

APRIL, 2024

MONTHLY REPORT

METHODOLOGY

[New Social Initiative](#) monitors media and social media in cooperation with [Pikasa Analytics INC](#), a data analytics company specializing in developing and implementing tools, software, and machine learning algorithms. The tool allows monitors to count the nominal number of articles on particular topics and see the level of audience engagement.

Engagements on websites are defined as news articles from each outlet's website shared on Facebook and the total number of likes, shares, and comments they have collected. Social media engagement encompasses likes, shares, and comments gathered from all social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn) for all posts, including photos, videos, and text. The assessment of engagement extends beyond the media outlets to encompass a variety of social media accounts, including those of politicians and opinion makers.

The tool aggregates articles, and the NSI monitoring team reviews them to identify potential disinformation and other information anomalies. However, the methodology has several limitations and was designed to narrow down the monitoring objective. It is tailored, with each observed account being handpicked by Pikasa and NSI monitors. Consequently, the total number of posts and articles includes only the observed accounts, excluding other accounts that may also be posting news. Nonetheless, the engagement calculation includes all shares, comments, and other interactions.

Moreover, private accounts cannot be observed. Only officially designated accounts of political leaders or fan pages can be observed. Consequently, some politician's Facebook accounts may not be included in the analysis. Another limitation is related to access, as NSI can observe articles and posts published as far back as December 1, 2023.

Observed media that report from Kosovo in Serbian language

Alternativna, Gračanica online, Radio Kontakt Plus, Kosovo Online, KoSSev, Medija Centar, TV Most, Radio Kim, Radio Mitrovica Sever, Radio Televizija Gračanica, and RTK2

Observation period:

April 1 – April 30, 2024

The number of online media observed:

126 media reporting in Albanian and in Serbian in Kosovo, 126 media reporting from Serbia and 24 international media outlets.

Monitoring goal:

Information disorders on the Internet and social media Websites, online news portals, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram in Kosovo with a focus on Kosovo Serb information space.

Specific topics observed:

Regular session of the UN Security Council (around 200 articles from media in Kosovo and Serbia reviewed), Developments in north Kosovo (around 600 articles from media in Serbia observed), Kosovo-Serbia dialogue (around 600 articles from media in Kosovo and Serbia reviewed)

Background information about the topics of observation:

April was a dynamic month; it marked the beginning of the census in Kosovo, a successful vote for Kosovo by a majority of the present members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, passage in the European Parliament of the directive on visa liberalization for the passports held by the citizens of Serbia residing in Kosovo, a military exercise by the Serbian Army 30km away from Kosovo, the voting for the recall of the Albanian mayors in northern Kosovo was organized and subsequently boycotted by the Kosovo Serb voters, leading to its failure.

Key findings

- Manipulation through omission is the best way to describe the dominant trait of the information space in Kosovo. It is primarily a domestic or internal issue driven by societal segregation between ethnic communities, resulting in a lack of understanding or proper contact rather than malicious intent by the journalists. Regarding Kosovo Serb areas and the information space present there, this translates into predominantly community impact-focused reporting of the media in Serbian and the predominantly legalistic focus of the press in Albanian.
- Regarding information disorders observed in the Kosovo Serb information space through translation of sources in the Albanian language, they are predominantly officials-led campaigns, meaning that institutional leaders, through their statements, misinform the public beyond what can be considered a political spin. Regarding information disorders observed in the Kosovo Serb information space through the rebroadcast of sources from Serbia, they were almost exclusively discrediting campaigns that used unauthorized recordings of some Kosovo Serb politicians but Kosovo Albanian politicians as well. The tapes' authenticity, however, has not been disputed by the persons in question, only their editing.

