media, electronic information systems or otherwise. The four surveys carried out so far show that approximately a third of the respondents are persistently unaware of such a crime. 2018 registered the lowest number of respondents who said that they were aware that preach-

ing or inciting to racial or national hatred constituted a crime; they accounted for 65% of the interviewed; this is a significant drop compared to 2014 when 77% of the interviewed answered that they were aware of this crime (Fig. 17).

The situation is similar with regard to the crimes under Article 162, para 2 and 3 of the Penal Code. Paragraph 2 criminalizes violence or damage inflicted on personal property on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnic origin, religion or political belief, while paragraph 3 criminalizes creating groups to commit the crimes under Article 162, para 1 or 2 of the Penal Code. One in four respondents does not know that these acts constitute a crime. The share of those who respond that they are aware that such acts are criminal is 72% (about the crime under para 2) and 67% (about the crime under para 3) and once again these are the lowest levels registered during the four surveys carried out since 2013 (Fig. 18).

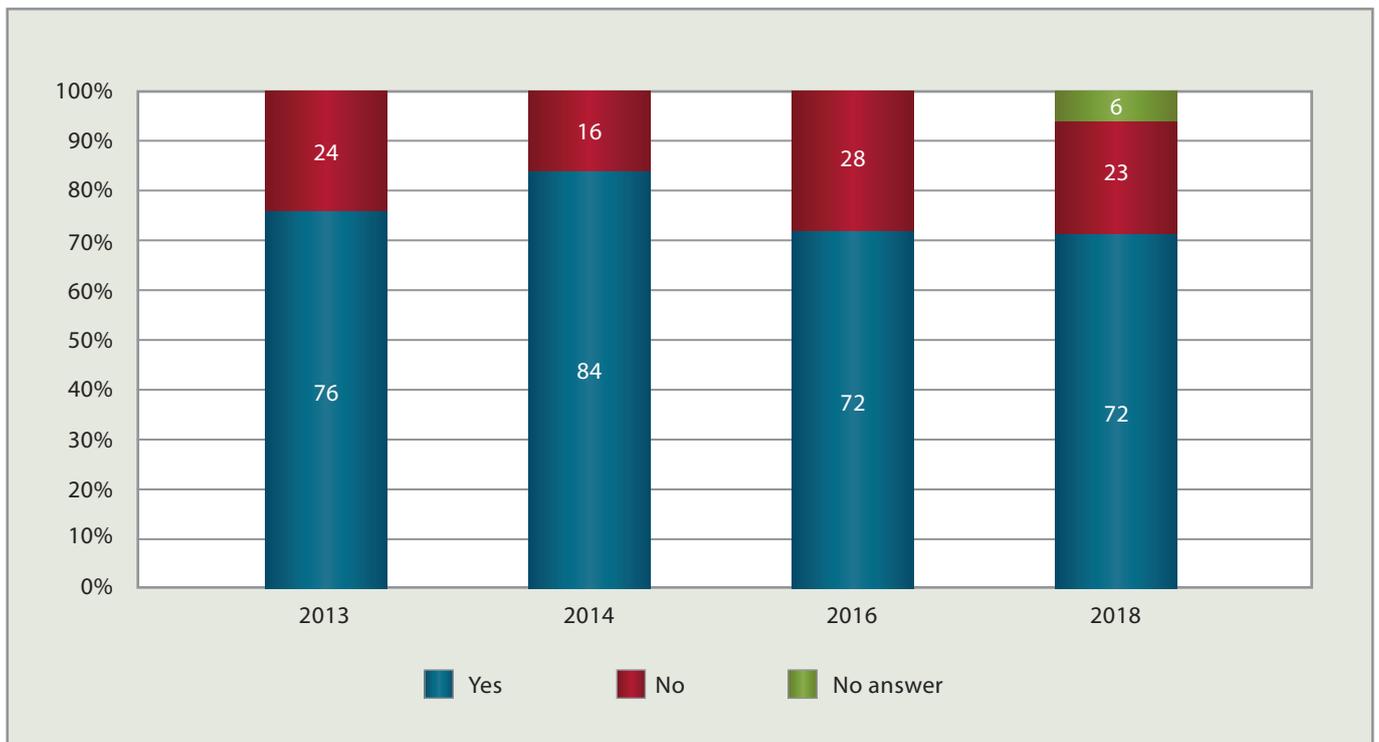
The survey also tests to what extent the public is aware of the fact that propagating fascist or other anti-democratic ideology in Bulgaria also constitutes a crime (Article 108 of the Penal Code). In 2018 about a third of the respondents did not know that exhorting fascist or other anti-democratic ideology was a crime. Only 64% of

Figure 17. Inciting hatred as a crime



Question: *Do you know that preaching and inciting to racial or national hostility or hatred or racial discrimination constitutes a crime in Bulgaria (Article 162, para 1 of the Penal Code)?*

Figure 18. Hate crimes (Article 162, paragraph 2 of the Penal Code)



Question: *Do you know that violence inflicted on a person or damage to private property on the grounds of his or hers different nationality, race, religion or political belief constitute a crime in Bulgaria?*

the people know about such a crime and this is the lowest share for the four surveys carried out so far in the last 5 years. With regard to public awareness about exhorting Fascist and anti-democratic ideology as a crime, considerable decrease has been registered compared to 2014 when 80% of the respondents reported to be aware that such acts constitute crimes and even compared to 2013 when 70% did so (Fig. 19).

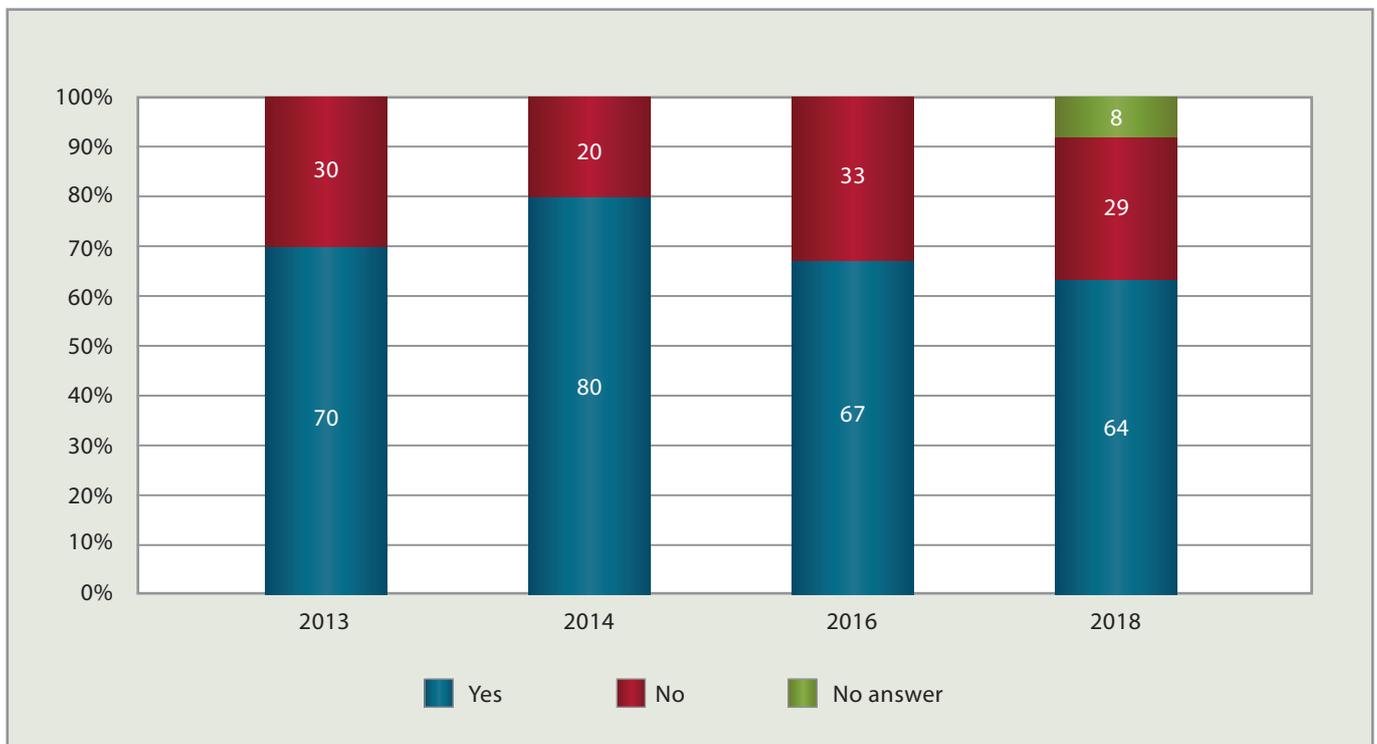
Certain demographic factors have impact on recognizing hate speech, propagation of fascist or anti-democratic ideology in general and hate-motivated violence as crimes. The most significant difference has to do with the education level of the respondents. With regard to the crime under Article 162, paragraph 2 of the Penal Code (violence or damage to the property of a person on the grounds of the person’s different nationality, race, religion or political belief), only 15% of the respondents with university or college education are not aware that it is a crime compared to twice as many people (31%) among the respondents with primary or lower education who are not aware that it is a crime (Fig. 20). Difference in education level has a bearing on differences in employment that are less considerable but still important: 21% of the employed respondents are not aware that it is a

crime compared to 34% of the unemployed (who also have lower education) who are not aware. Prominent differences can be observed on a regional level as well: 41% of the residents in the North Western Region are not aware of the crime under Article 162, paragraph 2, of the Penal Code compared to only 14% in the North Eastern Region. The same differences can be observed with regard to public awareness of the four crimes mentioned in the survey.

