



# NATIONALIST “HIJACKING” OF STUDENT PROTESTS

CASE STUDY OF THE TELEGRAM  
CHANNEL “BUNT JE STANJE DUHA”

Katarina Bogičević



## KEY POINTS

- ◆ A tragedy that claimed the lives of 16 people served as the trigger for mass protests and a struggle for justice and institutional accountability;
- ◆ The student movement mobilized diverse social groups around fundamental democratic demands;
- ◆ The movement’s heterogeneity, horizontal structure, and the crisis context in which it operates make it vulnerable to far-right intervention;
- ◆ Alt-right aesthetics serve as a camouflage for the engagement of local far-right actors;
- ◆ The research focuses on a case study of a specific Telegram channel, analyzing sophisticated discursive strategies used to legitimize and promote an ethnonationalist agenda;
- ◆ The analysis identifies the radicalizing potential and the risk of normalizing nationalist ideas within the broader protest discourse.

## INTRODUCTION

The tragedy in which 16 people lost their lives following the collapse of a reconstructed railway station canopy in Novi Sad marked a turning point in the collective consciousness of Serbian society. The widespread belief that the incident resulted from systemic corruption and the erosion of institutional accountability triggered a mass wave of civic discontent and resistance. In the series of protest events following November 1, 2024, an emancipatory student movement emerged with the potential to articulate an alternative vision of society and the state.<sup>1</sup> The movement "Students in Blockade" is predominantly based on horizontal organizing principles and digital communication networks, and it reflects the key characteristics of new social movements. The absence of hierarchical structures, deliberative decision-making processes, and the occupation of urban spaces as sites of political expression, position this movement within contemporary patterns of civic resistance articulation.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, although this form of organizing is democratic and inclusive at its core, it also generates a number of structural vulnerabilities. The heterogeneity of actors and the movement's diffuse boundaries allow various political forces to intervene in its narrative and symbolic space. Particularly concerning is the presence and discursive normalization of the far right, whose members exploit the escalating crisis to legitimize their own ideological positions. These actors increasingly disguise their messaging through humor, irony, memes, and a communication style more aligned with internet culture than with traditional forms of violent extremism.<sup>3</sup> The complexity of **Extreme Digital Speech (EDS)** they employ requires moving beyond narrow definitions of extremism shaped by legal categories of violence and hate speech, and toward a more nuanced understanding of techniques of dehumanization, delegitimization, and exclusion.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the paper analyzes how the Telegram channel "BUNT je stanje duha" (Eng. "Rebellion is a state of mind") as a prominent localized variant of alt-right aesthetics, uses discursive strategies of extreme digital speech to infiltrate in the dominant protest narrative, shape the perception of "internal enemies," and promote nationalism under the guise of collective struggle.<sup>5</sup> The aim of the study is, through the method of Critical Discourse Analysis, to examine harmful patterns in protest communication that undermine their democratic and transformative potential, and to contribute to a deeper understanding of these phenomena within broader protest and social frameworks. Particular attention is devoted to the channel's positioning in relation to other protest actors (including the regime), as well as to the methods of pseudo-legitimization of ethnonationalism, militarized speech, and threats.<sup>6</sup>

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I The term "Extreme Digital Speech" (EDS) is used with the intention of encompassing, in addition to explicitly violent forms of extremist expression online, a broader spectrum of phenomena, including hate speech, dehumanization, and exclusionary political-cultural patterns that develop within digital spaces of extremism. In contemporary analyses, EDS is not understood solely as clearly delineated content, but rather as context-dependent and often ambiguous forms of expression that play an important role in the formation of communities, political identities, and alternative narratives within the digital public sphere.

II The alt-right refers to a loosely affiliated network of far-right movements and online communities that reject mainstream conservatism and promote ethnonationalist, xenophobic, misogynistic, and/or anti-immigrant ideologies. These groups often communicate through ironic, meme-driven, and subcultural language distinctive to digital environments.

