

JUNE-AUGUST

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# QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT

# 2024

# Ethnic Intolerance and Security Manipulation

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## Methodology

New Social Initiative monitors media and social media in cooperation with Pikasa Analytics INC, a 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, Gracanica Online, Radio Kontakt Plus, Kosovo Online, KoSSev, Medija Centar, TV Most, Radio Kim, Radio Mitrovica Sever, Radio Televizija Gracanica, and RTK2

### Observed period:

June 1 – August 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.

### 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.

The 2024 Kosovo census, the first nationwide census in over a decade, took place from April 5 to May 17, 2024 (in some municipalities until May 24), after being delayed multiple times due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other procedural issues. Challenges included boycotts in northern Kosovo by Serb-majority municipalities, echoing similar problems from the 2011 census. According to preliminary results of the census published in July, Kosovo has 1.586.659 residents.

In July 2024, a Serbian police officer, Nikola Krsmanović, was killed, and his colleague, Vjekoslav Ilić, was seriously injured during a routine vehicle check in Loznica, near Serbia's western border with Bosnia. The attacker, Faton Hajrizi, identified as a Kosovo Albanian and a recent escapee from a low-security prison in

Kosovo, opened fire on the officers before fleeing the scene. The incident sparked a two-day manhunt involving Serbian police and cooperation with Bosnian authorities, ending with Hajrizi's death in a police operation near Loznica.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Serbia and the European Union on critical raw materials was signed on July 19, 2024, during a high-level summit in Belgrade. The agreement was signed by Maroš Šefčovič, the European Commission's Vice-President for the European Green Deal, and Dubravka Đedović, Serbia's Minister of Mining and Energy. The agreement supports the development of value chains for critical raw materials, including lithium, to contribute to the EU's green transition.

In August 2024, the Kosovo Police closed nine branches of the Serbian Post in North Mitrovica, Leposavić, Zubin Potok, and Zvečan. The closure was based on allegations that these offices operated without registration under Kosovo's legal framework. The reaction from Serbia was strong, with officials condemning the closures as provocative actions aimed at undermining the Serbian community. Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić labelled the closures as part of a broader campaign against Serbian institutions in Kosovo. Protests were held in response, and Serbia called on the international community to intervene. The Quint embassies (U.S., U.K., Germany, France, and Italy) and the EU expressed concerns about potential destabilization. While they emphasized the importance of legality and the rule of law, they also urged both sides to address disputes through dialogue and avoid actions that could escalate tensions.

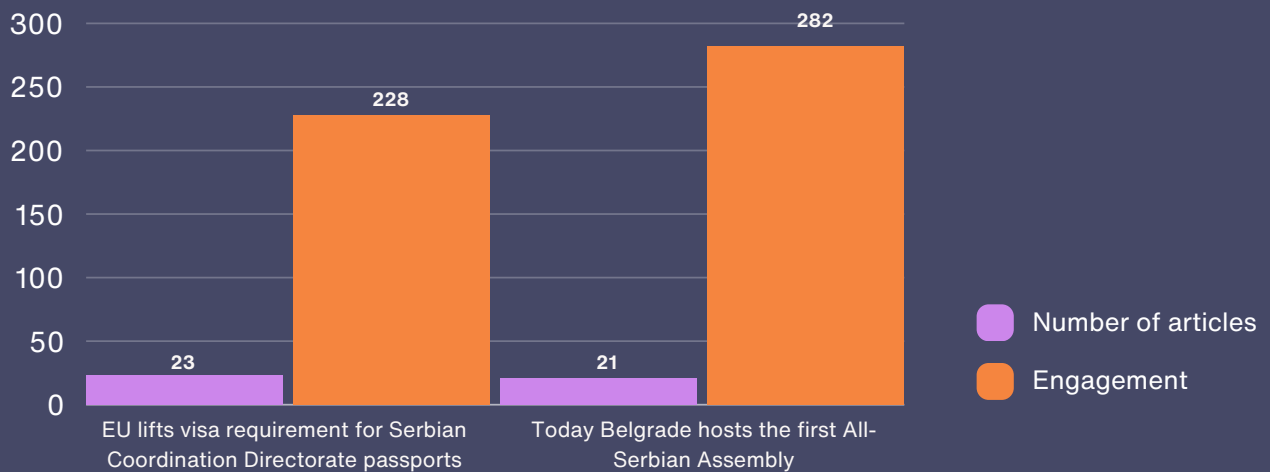
## Key findings

- Unlike the previous two quarterly reports, no single topic was dominant during the three months of observation. Regardless, it is possible to discern a pattern of increased ethnic intolerance by the officials from Kosovo and Serbia and politicization of security incidents of environmental protests with the aim of delegitimizing or covering up governing failures.

## Monitoring results

No topic observed in the media from Kosovo reporting in Serbian garnered more than 23 articles in the reporting period. For example, the two most reported topics were visa liberalization for the Coordination Directorate passports issued by Serbia and the All-Serbian Assembly.

