

Disinformation in Croatia
and the Western Balkans:
the fact-checkers'
perspective



October 25, 2022
EU DisinfoLab Annual Conference

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The Context / Logical Framework



The percentage of Western Balkan citizens thinking EU accession will never happen **has increased by 6 points**
- from 22% in BB2021 to



28%

For the first time since 2015 **support to EU membership broke steady growth and decreased** across the region to



60%

of Western Balkan citizens endorsing it, from 62% in BB2021

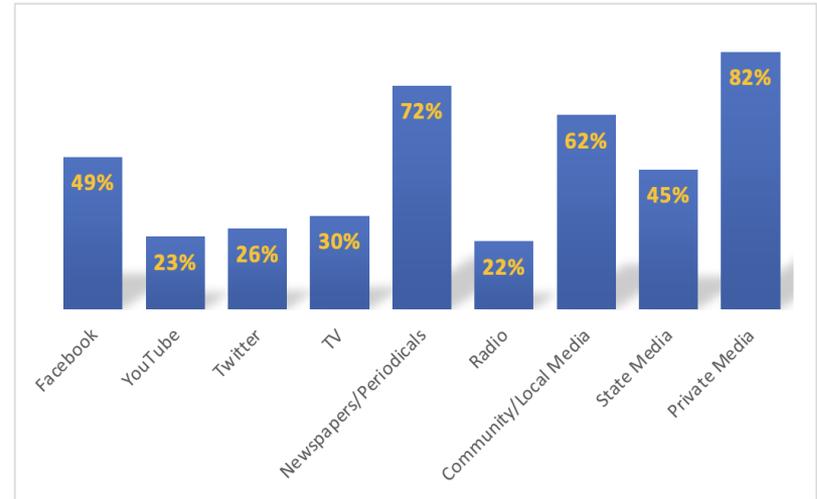
“evidence suggests that most major media outlets in the Western Balkans are at least complicit in one form of disinformation or another, ranging from click-bait sensationalism to the work-for-hire fabrication of fully false narratives”

“political parties play a particularly prominent role throughout the region, often coordinating with affiliated media to produce and disseminate disinformation for electoral purposes. Nationalist organisations and other groups, including religious and veterans’ groups, are also well represented.”

“By manipulating political discourses, Russia’s disinformation operations stir regional tensions to undermine further integration and discredit the EU”

“Serbia serves as a launchpad for the Kremlin’s disinformation operations in the Western Balkans in general, and in the context of undermining the EU, in particular”

Figure 9: Channels of Disinformation Distribution in the Western Balkans (2018-2020)



Source: Authors’ calculation

“Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying Ways to Effectively Counter Them”

European Parliament, Policy Department for External Relations Directorate General for External Policies of the Union PE 653.621 - February 2021

Figure № 36 Perception of the prevalence of fabricated news

Please indicate how often the following statement applies to you. *“I come across information in the media that I think is almost completely made up.”* Base: Total target population. n=6053, Albania n=1000, North Macedonia n=1009, Montenegro n=1012, BiH n=1000, Kosovo n=1032, Serbia n=1000

