

DISINFORMATION TRENDS AND NARRATIVES IN THE WESTERN BALKAN REGION

MEDIA MONITORING REPORT

JULY– SEPTEMBER 2024



Kingdom of the Netherlands





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

antidisinfo.net/hub

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Monitoring conducted by the network members of the Western Balkans Anti-Disinformation Hub during the third quarter of 2024 indicates clear influence of global disinformation trends on the Western Balkans (WB), associated with big events affecting public debates. Disinformation campaigns promoting the goals of anti-democratic forces perpetrating continued in the region, with damaging narratives swirling around anti-EU/anti-West sentiments, Russia's war against Ukraine, and the long-lasting Kosovo-Serbia tense relations. Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and snap elections in Montenegro only added fuel to the fire, while anti-gender rhetoric reached a fever pitch during the Paris Olympics.

Key storyline promoted by Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) actors has not changed: the West – painted as a villain, accused of pulling the strings in the local issues of other sovereign nations. NATO or the EU memberships – framed as selling out sovereignty, while BRICS (or Russia or China) hailed as champions or 'alternatives.'

The spotlight remained on Ukraine war disinformation, even as media interest shifted all over the Olympics. The usual narratives on blaming NATO for the conflict and glorifying Russia again dredged up old, debunked claims, such as depicting Ukraine as run by neo-Nazis. Meanwhile, forced closing of "Mirëdita, dobar dan" peace festival in Belgrade or the reopening of Mitrovica's Ibar Bridge twisted provided fresh feed for anti-West conspiracies, connected to Kosovo-Serbia relations.

Narratives against gender equality hit their peak due to the many conspiracies around the Olympics. Labeling efforts to promote inclusivity and equality as "satanic," and baseless claims about athletes, like Algerian female boxer Imane Kelif being transgender, spread like wildfire. Much of this came from Russian networks, playing on cultural sensitivities to stoke division world over, affecting the traditionally socially conservative Balkan audiences.

Domestic Balkan actors related to FIMI influences also used disinformation to affect the process and outcome of municipal elections in Bosnia and snap elections in Montenegro. Fake polls and fabricated research were used to mislead voters and smear political opponents, deepening rifts in an already polarized environment.

This wave of disinformation feeds on unresolved conflicts and cultural fault lines, sowing deeper polarization, mistrust and division, and should be countered by bringing back the focus of public debate and policy making on open dialogue and the commitment to bringing stronger and resilient communities.



METHODOLOGY

This report refers to the period from July to September 2024. The Western Balkans Anti-Disinformation Hub analyzed over 500 articles and social media posts from North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Uncovering and understanding disinformation linked to foreign influences that mislead the public and weaken democratic institutions, has remained the goal of this analysis, through the use of clear and transparent methodology aligned with EU and NATO definitions. This particularly means that the analysis focused on intentionally false or misleading content, created by external and domestic actors for economic or political gain.

The Hub partner organizations teams explored key aspects of the messaging behind the disinformation and narratives as well as their sources and the regional road of information flow. The potential to incite violence or radicalization, or its power to develop further polarization, has been the primary factor that influenced the choice of articles. By diving deep into all these factors, the report sheds light on how disinformation works and the risks it poses to the region's stability and democratic development.

