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Disinformation Alerts – Serbian Media Monitoring is a monthly report on the news related to disinformation and misinformation targeting Kosovo, published by media in Serbia

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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: Serbian Media Monitoring aim to counter disinformation that targets Kosovo, by monitoring, on a monthly basis, preselected media outlets originating in Serbia. The preselected media are Tanjug, Informer, Novosti, Kurir, B92, Politika, Naša Borba, and Nin, which are known for producing news with disinformation content that is not limited only to Kosovo.

The monitoring of these media shows that during June 2020, a total of 660 news have been published by the above mentioned preselected media outlets originating in Serbia, of which Tanjug has published 81, Beta 89, Informer 51, Novosti 102, Kurir 17, B92 235, Politika 74, and Naša Borba 11 articles related to Kosovo.

A careful review shows that the news published during this period by Beta, B92, Kurir, Naša Borba and Nin did not contain any serious disinformation content. However, the other preselected media outlets did have quite a large number of news and articles with disinformation content on Kosovo. Against this backdrop, KIPRED was focused on the deconstruction of the most blatant disinformation provided by the above listed Serbian media, which will be conducted in the following section.

The aim of the disinformation generated in this monitoring period by the preselected Serbian media in relation to Kosovo was focused on discrediting the legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood, by portraying it as a state that oppresses and does not protect its Serbian and other ethnic minorities, as a recruiting center for radical Islamists, and on denying Serbian war crimes committed in Kosovo. The disinformation detected during this period will be discussed and deconstructed in the following section.

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE MOST BLATANT DETECTED DISINFORMATION

Disinformation Alert 1

Headline: *TAČI PLJUNUO EVROPI U LICE! Pogledajte šta je uradio odmah posle sastanka sa Lajčakom! (TAČI SPITTED INTO THE EUROPE'S FACE! See what he did right after the meeting with Lajčak!), Informer, June 17th 2020.*¹

The article claims that Kosovo's President Thaçi, with a certain act after the meeting with Miroslav Lajčák, the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, has spat in the Europe's face. According to article, "the President of the unrecognized state of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, has disinfected his cabinet immediately after meeting with the EU envoy Miroslav Lajčák. Fearing the Coronavirus, Thaçi has hired a specialized company for this purpose, and he paid an extremely high fee. The article further claims that Thaçi has not disinfected his cabinet after meetings with other international officials.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

The aim of this article is to discredit the institution of the President of Kosovo, and to damage the relations of Kosovo with the European Union. In addition, the article uses the derogatory language, by calling Thaçi as "the President of the unrecognized state of Kosovo." It uses a bombastic title for presenting a procedure of disinfection that is "standard" part of the protocol during the COVID-19 pandemic as a gesture with which Kosovo's President Thaçi has "spit into the Europe's face." The news was made public by the specialized company that has disinfected the premises, most probably because of commercial reasons. As part of measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health has adopted a "Manual" that recommends to

¹A. Grbović, "TAČI PLJUNUO EVROPI U LICE! Pogledajte šta je uradio odmah posle sastanka sa Lajčakom!" (TAČI SPITTED IN EUROPE'S FACE! See what he did right after the meeting with Lajčak!), Informer, June 17th 2020, <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/527148/taci-pljunuo-evropi-lice-pogledajte-sta-uradio-odmah-posle-sastanka-lajcakom-video>

“routinely clean and disinfect all the surfaces that are frequently touched in the workplace.”² In accordance with this recommendation, the Presidential cabinet is regularly cleaned after every meeting with international officials, and the procedure after the meeting with Mr. Lajčák is not an exception.

