



**A Snapshot of the Russian Diplomatic Warfare
and Disinformation against Kosovo**

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CONTACT:

Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED)

Str. Major Mehmet Bushi, H.III/1, 10 000 Prishtina, Kosovo

Tel: +383 (0)38 542 778

Web-site: www.kipred.org

Email: info@kipred.org

AUTHOR:

Dr. Lulzim Peci

PREFACE AND INTRODUCTION:

Dr. Mentor Agani

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PREFACE

During the, at least, a little bit over three last decades, Balkans was an area characterized with high levels of instability. First, in late 1980s, Milosevic seized power, first in Serbia, and then in Yugoslavia, and shortly after the political quarrels and disputes started to emerge all over the former Yugoslavia. These political quarrels and disputes were rapidly transformed into real, military, conflicts, and the world witnessed the wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo with all of their atrocities. In despite of the fact that after the bloody dissolution of Former Yugoslavia the possibilities for a renewed armed conflicts decreased dramatically, the region started to confront hybrid threats posed by Russia in conjunction with Serbia that were aiming to halt membership in NATO and to disrupt the EU integration process of other countries of the region, and particularly to undermine the independence of Kosovo.

Throughout this long period, Kosovo was among the major issues– and in many instances, the very major one, in these destabilizing efforts of Russia and Serbia in Balkans. As such, Kosovo was certainly in a very large measure, and throughout this period, a target of deliberate and systematic propaganda and disinformation efforts and campaigns of both, Moscow and Belgrade. What is immensely interesting and curious, however, is that the Serbian and Russian propaganda and disinformation activities were never a major topic of any policy research endeavor conducted in Kosovo. Consequently, until recently, there were no researches which were tackling specifically the diplomatic warfare and disinformation efforts of Russia as the major topic of the research.

This has changed ever since January of 2020, with initial publications of monthly editions of *Kosovo Disinformation Alerts* for both, Russian and Serbian media, which were followed with the publications of three-monthly editions of *Kosovo Disinformation Observers: Serbia and Russian Media*, conducted by the Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), supported by the Open Information Partnership (OIP) based in the United Kingdom.

The work in *The Kosovo Disinformation Alerts* consisted of finding and analyzing, in terms of their veracity, of all the articles on, or related to, Kosovo, issued by different media in Russia and Serbia, as well as of statements, reports and documents issued by Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Once after the articles containing disinformation were identified, the

disinformation was analyzed and published for a number of articles. Also, after the publication of these *Alerts* for three months, an analysis, including the statistical one, of the current trends in disinformation activities and campaigns was conducted, and that analysis was published in the three-monthly editions of *Kosovo Disinformation Observers*.

On the other hand, KIPRED made another qualitative step in addressing the Russian diplomatic warfare and disinformation by researching it from a policy perspective with the publication of the Special Policy Brief entitled: *Russia's Information Warfare Towards Kosovo: Political Background and Manifestation*, of October 2020, and later with another Policy Report entitled: *Countering Russian Malign Information Operations: Kosovo's Government Institutional Capacities and Coordination*, of March 2021. In addition, KIPRED continued the monitoring of the Kremlin's policy and disinformation of media in English and Serbian language originating in Russia from mid-2021 until the beginning of 2022 with quarterly reports *Kosovo Observer: Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation*

All this work has shed light on the political background on the Russia's diplomatic warfare against Kosovo, on the capacities of Kosovo's governmental institutions to counter it, then it has identified and clustered the key narratives of Kremlin's propaganda, and has given an overview of statistical analyses of articles containing disinformation on Kosovo published by media in English and Serbian language originating in Russia.

INTRODUCTION

This publication contains the following works prepared and presented by KIPRED over the last three years on the topic of Russian and Serbian disinformation activities and campaigns: 1) Special Policy Brief – *Russia’s Information Warfare Towards Kosovo: Political Background and Manifestation*, October 2020; 2) Policy Report – *Countering Russian Malign Information Operations: Kosovo’s Government Institutional Capacities and Coordination*, March 2021; 3) *Kosovo Observer: Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation*, June 1 - August 15, 2021; 4) *Kosovo Observer: Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation*, August 15 – October 31, 2021; 5) *Kosovo Observer: Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation*, November 1, 2021 - January 15, 2022; 6) *Kosovo Disinformation Observer: Serbian and Russian Media*, January – March, 2020; 7) *Kosovo Disinformation Observer: Serbian and Russian Media*, April – June, 2020; 8) *Kosovo Disinformation Observer: Serbian and Russian Media*, July – September, 2020; 9) *Kosovo Disinformation Observer: Serbian and Russian Media*, October – December, 2020.

The policy brief *Russia’s Information Warfare Towards Kosovo: Political Background and Manifestation* provides a short historical overview of the involvements of Russia on the Kosovo’s issue, from the end of the 19th century, which is then followed by a short historical and political overview of post-Soviet Russia’s involvement in Kosovo. After these two shorter sections, this policy brief continues with a longer section that analyzes the actual Russian diplomatic war against Kosovo, and the Russian cooperation with Serbia for accomplishing the objectives of this diplomatic war. The brief concludes that the context of Russian malign information operations toward Kosovo is underpinned by the mutual dependence of Moscow and Belgrade in pursuing their foreign policy interests toward Prishtina, Brussels, and Washington. As much as Serbia needs Russia for supporting its aims toward Kosovo, so does Russia needs Serbia in pursuing its policy on Kosovo. This is a fundamental component of the overall Russia’s strategy to stall the integration of the remaining states of the Western Balkans into the Euro-Atlantic institutions, by keeping the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia unresolved, in order to instill instabilities in the region, thus challenging the West in its own garden. Furthermore, this special policy brief states, Moscow is trying to misuse Kosovo’s independence as a “precedent” in pursuing its hegemonic

ambitions in the, so called, Russia's "near abroad." In these joint and concerted efforts of Russia and Serbia, Moscow has made clear its intention to give Serbia virtually the veto power on the settlement of its dispute with Kosovo, which, at the end of the day, may require the involvement of the United Nations Security Council, and, ultimately, of the Russian approval. This "lovely embrace" of Russia, did become a recipe for suffocating Serbia's EU integration ambitions that are conditioned with the full normalization of its relations with Kosovo. Therefore, for further curtailing of the Russian malign influence in the Western Balkans, according to the conclusions of this policy brief, the Western European countries should finally overcome their different positions on Kosovo's independence, by giving a clarity to the negotiation process between Kosovo and Serbia that will provide to Belgrade the most feared option by Russia, namely, making a strategic choice between Brussels and Moscow.

The policy report *Countering Russian Malign Information Operations: Kosovo's Government Institutional Capacities and Coordination*, of March 2021, is a policy analysis aiming to review and assess the capabilities of the institutions of Kosovo's Government to tackle, confront, and counter the Russian malign information operations. It has analyzed the foreign establishment of Kosovo, namely, the Office of the President (OP), the Office of the Prime-Minister (OPM), and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Diaspora (MFAD). Unfortunately, the findings of the research were that the OP, OPM, and MFAD, neither have the basic capacities, nor are coordinated with regard to countering Russian malign efforts against Kosovo. On the other hand, the other relevant governmental institutions, such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, and Kosovo's Judicial Council, have sufficient capacities to provide the necessary information to Kosovo's foreign policy establishment to counter the Russian diplomatic and malign information operations.

The policy report comes to the conclusion that prevailing circumstances related to Russian malign information operations need an immediate response by the Kosovo Government, both, in establishing a strategic communications institutional set-up, and in capacity building. Thus, the paper recommends that Government of Kosovo needs to establish a Strategic Communication Task Force, whose main mandate would be to counter Russian and other malign operations against Kosovo, with special focus on organizations like the United Nations, the Organization for

Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe, as well as on diplomatic missions accredited in Moscow and Belgrade, where the heartlands of Russian malign information operations are based. The fundamental duties of this Task Force should be analyzing Russian malign information operations against Kosovo, drafting counter and proactive narratives for responding Moscow, as well as anticipating its narratives and operations.

Indeed, the proposed framework, as such, will not be sufficient for addressing the Russian malign information operations that are spread and amplified by the Moscow controlled media. For being able to provide qualified and timely outputs, firstly, a profound knowledge on the methods of Russian disinformation strategies and tactics should be embedded within this framework, and the acquisition of skills on countering the disinformation and narratives of Moscow is also necessary. And secondly, the possession of advanced knowledge on political, military and diplomatic history of Russia, with the special focus on Putin's era, as well as its economy, is necessary to tackle Moscow's activities in a professional manner. Unfortunately, as this policy report finds out, in this regard, Kosovo's foreign policy establishment lacks basic knowledge on these topics, and not even a single investment has been made by Kosovo Government to build these capacities.

After the first Special Policy Brief, and the second Policy Report, this book contains, as its final part, two group of seven publications in total, issued by KIPRED in 2020, and 2021. Firstly, there are three *Kosovo Observers: Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation* (1: June 1 – August 15, 2021; 2: August 15 – October 31; and, 3: November 1, 2021 – January 15, 2022), and, secondly, four *Kosovo Disinformation Observers: Serbian and Russian Media* for the year 2020 (1: January – March, 2020; 2: April – June, 2020; 3: July – September, 2020; and, 4: October – December, 2020).

As mentioned in the Preface, during 2020, KIPRED had prepared two *Disinformation Alerts* for each and every month of the year: one was on disinformation by Russia, and the other on disinformation by Serbia. At the end of every quarter of the year, KIPRED did prepare the *Kosovo Disinformation Observers: Serbian and Russian Media*, in which it did analyze the disinformation trends during the previous three-monthly period. During the following year, 2021, KIPRED ceased to publish the *Disinformation Alerts*, but it continued to publish the three-monthly *Kosovo*

Observers, on the trends of disinformation, but this time only on disinformation delivered by Russian media and foreign policy establishment.

In analyzing the news, KIPRED focused on several media in Serbia, known for publishing news with disinformation content, and in several other media in Russia. The preselected media in Serbia were Tanjug, Informer, Novosti, Kurir, B92, Politika, and Nasa Borba. On the other hand, the preselected news media in Russia were Russia Today, Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran, and The Pravda Report. Also, KIPRED analyzed documents and statements related to Kosovo that were published and/or delivered and/or issued by Kremlin, and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The major achievement of all these publications of KIPRED on disinformation activities of Russia and Serbia during the years 2020 and 2021 was clustering of disinformation, namely, its categorization into clusters that were defined in accordance with general topics of the disinformation news. According to this clusterization, KIPRED has classified all the Russian and Serbian disinformation, spread by media or by foreign affairs institutions, into the following four major clusters:

- 1) Portraying independence and sovereignty of Kosovo as illegal and in violation of the international law, and comparing it with the Russian annexation of Crimea;
- 2) Portraying Kosovo as a quasi, pariah and criminal state, that exercises violence against the local Serbian Community and the Serbian Orthodox Church, as a threat to international security, hotbed of Islamic extremism, which also does not honor the agreements achieved in Brussels.
- 3) Manipulating and trying to change the narratives on the Kosovo war by denying the war crimes committed by Serbia in Kosovo, presenting the Kosovo Liberation Army as a terrorist organization, state creature that was created through a “genocide” supported by Western countries against the Serbian population, exaggerating the number of Serb casualties during the war, degrading the international and domestic efforts in dealing with war crimes in Kosovo by putting at the forefront the issue of the Specialist Chambers and alleged “organ harvesting.”
- 4) Undermining the role of thhe West in the state-building of Kosovo especially for the rule of law and transitional justice, as well as for training and equipping the Kosovo Security Force, and

accusing the US for the “secrecy” of the Bondsteel military base that functions under the mandate of the NATO’s led Kosovo Force (KFOR).

If we look at all the disinformation news discovered in all the thousands of articles that KIPRED has analyzed during these two years, we will see that the overwhelming majority of the disinformation will broadly fall into one of these four clusters of disinformation topics.

This publication that is following is a broad – although not comprehensive – review of the work already done. As noted earlier, the analyses and researches of the disinformation spread on Kosovo by Russia and Serbia, as such, that is, as a major topic of research, were inexistent before 2020. If propaganda and disinformation were investigated, they were auxiliary and supplementary, with the goal of helping to study other things. The work conducted by KIPRED, with the support of Open Information Partnership, during the last three years was pioneering in this field in Kosovo.

Special Policy Brief

Russia's Information Warfare Towards Kosovo:

POLITICAL BACKGROUND AND MANIFESTATION

OCTOBER 2020

Executive Summary

The aim of this Policy Brief is to analyze the political background of the Russian malign information operations towards Kosovo, which are part of a much larger malign operations against the Western countries and their partner countries. In this regard, the Brief will firstly introduce a short overview of the Russian involvement in Kosovo, from the beginning of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, until the end of 2017, when, as a result of the Moscow's diplomatic war, Kosovo experienced an unusual act in international politics, namely the withdrawal of recognition of its independence by Suriname. Secondly, it will analyze in detail the Russian diplomatic war against Kosovo, from 2018 to present, and its interrelation with Serbia, which is the most important stronghold of Moscow's influence in the Balkans. In this vein, in order to get a deeper understanding of the recent political background of the Russian malign operation campaign towards Kosovo (June 2018 – September 2020), this Policy Brief analyzes thoroughly the public statements and documents issued by Kremlin, the Russian Foreign Ministry, the Russian Mission to the United Nations, and the Russian Embassy to Serbia, which are the four most important speakers of Moscow in its diplomatic war against Prishtina.

This policy brief concludes that the context of Russian malign information operations towards Kosovo is underpinned by the mutual dependence of Moscow and Belgrade, in pursuing their foreign policy interests towards Prishtina, Brussels and Washington. In this regard, the analyses shows that as much as Serbia needs Russia for supporting its aims towards Kosovo, so does Russia need a "political and military neutrality" of Belgrade. This is a fundamental component of the overall Russia's strategy to stall the integration of the remaining states of the Western Balkans into Euro-Atlantic institutions, by keeping the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia unresolved, in order to instill instabilities in the region and challenge the West in its own garden. Furthermore, Moscow is trying to misuse Kosovo's independence as a "precedent" in pursuing its hegemonic ambitions in the, so called, Russia's "near abroad."

The research provides sufficient evidence in proving that Russia and Serbia's efforts in undermining the viability of Kosovo's statehood are conducted in a concerted manner, with similar positions and statements, that in many cases are systematically accompanied with

disinformation on the state of affairs in Kosovo and the role of the West in its state-building. In this regard, among others, the Kosovo's statehood is propagated by Moscow and Belgrade as a failed project of the West, and as a "rogue state entity" that endangers the regional security and stability, violates the rights of the local Serbian community, and dishonors the agreements achieved in Brussels during the EU facilitated dialogue with Serbia. On the other hand, the role of the West in Kosovo is portrayed, among others, as "NATO hegemony," being responsible for "war crimes" against Serbs, where the European Union is being accused for a failure, and the United States for "privatizing" its Bondsteel military base in Kosovo that operates within the framework of the NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR).

Against this backdrop, it can be expected that both, Russia and Serbia, in the upcoming period will exploit the possible fractures of Trans-Atlantic relations and the lack of unity within the European Union, for their own benefit, and at the expense of Kosovo and the West. Therefore, in order to further curtail the Russian malign influence in the Western Balkans, the Western European countries should finally overcome their different positions on Kosovo's independence, by giving a clarity to the negotiation process between Kosovo and Serbia that will provide to Belgrade the option that is most feared in Russia, namely, making a strategic choice between Brussels and Moscow. Once the unity of Washington's European allies is achieved, the Russian veto in the UN Security Council will also lose its effect, because Kosovo's road for NATO and EU membership will be opened, due to the fact that for the membership in these two institutions, the UN membership is not specifically required.

Most importantly, Kosovo Government should immediately prepare and employ a comprehensive inter-agency counter-strategy against the Russian malign operations, which has proven so far to be quite successful, not only in blocking Kosovo's integration within international community, but also in assisting Serbia in its de-recognition campaign that resulted with the withdrawal of more than ten recognitions of the Kosovo's statehood.

Introduction

The Russian visible diplomatic involvement in Kosovo began with the “Great Eastern Crisis.” The first Russian diplomat posted to the present day Kosovo, the Vice-Consul Ivan Stepanovich Yastrebov, was settled in the town of Prizren in April 1870, which at that time was an outpost of the Russian Consulate in the Vilayet of Shkodra.¹ Yet, the first Consul of Russia posted in the territory of Kosovo during the Ottoman rule was Gregory Stepanovich Shcherbin, whose mission in the town of Mitrovica begun in March 1903 and lasted very shortly.² In this period, the overall foreign policy and diplomatic activities of the Tsarist Russia vis-à-vis the Western Balkans were oriented in support of Serbia’s territorial ambitions in the region, including its territorial ambitions towards Kosovo. This ambition of Russia for expansion of its influence in Balkans was driven also by the Pan-Slavism, that was grown out of the “Slavophile movement.”³ Consequently, Kosovo that used to be a vilayet within the Ottoman Empire, with a majority Albanian population, was occupied by Serbia in 1912 during the First Balkans War, and its conquest was accepted by the London Ambassadorial Conference of 1913.⁴

During the period between two world wars, Moscow’s diplomatic involvement in Kosovo, that was already annexed by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, virtually vanished as a consequence of the lack of diplomatic relations of Belgrade with the Soviet Union.⁵ In addition, soon after the end of the WWII, the Socialist Yugoslavia broke with Stalin, in 1948, and later became one of the key founders of the Non–Aligned Movement, in 1961. Nevertheless, during the Cold War, when the world was divided alongside ideological lines, and in the fierce geopolitical competition between the United States of America and the Soviet Union, Kosovo had no particular importance in the Balkanian geopolitical and/or ideological chessboard, in order to be given a special attention by

¹ Lilić, Borislava. (2002). *Economy, population and settlements on Šar mountain as described in studies of Russian consul in Prizren I.S. Yastrebov*. 2002. Journal of the Geographical Institute Jovan Cvijić SASA. Belgrade.

² The mission of Consul Scherbin lasted very shortly, because he was killed during an uprising of Kosovar Albanians against Russian presence in Mitrovica on March 31st, 1903.

³ For further exploration see: Phillips, James Peter (2012), *The eastern crisis, 1875- 1878*, in *British and Russian press and society*. PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 31-40.

⁴ Malcolm, Noel. (1998) *Kosovo: A Short History*, New York University Press, pp. 256-257.

⁵ Kingdom of Yugoslavia established the diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union on the eve of the Second World War, in June 1940, whereas the first Soviet ambassador assumed his duties in Belgrade on October 17th, 1940, <http://www.polpred.oldgood.org/1024.html>

Moscow. At that time of fierce global ideological clashes, Kosovo was largely ignored even by Albania⁶ – let alone Moscow, or other great centers of power in international politics.

With the end of the Cold War and dissolution of the Socialist Yugoslavia, a new Russia returned in the Balkans, this time more as a political actor, rather than as a military or economic power. In the unipolar period of the US and NATO's global military preponderance, in its struggle for returning on the stage of the world politics as a great power, after the rapid decline of the Soviet Union and its dissolution, Russia was trying to display the world as multipolar, by using the reminiscences of the post Second World War international system. The West, from its side, adopted an opposite approach, by making efforts to integrate Russia in the new security architecture of Europe that occurred after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This meant giving the opportunity to Moscow to have a voice, but not a veto, on the NATO's enlargement and involvement in crisis management.⁷ The political return of Russia to the Balkans, unavoidably, involved Moscow in a blatant support of the interests of Serbia, and, by default, in an unfriendly policy towards Kosovo. In a way, this resembled the involvement of Tsarist Russia during the Eastern Crisis, in the last quarter of 19th century, albeit in a profoundly different geopolitical context.

⁶ See for example: Sejdiu B. and Peci L. (2018), "Engaging with the self-captive nation: Albania in the US official documents from 1945 to 1980," *Journal of South-East European and Black Sea Studies*, Routledge, 18(1), London

⁷ For deeper exploration see: Asmus R. (2002), *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era*, Columbia University Press, New York.

A short Overview of the Post-Soviet Russia's Involvement in Kosovo

In the period that followed with the beginning of the bloody break-up of the Tito's Yugoslavia, Russia initially chose to ignore the problem of Kosovo by blocking its internationalization and by supporting Belgrade actions. Nevertheless, the era of the first post-Soviet Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev is considered the only one in which Russia's foreign policy was accommodating with the West. Contrary to many in the foreign policy establishment of Russia, Kozyrev was considering that the option of turning Yugoslavia into Russia's new outpost in the Balkans was unrealistic.⁸ However, Kozyrev's foreign policy embarked in a different course when his successor, Yevgeni Primakov, took the driver's seat of Russian diplomacy. Primakov was a hostage to imperial nostalgia and theoretical concepts of multi-polarity, that led him in the direction of the illusionary schemes of anti-Western alliances. With this conceptual thinking of the Kremlin's foreign establishment, when the war erupted in Kosovo, Russia, as a member of the Contact Group,⁹ was engaged in the Rambouillet Peace Conference (February 1999) on Kosovo, where it made a deliberative choice to provide unconditional support to the obstructive behavior of Belgrade. Ultimately, Serbia's rejection of the Rambouillet accords, and its military campaign of systematic killings and ethnic cleansing on the ground in Kosovo, left no other options to the West but to wage the war against Yugoslavia.¹⁰

The reaction of Russia to the NATO's military intervention was immediate and harsh. Moscow condemned the Alliance's strikes claiming that those who were in charge for the intervention should be tried for "war crimes," and abruptly terminated, though not completely, relations with NATO. Nevertheless, as NATO ground invasion in Kosovo was becoming a real option – in face of terrible massacres of civilians and large scale ethnic cleansing – Russia represented by its envoy Victor Chernomyrdin joined the Western representatives, the US Envoy Strobe Talbot and Finish President Ahtissaari, in their efforts to end the war that led to the de facto surrendering of

⁸ Levitin, O. (2000). *Inside Moscow's Kosovo muddle*. Survival, 42(1), p. 133, IISS, London.

⁹ For further information on the Contact Group on Former Yugoslavia see: Schwegmann, Ch. (2000), Contact Group and its impact on the European Institutional Structure, Occasional Paper 16, European Union Institute for Security Studies, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/contact-group-and-its-impact-european-institutional-structure>

¹⁰ Levitin, p.137

Milošević.¹¹ Milošević accepted the agreement that provided for a full withdrawal of Serbian security forces and administration from Kosovo, the deployment of the NATO led peace enforcement operation Kosovo Force (KFOR) and the establishment of the UN Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK).¹²

Furthermore, Russia became part of the KFOR mission (although initially conducted an adventurous effort in trying to occupy the airport of Prishtina¹³), and opened an Embassy Chancery in the Kosovo's capital.¹⁴ However, the Russian contingent left the KFOR Mission in July, 2003¹⁵, by de-facto disengaging from the direct military presence in Kosovo. Yet, this move of Kremlin was not accompanied with political and diplomatic withdrawal. Thus, Russia didn't withdraw from its interests related to Kosovo, but instead made a strategic decision to exercise influence over it, by using mainly diplomatic power for pursuing its foreign policy interests and rivaling the West in the region.

Against this backdrop, the Kai Eide Report, that was endorsed by the UN Security Council in October 2005,¹⁶ paved the way for addressing the Kosovo's final status by re-engaging in the Contact Group (U.S., Russia, Great Britain, Germany, France and Italy), and consequently returned Moscow back as a major player in the region. In order to achieve a strategic benefit from this venture, according to Bechev, President Putin played his cards right from the very outset. If Kosovo remained part of Serbia, this could have been marked as a diplomatic victory of Russia. On the other hand, if the West would oppose it, and opt for independence of Kosovo,

¹¹ Norris, J. (2005). *Collision Course: NATO, Russia and Kosovo*, Praeger Publishers.

¹² See: NATO, Technical Military Agreement between the International Security Force ("KFOR") and the Governments of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia, 9 June 1999, <https://www.nato.int/kosovo/docu/a990609a.htm>, and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244(1999), 10 June 1999, <https://unmik.unmissions.org/united-nations-resolution-1244>

¹³ See for example: CNN, Pentagon: Russian presence at Pristina airport 'very minor', June 15, 1999, <http://edition.cnn.com/US/9906/14/us.kosovo.04/>

¹⁴ UNMIK, Diplomatic Missions, <https://unmik.unmissions.org/diplomatic-missions>

¹⁵ NATO Update, Russian Troops Leave Kosovo, July 10, 2003, <https://www.nato.int/docu/update/2003/07-july/e0702a.htm>

¹⁶ Security Council (2005), Letter dated 7 October 2005 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2005/635, 7 October 2005, <http://pbosnia.kentlaw.edu/kai-eide-report-N0554069.pdf>

Russia would have tried to present it as a precedent with universal implications, and use it for pursuing territorial interests in its near neighborhood.¹⁷

Consequently, Russia opposed, and warned that it would veto the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement presented to the UN Security Council, in April 2007, by the UN Special Envoy, President Ahtisaari.¹⁸ The Ahtisaari Plan provided for a supervised independence to Kosovo, which basically meant that Kosovo would become independent, but with a transitional period of international supervision and with strong constitutional guarantees for the collective rights of the Serb minority in Kosovo. Furthermore, as Bechev observes, the Declaration of the Military Neutrality by the National Assembly of Serbia, in autumn 2007, cemented the alliance with Russia, which made Belgrade to believe that with the assistance of Moscow, it can pursue a campaign for fighting back against a possible declaration of the independence of Kosovo.¹⁹

Under such circumstances, Kosovo declared independence on 17 February 2008, which was recognized immediately by the vast majority of the Western countries, with the exception of Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. Nevertheless, Russia and Serbia suffered another blow when the initiative backed by the UN General Assembly (October 2008) to address the legality of the Independence of Kosovo by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), resulted in their disfavor. The Advisory Opinion of the ICJ, which was rendered on 22 July 2010, clearly stated that the declaration of independence of Kosovo did not violate the international law.²⁰ The subsequent UN General Assembly Resolution of 9 September 2010 acknowledged the content of the ICJ's Advisory Opinion and transferred the UN mandate related to the Kosovo – Serbia dispute to the European Union,²¹ thus effectively putting Russia out of the negotiating table.

¹⁷ Bechev. D (2017), *Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe*, Yale University Press, p. 60.

¹⁸ See for example: BBC: "Russia threatens veto over Kosovo", 24 April, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6587497.stm>

¹⁹ Bechev. D. (2017), p. 60

²⁰ ICJ, Accordance with the International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in respect of Kosovo, 22 July, 2010, <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/141/141-20100722-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf>

²¹ UN General Assembly Resolution (64 Session, Agenda item 77) on the Request for an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on whether the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo is in accordance with international law, 9 September 2010, https://unmik.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/old_dnn/GA64298.pdf

As a result of the EU facilitated dialogue, Kosovo and Serbia in April 2013 reached in Brussels the First Agreement on Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations²² that created a ground for “modus vivendi” between the two countries, but it did not solve their dispute. During this negotiation process, Russia was rather marginalized by Serbia. Nevertheless, a month after the agreement, on 24 May 2013, the Serbia’s President Nikolic signed with Putin the Declaration on Strategic Partnership between the two countries that marked a new important turn of Belgrade towards Moscow.

Furthermore, on June 16, 2013, during the first visit of the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in Belgrade since 2010, the then Prime-Minister of Serbia, Ivica Dačić, stated that “relations with Russia are probably on the highest level in the last couple of decades” and that, “without the UNSC support by Russia and China, Serbia’s position on Kosovo-Metohija would be hopeless today.”²³ Although Serbia formally remained neutral towards the subsequent Ukrainian Crisis that culminated with the Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014, which Putin has tried to justify with the “precedent” of the independence of Kosovo,²⁴ Belgrade’s desire to rely on Russia’s support at the expense of the Western efforts and investment to solve the dispute with Kosovo became obvious. Furthermore, Belgrade turned itself into an anchor of Russian interests in the Balkans, during the times when the region is viewed by Moscow as the “Europe’s weakest link.”²⁵

Such a fusion of interests proved to be useful for both countries, since Serbia was getting support by Russia in projecting the independence of Kosovo as reversible and its statehood as failed, whereas Russia was using Serbia for ensuring its security foothold in the region in order to challenge the “NATO hegemony” in the region and for pursuing its energy interests.²⁶ The establishment of the dubious Russian–Serbian Humanitarian Center in the city of Niš that

²² First Agreement on Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations, 19 April, 2013.

<https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/2022>

²³ Weber, B. and Bassuener, K., The Western Balkans and Ukrainian Crisis, a changed game for EU and US policies, Policy Paper, Democratization Policy Council, Berlin – Sarajevo 2014, pp. 3-9

²⁴ Barlovac B. “Putin Says Kosovo Precedent Justifies Crimea Secession”, BIRN, Belgrade, 18 March, 2014.

²⁵ Bugajski, J, and Assenova, M., (2016) Eurasian Disunion: Russia’s Vulnerable Flanks, The Jamestown Foundation, Washington D.C. p.219.

²⁶ Ibid.

allegedly conducts intelligence activities,²⁷ the failed coup plot in Montenegro in 2016 at the eve of the country's NATO's membership,²⁸ and the Gazprom projects such as the failed South Stream²⁹ and the emerging Turk Stream,³⁰ are visible acts of this alignment between Russia and Serbia.

The results of this "(un)holly alliance" between Russia and Serbia in relation to Kosovo soon became visible. On 27 October 2017, Suriname announced that it had revoked the recognition of the independence of Kosovo.³¹ Allegedly, this act has been undertaken in order to please Putin ahead of the first visit by the Surinam's Foreign Minister Pollack-Beigh to Russia, on 31 October 2017.³² This was preceded with the visit of a Russian business delegation to Suriname in the same month and the visit of the Suriname's Minister of Trade in May of the same year in Saint Petersburg.³³ In the course of one year since this unusual act in international politics has been undertaken by Suriname, the revocation of the recognition of Kosovo's independence was undertaken by nine more countries.³⁴

In order to get a deeper understanding of the recent political background of the Russian malign operation campaign towards Kosovo, the following section of this policy brief will analyze thoroughly the public statements and documents issued by Kremlin, the Russian Foreign Ministry, the Russian Mission to the United Nations, and the Russian Embassy to Serbia, which are the four most important speakers of Moscow in its diplomatic war against Prishtina.

²⁷ See for example: Durdjic M, US Sees Russia's 'Humanitarian Center' in Serbia as Spy Outpost, Voice of America News, 15 June, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/europe/us-sees-russias-humanitarian-center-serbia-spy-outpost>

²⁸ For deeper inquiry see: Bajrović, R., Garčević, R. and Kramer, R. (2018), Hanging by a thread: Russia's Strategy for Destabilization in Montenegro, Russia Foreign Policy Papers, Foreign Policy Research Institute, <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/kraemer-rfp5.pdf>

²⁹ See for example: Korsunskaya D. Putin drops South Stream gas pipeline to EU, courts Turkey, Reuters, 1 December 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-gas-gazprom-pipeline-idUSKCN0JF30A20141201>

³⁰ See the official web-site of Turk Stream: <https://turkstream.info/>

³¹ Balkan Insider, What did Suriname just do to Kosovo, 31 October, 2017, <https://www.balkaninsider.com/what-did-suriname-just-do-to-kosovo/>

³² Kos-Stanišić, L., Luša, Đ. 2018. Position of Latin America Towards Kosovo in: Proroković, D. (ed.) Kosovo: Sui generis or Precedent in International Relations. Belgrade: Institute for International Politics and Economics, p. 254

³³ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Surinamese Foreign Minister Yldiz Pollack-Beighle, Moscow, October 31, 2017.

³⁴ European Parliament, Parliamentary Questions, Subject: VP/HR — Withdrawal of recognition of Kosovo, 20 December 2018, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2018-006438_EN.html

The “Stereo Dolby System” of the Russian Diplomatic War against Kosovo

Soon after the withdrawal of the Kosovo’s recognition by Suriname, on December 19, 2017, President Vučić of Serbia paid his first visit in that capacity to Moscow. In a statement issued after the meeting with Vučić, Russia’s President Putin expressed his support for the “sovereignty and territorial integrity” of Serbia, while stressing at the same time that dispute between Prishtina and Belgrade should be settled by political means and in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, and that Russia will support any mutually acceptable solution by Belgrade and Prishtina.³⁵

In line with the efforts of Moscow and Belgrade aimed at the de-recognitions of Kosovo, the Russia’s Permanent Representative to the U.N., Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia, in a statement delivered on 7 February 2018, accused, what he called as “the sponsors and executors of the questionable Kosovo project.” He called them to “reflect on the results of that misadventure,” by considering that “Kosovo continues to be one of the main problems on the regional, European and international agendas.” Furthermore, Nebenzia tried to project the legacy of Kosovo’s independence as a failure, by accusing also the KFOR and the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) for the same, including for alleged inefficiency of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers.³⁶ In addition, he accused the European Union for a failure in facilitating the dialogue between Prishtina and Belgrade, and Kosovo as the spoiler of the dialogue, by restating that the only solution to the Kosovo problem is a political one, which should be based on dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina in accordance with resolution 1244 (1999) of the Security Council.³⁷

A week after Vučić’s next meeting with Putin in Moscow (8 May, 2018),³⁸ in the meeting of the Security Council of 14 May 2018, Nebenzia’s deputy, Mr. Safronkov, while reinstating the same

³⁵ The Kremlin, Press Statements following the Russian – Serbian Talks, December 19, 2017, <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/511/events/56418>

³⁶ For further details see: The Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor’s Office, <https://www.scp-ks.org/en>

³⁷ UNSC Meeting Transcript, Speech by Vladimir A. Nebenzi, Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN at the UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Kosovo, 7 February, 2018, <https://russiaun.ru/en/news/kos070218>

³⁸ The Kremlin, Meeting with President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić, 8 May 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/511/events/57434>

position on Kosovo–Serbia dispute, increased further accusations towards Kosovo and the West. The Kosovar Government, among others was blamed for intimidation of local Serbs and preparations for transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into a full-fledged army, whereas NATO was blamed for termination of contacts between KFOR and Russia, and the U.S. was blamed for the “absolute secrecy of the Bondsteel base” and for the “military training of Kosovo Albanian security forces for conducting active hostile activities.”³⁹

On the other hand, President Putin, in an interview with the Austrian ORF Television Channel, given 4 June, 2018, made again an effort to use the “Kosovo precedent” to justify the legality of annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. In this regard, he justified the illegal referendum held in Crimea prior to the invasion by the Moscow’s military forces, by considering it as “a legal foundation” for the annexation by Russia. In addition, Putin considered the Kosovo independence as an annexation, which has been done after the invasion NATO.⁴⁰ This malicious using of the Kosovo’s false card for pursuing the Russia’s hegemonic ambition in its neighborhood was once again confirmed by Kremlin.

Interestingly, almost ten days later, in a statement given by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in a news conference following the talks with the Greek Foreign Minister, Kotzias, on 13 June 2018, gave a signal that the position of Russia on the Kosovo–Serbia dispute has slightly changed and gave to it a dimension of regional implications. In his words, Russia is “interested in settling issues in the Western Balkans in line with the aspirations of the people there. This applies to a Kosovo settlement based on UN Security Council Resolution 1244.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, two days later, in a press briefing, the Spokeswomen of the Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova changed the

³⁹ UN Security Council Meeting Transcript, Speech by Deputy Permanent Representative V.K. Safronkov at an open meeting of the UN Security Council on the situation in Kosovo, 14 May, 2018, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_8254.pdf

⁴⁰ The Kremlin, Interview with Austrian ORF television channel, 4 June 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57675>

⁴¹ Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to media questions during a news conference following talks with Foreign Minister of the Hellenic Republic Nikos Kotzias, Moscow, June 13, 2018, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/3257405

tone by stating that the Russian position “above all reflects the interests and requests of Serbia as a state and a nation.”⁴²

In this vein, in their meeting that took place on 29 June 2018, the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and Serbian Foreign Minister Dačić confirmed their “readiness to continue to closely interact on the problem of Kosovo, including at multilateral platforms.”⁴³ This made publically the very known fact that Russia and Serbia are working in a close coordination in pursuing their similar and complementary interests against the statehood of Kosovo and its Western supporters. The position of Russia towards Kosovo modified to the new dynamics of Moscow–Belgrade relations was presented by a special comment delivered by the Russian Foreign Ministry on 20 July, 2018:⁴⁴

“As is known, the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina is conducted with EU mediation under the UN General Assembly Resolution of September 9, 2010. The position of the Russian Federation is as follows: This process relies on international law and the fundamental document of the Kosovo settlement, *UN Security Council Resolution 1244, according to which the Autonomous Province of Kosovo is part of the Republic of Serbia.*”

Russian-Serbian relations have the nature of a strategic partnership. Contacts between Moscow and Belgrade, including those at the top level, are fairly intensive. The situation around Kosovo and other urgent bilateral and international issues are systematically discussed...

⁴² The Russian Foreign Ministry, Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, 15 June, 2018 https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3260571#27

⁴³ The Russian Foreign Ministry, Press release on Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s meeting with Foreign Minister of Serbia Ivica Dačić, 29 June, 2018, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/maps/rs/-/asset_publisher/GLz7aPgDnSfP/content/id/3286104

⁴⁴ The Russian Foreign Ministry, Comment by the Information and Press Department on the inquiry of the Beta News Agency into Russia’s position on the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, 20 July, 2018, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3302372

We are resolutely opposed to the artificial deadlines for a dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. We believe the Kosovo issue can only be resolved on terms that are acceptable to Serbia.

