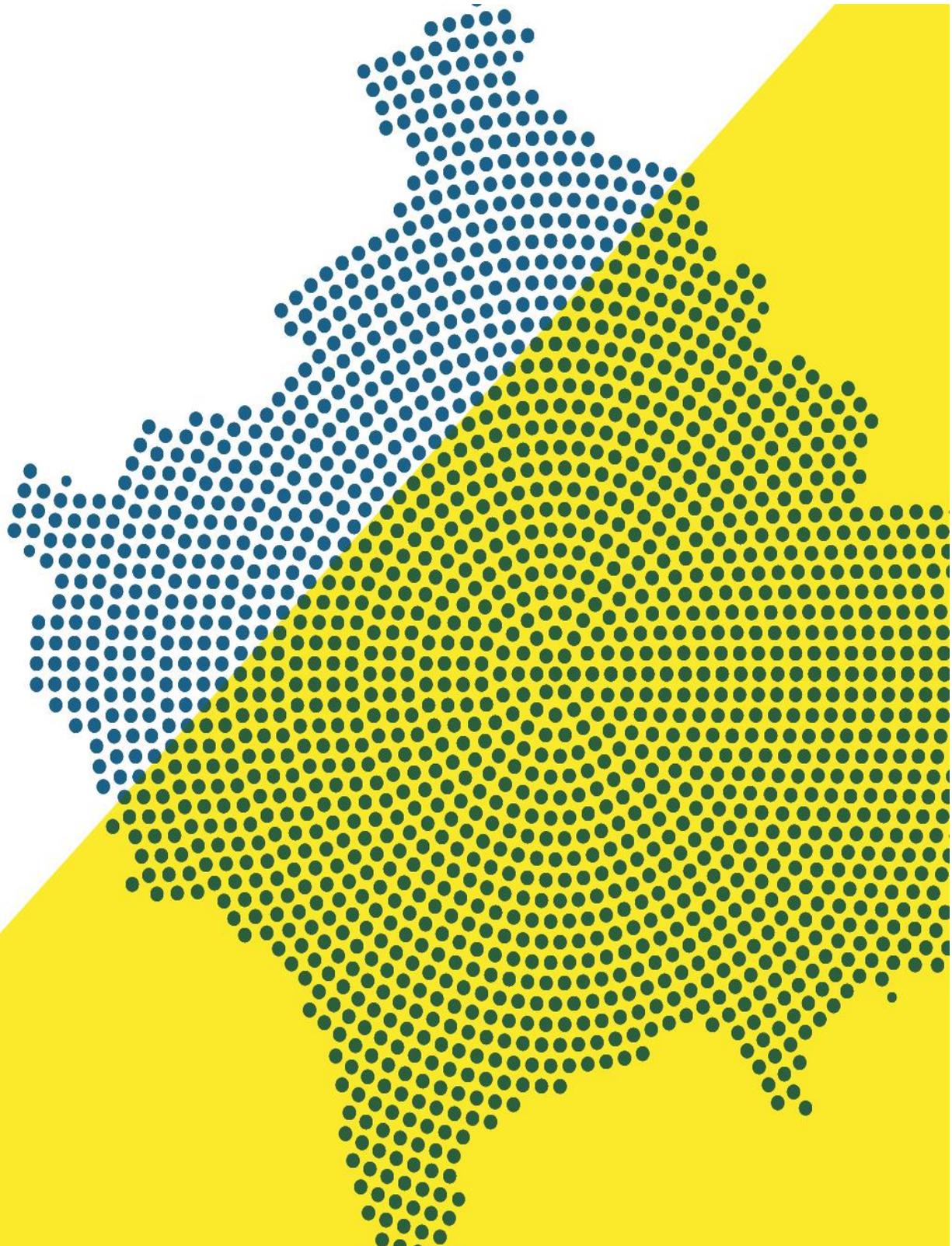


Kosovo Observer:

**Russian Diplomatic Warfare
and Media Disinformation**

June 1 – August 15, 2021



BASIC INFO:

Kosovo Observer: Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation – is a quarterly report that analyses public statements and publications of the Russian foreign policy establishment and the features of the news containing disinformation and misinformation targeting Kosovo, published by Russian media in English and Serbian Language