III Pseudo-legitimization of ethnonationalism refers to the process in which ethnonationalist ideas (such as the supremacy of one ethnic group and the linkage of statehood to ethnic homogeneity) are presented as legitimate, acceptable, or even patriotic, while in reality undermining democratic principles and human rights.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs the method of **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**, based on the framework that defines CDA as a multimodal approach.<sup>iv</sup> This understanding acknowledges that discourses are often realized not only through text and speech but also through other modes of communication, such as visual elements (photographs, videos, symbols, memes, emojis, etc.).<sup>v</sup> Visual forms not only complement textual discourse but also structure or even transform it.

The subject of analysis is the content related to student and civic protests distributed on the Telegram channel "BUNT je stanje duha." With approximately 86,000 users, "BUNT" represents one of the most followed far-right channels in Serbia. The temporal scope of the research covers the period from November 1, 2024 (marked by the collapse of the canopy in Novi Sad) to June 28, 2025 (the date of the Vidovdan mass protest). The analyzed sample includes more than 350 posts, comprising both textual and audiovisual content. The corpus examined does not consist solely of original posts but also includes shared material from other Telegram channels, as well as messages that explicitly mention and promote other accounts, groups, or users. This approach enabled a broader mapping of content flows, referential practices, and the processes of legitimization, networking, and dissemination of radical and/or extremist narratives.

## TRANSFORMATION OF CIVIC DISCONTENT: EXCLUSIVE PATRIOTISM

The analyzed content of the channel shows that "BUNT" situates the protests within a discursive framework of "patriotic struggle", activating accumulated layers of meaning of patriotism based on an exclusive, ethnonationalist identity. This framework stands in conflict with democratic and civic understandings of patriotism, which in part of the public discourse are associated with the student movement, and which imply concern for the common good, accountable institutions, and the rule of law.<sup>6</sup>

Posts about the protests regularly use terms such as "patriots", "loyal sons of the homeland", "Serbs", while the protests themselves are referred to as an "exorcism action". This points to an attempt to elevate the movement morally and spiritually as a collective struggle of Serbs against evil – most often defined within the frameworks of the globalist, EU/Western agenda, and the agenda of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In the struggle for hegemony over the meaning of "patriotism", students who carry symbols such as flags with the slogan "No Surrender" and insignia of Republika Srpska are given the status of "heroes" and "fighters":<sup>v</sup>

"Full support to the students, keep it up; we call on all fatherlanders and patriots to support these young people, as they did not deserve to be lynched for Serbian flags, but praised.

[...]

Once again, full support for yesterday's action; the exorcism has been performed, the demons are raging – hold strong."<sup>7</sup>

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IV Discourse can be understood as a set of linguistic and broader social practices that simultaneously produce and reproduce social relations of power and ideologies, through which social reality is constructed, maintained, and changed.

V "Nema predaje" flag – A nationalist slogan meaning "No surrender," often displayed on flags, banners, and murals. It signals an uncompromising stance toward Kosovo's independence and embodies a broader narrative of resistance, victimhood, and the defense of Serbian identity and sovereignty.

Republika Srpska is one of the two entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is predominantly inhabited by Bosnian Serbs and has its own political system with independent legislative, executive, and judicial branches, as well as a de facto capital in Banja Luka. Republika Srpska was established in 1992 by Bosnian Serbs and was internationally recognized as part of Bosnia and Herzegovina through the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement. During the Bosnian War (1992–1995), Bosnian Serb leaders, including Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, were convicted of war crimes and genocide. Although Bosnia and Herzegovina is formally a unified state, ethnic divisions and aspirations for secession – particularly by the political leadership of Republika Srpska – continue to pose a challenge to the country's stability.

In contrast, numerous posts label students, organizations, or individuals who distance themselves from nationalist symbols. By inserting terms such as “false representatives of students”, “the other Serbia”, “Ustashes”, “Šiptars”, and “faggots”, the “BUNT” channel seeks to construct a binary *friend–enemy* logic, whereby any deviation from the ethnonationalist framework is marked as betrayal:

“We drink the tears of the Other Serbia.

