

MARCH-MAY 2024

QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT

2024

Kosovo's bid for Council of Europe

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 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, there are several limitations to the tool. 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. Engagement calculation consists of all shares, comments, and other interactions.

Moreover, private accounts can only be observed if officially designated as accounts of political leaders or fan pages. Consequently, some politicians' 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

Observed period:

March 1 – May 31, 2024

Number of online media observed:

126 media reporting in Albanian and 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 were the implementation of the Visoki Decani Monastery decision, the vote in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the vote in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Background information about the topics of observation:

Between March and May 2024, the period saw significant developments regarding Kosovo's application to join as a full Council of Europe (CoE) member. In March, the Kosovo government gave the executive order to implement decades-long verdicts of multiple Kosovo Courts and the Constitutional Court in the final instance and register the Serbian Orthodox Monastery of Visoki Dečan as the owner of their property. The move allowed for Kosovo's bid to join the CoE to advance as the rapporteur of CoE, Dora Bakoyannis found the fulfillment of this requirement enough to propose to the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that Kosovo become a member of this institution. In April, further steps were made as the majority of present delegates of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) recommended that Kosovo be invited to become a member of the Council of Europe – while deciding to monitor its fulfillment of an extensive list of commitments and obligations as from its accession. However, in May, when the final decision by the Committee of Minister of CoE was to be made, the Kosovo bid did not make the agenda amid Kosovo's refusal to abide by final non-formal conditions and start the process of formation of the Association of Serb-majority municipalities.

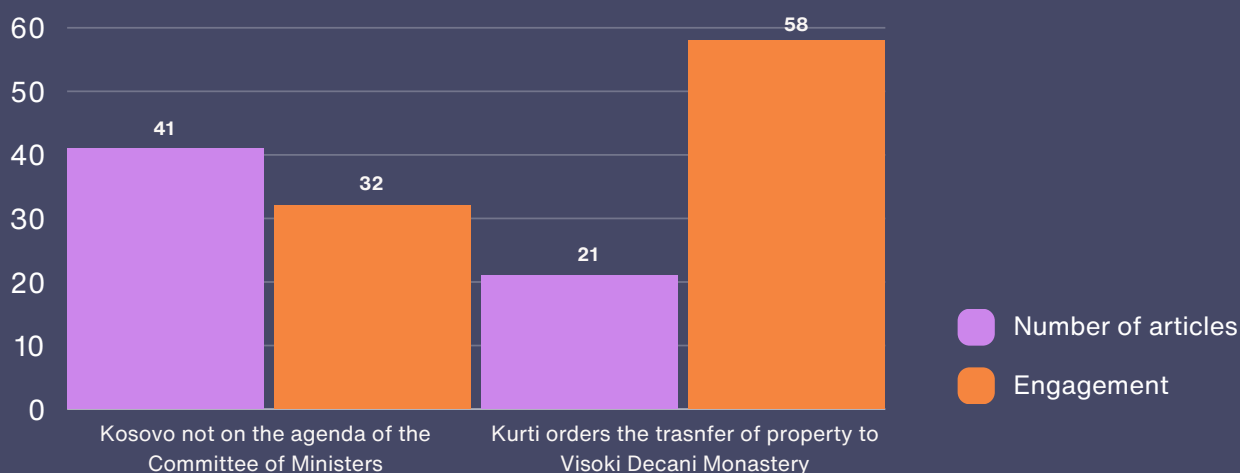
Key findings

- Kosovo's bid for the CoE membership vote was reported in media from Serbia through different stages, first involving somewhat acrimonious reporting about the rapporteur Dora Bakoyannis. In contrast, the 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 lack of coordination between the President and the PM.
- In Kosovo, some officials spun the potential benefits of the possible membership in CoE to suggest it might bring justice for war crimes and alleged genocide, neither of which are in the mandate of this institution.
- In Kosovo, the media gave space to a controversial person formally convicted of spreading hate to talk derogatorily about the heritage of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo.
- Overall, the reports on the CoE-related developments contributed to further polarization, manipulation of the feelings of victims of war, and other societal anomalies. At the same time, the media did not uplift the discussion about the rule of law or human rights standards.

Monitoring results of Kosovo media

The media from Kosovo that reported in Serbian dedicated less space to CoE-related news than those that reported in Albanian. Only two CoE-related topics made it to the top 20 reported topics in three months.