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Executive Summary

The Kosovo Observer: Russian Diplomatic Warfare and Media Disinformation is a quarterly report that aims to analyse public statements, briefing for journalists, articles and other documents published on the web-sites of Kremlin, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Russian Permanent Mission to the United Nations the Permanent Mission of Russia to OSCE, the Permanent Russian Representation to the Council of Europe, and the Russian Embassy to Serbia, which are the key speakers of the Russian diplomatic war against Kosovo. In addition, this observer analyses the features of the news containing disinformation on Kosovo, published by the preselected media, namely Russia Today, Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report, which are an extended hand of the Russian Foreign Policy establishment in its diplomatic warfare against Kosovo.

In this regard, the analyses of the statements, briefings, articles and other documents of the Russian foreign policy establishment from June 1st to August 15th, 2021, shows clearly the continuation of the narratives aim to undermine the statehood of Kosovo and the Western engagement in Kosovo and the region, changing the narratives of the war crimes in Former Yugoslavia, including undermining of international justice, accusing Kosovo for oppressing local Serbs and Serbian Orthodox Church, and for not honouring the agreement on establishing the Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities, as well as by comparing the case of Kosovo with Crimea. These narratives that frame the diplomatic warfare of Russia towards Kosovo, are in followed in general by the disinformation published by the above mentioned preselected media.

Against this background, a very important momentum of the Russian diplomatic warfare towards Kosovo will be created after the end of the agreement on the moratorium of Kosovo to apply for membership in International Organizations and Serbia's campaign on de-recognition of Kosovo that will be effective on September 3rd, 2021, which will coincide with the opening of the 76 Session of the UN General Assembly. This momentum can be used by Russia to work jointly with Serbia to conduct an aggressive campaign for de-recognition of Kosovo during the proceedings of this session and its aftermath.

Russian Diplomatic Warfare on Kosovo

In this period, the Kremlin, Russian Foreign Ministry and the Russian Permanent Mission to the United Nations have targeted Kosovo directly or in a larger context in a number of statements, briefings for journalists, reports and articles, whereas the Permanent Mission of Russia to OSCE, the Permanent Russian Representation to the Council of Europe, and the Russian Embassy to Serbia have not posted any publication on their web-sites related to Kosovo. Against this background, in the following text will be presented a chronological analyses of these targeted activities of the Russian diplomatic warfare against Kosovo.

In this regard, in a statement of June 8, 2021 delivered at the UN Security Council meeting on the consideration of the report of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals,¹ the Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia, G.V. Kuzmin, accused the International Criminal Tribunal on Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) that “became blind and deaf to certain crimes, by turning a blind eye to the obvious crimes of the Kosovo Albanians”, which cases are handled now by the Kosovo Special Chambers, based in Hague, while ironically at the same time he was justifying and protecting the non-cooperation of Serbia with the International Residual Mechanisms. However, it should be noted that it was exactly Russia that was making a huge pressure for a speedy charges on the alleged crimes by the Kosovo Special Chambers,² and at the same time is making attempts to discredit the credibility of ICTY that was created with the Moscow’s support of the Resolution 827 of the UN Security Council of May 25th, 1993³.

On the other side, in a statement of June 10th, 2021⁴, at the UN Security Council briefing on cooperation between the UN and regional organizations, the Russian First Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy, in addition to condemning the policy of the European Union towards Russia and the conflict in Ukraine, he criticized Brussels for “playing up to Prishtina” and called for the creation of the Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities, and called for not

¹ [Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations \(russiaun.ru\)](https://www.russia.un.org/en/press/2021-06-08-statement-by-deputy-permanent-representative-of-russia-at-the-12114th-meeting-of-the-security-council)

² See for example: [Foreign Ministry statement on the 20th anniversary of NATO aggression against Yugoslavia - News - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/news?id=1647744)

³ UN Security Council, Resolution 827, May 25th, 1993, https://www.icty.org/x/file/Legal%20Library/Statute/statute_827_1993_en.pdf

⁴ [Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations \(russiaun.ru\)](https://www.russia.un.org/en/press/2021-06-10-statement-by-first-deputy-permanent-representative-of-russia-at-the-12115th-briefing-of-the-security-council)

“deviating” from the principle of impartiality of mediation, thus aiming also at undermining the role of the West as an incapable mediator.