No surrender – Kosmet is entirely part of Serbia! Republika Srpska is the pride of Serbdom!”<sup>8 VI</sup>

“Students who carried Serbian flags at yesterday’s protests were attacked today by all and sundry – from Šiptars, Ustašas, and domestic traitors to all sorts of shady characters.”<sup>9</sup>

The donation of 15 “No Surrender” flags to a group of students from the Faculty of Law at the University of Belgrade is not merely a symbolic gesture.<sup>10</sup> It represents an attempt by “BUNT” to materialize its discourse, present nationalist symbolism as the “natural” form of student resistance and mobilize students in the physical space. The controversies this action sparked within the student movement and the broader public were used for further discursive mobilization and the deepening of polarization:<sup>11</sup>

“Stop pushing young people ‘there was a g\*nocide’ and ‘rememberin’ S\*ebrenica’ idiots.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the figure of the “real” student is gradually constructed – the one who “takes part in every protest for Kosovo and Metohija,” “wears a šajkača and carries *No surrender* flag” – as opposed to the “rightfully attacked” one, who “acknowledges various false genocides.”

Through these strategies, “BUNT” produces and reshapes the meanings of the protests, delegitimizes pluralistic narratives, and establishes a hierarchy of acceptability based on nationalist loyalty, positioning itself as the legitimate and authentic voice of the Serbian people.

## MAPPING THE ENEMIES: WHO IS THE ONTOLOGICAL “OTHER”?

“BUNT”’s posts are characterized by a dual communication matrix – an antagonistic tone and dehumanizing discourse when referring to the “Other” (NGO activists, opposition actors, and independent media), while a calm, rationalizing rhetoric is reserved for figures of authority such as the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC), state institutions, and regime’s figures, even when disagreement is expressed. The dominant tone in the latter case is informative. Below are two contrasting examples that illustrate this matrix:

- 1 “The people rise up because of real problems, the opposition – with the help of Nova S and N1 (TV stations, author’s note) – hijacks the popular protests, and then starts pushing a pro-Western, faggot, and anti-Serbian agenda until the protests are suppressed. Marinika, Lazović, Grbović, Biljana Stojković, Brković, Mila, Bjelić and the rest of that scum are worse than any lowlife. The people want change, but they don’t want Western puppets, they don’t want ekavian Ustashes!”<sup>13</sup>
- 2 “President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić recently stated that by March 31, 2025, the citizens of Serbia will witness the fiercest fight against corruption in the past 24 years, targeting both people in power and their collaborators. Vučević said on TV Pink that a stronger fight is being prepared against those abusing their positions, adding that such actions are carried out continuously, but that there are moments when the state must increase its efforts.”<sup>14</sup>

VI “Kosmet” is a Serbian abbreviation for Kosovo and Metohija, strategically employed to underline Serbia’s territorial and historical entitlement narratives.

Posts targeting activists and the opposition in the context of protests are largely immersed in a broader anti-Western and anti-liberal sentiment. Therefore, the anti-systemic character of this channel stems primarily from its opposition to the liberal-democratic order, which explains the pronounced "anti-opposition" and "anti-NGO" discourse. On the other hand, hostility toward the ruling coalition and state institutions is predominantly activated through key points of nationalist frustration: the "betrayal" of Kosovo, "subservience" to the EU/West, and the toleration of internal enemies ("Second-Serbians," NGOs, LGBT+ activists, "left liberals", "foreign mercenaries," etc.). Instead of demands for the democratic reform of captured institutions – which is the imperative of student protests – "BUNT" rather promotes their restoration in the service of an identitarian exclusive order marked by the "Svetosavian-Chetnik ideology", which is portrayed as "immortal and the only correct one."<sup>15</sup>

