

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN RUSSIAN AND SERBIAN INFLUENCE OPERATIONS: A CASE STUDY ON THE CROSS-BORDER SHAPING OF NARRATIVES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Mato Brautović :: Romana John

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE / DOI: 10.20901/ms.15.30.1 / SUBMITTED: 9.2.2024.

ABSTRACT *This study examines the intricacies of Russian and Serbian influence operations within the Western Balkans, focusing specifically on concerted efforts to shape narratives through media channels. Drawing on a case study of the canceled pro-Ukrainian concerts by the band Ljapisi Trubeckoj in Belgrade (Serbia) and Budva (Montenegro), this study highlights the interplay of the various actors involved in the influence campaign. The campaign was orchestrated by radical and pro-Russian Serbian politicians and organized through social networks, while at the same time Russia's state media, namely Sputnik Serbia and RT, played an important role in initiating and spreading narratives consistent with Russian interests. Moreover, these narratives also resonated with Serbian and Montenegrin media and were supported by influential Croatian and Bosnian media. By analyzing this cross-border narrative formation, this study uncovers the mechanisms Russia and Serbia use to influence public opinion in the Western Balkans and the EU. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the broader impact of Russian influence operations in the region and shed light on the complex dynamics underlying such campaigns.*

KEYWORDS

RUSSIA, SERBIA, WESTERN BALKANS, INFLUENCE OPERATIONS, DISINFORMATION, MEDIA

Authors' note

Mato Brautović :: University of Dubrovnik, Faculty of Media and Public Relations :: mbraut@unidu.hr

Romana John :: University of Dubrovnik, Faculty of Media and Public Relations :: romana.john@unidu.hr

Note: The research was carried out as part of the Adria Digital Media Observatory project, co-funded by the European Union (the Digital Europe Program; Grant Agreement No. 101083909)

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the Western Balkans (WB) were a crossroads of the geopolitical interests of various powers, hence the entanglement of this multinational and multi-religious region in conflicts and confrontations. This became particularly evident in the 20th century, when two world wars began and were fought in the Western Balkans. As the tensions from the world wars could not be resolved, a new bloody war broke out in the 1990s amid the collapse of Yugoslavia. There is currently a fragile peace in the region, but everything can easily change as the region is caught between the geopolitical interests of Russia, China, Turkey, the European Union, the US and NATO. The existing peace that resulted from the Dayton Agreement has not solved the regional problems. It is therefore important to understand which factors can undermine it and to determine to what extent the influence operations of foreign actors (especially Russia) can weaken the region and potentially cause new conflicts. Due to its complex political architecture, poorly regulated media ecosystems and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the region is an ideal playground for geopolitical games in the form of influence operations.

Russia represents the leading foreign actor that for years has used the media, political and economic influence and allied organizations to promote its point of view and prevent European and regional integration (Stanicek & Caprile, 2023). Perhaps the clearest effects of Russian influence operations can be observed in Montenegro. Not only were they active by manipulating information, but the Russians also helped in the attempted coup d'état in 2016 to prevent Montenegro from joining NATO (Conley & Melino, 2019).

Cultural tools and influence networks from both within (a sympathetic ethnic Serbian population) and outside Montenegro (intelligence and criminal networks in the region) have been deployed, and Montenegro is proving to be one of Russia's laboratories for malign influence. (Conley & Melino, 2019).

Similar to Montenegro, the entire Western Balkan region is a Russian laboratory for malign influences, especially after the so-called "special military operation" in Ukraine was launched in February 2022. Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine the mechanisms Russia and its satellites use to influence public opinion in the Western Balkans and to explore how they use neutral events to reach a wider public without immediate political polarization.