In her media briefing of June 10th, 2021⁵, the Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, reiterated the position of the Russian Federation on the Kosovo – Serbia dialogue by stressing that Moscow desires that “Belgrade and Pristina to attain a viable and mutually acceptable solution on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 1244. This solution should conform to international law and should also be approved by the UN Security Council because this implies efforts to maintain international peace and security”, and that it support a settlement that “would suit the people of Serbia”. This already known position, in addition to entailing a contradiction between “a mutually agreed solution” and a “solution that would suit to people of Serbia”, makes clear the aim of Russia to bring any agreement between Kosovo and Serbia to the UN Security Council, where either it can torpedo it, or it may try to negotiate the text of a resolution to its benefit, if it does not suit its foreign policy interests.

In another briefing, held on June 17th, 2021⁶, Zakharova attacks the United States about delivery of weapons and military equipment that have been purchased by the Government of Kosovo by claiming that Washington is “openly undermining the international efforts to ensure peace and stability in the Balkans”, and by stressing that “Washington’s idea” to build an army in Kosovo is a “direct and blatant violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244” since according to her it envisages “the disbandment of any Kosovo Albanian paramilitary units and allows an international peacekeeping contingent alone to be present in the territory of Kosovo”. This statement is an attempt of Moscow to portray the defense cooperation between the Washington and Prishtina as detrimental to the peace and stability in the Balkans, whose guarantor ironically is NATO and primarily the United States as its leader, and by disputing the Kosovo’s statehood and legality of the development of the Kosovo Security Force through manipulating the content of the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, namely the point 9.b. that requires “Demilitarizing the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and other armed Kosovo Albanian groups...”⁷. In this regard, it should be noted that the required disarmament and dissolution of the Kosovo Liberation Army and other armed Albanian groups has been completed in

⁵ [Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, June 10, 2021 - News - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

⁶ [Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, June 17, 2021 - Asia-Europe Meeting \(ASEM\) - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

⁷ UNSC Resolution 1244, June 10th, 1999, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/990610_SCR1244%281999%29.pdf

September 1999. On the other side, the Kosovo Security Force is not an “Albanian armed group”, but an armed multi-ethnic force, whereas not a single article of the UNSC Resolution 1244 does not forbid its creation and development.

Against background, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in his article “The Law, the Rights and the Rules”⁸, published in the very aftermath of the Biden – Putin Summit in Geneva, in addition to his harsh criticism of the West, and especially the United States of America, among others addresses also in a highly manipulative manner the legality of the independence of Kosovo. In this regard, he claims that “the rules-based [Western] order is the embodiment of double standards. The right to self-determination is as an absolute “rule” whenever it can be used to an advantage, ... as Kosovo, which obtained its “independence” in violation of a UN Security Council resolution. However, if self-determination runs counter to the Western geopolitical interests, as it happened when the people of Crimea voted for reunification with Russia, this principle is cast aside, while condemning the free choice made by the people and punishing them with sanctions”. Ironically, Lavrov is trying to portray Russia as a country that respects international law and multilateralism, while he proves the opposite by denying the verdict of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the Declaration of Independence of Kosovo⁹, and at the same time by accusing the West for not accepting the illegal annexation of Crimea and for introducing sanctions in response to Russian aggressive policy in its near neighborhood.

Furthermore, The Russian Foreign Ministry, on July 8th, 2021 published the report “Human Rights Situation in Certain Countries” that targets all European countries, United States and Australia, with the exception of Serbia and Belarus. The report dedicates to Kosovo a lengthy special section, which uses only four sources without proper referencing for arguing on the “human rights situation” in the country. The report, among others, accuses Kosovo authorities for oppressing its non-majority communities, especially local Serbs and Serbian Orthodox Church, creation of the Ministry of Defense and upgrading of the mandate of the Kosovo Security Force with the defense of sovereignty and territorial integrity “contrary” to the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, for not honoring the agreement on establishment of the Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities, dysfunctional

⁸ [Article by Sergey Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, “The Law, the Rights and the Rules”, Moscow, June 28, 2021 - Nota bene - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](#)

⁹ ICJ, Advisory Opinion, Accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo, 22 July, 2010, <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/141/16012.pdf>

rule of law, corruption and organized crime, and as a major country of origin, transit and destination for illegal operations related to trafficking in humans, drugs and weapons, and smuggling,

Interestingly, in a rather harassing Putin's article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians"¹⁰, published on July 12, 2021, where he does not hesitate to question the borders between the states that emerged out of former Soviet Union, he ironically lectures to Ukraine how it is the poorest European country, "being poorer ... than "unrecognized Kosovo".