Even when the authorities or specific regime figures are portrayed negatively, this seems to function as a tactical attempt to court the "majority Serbia" that is protesting en masse. Unlike the aggressive, emotionally charged discourse directed at the "Other Serbia," there is a noticeable absence of genuine affective engagement here, and incendiary rhetoric is employed only within the aforementioned context. This lack of affect is also apparent at moments when a clear and forceful condemnation of violence against citizens would be expected. For instance, during physical attacks on students and other demonstrators, "BUNT" fails to use the opportunity to problematize the authoritarian mechanisms of power. On the contrary, it provides sparse reporting or, in some cases, incorporates its own agenda by diverting attention from the contentious incidents:

"Neither legally nor politically is there surrender of the Holy Land."<sup>vii</sup>

Violence is not the solution, wishing Sonja a speedy recovery!"<sup>16</sup>

A similar pattern of "distance" also appears in the reaction to the police intervention during the student blockade of the road in Novi Pazar. While testimonies of police violence against peaceful protesters – including reports of being dragged by their arms and legs – circulate widely on social media and independent channels, the "BUNT" channel opts for a notably detached, informative tone:

"The police intervened in Novi Pazar to ensure the passage of buses transporting attendees to today's ruling party rally."<sup>17</sup>

Such rationalizing communication unequivocally reflects a limited identification with the protests when they move beyond the ethno-national paradigm. Accordingly, criticism of the regime can be seen as selective, tactical, and instrumentalized in service of their agenda. Although "BUNT"'s stance toward the authorities appears confused, it is not fundamentally oppositional – discourse analysis clearly shows that the channel's affective energy is primarily directed at delegitimizing liberal-democratic actors.

## PSEUDO-LEGITIMIZATION OF ETHNO-NATIONALISM THROUGH IRONY AND CULTURAL CODE

In the discourse constructed by "BUNT", extremist ideas are often masked and normalized using irony and sarcasm, memeification, and colloquial language that obscures seriousness of the messages (see images 1–4).

**Meme culture and referential language** are used to reinforce a sense of belonging to "our own" and to recruit audience without an open call for violence. This is a strategy typical for the broader alt-right movement and other extremist internet cultures.<sup>18</sup>

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VII "Holy Land" in this context refers to Kosovo.

Image 1:

Meme "Infiltrated" vs. "Not Infiltrated"

Source: Telegram channel "BUNT je stanje duha", 2024.<sup>19</sup>



Translation of the text box from the meme image (see image 1).

**INFILTRATED ELEMENT**

Full of rage, out to smash and fight  
Sick of 10 years of protests with zero results  
Doesn't want to just march and go home  
Has the guts to physically confront the gang  
Risks prison  
Gets his ribs broken when they catch him  
Decided to free himself

**NOT AN INFILTRATED ELEMENT**

Came out peacefully, calls people to sit on the pavement and join the performance  
Not sick of 10 years of useless protests  
Wants to march and go home  
Has no guts to physically confront the gang  
Doesn't risk prison  
Never gets arrested  
Begs the EU and US ambassador to bring democratic liberation

- Кључа од беса изашао да изломи и једне и друге
- Мука му од 10 година узалудних протеста који ничему не служе
- Неће да се прошета и оде кући
- Има храбрости да се физички обрачуна са бандом
- Ризикује робију
- Када га ухапсе изломе му ребра
- Решио да преузме ствар у своје руке и сам се ослободи

- Изашао миран, позива људе да седну на бетон и учествују у перформансу
- Није му мука од 10 година узалудних протеста
- Хоће да се прошета и оде кући
- Нема храбрости да се физички обрачуна са бандом
- Не ризикује робију
- Никада га не ухапсе
- Моли европску унију и америчког амбасадора да га демократски ослободи

By hiding behind cognitive distortions, irony, "edgy" content, and trolling, "BUNT" engages in a form of subversion that allows it to evade any responsibility for the radicalizing potential of its posts and the real (offline) attacks that may occur as a consequence of the discourse it promotes.<sup>20</sup>