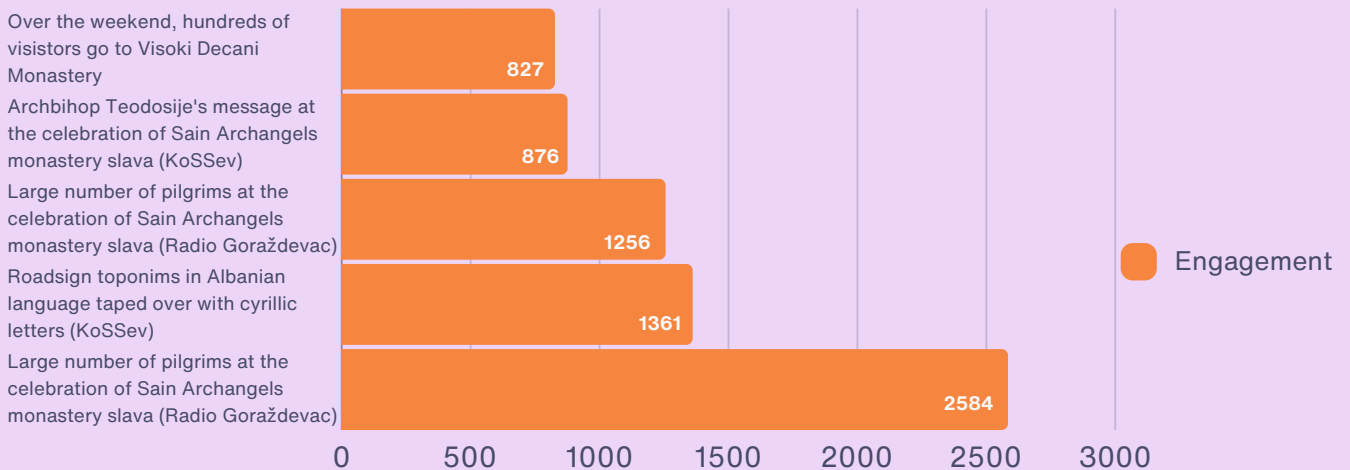
- Media from Serbia have a clear division: everyday topics related to Kosovo are more covered by the media more critical of the Serbian Government (e.g., N1 or Danas), while Kosovo-related articles that involve either statements or speeches by Serbia’s President Aleksandar Vucic dominate Serbian pro-government tabloids.
- Media outlets often fail to provide comprehensive context, focusing instead on transmitting official statements without critical analysis. This can lead to a skewed understanding of events among the public.

Monitoring results of Kosovo-based media

During the reporting period, the most active media outlet reporting in Serbian language from Kosovo was Kosovo Online, which published 2,899 articles with 26,106 engagements. However, the website that recorded the most engagements on social media was KoSSev, with 38,134 engagements, despite being the third most active Serbian-language media outlet in Kosovo, with only 660 published articles in April.

The media in Kosovo that report in Serbian reported the most about the vote for the recall of the Mayors (62 articles), the meeting in Brussels regarding the ban on the import of Dinar (59 articles), and the arrest of Srećko Sofronijević (20 articles). Given the volume of written articles, the engagement was considerable. The selection of articles that garnered the highest engagements show audiences’ proclivity to local news. Following is the list of individual articles by Serbian media in Kosovo with the highest engagements.