Disinformation Alert 2

Headline: *PRETIO JE SRBIJI DA ĆE SA TERORISTIMA OVK ZAUZETI NIŠ, SAD GA ČEKA ROBIJA! Evo ko je Kadri Veselji, Šiptar koji je optužen za najstrašnije zločine nad Srbima! (HE THREATENED SERBIA THAT HE WILL TAKE NIŠ WITH KLA TERRORISTS, NOW A LONG PRISON TERM IS AWAITING HIM! This is who Kadri Veseli is, a Shiptar who is accused for the most horrible crimes against the Serbs!), Informer, June 24th 2020.*³

The article claims that Kadri Veseli, who has threatened Serbia that Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) terrorists will take the town of Niš, is now going to end up in prison. According to article, in 2009, Veseli has founded a company in Switzerland as a Serbian citizen, that is, with Serbian passport. The article states that according to media, Veseli, as one of the commanders of the "Black Hand" group, has participated together with Thaçi and Xhavit Haliti in the kidnappings and murderings of Serbs, as well as of disobedient Albanians. Moreover, the article claims that alongside Thaçi, Veseli is mentioned in the report by the Council of Europe on the human organ trafficking scandal, mostly of Serb prisoners, during the war period 1989-1999. It also states that Veseli and Thaçi, together with the former Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, are opposing the work of the Special Court and trying, through the parliamentary initiative in the Kosovo Parliament, to repeal

² “Manual për Mbrojtje nga Përhapja e Virusit COVID-19,” Ministry of Health, Republic of Kosovo, 18 June 2020, <https://omk-rks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Manual-p%C3%ABr-parandalimin-dhe-luftimin-e-COVID19.pdf>

³ “PRETIO JE SRBIJI DA ĆE SA TERORISTIMA OVK ZAUZETI NIŠ, SAD GA ČEKA ROBIJA! Evo ko je Kadri Veselji, Šiptar koji je optužen za najstrašnije zločine nad Srbima! (HE THREATENED SERBIA THAT HE WILL TAKE NIŠ WITH KLA TERRORISTS, NOW A LONG PRISON TERM IS AWAITING HIM! This is who Kadri Veseli is, a Shiptar who is accused for the most horrible crimes against the Serbs!)” Informer, June 24th 2020, <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/529028/pretio-srbiji-teroristima-ovk-zauzeti-nis-sad-ceka-robiya-evo-kadri-veselji-siptar-koji-optuzen-najstrasnije-zlocine-nad-srbima>

the decision on the establishment of that judicial institution, which was made by the parliament in the previous convocation.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

The article puts forward several false claims that aim at discrediting the state of Kosovo, its institutions and leadership as well as members of the Kosovo Liberation Army. It uses the derogatory term “*Šiptar*” for Kadri Veseli, the leader of the Kosovo Democratic Party (PDK) and former speaker of the Parliament, while at the same time labelling KLA as terrorist organisation.

a) There are no proofs whatsoever about the human organ trafficking

The article falsely links Hashim Thaçi and Kadri Veseli with the human organ trafficking during the war period 1998-1999. Such accusations were first mentioned in Dick Marty’s Report that was published on December 14th 2010, and was presented to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on January 7th 2011. The Report claimed “inhuman treatment of people and killing of prisoners with the purpose of removal and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo by the members of the Kosovo Liberation Army. However, the statement by Clint Williamson, the Chief Prosecutor of the of the European Union Special Investigative Task Force of July 29th 2014, states that in order to prosecute offenses related to human organ trafficking “requires a level of evidence that we have not yet secured.”⁴ On the other hand, the indictment to which the article is referring does not mention at all any accusations related to human organ trafficking. The statement by the Specialist Prosecutor’s Office (SPO) of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC) of June 24th 2020, clearly states that “the crimes alleged in the Indictment involve range of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including murder, enforced disappearance of persons, persecution, and torture,”⁵ but it does not mention human organ trafficking. The accusations about human organ trafficking were the main reason why the international community insisted

⁴ Clint Williamson, “Statement of the Chief Prosecutor of the Special Investigative Task Force,” Brussels, European Union, July 29th 2014.

⁵ “Press Statement,” Specialist Prosecutor’s Office, Kosovo Specialist Chambers, June 24th 2020.

in creating the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, however, it seems that ten years after such accusations first appeared, they have just disappeared.

