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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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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 the 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, Newsfront, 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, issued by Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During September 2020, Russia Insider has published 2 news, TASS 7, The Duran 3, Newsfront 9, Unz 3, The Moscow Times 4, Russia Today 9, Sputnik International 14, whereas Sputnik Serbia has published 217 news related directly or indirectly to Kosovo. Meanwhile Meduza, and Pravda Report, have not published any news related to Kosovo. On the other hand, during this monitoring period, on their web-sites, Kremlin had one, and the Russian Foreign Ministry 2 postings related to Kosovo.

Due to the large number of articles with disinformation content generated by these media, this edition analyzes only the articles with blatant disinformation content. The published disinformation aims to undermine the statehood of Kosovo, and to discredit the credibility of the US policy. In doing so, these media deny war crimes committed by Serbia in Kosovo, accuse the US and NATO for war crimes against Serbian population, exaggerate the number of Serb casualties, and, on the other hand, Serb politicians accuse Kosovo institutions for violating and sabotaging agreements reached in Washington and Brussels.

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE DETECTED DISINFORMATION

Disinformation Alert 1

Headline: Вучић: Одбраном територијалног интегритета Србија брани темеље УН [Vučić: By defending its territorial integrity, Serbia is defending the foundations of the UN], **Sputnik Serbia, September 21th 2020.**¹

On the occasion of the 75-th anniversary of the UN, the Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić tends to present himself as a defender and promoter of UN values. Among other things, Vučić claims that “Provisional institutions in Pristina declared independence as a unilateral act and violated the UN Resolution 1244, thus seriously undermining the security of Serbia and the region as a whole.” He further added that “By defending sovereignty and territorial integrity, respecting Resolution 1244, Serbia also defends international law, the UN Charter, but also finally the authority of the Security Council.”

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

Vučić’s statements themselves contain two elements of disinformation. First, he tries to present the authors of the declaration of independence as “provisional institutions,” and, on the other hand, he emphasizes that the “declaration of independence violated the UNSCR 1244.”

On February 17th 2008, Kosovo declared independence based on the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement.² Serbia, which was backed also by Russia, filed a request for an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), with the question “Is the unilateral declaration of independence by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo in

¹ Вучић: Одбраном територијалног интегритета Србија брани темеље УН, <https://rs.sputniknews.com/politika/202009211123438785-vucic-odbranom-teritorijalnog-integriteta-srbija-brani-temelje-un/>.

² Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement, https://web.archive.org/web/20091015082628/http://www.unosek.org/docref/Comprehensive_proposal-english.pdf

accordance with international law?”. The Court concluded that the authors of the declaration of independence of February 17th 2008, did not act as one of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government within the Constitutional Framework, but rather as persons who acted together in their capacity as representatives of the people of Kosovo outside of the framework of the interim administration.³ Therefore, given that the declaration of independence was not issued by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, consequently it did not violate the Constitutional Framework. In this regard, it should be noted that the opinion of ICJ confirmed that Kosovo’s declaration of independence of February 17th 2008, has not violated the UNSC Resolution 1244, or any international legal norms.⁴

So, while proclaiming himself as a promoter of UN values, Vučić, on the other hand, is issuing statements that are contrary to the advisory opinion of the ICJ, which is the main judicial body of the United Nations.⁵

Disinformation Alert 2

Headline: Дачић: Показао сам Гренелу писмо које доказује да је Приштина већ срушила споразум [Dačić: I showed Grenel a letter that proves that Pristina has already broken the agreement], **Sputnik Serbia, September 25th 2020.**⁶

Ivica Dačić falsely claims that the request made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo, Meliza Haradinaj-Stublla, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is an act that violates the Washington agreement. He emphasizes that the request for recognition by the Republic of Kosovo is prohibited by the Washington agreement. He added that “I showed Grenell a letter that proves that Pristina has already violated the

³ International Court of Justice. Advisory Opinion on the accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo, July 22nd 2010, <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/141/141-20100722-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ International Court of Justice, <https://www.icj-cij.org/en>.

⁶ Дачић: Показао сам Гренелу писмо које доказује да је Приштина већ срушила споразум, <https://rs.sputniknews.com/politika/202009251123458520-dacic-pokazao-sam-grenelu-pismo/>.

agreement.” Moreover, he emphasizes that “it is not a problem for Pristina to sign anything, and not to implement it later, and the confirmation of that is, as Dačić points out, the Association of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo. On the other hand, he accuses the European Union regarding the Association emphasizing that “there is no reaction from Brussels, and they are the guarantors of that agreement, which was signed seven years ago, and it was signed by Hashim Thaçi, Catherine Ashton and me.”

