



BASIC INFO:

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

SUPPORTED BY:



London, United Kingdom

DISCLAIMER:

The views presented in this publication are solely those of the Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED).

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

RUSSIAN MEDIA

JANUARY 2020

INTRODUCTION

Kosovo Disinformation Alert: Russian Media Monitoring aims to counter disinformation that targets Kosovo, through monitoring on a monthly basis of the preselected media outlets originating in Russia, in both, English, and Serbian Language. The preselected media in English Language are Russia Today, Sputnik, Meduza, Russia Insider, TASS, The Moscow Times, Newsfront, Unz, The Duran, and Pravda Report, whereas in Serbian Language is the 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 January 2020, the Russia Today has published two news, Sputnik one, Meduza none, Russian Insider one, TASS one, The Moscow Times none, Newsfront none, Unz none, The Duran none and Pravda Report none, whereas Sputnik Serbia has published 62 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. On the other hand, during this monitoring period Kremlin had no news, while Russian Foreign Ministry has published one transcript of a press conference in which Kosovo was raised as an issue.

A careful review of the monitored news shows that the published during January 2020 in news in English Language by the above listed media based in Russia do not have disinformation content, but this is not the case for Sputnik Serbia and the Russian Foreign Ministry.

The disinformation generated during this monitoring period by the preselected Russian media and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in relation to Kosovo, indicate its focus on undermining the statehood of Kosovo, and the support of Western countries in its democratic state building. This is done by presenting Kosovo as a state creature which was created through a “genocide” against its Serbian population supported by Western countries, by the denial of war crimes committed by Serbia in Kosovo, by making improper comparisons of Kosovo’s statehood with the annexation of Crimea by Russia, and by presenting it as a threat to the security to regional security. The disinformation detected during this period will be discussed and deconstructed in the following section.

DECONSTRUCTION OF THE DETECTED DISINFORMATION

Disinformation Alert 1

Headline: *Natalija Poklonskaya Sputnik: Na Kosovu je izvršen genocid nad Srbima*
(*Natalija Poklonskaya for Sputnik: Genocide against Serbs has been committed in Kosovo*),
Sputnik Serbia, January 2nd, 2020¹

In her interview, **Natalia Vladimirovna Poklonskaya**, the Deputy Chair of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Russian State Duma, claims that “a genocide has been committed against Serbs in Kosovo, who have been destroyed and evicted, and this was assisted by foreign intervention”.

Furthermore, she stated that ‘Kosovo and Metohija’ has for Serbia “the same fateful significance that Crimea and Sevastopol have for Russia – it is the soul, Orthodoxy. The christening of Russia took place in the Hersones, Crimea. It is our country and has always been Russian. So many people were killed there, all pervaded Russia. It is the same with Kosovo and Metohija: Orthodox shrines, ancient monasteries, famous battles and, of course, Kosovo and Metohija have sacred significance for Serbia. But when we held a referendum in Crimea, it was for the right to realize the will of indigenous Crimeans, and no one evicted them in order to artificially inhabit some other people there.

Deconstruction of the disinformation: Facts and Figures

a) There was no genocide committed against Kosovo Serbs

The detailed data gathered based on 31,600 documents, presented in the publication “Kosovo Memory Book” (February 2nd, 2015), and prepared by the Humanitarian Law Center based in Belgrade, confirm the deaths and disappearances of 13,535 individuals during the war in Kosovo

¹ See the full interview: Natalija Poklonskaya Sputnik: Na Kosovu je izvršen genocid nad Srbima, Sputnik Srbija, January 17th, 2020, <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/intervju/202001021121462218-natalija-poklonska-za-sputnik-na-kosovu-je-izvršen-genocid-nad-srbima-video-metohija/>

and its immediate aftermath (January 1st, 1998 – December 31st, 2000). 10,812 of this number were Albanians, 2,197 were Serbs, while 526 victims were Roma, Bosniaks, Montenegrins, and other non-Albanians². Furthermore, not even a single international organization has stated that there was any genocide committed against the Serbian population in Kosovo.

