

JUNE, 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 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

### **Observation period:**

June 1 – June 30, 2024

### **The 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:**

Land expropriations in northern Kosovo, cultural exchange festival in Serbia, World Cup, alleged naming of US Envoy for recognition, opening of Ibar bridge for traffic, and other security-related topics.

**Background information about the topics of observation:**

- The Ibar Bridge, located in the city centers of North and South Mitrovica, is a symbolic and physical divider between the predominantly Albanian community in the south and the predominantly Serb community in the north. For many years, it has been a focal point of ethnic tensions between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs. While crucial for local transportation and connectivity, the bridge has also been a flashpoint for protests and violence, with frequent closures preventing free movement between the two sides. Before an electoral campaign, the government of Kosovo sought to open the bridge for traffic amid wide opposition from the Kosovo Serb community in the north. As the bridge is manned by KFOR, the international community insists that the Government of Kosovo open the bridge at the right time and with proper consultations with the community in the north.
- Land expropriations in north Kosovo are a contentious issue, reflecting the broader political and ethnic tensions between the Kosovo government and the predominantly Serb population in the region. The Kosovo government justifies these expropriations as necessary for infrastructure development and public services, while the local Serb community contests their legality and views them as discriminatory. As part of the process of joining the Council of Europe, the Kosovo Government committed to implementing expropriation procedures according to the law in force. Eventually, it failed to do so, eliciting the reaction of the EU, QUINT states, and the OSCE.
- In 2024, the "Mirëdita, Dobar Dan" festival in Belgrade faced significant challenges as political tensions between Serbia and Kosovo escalated. The festival aimed to foster Dialogue. Despite the organizers' efforts to create a space for cultural understanding, the 2024 edition saw increased security concerns, and events were disrupted by demonstrators who accused the festival of promoting Kosovo's independence.

## Key findings

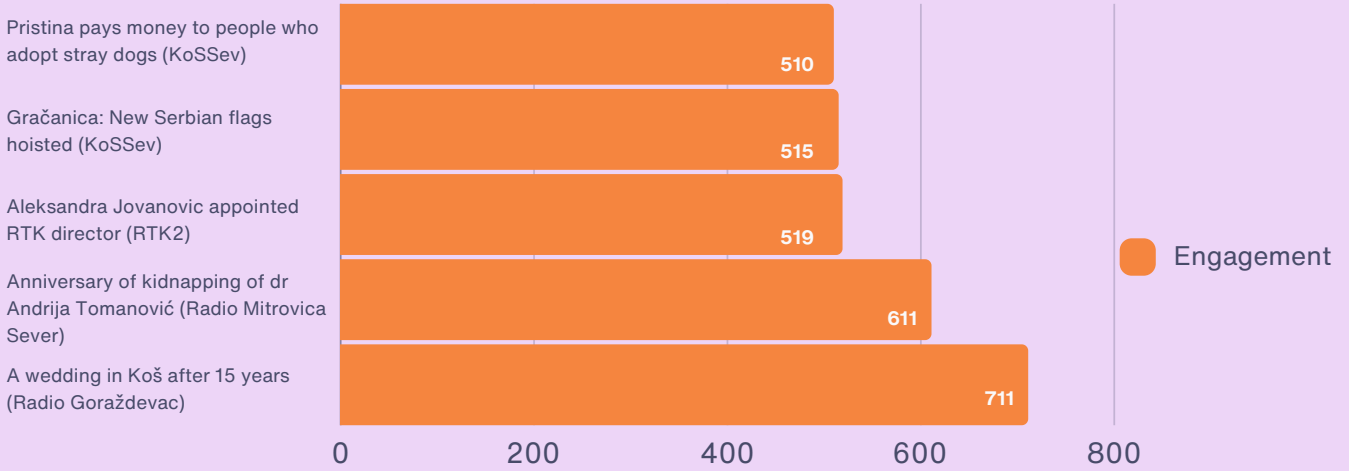
- The Serbian media in Kosovo reported extensively on the Grand Serbian Assembly, Vidovdan celebrations, and the wounding of a Serbian police officer at the Israeli Embassy in Belgrade. The latter generated the most engagements, though overall engagement levels were the lowest recorded for the year.
- Popular individual articles included topics such as a wedding in Koš after 15 years and new Serbian flags being hoisted in Gračanica.
- Albanian media primarily reported on visa liberalization with Israel, the Vučić-Kurti meeting in Brussels, and Tony Blair's speech on the anniversary of NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia.
- Popular topics included religious events and the World Cup, with one standout article about a football fan placing Albanian and Croatian flags on his car.
- A significant disinformation event in the Albanian media revolved around the alleged appointment of Edward Joseph as the Special US Envoy, which the US government did not confirm. At least three outlets circulated this false information.<sup>1</sup>
- There continues to be no overlap in the topics most reported by Albanian and Serbian media in Kosovo.
- All findings, including this monthly report, highlight the ongoing media divide in Kosovo and the distinct narratives presented to Serbian and Albanian audiences.