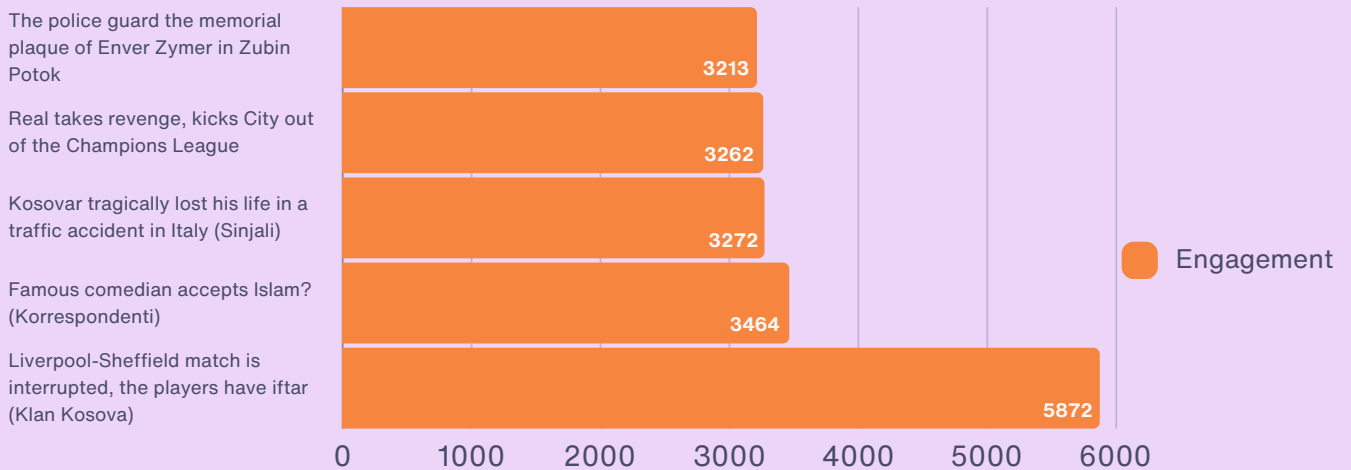
Popular articles in Serbian language on Facebook



In monthly reports from December onward, overlaps between the most reported topics and the most popular topics in Kosovo media that report in Albanian and those that report in Serbian were detected only in February. In April 2024, no overlaps were observed. A notable counterintuitive example of the arrest of Dejan Jankovic is one of the top three reported events in Albanian media and more modestly reported in Serbian language media (27 including the articles about the arrest and the articles about the release).

Unlike the media from Kosovo that report in Serbian language, the most reported topics by media that report in Albanian also measured notable engagement. The most reported event, also measured over 9500 engagements across 509 articles published on it, was the femicide that occurred in Peja/Peć. The second most reported topic was the arrest of Deputy Director of Kosovo Police, Dejan Janković in Serbia (477 articles with over 5000 engagements) and a related statement by PM Kurti on the security measures Kosovo citizens were subject to in the border crossings in Serbia (470 articles with 7100 engagements). Finally, the vote in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Kosovo's request for membership was one of the top topics, with 461 articles published and over 8800 engagements measured.

Popular articles in Albanian language on Facebook



During the reporting period, the most active media outlet reporting in Albanian language from Kosovo was Bota Sot, which published 10,377 articles with 65,829 engagements. However, the website that recorded the most engagements on social media was Sinjali, with 145,454 engagements, despite being the 10th most active Albanian-language media outlet in Kosovo, with 3,572 published articles in April.

No prominent examples of media manipulations were observed in local media reporting in the Serbian language from Kosovo. However, given that these media focus on matters related to the Kosovo Serb community predominantly, the content of the articles concentrate on politics, makes up for a very toxic environment for readers, as the majority of the local media report on increasingly acrimonious statements by both Kosovo and Serbia officials. These messages include warnings of war, terrorist attacks, ethnic cleansing, traps, threats to sovereignty, army exercises and armament in response to them, and several other messages that signal instability and extreme political and ethnic polarization.

As both the statements of Serbia and Kosovo officials are being transmitted, and as both sides usually react to claims of the other, balance in views is generally offered to the readers, but the problem arises from the fact that these are predominantly ethnocentric, biased narratives that often contribute to the rise of political tensions. Local media have a fair number of statements by analysts or EU and US officials, including KFOR, that counter the prevailing warmongering narratives of the Kosovo and Serbia officials. Still, as a rule, these articles measure fewer engagements. At the local level, especially when it comes to northern Kosovo, a considerable number of articles (over 50 in April) reporting on actions of the police, be it goods or arms seizures, installation of video cameras or incident reports, measure solid engagement too but overall, contribute to the sense of securitization and instability. Some of the police actions are reported by the institutions from a strictly legalistic perspective, ignoring the effects of medicine seizure, for example, on the community.

