

# DISINFORMATION TRENDS AND NARRATIVES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

MEDIA MONITORING REPORT FOR THE PERIOD  
JULY-DECEMBER 2022



Kingdom of the Netherlands

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WESTERN BALKANS ANTI-DISINFORMATION HUB  
EXPOSING MALIGN INFLUENCES THROUGH WATCHDOG JOURNALISM

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SKOPJE 2023

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the second half of 2022, disinformation has become a global issue that has only intensified with the emergence of COVID-19 and the Russian aggression towards Ukraine. Malign forces have engaged in hyper-production of various disinformation narratives with the intention of causing disruption and confusion in the Western Balkan countries. These narratives aim to present the war as a “special operation”, justify the aggression, and spread anti-NATO and anti-EU sentiments in the region. Given the accession processes that lie ahead for the Western Balkan countries, this propaganda is particularly harmful, and monitoring of disinformation is essential to better understand its means.

This report is based on a continuous monitoring process of domestic media in North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina conducted within the framework of the regional project Western Balkans Anti-Disinformation Hub: Exposing Malign Influences through Watchdog Journalism. It presents an overview of disinformation trends and narratives, their distribution between countries, and their sources for the period of July-December 2022.

During the monitoring period, the most frequent theme for disinformation in all Western Balkan countries was “The Russian war in Ukraine.” The narratives varied, but tended to present a negative picture of Ukraine as a neo-Nazi and war profiteer that sells military aid that other countries donate. The second most frequent theme was “The West is responsible for the war,” which means “The war is actually between the USA and Russia,” alongside the narrative that “NATO expansion is to blame for Russia’s aggression.”

Disinformation narratives inspired by cyber-attacks in the region, such as “Governments in the Western Balkans are not competent to deal with the



threat,” and “Russia is responsible for the attack,” intended to show Russia as superior to the Western Balkan countries.

Nearly half of analysed articles during the monitoring period had the potential to incite violence, highlighting the intent of various trends and narratives to disrupt democratic processes and provoke conflict, particularly through the radicalization of vulnerable groups in the communities of Western Balkans.

More than half of the total number of disinformation instances analysed during the reporting period was found on Facebook, and the other half on online news sites. Online news sites also post disinformation articles on their Facebook pages, so even though the content is on the online portal, the readership is on Facebook. This underscores the importance of the work of independent fact-checkers on Facebook as they are the first line of defence against disinformation.





# INTRODUCTION

Monitoring and mapping the flow of media content between countries in the Western Balkan region is an essential step towards understanding and defining the messages that external factors aim to send. Disinformation originating from multiple sources but with similar intent spreads so freely between countries that it has the potential to disrupt democratic processes and provoke conflict through the radicalization of vulnerable groups.

Malign influence is exploiting key political developments such as referendums, elections pandemics, and the current Russian aggression on Ukraine, creating various narratives and trends only to support the aggression, blame the West for starting the war, present Ukraine as neo-Nazi, and incite anti-EU and anti-NATO sentiment. This strong pro-Kremlin propaganda has been widely republished, emulated, and disseminated throughout the region, with the aim of stopping the integration of targeted countries within the European Union and NATO, by offering Russia as an alternative.

Disinformation poses a significant threat to the security and safety of the Western Balkans, and all stakeholders must work together to prevent the dire consequences. This region has been a fertile ground for conspiracy theories, plagued by distrust in institutions and declining quality of journalism, while various malign actors, both domestic and foreign, use traditional and online media to promote their agendas and hinder democratic developments in the region.

To counter these tendencies, the Western Balkans Anti-Disinformation Hub project uses a tailored methodology. The first step is monitoring disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda by documenting suspicious contents within the online media sphere, including social networks. This is followed by the debunking of identified disinformation through fact-checking, networking,



watchdog, and investigative journalism. Finally, the results are gathered in order to generate knowledge recorded through regional database and further analysed and shared through monitoring reports, geopolitical analysis and other publications. The combination of methods increases situational awareness and public knowledge about disinformation ecosystems in the Western Balkans, providing the basis for further advocacy initiatives leading to systemic solutions.





# PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Western Balkans Anti-Disinformation Hub: Exposing Malign Influences through Watchdog Journalism project debunks the chief propaganda claims that deny the existence or minimize the importance of foreign malign influences i.e. disinformation originating from external actors in Western Balkans, providing evidence about the actual situation on the ground in the form of long-lasting public record, creating a data-driven early warning infrastructure for disinformation threats and potential harm.

The project is implemented by Metamorphosis Foundation for Internet and Society from North Macedonia with support by the Kingdom of the Netherlands. As a regional initiative, the project created a network of media outlets and investigative journalists (infrastructure) that builds fact-based public record, based on transparent methodological approach, disproving the main populist tenet of populist propaganda undercutting the democratic institutions – false equivalence.

The core network of the Western Balkans Anti-Disinformation Hub projects consists of six project partners, with Metamorphosis Foundation, the founder of the only fact-checking service Truthmeter.mk and founder of media outlets Meta.mk and Portalb.mk, as well as of the online media and digital literacy resource center CriThink.mk. The network also consists of ISAC - International and Security Affairs Centre, a think tank from Serbia; Association of Citizens Why Not (Udruga građana Zašto ne) from Bosnia and Herzegovina, founder of the fact-checking services Istinomjer.ba and Raskrinkavanje.ba; The Center for Democratic Transition from Montenegro, founder of the fact checking service Raskrinkavanje.me; Faktoje.al the fact-checking service from Albania; and Sbunker.net, a media publishing organization from Kosovo. This core network combines their various capacities and experiences to expose foreign malign influence in Western Balkans by mapping the flow of disinformation, misinformation and propaganda originating from external actors or their proxies,



aimed to further their interests that are contrary to development of democracy and the European integration of the region.

This project increases situational awareness and public knowledge about disinformation ecosystems in Western Balkans, by providing a framework of a data-driven early warning infrastructure. In doing so, the project will build synergies and also identify gaps in current anti- disinformation efforts. The produced journalistic content (fact-checking articles, in-depth and investigative stories) will systematize data collection and analysis building a base for creation of a data- driven early warning infrastructure centered around the knowledge hub.

The strong focus of the project is creating an infrastructure that will enable regular and structured information sharing, situational awareness and threat assessments, and production of data-driven reports and analysis.

Disinformation trends and narratives in the Western Balkan region the continuation of the first data-driven monitoring report, produced as a result of the work by the partner-members of the Western Balkans Anti-Disinformation Hub, achieved in the period July 2022 – December 2022.





# METHODOLOGY

The present report provides an overview of the monitoring process of domestic media in six Western Balkan countries, namely North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, from July to December 2022. The purpose of this monitoring was to identify and analyze the disinformation trends related to foreign malign influences in the region and to understand the main messages that they aim to send.

To achieve this goal, we analyzed more than 1000 disinformation articles from various media outlets, all of them containing disinformation related to foreign influences in the region. The selection of articles was made based on the availability of verifiable facts that can be checked through professional journalistic methods, and we made sure to include those with high representation on social networks.

The analysis of these articles was conducted from different aspects, including the disinformation message they intend to convey, the themes and narratives they relate to, their level of influence, sources of origin, media distribution in the region, and their potential to cause violence or radicalization.





# ANALYSIS OF MEDIA MONITORING FINDINGS



## Main themes and narratives

According to our research conducted between July-December 2022, “The Russian war in Ukraine” was the most prevalent theme for disinformation across all Western Balkan (WB) countries. This disinformation was particularly evident in Facebook communities where several narratives attempted to condemn countries that provided military aid and weapons to Ukraine. Some of the false narratives used were, “Ukraine is selling weapons for profit,” “Russia is conducting a special operation in Ukraine,” and “Russia is fighting neo-Nazis in Ukraine.” These narratives aimed to portray the countries as evil helpers and supporters of the war, which only prolongs the suffering of the Ukrainian people. A clear disinformation message that these narratives tried to send was, “WB countries should not be deceived by political leaders to donate aid to Ukraine.”

