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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

**SERBIAN MEDIA  
NOVEMBER 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 outlets known for producing news with disinformation content that is not limited only to Kosovo.

The monitoring of these media shows that during November 2020 a total of 548 news have been published by them, of which Tanjug has published 63, Informer 47, Novosti 113, Kurir 10, B92 82, Politika 27, and Naša Borba 8 articles related to Kosovo.

A careful review shows that the news published during this period by Informer, Kurir, Politika, B92 and Nin did not contain any serious disinformation content. However, certain other preselected media outlets did have a number of news and articles with disinformation content on Kosovo. Against this backdrop, KIPRED is 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 generated in this monitoring period by the preselected Serbian media in relation to Kosovo indicates that this disinformation was focused on undermining Kosovo's statehood by constantly referring to it as "the province of Kosovo and Metohija," and by discrediting its leadership and institutions. In addition, some of the preselected articles aim at 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. The preselected articles also aim at obscuring the past, by denying crimes and atrocities of Serbia in Kosovo during the 1990s, and by exaggerating the number of Serb casualties. By portraying Serbs as victims during the Kosovo war, the preselected media aim at equating the victim (Kosovo Albanians) with the aggressor (Serbia) during the conflict in Kosovo in 1999.

## THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE MOST BLATANT DETECTED DISINFORMATION

### Disinformation Alert 1

**Headline:** *KO JE KADRI VESELJI? Glavni obaveštajac OVK, specijalista za likvidaciju svedoka, 'pravi gospodar Kosova' (WHO IS KADRI VESELI? KLA chief intelligence officer, specialist for witness liquidation, 'the true master of Kosovo',* **Novosti, 05 November 2020.**<sup>1</sup>

The article is about Kadri Veseli, for whom it states that was charged for the liquidation of witnesses, participation in the kidnappings and killings of Serbs, as well as of disobedient Albanians, rape, mutilation, organizing and carrying out terrorist actions, including drug trafficking. The article claims that Veseli, who was once described by the President of Serbia as the “true master of Kosovo,” is also linked with the “Yellow House” case. It states that the former head of the parliament in Pristina, the leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (DPK), and a close friend of Hashim Thaçi, was brought into direct contact by the Council of Europe’s rapporteur Dick Marty with illegal organ trafficking in Kosovo and Albania during the 1999 conflict. It further claims that out of more than 40 protected witnesses that were killed in the trials against Fatmir Limaj and Ramush Haradinaj, Veseli has personally killed four of them. It states that one of them was Agim Zogaj, a witness in the case of war crimes committed in the village of Kleçka, who was found dead in a park in Germany. In addition, the article states that Veseli, as the former leader of the terrorist KLA was also considered a key informant of this paramilitary formation, and in security circles. According to Serbian services, Veseli was the main actor in a terrorist attack on a police patrol in Glogovac, in which two policemen were killed. In the end, the article describes the attack of the terrorist KLA on a police convoy in the village of

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<sup>1</sup> “KO JE KADRI VESELJI? Glavni obaveštajac OVK, specijalista za likvidaciju svedoka, 'pravi gospodar Kosova' (WHO IS KADRI VESELJI? KLA chief intelligence officer, specialist for witness liquidation, 'true master of Kosovo',” *Novosti*, 05 November 2020, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/932721/kadri-veselji-glavni-obavestajac-ovk-specijalista-likvidaciju-svedoka-pravi-gospodar-kosova>.

Ludovic on November 25, 1997. It states that at that time, KLA was under the command of the late Adem Jashari who was killed in March 1998, in a counterattack by the Serbian police.

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

#### **a) Agim Zogaj has committed suicide**

The article falsely claims that Kadri Veseli has personally killed four protected witnesses in the trials against Fatmir Limaj and Ramush Haradinaj, including Agim Zogaj, a witness in a case for war crimes committed in the village of Kleçka. However, Agim Zogaj who was found dead in September in a park in Duisberg in Germany, was not killed by anyone, but he hung himself on a tree. Based on the autopsy, the German police confirmed that Agim Zogaj, committed suicide. As for the other three protected witnesses that article allegedly claims to have been killed by Veseli, the article does not show any proof whatsoever about that allegation.<sup>2</sup>

