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Disinformation Alerts – Serbian Media Monitoring is a monthly report on the news related to disinformation and misinformation targeting Kosovo, published by media in Serbia

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KOSOVO DISINFORMATION ALERTS

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INTRODUCTION

Kosovo Disinformation Alerts: Serbian Media Monitoring aims to counter disinformation through monitoring on a monthly basis of the preselected media outlets originating in Serbia. The preselected media are Tanjug, Informer, Novosti, Kurir, B92, Politika and Naša Borba, which are known for producing news with disinformation content that is not limited only to Kosovo.

The monitoring conducted has shown that during August 2020, a total of 451 news were published by the mentioned preselected media outlets originating in Serbia, of which Tanjug has published 37, Beta 62, Informer 64, Novosti 64, Kurir 12, B92 149, Politika 43 and Naša Borba 20 articles related to Kosovo.

A careful review shows that the news published during this period by Tanjug, Kurir, Naša Borba and Nin did not contain any serious disinformation content. However, other preselected media outlets did have quite a large number of news and articles with disinformation content on Kosovo. Against this backdrop, KIPRED was focused on the deconstruction of the most blatant disinformation provided by the above listed Serbian media, which will be discussed in the following section.

The aim of the disinformation related to Kosovo, generated during this monitoring period by the preselected Serbian media indicates that it was focused on discrediting the legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood by referring to it as "quasi-" and "fake-" state, and at portraying Kosovo as a state that endangers the Serbian and Christian spiritual heritage. The preselected articles also put 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, while at the same time minimizing and hiding the war crimes committed by Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces. Finally, certain articles made false claims that American deliveries of weapons and military equipment to the Kosovo authorities, is part of the preparations for an open conflict with Serbia, in despite of the fact that it is Serbia itself that was intensively purchasing sophisticated weaponry from Russia and China during the recent years.

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE MOST BLATANT DETECTED DISINFORMATION

Disinformation Alert 1

Headline: *Otkriven tajni dokument: Avion sa dokazima o zločinima OVK namerno oboren; sve znao visoki diplomata EU? (Secret document revealed: The plane with evidence on KLA crimes deliberately shot down; A senior EU diplomat know everything?), B92, 18 August 2020.*¹

The article writes about the crash of the Slovak military plane near the Hungarian village Hejce in 2006, in which 42 Slovak soldiers who were returning from the KFOR mission in Kosovo have died. The article claims that the plane was deliberately shot down, because it contained evidence on mass graves and KLA crimes. Such claim is based on a statement by lawyer Goran Petronijević, who asserts that this is indicated by information obtained after the Slovak Ministry of Defense declassified the Report on the Investigation of the Aircraft accident in July this year. According to Petronijević, the Official Report which concluded that the aircraft accident occurred after a pilot mistake, was within a few hours after the crash, declared as a state secret by the State Commission of Slovakia. Petronijević claims that, according to the testimonies of soldiers who came to replace the departing contingent, among other things, the crashed plane was loaded with several aluminum crates with evidence on mass graves of, either Serbs, or Albanians, or non-Albanians, who were killed by the KLA. Petronijević further states that some members of the victim's families directly accuse Miroslav Lajčák for covering the case. According to him, at that time, Lajčák was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia and one of their most influential politicians. Given that he is clearly a NATO man and a European bureaucrat, Petronijević claims

¹ "Otkriven tajni dokument: Avion sa dokazima o zločinima OVK namerno oboren; sve znao visoki diplomata EU? (Secret document revealed: The plane with evidence on KLA crimes deliberately shot down; A senior EU diplomat knew everything?), B92, 18 August 2020, https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2020&mm=08&dd=18&nav_category=640&nav_id=1720886

that in order to protect the KLA criminals, NATO has most likely influenced Lajčák to declare the case as a state secret.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

