

SEPTEMBER, 2024

MONTHLY REPORT

METHODOLOGY

[New Social Initiative \(NSI\)](#) monitors media and social media in cooperation with [Pikasa Analytics INC](#), a data analytics company that develops and implements 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, the tool has several limitations. It is tailored, with Pikasa and NSI monitors handpicked for each observed account. 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:

September 1 – September 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, including Websites, online news portals, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, in Kosovo, focusing on the Kosovo Serb information space.

Specific topics observed:

The proposed establishment of a sovereign microstate for the Bektashi Order in Albania's capital, Tirana; a potential political smear campaign against a Kosovo Serb opposition leader; the President of Serbia's address regarding future policy toward Kosovo; and uncorroborated allegations of plans for mass dislocation of the Kosovo Serb population outside of Kosovo.

Key findings

- Uncorroborated claims and conspiracy narratives were prevalent, including claims of mass dislocation plans for Kosovo Serbs without evidence, spreading alarm and inter-ethnic tensions.
- Articles perpetuating hate speech were observed, including 27 uses of "genocide" in one article by Bota Sot labeling Serbia's actions in Kosovo inaccurately.
- Six instances of derogatory racial slurs about Kosovo Albanians were observed in Serbian media, primarily by Informer and Večernje Novosti. One example of a racial slur against Kosovo Serbs was observed in Albanian media by Klan Kosova.
- Claims of conspiracies, such as an MI6 plot against Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vulin, were published without verification (Politika).
- Unsubstantiated allegations targeted opposition leaders, notably Savo Manojlović, accusing him of collaborating with the Kosovo government for trivial reasons, such as clothing.
- Persistent narratives alleging coordinated efforts by external actors (e.g., Serbia, Albania, and international organizations like NATO) to destabilize Kosovo's sovereignty were observed in multiple media outlets.
- The narrative of the securitization of Northern Kosovo, fueled by both Serbian and Kosovo officials, continues to strain ethnic relations and hinder economic progress.
- Uncorroborated allegations, use of inflammatory language, and biased reporting further contribute to inter-ethnic tensions and political discreditation.

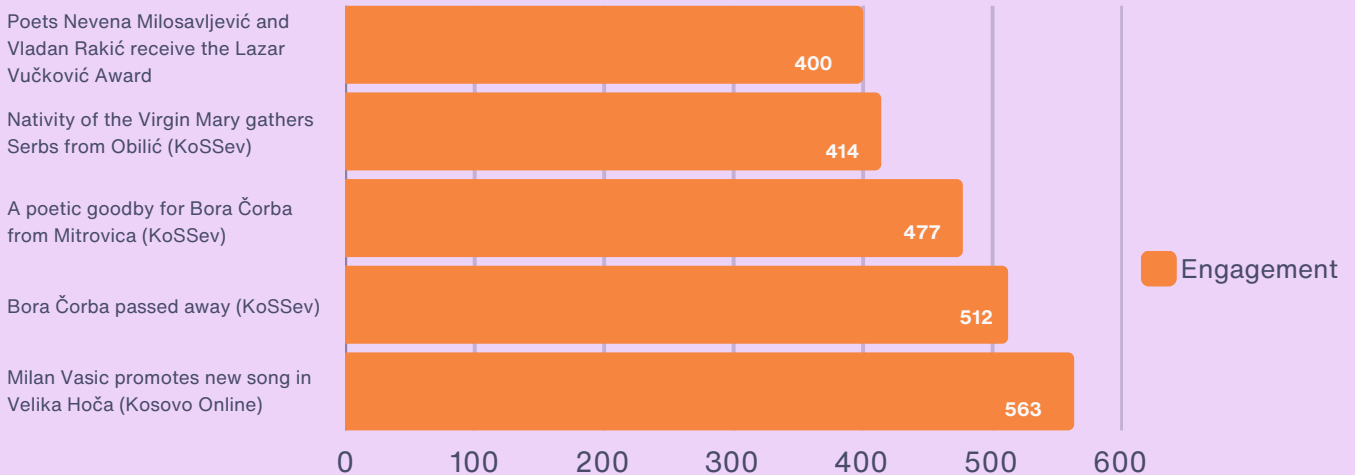
Monitoring results

During the reporting period, the most active media outlet reporting in Serbian language from Kosovo was Kosovo Online, which published 2781 articles with 35,315 engagements. The same website also recorded the most engagements on social media.