We can therefore assume that the decreased number of people who are aware that the most extreme forms of hate speech are criminalized has to do with limited access to good education. However, the decreased number is also a sign of the normalization of hate speech as part of public life: in a situation in the last five years where approximately half and more of the respondents have come across instances of hate speech every year but there was not a visible response of the law enforcement authorities, a growing number of people start perceiving hate speech as acceptable and normal behaviour.

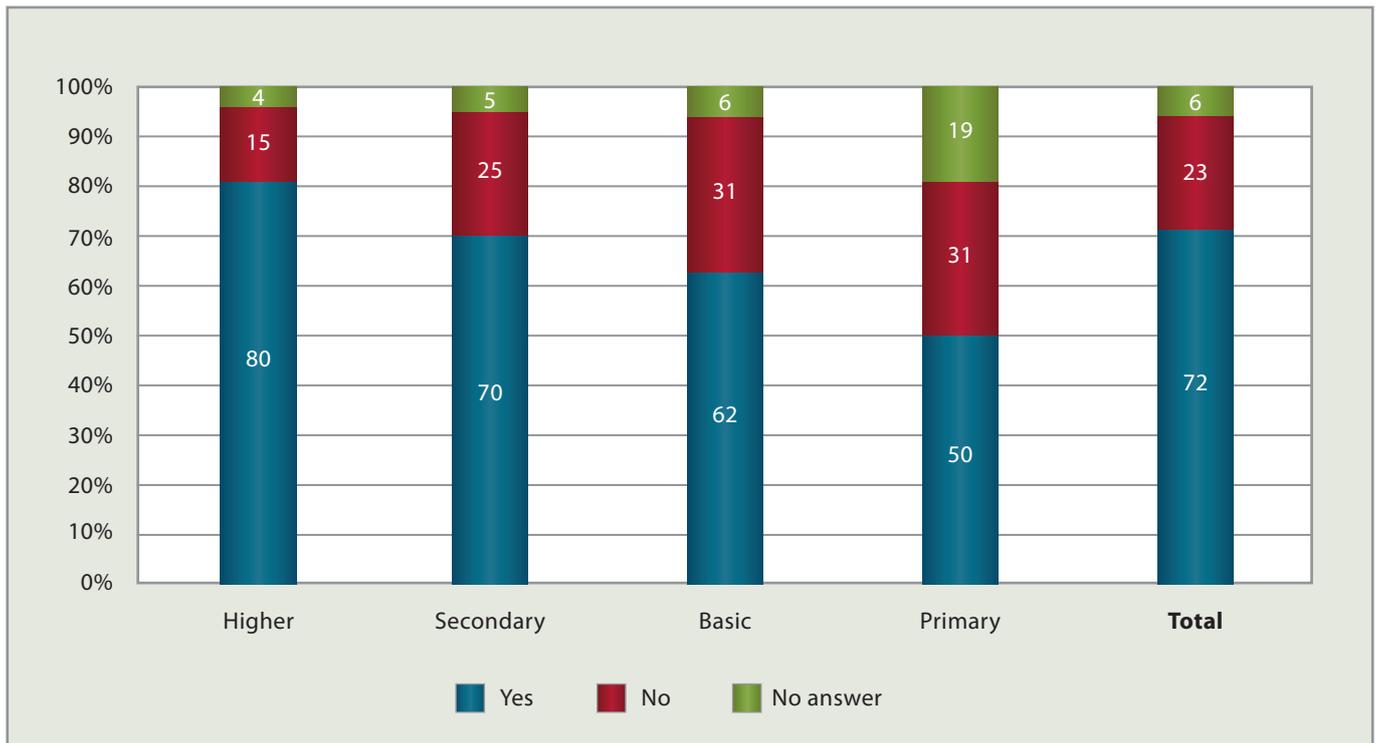
Although between a fifth and a third of the respondents are not aware that certain forms of hate speech are criminalized, in 2018 57% of the respondents agree that the prosecutor’s office has to prosecute politicians and

Figure 19. Crimes against the Republic



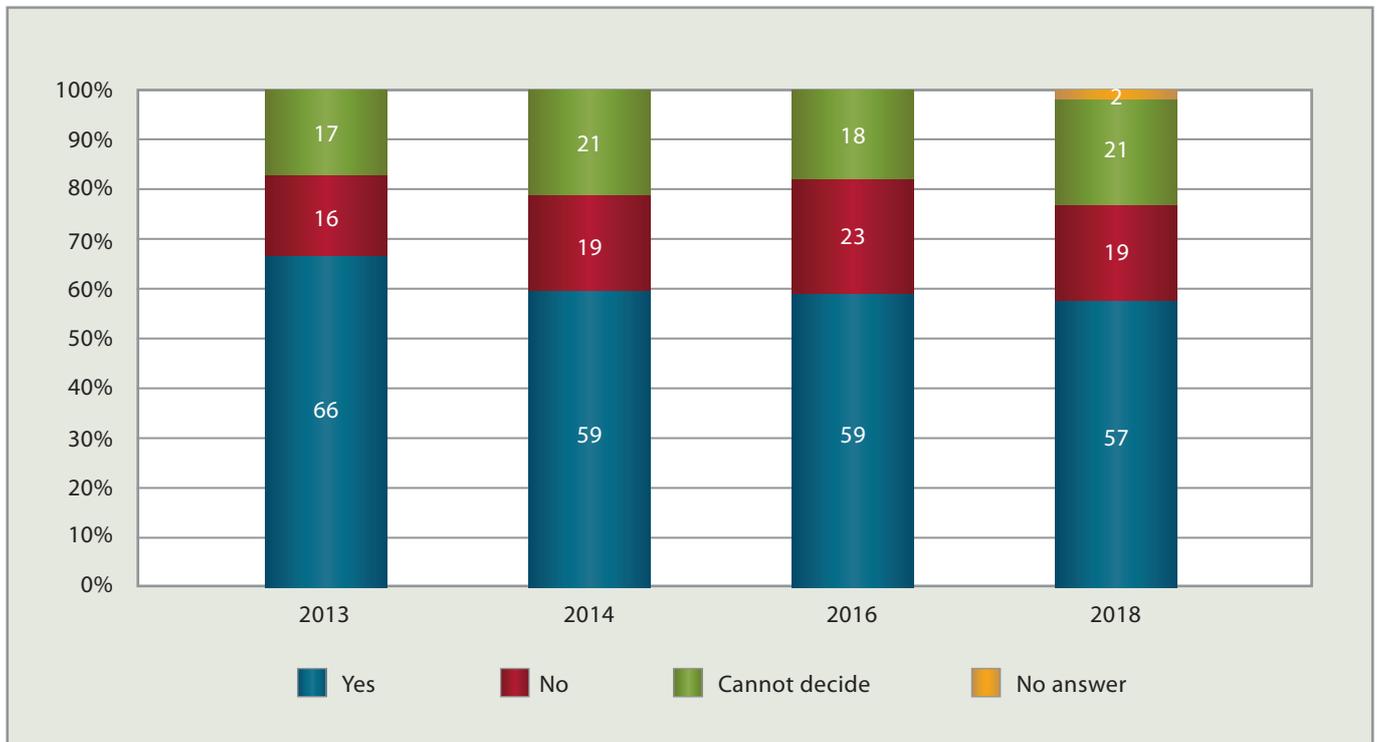
Question: *Do you know that propagating fascist or other anti-democratic ideology constitutes a crime in Bulgaria (Article 108 of the Penal Code)?*

Figure 20. Impact of education on recognition of hate crimes in 2018



Question: *Do you know that violence committed against a person or damage to private property on the grounds of his/ hers different nationality, race, religion or political belief constitutes a crime in Bulgaria (Article 162, para 2 of the Penal Code)?*

Figure 21. Public support for criminal prosecution of hate speech



Question: *Do you think that the prosecutor's office should initiate criminal proceedings against politicians and journalists who express in public disapproval, hatred or aggression against minorities?*