#### **b) There is no proof whatsoever about the human organ trafficking**

The article falsely claims that Kadri Veseli was linked with the "Yellow House" case since the Council of Europe rapporteur Dick Marty has directly linked him with illegal organ trafficking in Kosovo and Albania during the 1999 conflict. It is true that such accusations against Veseli were mentioned in Dick Marty's Report that was published on 14 December 2010 and was presented to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 7 January 2011. The Report claimed "inhuman treatment of people and killing of prisoners with the purpose of removal and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo by the members of the Kosovo Liberation Army. However, statement by Clint Williamson, the Chief Prosecutor of the of the European Union Special Investigative Task Force of 29 July 2014 states that the prosecution of the offenses related to human organ trafficking "requires a level of evidence that we have not yet secured."<sup>3</sup> On the

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<sup>2</sup> Fatmir Aliu, "Kosovo War Crimes Witness to be Buried Today," Balkan Insight, 01 October 2011, <https://balkaninsight.com/2011/10/01/kosovo-war-crimes-witness-to-be-buried-today/>.

<sup>3</sup> Clint Williamson, "Statement of the Chief Prosecutor of the Special Investigative Task Force," Brussels, European Union, 29 July 2014.

other hand, the indictment against Kadri Veseli by the Specialist Prosecutor's Office (SPO) does not mention at all any accusations related to human organ trafficking. The statement by the Specialist Prosecutor's Office of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC) of 24 June 2020 clearly states that "the crimes alleged in the Indictment involve range of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including murder, enforced disappearance of persons, persecution, and torture,"<sup>4</sup> but it does not mention human organ trafficking. The accusations about human organ trafficking were the main reason for which the international community insisted in the creation of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, however, it seems that ten years after such accusations first appeared, they have just disappeared.

### **c) Killing of Adem Jashari was not a counterattack but a deliberate massacre**

When listing different accusations against Kadri Veseli, the article falsely claims that Adem Jashari was killed by Serbian police in a counterattack. In reality, on 5 March 1998, special police forces attacked the village of Prekaz in Drenica – the home of Adem Jashari, a well-known KLA commander. According to Serbian police, the attack on Donji Prekaz was in response to KLA attacks on nearby police patrols. However, the Human Rights Watch report states that "an estimated fifty-eight ethnic Albanians were killed in the attack, including eighteen women and ten children under the age of sixteen, and then summarily buried by the police before autopsies could be performed." The Human Rights Watch report concluded that serious violations of international humanitarian law were committed by the Serbian special police: notably, indiscriminate attacks on noncombatants, the systematic destruction of civilian property, and the summary and arbitrary executions of those in detention. Although it appears that some Albanian villagers in Prekazi i Poshtëm/ Donji Prekaz were armed and defending themselves against the police, the evidence is overwhelming that the police used excessive and indiscriminate force, and that the police executed at least three people after they had been detained or had surrendered. It further states that "the police attacked Prekaz and the Jashari compound [in a] prepared and determined manner. All evidence suggests that the attack was not intended to apprehend armed

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<sup>4</sup> "Press Statement," Specialist Prosecutor's Office, Kosovo Specialist Chambers, 24 June 2020.

Albanians, considered “terrorists” by the government, but, as Amnesty International concluded in its report on violence in Drenica, “to eliminate the suspects and their families.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Disinformation Alert 2**

**Headline:** *PLANIRAJU NAPAD - HOĆE DA SE OSVETE SRBIMA?! Zbog hapšenja Tačija i Veseljija raste nervoza ekstemista (THEY ARE PLANNING AN ATTACK - THEY WANT TO TAKE VENGEANCE ON SERBS?! The arrests of Thaçi and Veseli increases the nervousness of the extremists), Novosti, 05 November 2020.*<sup>6</sup>

The article transmits a statement of Ljuban Karan, a former officer of the Counterintelligence Service, according to whom whenever the KLA leaders were summoned to court, the Albanian extremists, who are quite many, have shown great nervousness by attacking Serbs who still remain in Kosmet. He says that now, one can also expect an increase in the number of provocations and attacks on Serbian property, perhaps even on the lives of Serbs, especially in places where Albanians are the majority. Karan adds that he does not expect drastic actions like the pogrom that happened in 2004, because Albanians, as well as those who protect them, know that in such a case Belgrade would take action. Such attacks, according to Karan, could be in the form of stealing a tractor or domestic animals, or anything else that Serbs in Kosmet make a living from, because that way they pass a message that they have to leave.

