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**BASIC INFO:**

Disinformation Alerts – Russian Media Monitoring is a monthly report of the news containing disinformation and misinformation targeting Kosovo, published by Russian media in English and Serbian Language

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The views presented in this publication are solely those of the Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED).

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# KOSOVO DISINFORMATION ALERTS

## RUSSIAN MEDIA

FEBRUARY 2020

## INTRODUCTION

**Kosovo Disinformation Alert: Russian Media Monitoring** aims to counter disinformation that targets Kosovo, through monitoring on a monthly basis of the preselected media outlets originating in Russia, in both, English, and Serbian Language. The preselected media in English Language are Russia Today, Sputnik, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report, whereas in Serbian Language is the Sputnik Serbia. In addition, the Kosovo Disinformation Alert monitors news, documents, and statements related to Kosovo, published by Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During February 2020, Russia Today has published five news, Sputnik one, Meduza none, Russian Insider two, TASS one, The Moscow Times none, Newsfront six, Unz none, The Duran one and Pravda Report none, whereas Sputnik Serbia has published 132 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. On the other hand, during this monitoring period, Kremlin had one, and Russian Foreign Ministry three postings on their web-sites related to Kosovo.

A careful review of the monitored news shows that the news published in English Language by the above listed media based in Russia in February 2020, do not have a serious disinformation content, and also Sputnik Serbia had not a single article that could be classified as disinformation, although few of them had a misinformation content. On the other hand, Kremlin had two news with no disinformation content, whereas the Report on Human Rights in a number of countries, of February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and the briefing of the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation of the February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020, contained a serious disinformation content.

The disinformation provided by both, the Report and the Briefing of the Russian Foreign Ministry clearly aims at presenting an obscure picture of the position of the Serbian Community and of inter-ethnic situation in Kosovo. This is done in order to display Kosovo as a state that oppresses minority communities and with high potential for eruption of ethnic violence, as well as to undermine the statehood of, and the support of the West to, Kosovo. The disinformation detected in this period will be discussed and deconstructed in the following section.

## DECONSTRUCTION OF THE DETECTED DISINFORMATION

### Disinformation Alert 1

**Title:** Report: Human Rights situation in certain countries, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Moscow February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020<sup>1</sup>

On February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has published a report on Human rights in certain countries, in which it dedicated a separate country section to Kosovo as well. In this section it presented a bleak picture of the country that has little to do with its reality. Since the report is filled with a large number of allegations, and vast majority of them are not supported by sources (there were only three reference sources mentioned), we will focus on the two most blatant cases of disinformation.

The report starts with the statement: “In 2017-2019, the human rights situation in the self-proclaimed "Republic of Kosovo" continued to be a major concern for the international community due to numerous incidents and violations that threatened to escalate into massive outbreaks of violence by Kosovo Albanian nationalists against Serb and other national minorities.”

Furthermore, among other false data and interpretations presented, there is a claim that “The Kosovo Serb NGO "Aktiv" reports that between September 2017 and September 2018 more than 50 murders of Kosovo Serbs took place”.

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights situation in certain countries, The Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Moscow, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020..

[https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign\\_policy/humanitarian\\_cooperation/-/asset\\_publisher/bB3NYd16mBFC/content/id/4025481#46](https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/humanitarian_cooperation/-/asset_publisher/bB3NYd16mBFC/content/id/4025481#46)

## Deconstruction of the disinformation: Facts and Figures

### a) Incidents that threatened to escalate into massive outbreaks of violence by Kosovo Albanian nationalists against Serb and other national minorities

This statement is not in accordance with the situation on the ground in Kosovo, which did not face any major inter-ethnic incidents since the riots of March 2004. Furthermore, the reports of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG), which in the report were quoted in a biased manner, do not support any such statement. In addition, in despite of the occasional tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, the inter-ethnic relations during the period covered by the report have remained stable, without any sign of any outbreak of any massive violence<sup>2</sup>.