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

a) The Washington Agreement

The Washington Agreement was signed on September 4th 2020, at the Oval Office, between Kosovo and the USA, on the one hand, and between Serbia and the USA, on the other.⁷ The agreement was of economic nature, but it also contained some points regarding the application in international organizations, the recognition of Kosovo, the de-recognizing campaign of Serbia, the recognition by Israel, etc.⁸ Ivica Dačić wrongly alludes to the point of the agreement which explicitly states that “Kosovo will agree to implement a one-year moratorium seeking new membership into International Organizations. Serbia will agree to a one-year moratorium of its de-recognition campaign, and will refrain from formally or informally requesting any nation or International Organization not to recognize as an independent state.”⁹ Therefore, Kosovo has accepted a one-year moratorium in terms of membership in international organizations, but it should be noted, that it is Serbia that should give up from its requests to countries or international organizations for not recognizing Kosovo as an independent state, and not Kosovo. And, this is exactly the opposite of what Dačić declares. Moreover, this fact is also confirmed through the last point of the agreement, which guarantees Kosovo’s recognition

⁷ Serbia, Kosovo normalize economic ties, gesture to Israel, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/kosovo-serbia-normalize-economic-ties-gesture-to-israel/2020/09/04/f803b83c-ee5-11ea-bd08-1b10132b458f_story.html.

⁸ Washington-Agreement-Kosovo-Serbia, <https://www.new-perspektiva.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Washington-Agreement-Kosova-Serbia.pdf>.

⁹ Ibid.

as an independent state from Israel.¹⁰ Obviously, Dačić's statement is a classic case of misinterpretation and political manipulation, that does not correspond with the wording of the Washington Agreement.

b) The Association/Community of the Serb majority municipalities

Belgrade and Moscow authorities have repeatedly complained that institutions in Kosovo are sabotaging and blocking the implementation of the agreement on the Association of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo. In 2015, Kosovo and Serbia reached an agreement on the general principles of the Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo.¹¹ The agreement stipulated that the Community/Association will be a legal entity defined by a statute.¹² Moreover, the drafting of this statute was the task of the Management Team, with facilitation, if necessary, of the Ministry of Local Government.¹³ In this regard it should be emphasized that the Management Team consisted of four Serb officials,¹⁴ which had the task to draft the statute, and it is not known whether they have performed this task to date.¹⁵

Moreover, in 2015 when the agreement was reached, the Minister of the Local Government Ministry was from the Serb List (Lista Srpska), and this Ministry is even today governed by the chairman of the Serb List.¹⁶ Therefore, the responsibility for the prolongation of the Association/Community implementation lies also on the Management Team and the Serb

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Serbia and Kosovo Reach Four Key Agreements, <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/08/26/serbia-kosovo-reach-four-key-agreements-08-26-2015/>.

¹² Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo – general principles/main elements, Article 2, https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/statements-eeas/docs/150825_02_association-community-of-serb-majority-municipalities-in-kosovo-general-principles-main-elements_en.pdf

¹³ Ibid, Article 21.

¹⁴ Koha.net: Çka thuhet në procesverbalet e ekipit menaxhues për Asociacionin? <https://www.koha.net/arberi/111137/cka-thuhet-ne-procesverbalet-e-ekipit-menaxhues-per-asociacionin/>

¹⁵ Radio Evropa e Lirë, Draft-statuti i Asociacionit nuk i është dorëzuar as Prishtinës dhe as BE-së, <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/draft-statuti-i-asociacionit-nuk-i-eshte-dorezuar-as-prishtines-dhe-as-be-/29568500.html>

¹⁶ MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, GORAN RAKIĆ, Minister, Ministry of Local Government Administration, <https://mapl.rks-gov.net/en/organizimi-en/ministri-dhe-kabineti-i-ministrit-en/>.

ministers. Moreover, in the end, Dačić not only accuses Kosovo of sabotaging the agreement, but he also accuses the European Union and Miroslav Lajčak.

Disinformation Alert 3

Headline: Америка на корак од заокрета: Признаје ли Трамп да је стварање независног Косова — грешка [America on the verge of turning: Is Trump recognizing that the creation of an independent Kosovo is a mistake], [Sputnik Serbia, September 15th 2020](#)¹⁷

The article discusses the US policy, by falsely stating that it has changed its position on the Kosovo issue. Moreover, the article gives inaccurate information on the March 2004 riots in Kosovo. The article states that “For the first time America has in principle the same position with Serbia”; “It was wrong that after the 1999 bombing of Serbia, America did not allow the word and spirit of the Resolution 1244, and the territorial integrity of Serbia (then Serbia and Montenegro) to be respected”; “Trump thinks that it is completely wrong that America allowed Albanians to expel more than 4,000 Serbs on March 17th 2004, kill dozens of people, destroy about 1,000 Serb houses and burn and destroy about a hundred shrines in Kosovo and Metohija.”