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<sup>5</sup> “Humanitarian Law Violations in Kosovo,” Human Rights Watch, 01 October 1998, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports98/kosovo/Kos9810-04.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> “PLANIRAJU NAPAD - HOĆE DA SE OSVETE SRBIMA?! Zbog hapšenja Tačija i Veseljija raste nervoza ekstemista (THEY ARE PLANNING AN ATTACK - THEY WANT TO TAKE VENGEANCE ON SERBS?! The arrests of Thaçi and Veseli increases the nervousness of the extremists),” *Novosti*, 05 November 2020, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/932863/planiraju-napad-hoce-osvete-srbima-zbog-hapsenja-tacija-veseljija-raste-nervoza-ekstemista>.

## The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

Serbian media and Belgrade authorities have in several occasions come forward with false claims about secret military operations of Albanians in Kosovo.<sup>7</sup> The article has not presented a single evidence about such allegedly planned actions. Moreover, the article cites the former officer of the notorious Counterintelligence Service (KOS), Ljuban Karan, who can hardly be considered as reliable and unbiased source, and who has probably committed crimes in Kosovo during the conflict in 1999. The article falsely claims that the alleged attacks against Serbs might especially happen in the places where Albanians are in the majority. In fact, except for some rare cases, almost all the Serbs in the South of Kosovo live in the Serb-majority municipalities and not in places where Albanians are the majority. It is important to mention that Serbs living in Serb-majority municipalities in the South of Kosovo are well integrated and fully accept legal jurisdiction of Kosovo institutions. On the other hand, since the Brussels Agreement signed in 2013, the Kosovo institutions have also gradually extended their legal jurisdiction to the Serb-majority municipalities in the North of Kosovo. Consequently, neither there is an intention, nor there is a need for authorities in Pristina to undertake any action of expelling 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 relevant international organisations have referred to the event of March 2004 as “riot” or “unrest”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See for instance “VUČIĆ UPOZORIO: Sprema se novi 17. mart i pogrom Srba (VUČIĆ WARNED: A new March 17 and a pogrom of Serbs is being prepared),” Nasa Borba, 25 September 2020, <https://nasaborba.com/vucic-upozorio-sprema-se-novi-17-mart-i-pogrom-srba/>.

<sup>8</sup> International organisations such as 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 3**

**Headline:** *Petković: U vreme epidemije virusa korona otimaju nam lekove (Petković: During the pandemic of the corona virus, they are grabbing our medicines), Tanjug, 19 November 2020.*<sup>9</sup>

The article transmits a statement of the Director of the Office for “Kosovo and Metohija” of the Serbian Government, Petar Petković, who claims that inspectors from Pristina have entered into pharmacies in northern Kosovska Mitrovica, in order to seize drugs that are not on the list of drugs of the unilaterally declared independent state of Kosovo. Petković stated that there are photos showing these inspectors taking drugs away from people in front of pharmacies, and pointed out that the whole world should see Albanians taking away drugs from Serbs during the corona virus epidemic. He said that “Serbia is doing everything to help our health system in Kosovo and Metohija,” but “in a situation where we need to be united, someone is using the epidemic and the corona virus to grab the drugs from the Serbs in front of the pharmacy.” Petković called on Albanians not to put public pressure regarding the indictments in The Hague, and pointed out that official Belgrade, as well as no Serb representative, at any time rejoiced that the greatest KLA leaders were in court. He underlined that “we did not celebrate because we are responsible and because we take care of every Serb in “Kosovo and Metohija”, and their safety,” Petković asked “what would happen if only one drop of blood fell, who would be responsible?” and reminded that Serbia does not have an army and police in “Kosmet”.

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<sup>9</sup> “Petković: U vreme epidemije virusa korona otimaju nam lekove (Petković: During the epidemic of the corona virus, they are grabbing our medicines),” *Tanjug*, 19 November 2020, <http://tanjug.rs/full-view.aspx?izb=606951>.