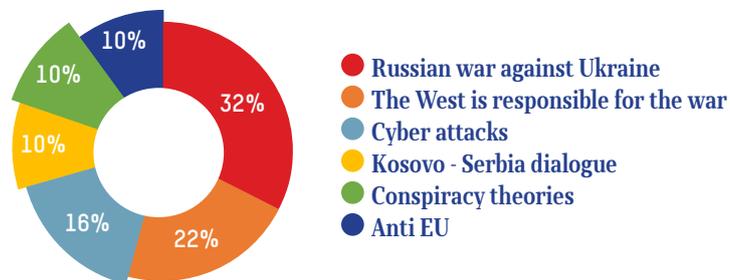
The second most frequent theme, “The West is responsible for the war,” was not as dominant in the previous reporting period. However, as the USA continued to send aid packages alongside forty-two other countries, the false narratives intensified. Some of the narratives used were, “The West is trying to start a Third World War,” “The West is hypocritical and has double standards,” and “NATO expansion is to blame for Russia’s aggression.” These narratives aimed to create fear among people by portraying the war as between the USA and Russia, not Russia and Ukraine, which could potentially escalate into a nuclear war. Disinformation media tends to mislead the public into believing that human rights and democracy have been hypocritically used as an excuse to sell the West’s own agenda in the region.



There were several cyber-attacks in the region that attempted to suspend the online work of public institutions. The narratives varied from country to country, but they had a common tendency to highlight that the governments in the Western Balkans are not capable of dealing with the threat, and if “Russia is behind the attacks,” we have underestimated its power and influence.

Other themes of disinformation were much less frequent. In the Serbian disinformation sphere, the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue aimed to represent Kosovo as the initiator of the conflict, while the Kosovo media disinformation suggested the opposite. Covid conspiracy theories are not as influential as before, but our findings revealed that the same sources previously spreading conspiracy theories are now spreading pro-Russian and anti-Western propaganda.

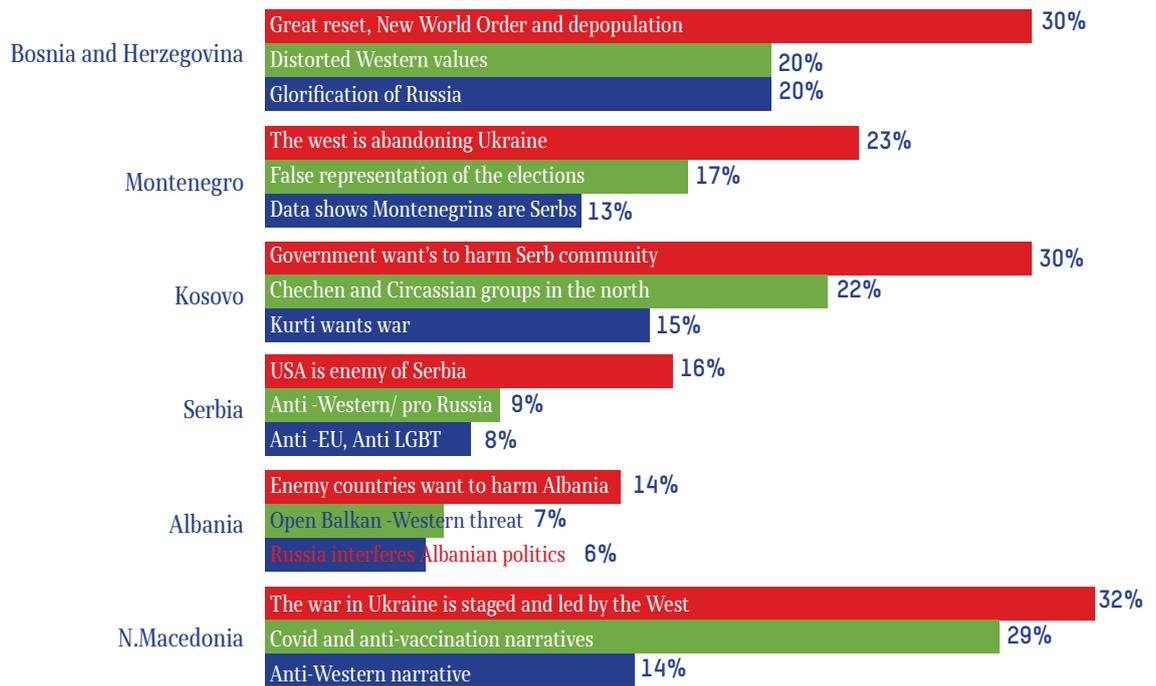
#### **PERCENTAGE REPRESENTATION OF EACH TOPICS OF DISINFORMATION**



The research shows that when comparing the most frequent narratives per country, at least one of the following narratives can be found in the top three disinformation in each Western Balkan (WB) country: anti-Western, anti-EU, anti-USA, and anti-NATO. This finding indicates that the tendency of disinformation narratives in the WB countries is to present Russia as an alternative closer in values to the traditional WB societies and to prevent the integration of targeted countries within the European Union and NATO.



**TOP THREE DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES PER COUNTRY, JULY-  
DECEMBER 2022 (PERCENTAGE FROM THE TOTAL NUMBER OF ARTICLES)**



The analysis indicates that although the previous narratives are present in the Kosovo disinformation sphere, none of them appear in the top three most frequent ones. Instead, disinformation narratives in Kosovo are focused on portraying the Kosovo government as nationalistic, unfair to the Serbian community, and willing to engage in a war.

**Articles that have potential to cause  
violence or radicalization**

Our findings reveal that almost half (47%) of the total number of analysed articles in the monitoring period have the potential to cause violence or radicalization. To



fully understand the disinformation propaganda, they serve, we must examine the narratives and their purpose not only in the context of individual countries but also in the context of the whole region and the events and processes that are happening or are about to happen.

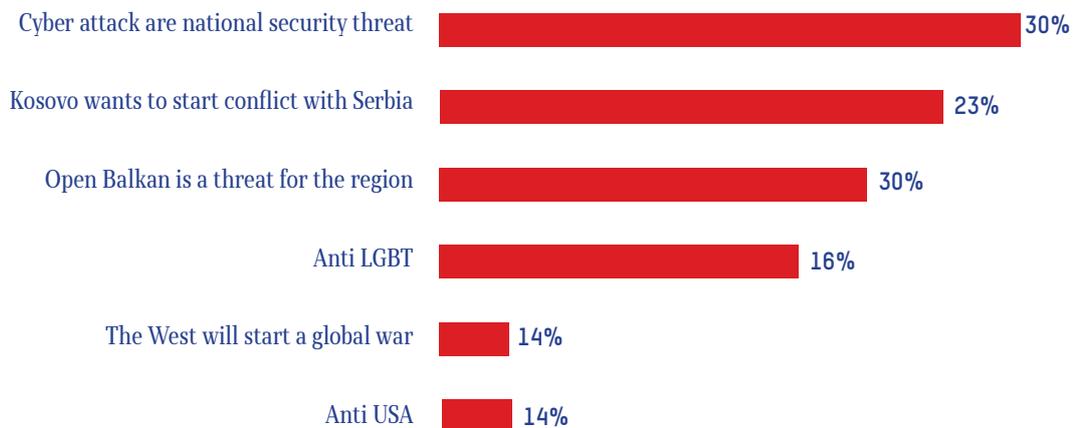
Among the narratives that may cause violence or radicalization, multiple cyber-attacks as a national security threat is by far the most dominant. Almost one third of all the articles that could cause violence or radicalization are related to this. Disinformation narratives suggest that national governments are failing to deal with the situation and claim that “Russia is behind the attacks”.

The second narrative that may cause radicalization was “Kosovo wants to start conflict with Serbia”, which was widely spread through Serbian media and then through all Western Balkan disinformation channels. They claimed that “Serbia should deal with Kosovo, inspired by the example of Russia”.

