

MAY, 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:**

May 1 – May 31, 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:**

Civil code (around 150 articles from media in Albanian and Serbian reviewed), census (around 200 articles from media in Albanian and Serbian reviewed), Developments in north Kosovo (around 150 articles from media in Kosovo and 150 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:**

In May, Kosovo received support to advance to observer status at the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO (NATO PA). Still, the vote was postponed due to the rapporteur's recommendation regarding Kosovo's request for membership in the Council of Europe. During several weeks of the month, the population census took place in Kosovo. In northern Kosovo, the police shut down Poštanska Štedionica bank and National Treasury Office, while the Government approved legally and procedurally disputed expropriation on land in Leposavić and Zubin Potok.

## Key findings

- May was the month with the lowest engagements on social media posts featuring media content in both Serbian and Albanian languages in Kosovo in 2024.
- Political topics were prominent in both Serbian and Albanian media, with overlaps in media interest in Kosovo's accession to CoE and its status in the NATO PA. The CoE vote was reported in media from Serbia through different stages, first involving somewhat acrimonious reporting about the rapporteur Dora Bakoyannis. In contrast, later postponement of the vote resulted in reporting that could be described as divisive and triumphalist tones. The media in Kosovo mainly focused on the causes of the Government's failure and the rift between the President and the PM. The advancement of Kosovo's status in NATO PA was a cause to ramp up anti-Western sentiments in the media from Serbia.
- Media freedom in Kosovo, or its slow decline, was verified in May by the RSF index, in which Kosovo recorded a decline of 8 points or 19 places.
- Pro-government media outlets and officials in Serbia led a hateful campaign against a foreign official, Dora Bakoyannis. In contrast, pro-government outlets in Kosovo led a disinformation campaign against a US official, DAS Gabriel

Escobar. This highlights the ongoing use of media for political manipulation and spreading false information.

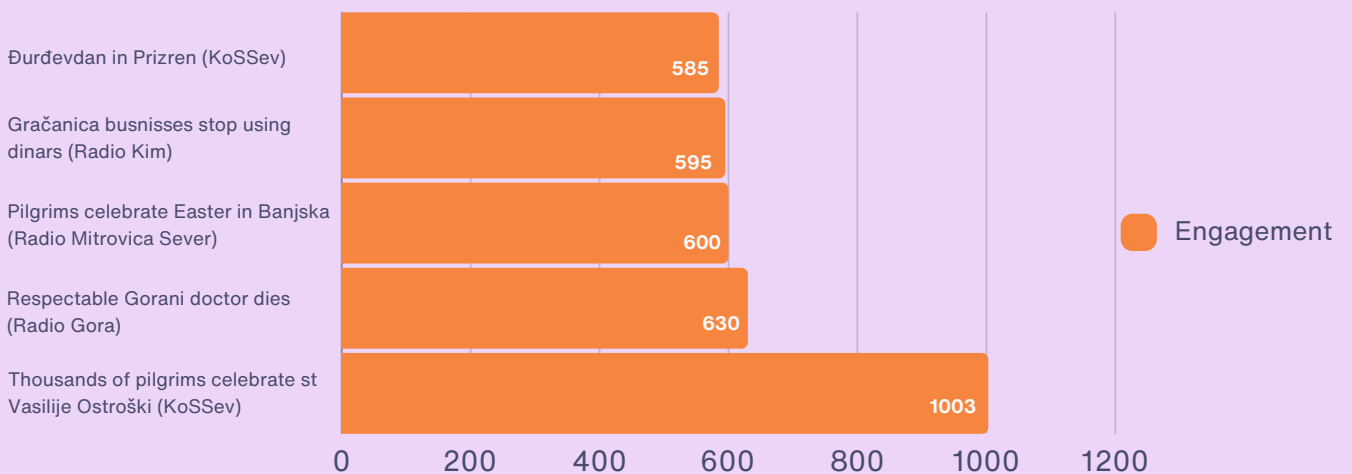
- Reporting often failed to adequately cover the community impact of governmental actions, focusing instead on political narratives. This gap in coverage underscores the need for more inclusive and comprehensive journalism.

