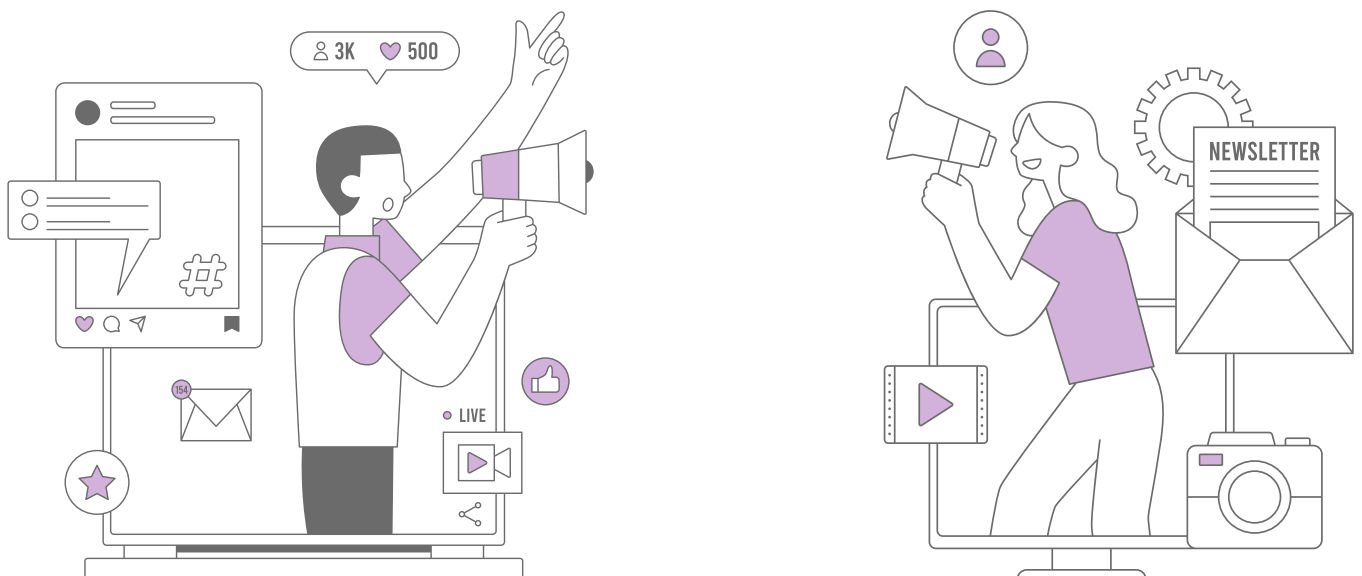




Democracy for Development  
Demokraci për zhvillim  
Demokratija za razvoj

# ONLINE MEDIA MONITORING IN JANUARY

January, 2024



# TABLE OF CONTENT

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<b>1</b>	METHODOLOGY.....	3
<b>2</b>	MAIN FINDINGS.....	4-5
<b>3</b>	EXAMPLES IN ALBANIAN LANGUAGE.....	6-9
<b>4</b>	EXAMPLES IN SERBIAN LANUAGE.....	10-11

# ONLINE MEDIA MONITORING IN JANUARY

## 1 Monitoring period

January, 1-31

## 2 Scope

Information disorder online and in social networks: Websites, online news portals, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram.

## 3 Sample

Albanian and Serbian language

## 4 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to monitor the disorders in Albanian Serbian online media regarding the developments/events that took place during the month of January in Kosovo.

*This report was drafted by the Democracy for Development Institute (D4D) as part of the "Comprehensibility and Understandability of Information Disorder in Kosovo," Project, supported by NDI and USAID in Kosovo. The content and views expressed in this document are the responsibility of the Democracy for Development Institute and do not necessarily reflect the position of NDI Kosovo.*

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the Democracy for Development Institute (D4D) is to detect and counteract the proliferation of news characterized by information disorder, an escalating trend in the dissemination of distorted information. The D4D Institute actively monitors online and social media platforms to identify news articles exhibiting information disorders through a dedicated monitoring platform that classifies articles into distinct categories: developments in the North; Kosovo-Serbia dialogue; hate speech; online violence against women; political divisions; and international influence. Over 100 domestic, regional and international media were selected and monitored through the platform. Monitoring and analysis of articles with information disorder is carried out simultaneously in two samples: Albanian and Serbian. Selection of examples from both samples is done based on the contents of the article shared: disinformation, manipulation of facts, unverified contents, inaccurate news, conspiracy theories, hate speech, offensive language, threatening or language, articles with tendentious titles, and biased reporting.