The Open Balkan initiative, on the other hand, was represented negatively in various ways, such as being seen as a pro-Russian project, a creation of the West, a project of “Greater Serbia”, and a substitute for EU membership.

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**NARRATIVES THAT HAVE POTENTIAL TO CAUSE VIOLENCE OR RADICALIZATION**  
(percentage from the total number of articles than have potential to cause radicalization)



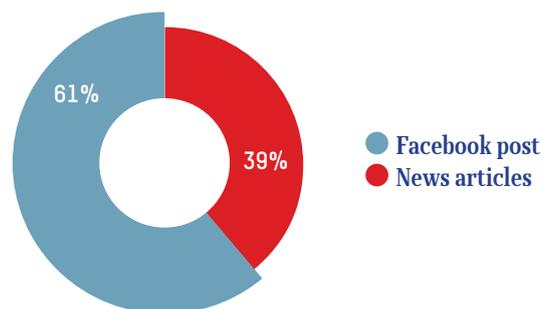


Anti-LGBT propaganda is a prevalent disinformation narrative throughout all Western Balkan countries, often accompanied by hate speech and calls for violence. In September 2022, the Euro Pride march in Belgrade was banned by the Serbian government, citing that it did not give in to pressures from Western powers.

## Sources of disinformation

More than half of the analyzed disinformation was found on Facebook, with the other half on online news portals. Facebook profiles and pages with a high number of followers often present themselves as media outlets and spread disinformation narratives and pro-Russian propaganda. The second source of disinformation is online portals, which are often affiliated with political parties and lack a master head or impressum, as well as Serbian tabloids that have a similar version in each country in the region.

### REPRESENTATION OF DISINFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA



After the EU imposed a ban on Russia news outlets from broadcasting and publishing in Europe, the Russian Embassies in the WB countries have resorted to using their Facebook and Twitter profiles to spread pro-Russian disinformation, thereby playing a crucial role in its dissemination.



# **MEDIA MONITORING REPORT ALBANIA**



Name of the organization / media:	<b>Faktoje</b>
Location:	<b>Tirana, Albania</b>
Reporting period:	<b>July<sup>1st</sup> – December 31<sup>th</sup> 2022</b>

## **Country context update**

During the period of July 2022 to December 2022, Albania experienced four significant events that produced widespread disinformation and confusion across Albanian media. Between July and October, Albania suffered several cyberattacks on its government systems, including websites, border systems, and police databases. Initially, there was a lot of speculation about the culprit since information was not available. The Albanian media primarily targeted Russia and Iran. The focus shifted to Iran after the MEK postponed a conference due to security alerts and threats from Iran. In September, the Albanian government cut diplomatic ties with Iran, leading to more attacks. The attacks continued into October, which paralyzed the border system, and hackers leaked private information through Albanian media.

Between November and December, the raising of barricades in northern Kosovo and subsequent discussions between Vucic and Kurti dominated the coverage. The media continued to predict war and catastrophe while spreading disinformation about the causes of the conflict and what was discussed between the two parties.



There has been a general rise in coverage and accusations about Russian influence in Albania over the November–December period. The opposition accused Rama of collaborating with Serbia to help Russia bypass EU sanctions. On the other hand, the ruling party has used an investigation by Mother Jones to ramp up accusations that the opposition has close ties to Russia. With elections approaching in May 2023, both parties have used media portals to weaponize these claims against each other.

Another key issue that emerged concerned the attacks by British media and the British government against Albanian immigrants. Albanian portals have used these attacks to criticize Prime Minister Rama’s government and its policies for driving young Albanians to illegal immigration.

Month (2022)	Main/key/ most impactful/ most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
July	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cyberattack against Albanian government systems</li> <li>2. Kosovo decision re. IDs sparks fears of war with Serbia</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cyberattacks on government systems led to much speculation about the culprits. Albanian media portals featured a lot of speculations about who was behind the attacks, with the main focus being on Russia and Iran. A particularly noteworthy one being a claim that hackers had demanded \$3 million to release the websites back to the Albanian government. In addition to written articles, so-called security experts (often enough with any credentials) would go on talk shows to spread not only disinformation about the culprits and what Albania should expect. <u><a href="#">Albania, prey to cyber attacks.</a></u></li> <li>2. Main narratives came as a result of the decision to impose reciprocity. Once again media portals and talk show hosts invited people to write and fear monger about a potential war. This was also fueled by statements from both governments about the other’s desire to escalate the situation. <u><a href="#">Why war warnings between Kosovo and Serbia are unwelcome</a></u></li> </ol>





Month (2022)	Main/key/ most impactful/ most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
August	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coverage of cyberattacks continued</li> <li>2. Kosovo decision re. IDs sparks fears of war with Serbia (continued)</li> <li>3. Russian spies in Albania</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Speculation about cyberattacks continued, with Iran being the main focus given also that a conference by MEK was postponed following a security warning regarding Iran from the US embassy. Albanian media continued to spread information from a website called Homeland Justice which claimed to have private data acquired during the hacking. <a href="#">Did hackers also take control of sms server or SMS Server functions that e-Albania uses?</a> <a href="#">Fake news of missile attack on mujahedeen camp recycled by British media.</a></li> <li>2. Fears about war with Serbia also continued. In addition, the deal reached between the two countries had Albanian media speculating that Serbia had recognized Kosovo's independence. <a href="#">Why war warnings between Kosovo and Serbia are unwelcome Serbia drops Kosovo recognition card whenever final agreement is discussed</a></li> <li>3. The presence of two Russian spies near a weapons factory led to much speculation about Russia wanting Albania's and NATO's army secrets. It also caused fear about the war in Ukraine reaching Albania. <a href="#">"Agents" at Gramsh plant, authorities downplay allegations of Russian interference</a></li> </ol>





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September	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Albania cuts diplomatic ties with Iran</li> <li>2. Albania government suffers multiple cyberattacks</li> <li>3. Russian political influence in Albania</li> <li>4. Plan to kill Albin Kurti</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Albania cutting ties with Iran led to speculation in print and TV about Iran retaliating and Iranian diplomats fighting with Albanian police.</li> <li>2. In September, there were multiple cyber-attacks on Albania’s government websites, border system and police databases. Once again there was much speculation about the origin, what hackers want and what this means for Albania’s security with several analysts and outlets predicting war, more cyberattacks and other forms of fearmongering, including a supposed attack on the Prime Minister.</li> </ol> <p><u><a href="#">Iran’s false retaliation after diplomatic relations cut off</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">No alarm over Iran’s physical elimination of Rama</a></u></p> <p>Finally, a report by the US magazine Mother Jones found out that Russia had donated money to Albania’s main opposition party. Two weeks before Faktoje published an article <u><a href="#">The Russian lobby file, two years of procrastination in the justice system and in the end Basha was forgotten</a></u> that brings an analysis of how the evidence collected for 2 years by the prosecutor’s office, with the accused former head of PD Lulzim Basha and two other party officials, was not enough to shed light on the so-called “Russian lobby file”.</p> <p>This led to much speculation about who had been the recipient of that money, with various factions of the party pointing the finger at each other. There were even conspiracy theories that it was Prime Minister Edi Rama himself who had orchestrated the whole affair to undermine the opposition.</p>