Yet, in a press briefing of July 29, 2021¹¹, the Charge d'Affairs of the Russian Permanent Mission to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy, stressed that Russia seeks a balanced approach to the prosecution of the war crimes, because according to him on many occasions the Serbs were targeted, whereas the other ethnic groups were kind of treated in a different way, without giving any tangible evidence, which in essence is an attempt to undermine the credibility of international justice and to the narratives on the war crimes in former Yugoslavia. Interestingly, in this statement for the first time, Russia expressed doubts on the credibility of information about organ harvesting during the war in Kosovo, which allegedly, according to the Report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Inhuman treatment of people and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo (January 7th, 2011)¹² have been committed by members of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

In this vein, on August 4th, 2021, the Russian Foreign Ministry published the document Russia's position at the forthcoming (seventy-sixth) session of the UN General Assembly¹³, in which the point 23 is dedicated to the "settlement of the Kosovo issue"¹⁴. The content of this point shows clearly the continuity of Russia's position and diplomatic warfare towards Kosovo. First and foremost, Moscow

¹⁰ Vladimir Putin, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>

¹¹ [Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations \(russiaun.ru\)](http://russiaun.ru)

¹² Report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Inhuman treatment of people and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo (January 7th, 2011) <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/12608/html>

¹³ The 76 Session of the General Assembly will be opened on September 14th, 2021 and will be closed on September 30th, 2021, General Assembly, Opening dates of forthcoming regular sessions of the General Assembly and of the general debate, February 15th, 2021, <https://undocs.org/en/A/INF/76/1>

¹⁴ Point 23, Russia's position at the seventy-sixth session of the UN General Assembly, August 4th, 2021, "The settlement of the Kosovo issue should be based on international law, first and foremost on UNSC resolution 1244. Belgrade and Pristina should come to an agreement themselves, while the task of the international community is to help the parties find mutually acceptable solutions without external pressure. The EU, as a mediator in the dialogue in accordance with UNGA resolution 64/298 of 9 September 2010, should seek to ensure that the parties implement the agreed decisions, primarily, the establishment of the Community of Serb municipalities in Kosovo (the CSMK; the agreement reached in 2013 has still not been implemented). We support the work of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)", [Russia's position at the seventy-sixth session of the UN General Assembly - Conflicts - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation \(mid.ru\)](http://mid.ru)

aims to present the Kosovo's statehood as an unfinished issue, by stating that its "settlement" should be based on international law and the UNSC Council Resolution 1244. Furthermore, Russia ignores the Advisory Opinion of the ICJ on the legality of the Declaration of Independence of Kosovo, and misinterprets the UNGA Resolution 64/298 of 9 September 2010, which acknowledged the Advisory Opinion and stipulates that aim of the EU mediated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia "would be to promote cooperation, achieve progress on the path to the European Union and improve the lives of the people"¹⁵, and this has nothing to deal with Kosovo's statehood.

In a briefing by Deputy Director of the Foreign Ministry Information and Press Department Alexander Bikantov, of August 5, 2021, in the section "Answers to media questions" Kosovo was addressed under the heading "Plans of 10 African and Asian countries to withdraw recognition of Kosovo". Bikantov firstly stated that Russia intends to firmly pursue the policy that the "mutually acceptable solution" between Belgrade and Prishtina should be based on the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, approved by the UN Security Council and that Moscow "will only agree to a decision that suits the Serbs". This statement also brings to the surface the intent of Russia to either make Serbia hostage of its aims to impede the European Union and the United States efforts for achieving a comprehensive agreement on normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, or to torpedo possible Kosovo's quest for a membership in United Nations, in a case of an agreement short of formal recognition by Serbia. On the other side, in relation to the one year moratorium on membership of Kosovo in international organizations and the suspension of Serbia's campaign for withdrawal of recognitions of the independence of Kosovo that was agreed in Washington on September 4th, 2020¹⁶, which effectively will end in a matter of days, Bikantov stated that any revision of "ill-considered" decision to recognize Kosovo, is a sovereign choice of some members of international community, and that it "the result of the sound analysis of the situation, including Pristina's behavior". In addition, he accused Prishtina for obstructing the dialogue process since 2013, especially for not implementing the agreement on Association of Serbian Majority Municipalities, and on the other side, he criticized EU, as a facilitator of the dialogue, for a lack of clear reaction on Kosovo's "obstructions",