For example, a meme directly targeting opposition figures and activists (image 2) features the caption "Infiltrated elements – the cancer of Serbian rebellion."<sup>21</sup> The use of terms like "cancer" implies that certain groups or individuals are not merely political opponents, but a pathological deviation – a "disease" within the national body. Such language carries strong symbolic meaning and functions as a code for exclusion, dehumanization, and the legitimization of "cleansing" – not from without, but from within. The internal enemy is not only ideologically "other," but ontologically inferior or non-belonging. Through phrases like "Serbs will never again be ashamed of being Serbs, except for those few *born by mistake*,"<sup>22</sup> any space for identity heterogeneity is erased, legitimizing a politics of exclusion and violence toward liberal-democratic actors.

Image 2:

"Infiltrated elements – the cancer of Serbian rebellion"

Source: Telegram Channel "BUNT je stanje duha", 2024.<sup>23</sup>

БУНТ је стање духа †



The normalization of controversial messages and contextually radical symbols is often carried out through a form of pseudo-legal legitimization via populist appropriation of the Constitution:

"No surrender" flag is a regular and legitimate flag [...] What other flag should be carried in front of the Constitutional Court, if not the 'NP' flag? What flag could more clearly point to the violation of the Constitution?"<sup>24</sup>

However, this narrative pattern is not an expression of so-called "constitutional patriotism" (Habermas), but rather a populist (mis)use of the normative framework. At the same time, any connection to extremism is denied – once again through irony – and criticism is dismissed as "sheer stupidity":

"I feel sorry for people who are so stupid that they publicly express their dissatisfaction with these flags. You need to understand that the majority of Serbia respects all of this [...]."<sup>25</sup>

"And to these intellectual gems, apparently even the Serbian flag is extremist. Hahahaha."<sup>26</sup>

**Image 3:**

"How the students looked yesterday in the eyes of those who hate everything Serbian"

Source: Telegram channel "BUNT je stanje duha", 2025.<sup>27</sup>



Како су изгледали студенти јуче у очима ових што мрзе све српско:

[t.me/buntcg](https://t.me/buntcg)

The relativization of extremism is supported by the narrative construction of "majority Serbia," which discredits opposition voices and represents them as detached from reality or "alienated from the nation." Additionally, through mimetic forms (image 3) accompanied by phrases such as "they hate everything Serbian," national boundaries are reinforced, affects are mobilized, and the sense of group belonging is strengthened.<sup>28</sup> For "BUNT", even murals dedicated to a war criminal are framed as aesthetic expressions of "Serbianness," and the channel uses the opportunity to mockingly contrast these "artworks" with protest performances:

"However, these people who paint squares red are the same ones who are bothered by works of art in the form of murals of Serbian heroes – such as Ratko Mladić, for example."<sup>viii</sup>

Serbia Colorado<sup>29</sup>

The use of cultural codes, ironic and "entertaining" content is not merely a rhetorical strategy but serves a clear mobilizing function with real-world consequences.<sup>ix</sup> Through their continuous reproduction and normalization, the channel not only solidifies identity boundaries but also actively contributes to the potential radicalization of its audience, all while circumventing the issue of responsibility.

## PRESENCE OF MILITARIZED DISCOURSE AND THREATS

Some posts contain threatening discourse and (implicit) calls to action, including the removal of symbols that "BUNT" opposes:

"You have grown old and rotten, everything you have worked on for years is falling apart, you will never again see EU flags welcomed in Serbia, each one will be treated just like the Ukrainian flag yesterday at the protest."<sup>30</sup>

VIII Ratko Mladić, former commander of the Bosnian Serb Army, was convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and sentenced to life imprisonment. In the final judgment of June 8, 2021, he was found guilty of genocide in Srebrenica, crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed during the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995.

IX Cultural codes are recognizable symbols, linguistic patterns, and value signals that are deeply rooted in the national imagination.