In September, Serbian-language media in Kosovo reported the most about the civic protest in front of the police station in North Mitrovica (22 articles) and the postponement of the beginning of the trial against the accused for the armed attack in Banjska (21 articles). Other notable topics included the physical attack and robbing of an elderly Serbian married couple in Gračanica (19 articles) and the opening of the Merdare and Brnjak crossing points for traffic (18 articles). None of the most reported topics made it to the audience favorites on Facebook. The Facebook audience is most engaged with culture-related articles.

Since May 2024, media reporting in the Serbian language has seen an overall decrease in engagement levels. August 2024 saw a slight increase in audience engagement on Facebook compared to July 2024. However, a new decrease in engagements was recorded in September 2024 compared to August. These engagements are considerably lower than those recorded in the first half of 2024.

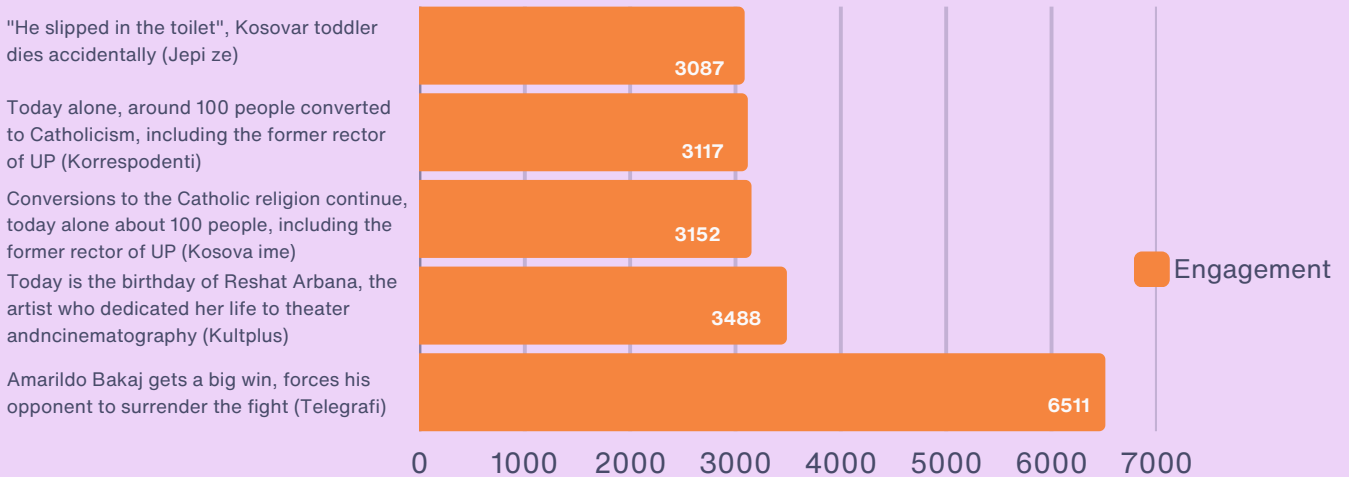
Popular articles in Serbian language on Facebook



Usually, there are no overlaps in the most reported topics in Serbian and Albanian-language media in Kosovo. However, partial overlap was observed in September when media that reported in Albanian focused on the information that the indictment for the armed attack in Banjska was filed (307 articles), while the media that reported in Serbian extensively reported at the end of the month about the postponement of the beginning of the trial for this case.

However, when it comes to the media that report in Albanian language, the topic covered the most in September (477 articles) was the renaming of a street in village Banjska after a police officer was killed in the Banjska armed attack in September 2023. This was followed by 420 articles about a series of security incidents that happened in early September that, among others, involved the alleged murder of an ex-convict by an opposing criminal clan and a stabbing between students. Finally, 404 articles were written in Albanian about the visit of the Turkish Foreign Minister, Hakan Fidan, to Kosovo. The topics that were covered most did not garner the most audience engagement. When examining the most popular individual articles on Facebook, sports and religious conversion articles topped the list of the most engaging topics.

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 10,133 articles with 50,953 engagements. However, the website that recorded the most engagements on social media was Indeksonline, with 164,308 engagements, on 4,653 published articles in September.

In August, notable media in Kosovo rebroadcasted an article with no concrete evidence supporting the claim that the Visoki Dečani Monastery directly invests in hydropower plants in the region. Bota Sot maintained part of this anti-monastery campaign about a different initiative.

In September, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama proposed establishing a sovereign microstate for the Bektashi Order, a Sufi Islamic sect known for its moderate and tolerant practices. This proposed state, to be located in Tirana, would function similarly to the Vatican, with its governance and autonomy.