The article puts forward several false claims, in order to discredit KLA, NATO, and high level Slovak politicians. It utilizes the tragic crash of the Slovak military plane for spreading disinformation and state propaganda.²

a) The plane crashed because of pilot's mistake

The article reports a fake news that the Slovak military plane that crashed killing 42 Slovak soldiers who were returning from the KFOR mission, was deliberately shot down because it contained evidence about mass graves and crimes committed by KLA. Such claims are not supported by any concrete facts, except of alleged testimonies of soldiers who replaced the departing contingent, and those coming from the family members of the deceased soldiers. It is significant that at the time when the Slovak Ministry of Defense has declassified, in July of this year, the Report on the Investigation of the Aircraft accident, no concrete facts from this Report have been cited. As a matter of fact, after the Report has been declassified, the state secretary of the Ministry of Defense has declared that he basically agrees with the conclusion from the expert investigation that the air accident had probably occurred due to a failure of a human factor. It is also significant that, although one soldier, Martin Farkaš, had survived the accident, no testimony from him was mentioned by the article to support its claims.³

² Another article with similar content is OBOREN AVION SA DOKAZIMA PROTIV OVK? Skinuta oznaka o tajnosti s dosijea o nesreći iz 2006 (PLANE WITH EVIDENCE AGAINST KLA SHOT DOWN? Secrecy removed from the 2006 accident file), Novosti, 18 August 2020, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/910217/oboren-avion-dokazima-protiv-ovk-skinuta-oznaka-tajnosti-dosijea-nesreci-2006>

³ See "What happened in Hejce? The crash of the aircraft is attributed to errors in piloting," Tekdeeps, 31 July 2020, <https://tekdeeps.com/what-happened-in-hejce-the-crash-of-the-aircraft-is-attributed-to-errors-in-piloting-home-news/>

b) Identified mass graves in Kosovo were those of ethnic Albanians

The article falsely claims that the Slovak military plane was deliberately shot down, because it contained evidence of mass graves and KLA crimes. It states that the crashed plane, among other things, was loaded with several aluminum crates with evidence of mass graves of, either Serbs, or Albanians, or non-Albanians, who were killed by the KLA. Clearly, the article attempts to falsely portray the liberation war of KLA as one of war crimes against humanity, while minimizing and hiding at the same time the war crimes committed by Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces.

In reality, the data reported by reliable institutions, such as the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), and the Human Rights Watch, clearly show that the huge majority of the persons killed, kidnapped, and missing, during the conflict, were ethnic Albanians, not ethnic Serbs. Besides, reports of these institutions undoubtedly show that a bulk of these crimes were committed by Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces, not the KLA. Finally, all the mass graves that have been identified were those of ethnic Albanians, and not even a single one was filled with bodies of ethnic Serbs. More concretely, it is estimated that more than 7,000 persons were missing during the conflict in Kosovo of 1999. As of July 2001, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) had exhumed approximately 4,300 bodies. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, as of April 2001, 3,525 people remained missing from the conflict – the vast majority of them Kosovar Albanians.⁴ On the other hand, according to the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), between 2001 and 2002, 840 persons were recovered from clandestine grave sites in the territory of Serbia. All of the mortal remains recovered in Serbia during 2001–2002, were those of Kosovo Albanians executed in 1999.⁵ According to ICTY and Human Rights Watch, the main difficulty in finding the missing persons is the deliberate attempt of the Serbian and Yugoslav authorities to efface evidence and

⁴ *Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo*, Human Rights Watch Report, 2001, p. 7, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/kosovo_full_low.pdf.

⁵ See, *The Situation in Kosovo: A Stock Taking*, The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), Sarajevo, 14 September 2010.

remove the bodies. There are documented cases where bodies were disinterred and removed from the crime scene, in an apparent attempt to conceal the killings. Moreover, a radio documentary broadcast on National Public Radio in the United States, called “Burning the Evidence,” claimed that Serbian and Yugoslav forces systematically transported the bodies of killed Kosovar Albanians to the mining complex at Trepça near Mitrovica, where they were incinerated.⁶

Disinformation Alert 2

Headline: *REALIZACIJA VUČIĆEVE IDEJE: Formira se tim za zaštitu svetinja (THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VUČIĆ’S IDEA: The team for the protection of shrines is being formed), Novosti, 17 August 2020.*⁷

