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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 of these media has shown that during May 2020, a total of 391 news were published by the above mentioned preselected media outlets originating in Serbia, of which Tanjug has published 55, Informer 60, Novosti 47, Kurir 13, B92 151, Politika 62, and Naša Borba 3 articles related to Kosovo.

A careful review of these articles has shown that the news published during this period by Naša Borba did not contain any serious disinformation content. However, other preselected media outlets did have a relatively 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 produced during this monitoring period by the preselected Serbian media in relation to Kosovo 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.

DECONSTRUCTION OF THE MOST BLATANT DETECTED DISINFORMATION

Disinformation Alert 1

Headline: *Poslanik u Bundestagu za "Novosti": Kosovo je MAFIJAŠKA tvorevina, kojom iz Prištine vladaju RATNI ZLOČINCI [Bundestag's MP for "Novosti": Kosovo is a MAFIA creature, ruled from Pristina by WAR CRIMINALS], **Novosti, May 19th, 2020**¹*

The article provides an interview conducted by the journalist of Novosti, Ivana Stanojević with Dr. Anton Friesen,² a member of the German Bundestag from the extreme right Alternative for Germany party, and it also provides an interesting case of a double-disinformation.

Firstly, the qualifications used in the title of the article [Bundestag MP for "Novosti": Kosovo is a MAFIA creation, ruled from Pristina by WAR CRIMINALS], and in its subtitle [The list of fatal outcomes certainly includes the mafia pseudo-state, which, from Pristina, is ruled by war criminals, under the influence of clans for trafficking in human beings, organs and narcotics - points out Dr. Anton Friesen], do not correspond at all with the interview, and those qualifications are not used by Mr. Friesen.

Secondly, Friesen had accused the former German Minister of Defense, Rudolf Sharping, for “launching a lie in the world, called "the Operation Horseshoe", which served as the basis for NATO aggression against the FRY, without a UN mandate”; he has claimed that “in the presence of KFOR, before the eyes of the engaged soldiers and elders, multiple pogroms of the Serbian population took place, monasteries and churches were destroyed. Today, the population of Kosovo is the second poorest in Europe, corruption and trafficking in human beings

¹ Novosti, Poslanik u Bundestagu za "Novosti": Kosovo je MAFIJAŠKA tvorevina, kojom iz Prištine vladaju RATNI ZLOČINCI, May 19th, 2020, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:865646-Poslanik-u-Bundestagu-za-Novosti-Kosovo-je-MAFIJASKA-tvorevina-kojom-iz-Pristine-vladaju-RATNI-ZLOCINCI>

² Dr. Anton Friesen's official bio posted at the web-site of the German Bundestag, <https://www.bundestag.de/abgeordnete/biografien/F/519566-519566>

and organs are flourishing. The KFOR mission, therefore, did nothing to contribute to stability in Kosovo”.

It should be mentioned here that there were several other articles which were based on the statements of Mr. Friesen that were published by B92³ and Kurir.⁴

Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

a) The “Horseshoe Operation” plan

The “Horseshoe Operation” plan was provided in 1999 to the then-German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, by the Bulgarian Foreign Minister, Nadezhda Neynski (formerly Nadezhda Mihaylova). According to this plan that was carefully prepared by the intelligence services of Serbia, Milošević had set two goals: “First – to destroy the Kosovo Liberation Army, and second – to “cleanse” Kosovo of ethnic Albanians. This plan boiled down to the deportation of large masses of Albanians from Kosovo. Its execution started at the end of February 1999.”⁵ Within weeks after the beginning of NATO intervention, the Serbian armed forces had killed more than 9,000 and drove out to Albania and Macedonia around 860,000 Kosovo Albanians.⁶ It is important to stress here that prior to NATO intervention, the Yugoslav forces had already killed 2,000, detained over 1,200, and displaced around 300,000 Albanian Kosovars.⁷ These facts are a clear

³ B92, "Na Kosovu je sve počelo zbog genocidne ludačke teorije nemačkog ministra o srpskim koncentracionim logorima", May 14th, 2020,

https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2020&mm=05&dd=14&nav_category=640&nav_id=1683967,

B92, "Kosovo je mafijaška tvorevina", May 19th, 2020,

https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2020&mm=05&dd=19&nav_category=640&nav_id=1685422