Most prevalent categories in the Albanian sample in November included: developments in the north, political divide and polarization. The Serbian sample saw the topic of “development in the north” getting the most headlines. 1000 most widely read articles have been verified for each sample. 460 articles in Albanian and 600 in Serbian resulted in information disorder.

### 3. MAIN FINDINGS

- **Reemergence of old news as Clickbait:** To increase clicks, old news is repackaged and presented as current events, relying on sensationalizing the news as a current truth. The reemergence of past articles and news items as a current event distorting the truth, as was the case of Prime Minister Kurti's interview to a German medium. Edited parts of the interview were labeled as scandalous, even though the journalist himself stated that there was nothing to hide; the article simply only included the parts that were of interest to the German public. The reemergence of old articles does not constitute new information; however, the use of such articles to create a scandal in the eyes of the readers is considered Clickbait.
- **Lack of reliable sources and information:** Articles fail to indicate reliable sources or substantive information to support their sensational headlines, leading to disinformation. The phenomenon of sensational headlines that do not match the content or fail to provide factual information is a concerning trend in online media. This practice involves creating attention-grabbing headlines to attract readers, regardless of the accuracy or significance of the content. The issue with sensational headlines is their mismatch with the article's content. They often include bold statements or claims without providing sufficient and reliable evidence or argument. Such articles can have serious implications in sensitive and critical situations, such as the Kosovo-Serbia relations. Disinformation through sensational headlines leads to division and polarization within the society. Moreover, it diverts attention from important and complex issues to articles with misleading headlines, which constitute disinformation.
- **Speculative elements:** headlines using speculative language regarding potential conflicts in Kosovo can incite aggressive interethnic language, increasing the risk of conflict escalation and undermining diplomatic efforts by Kosovo and Serbia to promote peace and stability. Speculation occurs when claims are made or conclusions are drawn based on incomplete information or unverified sources. To some extent, speculation is natural when predicting or analyzing future events. However, excessive or unfounded speculation can pose challenges to the credibility of the media and the accuracy of the information presented to the public. The main issue with speculation is its potential to misinform readers.

### 3.

- **Selective use of facts and quotes:** Unverified narratives are created by using facts and quotes selectively, often taken out of context to fit prepackaged stories, thus distorting the public perception. In the Serbian language sample, instances were noted where statistics collected by the European Stability Initiative were used, citing an article on the reliability of facts and statistics provided by Serbian political figures mentioned in the report. From the entire ESI report, Serbian media selectively quoted only parts that fit their already prepared stories, taken out of the context of the published ESI report.
- **Unverified articles:** regarding the ethnic cleansing of the Serbian community in Kosovo: The continuous spread of unverified narratives, such as the ethnic cleansing of Serbs in Kosovo and threats from the Kosovo government against the Serbian community, inciting fear and division, serving political purposes rather than the truth.

## 4. ALBANIAN-LANGUAGE EXAMPLES

Epilogu news portal posted an article titled: **German media FAZ: Kurti’s policies in line with Serbian plans to destabilize the region.** Epilogu’s article states that the article was published today (January 3, 2024) by the German medium Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ). However, D4D found that the German- language news item was published in June 2023.

The language used in the headline “Kurti’s policies in line with Serbia’s plans for destabilization in the region” includes elements of news misinterpretation, as the headline can be construed as “Kurti’s policies are intentionally aligned with Serbian plans.” However, the German reporter, MICHAEL MARTENS, writes that Kurti’s decisions are making it easier for Vučić to destabilize the region.



Additionally, Epilogu mentions an earlier interview that Martens conducted with Prime Minister Kurti, stating that the reporter had to leave “significant” parts out of the interview, which leaves room for the creation of a scandal. “He had removed Kurti’s most important words from an interview in November, where the Prime Minister admitted that the American Ambassador knew more about the situation in the north of the country, which prompted him to withdraw from the issue of the illegal license plates.” - Epilogu

In 2022, when the interview was held, the German reporter explained that all removed parts were approved by Prime Minister Kurti’s team, but that he did not consider them important enough to keep in the final draft. Through X (formerly Twitter), he explained that the removed part was not significant for German readers and, therefore, to make the interview shorter, some parts were omitted. 7 “Some seem to consider it a scandal (or want to turn it into one) that the American Ambassador might know more about the security situation in certain regions at certain moments (in this case the North of Kosovo) than a Prime Minister. But is this a scandal? – M. Martens.

“Some seem to consider it a scandal (or want to turn it into one) that the American Ambassador might know more about the security situation in certain regions at certain moments (in this case the North of Kosovo) than a Prime Minister. But is this a scandal? – M. Martens.