## Monitoring results

During the reporting period, the most active media outlet reporting in Serbian language from Kosovo was Kosovo Online, which published 2,759 articles with 22,161 engagements. However, the website that recorded the most engagements on social media was KoSSev, with 26,079 engagements, despite being the third most active Serbian-language media outlet in Kosovo, with 608 published articles in June.

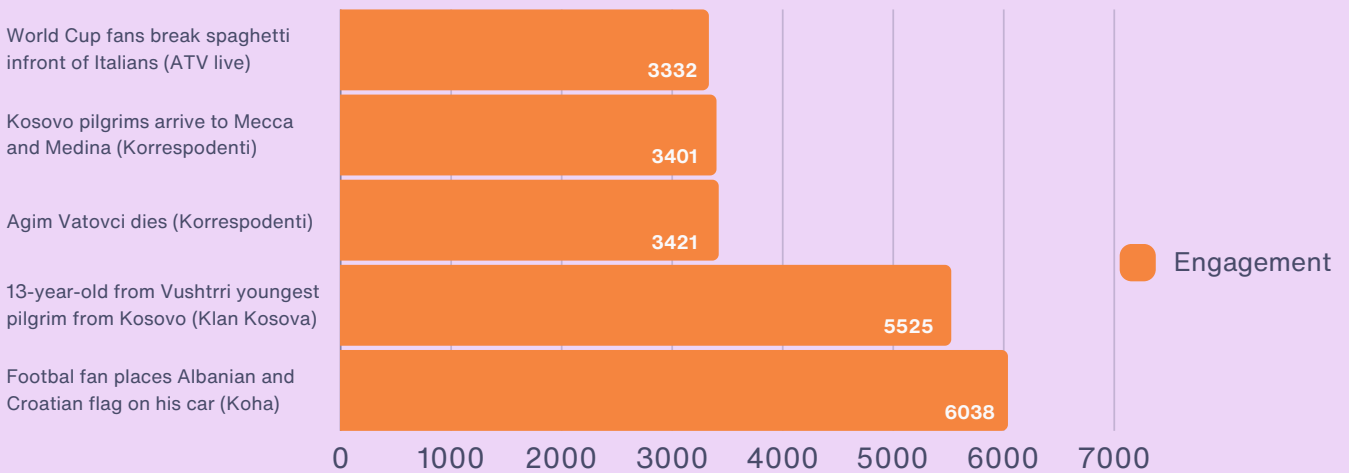
Serbian-language media in Kosovo focused heavily on three main topics during the reporting period: the developments surrounding the Grand Serbian Assembly (21 articles), the Vidovdan celebrations (21 articles), and the wounding of a Serbian police officer during an attack on the Israeli Embassy in Belgrade (20 articles). The latter topic generated the highest levels of audience engagement. Analysis of the most engaged articles on Facebook highlights a strong audience preference for community-related news. However, the overall engagement levels were notably the lowest recorded compared to previous months.

### Popular articles in Serbian language on Facebook



As is typically the case, there was no overlap between the most reported topics in Serbian and Albanian-language media in Kosovo. Albanian-language outlets' top-reported issue was visa liberalization with Israel, which generated 571 articles. This was followed by coverage of the Vučić-Kurti meeting in Brussels (411 articles) and Tony Blair's speech marking the anniversary of NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia (388 articles). However, when examining the most popular individual articles on Facebook, religious topics and World Cup-related content dominated Albanian-language media. In contrast to Serbian-language media, Albanian-language outlets recorded higher engagement levels than in May.