RUSSIAN SOFT POWER MECHANISMS AND THE ROLE OF SERBIA

Influence Operations (IO) is an umbrella term for various tactics and strategies, including soft power instruments, aimed at informing, influencing, or persuading individuals, elites, groups, or the public, especially in other countries (Cohen & Bar'el, 2017). For Russia, influence operations are "(...) a key geo-strategic element capable of upsetting the status quo" (Thomas, 1998, p. 51) or to sustain geopolitical rivalry with world powers (the US, India, China) (Mareš, 2021). Russia deploys different IO techniques from

Soviet times but differs in the way that it "(...) is primarily not selling Russia as an idea, or the Russian model as one to emulate (...) Instead, it has as one aim undermining the notion of objective truth and reporting being possible at all." (Giles, 2016, p. 6)

To achieve foreign policy goals, Russia IO manipulates public opinion through soft power instruments such as culture and media with the aim of influencing neighboring countries by making them weak and domestically unstable (Marsili, 2021). According to Marko Cruz (2021), the Russian soft power mechanism in Southeast Europe (SEE) is based on several instruments, including the Russian community in host countries through the concept of "Russian world", the Serbian Orthodox Church, state-sponsored media, social media, pro-Russian radical groups, and far-right political parties. In addition to the Russian soft power, the local power Serbia is active in the WB by deploying the "Serbian world", which is often interchangeable and intertwined with the Russian counterpart. Serbia mimics the Russian approach for achieving domestic and international political goals although "(...) hermetic barriers between domestic and international propaganda have disappeared" (Foster, 2021, p. 128).

The Serbian government is very advanced in terms of exerting influence operations and is dedicated to aggressively promote Russian (and Chinese) geopolitical interests (Mujanović, 2022). They see this as an addition to their concept of the "Serbian world", which is based on the premise that religion and ethnicity are equal, so that all Orthodox are Serbs (DFC, 2021). If this concept does not work for them, the concept is extended to all Slavs in the Western Balkans who are also viewed Serbs, even though they are Catholics or Muslims.

One of the most important levers of the "Serbian world" is disinformation that contains pro-government, pro-Russian and pro-Serbian narratives (Balkan Free Media Initiative, 2022). In the case of pro-government disinformation, the aim is to manipulate citizens by spreading false government successes, preventing criticism and attacking the opposition. The Serbian government's main channel is the state-owned Telekom Srbija (TS) (Mujanović, 2022), which has taken over the Serbian media and started to take over the mainstream media in Southeast Europe. State actors also run extensive influence operations through social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube to create "(...) a perception of widespread and authentic grassroots support for Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and the Serbian Progressive Party" (Nimmo et al., 2023). Stanford's Internet Observatory (Bush, 2020) identified a network consisting of 8,500 Twitter accounts and 43 million tweets supporting Vučić and his party. Similarly, in July 2023, an anonymous source published a list of 14 thousand accounts on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram that used astroturfing techniques to promote Vučić and the Serbian Progressive Party (Kosanović, Subotić & Janjić, 2023).

The second dominant narrative is the pro-Russian narrative to discredit Western institutions and to rely on Russian disinformation sources. Previous studies have shown that Serbian media play a central role in spreading disinformation about the Russian-Ukrainian war (Brautović, 2023), with the aim of "(...) creating an anti-Western atmosphere

that increasingly distances Serbia from Euro-Atlantic integration.” (Kisić, 2022) As the Western Balkan states have a common disinformation ecosystem (Brautović, 2022), Serbian domestic disinformation is spread in the region. A partial explanation for this narrative could be found in the fact that the majority of Serbs support Russia as a result of domestic media framing, which portrays Russia as positive, while the EU, the US and NATO are portrayed as negative actors (CRTA, 2022). Further, the Atlantic Council of Montenegro (2020) found that the Russian state-sponsored media content “(...) correlates with the tone of narratives that are promoted by mainstream and pro-government media outlets in Serbia”.

The third Serbian narrative promotes division and polarization between different ethnic groups (Balkan Free Media Initiative, 2022) in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, etc. with the aim of bringing all Serbs under Serbia by seceding from these countries. In this case, the “Serbian world” has a special role, as has been shown in the case of Montenegro.