With this comment, Russia, first and foremost, clarified that it does not recognize the Advisory Opinion of the ICJ on the Kosovo's Declaration of independence, and also has given a manipulative interpretation of the General Assembly Resolution of 9 September 2010,⁴⁵ which specifically acknowledged the Advisory Opinion and transferred the authority for the settlement of the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia to the European Union. Also, Moscow made clear its intentions to turn the dialogue into a "never ending story" and to prolong it as much as possible, in order to weaken the credibility of the West and to keep the region unstable. Furthermore, through this comment, Moscow also displayed its intention to give to Serbia a veto power on the settlement of its dispute with Kosovo, which at the end of the day may require the Russian approval of any solution. In other words, the Russian "lovely embrace" became a recipe for suffocating Serbia's EU integration ambitions that are conditioned with the full normalization of relations with Kosovo.

Yet, Lavrov and Dačić met again on August 21, 2018, in Sochi. In the press conference following the meeting, Lavrov praised the "constructive role" of Serbia in the EU facilitated dialogue. He blamed Kosovo for not honoring the signed agreements in Brussels. While Kosovo had not a single visible sign of inter-ethnic violence for more than a decade, Lavrov was calling on KFOR and EULEX "to prevent violence and vandalism in Kosovo, including against Serbs and religious sites."⁴⁶ In addition to the press conference, a press release had been issued after their meeting, which stated that Lavrov and Dačić have reviewed in detail the charted steps to further improve

⁴⁵ General Assembly Resolution, A/Res/64/298/, 9 September 2010, https://unmik.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/old_dnn/GA64298.pdf

⁴⁶ The Russian Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Foreign Minister of Serbia Ivica Dacic, Sochi, 21 August, 2018, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/maps/rs/-/asset_publisher/GLz7aPgDnSfP/content/id/3322203

coordination in relation to Kosovo,⁴⁷ thus giving a hint on possible detailed implementation of joint strategy against Kosovo and the West. Therefore, it was not a surprise that in the press conference, Lavrov was trying to portray Kosovo as a country that is perpetuating violence against its Serbian non-majority community, whose representatives and members are integrated within the Kosovo Government, including multi-ethnic Kosovo Police. In essence, through these disinformation efforts, both Russia and Serbia are trying to create a ground for giving to Kosovo Serbs separate authority in policing, and ultimately eradicating the multi-ethnic character of the Kosovo's statehood.

On the other hand, in his remarks at the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly, held on September 28th, 2018 in New York, Lavrov reiterated that Russia will support any solution of the Kosovo-Serbia dispute that will be acceptable for Serbia, he blamed Kosovo for not fulfilling the agreements achieved in Brussels, and he also accused bluntly the United States for morphing the international presence in Kosovo (KFOR) into a US base,⁴⁸ thus giving to Kosovo a public character of a clashing point with Washington.

Furthermore, in a joint press conference with the Foreign Minister of Comoros, Mohamed El-Amine Souef, that took place in Moscow on 9 November, 2018, Lavrov praised the decision of Comoros to withdraw the recognition of Kosovo, and, among others, blamed again the NATO, "Washington and its allies," for bombing ex-Yugoslavia in 1999 and for recognizing Kosovo in 2008 in a bid to "legitimize their aggression in retrospect."⁴⁹ These Lavrov's narratives regarding Kosovo and the role of the West in its state building, are not a product of an undeliberated policy. In contrary they represent an attempt for revision of the bloody history of the break-up of former

⁴⁷ The Russian Foreign Ministry, Press release on Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's conversation with Serbian First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić, 21 August, 2018,

https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/maps/rs/-/asset_publisher/GLz7aPgDnSfP/content/id/3322221

⁴⁸ The Russian Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly, New York, September 28, 2018, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/general_assembly/-/asset_publisher/lrzZMhfoyrUj/content/id/3359296

⁴⁹ The Russian Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a news conference following talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Comoros, Mohamed El-Amine Souef, Moscow, November 9, 2018,

https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/3404241

Yugoslavia, and particularly of Kosovo, in which Serbia has perpetuated the largest atrocities, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing, in the European soil since the end of the Second World War. In this regard, Russia tries also to hide its role as a spoiler in almost all peace efforts in relation to Kosovo, from Rambouillet, to the Kosovo Status talks led by the UN Envoy, President Ahtisaari, by accusing the West and interpreting their threat with veto in the UN Security Council as a respect for the norms of international law, that has been done at the cost of human sufferings, and at the expense of justice.

Yet, President Vučić paid another visit to Moscow on 2 October, 2018, and he thanked Putin for his strong position in safeguarding the international law and vital national and state interests of Serbia.⁵⁰ Soon after this meeting, the Russia's U.N. Ambassador Nebenzia, in a statement delivered on 14 November 2018, intensified his accusations against Kosovo authorities, by falsely claiming that Prishtina will deploy one of the garrisons of the future army in the northern part of its territory, when no such intention was ever planned by the Kosovo Security Force that is developed under the supervision of NATO,⁵¹ by reiterating the false claims on Kosovo Albanians "for daily attacks on Kosovo Serb homes, arson, property damage and [that] cadastral authorities are usurpation of the UNESCO protected Orthodox sites," and asked, as in many previous UN Security Council meetings, the Specialist Chambers to start delivering on treating the "crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army."⁵²

On the other hand, in a repeated attempt to revise the history, Foreign Minister Lavrov in an interview given to the daily newspaper *Srpski Telegraf* on 17 November 2018, stated that the West "trampled international law underfoot in 1999 when they bombed Yugoslavia for two and a half months, after which the West, seeking to legitimize its aggression, recognized Kosovo's self-proclaimed independence," and accused the West for the creation of new dividing lines in a

⁵⁰ The Kremlin, Meeting with President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić, 2 October 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/511/events/58675>

⁵¹ See: NATO Liaison and Advisory Team (NALT), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_144933.htm

⁵² The UN Security Council, Speech by Permanent Representative V.A. Nebenzia at the meeting of the UN Security Council on Kosovo settlement, 14 November, 2018, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_8399.pdf

Post-Cold War Europe.⁵³ Similarly, in an interview given a month later to the Greek daily *Efimerida ton Sindakton*, Lavrov, on one hand, accused NATO and the EU for increasing their efforts to “absorb” the Balkans, and for imposing to the countries of the region making “a false choice” between Moscow with Washington and Brussels. According to him, this destabilizes the security architecture in Europe, increases tensions and creates new dividing lines, thus reinforcing the Russian opposition towards integration of the region into the EU and NATO. On the other hand, he projected Kosovo as the biggest source of instability in the region, and he accused the Kosovo Government for creating a regular Kosovo army, which, according to him, will be hostile towards Serbian Community in Kosovo.⁵⁴ In this vein, the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Spokeswoman, Zaharova, on 13 December, 2018, reinforced the position of Russia by stating that the Resolution 1244 (1999) has not been cancelled, by adding that any possible changes of the resolution can be made utterly in the agreement with Belgrade and solely in the interest of the Serbian people,⁵⁵ thus reiterating that, related to Kosovo, Russia is a de-facto holder of the Belgrade’s veto in the U.N. Security Council.

After Kosovo Parliament adopted a package of laws on 14 December 2018 that provided for a gradual ten years transformation of Kosovo Security Forces into an armed force, which were supported by the United States, with the request of Russia and Serbia, the UN Security Council held an emergency meeting on 17 December 2018. The Russian Ambassador Nebenzia in his statement bluntly tried to manipulate the interpretation of the Resolution 1244 of the Security Council, by stating that the resolution provides for a demilitarization of all Kosovo Albanian armed groups. Obviously, this has nothing to do with the Kosovo Security Force that is a multi-ethnic institution and by all means is not a subject of demilitarization. In his statement, Ambassador Nebenzia also tried to display the Kosovo Security Force as a threat to peace and

⁵³ The Russian Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s interview with Serbian newspaper *Srpski Telegraf*, 17 November, 2018, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3411347

⁵⁴ The Russian Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s interview with the Greek daily *Efimerida ton Sindakton*, published on December 7, 2018, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xlEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/3437070

⁵⁵ Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Moscow, 13 December, 2018, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3440823

security in the region, while at the same time he accused the United States for the secrecy of military activities in the Bondsteel base. Furthermore, and quite strangely, he stated that if the Kosovar armed forces enter the north of the country or exercise violence against local Serbs in another areas of Kosovo, Belgrade will protect them.⁵⁶ He thus hinted at a possibility of a direct conflict of Serbia's forces with the KFOR troops, even though President Vučić was present in the meeting and he did not say a single word on these speculations.

The issue of the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) was commented also by President Putin, in an interview with Serbian newspapers *Politika* and *Večernje Novosti*, given on the eve of his visit to Belgrade in mid-January 2019. He criticized the European Union for “a rather passive response” on the decision of the Kosovar authorities to transform the KSF, which has “violated international law” and is perceived by Kosovar Serbs as a security threat. Putin also reiterated his strong opposition towards NATO enlargement in the Balkans, by calling it, among others, a “vestige of the Cold War, a misguided destructive military and political strategy” that reduces trust and increases tensions in Europe,⁵⁷ thus trying to undermine the fundamental positive effects that the enlargement of the Alliance has had on the stability and security of Europe and of the Western Balkans. This statement represents a Cold War syndrome of Russia towards the West, that also helps the understanding of the strategic depth and narratives that lay behind malign disinformation operations towards Kosovo, which is undoubtedly a crucial point of the diplomatic battleground with the US and EU in the Balkans.

In the news conference that took place in Belgrade on 17 January 2019, following the meeting with Vučić, Putin again reiterated his interpretation on the transformation of KSF, and the Russian request for an immediate creation of the Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities. But, regarding the dialogue between Kosovo and Belgrade, he opted for “a mutually acceptable agreement, based on the UNSC Resolution 1244.”⁵⁸ This was slightly different from the

⁵⁶ The United Nations Security Council, 8427th Meeting, 17 December 2018, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_8427.pdf

⁵⁷ The Kremlin, Interviews to Serbian periodicals *Politika* and *Večernje novosti*, 16 January 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59680>

⁵⁸ The Kremlin, Joint News Conference with President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic, 17 January, 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/511/events/59693>

statements of the Russian Foreign Ministry that push for an agreement that has to be acceptable only for the Serbian people and Serbia. But, on the other hand, in order to give a public attention to the Russian overall engagement towards Kosovo, the next day after his visit to Serbia, President Putin convened a meeting with the permanent members of the Russian Security Council, in which, among others, participated the Defense Minister Shoigu, the Director of the Federal Security Service Bortnikov, and the Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service Naryshkin. According to the statement issued after the meeting, the discussion was particularly focused on the outcomes of the talks with Vučić in relation to Kosovo.⁵⁹

After this meeting, the Russian diplomatic war towards Kosovo intensified and was accompanied with more targeting and structured narratives. In the public statements delivered in the following months, especially by the Russian Foreign Ministry and the Russian Mission to the United Nations, the following propaganda elements came at the forefront of the Russian diplomatic war against Kosovo: the narratives on the case of alleged organ harvesting and trafficking related against the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, labeling the majority of the members of the Kosovo Security Force as “former KLA terrorists,” blaming the US and a number of other NATO countries, for training and equipping with weapons the KSF and presenting it as a security threat for Kosovo Serbs, targeting the “secrecy” of the US Bondsteel base in Kosovo, blaming Kosovo for virtually non-existent crimes against Kosovo Serbs, including those on the Serbian Orthodox Church, denying the war crimes conducted by Serbia in Kosovo by including also the Reçak Massacre, blaming Kosovo for not honoring the agreements achieved in Brussels, especially on the Association of Serbian Majority Municipalities, blaming NATO for the intervention of 1999 by presenting false figures on the number of people and children killed in Serbia during the bombing campaign of the Alliance, blaming KFOR and EU for supporting “Kosovo Albanians,” and presenting Kosovo as a failed state and a stronghold of Islamic terrorists.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ The Kremlin, Meeting with the permanent members of the Security Council, 18 January 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/511/events/59693>

⁶⁰ For further details see the following documents: Speech by Permanent Representative V. A. Nebenzia at the UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Kosovo, 07 February, 2018, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_8459.pdf, Speech by Permanent Representative V. A. Nebenzia at the UN

Ironically, Serbian Foreign Minister Dačić and, especially, President Vučić, in the meetings of the UN Security Council, used less harsh vocabulary towards Kosovo, than the representatives of Russia. Although they criticized the performance of KFOR and EULEX, and they certainly were trying to present a bleak picture of Kosovo, their narratives did not match the tough harshness of those of Russia.⁶¹ Obviously, Russia made a choice to become a “very bad guy” towards Kosovo and the West, whereas the Serbian approach was to project itself as “not a bad guy” for the West,

Security Council meeting on the situation in Kosovo, 31 October 2019, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_8655.pdf, Statement and Right of Reply by Chargé d'Affaires of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Polyanskiy, at the UN Security Council open debate, 19 November 2019, https://russiaun.ru/en/news/sc_1911, Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, Moscow, February 7, 2019, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3503377, Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Moscow, 14 February, 2019, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3517450, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at the Munich Security Conference, Munich, 16 February, 2019, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/3520272, Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Moscow, 28 February, 2019 https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3549162, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview for a Vladimir Kobyakov documentary, “A U-Turn over the Atlantic”, to be screened by NTV Channel, Moscow, 22 March, 2019, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3580855, Foreign Ministry statement on the 20th anniversary of NATO aggression against Yugoslavia, 23 March, 2019, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3583602, Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko's interview with the Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, April 15, 2019, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/evropejskij-souz-es/-/asset_publisher/6OiYovt2s4Yc/content/id/3616145, Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova on the sidelines of the Terra Scientia National Educational Youth Forum, Solnechnogorsk, August 9, 2019, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3754402, Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Moscow, 4 September, 2019, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3772341, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to questions during the Valdai International Discussion Club's panel on Russia's policy in the Middle East, Sochi, 2 October, 2019, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/3826083

⁶¹ See for example the transcripts of the following UN Security Council Meetings, S/PV.8427, 17 December 2018, in which participated President Vučić, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_8427.pdf, and S/PV.9541, 10 June 2019, in which participated Foreign Minister Dačić.

and “a bad guy” for Kosovo, in order to keep open the doors for diplomatic maneuvering with Washington and Brussels.

Another important step of Russia, in pursuing the diplomatic war and malign disinformation operations towards Kosovo, was marked with the appointment of a very seasoned Ambassador to Serbia, Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko, on 10 June 2019, who among others was a Special Envoy of the Russian Foreign Minister for the Balkans from 2004 to 2009, and Ambassador in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2009 to 2014.⁶² In his capacity as a Special Envoy for the Balkans, Ambassador Kharchenko was part of the Contact Group’s troika special envoys together with the US Ambassador Frank Wisner, and the EU representative, Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, in the follow-up mediation efforts between Kosovo and Serbia, which started with the initiative of the President Sarkozy of France, after Russia threatened to veto the Ahtisaari’s Plan for Kosovo’s supervised independence.⁶³ At the beginning of December 2010, the Troika reported to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon the failure of their efforts in reaching an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia,⁶⁴ in which, as explained earlier, Putin strategically played his cards very well.

In his interview with *RIA Novosti*, on 1 July 2019, while emphasizing the mutual support between Russia and Serbia in different international forums and venues, Kharchenko underlined that during Putin’s visit in Belgrade, on 17 January 2019, long term decisions have been made. In regard to Kosovo, in addition to reiterating the already set narratives of Russia against Kosovo and the West, he restated the position of Moscow that is “guided” by the UN Security Council Resolution 1244(1999), that Russia favors a negotiated solution on the bases of agreements between Belgrade and Prishtina, and underlined that such an agreement should be confirmed or approved by the UN Security Council, thus making public the intention of Russia to keep an upper hand upon the results of the Kosovo–Serbia dialogue. Furthermore, following the already set

⁶² See the official CV of Ambassador Kharchenko, <https://serbia.mid.ru/sr/embassy/ambassador/>

⁶³ See for example: Deutsche Welle, Contact Group Meets on Kosovo’s Future as Tensions Rise, 25 July, 2007, https://www.google.com/search?q=Contact+group+troika+Kosovo&rlz=1C1GCEA_en_843_843&oq=Contact+group+troika+Kosovo&aqs=chrome..69i57.22441j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

⁶⁴ See for example: UN SG’s letter dated 10 Dec 2007 to the President of the UN SC - Report of the EU/US/Russian Fed. Troika on Kosovo (S/2007/723), <https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/un-sgs-letter-dated-10-dec-2007-president-un-sc-report-euusrussian-fed-troika-kosovo>

course of Kremlin's policy, he accused the West, and particularly the US, for supporting Kosovo and NATO enlargement in the Balkans, and praised Serbia's "balanced multi-vector foreign policy."⁶⁵

In the interview given to *Politika*, on 1 September, 2019, he stated that "Serbia is a stronghold of Russia, as well as Russia is a stronghold of Serbia and will remain so". In this spirit, he stressed that the West wants Russia out of the Balkans, in order for all the countries to become NATO members, which, in case of Serbia's membership in the Alliance, would justify "the atrocities" committed during the air campaign of 1999. On the other hand, while stressing that Russia does not advocate the partition of Kosovo, Kharchenko stated that the partition of Kosovo would not set "a precedent for territorial division in Europe,"⁶⁶ thus indicating that Moscow has nothing against this option, which, at the end of the day, will only serve to its hegemonic interests in its neighborhood.

Furthermore, the stature of Kharchenko in the Russian foreign policy establishment related to the Balkans, has been also displayed by his comments of 4 October, 2019, published by the Russian Embassy in Belgrade, on the statements of the US Defense Secretary, Mark Esper, delivered in the US Senate in July 2019. In his comments, among other things, he accused the US for a "rules-based order" outside of the international law, by claiming that the US wants to turn Kosovo into a "NATO platform" with the largest Bondsteel base.⁶⁷ He also reiterated, with the same tone, the Russian already set narratives against Kosovo and the West, in his interview with the Russian *TASS News Agency*, on October 31, 2019, few days after Prime-Minister Brnabić met

⁶⁵ Interview of the Ambassador of Russia to Serbia, A. A. Botsan-Kharchenko to the *RIA Novosti* news agency, 1 July 2019, https://serbia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/intervyu_posla_rossii_v_serbii_a_a_botsan_kharchenko_ria_novosti/

⁶⁶ Interview of the Ambassador of Russia to Serbia, A. A. Botsan-Kharchenko, to the *Politika* newspaper, 1 September, 2019, https://serbia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/intervyu_a_a_botsan_kharchenko_gazete_politika/

⁶⁷ Commentary of the Ambassador of Russia to Serbia, A. A. Botsan-Kharchenko, in connection with the statements of the US Secretary of Defense M. Esper, actively quoted in the Serbian media at the hearings on his candidacy in the Senate in July 2019, https://serbia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/kommentariy_posla_rossii_v_serbii_a_a_botsan_kharchenko_v_svyazi_s_aktivno_tsitiruemymi_v_serbskikh/

with Medvedev in Russia on the occasion of the signing of the agreement on the free trade zone between Serbia and Euro Asian Economic Union (EAEU).⁶⁸

In another interview given in December 2019, Kharchenko clarified that since the withdrawal of the Russian contingent from KFOR in July 2003, the Moscow's diplomatic engagement towards Kosovo was focused on political work, particularly in the UN Security Council,⁶⁹ by aiming to project Kosovo as a "global problem" of international security. Obviously, in pursuing its interests in the Balkans, Russia has projected Kosovo as one of the hottest regional spots of the diplomatic confrontation with the West, and particularly with the United States.

In this regard, one should take into account that Russia's GDP (1.7 trillion USD) is much smaller than, for example, those of the Italy (2.001 trillion USD), and the United Kingdom (2.287 trillion USD),⁷⁰ with each of these two countries having almost 2.5 times smaller population,⁷¹ and its military budget (66.527 billion USD), can in no way match that of the United States (731.751 billion USD).⁷² Thus, having in mind its economic and military capacities, Russia has wisely chosen the economically much more affordable and cost effective strategy to exert diplomatic hardness and malign information operations towards the West and the Balkans.

Within this context an intense diplomatic interaction between Russia and Serbia has marked the end of the year 2019. Prior to the meeting between Presidents Putin and Vučić in Moscow in the beginning of December, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Groshenko had a political consultations' meeting in Belgrade with Dačić on 29 November. On the other hand, in a press-conference after the meeting of two presidents in Sochi, on 4 December, 2019 Putin, among

⁶⁸ Interview of the Ambassador of Russia to Serbia A.A. Botsan-Kharchenko to the TASS news agency, Belgrade, 31 October, 2019, https://serbia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/intervyu_posla_rossii_v_serbii_a_a_botsan_kharchenko_informatsionnomu_agentstvu_tass_belgrad_31_oktya/

⁶⁹ Russian Embassy in Belgrade, Interview of the Ambassador of Russia to Serbia, A. A. Botsan-Kharchenko, to the newspaper *Edinstvo*, 25 December, 2019 https://serbia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/intervyu_posla_rossii_v_serbii_a_a_botsan_kharchenko_gazete_edinstvo_25_dekabrya_2019_goda/

⁷⁰ The World Bank Data, GDP (Current USD), Russian Federation, Italy, United Kingdom, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=RU-IT-GB>

⁷¹ The World Bank Data, Total Population, Russian Federation, Italy, United Kingdom, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=RU-IT-GB>

⁷² The World Bank Data, Military Expenditure, Russian Federation, United States, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD?locations=RU-US>

others, underlined Russia's endorsement for Serbia's political-military neutrality, and he reiterated the Russian position that the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia should be solved within the framework of the UNSC Resolution 1244, including the respect "for sovereignty and territorial integrity," backing Serbia's position against the independence of Kosovo.⁷³

On the other hand, Foreign Minister Lavrov met with Dačić in Moscow on 20 December, 2019, where, according to the statement issued after the meeting, they pointed out their coordinated efforts towards Kosovo, "based on the Resolution 1244 and international law," and their "shared intention" for stability in the Balkans. Whereas in an interview with *Srpski Telegraf*, on the same day, Lavrov reiterated that any agreement between Kosovo and Serbia should be approved by the UN Security Council, and that Russia will approve a solution that is acceptable for Serbia,⁷⁴ by not letting a room for doubting any dissonance in the strategic partnership of the two countries in their diplomatic war towards Kosovo.

An interesting development regarding the Russian diplomatic war towards Kosovo, is the publication of a rather odd report of the Russian Foreign Ministry on "Human Rights in certain countries," on 7 February 2020, in which, in addition to all NATO and EU countries, the human rights situation was "reviewed" for Australia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Japan and Kosovo. Belarus and Serbia were the single countries of Europe not included in the list,⁷⁵ and this very fact, obviously tells that Russia considers these two countries as its strongholds in Europe. The Report highlights the geographic scope of Moscow's malign operations against the West and its allies and partners.

In regard to Kosovo, the situation in the country is presented with a lot of false allegations, especially about the position of Serbian minority community. The (non)seriousness of this Report

⁷³ The Kremlin, News conference following Russian-Serbian talks, 4 Decemeber, 2019,

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/62240>

⁷⁴ The Russian Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with Serbian newspaper *Srpski Telegraf*, published on 20 December, 2019,

https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/3965980

⁷⁵ Russian Foreign Ministry, The Report on "Human Rights in certain countries", 7 February 2020,

https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/humanitarian_cooperation/-/asset_publisher/bB3NYd16mBFC/content/id/4025481

is shown by the fact that it uses only three references which are interpreted in a manipulative manner. The Russian Foreign Ministry went as far as to present even a blatant disinformation by quoting an inexistent report of the respected Kosovo Serbian *NGO Aktiv* that allegedly, “50 local Serbs have been murdered in Kosovo from September 2017 and September 2018,”⁷⁶ when not even a single case of inter-ethnic killing in Kosovo was recorded ever since 2004.

In the following period, which was marked with the worldwide spread of the COVID-19 pandemics, the intensity of bilateral visits between Russia and Serbia decreased, but this had not an effect on keeping the track of Moscow’s malign information operations towards Kosovo. In the press briefings of the Russian Foreign Ministry, in the meetings of the UN Security Council and in the interviews of Ambassador Kharchenko, Kosovo and its Western supporters remained a constant target of blame and disinformation, especially about the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, the denial of the war crimes committed by Serbia in Kosovo, on “crimes” committed against local Serbs in Kosovo, transformation of the Kosovo Security Force, stalling of the EU facilitated dialogue, changing the historical narratives about NATO’s involvement in the Balkans and the US Bondsteel base, as well as the comparison of the independence of Kosovo with the annexation of Crimea, in addition to reiterating almost in every occasion their support of Serbia and their aim that any agreement between Kosovo and Serbia should be approved by the UN Security Council.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ The Russian Foreign Ministry: Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Moscow, 27 February 2020, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4062030, Comment by the Information and Press Department on the politicisation of war crimes in the Balkans, 25 May, 2020, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/kommentarii_predstavatelya/-/asset_publisher/MCZ7HQuMdqBY/content/id/4138028, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s news conference on the telephone conversation with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, Moscow, June 16, 2020, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/4166417; The Russian Mission to the United Nations: Statement by Mr. Vassily Nebenzia, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, 28 April, 2020, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_339_E.pdf, Highlights of the remarks by Vassily Nebenzia, Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN, at an Arria-formula VTC “Follow-up to the Arria-formula discussion of March 6, 2020, on the situation in Crimea”, 21 May, 2020, https://russiaun.ru/en/news/arria_210520; The Russian Embassy in Belgrade: Speech by the Ambassador of Russia to Serbia A. A. Botsan-Kharchenko during the video-conference “Let’s bow to those great years,” 08 May, 2020, <https://serbia.mid.ru/ru/press->

In light of this approach, it cannot be ruled out that Russia will block any change of the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 in order to keep the situation tensed in the region and fuel instability in the Balkans, even if Kosovo and Serbia reach any agreement that paves the way for recognition of Kosovo (tacit or expressive), and even in a case that Serbia embarks in the direction of the West and detaches itself from the strong embrace of the “Russian Bear.”

Furthermore, after the admission of North Macedonia in NATO on 1 April 2020, that has been accepted with uneasiness by Moscow,⁷⁸ the Kosovo–Serbian dispute and the Bosnia and Herzegovina disagreement between the Federation and Republika Srpska on the future of the country and membership in NATO, remained the single hot spots where Russia still has some space to instill instabilities at the expense of the Western efforts to project stability and security in the Western Balkans.

Against this background, there are no visible signs on the horizon that Serbia will start to change the parameters of its alignment with Russia and its position towards Kosovo. In Belgrade’s diplomatic calculations, both Moscow and Prishtina are variables of the same equation in relation to the European Union and the United States. In this vein, in their joint article “The Kosovo knot: is a fair solution possible?,” published in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Kurir* on June 18, 2020, on the same date of Lavrov’s visit to Belgrade and meeting with President Vučić, Lavrov and Dačić confirmed that they share the same positions, not only related to Kosovo, but also towards the United States and the European Union.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Lavrov and Dačić implicitly supported the

[centre/news/vystuplenie_posla_rossii_v_serbii_a_a_botsan_kharchenko_v_khode_videokonferentsii_poklonimysya_veliki/](https://serbia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/vystuplenie_posla_rossii_v_serbii_a_a_botsan_kharchenko_v_khode_videokonferentsii_poklonimysya_veliki/), Statement by the Ambassador of Russia to Serbia A. A. Botsan-Kharchenko for the media, 12 May, 2020, https://serbia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/zayavlenie_posla_rossii_v_serbii_a_a_botsan_kharchenko_12_maya_2020_goda/, Interview of the Ambassador of Russia to Serbia A. A. Botsan-Kharchenko to the RTS TV channel, 12 June, 2020, https://serbia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/intervyu_posla_rossii_v_serbii_telekanalu_rts_12_iyunya_2020_g/

⁷⁸ See for example: Reuters, Russia threatens retaliation as Montenegro becomes the 29th NATO member, 6 June, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-nato-montenegro-idUSKBN18W2WS>, and Euractiv, Russia fumes at North Macedonia’s NATO Accession, 1 April, 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/russia-fumes-at-north-macedonias-nato-accession/>

⁷⁹ The Russian Foreign Ministry: Article co-authored by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dačić published in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Serbian Kurir* on June 18, 2020, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/maps/us/-/asset_publisher/unVXBbj4Z6e8/content/id/4168272

option of partition of Kosovo as a compromise for normalization of relations with Serbia, as underlined in their joint article:

“At the same time, we note that Serbia’s admission to the EU is still used by some as a lever to exert pressure on Belgrade in matters of recognizing Kosovo’s “independence.” It turns out that to become an EU member, the applicant state must give away a chunk of its territory. Those behind this absurd demand see a certain threat in the possible adjustment of the Kosovo administrative line. Such a concern seems all the more hypocritical if you think about who and how dismembered Yugoslavia.”⁸⁰

On the other hand, Putin and Vučić had an intensive communication during the COVID-19 pandemics that culminated with Vučić’s visit to Moscow on 23 June 2020. This visit took place just a few days before the planned White House meeting in Washington between Kosovo and Serbia.⁸¹ Interestingly, in the introductory statement to Vučić’s visit, Putin did not mention Kosovo at all.⁸²

Nevertheless, after the Washington Agreement of 4 September 2020,⁸³ at the request of Vučić, initially a phone conversation took place with Lavrov on 6 September, 2020, in which the overall commitment of the strategic partnership between the two countries was stated, but in terms of synchronization of policy on Kosovo, it was stated only the Russian position that the dispute should be solved in accordance with the Resolution 1244.⁸⁴ In the statement issued by Kremlin, following the phone conversation of Vucic with Putin on 10 September 2020, the Resolution 1244 was not mentioned as a basis for an agreement for the Kosovo–Serbia dispute. Instead, a

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ See for example: Balkan Insight, Serbia, Kosovo Prepare for Restart of Talks in Washington, 17 June 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/16/serbia-kosovo-prepare-for-restart-of-talks-in-washington/>

⁸² The Kremlin, Meeting with President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic, 23 June, 2020, <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/511/events/63549>

⁸³ See for example: The Washington Post, Serbia and Kosovo sign breakthrough economic accord that is short of normal relations, 4 September 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-kosovo-serbia-agreement/2020/09/04/b1283f8c-eec0-11ea-99a1-71343d03bc29_story.html

⁸⁴ The Russian Embassy in Belgrade, Telephone conversation between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and President of Serbia A. Vucic, 06 September, 2020, https://serbia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/o_telefonnom_razgovore_ministra_inostrannykh_del_rossii_s_v_lavrova_s_prezidentom_serbii_a_v_uchichem/

“balanced compromise solution, that should be acceptable to Belgrade, and approved by the UN Security Council,” was used as wording on this matter.⁸⁵

Yet, Serbia’s commitment to move its Embassy in Israel from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem, as a part of the Washington Agreement, which is also in collision with the position of Russia regarding the Palestinian problem, was not criticized by Lavrov in a press conference held on 09 September, 2020. Ironically, while not criticizing Serbia for the agreement, Lavrov used the opportunity to question the sincerity of Washington as a mediator,⁸⁶ thus signaling that deviations of Belgrade from Moscow’s positions will be tolerated, as long as they do not endanger the Russian interests, that is, the interests to keep the upper hand on Kosovo–Serbia dispute in the quest for influence and rivalry with Washington and Brussels in the Balkans.

⁸⁵ The Kremlin, Telephone conversation with President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic, September 10, 2020, <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/511/events/64019>

⁸⁶ The Russian Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Mukhtar Tleuberdi, Moscow, September 9, 2020, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Mukhtar Tleuberdi, Moscow, September 9, 2020

Conclusion

The context of Russian malign information operations towards Kosovo is underpinned by the mutual dependence of Moscow and Belgrade, in pursuing their foreign policy interests towards Prishtina, Brussels and Washington. As much as Serbia needs Russia for supporting its aims towards Kosovo, so does Russia need a “political and military neutrality” of Belgrade. This is a fundamental component of Russia’s strategy to stall the integration of the remaining states of the Western Balkans into Euro-Atlantic institutions, by keeping the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia unresolved in order to instill instabilities in the region and challenge the West through “malicious soft power.”

In this regard Moscow made clear its intention to give Serbia the veto power on the settlement of its dispute with Kosovo, which, at the end of the day, may require the involvement of the United Nations Security Council, and, ultimately, the Russian approval. In other words, the Russia’s “lovely embrace,” became a recipe for suffocating Serbia’s EU integration ambitions that are conditioned with the full normalization of relations with Kosovo. Nevertheless, the end game of the Russian malign operations towards Kosovo, by recalling the vast investment of its political credo in Serbia, will depend from the “face saving mode” of both of them in the end of the negotiation process between Kosovo and Serbia.

Against this backdrop, it is very likely that both, Russia and Serbia, in the upcoming period will exploit possible fractures of Trans-Atlantic relations and the lack of unity within European Union for their own benefit and at the expense of Kosovo and the West. Therefore, in order to further curtail the Russian malign influence in the Western Balkans, the Western European countries should finally overcome their different positions on Kosovo’s independence, by giving a clarity to the negotiation process between Kosovo and Serbia that will provide to Belgrade the most feared option for Russia, namely, making a strategic choice between Brussels and Moscow. Once after the unity of the Washington’s European allies is achieved, the Russian veto in the UN Security Council will also lose its effect, because Kosovo’s road for NATO and EU membership will be opened, due to the fact that for the membership in these two institutions, the UN membership is not specifically required.

On the other hand, Kosovo Government, which until now did not address in a systematic manner the Russian diplomatic war, should immediately prepare and employ a comprehensive inter-institutional counter-strategy against Moscow's malign operations, which have proven so far to quite successful, not only in blocking Kosovo's integration within international community, but also in assisting Serbia in its de-recognition campaign that resulted with the withdrawal of more than ten recognitions of Kosovo's statehood.

Policy Report

Countering Russian Malign Information Operations:
Kosovo's Government Institutional Capacities and Coordination

MARCH 2021

Executive Summary

This policy report reviews and assesses the Kosovo Government's institutional capacities and inter-institutional coordination for exposing and countering the Russian malign information operations towards Kosovo.

The research findings give sufficient evidence that the foreign policy establishment of Kosovo, namely, the Office of President (OP), Office of Prime-Minister (OPM) and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Diaspora (MFAD), neither have basic capacities nor are coordinated with regard to countering Russian malign efforts against Kosovo.

On the other hand, the other relevant governmental institutions, such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, and Kosovo Judicial Council, have sufficient capacities to provide the necessary information to Kosovo's foreign policy establishment to counter the Russian diplomatic and malign information operations, which are also amplified by media controlled Moscow.

Against this research background, this policy report recommends the establishment of the Strategic Communication Task Force for countering the Russian and other states' diplomatic and malign information operations against Kosovo. Furthermore, this policy report also recommends several policy-making measures. This includes adopting the new foreign policy strategy of Kosovo that must take into the consideration the contemporary international political environment, particularly the Russian foreign politics and an Action Plan for countering the Russian diplomatic war and malign information operations against Kosovo.

Finally, the report recommends several capacity building steps for increasing the capacities of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Diaspora, and of other relevant governmental institutions, as well as for media and civil society, related to Russian disinformation strategies and tactics, countering disinformation, and increasing general knowledge on the Russia's political, military and diplomatic history and its contemporary economy, in order to be able to deal with this threat in a professional manner.

Introduction

The Russian malign information operations towards Kosovo are systematic, consistent and persistent over time. During the course of the last 20 years, in all posts published by the official web-sites of the Russian governmental institutions and representations, it is impossible to find a single positive statement about Kosovo.

The first post related to Kosovo that can be found at the web-site of the Ministry for Foreign Relations (MFA) of the Russian Federation, is dated on September 19, 2001, a week after 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. The Russian MFA transmitted a statement by the “Most Holy Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Alexy II and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Acts of Terrorism in America”, in which, among others, he inter-relates the horrible Al-Qaida terrorist attacks in the United States with Albanians in Kosovo and North Macedonia. This statement emphasizes that “Orthodox shrines are still being destroyed, and the civilian population is being subjected to terror, in Kosovo and Macedonia.”⁸⁷ Since then until the end of February 2021, on the web-site of the Russian Foreign Ministry were published 826 posts related directly or indirectly to Kosovo, 35 out of them in 2020, and 48 in 2019⁸⁸. On the other hand, the first post published during the period from 2000, until February 2021, on Kremlin’s web-site, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo, dates on August 31, 2000.⁸⁹

These Moscow’s malign information operations towards Kosovo in terms of public diplomacy are also coupled with the statements and posts of the Russian missions to the key international organizations, mostly the Russian Permanent Mission to the United Nations (UN),⁹⁰ the Russian

⁸⁷ Statement by the “Most Holy Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Alexy II and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Acts of Terrorism in America”, September 19, 2001,

https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/crime/-/asset_publisher/3F5IZsLVSx4R/content/id/572828

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https://www.mid.ru/en/search?p_p_id=3&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=maximized&_3_struts_action=%2Fsearch%2Fsearch

⁸⁹ Kremlin, “Vladimir Putin signed a resolution extending the term of service of Russia's Internal Affairs Ministry and Federal Border Guard Service personnel as part of the international police force in Kosovo, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia”, August 31, 2000.

