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Disinformation Alerts – Russian Media Monitoring is a monthly report of the news containing disinformation and misinformation targeting Kosovo, published by Russian media in English and Serbian Language

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CONTACT:

Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED)

Str. Major Mehmet Bushi, H.III/1

10 000 Prishtina, Kosovo

Tel: +383 (0)38 542 778

Web-site: www.kipred.org

Email: info@kipred.org

KOSOVO DISINFORMATION ALERTS

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INTRODUCTION

Kosovo Disinformation Alerts: Russian Media Monitoring aims to counter disinformation that targets Kosovo, by monitoring on a monthly basis preselected media outlets originating in Russia, in both, English, and Serbian languages. The preselected media in English language are Russia Today, Sputnik, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, News front, Unz, The Duran, and Pravda Report, whereas in Serbian language is Sputnik Serbia. In addition, the Kosovo Disinformation Alert monitors news, documents, and statements related to Kosovo, published by Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During November 2020, Sputnik International has published 10 news, TASS 1, Unz 1, Russia Today 4, whereas Sputnik Serbia has published 155 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. Meanwhile Russia Insider, News front, Meduza, The Duran, The Moscow Times and Pravda Report have not published any news related to Kosovo. On the other hand, during this monitoring period the Russian Foreign Ministry had 2 postings related to Kosovo on its web-site.

Due to a large number of articles with disinformation content generated by these media, in this edition are analysed only the articles with most blatant disinformation content. The provided disinformation aims to undermine the statehood of Kosovo by constantly referring to it as “the province of Kosovo and Metohija,” and by discrediting its leadership and institutions. Furthermore, these media tend to present Kosovo as a hotbed of extremism. The preselected articles also aim to distort the truth on the past by denying crimes and atrocities of Serbia in Kosovo and in Bosnia during the 1990s and by portraying Serbs as victims during the wars, which aims at equating the victim with the aggressor.

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE DETECTED DISINFORMATION

Disinformation Alert 1

Headline: Српским рукометашима забрањен улазак на Косово и Метохију [Serbian handball players banned from entering Kosovo and Metohija], **Sputnik Serbia, November 11th, 2020.**¹

The article highlights the ban on crossing the border of the Republic of Kosovo TO the handball team Kuršumljia "Members of the Kuršumljia Handball Club were returned from the administrative crossing of Merdare with Kosovo and Metohija, where they were supposed to play a match with Mokra Gora." The article falsely claims that "The players and the professional staff of the Serbian club received a document stating that athletes cannot enter Kosovo and Metohija because that is considered a threat to political internal security."

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

The article falsely claims that the handball players have been banned from crossing the border between Kosovo and Serbia, claiming that they have received a document stating that "athletes cannot enter Kosovo and Metohija because that is considered a threat to political internal security." In this regard, the Kosovo Police reacted by stating that "On 12.11.2020, at 15:20, at the border in Merdare a Handball Team came to play a match in Zubin Potok. "Based on the anti-COVID-19 measures, their entry into the territory of the Republic of Kosovo has been refused."² Moreover, the second reason is that international games with teams from other countries are allowed only with the permission of the respective sports federations of the Republic of Kosovo.³ Therefore, the claims of this article, that the handball players were banned from entering the

¹ Српским рукометашима забрањен улазак на Косово и Метохију [Serbian handball players banned from entering Kosovo and Metohija], <https://rs.sputniknews.com/politika/202011141123854727-srpskim-rukometasima-zabranjen-ulaz-na-kosovo-i-metohiju/>.

² Kosova kthen ekipin serb të hendbollit në kufi [Kosovo turns back the Serbian Handball Team at the border], <https://www.albinfo.at/kosova-kthen-ekipin-serb-te-hendnollit-ne-kufi1/>.

³ Ibid.

Republic of Kosovo based on the reason that they are considered a threat to the political internal security are not true and are completely misinformative.

Disinformation Alert 2

Headline: Почела велика битка Срба за сваки педаљ њихове земље на Косову [A great battle of Serbs has begun for every inch of their country in Kosovo], **Sputnik Serbia, November 17th, 2020.**⁴

The article highlights the issue of the property of the Serb community in Kosovo, claiming that Serbs are being financially harmed and that their property is without protection. The article falsely claims that “Serbs have submitted about 70,000 requests for the return of usurped property. Although law and justice are on their side, the so-called state of Kosovo is delaying lawsuits while selling their property for nothing.”