On the other hand, Kosovo Serb political parties' reactions to these events ignore the legalistic perspective and strictly focus on the community impact of the actions. For example, the police will report that they seized medicine from registered but unlicensed pharmacies. At the same time, SL will state that elderly citizens will no longer be able to obtain the prescribed medicine close to their homes and interpret this as a part of a more comprehensive plan of the Government of Kosovo to make the lives of Kosovo Serbs impossible and push them to leave Kosovo. Neither the police nor other Kosovo officials, most commonly the Minister of Internal Affairs, nor SL officials would accept the merits of the parts of the argument of the other side or identify that the core of the issue with licensing pharmacies in northern Kosovo is a result of the failure to solve this through Dialogue spanning back to 2015. The media, too, often fail to provide a broader context to claims of both and mostly rely on transmitting only the information provided in official statements.

The media reporting on developments in the north of Albanian lacks the community impact aspect and the broader context or Dialogue failure aspect.

The most significant political event in Kosovo's Serb information space was the vote for the recall of the Mayor; however, as the voters boycotted this political process, it did not attract significant reader attention. The article with the highest engagement in Serbian on the topic measured only 75 engagements, with at least five articles in Albanian on the same topic overperforming it. Articles in the Serbian language focused either on the irregularities on the voting day or the discontinuity between SL supporting the petition for the recall but not the voting itself. In contrast, articles in Albanian focused on whether punitive measures imposed on Kosovo due to the forceful entry of Mayors in some of the municipal buildings would be lifted after the recall vote had been organized. An objective analysis of the mathematical (im)possibility for the success of the recall vote and its implications in the case the recall was not boycotted but failed was largely lacking, especially in the media reporting in the Albanian language.

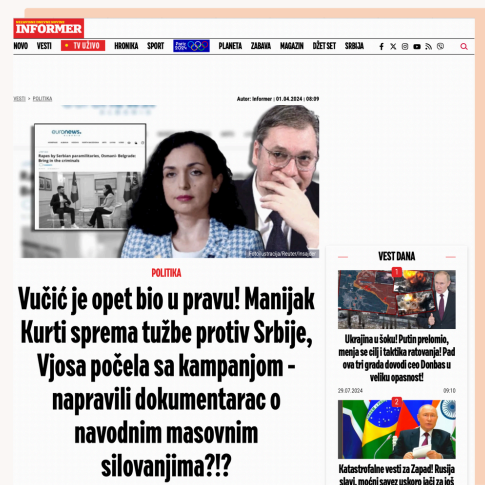
Another dominant topic during April was the vote of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council (PACE) of Europe on the recommendation of the rapporteur Dora Bakoyannis regarding Kosovo's application for membership in the organization. The articles in the media that report in Serbian language from Kosovo mostly included statements by Serbia's representatives in the CoE, explaining the procedure and expressing views that the vote taking place would be a violation of the organization statute in addition to being dubbed hypocritical given allegations of human rights violations of non-majority communities in Kosovo, primarily the Kosovo Serb community. Media reporting in Albanian predominantly carried statements of Kosovo officials who expressed confidence in the Kosovo MP Delegation's lobbying efforts at PACE.

A notable official-driven spin campaign related to Kosovo's possible Council of Europe membership present in both Albanian and Serbian language media in Kosovo was a claim by Minister of Justice Albulena Haxhiu, but other officials too, that this membership would bring Kosovo closer to filing a suit for genocide against Serbia.¹ As later debunked by some legal and transitional justice experts, this claim was false as CoE does not handle cases from the domain of criminal justice but country-specific cases that have exhausted domestic legal remedies after the moment of full membership in CoE.