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/39077>

⁹⁰ The Russian Permanent Mission to the United Nations has published until now 192 post related directly or indirectly to Kosovo, <https://russiaun.ru/site/search/lang/ru?search=Kosovo>

Permanent Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE),⁹¹ and the Russian Permanent representation to the Council of Europe (CoE)⁹², as well as with those of the Russian Embassy in Belgrade.⁹³

There is no doubt that the context of the disinformation warfare towards Kosovo is also reinforced by the interdependence of Moscow and Belgrade, in pursuing their foreign policy interests towards Prishtina, Brussels and Washington. As much as Serbia needs Russia for supporting its aims towards Kosovo, so does Russia need Serbia for pursuing its foreign policy interests by instilling instabilities in the Western backyard, and thus rivalling the West in the Balkans.⁹⁴ In this regard, a crucial momentum of these efforts against Kosovo was marked by the meeting of the Security Council of Russia that was convened by President Putin on January 18th, 2019, a day after his visit to Belgrade, which was entirely focused on Kosovo.⁹⁵

This meeting gave a clear signal that Kosovo is very high on the agenda of Kremlin and that it is a matter of the entire foreign and security establishment of Russia. After this meeting, the Russian malign information operations intensified with more targeted and structured narratives.⁹⁶

Furthermore, the data that derived from the media monitoring that KIPRED has conducted from January 1st to December 31st, 2020, shows that a preselected media outlets controlled by Russia's government have published 1839 news related directly and indirectly to Kosovo. Namely, Sputnik – Serbia has published 1592, Sputnik International 41, Russia Today 59, Russia Insider 13, Meduza 1, TASS 40, Moscow Times 8, Newsfront 55, UNZ 15, and The Duran 15 news.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the OSCE, <https://osce.mid.ru/web/osce-en/permanent-representative>

⁹² Permanent Representation of the Russian Federation to the Council of Europe, https://coe.mid.ru/en_GB

⁹³ Embassy of the Russian Federation to Serbia, <http://www.ambasadarusije.rs/>, <https://serbia.mid.ru/ru/>

⁹⁴ Lulzim Peci, Special Policy Brief, Russia's Information Warfare Against Kosovo: Political Background and Manifestation, KIPRED, October 2020, p.3. [http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Russia - Kosovo Political Background - Eng - Fin 616233.pdf](http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Russia_-_Kosovo_Political_Background_-_Eng_-_Fin_616233.pdf)

⁹⁵ The Kremlin, Meeting with the permanent members of the Security Council, 18 January 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/511/events/59693>

⁹⁶ Lulzim Peci, Special Policy Brief, Russia's Information Warfare Against Kosovo: Political Background and Manifestation, KIPRED, October 2020, p.20. [http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Russia - Kosovo Political Background - Eng - Fin 616233.pdf](http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Russia_-_Kosovo_Political_Background_-_Eng_-_Fin_616233.pdf)

⁹⁷ KIPRED, Press Release: Fushata Dezinformuese e Mediave ruse dhe serbe ndaj Kosovës: Cfare mësimesh mund të nxirren nga monitorimi i mediave gjatë vitit 2020, February 25, 2020,

A careful analyses of the evidence gathered on the disinformation and propaganda against Kosovo from the Russian official sources (Kremlin, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Russian Permanent Mission to the United Nations, and the Russian Embassy in Belgrade) amplified by Moscow controlled media, shows that they are clustered around following targeted narratives in undermining the statehood of Kosovo⁹⁸:

- Portraying independence and sovereignty of Kosovo as illegal and in violation of the international law, and comparing it with the Russian annexation of Crimea.
- Portraying Kosovo as a quasi, pariah and criminal state, that exercises violence against the local Serbian Community and the Serbian Orthodox Church, a threat to international security, hotbed of Islamic extremism, which also does not honor the agreements achieved in Brussels.
- Manipulating and trying to change the narratives on the Kosovo war by denying the war crimes committed by Serbia in Kosovo, presenting the Kosovo Liberation Army as a terrorist organization, state creature that was created through a “genocide” supported by Western countries against the Serbian population, exaggerating the number of Serb casualties during the war, degrading the international and domestic efforts in dealing with war crimes in Kosovo by putting at the forefront the issue of the Specialist Chambers and alleged “organ harvesting.”
- Undermining the role of the West in the state-building of Kosovo especially for rule of law and transitional justice, as well as for training and equipping the Kosovo Security Force, and accusing the US for the “secrecy” of the Bondsteel military base that functions under the mandate of the NATO’s led Kosovo Force (KFOR).

<http://www.kipred.org/sq/lajmet/Fushata-Dezinformuese-e-mediave-ruse-dhe-serbe-kunder-Kosoves-Cfare-mesimesh-mund-te-nxirren-nga-monitorimi-i-mediave-gjate-vitit-2020-434>

⁹⁸ For further details see: Special Policy Brief, Russia’s Information Warfare Towards Kosovo: Political Background and Manifestation, KIPRED, October 2020, http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Russia_-_Kosovo_Political_Background_-_Eng_-_Fin_616233.pdf and KIPRED, Press Release: Fushata Dezinformuese e Mediave ruse dhe serbe ndaj Kosovës: Cfare mësimesh mund të nxirren nga monitorimi i mediave gjatë vitit 2020, February 25, 2020, <http://www.kipred.org/sq/lajmet/Fushata-Dezinformuese-e-mediave-ruse-dhe-serbe-kunder-Kosoves-Cfare-mesimesh-mund-te-nxirren-nga-monitorimi-i-mediave-gjate-vitit-2020-434>

The responses of the Kosovo's foreign policy establishment to the Russian diplomatic and malign information operations against Kosovo, in the best case were very rare and ad-hoc. The careful look at the web-sites of the President, Government and the Foreign Ministry of Kosovo shows that there are very few public responses to the Russian efforts against Kosovo.

Against this background, the primary focus of this policy report is to review and assess the Kosovo Government's institutional capacities and inter-institutional coordination for countering the Russian diplomatic and information operations towards Kosovo. In this regard, the research will be focused on the Office of the President, the Office of the Prime Minister, as well as on the governmental ministries and other institutions, whose mandate covers the issues that are targets of the Russian disinformation narratives against Kosovo.

The Russian Malign Information Operations: Reflections of the Kosovo's Foreign Policy Establishment

According to the interviewed high ranking officials of the cabinets of the Prime Minister of Kosovo and the former President, and of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora of Kosovo, there are several forms in which the country is affected by the Russian malign information operations.

In this regard, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kosovo, Teuta Sahatqija, observes that Russia has operated in various forms in the region in the last few decades. According to her, the Russian influence in the region is higher than that in Kosovo given the proximity of the Slavs and the Orthodox Church on the one hand, and the economic and military influence on the other. She argues that Kosovo's advantage is the anti-Russian mood of the majority of the population, while also the level of economic and military influence is negligible compared to the surrounding countries. In this vein, she stresses that the development of the information technology has “enriched” the malign activities of Moscow in the region and Kosovo, and has given to her another tool for asserting its influence.

Furthermore, Deputy Foreign Minister Sahatqija argues that in comparison with countries like North Macedonia and Montenegro, where Russia, in addition to the information warfare, has employed covert operations, including coup d'état attempt in Podgorica in 2016 or destabilization of situation after the general elections in Skopje, in the case of Kosovo the Moscow's malign operations are mainly limited to “cyber space” and diplomacy. Against this backdrop, she observes that the highest influence of Russia is on the international arena, especially regarding the campaign for de-recognition of Kosovo and against its membership in international organizations, which is conducted in coordination with Serbia, and harsh discourse and misinformation narratives presented, especially in the United Nations Security Council meetings on Kosovo.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Personal interview with Ambassador Teuta Sahatqija, Deputy Foreign Minister of Kosovo, February 28th, 2021.

A high ranking member of the Prime-Minister's Office observes that it is evident that the Russian/Serbian engagement in Kosovo is systematic, professional, long-term, and against Kosovo's inclusion in Euro-Atlantic structures, especially in NATO. Furthermore, he argues that the long standing ties of Russia in the region have never been broken, and that Moscow's destabilizing efforts in the region cannot be explained as a coincidence, but rather as an implementation of a deliberated policy.¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, a political adviser to former President Thaçi, Ardian Arifaj, argues that although not much is known in the public opinion about Russian malign operations against Kosovo, they are displayed in several forms. Russia acts subtly, mainly by disseminating disinformation through the media controlled by the Kremlin's establishment. In the international arena, Russia is spreading the narratives that aim to contest the statehood and the sovereignty of Kosovo, the role of Washington and Brussels on its state-building, and weaken their authority, whereas, domestically, it is aiming to cause uncertainty about Kosovo's position on the international stage.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, he argues that dealing with the Russian "hybrid war" seems to have not been sufficiently understood by Kosovo institutions and that the depth of this risk is undervalued. Kosovo must respond to this "war" itself. A brief look at the regional and European media shows how far behind Kosovo is in confronting the campaign of Russia and Serbia. He also claims that the political class of Kosovo must understand that from the campaign against Kosovo coming from Moscow, everyone in Kosovo is a loser and there are no winners, given the fact that the very statehood is violated and the right of Kosovo independence is contested by Russia, which represents one of the main risks for Kosovo.¹⁰²

On the other hand, Kosovo's public diplomacy responses to these Russian malign information operations have been rather ad-hoc and sporadic. The focus of these responses was limited mainly to the debates in the meetings on Kosovo of the United Nations Security Council, in which

¹⁰⁰ Personal Interview with a high ranking official of the Cabinet of the Prime-Minister of Kosovo, February 2021

¹⁰¹ Personal interview with Ardian Arifaj, former political adviser to the President of Kosovo, February 19, 2021.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Kosovar authorities participate as guests, where the country is usually presented by the Ambassador of Kosovo to the United States, as well as with occasional participation of the country's Foreign Minister, Prime-Minister and President. On the web-sites of Kosovo's President,¹⁰³ Prime-Minister,¹⁰⁴ and the Foreign Ministry, one can hardly find any post directly related to Russian malign information operations towards Kosovo, with the exception of the post of Kosovo's Foreign Ministry of February 26, 2021.¹⁰⁵ Against this backdrop, a high ranking official of the Prime Minister's Office, concludes that it is naivety to believe that the response to Russian/Serbian destabilizing actions against Kosovo will be prevented by the international community, as long as Kosovo does not make systematic investments in this regard.¹⁰⁶

This research evidence clearly shows that in despite of the awareness on the risk posed by Moscow, the Kosovo's state authorities have not undertaken so far any serious steps in addressing in a systematic manner the Russian malign information operations and diplomatic war against the country. The lack of Kosovo's strategic response to these Russian efforts in undermining its statehood has detrimental effects on its integration within international community. Failure of Kosovo in joining UNESCO, Interpol and World Trade Organization, as well as withdrawal of recognitions by more than ten countries are also impacted by Prishtina's lack of proactive policy towards Moscow. Furthermore, Kosovo has neither a foreign policy strategy, nor a strategic direction in place for dealing with contemporary hardships with which the country is confronted under the new circumstances of international politics marked by a revival of a Cold War 2.0 between the United States, and Russia and China on one hand, and trans-Atlantic tensions and disunity on the statehood of Kosovo, on the other. Under these circumstances, while Serbia has a powerful ally - Russia that is strong enemy of Kosovo and the West, none of the powerful Western friends of Kosovo is an enemy of Serbia, whose diplomatic war against Kosovo is conducted in full conjunction with Kremlin. These circumstances require undertaking

¹⁰³ <https://president-ks.gov.net/en/search-results/?search=Russia>

¹⁰⁴ <https://kryeministri-ks.net/en/page/2/?s=Russia>

¹⁰⁵ https://www.mfa-ks.net/en/single_lajmi/4313

¹⁰⁶ Personal Interview with a high ranking official of the Cabinet of the Prime-Minister of Kosovo, February 2021.

immediate steps by the Kosovo Government in strengthening its foreign relations capacities to deal with these contemporary challenges.

Kosovo's Government Foreign Policy Establishment Capacities

The Constitution and the legal framework of Kosovo assigns to the President, Prime-Minister and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Diaspora particular competencies for formulation, implementation and leading of the foreign policy of the country.

In this regard, the Constitution of Kosovo, among others, attributes the President of the country with competences of representation and leading of the foreign policy of the country.¹⁰⁷ The Office of the President of Kosovo is composed by the Cabinet of the President (Chief of Staff, Political Advisers, support staff) and the civil staff that is led by the Secretary of the Office of President.¹⁰⁸ The Office of the President of Kosovo has 79 employees.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, according to Arifaj, the Office of the President of Kosovo has had at least one political adviser that has followed information on the Russian malign information operations and has recommended respective responses. In this regard, the Office of the President has used its key “weapon,” namely the opportunity to address public opinion and to speak in international forums in order to raise the alarm on the Russian threats to Kosovo and the region, and on the efforts of the West in building a sustainable peace in Kosovo and the region.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Art 84 (1) and 84 (10) of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, <http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Constitution1Kosovo.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ Art 14-17 of Law No. 03/L-094 on the President of the Republic of Kosovo, promulgated on January 2009, https://president-ksgov.net/repository/docs/LAW_No_03L_094_ON_THE_PRESIDENT_OF_THE_REPUBLIC_OF_KOSOVO.pdf

¹⁰⁹ Law No. 07/L-041 on the Budget Appropriations for the Budget of the Republic of Kosovo for the Year 2021, Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, No.1, January 6th, 2021. <https://mf.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/1F14DA73-6925-49B6-883E-014550C6E3C8.pdf>

¹¹⁰ Arifaj.

On the other hand, the Kosovo's Constitution gives to the Government of Kosovo the competencies of proposing and implementation of the foreign policy of the country,¹¹¹ and to the Prime-Minister, the competencies of leading the Government¹¹² and of consultation with the President on the implementation of foreign policy and on the matters of intelligence.¹¹³ The Office of Prime Minister, without counting the governmental agencies that function under its auspices, has 112 employees, including civil staff led by the Secretary General of the Office of Prime-Minister and political appointees.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, within the Prime-Ministry, the Office of Public Communication that is comprised by six employees, has specific functions and responsibilities, including the one to require information on weekly bases from the Ministries' Offices of Public Communication with regard to policies and other activities of the Ministries, and of providing regular reports from international media for the Prime-Minister, Government Spokesperson and Ministries.¹¹⁵ But, according to a high ranking official of the Prime-Minister's Cabinet, there is not a specific desk or officer within the Prime-Minister's Office or at any other level of the Kosovo Government, who deals Russia.¹¹⁶

The legal framework of Kosovo assigns to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Diaspora the fundamental competency of formulation and implementation of the country's foreign policy,¹¹⁷ reporting to the President and the Government of Kosovo, coordination with the President and Prime-Minister over the strategic direction and most important issues of the Kosovo's foreign policy.¹¹⁸ The Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, including the Diplomatic Service of

¹¹¹ Article 93 (1), Art 84 (1) and 84 (10) of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, <http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Constitution1Kosovo.pdf>

¹¹² Ibid., Article 94 (1) and 94 (5).

¹¹³ Ibid, Article 94 (7) and (9).

¹¹⁴ Law No. 07/L-041 on the Budget Appropriations for the Budget of the Republic of Kosovo for the Year 2021, Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, No.1, January 6th, 2021. <https://mf.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/1F14DA73-6925-49B6-883E-014550C6E3C8.pdf>

¹¹⁵ The Office of Prime-Minister, Office of Public Communication. 1.2, 1.11 and 3, <https://kryeministri-ks.net/en/the-prime-minister-office/offices/office-of-public-communication-opc/>

¹¹⁶ Personal interview with a high ranking official of the Cabinet of the Prime-Minister of Kosovo.

¹¹⁷ Article 3.2, Law 03/L-044 on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diplomatic Service of Kosovo.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 3.2 (h).

Kosovo has 389 employees,¹¹⁹ including 33 embassies and diplomatic missions.¹²⁰ In terms of organization, the Department of Bilateral Relations of the Ministry is in charge for covering Russia. The mandate of this department is to cover bilateral relations of all the continents of the globe with the exception of Europe, namely USA and Canada, Asia and Pacific, Africa and the Americas, Russia and Eurasia, and Middle East and Arab Countries.¹²¹ This department is, among others, tasked with drafting policies on specific countries of these geographical areas and analysis related to bilateral relations, and cooperation with the Presidency, Office of the Prime Minister and line Ministries with regards to bilateral relations with these states. Nevertheless, within the Ministry there is not a single officer who speaks Russian, or who covers Russia systematically and on daily bases.¹²² In addition, the Kosovar MFAD has not a basic expertise on Russia.¹²³

Given these evidences, it is obvious that the organization of the MFAD, training and allocation of its personnel are in huge discrepancy with the requirements of Kosovo's foreign policy needs and objectives, especially with regard to the diplomatic war and the malign information operations of Russia against Kosovo. In addition to unfitting organization of the MFAD in dealing with Russia's threat, the Ministry has not drafted a foreign policy strategy that would give a strategic direction to Kosovo's institutions and its diplomatic service.

Against this background, the Deputy Foreign Minister Sahatqija points out that MFAD is an important diplomatic institution, which must deal regularly and systematically with the Russian diplomatic war that thoroughly harms Kosovo in the international arena. Ad-hoc and uncoordinated reactions on social media by Kosovo's officials are far from being sufficient in countering Russian malign information operations against Kosovo. She argues that in addition to institutional capacity building and coordinated efforts with its allies for countering the Russian

¹¹⁹ Law No. 07/L-041 on the Budget Appropriations for the Budget of the Republic of Kosovo for the Year 2021, Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, No.1, January 6th, 2021. <https://mf.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/1F14DA73-6925-49B6-883E-014550C6E3C8.pdf>

¹²⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, Embassies of the Republic of Kosovo, <https://www.mfa-ks.net/misionet/493/ambasadat-e-republiks-s-kosovs/493>

¹²¹ Department of Bilateral Relations, Ministry for Foreign Relations and Diaspora, <https://www.mfa-ks.net/en/ministria/532/departamenti-pr-marrdhnie-dypalshe/532>

¹²² Personal interview with a high ranking official of the Prime-Minister's Office, February 2021

¹²³ Personal conversation with a high ranking official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora of Kosovo, February 2021

threat, Kosovo Government should invest in digital diplomacy and on improving the image of the country abroad in cooperation with civil society, media and businesses¹²⁴.

The Political Adviser to the former President, Ardian Arifaj, argues that the Russian campaign can be "fought" only in cooperation and coordination of all the institutions of Kosovo, i.e. coordination of civil government institutions, security mechanisms, and NGO-s specialized in security issues, and with the support of Kosovo's international partners, whose interests are at stake from the Russian anti-western stance and its influence in the region. He points out that the political institutions should cooperate with security mechanisms and international partners to prepare respective national foreign policy and security strategies to deal with the Russian threat to Kosovo and beyond. In this regard, he claims that, in addition to diplomacy, one of the most important battlefields of Kosovo in dealing with Russia are domestic and foreign public opinions, and he proposes that civil society and media should be included in education and information campaigns, in order to strengthen the institutional and societal resilience. Furthermore, he thinks that allocating funds for campaigns outside Kosovo is another step that needs to be taken in countering Russia's malign information operations against Kosovo. Although these information, promotion, and lobbying campaigns, are costly, according to him, the price that Kosovo is going to pay will be much higher if it does not counter systematically these Russian operations.¹²⁵

Finally, a high ranking official of the Prime-Minister's Cabinet, observes that, surprisingly, Kosovo institutions have not established institutional mechanisms to monitor developments in Russia and Serbia, and to oppose their destabilizing actions. He points out that in the continuation of Kosovo's efforts for Euro-Atlantic integration, that are also impeded by the Russian influence, investments should be made in the establishment of respective research structures as well as on the opposition to destabilizing actions, both at home and abroad.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Sahatqija.

¹²⁵ Arifaj.

¹²⁶ Personal interview with a high ranking official of the Prime Minister's Office, February 2021.

Capacities of other relevant Governmental Institutions

The large scope of anti-Kosovo and anti-Western narratives that are pursued by the Russian foreign policy mechanisms and its controlled media, requires concerted approach of Kosovo's Government in responding to these features of Moscow's disinformation operations against the country. For building systematic and credible counter-narratives against Russian malign information operations, first and foremost there is a need for building a system of information across the Kosovo Government, which until now was inexistent.

In this regard, in addition to the Office of the President, Office of the Prime-Minister, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, given the scope and clusters of the Russian disinformation narratives against Kosovo, it is of primary importance to have a permanent involvement of the Ministry of Interior Affairs and Public Administration, for providing the data on crime rates in the country, especially on those related to Serbian Community, Orthodox Church, and religious extremism, then, the Ministry of Justice and the Judicial Council of Kosovo, for the data related to war crimes, the Ministry of Defense for the data related to Kosovo Security Force and the international defense cooperation, and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, for the data related to the Serbian Orthodox Church sites in Kosovo, whereas the other ministries could be involved on occasional bases.

In terms of institutional capacities, the Ministry of Interior Affairs and Public Administration is well equipped for providing the data that are necessary for countering Russia's information warfare against Kosovo. In this regard, within the Department of Public Security there is in place the Division for Research and Statistics (DRS), which, among other things, is tasked to conduct research, statistical analysis and collection of information in the field of general security, and to provide draft analyses and statistical reports on daily, weekly, monthly, semi-annual and annual basis on incidents/crimes and public safety.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Ministry of Internal Affairs and Public Administration of Kosovo, Division for Research and Statistics (DRS), <https://mpb.rks-gov.net/f/77/Division-for-Research-and-Statistics>

On the other hand, within the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Transitional Justice and support of the crime victims has been established recently. This department, among others, is tasked to support gathering and documentation of the facts related to war crimes committed in Kosovo until the June 10th, 1999, and establishing and keeping the database for documentation of the war crimes and war damages.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the Judicial Council of Kosovo has a fundamental role to play in this venture, due to the fact that it possess comprehensive data on the cases that have been adjudicated within the justice system in Kosovo.¹²⁹ If provided in an appropriate format, by including also the cases of war crime trials, these data may become an important tool in countering the Russian narratives against Kosovo.

Within the Ministry of Defense there are in place two departments that are of fundamental importance for dealing with the Russian threat, namely the Directorate for Defense Policies and the Directorate for Intelligence and Security. The Department for Policies and Strategy, and its Section for Development and Analyses that are part of the Directorate for Defense Policies, among others, is in charge for conducting analyses and making assessments of regional trends in the defense and security area,¹³⁰ which for the case of Serbia's trends and its defense cooperation with Russia are necessary. The Directorate for Intelligence and Security and its Department for Collection and Analyses, among others are tasked to "collect, process, evaluate, analyze, and distribute data and information as well as present intelligence products related to groups and organizations with threatening activities of foreign countries, [...], that may threaten or endanger the activity of MoD and KSF for the security of the country, protection of integrity, territorial integrity and constitutional order,"¹³¹ and "based on warning indications, makes long-term forecasts for risks and potential threats for MoD/KSF and the Republic of Kosovo."¹³² A number

¹²⁸ Department for Transitional Justice and Support of the Crime Victims, Ministry of Justice of Kosovo, <https://md.rks-gov.net/page.aspx?id=1,162>

¹²⁹ See for example: Statistics from General annual report, Kosovo Judicial Council, <https://www.gjyqesori-rks.org/statistics/?lang=en>

¹³⁰ Article 10 (1.1), REGULATION (GRK) NO. 07/2019 ON INTERNAL ORGANIZATION AND SETTLEMENT OF JOB POSITIONS IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE 2, April 26, 2019, https://mod.rks-gov.net/repository/docs/RREGULLOREQRK_NR_072019_P_R_ORGANIZIMIN_DHE_SISTEMATIZIMIN_E_VENDEV_E_T_PUN_S_N_MINISTRIN_E_MBROJTJES_nga_ZKM.pdf

¹³¹ Ibid, Art. 47 (2.10).

¹³² Ibid, Art. 47 (2.6).

of products that these two Directorates of the Ministry of Defense can provide, if delivered in an appropriate form, may have crucial importance, not only on countering reactively or proactively, but also for anticipating specific Russian malign information operations against Kosovo.

Finally, within the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, functions the Department of Cultural Heritage,¹³³ which is addition of being in charge for the entire cultural heritage in Kosovo, has to deal also with the special protective zones related to the heritage of Serbian Orthodox Church,¹³⁴ which are important elements of the Russian malign narratives against Kosovo.

Given the evidence provided above, it can be concluded that Kosovo has basic institutional capacities to deal with the Russian malign information operations, but the key deficiencies in this regard are the weaknesses of the country's foreign policy establishment, especially of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, that has not built until now the basic capacities to deal with Russia, both, in terms of institutional knowledge and of structure, as well as a total lack of governmental inter-institutional coordination.

¹³³ Department of Cultural Heritage, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Kosovo, <https://www.mkrs-ks.org/?page=2,10>

¹³⁴ Law No. 03/L-039, Ligji per zonat e veçanta të mbrojtura, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2529>, February 20th, 2008.

Countering Russian Malign Information Operations: The Way Forward

The current circumstances related to the Russian malign information operations need an immediate response by the Kosovo Government, both in establishing the respective structures, and in capacity building. Since establishing of this structure must start from the scratch, there is a need initially to build a basic structure that in few years can evolve into a strong governmental institution that can effectively counter the malign information operations of Russia and other countries against Kosovo.

In order to meet immediate needs, the Government of Kosovo needs to establish a Strategic Communication Task Force, whose main mandate would be to counter Russian and other malign operations against Kosovo, with the special focus on international organizations like United Nations, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Council of Europe, as well as on diplomatic missions accredited in Moscow and Belgrade, where the heartlands of Russian malign information operations against Kosovo are based. The fundamental duties of this task force should be analyzing Russian malign information operations against Kosovo, drafting counter and proactive narratives for responding to Moscow, as well as anticipating its narratives and operations.

An issue of fundamental importance in this direction is ensuring the coordination of the Office of the President, Office of the Prime Minister and the MFAD, for responding to Russia. In order to ensure concerted efforts of the foreign policy establishment of Kosovo on this matter, the political decision-making structure of the Strategic Communication Task Force may be comprised by the representatives of the President's Office, Prime-Minister's Office and the Cabinet of the Foreign Minister of Kosovo, who will be in charge for deliberating respective political decisions on responding to the Russian diplomatic war against Kosovo.

On the other hand, since the mandate of the General Directorate of the Foreign Ministry, among others is to provide advice in the areas covered by its departments,¹³⁵ in this case by the

¹³⁵ General Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Relations and Diaspora of Kosovo, <https://www.mfa-ks.net/en/ministria/528/drejtori-i-prgijthshm/528>

Department of Bilateral Relations that covers Russia,¹³⁶ the Director General of the Foreign Ministry of Kosovo can play the role of the Secretary of this Task Force. His/Her main role should be to provide advices on possible responses to the declarations of the Russian officials and media on Kosovo, which should be tracked on the daily bases by at least one responsible officer with appropriate knowledge on Russia in the Department of Bilateral Relations, who should be appointed as soon as possible by the Ministry. The role of the Director General should also entail the tasks of providing advice on counter-narratives and proactive narratives against Russia's malign information operations..

Against this background, the Task Force is necessary to build a permanent liaison with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Public Administration (Department of Public Security and its Division for Research and Statistics), Ministry of Justice (Department for Transitional Justice), Kosovo Judicial Council, Ministry of Defense (Directorate of Defense Policies and Directorate for Intelligence and Security), and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (Department of Cultural Heritage).

These governmental bodies should provide assistance to the Task Force in order to ensure timely and qualified responses to the Russian malign information operations and narratives against Kosovo. Their main task should be to provide information at their disposal to the Secretary of the Task-Force, either upon the request, or proactively. On the specific matters that cannot be covered by these institutions, when necessary, the Secretary of the Task Force should liaison with other respective governmental institutions of Kosovo in order to get a timely and qualified information.

¹³⁶ Department of Bilateral Relations, Ministry of Foreign Relations and Diaspora,

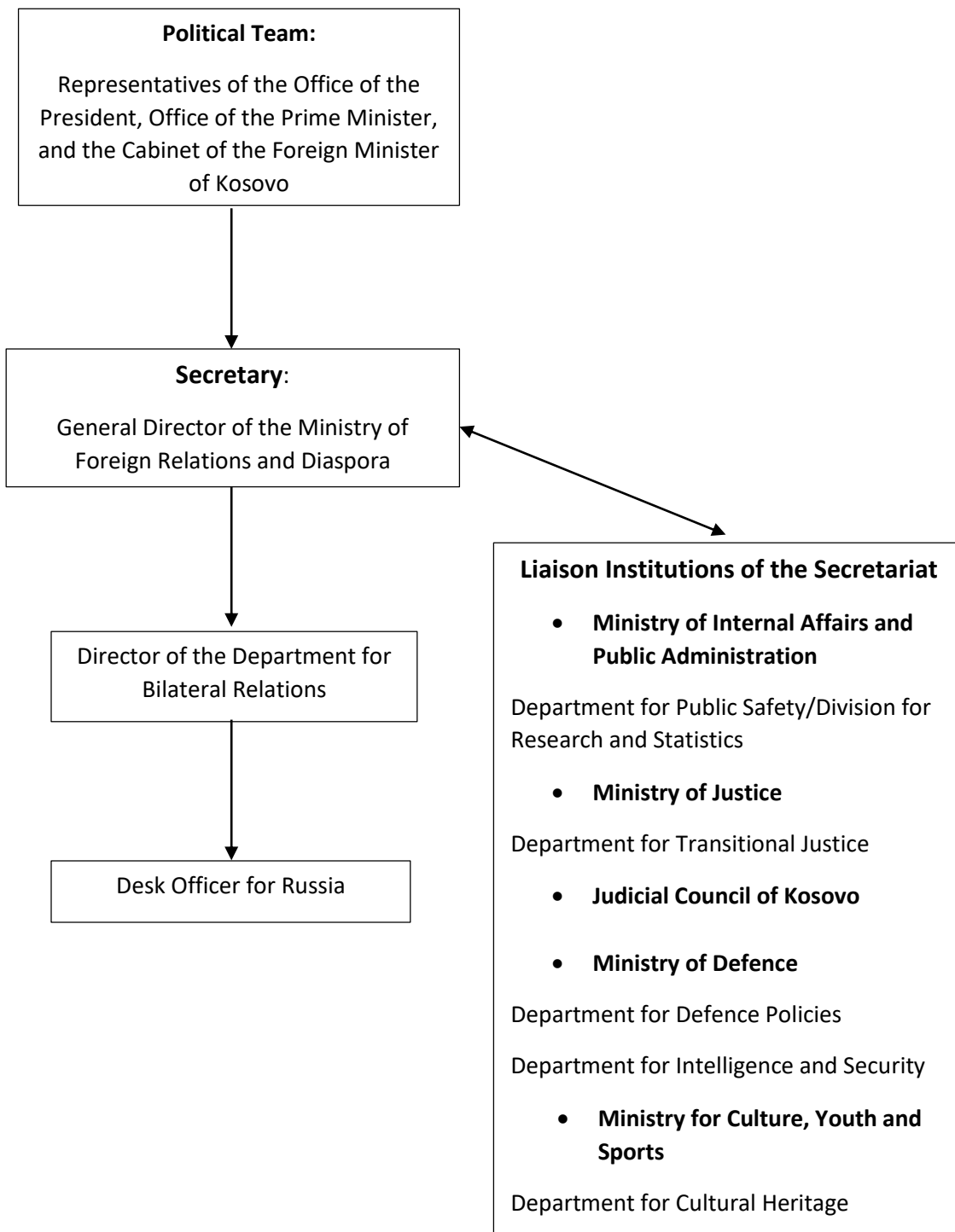


Fig.1. Recommended Structure of the Strategic Communication Task Force

The proposed structure, as such, will not be sufficient for addressing the Russian malign information operations that are amplified by the Moscow controlled media. First and foremost, in order to be able to provide qualified and timely outputs, within this structure should be embedded a profound knowledge on the methods of Russian disinformation strategies and tactics, and getting skills on countering the disinformation and narratives pursued by Moscow.

Secondly, the possession of advanced knowledge on political, military and diplomatic history of Russia, with the special focus on the Putin's era, as well as its economy, is necessary to deal in a professional manner with Moscow. In this regard, Kosovo's foreign policy establishment lacks the basic knowledge on these topics, and not a single investment has been made by the Kosovo Government to build these capacities.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Personal conversation with a senior official of the Foreign Ministry of Kosovo, February 2020

Recommendations:

Having in consideration the findings of this policy report on Kosovo Government's institutional capacities and inter-institutional coordination, KIPRED proposes the following recommendations for overcoming the deep shortcomings of Kosovo for countering and exposing the Russian diplomatic and malign information operations towards Kosovo:

- Kosovo Government should:
 - Adopt as soon as possible a decision for establishing a Strategic Communication Task force to deal with malign operations of Russia and other countries targeted against Kosovo.
 - Draft a new Foreign Policy Strategy that will be adapted to the contemporary international politics, including Russian malign influence on Kosovo.
 - Draft an Action Plan for countering Russian diplomatic war against Kosovo and its malign information operations that are amplified by the media controlled by Moscow.
 - Allocate funds and fundraise for capacity building needs of Kosovo to counter Russian diplomatic war and malign information operations.
 - Allocating funds for promotion and lobbying on Kosovo abroad.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora should:
 - Appoint immediately at least one desk officer on Russia within the Department of Bilateral Relations.
 - Organize courses of the Russian language for the needs of Kosovo's Foreign Service, and other governmental institutions and agencies.
 - Organize courses on the methods of the Russian disinformation strategies and tactics and on countering the disinformation and narratives for the personnel of Kosovo's Foreign Service, other governmental institutions and agencies, think tanks and media.

- Organize courses on political, military and diplomatic history of Russia for the personnel of Kosovo's Foreign Service, other governmental institutions and agencies, think tanks and media.

Kosovo Observer:

Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation

June 1 – August 15, 2021

Executive Summary

The Kosovo Observer: Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation is a quarterly report that aims to analyse public statements, briefing for journalists, articles and other documents published on the web-sites of Kremlin, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Russian Permanent Mission to the United Nations the Permanent Mission of Russia to OSCE, the Permanent Russian Representation to the Council of Europe, and the Russian Embassy to Serbia, which are the key speakers of the Russian diplomatic war against Kosovo. In addition, this observer analyses the features of the news containing disinformation on Kosovo, published by the preselected media, namely Russia Today, Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report, which are an extended hand of the Russian Foreign Policy establishment in its diplomatic warfare against Kosovo.

In this regard, the analyses of the statements, briefings, articles and other documents of the Russian foreign policy establishment from June 1st to August 15th, 2021, shows clearly the continuation of the narratives aim to undermine the statehood of Kosovo and the Western engagement in Kosovo and the region, changing the narratives of the war crimes in Former Yugoslavia, including undermining of international justice, accusing Kosovo for oppressing local Serbs and Serbian Orthodox Church, and for not honouring the agreement on establishing the Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities, as well as by comparing the case of Kosovo with Crimea. These narratives that frame the diplomatic warfare of Russia towards Kosovo, are in followed in general by the disinformation published by the above mentioned preselected media.

Against this background, a very important momentum of the Russian diplomatic warfare towards Kosovo will be created after the end of the agreement on the moratorium of Kosovo to apply for membership in International Organizations and Serbia's campaign on de-recognition of Kosovo that will be effective on September 3rd, 2021, which will coincide with the opening of the 76 Session of the UN General Assembly. This momentum can be used by Russia to work jointly with

Serbia to conduct an aggressive campaign for de-recognition of Kosovo during the proceedings of this session and its aftermath.

Russian Diplomatic Warfare on Kosovo

In this period, the Kremlin, Russian Foreign Ministry and the Russian Permanent Mission to the United Nations have targeted Kosovo directly or in a larger context in a number of statements, briefings for journalists, reports and articles, whereas the Permanent Mission of Russia to OSCE, the Permanent Russian Representation to the Council of Europe, and the Russian Embassy to Serbia have not posted any publication on their web-sites related to Kosovo. Against this background, in the following text will be presented a chronological analyses of these targeted activities of the Russian diplomatic warfare against Kosovo.

In this regard, in a statement of June 8, 2021 delivered at the UN Security Council meeting on the consideration of the report of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals,¹³⁸ the Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia, G.V. Kuzmin, accused the International Criminal Tribunal on Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) that “became blind and deaf to certain crimes, by turning a blind eye to the obvious crimes of the Kosovo Albanians”, which cases are handled now by the Kosovo Special Chambers, based in Hague, while ironically at the same time he was justifying and protecting the non-cooperation of Serbia with the International Residual Mechanisms. However, it should be noted that it was exactly Russia that was making a huge pressure for a speedy charges on the alleged crimes by the Kosovo Special Chambers,¹³⁹ and at the same time is making attempts to discredit the credibility of ICTY that was created with the Moscow’s support of the Resolution 827 of the UN Security Council of May 25th, 1993¹⁴⁰.

On the other side, in a statement of June 10th, 2021¹⁴¹, at the UN Security Council briefing on cooperation between the UN and regional organizations, the Russian First Deputy Permanent

¹³⁸ [Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations \(russiaun.ru\)](https://www.russiaun.ru/)

¹³⁹ See for example: [Foreign Ministry statement on the 20th anniversary of NATO aggression against Yugoslavia - News - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

¹⁴⁰ UN Security Council, Resolution 827, May 25th, 1993, https://www.icty.org/x/file/Legal%20Library/Statute/statute_827_1993_en.pdf

¹⁴¹ [Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations \(russiaun.ru\)](https://www.russiaun.ru/)

Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy, in addition to condemning the policy of the European Union towards Russia and the conflict in Ukraine, he criticized Brussels for “playing up to Prishtina” and called for the creation of the Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities, and called for not “deviating” from the principle of impartiality of mediation, thus aiming also at undermining the role of the West as an incapable mediator.

In her media briefing of June 10th, 2021¹⁴², the Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswomen, Maria Zakharova, reiterated the position of the Russian Federation on the Kosovo – Serbia dialogue by stressing that Moscow desires that “Belgrade and Pristina to attain a viable and mutually acceptable solution on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 1244. This solution should conform to international law and should also be approved by the UN Security Council because this implies efforts to maintain international peace and security”, and that it support a settlement that “would suit the people of Serbia”. This already known position, in addition to entailing a contradiction between “a mutually agreed solution” and a “solution that would suit to people of Serbia”, makes clear the aim of Russia to bring any agreement between Kosovo and Serbia to the UN Security Council, where either it can torpedo it, or it may try to negotiate the text of a resolution to its benefit, if it does not suit its foreign policy interests.