Disinformation Alert 3

Headline: *Kod Lipljana nepoznati napadači povredili trojicu Srba (Near Lipljan, unknown assailants injured three Serbs), Tanjug, June 1st 2020.*⁶

The article transmits a news by Kosovo Online, which reported that three Serbs from Donja Gušterica near Lipljan were injured when four unknown young men have attacked them. The article further claims that the three injured young Serbs have alleged that the young men who attacked them with metal bars spoke Albanian language. According to article, after the incident, the attackers fled in unknown direction, while the attack was reported to the Kosovo Police, which conducted an investigation and took statements from the injured Serbs. The article claims that this was just another in a row of Kosovo incidents, in which the victims are Serbs.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

The media in Serbia have frequently reported about different incidents against local Serbs in Kosovo. In most of the cases, without being officially confirmed by relevant institutions, or independently from official statements by such institutions, Albanians were always presented as perpetrators. In the case of Donja Gušterica, the attack on three Serbs has been confirmed by the local Police in Kosovo. However, according to initial findings by the police, the attackers were four young Roma persons, not Albanians. Currently, the suspects are on the run, while the case is under investigation by the relevant police units. In addition, the Kosovo Police has provided official data about the ethnically motivated violence in Kosovo during the period 01.01.2020 –

⁶ “Kod Lipljana nepoznati napadači povredili trojicu Srba (Near Lipljan, unknown assailants injured three Serbs),” Tanjug, June 1st 2020, <http://www.tanjug.rs/full-view.aspx?izb=563306>

30.06.2020. According to their report, during this period there have been no initiated cases with interethnic motives when it comes to “Criminal Offenses against life and body”.

Disinformation Alert 4

Headline: “Петковић: Снажна и јака Србија може да обезбеди бољи живот Србима на Косову (Petković: A strong and powerful Serbia can provide a better life for Serbs in Kosovo),” **Tanjug, June 12th 2020.**⁷

The article transmits a news according to which the Assistant Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, Petar Petković, has visited several locations in Gračanica, in which the final works on the construction of the new Library building and apartments for socially endangered families are underway. The article claims that financing for these constructions was provided by the Government of Serbia. According to Petković, the Government of Serbia, aims at achieving, for the Serbs in Kosovo, a standard and a life worthy of a man in the 21st century. He claims that there are a lot of problems for local Serbs and that by building schools, roads and hospitals the government shows that the real intention of Serbia in Kosovo and Metohija is to develop, build and through that to create a good atmosphere.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures.

The article claims that the Government of Serbia is financing the construction of the new Library building and of the apartments for socially endangered families in the Municipality of Gračanica. However, the official webpage of the Municipality of Gračanica has no information on these construction sites whatsoever. On the other hand, according to the same webpage, in October 2019, 24 Serb families have moved into their new apartments of 43 to 54 square meters. These apartments are part of the six buildings that were built in Laplje Selo for socially endangered

⁷ “Петковић: Снажна и јака Србија може да обезбеди бољи живот Србима на Косову (Petković: A strong and powerful Serbia can provide a better life for Serbs in Kosovo),” Tanjug, June 12th 2020, <http://www.kim.gov.rs/v3866.php>

families and married couples. Four buildings with 16 apartments were built by the Municipality of Gračanica, and two with eight apartments by the Kosovo Ministry of Local Self-Government.⁸ With the claims like these, the article tends to show that the state of Kosovo does not care for its Serbian citizens, and therefore Serbia needs to make investments in Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo in order to provide them “with standard and a life worthy of a man in the 21st century.” In reality, however, the situation is altogether different, since according to the Constitution, ethnic minorities in Kosovo, and particularly the Serbian one, enjoy the highest level of minority rights in the entire region. In line with this, the state of Kosovo also takes care for socially endangered Serbian families by financing the building of their apartments, as is shown in this case.