¹ <https://kossev.info/albuljena-hadziju-savet-evrope-tuzba-genocid-srbija/> or <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/hadziju-clanstvo-kosova-u-savetu-evrope-otvara-put-tuzbama-za-genocid-protiv-srbije>

A similar official-led spin intended to glorify a potential political achievement came from Kosovo President Osmani,² who claimed that Kosovo's membership in CoE would allow families of the missing from Kosovo to file a suit against Serbia. As Serbia has been a member of CoE since 2003, it can be sued at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) by anyone, not just its nationals or the nationals of other CoE member states. This means that any individual, group of individuals, or non-governmental organization claiming to be a victim of a violation of the rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights by one of the member states can bring a case to the ECHR, provided they have exhausted all domestic legal remedies. In other words, no Kosovo national must wait for Kosovo to be a member of CoE to sue Serbia if they wish to. Kosovo nationals have already brought claims against Serbia to ECHR.³

The ripple effect of this claim by Osmani permeated to Serbia's media space, too, where Informer saw it as proof of Vucic's wisdom, who, according to the tabloid, already saw through Pristina's intent to use the membership in CoE to bring forward a suit for genocide against Serbia. "Vucic was right again! Maniac Kurti is preparing a suit for genocide against Serbia; Vjosa started with the campaign – they made a documentary about alleged mass rapes?! " the title reads.



Census, too, was a topic subject to officials-led disinformation campaigns. Talking to Serbian media to promote the process among the Kosovo Serb community, the director of the Kosovo Agency for Statistics, Avni Kastrati,⁴ made false claims that census registration affects workers' rights and residence status: "Tomorrow they may face challenges if they apply for a position, say as a civil servant or a police officer, if they are not listed it is as if they fell from the sky, that is as if they did not exist here." If someone applies for any function in the municipality tomorrow, it will be a big challenge for that citizen. Suppose a Serb from the north is unemployed today and tomorrow applies for a judge, prosecutor, or police officer. In that case, the competent institutions can ask us if they responded to the census. If not, then you behave like a stranger. Also, any pension benefits or other issues will be challenging to get if you are not listed," claimed the official.

² <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/osmani-clanstvom-u-se-porodice-nestalih-moci-ce-da-tuze-srbiju-27-4-2024>

³ See Ali Azemi against Serbia: <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22%3A%22001-139052%22%7D>

⁴ <https://kossev.info/kastrati-popis-srbi-popisivaci-ucescel/> and <https://www.gorazdevac.com/2024/04/10/kastrati-ako-se-niste-popisali-a-sutra-zatrazite-posao-statisticki-to-je-kao-da-ste-pali-sa-neba/>

Overall, the media that reports in the Serbian language in Kosovo rarely transmit news about Kosovo from Serbian media. In cases when they do, those articles predominantly include statements by political analysts. A notable exception to this in April was several articles transmitted by Kosovo Online from Večernje Novosti. All these articles had in common the fact that they discredited a local Kosovo Serb politician from Leposavić⁵ through alleged incriminating audio and video recordings of him that have been surfacing on different Telegram accounts in the past few months continuously. Some of these recordings have led to investigations by the Kosovo Police.

On the other hand, a coalition of local media in the Serbian language is working to counter some information disorders in the media from Serbia. In April, Radio Goraždevac⁶ explained to their readers how a tabloid from Serbia used fire in Istog/Istok to spread untruthful information about panic and dramatic situations with wildfires in northern Kosovo. KoSsev⁷ debunked a whole series of articles of the media from Serbia that celebrated the adoption of visa liberalization for Coordination Directorate passports as the final step in the procedure, although it was not. Radio Kim⁸ explained the unfounded triumphalism in how some media from Serbia interpreted reports of the media from Kosovo that report in Albanian language about the meeting between President Aleksandar Vučić of Serbia and President Emanuel Macron of France. Alternativna⁹ had the most articles dedicated to debunking information disorders in relation to Kosovo or the north of Kosovo. The most notable of Alternativna's articles is the one where, due to a mistake in the live translation of RTK from English to Albanian, at least three portals reporting in the Albanian language in Kosovo claimed that, during the UN Security Council meeting, Aleksandar Vucic accused the husband of President of Kosovo, Vjosa Osani of killing two Serb youngsters in January 2023.