### 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 10,937 articles with 53,902 engagements. However, the website that recorded the most engagements on social media was Klan Kosova, with 126,344 engagements, on 3,832 published articles in June.

The most prominent dialogue-related information disorder in the media reported in Albanian in June was the alleged pending appointment of the Special US Envoy to lobby the 5 EU non-recognizers to change their position on Kosovo. This person was alleged to be Edward Joseph, a long-time diplomat and a university professor. Although Joseph publicly advocated such an idea back in 2022,<sup>1</sup> there was no official confirmation of such a decision being made by the Biden administration. On the contrary, all State Department officials' statements underlined that the Government of Kosovo's current approach is undermining US efforts to lobby for recognition of Kosovo.<sup>2</sup> At least three outlets shared this news in Albanian in Kosovo.<sup>3</sup>

Previous months' reports noticed the evident absence of the Kosovo Serb commentators in the Albanian media and the public space. In June, an example was recorded in which a convicted war criminal was given space by one media outlet as a relevant actor to comment on the developments in northern Kosovo. Sulejman Selimi was convicted of war crimes by national courts in Kosovo, and an MP of the ruling LVV amplified his message. By presenting a convicted war criminal as a credible commentator on sensitive political issues, the media outlet could be seen as shaping public perception in a biased or distorted way. This undermines the credibility of informed discussions on northern Kosovo and may influence public opinion based on misleading premises.



Another misuse of the conflict in Kosovo was observed in a short announcement of the event on the Klan Kosova portal. The media announces an event related to the "Serbian genocide in Kosovo," which is not a legal fact confirmed by the International Court of Justice. At the same time, they were using an unwetted number of "1432 Albanian children" victims of alleged genocide in Kosovo. The illustration for the article is a photo from the Kosovo War Childhood Museum run by the Humanitarian Law Center,<sup>5</sup>

1 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357929959\\_From\\_Crisis\\_to\\_Convergence\\_A\\_Strategy\\_to\\_Tackle\\_Instability\\_in\\_the\\_Balkans\\_at\\_its\\_Source](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357929959_From_Crisis_to_Convergence_A_Strategy_to_Tackle_Instability_in_the_Balkans_at_its_Source)

2 [https://sk.usembassy.gov/das\\_e\\_rfe/](https://sk.usembassy.gov/das_e_rfe/)

3 <https://www.botasot.info/aktuale-lajme/2189169/rustemi-i-vv-se-pergezoi-sylejman-selimin-qe-tha-se-ne-veri-eshte-kthyer-rendi/> and <https://www.rtklive.com/sq/news-single.php?ID=668014> and <https://ekonomiaonline.com/presidenti-biden-me-emisar-special-per-njohjen-e-kosoves-nga-peseshja-e-be-se/>

4 <https://www.botasot.info/aktuale-lajme/2189169/rustemi-i-vv-se-pergezoi-sylejman-selimin-qe-tha-se-ne-veri-eshte-kthyer-rendi/>

5 <https://prishtinainsight.com/war-childhood-museum-exhibition-opens-for-the-first-time-in-prishtina/>

according to which, in the last war in Kosovo, 1,024 children were killed. In comparison, another 109 children were reported missing. The numbers include victims who are not just Albanian children, nor just victims of Serbian military and paramilitary forces, but victims of UCK and NATO campaigns as well. Albanian children, regardless, constitute a vast majority of the identified number of victims.

Limited anti-western sentiments could also have been noted during June in media in the Albanian language, whereby one interlocutor of Bota Sot<sup>6</sup>, singled out France as the country that "opposes" Kosovo's membership in the Council of Europe (CoE) and a government that is "arming Serbia", when in fact other QUINT countries felt Kosovo did not fulfill political criteria for joining the CoE and trade in arms with Serbia, including Germany, although in much lesser amounts.

Similar, provisionally speaking, anti-western narratives were observed in another article by Bota Sot, where top EU and US officials working on the Dialogue are accused of helping the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, maintain the status quo in Kosovo.<sup>7</sup>



Other security-related information disorders could have been observed in the title "The German Parliament Extends the Mandate of KFOR." Although likely not intentional manipulation and likely the product of the lack of technical knowledge of the journalist, the title could misguide the reader to think that the mandate of the KFOR mission is dependent on the decision of the German Bundestag rather than the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The article explains correctly that the Bundestag approved the extension of participation of the German troops in the NATO multinational mission in Kosovo – KFOR.