### b) The Kosovo Serb NGO "Aktiv" reports that between September 2017 and September 2018 more than 50 murders of Kosovo Serbs took place

This statement is not supported by any credible data, including those provided by the esteemed Kosovo Serb NGO "Aktiv"<sup>3</sup>, Kosovo Police, and also by periodic reports of the SRSG to the United Nations Security Council. Furthermore, according to all these reports it is easily verifiable that not even a single case of any inter-ethnic murder has been registered in Kosovo<sup>4</sup>.

## **Disinformation Alert 2**

**Title:** Briefing by the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Moscow, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020: The Hague-based Kosovo Specialist Chambers' Specialist Prosecutor Jack Smith ready to initiate proceedings as part of the investigation into the crimes of Kosovo Albanians.

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<sup>2</sup> For further documentation of this statement see for example the UN Secretary General Reports on the United Nations Administration Mission in Kosovo (2017-2019), <https://unmik.unmissions.org/sg-reports>.

<sup>3</sup> For further inquiry see the publications of NGO Aktiv available at: <http://ngoaktiv.org/publications>

<sup>4</sup> For further documentation of this statement see for example the UN Secretary General Reports on the United Nations Administration Mission in Kosovo (2017-2019), <https://unmik.unmissions.org/sg-reports>

In her briefing the Spokesperson Zakharova, stated: “We firmly believe that hushing up the brutal crimes in Kosovo and leaving them without being investigated and punished is unacceptable. Illicit organ harvesting must remain a matter of scrutiny for the world community. What is at stake is the reputation of the international justice system, the European Union as a guarantor of the specialist court performing its duty and the general capability of European institutions to adequately assess the reality. All the individuals involved must suffer severe punishments, regardless of the positions they currently hold in Pristina.”

### **Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures**

#### **a) Hushing up of the brutal crimes in Kosovo**

In her accusations against the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, Zakharova neglects the fact that until the end of the last year more than 200 Kosovo citizens have been interviewed by the Prosecution of the Chambers<sup>5</sup>, which is a clear evidence that the Chambers are not hushing up the alleged crimes.

Furthermore, she gave a special emphasis to the alleged “organ harvesting”, for which, according to the Chief Prosecutor of the Special Investigative Task Force, Clint Williamson, “there are compelling indications that this practice did occur on a very limited scale and that a small number of individuals were killed for the purpose of extracting and trafficking their organs..., and that a handful of individuals were subjected to this crime.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the illicit organ harvesting is a matter of scrutiny of the world community.

In addition she was asking for severe (not deserved) punishments for all the individuals involved, regardless of their official positions in Kosovo, by neglecting the fact that according to the Article 16, Point b of the Law on Kosovo Specialist Chambers “the official position of the accused,

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<sup>5</sup> See for example: Gazeta Express, Mbi 200 persona të intervistuar nga Gjykata Speciale, a do të ndodhin arrestimet e para këtë muaj [More than 200 persons interviewed by the Specialist Chambers, will the first arrests take place this month], <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/mbi-200-persona-te-intervistuar-nga-gjykata-speciale-a-do-te-ndodhin-arrestimet-e-para-kete-muaj/>

<sup>6</sup> Statement of the Chief Prosecutor of the Special Investigative Task Force, Clint Williamson, 29 July, 2014, [https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Statement\\_of\\_the\\_Chief\\_Prosecutor\\_of\\_the\\_SITF\\_EN.pdf](https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Statement_of_the_Chief_Prosecutor_of_the_SITF_EN.pdf)

whether as head of state, prime minister or government official, does not release this person from criminal liability, nor does it mitigate his sentence”, thus proving that her claim does not have any bases<sup>7</sup>, but is a political propaganda against Kosovo.

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<sup>7</sup> Law No. 05/L-053 on the Specialist Chambers and the Office of the Specialist Prosecutor, August 31, 2015, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=11036>