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

There have been similar reports in the past about the property problems of Serbs in Kosovo. The Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED) had sent a request regarding this issue⁵ to the Kosovo Property Comparison and Verification Agency (KPCVA). The KPCVA response,⁶ among other things states that:

- After the end of the war in Kosovo, the UNMIK Administration established the Housing and Property Directorate (HPD), which was the decision-making authority for property matters. During the mandate of this institution 29,000 requests of citizens of all communities in Kosovo have been implemented and properties returned to citizens.

⁴ Почела велика битка Срба за сваки педаљ њихове земље на Косову [A great battle of Serbs has begun for every inch of their country in Kosovo], https://cdn1.img.rs.sputniknews.com/img/111995/63/1119956375_0:134:3078:1800_1000x0_80_0_1_702b1241a0cb7011ae88d194e26e675f.jpg.webp.

⁵ Request sent from KIPRED to KPCVA, October 2nd, 2020.

⁶ Report from KPCVA, October 7th 2020.

- After the end of the mandate of the Housing and Property Directorate (HPD), International Institutions have established the Property Agency of Kosovo (PAK), which had also had the mandate to address property issues. PAK had inherited 42,000 property issues from the HPD, which were reviewed and decided by the Property Claims Commission, and all these claims have been implemented based on the applicable legal framework.
- Three of these institutions HPD, PAK, and KPCVA, have executed the deportation order for 8,229 properties which have been usurped. Meanwhile, 476 criminal charges have been filed for non-release of property, or for other issues.
- Currently, there are pending eviction orders for a total of 61 properties, 22 out of which are located in the North of Mitrovica.
- Until today, the number of properties under the administration of KPCVA with the will of the owners is 12,190. Meanwhile 8,237 is the number of properties in the lease scheme, where, so far, there were 5,279,154.00 € transferred to the owners from this scheme.

Therefore, considering the above-mentioned facts, the claims of this article are misinformative and do not stand in reality.

Disinformation Alert 3

Headline: Dokazi na videlo: Lažno Kosovo — rak-rana Evrope u čijem temelju je strašan zločin [Evidence into the light: Fake Kosovo - a cancer-wound of Europe in whose foundation is a horrific crime], **Sputnik Serbia, November 9th, 2020.**⁷

The article highlights the joint comments of the President of the Committee for Kosovo and Metohija, Milovan Drecun, and the lawyer Goran Petronijević, on the trial of the former KLA commanders. Initially Drecun states that “Of course, Taçi will plead not guilty, because killing Serbs and our soldiers is not a crime for him. This phase also shows that more indictments will emerge from Taçi's indictment. It's difficult to say whether the court will have the strength to present everything and how it will behave.” Moreover, Drecun emphasizes that the Albanians hoped for Biden's victory in the USA, claiming that “We will only see if there will be political pressure and if the elections in America will have an impact. Some proceedings have shown that the court has some calculations.” Regarding the US President Joe Biden, the article claims that “Of course they supported them. That is why they did not want to prosecute them, because then they would be asked in their countries - when did you support them? That is why the West protected them all the time, but something seems to have changed. The question is whether Biden will try to influence the trial of Taçi, or the entire court.” At the end of the article, by alluding to the international factor, Petronijević claims that “despite the indictments against KLA leaders, the Western leaders who helped them will not be held accountable, although part of the structures of NATO, the EU and America are directly responsible.”

⁷ Dokazi na videlo: Lažno Kosovo — rak-rana Evrope u čijem temelju je strašan zločin [Evidence into the light: False Kosovo - a cancer-wound of Europe in whose foundation there is a horrific crime], <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/analize/202011091123818517-dokazi-na-videlo-lazno-kosovo---rak-rana-evrope-u-cijem-temelju-je-strasan-zlocin-video/>.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

a) The Special Chambers have been established by the decision of the Kosovo Assembly

The Kosovo Assembly had voted in favour of establishing The Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor's Office,⁸ to comply with its international obligations in relation to the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly's Report of 7 January 2011.⁹ The mandate and jurisdiction of the court is on the crimes against humanity, war crimes and other crimes under Kosovo law, which were commenced or committed in Kosovo between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 2000 by or against citizens of Kosovo or the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. So, despite of the fact that its headquarters is in The Hague, the establishment, operation and decision-making of Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Office is based on the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Kosovo and the highest international standards and acts regarding the protection of human rights. As such, the statement that "Thaçi will plead not guilty, because killing Serbs and our soldiers is not a crime for him," is completely unfounded because the Republic of Kosovo itself has established the Specialist Chambers and by taking this act Kosovo has shown its responsibility towards justice for alleged war crimes. Moreover, the presumption of innocence principle applies to every accused, which states that "Everyone charged with a criminal offense has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defense."¹⁰

⁸ Kosovo parliament approves special war crimes court, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33770897>.