## The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

### a) The Kosovo Inspectorate was doing a routine control of pharmacies in North Mitrovica

The article falsely claims that at the time of corona virus pandemic, the Kosovo inspectors have seized drugs from pharmacies in the North Mitrovica as well as from citizens in front of pharmacies. In fact, the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Kosovo Customs and Police, have raided a pharmacy in North Mitrovica to seize drugs unregistered in the Kosovo health system. This was confirmed by Vojkan Laketić, the owner of one of the pharmacies in North Mitrovica, who told the Serbian portal "Kosovo-online" that the action was organized in order to check whether the drugs sold in the pharmacies of Serb owners are registered in the health system of Kosovo.<sup>10</sup> The inspectors were also checking if pharmacists working in these pharmacies have diplomas recognized by the Government of Kosovo. It should be mentioned that according to the Serbian language portal "Kossev," the control by inspectors was met with resistance from a group of Serb citizens who had gathered in front of one of the pharmacies in the city centre. While the Kosovo Police was trying to enable the inspection process, those Serb citizens addressed them with insults and whistles.<sup>11</sup>

### b) Serbia authorities and media have greatly rejoiced the imprisonment of KLA leaders

The article falsely claims that official Belgrade, as well as other Serb representatives, have not rejoiced the imprisonment of the key KLA leaders, in order to falsely portray Serbia as a responsible actor vis a vis Kosovo. In fact, the indictment and, later, the imprisonment of key KLA

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<sup>10</sup> "Policia dhe inspektorët aksion në Mitrovicën e Veriut për ilaçe pa banderola, pengohen nga banorët (Police and inspectors in action in North Mitrovica for medicines without banners, obstructed by residents)," *Zeri*, 19 November 2020,

<https://www.zeri.info/aktuale/378151/policia-dhe-inspektoret-aksion-ne-mitrovicen-e-veriut-per-ilace-pa-banderola-pengohen-nga-banoret-video/>.

<sup>11</sup> "Inspektorati kontrollon barnatoret në veri të Mitrovicës, serbët i fishkëllejnë dhe shajnë Policinë (The Inspectorate controls pharmacies in northern Mitrovica, Serbs whistle and insult Police), *Klan Kosova*, 19 November 2020,

<https://klankosova.tv/inspektorati-kontrollon-barnatoret-ne-veri-te-mitrovices-serbet-i-fishkellejne-dhe-shajne-policine-video/>.

leaders has been hailed as a huge victory by Serbian authorities and media. Moreover, the media in Serbia have conducted a huge media propaganda related to these events. For instance, commenting on the indictment of the Special Prosecutor's Office, the Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić has called the former Kosovo President Hashim Thaçi a “criminal.”<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the President of the Assembly of Serbia, Ivica Dačić, has commented about the KLA members that “they were in the forest and killed people.”<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, a number of media in Serbia have extensively written in a propagandistic manner about the indictment and imprisonment of key KLA leaders. Some Serbian media have even made a notorious false claim that Thaçi and his KLA collaborators have continued with human organ trafficking in Kosovo up to the present day.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “Kosovo, Srbija i ratni zločini: Hašim Tači u Hagu poriče optužbe (Kosovo, Serbia and war crimes: Hashim Thaçi denies charges in The Hague),” B92, 09 November 2020, [http://www.b92.net/bbc/index.php?yyyy=2020&mm=11&dd=05&nav\\_id=1700132](http://www.b92.net/bbc/index.php?yyyy=2020&mm=11&dd=05&nav_id=1700132).

<sup>13</sup> “BILI SU U ŠUMI I UBIJALI LJUDE” Dačić o pripadnicima i sudu za OVK: “Mora da postoji PRAVDA I ZA SRPSKE ŽRTVE” (“THEY WERE IN THE FOREST AND KILLED PEOPLE” Dacic on the members and the court for KLA: “There must be JUSTICE FOR SERBIAN VICTIMS AS WELL”), *Blic*, 18 November 2020, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/bili-su-u-sumi-u-ubijali-ljude-dacic-o-pripadnicima-i-sudu-za-ovk-mora-da-postoji/b4yqy2v>.

<sup>14</sup> “TAČI I DALJE TRGUJE LJUDSKIM ORGANIMA?! Šiptarski mediji objavili šokantne informacije (TAČI STILL TRADES WITH HUMAN ORGANS?! Shiptar media published shocking information),” *Informer*, 30 October 2020, <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/559156/taci-dalje-trguje-ljudskim-organima-siptarski-mediji-objavili-sokantne-informacije>.