In another briefing, held on June 17th, 2021¹⁴³, Zakharova attacks the United States about delivery of weapons and military equipment that have been purchased by the Government of Kosovo by claiming that Washington is “openly undermining the international efforts to ensure peace and stability in the Balkans”, and by stressing that “Washington’s idea” to build an army in Kosovo is a “direct and blatant violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244” since according to her it envisages “the disbandment of any Kosovo Albanian paramilitary units and allows an international peacekeeping contingent alone to be present in the territory of Kosovo”. This statement is an attempt of Moscow to portray the defense cooperation between the Washington and Prishtina as detrimental to the peace and stability in the Balkans, whose guarantor ironically is NATO and primarily the United States as its leader, and by disputing the Kosovo’s statehood

¹⁴² [Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, June 10, 2021 - News - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

¹⁴³ [Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, June 17, 2021 - Asia-Europe Meeting \(ASEM\) - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

and legality of the development of the Kosovo Security Force through manipulating the content of the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, namely the point 9.b. that requires “Demilitarizing the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and other armed Kosovo Albanian groups...”¹⁴⁴. In this regard, it should be noted that the required disarmament and dissolution of the Kosovo Liberation Army and other armed Albanian groups has been completed in September 1999. On the other side, the Kosovo Security Force is not an “Albanian armed group”, but an armed multi-ethnic force, whereas not a single article of the UNSC Resolution 1244 does not forbid its creation and development.

Against background, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in his article “The Law, the Rights and the Rules”¹⁴⁵, published in the very aftermath of the Biden – Putin Summit in Geneva, in addition to his harsh criticism of the West, and especially the United States of America, among others addresses also in a highly manipulative manner the legality of the independence of Kosovo. In this regard, he claims that “the rules-based [Western] order is the embodiment of double standards. The right to self-determination is as an absolute “rule” whenever it can be used to an advantage, ... as Kosovo, which obtained its “independence” in violation of a UN Security Council resolution. However, if self-determination runs counter to the Western geopolitical interests, as it happened when the people of Crimea voted for reunification with Russia, this principle is cast aside, while condemning the free choice made by the people and punishing them with sanctions”. Ironically, Lavrov is trying to portray Russia as a country that respects international law and multilateralism, while he proves the opposite by denying the verdict of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the Declaration of Independence of Kosovo¹⁴⁶, and at the same time by accusing the West for not accepting the illegal annexation of Crimea and for introducing sanctions in response to Russian aggressive policy in its near neighborhood.

¹⁴⁴ UNSC Resolution 1244, June 10th, 1999,

https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/990610_SCR1244%281999%29.pdf

¹⁴⁵ [Article by Sergey Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, “The Law, the Rights and the Rules”, Moscow, June 28, 2021 - Nota bene - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

¹⁴⁶ ICJ, Advisory Opinion, Accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo, 22 July, 2010, <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/141/16012.pdf>

Furthermore, The Russian Foreign Ministry, on July 8th, 2021 published the report “Human Rights Situation in Certain Countries” that targets all European countries, United States and Australia, with the exception of Serbia and Belarus. The report dedicates to Kosovo a lengthy special section, which uses only four sources without proper referencing for arguing on the “human rights situation” in the country. The report, among others, accuses Kosovo authorities for oppressing its non-majority communities, especially local Serbs and Serbian Orthodox Church, creation of the Ministry of Defense and upgrading of the mandate of the Kosovo Security Force with the defense of sovereignty and territorial integrity “contrary” to the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, for not honoring the agreement on establishment of the Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities, dysfunctional rule of law, corruption and organized crime, and as a major country of origin, transit and destination for illegal operations related to trafficking in humans, drugs and weapons, and smuggling,

Interestingly, in a rather harassing Putin’s article “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”¹⁴⁷, published on July 12, 2021, where he does not hesitate to question the borders between the states that emerged out of former Soviet Union, he ironically lectures to Ukraine how it is the poorest European country, “being poorer ... than “unrecognized Kosovo”.

Yet, in a press briefing of July 29, 2021¹⁴⁸, the Charge d’Affairs of the Russian Permanent Mission to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy, stressed that Russia seeks a balanced approach to the prosecution of the war crimes, because according to him on many occasions the Serbs were targeted, whereas the other ethnic groups were kind of treated in a different way, without giving any tangible evidence, which in essence is an attempt to undermine the credibility of international justice and to the narratives on the war crimes in former Yugoslavia. Interestingly, in this statement for the first time, Russia expressed doubts on the credibility of information about organ harvesting during the war in Kosovo, which allegedly, according to the Report of the Parliamentary Assembly

¹⁴⁷ Vladimir Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”, July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>

¹⁴⁸ [Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations \(russiaun.ru\)](http://www.russiaun.ru/)

of the Council of Europe Inhuman treatment of people and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo (January 7th, 2011)¹⁴⁹ have been committed by members of the Kosovo Liberation Army. In this vein, on August 4th, 2021, the Russian Foreign Ministry published the document Russia's position at the forthcoming (seventy-sixth) session of the UN General Assembly¹⁵⁰, in which the point 23 is dedicated to the "settlement of the Kosovo issue"¹⁵¹. The content of this point shows clearly the continuity of Russia's position and diplomatic warfare towards Kosovo. First and foremost, Moscow aims to present the Kosovo's statehood as an unfinished issue, by stating that its "settlement" should be based on international law and the UNSC Council Resolution 1244. Furthermore, Russia ignores the Advisory Opinion of the ICJ on the legality of the Declaration of Independence of Kosovo, and misinterprets the UNGA Resolution 64/298 of 9 September 2010, which acknowledged the Advisory Opinion and stipulates that aim of the EU mediated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia "would be to promote cooperation, achieve progress on the path to the European Union and improve the lives of the people"¹⁵², and this has nothing to deal with Kosovo's statehood.

In a briefing by Deputy Director of the Foreign Ministry Information and Press Department Alexander Bikantov, of August 5, 2021, in the section "Answers to media questions" Kosovo was addressed under the heading "Plans of 10 African and Asian countries to withdraw recognition of Kosovo". Bikantov firstly stated that Russia intends to firmly pursue the policy that the "mutually acceptable solution" between Belgrade and Prishtina should be based on the UN

¹⁴⁹ Report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Inhuman treatment of people and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo (January 7th, 2011) <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/12608/html>

¹⁵⁰ The 76 Session of the General Assembly will be opened on September 14th, 2021 and will be closed on September 30th, 2021, General Assembly, Opening dates of forthcoming regular sessions of the General Assembly and of the general debate, February 15th, 2021, <https://undocs.org/en/A/INF/76/1>

¹⁵¹ Point 23, Russia's position at the seventy-sixth session of the UN General Assembly, August 4th, 2021, "The settlement of the Kosovo issue should be based on international law, first and foremost on UNSC resolution 1244. Belgrade and Pristina should come to an agreement themselves, while the task of the international community is to help the parties find mutually acceptable solutions without external pressure. The EU, as a mediator in the dialogue in accordance with UNGA resolution 64/298 of 9 September 2010, should seek to ensure that the parties implement the agreed decisions, primarily, the establishment of the Community of Serb municipalities in Kosovo (the CSMK; the agreement reached in 2013 has still not been implemented). We support the work of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)", [Russia's position at the seventy-sixth session of the UN General Assembly - Conflicts - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

¹⁵² Point 2, UNGA Resolution 64/298, September 9th, 2010, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/ROL%20A%20RES64%20298.pdf>

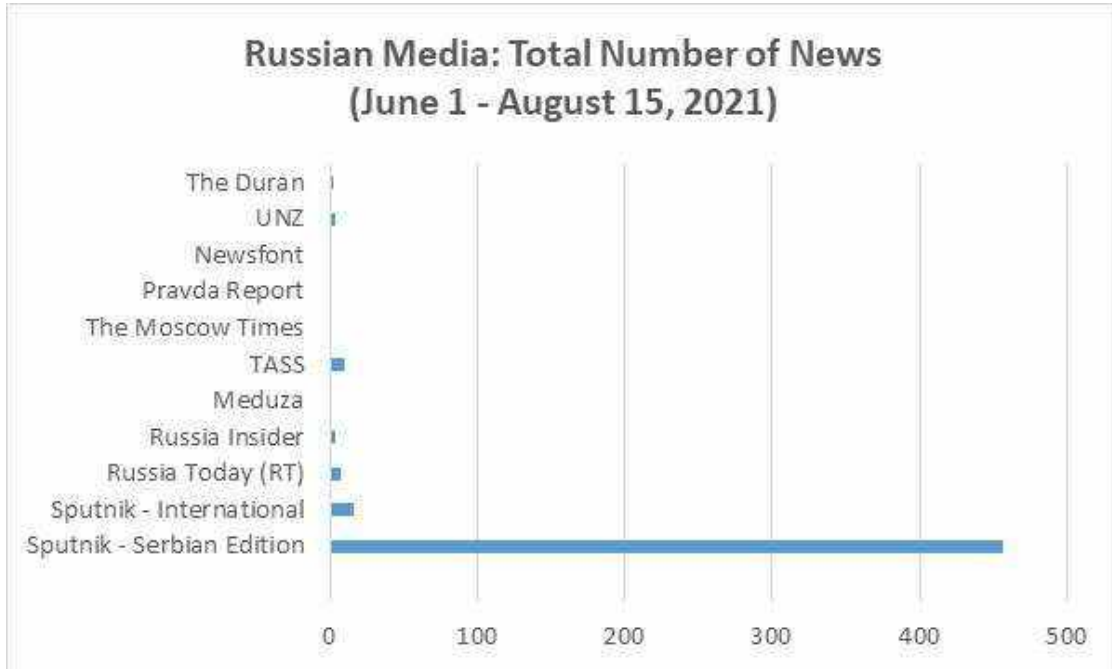
Security Council Resolution 1244, approved by the UN Security Council and that Moscow “will only agree to a decision that suits the Serbs”. This statement also brings to the surface the intent of Russia to either make Serbia hostage of its aims to impede the European Union and the United States efforts for achieving a comprehensive agreement on normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, or to torpedo possible Kosovo’s quest for a membership in United Nations, in a case of an agreement short of formal recognition by Serbia. On the other side, in relation to the one year moratorium on membership of Kosovo in international organizations and the suspension of Serbia’s campaign for withdrawal of recognitions of the independence of Kosovo that was agreed in Washington on September 4th, 2020¹⁵³, which effectively will end in a matter of days, Bikantov stated that any revision of “ill-considered” decision to recognize Kosovo, is a sovereign choice of some members of international community, and that it “the result of the sound analysis of the situation, including Pristina’s behavior”. In addition, he accused Prishtina for obstructing the dialogue process since 2013, especially for not implementing the agreement on Association of Serbian Majority Municipalities, and on the other side, he criticized EU, as a facilitator of the dialogue, for a lack of clear reaction on Kosovo’s “obstructions”,

Russian Media Disinformation on Kosovo

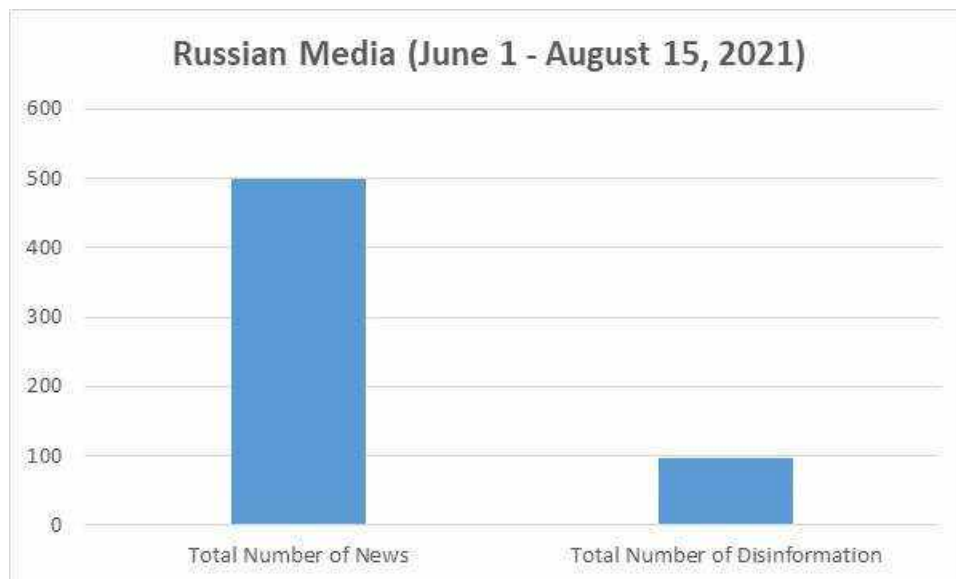
The preselected media outlets originating in Russia that have been monitored from June 1 to August 15, 2021 are Russia Today, Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report.

The monitoring of data shows that during this period media outlets originating in Russia have published 500 news related directly and indirectly to Kosovo. Sputnik – Serbian Edition has published 457, Sputnik International 16, Russia Today 7, Russia Insider 3, Meduza none, TASS 10, Moscow Times none, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 1, UNZ 4, Duran 2.

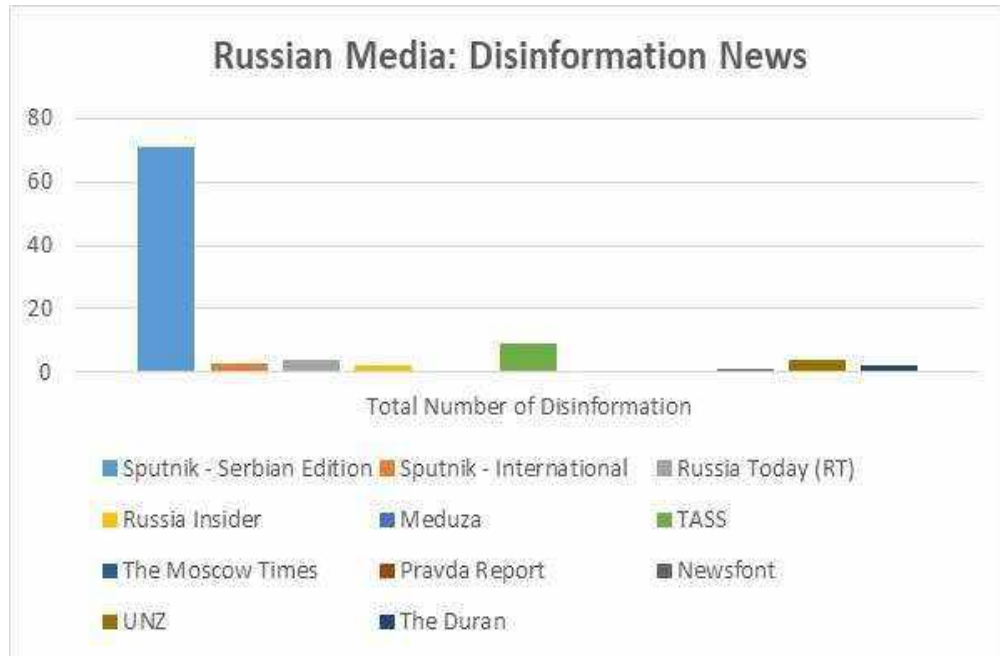
¹⁵³ Point on the moratorium of the Washington Agreement, “Kosovo (Prishtina) will agree to implement a one year moratorium seeking new membership in International Organizations. Serbia (Belgrade) will agree on a one year moratorium of its de-recognition campaign, and will refrain formally or informally requesting any nation or International Organization not to recognize Kosovo as an state. Both agreements to desist will take effect immediately”, <https://www.new-perspektiva.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Washington-Agreement-Kosova-Serbia.pdf>



An overview of the published news by these media conducted by KIPRED shows that out of 500 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo, 96 (19,2%) of them had disinformation content.



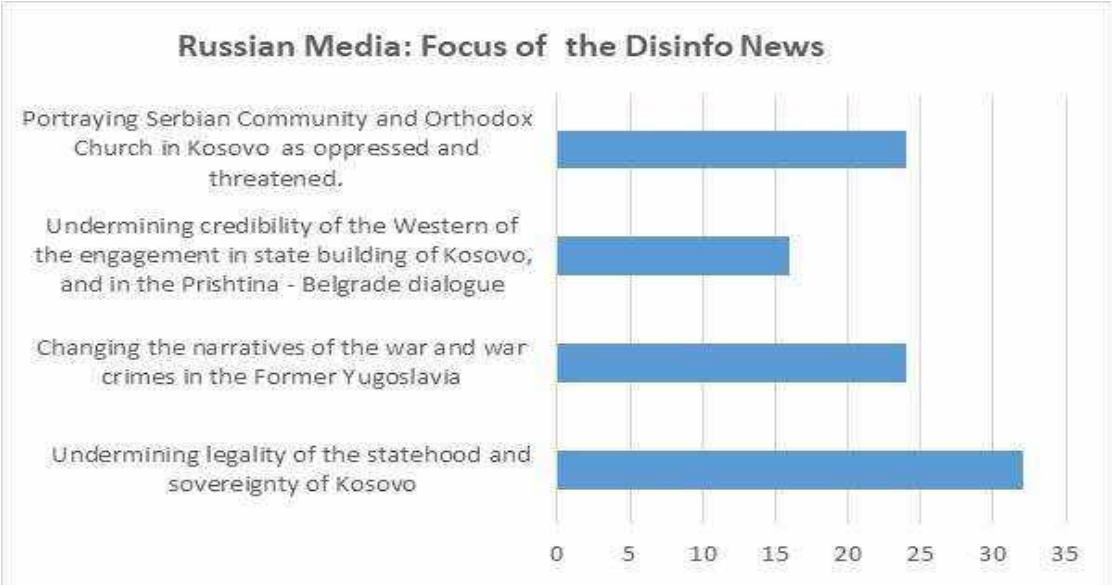
The largest number of disinformation was published by Sputnik Serbia (71), followed by TASS (9), Russia Today (4), UNZ (4), Sputnik International (3), Russian Insider (2), The Duran (2) and Newsfront (1).



In order to have a better overview of the disinformation features targeting Kosovo published by the above media outlets originating in Russia, the main focus of their content has been clustered into the following disinformation aims:

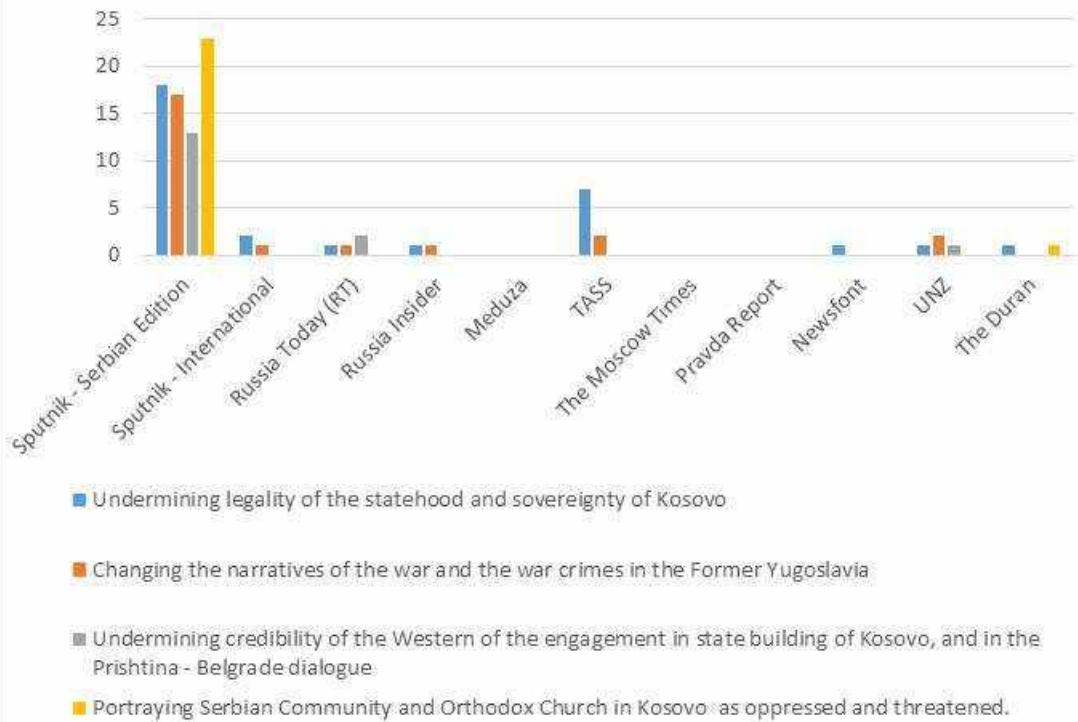
- Undermining legality of the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo.
- Changing the narratives of the war and the war crimes in the Former Yugoslavia.
- Undermining credibility of the Western of the engagement in state building of Kosovo, and in the Prishtina - Belgrade dialogue.
- Portraying Serbian Community and Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened.

The content of the news containing disinformation published by these Russian media outlets shows that their largest number was aiming to undermine the legality of the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo (32), followed by portraying Serbian Community and Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened (24), changing the narratives of the war and the war crimes in the Former Yugoslavia (24), and undermining credibility of the Western of the engagement in state building of Kosovo, and in the Prishtina - Belgrade dialogue (16).



The analyses of the general features of the clustered disinformation news published by the media outlets originating in Russia shows that they are mainly focused on undermining legality of the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo, changing the narratives of the war and war crimes in the Former Yugoslavia and undermining credibility of the Western engagement in the state building and Prishtina – Belgrade dialogue, with the exception of Sputnik Serbia that gives a special attention to the disinformation aiming at portraying Serbian Community and Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened.

Clustered Disinformation News



Conclusions

A very important momentum of the Russian diplomatic warfare towards Kosovo will be created after the end of the agreement on the moratorium of Kosovo to apply for membership in International Organizations and Serbia's campaign on de-recognition of Kosovo that will be effective on September 3rd, 2021, which will coincide with the opening of the 76 Session of the UN General Assembly. This momentum can be used by Russia to work jointly with Serbia to conduct an aggressive campaign for de-recognition of Kosovo during the proceedings of this session and its aftermath.

In this regard, the analyses of the statements, briefings, articles and other documents of the Russian foreign policy establishment from June 1st to August 15th, 2021, shows clearly the continuation of the narratives aim to undermine the statehood of Kosovo and the Western engagement in Kosovo and the region, changing the narratives of the war crimes in Former Yugoslavia, including undermining of international justice, accusing Kosovo for oppressing local Serbs and Serbian Orthodox Church, and for not honoring the agreement on establishing the Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities, as well as by comparing the case of Kosovo with Crimea. These narratives frame the diplomatic warfare of Russia towards Kosovo.

In addition, the analyses of the general features of the clustered disinformation news published by the media outlets originating in Russia shows that they are mainly focused on undermining legality of the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo, changing the narratives of the war and war crimes in the Former Yugoslavia and undermining credibility of the Western engagement in the state building and Prishtina – Belgrade dialogue, with the exception of Sputnik Serbia that gives a special attention to the disinformation aiming at portraying Serbian Community and Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened.

Against this background, Kosovo Government in coordination with its Western partners need to be prepared well for the upcoming Session of the UN General Assembly in order to avoid any surprising withdrawal of recognition. In this vein, Kosovo Government should address the UN members with an appropriate document that counters the Russian and Serbian narratives against the Kosovo's statehood and sovereignty, and to campaign for further recognitions.

This is momentum is particularly important, due to the fact that any further recognition or de-recognition of Kosovo will have a serious impact on the process of the dialogue with Serbia, since it will considerably effect the strength of positions of each of them.

Kosovo Observer:

Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation

August 15 – October 31, 2021

Executive Summary

The Kosovo Observer: Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation is a quarterly report that aims to analyse public statements, press briefings, articles, and other documents, published on the web-sites of Kremlin, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Russian Permanent Mission to the United Nations, the Permanent Mission of Russia to OSCE, the Permanent Russian Representation to the Council of Europe, the Russian Permanent Mission to the EU, and the Russian Embassy to Serbia, which are the key exponents of the Russian diplomatic war against Kosovo. In addition, this Observer analyses the patterns of the news containing disinformation on Kosovo, published by the preselected media, namely Russia Today, Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report, which are an extended hand of the Russian Foreign Policy establishment in its diplomatic warfare against Kosovo.

In this regard, the analyses of the statements, briefings, articles, and other documents of the Russian foreign policy establishment, issued from August 15th to October 31st, 2021, shows that during this period the Moscow's foreign establishment was focused on undermining the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo, and comparing it with the illegal annexation of Crimea, undermining the credibility of the Western engagement in the state building of Kosovo and in the Prishtina - Belgrade dialogue, condemning the actions of the Kosovo Police in the northern part of Kosovo and for waging an "anti-Serbian violence," and with harsh reactions on declaring of two Russian diplomats accredited at UNMIK as non-grata by Kosovar authorities.

The news containing disinformation and misinformation of malign character on Kosovo, published during this period by the media mentioned above , were focused mostly on undermining the legality of the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo, followed by those portraying Serbian Community and Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened, on undermining the credibility of the Western engagement in the state building of Kosovo and in the Prishtina – Belgrade dialogue, and on the changing of narratives of war and war crimes in the Former Yugoslavia.

Russian Diplomatic Warfare on Kosovo

In this period, the Russian Foreign Ministry, the Russian Permanent Mission to the United Nations, the Russian Permanent Mission to the EU, and the Russian Embassy to Serbia have targeted Kosovo, directly, or in a larger context, in a number of statements, briefings for journalists, and press statements, whereas the Kremlin, the Permanent Mission of Russia to OSCE and the Permanent Russian Representation to the Council of Europe, have not posted on their web-sites any publications related to Kosovo. Against this background, the following text will present a topic based chronological analysis of these targeted activities of the Russian diplomatic warfare against Kosovo.

In this regard, in an interview given to the “Euractiv” on September 9th, 2021,¹⁵⁴ which was focused primarily on the situation in Afghanistan and Ukraine, the Permanent Representative of Russia to the EU, Ambassador Vladimir Chizhov, tried to justify the illegal annexation of Crimea by stating that the Western position on this aggressive act has a poor legal standing, and questioning it by stating: “Why should the West consider an arbitrary decision by Khrushchev in 1954, in contravention of all the legislation that existed at that time, to be the legal basis for what is happening today? Whereas the referendum which took place in 2014 was a clear expression of popular will of the Crimean population,” and ironically accusing them for recognizing Kosovo without any referendum, as the independence of Kosovo was questioned by the vast majority of its population.

Against this background, according to a press-release issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry,¹⁵⁵ the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with the Foreign Minister of Serbia Seljaković on September 25th, 2021, in the margins of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, in which

¹⁵⁴ Interview by Permanent Representative of Russia to the EU, Ambassador Vladimir Chizhov for "Euractiv", 9 September 2021, [Interview by Permanent Representative of Russia to the EU Ambassador Vladimir Chizhov for "Euractiv", 9 September 2021 - News - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#), posted on September 13, 2021

¹⁵⁵ Press release on Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's conversation with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia Nikola Selaković, September 25th, 2021, [Press release on Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's conversation with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia Nikola Selakovic - The UN General Assembly - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

they noted a “common general approach” towards Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus highlighting their coordination towards these two countries. In this vein, in a highly critical speech towards the West in this session of the General Assembly of the United Nations,¹⁵⁶ in which, among others, he accuses the West for creating an “artificial entity of Kosovo” by forcefully seizing it from Serbia and by recognizing it afterwards, and justifies the illegal annexation of Crimea with the internationally non-recognized referendum of 2014, by which “the Crimean people were trying to break free from the ultra-radicals who were behind the coup in Ukraine supported by the West.”

These Russian revisionist policies of the de facto not recognition of inter-state borders of the former Soviet Union republics, and of questioning the legality and legitimacy of the recognition of Kosovo by the West, present one of the reasons of its malign activities in the Western Balkans. These revisionist policies aim also at questioning the validity of inter-state borders in Bosnia and Herzegovina, by supporting the separatist tendencies of the leader of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, by misusing the independence of Kosovo while keeping hostile position towards it, and by comparing it with Crimea, in order to destabilize the South East Europe and undermine the Western long term stability and security involvement in the region.

On the other hand, the Spokeswomen of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, on September 24, 2021,¹⁵⁷ condemned Kosovar authorities for not allowing a journalist team of Izvestia, two of them Russian citizens, Denis Bolshakov (correspondent) and Oleg Berkach (operator), and one Belorussian citizen, Sergei Belous (translator), to enter the territory of Kosovo at the cross-border crossing Jarinje with Serbia, by stating among other things that “A provocation was perpetrated against two Russian correspondents from Izvestia Multimedia Information Centre (Channel 5), with the involvement of provisional self-government bodies of

¹⁵⁶ Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s address at the General Debate of the 76th session of the General Assembly, New York, September 25, 2021, [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s address at the General Debate of the 76th session of the General Assembly, New York, September 25, 2021 - The UN General Assembly - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

¹⁵⁷ Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova’s comment on the Kosovo Albanian information provocation against Russian journalists, September 24th, 2021, [Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova’s comment on the Kosovo Albanian information provocation against Russian journalists - Conflicts - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija (KiM), which behave like bodies of lawless arbitrariness.” The Russian Foreign Ministry, and journalists of Izvestia, knew very well that for entering Kosovo, Russian citizens must obtain an entry visa issued by the Kosovo Embassy in Tirana, or the General Consulate in Istanbul,¹⁵⁸ and that the Kosovo Border Police has acted accordingly, but her statement is an obvious attempt to undermine the independence and sovereignty of Kosovo, and she goes further by using a derogatory term “Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija (KiM),” which cannot be found not even in a single United Nations official document.

Furthermore, in a “Comment on the situation in Kosovo,” posted by the Russian Foreign Ministry on September 28th, 2021,¹⁵⁹ Zakharova accuses Kosovo Government for escalation of tensions in the north of the country, by claiming that “Civilians, among whom there are victims, are subjected to violence. Several people have been hospitalized.” However, the reality was completely different, given that during this crisis in the northern part of Kosovo, the Kosovo Police did not use force at all during its “preemptive protection” of the border-crossings of Jarinje and Brnjak with Serbia, and that it was solved with an agreement on vehicle registration plates between two countries, facilitated by the European Union and United States, achieved in Brussels on September 30th, 2021.¹⁶⁰ In this vein, on September 30th, 2021, in a briefing with journalists, the Deputy Director of the Information and Press Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Alexey Zaytsev, accused Kosovo authorities for the crisis in the north of the country, and denied the accusations of Kosovo’s President Osmani that “the Belgrade authorities, influenced by Russia, are inciting tensions in northern Kosovo and trying to destabilise the entire region.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Kosovo Foreign Ministry, https://www.mfa-ks.net/en/sherbimet_konsullore/503/kush-ka-nevoj-pr-viza-t-kosovs/503

¹⁵⁹ Comment by the official representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Mikhail Zakharova, on the situation in Kosovo, September 28th, 2021, [Comment by Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on the situation in Kosovo - News - Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4875750)

¹⁶⁰ Serbia, Kosovo Reach Compromise To End Border Deadlock, Radio Free Europe, September 30th, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-serbia-border-agreement/31485862.html>

¹⁶¹ Briefing with journalists, the Deputy Director of the Information and Press Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Alexey Zaytsev, September 30th, 2021, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4875750

Nevertheless, this statement does not reflect absence of Russian malign involvement in this crisis. On September 26th, 2021, the Russian Ambassador to Belgrade Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko in a company with the Serbian Defense Minister Stefanović, inspected the Serbian military forces near the border with Kosovo, which were in the state of an elevated combat readiness. Paradoxically, from there he supported “Belgrade’s efforts to de-escalate a very dangerous situation,” and accused the EU and the U.S. for “applying double standards and for closing their eyes to a situation that they did not want to understand, including who was to be blamed for what was happening.”¹⁶² At a joint news conference following the meeting with Serbia’s President Vučić on October 10th, 2021,¹⁶³ the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, among other things, restated President Putin’s stance that, as an outcome of the dialogue with Kosovo, Russia will accept any decision that suits Serbia and Serbian people, that this “matter” should be based solely on the UNSC Resolution 1244, and that this final decision should be submitted to the UNSC for approval. Ironically, he added that Russia presumes that the U.S. will use its significant influence on Kosovo to “come to agreements that will be in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and suit our Serbian friends,” and he criticized the EU for not being able to convince Kosovo to establish the Association of Serbian Majority Municipalities. This statement of Lavrov, in essence indicates Kremlin’s intention to play on the card of double veto in order to block achievement of any agreement for comprehensive normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, firstly, by trying to provide a “virtual veto” to Belgrade in the dialogue, by requiring that the outcome should suit solely the interest of Serbia, in order to keep it as a solid base of its influence in the region, on one hand, and by implicitly threatening to veto at the UN Security Council any agreement that does not suit Russian interests, that is, to block possible Kosovo’s UN membership and to keep indefinitely open the Kosovo – Serbian dispute, on the other. The most sarcastic part of this statement is the Russian “presumption” that the US will push an agreement that will suit solely the interest of Serbia and ignore the ICJ Advisory Opinion

¹⁶² Euractiv.rs, Northern Kosovo situation sparks international response, September 27th, 2021,

https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/northern-kosovo-situation-sparks-international-response/

¹⁶³ Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with President of the Republic of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić, Belgrade, October 10th, 2021, [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with President of the Republic of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic, Belgrade, October 10, 2021 - Conflicts - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

of July 2010, which, among others, stated that the Declaration of Independence of Kosovo has not violated the UNSC Resolution 1244.

In this vein, the Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswomen, Zakharova, in a comment on the statement of October 10th, 2021, of the Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama, on “the unification of Kosovo with Albania,” accused the West as curators of independence of Kosovo, for being silenced on this statement of Rama, while “attacking Belgrade for its justified Serbian World humanitarian concept that does not run counter to international law.”¹⁶⁴ This statement of Zakharova was followed by the statement of the Serbian Interior Minister, Aleksander Vulin, who “explained” the “humanitarian concept” of “the Serbian World” by stating that the only barrier to “Greater Albania,” and the only force that will enable the Serbs to not make any decisions influenced by others is the Serbian political unity and the creation of a “Serbian world.”¹⁶⁵

Yet, in another comment of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of October 14th, 2021¹⁶⁶, the Spokeswoman Zakharova, as a reaction to the Kosovo Police cross-country operation against smuggling and organized crime, that took place on October 13th, 2021, accused the Kosovar authorities for invading “the Serb populated areas in the North of Kosovo” by labeling it as a “recurrence of anti-Serbian violence” in Kosovo. Furthermore, she urged KFOR to implement its mandate under UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and “bring to heel the rampaging Kosovo Albanian radicals,” by using offensive terms not suitable to any diplomat. This reaction expresses the objective of Russia to keep the north of Kosovo as an area without the rule of law and out of the reach and control of Prishtina, as a place where it may exert its influence among local Serbian radicals, and thus keep the situation tense with an image of a “frozen conflict,” in order to subsequently erode the sovereignty of Kosovo in this part of the country.

¹⁶⁴ Comment by Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswomen, Zakharova, on the statement of Prime Minister Edi Rama, October 10th, 2021, [Comment by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on the statement by Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama - Conflicts - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

¹⁶⁵ B92, Serbia's response to "unification of Albania and Kosovo", October 10th, 2021, https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2021&mm=10&dd=10&nav_id=111942

¹⁶⁶ Comment by Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswomen, Zakharova, on the recurrence of Anti-Serbian violence in Kosovo, October 14th, 2021, [Comment by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on the recurrence of anti-Serb violence in Kosovo - Conflicts - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

In the same vein was also the statement of the Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia at the UNSC briefing on the situation in Kosovo, of October 15th, 2021¹⁶⁷, in which he initially offended Kosovo's President, Vjosa Osmani, by stating that her statement was a propaganda pamphlet and a tail. Among other things, he portrayed the situation of Serbs in Kosovo as a deteriorating one, he condemned the development of military capabilities of the Kosovo Security Force, accused Kosovo government for not implementing the agreement on the Association of Serbian Majority Municipalities, strongly opposed Kosovo's membership to international organizations, and insisted that only UNMIK is entitled to present the "province."

Nevertheless, the reactions of Russia got harsher, when, on October 22nd, 2021, the Kosovo Foreign Ministry declared as non-grata two Russians diplomats of the Russian Embassy Office in Prishtina accredited to UNMIK, Denis Vengerski and Alexey Kryvosheev, due to "undermining the national security and the constitutional order" of Kosovo. In an immediate reaction following this decision, the Press Service of the Russian Embassy in Belgrade stated, "We do not recognize the 'independence' of Kosovo and thus the 'government' of the province and other 'structures'. For us, no 'decisions' of Pristina have legal force," and "based on the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, we are cooperating with UNMIK on this issue," by adding that this is "absolutely unacceptable attempt to obstruct UNMIK-accredited diplomats from carrying out their activities in accordance with international law."¹⁶⁸ In addition, in a comment of October 23rd, 2021, the Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zakharova called this decision of Kosovo authorities as a "gross anti-Russian provocation." Furthermore, she stated that "by all indications," this is "a purposeful provocation in order to serve the Western project of creating a puppet Albanian-populated state entity pursuing an aggressive policy, not least aimed against Russia, its constructive role in the

¹⁶⁷ Statement by Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia at UNSC briefing on the situation in Kosovo, October 15th, 2021, [Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations \(russiaun.ru\)](https://www.russiaun.ru)

¹⁶⁸ Sputnik Serbia, Rusija odgovorila Prištini: Ne priznajemo ni tzv. Kosovo ni odluke "vlade," October 22nd, 2021, [Rusija odgovorila Prištini: Ne priznajemo ni tzv. Kosovo ni odluke „vlade“ \(sputniknews.com\)](https://sputniknews.com)

Balkans.”¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, in a press briefing of October 28th, 2021,¹⁷⁰ she could not deny the existence of a verbal note of the Embassy Office of Russian Federation in Prishtina, addressed to the Foreign Ministry of Kosovo on November 27th, 2020, which the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo, Meliza Haradinaj, posted on her twitter account.¹⁷¹ Instead, making public of this verbal note Zakharova considered that aimed at convincing Kosovo public that the Russia’s position towards Kosovo and the UNSC Resolution 1244, is “changing and teetering”. Nevertheless, according to the Kosovo Police, the Russian diplomats declared as non-grata left the territory of Kosovo at the Merdare border-crossing with Serbia in afternoon of October 23rd, 2021.