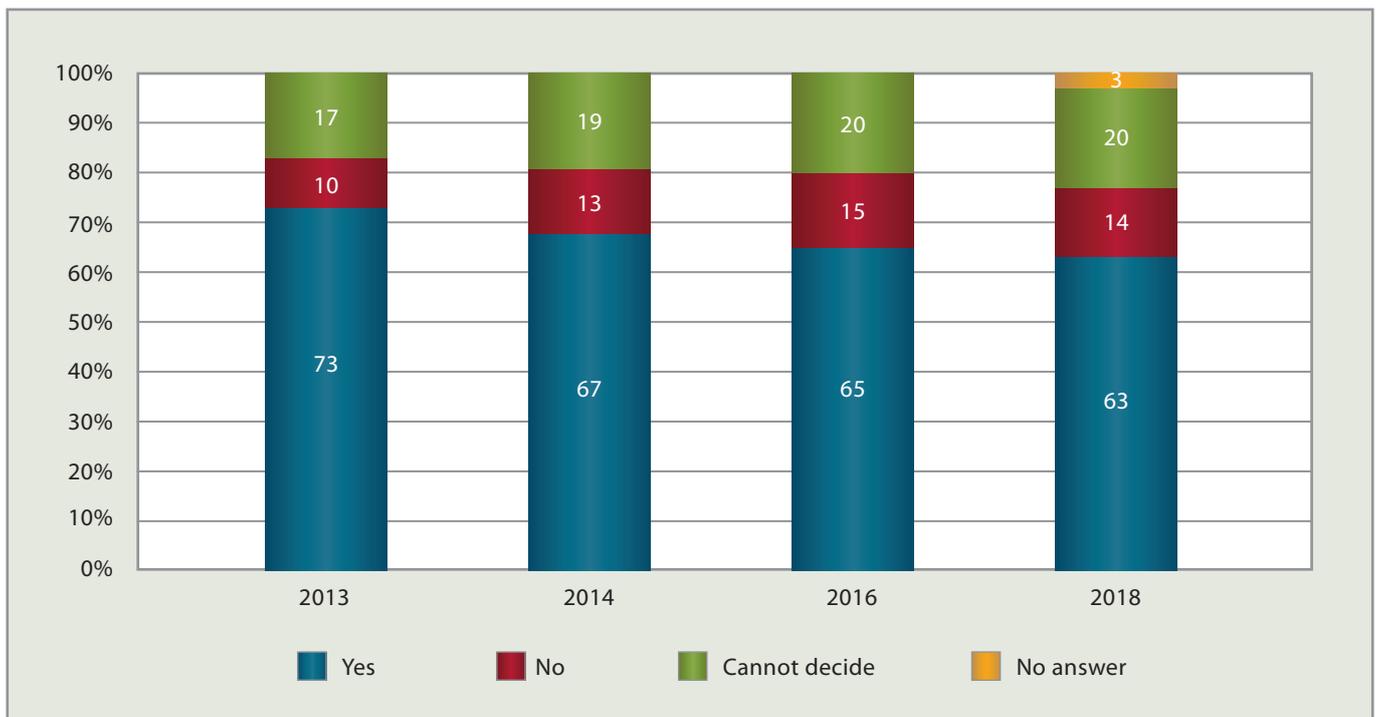
journalists for public statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression against members of various minority groups. However, compared to the first survey from 2013, it can be observed that the share of people who agree with this statement has decreased by 9% in the last five years. Just a fifth of the respondents (19%) are not in favour of criminal prosecution of politicians and journalists who use hate speech (Fig. 21).

The majority of the citizens are in favour of criminal prosecution of manifestations of aggressive nationalism as well. In 2018 63% agree that the prosecutor’s office should initiate proceedings against politicians and journalists who propagate aggressive nationalism. A negative trend can be observed again compared to data from 2013: in the last five years the number of people who agree that criminal proceedings should be initiated against manifestations of aggressive nationalism has fallen by 10% (Fig. 22). This development is probably due to three factors: hate speech in the years from 2013 to 2018 has been “normalized”, it has become a permanent feature of the media environment and it has evolved without any criminal proceedings initiated by the law enforcement authorities against the most blatant cases of hate speech used in public; nationalist political formations have taken a permanent seat in the National Assembly and since 2017 in the government as well, i.e.

they have become a part of the political mainstream; at the same time law enforcement authorities continue to be less than efficient in prosecution of any kind of “high-profile crime”: corruption, money laundering, abuse of the EU funds, etc., due to which they have been subject to monitoring and criticism by the European Commission. The inefficiency of law enforcement authorities to initiate criminal proceedings against hate speech and hate crimes is part of the overall crisis of the prosecutor’s office and the police. The failure of law enforcement authorities to respond to such crimes both makes the public lose trust in them as well as limits public support for criminal prosecution of the crime itself.

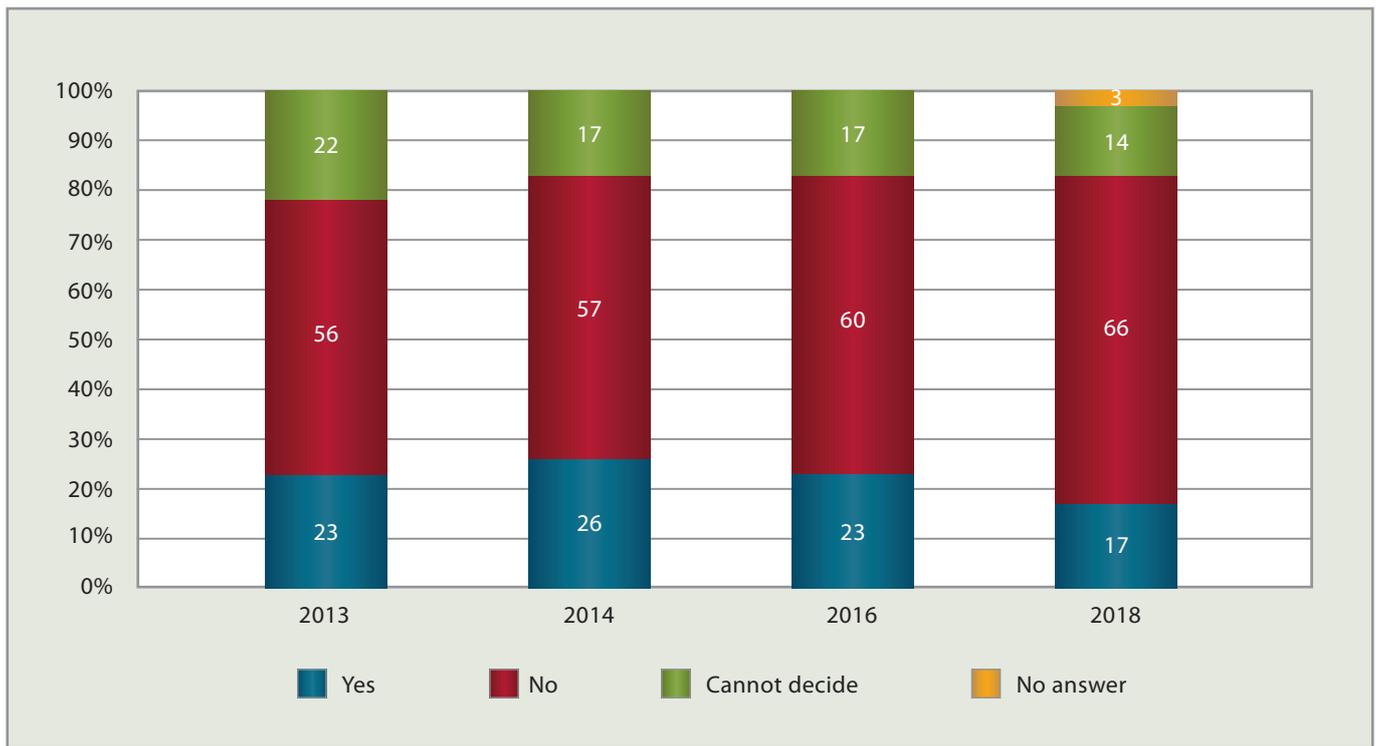
A conflict can be observed, as in previous surveys: on the one hand, the majority of the respondents agree that public use of hate speech should be criminally prosecuted; on the other hand, few of the respondents are willing to put in personal effort to curb its spread. In 2018 only 17% of the respondents said that they would report to the police any instance of hate speech they had witnessed. In comparison, in 2014 the share of people willing to report instances of hate speech to the authorities was 26%, i.e. four years of active presence of hate speech in public discourse and failure to investigate and prosecute this crime have resulted in a decrease of the percentage of citizens willing to report such instances by 9% (Fig. 23).

Figure 22. Public support for criminal prosecution of aggressive nationalism



Question: Do you think that the prosecutor’s office should initiate criminal proceedings against politicians and journalists who propagate aggressive nationalism?