Disinformation Alert 5

Headline: “Đurić: Prebijanje mladića je pokazatelj strahovlade Prištine (Đurić: The beating of young men is an indicator of the terror of the government of Priština),” **Tanjug, June 28th 2020.**⁹

The article provides the comments made by the director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, Marko Đurić, about an alleged incident in Kosovo. According to Đurić, “the beating of two Serbian young men because of the display of the Serbian flag on the occasion of Vidovdan is a manifestation of institutional violence of Pristina and of the government of fear that denies everyone, except Albanians, the right to national pride and belonging.” He considers such bestial act, simply because of the display of national symbols, as a direct attack on the identity and the most elementary national rights of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija. Furthermore, Đurić claims that

⁸ “Додељени кључеви станова у Лапљем Селу (Delivered keys of the apartments in Laplje Selo),” October 16th 2019,

<http://nasagracanica.com/%d1%81%d0%b2%d0%b5d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b8/%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b8/dodeljeni-kljucevi-stanova-u-lapljem-selu/>

⁹ “Đurić: Prebijanje mladića je pokazatelj strahovlade Prištine (Đurić: The beating of young men is an indicator of the terror of the government of Priština),” Tanjug, June 28th 2020,

<https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:873133-Djuric-Prebijanje-mladica-je-pokazatelj-strahovlade-Pristine>

international representatives in Kosovo and Metohija are obliged to answer the question: "Why Albanian extremists are allowed what no one else in the civilized world is allowed to do, and why have thugs in our southern province been tolerated for two decades?"

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

a) The incident was not about the display of the Serbian flag

There was another article that has reported the fake news about an incident against the local Serbs in Kosovo, in which two Serbian young men have allegedly been beaten because of the display of the Serbian flag on the occasion of one of the biggest Serbian holidays, Vidovdan. Given that it was impossible to find any other news about the alleged incident from any other media than the Serbian one, KIPRED has contacted Kosovo Police and asked for their statement on the issue. In its statement, the Information Office of the Kosovo Police emphasizes that KP is law enforcement institution and in all cases acts according to its legal duties and authorizations, in order to maintain public order and tranquility as well as equal and fair treatment of all persons without distinction. Regarding the incident in Gazimestan, Kosovo Police has issued the following information: "On June 28th 2020, shortly before 14:00, during the manifestation in Gazimestan, two persons (suspected to be under the influence of alcohol), have made several repeated provocations within the gathered crowd. Despite the notices given by the Police, they had continued with provocations, and police officers were forced to take action to stop the provocations and to displace them from the crowd. Afterwards, the same persons were released. Clearly, the alleged incident was not about the display of the Serbian flag by young Serbs, as claimed in the article, but it was the police legally acting against provocateurs in a public event.

b) Kosovo as a state does respect the rights of all non-majority communities

According to the director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, Marko Đurić, the “incident” in Gazimestan represents a manifestation of institutional violence of the government in Pristina, which denies the right to national pride and belonging to everybody, except Albanians. Clearly, with such statement Đurić intends to present Kosovo as a state that oppresses its non-majority communities and denies their right to national pride and belonging. However, according to Kosovo Constitution, all communities living in Kosovo are guaranteed the highest level of minority rights compared to the entire Western Balkan region.

Article 3 of the Constitution clearly states that Kosovo “is a multi-ethnic society consisting of Albanian and other Communities, governed democratically with full respect for the rule of law through its legislative, executive and judicial institutions.”¹⁰ Furthermore, Article 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo¹¹ designates Albanian and Serbian languages as the two official languages, with equal status before the institutions. The Law on the Use of Languages also makes reference to the Constitution and states that the Albanian and Serbian versions are “equally authoritative,” meaning that neither takes precedence over the other when it comes to interpretation.¹² In addition, Article 22 states that along with other international human rights instruments, “Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities” is directly applicable in Kosovo.¹³ Finally, Article 64 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo clearly states that in the Assembly of Kosovo “twenty (20) of the one hundred twenty (120) seats are guaranteed for representation of communities that are not in the majority in Kosovo.”¹⁴ All these provisions in the Constitution clearly show that Kosovo is a multi-ethnic society with high respect of human rights that does not deny the right to national pride and belonging, not only to Serbs, but to all other non-Albanian citizens.