CoE-related topics in Serbian media between March and May 2024



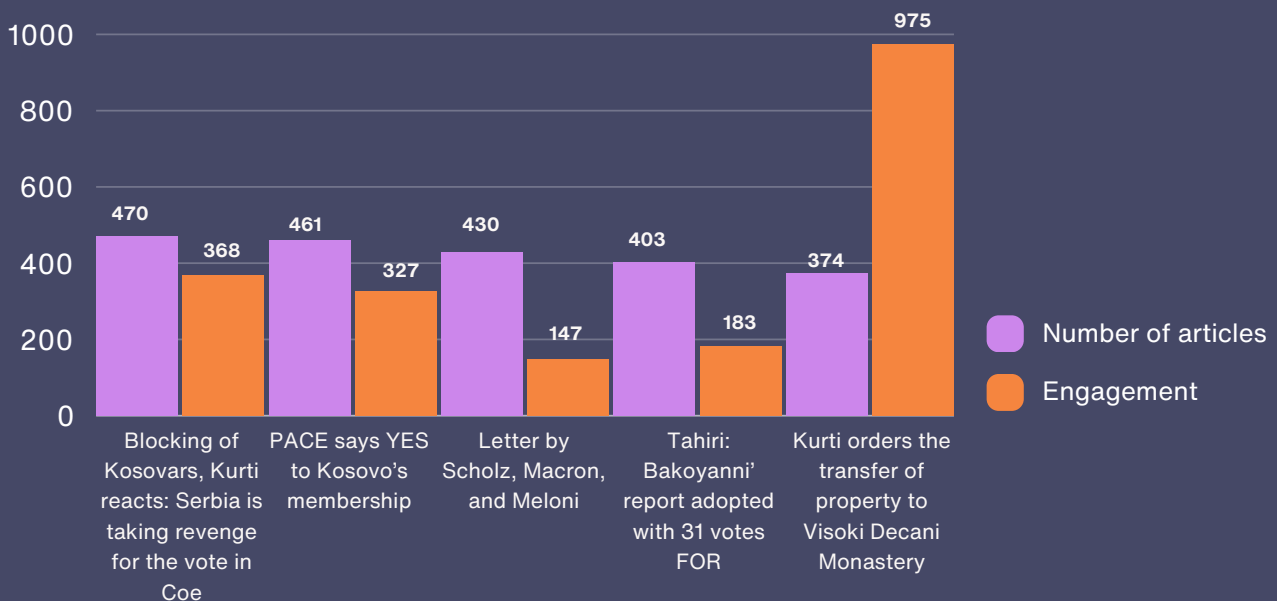
During the reporting period, the most active media outlet reporting in Serbian language from Kosovo was Kosovo Online, which published 7,865 articles with 71,322 engagements. However, the website that recorded the most engagements on social media was KoSSev, with 101,107 engagements, despite being the third most active Serbian-language media outlet in Kosovo, with 1994 published articles between March and May.

In March, Serbian media had 18 articles about implementing the decision to register the property of Visoki Decani Monastery. In May, the media in Serbian reported the most about the developments around the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe meeting (41 articles), while in April, this topic was not as extensively covered to enter the top 20 in the month.

Regardless of the difference in the number of reports, this was one of the rare topics that overlapped significantly in media spaces in Albanian and Serbian.

Kosovo's bid for the CoE was extensively reported in Albanian media. Articles related to it appear in the category of the most reported on the levels of individual months and three-month parameters. For example, CoE appears five times in the list of the 20 most reported topics between March and May 2024. However, the engagements suggest that, for the audience, the steps advancing in the process were not as important as the decision of the Kosovo government to implement the Constitutional Court decision and register Monastery Visoki Decani as the owner of long-disputed property in the cadaster. This news had more than three times higher engagements than other CoE-related news.

Chart CoE-related topics in Albanian media between March and May 2024



In April, the vote in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Kosovo's request for membership was reported in 461 articles that measured over 8800 engagements. In May, the letter by Scholz, Macron, and Meloni to Kurti regarding expectations for the conditions to be fulfilled if Kosovo wanted support for joining CoE was the most reported topic by media that report in Albanian. It measured over 4400 engagements across 430 articles published. In March, the most reported news was that the Parliamentary Committee of CoE adopted Bakoyannis's report, while the news with the highest engagement in the category was implementing the CC decision on Visoki Decani Monastery.

During the reporting period, the most active media outlet reporting in Albanian language from Kosovo was Bota Sot, which published 33,928 articles with 226,484 engagements. However, the website that recorded the most engagements on social media was Sinjali, with 457,103 engagements, despite being the 9th most active Albanian-language media outlet in Kosovo, with 11,230 published articles in May.

While the media did report a lot on the topic, it did not garner a lot of audience engagement. Hence, there are no CoE topics in the list of 20 most popular articles on Facebook in either Serbian or Albanian language for three months.

The executive order to the Central Cadaster agency to implement the CC decision and register the Monastery of Visoki Decani as owners of their land triggered an avalanche of negative comments in Albanian media space. They predominantly targeted Kurti, who was cursed and called a traitor in the most extreme reaction carried by the media.¹

Other more extreme reactions were targeting the Serbian Orthodox heritage in Kosovo. Many media² offered a platform to a controversial self-proclaimed priest³, officially charged with spreading hatred,⁴ to continue doing so by claiming that there are no Serbian Orthodox Churches in Kosovo.



The topic of Visoki Decani subsided over the next months. However, following the failure in May 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 opinions⁵ and anti-Western narratives⁶, resurfaced in the public space.