“The other-Serbian leftist mentally ill activists had their flags taken away again. As we heard, there was also an Antifa flag, we don’t know what happened to it, but we hope you know what should happen next time.”<sup>31</sup>

Statements like “EU flags must be taken down” not only justify acts of violence but legitimize them as a patriotic duty.<sup>32</sup> This symbolically enacts a “cleansing” of public space from anything that deviates from ethno-nationalist iconography. When physical violence is explicitly encouraged, it is most often directed at designated media “enemies,” especially N1:

“Better that they beat the scum from N(DH)1.”<sup>x 33</sup>

“They beat the N1 crew!”<sup>34</sup>

“Well-deserved for the N1 team! Well done, brother Serb!”<sup>35</sup>

The phrase “brother Serb” serves as a discursive mechanism to include the violent actor into the imaginary community of “true” Serbs. Besides N1, opposition politicians also become targets of militarized and humiliating discourse. A concrete example concerns the vice president of the Freedom and Justice Party (SSP):

“Marinika Tepić also joined the protest, much to her regret and the delight of those present, someone threw feces packaged in a bag at her. Next week, a hunger strike hahahahaha. Drive out the trash, tit for tat. How many times will the same mistakes be made?”<sup>36</sup>

Feces, laughter, and the rhetorical question “How many times the same mistakes?” together function as a discursive resolution that normalizes violence against political opponents, with the public space now being literally – and physically – cleansed. Although several posts were identified in which pro-government figures were threatened, these profiles appear within the alt-right aesthetic as “caricatures of the system.” Notorious SNS activists like “DJV” (Dragan J. Vučićević), “Đuka Bizon” (Vladimir Đukanović), and others serve as instruments of performative distancing from the ruling structures and help preserve an anti-government image among the audience:

“That’s right, until you feel the hard hand. They don’t know how to deal with cattle like you, but there are those who do...”<sup>37</sup>

The use of a brutal, almost mafia-like tone signals the idea of para-institutional justice and further normalizes violence as the ultimate response to an “impotent” state.

## META-NARRATIVES AND CONTROL OF MEANING: THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, RUSSIA, AND “COLOR REVOLUTIONS”

When the dominant public discourse around the protests does not align with “BUNT”’s agenda and indirectly undermines its key support points, the channel resorts to strategies of adaptation. In the case of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) Patriarch’s visit to Russia and his controversial statements during a meeting with Putin – where he characterized the protests in Serbia as a color revolution – “BUNT” takes a balanced stance.<sup>38</sup> It “categorically” refuses to agree with Patriarch Porfirije’s position on the “color revolution,” while simultaneously emphasizing that its attitude toward the Church “does not change at all.”<sup>39</sup> Control over meaning is maintained here through a careful differentiation between contesting the Patriarch’s specific statement and reaffirming the Church as an unquestionable spiritual authority.

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X “N(DH)1” is a pejorative wordplay combining “N1”, a prominent Serbian news outlet, with the acronym NDH, which stands for Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (Independent State of Croatia), a fascist puppet state during World War II. Similarly, the opposition is disparagingly labeled “opozicIJA,” where the ending “CIJA” phonetically echoes “CIA,” (Central Intelligence Agency), implying foreign (particularly American or Western) influence and control. Both instances illustrate how linguistic punning is used within the discourse to construct negative identities and reinforce in-group/out-group boundaries.

This micro-narrative (the interpretation of an individual event) is constructed to activate a broader Serbian meta-narrative, which is encoded through the following elements: 1) Kosovo and Metohija as a symbol of national sacrifice and founding myth; 2) resistance to the West and the EU; and 3) the SPC as a pillar of collective identity. Finally, by calling for "respecting the channel's rules" and refraining from insults toward the Church or the Patriarch, internal discourse discipline is enforced, preventing any further dilution of the "regime of truth" (Foucault) that "BUNT" builds as a community. <sup>XI 40</sup>