¹⁰ The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 3, June 15th 2008, <http://kryeministri-ks.net/wpcontent/uploads/2018/03/Kushtetuta.e.Republikes.se..Kosoves-2.pdf>

¹¹ The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 5.

¹² Law No. 02/L-37 on the Use of Languages, Articles 2 and 5, as promulgated by UNMIK Regulation No.2006/51, October 20th 2006.

¹³ The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 22.

¹⁴ The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 64.

Disinformation Alert 6

Headline: *“IGRA EU OKO OPTUŽNICA: Odmrznuli Tačija da MINIRAJU Trampa (THE EU GAME WITH THE INDICTMENTS: They defrosted Thaci to UNDERMINE Trump),”***Novosti, June 26th 2020.**¹⁵

The first part of the article mainly insinuates that the European Union has “exploited” the Kosovo Specialist Chambers to simply remove America out of the main role in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. The article supports this claim with the fact that indictment by the Specialist Prosecutor’s Office has become public while President Taçi was on a plane on his way to a meeting at the White House with the Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, organized by Richard Grenell, the President Trump's special envoy for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. The article also cites the President of the Committee for Kosovo and Metohija, Milovan Drecun, according to whom the KLA leaders initially wanted to repeal the law on the basis of which the Special Prosecutor's Office and the Judicial Council were formed. When they saw that that was not possible, they began to push for the resolution in the Kosovo Assembly for negotiations with Belgrade, about some kind of genocide against Albanians and war reparations, the establishment of a museum of genocide, in order to prepare the ground for possible political trade. Drecun also claims that neither was the KLA fight pure, nor was that a fight for freedom; according to him, KLA “was a criminal organization that wanted to completely remove the Serbs out from Kosovo and Metohija and they continue to do so, because they are still in the intelligence sector and other structures.” Furthermore, he asserts that his working group has documentation that includes data on beheadings, burnings of the living and wounded people, rapes, killing of women with 17-20 stabbings, and even hand cutting and eyes extraction.

¹⁵ D. Milinković and S. Rovečanin Tomković, “IGRA EU OKO OPTUŽNICA: Odmrznuli Tačija da MINIRAJU Trampa (THE EU GAME WITH THE INDICTMENTS: They defrosted Thaci to UNDERMINE Trump), Novosti, June 26th 2020, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:872632-IGRA-EU-OKO-OPTUZNICA-Odmrznuli-Tacija-da-MINIRAJU-Trampa>

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

a) The Serbs are ‘perpetrators,’ rather than ‘victims’ in Kosovo

Institutions and media in Serbia have recently engaged in an aggressive campaign, which is trying to portray the liberation war of KLA as one of war crimes against humanity. Clearly, the aim of such campaign is to misuse the current indictment against President Thaçi and other KLA members by Specialist Prosecutor’s Office of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers in order to falsely portray Serbs as the victims during the Kosovo war. In addition, this campaign is aiming at minimizing and concealing the war crimes committed by Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces during the war in Kosovo, as well as at equating the victim with the aggressor. In this concrete case, the article tries falsely to portray Serbs as victims in Kosovo, although it is a well-known fact that Serbs have been the aggressor and caused the wars in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. During these wars, the Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces have committed genocide¹⁶ and war crimes against Croats, Bosniaks and Albanians.

In Kosovo alone, 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.”¹⁷ 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,

¹⁶ 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 led by Ratko Mladić. See Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation 1918-2005*, Washington, D.C.: Indiana University Press. 2006, pp. 459-460.