Russian Media Disinformation on Kosovo

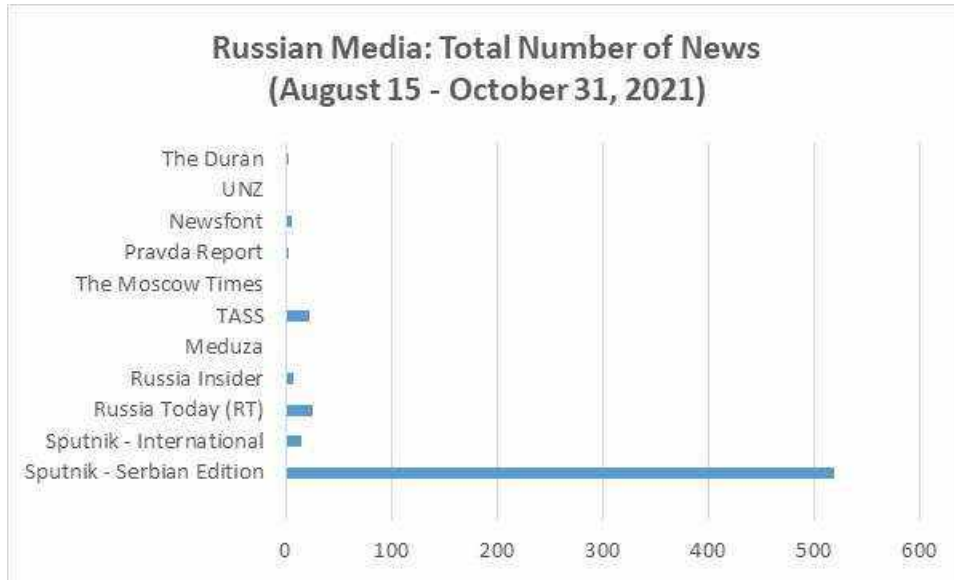
The preselected media outlets originating in Russia that were monitored from August 15th to October 31st, 2021, are Russia Today, Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report.

The monitoring of data shows that during this period these media outlets have published 598 news related directly and indirectly to Kosovo. Sputnik–Serbian Edition has published 519, Russia Today 25, TASS 22, Sputnik International 15, Russia Insider 7, Newsfront 6, Pravda Report 2, The Duran 2, Meduza none, Moscow Times and UNZ none.

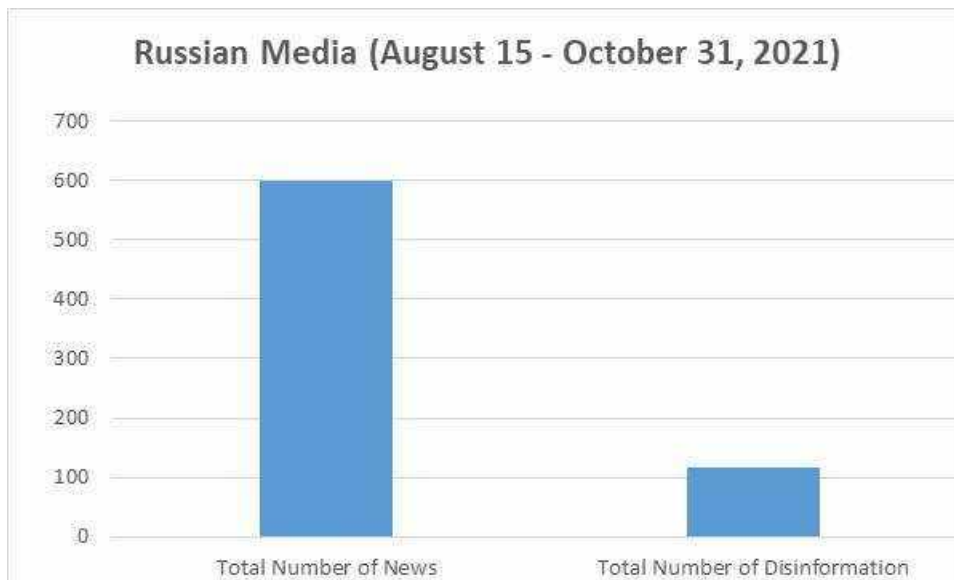
¹⁶⁹ Comment by the official representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, in connection with the anti-Russian provocation of Pristina, October 23rd, 2021, [Comment by Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on Pristina’s anti-Russian provocation - News - Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

¹⁷⁰ Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, October 28, 2021, [Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, October 28, 2021 - News - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

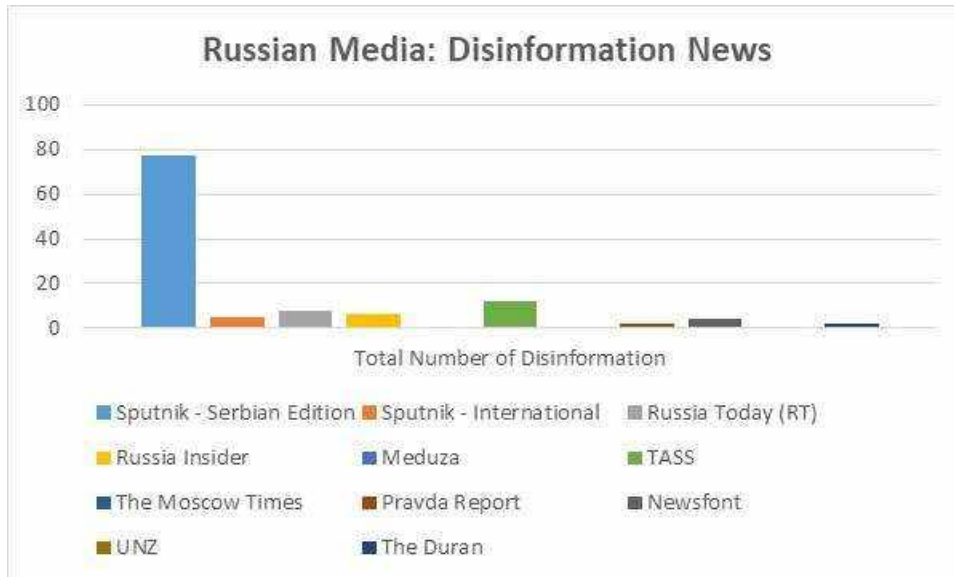
¹⁷¹ https://kallxo.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/FCVL_5cXMAgepHk.jpg



An overview of the published news by these media conducted by KIPRED shows that out of 598 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo, 116 (19,4%) of them contained disinformation.



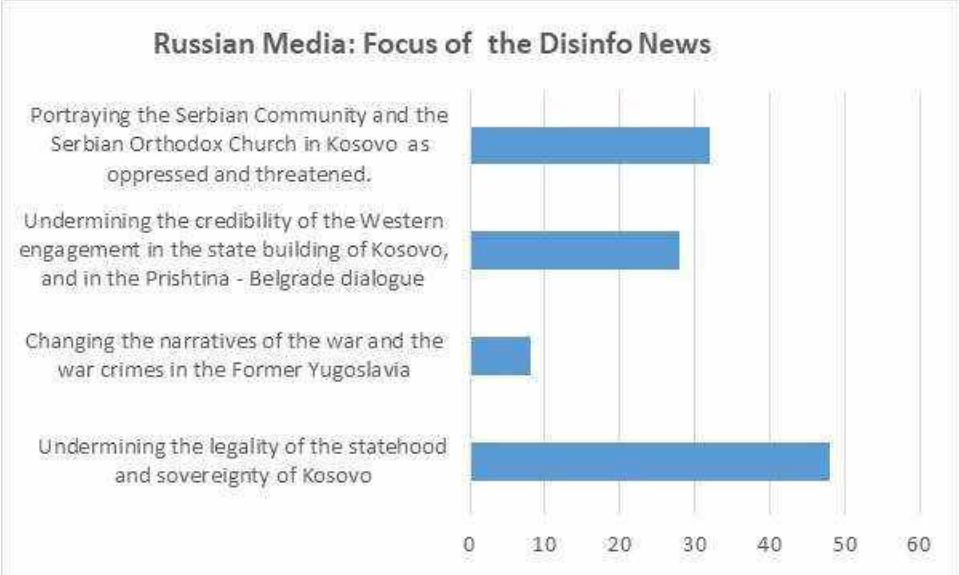
The largest number of disinformation was published by Sputnik Serbia (77), followed by TASS (12), Russia Today (8), Russian Insider (6), Sputnik International (5), UNZ (4), Newsfront (4), The Duran (2) and Pravda Report (2).



In order to have a better overview of the disinformation patterns targeting Kosovo, in the news published by the above-mentioned Russian media outlets, the main focus of their content was clustered around the following disinformation aims:

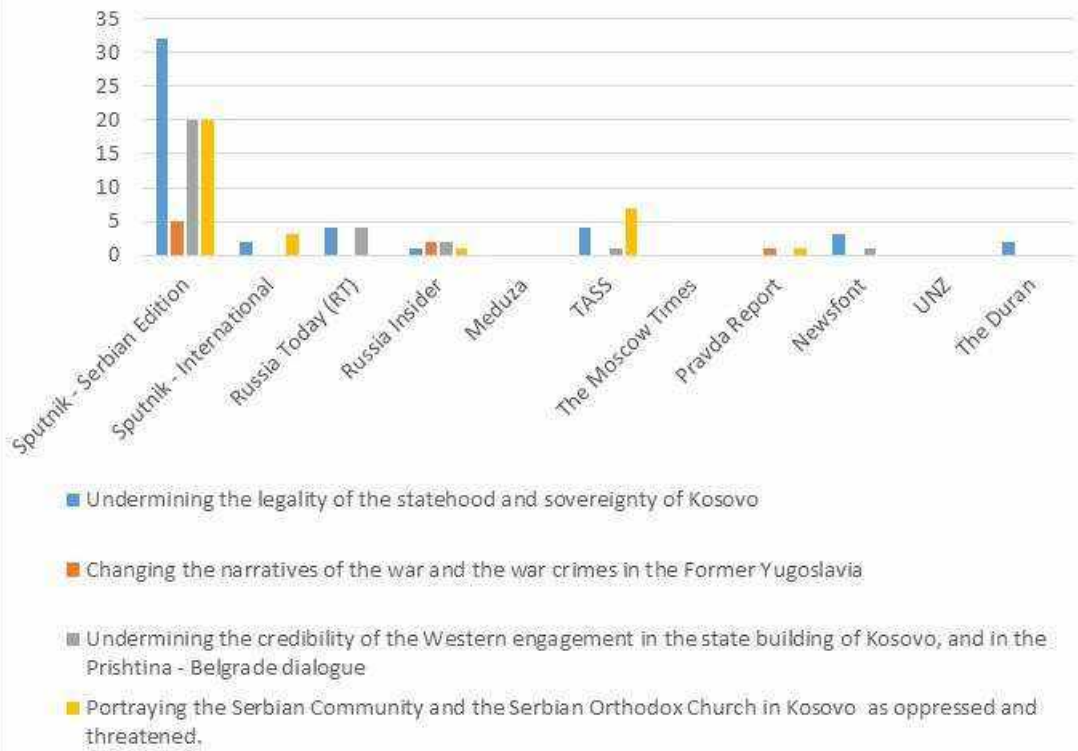
- Undermining the legality of the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo.
- Changing the narratives of the war and the war crimes in Former Yugoslavia.
- Undermining the credibility of the Western engagement in the state building of Kosovo and in the Prishtina – Belgrade dialogue.
- Portraying the Serbian community and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened.

Regarding the content of the news containing disinformation, published by these Russian media outlets, the largest number of them was aiming to undermine the legality of the statehood and of sovereignty of Kosovo (48), followed by portraying the Serbian community and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened (32), undermining the credibility of the Western engagement in the state building of Kosovo, and in the Prishtina - Belgrade dialogue (28), and changing the narratives of war and war crimes in Former Yugoslavia (8).



The analysis of the patterns of the clustered disinformation news published by the above-mentioned Russian media outlets show that they are mainly focused on undermining the legality of the statehood and of the sovereignty of Kosovo, and disinformation aiming at portraying the Serbian community and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened, as well as on the undermining of the credibility of Western engagement in the state building of Kosovo, and in the Prishtina - Belgrade dialogue. Interestingly the disinformation news aiming at changing the narratives of war and war crimes in the Former Yugoslavia have caught much less attention of these media outlets than in the previous report.

Clustered Disinformation News



Conclusion

An important momentum for intensification of Russian – Serbian cooperation against the statehood of Kosovo and on stability and security in the Western Balkans may occur during the visit of Serbian President to Moscow and his meeting with the Russian President Putin on November 25th, 2021. In this regard it should be noted that the latest clashes between Prishtina and Belgrade, as well as those between Prishtina and Moscow, accompanied with the lack of progress of the Brussels' facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, have created a fertile ground for further intensification of Russia's diplomatic warfare against Kosovo and undermining the efforts of the West for finding a viable solution of the dispute between the two neighboring countries.

As mentioned in the above analyses, the Russian revisionist policies of de facto not recognizing the inter-state borders of the former Soviet republics and of questioning the legality and legitimacy of the recognition of Kosovo by the West, are one of the reasons of its malign activities in the Western Balkans. These Kremlin's revisionist policies aim also at questioning the validity of the inter-state borders in Bosnia and Herzegovina, by supporting the separatist tendencies of the leader of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, misusing and keeping hostile position towards the independence of Kosovo and by comparing it with Crimea, in order to destabilize the South East Europe and undermine the Western long term stability and security involvement in the region.

In this regard, the analyses of the public statements, briefings, articles and other documents of the Russian foreign policy establishment from August 15th to October 31st, 2021, show clearly the continuation of the narratives' aim to undermine the statehood of Kosovo and of Western engagement in Kosovo and in the region, as well as to accuse Kosovo authorities for exercising violence over Serbian community and deny its right to fight the organized crime in the entire territory of the country. The public activities of the Russian foreign policy establishment against Kosovo during this period have intensified since the second part of September 2021 with the starting of a short lived crisis in the northern part of Kosovo and the expulsion of two Russian diplomats of the Embassy Office of Russia in Prishtina, in the end of October 2021.

Finally, the analyses of the discourse of the news containing disinformation and malign misinformation (116) of the preselected media outlets, which are an extended arm of Moscow, show that, in general, they follow the narratives of Russia's foreign policy establishment, whereas the Sputnik Serbia, Russia Today and TASS are at the forefront of these malign information activities against Kosovo.

Kosovo Observer:

Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation

November 1, 2021 – January 15, 2022

Executive Summary

The Kosovo Observer: Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation is a quarterly report that aims to analyse public statements, press briefings, articles, and other documents, published on the web-sites of Kremlin, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Russian Permanent Mission to the United Nations, the Permanent Mission of Russia to OSCE, the Permanent Russian Representation to the Council of Europe, the Russian Permanent Mission to the EU, and the Russian Embassy to Serbia, which are the key exponents of the Russian diplomatic war against Kosovo. In addition, this Observer analyses the patterns of the news containing disinformation on Kosovo, published by the preselected media, namely Russia Today, Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report, which are an extended hand of the Russian Foreign Policy establishment in its diplomatic warfare against Kosovo.

In this regard, the analyses of the statements, briefings, articles, and other documents of the Russian foreign policy establishment, issued from November 1st 2021 to January 15th, 2022, show that during this period that coincides with preparations for the invasion in Ukraine, the Moscow's foreign policy establishment has elevated the level of the misuse of Kosovo in its diplomatic warfare against the West. In addition to Crimea, Moscow is now comparing the behaviour of the Government of Kosovo with that of Ukraine, and that of the northern part of Kosovo with the separatist regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, at the same time when it is victimizing ethnic Russians in Ukraine and ethnic Serbs in Kosovo. Against this backdrop, it has continued to manipulate the narratives of NATO intervention in former Yugoslavia, undermining the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo, undermining the credibility of the EU engagement in the Prishtina - Belgrade dialogue in parallel with the Brussels' role in the implementation of the Minsk Agreement, accuse Kosovo and the West that their aim is to have the "Balkans powder keg" explode, by specifically targeting the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Kosovo and the Head of the OSCE Mission, the British Ambassador Davenport, and to portray the Serbian community and Orthodox Church in Kosovo as threatened and oppressed. Most interesting, it is almost obvious that in the meeting between President Putin and Vučić of November 25th, 2021, has been discussed the upcoming Russian military buildup on the Ukrainian border, and possible Russian

– Serbian coordination on their aims in the Western Balkans in the light of the upcoming Putin’s aggression in Ukraine.

The news containing disinformation and misinformation of malign character on Kosovo, published during this period by the media mentioned above, were mainly focused on undermining the credibility of the Western engagement in the state building of Kosovo and in the Prishtina – Belgrade dialogue, followed by those whose focus was on undermining the legality of the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo, on portraying the Serbian Community and Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened, and on changing the narratives of war and war crimes in Former Yugoslavia.

Russian Diplomatic Warfare on Kosovo

During this period, the Kremlin, Russian Foreign Ministry, the Russian Permanent Mission to the OSCE, and the Russian Embassy to Serbia have targeted Kosovo, directly, or in a broader context, in a number of statements, briefings for journalists, and press statements, whereas the Permanent Mission of Russia to the United Nations, the Russian Permanent Mission to the EU, and the Permanent Russian Representation to the Council of Europe, have not posted on their web-sites any publications related to Kosovo. Against this background, the following text will present and discuss the topic based on chronological analysis of these targeted activities of the Russian diplomatic warfare against Kosovo.

In this regard, on November 3rd, 2021, the spokeswoman of the Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova¹⁷² accused Kosovo Albanians for worsening the situation in the region and for bringing it to the edge of escalation with the support of the West, by specifically targeting diplomats of the United Kingdom. She stated that “the situation in the Balkans is getting worse, the fuse of the Balkans powder keg can be lit at any moment due to the actions of Kosovo extremists, with the complicity or direct encouragement of Western patrons”. According to her, the source of this problem are “Albanian ultranationalists who took power there and who are especially active in showing their muscles ahead of the local elections,”¹⁷³ as well as their Western supporters that “in 1999 launched a NATO aggression on Yugoslavia with the aim of tearing Kosovo away from Serbia, without taking into account the numerous human casualties”, who are also trying to push Serbia “to give up national interests and historical memory”. In this context, in an unprecedented attack, she accused Great Britain for directly encouraging the “Kosovo provocateurs”, by stating that “anti-Serbian arbitrariness was blessed by the British ambassador in Pristina and his compatriot who is at the head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo”¹⁷⁴.

In a press conference on November 13th, 2021, following his visit to Paris, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused European Union for its incapability to pressure Kosovo to

¹⁷² Sputnik Serbia, Zaharova: Balkansko bure baruta u svakom trenutku može da plane, November 3rd, 2021, [Zaharova: Balkansko bure baruta u svakom trenutku može da plane - 03.11.2021, Sputnik Srbija \(sputniknews.com\)](https://www.sputniknews.com/en/news/2021/11/03/zaharova-balkansko-bure-baruta-u-svakom-trenutku-moze-da-plane-03.11.2021/)

¹⁷³ The first and the second round of the Municipal Elections in Kosovo took place on October 17th and November 14th, 2021, respectively.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

implement the agreement on the Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities, by trying to undermine its credibility. He stated that “the European Union, acting as the UN General Assembly’s mediator, is unable to implement the decisions adopted with its assistance by Belgrade and Pristina in 2013” aiming primarily at the agreement to establish the Community of Serb (Majority) Municipalities in Kosovo, which, according to him, would “allow Serbs to retain their identity in this territory”¹⁷⁵.

On the other hand, on the occasion of the meeting with the Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić on November 25th, 2021, President Putin paid a special attention to the military cooperation between Moscow and Belgrade, whereas regarding cooperation at international stage, he solely underlined the “settlement in Kosovo”, by stressing the support for the position of Serbia.¹⁷⁶

In this vein, on December 9th, 2021, the Permanent Representative of Russia to the OSCE, Mr. Alexander Lukashevich, started his statement on the security situation in the Western Balkans¹⁷⁷ by labeling Kosovo as “Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija”, regardless of the fact that the OSCE uses the term Kosovo to address the country. He accused “Kosovar Albanians” for trying to take over the “Serb populated areas” in the northern part of Kosovo and for exercising violence against Serb civilians, when this obviously was not a case.

In this regard, it has to be noted that Kosovo Police did not use force during its “preemptive protection” operation of the border-crossings of Jarinje and Brnjak with Serbia, and that this problem was solved with an agreement on vehicle registration plates facilitated by the European Union and the United States, achieved in Brussels on September 30th, 2021, whereas on October 13th, 2021 Kosovo Police conducted cross-country operation against smuggling and organized crime, including the north of the country.

¹⁷⁵ Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to media questions following his visit to France, Paris, November 12, 2021, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1785967/

¹⁷⁶ Talks with President of Serbia of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic, The Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67194>

¹⁷⁷ Statement by Mr. Alexander Lukashevich, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation at the 1348th meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council on the security situation in the Western Balkans.

[Alexander Lukashevich on the security situation in the Western Balkans, 9 December 2021 - Speeches and Interviews of the Permanent Representative - Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the OSCE \(mid.ru\)](#)

Furthermore, he accused without any evidence the UK intelligence for organizing “disturbances” on October 13th, 2021, thus putting again London at the forefront of criticism against the West in Kosovo. In addition, he accused Kosovo for incidents involving Serb orthodox religious heritage sites, specifically the case of the Orthodox Church in the town of Zvečan/Zvečan, that was burglarized on 30 November, 2021, by ignoring the fact that this municipality that is located in the north of the country, is almost 100% populated by Serbian population and that Kosovo Police station in this municipality is comprised predominantly by Kosovo Serb police officers, who are in charge for the safety of the local population.

On the other hand, the Russian Ambassador to Serbia, Aleksandar Bocan-Harchenko, in his presentation on the topic of “Russian–Serbian Strategic Partnership and the situation in the Balkans”, organized by the Belgrade Institute of International Politics and Economy organized on December 14th, 2021¹⁷⁸, considered that the condition put to Serbia to recognize Kosovo is a stupidity, and that linking the implementation of the agreements with the recognition of Kosovo by Serbia is impossible and damaging. Furthermore, he insisted that EU should pressure Kosovo to implement all the signed agreements, while stating that in the contrary, the EU will lose credibility.

In an interview given to the Bosnian newspaper “Oslobodjenje” on December 24th, 2021¹⁷⁹, the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov denied existence of Russian malicious influence in the region, and for this narrative he accused the “local Russophobes”, by adding that this “probably serves the interests of some extra-regional actors” [the West] that prefer “fishing in muddy water.” Furthermore, he accused the West for dragging into NATO certain countries of the region by ignoring the will of their people (Montenegro), and blamed NATO for its interventions in 1990’s. Regarding Kosovo he stated the already repeated position of Moscow that Belgrade and Pristina

¹⁷⁸ Sputnik Serbia, Jasna poruka ambasadora Rusije: Uslov da Srbija na kraju prizna nezavisnost Kosova je — glupost, December 14th, 2021, [Jasna poruka ambasadora Rusije: Uslov da Srbija na kraju prizna nezavisnost Kosova je – glupost \(sputniknews.com\)](https://www.sputniknews.com/jasna-poruka-ambasadora-rusije-uslov-da-srbija-na-kraju-prizna-nezavisnost-kosova-je-glupost/)

¹⁷⁹ Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s interview with the newspaper Oslobodjenje on the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations established between the Russian Federation and Bosnia and Herzegovina on December 26, 1996, published on December 24, 2021, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1791944/

should achieve “a mutually acceptable solution based on UNSC 1244”, and that this should be approved by the UN Security Council.

In a press briefing of January 13th, 2022, the spokeswoman of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, in a reaction to the declaration as a person non-grata by the Foreign Ministry of Kosovo of the Russian UNMIK official Andrey Nikolaevich Antonov, on December 31st, 2021, stated among others that this act is “a continuation of the Kosovo authorities’ provocative policy aimed at purging those UN Mission members who have an objective perspective on the situation on the ground”¹⁸⁰. Nevertheless, as media in Kosovo have reported, according to an UNMIK official identified with initials as P.T., Antonov was exercising pressure on Serbian political structures in the municipalities with Serbian majority and was involved in the blockages in the northern part of Kosovo in September 2021¹⁸¹.

However, a major change of the Russian narratives towards Kosovo has been introduced by the Foreign Minister Lavrov in an interview given to the Moscow based Channel One’s political talk show “The Great Game” on January 13, 2022¹⁸². In his statement he put in the same package of comparison the Minsk agreements and the agreement on the Association of Serbian Majority Community Municipalities (ASM) in Kosovo, as well as the ASM with the Donetsk and Lugansk separatist regions. He stated that “the agreement on ASM envisaged providing autonomous rights to the Serbs, which is strongly reminiscent of what is spelled out in the Minsk agreements for the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics”, and presented both of them through the lenses of Pan-Slavism, by emphasizing that “these agreements concern the rights of the Slavs, especially the Orthodox Christian Slavs”. It is obvious that by these statements, Minister Lavrov aims to victimize the Serbian Community in Kosovo similarly with the Russians in the separatist regions of Donetsk and Lugansk that have been used as an excuse for military intervention in Ukraine.

¹⁸⁰ Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, January 13, 2022, https://www.mid.ru/fr/press_service/spokesman/briefings/1794251/?lang=en

¹⁸¹ Gazeta Express, Rusi “non grata” i UNMIK-ut, po bënte presion mbi serbët e veriut, December 13, 2021, <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/rusi-non-grata-i-unmik-ut-po-bente-presion-mbi-serbet-e-veriut/>

¹⁸² Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s interview on Channel One’s “The Great Game” political talk show, Moscow, January 13, 2022, [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s interview on Channel One’s “The Great Game” political talk show, Moscow, January 13, 2022 - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](https://www.mid.ru/fr/press_service/spokesman/briefings/1794251/?lang=en)

In addition, in his remarks and answers to media questions at a news conference on Russia's foreign policy performance in 2021, Moscow, January 14, 2022, Foreign Minister Lavrov further clarified his comparison of the Association of Serbian Majority Municipalities with the separatist regions of Donetsk and Lugansk by blaming the EU for the lack of implementation of both agreements¹⁸³. Interestingly, according to him, the ASM aims to give only the Serbs in the northern part of Kosovo "major rights of autonomy on cultural, humanitarian, language and educational matters, as well as in the area of special ties with Serbia", which are similar to the rights that have "been approved for the Donetsk and Lugansk republics in the Minsk Package of Measures." In this statement, Lavrov clearly aimed at the revision of the agreement of the ASM, and at projecting the northern part of Kosovo similarly with the ambitions of the two separatist regions of Ukraine.

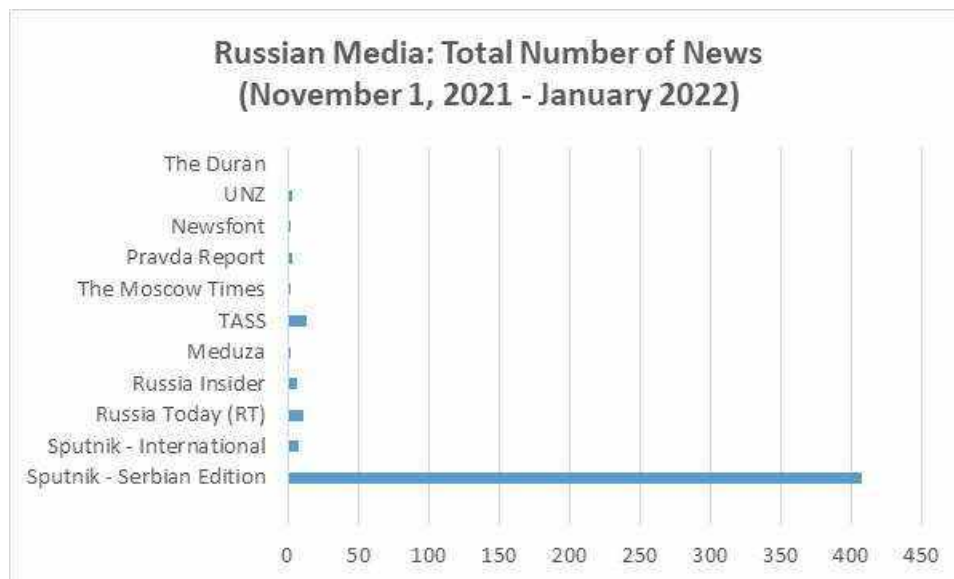
Furthermore, he accused the EU that it was involved in drafting of both these documents, namely, the entire European Union in the case of Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities, and in the case of the Minsk Agreement, the EU represented by Germany and France in the Normandy format, and that those were not implemented by "Pristina in the case of Kosovo and the Kiev regime in the case of the Minsk agreements". It is interesting that the comparison of Kosovo with Crimea ceased, and that now Kosovo has started to be compared with Ukraine, simultaneously with the comparison of the situation in the northern part of Kosovo with that of separatist regions of Donetsk and Lugansk.

¹⁸³ Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a news conference on Russia's foreign policy performance in 2021, Moscow, January 14, 2022, https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1794396/?lang=en

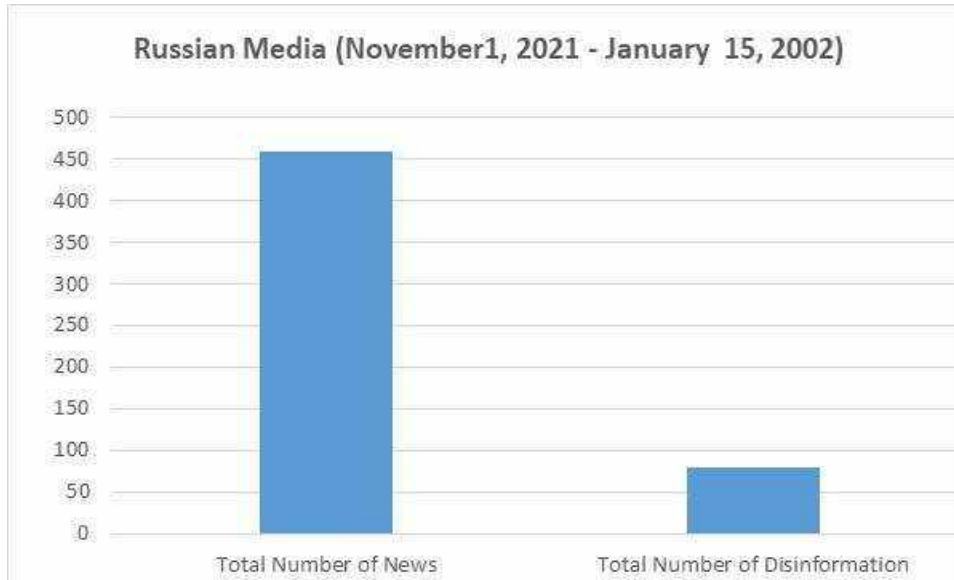
Russian Media Disinformation on Kosovo

The preselected media outlets originating in Russia that were monitored from November 1, 2021, to January 15th, 2021, are Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Russia Today, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report.

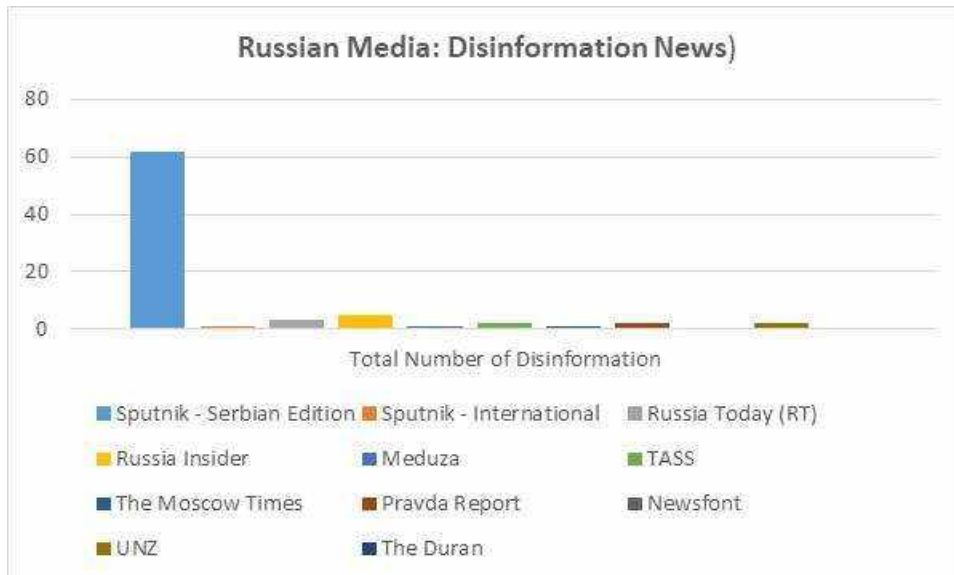
The monitoring of data shows that during this period these media outlets have published 598 news related directly and indirectly to Kosovo. Sputnik–Serbian Edition has published 408, TASS 13, Russia Today 11, Sputnik International 8, Russia Insider 6, Pravda Report 3, UNZ 3, Meduza 2, Moscow Times 2, Newsfront 2, and The Duran none.



An overview of the published news by these media conducted by KIPRED shows that out of 458 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo, 79 (17,2%) of them contained disinformation.



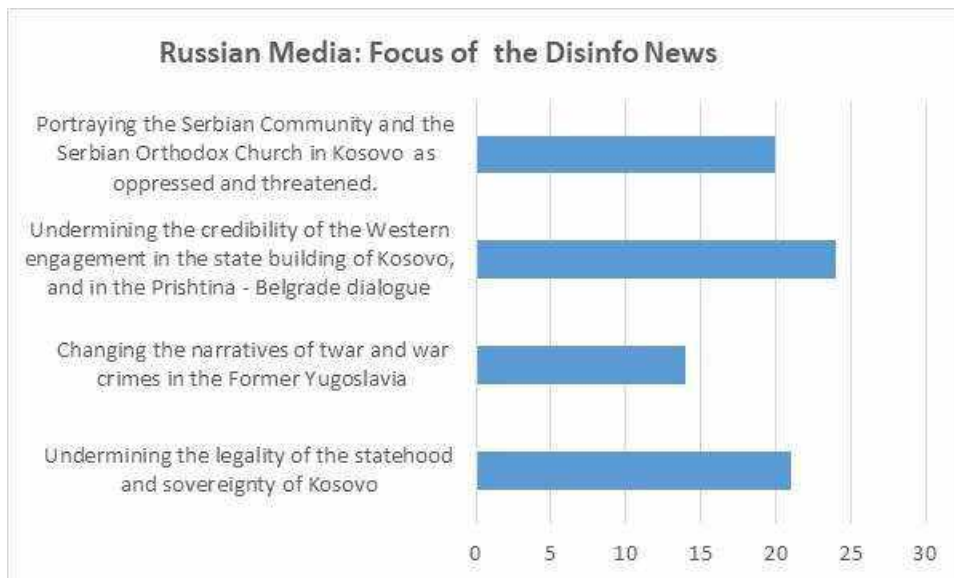
The largest number of disinformation was published by Sputnik Serbia (62), followed by Russian Insider (5), Russia Today (3), TASS (2), Pravda Report (2). UNZ (2), Sputnik International (1), Meduza (1), Moscow Times (1), Newsfront (0) and The Duran (0).



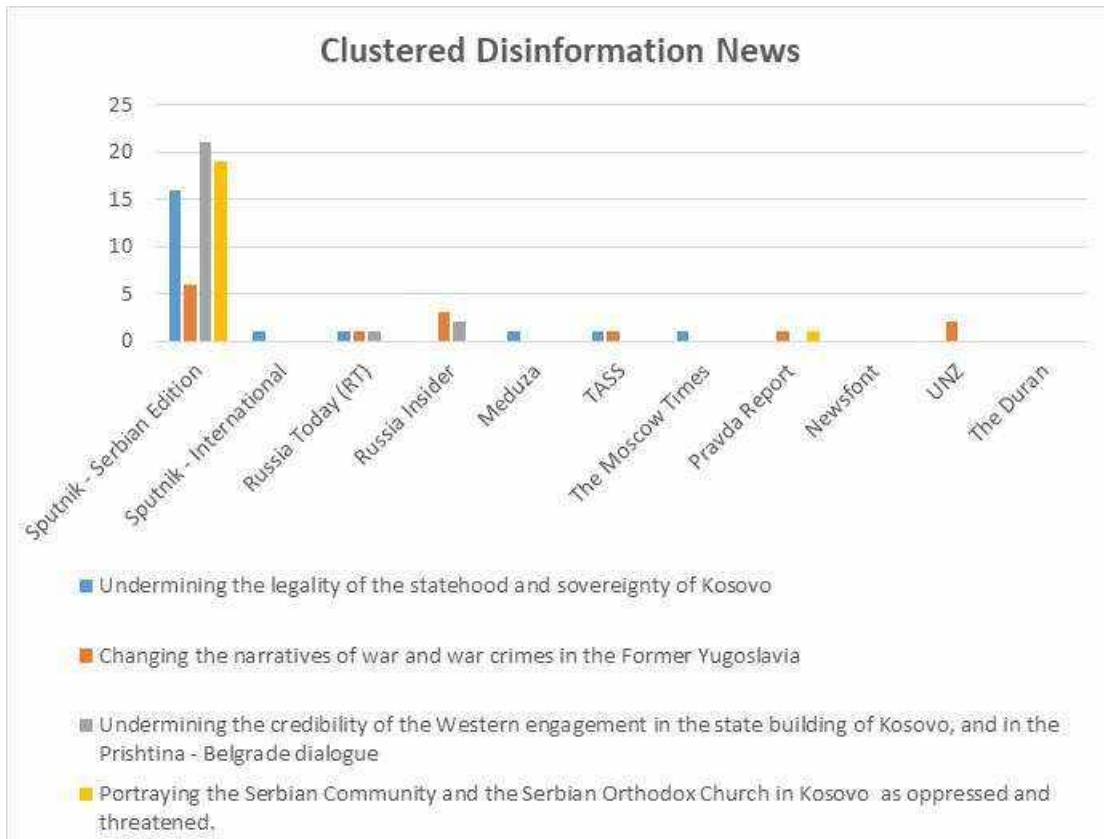
In order to have a better overview of the disinformation patterns targeting Kosovo, in the news published by the above-mentioned Russian media outlets, the main focus of their content was clustered around the following disinformation aims:

- Undermining the legality of the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo.
- Changing the narratives of war and war crimes in Former Yugoslavia.
- Undermining the credibility of the Western engagement in the state building of Kosovo and in the Prishtina – Belgrade dialogue.
- Portraying the Serbian community and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened.