The article reports that the Government of Serbia, together with the Serbian Orthodox Church, should form, in the coming days, a special team for the protection of Serbian and Christian spiritual heritage in Kosovo, and in other areas where the Serbs live. Such initiative is based on the idea of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, who spoke about the necessity of establishing such a body, encouraged by the new attacks of the authorities in Prishtina on the monastery of Visoki Dečani, and has received great support in the Patriarchate and intellectual circles. According to article, through the work of this team, President Vučić intends to present to international public all the risks of the disappearance of Christian heritage, primarily in Kosovo, but also in Croatia and Montenegro. Vučić has pointed out that the protection of the Serbian cultural and religious heritage, primarily in Kosovo, but also in other places where the Serbs live, presents a priority in Serbia’s state policy. Furthermore, according to article, in Kosovo alone, some 150 churches, monasteries and other religious facilities of the Serbian Orthodox Church

⁶ According to Serbian fighters and “a well-placed Serbian intelligence officer,” between 1,200 and 1,500 bodies were destroyed at the Trepça mine. See *Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo*, 2001, p. 122.

⁷ D. Milinković, “REALIZACIJA VUČIĆEVE IDEJE: Formira se tim za zaštitu svetinja (THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VUČIĆ’S IDEA: The team for the protection of shrines is being formed),” *Novosti*, 17 August 2020, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/909958/realizacija-vuciceve-ideje-formira-tim-zastitu-svetinja>

were destroyed, damaged and desecrated, as many as 61 of which had the status of cultural monuments. In addition, the article claims that Serbian heritage was also under attack for decades in Croatia, where "a cultural genocide" was basically carried out. The article states that similar attempts to "appropriate" the Serbian heritage are currently also underway in Montenegro.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

a) The Monastery of Deçan is not threatened

The article claims that the Government of Serbia, together with the Serbian Orthodox Church, will form a special team for the protection of the Serbian and Christian spiritual heritage, because it is allegedly in danger, not only in Kosovo, but in Croatia and Montenegro as well. This presents another attempt to portray Serbs as victims whose cultural and religious heritage is under attack throughout the region. According to article, the decision for the creation of such a body was encouraged by the new attacks of the authorities in Prishtina on the monastery of Visoki Deçani.⁸ The dispute in question is actually the one between the Municipality of Deçan and the monastery of Visoki Deçani, about the construction of the road that connects Deçan and Plava. The claim by the article about the monastery being endangered is false, given that the Kosovo Prime-minister Hoti has made it clear that the road will be built in accordance with the law and the decision of the Constitutional Court of Kosovo. In 2016, the Constitutional Court of Kosovo took a decision which recognized to the Monastery of Deçan the right of ownership for 24 hectares of land.⁹

⁸ Several other articles on Serbian media have reported about the vents related to the monastery of Visoki Deçani. See for instance "SRBIJA NE DA SVETINJE! Vučićeva ideja dobila podršku! Formira se specijalni tim za zaštitu duhovne baštine! (SERBIA DOES NOT GIVE HOLY PLACES! Vučić's idea received support! A special team for the protection of spiritual heritage is being formed!)," *Informer*, 17 August 2020, <https://informer.rs/vesti/drustvo/542031/srbija-svetinje-vuciceva-ideja-dobila-podrsku-formira-specijalni-tim-zastitu-duhovne-bastine>. See also "Kancelarija Vlade Srbije o radovima kod Visokih Dečana: Antihrišćanska kampanja na Kosovu (Serbian Government Office on Works near Visoki Deçani: Anti-Christian Campaign in Kosovo)," *Beta*, 14 August 2020, <https://beta.rs/scena/kultura-vesti/131999-kancelarija-vlade-srbije-o-radovima-kod-visokih-decana-antihristianska-kampanja-na-kosovu>

⁹ "Hoti: Brenda ditësh apo javësh do të zgjidhet çështja e ndërtimit të rrugës Plavë-Deçan (Hoti: The issue of construction of the Plavë-Deçan road will be resolved within days or weeks)," *Evropa e lirë*, <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/30801754.html>

