

COMPARISON OF UKRAINE AND KOSOVO IN RUSSIA'S DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES



Comparison of Ukraine and Kosovo in Russia's disinformation narratives

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List of abbreviations

RT	—————	Russia Today
KFOR	—————	NATO Peacekeeping Forces in Kosovo
KLA	—————	Kosovo Liberation Army
UN	—————	United Nations
WB	—————	Western Balkans
USA	—————	United States of America
EU	—————	European Union
NATO	—————	North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Executive Summary

Russia seeks to influence the Western Balkans through specific narratives that primarily convey anti-Western messages, including anti-USA, anti-NATO, and anti-EU sentiments. These narratives portray the Euro-Atlantic alliance as destroyers of traditional values and as the culprits behind the region's political tensions. Russia's influence in the area is largely exercised through Serbia, leveraging events in Kosovo as a pretext to develop disinformation narratives.

The report, based on theoretical divisions of narratives, indicates that Russia employs two types of narratives in the Western Balkans: geopolitical narratives aimed at enhancing its regional influence and identity narratives intended to cultivate local discontent with the Western Countries. Specifically concerning Kosovo, these disinformation narratives focus on four main themes: the contested statehood of Kosovo, drawing parallels between Russia's military invasion of Ukraine and the war in Kosovo, comparing the status of Kosovo with Crimea, and portraying Russians and Serbs as victims.

The contested statehood of Kosovo is a primary narrative in Russian disinformation efforts. As part of its revisionist strategy to challenge the post-Cold War international order, Russia aims to undermine the legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood. These narratives often portray Kosovo as a "mafia state" operating under the protection of KFOR, insinuating that Western powers implicitly support its alleged criminal activities. Additionally, they suggest that Kosovo is incapable of sustainable governance without Serbia's support, thus undermining the legality and sovereignty of the state of Kosovo. A particular emphasis is placed on attempts to revise the history of the Kosovo war, with Russia striving to construct an alternative version of events that distorts the crimes committed against the Albanian population and justifies Serbian intervention. _____

Russia deliberately uses an analogy, without explaining the circumstances of the cases, to compare its aggression in Ukraine with the war in Kosovo. It presents its military aggression in Ukraine as an attempt to stop a genocide similar to the one allegedly claimed in Kosovo. Russia makes unfounded claims that massacres such as those in Bucha (Ukraine) and Reçak (Kosovo) are staged, and it also spreads myths about organ trafficking during wartime, referencing events from 1999 during the Kosovo war and unsubstantiated claims involving the KLA. Additionally, the Russian narrative unfoundedly suggests that the KLA may be present in Ukraine through mercenary groups, while also asserting, without credible sources, that Kosovars are interested in defending Ukraine with arms.

The Russian disinformation narrative draws a comparison between Crimea and Kosovo to promote the idea of “double standards” employed by the Western Countries and the UN. Russia claims that while the Western Countries recognized Kosovo's independence as an expression of the will of its people, they refuse to acknowledge the will of the people in Crimea following the referendum held there, despite the fact that Kosovo and Crimea cannot be compared in any historical or political sense. This approach aims to undermine international support for sanctions against Russia and to challenge the legitimacy of Western Countries support for Kosovo. By comparing the situations, Russia seeks to justify the annexation of Crimea and question the fairness of the international order. _____

The Russian disinformation narrative focuses on the victimization of the Serbian minority in Kosovo, spreading unfounded claims that they face serious threats to their security and property. This narrative portrays the Serbian minority and the Serbian Orthodox Church as oppressed and endangered, aiming to create a persistent image of persecution. Russia attempts to draw a parallel between the Serbian minority in northern Kosovo and the Russian minority in Donbas, claiming that Serbs in Kosovo are experiencing persecution similar to that faced by Russians in Donbas.

The main actors who construct and disseminate these narratives are high-ranking Russian officials, including President Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and the spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maria Zakharova. These narratives are then spread by Russian state media outlets such as "Russia Today" and "Sputnik" in the Serbian language through media articles. On social media and digital platforms, these narratives are primarily propagated by influencers with large followings, especially on Telegram and other platforms.

These narratives distort facts and create false situations to enhance their credibility. A key characteristic is their consistency in constructing stories based on fabricated scenarios or distorted facts, aiming to evoke the audience's emotions.

The primary target of these disinformation narratives is the Serbian community in Kosovo, conveyed through anti-Western messages, while other citizens of Kosovo are targeted by portraying the Western Countries as promoter of liberal values and Russia as a defender of traditional values.

Findings of the report suggest that Russian and Serbian narratives about Kosovo are similar, and it is unclear which side is echoing the other's narratives; however, the interests of these two states are distinct yet often complement each other.

Introduction

The report is produced by **hibrid.info**, a fact-checking platform within the organization Action for Democratic Society. The purpose of this report is to identify and analyze the main disinformation narratives from Russia, as well as the actors and objectives promoting these aspects of informational disruption.

Furthermore, the report addresses the identification of narratives in a theoretical context, identifying three main types: geopolitical narratives, which aim to establish a moral order in international relations; national-identity narratives, which interpret significant issues through the internal perspectives of a nation; and political narratives, which serve to justify political decisions within states. These types of narratives are examined for how they can be involved in disinformation.

The report analyzes the impact of Russian narratives in the Western Balkans, describing the main disinformation narratives that Russia constructs for the states in this region. Additionally, the findings of the report provide a breakdown of Russian disinformation narratives with a particular focus on Kosovo, identifying four primary objectives: contesting Kosovo's statehood, creating an analogy between the aggression in Ukraine and the war in Kosovo, comparing Kosovo's status to that of Crimea, and portraying Russians and Serbs as victims. This section also includes tables illustrating the connections between the narratives and their objectives, the actors who create and disseminate these narratives, and the fact-checking related to them. In the concluding section, the report thoroughly analyzes the objectives, actors, and the (in)stability of the facts underpinning the Russian disinformation narratives about Kosovo.

Methodology

The methodology for selecting data and identifying narratives for this report consists of two main approaches:

Primary data include an analysis of existing literature, encompassing reports and news articles from local and international expert groups, as well as other publications. In addition, research was conducted on official communications from Russian state institutions and Russian media to identify the main narratives related to Kosovo. Articles that expose disinformation and Russian narratives from the fact-checking platform “hibrid.info” were also utilized. The primary narratives were determined by identifying sub-narratives (smaller stories) that were categorized into the main narratives based on content classification according to context and topics.

Secondary data were gathered through in-depth interviews with experts on Russian policies and Russian influence in the Western Balkans, specifically in Kosovo. The interviews were structured as semi-structured questionnaires focusing on Russian narratives concerning Kosovo, including their objectives and impact in the fields of diplomacy and security.

This integration of primary and secondary data sources provides a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of Russian narratives.

Narratives and their implications indisinformation

What is a narrative?

“Narrative” term, derived from the Latin word “narratio”, describes stories that help simplify complex realities and adapt to a changing world, influencing social perceptions and decisions more through myths and interpretations than through accurate facts¹.

Researchers in this field identify three types of narratives²:

(1) Geopolitical narratives explain the fundamental functioning of the world through overarching topics such as power dynamics, principles of international relations, and moral frameworks of 'good' and 'evil', often incorporating ideological conflicts like communism versus capitalism on a global scale.

(2) National narratives, also known as identity narratives, focus on the histories and self-perceptions of nations, encapsulating a nation's history, aspirations, and actions while providing insights into both internal and external perspectives through the construction of a collective identity and vision for the state.

(3) Political narratives elucidate current state policies, the reasoning behind decisions, expected contributions to development, stakeholders, and challenges, while offering guidance for interpreting unfolding events and providing a contextual understanding of governmental actions and their implications.

¹O. Davlikanova, A. Kostenko (2023): The War of Narratives: Ukraine's Image in the Media. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Office in Ukraine

²Miskimmon, A./O'Loughlin, B./ Roselle, L. (2013): Strategic Narratives. Communication Power and the New World Order. New York: Routledge (1st edition).

Impact of narratives on misinformation

In a deeply polarized world characterized by political, economic, and security confrontations, states utilize narratives to shape their image and reinforce their position on the international stage.

They exploit propaganda and misinformation to create and protect their interests.³

Disinformation narratives consist of false or partially true stories aimed at manipulating the public through a chronologically organized framework. These narratives function as interconnected segments within a specific timeframe, employing various topics to reinforce the overarching storyline.⁴

Based on the theories outlined above, several key points can be established regarding the objectives, methods, and functions of disinformation narratives. These narratives are constructed to manipulate audiences by disseminating false information and exploiting weaknesses within the information ecosystem, such as public trust in specific sources and the rapid spread of information through social media. Their use serves various purposes, including undermining opponents, shaping public opinion, and amplifying political agendas. This is achieved through techniques such as the selective presentation of facts, the fabrication of information, and amplification via botnet⁵. The challenges that disinformation narratives present to social cohesion, democratic processes, and international stability are crucial to address on a global scale. From this perspective, these narratives often aim primarily to introduce a dominant storyline into public discourse, intending to sow or amplify doubt about the social and democratic values that various societies have established. This is seen as a first step toward the potential alteration of the factual situation on the ground.