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October	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Albanian media continue to cover the aftermath of the cyberattacks, especially data dumps on the Homeland Justice website concerning sensitive information.</li> <li>2. Prime Minister Rama's speech on the Dick Marty report and opposition's ties to Russia.</li> <li>3. Deadline for agreement on license plates between Kosovo and Serbia, and violence in northern Kosovo.</li> <li>4. Albanian immigration to the UK and coverage by British tabloids.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Albanian media continued to spread unverified claims about the cyberattacks from Iran, including the website Homeland Justice which argues that they have sensitive information about the Albanian government. It is unclear how much of this is true, their sources, and what the Albanian government is doing about it, which leaves space for speculation. Furthermore, there were claims that Iran would retaliate, fears of potential attacks, and even opposition politicians claimed that Rama was doing this on purpose to hide his own issues. We have written a broader analysis of this topic <a href="#">Albania and neighbouring countries prey to cyber attacks</a> <a href="#">Fake news of missile attack on mujahedeen camp recycled by British media.</a></li> <li>2. Prime Minister Edi Rama gave a speech to the Council of Europe in October where he slammed the Dick Marty report which accuses former Kosovo Liberation Army leaders of being organ traffickers. The so-called Dick Marty report has been used by both the ruling Socialist party and the opposition of accusing the other of not standing with Kosovo. The ruling party has tried to depict the opposition as being in Russia's pocket through their support of the Dick Marty report when it was voted while the opposition was in power. We are working to debunk this.</li> <li>3. As the deadline for a new agreement on license plates loomed near, speculations about tensions and conflict in northern Kosovo are once again the subject of many articles. As usual, the incendiary tone of these articles does much harm, portraying the north as an area under constant conflict and the future as harboring a potential war. <a href="#">Serbia drops Kosovo recognition card whenever final agreement is discussed</a></li> <li>4. More recently, the question of Albanian men migrating to the UK through boats have become a major point of contention, with Rama calling the coverage xenophobic, while Albanian media portals have turned the spotlight on Rama's policies and the way they are driving what has been described as a mass exodus. There have been a lot of translations of articles from the British tabloids, with no care for their truthfulness or accuracy. <a href="#">Tabloid publication of 'copy-paste' titles is echoing anti-immigrant propaganda in Britain</a></li> </ol>





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November	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clashes and various forms of disinformation about Kosovo and Serbia, including that Kosovo wants to exterminate Kosovo-Serbs and Serbia is influenced by China and Russia.</li> <li>2. UK demonization of Albanian immigrants</li> <li>3. Iranian hackers dump sensitive information raising concerns about Albania's national security.</li> <li>4. Albanian opposition is financed by Russia</li> </ol>	<p>Regarding Kosovo and Serbia, the main sources were a combination of statements by officials (such as Serbia's Kosovo Office Petar Petkovic, or even the cabinet of Prime Minister Kurti). The rest was a matter of Albanian media portals running away with statements unchecked and without context. We have debunked several of these narratives <a href="#">here</a>, <a href="#">here</a>, <a href="#">here</a>, and <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>The demonization of Albanian immigrants and the spread of disinformation about how many Albanians are reaching British shores and how they are getting there originated from British tabloids like the Daily Mail and the Sun. Albanian portals usually translated and spread their coverage without double-checking their veracity. We have debunked these claims <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>Information about Iranian hackers and what data they have stolen originates mostly from a website called Homeland Justice which is both unverified and dangerous. We debunked the origins and role of Homeland Justice in a specific piece <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>Rumors about the Albanian opposition being financed by Russia have swirled thanks to two investigations by Mother Jones. Nevertheless, the source of the disinformation has not been Mother Jones but rather Albanian political parties that have used the information and speculation to their political benefit, throwing the blame at each other about who is receiving money and is being influenced by Russia. We have talked about this in a piece <a href="#">about</a> Russian lobbying and Albanian politics.</p>





Month (2022)	Main/key/ most impactful/ most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
December	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Barricades in northern Kosovo and agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, including claims about Serbia inciting violence among Kosovo Serbs and fears of another war.</li> <li>2. US Ambassador to Albania at odds with Albanian Prime Minister. Opposition accuses Albanian Prime Minister of Violating sanctions against Russia.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As barricades began to be erected in northern Kosovo, Albanian media created an atmosphere of uncertainty and war, predicting another armed conflict. They also speculated about the kind of deal that Kosovo may have reached with Serbia, including deals about the association of Serb-majority municipalities. We have debunked several of these narratives <a href="#">Who rings the bells of war in Kosovo?, Kurti denies existence of secret agreements between Kosovo and Serbia,</a></li> <li>2. Albanian media has been awash with various speculations about US ambassador to Albania Yuri Kim and her relationship to Prime Minister Edi Rama. After Albania’s Minister of Foreign Affairs mentioned that Kim’s tenure was coming to an end and she must be replaced, Albanian media brewed with speculations that the statement was a breach of diplomatic protocol. Some outlets in particular claimed that Rama’s government, through this statement which intimates they will try to replace her, is trying to put pressure on Kim so she won’t interfere in the election of the new head for the Special Prosecution against Organized Crime and Corruption, an organization backed by the US to reform the Albanian judicial system.</li> <li>3. Based on an investigation by a Montenegrin newspaper, several outlets have accused Prime Minister Edi Rama of colluding with Serbia to help Russia bypass the sanctions imposed by the European Union. The article states that Belgrade and Tirana have also used the territory of Montenegro to break these sanctions, helping thousands of tons of grain and chemical fertilizer move from Port of Durrës towards Serbia through Montenegro and vice versa. The opposition jumped onto these claims and tied them to the Open Balkan project, which they have often proclaimed to be against and described as a Pro-Russia and pro-Serbia endeavor. <a href="#">Albania, Serbia, Montenegro not breaking sanctions against Russia</a></li> </ol>



# **MEDIA MONITORING REPORT BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**



Name of the organization / media:	<b>UG Zastone/CA Why Not</b>
Location:	<b>Sarajevo</b>
Reporting period:	<b>July 1<sup>st</sup> – December 31<sup>th</sup> 2022</b>

## **Country context update**

The media landscape in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) remained a fertile ground for disinformation and manipulative reporting on the Russian aggression on Ukraine. The RS public broadcaster, private media, and anonymous outlets continued to report from the Russian perspective, without criticizing the actions of Russia in Ukraine, and uncritically echoed the information provided by state-owned Russian media, such as Sputnik Srbija and RT Balkan.

From September to October 2022, the focus of disinformation and manipulation shifted somewhat to the General Elections in BiH and the accompanying pre-election campaign, which took place on October 2nd, 2022. The opposition parties and candidates in the BiH entity of Republic of Srpska (RS) were the primary targets of disinformation during this election campaign. Many false claims against the RS opposition were published by public broadcasters, newspapers, web portals, and anonymous media, accusing them of working with Sarajevo and being paid by foreigners to destroy RS. Despite being debunked by fact-checking organizations and official institutions, some of these false claims were republished in disinformation narratives aimed at destroying RS.



In November, disinformation related to the 2022 General Elections in BiH and the ensuing political turmoil that led to protests in Banja Luka and Sarajevo were observed. The opposition parties in RS were still the main targets of disinformation, with false claims that they were working to destroy RS institutions and were advised to do so in a meeting with the US and UK Embassies. Furthermore, long-standing disinformation narratives that foreign countries were planning to arrest or kidnap RS President Milorad Dodik continued to linger in the media space, despite being proven false over time.

Month (2022)	Main/key/most impactful/most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
July	Disinformation and conspiracy theories related to the genocide in Srebrenica narratives, while anti-vaccination conspiracy theories persisted.	During July, at the time around the main annual commemoration in Srebrenica, many Serbian media are publishing disinformation about the events, judicial proceedings and determined fact regarding the genocide in Srebrenica which occurred in 1995. <a href="#">Tabloid misleading with court verdicts for Srebrenica genocide</a>
August	Re-emergence of narratives that Putin is removing biological weapons laboratories	Since the invasion on Ukraine began, many media claimed that the USA was running laboratories for biological weapons in Ukraine. Such claims were denied many times, only to frequently re-emerge once in a while. <a href="#">Putin is not removing biological weapons labs in Ukraine</a>
September	Global reset of currencies"	Claims that 209 nations are taking part in the global reset of currencies emerged on social media. It is further claimed that the "new global quantum system initiated the integration with the "Global financial system" on midnight, 31 August. <a href="#">Neither the U.S. election has been annulled, nor is there a "fine" underway.</a>