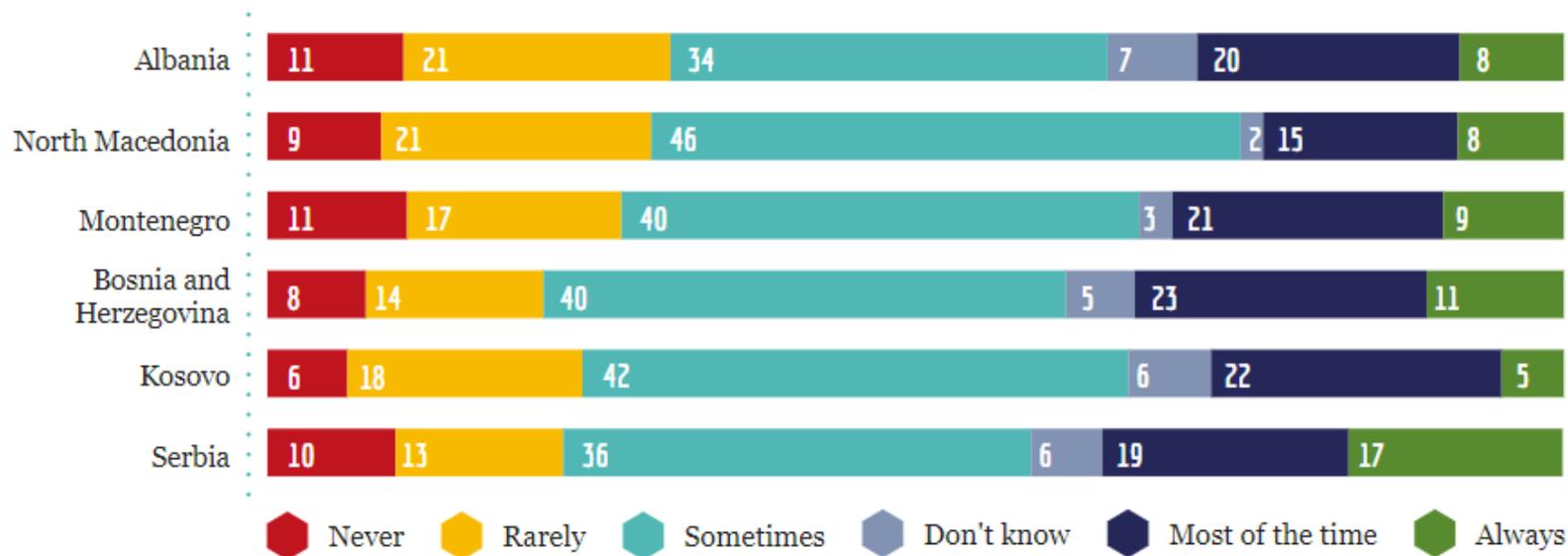
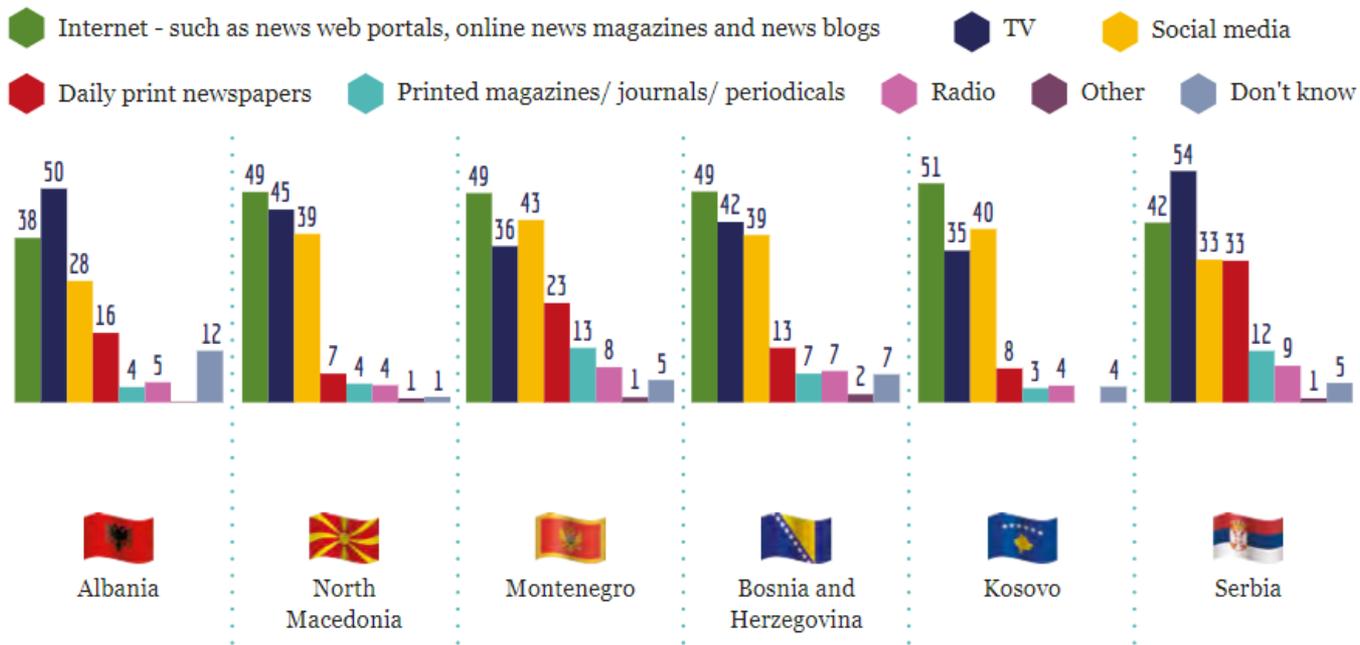


Figure № 30 Sources of inaccurate or made-up information

Where do you usually come across information that is not fully accurate or almost completely made-up? Base: those who have come across inaccurate or fabricated information in the media

n=5528, Albania n=878, North Macedonia n=940, Montenegro n=933, BiH n=927, Kosovo n=936, Serbia n=915.



Faktograf.hr

- initiated in 2015 as a joint project of democracy watchdog Gong and Croatian Journalists' Association, supported by Istinomjer.ba, Istinomjer.rs and National Endowment for Democracy
- verified by International Fact Checking Network since 2017.
- sections:
 - In Focus: deep dive reporting and analysis
 - Exposed: debunks on social networks
 - Accuracy Check: fact-checks of politicians' statements
 - You asked: answering the readers' requests (40% answered with articles)
- + election debates subjected to live fact-checking
- more than 3000 articles published in the first 6 years
- annually cca 1.5 million visits, 16.5% by returning visitors
- part of Meta's Third-Party Fact-Checking Program since 2019.