According to the government, Rama's initiative aims to promote religious tolerance and coexistence.

This initiative prompted a series of critical texts in Bota Sot.¹ in which interlocutors argue that this initiative is part of a broader strategy to advance pro-Serbian projects in the Balkans, potentially undermining Kosovo's sovereignty and regional stability. They suggest that such moves may serve Serbian geopolitical goals by legitimizing special religious or cultural autonomies, such as one for Visoki Dečani Monastery. This is woven into a broader conspiracy narrative accusing external actors (Serbia, mafia, and Soros Foundation) and Albania's Edi Rama of covertly collaborating with Serbia to undermine Kosovo's sovereignty.

The same media published several other articles, or rather op-eds, that do not respect journalistic standards and misuse the principles of freedom of speech to perpetuate harmful narratives and hate speech. The most problematic one is the article titled "The US, EU, NATO are not Kosovo's "Hani i Musa" for Serbia to enter and exit whenever it pleases" labels Serbia's actions in Kosovo as genocidal and criticizes international organizations like the U.S., EU, and NATO for perceived inaction. The article employs derivatives of the word "genocide" 27 times to describe Serbia's actions. Labelling Serbia as genocidal in the context of Kosovo is inaccurate. While serious human rights violations occurred during the 1998-1999 conflict, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, the term "genocide" has a specific legal definition involving intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group. International courts have not classified Serbia's actions in Kosovo as genocide. The article's language, particularly the repeated use of "genocide" to describe Serbia's actions, can be considered inflammatory. Such terminology may incite hatred or violence against Serbs, contributing to ethnic tensions.

During the reporting period, allegations have surfaced against Kosovo Serb politician Aleksandar Arsenijević, suggesting his involvement in the May 29, 2023, attack on KFOR troops in Zvečan due to the proximity to⁴ masked individuals present at the protest. Civil society activist Kaltrina Kamberi shared a photograph purportedly showing Arsenijević with these individuals, further alleging that some were involved in the September 24, 2023, Banjska incident. Arsenijević has⁵ refuted these claims, labeling them as disinformation aimed at discrediting him.

¹ <https://www.botasot.info/aktuale-lajme/2234857/shtet-bektashi-brenda-shtetit-nela-ideja-e-rames-e-gatuar-ne-beograd-ndash-ky-eshte-demi-ge-do-ti-beje-kosoves/> and <https://www.botasot.info/opinione/2234368/shteti-i-babadjalit-ushqen-te-gjitha-projektet-pro-serbe-ne-balkan/> and <https://www.botasot.info/politika-lajme/2236181/krijimi-i-shtetit-bektashi-ymeri-shperthen-ndaj-rames-po-flirtin-dite-e-nate-me-vuciqin-e-erdoganin-ndash-ky-eshte-synimi-i-tij/>

² SHBA, BE, NATO s'është Kosova 'Hani i Musës' që Serbia të hyjë e dalë kur t'i teket: <https://www.botasot.info/opinione/2234355/shba-be-nato-seshte-kosova-hani-i-muses-qe-serbia-te-hyje-e-dale-kur-ti-teket/>

³ https://balkaninsight.com/2021/05/24/kosovo-pm-revives-plan-to-sue-serbia-for-genocide/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁴ <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/aleksander-arsenijevig-ishte-pare-afer-maskave-kur-ishte-sulmuar-kfor-i/> and <https://lajmi.net/protestuesi-pagesor-aleksander-arsenijevig-me-maskat-ku-u-sulmua-kfor-i/>

⁵ https://radiokontaktplus.org/en/main/inaccurate-photos-2c-false-statements-and-accusations-without-checking-the-facts-as-an-attempt-to-discredit/82007/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

He emphasized the lack of concrete evidence linking him to the violent events in question. Independent verifications of these allegations are currently lacking. When it comes to the media in Serbia, several tabloids led a suggestive campaign that Serbia might declare formal occupation of Kosovo⁶ ahead of the President of Serbia's announced address regarding the situation in Kosovo-Serb majority areas. The topic was also covered by several analysts and professional media who dismissed the claims.⁷ Indeed, during the conference where the Serbian president did not discuss this option, but he did announce Serbia might file another request to KFOR⁸ to deploy troops to Kosovo by the end of the 2024.