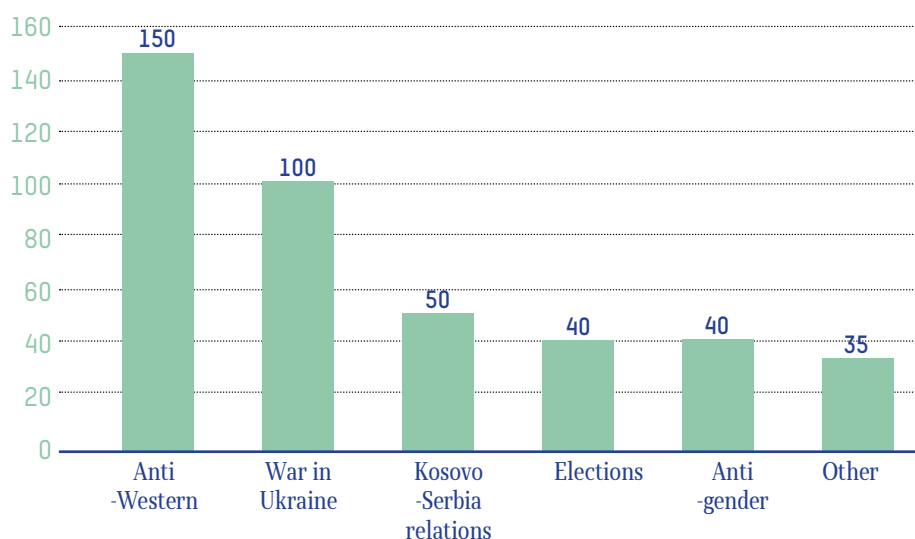




HIGHLIGHTS OF DISINFORMATION

Looking at the third quarter of 2024 globally and the big events that sparked the public debates, disinformation campaigns affecting the Western Balkans continued to promote damaging narratives swirling around anti-EU/anti-West sentiments, the war in Ukraine, and the long-lasting Kosovo-Serbia tense relations. Municipal elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and snap elections several important municipalities in Montenegro opened swirling chaos of fake polls, while anti-gender rhetoric peaked during the Olympics. Localized disinformation campaigns were targeting specific Balkan countries, influencing and shifting the public opinion in subtle but impactful ways, without having to dominate the broader discourse.

**NUMBER OF ARTICLES OF MOST DOMINANT
DISINFORMATION TOPICS, JANUARY-MARCH 2024**





Anti-West narratives with clear goal for sewing distrust against the West ran through all major topics during this period, framing the local and geopolitical events as examples of unwanted and harmful Western interference. In Serbia, such narratives were part of rhetoric by high government officials, including President Aleksandar Vučić, who accused protesters of being part of a “hybrid warfare,” allegedly orchestrated by the West to destabilize Serbia. Similarly, the Chinese authorities baselessly blamed the US nonprofit foundation National Endowment for Democracy (NED) of inciting divisions and orchestrating government overthrows around the world, including defamation of anti-disinformation organizations in Kosovo and in Serbia. In the North Macedonia public discourse, the US Embassy and by extension the USA were accused of in internal criminal and legal matters, certainly lacking facts and evidence in support to the accusations. These unfounded narratives aimed at delegitimizing the Embassy’s role but also imposing a broader story: portraying the West as the manipulative driver that undermines the Balkan sovereignty. Aligning with NATO or the EU was framed as surrendering autonomy, with Western powers depicted as pursuing geopolitical dominance over the region.

Targeting gender equality, LGBTQ+ representation and inclusivity in general, depicting them as direct treats to traditional values is widespread tactics used by the Kremlin and its proxies to sow further divisions within targeted societies, by inciting anger and outrage among conservative audiences. This trend has peaked the dissemination of anti-gender disinformation during the Olympics in Paris, serving as base for the “anti-woke” narratives. They range from declaring the event of being “satanic” to false accusations of being transgender against female boxer Imane Kelif. Originating from Russian networks, these psyop campaigns exploited cultural sensitivities, and were used for amplification of further division and anti-Western messaging both in EU as well as the Western Balkans.

PERCENTAGE OF MOST COMMON ANTI-WESTERN SUB-NARRATIVES IN JULY- SEPTEMBER 2024

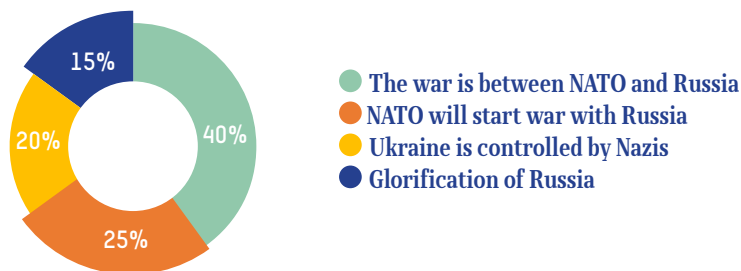




The war in Ukraine has diminished over time within Western Balkan's media, however the volume of disinformation using the narratives that attribute blame for the war to NATO or EU, with strong anti-Western sentiment and glorifying Russia, has remained a steady continuity, as well as disinformation describing Ukraine as a state dominated by neo-Nazis.