A similar mechanism is applied in the channel's commentary on the protest in Novi Pazar, which elicited strong positive public reactions. The protest, under the slogan "Pazar is the world – *Bujrum* to the free marketplace," represents a delicate issue for "BUNT" that creates ideological tension between declarative support for "popular resistance" and actual loyalty to ethnonationalist ideas: <sup>41</sup>

"Novi Pazar, which is bothered by Christ's Monograms and 'No Surrender' flags, is certainly not 'the world' or anything like that [...] because even in Novi Pazar, Kosovo and Metohija are Serbia, and Christ is the only God." <sup>42</sup>

**Image 4:**

"Hush. Support for the brothers from Republika Srpska!"

Source: Telegram channel "BUNT je stanje duha", 2025. <sup>43</sup>

Unable to openly delegitimize the Novi Pazar protest and its symbolism, "BUNT" resorts to redistributing meaning (see image 4), once again invoking the meta-narrative of Serbia's territorial and ethno-confessional unity. The concluding statement about Christ as "the only God" in Novi Pazar explicitly manifests religious intolerance and signals Islamophobic sentiment. <sup>XII</sup>

Another notable challenge for "BUNT" was the departure of a group of students to Strasbourg and Brussels, and the "bridging" tactic remains the same – a sophisticated technique of contesting these initiatives and their actors by redefining the focus through a broader symbolic framework: <sup>44</sup>

"Strasbourg, Brussels, Europe, and least of all Croatia are not crosses to bear, but burdens to be shed; the true values and struggles lie within us and our own four walls. A Serb is Christ's." <sup>45</sup>

"BUNT" displaces students who appeal for support from the so-called international community out of the collective "Us" and disciplines belonging by emphasizing who "our own" are:

"40 of them didn't go to Strasbourg or Brussels, but they did go to Kosovo and Metohija, and they are ours, we are proud of them. We don't cry for the EU, but we will return to Kosovo and Metohija because Kosovo sheds a single tear." <sup>46</sup>



XI Using Foucault's concept of the "regimes of truth," in this text I use the term "truth" to denote a system of organized procedures and ways in which statements are produced, regulated, distributed, and function within society, all closely linked to power structures that confirm, disseminate, and shape these "truths" according to their own interests. Thus, "ethnonationalist truth" cannot be viewed outside of power structures but rather as their product and instrument.

XII Novi Pazar is predominantly inhabited by Bosniaks (Slavic Muslims).

From this, it is evident that “BUNT” is not a passive observer or commentator of these events but an active producer of meaning. When narratives emerge that threaten it – whether coming from religious, ethnic, or “European” frameworks – “BUNT” does not retreat. Instead, it moves into a meta-narrative defense, reinterpreting meanings through multilayered cultural codes and sacred pillars of national identity.

## DISCURSIVE TURN: NATIONALISM “CREPT” ONTO THE STAGE OF THE STUDENT REBELLION?

The mass protest of students and citizens on Vidovdan, June 28th, confirms that the struggle for control over meaning does not remain confined to the digital sphere. The choice of speakers – those invoking Bishop Nikolaj, the “Kosovo Covenant,” and “Serbian integralism,” including figures who promote the poetry of Radovan Karadžić, convicted of war crimes committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina – illustrates a discursive turn within the student movement.<sup>47</sup> XIII “Us” are not abstract constructs but concrete instruments of political and symbolic action, shaping the direction and character of the protests.