1 <https://nacionale.com/politike/baraliju-zhgenjehet-keq-me-kurtin-gjaku-i-adem-jasharit-do-te-na-mallkoje-ge-e-votuan-kele-tradhtar>

2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9Xzi_FaIA and <https://korrespondenti.com/lajme/godet-prifti-at-nikolla-xhufka-manastiri-i-decanit-eshte-i-shqiptarëve-nuk-ka-kisha-serbe-ne-kosove/>, and <https://www.botasot.info/lajme/2146748/godet-prifti-at-nikolla-xhufka-manastiri-i-decanit-eshte-i-shqiptarëve-nuk-ka-kisha-serbe-ne-kosove/>, and <https://kosovaima.tv/godet-prifti-at-nikolla-xhufka-manastiri-i-decanit-eshte-i-shqiptarëve-nuk-ka-kisha-serbe-ne-kosove/>

3 <https://www.kosovo-online.com/en/news/society/orthodox-church-albania-nikolla-xhufka-it-about-fraud-and-person-who-not-priest-1-12>

4 <https://radiokim.net/vesti/hronika/218076-podignuta-optuznica-protiv-dzufke-i-zagallja-za-izazivanje-razdora-i-netrpeljivosti/>

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

6 <https://www.botasot.info/opiniono/2168350/e-keqja-vjen-prej-atij-ge-te-njeh-jo-prej-atij-ge-nuk-te-njeh/>

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.

As the decision to adopt the Bakoyannis report took place in the Parliamentary Committee, a smear campaign against the Greek politician started in the media from Serbia. Her decision to amend the report and recommend monitored membership to Kosovo was dubbed shameful by some tabloids. Bakoyannis was also juxtaposed with the Montenegro delegate who voted against the Bakoyannis report despite her Government's official decision to support it. According to the media, one woman represents honor, and the other represents disgrace.

ČAST I BRUKA: Viđena dva lica u savetu Evrope

AUTOR: ALEKSANDAR ANĐELIĆ VESTI | 30.03.2024 | 19:30

Pratite nas i putem Android ili iOS aplikacija

Svak je rođen da po jednom umre, čast i bruka žive dovijeka, rekao je Petar Petrović Njegoš u svom "Gorskom vijencu".

ČAST

NAJNOVIJE NAJČITANIJE SPORT

16:36
PRARTIZAN NA
GOSTOVANJU STAROM "DŽELATU"
Crno-beli žele povratak

16:35
"NEKA TE ANDELI ČUVAJU, BRATE
MOJ": Prijatelji se potresnim rečima
oprašaju od mladića poginulog kod
Bele Palanke

16:33
PODELA BODOVA NA LAGATORU:
Pobednika u derbiju nije bilo - FAP
odneo sladi deo kolača!

16:31
DVOJE DECE STRADALO U
EKSPLOZIJU: Hitno se oglašio Ramzan
Kadirov (VIDEO)

16:30
NAJNOVIJE VESTI O SAŠI POPOVIČU
OBJAVLJENE: Doktori mu ovo strogo
ZABRANILI da jede, a evo šta mu
može pomoći!

POGLEDAJ SVE NAJNOVIJE VESTI

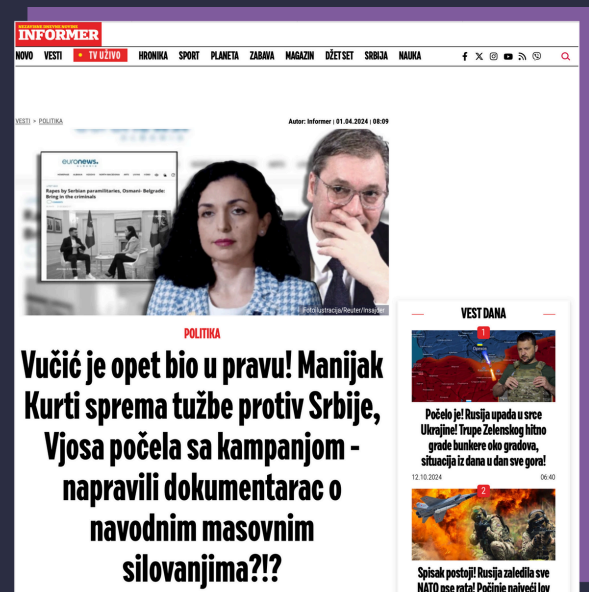
The media echoed the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, who said that her decision to change her position in a matter of days was shameful.

In April, 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.⁷ 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.

⁷ <https://kossev.info/aljbuljena-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,⁸ 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.

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! Manijak 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.



In May, most media from Serbia, including the officials, continued with a higher intensity 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,¹⁰ 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.

⁸ <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/osmani-clanstvom-u-se-porodice-nestalih-moci-ce-da-tuze-srbiju-27-4-2024>

⁹ See Ali Azemi against Serbia: <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22%3A%22001-139052%22%7D>.

¹⁰ <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/4385785/petar-petkovic-o-sramnom-potezu-dore-bakojani>

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,"¹¹ was one of the titles in media in Kosovo. In contrast, in Serbian media, Knaus was accused of coming up with tricks¹² 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."

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."



¹¹ <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/operacioni-knaus-i-qeverise-kosova-deshtoi-ne-ki-e-kurti-e-osmani-u-percan-keq/>

¹² <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/vucic-kosovo-statut-zajednica/32950133.html>

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.