



Democracy for Development
Demokraci për zhvillim
Demokratija za razvoj

ONLINE MEDIA MONITORING IN MARCH

March, 2023

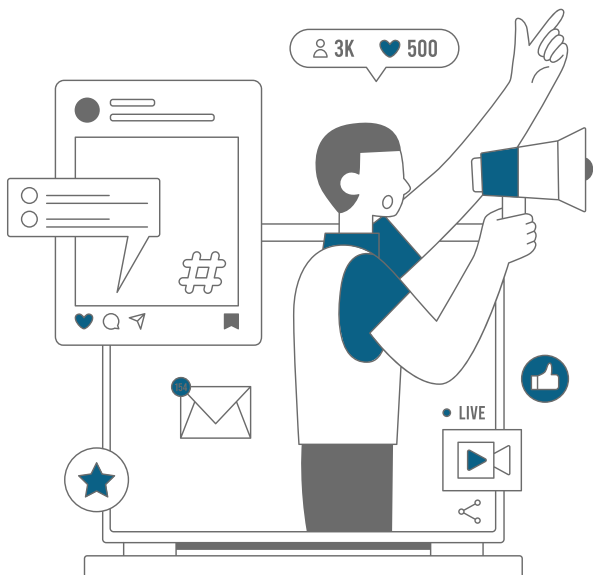


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ONLINE MEDIA MONITORING IN MARCH

1 Monitoring period

March 1-31, 2024

2 Scope

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

3 Sample

In 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 March 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 aim of the Democracy for Development Institute (D4D) is to identify and combat news items with information disorder, an increasing trend of spreading inaccurate and unverified information. The D4D Institute 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 parallelly in two samples: in 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 included: developments in the north, Kosovo-Serbia dialog and political polarization. The Serbian sample saw the topic of “development in the north” getting the most headlines. 1000 most articles in Albanian have been analyzed, of which over 350 resulted in information disorder. Of the 1000 articles in Serbian reviewed, 400 resulted in information disorder.

3. MAIN FINDINGS

- **Misleading Context** - Headlines often use historical or regional events, such as the 1999 NATO bombings, to connect them to the political situation in Kosovo, summarizing key aspects unrelated to the current political situation in Kosovo. Headlines often remove key details unrelated to the current situation in Kosovo, presenting them as pertinent and omitting the most important parts, leading to public confusion.
- **There is a significant mismatch between sensational headlines and contents of articles.** Some cases included in this report feature sensational headlines with unverified information. While these headlines depict a serious threat in Kosovo from a potential conflict with Serbia, alleging it is inevitable, Kosovo's online media do not give such information in their articles..
- **Sensational Headlines:** Headlines use sensational language to grab the readers' attention, exploiting sensitive topics like security to evoke public emotions and create uncertainty. Phrases like "games with borders" and "Midnight bell wakes Joe Biden" are intended to incite readers' interest or cause concern. However, without confirmed sources to support such claims, they aim to disinform and constitute a distortion of information.
- **Risk of misinterpretation:** Given the sensitive nature of Kosovo-Serbia relations, transmitting false information on border issues can have significant consequences. These headlines can inflame tensions, fuel discord, and undermine efforts for peace and stability in the region.
- **Disruptive Language:** Serbian-language headlines about Kosovo encourage divisive rhetoric, casting doubt on the role and authority of the EU, thereby hindering regional efforts for peaceful resolution and reconciliation. Moreover, it fosters suspicion and resentment against the EU among Kosovar and Serbian readers, which contributes to polarization and division.

4. ALBANIAN-LANGUAGE EXAMPLES

NTV Television published a series of unverified news. D4D has identified several articles from its online and social media monitoring in March.

Games with Borders, land swap with Serbia is decided.

Movements on the border with Serbia/ Midnight bells awake Joe Biden.



These headlines are effective tools for changing public perception and understanding of events. They seem to deliberately incite a feeling of urgency and panic about border movements between Kosovo and Serbia. Both headlines indicate there is significant activity or decision-making about the border between Kosovo and Serbia. However, a more thorough analysis reveals that these headlines are misleading and may constitute disinformation.

Neither headline includes specific information about alleged border movements or decisions. In both cases, vague rhetoric such as “games with borders” and “land swap” is used without providing specific information. This lack of precision makes it difficult for readers to identify the events or decisions being discussed. Both headlines use sensational language to attract attention and incite uncertainty.

Phrases like “games with borders” and “Midnight bell wakes Joe Biden” are intended to incite readers’ interest or cause concern. However, without confirmed sources to support such claims, they aim to spread disinformation and constitute a distortion of information. Despite the dramatic language in their headlines, the stories contain no evidence or corroboration for the claims made. Instead, they rely on vague hints and assumptions, effectively spreading speculation rather than conveying actual facts.



There is a significant discrepancy between these headlines and the articles’ content. While headlines indicate major border moves or decisions, the articles themselves provide no such information. Instead, they repeat articles already published or make dubious claims. Given the sensitive nature of Kosovo- Serbia relations, the spread of false or inaccurate information on border issues can have far-reaching effects.