Efforts portraying Russia and China as the Western Balkan's viable alternatives to the West with narratives portraying BRICS as the solution for the unjust euro-integration of the Balkan countries, have resurfaced in the third quarter of 2024. Depicting Russia, China and BRICS as a toll for preservation of sovereignty and development in contrast of avoiding the political and disvalued EU regulations.

PERCENTAGE OF MOST COMMON SUB - NARRATIVES ON THE TOPIC WAR IN UKRAINE JULY-SEPTEMBER 2024



Similarly to the political atmosphere, the Kosovo-Serbia tense relations and unresolved disputes remain in the centre of the disinformation media landscape, further deepening ethnic divisions and blocking any effort for resolution. Two main events have added fuel to the fire: the annual "Mirëdita, dobar dan" festival, held since 2014 on celebrating Albanian and Serbian cultures, and the killing of a Serbian police officer in the western Serbian city of Loznica. The festival was described as a gross provocation, with critics accusing it of deepening existing divisions. Meanwhile, local political figures attempted to politicize the killing of a Serbian police officer, alleging that the attack was orchestrated by Kosovar structures. The announcement of the reopening of the Ibra Bridge, otherwise considered as symbol of division between Serb and Albanian communities in Mitrovica, was added to these events, jointly portraying the Western interference through alleged hidden agendas. Due to local elections in Bosnia and snap elections in Podgorica -Montenegro, both were flooded with fake polls and fabricated research, used by political opponents that leveraged these tactics to discredit one another and manipulate decision making citizens.



PERCENTAGE OF MOST COMMON NARRATIVES ON TOPIC THE KOSOVO-SERBIA
RELATIONS JANUARY - MARCH 2024





COUNTRY CONTEXT UPDATE



ALBANIA

Albania's disinformation landscape was unaltered by recurring regional and global narratives in the third quarter of 2024. Russian claims targeted both Ukraine and NATO. In the meantime, Serbia-Kosovo relations continued to be at the center of disinformation cycles. Regional instability was instigated by continuous allegations of Kosovo oppressing the Kosovo-Serbs and conspiracy theories regarding Serbia's plans for population transfer.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić accused [Albania of deploying Bayraktar drones](#)—acquired from Turkey and stationed at the NATO base in Kuçova—to spy on Serbian military activities near the Kosovo border. Such claims have further deepened mistrust within the region.

The Olympics inspired creative disinformation, with false stories on ill athletes from Seine River pollution, as well as swimmer banned over tattoos and sensational claims regarding transgender athletes.

In September, stories in Albanian media alleged the [Albanian language suppression in North Macedonia](#), with claims for its removal from government communications and signs on the streets and roads. These stories created concerns about ethnic tensions, highlight the region's sensitivity to issues connected to identity, in a similar way the [European Union's decision](#) for pre-screening process for Schengen Area travelers did. This information was misreported as a new visa requirement, sparking fears about restricted movement for Albanians and fueling anti-EU sentiment.



Most impactful themes	Most impactful narratives	Most impactful disinformation instances
Albanian language in North Macedonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Government of North Macedonia is suppressing Albanian language in official communications ▶ Government of North Macedonia government is anti-Albanian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Travelers heading to Kosovo via Blace (Alb. Bllaca) border crossing in North Macedonia were surprised to find that <u>road signs previously written in Albanian had been removed</u> ▶ <u>Removal of Albanian language</u> from Macedonian government websites
Summer Olympics in Paris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI+ ▶ Double standards at the Olympics ▶ Conspiracy theories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Reports from the World Boxing Championship claimed that genetic testing revealed that <u>Khelifi’s chromosomes matched those of a man</u> ▶ Paraguayan swimmer was <u>banned from the Olympics because of tattoos</u> ▶ Seine river pollution had made <u>Olympic athletes sick</u>
Anti-EU narratives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ US is trying to provoke a war in the Balkans ▶ The West wishes ill to the Balkans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The European Union <u>will close its borders to Albanians</u>





BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Bosnia and Hercegovina almost by rule is overflowed by disinformation, conspiracy theories and genocide denial, around the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide on July 11. Every year they cause chaos in the public discourse and undermine remembrance of historical truth and reconciliation efforts, mostly framing the narratives as “revisionist history,” and questioning the authenticity of the [Potocari Memorial Center, tombstones](#) and their inscriptions.