⁹ AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO, Amendment no. 24, https://www.scp-ks.org/sites/default/files/public/amendment_of_the_constitution_-_no_24.pdf.

¹⁰ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 11, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf.

b) Biden has been in favour of establishing the Kosovo Specialist Chambers

The article also lays accusations against the US President Joe Biden, as well as against the Western countries, claiming that the West protected them all the time, alluding to Thaçi and the other defendants. It also poses the question on whether Biden will try to influence the trial of Thaçi, or the entire court. These claims represent a blatant disinformation, because, first of all, it should be noted that it was the US and the EU countries that constantly called for the establishment of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, and it was personally Joe Biden who had sent a letter to the former Prime Minister and current defendant Hashim Thaçi where he said that "he encourages Kosovo to fully collaborate with the European Union for the establishment of the Special Court on war crimes."¹¹ Moreover, after the publication of the indictment, the U.S. State Department reacted by stating that the indictments was "a step forward in the justice and reconciliation process in the Western Balkans, essential to advance the rule of law and justice for victims in Kosovo, as well as to move the country beyond this terrible period and join the Euro-Atlantic community."¹² Therefore, such statements do not stand in reality, but, on the contrary, are completely misinformative and manipulative.

¹¹ US vice President, letter to PM Thaçi: Kosovo must establish the Special Court on war crimes, <https://balkaneu.com/vice-president-letter-pm-thaci-kosovo-establish-special-court-war-crimes/>.

¹² Kosovo President Hashim Thaçi Indicted on War Crimes Charges, <https://www.voanews.com/europe/kosovo-president-hashim-thaci-indicted-war-crimes-charges>.

Disinformation Alert 4

Headline: Comment by the Information and Press Department on the Kosovo Specialist Chambers activities, **Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 9th, 2020¹³**, commented by **Sputnik Serbia.**¹⁴

Among other things, the comment by the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs falsely claims that, “The fact that the Kosovo Specialist Chambers Specialist Prosecutor's Office have stepped up their probe into Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) crimes on indictments against former leaders of this heinous entity has come to our attention. The defendants include “President” Hashim Thaçi and former “Speaker of the Parliament” Kadri Veseli. It is critically important to bring those guilty of committing serious crimes, identified in due time by PACE Rapporteur Dick Marty, before the court to hold them accountable before the law. In this sense, there must be no untouchable people. The impressive “status” of the accused is remarkable. It turns out that for many years there have been people at the head of the Kosovo quasi-state, with respect to whom strong evidence has been gathered tying them to illegal activities in Kosovo, including organised crime and terrorism”; “It is becoming clear to the wider Western public who NATO was helping when it bombed sovereign Yugoslavia in 1999”; Kosovo has long since become a hotbed of extremism and crime even as a neighbour of the EU. The arrest of two Kosovo “citizens” whom the Austrian police suspect of involvement in recent terrorist attacks in Vienna provides additional evidence of this. |

¹³ Comment by the Information and Press Department on the Kosovo Specialist Chambers activities, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4419121.

¹⁴ Rusija o suđenju Tačiju: Kazniti sve počinioce zločina na Kosovu [Russia on Thaci's trial: To punish all the perpetrators of crimes in Kosovo], <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/rusija/202011091123816380-rusija-o-sudjenju-taciju-kazniti-sve-pocinioce-zlocina-na-kosovu/>.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figure

Initially the article claims that "It is critically important to bring those guilty of committing serious crimes, identified in due time by PACE Rapporteur Dick Marty, before the court to hold them accountable before the law. In this sense, there must be no untouchable people. The impressive "status" of the accused is remarkable," by ignoring the fact that the Special Chambers have been established by the decision of the Kosovo Assembly, and that by this act Kosovo has shown its responsibility towards justice for alleged war crimes. Moreover, the fact that among the first accused were exactly the President of the Republic of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi and the MP Kadri Veseli, shows that the statement of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is completely manipulative and can be seen as an interfering approach to justice. In order to present the international factor and Kosovo as aggressors the statement claims that "It is becoming clear to the wider Western public who NATO was helping when it bombed sovereign Yugoslavia in 1999," by neglecting here a fundamental fact that the bombing campaign was a result of Milošević's atrocities against Kosovo Albanians, and his refusal to sign the Rambouillet Agreement mediated by the U.S. Ambassador Christopher Hill, EU Envoy Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch, and Russian Ambassador Boris Mayorski.¹⁵