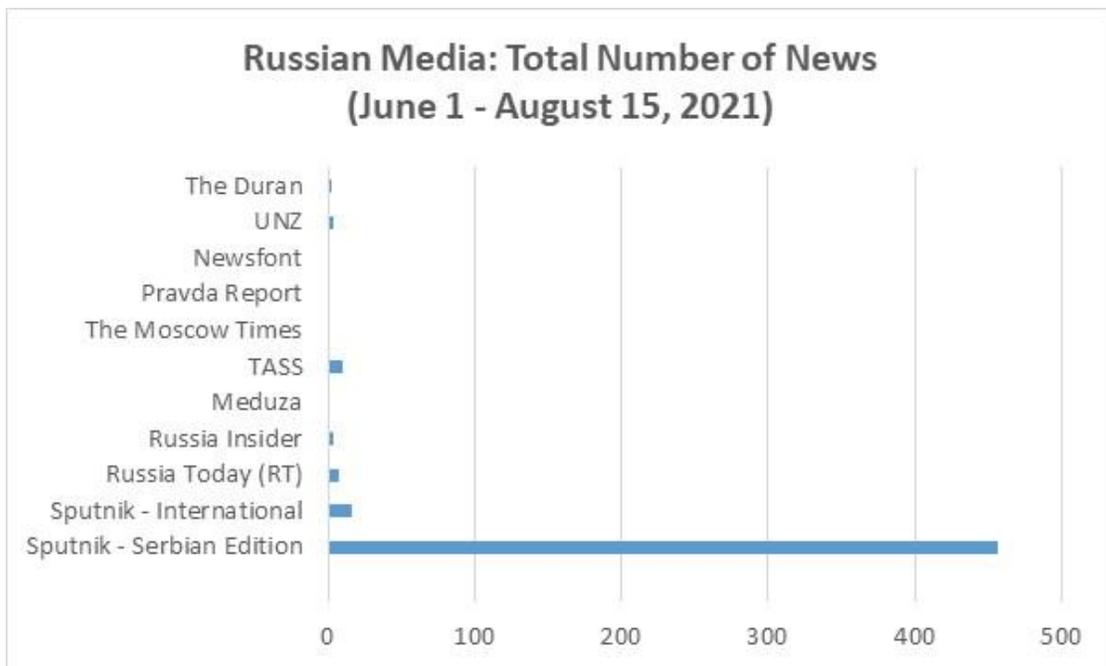
¹⁵ Point 2, UNGA Resolution 64/298, September 9th, 2010, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/ROL%20A%20RES64%20298.pdf>

¹⁶ Point on the moratorium of the Washington Agreement, "Kosovo (Prishtina) will agree to implement a one year moratorium seeking new membership in International Organizations. Serbia (Belgrade) will agree on a one year moratorium of its de-recognition campaign, and will refrain formally or informally requesting any nation or International Organization not to recognize Kosovo as an state. Both agreements to desist will take effect immediately", <https://www.new-perspektiva.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Washington-Agreement-Kosova-Serbia.pdf>