#### **Disinformation Alert 4**

**Headline:** HRVATSKI ISTORIČAR ŠARIĆ: Kosovo na albanskom ne znači ništa, Srbi su potomci antičkih stanovnika tog područja (CROATIAN HISTORIAN ŠARIĆ: Kosovo means nothing in Albanian, Serbs are the descendants of ancient inhabitants of that area), **Novosti**, 29 November 2020.<sup>15</sup>

The article transmits an interview with Croatian historian, Goran Šarić, who claims that Kosovo means nothing in Albanian, and that Serbs are the descendants of ancient inhabitants of that area. According to Šarić, Kosovo in Serbian means the land of the bird Kos, and that there are toponyms called Kosovo throughout the Serbian ethnic area, while among the Albanians they do not exist. For him, the very fact that Albanians call Kosovo by its Serbian name shows that they came to Kosovo after the Serbs. He also states that while the coexistence of Serbs and Albanians is very much needed, it cannot be built on lies, and that what Albanians are currently doing is not just stealing, but it is raping of history. According to him, some Albanian historians have recently claimed that Albanians have been in the Balkans for thousands of years, and that Nemanjićs are of Albanian origin. Šarić underlines that the bigger the truth is, the bigger the lie it takes to hide it. The article refers to people in ancient sources called Dardanians, and makes a parallel between the similar custom of ritual bathing of Dardanians and Serbs, and calls it as one of the numerous pieces of evidence that show that Serbs are descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Kosovo. It then mentions the similarity between names of towns and surnames of Dardanians and those of today's Serbs. The article further states that the more one digs far into the past of Kosovo and the entire Balkans, the more comes across Serbian traces dating back to the time of the Roman Empire. On the other hand, it claims that Albanians for the first time appeared in the Balkans in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, but they came to Kosovo later, just before the arrival of the Turks. The article cites a census in Kosovo conducted by Turks in 1455, according to which the absolute majority of

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<sup>15</sup> "HRVATSKI ISTORIČAR ŠARIĆ: Kosovo na albanskom ne znači ništa, Srbi su potomci antičkih stanovnika tog područja (CROATIAN HISTORIAN ŠARIĆ: Kosovo means nothing in Albanian, Serbs are the descendants of ancient inhabitants of that area)," *Novosti*, 29 November 2020, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/940321/hrvatski-istoricar-saric-kosovo-albanskom-znaci-nista-srbi-potomci-antickih-stanovnika-tog-podrucja>.

Kosovo residents at that time were Serbs (95.88 percent), while Albanians made up only 0.26 per cent of the population.

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

The article puts forward several false even notorious claims about who are the descendants of ancient inhabitants of Kosovo and the Balkans. Firstly, by referring to the similar custom of ritual bathing, it falsely claims that Serbs are descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Kosovo - of Dardanians. The ritual bathing has historically been a custom of many nations, and is still widely present nowadays. As such, the parallel between the similar custom of ritual bathing of Dardanians and Serbs can hardly be considered evidence for anything. Secondly, the article mentions the similarity between names of towns and surnames of Dardanians and those of today's Serbs as proof that Serbs are descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Kosovo. However, according to Ancient Greek historian Strabo, the Dardanians were Illyrians and he included them as part of the Illyrian world in his geography. Archaeological research has also proved that Illyrian names are predominant in western Dardania that is present-day Kosovo.

Thirdly, in addition to claiming that Serbs are descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Kosovo, the article makes a notoriously false claim that Albanians for the first time appeared in the Balkans in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, while in Kosovo even later, just before the arrival of the Turks. The Albanians, on the other hand, trace their origins back to the Illyrians who occupied the Balkans long before the arrival of the Southern Slavs in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> Serbian historians and archaeologists have long ago disputed the autochthony theory, but this opposition increased especially after the great Albanian revolt in Kosovo in 1981. Nowadays, the number of researchers who still refuse to take into consideration the many arguments supplied by different academic disciplines has shrunk, and the only researchers who deny the theory of Albanian

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<sup>16</sup> According to Dr. Robert Elsie, one of the very few real specialists on Kosovo and region, who was studying Kosovo long before it became newsworthy, Slav people settled in Kosovo during years 547–548. See Robert Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Kosovo*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Historical Dictionaries of Europe, No. 79, Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2011.

autochthony are only Serbian ones. However, there are exceptions, like the Serbian archaeologist Milutin Garašanin, who in 1955, wrote an article in the Prishtina periodical "Përparimi," in which he asserted that the Albanians are the direct descendants of the Illyrians.<sup>17</sup> In the years that followed, due to political reasons, rather than reliable scientific data, Garašanin increasingly fell into line with other Serbian researchers who denied any such descent.