Figure 23. Likelihood of reporting hate speech



Question: *Would you report to the police if you hear statements in public expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression towards minorities?*

Low willingness to report crime to the police is motivated both by the belief that the police will not respond (one in third of the people unwilling to report to the police believe it) and that hate speech is not a serious crime: 27% of the people who would not report to the police believe so. It comes as no surprise that passive attitudes to reporting the crime to the police dominate given the fact that a significant share of the respondents do not know that certain forms of hate speech are criminalized and the prosecutor’s office and the police do not particularly encourage reporting such crimes.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS STATE POLICIES TO CURB HATE SPEECH

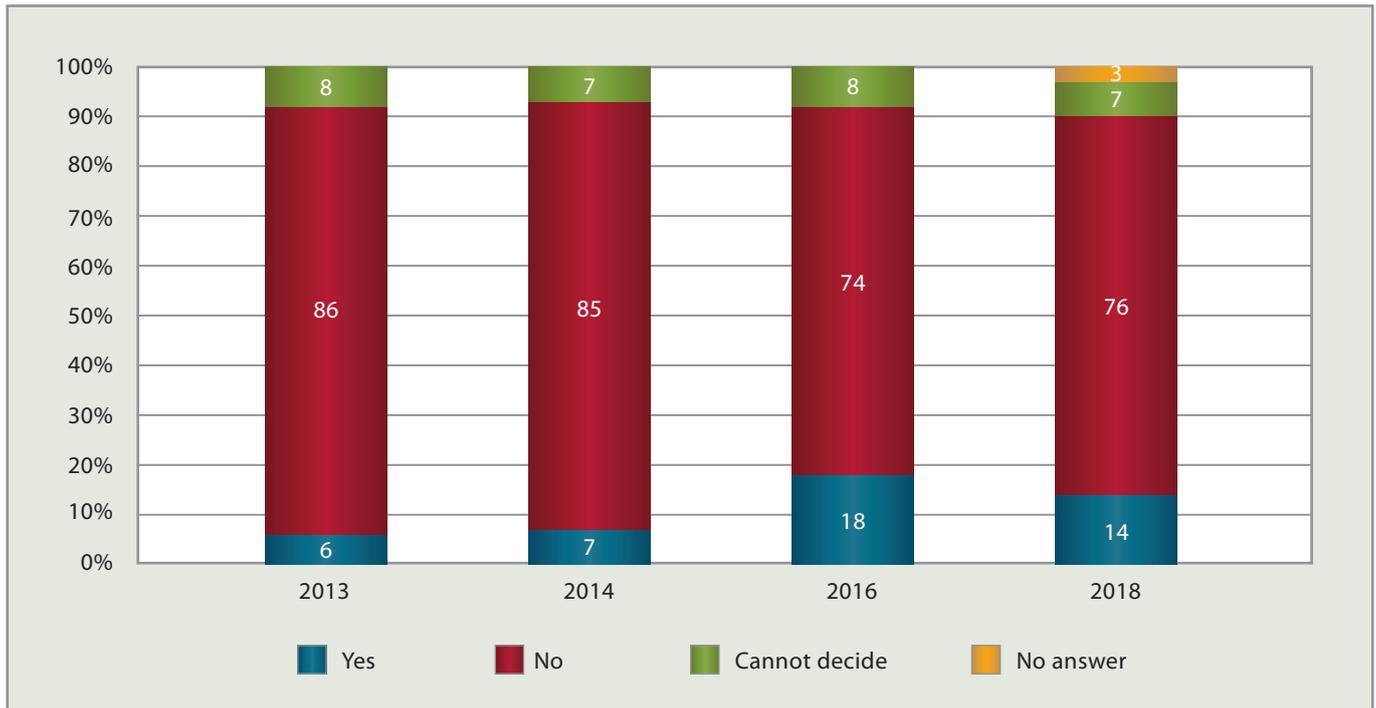
In 2018 three quarters of the respondents claimed that they did not approve of the public used of statements that express disapproval, hatred or aggression towards members of minority groups. Only 14% of the respondents said that were more likely or fully in favour of public use of hate speech. However, a negative trend has

been observed over the last five years since the survey has been carried out: the share of respondents who do not approve of public use of hate speech has fallen from 86% (in 2013) to 76% (2018). In 2018 the share of those who approve of public use of hate speech is twice as big compared to 2013 when only 6% of the respondents expressed approval (Fig. 24).

The people who report being in favour of public use of hate speech are relatively evenly distributed among the different demographic groups with some important exceptions: just 1% of the respondents who identify themselves as Roma approve of public use of hate speech; this share is 5% for those who identify themselves as Turks and 15% among those who identify themselves as Bulgarians. Approval of public use of hate speech is less widespread among lower educated respondents as well. Young people (aged 18–29) are slightly more likely to express approval of public use of hate speech; almost one in five (19%) expressed their approval compared to the national average of 14%. Certain regional differences can be observed: 21% of the residents of the North Western Region approve of public use of hate speech compared to 9% in the North Eastern Region.

When the survey has tested approval of public use of specific words and phrases which amount to hate speech,

Figure 24. Approval of hate speech (abstract)



Question: *To what extent do you approve of public use of statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression towards minorities? The figure shows under “Yes” the total of respondents who answered “more likely approve of” and “fully approve of” and under “No” the total of respondents who answered “fully disapprove of” and “more likely disapprove of”.*

the situation is both less clear and more nuanced. It is less clear because when the interviewees have been asked whether they approve of a particular statement, they have been much more likely to abstain from an answer or claim that they cannot decide: thus, for instance, with regard to the sentence “Those who defend refugees are corrupt”, 22% of the interviewed responded that they could not decide whether they approved or not the use of this sentence in public, and 5% left the question without an answer. With regard to the sentence: “The Minister is Jewish scum”, one in five claimed that they could not decide whether they approved its use in public and 6% left the question without an answer.

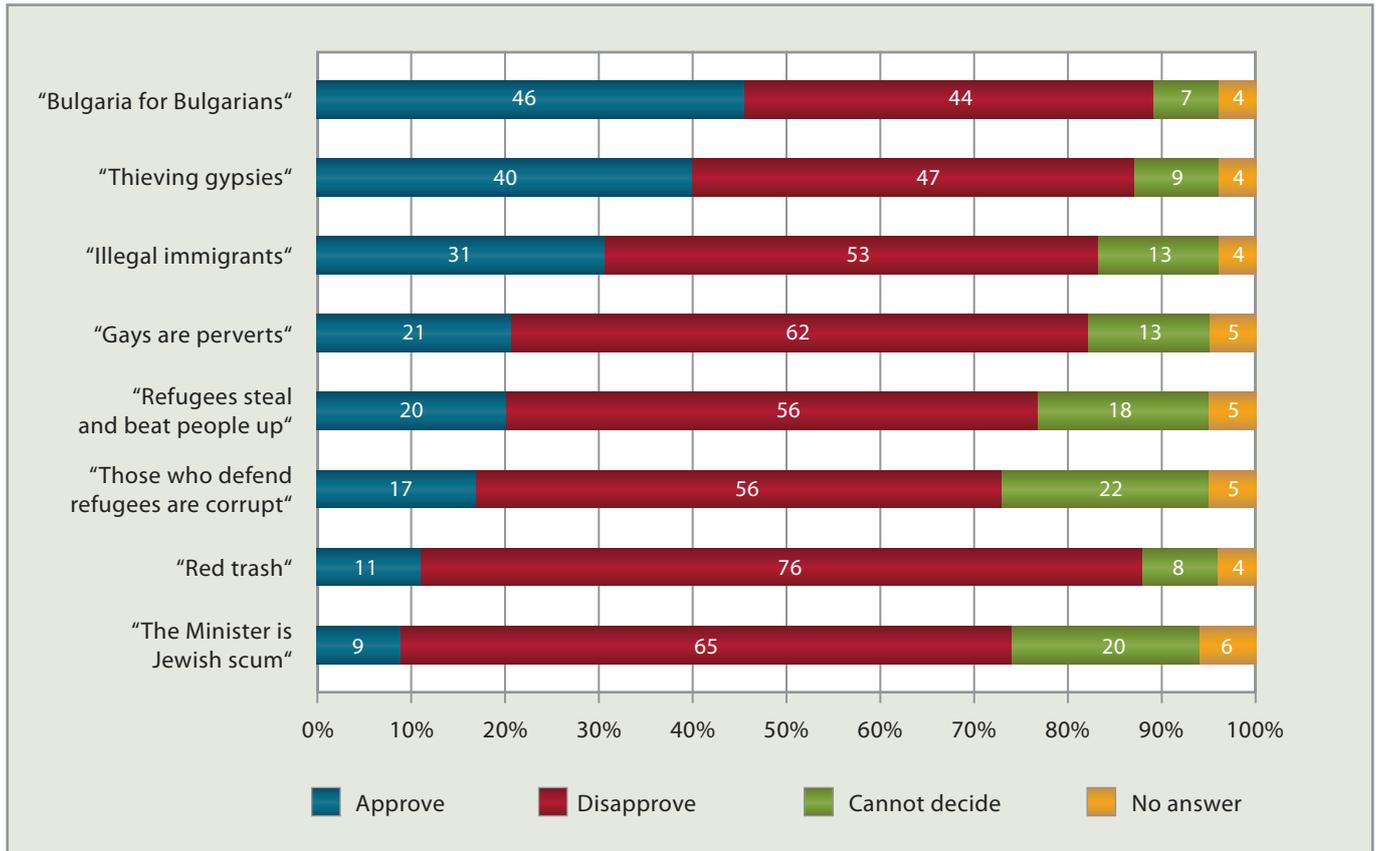
Eight expressions have been tested which amount to hate speech targeted at different minority groups and with regard to the remaining six statements, the people who said that they could not decide whether they approved of them and those who abstained from an answer account for between 11 and 23% of the respondents. The high number of people who answered that they could not decide makes it difficult to draw clear-cut conclusions about the findings of this part of the survey. This high share of people who abstained to answer might be due to mistrust of the interviewers, confusion or lack of awareness of some of the