Pro-government, pro-Russian and pro-Serbian disinformation is spreading much faster than independent fact-checkers in the region can document. This is stoking division and is reflected in anti-European and NATO sentiment, leading to growing security concerns for the region. (Balkan Free Media Initiative, 2022)

METHODOLOGY

To understand how Russia and Serbia use soft power instruments, the case study of the cancellation of the pro-Ukrainian punk band Lyapis Trubetskoy concerts in Belgrade and Budva was examined. The selected case is highly representative because Russia and Serbia deployed all the instruments of soft power mentioned in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the case shows the complexity of the phenomenon, which had a broader impact on the entire WB region and represents a neutral event that has broader implications for societies.

For examination purposes, we used a mix of methods: case study, textual analysis and different digital methods. Data for the case study were collected using a variety of digital methods, including Bing and Google searches, access to data via CrowdTangle and sharedcount.com, and domain analysis using the who.is service tool. We also conducted a text analysis of the retrieved articles to identify similarities, sources, and narratives. The initial sample of articles for analysis was collected using Bing and Google Search and CrowdTangle. The search was limited to the period between December 1, 2022 and February 28, 2023 and the search terms used were “Lyapis Trubetskoy” with name variation. In total, we found 75 articles (N=75) reporting on the cancellation of concerts in Belgrade and Budva.

From the above, the research questions were developed:

RQ1: How do Russia and Serbia utilize media channels to shape narratives and influence public opinion in the Western Balkans?

RQ2: What are the mechanisms and key actors involved in cross-border Russian and Serbian influence campaigns in the region?

RQ3: What was the role of Russia's state media in spreading specific narratives during the campaign against the Lyapis Trubetskoy concerts?

RQ4: How did pro-Russian actors in Serbia and Montenegro interact with Russia's state media to amplify narratives?

CANCELATION OF LYAPIS TRUBETSKOY CONCERTS IN BELGRADE AND BUDVA

The campaign for the cancellation of the concert of the Belarusian pro-Ukrainian punk band Lyapis Trubetskoy started on December 21, 2022 when *Ruserbia.com*, the online medium run by Russian immigrants in Serbia and registered at the Russian federation register on April 14, 2020 (Ruserbia, 2023), published the article (Ruserbia, 2022a) about the Belgrade concert that was supposed to be held on February 12, 2023. In this article, they accused the band's frontman Siarhei Mikhalek of spreading Ukrainian propaganda and requested the cancellation of the concert.

It is unnecessary to explain what the singer's visit, together with a musical band, to the capital of 'the last Russian ally in Europe' could mean just before the anniversary of the start of special military operations. They wondered about the reaction of the Serbs and Russians who had settled in the country a long time ago. (Ruserbia.com, 2022a)

The article also served to mobilize all the support from the wider Serbian public against the concert. As such, the article contained statements by the pro-Russian vice president of the Serbian Radical Party Miljan Damjanović and the vice presidents of the Serbian Movement Dveri Ivan Kostić and Radmila Vasić, as well as the right-wing intellectuals Ranko Gojković, Zoran Čvorović, and Stevan Gajić, who were all calling against the concert (2022a). The article was followed by a round table held in Belgrade on December 24, 2022, where different Serbian stakeholders discussed "anti-Russian" and "pro-West" propaganda and presented the Lyapis Trubetskoy concert as part of the organized efforts.

A striking example of the fact that many representatives of the 'liberal intelligentsia' have gathered in the territory of 'the last Russian ally in Europe' is the sudden increase in relevant events: Nino Katamadze, Vasya Oblomov have already visited Belgrade, Dmitriy Bikov and even the Lyapis Trubetskoy band, one of the voices of the Ukrainian Maidan. (Ruserbia.com, 2022b)

After this event, the campaign was silenced until the day before the concert. On the morning of February 11, the Serbian Movement Dveri and the Serbian Radical Party sent press releases requesting cancellation of the Belgrade concert (Beta, 2023a; 2023b). Dveri accused the band of spreading hatred against Russia and urged "(...) relevant

ministries, especially the Ministry of Culture and Minister Maja Gojković, the Mayor of Belgrade Aleksandar Šapić, the President of the City Assembly Nikola Nikodijević, as well as the director of the Belgrade Youth Center to react and cancel this concert." (Beta, 2023) Similarly, the Serbian Radical Party stated that "[t]he promotion of Nazism must be absolutely prohibited. Ukrainazis should not be propagated anywhere, especially in Serbia, where the majority of people support Russia's special military operation in Ukraine." (Beta, 2023b)

The offline campaign was followed by an online campaign on Twitter, Facebook and Telegram, where it was supported also by the ruling Serbian Progressive Party. On the morning of February 11, Vladimir Đukanović, vice president of the Serbian Progressive Party and ventriloquist of the Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić, requested cancellation on his Telegram channel "Analiza stanja" with the title of the post "Buy ticket so Zelenski can buy drones" (Đukanović, 2023).