The article also cites a census in Kosovo conducted by Turks in 1455 and falsely claims that at that time, with 95.88 percent Serbs were absolute majority in Kosovo, while Albanians made up only 0.26 per cent of the population. To correctly interpret the census in Kosovo conducted by Turks in 1455, it is important to mention that since 1453, the Ottoman Empire introduced the millet<sup>18</sup> system as a way of creating an institutional structure for administratively integrating increasingly growing numbers of Balkan non-Muslims into the Ottoman state. The "millet" system organized the Ottoman Empire according to religious adherence, rather than by territory, economic status, or ethnic background. Such structure was in place for the next four and a half centuries (until 1908), and it shaped not only how the Ottoman rulers viewed their subjects, but also the way those subjects viewed themselves and their neighbours.<sup>19</sup> All subjects were distributed among three millets that represented the most important existing non-Muslim faiths: (1) The Orthodox Christians who represented the single largest and economically most important non-Muslim group were headed by the patriarch of Constantinople; (2) the Jews who had great commercial and cultural significance were headed by an elected representative of the rabbinical council in Istanbul; and (3) the Armenian Christians were headed by an Armenian patriarch of Istanbul appointed by the Sultan, who represented also the empire's Roman Catholic subjects.<sup>20</sup> Obviously, the Muslims de facto constituted the fourth millet, making at the same time the Muslims of the Balkans members of the Ottoman-Turk "political nation" regardless of their

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<sup>17</sup> Milutin Garašanin, "Ilirët dhe prejardhja e tyre," "Përparimi," 1953, Nr.6, pp. 323-331. See also Slobodan Jovanović, "Jugosloveni i Albanci," "Ideje: Casopis za teoriju savremenog drustva," 1987, Nr. 5-6, pp. 181-185.

<sup>18</sup> In today's Turkish language "millet" means "nation", however, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the Ottoman Empire, the usage of the term did not focus on nation, but on religion and it basically meant religious nation.

<sup>19</sup> Payton, James R. Jr., "Ottoman Millet, Religious Nationalism, and Civil Society: Focus on Kosovo," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 26: Issues 1, Article 2, 2006, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> See Roumen Daskalov and Alexander Vezenkov eds., *Entangled Histories of the Balkans - Volume Three: Shared Pasts, Disputed Legacies*, Brill, 2015, p. 386.

mother tongue.<sup>21</sup> This means that Turks never conducted population censuses and tax defter on nationalities, but only according to religious beliefs. On the other hand, in his interpretation of series of Turkish defters from 1455 onward, Madgearu and Gordon have shown that "Kosovo... was a mosaic of Serbian and Albanian villages", while Prishtina, Prizren, and even Tetovo already had significant Albanian Muslim populations.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the article is primarily based on an interview with Goran Šarić, whom it falsely presents as a Croatian historian. However, according to Croatian sources, Šarić has been for years portraying himself as a Croatian historian, while in fact he is an ethnic Serb.<sup>23</sup> In Serbia, his articles were published presenting him as "a respected journalist Mislav Horvat, a correspondent from Zagreb. Some of his statement were also transmitted by serious media (Jutarnji list), until they realized that he was a fool and a fraud, and deleted all the texts mentioning him. Croatian media also call him "crazy and sick 'historian' who wrote such nonsense that everyone concluded that he needed medical help.<sup>24</sup> Obviously, Šarić cannot be considered a reliable and objective source, and this additionally confirms false claims made in the article.

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<sup>21</sup> Hupchick, Dennis P., *The Balkans: from Constantinople to Communism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p.133.