used terms (gay, refugee) but also a general sentiment that it is better to keep quiet on such issues.

Disapproval is the dominant attitude for six out of eight of the particular statements: 76% of the respondents disapprove of public use of expressions such as “Red trash” (referring to the supporters of a political party), 65% disapprove of the public use of the statement “The Minister is Jewish scum”, 56% disapprove of the public use of the statements “Refugees steal and beat people up” and “Those who defend refugees are corrupt”. In 2018, as in 2016, an alarmingly high public approval of public use of hate speech against the three groups of Roma, immigrants and gay people remained. Almost 40% of the respondents approve of public use of the expression “Thieving gypsies”, about a third approve of the public use of the expression “Illegal immigrants” and one in five approves of the public use of the sentence “Gays are perverts” (Fig. 25).

In 2018, as in 2016, approval for the public use of the expression “Bulgaria for Bulgarians” surpasses disapproval: in 2018 46% of the respondents approve of the public use of this expression, unlike 44% who disapprove. These data show that the increased tolerance of nationalist rhetoric established by the survey in 2014 is lasting. It is

Figure 25. Attitudes to public use of phrases that amount to hate speech in 2018 (specific)



Question: *To what extent do you approve of the use of each of the following expressions in the mainstream media (television, radio, newspapers)? The figure shows under "approval" the total of respondents who answered "more likely approve of" and "fully approve of" and under "disapproval" the total of respondents who answered "fully disapprove of" and "more likely disapprove of".*

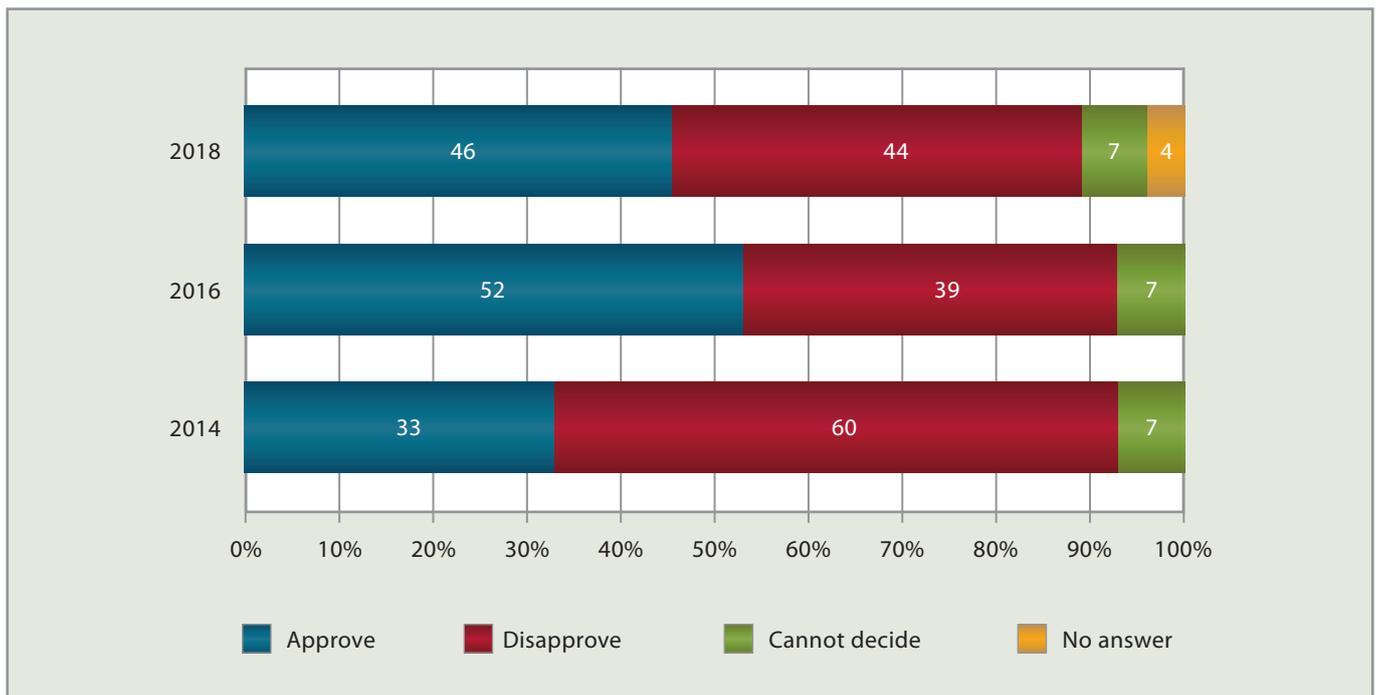
a prominent contrast to 2013 when 60% of the respondents disapproved of the public use of the expression "Bulgaria for Bulgarians" (Fig. 26). This result comes as no surprise given the fact that three nationalist parties take part in the current government. Their supporters have limited electoral power and it is not them who sustain the growing public approval of extreme nationalist talk which on its own amounts to hate speech. A more important factor is the lack of clear-cut boundary between the mainstream political parties and the nationalist formations: the nationalist parties are a partner in the government of the biggest right-wing political party (GERB) and the largest left-wing party (BSP) regularly uses rhetoric that cannot be distinguished in practice from the one of the nationalists.

Between 2014 and 2018 public approval of the public use of hate speech against gay people permanently increased, from 12% (2014) to 21% (2018). The majority of the respondents in the three surveys disapprove of the public use of the expression "Gays are perverts" but their share has dropped from 76% (2014) to 62% (2018) (Fig. 27).

In 2018, as in 2016, a persistently high share of respondents who approve of public use of hate speech against the Roma was observed: they accounted for 43% in 2016 and 40% in 2018. In all the three surveys which tested the question the highest share of respondents did not approve of the public use of the expression "thieving gypsies"; however, the trend is negative, a decrease of 18% has been registered compared to 2014 when 65% of the respondents claimed that they did not approve of the public use of this expression (Fig. 28).