³O. Davlikanova, A. Kostenko (2023): The War of Narratives: Ukraine's Image in the Media. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Office in Ukraine

⁴Aleksoska, Rosana & Aleksov, Darko (2023). One Year of Russian Aggression on Ukraine – Study on the Russian Propaganda, Influence and Disinformation in North Macedonia for the Period March 2022–February 2023. Citizens Association MOST/FN: Page 55.

⁵Botnet - the term refers to social media robots network, which are automated programs used to engage in the creation, commenting, reacting to, and sharing of content on social media platforms

Russian narratives and their impact on the Western Balkans

Russian official policy employs narratives that portray Russia as the historical savior of Europe and as a cultural and diplomatic bridge between East and West. These narratives aim to strengthen pro-Russian sentiments while falsely denouncing the West. They often glorify Russian leader Vladimir Putin and seek to justify the actions of the Russian government, using strategies to shape public opinion and advance Russian interests both domestically and internationally. These narratives frequently depict Western nations as Russophobic, presenting Russia as their victim. They assert territorial claims and deny violations of international law to influence public perception at both local and global levels.⁶

Russia leverages its influence in Serbia as a strategic tool to extend its reach into Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, and other countries in the Western Balkans, challenging the European Union and the United States. It views this as an opportunity to utilize the region for its geopolitical positions, considering its intervention in the Balkans a counterbalance to Western actions in its sphere of influence, as seen in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. For Moscow, this represents a way to return the same approach of influence to the Western Countries in sensitive regions.⁷

The main pillars of Russian influence in the region are Serbia, the Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. Podgorica continues to maintain a pro-Ukrainian stance, although the internal situation remains tense due to pro-Russian forces in power. In contrast, Serbia and the Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina uphold close and friendly relations with the Russian Federation.⁸

⁶Aleksoska, Rosana & Aleksov, Darko (2023). One Year of Russian Aggression on Ukraine – Study on the Russian Propaganda, Influence and Disinformation in North Macedonia for the Period March 2022–February 2023. Citizens Association MOST/FN: fq. 55.

⁷Dimitar Bechev (2019): Russia's strategic interests and tools of influence in the Western Balkans. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russia-strategic-interests-and-tools-of-influence-in-the-western-balkans/> (Accessed: September 10 2024) engage in the creation, commenting, reacting to, and sharing of content on social media platforms

⁸Interview with Lulzim Peci, 11 October 2024.

Russia's interest in the Balkans is to keep the region tense, obstructing the stabilization and consolidation of Western influence, particularly aimed at limiting the impact of the United States and Western countries. This is its primary strategic objective in the region.⁹

While quietly acknowledging that the future of the Western Balkans lies within the European Union, Russia intermittently seeks to assert its presence by leveraging its connections with the Orthodox Christian population in the region.¹⁰

In its use of information warfare and disinformation, Russia employs a 4D approach: dismissal, distortion, distraction, and dread. This framework, introduced by Ben Nimmo, involves discrediting critics, distorting unfavorable narratives, redirecting accusations toward others, and instilling fear in its adversaries.¹¹

Kremlin-linked media are utilized to control domestic reporting and disseminate information abroad, implementing a strategy known as "diffusion correction". This approach aims to counterbalance Western media coverage with a pro-Russian perspective in regions where Russian narratives support a broader political agenda.¹² Russian media outlets, such as Sputnik and Russia Today (RT), exert a significant influence in the Western Balkans by disseminating negative narratives about NATO and the EU. They promote Russia as a defender of Orthodox and Slavic values, playing a crucial role in spreading disinformation aimed at undermining the region's integration into NATO and the EU.

Pro-Russian media have played a key role in spreading disinformation, employing information warfare tactics to influence events such as Montenegro's accession to NATO and to exploit the ethnic-political divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁹Interview with Lulzim Peci, 11 October 2024.

¹⁰Cero, Harun. "Euroazijska I Evropska Unija: "Šizofrenost Vanjske Politike Srbije."" Al Jazeera Balkans, Al Jazeera Balkans, 16 July 2017.

¹¹Josip Mandić, Darijo Klarić. (2023). Case Study of the Russian Disinformation Campaign During the War in Ukraine – Propaganda Narratives, Goals and Impacts, Vol. 1, No. 2.

<https://nsf-journal.hr/online-issues/focus/id/1471>

¹²Stefanov, Ruslan & Vladimirov, Martin (2020). The Kremlin Playbook in Southeast Europe. Center for the Study of Democracy.

In North Macedonia, they have aimed to impact the dispute over the country's constitutional name with Greece and its Euro-Atlantic integration. Furthermore, these media outlets have propagated false narratives claiming that NATO and the EU are collaborating to alter Macedonia's national identity, framing local ethnic disputes as politically unstable due to the efforts of the Albanian minority to revive the "Greater Albania" project.¹³

In the Western Balkans, Russia employs the tactic of "whataboutism"¹⁴ to criticize the actions of Western countries regarding Kosovo's independence, while ignoring its own actions in Crimea. This approach aims to create an alternative narrative that justifies Russia's positions and spreads disinformation.¹⁵ Russia positions itself as an opponent of the EU and supports any initiative that hinders the Western Balkans' integration into the EU.¹⁶ Russia cannot stop the Western integration of the Balkans, but it undermines the progress of the countries in the region, fosters divisions, and maintains its economic and political ties to enhance its geostrategic significance.¹⁷ The perception that the United States "humiliated" Moscow during the Kosovo War in 1999 serves as the primary justification for Russia's engagement in the region to "correct past mistakes.

Russia uses history as a tool for political influence worldwide, presenting itself as the "liberator" of the Slavic peoples in the Balkans from the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century and depicting itself as the traditional protector of Orthodox peoples in the region. This narrative portrays the West as an actor with hidden interests, ignoring the needs of the Balkan populations.

¹³ Stefanov, Ruslan & Vladimirov, Martin (2020). The Kremlin Playbook in Southeast Europe. Center for the Study of Democracy.

¹⁴ "Whataboutism" një praktikë e përdorur shpesh për të fajësuar vendet e tjera për veprimet e tyre.

¹⁵ Giles, K. (2016) Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's

¹⁶ Thomas Brey, (2022): Russian Media in the Balkans: Case study: How Moscow's propaganda influences Serbia. Fondacionin Friedrich Naumann.

¹⁷ Yordan Tsalov (2020): Russian interference in North Macedonia: A View Before the Elections:

[https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2020/07/04/rus-](https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2020/07/04/russian-interference-in-north-macedonia-a-view-before-the-elections/)

[sian-interference-in-north-macedonia-a-view-before-the-elections/](https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2020/07/04/russian-interference-in-north-macedonia-a-view-before-the-elections/) (Accessed: September 2024).

Meanwhile, Moscow has manipulated this history, especially in the context of the wars in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s.¹⁸ Through this narrative, Russia attempts to position itself as the primary power that liberated the Orthodox nations of the Balkans from Ottoman rule and claims responsibility for protecting the identity and cultural heritage of Orthodox communities. This is achieved by strengthening cultural and political ties among Western Balkan countries through this historical interpretation.

Public figures, such as Serbian film director Emir Kusturica, have been utilized by Russia in its hybrid warfare, promoting pro-Russian narratives and significantly influencing public opinion in the Balkans.¹⁹

Russia employs “soft power” in the Western Balkans through interventions in domestic policies and support for nationalist activists, as well as through tactics like trade embargoes and cyberattacks. Additionally, it builds partnerships with Serbia and Republika Srpska, exploiting weaknesses in Western policies to maximize its influence and secure allies that serve its interests. At the same time, Russia engages in undermining political processes in the region through (dis)information campaigns and support for anti-Western radical actors, as illustrated by its efforts to block the accession of Montenegro and North Macedonia to NATO.²⁰

¹⁸Yehor Brailian (2023). Orthodoxy, Liberator Russia, Kusturica. How Russian propaganda operates in the Balkans. Detector Media, <https://en.detector.media/post/orthodoxy-liberator-russia-kusturica-how-russian-propaganda-operates-in-the-balkans> (Accessed: 11 September 2024)

¹⁹Interview with Yehor Brailian, 4 October 2024.

²⁰Dimitar Bechev (2019): Russia's strategic interests and tools of influence in the Western Balkans. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russia-strategic-interests-and-tools-of-influence-in-the-western-balkans/> (Accessed: 10 September 2024)

Russian disinformation narratives about Kosovo

Although Kosovo and Russia do not have diplomatic relations, the Kremlin has leveraged the case of Kosovo to reinforce its anti-Western rhetoric and influence regional politics. Through its veto in the UN, refusal to recognize Kosovo as an independent state, and support for Serbia in international forums, Russia aims to hinder Kosovo's international integration and recognition. Putin also exploits Serbian nationalism to maintain his influence in the region and create challenges for NATO.