Faktograf - Association for the Informed Public

- non-profit media organization focused on developing good journalism, critical thinking, and informed public
- employs 13 persons, out of which 11 are women
- undisclosed location due to risks from violent threats and harassment

RAZOTKRIVENO

Fake Serbian Sky News broadcasts Kolakušić's baseless claims about inflation, energy crisis and sanctions against Russia

Author: Ivica Kristović | September 16, 2022

In June, Mislav Kolakušić published a video in which he interprets global events, and part of his baseless claims are now being broadcast by a Serbian portal that falsely presents itself as Sky News.



YouTube

On September 10, the Skynews.rs portal, which has nothing to do with the more famous British namesake Sky News, published excerpts from an interview with the Croatian member of the European Parliament, **Mislav Kolakušić**, in which the member described the causes of inflation in Europe in an extremely simplified and unfounded manner and stated inaccuracies about the European sanctions against Russia. .

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The network of 6 fact-checking organizations from 5 countries in South-Eastern Europe that work on the promotion of media accountability, improving media literacy and fighting misinformation and disinformation:

- **Fake News Tragač**, published by Novi Sad School of Journalism, Serbia
- **Faktograf.hr**, published by Faktograf - the Association for the Informed Public, Croatia
- **Raskrikavanje.rs**, published by Crime and Corruption Reporting Network - KRIK, Serbia
- **Raskrinkavanje.ba**, published by Citizens' Association Why not - BiH
- **Raskrinkavanje.me**, published by Center for Democratic Transition, Montenegro
- **Razkrinkavanje.si**, published by Ostro.si, Slovenia



SEE Check & the war on Ukraine

- Timeline: February 24 - July 25 2022
- 5 fact-checking media in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia
 - the same or similar language area sharing the same or similar content
 - different capacities and sizes of the newsrooms
 - differences in methodologies
 - differences regarding 3PFCP
- Coverage of the analysis: Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian-Montenegrin speaking area
- [Live blog: Disinformation on war in Ukraine](#)

GLOBAL
NARRATIVES
AND LOCAL
ACTORS:

150 DAYS OF
THE WAR IN UKRAINE
AND OVER 1,500
DISINFORMATION
IN THE REGION

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SEE Check: Methodology

- published 313 analyses
- rated more than 1,396 media articles and posts on social networks
- 274 articles and publications were subsequently corrected

NEWSROOM	NUMBER OF PUBLISHED ANALYSES	NUMBER OF RATED ARTICLES AND PUBLICATIONS
Fakenews.rs	9	24
Raskrikavanje.rs	20	38
Faktograf.hr	77	119
Raskrinkavanje.me	98	219
Raskrinkavanje.ba	109	996
TOTAL	313	1.396

SEE Check: The most common sources of disinformation 1/2

SOURCE TYPE	NUMBER OF SOURCES
Private agencies	2
Public agencies	4
Public/state media	9
Print media	27
Electronic media	27
Anonymous web portals	158
Online media	184
Social networks	342
TOTAL	753*

*The total number of unique sources in the sample is 698. In 55 cases, the media, already classified in one of the categories, published disinformation on their social networks that were not found on web portals.

In addition to social networks, in some countries, such as Serbia, pro-Russian manipulative media content dominated the “mainstream” media because such a narrative is largely in line with the unofficial position of official politics in Serbia.

The situation is similar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where in the entity of the Republic of Srpska and their relevant ‘public media’ participate in the promotion of pro-Russian narratives, along with some other “mainstream” media.

There are also some web portals in Montenegro and Croatia that tend to spread Russian disinformation, favor the Russian side and justify the Russian invasion.

SEE Check: The most common sources of disinformation 2/2

SOURCE	NUMBER OF RATED ARTICLES
Sputnik (Serbia)	33
Informer (Serbia)	32
Novosti.rs (Serbia)	30
Alo.rs (Serbia)	28
In4s.net (Montenegro)	24
Srbija danas (Serbia)	21
srbin.info (Serbia)	20
Republika (Serbia)	20
24sedam.rs (Serbia)	16
objektiv.rs (Serbia)	14
pravda.rs (Serbia)	13
Vijestisrpske.com (BiH)	12
Pink.rs (Serbia)	12
Vesna Curguz (Serbia)	11
Vaseljenska.net (Serbia)	11
Logicno.com (BiH)	11
Borba.me (Montenegro)	11
Kurir (Serbia)	10
Espresso.co.rs (Serbia)	10
b92.net (Serbia)	10