<sup>22</sup> Madgearu, Alexandru and Gordon, Martin, *The Wars of the Balkan Peninsula: Their Medieval Origins*, Scarecrow Press, 2008 p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Šarić has recently admitted himself that he is a Serb. See "Горан Шарић: "Ја сам Србин који верује у Бора!" (Goran Saric: "I am a Serb who believes in God!)," Vidovdan, 08 January 2021, <https://vidovdan.org/info/goran-saric-ja-sam-srbin-koji-veruje-u-boga/>.

<sup>24</sup> "Suludi hrvatski 'povjesničar' svašta je ispričao u Beogradu! Tvrdi da je Milanović porijeklom Srbin (The crazy Croatian 'historian' told everything in Belgrade! He claims that Milanović is of Serbian origin)," Maxportal, 09 December 2020, <https://www.maxportal.hr/premium-sadržaj/suludi-hrvatski-povjesnicar-svasta-je-ispricao-u-beogradu-tvrdi-da-je-milanovic-porijeklom-srbin/>.

## **Disinformation Alert 5**

**Headline:** *Poseta Vučića nije zabranjena, otkazana zbog smrti patrijarha (Vučić's visit was not banned, it was canceled due to the death of the patriarch), Tanjug, 26 November 2020.*<sup>25</sup>

The article transmits a reaction by the Director of the Office for “Kosovo and Metohija” Petar Petković to the message of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the temporary Pristina institutions, Meliza Haradinaj Stublla, that Vučić will not get permission to visit “Kosovo and Metohija” until he apologizes for the alleged genocide. Petković ironically asked whether Serbian officials should also apologize for 220,000 expelled Serbs from “Kosovo and Metohija,” for “Yellow House,” and for trafficking with Serbian organs. He underlined that no one has forbidden the President of Serbia to enter the southern province and that such a notification from Pristina does not exist, but that Belgrade canceled the visit planned last Saturday due to the death of the patriarch.

Petković explained the chronology of events, stating that he first announced a visit to “Kosovo and Metohija” last Saturday, and that after that Stublla sent a request to visit location Kiževak near Raška on the same day, where the mass grave was found. He points out that “Stublla's letter, in which she asks to go to that location, shows that she did not intend to visit it before, because that can only be approved by the competent judge of the High Court within the department for war crimes.” According to Petković she “wanted to make a political show and hit the normalization of relations and the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina.” He stated that the Office after that informed Pristina that President Vučić wanted to visit the north of “Kosovo and Metohija,” as well as five locations in Metohija, which, he says, are suspected to be mass graves of Serbs and non-Albanians. “We asked Pristina to start excavating those graves as soon as possible, but they refused.” When we raised that issue in the dialogue, the Pristina side refused to hand over the KLA archives because those documents show exactly how many such locations there are,” Petković added. Petković also said that after President Vučić's request to visit “Kosovo

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<sup>25</sup> “Poseta Vučića nije zabranjena, otkazana zbog smrti patrijarha (Vučić's visit was not banned, it was canceled due to the death of the patriarch),” *Tanjug*, 26 November 2020, <http://www.tanjug.rs/full-view.aspx?izb=608872>.

and Metohija,” the EU sent a message that tensions should be lowered due to the Serbian and Albanian public, and that both visits should be canceled.

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

### **a) Contradictory and false claims about the cancellation of Vučić's visit**

The article and the Director of the Office for Kosovo Petar Petković put forward contradictory and false claims about the cancellation of Vučić's visit to Kosovo. Initially, Petković claimed that no one has forbidden President Vučić to visit Kosovo, and that such a notification from Pristina does not exist. However, the Kosovo Minister of Foreign Affairs, Meliza Haradinaj-Stublla, has stated that the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, has not made a request to the Kosovo Liaison Office in Serbia to visit Kosovo. She has further clarified that “based on the agreement on official visits reached as part of the Brussels Dialogue on 14 November 2014, Serbian officials are obliged to make written requests about their visits to the Republic of Kosovo directly to Kosovo’s Liaison Office in Serbia at least 72 hours in advance.” Since such request was never made, Stublla considers that Vučić's visit is simply a political provocation.<sup>26</sup>