6 <https://www.botasot.info/politika-lajme/2187014/pse-macron-bllokoi-kosoven-ne-kie-ndersa-po-armatose-serbine-e-zbulon-ish-agjenti-pse-ndodhi-kjo/>

7 <https://www.botasot.info/politika-lajme/2193857/krimineli-vuciq-ne-koketim-me-eskobarin-lajcakun-dhe-josep-borellin-po-lufton-qarri-zbulon-arsyen-pse-spo-hapet-ura-e-ibrit/>



Racial slurs for Serbs have been observed in less-known media sources in Albanian, like the claim by an interlocutor that police officers provoked him by using a racial slur for Serbs.<sup>8</sup>

A significant topic during June in Serbian media reporting was the festival focused on cultural exchange between Kosovo and Serbia, titled "Miredita, Dobar dan." The long-time festival has, year after year, been opposed by Serbian nationalists, but this year was the first time that it was banned due to alleged "security concerns." This festival and its donors have been used in a spin campaign by Informer to smear political opponents of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party. The media tried to connect an opposition movement, Move-Change, to the festival by underlining that a few years ago. At the same time, it was still civic. This movement used to be funded by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. "They want to wave symbols of the terrorist KLA in the middle of Belgrade! Details about the festival, which, like Manojlović, is sponsored by Rockefeller" was the title intended to mislead that opposition leader Manojlović is somehow connected to the festival. They want to wave symbols of the terrorist KLA in the middle of Belgrade! Details about the festival, which, like Manojlović, is sponsored by Rockefeller"<sup>9</sup> was the title intended to mislead that opposition leader Manojlović is somehow connected to the festival.



The same portal, Informer, continued to use racial slurs, dehumanizing language and spread hate toward Albanians from Kosovo through titles like: "Panicked Shiptars Resolve to Threats: Kurti's Bulldog Svecla: If Vučić Comes to Kosvo we Will Arrest and Imprison him." Informer had at least seven<sup>10</sup> more texts that used the racial slur for Albanians to spread animosity and hatred.



<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDAjtPqs8Tc>

<sup>9</sup> <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/915526/mirdita-savo-manojlovic>

<sup>10</sup> <https://informer.rs/sport/tudbal/920679/mirind-daku-siptar-vredao-srbiju-albanija-euro> and <https://informer.rs/sport/tudbal/916470/srbija-euro-provakacija> and <https://informer.rs/sport/tudbal/916277/albanci-skinull-zastavu-srbije> and <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/915143/kurti-decu-u-skolama-sprema-za-rat-sa-srbima> and <https://informer.rs/tv/live-tv/915114/albanija-edi-rama-kurti-pristina-srbija> and <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/914171/kurti-odeca-deca-pijacka-zaplenu> and <https://informer.rs/tv/live-tv/91674/kurtijeva-nakazna-drzava-amerikanci>



Expropriation of the land in Serb-majority areas is covered as a topic in almost all media from Serbia reporting in Serbian language. Still, in some, the reporting can be described as intending to stroke anti-western feelings in readers. As the process was not done per Kosovo law, it elicited critical reactions from the international representatives in Kosovo. Some of the media reporting in Serbia emphasized their own biased, cynical interpretation of those statements as a ruse by Western countries to pretend the illegal decision waxes them but not truly oppose it.

"Crocodile tears: Quint, EU, and OSCE lament over the robbery of the Serbian land"<sup>11</sup> was one of the titles in Pravda or "Vulin: Kurti is not the problem, but the international community who support him"<sup>12</sup> and "Kurti steals 100 plots of land from Serbs without the right to appeal, with the "ridiculous" reaction of the Quint countries."<sup>13</sup>



<sup>11</sup> <https://pravda.rs/2024/6/6/suza-suzu-stize-kvinti-eu-i-oeps-u-zao-zbog-otimacine-srpskog-zemljista-na-kosovu/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://objektiv.rs/vest/1507883/vulin-nije-problem-kurti-vec-medjunarodna-zajednica-koja-ga-podrzava/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://objektiv.rs/vest/1509395/kurti-srbima-otima-100-parcela-i-ta-bez-prava-na-zalbu-uz-smesnu-reakciju-zemalja-kvinta/>

*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.*