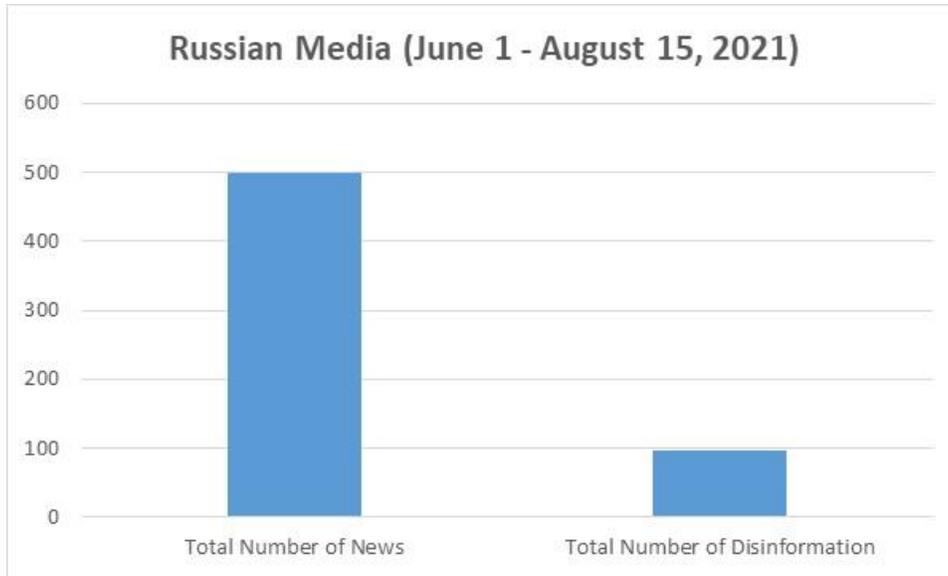
Russian Media Disinformation on Kosovo

The preselected media outlets originating in Russia that have been monitored from June 1 to August 15, 2021 are Russia Today, Sputnik International, Sputnik Serbia, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran and Pravda Report.

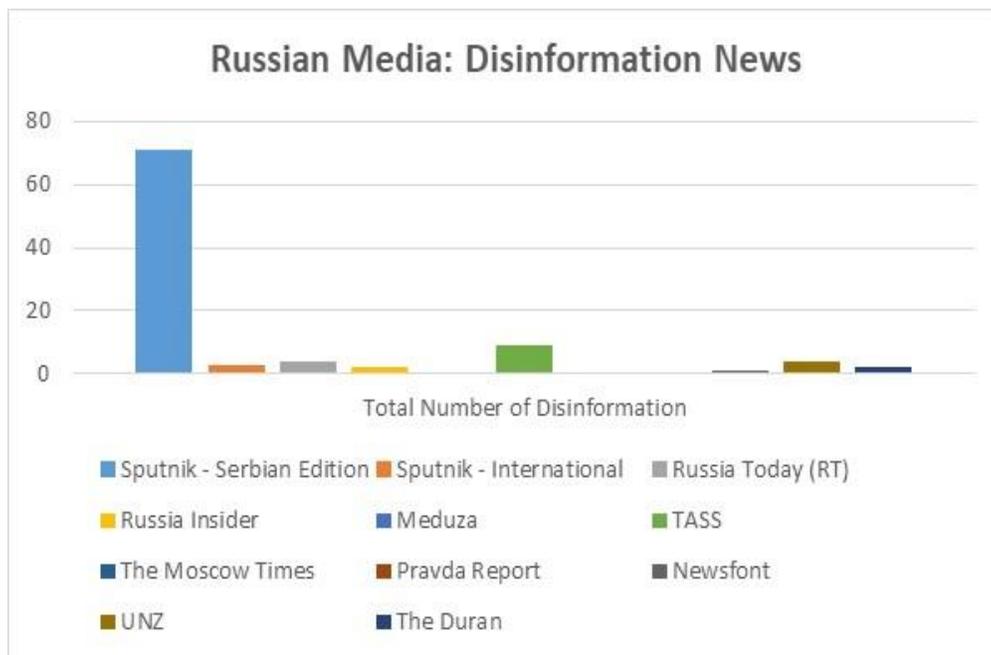
The monitoring of data shows that during this period media outlets originating in Russia have published 500 news related directly and indirectly to Kosovo. Sputnik – Serbian Edition has published 457, Sputnik International 16, Russia Today 7, Russia Insider 3, Meduza none, TASS 10, Moscow Times none, Pravda Report none, Newsfront 1, UNZ 4, Duran 2.



An overview of the published news by these media conducted by KIPRED shows that out of 500 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo, 96 (19,2%) of them had disinformation content.