According to findings in this report, Russia has several objectives regarding Kosovo and, more broadly, the Western Balkans. These include destabilizing the region, inciting ethnic tensions and conflicts, and undermining the trust of local citizens in the values of the EU, the U.S., and the West.

The “Kosovo issue” is frequently utilized by the Kremlin. Russia has, among other things, cited Kosovo as a precedent to construct narratives aimed at justifying its military interventions in various regions of the former Soviet Union. Following NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and the recognition of Kosovo's independence by Western countries in 2008, Russia has claimed legitimacy for its actions, including the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the recognition of contested territories in Georgia—such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008—and more recently, the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in Ukraine in 2022.²¹ Russia's primary goal is to justify its aggression against Ukraine and legitimize its claims to the historical legacy of Kyivan Rus and Crimea, hoping to establish the legality of its invasions in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Transnistria. This strategy serves Putin's ambitions to restore a Soviet empire within the borders of pre-1991 and to create a legal basis for Russian neo-colonialism, a policy Russia has pursued since the collapse of the Soviet Union.²²

²¹ Valur Ingimundarson. (2022). The ‘Kosovo Precedent’: Russia's justification of military interventions and territorial revisions in Georgia and Ukraine, LSE IDEAS, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/publications/updates/kosovo>

²² Interview with Kateryna Shymkevych, 23 October 2024

Russia employs two key events to achieve its strategic goals: NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999, which the Kremlin uses as justification for its actions in Georgia and Ukraine, and the negotiations for Kosovo's status in 2006–2007 led by UN envoy Martti Ahtisaari, which Russia presents as a precedent to support the “phantom republics” in its neighborhood. These events remain central to the Russian narrative, even though the International Court of Justice has ruled that Kosovo's path is now settled for both local and Western politics²³. Russia pursues three primary objectives: first, to justify its aggression against Ukraine and legitimize its claims to the historical legacy of Kyivan Rus and Crimea, aiming to demonstrate the legality of its invasions in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Transnistria. Putin seeks to use this as a foundation for the restoration of the Soviet empire and Russian neocolonialism. Secondly, Russia aims to spread the idea of “Russkiy mir” (the Russian world) and protect Russian speakers in various countries, framing this as an ideologically grounded neocolonial policy. Finally, it seeks to compel the US and the EU to recognize Russia's power through nuclear threats and pressure to prevent Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia from joining the EU and NATO, while building military alliances and global influence.²⁴

Russia's actions and disinformation narratives in the Balkans are rooted in the vulnerabilities of these countries, which are characterized by fragile democracies, regional disputes, historical grievances, and a lack of media literacy. These tactics enable Russia to exploit the situation to advance its interests.²⁵

Given Russia's support for extraterritorial Serbian nationalism and its propaganda machinery in Serbia, pro-Kremlin informational influence in Kosovo is primarily channeled from outside, through media based in Serbia (including Russian-language channels like Sputnik Srbija and RT, as well as various channels on the social network “Telegram”).²⁶

²³ Hoxhaj, Enver, (2022). Përplasja e madhe: Si po e lufton Rusia Kosovën dhe Ballkanin. UET Press. Page 68–69.

²⁴ Interview with Kateryna Shymkevych, 23 October 2024.

²⁵ Filipova, R. (2021) 'Tackling Kremlin's Media Capture in Southeast Europe. Shared Patterns, Specific Vulnerabilities and Responses to Russian Disinformation', Center for the Study of Democracy, p. 110. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/en/48899540/Tackling_Kremlins_Media_Capture (Accessed: 21 August 2023).

²⁶ Ibid

The latter began operations in the Balkans following the invasion of Ukraine on November 15, 2022, announcing its launch with the message: “We have launched RT in the Balkans. Because Kosovo is Serbia”.²⁷ RT chose Serbia as its base in the Balkans due to the close historical ties between Russia and Serbia, rooted in their shared Slavic and Orthodox heritage, as well as the Serbian government's control over the media market, which facilitates the spread of propaganda.²⁸ Russian state media refers to Serbian as “our language” aiming to further emphasize the alignment of interests between Russia and Serbia.²⁹

Russian narratives that are anti-NATO and anti-EU, referencing NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and the non-recognition of its independence from Serbia, have strengthened pro-Russian sentiments in Serbia. This has made Serbia a receptive ground for Kremlin propaganda.³⁰ RT's office in Belgrade employs “information laundering” where disinformation presented as journalistic reporting is disseminated by various Serbian media outlets. This tactic takes advantage of the financial difficulties faced by media organizations in the region.³¹

Russia continuously manipulates facts and twists information to serve its interests, often spreading lies and creating false documents and narratives.³² Typically, these involve fabricated or falsified facts. For instance, Russian propaganda justified the invasion of Ukraine by claiming that the Russian-speaking population was being persecuted there. In reality, there was no significant anti-Russian sentiment. This is an old technique where the aggressor attempts to portray itself as the victim to justify its criminal actions.

²⁷ <https://www.rt.com/russia/566567-rt-balkan-news-portal/>

²⁸ From Russia to Serbia: How RT spreads the Kremlin's propaganda in the Balkans despite EU sanctions, (2024):<https://rsf.org/en/russia-serbia-how-rt-spreads-kremlin-s-propaganda-balkans-despite-eu-sanctions> (Accessed: 10 September 2024).

²⁹ Brey, Thomas (2023). Russian media in the Balkans and their role in the aggression against Ukraine: Case Study, RT Balkan. Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit. Page 21

³⁰ From Russia to Serbia: How RT spreads the Kremlin's propaganda in the Balkans despite EU sanctions, (2024):<https://rsf.org/en/russia-serbia-how-rt-spreads-kremlin-s-propaganda-balkans-despite-eu-sanctions> (Accessed: 10 September 2024).

³¹ From Russia to Serbia: How RT spreads the Kremlin's propaganda in the Balkans despite EU sanctions, (2024):<https://rsf.org/en/russia-serbia-how-rt-spreads-kremlin-s-propaganda-balkans-despite-eu-sanctions> (Accessed: 10 September 2024).

³² Interview with Ukrainian journalist, 27 September 2024.

The narratives of disinformation primarily rely on consistency—namely, the repetition of unfounded claims—rather than on the ‘facts’ presented, which ultimately helps them gain credibility against reality.³⁴ Pro-Russian media channels promote stories that include disinformation and misinterpretations of historical events, using repetition to mask politically motivated constructs that lack factual basis.³⁵

Language barriers may slow down the spread of disinformation, but they do not stop it; disinformation originating from Serbia permeates several media outlets in the Albanian language across Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. Research indicates that a significant portion of disinformation in the Balkans comes from Russia and is disseminated through Serbia's media ecosystem. The main narratives are anti-Western, focusing on the “denazification” of Ukraine and conspiracy theories related to American biological weapons laboratories. This content spreads not only through social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram but also through traditional media in the region.³⁶

Recent U.S. sanctions against RT reflect a shift in Russia's tactics. The current focus is on creating “fake doppelganger media”³⁷ and sponsoring influencers on platforms such as TikTok and X/Twitter, often funded by targeted states. These channels amplify narratives about national unity or the potential threat of war in Kosovo, narratives that Russia can exploit to further its agenda.³⁸

Telegram has gained popularity in the Balkans since the invasion of Ukraine, especially among Serbs and in countries that use the Cyrillic alphabet. Meanwhile, Russians have created channels for users of Latin alphabets, increasing propaganda in Croatian, Slovenian, Albanian, and Greek.³⁹

³⁴ Interview with Gynen Venhari, 4 October 2024.

³⁵ Interview with Marko Banovic, 17 October 2024.

³⁶ <https://birn.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Russian-state-sponsored-disinformation-narratives-in-Albania.pdf>

³⁷ Term that refers to a social media profile that aims to resemble real media by using key visual attributes.

³⁸ Interview with Agon Maliqi, 21 September 2024.

³⁹ Kateryna Shymkevych (2024): Russia's influence in the Balkans: challenges for supporting Ukraine in countering Russian armed aggression. New Geopolitics Research Network.

The risk increases through social media, where destructive and disinformative content is spread without awareness of its Russian origin.⁴⁰ Agents from Russian state intelligence services disseminate Kremlin narratives on social media, with a particular focus on Telegram and the platform X, and less so on Facebook due to the way its algorithms operate.⁴¹ These narratives often build on historical events, exacerbating existing tensions among ethnic groups. In fact, historical events are exploited to draw parallels between the past and current occurrences in the Western Balkans in relation to the war in Ukraine.⁴² The Russian and Serbian information war also contributes to fostering anti-Western sentiments in Kosovo, “weakening the country’s traditional ties with the West” which are essential for Kosovo’s success on the international stage. This is achieved through various media channels, “including troll farms on social networks, to reinforce anti-Western narratives among Albanians in Kosovo”⁴³.