Besides Srebrenica, disinformation related to the 2024 BiH Local Elections was widespread, involving nearly all political players and a variety of tactics. False narratives targeted opponents, manipulated public perception, and aimed to undermine trust in the electoral process.

In relation to the global narratives three topics dominated the public discourse: conspiracy theories about an assassination attempt on former U.S. President Donald Trump, anti-gender narratives related to the 2024 Paris Olympics, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Fabricated claims regarding LGBTQI+ representation and gender policies, targeted Olympics, with clear aim to provoke cultural backlash and deepen divisions. On the other hand, disinformation on Trump’s assassination attempt spread politically charged [conspiracy theories](#). The Ukraine war disinformation consistently sought to distort civilian attacks. Russian-affiliated media labeled such events as “staged,” drawing false parallels with [the Markale massacre in Sarajevo](#). This narrative resurfaced after the July 8 bombing of a children’s hospital in Kyiv, dismissed as a provocation. False claims about “Hungary leaving NATO” seeking to undermine the Alliance’s unity and allegations that Ukrainian President Zelenskiy owns a casino in Cyprus, seeking to damage his credibility.



Most impactful themes	Most impactful narratives	Most impactful disinformation instances
Srebrenica resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Genocide denial ▶ EU pressures Serbia to recognize Srebrenica genocide ▶ NATO did not recognize the genocide in Srebrenica 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Republika Srpska Prime Minister Radovan Višković said that <u>“halfdead” were buried in Srebrenica</u> ▶ German ambassador to Serbia - <u>Serbian citizens who are temporarily working in Germany will have to sign a “recognition” of the genocide in Srebrenica.</u> ▶ NATO Secretary General declared that <u>“Srebrenica is the biggest lie in history.”</u>
Summer Olympics in Paris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Satanic rituals at the Olympics ▶ Anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI+ ▶ Anti -Western 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The golden calf symbolizes the Jewish-pagan idol Molech, and this marks the beginning of the <u>ritual drinking of the blood of Palestinian children.</u> ▶ Olympic Committee suspends <u>transgender swimmer without explanation</u>
2024 Local Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ US interference in the elections ▶ Muslims should not be economically independent ▶ False surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Behind the project, supported by USAID, is the intention to introduce <u>technology that will enable fraud.</u> ▶ The results of <u>several surveys</u> were published in the media ▶ <u>In one year, he made a deficit of 536 million,</u> Muslims are not allowed to be economically independent





KOSOVO

Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti's announcement on 18 July, over the reopening of the Ibar Bridge raised tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, with disinformation overflow to North Macedonia. The bridge accessible for pedestrians but closed to vehicles since 1999 war. The proposition of resuming vehicle traffic faced strong opposition, coming from Serbian community, Kosovo's opposition parties, civil society and QUINT/EU representatives, all raising concerns over worsening ethnic tensions and the security situation in northern Kosovo. In North Macedonia, the information for the reopening of the bridge was falsely published as it is reopening for pedestrians. A false claim for KFOR increasing its presence after Serbian offices closed in the north of Kosovo.

Another event took place on July 18, 2024, when a Serbian policeman was killed and another injured in the Serbian city of Loznica, near the BIH border. A Kosovar which escaped prison weeks earlier, was declared a suspect and killed after a prolonged pursuit. This event was heavily politicized, by claims that it was an intro to a orchestrated attack by Kosovo's structures. Minister for Interior Dačić stated that no arrest warrant had been issued despite having such alter being issued early-July by the Police. Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić also alleged that Kosovo's Bayraktar drones had entered Serbian territory twice, a claim rebutted by Kosovo's Ministry of Defense.