As stated by Martens, there are tendencies for certain news and interviews to be taken out of context, extracting the truth and interpreting it differently to create scandals. Old sensational news is brought back as current news for more clicks. The news item shared by over 10 online media outlets gathered around 36,000 clicks on their websites.



Article posted by Ora info titled: **Serbian media: After banning Dinar, the Serbian army must enter Kosovo.**

The published news item provides no details of the situation mentioned in the title. The content includes the decision of the Central Bank of Kosovo (CBK) and subsequent procedures, as well as Vučić’s appeal to the international community that the removal of the Dinar makes life more difficult for Serbs.

The Article fails to provide reliable information and sources related to the headline, hence it is considered disinformation. This form of writing is used as clickbait. The link is broken, as it may have been deleted, but the Facebook post still remains and has collected 27 likes, 2 comments, and 11 shares, and approximately 180 clicks on the online page.



Articles published by Bota Sot with the titles:

**Serbian-Russian tactics for the destabilization of the Balkans - “Scenarios” are made known: Kosovo and two other countries in danger, Albania.**

**“War is inevitable”, the Austrian expert makes the foreboding: Kosovo and this country must prepare - these are the plans of Serbian extremists!**

The narratives published in recent months regarding potential conflicts in the Balkans, particularly between Kosovo and Serbia, persist. The first headline features disturbing information, claiming to reveal important Serbian-Russian tactics aimed at destabilizing the Balkans. The article begins with the perspective of an Austrian expert on Balkan security, but the majority of the content focuses on how the Balkans could be destabilized and what actions Serbia might take in 2024.

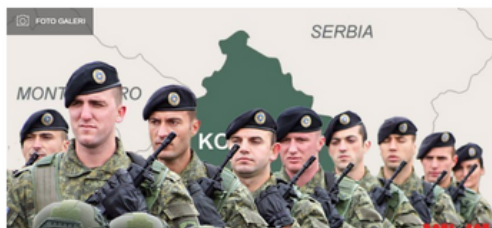


The article exaggerates the situation, especially in the title, leaving an unfinished sentence to entice readers to click. The phrase “Scenarios are made known” suggests that there is an organized plan for conflict in 2024 and identifies the countries at risk, yet no sources or evidence is provided to support such claims. Similarly, the second article claims that February 2024 will see conflicts and attacks.

**POLITIKA**

**“Lufta është e pashmangshme”, eksperti austriak jep parashikimin e keq: Kosova dhe ky shtet të bëhen gati - ja planet e ekstremistëve serbë!**

NGA: A.M. MË: 27 JANAR 2024 NË ORA: 18:01

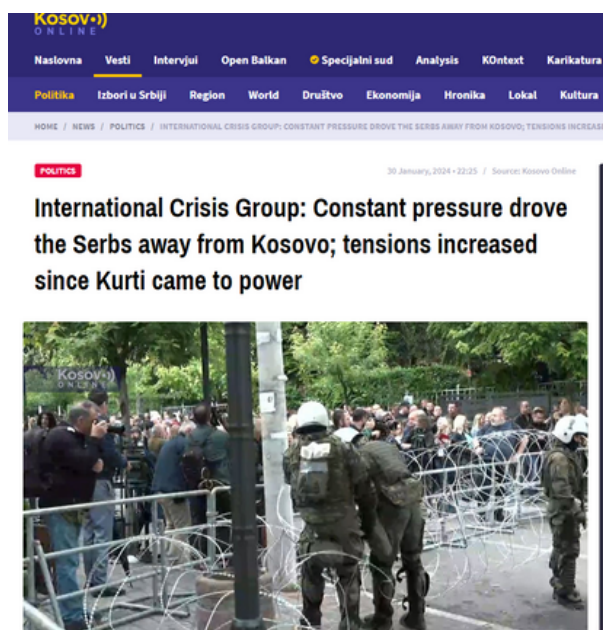


Sensational and unsubstantiated headlines like “Serbian-Russian tactics to destabilize the Balkans” and “War is inevitable” pose a significant risk of escalating tensions and fueling instability in the region. These headlines, using exaggerated language and dire predictions, have the potential to incite panic and uncertainty, as well as inter-ethnic hatred. Such publications misinform readers and contribute to a climate of uncertainty and concern by implying the existence of fixed agendas and imminent conflicts without providing reputable sources or verifiable data.