Some Russian political entities on the international stage employ “comparative rhetoric” drawing parallels between international recognition and Kosovo’s status of independence with other global events, such as the invasion of Ukraine, suggesting that the Western Countries have applied double standards. In 2022, RT disseminated a video of Russian President Putin making parallels between Kosovo and his request for the recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as independent republics, claiming that their declaration of independence following the Russian invasion of Ukraine was fully in line with international law.⁴⁴

Furthermore, a report from the European Parliament finds that Russian narratives play into long-standing disinformation campaigns designed to delegitimize Kosovo’s statehood, undermine its relations with Europe, and destabilize its governance.

⁴⁰ Interview with Milazim Krasniqi, 23 September 2024.

⁴¹ Interview with Gynen Venhari, 4 October 2024.

⁴² EUvsDisinfo (2023) Disinfo:NATO intervention in Serbia proved that depleted uranium shells are comparable to a dirty bomb, EUvsDisinfo. Available at: <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/natointervention-in-serbia-proved-that-depleted-uranium-shells-are-comparable-to-a-dirty-bomb> (Accessed: 31 July 2023).

⁴³ Interview with Agon Maliqi, 21 September 2024.

⁴⁴ https://twitter.com/RT_com/status/1537832678132695042 (Accessed: 17 August 2022).

The main narratives in these prolonged campaigns include claims that Kosovo is a mafia state operating under KFOR protection, thus implicitly supported by Western powers; fabrication and/or exaggeration of threats to the security and property of ethnic Serbs and other minorities living in Kosovo; and insinuations that Kosovo is incapable of stable governance without support from Serbia.⁴⁵

A study conducted by KIPRED institute found that Sputnik Serbia published the most disinformation narratives. The primary focus of this media content was on undermining the legitimacy and sovereignty of Kosovo, altering narratives about the war and war crimes in the former Yugoslavia, diminishing the credibility of Western engagement in building the state of Kosovo and in the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, as well as portraying the Serbian community and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened.⁴⁶ Sputnik in Serbian promotes ideas where Russian foreign policy is portrayed as benevolent and is presented for understanding and approval, while the notion that Russian military technology is superior to its Western counterparts is emphasized. Russia's influence over Western Balkan states aims to incite divisions among ethnic groups, such as Serbs against Croats, Albanians, or Montenegrins. Additionally, Brussels is depicted negatively to hinder these states' rapprochement with Euro-Atlantic structures, while economic cooperation with Russia is promoted as more beneficial than with the Western Countries.⁴⁷

Sputnik Srbija focuses on Russia's policies and other international actors in the region, particularly regarding Republika Srpska and Kosovo, arguing that cooperation with Russia and China is more beneficial for the Western Balkans.

⁴⁵ I Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying ways to Effectively Counter Them. (2021). European Parliament, Page 26.

⁴⁶ https://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Kosovo_Observer_Russian_Diplomatic_Warfare_and_Media_Disinformation_November_1_2021_%E2%80%93_January_15_2022_790580.pdf

⁴⁷ Brey, Thomas. (2018). Russische Medienmacht und Revisionismus in Serbien. SÜDOSTEUROPA Mitteilungen, 26–41.

Within this framework, it promotes the narrative that Russia views the region as stable and criticizes Kosovo's independence, describing it as a source of instability. Additionally, Sputnik criticizes the EU's ineffectiveness toward Serbia and portrays U.S. policy as hostile to both Serbia and Russia, referring to Kosovo as "the so-called Kosovo" and characterizing it as a "cancer" for the region. It also opposes policies aimed at integrating the Western Balkans into the EU, viewing Western presence as hegemonic

The table below outlines three main pillars related to narratives and objectives in the context of the current situation. The first pillar focuses on the various goals pursued by the involved actors, identifying the reasons and motivations behind their positions. This helps in understanding what they aim to achieve through the narratives they propagate. The second pillar addresses the specific narratives used to manipulate public perceptions and attain particular objectives, analyzing how these narratives reflect certain ideologies and contribute to social divisions. The third pillar identifies the officials, media, or interest groups responsible for disseminating these narratives, providing a clear view of the information channels and their impact on public opinion. This structure offers a deeper understanding of how information manipulates people's thoughts and behaviors in a specific context. .

The objectives of disinformation narratives	Disinformation narratives	Confronting the facts
Contested statehood of Kosovo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kosovo is a mafia state, operating under the protection of KFOR and thus with the implied support of Western powers - Suggestions that Kosovo is incapable of stable governance without the support of Serbia - Diminishing the legitimacy and sovereignty of Kosovo 	<p>The facts indicate that these disinformation narratives are part of long-standing campaigns aimed at delegitimizing the sovereignty of Kosovo, damaging its relations with Europe, and destabilizing its governance.⁴⁹</p>
Analogy of aggression in Ukraine and the war in Kosovo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The aggression in Ukraine to prevent a genocide similar to that in Kosovo - Kosovo should not be compared to Donbas, as there was no referendum there⁵⁰ 	<p>The facts show that Kosovo cannot be compared to the Donbas region, and the massacres in Bucha and Račak were real events, not staged. There is no evidence of organ transplants during the war in Kosovo or in Ukraine, and the KLA is not involved in the Ukrainian conflict. Additionally, there is no interest among Kosovars in participating in this war.</p>

⁴⁹ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EXPO_STU\(2020\)653621](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EXPO_STU(2020)653621)

⁵⁰ <https://infomax.mk/%d0%b7%d0%b0%d1%85%d0%b0%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b5-%d0%b3%d0%be-%d1%81%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d1%83%d0%b2%d0%b0%d1%98%d1%82-%d0%b5-%d0%ba%d0%be%d1%81%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%be-%d1%81%d0%be/>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The massacres in Bucha (Ukraine) and Raečak (Kosovo) were staged. - Organ transplants under wartime conditions, as in 1999 and in Ukraine - KLA is implicated in organ trafficking - KLA may be present in Ukraine through a group of mercenaries - Interest among Kosovars in defending Ukraine with arms 	<p>Were real events, not staged.⁵¹ There is no evidence of organ transplants during the war in Kosovo or in Ukraine⁵² and the KLA is not involved in the Ukrainian conflict.⁵³ Additionally, there is no interest among Kosovars in participating in this war.⁵⁴</p>
<p>“Comparison” Crimea – Kosovo</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Western Countries do not recognize the will of the people in Crimea, as it has recognized Kosovo. - Western Countries and the UN apply “double standards” in the cases of Crimea and Kosovo.⁵⁵ 	<p>The facts indicate that the comparison between Kosovo and the regions of Ukraine (Crimea, Donbas) occupied by Russia is manipulative, as the cases are entirely different from a historical, legal, and political perspective.⁵⁶</p>

⁵¹ <https://hibrid.info/lavrov-pretendon-se-masakrat-ne-ukraine-jane-inskenuar-njejte-sikur-qjo-e-recakut-ne-kosove/>

⁵² <https://hibrid.info/krijohet-edhe-nje-pretendim-i-pabazuar-per-trafikim-organesh-ne-ukraine-synohet-te-nderlidhet-me-pretendimet-tjeter-te-pabazuar-per-shtepine-e-verdhe/>

⁵³ <https://hibrid.info/synohet-te-nderlidhet-pretendimi-i-pabazuar-per-trafikim-organesh-ne-ukraine-me-perfshirjen-e-uck-se/>

⁵⁴ <https://hibrid.info/pretendimi-i-lavrov-it-se-mercenare-nga-kosova-jane-vendosur-ne-donbas-eshte-i-pabazuar-ne-fakte/>

⁵⁵ <https://lat.rtr.rs/rusija/101513-lavrov-povelja-un-kim-krim-referendum>

⁵⁶ https://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/KIPRED_-_Comparing_the_Incomparable_-_Kosovo_-_Russia_%E2%80%93_Ukraine_566569.pdf

Portrayal of Russians and Serbs as victims

- Fabrication of threats to the security and property of the Serbian minority and other minorities living in Kosovo.
- Portrayal of the Serbian minority and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo as oppressed and threatened.
- The Serbian minority living in northern Kosovo has an identical role to the Russian minority in Donbas.

- The persecution of the Serbian minority in Kosovo is likened to the Nazi persecution of the Russian population from the Donbas region.⁵⁷

The facts indicate a fabrication of threats to the security of the Serbian minority,⁵⁸ and the Serbian Orthodox Church,⁵⁹⁶⁰ portraying them as oppressed and threatened, with a role similar to that of the Russian minority in Donbas, and comparing their persecution to the Nazi persecution of Russians in Donbas.

