



BASIC INFO:

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

SUPPORTED BY:



London, United Kingdom

DISCLAIMER:

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

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



KOSOVO DISINFORMATION ALERTS

SERBIAN MEDIA
SEPTEMBER 2020

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 shows that during September 2020, a total of 592 news have been published by the mentioned preselected media outlets originating in Serbia, of which Tanjug has published 72, Beta 71, Informer 110, Novosti 40, Kurir 19, B92 202, Politika 36, and Naša Borba 20 articles related to Kosovo.

A careful review shows that the news published during this period by Tanjug, Beta, Kurir, Novosti, B92 and Nin did not contain any serious disinformation content. However, the other preselected media outlets did have a 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 conducted in the following sections.

The analysis of the disinformation generated in this monitoring period by the mentioned preselected Serbian media in relation to Kosovo shows that it was focused on discrediting the legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood by claiming that its status has not been resolved yet, and by speculating that even President Trump sees independent Kosovo as a mistake. In addition, some of the preselected articles aim at presenting Serbia as the sole beneficiary of the recent Washington agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. The preselected articles also put forward several false claims in order to discredit Kosovo leaders and to portray Kosovo as a state that endangers the Serbian minority and is planning to expel the remaining Serbs living in Kosovo.

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE MOST BLATANT DETECTED DISINFORMATION

Disinformation Alert 1

Headline: *VUČIĆ NA RTS: Putin mi se lično izvinio zbog nesmotrenog gesta Zaharove, zato što poštuje i mene i Srbiju! (VUČIĆ ON RTS: Putin has personally asked me for an apology for Zaharova's reckless gesture, because he respects both, me, and Serbia!), Informer, September 10th 2020.*¹

The article transmits an interview of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, on the Washington Agreement, given to Radio Television of Serbia (RTS). Among others, in his interview, Vučić explains the context of the Washington talks. He stresses that until a year ago, there was a division between East and West regarding Kosovo issue. On the one hand, there are the US and most of the EU countries that recognize the independence of Kosovo, and on the other, Russia that doesn't. Vučić insists that recently everything is changing, and that the doors of the White House that were earlier closed to Serbia have now opened with numerous projects. He also admits that in Washington they were asked to recognize Kosovo, but he has refused to agree on that. Furthermore, Vučić claims that the Washington agreement states that Kosovo cannot ask for new recognitions, except for Israel, which was forced by the US to recognize Kosovo's independence. According to him, during these years Kosovo "can't even dream of independence," and without Serbia it "can't get it, nor will it ever get it." He also asked to check on "how many countries have recognized Kosovo during the former government, and how many during the last five or eight years," as well as how many countries withdrew their recognitions.

¹ "VUČIĆ NA RTS: Putin mi se lično izvinio zbog nesmotrenog gesta Zaharove, zato što poštuje i mene i Srbiju! (VUČIĆ ON RTS: Putin has personally asked me for an apology for Zaharova's reckless gesture, because he respects both, me, and Serbia!)," Informer, 10 September 2020, <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/548000/vucic-rts-putin-licno-izvinio-zbog-nesmotrenog-gesta-zaharove-zato-sto-postuje-mene-srbiju>.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

The article transmits an interview of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić in which he puts forward several false claims about the agreement between Kosovo and Serbia for normalization of economic relations. This agreement between Kosovo and Serbia was signed by the Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Kosovo's Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti on September 4th 2020. The signing ceremony took place in the Oval Office of the White House in the presence of the US President Donald Trump. In his interview, President Vučić falsely claims that under the terms of the agreement Kosovo cannot ask for new recognitions, except for the one from Israel. Such claim is certainly not true, given that the agreement states that Kosovo will not apply for new membership in international organizations for a period of one year, and does not mention Kosovo's efforts for new recognitions. Furthermore, the article fails to mention Serbia's obligation in the agreement, according to which for a period of one year, Serbia should suspend all of its efforts, both, official, and unofficial, for encouraging other states, either to not recognize Kosovo, or to revoke existing recognition.² President Vučić also asserts in a rather triumphal manner that during these years Kosovo "can't even dream of independence," and that without Serbia it "can't get it, nor will it ever get it." It should be noted that the agreement in Washington was signed for a period of one year, and therefore the reference "during these years" is a false one. On the other hand, both, the US and the EU high officials have made it clear on several occasions that the final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia should include mutual recognition. As a matter of fact, in his interview, President Vučić admits that in Washington he was asked to recognize Kosovo, thus making his claim that Kosovo will never get recognition from Serbia rather doubtful.