Regarding the content of the news containing disinformation, published by these Russian media outlets, the largest number of them was aiming to undermine the credibility of the Western engagement in the state building of Kosovo, and in the Prishtina – Belgrade dialogue (24), then, to undermine the legality of the statehood and of sovereignty of Kosovo (21), followed by the portraying of the Serbian community and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened (20), and changing the narratives of war and war crimes in Former Yugoslavia (14).



The analysis of the patterns of the clustered disinformation news published by the above-mentioned Russian media outlets shows that they are mainly focused on undermining of the credibility of Western engagement in the state building of Kosovo, on undermining the legality of the statehood and of the sovereignty of Kosovo, then, on portraying the Serbian community and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened, as well as on the Prishtina - Belgrade dialogue. Interestingly, the disinformation news aiming at changing the narratives of war and war crimes in the Former Yugoslavia have caught much less attention of these media outlets than in the previous report.



Conclusion

An important development in the Russian diplomatic warfare against the West and Kosovo that occurred during this period is the shift in its narratives on the verge of Putin's aggression in Ukraine. In his two declarations, given on January 13th and 14th, 2022, Foreign Minister Lavrov compared the two Russian dominated separatist regions of Ukraine, Donetsk and Lugansk, with the Serbian dominated northern part of Kosovo, and the Minsk Agreement with that of Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities in terms of the rights of the Russian and Serbian populations in these two respective territories. Furthermore, for the "lack of implementation", Lavrov blames the "impotence" of the European Union to push Kyiv and Prishtina to honor these two agreements, respectively.

The attacks against the West in Kosovo were specifically focused on the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Kosovo, the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo – UK Ambassador Michael Davenport, and on the British Intelligence for plotting against Serbian community in Kosovo by supporting the Kosovo Police intervention in the northern part of Kosovo that was part of an anti-organized crime operation that took part across Kosovo on October 13th, 2021, and for "supporting" the decision of the Kosovo Government and Parliament not to let the referendum on the constitutional changes of Serbia to take place within the territory of Kosovo.

On the other hand, Kremlin has issued short introductory statements of the meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Serbian President Alexander Vučić that took place on November 25th, 2021 in Sochi,¹⁸⁴ in despite of the fact that the meeting itself lasted around three hours. Furthermore, according to the Serbian TV Pink, quoted by the Radio Free Europe, Vučić left the meeting by being proud on the military-technical cooperation with Russia, and he prayed for a fast arrival to Serbia of certain tactical weapons, by citing specifically the anti-tank weapons. Most interestingly, Vučić stressed the urgency of shipment of these Russian weapons since according to him *"there will be other important major things of strategic interest for Serbia in the*

¹⁸⁴ Talks with President of Serbia of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic, The Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67194>

future, and not in the distant future," where he added "so we will have the first things before the end of the year in Serbia".¹⁸⁵

Having in mind these declarations of Vučić, it is almost obvious that in the meeting with President Putin they have discussed the upcoming Russian military buildup on the Ukrainian border, and possible Russian – Serbian coordination on their aims in the Western Balkans in the light of the upcoming Putin's aggression in Ukraine. It has to be noted that one week after Vučić's meeting with Putin, the US media reported about the military aims of Kremlin towards its neighbor¹⁸⁶. In this regard, the comparison of the separatist regions of Donetsk and Lugansk with the northern part of Kosovo by Minister Lavrov, remains a matter of concern regarding possible coordination of Serbian and Russian actions in relation to Kosovo and the Western Balkans.

Against this backdrop, the absurd comparisons of Kosovo and NATO's intervention, with Crimea and separatist regions of Donetsk and Lugansk of Ukraine, as well as the past ones with South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, used by Putin's regime leaves no doubts that they are pursued to justify the aggressions and hegemonic policies in the Russia's "near abroad" that are naked from the basic norms of respect for human rights and of international law.

Finally, the analyses of the discourse of the news containing disinformation and malign misinformation (79) of the preselected media outlets, which are an extended arm of Moscow, show that, in general, they follow the narratives of Russia's foreign policy establishment, and that the Sputnik Serbia, Sputnik International, Russia Today and TASS remain at the forefront of these malign information operation against Kosovo.

¹⁸⁵ Radio Free Europe, Russian, Serbian Presidents Emerge From Meeting With Talk Of Gas Deal, 'Tactical' Weapons, 25 November, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-vucic-gas-weapons/31579354.html>

¹⁸⁶ Washington Post, Russia planning massive military offensive against Ukraine involving 175,000 troops, U.S. intelligence warns, 3 December 2021.

**KOSOVO
DISINFORMATION OBSERVER**

SERBIAN AND RUSSIAN MEDIA

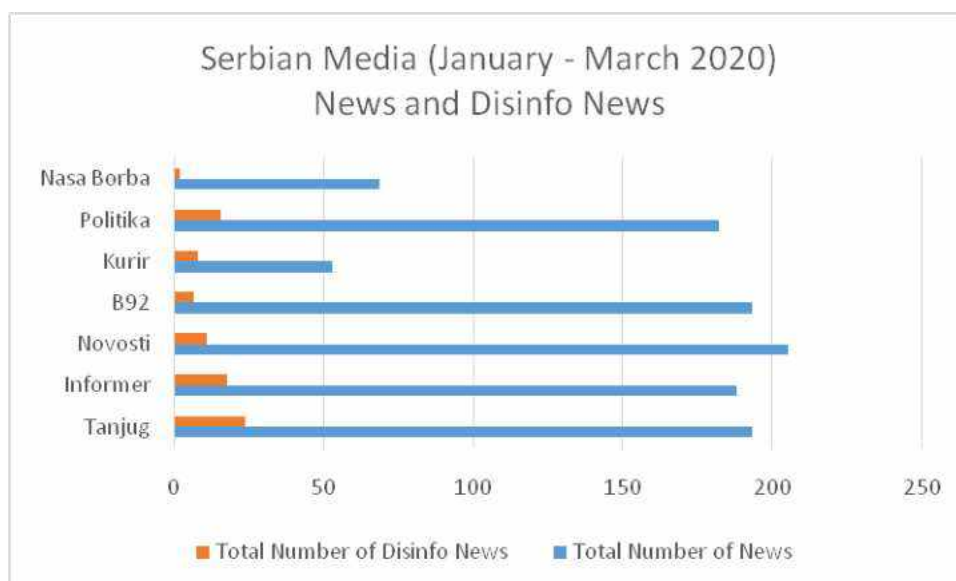
January – March 2020

Executive Summary

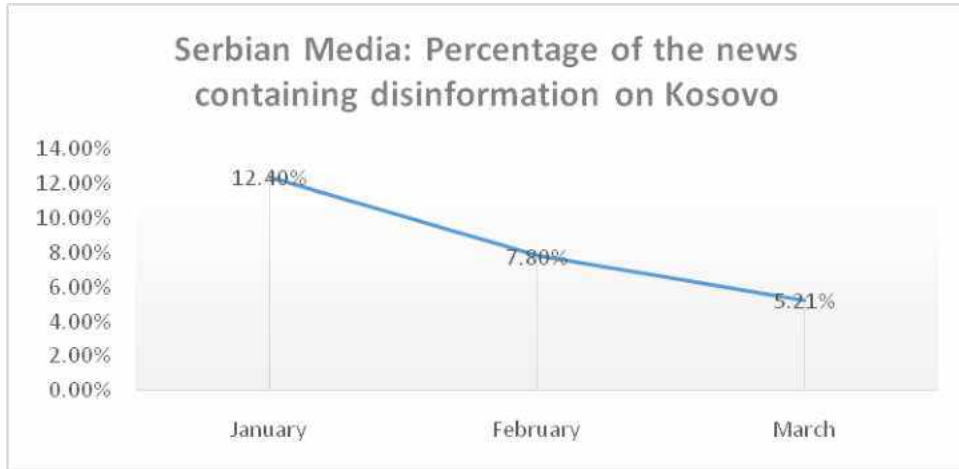
Kosovo Disinformation Observer: Serbian and Russian Media Monitoring is a quarterly report that aims to analyse the disinformation trends of news published by the preselected media outlets originating in Serbia and Russia in English and Serbian language targeting Kosovo.

The preselected media originating in Serbia, that are known for publishing news with disinformation content, are Tanjug, Informer, Novosti, Kurir, B92, Politika and Naša Borba, whereas the respective preselected media originating in Russia are Russia Today, Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report, as well as documents and statements related to Kosovo, published by Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

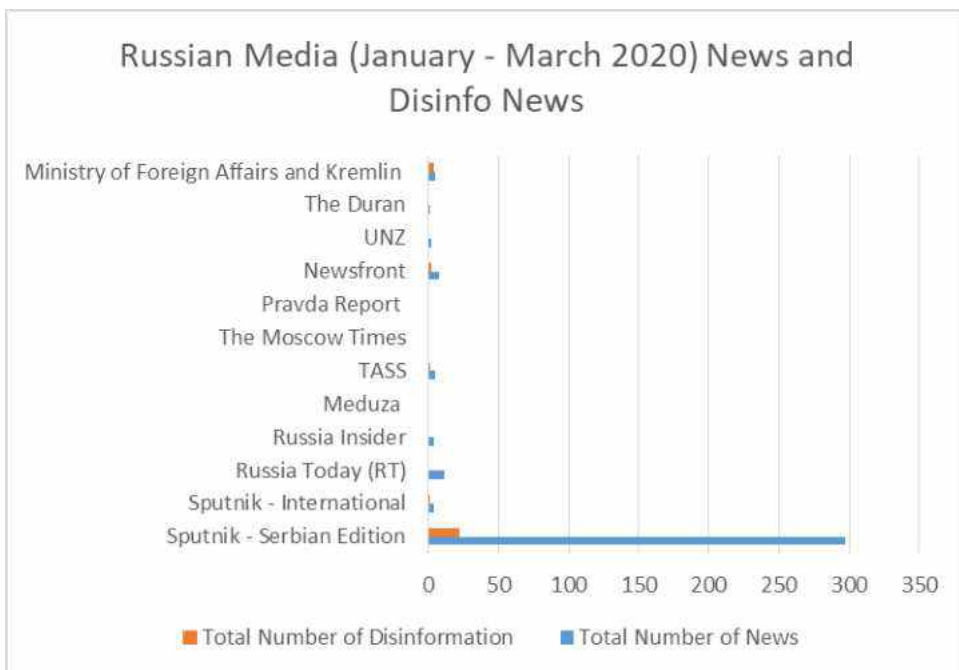
The monitoring of data shows that from January 1st to March 31st, 2020 media outlets originating in Serbia have published 1,083 news that were related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. Tanjug has published 193, Informer 188, Novosti 205, B92 193, Kurir 53, Politika 182 and Naša Borba 69 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo.



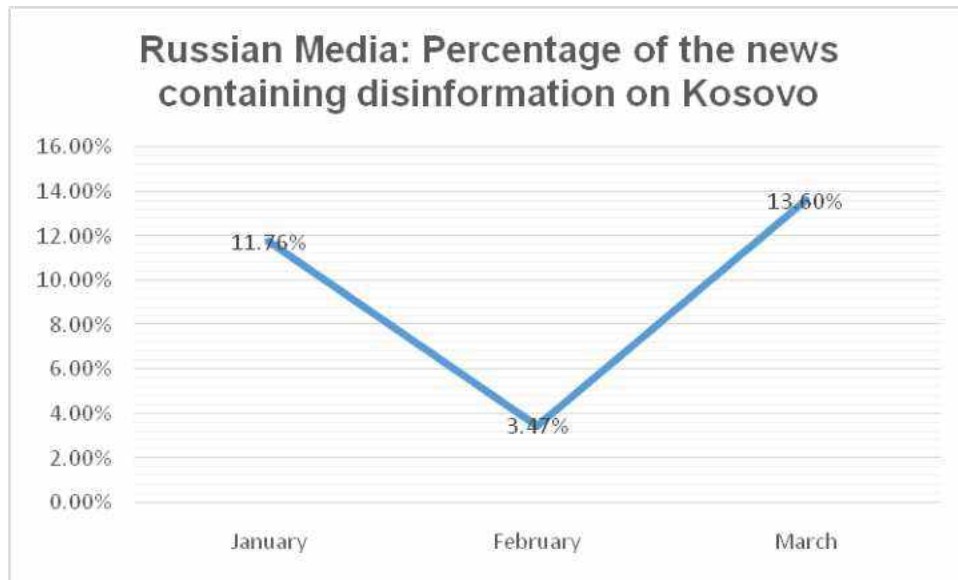
The disinformation trends of the Serbian media show that the highest percentage value of the news/disinformation ratio was in January 2020, 12.40%, followed by 7.80% in February, and 5.21% in March 2020.



The monitoring of data shows that from January 1st to March 31st, 2020, media outlets originating in Russia have published 337 news related directly and indirectly to Kosovo. Sputnik – Serbian Edition has published 297, Sputnik International 4, Russia Today 11, Russia Insider 4, Meduza none, TASS 5, Moscow Times none, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 8, UNZ 2, Duran 1 and the Foreign Ministry of Russian Federation 5 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo.



The disinformation trends of the Russian media show that the highest percentage value of the news/disinformation ratio was in March 2020, 12.40%, followed by 11.76% in January, whereas the lowest percentage value of this ratio was in February 2020, 3.47%.



The deconstruction of the news originating in Serbia containing the most blatant disinformation (19 news) published by the mentioned preselected media during this period¹⁸⁷, indicates that the disinformation was focused on undermining the legality and legitimacy Kosovo's statehood by:

- Projecting Kosovo as a rogue state and discrediting NATO by accusing it for commitment of terrible crimes against Serbia.
- Portraying Kosovo as a state that oppresses its minority ethnic communities, and miscalculating the number of Serbian refugees who left Kosovo after the war,
- Denying war crimes committed in Kosovo by the Serbian armed forces during the 1998-1999 conflict, and
- Discrediting the leadership and security institutions of Kosovo as well as the provided Western assistance.

¹⁸⁷ KIPRED, Kosovo Disinformation Alerts: Serbian Media, January – March 2020, <http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Serbian Media - January 2020 559714.pdf>, <http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert Serbian Media - February 2020.docx 781033.pdf>, <http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert Serbian Media - March 2020-Eng.docx 864184.pdf>

On the other side, the deconstruction of the news originating in Russia containing the most blatant disinformation (10 news) published by the mentioned preselected media during this period¹⁸⁸ indicates that the disinformation was focused on undermining legitimacy and legality of the statehood of Kosovo, by:

- Presenting Kosovo as a threat to international and regional security,
- Presenting Kosovo as a state creature that was created through a “genocide” supported by Western countries against its Serbian population,
- Accusing Kosovo and NATO for war crimes against Serbian population, and exaggerating the number of Serb casualties during the Kosovo War.
- Displaying Kosovo as a state that oppresses minority communities and with high potential for eruption of ethnic violence,
- Denying war crimes committed by Serbia in Kosovo,
- Making improper comparisons of Kosovo’s statehood with the annexation of Crimea by Russia,

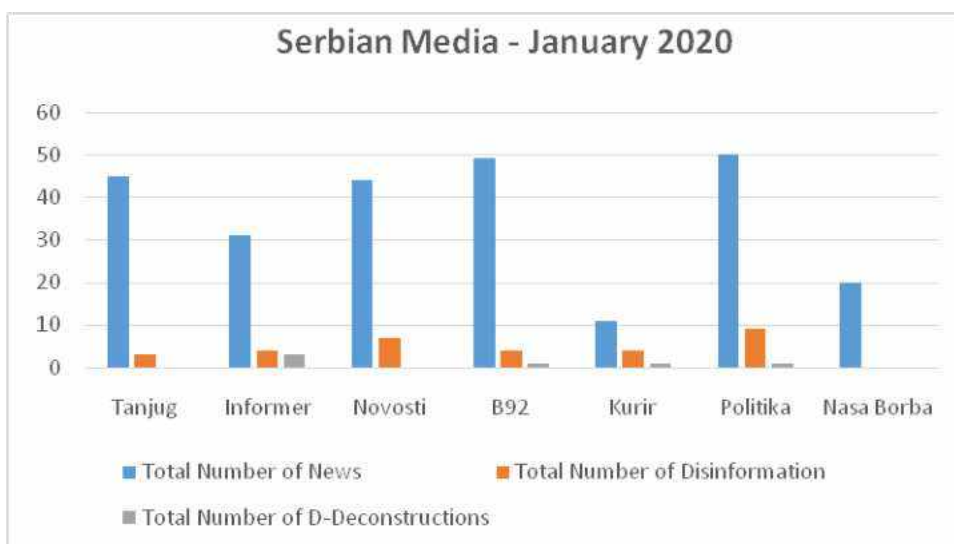
Therefore, it can be concluded that the news with the disinformation content related to Kosovo published by media originating in Serbia and Russia were very similar, if not the same. Both aimed at undermining the legitimacy and legality of the statehood of Kosovo, with a slight difference that in addition to Serbian media, Russian media are comparing Kosovo’s statehood with annexation of Crimea.

The following analyses will present the monthly statistical data on the news/disinformation ratios for the preselected media outlets originating in Serbia and Russia, and they will provide a short analyses as well, on the focus and aims of the published disinformation based on the disinformation analyses of the January, February and March editions of the Kosovo Disinformation Alerts for Serbian and Russian Media.

¹⁸⁸ Kosovo Disinformation Alert: Russian Media, January – March 2020 Editions, http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Russian Media - January 2020.docx_381824.pdf, http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Russian Media - February 2020.docx_463885.pdf, and http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Russian Media - March 2020 Eng_568615.pdf

News and Disinformation January 2020

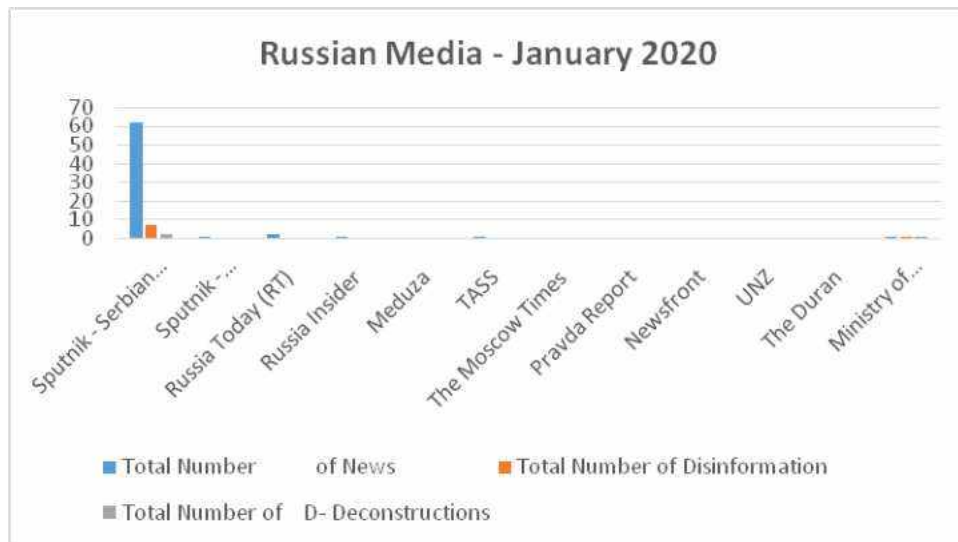
The monitoring of data on the Serbian media shows that from January 1st to 31st, 2020, Tanjug has published 45, Informer 31, Novosti 44, B92 49, Kurir 11, Politika 50 and Naša Borba 20 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 31 out of the 250 news published by these media outlets, had disinformation content.



The deconstruction of the news containing the most blatant disinformation (6 news) published in January 2020 indicates that the disinformation was focused on denying war crimes committed by Serbian armed forces in Kosovo during the 1998-1999 conflict, on discrediting the leadership and security institutions of Kosovo, as well as the provided Western assistance, on projecting Kosovo and Montenegro as rogue states, and on presenting the EU supported regional cross-border cooperation between Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania, as a support provided by Montenegro for the creation of a phantom “Greater Albania”¹⁸⁹.

¹⁸⁹ Kosovo Disinformation Alert: Serbian Media, January Edition, KIPRED 2020, <http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Serbian Media - January 2020 559714.pdf>

On the other hand, the monitoring of data on the Russian media shows that from January 1st to 31st, 2020, Sputnik Serbia has published 62, Sputnik International 1, Russia Today 2, Russia Insider 1, Meduza none, TASS 1, The Moscow Time none, Pravda Report none, Newsfront none, UNZ none, The Duran none, and the Russian Foreign Ministry 1 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 8 out of the 68 news published by these media outlets, had disinformation content.

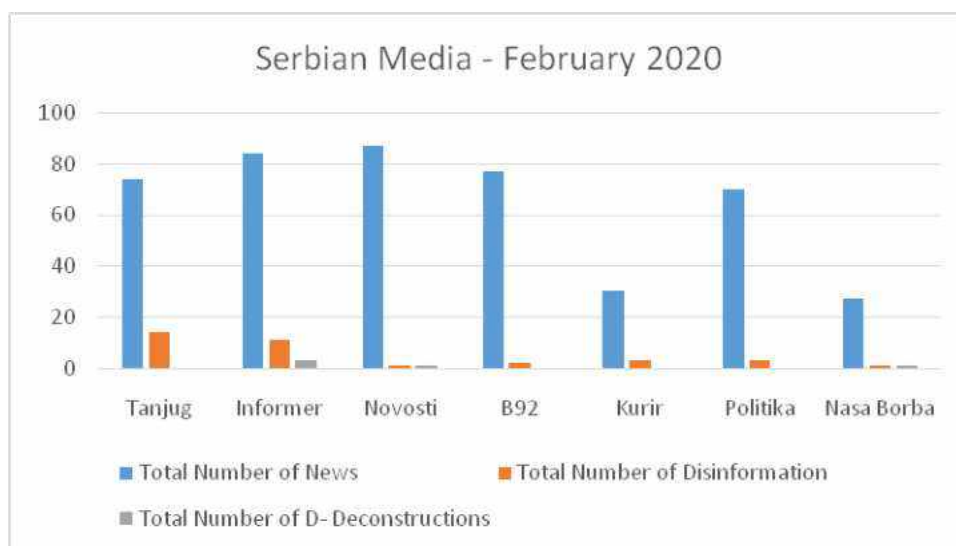


The deconstruction of disinformation news produced in January 2020 by the preselected Russian media and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in relation to Kosovo, indicates their focus on undermining the legitimacy and legality of the statehood of Kosovo and of the support of Western countries. This is done by presenting Kosovo as a state creature which was created through a “genocide” against its Serbian population supported by Western countries, by the denial of war crimes committed by Serbia in Kosovo, by drawing improper comparisons of Kosovo’s statehood with the annexation of Crimea by Russia, and by presenting Kosovo as a threat to regional security¹⁹⁰.

¹⁹⁰ Kosovo Disinformation Alert: Russian Media, January Edition, KIPRED 2020, http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Russian Media - January 2020.docx_381824.pdf

News and Disinformation February 2020

The monitoring of data on the Serbian media shows that from February 1st to 29th, 2020, Tanjug has published 74, Informer 84, Novosti 87, B92 77, Kurir 30, Politika 70 and Naša Borba 27 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 35 out of the 449 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.

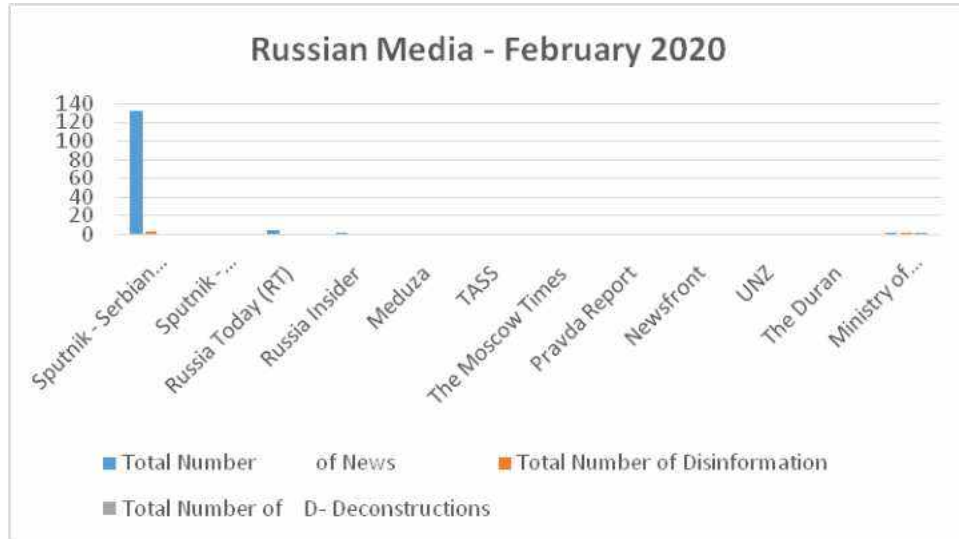


The deconstruction of the news containing the most blatant disinformation (5 news) published in February 2020 indicates that the disinformation was focused on denying war crimes committed by Serbian armed forces during the 1998-1999 conflict, on miscalculating the number of Serbian refugees who left Kosovo after the war, discrediting the leadership and security institutions of Kosovo, as well as the provided Western assistance, and on projecting Kosovo and Montenegro as rogue states¹⁹¹.

On the other hand, the monitoring of data of the Russian media shows that from February 1st to 29th, 2020, Sputnik Serbia has published 132, Sputnik International 1, Russia Today 5, Russia Insider 2, Meduza none, TASS 1, The Moscow Time none, Pravda Report none, Newsfront none,

¹⁹¹ Kosovo Disinformation Alert: Serbian Media, February Edition, KIPRED 2020, <http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert Serbian Media - February 2020.docx 781033.pdf>

UNZ none, The Duran none, and Kremlin and the Russian Foreign Ministry 3 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 5 out of the 144 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.

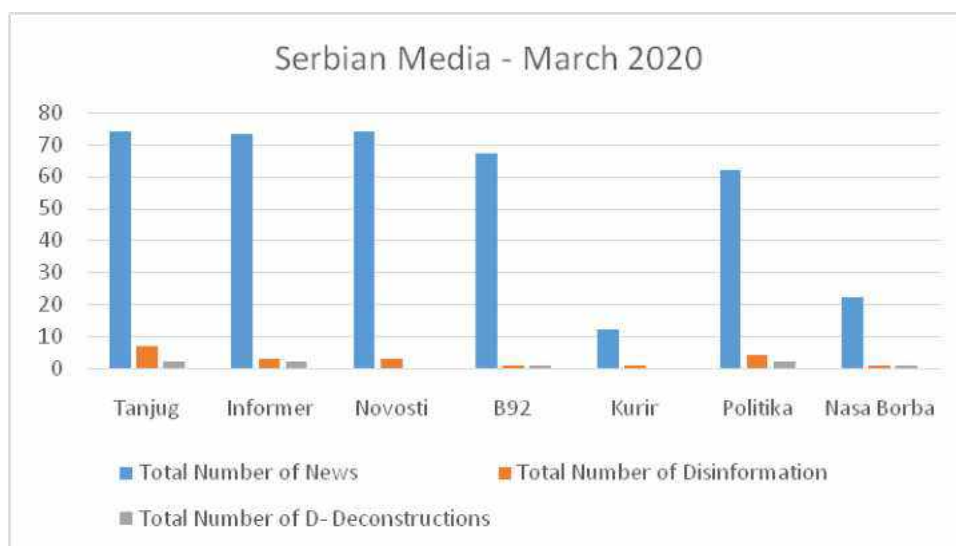


The disinformation published by the Russian news sources, including the Russian Ministry for Foreign Relations, aims at presenting an obscure picture of the position of the Serbian Community and of inter-ethnic situation in Kosovo. This is done in order to display Kosovo as a state which oppresses minority communities, with high potential for eruption of ethnic violence, as well as to undermine both, the legitimacy and legality of Kosovar statehood, and of the support of the West to it.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Kosovo Disinformation Alert: Russian Media, February Edition, KIPRED 2020, <http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Russian Media - February 2020.docx> 463885.pdf

News and Disinformation March 2020

The monitoring of data on the Serbian media shows that from March 1st to 31st, 2020, Tanjug has published 74, Informer 73, Novosti 74, B92 67, Kurir 12, Politika 62, and Naša Borba 22 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 20 out of the 384 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.

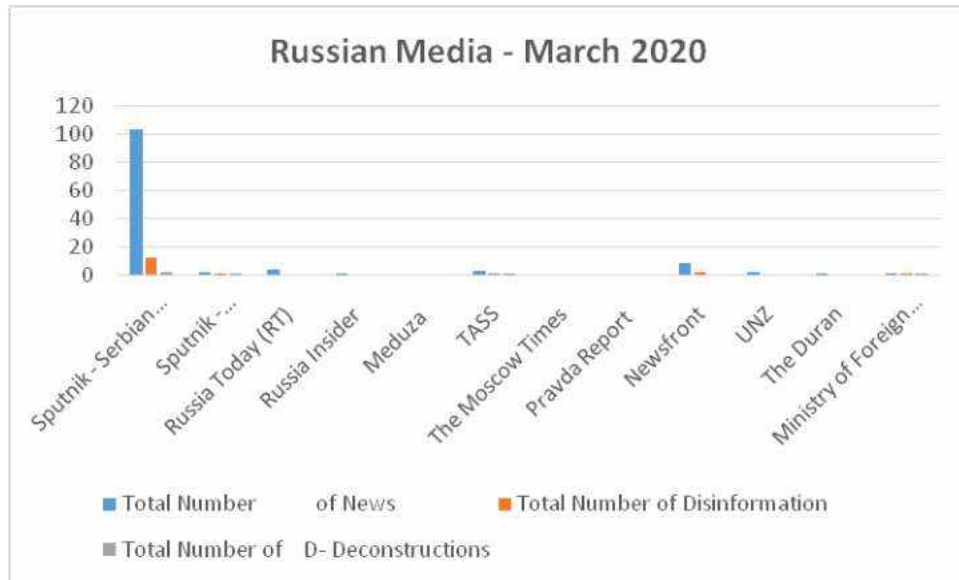


The deconstruction of the news containing the most blatant disinformation (8 news) published in March 2020 indicates that the disinformation was focused on undermining the legitimacy and legality of the statehood of Kosovo and of its sovereignty, by discrediting its leadership and security institutions, as well as by portraying Kosovo as a state that oppresses its ethnic minorities. The preselected articles are also trying to undermine the support of the West to Kosovo, and to discredit NATO, by accusing it for commitment of terrible crimes against Serbia.¹⁹³

On the other hand, the monitoring of data on the Russian media shows that from March 1st to 31st, 2020, Sputnik Serbia has published 103, Sputnik International 2, Russia Today 4, Russia Insider 1, Meduza none, TASS 3, The Moscow Time none, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 8, UNZ

¹⁹³ Kosovo Disinformation Alert: Serbian Media, March Edition, KIPRED 2020, http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert_Serbian_Media - March_2020-Eng.docx_864184.pdf

2, The Duran 1, and Kremlin and the Russian Foreign Ministry 1 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 17 out of the 125 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.



The disinformation generated during this period by the preselected Russian media in relation to Kosovo, are focused on undermining the legitimacy and legality of the statehood of Kosovo and on discrediting the credibility of NATO alliance. In doing so, these media deny the war crimes committed by Serbia in Kosovo, they accuse Kosovo and NATO for war crimes against the Serbian population, and exaggerate the number of Serbian casualties.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Kosovo Disinformation Alert: Russian Media, March Edition, KIPRED 2020, <http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Russian Media - March 2020 Eng 568615.pdf>

**KOSOVO
DISINFORMATION OBSERVER**

SERBIAN AND RUSSIAN MEDIA

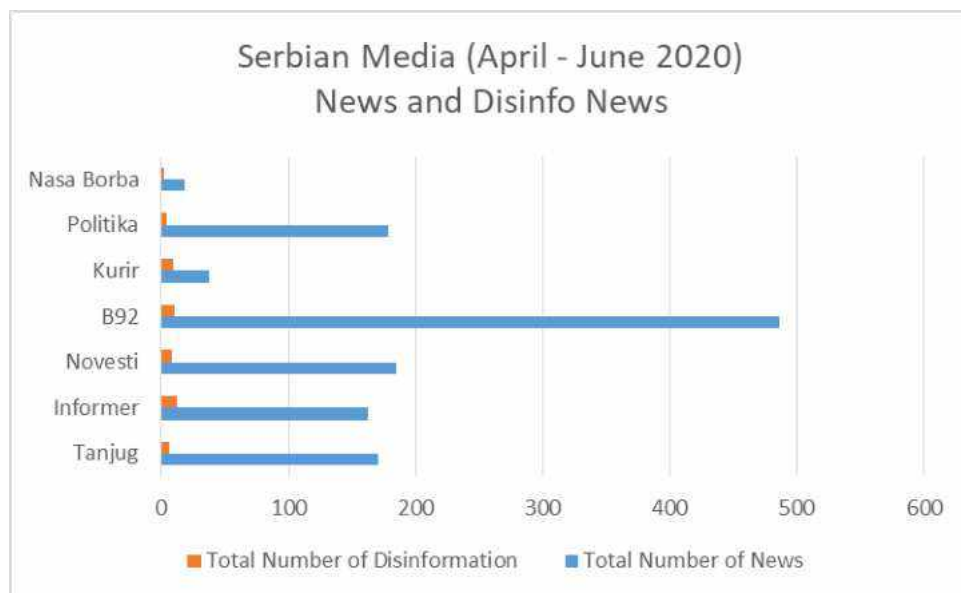
April – June 2020

Executive Summary

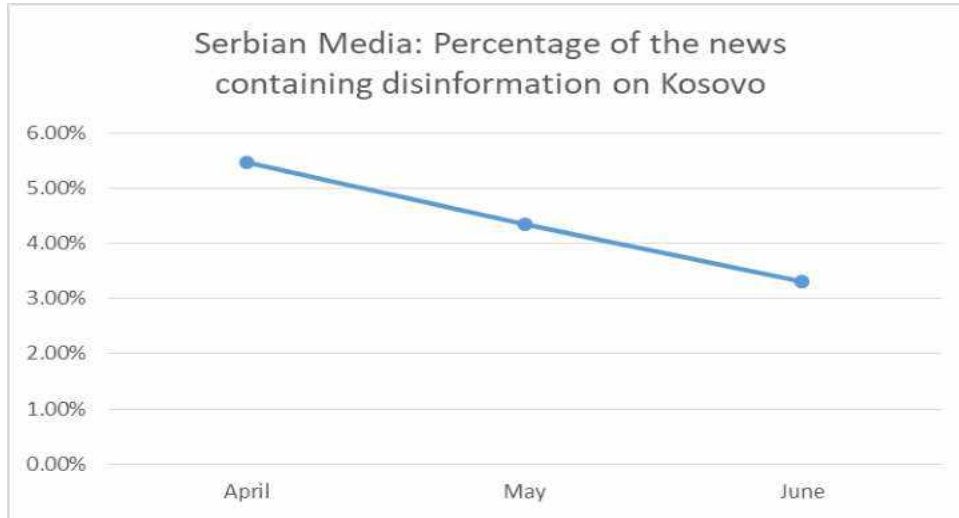
Kosovo Disinformation Observer: Serbian and Russian Media Monitoring is a quarterly report that aims to analyse the disinformation trends of news published by the preselected media outlets originating in Serbia and Russia in English and Serbian language targeting Kosovo.