⁵⁷ https://www.facebook.com/MIDRussia/videos/3823078707935906/?__tn__=%2CO-R

⁵⁸ <https://hibrid.info/zakharova-pretendon-pa-fakte-se-stervitja-ushtarake-defender-europe-23-ne-kosove-perben-nje-provokim-antiserb/>

⁵⁹ <https://hibrid.info/politika-rs-konspiron-se-kurti-ia-ka-ofruar-vatikanit-tempujt-serbe/>

⁶⁰ <https://hibrid.info/narrativi-dezinformues-ruso-serb-per-sulm-te-planifikuar-ndaj-simboleve-te-ortodoksise-ne-kosove/>

Russian claims contesting the statehood of Kosovo

Russia, as part of its strategy to challenge the international order established after the Cold War, aims to undermine the statehood of Kosovo, portraying it as an example of Western liberal intervention. Putin frequently cites NATO's air campaign in 1999 against the then-Yugoslav army and the recognition of Kosovo by Western countries following its declaration of independence in 2008, using these instances to denounce "Western double standards" in international law.

Russia has played a significant role in obstructing Kosovo's membership in UNESCO and INTERPOL, and it serves as a primary sponsor of Serbia's campaign to retract the recognitions given to Kosovo's independence by various states. To achieve these objectives, Russia employs a wide range of tools, including its veto power in the UN Security Council and its network of alliances within international organizations.

Although there has been some competition between Russian and Serbian information warfare in recent years, they largely operate in sync to weaken support for Kosovo in the Western Countries, primarily by exploiting both far-right and far-left platforms for disinformation. Russia has no direct interest in Kosovo but uses it as a leverage point to obstruct the EU-supported dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. This strategy aims to prevent a resolution to the Kosovo issue and its integration into international organizations. Consequently, Russia also exerts pressure on Serbia to reject any agreements that could lead to a final resolution between Kosovo and Serbia.⁶¹

Disinformation narrative regarding Kosovo as a non-legitimate state

Their insinuations that Kosovo cannot function without support from Serbia further deepen the negative perception of its legitimacy, undermining the importance of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. These narratives pose significant obstacles to Kosovo's development as an independent and functional state.

⁶¹ Interview with Agon Maliqi, 21 September 2024.

Russia consistently portrays Kosovo's independence as an illegal act imposed by the Western Countries, completely disregarding the fact that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) determined that there was no violation of international law in Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008. Furthermore, Kosovo is portrayed as a "dangerous precedent" where the recognition of its independence, according to the Russian narrative, **undermines international norms and justifies separatism in other regions.**

Despite not recognizing Kosovo's independence, Russia adopts a dual approach through its Liaison Office in Kosovo and ignores the ICJ's ruling that affirms Kosovo's independence in accordance with international law.⁶²

Portrayal of Kosovo as a destabilizing factor in the Balkans

Russia often describes Kosovo as a continuous source of tension and conflict in the Balkans, echoing concerns about the security of Serbs in Kosovo and organized crime in the region. This narrative aims to reinforce the idea that Kosovo is not a stable state and that the West failed in its peace efforts.

Kosovo is depicted as a hub for terrorist recruitment, with Russian official Maria Zakharova calling it a "bastion of terrorism".⁶⁴ According to this disinformation narrative, Ukraine faces a more severe situation regarding terrorism than Kosovo, suggesting that terrorist threats and activities are more widespread and sophisticated in Ukraine.⁶⁵ Russia promotes the idea that Muslims from Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina pose a threat of spreading Islamism in the Balkans, attempting to create fear and division among communities. It positions itself as a protector of traditional Orthodox values against Western Countries portrayed as having abandoned Christianity and family values.⁶⁶

⁶² Yehor Brailian (2023). Orthodoxy, Liberator Russia, Kusturica. How Russian propaganda operates in the Balkans. Detector Media, <https://en.detector.media/post/orthodoxy-liberator-russia-kusturica-how-russian-propaganda-operates-in-the-balkans> (Accessed: 11 September 2024)

⁶⁴ <https://lat.sputnikportal.rs/20201113/nebenzja-kosovo-je-regrutni-teroristicki-centar-1123848348.html>

⁶⁵ <https://sputnikportal.rs/20240323/zaharova-ukrajina-prevazilazi-i-kosovo-u-ekstremistickom-ludilu-1170145414.html>

⁶⁶ Interview with Yehor Brailian, 4 October 2024.

The narrative “Kosovo, the heart of Serbia” is widespread in Russian channels, with many sources still referring to Kosovo as “Kosovo and Metohija” claiming it belongs to Serbia. Graffiti in Mitrovica depict Crimea as part of Russia and Kosovo as part of Serbia. Russian media frequently use terms like “the so-called Republic of Kosovo” or “self-declared republic” and even weather sites like Meteor.com.ua mark Kosovo as part of Serbia. Additionally, Russian and pro-Russian media portray Kosovo as a place of Islamic fundamentalism, separatism, extremism, narco-terrorism, and a “mafia state”.⁶⁷

This false portrayal of Kosovo is often accompanied by descriptions like a “criminal black hole” on the map of Europe, suggesting it is a center of illegal and criminal activities.

This term implies deep issues with organized crime, drug and arms trafficking, and the recruitment of individuals for terrorist activities, making it a dangerous point for regional stability and European security overall.⁶⁸ The goal of these disinformation narratives is to create a negative opinion of Kosovo, its government, and its people, aiming to convince others that Kosovo, not Serbia, is responsible for regional tensions, manipulating the truth in favor of the Kremlin.⁶⁹

The developments during the 1990s and the war in Kosovo represent a significant and complex period in Balkan history, especially in the narratives promoted by Russia. Moscow’s regime has portrayed itself as a protector of Serbs and their rights, criticizing NATO’s intervention in 1999 as an act of aggression, claiming it violated Serbian sovereignty. Russia accuses Ukraine of serving as a training ground for NATO, suggesting NATO has established military bases in Ukraine and that both NATO and the EU are conducting operations there, leading Balkan countries to consider reinstating mandatory military service.⁷⁶ This narrative parallels the depiction of NATO’s 1999 airstrikes as anti-Serb actions.⁷⁷

⁶⁷ Interview with Makei Liudmyla, 11 October 2024.

⁶⁸ <https://lat.sputnikportal.rs/20210514/zaharova-radikalni-albanci-pretvorili-kosovo-u-kriminalnu-crnu-rupu-evrope-video-1125353733.html>

⁶⁹ Interview with Liudmyla Makei, 11 October 2024.

⁷⁶ Kateryna Shymkevych (2024): Russia’s influence in the Balkans: challenges for supporting Ukraine in countering Russian armed aggression. New Geopolitics Research Network.

⁷⁷ Interview with Gynen Venharin, 4 October 2024.

This approach has contributed to a demonized image of the Western Countries and positions Russia as a defender of the ethnic and historical rights of Slavic people. In this context, Kosovo is seen as a “dangerous precedent” where its recognition of independence justifies separatist aspirations in other regions, like Crimea and Donbas, and challenges international norms.

Russia has manipulated historical narratives to strengthen its geopolitical stance and justify its activities in the region, further polarizing the Balkan situation and attempting to reassert its influence in former Yugoslav republics.

A key claim of the Russian narrative is that NATO bombed Yugoslavia using depleted uranium, portraying this as a severe human rights violation and an act of aggression with serious consequences for the civilian population. This “argument” highlights the risks of Western military actions and justifies criticism against them.

Additionally, Russia alleges that the West has protected organ trafficking and arms smuggling in Kosovo, depicting this as a dark aspect of the post-war period and suggesting that NATO's humanitarian mission was driven by other interests. These narratives aim to cast doubt on Western intentions in the region and justify Russia's role as a supporter of stability and rights in the Balkans.

Disinformation narrative: Comparing aggression in Ukraine with the war in Kosovo

Since the start of Russia's aggression in Ukraine in 2022, the Kremlin has attempted to create its own narrative to legitimize the military invasion, often referencing the Kosovo war to draw parallels. Russian officials and state-aligned media have made misleading comparisons, such as between the Bucha and Reçak massacres, organ trafficking claims, the comparisons of Crimea and Kosovo, and alleged participation of groups from Kosovo in the Ukraine conflict”.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ <https://hibrid.info/deklarata-te-paqendrueshme-nga-zaharova-per-intervenimin-e-nato-s-me-1999-dhe-trazirat-e-marsit-2004/>

⁷⁹ <https://thegeopost.com/sq/factchecking-shq/zaharova-me-narracion-te-rrejshe-per-nderhyrjen-e-nato-s-ne-kosove-ndodhi-pa-arsye-per-ne-kjo-toke-eshte-serbi/>

⁸⁰ Rizanaj, Festim (2023). Ndërlidhja dezinformuese e agresionit rus në Ukrainë me Kosovën. <https://hibrid.info/nderlidhja-dezinformuese-e-agresionit-rus-ne-ukraine-me-kosoven/> (Accessed: 22 October 2024).

Claims of preventing genocide similar to Kosovo

When Russian tanks and troops entered Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin used the violent dissolution of former Yugoslavia in the 1990s as justification for invading a sovereign European country. He frequently drew parallels between the Kosovo war, instigated by Serbia, and the annexation of Crimea and eastern Ukrainian regions by Russia.