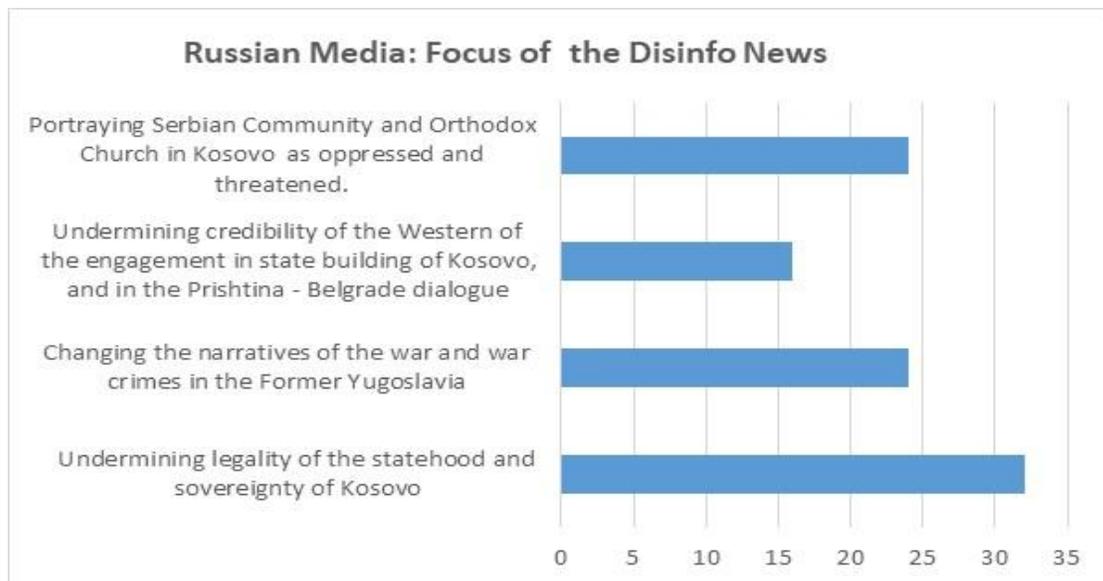
The largest number of disinformation was published by Sputnik Serbia (71), followed by TASS (9), Russia Today (4), UNZ (4), Sputnik International (3), Russian Insider (2), The Duran (2) and Newsfront (1).



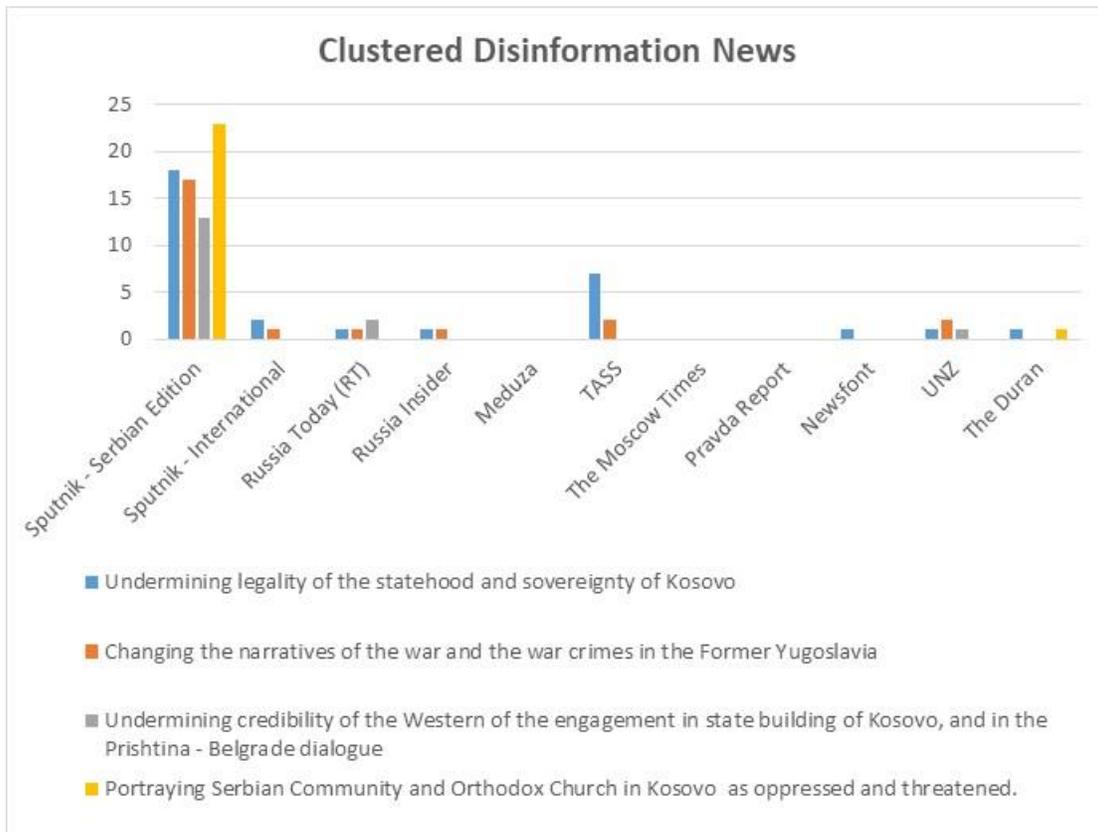
In order to have a better overview of the disinformation features targeting Kosovo published by the above media outlets originating in Russia, the main focus of their content has been clustered into the following disinformation aims:

- Undermining legality of the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo.
- Changing the narratives of the war and the war crimes in the Former Yugoslavia.
- Undermining credibility of the Western of the engagement in state building of Kosovo, and in the Prishtina - Belgrade dialogue.
- Portraying Serbian Community and Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened.

The content of the news containing disinformation published by these Russian media outlets shows that their largest number was aiming to undermine the legality of the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo (32), followed by portraying Serbian Community and Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened (24), changing the narratives of the war and the war crimes in the Former Yugoslavia (24), and undermining credibility of the Western of the engagement in state building of Kosovo, and in the Prishtina - Belgrade dialogue (16).



The analyses of the general features of the clustered disinformation news published by the media outlets originating in Russia shows that they are mainly focused on undermining legality of the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo, changing the narratives of the war and war crimes in the Former Yugoslavia and undermining credibility of the Western engagement in the state building and Prishtina – Belgrade dialogue, with the exception of Sputnik Serbia that gives a special attention to the disinformation aiming at portraying Serbian Community and Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened.



Conclusions

A very important momentum of the Russian diplomatic warfare towards Kosovo will be created after the end of the agreement on the moratorium of Kosovo to apply for membership in International Organizations and Serbia's campaign on de-recognition of Kosovo that will be effective on September 3rd, 2021, which will coincide with the opening of the 76 Session of the UN General Assembly. This momentum can be used by Russia to work jointly with Serbia to conduct an aggressive campaign for de-recognition of Kosovo during the proceedings of this session and its aftermath.

In this regard, the analyses of the statements, briefings, articles and other documents of the Russian foreign policy establishment from June 1st to August 15th, 2021, shows clearly the continuation of the narratives aim to undermine the statehood of Kosovo and the Western engagement in Kosovo and the region, changing the narratives of the war crimes in Former Yugoslavia, including undermining of international justice, accusing Kosovo for oppressing local Serbs and Serbian Orthodox Church, and for not honoring the agreement on establishing the Association of the Serbian Majority Municipalities, as well as by comparing the case of Kosovo with Crimea. These narratives frame the diplomatic warfare of Russia towards Kosovo.

In addition, the analyses of the general features of the clustered disinformation news published by the media outlets originating in Russia shows that they are mainly focused on undermining legality of the statehood and sovereignty of Kosovo, changing the narratives of the war and war crimes in the Former Yugoslavia and undermining credibility of the Western engagement in the state building and Prishtina – Belgrade dialogue, with the exception of Sputnik Serbia that gives a special attention to the disinformation aiming at portraying Serbian Community and Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened.

Against this background, Kosovo Government in coordination with its Western partners need to be prepared well for the upcoming Session of the UN General Assembly in order to avoid any surprising withdrawal of recognition. In this vein, Kosovo Government should address the UN members with an appropriate document that counters the Russian and Serbian narratives against the Kosovo's statehood and sovereignty, and to campaign for further recognitions.

This is momentum is particularly important, due to the fact that any further recognition or de-recognition of Kosovo will have a serious impact on the process of the dialogue with Serbia, since it will considerably effect the strength of positions of each of them.