b) In Kosovo were destroyed more mosques than churches

This article also makes a false claim that “since 1999, 147 churches and monasteries of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo have been mined, burned and damaged.” In fact, the truth is that during the war in Kosovo, more Muslim mosques than Orthodox churches and monasteries have been destroyed and damaged in Kosovo. Even the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo has reported that, since June 1999, 76 Orthodox churches, monasteries, or religious sites have been damaged or destroyed in Kosovo.¹⁰ On the other hand, according to Human Rights Watch report, between March and June 1999, Yugoslav soldiers and Serbian police and paramilitaries have destroyed thousands of Albanian homes throughout Kosovo, by using artillery, bulldozers, explosives, and arson.¹¹ At the same time, during the war, 225, out of the 600 mosques in Kosovo, were damaged, vandalized or destroyed, along with other Islamic sites.¹² After the war, international organizations and Kosovo institutions have engaged in parallel in rebuilding and reconstructing both, Muslim, and Orthodox, religious objects. The Report published by the “Reconstruction Implementation Commission for Serbia Religious Sites in Kosovo,” states that during the period 2004–2010, 28 Orthodox religious sites were restored, and additional 2 locations were managed and funded by UNESCO, 2 locations were managed and funded by the European Union, and a non-religious location was managed and funded by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.¹³

¹⁰ *Crucified Kosovo - Destroyed and Desecrated Serbian Orthodox Churches in Kosovo and Metohija (1999–2000)*, expanded electronic edition, www.kosovo.com/crucified/default.htm

¹¹ *Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo*, 2001, p. 143, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/kosovo_full_low.pdf

¹² For more details see Fejaz Drançolli, *Trashëgimia e Shkatërruar Në Kosovë 1998/99* [The destroyed heritage in Kosovo 1998/99], Institute for War Crimes Research, Prishtina, 2017.

¹³ “Reconstruction Implementation Commission for Serbia Religious Sites in Kosovo,” Implemented by the Council of Europe, 20 December 2011.

Disinformation Alert 3

Headline: NOVA NOTORNA LAŽ I PROVOKACIJA ŠIPTARA! Priviđa im se srpska Žandarmerija! Ili im je samo nemirna savest?! (A NEW NOTORIOUS LIE AND PROVOCATION OF THE SHIPTARS! They have an apparition of the Serbian Gendarmerie! Or is it just their troubled conscience?!), **Informer, 08 August 2020.**¹⁴

The article refers to an information transmitted by Kosovo media, that 11 members of the Serbian Gendarmerie have illegally entered into the village Karaçevo, in Kosovo. According to article, such news is only another notorious lie and provocation of the “Shiptars” (a derogatory expression for Albanians) in Kosovo. It claims that based on the information that Informer received from reliable sources, no member of the Serbian Gendarmerie has entered in that area. Article concludes that the fact that the Shiptars are dreaming, is perhaps just a matter of their troubled conscience.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

The article tries to falsely deny the information transmitted by Kosovo media that 11 members of the Serbian Gendarmerie have illegally entered into the territory of Kosovo. In doing so, similarly with many other cases with the media in Serbia, the article uses derogatory language about Albanians in Kosovo by referring to them as “Shiptars.” Media in Kosovo have widely reported about this incident in which the Serbian Gendarmerie violated Kosovo’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The articles in Kosovo media were supported by photos and video footages from the scene.¹⁵ It should be noted that the illegal entrance of the Serbian Gendarmerie into

¹⁴ “NOVA NOTORNA LAŽ I PROVOKACIJA ŠIPTARA! Priviđa im se srpska Žandarmerija! Ili im je samo nemirna savest?! (A NEW NOTORIOUS LIE AND PROVOCATION OF SHIPTARS! They have an apparition of the Serbian Gendarmerie! Or is it just their troubled conscience?!), Informer, 08 August 2020, <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/539990/nova-notorna-laz-provokacija-siptara-prividja-srpska-zandarmerija-ili-samo-nemirna-savest>

¹⁵ See for instance “Xhandarmëria serbe patrullon në Kosovë/Karaçevë,” RTV 21, 07 August 2020, <https://tv21.tv/xhardarmeria-serbe-patrullon-ne-kosove-karaceve-video/>.

the Kosovo's territory has been admitted by another article in Serbian media. Namely, an article in the daily newspaper "Politika,"¹⁶ transmits that KFOR and the Serbian Army have jointly patrolled on the administrative line near the village of Hodonovce, in the municipality of Kamenica.