After opposing Kosovo's independence on every international platform for many years, Russia in 2014 began to cite the so-called "Kosovo precedent" to justify the military annexation of over 20% of Ukraine's territory.

Three days before the invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Putin recognized the independence of two separatist regions in Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk, known collectively as Donbas.⁸¹ In his televised address on February 24, 2022, announcing plans for a "special military operation" he based the declaration of war on unsubstantiated claims of genocide.⁸²

Russian President Putin is particularly focused on NATO's bombing of Serbia in 1999 and Western support for Kosovo's independence in 2008. He claims these actions set a precedent against international law and order, despite using this as justification for invading Ukraine.

Denial of crimes: Claims that the massacres in Bucha (Ukraine) and Rečak (Kosovo) were staged

Unsubstantiated comparisons have been made equating Russian aggression in Bucha, Ukraine, with Serbian crimes in Rečak, Kosovo.

The massacre in Rečak, in mid-January 1999, where at least 40 Albanian civilians were killed, led to NATO bombing Serbian forces. Since then, Belgrade has claimed it was "staged". The claim is that the deceased were KLA members in civilian clothes, not civilians, thus fabricating a war crime to justify NATO's airstrikes on former Yugoslavia.

⁸¹ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/rusija-putin-ukrajina-teritorija/31717195.html>

⁸² <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/03/putin-ukraine-russia-nato-kosovo/>

Similarly, in Bucha, Moscow alleged that the bodies on the streets were “arranged” by Ukraine.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in May and July 2022, stated that the massacres of civilians in Ukrainian cities like Bucha were staged by Ukrainian authorities and their Western allies. He even claimed that such staging by Westerners occurred years earlier, citing the Reçak massacre in Kosovo by Serbian forces in 1999.⁸³

Based on evidence, a massacre of Ukrainian civilians occurred in Bucha by the Russian military.⁸⁴ Many international human rights organizations have documented the Reçak massacre by Serbian forces, including the UN Security Council,⁸⁵ OSCE Mission Chief in Kosovo William Walker,⁸⁶ who described it as a crime against humanity, and Human Rights Watch (HRW), etc.⁸⁷

“Organ trafficking” and the “Yellow House”

Russian officials and media have drawn unfounded comparisons between alleged organ transplants in Ukraine and the so-called “Yellow House” claims of organ trafficking in Albania during the Kosovo war.

These claims aim to suggest, without evidence, the possibility of organ transplants in Ukraine, based on the unproven “Yellow House” scenario.

In April 2022, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova attempted to link these claims, suggesting that if organ transplants were possible during wartime conditions in 1999, then they could occur in Ukraine as well.^{88 89}

⁸³ <https://lat.sputnikportal.rs/20220526/lavrov-u-buci-je-odradjena-ista-sema-kao-u-racku-1137735186.html>

⁸⁴ <https://www.dw.com/en/fact-check-ehat-really-happened-in-bucha/video-61388310>

⁸⁵ Security council strongly condemns massacre of Kosovo albanians in southern Kosovo - <https://press.un.org/en/1999/19990119.sc6628.html>

⁸⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1999/01/23/this-time-walker-wasnt-speechless/dcef30bd-6469-4718-b56c-e6a4eee9c179/>

⁸⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/campaigns/kosovo98/racak.shtml>

⁸⁸ <https://lat.r.rs/news/32683-zaharova-trgovina-organima-kosovo-metohija-ukrajina/>

⁸⁹ https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2022&mm=04&dd=04&nav_category=78&nav_id=2134314

In April 2023, Zakharova made another unfounded allegation about illegal organ transplants in Ukraine, comparing it to the unverified “Yellow House” scenario in Kosovo. She claimed that “organ transplants in Ukraine require attention” asserting without evidence that “such operations were conducted by illegal ‘transplantologists’ in the late 1990s in Albania”.^{90 91}

In August 2023, in an article for the Russian newspaper “Rossiyskaya Gazeta” Zakharova alleged without evidence that KLA was involved in organ trafficking in Ukraine. She further claimed Ukraine had become a leader in organ trafficking, asserting without proof that KLA was also involved.^{92 93}

Since the beginning of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the Kremlin has attempted to create disinformation narratives linked to the unverified claims of organ transplants in Albania (“Yellow House”) during the Kosovo war.

Participation of Kosovars and the KLA in the Ukraine conflict

Since the beginning of Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine, Russian officials and media have raised speculations regarding the involvement of Kosovars in the conflict, allegedly supporting Ukrainian forces. Prominent Russian figures, including President Putin, Foreign Minister Lavrov, and Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, have propagated these claims.

In February 2023, Lavrov alleged that Moscow has information indicating mercenaries from Kosovo, as well as Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, are stationed in the Donbas region of Ukraine. On the other hand, the Ukrainian Ambassador to Albania, Volodymyr Shkurov, acknowledged interest from Kosovars in traveling to Ukraine to support its defense but did not cite any confirmed cases of Kosovars joining the Ukrainian forces, contrary to Lavrov’s assertions.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ <https://lat.rt.rs/news/32683-zaharova-trgovina-organima-kosovo-metohija-ukrajina/>

⁹¹ <https://lat.rt.rs/news/32683-zaharova-trgovina-organima-kosovo-metohija-ukrajina/>

⁹² <https://lat.sputnikportal.rs/20230807/zaharova-ukrajina---lider-na-crnom-trzistu-organa-za-transplanciju-1159574009.html#>

⁹³ <https://lat.rt.rs/rusija/44302-zaharova-ovk-trgovina-organa/>

⁹⁴ <https://lat.sputnikportal.rs/20220218/vrbuju-placenike-s-kosova-iz-albanije-i-bih-za-donbas-lavrov-proveravamo-1134476350.html>

President Putin similarly claimed in March 2022 that mercenaries from the Balkans, specifically from Croatia, Albania, and Kosovo, were participating in the Ukraine war in support of Ukraine.⁹⁵

Most recently, in August 2023, Zakharova claimed that the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) is still active, albeit under a different name, and may be present in Ukraine as a group of mercenaries. She also alleged that the KLA could be involved in organ trafficking in Ukraine.⁹⁶

These statements by Russian officials regarding the involvement of groups from Kosovo and the possible presence of the KLA in Ukraine are unfounded and lack supporting evidence. Additionally, years ago, Kosovo's Assembly passed a law⁹⁷ prohibiting its citizens from participating in foreign conflicts, categorizing this as a criminal offense. Kosovo state officials have consistently refuted Russia's claims.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ https://tass.com/politics/1416985?fbclid=IwAR0BtlcbzPMbJ69vLo9VC7cNĚ7xĚXnhnf8qk9B_DA3hBt_CSEtsy8XJKx0Y

⁹⁶ <https://lat.rt.rs/rusija/44302-zaharova-ovk-trgovina-organa/>

⁹⁷ <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=10763>

⁹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPdol3sYGf8>

“Comparison” between the status of Kosovo and Crimea

Russian President Putin has drawn another parallel between the annexation of Crimea and Kosovo's independence from Serbia amid the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. Putin's claims, reiterated during Crimea's annexation in 2014, follow this logic: if the former Yugoslav republics and Kosovo—whose constitutional status was that of an autonomous province within Yugoslavia—could achieve independence through armed struggle, then why shouldn't Ukraine's strategic peninsula on the Black Sea and the pro-Russian “separatist provinces” in eastern Ukraine do the same, with Russia's support? According to Putin, Western Countries refuse to acknowledge the will of the people in Crimea, as it did in Kosovo.^{104 105} As a result, Kremlin propaganda created a myth about the self-determination of Russian speakers in Ukraine, spreading a false narrative through Russian, Prussian, and Serbian media since 2014 that incorrectly portrays Kosovo and Crimea as identical situations under international humanitarian law.¹⁰⁶

Russia does not have a clear geopolitical program for Kosovo but uses Kosovo as a diplomatic precedent. They bring up the Kosovo case in international discussions to justify their actions in countries like Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, arguing, “If Kosovo could do it, why shouldn't Crimea have the same right?”¹⁰⁷ Thus, Russia (mis)uses Kosovo's case to support its claims in other territorial issues. Russia's approach is more about “using Kosovo than engaging in Kosovo”.¹⁰⁸

Despite the illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in 2014 and its ongoing support for a separatist movement there, Putin has insisted that the annexation of Crimea should be recognized as a legitimate reflection of local residents' choice.¹⁰⁹ Such narratives, which draw comparisons and attempt to deflect with counter-accusations, are frequently employed by Russia—especially when it compares Kosovo to separatist regions in Ukraine, a tactic often associated with “whataboutism”.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/2346859-putin-zagrmeo-zapad-na-kosovu-priznaje-volju-naroda-na-krimu-ne>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.danas.rs/svet/putin-moze-kosovo-a-ne-i-krim/>

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Kateryna Shymkevych, 23 October 2024.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Lulzim Peci, 11 October 2024.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Jeta Loshaj, 14 October 2024.