Moreover, the deliberate use of provocative language and speculative assumptions increases the risk of conflict escalation and undermines diplomatic efforts between Kosovo and Serbia to promote peace and stability. The lack of verified sources in these articles makes the claims controversial, despite their penetration into public opinion. In January, Bota Sot managed to collect about 330,000 clicks on their online page.

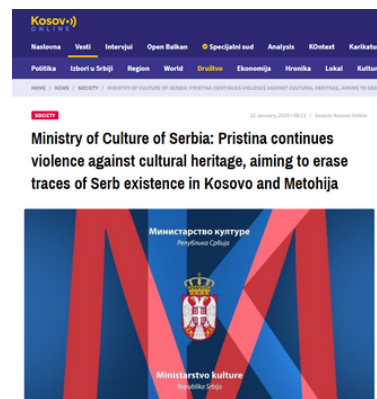
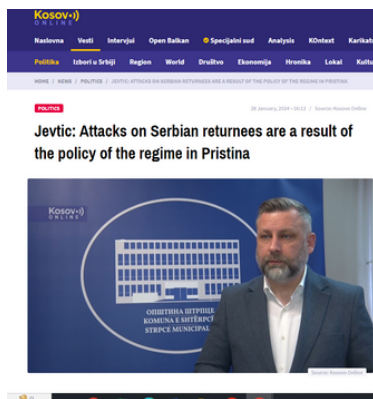
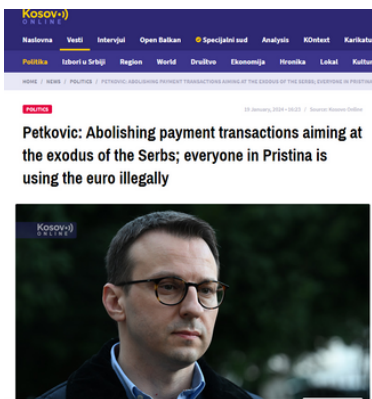
## 6. SERBIAN-LANGUAGE EXAMPLES

Kosovo Online medium publishes virtually daily articles with headlines stating that the Pristina regime is terrorizing the Serbian community. In some articles, statistics are cited to claim that ethnic cleansing is occurring and that Serbs in the north are fleeing Kosovo due to terror. These statistics are reportedly taken from a publication by the European Stability Initiative (ESI) titled: “Statistics, Lies, and Confusion in Kosovo,” which examines the accuracy of data provided by Serbian politicians. The ESI publication raises legitimate questions about the quality of these numbers.



Kosovo Online’s unverified content includes the selective use of facts and quotes, often taken out of context to fit a planned narrative. For example, while the ESI report questions the validity of crime statistics presented by Serbian political officials, Kosovo Online presents such figures as real evidence of ethnic cleansing and violence against Serbs in Kosovo. Kosovo Online informs its audience by omitting critical nuances, contributing to a distorted impression of the region’s circumstances and inciting hostilities between ethnic groups.

This outlet has been observed publishing articles with such a narrative, particularly regarding ethnic tensions and the level of crime in the region. These articles often highlight statistics purportedly showing ethnic cleansing and a Serbian exodus from Kosovo due to alleged terrorist activities. By selectively using statistics and exaggerating their significance, Kosovo Online spreads misunderstandings and encourages discord in the community. Moreover, using reputable international sources to lend credibility to false narratives exacerbates the problem of disinformation. To navigate the complex nature of modern information distribution, media consumers must employ critical discernment and seek multiple perspectives.



Some of the other headlines published in January by Kosovo Online include:

**Petkovic: Removal of payment transactions aimed at the exodus of Serbs; everyone in Pristina is using the Euro illegally**

**Ministry of Culture of Serbia: Pristina continues its violence against cultural heritage, aiming to erase traces of Serbian existence in Kosovo and Metohija**

**Jevtic: The attacks on Serbian returnees are the result of the policy of the regime in Pristina**

In January, Kosovo Online collected about 81,000 clicks on its website, with 81% of the traffic from Serbia, the rest from the Balkans, and 6% from the diaspora.

The Democracy for Development (D4D) Institute was established in April 2010 by a group of analysts who were increasingly worried that the state-building exercise had neglected democracy. D4D's vision is to promote an active and educated citizenry that participates fully in the public space and utilizes the public arena of representation and decision-making to deliberate and build consensus over resource allocation that is efficient, smart, long-term, and that brings about equitable development. D4D influences specific policy, promotes a cross-sectorial approach to problem solving, and tackles the institutional routine of decision making by recommending incremental improvements and operates with maximum effectiveness in order to fully promote Kosovo's stabilization and democratic development. For more information about D4D's activities please visit our website: [www.d4d-ks.org](http://www.d4d-ks.org)

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