² For more details see "Marrëveshja Kosovë-Serbi në shqip (Kosovo-Serbia Agreement in Albanian)," *Koha*, September 4th 2020, <https://www.koha.net/arberi/236069/marreveshja-kosove-serbi-ne-shqip-dokument/>

Disinformation Alert 2

Headline: AMERIKA MENJA POLITIKU: Tramp gleda na nezavisno Kosovo kao grešku!
(AMERICA CHANGES ITS POLITICS: Trump sees the independent Kosovo as a mistake!),
Naša Borba, September 15th 2020.³

The article transmits an interview with Serbian radio in Chicago of Richard Grenell, the US President's special envoy for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, in which, according to the article, Mr. Grenell has revealed that President Trump considers that the Kosovo conflict has been mismanaged over the last 20 years. The article then interprets such a view of President Trump by putting forward several assumptions. According to article, with such a view, Trump admits that the US was wrong in not respecting the territorial integrity of Serbia, as stated in the Resolution 1244. The article further claims that with that statement, Trump also admits that, as the US leader, he was wrong for not allowing the return of 1,000 Serbian soldiers and policemen to the territory of the autonomous province of Kosovo. In addition, the article states that Trump thinks that it was completely wrong that on March 17th 2003, America allowed Albanians to expel more than 4,000 Serbs, kill dozens of people, destroy about 1,000 Serb houses and burn and destroy about a hundred shrines in Kosovo. Finally, based on the current messages from the White House, the article assumes that Trump would not insist that the outcome of all talks from 2000 to 2008 should exclusively be the independence of the southern Serbian province, as it was done by all American officials in that period.

In its second part, the article expresses doubts about everything written earlier by stating that “it is simply hard to believe that Trump thinks that it was a mistake that America has not been even more brutal towards Serbia over the last 20 years.” It claims that it is hard to believe that Trump thinks that it was a mistake that the US did not allow all the Serbs to be expelled and killed, all the shrines burned, Dečani and the Patriarchate of Peja blown up, and Belgrade forced to recognize Kosovo with some new sanctions and bombs. The article concludes that the essence of

³ Tomislav Ivanović, “AMERIKA MENJA POLITIKU: Tramp gleda na nezavisno Kosovo kao grešku! (AMERICA CHANGES ITS POLITICS: Trump sees independent Kosovo as a mistake!),” *Naša Borba*, September 15th 2020, <https://nasaborba.com/amerika-menja-politiku-tramp-gleda-na-nezavisno-kosovo-kao-gresku/>.

Grenell's new message is that there is hope that America is ready for a historic turn on Kosovo's policy by cooperating with the great powers, primarily with Russia and China, in order to encourage Serbs and Albanians to resolve the historical dispute on their own.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

a) President Trump is not against Kosovo's independence

The article falsely claims that by saying that the Kosovo conflict has been mismanaged over the last 20 years, President Trump basically admits that the US was wrong to recognize Kosovo's independence and not to respect the territorial integrity of Serbia. In fact, in its second part, the article basically contradicts itself, by putting forward serious doubts about assumptions made in its first part. It was precisely Richard Grenell, the President Trump's special envoy for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, that initiated and mediated the negotiations that led to the agreement between Kosovo and Serbia for normalization of economic relations. According to different sources, mutual recognition was part of the initial version of this agreement that was signed by Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Kosovo's Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti on September 4th 2020. President Vučić himself has admitted that he was asked to recognize Kosovo's independence during these negotiations in Washington.⁴ It is hard to believe that President Trump's special envoy is going to put pressure on President Vučić to recognize Kosovo's independence, only a few days before President Trump is going to declare that the US was wrong to recognize Kosovo's independence.

⁴ "VUČIĆ NA RTS: Putin mi se lično izvinio zbog nesmotrenog gesta Zaharove, zato što poštuje i mene i Srbiju! (VUČIĆ ON RTS: Putin has personally asked me for an apology for Zaharova's reckless gesture, because he respects both, me, and Serbia!)," Informer, September 10th 2020, <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/548000/vucic-rti-putin-licno-izvinio-zbog-nesmotrenog-gesta-zaharove-zato-sto-postuje-mene-srbiju>.

b) Exaggeration of figures related to March 2004 riots

The article refers to Albanian riots of March 2004, by falsely claiming that Trump thinks that it was completely wrong that on March 17th 2003,⁵ “America allowed Albanians to expel more than 4,000 Serbs, kill dozens of people, destroy about 1,000 Serb houses and burn and destroy about a hundred shrines in Kosovo.” During this period, Kosovo was administered by UNMIK, which, among others, oversaw a substantial UN International Police Force that was responsible for safety of the citizens. Thus accusation that the US allowed the acts mentioned above is not true.