It is important to stress here that prior to NATO intervention, the Yugoslav forces had already killed 2,000, detained over 1,200, and displaced around 300,000 Albanian Kosovars.¹⁶ All these facts become clear and obvious in the statement of March 24 1999, of the U.S. President Clinton, in which he emphasized that "We and our NATO allies have taken this action after extensive and repeated efforts to obtain a peaceful solution to the crisis in Kosovo," and that the military strikes have had the following objectives: "to demonstrate NATO's resolve, to deter Belgrade from launching more offensives against Kosovo Albanians and to degrade Yugoslavia's military capabilities to carry out future attacks."¹⁷ Finally, it is claimed that "Kosovo has long since

¹⁵ Rambouillet Accords: Co-Chairmen's Conclusions, February 23rd, 1999, https://web.archive.org/web/20070926234216/http://www.ohr.int/other-doc/contactg/default.asp?content_id=3560.

¹⁶ Eric Herring, From Rambouillet to the Kosovo accords: NATO'S war against Serbia and its aftermath, The International Journal of Human Rights, Routledge, October 2007.

¹⁷ CNN: NATO Attack on Yugoslavia begins, March 24th, 1999, <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9903/24/kosovo.strikes/>

become a hotbed of extremism and crime even as a neighbour of the EU. The arrest of two Kosovo “citizens” whom the Austrian police suspect of involvement in recent terrorist attacks in Vienna provides additional evidence of this, by attempting to create a link between foreign terrorist fighters from Kosovo and recent terrorist attacks in Vienna even though there is no linkage between them. In this regard, two issues should be noted, since 2016 until today, there was not even a single foreign fighter from Kosovo who has gone to Syria and Iraq and moreover since 2014, the Kosovo Police, as well as its prosecuting and judicial institutions have acted, and in August 2014, 40 Kosovar citizens suspected to have participated in terrorist activities in Iraq and Syria were arrested. Secondly, Kosovo institutions have condemned this terrorist attack.¹⁸ Therefore, this comment by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not stand on any of the points, and is completely manipulative.

¹⁸ Kryeministri Hoti letër Kancelarit Kurz: I dënojmë fuqishëm sulmet terroriste në Vjenë [Letter of the Prime Minister Hoti to Chancellor Kurz: We strongly condemn the terrorist attacks in Vienna], <https://kryeministri-ks.net/kryeministri-hoti-leter-kancelarit-kurz-i-denojme-fuqishem-sulmet-terroriste-ne-vjene/>.

Disinformation Alert 5

Headline: Dva opasna zakona protiv Srba: Samo Beograd ne tera druge narode na svoju verziju istorije [Two dangerous laws against Serbs: Only Belgrade does not force other nations to its own version of history], **Sputnik Serbia, November 27th, 2020.**¹⁹

The article comments the statements made by Dragomir Andjelković regarding the law on the KLA war values in Kosovo, and the Law on the Prohibition of Genocide Denial in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Among other things, Dragomir Andjelković claims: "The truth is on our side, and the crimes are on their side. We do not have laws that would impose the recognition of the genocide that was committed against the Serbian people, because the truth is known. There is no doubt that genocide was committed against Serbs during the Second World War, we were undoubtedly the biggest victims in the First World War and we were undoubtedly exposed to mass persecutions and pogroms during the wars of the 1990s. So, all that huge truth comes to the surface by itself, no matter how much someone tried to hide it." The article further claims that Serbia has arrested its criminals: "We fought defensive wars and we arrested and prosecuted our criminals. And we are ready to continue to do that, and that is why we do not need any special laws that would protect our citizens who have committed crimes."

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

a) Denying war crimes committed by Serbia in Kosovo

The article aims at minimizing and concealing the war crimes committed by Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces during the wars in Kosovo and in Bosnia, as well as at equating the victim with the aggressor. In this concrete case, the article tries falsely to portray Serbs as victims, although it is a well-known fact that Serbs have been the aggressor and caused the wars in

¹⁹ Dva opasna zakona protiv Srba: Samo Beograd ne tera druge narode na svoju verziju istorije [Two dangerous laws against Serbs: Only Belgrade does not force other nations to its own version of history], <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/analize/202011271123963921-dva-opasna-zakona-protiv-srba-samo-beograd-ne-tera-druge-narode-na-svoju-verziju-istorije-//>.

Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. During these wars, the Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces have committed genocide²⁰ and war crimes against Croats, Bosniaks and Albanians.

The Srebrenica massacre in 1995 is considered an act of genocide and a war crime by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) since more than 7000 Bosniak men and boys were executed over the course of a couple of days by the Serbian troops, which is the worst episode of mass murder within Europe since World War II.²¹ Also in Kosovo, during the conflict of 1999, the Human Rights Watch report has documented “torture, killings, rapes, forced expulsions, and other war crimes committed by Serbian and Yugoslav government forces against Kosovar Albanians between March 24 and June 12, 1999.” Moreover, the report has also revealed “a coordinated and systematic campaign to terrorize, kill and expel ethnic Albanians of Kosovo that was organized by the highest levels of the Serbian and Yugoslav governments in power at that time.”²² More concretely, based on different sources, the Report has concluded that “approximately 10,500 Kosovar Albanians were killed between March 20 and June 12, 1999, with a 95 percent confidence interval from 7,449 to 13,627.” In addition, according to the report “the Yugoslav military and Serbian police and paramilitaries expelled 862,979 Albanians from Kosovo, and several hundred thousand more were internally displaced. These figures indicate that by early June 1999, more than 80 percent of the entire population of Kosovo, and 90 percent of Kosovar Albanians, were displaced from their homes.”²³

b) The Serbs have not been held accountable for the committed crimes

The second part of the article states that Serbia has arrested and prosecuted its criminals, and that it is ready to continue to do that, and that is why it does not need any special laws that would protect its citizens who have committed crimes. In fact, this statement does not stand in reality

²⁰ See Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation 1918-2005*, Washington, D.C.: Indiana University Press. 2006, pp. 459-460.

²¹ Srebrenica massacre, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Srebrenica-massacre>.

²² “Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo,” Human Rights Watch Report, 2001, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2001/10/26/under-orders/war-crimes-kosovo>.

²³ Ibid.

and is misinformative. From 1999–2018, the justice institutions of Kosovo for war crimes have accused 111 people, out of which 61 were Albanians, 44 Serbs, 5 Montenegrins and 1 was Roma. Out of 61 accused Albanians, 34 were convicted, 23 released, 2 are on the run, and 2 are still in the judicial proceedings. Out of 44 accused Serbs, 4 were convicted, 13 released and 24 are on the run.²⁴ On the other hand, the Serbian justice institutions for the crimes committed in Kosovo have convicted until now 17 Serbs, who were soldiers or police officers during the war, but almost none of them belonged to the commanding hierarchy, while the International Tribunal for War Crimes in Yugoslavia has convicted six Serbian high-ranking representatives.²⁵

In this regard, it should be noted that after the end of the mandate of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the United Nations established the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals.²⁶ The mechanism obliges the states of former Yugoslavia to prosecute persons suspected of crimes against humanity in local courts.²⁷

²⁴ : An Overview of the War Crimes Trials in Kosovo: 1999 – 2018, Humanitarian Law Center, October 2018, <http://www.hlc-kosovo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/HLC-Kosovo-An-overview-of-war-crime-trials-in-Kosovo-1999-2018.pdf>.

²⁵ Blakaj: Në Kosovë për krime luftime janë dënuar gjashtë serbë, në Serbi për krime të kryera në Kosovë janë dënuar 15 serbë [Blakaj [Bekim Blakaj, Director of the Kosovo Office of the Fund for Humanitarian Law]: In Kosovo for war crimes are convicted six serbs, in Serbia for war crimes committed in Kosovo were convicted 15 Serbs], Telegrafi, March 15th, 2019, <https://telegrafi.com/blakaj-ne-kosove-per-krime-lufte-jane-denuar-gjashte-serbe-ne-serbi-per-krime-te-kryera-ne-kosove-jane-denuar-15-serbe-video/>.

²⁶ International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals: <https://www.irmct.org/en/about>.

²⁷ Statute of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, Article 6, https://www.icty.org/x/file/About/Reports%20and%20Publications/ResidualMechanism/101222_sc_res1966_residualmechanism_en.pdf?fbclid=IwAR199bMnI4zwmDmFeEmTbzAHT9jjuBJ65K4jcvrm2Mjzb2S7dIN4v3QyFWc.