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/putin-njohja-e-krimese-kosova-/31717125.html>

¹¹⁰ “Whataboutism or whataboutery (as in ‘but what about...?’) is a strategic response technique that addresses an accusation with a counter-accusation instead of defending against the original charge.

Why the comparison doesn't hold?¹¹¹

NATO did not "occupy" Kosovo after the agreement to withdraw Serbian forces but deployed a peacekeeping mission to maintain peace and security for all citizens in Kosovo, including the Serbian community. In contrast, Russian forces established control over Crimea even before a referendum on joining Russia was held.

NATO intervened in Kosovo following documented Serbian crimes against Albanians, including mass killings, ethnic cleansing, and forced displacement. Russian forces, on the other hand, intervened in Ukraine despite no reported abuses or violence against the Russian minority there.

Kosovo declared independence but did not unite with Albania. Crimea, with a majority Russian-speaking population, signed an agreement to join Russia just two days after a referendum, which Western countries deemed undemocratic.¹¹²

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008 following an extensive process known as the Vienna negotiations.¹¹³ In 2010, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Kosovo's declaration of independence did not violate international law.¹¹⁴ So far, Kosovo's independence has been recognized by over 100 countries, including the United States and most EU nations.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/putin-njohja-e-krimese-kosova-/31717125.html>

¹¹² <https://www.glasamerike.net/a/6471431.html>

¹¹³ <https://www.dw.com/sq/viti-2008-viti-i-pavar%C3%ABsis%C3%AB-s%C3%AB-kosov%C3%ABs/a-3900406>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.dw.com/sq/gjnd-pavar%C3%ABsia-e-kosov%C3%ABs-%C3%ABsht%C3%AB-n%C3%AB-p%C3%ABrputhje-me-t%C3%AB-drejt%C3%ABn-nd%C3%ABrkomb%C3%ABtare/a-5826936>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.kosovothanksyou.com/>

Furthermore, Crimea is an integral part of the Ukrainian state, illegally annexed by Russia in 2014.¹¹⁶ The referendum held in Crimea on March 16, 2014, was deemed illegal the same year—rejected by a vote of 100 member states in the United Nations General Assembly.¹¹⁷

Though the comparison between Crimea and Kosovo is unfounded, inaccurate, and unsustainable, high-ranking Russian officials continue to use it as an alibi, including President Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and others.^{118 119}

¹¹⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-crisis-in-Crimea-and-east-ern-Ukraine>

¹¹⁷ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/03/464812-backing-ukraines-territorial-integrity-un-assembly-declares-crimea-referendum>

¹¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IPBYzKR2U>

¹¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPVuCYVtFc0>

Narrative of portraying Russians and Serbs as victims

Russia, as Serbia's main ally, has seized the opportunity to counter Western-supported positions regarding Kosovo and has attempted to influence the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. Some media in Serbia and in northern Kosovo (mainly inhabited by the Serbian minority), identified as being close to the government, promote the well-known Russian propaganda that portrays Serbia as a victim and questions the legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood. These publications activate narratives of historical revisionism and unfounded claims of ethnic cleansing against Serbs in Kosovo, aiming to deepen divisions and obstruct the EU-facilitated dialogue for a final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia.

Moscow's propaganda machine serves as a powerful tool for maintaining Russia's popularity among vulnerable groups and has been advantageous for politicians like Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, who follows the example of the Serbian dictator Milošević, from the Kosovo war in 1999 to the current war in Ukraine. Just as Milošević claimed that Serbs in Kosovo were oppressed by Albanians, Putin has used the supposed image of oppressed Russians in Ukraine to justify the war, while Vučić manipulates Serbs in Kosovo to incite tensions through various means, portraying them as victims.¹²⁴ One of the most effective tools used by Serbia is emotional manipulation, primarily through the depiction of the Serbian minority as victims of international community decisions, with Russia positioned as the protector of Serbian minority rights in Kosovo¹²⁵

In September 2024, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, during a meeting at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry before ambassadors from around 80 countries, stated that "the persecution of Serbs in Kosovo is similar to the Nazi persecution of the Russian population from the Donbas territory, perpetrated by Ukrainian authorities".¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Interview with Marko Banovic, 17 October 2024.

¹²⁶ <https://lat.rt.rs/rusija/108242-lavrov-srbija-kim-progon-srpski-narod-ruski-narod-donbas/>

Six-pointed stars, reminiscent of the Star of David, a symbol of Judaism, were placed on the barbed wire of KFOR surrounding¹²⁷ the Municipality of Leposavić, amidst a situation where local Serbs protested against the Albanian mayor of this municipality. This symbol was used to convey the false Russian narrative to Leposavić, as the Russian president has continuously referred to the Ukrainian government as a Nazi government. It was now the turn of Serbian officials to attempt a similar portrayal of the Kosovo Government and local officials. By promoting this false narrative and attempting to compare the Serbian citizens of Kosovo to Jews during World War II, Serbian politicians and officials have raised such narratives by misinterpreting facts and establishing false contexts. Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti and the Albanian mayors of northern Kosovo municipalities were aimed to be depicted as Nazis by Serbian officials,¹²⁸ referring to them as “Gauleiters”¹²⁹ in media reports¹³⁰ from some Serbian outlets. The false portrayal of the Ukrainian and Kosovo governments as Nazi regimes was further emphasized when the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Zakharova, claimed that Ukrainian President Zelenskyy and Kosovo Prime Minister Kurti are Nazis.¹³¹ Narratives that portray Kosovo as an illegitimate state without international perspective often embody dangerous ideas.

Kosovo serves as a clear example where Russian hybrid tactics are attempted, similar to those used in Donbas by Russia. The dissemination of media propaganda highlighting the dangers faced by Serbs in Kosovo, the escalation of interethnic tensions in the region, and graffiti campaigns with messages like “When the army returns to Kosovo”¹³² reflect the implementation of Russian doctrine. The terrorist attack in the village of Banjska in Zvečan on September 24, 2023, which involved media preparation and the act of the attack itself, exhibits all the characteristics of hybrid warfare tactics as outlined by this doctrine.¹³³

¹²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgE6KeQoJug>

¹²⁸ <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/petkovic-za-sve-sto-se-juce-desilo-na-severu-kosova-odgovornost-snosi-aljbin-kurti>

¹²⁹ Gauleiter – emërtim për guvernatorët lokal nën qeverisjen naziste të Hitlerit.

¹³⁰ <https://happytv.rs/vesti/politika/okupacioni-gaulajter-uvodi-specijalnu-policijsku-jedinicu-za-oblast-enje-srpska-lista-upozorava-na-fasisticki-potez-aljbina-kurtija/630832/>

¹³¹ <https://t.me/MFARussia/14515>

¹³² <https://www.koha.net/arberi/kur-ushtria-te-kthehet-ne-kosove-shfaqen-grafite-te-reja-ne-veri>

¹³³ Doktrina Gerasimov, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/05/gerasimov-doctrine-russia-foreign-policy-215538/>: Valery Gerasimov, Shefi i Shtabit të Përgjithshëm të Federatës Ruse, pas të cilit është emëruar doktrina, thotë: luftërat nuk shpallen më dhe kur ato fillojnë, ato zhvillohen sipas një modeli atipik.

The terrorist attack in the village of Banjska in Zvečan on September 24, 2023, which involved media preparation and the act of the attack itself, exhibits all the characteristics of hybrid warfare tactics as outlined by this doctrine.¹³⁴

Russia has shown a particular interest in destabilizing the situation in Kosovo. It has aimed to “stir alarm bells for war, incite interethnic hatred” and increase Kosovo’s distrust towards the Western Countries. Furthermore, Russia has worked towards “sabotaging any agreements with Serbia mediated by the EU and the USA”, attempting to undermine efforts for peace and stability in the region.¹³⁵ Russia claims that Serbs are victims of Western propaganda and that Serbia lost Kosovo as a result of this propaganda and Western interventions.¹³⁶

The potential formation of a conflict was initiated by creating an artificial crisis due to claims of threats to Serbs in Kosovo, providing a pretext for escalating the conflict. This narrative asserts that the Serbian minority living in northern Kosovo plays an identical role to the Russian minority in Donbas. In addition to graffiti writing, statements from Serbian officials accusing Kosovo’s state institutions of wanting a “pogrom”¹³⁷ against Serbs, even genocide, were quite clear. Just as in Donbas in 2014, narratives from Russian and Serbian state-controlled media served to create an informational environment that incites violence. The use of criminal groups and paramilitary formations characteristic of hybrid action has also been employed in Kosovo this time. Milan Radoičiq, the Vice President of the Serbian List in Kosovo and close to Serbian President Vučić, attempted to seize Banjska village in northern Kosovo with an heavily armed group. The type and amount of armaments, including electronic blocking systems, anti-personnel mines, automatic grenade launchers, and large quantities of explosives,¹³⁸ uncontrollably recall Putin’s “little green men”¹³⁹ who, under the guise of freedom fighters in Crimea, carried out separatist actions in Ukraine in 2014.