¹⁷ For details related to war crimes in Kosovo during the war in 1999 see “Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo,” Human Rights Watch Report, 2001, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/kosovo_full_low.pdf

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.”¹⁸

b) There is no evidence that KLA has committed such horrific crimes

The article cites the President of the Committee for Kosovo and Metohija, Milovan Drecun, who makes incredible false accusations against the KLA in general, and their leaders, in particular. Drecun claims that his working group has documentation that includes data on beheadings, burnings of the living and wounded people, rapes, killing of women with 17-20 stabbings, and even hands cutting and eyes extraction. There is no evidence whatsoever that KLA members have committed such horrific crimes during the war in Kosovo. According to the “Press Statement” of the Specialist Prosecutor’s Office of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, even the indictment to which the article is referring to “is only an accusation, and a KSC Pre-Trial Judge is currently reviewing it in order to decide on whether to confirm the charges.”¹⁹

Disinformation Alert 7

Headline: “Poslanik AfD u Bundestagu: Kosovo NEUSPEŠNA država, regrutni centar radikalnih ISLAMISTA (AfD MP in the Bundestag: Kosovo is a FAILED state, a recruitment center for radical ISLAMISTS),” **Novosti, June 17th 2020.**²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Press Statement,” Specialist Prosecutor’s Office, Kosovo Specialist Chambers, June 24th 2020.

²⁰ “Poslanik AfD u Bundestagu: Kosovo NEUSPEŠNA država, regrutni centar radikalnih ISLAMISTA (AfD MP in the Bundestag: Kosovo is a FAILED state, a recruitment center for radical ISLAMISTS),” Novosti, June 17th 2020, <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:870996-Poslanik-AfD-u-Bundestagu-Kosovo-NEUSPEŠNA-drzava-regrutni-centar-radikalnih-ISLAMISTA-VIDEO>

The article cites Jens Kestner, a member of the Bundestag from the Alternative for Germany (AfD), according to whom "it is the time to admit that the 'Kosovo' mission has failed and that Kosovo is a failed state, despite of all the financial, military and professional support of the international community. He states that according to the latest research, 74.8 percent of the respondents in Albania, and 63.9 percent of the respondents in Kosovo, support the unification of Kosovo and Albania, and concludes that for the past two decades, Germany "was not supporting the wish of Albanians in Kosovo for independence, but rather the state-building project of the creation of the so-called Greater Albania." In addition, according to Kestner, "Germany supports a failed pseudo-state in which Serbs have been victims of the most monstrous crimes in the past two decades and still live in isolated enclaves at the mercy of Albanian chauvinists." Kestner further claims that "Kosovo is a recruiting center for radical Islamists, and we, by supporting the separatists in Pristina, are endangering German citizens. The largest number of volunteers from the Balkans in ISIS came from Kosovo, many of them have returned home, and after serving symbolic prison sentences, they will freely travel all over the Europe." Kestner has also reminded that since 1999, 147 churches and monasteries of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo have been mined, burned and damaged.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

a) Greater Albania is not a feasible project for Albanians

The so-called Greater Albania is not an Albanian national project, but rather a Serbian fiction and propaganda. The opinions expressed by citizens in a survey cannot be considered as official policy of any state. In the past, all nations in the Western Balkans have "dreamt" about their "greater" states.²¹ After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Albanians hoped for creating their national state within the territories where ethnic Albanian population was in majority. After more than 100 years, the borders in the region have been set and recognised internationally. It is true that

²¹ There are considerable references to "Greater Serbia," "Greater Croatia," "Greater Albania," "Greater Macedonia," and so forth.