The state has to ban this piggery as a matter of urgency. So, let the authorities react, because there is no need to cause any tensions in our city and the country in general. (Đukanović, 2023)

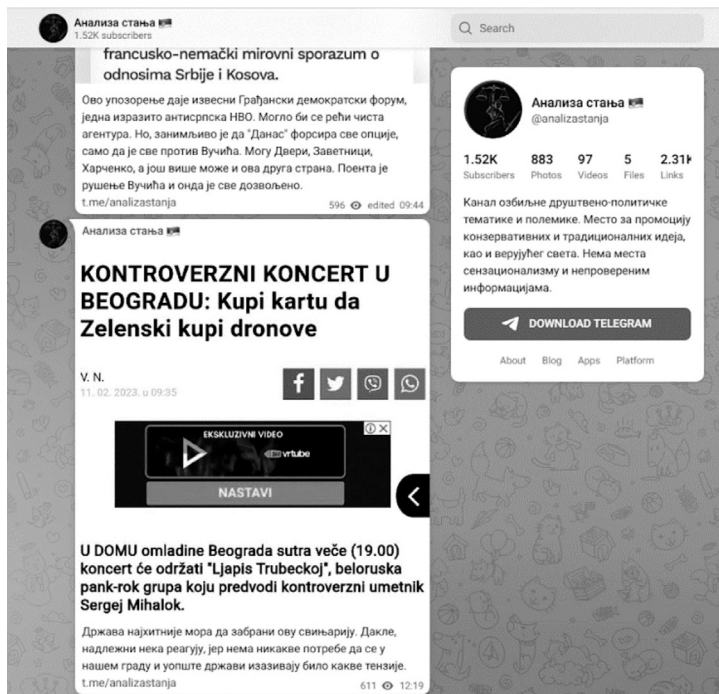


Image 1.

Vladimir Đukanović calling for the cancelation of the Belgrade concert

On the next day, the organizers could only cancel the concert (Domomladine.org, 2023). The president of the party Dveri Boško Obradović also called for the cancelation on his Twitter account and later celebrated with the following tweet:

The only correct decision: CANCELED! Belgrade must not be a place to support Ukrainian neo-Nazis and the tragedy of the two Slavic and Orthodox nations in the war conflict that was provoked by NATO after the color revolution in Kyiv. I know that some would like the same in Serbia, but it will not pass! (Obradović, 2023)

At the time of the writing of this article, more than 105.7 thousand people have seen Obradović's celebrative tweet.