China's influence in Kosovo has included spreading false claims to criticize the United States, through the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs which accused the National Endowment of Democracy (NED) of funding NGOs in Kosovo, including Sbunker, to incite division and tension between Serbia and Kosovo. In a report titled "National Endowment for Democracy: Who It Is and What It Does", China baselessly alleged that NED aims to foster discord, referring to Kosovo's government as "temporary self-governing institutions." These claims lack evidence and are part of broader efforts to undermine U.S. influence in the region.

During this period, Russian propaganda also resurfaced regarding Kosovo's independence. These statements came from Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and the spokeswoman for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maria Zakharova, who reiterated Moscow's opposition to Kosovo's independence.



Most impactful themes	Most impactful themes	Most impactful narratives
Kosovo-Serbia relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Kosovo and the West inciting anti-government protests in Belgrade ▶ Kosovo police is pressuring the Serbs ▶ Kosovo tries to intimidate the Serbs living in the North 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Protest in Belgrade was <u>incited by Prishtina and other Western entities</u> ▶ <u>Attack on the Serbian police officers</u> was orchestrated by Kosovar structures ▶ Dacic claimed that <u>there was no arrest warrant against Hajrizi</u>
Case with the Ibar Bridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The Ibar Bridge has been closed to pedestrians ▶ KFOR troops on the Ibar Bridge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <u>Citizens are freely moving on both sides</u> of the city after 25 years 'like a forbidden fruit ▶ Increases presence at the Ibar Bridge, <u>what do the internationals know?</u>
Chinese influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ U.S. and Western efforts to destabilise Kosovo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ National Endowment for Democracy attempts to <u>overthrow governments and incite divisions in various countries</u> worldwide including Kosovo





MONTENEGRO

The reporting period in Montenegro was defined by yet another crucial electoral event, this time taking place in the capital, Podgorica. Besides the capital, during the month of September, snap municipal elections also took place in Gusinje and Kotor. The pre-election period was notable for inflammatory rhetoric by political parties, reflecting intense political competition, and for the pervasive use of disinformation, a tactic that has increasingly characterized the country's political landscape. A prominent strategy in this cycle was the circulation of fake polls, deliberately designed to create a false impression of overwhelming support for one political faction while simultaneously undermining and discrediting the opposition.

Affected by global trends, disinformation in Montenegro has taken on a broader scope, particularly regarding the Olympics, which has become a focal point of political manipulation. This issue is emblematic of deeper challenges, including growing political polarization and the influence of external actors. The spread of false narratives has extended to various aspects, including athletes, the integrity of the Games themselves, and the promotion of anti-Western sentiments aimed at undermining Montenegro's alignment with Western democratic values.

In recent years, conspiracy theories have gained significant traction in Montenegro, primarily driven by coordinated disinformation campaigns and a lack of media literacy among the public. These theories, which touch on a range of issues from climate change to global elites exerting control, have found fertile ground on social media platforms, online forums, and, alarmingly, even within certain media outlets. The influence of these conspiratorial narratives serves to divide society, shape public perception in a distorted manner, and erode trust in institutions, making it more difficult to foster a well-informed, cohesive citizenry.



Most impactful themes	Most impactful narratives	Most impactful disinformation instances
Summer Olympics in Paris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Satanic rituals at the Olympics ▶ Anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI+ ▶ Anti-Western 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Pale horse with <u>his rider called death</u> and Hades followed him ▶ <u>Satanic symbols</u> the future that they are imposing and preparing for us ▶ The Olympic Committee has suspended a swimmer <u>from women’s competition but has not given reasons</u>
Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Fake polls ▶ False attributions ▶ Attacks on politicians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Newly <u>invented research</u> attributed to DPS ▶ The <u>Ipsos survey</u> arrived this morning, research was done for the needs of NSD ▶ Mujović admit that <u>he received an apartment</u> from DPS
Conspiracy theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Depopulation ▶ Climate change does not exist ▶ Antivaccination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The UN has a plan for <u>depopulation</u> ▶ Above our heads are <u>many different satellites</u> with different functions ▶ It is the “next big coup” of the “<u>vaccination mafia</u>”





NORTH MACEDONIA

The third quarter of 2024 in North Macedonia was similar to the other WB countries with the Ukraine war as well as the Olympics in Paris dominated the media landscape, fueling the anti-Western narratives.