On the other hand, according to the Human Rights Watch Report, during the March 2004 riots, 19 persons were killed, (11 of whom were Albanians and 8 were Serbs), while 954 were wounded, which is less than stated by the article. In addition, according to the report “at least 550 homes and twenty-seven Orthodox churches and monasteries were burned,” which is also less than the article is claiming.

c) Miss-interpretation of UNSC Resolution 1244

The article also refers to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1244, and it falsely claims that this Resolution guarantees Serbia’s territorial integrity and considers Kosovo as part of Serbia. In fact, the UNSC Resolution 1244 of 10th of June 1999 was unclear and contradictory about the final status of Kosovo. On the one hand, it stated that it reaffirms the “sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia” (of which Serbia was, after 2006, a legal successor), but, on the other hand, it also demanded that full account be taken of the Rambouillet accords, which, in turn, speak of determining a final settlement “on the basis of the will of the people.”⁶

On the other hand, the article also falsely accuses the US “for not allowing the return of 1,000 Serbian soldiers and policemen to the territory of the autonomous province of Kosovo.” It is true that the Point 4 of the UNSC Resolution 1244 confirms that, after the withdrawal of all Serb military, police and paramilitary forces from Kosovo, “an agreed number of Yugoslav and Serb

⁵ The year 2003 is wrong since the riots happened in March 2004.

⁶ “United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244,” S/RES/1244 (1999), 10 June 1999.

military and police personnel will be permitted to return to Kosovo to perform the functions in accordance with Annex 2.” The Annex 2 itself mentions the specific functions that such military and police personnel can perform upon returning to Kosovo. However, Resolution does not mention at all the size of such military and police personnel. Most importantly, the decision for eventual return of such personnel was to be taken by UNMIK, and not by the US authorities.⁷

Disinformation Alert 3

Headline: *Kurtijevi rođaci u Crnoj Gori menjaju prezime u Kurtović (Kurti's relatives in Montenegro change their surname to Kurtović), Politika, September 2nd 2020.*⁸

The article transmits the news that a large number of people in Montenegro who have the same surname as the president of the Self-Determination Movement, Albin Kurti, have changed their surname to Kurtović. The article states that Albin Kurti has for years claimed to be one of the main promoters of national issue, and was the one who declared national unity and tried to be present among Albanians in Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. Nevertheless, according to article, it seems that his relatives with the same surname are not taking into account what their cousin in Kosovo is propagating, and many of them have now started changing their surnames to Kurtović. The article claims that now, as many as hundreds have now a new surname.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

By using a sensational title, the article tries to falsely claim that hundreds of relatives of Albin Kurti - the president of the Self-Determination Movement – have recently changed their surname in Montenegro from Kurti to Kurtović. The article makes a false assumption that all citizens with

⁷ “United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244,” S/RES/1244 (1999), 10 June 1999.

⁸ “Kurtijevi rođaci u Crnoj Gori menjaju prezime u Kurtović (Kurti's relatives in Montenegro change their surname to Kurtović),” *Politika*, September 2nd 2020, <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/461635/Kurtijevi-rodaci-u-Crnoj-Gori-menjaju-prezime-u-Kurtovic>.

the same surname are ultimately related and are cousins with each other. Like with other nations in the world, this is certainly not the case with Albanians, since having the same surname and not being related at all with each other is rather common among Albanians. The article proclaims hundreds of citizens of Montenegro with surname Kurtović as relatives of Mr. Kurti simply based on the names in the voter lists in Montenegro. It does not provide any information on whether these citizens are from the village Sukobine, where Kurti's father was born, or from other places in Montenegro. In addition, the argument that these citizens have recently changed their surname in Montenegro from Kurti to Kurtović is false, given that that cannot be concluded from the voters lists in Montenegro. In order to fully clarify this issue, KIPRED has sent an official request to the Self-Determination Movement of Kosovo for an explanation regarding this issue. KIPRED has received an official reply stating that such news is absolutely untrue, and therefore represent fake news.

Disinformation Alert 4

Headline: *VUČIĆ UPOZORIO: Sprema se novi 17 mart i pogrom Srba (VUČIĆ HAS WARNED: A new March 17th and pogrom of Serbs is being prepared), Naša Borba, September 25th 2020.*⁹

The article transmits a statement of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, who warned that the Albanians in Kosovo are preparing for another March 17th, in order to expel the remaining 95,000 Serbs. In his response to the question on the eventual continuation of the dialogue in Brussels, he pointed out that in Kosovo is happening exactly what he has been for a long time talking about and for what he has already warned both, the EU, and the international officials. According to President Vučić "Albanians do not think that Serbs should have anything in Kosovo. They think that those who allowed them to create a state, will just push a button and Serbia will just like that recognize the so-called independent Kosovo." At the end of the article, President

⁹ "VUČIĆ UPOZORIO: Sprema se novi 17. mart i pogrom Srba (VUČIĆ HAS WARNED: A new March 17 and a pogrom of Serbs is being prepared)," Naša Borba, 25 September 2020, <https://nasaborba.com/vucic-upozorio-sprema-se-novi-17-mart-i-pogrom-srba/>.

Vučić once again warned that Albanians in Kosovo “will produce some new March 17, to expel those 95,000 Serbs who remained and finish the job.”