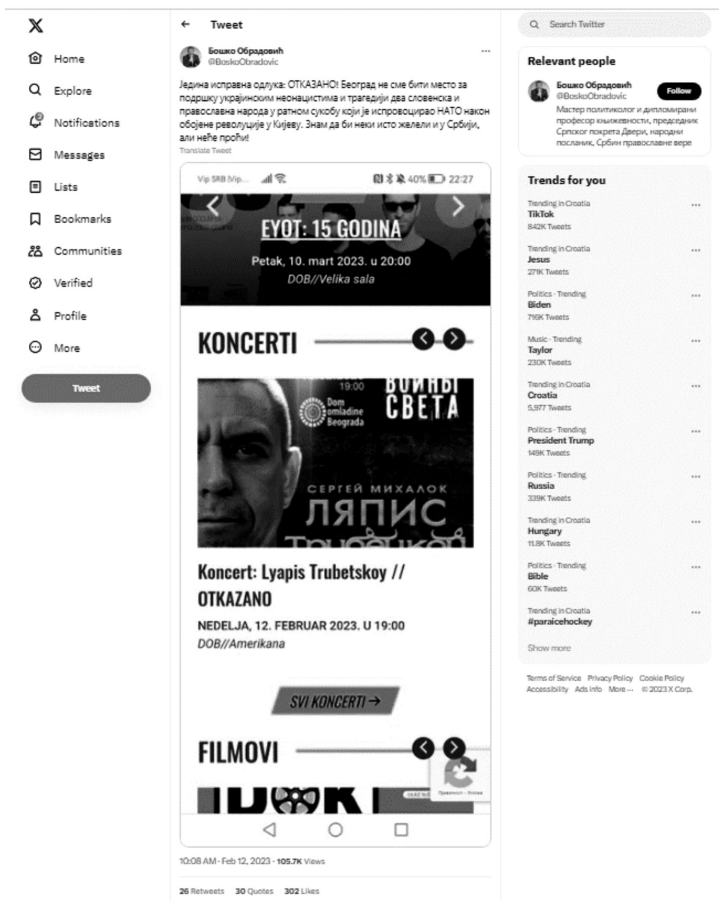


Image 2.

Boško Obradović celebrates the cancelation on Twitter

During the campaign for the cancellation of the Belgrade concert, the pro-Serbian media from Montenegro *in4s.net*¹ got involved by framing that concert was organized by anti-Putin immigration in Serbia. In the article titled "Anti-Russian emigration in Belgrade organizes a concert by a Belarusian "Thompson": Buy a ticket for Zelensky to buy drones" they asked for cancellation of the concert and accusing the Russian dissident Anastasia Murdzhinskaya from the NGO "Do Good" for "(...) the actions directed against the Russian special military operation in Ukraine" (*in4s.net*, 2023a). The source of this narrative was the Serbian newspaper *Novosti* (*Headliner.rs*, 2023; *Novosti.rs*, 2023). *In4s.net* reported that the band Lyapis Trubetskoy had been promoting their "charity tour" (quotes taken from the original article) for months.

Your ticket will become a donation for a car or drone for the Armed Forces. And when the Victory comes – your donation will be a ticket to a big concert in the Palace of Sports in Kyiv – Michalok invites his supporters. (*in4s.net*, 2023a)

Soon, the campaign moved to neighboring Montenegro where Lyapis Trubetskoy was supposed to hold a concert in Budva on February, 14. The need for the cancellation of Budva concert was expressed in a celebratory article by *Ruserbia.com* claiming that the band "in the area of the 'Serbian world' now can expect anything." (*Basenkov*, 2023). *In4s.net* soon followed with an article titled "Belgrade concert canceled, but scheduled for Budva!?" (*in4s.net*, 2023b). In contrast to the mainstream media in Serbia, Montenegrin media failed to announce the concert, but that did not stop the pro-Serbian/Russian groups in Montenegro from organizing a protest against the concert while a public online campaign was absent. On the evening of the concert, a group of pro-Russian militant activists gathered in the front of the club where concert supposed to be held and started protesting so organizers canceled concert and moved it to nearby Kotor for the following day. This concert was also canceled as a result of pressure (*CdM.me*, 2023a). Budva cancellation was the moment when the story was picked up by Russia's state media *Sputnik News* in Serbian language (hereafter referred to as *Sputnik Srbija*) and RT Balkan who took the lead and spread it in the SEE region. *Sputnik Srbija* reported that concert of the "extremist" band Lyapis Trubetskoy was canceled after the protest and quoted the *in4s.net* journalist Igor Damjanović as witness of the event without stating for which media outlet he was working or mentioning his active role in spreading pro-Serbian or pro-Russian views.

Around a hundred citizens of Budva gathered spontaneously last night, determined to prevent at all costs the performance of the extremist rock band Lyapis Trubetskoy, at whose performances Russophobic messages are sent around the world and aid is collected for the Ukrainian army. (*Novović*, 2023)

¹ *in4s* represents short for "four S", i.e., the acronym of "Samo sloga Srbina spasava", which can be translated into English as "Only unity saves the Serbs"

² Marko Perković Thompson is a Croatian singer known for his patriotic songs. He is popular, but also controversial and is often criticized for using historical symbols from the Second World War and nationalistic tones. The media portrays him negatively and associates him with right-wing extremism.