b) The claim that the presumed genocide was assisted by foreign intervention

NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia (March 24th – June 10th, 1999), known as Kosovo War, was waged in order to halt the humanitarian catastrophe that Kosovo Albanian population was suffering in the form of massive killings and expulsion conducted by the Serbian military, paramilitary and police forces. During this period, more than 10,000 Kosovo Albanians were killed by the Serbian Armed Forces, and, according to UNHCR, over 850,000 were expelled or left the territory in face of Serbian atrocities³. Furthermore, the war ended by the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999), which was supported by Russia as well, and which expressed its determination to resolve the grave humanitarian situation in Kosovo, and provided the establishment of the UN Administration in Kosovo and the NATO-led Peace Enforcement Mission (Kosovo Force – KFOR)⁴.

c) The comparison of Crimea with Kosovo

In contrast to Crimea's illegal annexation by Russia, which was justified by an internationally unrecognized referendum, Kosovo's independence was consequence of forceful stripping of Kosovo's federal autonomy within Yugoslavia in 1989-1990, expulsion of Albanian majority population from the public sector, grave atrocities conducted by Belgrade's military, paramilitary and police forces (1998-1999), and the UNSC mandated negotiation process led by President Ahtisaari, which ended with the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement that

²Humanitarian Law Center: 31,600 documents undoubtedly confirm death or disappearance of 13,535 individuals during war in Kosovo, Belgrade, January 6th, 2015, http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?page_id=14390&lang=de. The Data Base of the Kosovo Memory Book is online available at www.kosovomemorybook.org

³ See for example: UNHCR, Kosovo Crisis Update, August 4th, 1999, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/updates/1999/8/3ae6b80f2c/kosovo-crisis-update.html>

⁴ See UNSC Resolution 1244(1999), 10 June 1999, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/990610_SCR1244%281999%29.pdf

provided for a supervised independence of Kosovo⁵. Russia was represented in the President Ahtisaari's team with its high-ranking diplomat Mr. Peter Ivancov. Furthermore, on July 22, 2010, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered the advisory opinion confirming that Kosovo's declaration of independence of February 17, 2008 has not violated the International Law.

Disinformation Alert 2

- **Headline:** Šta se krije iza poruke zemalja Kvinta o godišnjici Račak (What lies behind the Quint countries' message about Racak's anniversary), **Sputnik Srbija, 16 January 2020**⁶

The article states that "... lawyer Goran Petronijević says the West's attempt to hide it [Racak] was all a part of a false scenario that led to the bombing of the FRY", and that "There was no crime in Račak, but there was an armed conflict between the legitimate and legal forces of the Serbian army and police against the KLA terrorists. There were no civilian casualties, no excessive use of force, or anything else, because if it had been, the Hague would have already been using it in all the processes that took place."

The deconstruction of the disinformation: Facts and figures

- a) There was no crime in Racak - there were no civilian casualties, no excessive use of force, or anything else**

The head of Finish Investigation Team, Dr. Helena Ranta, who was in charge of the investigation of the massacre of Račak committed by Serbian forces on January 15, 1999 when 45 villagers were killed, once after the investigation was completed and forensic showed that 45 victims were unarmed civilians, called this act as a "crime against humanity."⁷

⁵ See: Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement, February 2nd, 2007, <http://pbosnia.kentlaw.edu/Comprehensive%20Proposal%20for%20the%20Kosovo%20Settlement.pdf>

⁶SputnjikSrbijaŠta se krijeizaporukezemaljaKvinte o godišnjiciRačka, January 16, 2020, <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/analize/202001161121549706-sta-se-krije-iza-poruke-zemalja-kvinte-o-godisnjici-racka/>

⁷Chris Bird, Racak report finds Serbs guilty, Guardian, March 18, 1999, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/mar/18/4>

b) The Hague Tribunal has not used this case in its process

On the next day after the massacre had been committed, the then Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Louise Arbour has launched an investigation on this case,⁸ but her entry in Kosovo was denied by the authorities of Belgrade on January 18th, 1999, at the Macedonian border.