Month (2022)	Main/key/most impactful/most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
October	Independent International Commission of Inquiry for Ukraine	In the articles of some media about the report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry for Ukraine, the cases of war crimes committed by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine were completely omitted, and only the cases committed by Ukraine were presented. <a href="#">Manipulative reporting on the investigation of the Independent International Commission on Ukraine</a>
November	Rockets falling on Poland	Some local media reported in an unprofessional manner regarding the fall of the rockets in Poland, unconfirmed information were presented as undisputable facts. <a href="#">Media reporting about crash rocket in Polish from unverified accusations to apocalyptic conspiracy theories</a>
December	Russian Draft Resolution on Combating the Glorification of Nazism	Media in BiH and the region reported on the adoption of the Russian Draft Resolution on Combating the Glorification of Nazism, with some of them subtly accusing the countries which voted against the mentioned Russian Resolution. <a href="#">Tendentious coverage of Russia's "anti-Nazi" resolution at the UN</a>





# MEDIA MONITORING REPORT **KOSOVO**



Name of the organization / media:	<b>Sbunker</b>
Location:	<b>Pristina</b>
Reporting period:	<b>July 1<sup>st</sup> – December 31<sup>th</sup> 2022</b>

## Country context update

During the period under review, the main topic of interest for media outlets in Kosovo, both in Albanian and Serbian, was the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia. Our team identified and debunked a number of articles originating from Serbia whose primary objective was to spread fear among the Serbian population, especially in the north of Kosovo. The Kosovo government's decision to enforce reciprocity with Serbia on license plates and ID cards led to Serbs setting blockades at the main roads towards border points of Jarinje and Bërnjak. Belgrade officials and members of the Serbian List speculated on the situation, describing the government's decision as an attack and pressure on the Serbian population. Many even mentioned "a possible war" as a measure for "the protection of Serbs in Kosovo" and to prevent "the ethnic cleansing campaign."

On August, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 11 citizens were injured, and several cars of citizens and Kosovo Police were damaged during the unrest. After the tensions in the north of Kosovo, Serbian officials claimed that a group of Chechens and Circassians were staying in Kosovo, whose task was "to eliminate armed Serbs in the north of Kosovo" and "recruit potential soldiers to fight in Ukraine." These claims were denied by Kosovo authorities. Our team, as well as no other serious media, found any evidence to support these claims, indicating that it was pure disinformation.



In other cases, Serbian media published false claims that “a convoy of cars of the Kosovo Security Force (FSK) passed through Zubin Potok,” a city in the north of Kosovo. This claim was not substantiated and was not supported by any reliable source of information.

There was also news regarding other issues. For example, fake news circulated about the number of people infected with COVID-19, and false information with supposed exact dates/months for visa liberalization for Kosovo. Our team encountered unverified news regarding a statement by foreign politicians/diplomats linked with Kosovo, such as Turkish President Erdogan, and disinformation regarding an alleged “statement” by the Ambassador of the USA to Kosovo, Jeffrey M. Hovenier, that was widely re-shared.

Month (2022)	Main/key/most impactful/most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
July	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Misleading headlines about the “long-awaited agreement” between Kosovo and Serbia.</li> <li>3. Kosovo authorities denounce Russia’s claim of ‘mercenaries killed from Kosovo’ as misinformation</li> <li>3. Serbian officials on a disinformation campaign for Kosovo Serbs.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. After almost every political agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, various Facebook pages, unknown websites, - but with a large number of followers and shares, - proceed to misinterpret the news and misinforming the public opinion. This was the case also with the recent Kosovo-Serbia agreement. <u><a href="#">Misinformative headline about the “long-awaited agreement” between Kosovo and Serbia</a></u></li> <li>2. The Ministry of Interior of Russia has published a list, claiming that over 7,000 mercenaries from third countries have been engaged in the war in Ukraine. It is claimed that in total 156 of them are from Kosovo, and that 61 out of them have been allegedly killed. <u><a href="#">Kosovo authorities denounce Russia’s claim of ‘mercenaries killed from Kosovo’ as misinformation</a></u></li> <li>3. As with every action undertaken by Kosovo institutions that has to do with the enforcement of the law, the Government of Serbia - through the so-called “Office for Kosovo” - calls out the action of the KP as an “attack and pressure on the Serbs.” <u><a href="#">Serbian officials on a disinformation campaign for Kosovo Serbs</a></u></li> </ol>





Month (2022)	Main/key/most impactful/most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
August	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. False news on visa liberalization in Kosovo.</li> <li>2. Serbia's disinformation campaign on reciprocity restores blockades in the north.</li> <li>3. Vucic disinformers about the creation of an "anti-serbian task force" by Kurti.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Facebook page <i>Analiza</i> published an article with a misleading title "<i>The Prime Minister of the Netherlands has said 'No visa for Kosovo, they don't deserve it!'</i>" <a href="#">False News on Visa Liberalization in Kosovo</a></li> <li>2. The implementation of the decision of the Government of Kosovo on the application of reciprocity on license plates and ID cards brought back the blockades at the border points towards Jarinje and Bërnjak. Serbian officials through the Srpska Lista speculated about the situation, describing the government's decision as an attack and pressure on the Serbian population, while also mentioning the war in the name of "self-defense". <a href="#">Serbia's disinformation campaign on reciprocity restores blockades in the north</a></li> <li>3. In the northern part of Kosovo which was blocked by the Serbs, a policeman and two citizens were injured by gunfire. Less than an hour later, this piece of news was disproved by Kosovo Police (PK) via press release. <a href="#">Fake news regarding the alleged wounding of a policeman and two Serbs in the north</a></li> <li>4. Serbian officials disinformers about the reasons for the arrest of Dejan Spahic by the Kosovo Police". During an interview for Serbian public television - RTS, President Vučić stated that the driver of the ambulance was not arrested by ROSU units, but by the so-called Special Intelligence Agency. He speculated further saying that this force was created and is led by the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Albin Kurti. <a href="#">Vucic misinforms about the creation of an "anti-Serbian task force" by Kurti</a></li> </ol>





Month (2022)	Main/key/most impactful/most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
September	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The fact-free claim of "Alo" that Albin Kurti is financing the film "I and Milosevic".</li> <li>2. Misleading news about the interview of the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Pristina.</li> <li>3. Vucic's disinformation about the Chechen and Circassian groups in northern Kosovo.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>"I and Milosevic"</i> is a Kosovar cinematographic project, and certain Serbian media have claimed that the purpose of this film is to incite hatred towards Serbs. <a href="#">The fact-free claim of "Alo" that Albin Kurti is financing the film "I and Milosevic"</a></li> <li>2. The Facebook page "Specialja" misquoted the interview of the UK Embassy, claiming that they stated: <i>"We will make life worse for corrupt politicians in Kosovo as well."</i> <a href="#">Disorienting news about the interview of the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Pristina</a></li> <li>3. After the recent tensions in the north of Kosovo Aleksandar Vucic, claims that a group of Chechens and Circassians had stayed in Kosovo. Their task was "to eliminate armed Serbs in the north of Kosovo and to recruit potential soldiers to fight in Ukraine". <a href="#">Vucic's misinformation about the Chechen and Circassian groups in northern Kosovo</a></li> </ol>
October	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fake news about the numbers of people infected with COVID-19</li> <li>3. Ambassador Rohde's statement on the visa liberalization date is misinterpreted</li> <li>4. MP Abrashi disseminated an unverified document claiming Serbia is "mobilizing".</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The online website masquerading as a medium "todaynews80.com", published an article where it claimed that in Kosovo there is an increase in cases of people infected with Covid-19. <a href="#">Fake news about the numbers of people infected with COVID-19</a></li> <li>2. The circulation of false information with supposed exact dates/ months for visa liberalization for Kosovo is spreading and circulating with a statement by the German Ambassador Rohde. <a href="#">Ambassador Rohde's statement about the visa liberalization date is misinterpreted</a></li> <li>3. The Vetëvendosje (LVV) MP Artan Abrashi has disseminated an unverified document on his Facebook account, claiming the mobilization of Serb Armed Forces. <a href="#">MP Abrashi disseminated an unverified document claiming Serbia is "mobilizing"</a></li> </ol>