in a research survey conducted, 74.8 percent of the respondents in Albania, and 63.9 percent of the respondents in Kosovo, supported the unification of Kosovo and Albania, as a form of wishful thinking. However, if other survey responses are analyzed, it becomes clear that citizens in both countries don't consider such unification as a feasible one. In its research paper, "Deconstruction of the Idea of Unification: The Future of Relations between Kosovo and Albania," KIPRED has clearly demonstrated that unification of Kosovo and Albania is almost impossible due to a number of internal and external limiting factors.²²

b) Kosovo is not a failed pseudo-state and respects the minority rights

Kestner falsely claims that Kosovo is "a failed pseudo-state in which Serbs have been victims of the most monstrous crimes in the past two decades and still live in isolated enclaves at the mercy of Albanian chauvinists." First of all, Kosovo has declared its independence on February 17th 2008, and its statehood has since then been recognised by more than 100 states, including 23 EU member states, USA, Japan and Turkey. It is also a full member of World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), FIFA, UEFA and many other international and regional organizations and initiatives. It has also signed a "Stabilisation and Association Agreement" with the European Union, and all these are certainly not accomplishments that 'failed pseudo-states' manage to achieve.

On the other hand, it was the Serbian military, police, and paramilitary forces that have committed "the most monstrous crimes" against Albanians in Kosovo, not the other way round. In Kosovo, the Serbs were "perpetrators," and Albanians were "victims". As already mentioned, 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." The Report has also concluded that "approximately 10,500 Kosovar Albanians were killed between March 20 and June 12, 1999," while "the Yugoslav military and Serbian police and paramilitaries expelled 862,979 Albanians

²² For details see Lulzim Peci and Agon Demjaha, "Deconstruction of the Idea of Unification: The Future of Relations Between Kosovo and Albania," Special Publication, Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), February 2020.

from Kosovo, and several hundreds of thousands more were internally displaced.”²³ Finally, as mentioned earlier, according to Kosovo Constitution, all the communities living in Kosovo are guaranteed the highest level of minority rights compared to the entire Western Balkan region.

c) Kosovo is not a recruiting center for radical Islamists

The article makes a false claim that “Kosovo is a recruiting center for radical Islamists,” since “the largest number of volunteers from the Balkans in ISIS came from Kosovo,” who after returning home served symbolic prison sentences. While it is true that since 2012, an estimated number of 255 foreign fighters have gone from Kosovo to join terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq, the article’s claim is certainly false. Namely, since 2014, Kosovo Police and its prosecuting and judicial institutions have acted, and in August 2014, 40 Kosovar citizens suspected to have participated in terrorism in Iraq and Syria were arrested and received heavy prison sentences. Until January 2015 some additional 80 people were arrested under similar charges including a number of influential radical imams. As a result, since 2016 until today, not a single foreign fighter from Kosovo has gone to Syria and Iraq. It is interesting that the article does not mention another interesting phenomenon related to foreign fighters, which comes from the Serb population living in the north of Kosovo. According to media reports, around 300 Serbian foreign fighters funded by the Russian organisation “the Kosovo Front” have been fighting in the Ukrainian separatist territories.²⁴ While not all these fighters are from Kosovo, it is difficult to determine their exact numbers, given that all of them are usually referred to as Serb nationals.²⁵

²³ “Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo,” Human Rights Watch Report, 2001, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/kosovo_full_low.pdf

²⁴ Andriy Stelmakh and Pavlo Kholodov (30 October 2017). “How Russia recruits Serbian mercenaries into the ranks of its fighters in Donbas.” *Euromaidanpress*; <http://euromaidanpress.com/2017/10/30/how-russia-recruits-serbian-mercenaries-into-the-ranks-of-its-fighters-in-donbas/>.

²⁵ Vuk Velebit. “Serb fighters in Ukraine continue to worry the West.” *European Western Balkans*, 29 December 2017; <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/12/29/serb-fighters-ukraine-continue-worry-west/>.