Sputnik Srbija was followed by a RT Balkan report (2023), quoting the same person – journalist Igor Damjanović who “(...) was among the citizens of Budva who expressed dissatisfaction with the concert and told *Srna* (the Serbian News Agency from Republic of Srpska) that the performance of this aggressive band that sends Russophobic messages had to be canceled”. Again, without mentioning that Damjanović works for *in4s.net* and attributing the source of the statement now to *Srna*. This narrative started to spread through the region and soon it was taken by the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia. A detailed list of regional media outlets that spread the narrative created by *Srna* and *Sputnik Srbija* can be found in the Appendix. It is not clear which the first source of the news was, *Srna* or *Sputnik Srbija*, but in almost all articles it is mentioned that Igor Damjanović made a statement to *Srna*, except in *Sputnik Srbija* which is also the oldest report. The original report from *Srna* is no longer available.

The independent Montenegrin media outlet *CdM.me* suspects that the protest could be organized by the Orthodox priest Mijajlo Backović and the journalist Igor Damjanović (*CdM.me*, 2023c) – coincidental witnesses to the majority of media reports (sic!). Priest Backović is the secretary of the Diocese of Budimlja-Nikšić, a supporter of the Balkan Cossack army and the Night Wolves, the founder of the militarized brotherhood of Serbian Orthodox youth Saint Panteleimon (Zečević, 2021; DFC, 2022) and an obstructor of minority rights (*Aktuelno.me*, 2023). Damjanović and Backović previously organized several pro-Russian protests in Montenegro (DFC, 2022).

Table 1 shows how regional mainstream media copy/pasted the text of the report about the Budva protest with minimal language adjustments of the original text from *Srna* / *Sputnik Srbija* that portrays Igor Damjanović as “accidental” witness and ignores his role of organizer and pro-Russian/Serbian activist.

Although the majority of Serbian and Montenegrin public and media favorably reported and reacted on cancelation requests only lonely voices criticized it. For example, Boris Varga (2023) wrote the column in the independent online media outlet *Autonomija* where he criticized the cancelation of the concerts and exposed the fact that there is an ongoing war between pro-Russian forces and Russian opposition in Serbia, where Serbian right-wing activists were taking an active role by conducting physical confrontations and inflammatory campaigns against critics of the Russian role in Ukraine. Similarly, Saša Ilić (2023) commented for *pescanik.net* that the cancelation of the concerts in Belgrade and Budva “(...) represents the justification of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in which the radical-progressive pro-Russian position is undermined as a common platform of all citizens of Serbia.” (Ilić, 2023). Besides the media, dissatisfaction with canceling the concerts was expressed by the Embassy of Ukraine in Montenegro (*CdM.me*, 2023a) and Russian immigrants (dissidents) in Montenegro (*Vijesti.me*, 2023).