## 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 2,790 articles with 23,278 engagements. However, the website that recorded the most engagements on social media was KoSSev, with 29,058 engagements, despite being the third most active Serbian-language media outlet in Kosovo, with 681 published articles in May.

The media in Kosovo that report in Serbian reported the most about the developments around the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe meeting (41 articles), the local assembly session of North Mitrovica dedicated to the opening of the bridge, and statements related to the initiative (31 articles), and the refusal of Kosovo authorities to allow entry to Serbian Patriarch (25 articles). The latter topic measured the most engagements. The selection of articles that garnered the highest engagements shows audiences' proclivity for local and religious holiday-related news. Following is the list of individual articles by Serbian media in Kosovo with the highest engagements. Compared to other observed months, these levels of engagements are the lowest recorded.

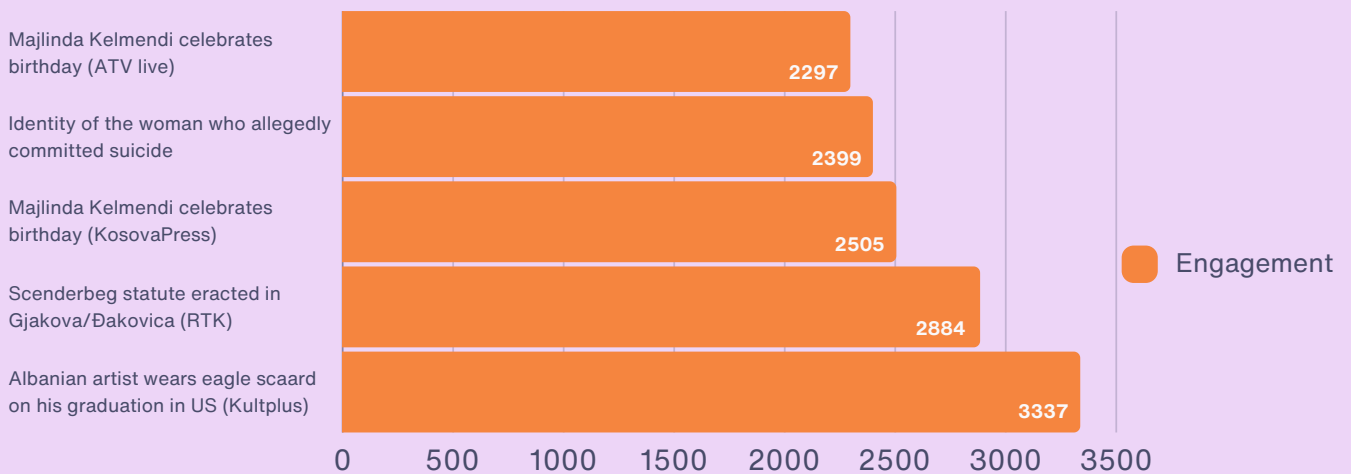
### Popular articles in Serbian language on Facebook



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 rarely observed. In May 2024, two overlaps were observed. There have been considerable media articles in both languages about Kosovo receiving observer status at the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe meeting.

The most reported topic by media that report in Albanian, which measured over 4400 engagements across 430 articles published on it, was the letter by Scholz, Macron, and Meloni to Kurti regarding expectations for the conditions to be fulfilled if Kosovo wanted support for joining CoE. The second most reported topic was the advancement of Kosovo's status in the PA of NATO (388 articles with over 6100 engagements) and a raid of the house of a person suspected of injuring three people (370 articles with 5670 engagements). As with media reporting in the Serbian language, the measured levels of engagement were the lowest in 2024.

### 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 11,902 articles with 73,573 engagements. However, the website that recorded the most engagements on social media was Sinjali, with 153,124 engagements, despite being the 10th most active Albanian-language media outlet in Kosovo, with 3,123 published articles in May.

Regarding the population census in Kosovo, the Serbian media reporting predominantly focused on finding out if the registrars have even visited any citizens in the north. At the same time, the media reported on the applicable fines for citizens who do not register. As was the case in April, some imprecise statements by the head of the Statistics Agency Avni Kastrati was observed. While in April, the official claimed that people who do not participate in the census will have limited worker rights and have their residence status brought into question, in May, the official claimed that the unregistered citizens would not receive state services.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the minister of finance, Hakuran Murati, contended that the population census will provide the accurate number of pensioners<sup>2</sup> in Kosovo.