Month (2022)	Main/key/most impactful/most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
November	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unverified news regarding a statement by President Erdogan</li> <li>Disinformation regarding to a Hovenier's statement</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unverified news regarding a statement by President Erdogan <a href="#">Unverified news regarding a statement by President Erdogan</a></li> <li>An attempt to disinform the public about allegedly a "statement" by the ambassador of the United States of America in Kosovo, Jeffrey M. Hovenier. <a href="#">Disinformation regarding a Hovenier statement</a></li> </ol>
December	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Claims of some media in Serbia that "Kurti wants war".</li> <li>Claims of some media in Serbia regarding an attack in Ujmani.</li> <li>Claims of Serbian politicians and some media that there are arrests and plans to kill Serbs in Kosovo.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Certain pro-media government in Serbia misinformed about the reasons that led to the failure to reach an agreement on license plates. "Novosti" has written that Kurti "deliberately failed the agreement" in order "to occupy the north with police forces". Kosovo officials categorically denied these claims. <a href="#">Media claims in Serbia that "Curtis wants war"</a></li> <li>Media in Serbia have speculated about the motives for setting up the barricades and the activities undertaken by the Kosovo authorities. <a href="#">Media in Serbia blasted over "Ujmani attack"</a></li> <li>Srpska Lista and media in the Serbian language have continued to spread disinformation raising allegations of possible arrests of former policemen and plans to murder Serbs who are standing at the barricades. These claims were denied by Kosovo officials. <a href="#">Serbian media and politicians denied arrests and planning to kill Serbs</a></li> </ol>



# **MEDIA MONITORING REPORT MONTENEGRO**



Name of the organization / media:	<b>CDT</b>
Location:	<b>Podgorica</b>
Reporting period:	<b>July 1<sup>st</sup> – December 31<sup>th</sup> 2022</b>

## **Country context update**

During the monitoring period, Montenegro held local elections. Despite expectations of a large-scale disinformation campaign, this was not the case. However, there were some isolated incidents of false polls being published, including one that was falsely attributed to CDT, and some minor disinformation was spread on the day of the election. The same disinformation narratives that have been seen in other countries were also present in Montenegro, including those related to the war in Ukraine, Russian sanctions, and vaccination.

Following the election, President Đukanović did not sign off on the new prime minister-designate, which led to continued political games in Parliament. The parliamentary majority then voted to amend the President's bill, aimed at stripping the President of some of his powers, which was considered unconstitutional. This move deepened the crisis with the Constitutional court and the election of judges, ultimately leading to a halt in the transition of local governments after the local elections.



Month (2022)	Main/key/ most impactful/ most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
July	European countries are against sanctions on Russia, two new NATO members, Nazi Ukrainians all over	Russian propaganda basically uses all the means necessary to discredit Kiev and to justify its aggression <a href="#">People with Nazi tattoos are not Ukrainian refugees</a> <a href="#">Sweden and Finland have not yet joined NATO.</a>
August	Spanish prime minister didn't say "Kosovo is Serbia", in the wake of war in Ukraine, US president Biden under attack	West is leaving Zelensky on his own, Biden is old and senile and he can't help, Pedro Sanchez misinterpreted during his visit to the western Balkans <a href="#">Is the U.S. really leaving Ukraine and Zelensky?</a> <a href="#">New level of falsehood: The President of the United States is not dead</a> <a href="#">Spain's prime minister did not say "Kosovo is Serbia"</a>
September	Russian propaganda against Ukraine continues (biolabs, sanctions) tensions in Kosovo...	There was many information about western countries abandoning sanctions against Russia, which is not true, and that Montenegro is banning Russians from entering. Also, there was an attack on a Serbian woman in Kosovo, unrelated to the tensions, but propaganda said it was <a href="#">Hungary has not lifted sanctions on Russia.</a> <a href="#">Montenegro does not prohibit Russians from entering the country</a> <a href="#">There is no evidence that the attack on an elderly woman in North Mitrovica was ethnically motivated</a>
October	October was dominated by disinformation about local elections and things related. Other than that, there were disinformation about Ukraine, vaccines and "evil" west.	In the month of the local elections in Montenegro there were several cases of false polls and other disinformation created to mislead people. <a href="#">False research attributed to CDT</a> <a href="#">SNP publishes non-existent opinion poll</a> <a href="#">Fake news on Telegram: Ipsos did not do research in Budva</a>





Month (2022)	Main/key/ most impactful/ most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
November	Most impactful instances were regarding to the divisions in Montenegrin society, also as war in Ukraine	Pro-Serbian media continued to spread their propaganda, while the same instances shared disinformation about war in Ukraine, with emphasis on division of the country, by the western partners. <a href="#">Census without count of population: Raković's unfounded national count</a> <a href="#">There is no evidence that Djukanovic threatened minorities in Bar</a> <a href="#">Hungary and Poland do not divide western Ukraine</a>
December	Dominant narratives in December were related to WC in Qatar, vaccines and war in Ukraine.	Many stories were made up about world football championship in Qatar, vaccines saw a comeback, while the Ukraine remains the focal point. <a href="#">Fake news: Ukrainians did not spread Nazism in Qatar</a> <a href="#">Siniša Mihajlović died of leukemia, not from a vaccine</a>



# MEDIA MONITORING REPORT NORTH MACEDONIA



Name of the organization / media:	Metamorphosis
Location:	Skopje
Reporting period:	July 1 <sup>st</sup> – December 31 <sup>th</sup> 2022

## Country context update

During the period of July to December, the primary topic of disinformation related to foreign malign influences in North Macedonia was the War in Ukraine. Disinformation sources sought to portray Ukraine as neo-Nazi and a puppet of the West. Various misleading representations of Zelensky as a neo-Nazi, member of the LGBT community, and anti-Christian were part of the disinformation narratives that pervaded the media sphere.

In August, the Ministry of Defence of Republic of North Macedonia started donating military aid to Ukraine (which included providing unused airplanes and tanks according to Soviet standards) which disinformation sources used as an opportunity to publish satirical articles about the situation, along with false claims that these planes were actually donated from Russia to North Macedonia during the 2001 armed conflict, aimed to stir inter-ethnic tensions between Macedonians and Albanians by invoking negative emotions related to these historic events.

In the following months, the disinformation narratives shifted to anti-NATO and anti-USA, accusing them not only of starting the war in Ukraine but also of



planning to initiate a Third World War by activating nuclear weapons. In December, false representation of a poll that measured the EU and NATO sentiments of citizens in the country pushed an anti-EU narrative.

Throughout the period, COVID-19 and anti-vaccination narratives, often promoted by local actors related to pro-Kremlin fringe political parties, were also debunked. The nature of these narratives didn't change much in comparison to the previous reporting period, as they continued to urge the public to refuse vaccinations, especially when it came to children.