In this context, “BUNT” seizes the moment to reinforce a discourse that rearticulates the protests as a national revival or “resurrection”:

“Belgrade roars to the battle cry of war veterans – Long live Serbia! After speeches by Prof. Dr. Milo Loppar and Košare war hero Nenad Stanić, an incredible moment followed when the city literally roared with a unanimous national outcry: Resurrect, Serbia!”<sup>48</sup>

At that very moment, perhaps for the first time within the protest organized by the “official” student movement, a public distance is expressed from liberal-democratic values and the movement’s original focus. “BUNT” capitalizes on this ideological rift and entrenches the nationalist narrative. For this purpose, the channel relies on its already recognizable elements of extreme speech infused with irony; an antagonistic and polarizing tone, dehumanization of critics, and historical revisionism:

“There are all kinds of fools in this country. Brothers and sisters, you must speak up more often that Ratko Mladić is a Serbian hero, and you must more often spread the Chetnik ideology, because for the sake of survival, we must detach ourselves from uNiVeRsAl cIvIlIzAtIoNaL vAlUeS.”<sup>49</sup>

Seen in a broader context, “BUNT” is not merely an opportunist, but a constitutive element of the entire ecosystem of far-right actors who systematically destabilize the democratic framework of the protests. The result is clear – ideological positions that were once marginal in the public discourse of civic resistance are now claiming space on the open stage.

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XIII Radovan Karadžić, the former political leader of the Bosnian Serbs, was sentenced to 40 years in prison by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). In the judgment delivered on March 24, 2016, he was found guilty, based on individual criminal responsibility, of the genocide in Srebrenica in 1995, as well as persecution, extermination, murder, deportation, forcible transfer, terrorizing civilians, unlawful attacks on civilians, and the taking of hostages. These crimes were committed during the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysis shows that the Telegram channel “BUNT je stanje duha” represents an example of a high-frequency radical poster. This means its activity is not characterized solely by explosive messages with open calls to action and violence. However, the continuous, daily sharing of content with a distinctly emotionally negative and dehumanizing tone directed at political and ideological “others” can have a strong impact on dynamics of polarization and radicalization. In the long term, such activity weakens the public’s resilience to extremist narratives and encourages audiences to adopt an exclusive worldview in which violence against dissenters and minority groups can be justified.

Through the use of sophisticated discursive strategies, the channel deliberately reproduces social divisions and hegemonistic patterns of power, targeting opponents of the ethnonationalist “regime of truth.” In this way, “BUNT” positions itself as a (discursive) ally of the order that systematically suppresses civil liberties, narrows the space for democratic pluralism, and delegitimizes opposition positions. It is particularly indicative that the channel constructs its greatest threats through figures symbolizing the liberal-democratic order: activists, NGOs, students connected to international initiatives, and prominent critics of the authorities. Therefore, the primary political function of “BUNT” is not to weaken the authoritarian system, but to restore it according to its own nationalist framework.

Although this study focuses on the Telegram channel “BUNT je stanje duha”, the aim is not to attribute disproportionate power to it in shaping protests and societal flows. Rather, it is viewed as a symptom and a node within a broader ecosystem of alt-right communication practices in the digital space. These are swarms of meaning—dense, affectively charged discursive structures circulating online – which, through repetition, exploit, shape, and deepen ideological antagonisms. Identifying and understanding the nature of these patterns and the networks through which they circulate is essential for a critical assessment of their cumulative effects and the real risks they pose to the normative framework defining the boundaries of politically acceptable and socially desirable behavior.

Considering these conclusions, the following **recommendations** are proposed:

- 1 Enhancing the effectiveness of media and digital literacy programs aimed at decoding subtle extremist content and recognizing sophisticated radicalization techniques;
- 2 Developing AI tools and linguistic models specifically trained for the Serbian language to monitor and analyze low-intensity forms of EDS, including complex linguistic patterns characteristic of the local context;
- 3 Conducting comprehensive qualitative research on far-right networks and influences in Serbia, with particular focus on alt-right culture, Russian influence, and regional actors;
- 4 Creating a platform for ongoing collaboration between civil society, the media, and educational institutions, aimed at designing and promoting locally relevant and emotionally resonant counter-narratives.

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Katarina Bogičević

Belgrade Centre  
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**BCSP**



Kingdom of the Netherlands

This publication was produced with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Its content is the sole responsibility of the Belgrade Centre of Security Policy and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Netherlands.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.55042/HTIH2063>

ISBN-978-86-6237-260-4

September 2025