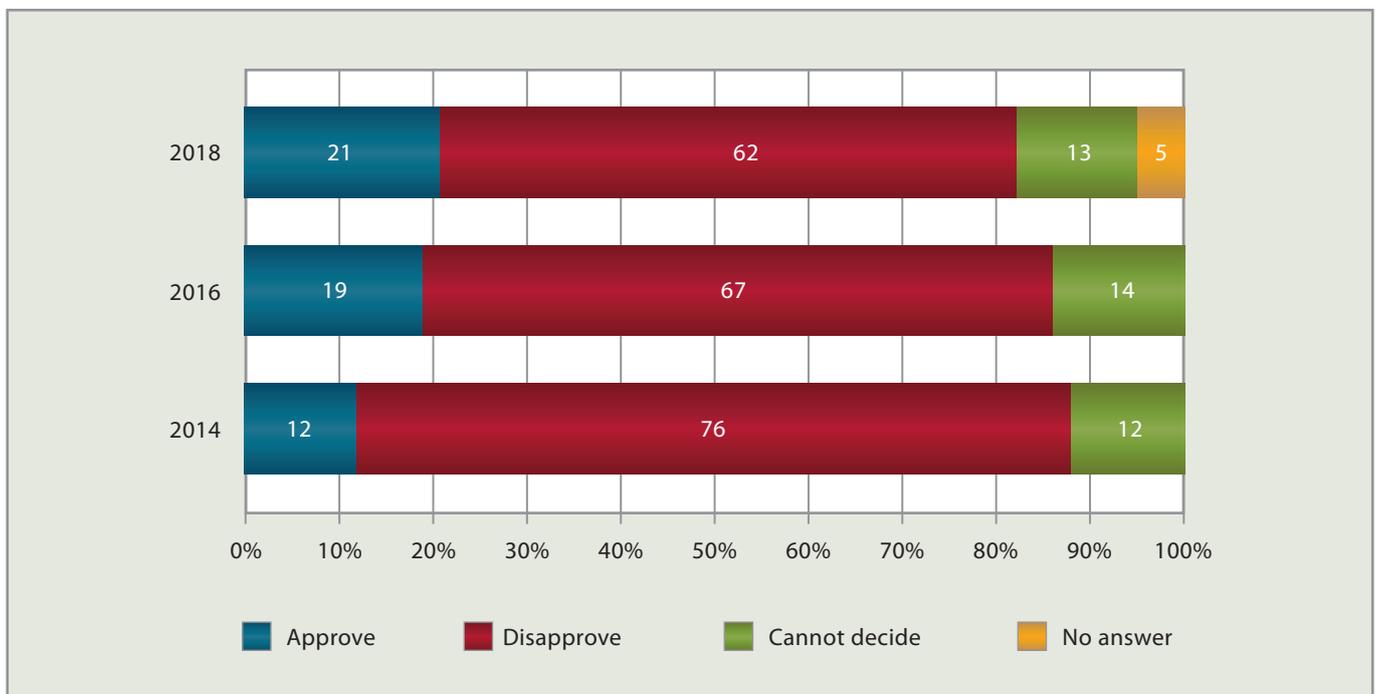
In 2018 the most substantial share of the respondents (46%) agreed with the statement that the state had to protect the social groups that were most often victims of hate speech. However, their share has fallen by 12% over the five years since the beginning of the survey. An increase can be observed in the share of those who do not agree that the members of the Roma community, gay people and foreigners have to be protected by the state when they are targets of hate speech: in 2018 one in three disagreed that such protection should be ensured compared to one in four in 2013 (Fig. 29). This develop-

Figure 26. Attitudes to the public use of expressions that amount to hate speech (specific): “Bulgaria for Bulgarians”



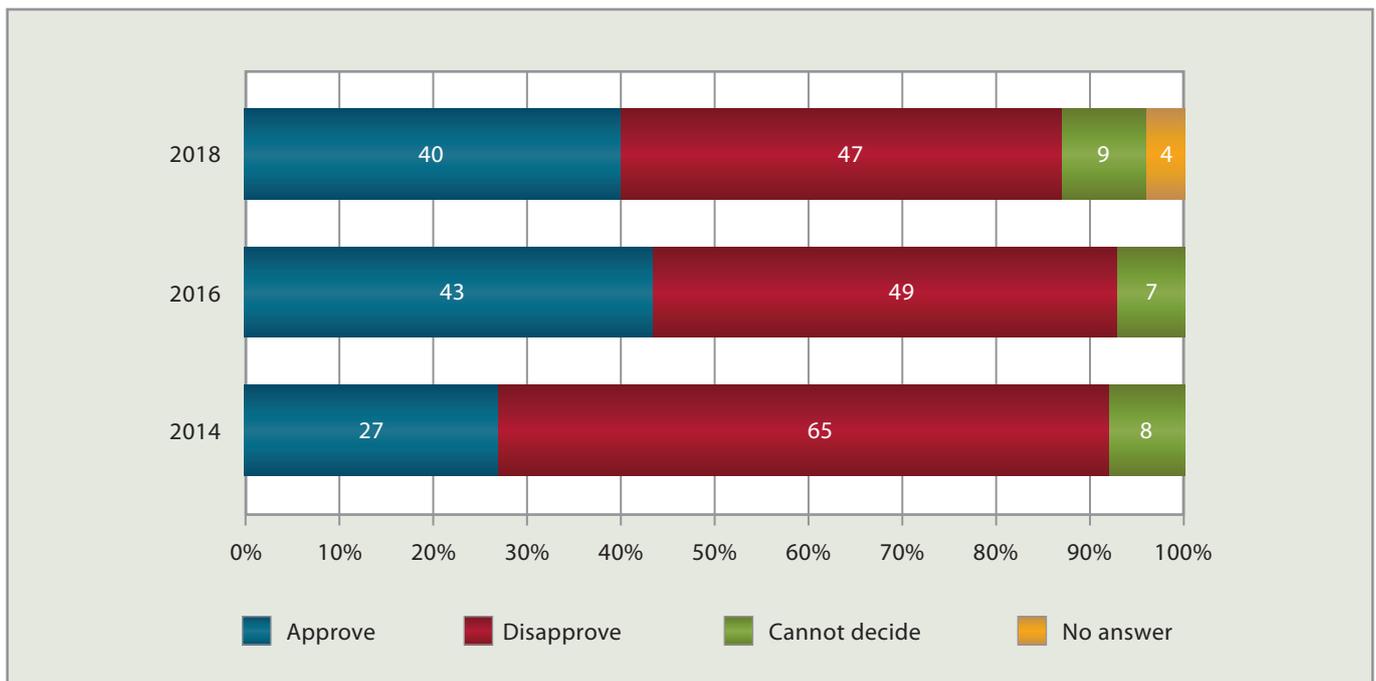
Question: *To what extent do you approve of the use of each of the following expressions in the mainstream media (television, radio, newspapers): “Bulgaria for Bulgarians”? The figure shows under “approval” the total of respondents who answered “more likely approve of” and “fully approve of” and under “disapproval” the total of respondents who answered “fully disapprove of” and “more likely disapprove of”.*

Figure 27. Attitudes to the public use of expressions that amount to hate speech (specific): “Gays are perverts”



Question: *To what extent do you approve of the use of each of the following expressions in the mainstream media (television, radio, newspapers): “Gays are perverts”? The figure shows under “approval” the total of respondents who answered “more likely approve of” and “fully approve of” and under “disapproval” the total of respondents who answered “fully disapprove of” and “more likely disapprove of”.*

Figure 28. Approval of hate speech (specific): “Thieving gypsies”



Question: *To what extent do you approve of the use of each of the following expressions in the mainstream media (television, radio, newspapers)? – “Thieving gypsies”. The figure shows under “approval” the total of respondents who answered “more likely approve of” and “fully approve of” and under “disapproval” the total of respondents who answered “fully disapprove of” and “more likely disapprove of”.*

ment is not surprising against the background of strong political campaigns against human rights organizations and human rights discourse in general.

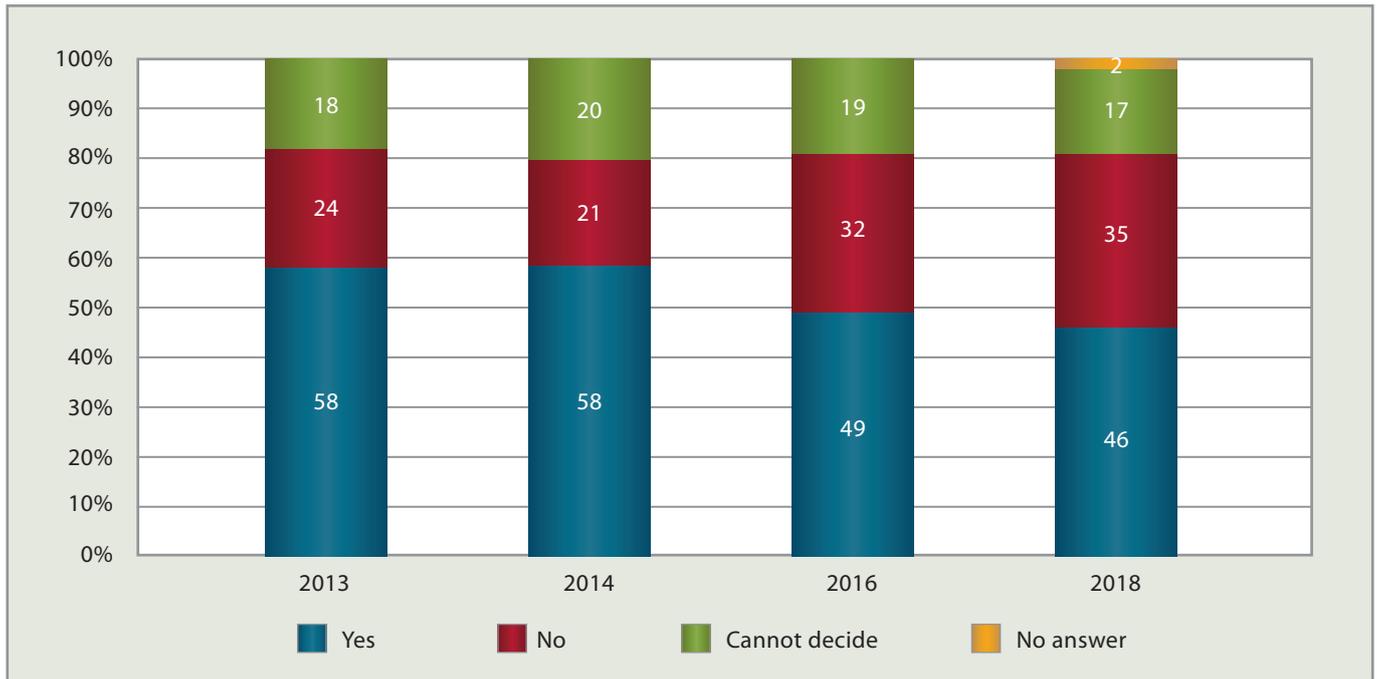
Among the respondents who identify themselves as Bulgarians, the share of those who agree with the statement that the state should protect members of the Roma community, gay people and foreigners against hate speech, almost equals the share of those who do not: 41% of the respondents who identify themselves as Bulgarians agree and 40% do not. The statement that the state should protect minority groups against hate speech enjoys greatest support among the respondents who identify themselves as Roma: 87% of them agree with this statement compared to the national average of 46%. A much higher share of those who agree can be also observed among the respondents who identify themselves as Turks: 66% of them agree that the state should provide protection to the victims of hate speech (Fig. 30).