SOURCE TYPE	NUMBER OF SOURCES
BIT chute	1
KZ clip	1
Odysee	1
Instagram	3
Viber	5
Telegram	6
V kontakte	7
Youtube	24
Twitter	77
Facebook	217
TOTAL	342

SEE Check: The narratives identified as the most widespread

- Justifying the invasion by accusing Ukraine of Nazism, biological, chemical and nuclear weapons, planned attacks on Russia...
- Justifying the invasion by accusing the West of the presence of NATO, the development of biological and chemical weapons, planned attacks on Russia, Nazism...
- The use of manipulative terminology such as the phrases "special operation" or "counteroffensive"
- Glorification of Russia and fabricated support for Russia, Putin and the Russian army
- Discrediting Volodymyr Zelensky and accusing him of Nazism, fleeing the country, cocaine..
- Denying accusations of Russian crimes and simultaneously accusing Ukraine of crimes
- Fake news about fake news
- Pro-Ukrainian disinformation
- "Fitting" the invasion into the narratives of popular conspiracy theories



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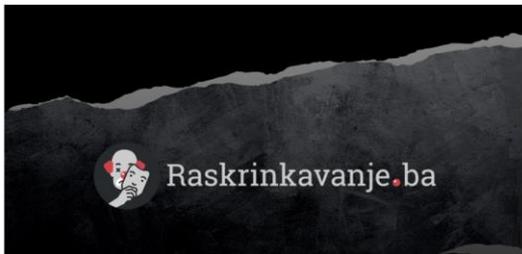
facebook

twitter

The threats of the editor of the portal Dnevni avaz to the Raskrinkavanja editorial office: "You will remember me when I come to you, I will blow you up!"

June 10, 2021 Emir Zulejhić

Evelin Trako, executive editor of the Dnevni avaz portal, threatened today the journalists of the Raskrinkavanje newsroom that he would "blow them up".



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SEE CHECK STANDS BY THE COURAGEOUS KRIK AND INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

SEE Check

December 10, 2021



Photo: krik.rs

SEE Check – the network of 6 fact-checking portals in 5 Southeast European countries – expresses support to **KRIK** portal, which is facing as many as 10 lawsuits aimed at intimidation and censorship. Almost a million dollars are being demanded from KRIK in court, as well as prison sentences for award-winning journalists Dragana Pećo and Vesna Radojević. Attacks on KRIK and **RasKRIKavanje.rs** because they do their job professionally are both an attack on journalism as a public good and freedom of speech as a fundamental principle of a democratic society.

The publisher of the tabloid Kurir uses the lawsuit to respond to the results of the work of the **RasKRIKavanje** portal, which proved that in 2020 Kurir published more than 160 false and manipulative news on its front pages. Other lawsuits filed against KRIK are by people such as, among others, the head of the BIA intelligence agency, police chiefs, tycoons close to the government, people on Interpol arrest warrants, the first accused in the case of producing a ton of marijuana...



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SEE CHECK WITH FAKTOGRAF: NO PUBLIC SMEAR CAMPAIGNS OR HACKER ATTACKS CAN INTIMIDATE US

SEE Check

December 14, 2021

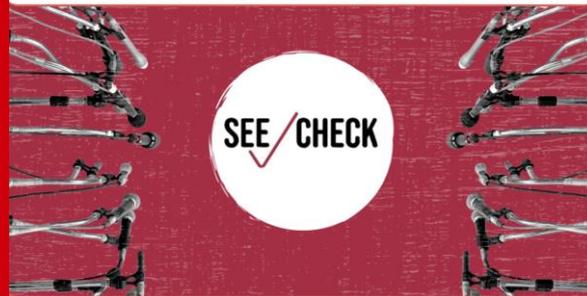


Photo: SEE Check

SEE Check – a network of fact-checking portals in five Southeast European countries – gives its full support to **Faktograf.hr** which is targeted by a hacking attack. The attack came after a smear campaign against Faktograf initiated by a well-known entrepreneur Nenad Bakic, one of the most prominent opponents of stronger epidemiological measures in the fight against Covid-19 in Croatia.

European fact-checkers and public policy

Research conducted by **Maldita.es** and **IFCN** in November 2021
on 27 European IFCN-signatories (70% EU, 30% non-EU)

We want a seat at the table when policy decisions are
made:

- 95.7% think public authorities should engage fact-checkers for expert advice
- 87% declare that through their work, they have learnt lessons that could be useful for designing more effective public policies and regulations

We would like to do more policy work (78.3% of us)

- but 66% do not have enough resources
- currently, the average is one person dedicated with less than 5 hours per week

We want more data, information and knowledge (100% of us)

- the most effective measure platforms could take is to allow ample data access to researchers, civil society organisations and fact-checkers

1st Policy Survey of European Fact-checking Organisations

Thank you!

Questions and comments are very welcome