One of the prominent topics during May was the possible adoption of the new Civil Code after the Kosovo PM vouched to secure the votes for the contested law personally. Despite some LGBTQI+ activists,<sup>3</sup> including the Kosovo Ombudsperson,<sup>4</sup> expressing concern that the law was not drafted by the Constitution and that it actually might be just a step in the direction of legalizing same-sex marriages, most of the international media<sup>5</sup> coverage of the story, except for Reuters<sup>6</sup> gaslighted these concerns to support the narrative that "Kosovo will legalize same-sex marriages by the end of May." Although there were no concrete actions behind PM Kurti's announcement, it still did spark a harsh discussion nationally in which hate speech toward LGBTQI+ and political pluralization dominated.

Following the failure to join CoE, the criticisms of the Government for implementing the Constitutional Court decision confirming the ownership of the Visoki Decani Monastery lands, including some time-selective, para-legal opinions<sup>7</sup> and anti-Western narratives<sup>8</sup> resurfaced in the public space.

When it comes to the developments in the north, the article with the most engagement was one that misrepresents the position of the Kosovo Serb community regarding the issue of opening the main bridge across Ibar for traffic. Published initially by RTK, the article "Even the Serbs in the north want the opening of the bridge" measured over 1100 engagements on the Dukagjini website.<sup>9</sup> A portal from northern Kosovo, Alternativna,<sup>10</sup> also addressed this article in their section dedicated to debunking information disorders.

1 <https://shqip.com/ka-perfunduar-regjistrimi-i-popullsise-cka-do-te-ndodhe-me-personat-qe-sjane-regjistruar/>

2 <https://indeksonline.net/regjistrimi-i-popullsise-murati-do-ta-djime-sakte-se-sa-pensioniste-jetojne-ne-kosove/>

3 <https://kossev.info/istopolni-brakovi-lgbt-kurti-poslanici-samoopredeljenje/>

4 <https://indeksonline.net/gelaj-per-kodin-civil-te-papranueshme-deklarimet-publike/>

5 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/kosovo-promises-to-introduce-same-sex-unions-in-may/> and <https://www.agenziaovva.com/en/news/kosovo-Prime-Minister-Kurti-announces-we-will-legalize-gay-marriage-in-May/> and <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/president-des-kosovos-will-homosexuelle-paare-anerkennen-19695563.html>

6 <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/muslim-majority-kosovo-considers-same-sex-unions-amid-fierce-opposition-2024-05-23/>

7 <https://ekonomiaonline.com/si-u-tjetersuan-tokat-e-komunes-se-decanit/>

8 <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/muslim-majority-kosovo-considers-same-sex-unions-amid-fierce-opposition-2024-05-23/>

9 <https://www.dukagjini.com/edhe-serbet-e-veriut-jane-per-hapjen-e-ures-se-ibar/>

10 <https://alternativna.com/rtk-o-izvestaju-o-medijskim-slobodama-pola-istine-kad-je-sever-kosova-u-fokusu-umesta-drugih-kljucnih-informacija/>

The actual significant developments in northern Kosovo included the shutting down of Poštanska Štedionica premises and the extrajudicial decision of GoK to expropriate large private properties in Leposavić and Zubin Potok. Both developments were predominantly reported matter-of-fact by the Albanian media, without mention of the community impact or the lack of legal clarity. However, most did carry the statement by Quint expressing concern over the legality of the decision on expropriation and the US reaction to the lack of coordination on the Poštanska Štedionica action. Responses of the Serbian Government included the usual talking points about the intent of Gok to pressure the Kosovo Serb community and, by those means, effect ethnic cleansing, with the director of the Serbian Office for Kosovo, Petar Petković, also calling Kurti "Balkan pyro man. "

May was a sobering month for freedom of the media in Kosovo, given that the RSF came out with its updated index of media freedom worldwide, where Kosovo marked a decline by 19 places. The spokesperson of the Kosovo government reacted, selectively quoting the report and claiming that the decline was solely due to the physical attacks of the journalists in northern Kosovo. In contrast, the spokesperson<sup>12</sup> of the ruling LVV tried further to misplace the blame on other competent institutions.