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures.

The article transmits a statement by the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, who falsely warns that Albanians in Kosovo are preparing for a new March 17th and a pogrom of the remaining 95,000 Serbs in Kosovo. Clearly, President Vučić’s aim is to increase the tensions among the Serbs living in Kosovo, by warning that Kosovo Albanians were planning to expel the remaining Serbs who are living there. Given that no such plans have been announced, or exist, and not even a single evidence was provided for them by President Vučić, one can conclude that such warning presents a disinformation. Serbs living in the Serb-majority municipalities in the South of Kosovo are well integrated and they fully accept the legal jurisdiction of Kosovo institutions. On the other hand, since the Brussels Agreement signed in 2013, Kosovo institutions have also gradually extended their legal jurisdiction to the Serb-majority municipalities in the North of Kosovo. Consequently, neither there is any intention, nor there is any need, for authorities in Prishtina to undertake any action of expelling the Serbs living in Kosovo. In line with the above, it is also important to mention that the article wrongfully and deliberately uses the term “pogrom,” though all the relevant international organisations have referred to the events of March 2004 as “riot” or “unrest.”¹⁰

¹⁰ International organisations such UNMIK, OSCE and Human Rights Watch. See for instance HRW report “Failure to Protect”; see also Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. “Four Years Later: Follow up of March 2004 Riots Cases before the Kosovo Criminal Justice System,” Monitoring Department, Legal System Monitoring Section, July 2008.

Disinformation Alert 5

Headline: *Dačić: Deseta tačka u predlogu dokumenta nema nikakav značaj (Dačić: The tenth point in the draft document has no significance), Politika, September 4th 2020.*¹¹

The article transmits a statement by the Serbian Foreign Minister, Ivica Dačić, who pointed out that the point of mutual recognition, found in the draft document offered by the United States to Serbia in the White House talks with Prishtina has no significance, and that it will not be in the final "economic document" to be signed today. According to Dačić, by including that clause in the document, the United States just wanted to please Prishtina, with the strategy "if it passes, it will pass," because if that clause was important to them, it would have been the first, and not the tenth point. In addition, he states that there is nothing wrong that, in addition to economic topics, a political issue has also arisen, because that only shows that the status of Kosovo has not been resolved yet, and that Washington is aware of that. Dačić concludes his statement by underlying that Serbia's position has changed on the international scene because Kosovo cannot become a member of international organizations since it no longer has a majority.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

The article transmits a statement by the Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić, who falsely tries to minimize the importance of the point of mutual recognition that was initially found in the draft agreement between Serbia and Kosovo in Washington. Dačić falsely claims that such point was not important for the United States and was included only to please Prishtina. President Vučić himself has admitted that he was asked to recognize Kosovo's independence during these negotiations in Washington.¹² It is hard to believe that Richard Grenell, the US President's special

¹¹ "Dačić: Deseta tačka u predlogu dokumenta nema nikakav značaj (Dačić: The tenth point in the draft document has no significance), Politika, 04 September 2020," <https://beta.rs/vesti/politika-vesti-srbija/133040-dacic-deseta-tacka-u-predlogu-dokumenta-nema-nikakav-znacaj>.

¹² "VUČIĆ NA RTS: Putin mi se lično izvinio zbog nesmotrenog gesta Zaharove, zato što poštuje i mene i Srbiju! (VUČIĆ ON RTS: Putin personally apologized to me for Zaharova's reckless gesture, because he respects both me and Serbia!)," Informer, September 10th 2020, <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/548000/vucic-rti-putin-licno-izvinio-zbog-nesmotrenog-gesta-zaharove-zato-sto-postuje-mene-srbiju>.

envoy for the Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue, would have put pressure on President Vučić to recognize Kosovo's independence, if this was not important to the United States. Dačić also falsely claims that the fact that political issue has also arisen during negotiations, clearly shows that the status of Kosovo has not been resolved and that Washington is aware of that. The US was not only one of the key sponsors of Kosovo's statehood, but it was also heavily involved in lobbying for recognition of Kosovo's independence. Finally, Dačić falsely claims that Kosovo cannot become a member of international organizations, since it no longer has a majority. There is no universal majority for all international organizations, but the majority of a specific international organization depends on its membership. Kosovo will not apply for a new membership in international organizations for a period of one year because that is stated in Washington agreement. However, according to the same agreement, Serbia should suspend for a one year period all of its efforts, both, official, and unofficial, for encouraging other states to either not recognize Kosovo, or to revoke existing recognition.¹³

¹³ For more details see "Marrëveshja Kosovë-Serbi në shqip (Kosovo-Serbia Agreement in Albanian)," *Koha*, September 4th 2020, <https://www.koha.net/arberi/236069/marreveshja-kosove-serbi-ne-shqip-dokument/>