Month (2022)	Main/key/most impactful/most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
July	Nazism in Ukraine was dominant topic of disinformation, with anti-EU narratives, while anti-vaccination conspiracy theories persisted.	<p>Russian propaganda tends to present not only Ukraine as neo-Nazi, but also all European countries that support it.</p> <p><u><a href="#">Comparisons made between Zelensky and Hitler are unfounded and manipulative</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">Photo abused to accuse EU of allege fascism</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">No medical evidence that covid vaccines cause blood clotting</a></u></p>
August	<p>Disinformation about the planes that N. Macedonia donated to Ukraine.</p> <p>American influence in Ukraine as part of the narrative that the war is between USA and Russia.</p>	<p>Russia destroyed the planes that N. Macedonia donated to Ukraine, this planes were donated by Russia to N. Macedonia both of this claims are actually false.</p> <p>American multinational companies benefit from the war in Ukraine and the reason for the war is USA interest was debunked many times in the previous months.</p> <p><u><a href="#">It is not true that Russia has already crashed the planes we donated to Ukraine</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">It is not true that Russia donated fighter jets to N. Macedonia in 2001</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">It is not true that three US firms bought huge agricultural land in Ukraine</a></u></p>





Month (2022)	Main/key/most impactful/most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
September	Dominant disinformation for this month were about the great power of Russia and anti-LGBT narratives that included hate speech.	<p>Russia did not destroy 830 Ukrainian combat vehicles in a day and Ukraine is not responsible for the killings in Izium</p> <p>Euro pride was held this month resulting with strengthening of anti LGBT narrative alongside with claims that Zelensky participated in it.</p> <p><u><a href="#">It is not true that the Russians announced the destruction of 830 Ukrainian combat vehicles in one day</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">Manipulation of dates inaccurately claims Ukraine is to blame for mass graves in Izium</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">Photoshopped photo lies to the public that Zelensky participated in a gay parade</a></u></p>
October	Anti-NATO narratives and disinformation about American plans for detonating nuclear bomb in Ukraine were dominant this month.	<p>Partnership with NATO being represented as bad for N. Macedonia. News articles about American army losing the war in Ukraine even though they never send soldiers to fight there, alongside with false statements that America is planning to activate nuclear bomb in Ukraine.</p> <p><u><a href="#">It is not true that partnership with NATO means a weak economy and a weak army</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">Misinformation is that a US military has been destroyed in Ukraine</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">Post misinforms America plans to detonate nuclear bomb in Ukraine</a></u></p>
November	False representation of Ukraine and anti-vaccination narratives	<p>False representation of Ukraine as neo-Nazi and initiator of the third world alongside with accusation that the incident in Poland.</p> <p><u><a href="#">Fake video claims Ukrainians in Qatar arrested for using Nazi salutation</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">Misleading accusation that Ukraine wants to provoke world war three</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">It is not true that the Poles are dying for Ukraine, and Ukraine deliberately shelled Poland</a></u></p>
December	<p>Misleading representations of Zelensky as Nazi and anti-Orthodox. were dominant narratives for this month.</p> <p>Fake news about the poll that shows the EU sentiment in the country.</p>	<p>Zelensky bans churches and tries to punish Christians. False parallel between the President of Ukraine and Adolf Hitler.</p> <p>Fake news about the poll that shows growing trend of anti-EU sentiment in N. Macedonia.</p> <p><u><a href="#">Missed context: It is tendentious and purposeful to claim that Zelensky bans churches</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">It is not true that more than 70 percent of Macedonians are against the EU and NATO</a></u></p>



# MEDIA MONITORING REPORT **SERBIA**



Name of the organization / media:	<b>International and Security Affairs Centre - ISAC</b>
Location:	<b>Belgrade</b>
Reporting period:	<b>July 1<sup>st</sup> – December 31<sup>th</sup> 2022</b>

## Country context update

During the July to December 2022 reporting period, four significant issues dominated media publications and public discourse. Notably, the usual regional fest of hatred reserved for each July since the massacre in Srebrenica in July 1995 did not occur. The first issue was the War with Kosovo narrative, which is not a new trend, but was present in the majority of Serbian media during August 2022, even in some that are not government-oriented. Political elites in Serbia (and in Kosovo) used the predictions of an impending war with Kosovo (to start on 1 September 2022) as a “smoke screen” to hide their unwillingness and inability to solve critical life issues of population in both Serbia and Kosovo, such as all-level corruption, high crime levels, poverty, low levels of democracy, etc.

The second issue is tied to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and is part of a large Russian media campaign. A new and growing narrative is threatening EU nations with certain “freezing” during winter 2022-2023 due to the lack of Russian gas and oil. Combined with serious western analyses that the EU will go through a tough period due to the immediate need for diversification of oil and gas suppliers and an unavoidable increase in inflation, as well as possible stagflation, is providing a stable supply of narrative “ammunition” for those claiming that opposing Russia is a grave mistake and that Russian victory in



Ukraine is the only possible scenario, which will cause the downfall of both the EU and NATO.

The third major narrative was tied to the organization of the EuroPride 2022 event, which was entrusted to Belgrade as the city host and took place from 12th to 18th September. This event drew a lot of attention from the media and the public and clearly showed a high level of mistrust and animosity towards the LGBT+ population in a large percentage of the Serbian population. The media narratives targeting the LGBT+ population were additionally spiced by Russian propaganda (often quoting Russian anti-LGBT laws) and loathing towards the collective West - the major observation being that the promotion of LGBT+ rights is forced on Serbia by the West.

The fourth issue was a second wave of Russian narratives tied to the ongoing war in Ukraine, which came later in the year. It was a clear attempt by pro-Russian and Russian-controlled media to mitigate losses on the battlefield in Ukraine by flooding the media space with strong pro-Russian messages and assurances of an impending Russian victory.

Month (2022)	Main/key/most impactful/most important disinformation instances for this month (regardless if they were debunked or not)	Short explanation, flow/origin and impact, incl. links to debunking articles if available.
July	<p>As usually during July in Serbia major disinformation are about massacre in Srebrenica in July 1995.</p> <p>The only difference this year are comparisons to what is happening in Ukraine (e.g. the West is falsely trying to portrait Russians as war criminals same as they did with Serbs in Bosnia and in Kosovo). Combined with anti EU narratives and narratives on genocide efforts of Kosovo government towards Serbs for years turn July in one of the strongest anti – Western months in Serbia.</p>	<p>In attempts to downplay involvement and scope of massacre in Srebrenica every July, especially after 2017 when gen. Ratko Mladic was convicted in the ICTY in Hague, there is abundant of disinformation news, news that attempt to deflect the guilt and pure fake news on massacre and events on memorial graveyard in Potočari, Srebrenica. It should be mentioned that there is also several books that “debunk lies” about Srebrenica portraying the whole affair as part of constant efforts of the West to destroy Serbs and the Orthodox Christianity (“Сребреница - службена лаж једне епохе”; “Zabranjena istina o Srebrenici”; „СРЕБРЕНИЦА: Лаж и подвала српском народу”; etc.).</p> <p>This narrative is highly dangerous and contributes to the obstruction of reconciliation between the peoples of the Western Balkans, while representing one of the foundations of any future conflicts in BiH.</p> <p><u><a href="#">What verdict says it was genocide?</a></u></p>





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August	<p>Impending war with Kosovo was the major disrupting narrative in Serbian media during the August 2022. Almost all media in Serbia, including those that are not pro-government had numerous news and articles on the issue. The war was set to start on 1st September 2022, due to that being the date by which license plates on northern Kosovo had to be replaced according to the decision of the Government of Kosovo. As soon as Belgrade and Priština reached agreement to postpone such a decision <u>[Serbia-Kosovo agreement: When will it come into force and what will it mean in practice?]</u> combined with strong messages from both EU and USA that such conflict will not be tolerated this narrative quickly tuned down. But this narrative, as before, will certainly resurface, even during this year.</p> <p>The story of war was present in both Serbia and Kosovo most probably as an attempt to gain better starting position before the restart of negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina that bot EU and USA are demanding.</p>	<p>The Kosovo declaration of independence, together with unresolved issues of missing persons, war crimes and state and private property, is a major stumbling block in Serbia-Kosovo relations. All of those hard to solve issues have been abused by politicians in both Serbia and Kosovo with the goal to strengthen tensions and nationalistic sentiment, providing excellent cover for piled existential issues of peoples on both sides of the border (or separation line as it is called in Serbia).</p> <p>It is also interesting that the Serbia-Kosovo issues are now being interpreted also in light of Russia-Ukraine conflict: Russian President Mr. Vladimir Putin on more than one occasion justified Russian occupation of parts of Ukraine with NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 due to the humanitarian crises in Kosovo, while right-wing organizations in Serbia are claiming that Russia “special military operation in Ukraine” is something Serbia should copy in case of Kosovo_ <u>[Vladimir Djukanovic threatens: Serbia will be forced to embark on denazification of the Balkans]</u></p> <p>Increasing tensions between Belgrade and Pristina, strengthen by war mongering rhetoric’s is modus operandi for many politicians in both Serbia and Kosovo and is seriously harming perspective for reconciliation of Albanians and Serbs.</p>