Disinformation Alert 4

Headline: *ON JE ODGOVORAN ZA UBISTVO 160 SRBA: Sve o teroristi OVK koji udara na temelje Dečana (HE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLING OF 160 SERBS: All about a KLA terrorist who strikes at the foundations of Decani), Novosti, 20 August 2020.*¹⁷

The article accuses the Mayor of the municipality of Dečan, Bashkim Ramosaj, who, in despite of the order of the government in Prishtina, supports the continuation of the works in the construction of the road that endangers the ancient Serbian monastery Visoki Dečani. It transmits the claims made by the Association of the Families of Kidnapped and Killed Serbs in Kosovo, that Ramosaj received the position of mayor as a "reward for his crimes." The Association claims that all the former members of the terrorist KLA were rewarded with high positions in their municipalities in political and public life. Ramosaj is a member of Ramush Haradinaj's party, the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo, and during the conflict in 1999 was a member of the so-called brigade "Black Eagles" within the former KLA, which was under the direct command of Ramush Haradinaj. According to the Association, Ramosaj is directly responsible for the kidnapping and killing of more than 160 Serb civilians, soldiers and police officers in the area of the Dečan municipality. The Association claims that after the members of his brigade expelled all the Serbs

¹⁶ "KFOR i Vojska Srbije u zajedničkim patrolama na administrativnoj liniji (KFOR and the Serbian Army in joint patrols on the administrative line)," Politika, 08 August 2020, <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/459996/KFOR-i-Vojska-Srbije-u-zajednickim-patrolama-na-administrativnoj-liniji>.

¹⁷ "ON JE ODGOVORAN ZA UBISTVO 160 SRBA: Sve o teroristi OVK koji udara na temelje Dečana (HE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLING OF 160 SERBS: All about a KLA terrorist who strikes at the foundations of Decani)," Novosti, 20 August 2020, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/910833/odgovoran-ubistvo-160-srba-sve-teroristi-ovk-koji-udara-temelje-decana>.

from Dečan, Ramosaj is now trying in every way to endanger the monastery Visoki Dečani – a Serbian and Orthodox sanctuary that testifies about the Serbian roots in this area.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures.

This is yet another among several other articles that discusses the construction of the road between Dečan and Plava as an attempt to allegedly endanger the ancient Serbian monastery Visoki Dečani.¹⁸ The issue of the road and the monastery has already been discussed under the Disinformation Alert 2, and, therefore, this Deconstruction of the Disinformation will address false claims of the article related to the Mayor of the Municipality of Dečan, Bashkim Ramosaj. The article uses offensive language by referring to Mr. Ramosaj as a terrorist, and to the KLA as a terrorist organization. Moreover, the article makes false claim that Ramosaj got the position of mayor as a "reward for his crimes," and that "all the former members of the terrorist KLA were awarded with high positions in their municipalities in political and public life." In the Republic of Kosovo, mayors in all the municipalities are elected directly, by the citizens, through free and democratic elections, and their posts are not "awarded," as claimed by the article.

In addition, the article falsely claims that Mr. Ramosaj is directly "responsible for the kidnapping and killing of more than 160 Serb civilians, soldiers and police officers, in the area of the Dečan municipality." Such accusations were never proven, either by a court process, or by findings of renowned organizations such as "Humanitarian Law Center" and "Human Rights Watch." On the contrary, according to the detailed data gathered based on 31,600 documents and presented in the publication "Kosovo Memory Book" (February 2nd, 2015) prepared by the Humanitarian Law Center based in Belgrade, during the period 1.01.1998–14.06.1999, a total of 679 persons were killed or missing in the municipality of Dečan. Of those, 592 were ethnic Albanians, 77 were Serbs,

¹⁸ See for instance "UBIJAO SRBE, SAD UDARA I NA DEČANE: Ovaj terorista OVK ugrožava srpsku svetinju - radio pod komandom Haradinaja (HE KILLED SERBS, NOW HE IS ATTACKING DEČANI: This KLA terrorist endangers Serbian shrine – he worked under Haradinaj's command)," Novosti, 19 August 2020, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/910828/ubijao-srbe-sad-udara-decane-ovaj-terorista-ovk-ugrozava-srpsku-svetinju-radio-pod-komandom-haradinaja>

and 10 were of other ethnic background, which brings severely in doubt the credibility of data and allegations as claimed in the article.