d) In Kosovo were destroyed more mosques than churches

The article also makes a false claim that “since 1999, 147 churches and monasteries of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo have been mined, burned and damaged.” In fact, the truth is that during the war, more Muslim mosques than Orthodox churches and monasteries have been destroyed and damaged in Kosovo. Even the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo has reported that since June 1999, 76 Orthodox churches, monasteries, or religious sites have been damaged or destroyed in Kosovo.²⁶ On the other hand, according to Human Rights Watch report, between March and June 1999, Yugoslav soldiers and Serbian police and paramilitaries destroyed thousands of Albanian homes throughout Kosovo with the use of artillery, bulldozers, explosives, and arson.²⁷ At the same time, during the war, 225 of the 600 mosques in Kosovo were damaged, vandalized or destroyed, along with other Islamic sites.²⁸ After the war, international organizations and Kosovo institutions have in parallel engaged in rebuilding and reconstructing both, Muslim and Orthodox religious objects. The Report published by the “Reconstruction Implementation Commission for Serbia Religious Sites in Kosovo” states that during the period 2004-2010, 28 Orthodox religious sites were restored, and additional 2 locations were managed and funded by UNESCO, 2 locations were managed and funded by the European Union, and a non-religious location was managed and funded by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports”.²⁹

²⁶ “Crucified Kosovo - Destroyed and Desecrated Serbian Orthodox Churches in Kosovo and Metohija (1999–2000),” expanded electronic edition, www.kosovo.com/crucified/default.htm

²⁷ “Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo,” 2001, p. 143.

https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/kosovo_full_low.pdf

²⁸ For more details, see Fejaz Drançolli, *Trashëgimia e Shkatërruar Në Kosovë 1998/99*, Institute for War Crimes Research, Prishtina, 2017.

²⁹ “Reconstruction Implementation Commission for Serbia Religious Sites in Kosovo,” Implemented by the Council of Europe, 20 December 2011.

Disinformation Alert 8

Headline: *“Trojica preminulih zbog sumnjive rakije (Three dead of suspicious brandy),”*

Politika, June 19th 2020.³⁰

According to article, three Serbs, two of whom were brothers, as well as their neighbor from Prilužje, one of the largest Serb villages in the municipality of Vushtrria, died as a result of, as is suspected, brandy of doubtful origin. The article cites Aca Mišić, the president of the temporary body of the municipality of Vushtrria, according to whom the two brothers passed away on Wednesday, while their neighbor died on Sunday afternoon. He claims that all three have initially experienced the symptoms of loss of sight, after buying a doubtful brandy, from an Albanian from Orahovac. According to article, unofficial sources claim that the identity of the Albanian whose brandy was the cause of death of three Serbs is known. Also, according to unofficial information, the cause of death of these three people is methyl alcohol, and the Kosovo Police is investigating the case. Samples of the brandy were sent for analysis, while the phone number of the seller from Orahovac was given to the police.

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

We have here, again, an article that reports about the death of three local Serbs in Kosovo, and in which, without any official confirmation by relevant institutions, an Albanian is accused as perpetrator. Due to the lack of confirmed information about this case, KIPRED has contacted Kosovo Police and asked for an official information. In the official response of the Kosovo Police, Avni Zahiti, Public Information Officer of the Mitrovica Regional Police Directorate, informed us that Kosovo Police is aware of the case and that in cooperation with the judiciary is undertaking

³⁰ Biljana Radomirović, “Trojica preminulih zbog sumnjive rakije (Three died of suspicious brandy),” Politika, June 19th 2020, <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/456589/Trojica-preminulih-zbog-sumnjive-rakije>

the necessary investigative actions. Mr. Zahiti also stated that a Kosovar male victim was found without signs of life. Relevant police units, the medical team which confirmed the death of the victim, and the state prosecutor had gone to the scene. While the police units were examining the scene, they were informed that the second Kosovar male victim - the brother of the first victim - also died at the Gračanica hospital. Later it was confirmed that the third male person, who was sent to the Clinical Centre in Prishtina in critical health condition has also passed away. With the order of the prosecutor, all the three dead bodies of the victims were sent to the Institute of Forensic Medicine for autopsy. Further investigation of the case is underway. It is evident that the death of the three Serbs from Kosovo has occurred in suspicious circumstances, however, neither the cause of death has been yet officially confirmed, nor has any Albanian from Kosovo been officially charged for this "crime."