### **b) The manipulation with the number of expelled Serbs and organ trafficking**

Mr. Petkovic falsely claims that 220,000 Serbs were expelled from Kosovo after the conflict in 1999. In fact, according to the report published by Kosovo Coordination Centre of the Government of Serbia in February 2002, there were 129,474 Serbs living in Kosovo. On the other hand, according to the last Yugoslav census of 1991 there were 194,000 Serbs living in Kosovo,

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<sup>26</sup> “Haradinaj-Stublla deklaroi se Vuçiq nuk ka marrë leje për vizitën në Kosovë, e quan provokim politik (Haradinaj-Stublla states that Vučić did not receive permission to visit Kosovo, calls it a political provocation),” *Zeri*, 26 November 2020, <https://www.zeri.info/aktuale/364663/haradinaj-stublla-deklaroi-se-vuciq-nuk-ka-marre-leje-per-viziten-ne-kosove-e-uan-provokim-politik/>.



with a very unlikely trend for that number to increase during the 90's.<sup>27</sup> These figures project a number of, at most, 75,000 Serbs that left Kosovo after the war, which is certainly far less than 220,000 as claimed by the article.

On the other hand, the article again makes a false claim about the “Yellow House” and trafficking with Serbian organs. As explained several times before, accusations about human trafficking were first mentioned in Dick Marty’s Report that was published on 14 December 2010 and was presented to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 7 January 2011. The Report claimed “inhuman treatment of people and killing of prisoners with the purpose of removal and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo by the members of the KLA. However, the statement by Clint Williamson, the Chief Prosecutor of the of the European Union Special Investigative Task Force of 29 July 2014 states that prosecution of offenses related to human organ trafficking “requires a level of evidence that we have not yet secured.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the statement by the Specialist Prosecutor’s Office (SPO) of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC) of 24 June 2020 clearly states that “the crimes alleged in the Indictment involve range of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including murder, enforced disappearance of persons, persecution, and torture,”<sup>29</sup> but it does not mention human organ trafficking. Although the accusations about human organ trafficking were the main reason why the international community insisted in creating the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, it seems that ten years after such accusations first appeared, they have just disappeared.

### **c) Mass graves of missing persons are a huge concern for all sides**

The article claims that President Vučić wanted to visit five locations in “Metohija,” which were suspected to be mass graves of Serbs and non-Albanians. In addition, Petković insists on the KLA

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<sup>27</sup> For further exploration see: The Lausanne Principle: Security, Territory and the Future of the Kosovo Serbs, European Stability Initiative, June 7, 2004, [https://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi\\_document\\_id\\_53.pdf](https://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_53.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Clint Williamson, “Statement the Chief Prosecutor of the Special Investigative Task Force,” Brussels, European Union, 29 July 2014.

<sup>29</sup> “Press Statement,” Specialist Prosecutor’s Office, Kosovo Specialist Chambers, 24 June 2020.

archives being handed over to Serbia “because those documents show exactly how many [mass graves] locations there are.” Belgrade authorities and media in Serbia have regularly put forward such false claims about the existence of the alleged mass graves of Serbs and non-Albanians in Kosovo. If such claims would have been based on evidence, the international community presence in Kosovo, namely the UNMIK and EULEX, and International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) undoubtedly would initiate searching of these alleged mass grave sites.

More concretely, it is estimated that more than 7,000 persons were missing during the conflict in Kosovo in 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 remain missing from the conflict - the vast majority of them Kosovar Albanians.<sup>30</sup> 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 Kosovar Albanians to the mining complex at Trepca near Kosovska Mitrovica, where they were incinerated.<sup>31</sup>

In this regard, according to Kosovo Government’s Commission on Missing Persons, there are still 1,650 people missing out of which 1,100 are ethnic Albanians, 360 are Serbs and 200 are from other minority communities<sup>32</sup>, which represents a burning issue of transitional justice in Kosovo and normalization of relations with Serbia.

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<sup>30</sup> “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](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/kosovo_full_low.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> According to Serbian fighters and “a well-placed Serbian intelligence officer,” between 1,200 and 1,500 bodies were destroyed at Trepca. See “Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo,” 2001, p. 122.

<sup>32</sup> Milica Stojanović and Serbeze Haxhijaj “Families loose hope of finding Kosovo’s missing Serbs”, Balkan Insight, August 30, 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/08/30/families-loose-hope-of-finding-kosovos-missing-serbs/>