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September	<p>As the week of EuroPride 2022 event (12th to 18th September) was coming near anti – LGBT+ narratives in Serbian media where overwhelming.</p> <p>From announcing and actually holding anti-LGBT+ protests and walks (often presented as Lity – festive religious procession in Eastern Orthodoxy) to a serious increase in homophobic statements from both media and government representatives the September 2022 was a serious setback for minority rights and rule of law in Serbia.</p>	<p>With another blatant disregard of Constitution of Republic of Serbia and numerous other legislations President of Serbia Mr. Aleksandar Vučić on 27th August 2022 said that after consultation with members of the government the decision was reached that Pride Parade is canceled:</p> <p><u><a href="#">Serbia finds out the name of Prime Minister-designate Vučić: This is our agreement, there are no frictions and quarrels in our country</a></u></p> <p>The President justified such decision with the claim that the Serbia is too busy with more important issues and problems with Kosovo – proving that Serbia has no capacity or will to deal with violent right-wing organizations that made promise that “Peder neće gradom šetati” (“A fag will not have a stroll in the city”).</p> <p>Such a statement triggered increased activities of right-wing organizations, going as far as asking for Serbia to adopt some homophobic laws as passed in Russia including church dignitary (bishop) Nikanor cast anathema on all participants of Euro Pride 2022 and Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić (she is an open lesbian).</p> <p>As previous few years Belgrade Pride was held without any significant incidents such escalation of rhetoric both of government and right-wing organizations is clear sign of level of success in foreign malign influence in Serbian society.</p>





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October	<p>The October 2022 has seen continuation of 3 major negative and false narratives: those dealing with tensions with Kosovo, those proving near fall of EU and NATO and last those, which are a clear campaign of Russia, proving that Ukraine gains on battlefield are only temporary and that Russia will soon win the war.</p> <p>We have also seen increase in using western sources in pro-Russian media as in the following example of a partially fake news:</p> <p><a href="#"><u>THE HORRORS OF WAR - GRUESOME LIQUIDATIONS OF OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME IN UKRAINE</u></a> Original text (also partially fake, as some statements in text e.g. by Anton Gerashchenko are fabricated): <a href="#"><u>How the Ukrainians are taking brutal revenge</u></a></p> <p>UK and coverage by British tabloids.</p>	<p>The tensions with Kosovo remain major source of news in Serbian media space and even as they often are not false (especially when quoting Serbian and Kosovo politicians) vast majority of such news and analyses are striving at increasing tensions and creating atmosphere of mistrust. The clear example is a song of a Serbian Bishop which was published in many of monitored media which condemns "the sale of Kosovo":</p> <p><a href="#"><u>Bishop Fotije: Kosovo is not for sale</u></a></p> <p>The near and inevitable dissolution of EU and NATO due to the economic crises caused by sanctions to Russia remains one of the popular topic in monitored media:</p> <p><a href="#"><u>News analysis "A dark forecast for Brussels: the European Union will collapse"</u></a></p> <p>Praises of Russian military technology, their soon victory in war in Ukraine as well as involvement of USA in the conflict has even increased since Russia's military failings in Ukraine:</p> <p><a href="#"><u>U.S. uses Moldova to develop biological weapons</u></a></p> <p>Pure fake news appears even in western media:</p> <p><a href="#"><u>Zelensky organized the hunt for Russians</u></a></p>





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November	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Russia-Ukraine conflict: With Ukraine victory in the strategic city Kherson the Russian media campaign was forcefully trying to prove that Russian "special military operations in Ukraine" is a continuation of Russian battle against fascism from the Second World War.</li> <li>2. Belgrade-Priština tensions: As German-France non-paper/proposal for long term normalization of Serbia-Kosovo relations is gaining support of western allies the tensions in Belgrade-Priština relations are rising</li> </ol>	<p>The Russian media campaign has intensified after withdrawal of Russian army from Kherson, trying, on the first place, to calm its domestic audience that sees this as a dangerous sign of Russian military weakness. Due to the close ties of many Serbian media to Russian portals and news agencies there is a direct spillover of this campaign in to the Serbian media space.</p> <p><a href="#">Analysis of the News „Three surprising mistakes of the West – they will have to live in a new world“</a></p> <p><a href="#">Analysis of the News „Khazin: The West is secretly negotiating with Putin, everything is reminiscent of the spring of 1945“</a></p> <p><a href="#">Report of the Bundeswehr: Germany is preparing for war with Russia</a></p> <p>The political elites of both Belgrade and Priština are, hopefully correctly, recognizing latest efforts of international community to force both sides to come to mutually acceptable terms in the form of legally binding normalization agreement. But both sides apparently believe they should make every effort to prove other side is opposed to peace and stability by inducing internal tensions.</p>





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December	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Russia-Ukraine conflict: The media campaign from previous month continued with same intensity only increasing in number of narratives painting Russia “the good guys” and the western states “the bad guys” with constant insisting that the west is not unified in its support to Ukraine</li> <li>2. Belgrade-Priština tensions: Same as in November, with incidents like arrest of Serbian former member of Kosovo police which prompted Serb on north of Kosovo to start series of protests and put blockades on the roads further pushing Priština to send its special forces (ROSU) to north of Kosovo political and causing Belgrade send request to KFOR for return of Serbian army and police to Kosovo. Kosovo’s application to EU submitted on 15. December only intensified tensions and media carnage.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The continued Russian media campaign keeps pressure on both domestic and international audience with statements from both political actors and “independent” analyst providing huge source of anti-western and pro-Russian narratives. <a href="#">Analysis of the News „Macron: US-Europe relations are facing de-synchronization</a> <a href="#">Volodin: America Turned into Sodom by Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage</a></li> <li>2. The media attention to problems between Serbia and Kosovo is as high as ever but with added hostilities towards EU, EU states and USA as enemies of Serbia pushing for Serbia’s recognition of Kosovo independence. Also, there is a renewed effort in some of media to paint president Vučić as a traitor which will “sell off Kosovo” <a href="#">Analysis of the narrative “Germany is behind Kurti’s terror”: Crisis in Kosovo and anti-Western narratives in the Serbian media</a></li> </ol>



## CONCLUSION

In the reporting period of July-December 2022, the theme of “The Russian war in Ukraine” was the most prevalent disinformation narrative in all Western Balkan (WB) countries. The narrative continues to be dominant, especially in justifying Russian aggression and portraying Ukraine as neo-Nazi. The second most frequent theme was “The West is responsible for the war,” which became more prevalent after the US continued to send military aid to Ukraine, alongside the narrative that “Ukraine is selling the donated weapons.”

Anti-Western, anti-NATO, anti-EU, and anti-USA narratives were among the top three narratives in all WB countries. These narratives aim to undermine trust in the EU, present the West and NATO as hypocritical with double standards, and hinder the integration of targeted countries within the European Union and NATO.

Disinformation narratives about cyber-attacks were used to question the cyber security of the WB countries, creating a misleading picture of “Russia’s power” and inciting fear and distrust in the governments of the region. Almost half (47%) of the total number of analyzed articles in the monitoring period had the potential to cause violence or radicalization.

Narratives such as “Kosovo plans to start a war” or “Serbia should deal with Kosovo inspired by the example of Russia” cause fear and radicalization of vulnerable groups and tensions between communities and countries. Anti-LGBT narratives were also found to cause radicalization and tensions between communities and countries, particularly when part of a larger narrative such as “Russia will help defend our conservative values from the powerful immoral West.” More than half of the total number of disinformation analyzed was found on Facebook, and the other half was on online portals.



Disinformation spreads easily on social media, and anyone with an internet connection can access it and post false claims and narratives. Online portals, in most cases without clear ownership, master head, and impressum, also post their disinformation articles on their Facebook pages, making the work of independent fact checkers on Facebook crucial in the fight against disinformation.





[antidisinfo.net/hub](https://antidisinfo.net/hub)