Criticism of the media environment in Kosovo also came from DAS Gabriel Escobar, who was the subject of a disinformation campaign. In one of his farewell interviews,<sup>13</sup> he implied that following his communication with Kosovo MFA about his end of the mandate and transition to another post, obscure media outlet Frontliner spun the information to claim that Escobar was fired, not that his mandate ended. Escobar dubbed this a disinformation campaign "typical of the Western Balkans "and added that instances like these drive increasing criticism of the media. The disinformation campaign against the US official spread regionally despite efforts of many outlets in Kosovo, among the first Sbunker<sup>14</sup> to counter it.

Regarding the media reports from Serbia, debunking articles related to Kosovo continues to rank high in engagements. For example, Raskrikavanje<sup>15</sup> article about the spin on the advancement of Kosovo's status in NATO PA was the highest-ranking article in one of the observed categories. As some Serbian tabloids reported in Kosovo receiving observer status as equal to membership in NATO or as a form of award for GoK for "terrorizing Serbs, "Raskrikavanje explained what the observer status in NATO PA implies and the fact that Serbia has the same status since 2007 and is yet not a member.

11 <https://alternativna.com/reakcija-portparola-kosovske-vlade-na-indeks-o-slobodi-medija-selektivna-interpretacija-realnosti/>

12 <https://gazetainfokus.com/zedhenesi-i-lvv-se-renia-ne-lirine-e-medlave-ska-te-beje-me-presion-e-me-kufizime-nga-qeveria/>

13 <https://kossev.info/istopolni-brakovi-lgbt-kurti-poslanici-samoopredeljenje/>

14 <https://sbunker.org/en/disinfo/debunking-articles/departamenti-amerikan-i-shtetit-demanton-dyshimet-e-ngritura-ndaj-escobarit/>

15 <https://www.raskrikavanje.rs/page.php?id=Ne-Kosovo-nije-primljeno-u-NATO-1341>

A stark comparison that shows that Serbian tabloids don't necessarily work to reaffirm narratives but often rely on commercial gains from clickbait is the example of Informers article about a 'shocking NATO map' that features a cut line between Kosovo and Serbia implying that the international community in the West is changing its view of Kosovo. Alternativna<sup>16</sup> addressed this information disorder in their Demasking section, too.

In addition to observer status in NATO PA, most media from Serbia, including the officials, led a strong and derogative campaign against the rapporteur for Kosovo in CoE Dora Bakoyannis, who amended her report in March to call the PACE to recommend the Committee of Ministers of CoE to admit Kosovo into the organization following tangible steps in forming the A/CSM. Head of Office for Kosovo, Petar Petkovic,<sup>17</sup> called the report by Bakoyannis distorted and shameful, further citing GoK indiscretions that target the Kosovo Serb community.

Furthermore, following the GoKs ban of entry to the Serbian Patriarch, the same official again saw the move as the shape of Ms. Bakoyannis: "Dora, this is by Kurti's order: Patriarch banned from entering Kosovo. Are these the rights you praised in your report", reads one of the titles in Novosti.



Regarding the CoE, both in the media from Serbia and the media from Kosovo, accusations against the European Stability Initiative and its member Gerald Knaus and his alleged meddling in the process were observed. While Serbian officials saw it as lobbying, media from Kosovo saw it as harmful meddling that alienated the Kosovo President from the lobbying process, eventually leading to the vote's failure.

"The Government's "Knaus" operation - Kosovo failed in KiE, Kurti, and Osmani were badly divided,"<sup>18</sup> was one of the titles in media in Kosovo. In contrast, in Serbian media, Knaus was accused of coming up with tricks<sup>19</sup> on behalf of Kosovo to improve the odds of a successful vote in CoE. One such "trick" was a letter by FM Donika Gervalla promising that Kosovo will, following full membership in CoE, start drafting its version of the Statute of the A/CSM. According to Informer, this was "foul play by Šiptars."