After the election and the change in Government, the newly elected Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski positioned the country in geopolitical sense. He gave unequivocal support for Ukraine and its people, which meant continuation and alignment with the previous Government. This received harsh reaction by supporters of Kremlin interests in the country, who used social networks to target individual politicians for their statements and trying to undermine this position by propagating that this support is as an endorsement of Nazism and fascism. This disinformation exploited historical sensitivities and stirred emotions among citizens.

Much like the rest of the countries in the region, the anti-gender disinformation followed the Olympics in Paris, falsely framing it as promotion of “gender ideology” that attacks the traditional values. The ban on Russia’s participation was weaponized, by the political party Levica which openly defended the comparing this exclusion to the 1936 Berlin Games under the Nazis, seeking to evoke emotions and connect the anti-Western to the anti-gender narratives.

Interethnic tensions, highly elevated during the elections, continued to be inspiration for disinformation. The suppression of the Albanian language in North Macedonia portraying the Government as discriminatory against the Albanian-speaking population, continued to sow distrust and polarization. Anti-migrant narratives regarding migrants coming from Albania spread by politician Petar Bogoeski, in attempt of using old news as new, trying to inflict more fear and xenophobia among citizens.



Most impactful themes	Most impactful narratives	Most impactful disinformation instances
War in Ukraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The war is between NATO and Russia ▶ Ukraine is part of Russia ▶ Glorification of Russia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ There was a <u>NATO headquarters in the children’s hospital in Kiev</u> ▶ <u>Russia needs to consider</u> returning to historical Polish, Roman, Slovak and Hungarian lands ▶ <u>Russia is a powerful bear</u> that Ukrainians and the West want to catch
Summer Olympics in Paris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI+ ▶ Satanic rituals at the Olympics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Algerian boxer Imane Kelif <u>is biologically male</u> ▶ The directors of the <u>demon show at the opening of the Olympic Games</u> were hit by thunder
Anti-Western	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The West is manipulating Ukraine ▶ Satanizing NATO and the West ▶ Double standards of the West 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ukrainian forces <u>are Western cannon fodder</u> that aim to usurp Russia’s natural resources ▶ Congratulations on 30 years of dependence on <u>satanic NATO</u>





SERBIA

Serbian media kept steady topics in the third quarter of 2024. Globally focusing on Russian invasion of Ukraine, and locally on the Belgrade-Priština tensions. In both cases amplifying the strong anti-Western as well as the nationalistic narratives.

The period was marked by two high-profile visits from French President Macron and German Chancellor Scholz. The aftermath of the visits was [the purchase of French Rafale fighter jets](#) and [EU-Serbia strategic partnership](#) related to battery production, electric vehicles sustainable raw materials. In parallel, Serbian officials fueled regional destabilization with steps such as the adoption of [“Declaration on the Protection of National and Political Rights and the Common Future of the Serbian People”](#) by [the governments](#) of Republic of Serbia and the Assembly of the Bosnian Serb entity Republika Srpska within Bosnia and Herzegovina [in June](#). Subsequently, the parliaments of [Serbia](#) and [Republika Srpska](#) then adopted the same declaration during July. This duality strongly polarized the public discourse.

The polarization and the strong regional hegemonic nationalistic goals was present during the elections in Bosnia and Hercegovina as well as Montenegro, both being target of extended coverage by Serbian pro-government and pro-Russian media.

In their [analysis of the Serbian right-wing media landscape](#), fact-checking service Raskrikavanje.rs categorized three media camps: pro-government, Russian owned RT and Sputnik; and anti-government. Their common denominator are pro-Russian narratives: “...there are two views of the world: the good one, which is represented by Russia and in which traditional and conservative values dominate, and the bad one, which is represented by the West and which talks about human rights, freedoms, multiculturalism, equality...” Strong connections between the three camps were observed regarding geopolitical issues, proving that ideological alignment can bridge otherwise conflicting political positions.