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

This article is completely manipulative, and contains many disinformation elements. It first begins with the interpretation of American policy, by presenting that Donald Trump thinks that everything that has happened in Kosovo has been wrong, as well as the issues that he deals with, and it also gives completely untrue data.

a) US policy towards Kosovo under Donald Trump administration

¹⁷ Америка на корак од заокрета: Признаје ли Трамп да је стварање независног Косова — грешка, <https://rs.sputniknews.com/autori/202009151123399335-amerika-na-korak-od-zaokreta-priznaje-li-tramp-da-je-stvaranje-nezavisnog-kosova--greska/>.

First of all, it should be noted that the United States has been and remains the main ally of the Republic of Kosovo. During the Donald Trump administration, an agreement was reached between Kosovo and Serbia, which treats Kosovo as an equal party with Serbia, and fully respects Kosovo as an independent state. Moreover, through this agreement, the Republic of Kosovo has secured one of the most important recognitions, the recognition by Israel. And the last fact that proves the importance of the USA for Kosovo, is the establishment of Kosovo Army,¹⁸ which happened exactly during the Trump's mandate, and with the support of his administration.¹⁹ Moscow and Belgrade have consistently opposed the establishment of the Kosovo Army, claiming that it poses a threat to the security of the region.

b) The March riots

According to Human Rights Watch Report, "Failure to Protect," the March 2004 violence left 19 persons dead (11 Albanians and 8 Serbs), while 954 were wounded. The report also states that in addition to Serbs, Roma, Ashkali, and other non-Albanian minorities were targeted. In addition, according to the report "at least 550 homes and twenty-seven Orthodox churches and monasteries were burned,"²⁰ which is less than 1000 houses and 100 shrines and churches, as the article is claiming. It is also important to mention that the article wrongfully and deliberately uses the term "pogrom," though all relevant international organizations have referred to the events of March 2004 as "riot" or "unrest."²¹

¹⁸ Kosovo approves new army despite Serb opposition, NATO criticism, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-army-idUSKBN1OD16S>.

¹⁹ US backs Kosovo's plan to create an army, <https://www.france24.com/en/20181206-us-backs-kosovos-plan-create-army>.

²⁰"Failure to Protect," Human Rights Watch Report, July 2004, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/07/25/failureprotect/anti-minority-violence-kosovo-march-2004>.

²¹ International organisations such as UNMIK, OSCE and Human Rights Watch. See for instance HRW report "Failure to Protect"; see also Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. "Four Years Later: Follow up of March 2004 Riots Cases before the Kosovo Criminal Justice System," Monitoring Department, Legal System Monitoring Section, July 2008.

Disinformation Alert 4

Headline: Да ли је Трамп схватио грешке Америке у косовском конфликту?, [Did Trump understand America's mistakes in the Kosovo conflict?], **Sputnik Serbia, September 15th 2020.**²²

The article highlights the opinion of political analyst, Dragomir Andjelković, who talks about US policy and Donald Trump's approach to Kosovo issue. Among other things, Andjelković emphasizes that "It is clear that America's biggest mistake is certainly that it carried out an aggression against a sovereign state, in order to occupy a part of its territory"; "When he spoke about the mismanaged conflict, he probably meant the aggression against the FRY, which took place 20 years ago."

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

Similarly to previous article, this one also makes statements that attempt to highlight changes of the US policy towards Kosovo, by emphasizing that Donald Trump sees the 'aggression' against Serbia as wrong, alluding to NATO intervention, the purpose of which was to occupy a part of the territory of Serbia. Similar news were published in 2016, in the Serbian newspaper Nedeljnik, stating that "Donald Trump apologized for the U.S. role in the 1999 bombing of former Yugoslavia."²³ Such reports were denied by Jason Miller, an adviser to Donald Trump, who had stated that "Mr. Trump never gave an interview to the Serbian weekly magazine Nedeljnik, as falsely reported by the discredited Newsweek"; This was a hoax and we look forward to receiving a formal retraction and apology from all involved."²⁴

Regarding the 'occupation' of the territory of Serbia as a result of NATO intervention, it should be emphasized that the military presence in Kosovo was established by the UN Security Council

²² Да ли је Трамп схватио грешке Америке у косовском конфликту?, <https://rs.sputniknews.com/analyze/202009151123399511-da-li-je-tramp-shvatio-greske-amerike-u-kosovskom-konfliktu-/>

²³ Serbian Magazine Retracts Article Saying Trump Apologized For NATO Bombing, <https://www.rferl.org/a/us-serbia-trump-apologizes-1999-nato-bombing/28051438.html>.