### Most reported topics in Serbian media between June and August 2024

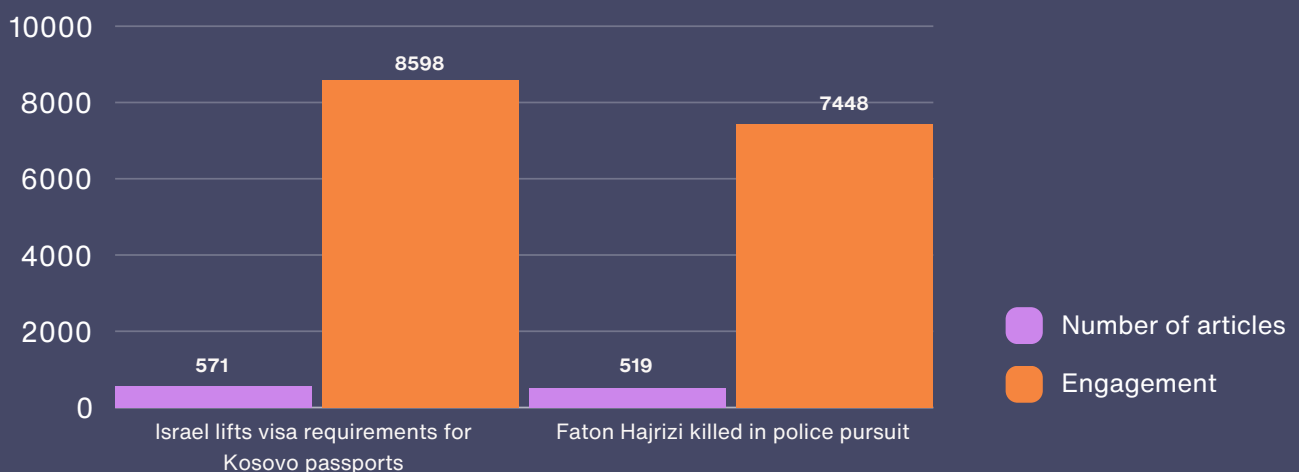


During the reporting period, the most active media outlet reporting in Serbian language from Kosovo was Kosovo Online, which published 8,342 articles with 76,497 engagements. The same website was at the top by the level of engagements on social media.

When analyzing the top 20 most reported topics in media from Kosovo reporting in Serbian and those reporting in Albanian, the only overlaps observed in reports on the Faton Hajrizi case and CIA Chief William Burns's visit to Kosovo PM Albin Kurti. This reinforces the continual observation of severe segregation of the media space in Kosovo and the diverging interests of different language groups.

When it comes to media reporting in the Albanian language, while visa liberalization was in their focus as well, their reporting underlined the importance of the lifting of the visa regime for Kosovo passports by Israel.

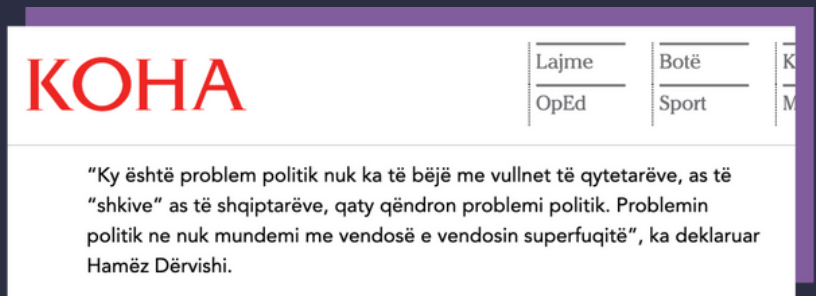
### Most reported topics in Albanian media between June and August 2024



During the reporting period, the most active media outlet reporting in Albanian language from Kosovo was Bota Sot, which published 32,424 articles with 182,289 engagements. However, the website that recorded the most engagements on social media was Klan Kosova, with 556,520 engagements, despite being the 7th most active Albanian-language media outlet in Kosovo, with 11,314 published articles between June and August.

Across the three months, a consistent trend of ethnic intolerance was observed in media and political discourse in both Kosovo and Serbia.

Serbian media frequently used derogatory terms for Albanians, including the racial slur "Šiptar," appearing in at least 37 articles in July alone when the murder of Krsmanović by Hajrizi escalated ethnic tensions. Similarly, slurs against Serbs were noted in Albanian media, contributing to a hostile narrative environment.



Articles in Serbian media often framed actions by Kosovo authorities, such as road construction in protected zones, as collective actions by "Albanians," fostering stereotypes and deepening interethnic divisions. Albanian media, meanwhile, amplified narratives around alleged genocidal acts or historical grievances without verified evidence.



Political actors in both Kosovo and Serbia leveraged security incidents to advance their agendas, often inflaming ethnic tensions.

The killing of policeman Nikola Krsmanović by a Kosovo Albanian fugitive was portrayed in Serbia as an act of terrorism. Conversely, Kosovo officials attempted to link the perpetrator to Serbian organized crime, creating conflicting and unsupported narratives. This incident heightened interethnic tensions and led to sensationalist coverage in Kosovo and in Serbia.

Efforts to reopen the Mitrovica Bridge for traffic were heavily politicized. Serbian leaders claimed it was a provocative act by Kosovo, while Albanian narratives framed the opposition as resistance to normalization. Media coverage amplified tensions, with sensationalist language used to delegitimize the intentions of both sides.

Both Kosovo and Serbia used environmental and public protests as tools for political maneuvering. Serbian officials delegitimized protests against environmental degradation by accusing activists of being foreign agents and associating them with Kosovo's government. Claims that these protests aimed to destabilize Serbia diverted attention from environmental grievances.



In Kosovo, disinformation campaigns targeted Serbian heritage, alleging false connections between the Orthodox Monastery and environmentally harmful hydropower plants. These narratives undermine both environmental activism and cultural heritage protections.

Some media were instrumental in shaping polarized narratives, spreading disinformation, and intensifying public divisions. In Kosovo, exaggerated claims about census participation fines and infrastructure projects in northern regions were disseminated, fostering distrust among communities. In Kosovo, media promoted revisionist histories, such as claims about the Visoki Dečani Monastery's land ownership, further polarizing the narrative landscape.

Throughout the inflammatory reporting period, international actors, including QUINT countries and NATO, consistently called for de-escalation and dialogue. However, their statements were often selectively interpreted or dismissed by local actors to align with domestic narratives.

This quarter's media and political landscape revealed a deeply entrenched pattern of ethnic intolerance, politicized narratives, and disinformation.

*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.*