Most impactful themes	Most impactful narratives	Most impactful disinformation instances
Serbia-Kosovo relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ “Mirdita, good day” is a provocation for the Serbian people ▶ Kosovo is a false state ▶ Kosovo is source of crime and hearted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The “<u>Mirdita, good day</u>” festival that will be held on the very days when the Serbian people celebrate Vidovdan, has been <u>nothing more than a crude provocation</u>. ▶ Such a cultural policy - in which “Mirdita” is held in Belgrade on Vidovdan - <u>is distributed from those power centers that keep part of our territory under military occupation</u>.
Resentment towards the EU and NATO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ EU blackmails and lies Serbia ▶ “False European” public services in Serbia ▶ Serbia is a double player 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The public service of “European” Serbia <u>accuses Sputnik of Macron</u> – the hero of media freedom ▶ <u>Serbia is not a servant of either Russia or the USA</u>
China influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ China as Serbia’s true and sincere friend ▶ China as a defender of Serbia’s interests in international arena ▶ The friendship between Serbia and China bothers the West 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The bombing of the embassy was a humiliation for the <u>Chinese people! China is our greatest friend in the world!</u> ▶ <u>The friendship between Serbia and China bothers the West!</u> Xi Jinping has made it clear what he thinks about the bombing of the embassy!





KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR



As a part of early warning mechanism, anti-disinformation experts from the Western Balkans countries stress the following disinformation-related issues and trends as particularly important for the period July-September and beyond.

The regional view of Western Balkans:

- **UPCOMING U.S. ELECTIONS:**
 - The potential shifts in the foreign policy and its effects on the Balkans, particularly the return of the former Trump-era policies that could revive tensions regarding Kosovo and persistent disinformation that sow ethnic and ideological divisions.
- **INTENSIFIED KREMLIN NARRATIVES ON UKRAINE WAR:**
 - The justification of its military actions as a fight against “Nazism” connecting it to the Soviet Union’s role in World War II, tapping into the historical trauma and emotions.
- **ANTI-WEST “EU IS A THREAT TO NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY” NARRATIVE**
 - Elections as well as social dissatisfaction translated into a perfect opportunity for narratives that drive into a choice between aligning with EU’s democratic values or supporting authoritarian regimes with alternative governing.
- **“THE BALKAN HAS SURRENDERED SOVEREIGNTY TO THE WEST” NARRATIVE**
 - This narrative is gaining traction, portraying EU as, depicting EU as “decadent” and out of touch with traditional values, incapable of understanding and addressing local needs. At the same time the authoritarian regimes as traditional option that upholds the values and can deliver on local needs.



Albania

- Issues around the use of Albanian language in North Macedonia and rising ethnic tensions will affect the relationship between Albania and North Macedonia both in the media arena, as well as the regional cooperation.

Bosnia

- Statehood Day (25 November) and Republika Srpska Day (9 January) commemorations are used for disinformation and hateful narratives on yearly occasions, being a flash point for deepening divisive rhetoric, fueling ethnic tensions.

Kosovo

- Developments in northern Kosovo, incited both by decisions of the Government or the Serbian community, intensifying already tense relations. The possibility of reopening Ibar Bridge is one clear example of such developments.

Montenegro

- Aftermath of the local elections in Podgorica and the uncertainty over forming of the new local governance structures, which might lead to new elections or delaying functional local governance, consequently increasing political instability.

Serbia

- Flirting with conversations about proposed independence of Republika Srpska from Bosnia and Hercegovina and its union with Serbia, unraveling the fragile peace established by the Dayton Agreement and renewing the ethnic tensions in the region.
- Clashes over the lithium-mining project between the Government defending the economic benefits of the project and the environmental activists warning about the long-term environmental losses.
- Disinformation about the past and possible new incidents in northern Kosovo.

North Macedonia

- Ethnic relations worsening over political strategy of the government to open long-settled issues such as the North Macedonia's language law or the Albanian academy for education and science. These issues present fertile soil for disinformation campaigns that will drive polarization through "us vs. them" narratives, deepening ethnic tensions.
- Incidents of hate speech, hate crimes used for political propaganda with associated disinformation and media bias. Since the May elections, ruling and opposition parties have been blaming each other for upcoming stoking of interethnic tensions, 'warning' that their opponents would cause 'instability' for political profit.



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