Clear-cut regional differences can be observed with regard to approval of policies to counteract hate speech. In the North Western Region the share of those who disagree that the state must provide protection to members of minority groups against hate speech (47%) is definitely higher than the share of those who agree (30%). In comparison the average national share of people who

disagree with having a public policy to curb hate speech is 35% and their number is lowest in the North Central Region (26%). In the South Central Region, those in favour and those against such a policy have equal share. The North Central Region has the highest share of people who agree that the state must provide protection to members of minority groups against hate speech; the ones who agree with this statement are 58% compared to the national average of 46%. It is worth noting that the North Western Region has a high number of those who cannot decide – 23% compared to the average 17% for the country, while in the South Central Region only 11% cannot decide (Fig. 31).

The survey tests public approval of the implementation of some of the measures to combat hate speech that are included in General Policy Recommendation No. 15 of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). The most important in this respect are the recommendations to withdraw public funding from political parties and media that use hate speech. The data show steady attitudes in support of sanctioning political parties in such circumstances: in 2018, as in 2016, the most prominent share of the respondents (64%) agreed that public funding should be withdrawn from political parties whose leaders use hate speech (Fig. 32).

Figure 29. Public support for policies against hate speech

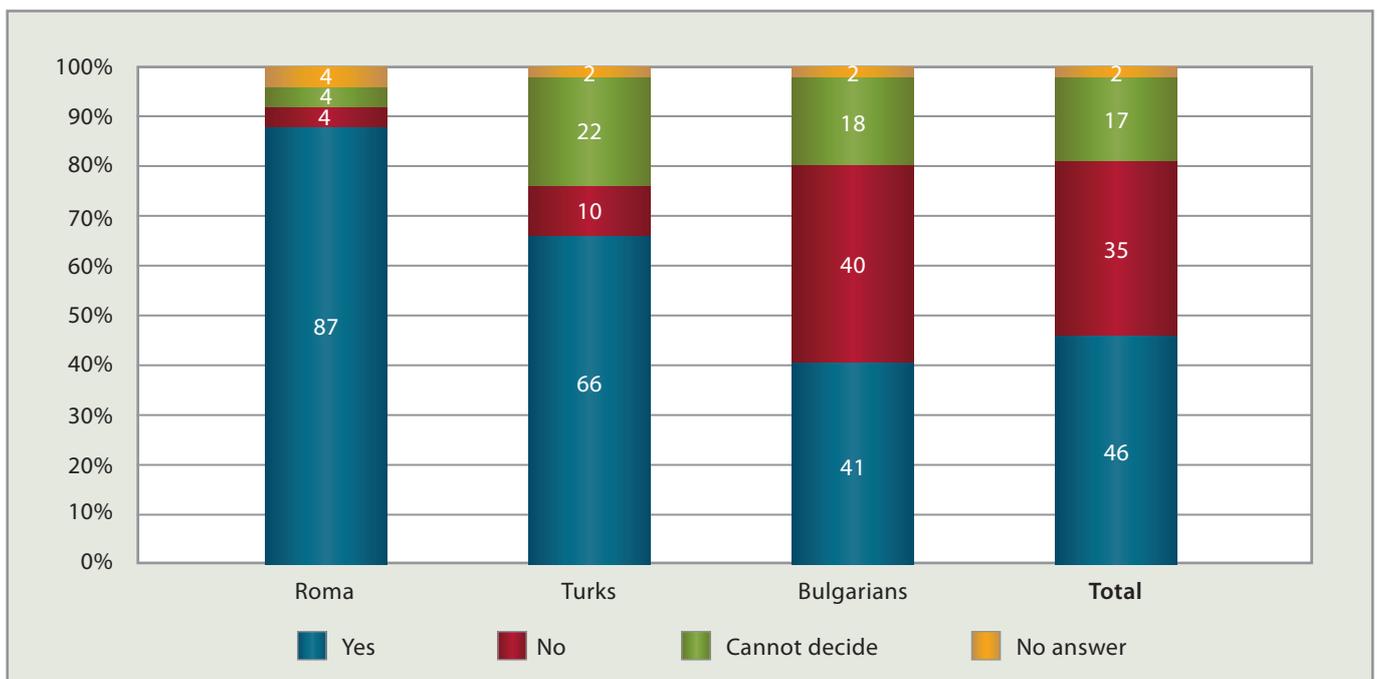


Question: *Do you think that the state should protect the members of the Roma community, gay people and foreigners against statements made in public and expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression against them?*

Considerable approval can be also observed in favour of withdrawing public funding from media that use hate speech. In 2018 the biggest share of respondents (57%) agreed that public funding had to be withdrawn from the media if their journalists made

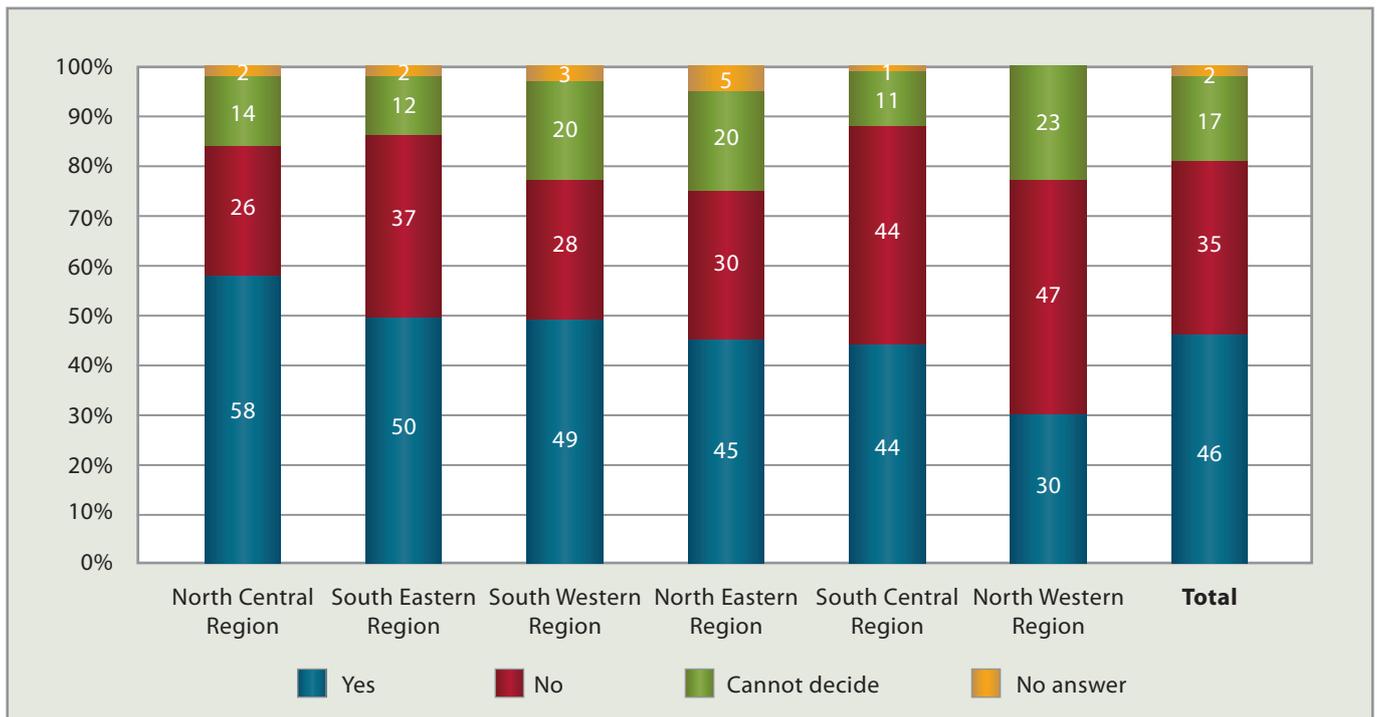
statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression towards various minorities. The attitudes towards these two measures have remained unchanged as seen from the comparison with the findings from 2016 (Fig. 33).