It may escalate tensions, fuel discontent and undermine regional peace and security efforts. In conclusion, the given headlines show features that are commonly encountered in online media disinformation.

The following headlines provide examples of the distortion of information in online media through the use of sensational language, confusing readers and spreading false narratives:

The ‘VARG’ effect hits Kosovo, as the war begins in the north

Similar to the first headline, this evokes fear and concern by implying that a conflict is breaking out in the north of Kosovo. However, a deeper reading reveals that the article is about tensions with Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, rather than Kosovo. The article states that the situation in BiH can cause a chain effect in the Balkan states, including Kosovo.



The following headlines provide examples of the distortion of information in online media through the use of sensational language, confusing readers and spreading false narratives. The headline amounts to disinformation as it leads readers to believe that we are in the verge of a war, when in fact the material is historical in nature and unrelated to current events. It aims to emotionally influence readers to attract clicks. This media outlet has garnered over 300 clicks on its online page for each article. By combining events in one country with those in another, the headline conveys misinformation, inciting uncertainty among readers regarding the current situation in Kosovo. This form of sensational headlines can exacerbate existing tensions and cause unnecessary public panic.



NATO fires up its warplanes, Shea delivers the big news

The headline is not clear. The first reading conveys a sense of urgency and dread, suggesting that NATO planes are preparing for a possible clash. However, the article reveals that there is no imminent threat of war. Indeed, the article highlights Jimmy Shea's words prior to the 1999 NATO bombing, which happened 25 years ago, and is unrelated to NATO's current military activity in Kosovo. The 'VARG' effect hits Kosovo, as the war begins in the north.

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6. SERBIAN LANGUAGE EXAMPLES

Sputnik Serbia is a subsidiary of Sputnik, a Russian state-owned news service that operates globally to provide news and information from a Russian perspective. Rossiya Segodnya, a media corporation owned by the Russian government, launched Sputnik in 2014. Sputnik Serbia mainly covers news and current affairs in Serbia, the Balkans and global events, from a Russian perspective. It produces articles in Serbian to reach Serbian-speaking audiences. Sputnik Serbia, like its parent organization, has faced criticism for allegedly spreading pro-Russian narratives and disinformation. Two of the articles below, published in March, exemplify the nature of disinformation news about Kosovo.

Scandalous to the Extreme: The EU Snatches Kosovo from Serbia, Erasing Everything - after the comma

Article with False Content: The title perpetuates an untrue situation, implying that the United Nations (UN) “snatched” Kosovo from Serbia illegally. This suggests a theft or coercion that did not occur. In reality, after a period of conflict, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, and the majority of the international community has recognized it as independent. The title misleads readers and distorts the historical background of Kosovo’s independence by showcasing the situation as an illegal EU activity.

Furthermore, it encourages divisive language by questioning the EU’s role as a mediator in the negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia. Casting doubt on the EU’s authority, the title hinders regional efforts for peaceful settlement and reconciliation. Additionally, it fosters skepticism and resentment against the EU among some audiences, contributing to polarization.



Overall, the headline promotes hate and misinformation by demonizing the EU and perpetuating false narratives about Kosovo's status. Presenting the subject in inflammatory terms and distorting the facts, the article arouses resentment and antipathy towards particular individuals or institutions. In sum, the headline "Scandalous to the Extreme: EU snatches Kosovo from Serbia erasing everything - after the comma" illustrates the spread of disinformation through sensationalism, and divisive rhetoric. This incites hatred and undermines regional peace and reconciliation efforts. Readers should critically examine these headlines and seek reliable sources of information in order to obtain an accurate knowledge of complex global topics.



Ana Brnabić: Pogrom of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija, the largest ethnic cleansing since World War II

Serbian political figures continue to spread false narratives about Kosovo, and media outlets spread

misinformation and reinforce them. The Prime Minister of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, posted regarding the events of March 17, 2004 in Kosovo, stating that the 2004 riots were the biggest ethnic cleansing since World War II. However, it is essential to assess the accuracy and the context of her statement, especially when it comes to sensitive historical events.

The headline describes the events of March 17, 2004 in Kosovo as "one of the largest ethnic cleansing since World War II in the heart of Europe." Describing the event as one of the largest ethnic cleansing since World War II is inaccurate and does not adequately portray the true scope or context of the situation. The title reports on the damages caused by the events of March 17, 2004 in Kosovo as ethnic cleansing. However, it fails to present a complete picture of the issue, omitting numbers and other details.

Emphasizing some parts and ignoring others, the headline can change readers' perceptions and distort their interpretation of events. Sputnik Serbia portal has managed to collect over 15,000 clicks in its news items posted since March, of which only 27% are readers in Serbia and the rest are from Balkan countries.

The Democracy for Development (D4D) Institute was established in April 2010 by a group of analysts who were increasingly worried that the statebuilding 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 decisionmaking 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

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