The securitization of Northern Kosovo has been a dominant narrative for over two years for both Serbian and Kosovo officials, and in addition to having a disturbing effect on the society and inter-ethnic relations in Kosovo, they also hindered Kosovo's economic progress and efforts to attract foreign direct investments, experts claim. However, the officials are not the only sources of disquieting news. In September, a former Serbian official and a prominent NGO representative from Serbia informed the Kosovo Prime Minister of alleged plans by Serbia to massively dislocate Kosovo Serbs to Bosniak and Muslim-majority regions in Serbia. These allegations were made with no material or other corroborations of the claims.

Political discrediting campaigns via uncorroborated affiliations of some Serbian opposition leaders with the Kosovo Government were also observed in September. Večernje Novosti made two such attempts in September. The first was against Savo Manojlović, a Kosovo Serb opposition leader active in the Serbian political scene. He is the most frequent target of such attacks in the media from Serbia. Večernje Novosti¹⁰ implied that there are insidious connections between Manojlovic and the Government of Kosovo because he is “the only politician from central Serbia to whom criminal, separatist regime of Albin Kurti allowed to enter Kosovo.” Furthermore, the article insinuates that this decision of the Government of Kosovo might have been influenced by the fact that Manojlovic was “wearing a NATO flag”. Manojlovic is seen wearing a jacket from a well-known Norwegian clothing brand, while the article author insinuates that this is a NATO flag because the NATO Secretary General at that moment was a Norwegian.



6 <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/1408286/vucic-sutra-18-saopstava-naciji-najvaznije-odluke-stolu-opcija-proglasenja-okupacije-dela-teritorije-srbije> and <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/4437323/kurir-saznaje-vucic-sutra-u-18-saopstava-naciji-najvaznije-odluke-na-stolu-i-opcija-proglasenja-okupacije-dela-teritorije-srbije>

7 <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/vucic-obracanje-javnosti-kosovo/> and <https://n1info.rs/vesti/aktivistkinja-iz-kosovske-mitrovice-najave-tabloida-o-okupaciji-zaludjivanje-javnosti-i-budalastina/>

8 <https://www.alo.rs/vesti/politika/955637/vazno-srbija-ce-ponovo-uputiti-zahtev-za-povratak-1000-srpskih-vojnika-i-policijaca-na-kim-vest>

9 <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/biserko-i-canak-obavestili-kurtija-da-beograd-planira-preseljenje-srba-sa-severa-u-rasku-traze-mu-da-to-spreci/> and <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/intervju-nenad-canak-informaciju-o-preseljenju-srba-sa-kim-u-sandzak-dobili-smo-sa-vise-strana/>

10 <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/1409004/nato-savo-zasto-manojlovic-jedini-politicar-srbije-kog-kurti-pustio-kim-zato-sto-nosi-norvesku-zastavu-video>

A derogative racial slur for Kosovo Albanians was observed in 6 articles published by Serbian media in September. In five of those instances, the word was used by tabloid Informer, while in one of the instances, it was used by Večernje Novosti. When it comes to the racial slur for Kosovo Serbs, it was observed to be used only once by Klan Kosova in September.

Another article with the same goal was also published by Večernje Novosti.¹¹ Later in the month, a meeting between Serbian opposition leaders and several Kosovo Serb political representatives was organised in Belgrade. The Kosovo Serb political leaders were labelled by Večernje Novosti as anti-Vučić while the meeting itself was described as “shameful” act of Serbian opposition entering into a coalition with Albin Kurti.



Opposite efforts of making uncorroborated claims of potential smear campaign with the end goal of elimination political opponents was observed too. The article from Politika¹² alleged that the British intelligence agency MI6 is orchestrating a campaign to discredit and potentially eliminate Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vulin due to his pivotal role in fostering strategic cooperation between Moscow and Belgrade. The article claims that MI6 plans to disseminate fabricated testimonies, allegedly obtained under duress from a Serbian national imprisoned in Kosovo, accusing Vulin of orchestrating the armed incident in Banjska. British Ambassador to Serbia, Edward Ferguson, expressed disappointment over the article, labeling the claims as "Kremlin-inspired nonsense." He criticized Politika for not seeking a comment from the British Embassy before publishing and questioned how such content aligns with the newspaper's founding principles.

¹¹ <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/1413775/sramotno-kompletna-opozicija-srbiji-usla-koaliciju-aljbinom-kurtijem-video>

¹² <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/632777/Moskva-i-Beograd-jacaju-veze-dok-London-priprema-poteze-protiv-srpskog-vicerepmijera>

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.