The preselected media originating in Serbia that are known for publishing news with disinformation content are Tanjug, Informer, Novosti, Kurir, B92, Politika and Naša Borba, whereas the respective preselected media originating in Russia are Russia Today, Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report, and this Kosovo Disinformation Observer also analyses documents and statements related to Kosovo, published by Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

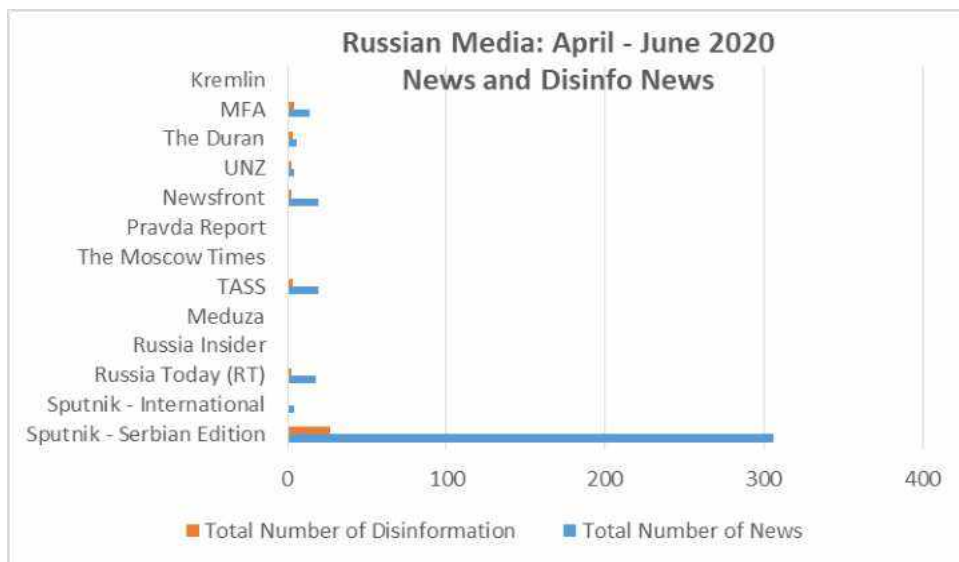
The monitoring of data shows that from April 1st to June 30th, 2020, the media outlets originating in Serbia have published 1,238 news that were related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. Tanjug has published 171, Informer 162, Novosti 185, B92 486, Kurir 37, Politika 179 and Naša Borba 18 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo.



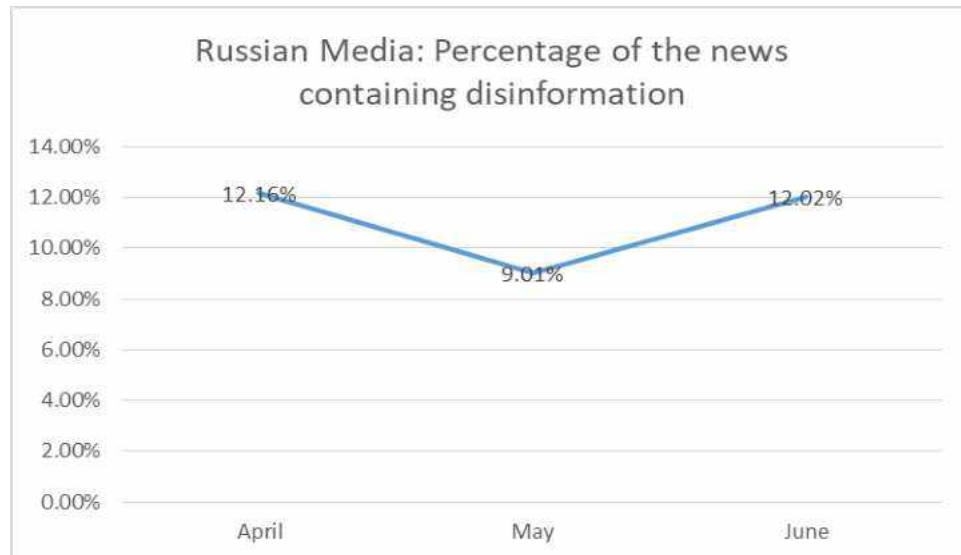
The disinformation trends of the Serbian media show that the highest percentage value of the news/disinformation ratio was in April 2020, 5.47%, followed by 4.35% in May, and 3.32% in June 2020.



The monitoring of data shows that from April 1st to June 30th, 2020, media outlets originating in Russia have published 393 news related directly and indirectly to Kosovo. Sputnik – Serbian Edition has published 306, Sputnik International 4, Russia Today 18, Russia Insider 1, Meduza none, TASS 19, Moscow Times 1, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 19, UNZ 4, Duran 6, Kremlin 1, and the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation 14 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo.



The disinformation trends of the Russian media show that the highest percentage value of the news/disinformation ratio was in April 2020, 12.16%, followed by 12.02% in June, whereas the lowest percentage value of this ratio was in May 2020, 9.01%.



The deconstruction of the news originating in Serbia containing the most blatant disinformation (17 news) published by the mentioned preselected media during this period, indicates that the disinformation was focused on undermining the legality and legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood by:

- Portraying the war for independence in Kosovo as a religious one and KLA as an Islamist military formation.
- Questioning the Kosovo's right to exercise its sovereignty, projecting it as a failed state, as a state that oppresses and does not protect its non-majority Serbian Community, as a "nest" of organized crime and trafficking, and as a centre for recruiting radical Islamists.
- Denying war crimes committed in Kosovo by the Serbian armed forces during the 1998-1999 conflict, and;
- Discrediting the role of the West in the state-building of Kosovo.

On the other hand, the deconstruction of the news originating in Russia containing the most blatant disinformation (13 news) published by the mentioned preselected media during this period indicates that the disinformation was focused on undermining legitimacy and legality of the statehood of Kosovo, by:

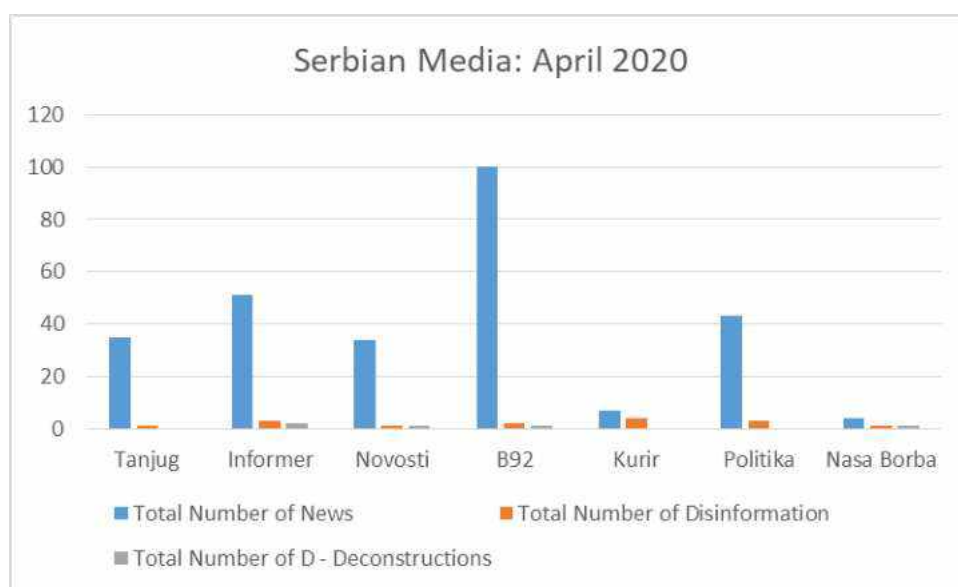
- Questioning Kosovo’s right to exercise its sovereignty and portraying its statehood as illegal and in violation of international law.
- Degrading the international intervention and support in Kosovo and presenting it as a criminal state, including the efforts for transitional justice in Kosovo.
- Questioning and changing of the narratives on the war in former Yugoslavia and denying war crimes of Serbia, and;
- Displaying Kosovo as a state that oppresses Serbian Community and other non-majority communities.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, in terms of their focus, the news with disinformation content related to Kosovo, published by media originating in Serbia and Russia during this period were very similar, if not the same. Their major aim was focused on undermining the legitimacy and legality of the statehood of Kosovo and portraying it as a failed and “rogue” state.

The following analyses will present the monthly statistical data on the news/disinformation ratios for the preselected media outlets originating in Serbia and Russia, and they will provide a short analyses as well, on the focuses and aims of the published disinformation, based on the disinformation analyses of the April, May and June 2020 editions of the Kosovo Disinformation Alerts for Serbian and Russian Media.

News and Disinformation April 2020

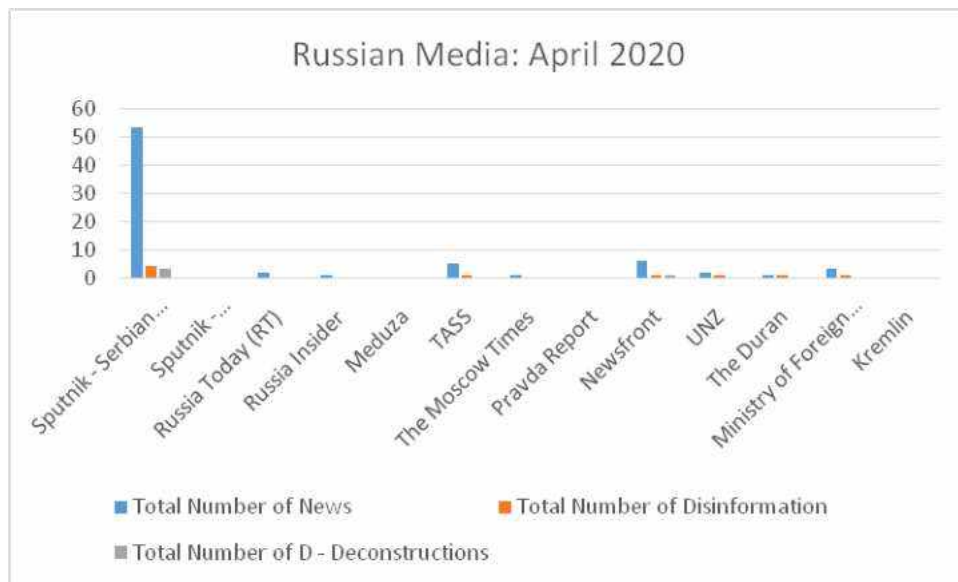
The monitoring of data on Serbian media shows that from April 1st to 30th, 2020, Tanjug has published 35, Informer 51, Novosti 34, B92 100, Kurir 7, Politika 43, and Naša Borba 4 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 15 out of the 274 news published by these media outlets, had disinformation content.



The deconstruction of the news containing the most blatant disinformation (5 news) published in April 2020 indicates that the disinformation was focused on undermining the legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood by portraying the war for independence as a religious one, and KLA as an Islamist military formation, discrediting the state of Kosovo and its leadership, as well as its security institutions and its citizens, undermining the support of the West by trying to discredit the EU and its position towards Kosovo. Most of the articles use denigrating and derogatory language when referring to Albanians and Kosovo's political elites.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Kosovo Disinformation Alert, Serbian Media: April 2020, KIPRED, 2020, [http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert Serbian Media - April 2020 \(1\) 357827.pdf](http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert Serbian Media - April 2020 (1) 357827.pdf)

On the other hand, the monitoring of data on the Russian media shows that from April 1st to 30th, 2020, Sputnik Serbia has published 53, Sputnik International none, Russia Today 2, Russia Insider 1, Meduza none, TASS 5, The Moscow Time 1, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 6, UNZ 2, The Duran 1, Kremlin none and the Russian Foreign Ministry 3 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 9 out of the 74 news published by these media outlets, had disinformation content.

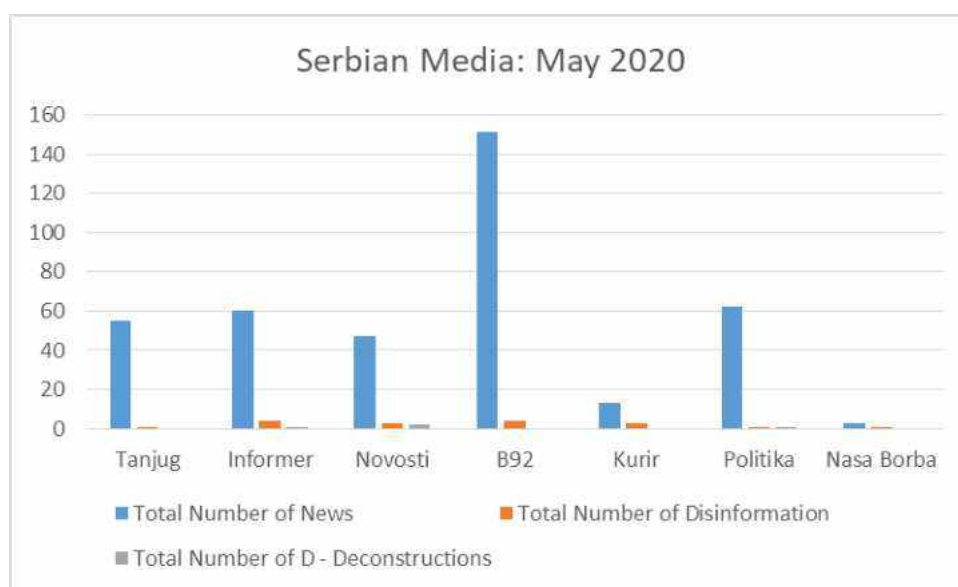


The deconstruction of disinformation news produced in April 2020 by the preselected Russian media and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in relation to Kosovo, indicates their focus on projecting the energy independence of Kosovo as an illegal act, Kosovo's statehood as illegal and in violation of international law, on degrading the international intervention and support in Kosovo, and claiming falsely that in the times of COVID-19 pandemic, EU considers Kosovo as a part of Serbia.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Kosovo Disinformation Alert, Russian Media: April 2020, KIPRED, 2020, <http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Russian Media - April 2020 536416.pdf>

News and Disinformation May 2020

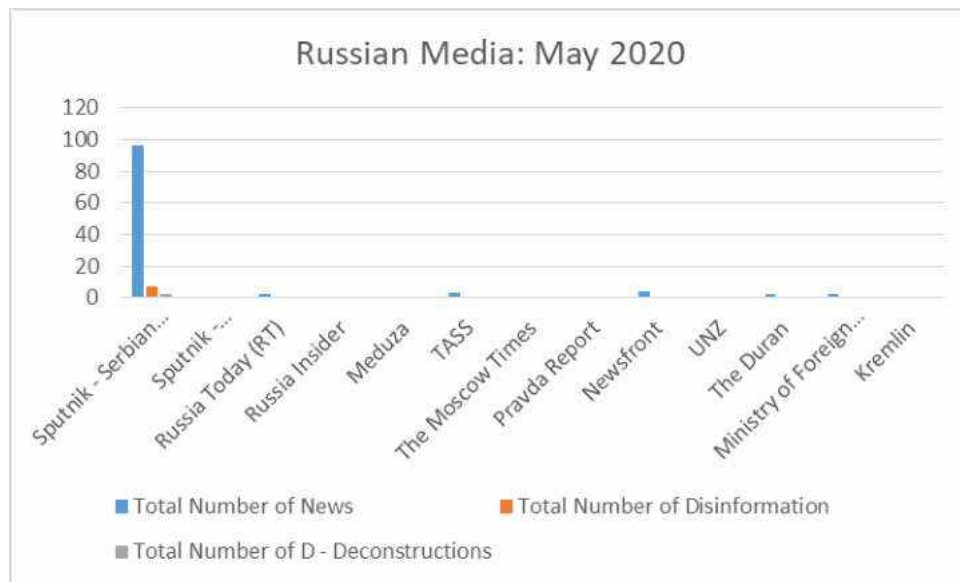
The monitoring of data on Serbian media shows that from May 1st to 31st, 2020, Tanjug has published 55, Informer 60, Novosti 47, B92 151, Kurir 13, Politika 62 and Naša Borba 3 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 17 out of the 391 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.



The deconstruction of the news containing the most blatant disinformation (4 news) published in May 2020 indicates that the disinformation was focused on undermining the legitimacy of Kosovo’s statehood by trying to delegitimise the intervention of NATO and the support of the Western countries, by questioning the legality of its independence, by portraying it as a country that violates the rights of non-majority communities and as a “nest” of organized crime and trafficking.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Kosovo Disinformation Alert, Serbian Media: May 2020, KIPRED, 2020, <http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert Serbian Media - May 2020 36944.pdf>

On the other hand, the monitoring of data on the Russian media shows that from May 1st to 31st, 2020, Sputnik Serbia has published 96, Sputnik International 1, Russia Today 2, Russia Insider none, Meduza none, TASS 3, The Moscow Times none, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 4, UNZ 1, The Duran 2, Kremlin none and the Russian Foreign Ministry 2 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 10 out of the 144 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.

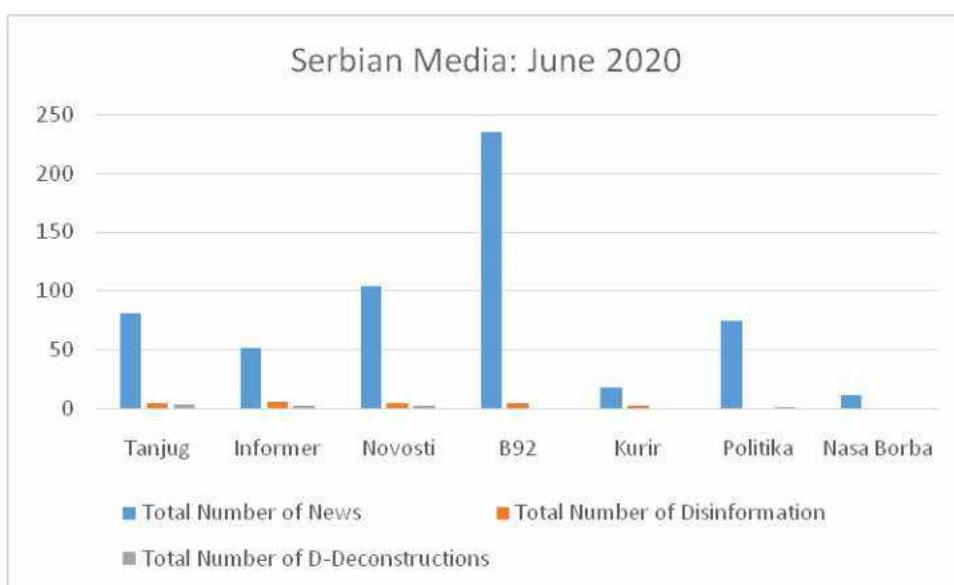


The disinformation published by the Russian news sources, including the Russian Ministry of Foreign Relations, aims at presenting Kosovo Serbs as victims of a “terror” exercised over them, questioning and changing of the narratives on the war in former Yugoslavia and denying war crimes of Serbia, questioning the efforts of transitional justice in Kosovo, questioning the legality of independence of Kosovo, presenting Kosovo as a criminal state, and questioning the role of KFOR and EU in Kosovo.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Kosovo Disinformation Alert: Russian Media: May 2020, KIPRED, 2020
[http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Russian Media - May 2020 \(2\) 119310.pdf](http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Russian Media - May 2020 (2) 119310.pdf)

News and Disinformation June 2020

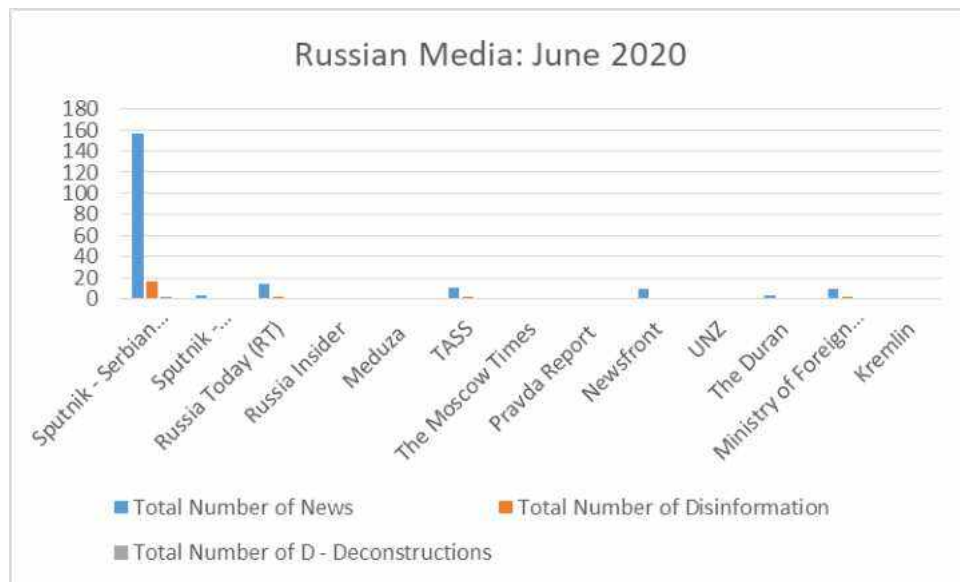
The monitoring of data on the Serbian media shows that from June 1st to 30th, 2020, Tanjug has published 81, Informer 51, Novosti 104, B92 235, Kurir 17, Politika 74, and Naša Borba 11 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 19 out of the 573 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.



The deconstruction of the news containing the most blatant disinformation (8 news) published in June 2020 indicates that the disinformation was focused on discrediting the legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood, portraying it as a state that oppresses and does not protect its Serbian and other non-majority communities, as a recruiting center for radical Islamists, and denying Serbian war crimes committed in Kosovo.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Kosovo Disinformation Alert, Serbian Media: June 2020, KIPRED 2020, http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert Serbian Media - June 2020_656805.pdf

On the other hand, the monitoring of data on the Russian media shows that from June 1st to 30th, 2020, Sputnik Serbia has published 157, Sputnik International 3, Russia Today 14, Russia Insider none, Meduza none, TASS 11, The Moscow Time none, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 9, UNZ 1, The Duran 3, Kremlin 1 and the Russian Foreign Ministry 9 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 25 out of the 208 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.



The disinformation generated during this period by the preselected Russian media in relation to Kosovo, was focused on undermining the legality of Kosovo's statehood and efforts of NATO and the West for peace and stability in Kosovo and its state-building, projecting Kosovo as a failed state that also undertakes discriminatory acts against Kosovo Serbian community, obscuring the past by de-facto denying crimes and atrocities of Serbia in Kosovo during the 90's, and undermining the role of the US and EU in establishing the Specialized Chambers of Kosovo.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Kosovo Disinformation Alert, Russian Media: June 2020, KIPRED 2020, <http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Russian Media - June 2020 98629.pdf>

**KOSOVO
DISINFORMATION OBSERVER**

SERBIAN AND RUSSIAN MEDIA

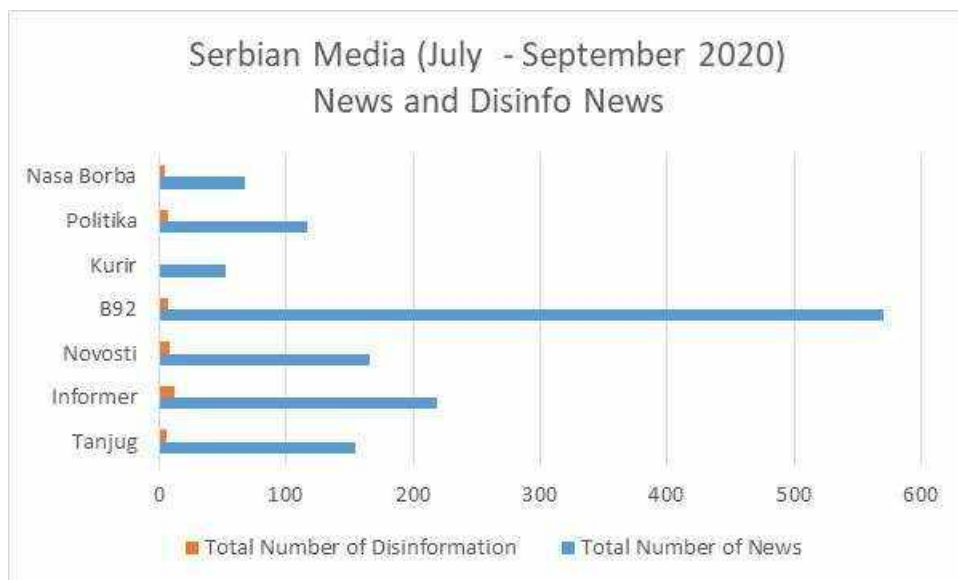
July – September 2020

Executive Summary

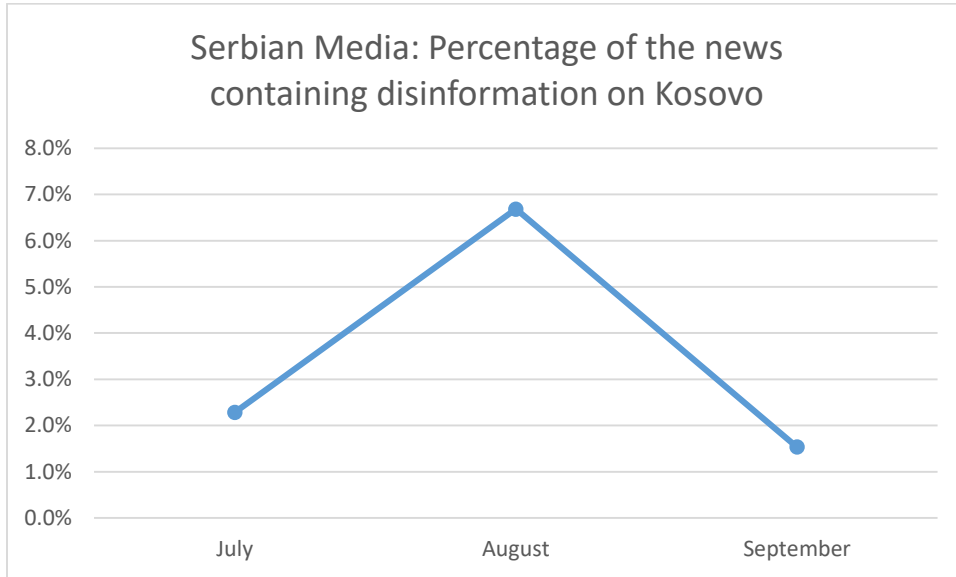
Kosovo Disinformation Observer: Serbian and Russian Media Monitoring is a quarterly report that aims to analyse the disinformation trends of news published by the preselected media outlets originating in Serbia and Russia in English and Serbian language targeting Kosovo.

The preselected media originating in Serbia that are known for publishing news with disinformation content are Tanjug, Informer, Novosti, Kurir, B92, Politika and Naša Borba, whereas the respective preselected media originating in Russia are Russia Today, Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report, and this Kosovo Disinformation Observer also analyses documents and statements related to Kosovo, published by Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

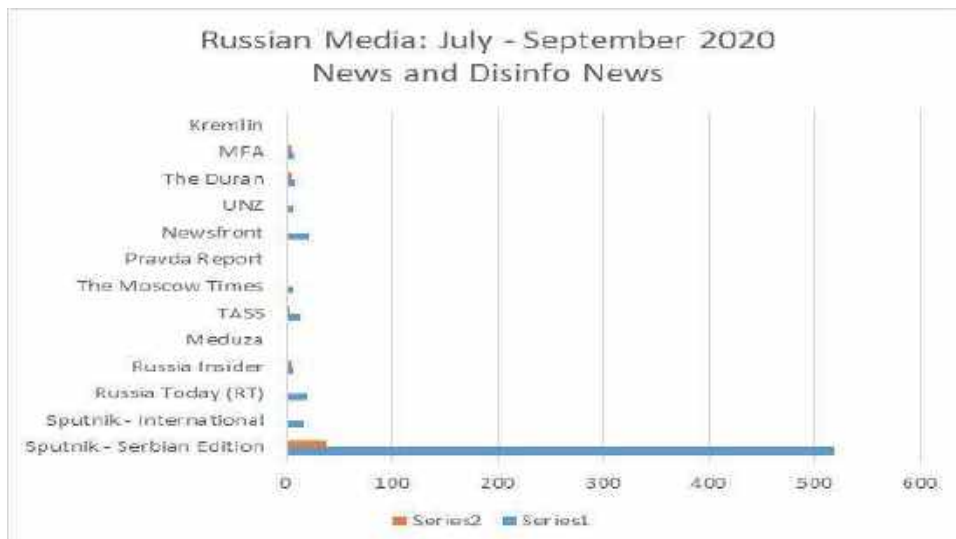
The monitoring of data shows that from July 1st to September 30th, 2020, the media outlets originating in Serbia have published 1,348 news that were related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. Tanjug has published 155, Informer 219, Novosti 166, B92 571, Kurir 52, Politika 117 and Naša Borba 69 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo.



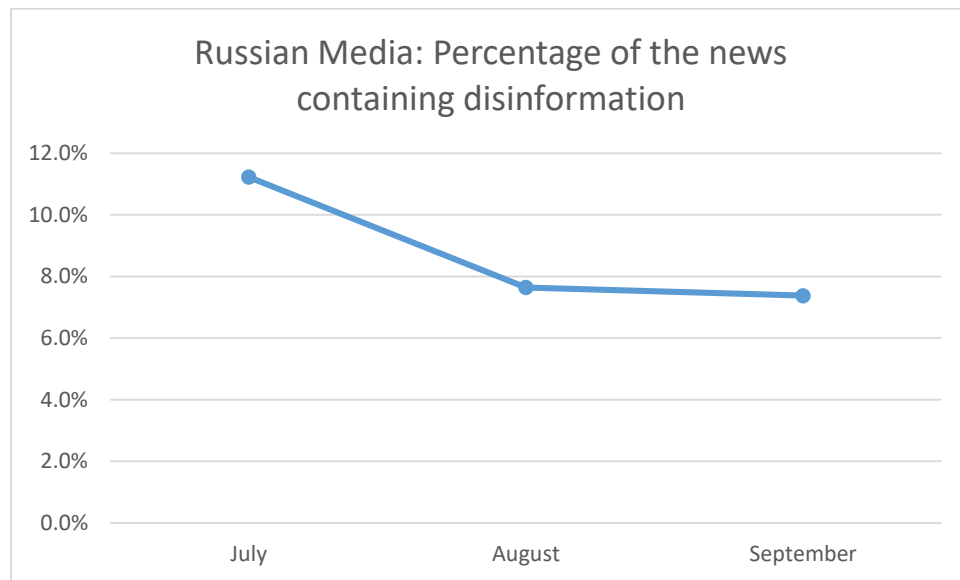
The disinformation trends of the Serbian media show that the highest percentage value of the news/disinformation ratio was in August 2020, 6.7%, followed by 2.3% in July, and 1.5% in September 2020.



The monitoring of data shows that from July 1st to September 30th, 2020, media outlets originating in Russia have published 624 news related directly and indirectly to Kosovo. Sputnik – Serbian Edition has published 520, Sputnik International 17, Russia Today 20, Russia Insider 5, Meduza none, TASS 13, The Moscow Times 6, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 21, UNZ 6, Duran 8, Kremlin 1, and the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation 7 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo.



The disinformation trends of the Russian media show that the highest percentage value of the news/disinformation ratio was in July 2020, 11.2%, followed by 7.6 % in August, whereas the lowest percentage value of this ratio was in September 2020, 7.4 %.



The deconstruction of the news originating in Serbia containing the most blatant disinformation (17 news) published by the mentioned preselected media during this period, indicates that the disinformation was focused on undermining the legality and legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood by:

- Undermining the legality of Kosovo as an independent state and portraying it as a state that endangers the Serbian and Orthodox heritage.
- Denying war crimes committed in Kosovo by the Serbian armed forces during the 1998-1999 conflict.
- Discrediting the treatment of the war crimes in Kosovo by international and national justice.
- Discrediting the role of the West and the Kosovo Security Forces in security matters in Kosovo, and,
- Presenting Belgrade as the sole beneficiary of the Washington Agreement of September 4th between Kosovo and Serbia

On the other hand, the deconstruction of the news originating in Russia containing the most blatant disinformation (17 news) published by the mentioned preselected media during this period indicates that the disinformation was focused on:

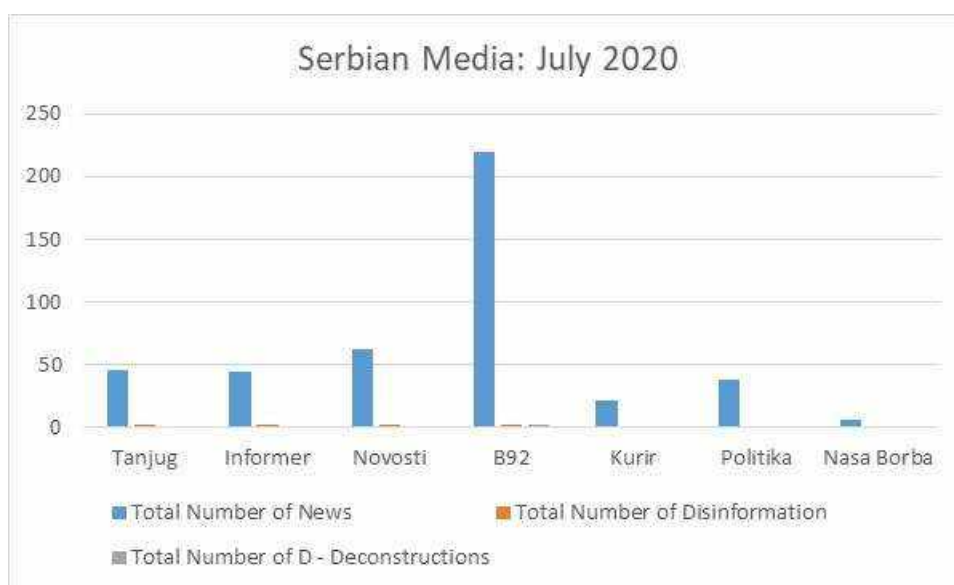
- Undermining the legality of Kosovo's statehood and discrediting its institutions.
- Portraying Kosovo as a state that violates human rights and oppresses Serbian Community and other non-majority communities.
- Questioning and changing of the narratives on the war in former Yugoslavia by accusing the US and NATO for war crimes, and denying war crimes of Serbia, and,
- Accusing Kosovo for violating and sabotaging the institutions reached in Brussels and Washington.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, in terms of their focus, the news with disinformation content related to Kosovo, published by media originating in Serbia and Russia during this period were quite similar in terms of their aims and targets.

The following analyses will present the monthly statistical data on the news/disinformation ratios for the preselected media outlets originating in Serbia and Russia, and they will provide a short analyses as well, on the focuses and aims of the published disinformation, based on the disinformation analyses of the July, August and September 2020 editions of the Kosovo Disinformation Alerts for Serbian and Russian Media.

News and Disinformation July 2020

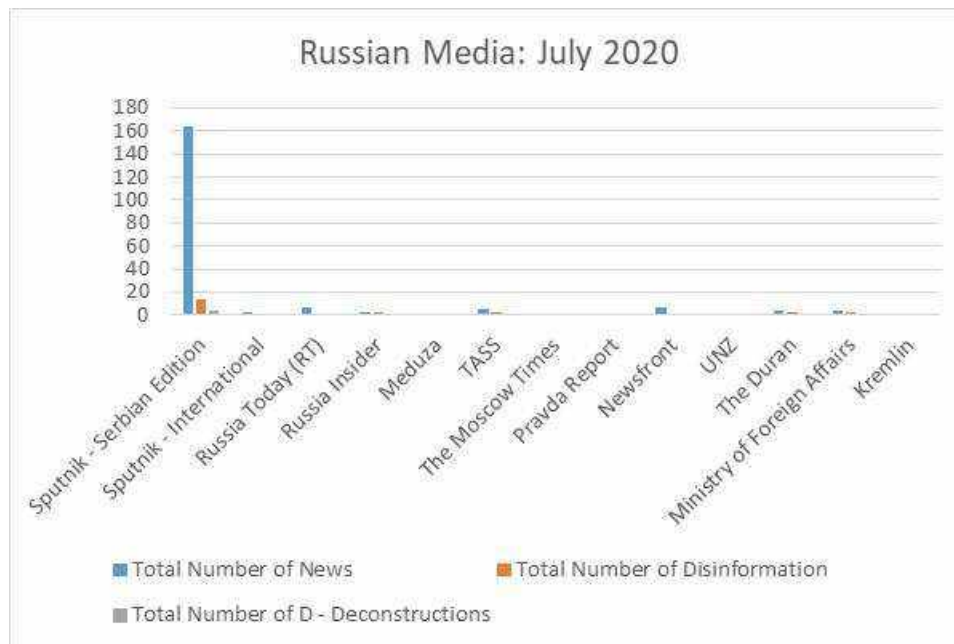
The monitoring of data on Serbian media shows that from July 1st to 30th, 2020, Tanjug has published 46, Informer 45, Novosti 62, B92 220, Kurir 21, Politika 38, and Naša Borba 6 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. In 10 out of the 438 news published by these media outlets, has been detected disinformation content.



The deconstruction of the news containing the most blatant disinformation (4 news) published in July 2020 indicates that the disinformation was focused on the denial of Serbian war crimes and of the victims and missing persons in Kosovo, on the denigration of the NATO intervention and of the Ambassador William Walker, denigration of the treatment of war crimes in Kosovo by domestic and international justice, and on the disparagement of the Kosovo Security Force and of Germany, under the pretension that they have made a secret deal for buying of 'Leopard II' tanks²⁰¹.

²⁰¹ Kosovo Disinformation Alert, Serbian Media, July 2020, http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D_-_Alert_Serbian_Media_-_July_2020_704688.pdf

On the other hand, the monitoring of data on the Russian media shows that from April 1st to 30th, 2020, Sputnik Serbia has published 164, Sputnik International 3, Russia Today 6, Russia Insider 3, Meduza none, TASS 5, The Moscow Time 1, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 6, UNZ none, The Duran 4, Kremlin none and the Russian Foreign Ministry 4 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 22 out of the 196 news related to Kosovo published by these media outlets, had disinformation content.