Disinformation Alert 5

Headline: *“DRAMATIČNO! AMERIKA HOĆE RAT NA KOSOVU! Bliski saradnik Sergeja Lavrova UPOZORAVA na ZASTRAŠUJUĆI SCENARIO! (DRAMATIC! AMERICA WANTS WAR IN KOSOVO! A close associate of Sergei Lavrov WARNS of a SCARY SCENARIO!),” Informer, 01 August 2020.*¹⁹

The article transmits a statement by Alexei Zaitsev, a close associate of Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, according to whom the United States is systematically militarizing the false state of Kosovo, as part of the preparation for an open conflict with Serbia. Zaitsev says that Moscow is following with great regret and concern the information about American deliveries of weapons and military equipment to the authorities in Pristina, which announced that it had received another contingent of 42 "Hammer" armored vehicles! According to the Russian official, with the militarization of the self-proclaimed “Republic of Kosovo,” the United States is openly working to the detriment of international efforts aimed at ensuring peace and stability in the Balkans. The article also cites the former lieutenant colonel of the Counter Intelligence Service of Serbia (KOS), Ljuban Karan, who claims that “the USA and Germany are literally showering the illegal “army” of the false state with donations of weapons.” He states that the problem is not only the formal recognition of “Kosovo,” but the fact that during the donation and sale of weapons, this quasi-state is treated as a NATO member. Karan also emphasizes that at the same time “Kosovo soldiers” are being trained for flying specialties and heavy weapons, thus implying that the US and Germany are also planning deliveries of planes, artillery, and tanks. For him, all this cannot

¹⁹ “DRAMATIČNO! AMERIKA HOĆE RAT NA KOSOVU! Bliski saradnik Sergeja Lavrova UPOZORAVA na ZASTRAŠUJUĆI SCENARIO! (DRAMATIC! AMERICA WANTS WAR IN KOSOVO! A close associate of Sergei Lavrov WARNS of a SCARY SCENARIO!),” Informer, 01 August 2020, <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/538270/dramaticno-amerika-hoce-rat-kosovu-bliski-saradnik-sergeja-lavrova-upozorava-zastrasujuci-scenario>.

be understood differently than as intensive preparation for a military solution to the Kosovo problem.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

During the month of August 2020, several media in Serbia, have reported that Kosovo is being heavily armed by the US and Germany.²⁰ This article refers primarily to the American deliveries of weapons and military equipment to Kosovo authorities, by citing another contingent of 42 "Hammer" armored vehicles. Throughout the article, a derogatory language is used, by referring to Kosovo as "quasi" and "false" state. The article makes false accusation that with such a step, the United States is openly working to the detriment of international efforts aimed at ensuring peace and stability in the Balkans. It goes even further by falsely claiming that the systematic militarization of the "false state of Kosovo" by the United States represents a segment of the preparations for an open conflict with Serbia.

The reality is in fact quite the opposite, and it is Serbia that has been intensively purchasing sophisticated weaponry during the recent years. In February 2020, the Serbian Defence Minister Aleksandar Vulin confirmed that the first two of a total of six Russian anti-aircraft defence systems Pantsir-S1 Serbia have arrived at the military Airport near Belgrade.²¹ In April 2020, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) noted that Serbia recorded the biggest expenditure for its military among the countries of the Western Balkans in 2019. It also reported that Serbia's military spending in 2019 stood at 1.14 billion dollars, which presents 43 percent increase compared with the previous year.²² Finally, in July 2020, Forbes has reported that Serbia

²⁰ In addition to this article, see "Београд купио кинеске, Тирана набавља америчке дронове: Хладни рат у ваздуху (Belgrade bought Chinese drones, Tirana bought American ones: The Cold War in the air," *Politika*, 15 August 2020, <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/460411/Hladni-rat-u-vazduhu>.

²¹ "BELGRADE – Serbia confirms Russian anti-aircraft defence systems," *Euractiv*, 24 February 2020, https://www.euractiv.com/section/all/short_news/belgrade-serbia-confirms-russian-anti-aircraft-defence-systems/.