⁴ Kurir, JOŠ JEDAN POSLANIK BUNDESTAGA STAO UZ SRBIJU Frizen: Za Kosovo je kriva ova ludačka teorija ministra Šarpinga!, May 19th, 2020, <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/3466725/jos-jedan-poslanik-bundestaga-stao-uz-srbiju-frizen-za-kosovo-je-kriva-ova-ludacka-teorija-ministra-sarpinga>

⁵ BIRN, Bulgaria ‘Leaked Milošević Ethnic Cleansing Plan, January 10th, 2012,

<https://balkaninsight.com/2012/01/10/bulgaria-leaked-milosevic-ethnic-cleansing-plan/>

⁶ For deeper inquiry on the effects of Kosovo refugee crisis see for example: Jim Whiteman, The Kosovo Refugee Crisis: NATO’s humanitarianism versus human rights, The International Journal of Human Rights, Vol. 4, Issue 3-4, Taylor & Francis, 2000.

⁷ Eric Herring, From Rambouillet to the Kosovo accords: NATO’S war against Serbia and its aftermath, The International Journal of Human Rights, Routledge, October 2007

evidence that the “Operation Horseshoe” was being executed in practice, regardless of the fact that its existence was being denied by Milošević⁸.

b) Presence of KFOR and situation in Kosovo

The single major inter-ethnic clash in Kosovo happened in March 2004. According to the already mentioned Human Rights Watch Report, “Failure to Protect,” published in July 2004, the March violence left 19 persons dead (11 Albanians and 8 Serbs), while 954 were wounded. In addition, according to the report “at least 550 homes and twenty-seven Orthodox churches and monasteries were burned.”⁹

Kosovo and UNMIK have acted quite rapidly in bringing the justice. According to OSCE Legal System Monitoring Report, “The Response of the Justice System to the March 2004 Riots,” as of 18 November 2005, “out of the 426 persons charged with criminal offences related to the riots, 209 persons had been convicted while 12 were acquitted.” At the time of reporting, there were still 110 cases pending, and the charges had been dropped in 95 cases.¹⁰ Furthermore, according to Dimitris A. Moschopoulos, the former Head of the Liaison Office of Greece in Kosovo, and the former EU Facilitator for the Protection of the Religious and Cultural Heritage of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in Kosovo, around 70% of the planned reconstruction had been completed until 2011, and the amount spent by the Kosovo Government up until then far exceeded the total amount originally budgeted for the whole reconstruction project.¹¹

⁸ BIRN, Bulgaria ‘Leaked Milošević Ethnic Cleansing Plan, January 10th, 2012, <https://balkaninsight.com/2012/01/10/bulgaria-leaked-milosevic-ethnic-cleansing-plan/>

⁹ “Failure to Protect,” Human Rights Watch Report, July 2004, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/07/25/failureprotect/anti-minority-violence-kosovo-march-2004>

¹⁰ “The Response of the Justice System to the March 2004 Riots,” Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Department of Human Rights and Rule of Law, Legal System Monitoring Section, Kosovo, December 2005.

¹¹ Dimitris A. Moschopoulos, SERBIAN ORTHODOX CULTURAL HERITAGE IN KOSOVO (A Brief Status Report), Peace Fare, October 6th, 2015, <https://www.peacefare.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Status-Report-on-Heritage-Sites-in-Kosovo.pdf>

Furthermore, the level of criminality in Kosovo does not differ from that of the other countries of the Western Balkans, including the trafficking and organized crime,¹² and KFOR is the most trusted security institution by all communities in Kosovo.¹³

Disinformation Alert 2

Headline: *ALBANCI HTELI DA OTMU ĐOKOVIĆA ZBOG IZJAVA O KOSOVU! Otkriveni svi detalji drame, Novak izgubio i pobegao iz Londona! [ALBANIANS WANTED TO KIDNAP ĐOKOVIĆ BECAUSE OF STATEMENTS ON KOSOVO! All the details of the drama revealed, Novak lost and escaped from London!], **Informer, May 6th, 2020***¹⁴

The article claims that the life of the best tennis player in the world seems fairytale, but it is not always like that. Nole [Novak Đoković] said he had no understanding for Kosovo Albanians and their move to declare independence, and complete chaos ensued. As "Kurir" finds out in **2008**, a hellish scenario was prevented. Nole's abduction was planned, and the British intelligence service knew all that. On the other hand, Đoković's mother, Dijana, claims that he had threats from Albanians because he said that Kosovo was Serbia. Then in **2009** we were guarded by members of Scotland Yard and I was scared. He lost from [Marat] Safin because he was under pressure. We haven't talked about it, but those are the moments when you are really afraid for your family.

Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

There is no evidence on these claims that can be found, either in international, or local Serbian media. Furthermore, after the match with Safin, Đoković (who is also a political activist against

¹² For further exploration see: HOTSPOTS OF ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: Local vulnerabilities in a regional context, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Geneva, 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Hotspots-Report-English-13Jun1110-Web.pdf>

¹³ See for example: Faton Bislimi, Public Pulse 1, UNDP Kosovo, September 2013,

https://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/library/democratic_governance/-/

¹⁴ *ALBANCI HTELI DA OTMU ĐOKOVIĆA ZBOG IZJAVA O KOSOVU! Otkriveni svi detalji drame, Novak izgubio i pobegao iz Londona!*, *Informer*, May 6th, 2020, <https://informer.rs/sport/tenis/515710/albanci-hteli-otmu-djokovica-zbog-izjava-kosovu-otkriveni-svi-detallji-drame-novak-izgubio-pobegao-londona>

Kosovo's independence) did not say a single word on his psychological state. On the contrary, he declared to "The Star" that he did not expect such a performance by Safin, by adding that "Playing him on Centre Court obviously motivates him more to do well".¹⁵ The single evidence that could be found on kidnapping, which was related to Đoković's family is that of Novak's spouse's grandfather, Miloslav Radisavljević, in the end of July 2018, in Serbia.¹⁶

Disinformation Alert 3

Headline: *Silvija Sardone: Srbima na KiM EU nudi fraze umesto zaštite, pale im kuće, pljačkaju imanja, za njih nema radnih mesta niti normalnog života [Sylvia Sardone: Instead of protection, EU offers phrases to Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, their houses are being burned, properties are looted, there are no jobs or normal life for them], Novosti, May 18th, 2020*

In her interview for Novosti, Silvija Sardone, Member of the European Parliament that belongs to the far right Italian political party Lega Nord of Matteo Salvini has declared: "I visited many places with a majority Albanian population outside my official mission and talked to many people in Serb enclaves. The situation is more than worrying, because I have not seen that there is any essential measure to protect the human rights of minorities who are mostly Christians. I believe that the process of establishing peaceful coexistence will be very long and I am not sure that all parties will participate equally in it," and that "I asked the EU and the Italian government to cooperate in the operation with KFOR in order to go to protect those villages where the situation is most risky. It is not acceptable for such things to happen to a civilized, bare-handed people in Europe, and for the police never to find the culprits. That is why I asked KFOR to monitor the police investigations, in order to check the correct procedure of its work".

¹⁵The Star, Safin upsets Djokovic at Wimbledon, June 25th, 2008, https://www.thestar.com/sports/2008/06/25/safin_upsets_djokovic_at_wimbledon.html

¹⁶ Sport24, Djokovic's wife's grandfather robbed, tied up, July 27th, 2018,

Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

The non-majority rights in Kosovo and their protection are in accordance with the highest European standards. Chapter I (articles 1–20)¹⁷ of the Constitution determines basic provisions of the Republic of Kosovo, some of which are related directly to communities, and these determine that Kosovo is a multi-ethnic society, that Albanian and Serbian are its official languages, meanwhile, the Bosnian, Roma and Turkish are official languages at the municipal level.¹⁸ With the goal of protecting and promoting interests of Serbian and other non-majority communities in the Republic of Kosovo, these communities were provided with the guaranteed political representation at all the levels of power. For example, the Serbian community has a guarantee of being represented in the government with one minister, while the second minister is guaranteed to represent other non-majority communities. In the case when the government consists of more than 12 ministries, the non-majority communities should have yet another minister. It should be stressed that the Serbian and other non-majority communities are guaranteed with at least two deputy-ministers, and here, again, when the government consists of more than 12 ministries, there should be another, third, deputy-minister representing the Serbian community, as well as another deputy-minister representing other non-majority communities¹⁹ The Article 16 of the Law on Local Self-Government recognizes three forms of the competencies: the own, the delegated, and the enhanced competencies. The enhanced competencies are determined by the Ahtisaari's Package, and were then incorporated in the Law on Local Self-Governance, and they include several specific competencies for the municipalities in which the Serbian community is majority. These municipalities have enhanced competencies in different fields, such as health, education, culture, and they have the right to participate in the appointment of the commanders of their own police stations.²⁰

¹⁷ [Chapter I] Contains basic provisions which include: The Definition of the State, The Sovereignty, Languages, Secular State, Local Governance, Citizenship, etc.