Table 1. Examples of same statement present in the media reports

Example of text	English translation
<i>Medium</i>	
<i>Sputnik Srbija</i>	
„Oko stotinjak građana Budve sinoć su se spontano okupili, odlučni da po svaku cijenu spriječe nastup ekstremističkog rok benda Ljapis Trubeckoj, na čijim nastupima širom svijeta šalju se rusofobne poruke i skuplja se pomoć za ukrajinsku armiju“, rekao je Sputnjiku novinar Igor Damjanović, koji je bio svjedok događaja.	“About a hundred citizens of Budva spontaneously gathered last night, determined to prevent at all costs the performance of the extremist rock band Lyapis Trubetskoy, whose concerts around the world feature Russophobic messages and raise funds for the Ukrainian army,” journalist Igor Damjanović, who witnessed the event, told Sputnik.
<i>RT Balkan</i>	
„Spontani revolt pokazale su stotine građane Budve, odlučnih da po svaku cenu spreče nastup ekstremističkog rok benda ‘Ljapis Trubeckoj’, na čijim nastupima širom sveta se šalju se rusofobne poruke i skuplja se pomoć za ukrajinsku armiju“, poručio je Damjanović.	“A spontaneous revolt was demonstrated by hundreds of citizens of Budva, determined to prevent at all costs the performance of the extremist rock band Lyapis Trubetskoy, whose concerts around the world feature Russophobic messages and raise funds for the Ukrainian army,” Damjanović stated.
<i>Index.hr</i>	
„Spontani revolt pokazale su sinoć i stotine građane Budve, odlučnih da po svaku cijenu spriječe nastup ekstremističkog rock benda Lyapis Trubetskoy, na čijim nastupima širom svijeta se šalju rusofobne poruke i skuplja se pomoć za ukrajinsku armiju“, rekao je.	“A spontaneous revolt was also demonstrated last night by hundreds of citizens of Budva, determined to prevent at all costs the performance of the extremist rock band Lyapis Trubetskoy, whose concerts around the world feature Russophobic messages and raise funds for the Ukrainian army,” he said.
<i>Slobodna Dalmacija</i>	
„Spontani revolt pokazale su sinoć i stotine građane Budve, odlučnih da po svaku cijenu spriječe nastup ekstremističkog rock benda “Lyapis Trubetskoy”, na čijim nastupima širom svijeta se šalju rusofobne poruke i skuplja pomoć za ukrajinsku vojsku“, rekao je Damjanović.	“A spontaneous revolt was also demonstrated last night by hundreds of citizens of Budva, determined to prevent at all costs the performance of the extremist rock band ‘Lyapis Trubetskoy,’ whose concerts around the world feature Russophobic messages and raise funds for the Ukrainian military,” Damjanović said.
<i>Tanjug</i>	
„Spontani revolt pokazale su sinoć i stotine građane Budve, odlučnih da po svaku cenu spreče nastup ekstremističkog rok benda Ljapis Trubeckoj, na čijim nastupima širom sveta se šalju se rusofobne poruke i skuplja se pomoć za ukrajinsku armiju“, rekao je Damjanović.	“A spontaneous revolt was also demonstrated last night by hundreds of citizens of Budva, determined to prevent at all costs the performance of the extremist rock band Lyapis Trubetskoy, whose concerts around the world feature Russophobic messages and raise funds for the Ukrainian army,” Damjanović said.



<p><i>Politika</i></p> <p>„Spontani revolt pokazale su sinoć i stotine građane Budve, odlučnih da po svaku cenu spreče nastup ekstremističkog rok benda Ljapis Trubeckoj, na čijim nastupima širom sveta se šalju se rusofobne poruke i skuplja se pomoć za ukrajinsku armiju“, rekao je Damjanović.</p>	<p>“A spontaneous revolt was also demonstrated last night by hundreds of citizens of Budva, determined to prevent at all costs the performance of the extremist rock band Lyapis Trubetskoy, whose concerts around the world feature Russophobic messages and raise funds for the Ukrainian army,” Damjanović said.</p>
<p><i>Alo!</i></p> <p>„Spontani revolt pokazale su sinoć i stotine građane Budve, odlučnih da po svaku cijenu spriječe nastup ekstremističkog rok benda Ljapis Trubeckoj, na čijim nastupima širom svijeta se šalju se rusofobne poruke i skuplja se pomoć za ukrajinsku armiju“, rekao je Damjanović.</p>	<p>“A spontaneous revolt was also demonstrated last night by hundreds of citizens of Budva, determined to prevent at all costs the performance of the extremist rock band Lyapis Trubetskoy, whose concerts around the world feature Russophobic messages and raise funds for the Ukrainian army,” Damjanović said.</p>
<p><i>Klix.ba</i></p> <p>„Spontani revolt pokazale su sinoć i stotine građane Budve, odlučnih da po svaku cijenu spriječe nastup ekstremističkog rok benda “Lyapis Trubetskoy”, na čijim nastupima širom svijeta se šalju se rusofobne poruke i skuplja se pomoć za ukrajinsku armiju“, rekao je Damjanović.</p>	<p>“A spontaneous revolt was also demonstrated last night by hundreds of citizens of Budva, determined to prevent at all costs the performance of the extremist rock band ‘Lyapis Trubetskoy,’ whose concerts around the world feature Russophobic messages and raise funds for the Ukrainian army,” Damjanović said.</p>
<p><i>PCNEN</i></p> <p>„Spontani revolt pokazale su sinoć i stotine građane Budve, odlučnih da po svaku cijenu spriječe nastup ekstremističkog rok benda Ljapis Trubeckoj, na čijim nastupima širom svijeta se šalju rusofobne poruke i skuplja se pomoć za ukrajinsku armiju“, rekao je Damjanović.</p>	<p>“A spontaneous revolt was also demonstrated last night by hundreds of citizens of Budva, determined to prevent at all costs the performance of the extremist rock band Lyapis Trubetskoy, whose concerts around the world feature Russophobic messages and raise funds for the Ukrainian army,” Damjanović said.</p>