²² "SIPRI: Serbian military spending rises 43 percent in 2019," N1, 27 April 2020, <http://rs.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a593348/SIPRI-Serbian-military-spending-rises-43-percent-in-2019.html>.

was the first European state to deploy Chinese combat drones CASC CH-92, reflecting Belgrade's deepening relationship with Beijing and Serbia's plans to seek airpower edge.²³

On the other hand, after a statement in July 2020 by Marko Đurić, the Director of the Office on Kosovo in the Government of Serbia, that Kosovo authorities have negotiated the purchase of armament with German Intelligence,²⁴ including the purchase of German tanks "Leopard II,"²⁵ KIPRED sent an official request to the Ministry of Defense of Kosovo for an explanation regarding this statement in particular, and the alleged arming of Kosovo in general. In the response provided by the Ministry of Defense of Kosovo, Colonel Sefer Isufi, the Deputy Director of the Office for Public Relations, provided a detailed report, in which he argues that all these are "fake" and "disinformation news" by the Serbian and Russian media,²⁶ by stressing the following facts:

a) From its establishment, the Kosovo Security Force has an agreement with NATO, in the framework of which within the Ministry of Defense and KSF functions the Advisory and Liaison Team of NATO (NALT),²⁷ which performs the following tasks:

- Advisory – including those in the fields of capacity building, training, governance, doctrine, logistics, international law, human rights, and management;
- Assisting – including the best practices in accordance with international standards, on such issues as strategies of the central offices, policies, planning processes, and the mechanisms of the internal control, which ensure transparency and responsibility;

²³ Sebastien Roblin, "Missile-Armed Chinese Drones Arrive in Europe as Serbia Seeks Airpower Edge," *Forbes*, 09 July 2020,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/sebastienroblin/2020/07/09/missile-armed-chinese-drones-arrive-in-europe-for-serbian-military/#7b45416379d2>.

²⁴ "Mediji: Angela dala zeleno svetlo, Nemci naoružavaju Kosovo (Media: Angela gave green light, Germans are arming Kosovo)," B92.net, 22 July 2020,

https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2020&mm=07&dd=22&nav_category=640&nav_id=1709605.

²⁵ "Немачка преговара о продаји оружја косовским Албанцима (Germany negotiating the selling of armament to Kosovo Albanians)," Politika.rs, 23 July 2020,

<http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/459010/Nemacka-pregovara-o-prodaji-oruzjakosovskim-Albancima>.

²⁶ Response through electronic mail from the Ministry of Defense of Kosovo, sent by Colonel Sefer Isufi, the Deputy Director of the Office for Public Relations.

²⁷ "Nato Advisory and Liaison Team (NALT)," *Nato.int*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_144933.htm.

- Liaison and coordination of the Assistance Programs of NATO.

On this issue everything is transparent, and there is no secret agreement whatsoever on the purchase of armament by the Ministry of Defense of Kosovo, given that all of its and KSF's activities are done in full coordination with the Advisory and Liaison Team of NATO, in which Germany itself is a member.

b) During the visit of the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Mr. Avdullah Hoti, to the Ministry of Defense and the KSF, he stated: "Today I am here to refute whatever news that were published in international media, regarding the supply with armament of KSF."²⁸ Also, during this visit, the Kosovo Security Force presented to Mr. Hoti the HMMWV vehicles, which were bought from the United States of America.²⁹

Meanwhile, during this meeting with the Prime Minister of Kosovo, the Minister of Defense, Mr. Anton Çuni stated that "the special war that is being waged by the Russian media, that KSF is allegedly being armed furtively from Germany, in the value of 170 million Euros, all these things, according to Minister Çuni, are being made to destabilize the peace in the Balkans, and to create excuse for further armament of Serbia, as well as with the tendency to compromise our good and transparent cooperation with the state of Germany."³⁰

c) The annual Budget of the Ministry of Defense for the year 2020 is 69,275,842 €, for the year 2021 it is 69,693,026 €, and for 2022 it is 74,369,087.24 With these budgetary projections, it is impossible for the Ministry of Defense to buy expensive equipment and military means, and particularly to buy equipment whose value is measured in hundreds of millions of Euros.

²⁸ "The Statement of the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Mr. Avdullah Hoti in the Cantonment Adem Jashari of the KSF," https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=6&v=4H-wFf5M6QI&feature=emb_title.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.