16 <https://alternativna.com/informer-o-sokratnoj-nato-mapi-iako-nema-niceg-sokratnog/>  
 17 <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/4385785/petar-petkovic-o-sramnom-potezu-dore-bakojani>  
 18 <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/operacioni-knaus-i-qeverise-kosovo-desitaj-ne-ke-kurti-e-osmani-u-percan-keq/>  
 19 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/vucic-kosovo-statut-zajednica/32950133.html>



Informer went further to conclude that the failure of Kosovo's bid to get on the agenda of the Committee of Ministers of CoE was "a diplomatic success of Vučić" even though countries that blocked the vote, like France, Italy, and Germany were transparent that the failure of the vote was a result of GoKs continual refusal to respect international agreements. Other media also described the vote postponement as a "slap to Kurti's face."



When it comes to the statements or decisions of the Government of Kosovo, the Serbian official who is the most vocal is Petar Petkovic; his main talking points almost always include accusations of ethnic cleansing and ambition of GoK to start a war, very often, including in May, Petkovic also spoke of Kurti's gauleiters (Albanian Mayors in Serb-majority areas) and daily terror against the Kosovo Serb community. Minister for Family Milica Đurđević Stamenkovski went a step further and called Kurti's policies "genocidal." Building on gauleiters parallel, during May

and in response to a ban on entry to Serbian actors to Kosovo, Petković also accused GoK of glorifying the heritage of a known Nazi collaborator, Xhafer Deva. Syntagms such as 'fake country' and 'fake Mayors' were also used to describe Kosovo and Albanian Mayors in Serb-majority areas by both Petkovic and Vučić. An example of improper (over)use of the word terror to describe developments related to the Kosovo Serb community is in the title: "Kurti's authorities ban Petkovic from coming to Kosovo and Metohija for Easter: The terror continues."



Serbian Officials continual hate speech and overexaggerations such as in the example above, are negatively affecting the credibility of those complaints. Nevertheless, the Government of Kosovo's relations with major Western allies, primarily the US,<sup>20</sup> are suffering over the GoK's policies toward Kosovo Serbs and disregard of international obligations. In May, Alternativna had one<sup>21</sup> article dedicated to how actual issues and multiple examples of human rights violations of the Kosovo Serb community get blurred and diminished by unnecessary spins of the Serbian officials.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/hovenijer-naruseni-partnerski-odnosi-sad-i-kosova-15-2-2024>

<sup>21</sup> <https://alternativna.com/između-broji-i-realnosti-etnicki-motivisani-incidenti-na-kosovu-u-senci-propagande/>

As was the case in previous months, Novosti led a derogative campaign against politicians from Leposavić who oppose the Srpska list and are a part of the administration of Albanian mayors in Serb-majority areas. An article by Novosti Radomirović and several people from the administration of the Albanian Mayor in Serb-majority Leposavić are called Kurtis servants and pawns.

They are also accused of staging the performance in which they carried the message "This is Europe" as a response to widely attended community and religious gatherings to celebrate the town's patron saint at which the Serbian people's flag was displayed despite the official ban by the Mayor. The decision of the Mayor to ban the hoisting of the Serbian flag for religious celebrations is currently under investigation by the Ombudsperson Institution in Kosovo. The incident was also reported by Novosti and described as shame. In the same article in which the ban on Serbian flags is discussed, Novosti also calls this municipality a "cocaine den" due to previously leaked videos of municipal officials consuming substances during office hours.



Local Serbian media reporting from Kosovo did not report on the incident similarly. Still, Kosovo Online did carry an article by Albanian Nationale<sup>23</sup> in which it is emphasized that one of the people holding the "This is Europe" banner is the suspected cocaine abuser from one of the leaked videos initially published by this outlet.

In May, the derogative word "Šiptar" and its variations appeared at least 17 times in media from Serbia, most often in articles carried one of two statements of Minister Aleksandar Vulin, who continually uses the term, while the term "shkije" and its variations were observed at least three times in Albanian media in Kosovo.

23 <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/nacionale-muskarci-koji-su-u-zgradi-opstine-leposavic-koristili-kokain-og>

*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.*