²⁴ Ibid.

Resolution 1244 (1999), which authorized the establishment of an international military presence and an international civil presence in Kosovo.²⁵ It should also be clarified that NATO intervention in 1999 against the FRY was only a bombing campaign and it never included ground troops. NATO troops did however enter Kosovo (which was officially an FRY territory) in June 1999, after the “Military Technical Agreement” was signed in Kumanovo between NATO and the authorities of Belgrade.²⁶

Disinformation Alert 5

Headline: Remembering NATO's Ruthless Bombing Campaign in Serbia, **Russia Insider**, **September 18th 2020.**²⁷

This article is a reprint of 2015, from Russia Insider. Among other things, the article makes false claims about the victims of massacre of Račak, It was alleged that the accusations could have been false and the bodies actually belonged to KLA insurgents whose clothes had been changed. Regarding NATO bombings, the article claims that “2,000 civilians were killed, including 88 children, and thousands more were injured.” And, finally the article states that “Over 200,000 ethnic Serbs were forced to leave their homeland in Kosovo.”

The Deconstruction of the Disinformation: Facts and Figures

a) The Račak Massacre

In an attempt of denial of war crimes committed by Serbian armed forces in Kosovo, this article tends to present the victims of the Račak massacre as members of the KLA. The head of the Finish

²⁵ United Nations, Security Council, Resolution 1244 (1999), https://unmik.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/old_dnn/Res1244ENG.pdf.

²⁶ “Military Technical Agreement Between the International Security Force (“KFOR”) and the Governments of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia,” Kumanovo, 9 June 1999, <https://www.nato.int/kosovo/docu/a990609a.htm>.

²⁷ Remembering NATO's Ruthless Bombing Campaign in Serbia, <https://russia-insider.com/en/history/remembering-natos-ruthless-bombing-campaign-serbia/ri4853>.

Investigation Team, Dr. Helena Ranta, who was in charge of the investigation into the Račak massacre, once after the investigation was completed, said that the forensic showed that 45 victims were unarmed civilians, calling this act as a “crime against humanity.”²⁸ Regarding the claims that the clothes may have been changed, the Head of the OSCE Mission, Ambassador William Walker, had stated during an interview that “It makes no sense to think that people up on that hill in the middle of the night on that icy slope were changing clothes, and painting people with blood, and shooting them; I can't imagine it.”²⁹

b) Exaggeration of the presented number of casualties

The Human Rights Watch Report “Civilian Deaths in the NATO Air Campaign,” on the basis of available evidence has concluded that, as few as 488, and as many as 527, Yugoslav civilians were killed as a result of NATO bombing. This report has further clarified that between 278 and 317 of the dead were in Kosovo, 201 civilians were killed in Serbia, and eight in Montenegro.³⁰

On the other hand, the detailed data gathered based on 31,600 documents, presented in the publication “Kosovo Memory Book” (February 2nd 2015), which was prepared by the Humanitarian Law Center based in Belgrade, confirm that NATO attacks killed a total of 754 people: 454 civilians and 300 members of the armed forces. 207 civilians were of Serbian and Montenegrin ethnicity, 219 were Albanian, 14 civilians were Roma, and 14 were of other nationalities. Clearly, the documented data show that the number of deaths during NATO Air Campaign was lower than 2000, as presented in the article.

c) The manipulation of the number of Kosovo Serbian post-war refugees

According to the report published by Kosovo Coordination Center of the Government of Serbia in February 2002, there were 129,474 Serbs living in Kosovo. On the other hand, according to the

²⁸ Recak report finds Serbs guilty, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/mar/18/4>.

²⁹ Frontline Interview, Ambassador William Walker, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/interviews/walker.html>.

³⁰ “Civilian Deaths in the NATO Air Campaign,” Human Rights Watch Report, Volume 12, Number 1 (D), 2000, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/nato/>.

last Yugoslav census of 1991 there were 194,000 Serbs living in Kosovo, with a very unlikely trend for that number to increase during the 90's. These figures project a number of, at most, 75,000 serbs that left Kosovo after the war, which is far less than 200,000 as claimed by the article.