5 <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/novosti-radomirovic-namesta-srbe-na-hapsenje-kosovskaj-policiji-29-4-2024> and <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/novosti-radomirovic-i-vokri-otimaju-srpsku-imovinu-26-4-2024> and <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/novosti-radomirovic-naredio-da-se-socijalno-ugrozenim-srbima-otmu-stanovi-u>
 6 <https://www.gorazdevac.com/2024/04/07/netacno-kad-sumski-pozar-u-osojanu-postane-dramaticna-situacija-na-severu-kosova/>
 7 <https://kossev.info/kosovo-vesti-netacno-vizna-liberalizacija-portali-tabloidi-naslavi/>
 8 <https://radiokim.net/vesti/netacno/215025-da-li-je-u-pristini-zavladao-ocaj-zbog-makronove-objave-i-kome-smeta-cirilica/>
 9 <https://alternativna.com/sokantna-izjava-dilasa-ali-ne-dragana/> and <https://alternativna.com/grom-iz-njujorka-srpski-tabloidi-o-vucicu-u-sb-un-senzacionalizam-u-sluzbi-politike/> and <https://alternativna.com/ne-nato-ne-dostavlja-tesku-artiljeriju-kurtijevom-rezimu/> and <https://alternativna.com/izgubljeni-u-prevodu-ne-vucic-nije-rekao-da-je-suprug-vjose-osmani-ubio-dva-srbina/> and <https://alternativna.com/srpski-tabloidi-o-kosovu-i-psse-u-vrtlogu-senzacionalizmu/> and <https://alternativna.com/vucic-i-sprecavanje-trecag-svetskog-rata-propaganda-od-prosle-godine/> and <https://alternativna.com/general-kavoli-nije-upozorio-na-pokrete-paramilitarne-grupe-i-radoica-kako-dezinformacije-zastravaju-odnose/> and <https://alternativna.com/rtk-tvrdi-da-gradani-na-severu-kazu-da-nece-bojkotovati-glasanje-senzacionalizam-ili-stvarnost/>

As is almost always the case regarding the UNSC sessions, information disorders were also observed in Serbian media. Another text by Alternativna underlines the systemic building of cult Vucic in some Serbia media where, during April, he was portrayed as someone who prevented the Third World War or dominated the debate at the UNSC and humiliated Vjosa Osmani.



This title reads, "UNSC session ends! Vučić dismantled Vjosa Osmani's lies, and the Russian representative shut her up further".

When it comes to media from Serbia, during April, across two Kosovo-related categories - Developments in northern Kosovo and Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia – the most engaging article was from Raskrikavanje, a specialized debunking portal from Serbia, the article that reviews headlines of Serbian tabloids in 2023 emerges at the top in engagement (almost 3000 engagements). In addition, in the categories of dinar ban, Kosovo – Serbia dialogue, and Kosovo police, N1 is the media from Serbia that had written the most articles, while in the category of developments in northern Kosovo, N1 was the second, after Kurti which had the largest number of articles in this topic. On the other hand, in tabloids from Serbia, the prevalent Kosovo-related topic was the session of the Security Council of the UN and Vucic's visit to France. A positive tone about Vucic and offensiveness to Vjosa Osmani was observed, as seen in the examples above.

Media from Serbia continued using the offensive word "Šiptar" to refer to Albanians. At least seven such articles were observed in April, while two articles in Albanian using the pejorative "shkije" were observed. Other offensive terms to refer to Kosovo officials and often police or security service members in the media from Serbia included – terrorists, phalanx, extremists, liars, and maniacs.

¹⁰ <https://www.raskrikavanje.rs/page.php?id=Naslovne-strane-2023-Sest-novina-vise-od-1150-manipulacija-1311>

This report is prepared by New Social Initiative, a civil society organization from North Mitrovica to ultimately impact inclusiveness, trust-building, democratization processes and good governance in Kosovo. While doing so, NSI follows its vision of an inclusive society built on trust and appreciation among its communities, in which citizens from all ethnic groups actively participate in the society and its governance.