Furthermore, according to The Hague Prosecutor Geoffrey Nice, “the prosecution's investigation on this case examined 62 witness statements. Initially, it counted on 30 witnesses giving evidence then the number was cut to 17, then nine, and finally to five. Of these, only one will testify "in vivo", while the others will give written statements. They will only come to the tribunal to be cross-examined by the defendant”⁹, which clearly shows the falsehood of this news.

Disinformation Alert 3

- **Title:** *Foreign Ministry's answers to media questions for a news conference on Russia's diplomatic performance in 2019, 17 January, 2020*¹⁰

In a press briefing of the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry held on January 17th, 2020,, the Spokesperson of this Ministry, Maria Zakharova, among other things has stated that “We consider the plans to create a “Kosovo army,” as the plans supported by the leading NATO countries, to be a major threat to regional security. This is a gross violation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which stipulates that all armed groups of Kosovo Albanians must be demilitarized, allowing only the multinational contingents in Kosovo”.

⁸Kosovo: Statement by Justice Louise Arbour, Prosecutor of the ICTY. Hague, 16 January, 1999, <https://www.icty.org/en/press/kosovo-statement-justice-louise-arbour-prosecutor-icty>

⁹MirkoKlarin, ANALYSIS: Tribunal Judges Restrict Racak Evidence, 1 June 2002, IWPR, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/analysis-tribunal-judges-restrict-racak>

¹⁰ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Foreign Ministry's answers to media questions for a news conference on Russia's diplomatic performance in 2019, 17 January, 2020, https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/mezdunarodnaa-informacionnaa-bezopasnost/-/asset_publisher/UsCUTiw2pO53/content/id/3995958

The deconstruction of the disinformation: Facts and Figures

a) Kosovo's Army as a threat to regional security

Kosovo's Security Force, labeled by the Spokesperson Zakharova as "Kosovo's Army," is the smallest in the entire region in terms of the number of the personnel, the budget and weaponry. In this regard it should be mentioned that Serbia's manpower strength is 30,000 active and 50,000 in reserve, with military budget of 832,088,523 Euro¹¹, in comparison to Kosovo's that has manpower of 5,000 active and 3,000 in reserve, with budget of 58,600,000 Euro¹². Also, Serbia has an incomparable supremacy in airpower, armored weaponry and artillery, which Kosovo does not possess at all.

b) The violation of the UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999)

The United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999), in its point 15, "Demands that the KLA and other armed Kosovo Albanian groups end immediately all offensive actions and comply with the requirements for demilitarization as laid down by the head of the international security presence in consultation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General".¹³

From the formulation of this provision of the UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999), it is clear that it refers to the post-war conditions of demilitarization, and it was implemented with the demilitarization of KLA and other armed Kosovo Albanian groups on September 20th, 1999, based on the agreement that was concluded between the KLA Leadership and the KFOR Commander, General Michael Jackson, on June 21st, 1999.

Kosovo Security Force does not operate in collision with the Resolution 1244 (1999), whose provisions in terms of development of Kosovo institutions are referred to the circumstances prior to the Declaration of Kosovo's Independence, which, as underlined above, according to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, does not violate the International Law.

¹¹Serbia Military Strength (2020), https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=serbia

¹² Law on the Budget of the Republic of Kosovo, 2019, <https://mf.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/D8042858-C783-42CF-BB4F-4AF0BF0E8E44.pdf>

¹³ See UNSC Resolution 1244(1999), 10 June 1999, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/990610_SCR1244%281999%29.pdf

Furthermore, Kosovo Security Force is a multi-ethnic organization that reflects the constitutional order of Kosovo, and as such does not belong to the categories of armed groups which were demanded to demilitarize by the UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999).