Figure 30. Public support for policies against hate speech in 2018 – Impact of ethnicity



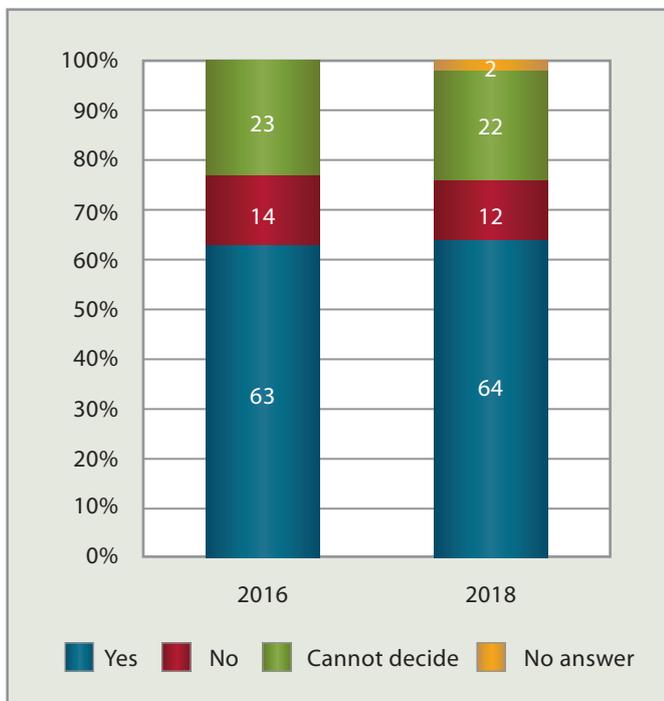
Question: *Do you think that the state should protect the members of the Roma community, gay people and foreigners against public statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression against them?*

Figure 31. Regional differences in the public support for anti-hate speech policies in 2018



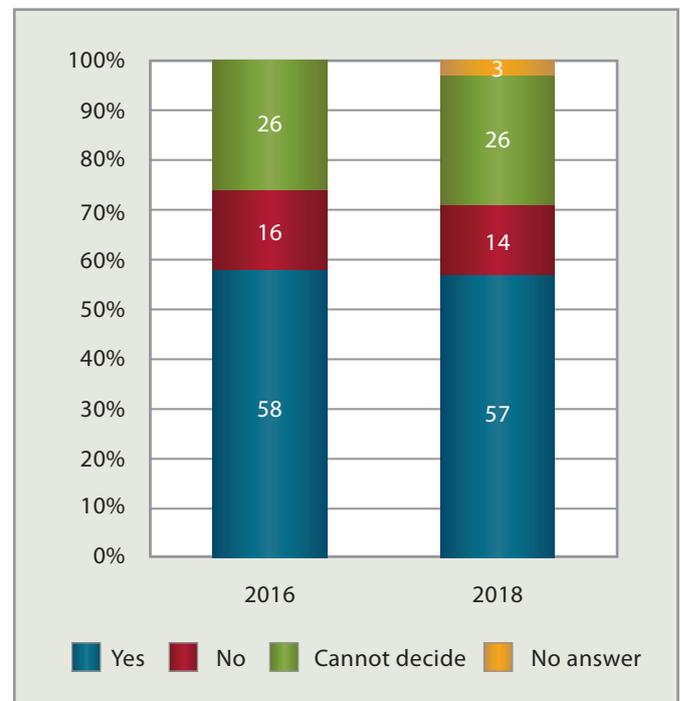
Question: *Do you think that the state must protect the members of the Roma community, gay people and foreigners against public rhetoric expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression against them? By place of residence of the respondents.*

Figure 32. Public support for withdrawing funding from political parties using hate speech



Question: *Do you think that “public funding should be withdrawn from political parties whose leaders make statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression towards various minorities?”*

Figure 33. Public support for withdrawing public funding from media propagating hate speech



Question: *Do you think that “public and European funding should be withdrawn from the media if their journalists make statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression towards various minorities?”*

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO ANTI-HATE SPEECH POLICIES

Hate speech in 2018 has persistently become an integral part of the political and media landscape in the country – incidence rates of hate speech have remained steady in the last five years, approximately half of the respondents have encountered hate speech over the last year and only the targeted minorities have changed. Only half of the respondents have come across the concept of “hate speech” itself. The focus groups show that it is very difficult for teachers and the Roma to define what “hate speech” is, which forms are criminal and which are simply publicly unacceptable and how to respond when confronted with such expressions. This shows that public policies for combating hate speech are either absent or insofar as they are in place, they have a limited effect.

Even though the largest share of people who have come across hate speech over the year report to have heard it on television, the breakdown by demographic groups shows that internet access is a main factor for encountering hate speech: public groups with greater internet access (young, educated, residents in Sofia) report encountering hate speech more often than the national average and much more compared to public groups which use less the internet (the elderly, less educated, residents in villages). In comparative perspective, the role of television as a media source for propagation of hate speech has steadily declined: if in 2013 75% of the people who encountered hate speech did it on television, their share fell to 56% in 2018. However, importance of public places (restaurants, cafes, public transport) as a venue to encounter hate speech has increased, though slightly.

Therefore, two recommendations can be put forward. First, the measures for prevention of propagation of hate speech in the internet have to be a priority of an overall national anti-hate speech policy. Second, the responsibility of local authorities (competent for keeping order in the public transport and in public places) should also be engaged with this respect.

The Roma have been steadily perceived as a main target of hate speech: the four surveys carried out show that the largest share of people who have heard hate speech report that it has been targeted at the Roma. The dynamics in the groups that are most often perceived

as targets of hate speech concern mainly the other four groups: Turks, Moslems, gay people and foreigners. In 2014 and 2016 increased incidence of hate speech targeted at Moslems and foreigners was registered that was undoubtedly related to the increased influx of migrants into the country and the shortcomings of the national migration policy. In 2018 reports of encountering hate speech went down for all of the examined groups with one exception: instances of hate speech against the Roma, Turks, Moslems and foreigners decreased but those against gay people doubled compared to the 2016 levels. In 2018 gay people are the second minority group most targeted by hate speech, following immediately the Roma, and this leap is due to the debate involving the failed ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention). The spread of hate speech apparently evolves in waves that are directly linked to the political situation and affect different minorities but maintain a constant background of anxiety and tension in the public.

If until 2018 hate speech was used by marginal political actors (the three nationalist formations), the debate about the ratification of the Istanbul Convention brought hate speech into the stock-in-trade of one of the two largest political powers (BSP), in contradiction with the values of the European political family to which the party belongs. Within the context of counteracting the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in particular, hate speech has evolved together with anti-European rhetoric which threatens to undermine the main political consensus in the country.

Increased nationalist trends in politics and the law enforcement authorities turning a blind eye towards crimes motivated by racial, ethnic and religious hatred have resulted in withdrawal of public support for anti-hate speech criminal policy: in 2018 the share of those who know that hate speech and violence motivated by ethnic, racial or religious hatred is a crime has been the lowest for the four surveys carried out so far. At the same time the share of those who would report to the police any witnessed public use of hate speech has fallen from 26% (2014) to 17% (2018) and approval for criminal prosecution of politicians and journalists who use in public hate speech has also gone down (the number of people in favour of such criminal prosecution have fallen from 66% in 2013 to 57% in 2018). A similar decrease can be observed in the share of people in favour of criminal prosecution of aggressive nationalism; over the last five

years, the share of those who support criminal prosecution of aggressive nationalism have fallen by 10% (from 73% in 2013 to 63% in 2018).

However, what has remained unchanged is public approval of financial measures for combating hate speech: in 2018, as in 2016, the most substantial number of respondents (64%) agreed that public funding should be withdrawn from political parties whose leaders use hate speech. Withdrawal of public funding from the media using hate speech also enjoys considerable approval. In 2018 the largest number of respondents (57%) agreed that public funding should be withdrawn from media whose journalists make statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression to different minorities. At-

titudes towards these two measures have remained unchanged compared to data from 2016.

As recommended in 2016, law enforcement authorities should encourage the reporting of hate speech as a crime and of hate crimes in general and should strengthen the trust of certain minority groups in their impartiality and competence. However, a national policy for combating hate speech cannot rely solely on criminal prosecution bodies. What is of key importance is the role of the education system (through measures to encourage tolerance, civic education and media literacy) and the introduction of measures against hate speech in the rules for administrative regulation of public funding of political parties and media.

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