¹⁸ Basic Provisions of the Constitution [articles 3, 5, and 6].

¹⁹ Article 96 [Ministries and the Representation of the Communities].

²⁰ Article 20 of the Law on Local Self Government: The Municipalities of Mitrovica North, Gračanica, and Štrpce have competencies for provision of secondary health care, including the registration and licensing of the institutions of health care, employment, payment of salaries and the training of the personnel and the administrators of the health care. Article 21 of the same Law: The Municipality of Mitrovica North has competence for higher education, including the registration and licensing of educational institutions, employment, payment of

Thus, the statements of Ms. Sardone that Kosovo does not have any essential measures to protect the human rights of minorities, is totally false and untrue. Furthermore, not a single diplomatic representation or international institution in Kosovo has issued any statement that supports her or similar claims, on alleged harassment of Serbian community in Kosovo.

Disinformation Alert 4

Headline: *Џерузалем пост: Косово није оно што треба Балкану [Jerusalem Post: Kosovo is not what the Balkans need], Politika, May 31st, 2020²¹*

The article says that the Israeli Jerusalem Post assessed that the dispute over Kosovo and Metohija should be resolved by compromise, rather than by unilateral actions. The text of the Honorary Consul of Serbia in Israel, Aleksandar Nikolić, published in the online edition of the paper, states that Israel, like many other countries in the world, including five EU member states, opposes unilateral declaration of independence, because they cannot accept a biased and unilateral solution, which sets a precedent and violates international law.

The author of the text wonders how much the inhabitants of Israel are ready to accept the disastrous forced solution over the holy city of Jerusalem, and emphasizes that similarly, Kosovo and Metohija is the cradle of the Serbian national identity, and according to him, her monasteries Visoki Dečani, the Patriarchate of Peja and of Gračanica are among the medieval living guardians of the Serbian spiritual, cultural and historical heritage.

salaries and training of educational instructors and administrators. Article 22 of the same Law: All the municipalities in which the Serbian community is in majority, have competences for exercising the responsibilities on cultural issues, including the protection and promotion of the Serbian cultural and religious heritage, and of others within the municipal territory, as well as for the support of the local religious communities, in accordance with the applicable law. Article 23 of the same Law: The municipalities in which the Serbian community is in majority have competencies to exercise the extended rights for participation in the election of local commanders, in accordance with the Law on Police.

²¹ Politika, Jerusalem Post, Џерузалем пост: Косово није оно што треба Балкану, <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/455208/>

Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

First of all, the article presents the opinion published by the Honorary Consul of Serbia, Mr. Nikolić, as a position of Jerusalem Post, which at the very outset creates a misleading impression.

Secondly, the declaration of independence of Kosovo has not violated the international law, as clearly stated by the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered on July 22, 2010²².

Thirdly, the orthodox monasteries, Visoki Dečani, the Patriarchate of Peja, and the one of Gračanica, are among the most valuable historical and cultural sites in Kosovo, but they did not serve exclusively and solely the Serbs only, but to all the ethnicities of orthodox religion that lived in their vicinities, given that at the time of their construction all the Central and Southern Balkans was Christian for more than 1000 years.

Fourthly, asking for “ownership” of Serbia over Kosovo, on the behalf of cultural and historical heritage, presents the greatest manipulation of the author of this article, because this silences the most fundamental fact that due to the gross human rights violations, war crimes and terror exercised by Serbia over Kosovo Albanians that constituted almost 90% of the population of Kosovo, in March 1999 NATO launched the first war in its history,²³ and Kosovo became independent in February 2008 with the support of the most powerful Western democracies.

²² International Court of Justice, ACCORDANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW OF THE UNILATERAL DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IN RESPECT OF KOSOVO, Advisory Opinion, July 22, 2010, <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/141/141-20100722-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf>

²³ See for example: Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O’Hanlon, Winning ugly : NATO’s war to save Kosovo, The Brookings Institution Press, 2000.