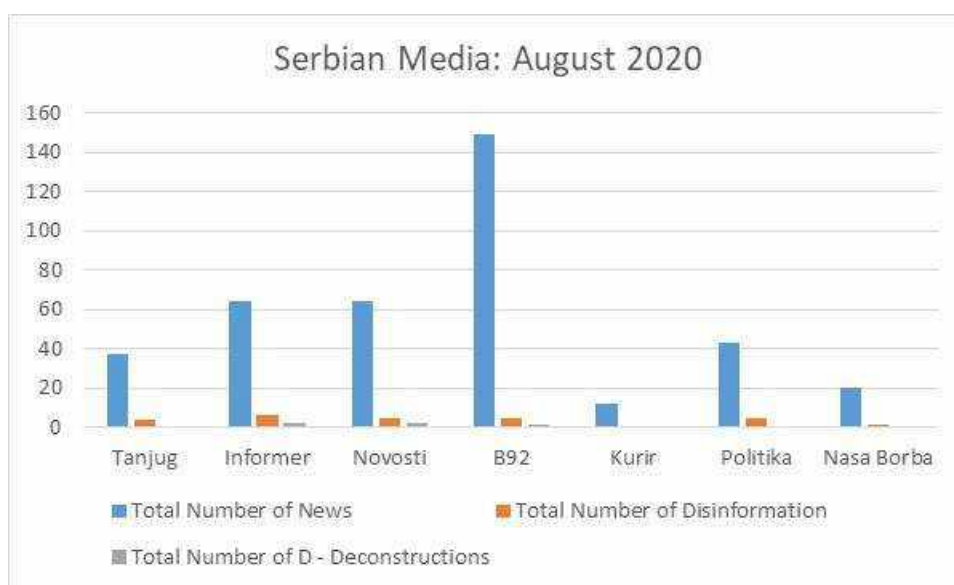


The deconstruction of disinformation news produced in July 2020 by the preselected Russian media and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in relation to Kosovo, indicates that they were focused on the undermining of the legality of Kosovo's statehood, discrediting Kosovo institutions and its leadership, projecting Kosovo as a failed state that does not respect human rights and discriminates Kosovo Serbs and other non-majority communities, obscuring the past by de-facto denying crimes and atrocities of Serbia in Kosovo during the 90's, and by portraying Serbs as victims during the Kosovo War²⁰².

²⁰² Kosovo Disinformation Alert, Russian Media, July 2020, [http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D - Alert - Russian Media - July 2020 402139.pdf](http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D_-_Alert_-_Russian_Media_-_July_2020_402139.pdf)

News and Disinformation August 2020

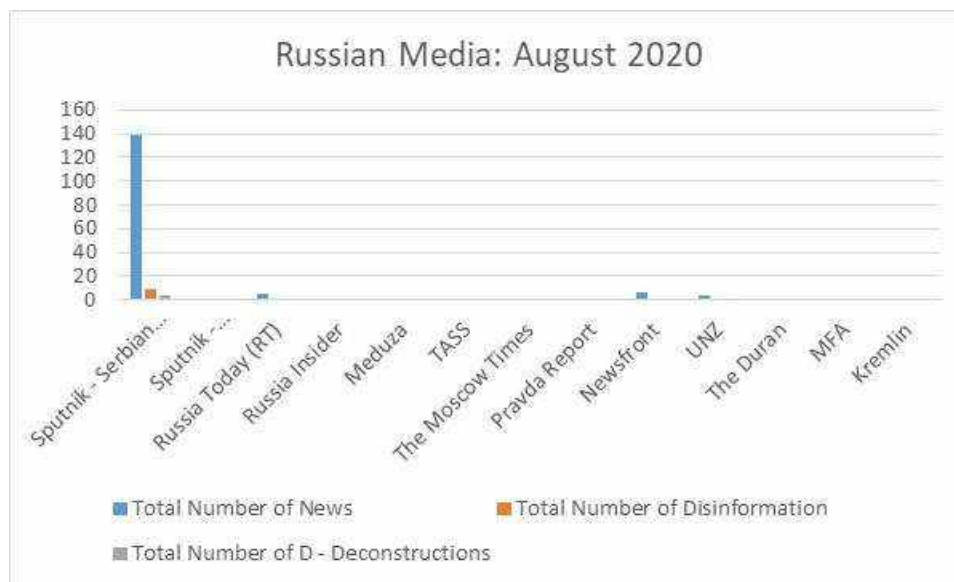
The monitoring of news on Serbian media shows that from August 1st to 31st, 2020, Tanjug has published 37, Informer 64, Novosti 64, B92 149, Kurir 12, Politika 43 and Naša Borba 20 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 26 out of the 389 news published by these media outlets have had disinformation content.



The deconstruction of the news containing the most blatant disinformation (5 news) published in August 2020 indicates that the disinformation was focused on discrediting the legitimacy of Kosovo’s statehood by referring to it as “quasi-” and “fake-” state, portraying Kosovo as a state that endangers the Serbian and Christian spiritual heritage, putting forward several false claims in order to discredit KLA and NATO, by falsely portraying the liberation war of KLA as one of war crimes against humanity, denying the war crimes committed by Serbia during the Kosovo War, and making false claims that American deliveries of weapons and military equipment to the Kosovo authorities is part of the preparations for an open conflict with Serbia²⁰³.

²⁰³ Kosovo Disinformation Alert, Serbian Media, August 2020, http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D_-_Alert_Serbian_Media_-_Gusht_2020_AD_620224.pdf

On the other hand, the monitoring of data on the Russian media shows that from August 1st to 31st, 2020, Sputnik Serbia has published 139, Sputnik International none, Russia Today 5, Russia Insider none, Meduza none, TASS 1, The Moscow Time 1, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 6, UNZ 3, The Duran 1, Kremlin none and the Russian Foreign Ministry 1 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 12 out of the 157 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.

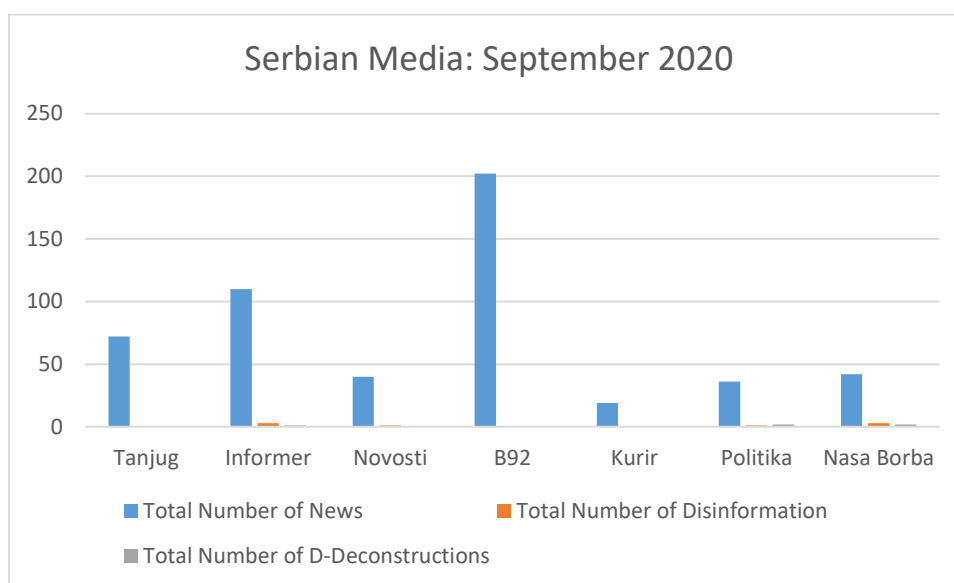


The disinformation published by the Russian news outlets were focused on undermining the legality of Kosovo's independence, drawing unfitting parallels between Kosovo and Republika Srpska, discrediting the international military presence in Kosovo by accusing the West for the annexation of a part of the Serbian territory, and by claiming falsely that there are still 18,000 usurped properties of the Serb community citizens in Kosovo²⁰⁴.

²⁰⁴ Kosovo Disinformation Alert, Russian Media, August 2020, http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D_-_Alert_Serbian_Media_-_Gusht_2020_AD_620224.pdf

News and Disinformation September 2020

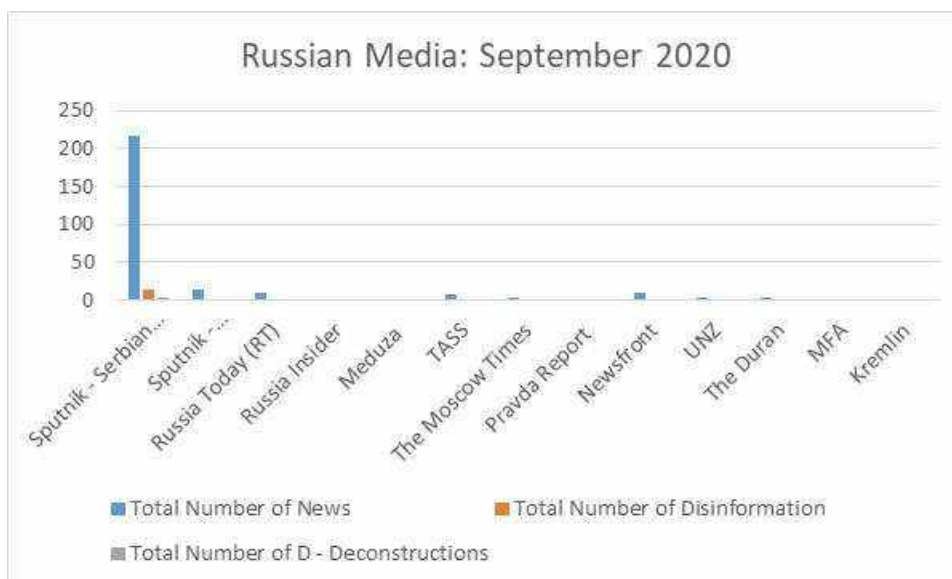
The monitoring of news published by the preselected Serbian media outlets shows that from September 1st to 30th, 2020, Tanjug has published 72, Informer 110, Novosti 40, B92 202, Kurir 19, Politika 36, and Naša Borba 42 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 8 out of the 521 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.



The deconstruction of the news containing the most blatant disinformation (5 news) published in September 2020 indicates that the disinformation was focused on discrediting the legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood, presenting Belgrade as the sole beneficiary of the Washington Agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, discrediting Kosovo leaders, and portraying Kosovo as a state that endangers the Serbian minority and is planning to expel the remaining Serbs living in Kosovo²⁰⁵.

²⁰⁵ Kosovo Disinformation Alert, Serbian Media, September 2020, http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Serbian_Media_-_Alert_September_fin.docx_902025.pdf

On the other hand, the monitoring of data on the Russian media shows that from September 1st to 30th, 2020, Sputnik Serbia has published 217, Sputnik International 14, Russia Today 9, Russia Insider 2, Meduza none, TASS 7, The Moscow Time 4, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 9, UNZ 3, The Duran 3, Kremlin 1 and the Russian Foreign Ministry 2 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 20 out of the 271 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.



The disinformation generated during this period by the preselected Russian media in relation to Kosovo, was focused on undermining the statehood of Kosovo, discrediting the credibility of the US policy, denying war crimes committed by Serbia in Kosovo, accusing the US and NATO for war crimes against Serbian population, exaggerating the number of Serb casualties, accusing the Kosovo institutions for violating and sabotaging agreements reached in Washington and Brussels²⁰⁶.

²⁰⁶ Kosovo Disinformation Alert, Russian Media, September 2020, [http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Russian_Media - Alter September fin_871089.pdf](http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Russian_Media_-_Alter_September_fin_871089.pdf)

**KOSOVO
DISINFORMATION OBSERVER**

SERBIAN AND RUSSIAN MEDIA

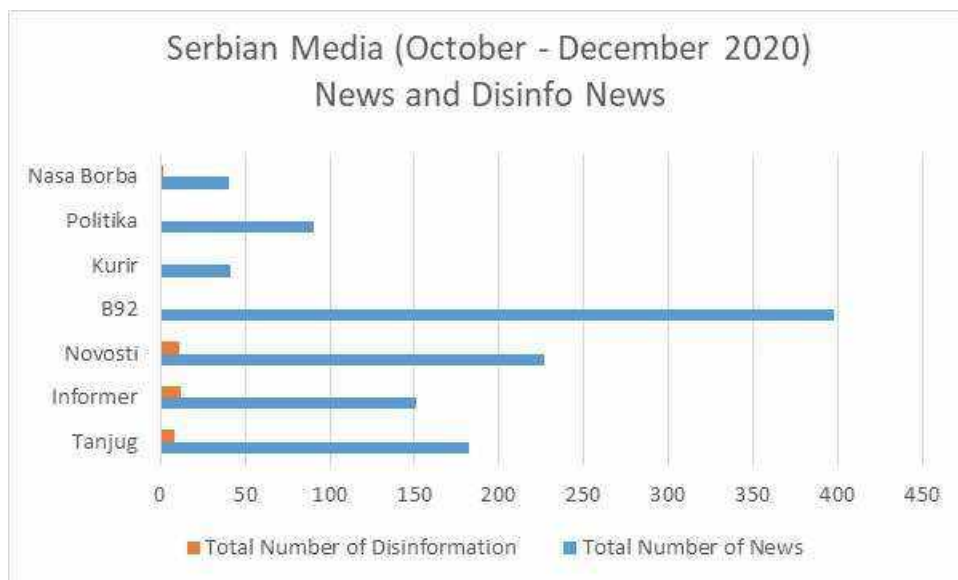
October – December 2020

Executive Summary

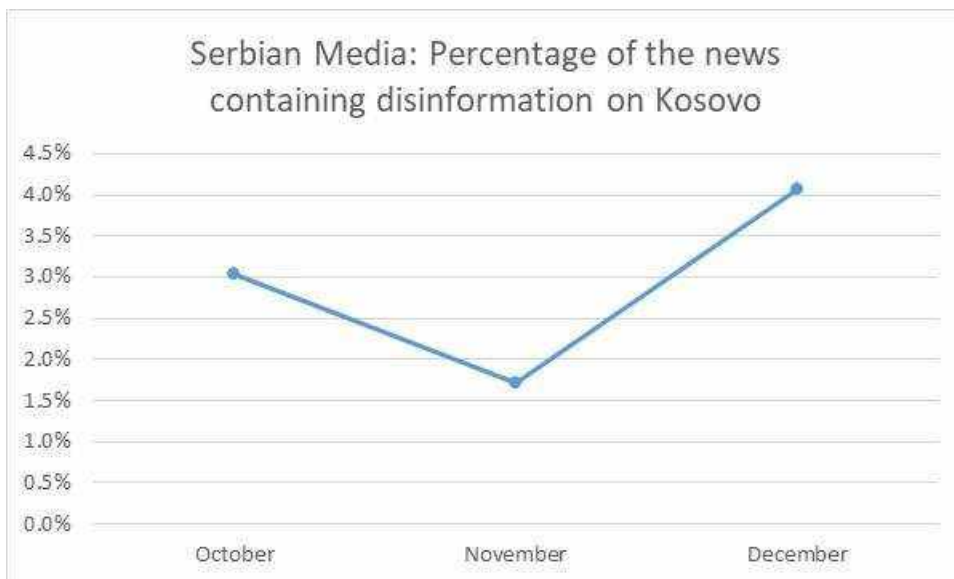
Kosovo Disinformation Observer: Serbian and Russian Media Monitoring is a quarterly report that aims to analyse the disinformation trends of news published by the preselected media outlets originating in Serbia and Russia in English and Serbian language targeting Kosovo.

The preselected media originating in Serbia that are known for publishing news with disinformation content are Tanjug, Informer, Novosti, Kurir, B92, Politika and Naša Borba, whereas the respective preselected media originating in Russia are Russia Today, Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report, and this Kosovo Disinformation Observer also analyses documents and statements related to Kosovo, published by Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

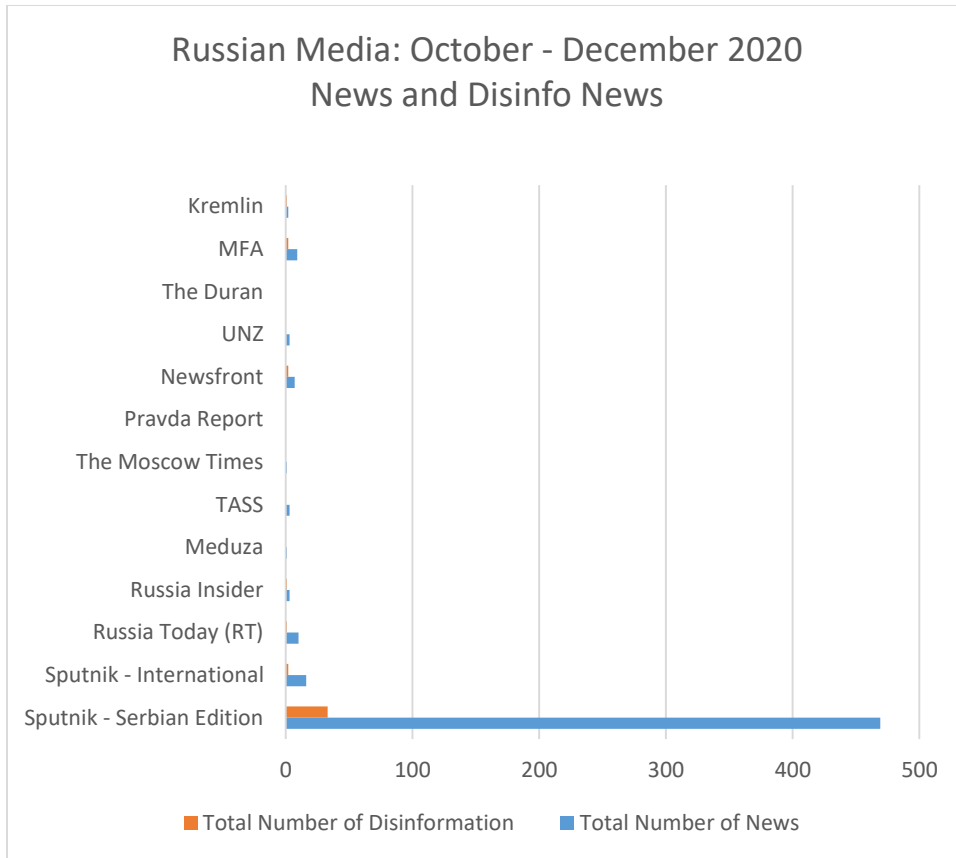
The monitoring of data shows that from October 1st to December 31st, 2020, the media outlets originating in Serbia have published 1,130 news that were related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. Tanjug has published 182, Informer 151, Novosti 227, B92 398, Kurir 41, Politika 91 and Naša Borba 40 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo.



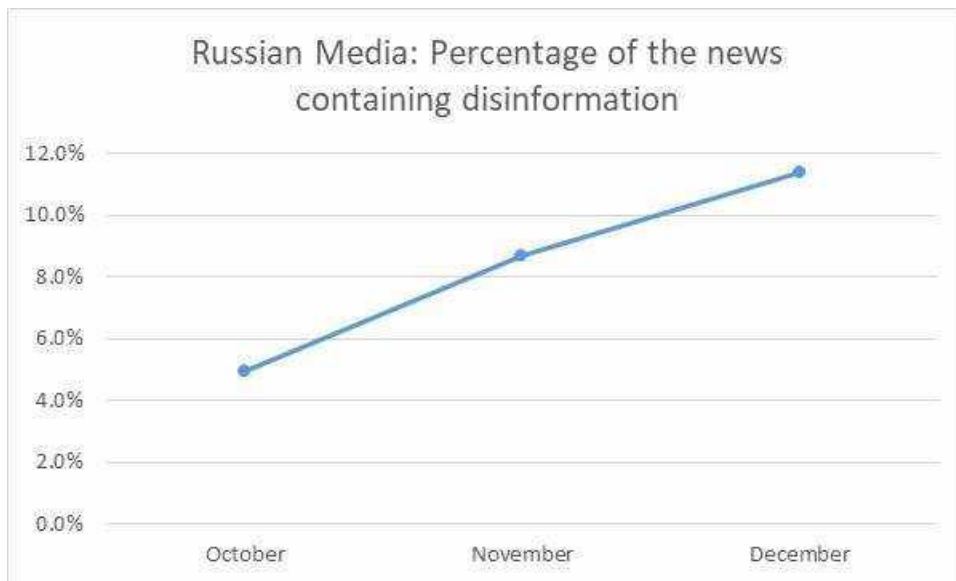
The disinformation trends of the Serbian media show that the highest percentage value of the news/disinformation ratio was in December 2020, 4.1. %, followed by 3.0 % in October, and 1,7 % in November 2020.



The monitoring of data shows that from October 1st to December 31st, 2020, media outlets originating in Russia have published 524 news related directly and indirectly to Kosovo. Sputnik – Serbian Edition has published 469, Sputnik International 16, Russia Today 10, Russia Insider 3, Meduza 1, TASS 3, The Moscow Times 1, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 7, UNZ 3, Duran 8, Kremlin 2, and the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation 9 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo.



The disinformation trends of the Russian media show that the highest percentage value of the news/disinformation ratio was in December 2020, 11.4%, followed by 8.7 % in November, whereas the lowest percentage value of this ratio was in October 2020, 5.0 %.



The deconstruction of the news originating in Serbia containing the most blatant disinformation (15 news) published by the mentioned preselected media during this period, indicates that the disinformation was focused on undermining the legality and legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood by:

- Undermining the legality of Kosovo and discrediting its leadership and institutions
- Portraying Kosovo as a "mafia" state that violates human rights and oppresses Serbian Community and that is planning to expel the remaining Serbs living in Kosovo through secret military operation.
- Denying war crimes committed in Kosovo by the Serbian armed forces during the 1998-1999 conflict.
- Changing narratives of the 1998-1999 conflict by presenting Serbs as victims and NATO as an aggressor that committed war crimes, and exaggerating the number of Serb casualties.
- Accusing Kosovo for violating and sabotaging the agreements reached in Brussels

On the other hand, the deconstruction of the news originating in Russia containing the most blatant disinformation (17 news) published by the mentioned preselected media during this period indicates that the disinformation was focused on:

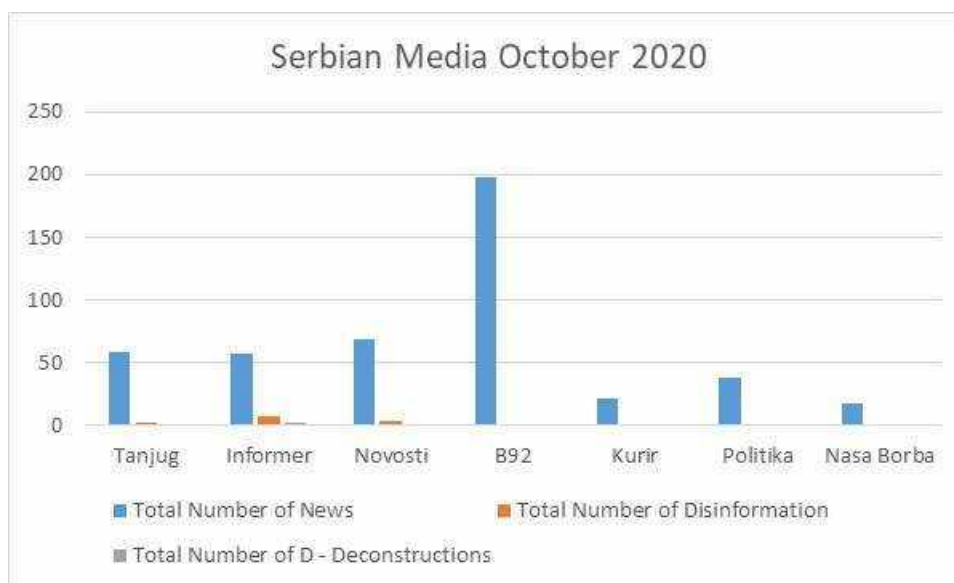
- Undermining the legality of Kosovo's statehood by comparing it with the cases of Crimea and Nagorno-Karabakh.
- Presenting Kosovo as a hotbed of extremism.
- Questioning and changing of the narratives on the war in former Yugoslavia by accusing the US and NATO for war crimes, and denying war crimes of Serbia, and,

Therefore, it can be concluded that, in terms of their focus, the news with disinformation content related to Kosovo, published by media originating in Serbia and Russia during this period were quite similar in terms of their aims and targets. However, there is a clear indication that Russia is misusing Kosovo case for the annexation of Crimea and other conflicts in its near neighbourhood.

The following analyses will present the monthly statistical data on the news/disinformation ratios for the preselected media outlets originating in Serbia and Russia, and they will provide a short analyses as well, on the focuses and aims of the published disinformation, based on the disinformation analyses of the October, November and December 2020 editions of the Kosovo Disinformation Alerts for Serbian and Russian Media.

News and Disinformation October 2020

The monitoring of data on Serbian media shows that from October 1st to 30th, 2020, Tanjug has published 59, Informer 57, Novosti 69, B92 198, Kurir 22, Politika 38, and Naša Borba 18 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. In 14 out of the 461 news published by these media outlets, has been detected disinformation content.

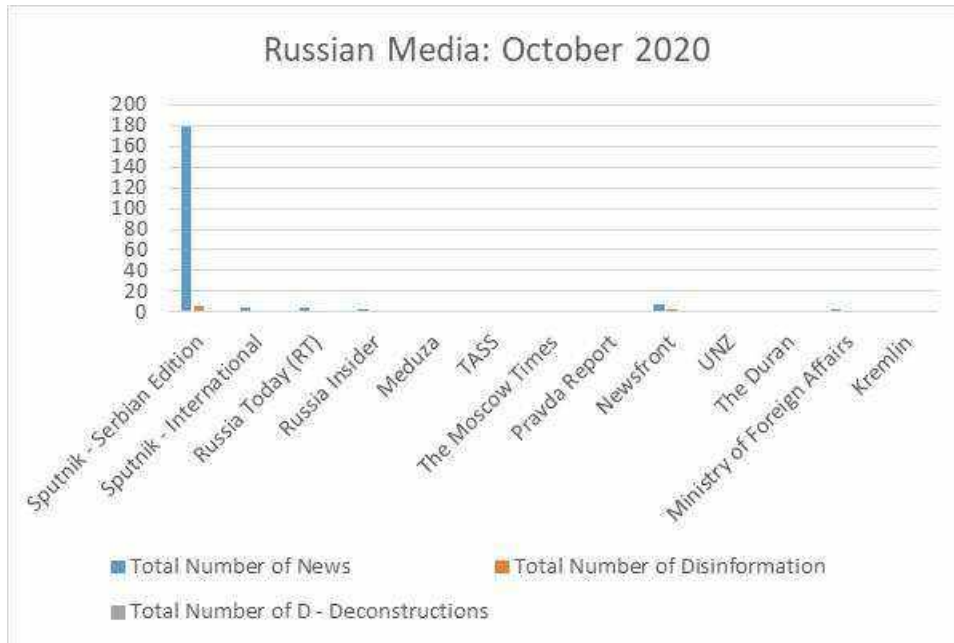


The deconstruction of the news containing the most blatant disinformation (5 news) published in October 2020 indicates that the disinformation was focused on undermining Kosovo's statehood, discrediting its leadership and rule of law institutions, accusing them for not implementing certain agreements achieved in Brussels, falsely portraying Kosovo as a state that is against the dialogue with Serbia, and that is planning to expel the remaining Serbs living in Kosovo through secret military operation²⁰⁷.

On the other hand, the monitoring of data on the Russian media shows that from October 1st to 30th, 2020, Sputnik Serbia has published 179, Sputnik International 4, Russia Today 4, Russia

²⁰⁷ Disinformation Alert: Serbian Media, October 2020, http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D_-_Alert_-_Serbian_Media_-_October_2020_813404.pdf

Insider 2, Meduza 1, TASS 1, The Moscow Time none, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 7, UNZ none, The Duran 4, Kremlin none and the Russian Foreign Ministry 2 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 10 out of the 202 news related to Kosovo published by these media outlets, had disinformation content.

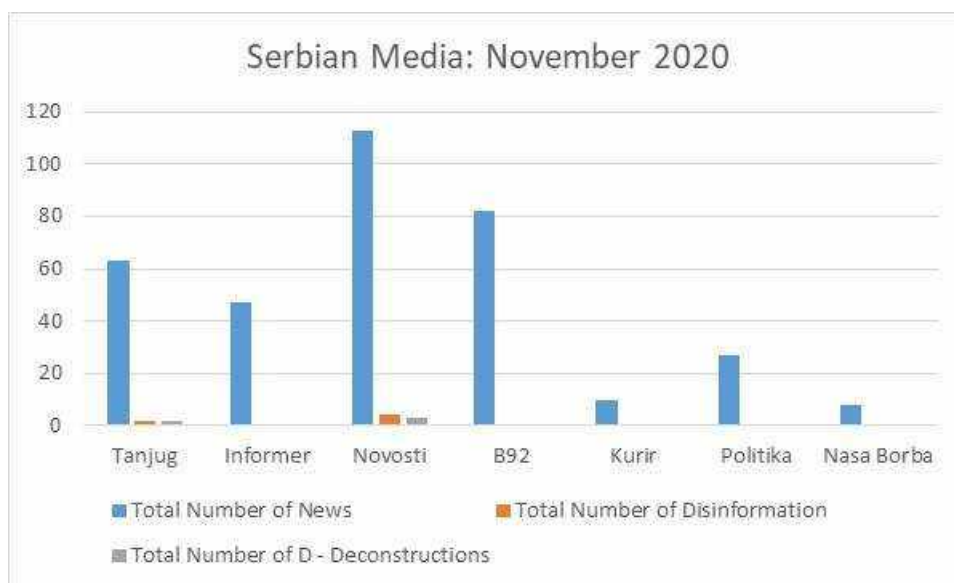


The deconstruction of disinformation news produced in October 2020 by the preselected Russian media and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in relation to Kosovo, indicates that they were focused on undermining the statehood of Kosovo by making improper comparisons of this statehood with the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh, accusing NATO for war crimes against Serbian population, and exaggerate the number of Serbian casualties of the NATO bombing campaign in 1999²⁰⁸.

²⁰⁸ Disinformation Alert: Russian Media, October 2020, http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/D_-_Alert_-_Russian_Media_-_October_2020_320568.pdf

News and Disinformation November 2020

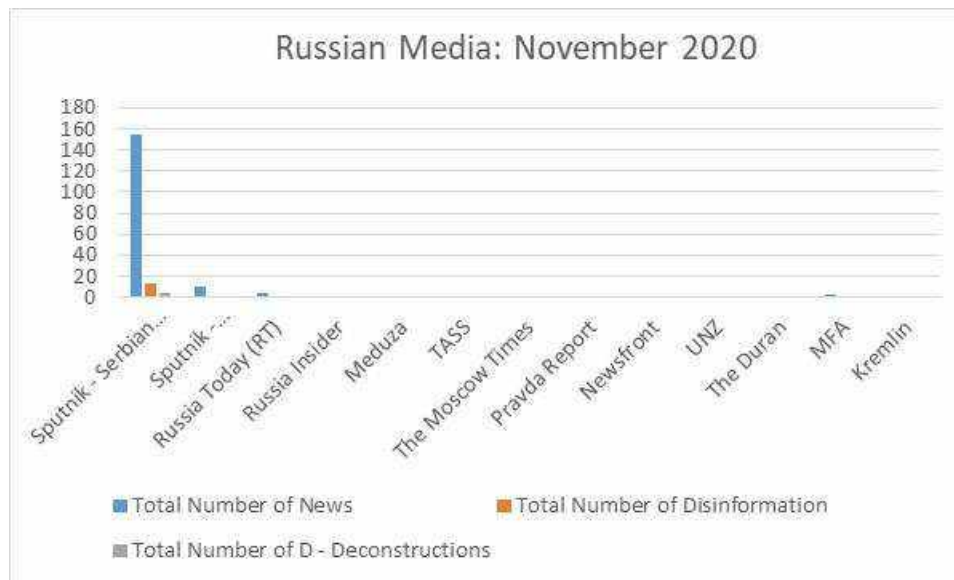
The monitoring of news on Serbian media shows that from November 1st to 30th, 2020, Tanjug has published 63, Informer 47, Novosti 113, B92 82, Kurir 10, Politika 27 and Naša Borba 8 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 6 out of the 350 news published by these media outlets have had disinformation content.



The deconstruction of the news containing the most blatant disinformation (5 news) published in November 2020 indicates that the disinformation was focused on undermining Kosovo’s statehood by constantly referring to it as “the province of Kosovo and Metohija,” discrediting its leadership and institutions, falsely portraying Kosovo as a state that does not respect human rights of the Serbs, and is planning to expel the remaining Serbs living in Kosovo through attacks on their lives and property, obscuring the past, by denying crimes and atrocities of Serbia in Kosovo during the 1990s, and by exaggerating the number of Serb casualties²⁰⁹.

²⁰⁹ Disinformation Alert: Serbian Media, November 2020, [http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Disinformation Alert - Serbian Media - November 2020_16621.pdf](http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Disinformation%20Alert%20-%20Serbian%20Media%20-%20November%202020_16621.pdf)

On the other hand, the monitoring of data on the Russian media shows that from November 1st to 30th, 2020, Sputnik Serbia has published 155, Sputnik International 10, Russia Today 4, Russia Insider none, Meduza none, TASS 1, The Moscow Time none, Pravda Report none, Newsfront none, UNZ 1, The Duran none, Kremlin none and the Russian Foreign Ministry 2 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 15 out of the 173 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.



The disinformation published by the Russian news outlets in November 2020 were focused undermining the statehood of Kosovo by discrediting its leadership and institutions, presenting it as a hotbed of extremism, changing the historical narratives by denying crimes and atrocities of Serbia in Kosovo and in Bosnia during the 1990s²¹⁰.

²¹⁰ Disinformation Alert: Russian Media, November 2020, [http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Disinformation Alert - Russian Media - November 2020_43622.pdf](http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Disinformation%20Alert%20-%20Russian%20Media%20-%20November%202020_43622.pdf)

News and Disinformation December 2020

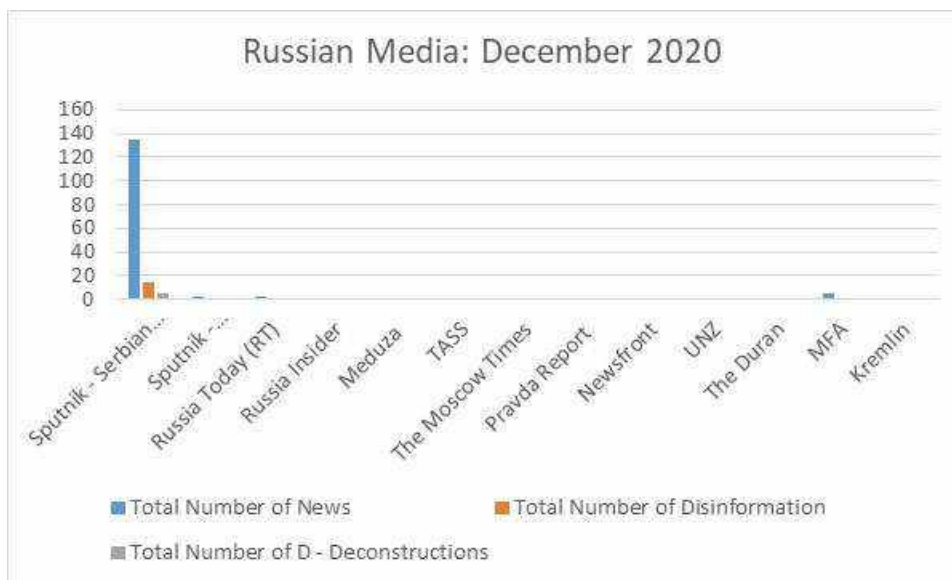
The monitoring of news published by the preselected Serbian media outlets shows that from December 1st to 31st, 2020, Tanjug has published 60, Informer 47, Novosti 45, B92 118, Kurir 9, Politika 26, and Naša Borba 14 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 13 out of the 319 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.



The deconstruction of the news containing the most blatant disinformation (5 news) published December 2020 indicates that the disinformation was focused on undermining Kosovo's statehood by discrediting its leadership and institutions, falsely portraying Kosovo as a mafia state that does not respect human rights of Serbs, obscuring the narratives of the past by denying crimes and atrocities of Serbia in Kosovo during the 1990s and by exaggerating the number of Serb casualties²¹¹.

²¹¹ Disinformation Alert: Serbian Media, December 2020, [http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Disinformation_Alert - Serbian Media - December 2020_267161.pdf](http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Disinformation_Alert_-_Serbian_Media_-_December_2020_267161.pdf)

On the other hand, the monitoring of data on the Russian media shows that from December 1st to 31th, 2020, Sputnik Serbia has published 135, Sputnik International 2, Russia Today 2, Russia Insider 1, Meduza none, TASS 1, The Moscow Time 4, Pravda Report none, Newsfront none, UNZ 1, The Duran none, Kremlin 1 and the Russian Foreign Ministry 5 news, related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. 17 out of the 149 news published by these media outlets had disinformation content.



The disinformation generated during this period by the preselected Russian media in relation to Kosovo, was focused on undermining the statehood of Kosovo by trying to draw parallels between independence of the Republic of Kosovo and the illegal annexation of Crimea, presenting Kosovo as a state that abolishes basic rights, the rule of law and the functioning of democratic institutions, changing the narratives of the past by denying crimes and atrocities of Serbia in Kosovo and during the 1990s²¹².

²¹² Disinformation Alert: Russian Media, December 2020, [http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Disinformation Alert - Russian Media - December 2020_102201.pdf](http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Disinformation%20Alert%20-%20Russian%20Media%20-%20December%202020_102201.pdf)