¹³⁴ Azra Karastanović (Ed), (2023). IGRA U SJENKAMA – Ruske hibridne aktivnosti na Zapadnom Balkanu, Digitalni forenzički centar (DFC), Podgorica, Page. 21-22.

¹³⁵ Interview with Agon Maliqi, 21 September 2024.

¹³⁶ Interview with Kateryna Shymkevych, 23 October 2024.

¹³⁷ Termi që përdoret nga zyrtarët serb duke pretenduar dëbimin, spastrimin e serbëve nga Kosova.

¹³⁸ <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/cfare-dihet-per-armatimin-e-konfiskuar-ne-veri/32965720.html>

¹³⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154>

Following the terrorist attack in Banjska in September 2023, where an armed Serbian group killed a Kosovo police officer and entered the Banjska Monastery, Serbia's official narrative on this event falsely claimed that it was a “rebellion of local Serbs” against the Kosovo Government led by Prime Minister Kurti. Following this false narrative, Serbian President Vučić stated on several occasions that the terrorist attack in Banjska was perpetrated by individuals who were local Serbs.¹⁴⁰

Russia employed a similar narrative following its intervention in Crimea in 2014. In a statement by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, soldiers in green uniforms without logos or emblems were referred to as citizens who had taken control of administrative offices in Crimea in self-defense¹⁴¹

Regarding the similarity of the green uniforms to those of the Russian army, Putin, following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, stated that they could be purchased in any store, just as Vučić declared nine years later (2023),¹⁴² concerning the attackers in Banjska. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, two well-known conflicts have remained: Transnistria in Moldova, where Russia has deployed troops, and Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The operational model is similar in the cases of Serbia and Russia. Both employ similar methods, training and arming local people to achieve their objectives. The main dilemma remains whether Russia has more influence in Serbia or vice versa.¹⁴³

However, the false narrative promoted by Russia against Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, depicting him as a Nazi leader in Ukraine, is not the only tactic employed by Serbian politicians, who attempt to push similar narratives regarding Serbia's stance on Kosovo. Public data thus far does not clarify which of these false narratives came first—Russia's against Ukraine or Serbia's against Kosovo.

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/armed-individuals-who-attacked-kosovar-police-are-local-kosovo-serbs-serbian-president/3000034>

¹⁴¹ <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-crimea/29790037.html>

¹⁴² <https://apnews.com/article/kosovo-serbia-policeman-killed-tension-kurti-vucic-51a29a3159646ec020851b3b5a24836f>

¹⁴³ Interview with Lulzim Peci, 11 October 2024.

These narratives consistently assign the Serbian people the role of victims to justify and mask the actions of Serbian paramilitary, police, and military forces in Kosovo, particularly during the Kosovo war and NATO's intervention in 1999.¹⁴⁴ Following the EU's visa liberalization for Kosovo, a narrative began to structure suggesting that the aim is the ethnic cleansing of Serbs through the visa liberalization process, as conditions are being created for their removal.¹⁴⁵

Russia and Serbia share several similar factors, such as a nationalist ideology towards neighboring nations and efforts to promote imperialism and colonialism through propaganda, seeking to control territories they consider part of their heritage. For Russia, these territories include Ukraine, Crimea, Belarus, the Baltic states, and several Central Asian countries; for Serbia, they include Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, and other territories. Another common element is the use of historical and spiritual narratives, with Kosovo being viewed as a sacred and ancient center for Serbia, and Crimea for Russia. Both countries propagate the idea of divine choice and Orthodox superiority, promoting their language and culture as essential—Russians viewing Ukrainian and Belarusian as dialects of Russian, while Serbs claim that Croatian and Montenegrin are parts of the Serbian language. These factors form the essence of the ideologies of “Russkiy mir” (the Russian world) and “Srpski svet” (the Serbian world).¹⁴⁶

Russian narratives, which are divided and structured, include geopolitical arguments used to justify Russia's actions, such as the comparison between Kosovo and Crimea. These narratives are targeted to influence both right-wing and left-wing segments in the Western Countries, where the right propagates the idea of a “replacement theory”¹⁴⁷ concerning Kosovo, while the left frames it as a product of American colonialism.¹⁴⁸ In the diplomatic arena, these narratives have the potential to affect the decision-making of skeptical EU states by portraying Kosovo as an unstable country.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Marko Banovic, 17 October 2024.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Gynen Venharin, 4 October 2024.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Kateryna Shymkevych, 23 October 2024.

¹⁴⁷ Teoria thotë se, popullsia e bardhë evropiane në përgjithësi po zëvendësohet demografikisht dhe kulturalisht nga popuj jo të bardhë, veçanërisht nga myslimanët. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/replacement-theory>)

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Agon Maliqi, 21 September 2024.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Jeta Loshaj, 14 October 2024.

However, Russia's influence in Kosovo is relatively small, even though it has exacerbated ethnic tensions and obstructed dialogue with Serbia. The Russian Patriarch and the Russian Orthodox Church are the Kremlin regime's most powerful tools, as well as Putin's propaganda machine.¹⁵¹ However, Russia's influence in Kosovo is relatively low, although it has heightened interethnic tensions and obstructed dialogue with Serbia.¹⁵² Serbian population in Kosovo is the primary target of these narratives, with Russia attempting to hinder their integration with the Western Countries and position itself as their true protector. Russian influence relies on ties with the Orthodox Church and political aspects.¹⁵³ Current narratives emphasize the connection between Slavs and Orthodox Christians, reinforcing their influence. Russia, with its "leading" role in the establishment of Orthodox Slavic states in the Balkans, continues to affect the cultural and political relationships in the region.¹⁵⁴ The destabilizing role of Russian Orthodoxy is a crucial part of the Russian Federation's soft power strategy, serving as a tool to strengthen ties with Balkan countries and promote narratives that favor Russian interests, effectively turning Orthodoxy into an instrument for consolidating its positions in the area.¹⁵⁵

Serbia is leveraging Russia's influence and support in international organizations to pressure certain countries regarding Kosovo's independence.¹⁵⁶ The absence of a defined narrative regarding the 1998–1999 war¹⁵⁷ and the lack of working groups for Russia and Serbia within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo¹⁵⁸ create a gap in the influence of others' narratives.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Kateryna Shymkevych, 23 October 2024.

¹⁵² Interview with Lulzim Peci, 11 October 2024.

¹⁵³ Interview with Agon Maliqi, 21 September 2024.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Lulzim Peci, 11 October 2024.

¹⁵⁵ Kateryna Shymkevych (2024): Russia's influence in the Balkans: challenges for supporting Ukraine in countering Russian armed aggression. Neë Geopolitics Research Network.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Kateryna Shymkevych, 23 October 2024.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Jeta Loshaj, 14 October 2024.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Lulzim Peci, 11 October 2024.

Conclusion

The report emphasizes that Russian disinformation narratives aim to create doubts about the legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood and spread ideas that fuel social and political tensions in the region. These narratives, relying on anti-Western messages and using Kosovo as a pretext, seek to influence public opinion and the stances of certain European countries that have yet to recognize Kosovo's independence. This situation presents a serious challenge for Kosovo, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine, where Russia attempts to justify its actions by drawing comparisons between the two countries, thus seeking to undermine international support for Kosovo.

However, the report points out that Kosovo currently lacks a clear strategy to counter these disinformation narratives. The absence of a coordinated plan to address these falsehoods makes Kosovo more vulnerable to such attacks, increasing public sensitivity to these messages. This calls for greater engagement from Kosovo's institutions to develop effective communication mechanisms and strengthen citizens' trust in official information.

Furthermore, the importance of cooperation with the European Union and the United States in efforts to counter disinformation narratives must be emphasized. This is crucial not only for strengthening Kosovo's position on the international stage but also for securing support through the resources and expertise these institutions provide. Strategic cooperation with other international actors can help create a shared narrative that promotes stability and democratic values in the region.

In conclusion, Kosovo must actively engage in efforts to address and challenge Russian disinformation narratives. This includes improving public communication, involving experts in the field of communications, and raising citizens' awareness about disinformation. These steps are essential for maintaining internal stability and strengthening Kosovo's position in an increasingly complex and disinformation-sensitive global environment.

Cultivating critical judgment among citizens requires an integrated approach that includes awareness-raising through informational campaigns, training, and advocacy in various forms, as well as incorporating media literacy into school curricula. This dual strategy aims to develop individuals' critical skills for analyzing information and identifying reliable sources, empowering them to distinguish facts from misinformation and propaganda. Awareness campaigns contribute to increasing public awareness, while sustainable media education in schools ensures the formation of younger generations with well-developed critical thinking skills from an early age.

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