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

The case of Lyapis Trubetskoy showed different types of media and their roles in spreading pro-Russian narratives. An important role in setting the agenda was played by the two ethnic minority media in Serbia and Montenegro *Ruserbia.com* and *in4s.net*. *Ruserbia.com* served as a starting point for mobilization of Serbian right-wing politicians and intellectuals, while *in4s.net* helped the narrative to transcend from Serbia to Montenegro. Both media were detected as sources of disinformation about Russian-Ukrainian war by the fact-checking organizations (Kuloglija & Husaric Omerovic, 2022; Raskrinkavanje.ba, 2023; Stopfake.org, 2016).

Serbian mainstream media dominate the disinformation ecosystem in the WB. According to a study conducted by Krupalija et al. (2021), 15 of the top 20 COVID-19 disinformation sources in the region were from Serbia or related Serbs, including the aforementioned *Alo*, *Novosti*, *Sputnik News Srbija*, *in4s.net*, and *Pravda*. Similarly, a study of the Russian-Ukrainian war disinformation in SEE (Murić et al., 2022) found that of the top 20 sources of disinformation, 16 originated in Serbia.

...pro-Russian manipulative media content dominated the 'mainstream' media, because such a narrative is largely aligned with the unofficial stance of official politics in Serbia. (Murić et al., 2022, p. 4)

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is very similar to that in Serbia, where the Republika Srpska public media and the Srna news agency promote pro-Russian narratives (Murić et al., 2022).

In the case of the Lyapis Trubetskoy, Serbian media played a multifunctional role. They helped setting the pro-Russian agenda in the context of the Belgrade concert and served as proxies for narratives set by right-wing politicians and state-sponsored media. On the other hand, Montenegrin mainstream media played a reactive role and reported only after the actors such as the Embassy of Ukraine and police informed about the protests against the concert in Budva. Mainstream media in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia contribute to the spread of pro-Russian narratives by relying on reports from *Srna* and *Sputnik Srbija*. Table 1 best illustrates how the spread of narratives from state-sponsored media in Serbia, Republika Srpska and Russia spills over into Croatia and the WB. For example, the leading media in Croatia *index.hr* (Peruško, 2023) linguistically adapted the report from *Srna* / *Sputnik Srbija* and had an amplifying effect on spreading pro-Russian narratives in Croatia and the EU. The explanations for this kind of journalism can be found in editorial policies that prioritize speed and quantity of content production without fact-checking (Janjić, 2023, p. 234-235). Another explanation can be the adoption of reports by the state agencies *Srna* and *Tanjug* and the Serbian mainstream media, which are considered reliable sources even though they represent the unofficial views of the ruling elite, and in the case of Serbia, in the propagation of the "Serbian world".

The analysis also shows the existence of a cluster of 15 local online media in Bosnia and Herzegovina, mainly from the territory of the Republic of Srpska, which republished the *Srna* report on the cancellation of the Budva concert, using the same illustrative photo. The detailed analysis showed that all domains were private and without impressums. The anonymization of the publisher and the copy-past method can be used as an argument for the claim that this is in fact a troll farm that is used for economic or political purposes. At the time of writing (December 2023), the websites that were part of the troll farm have been shut down.

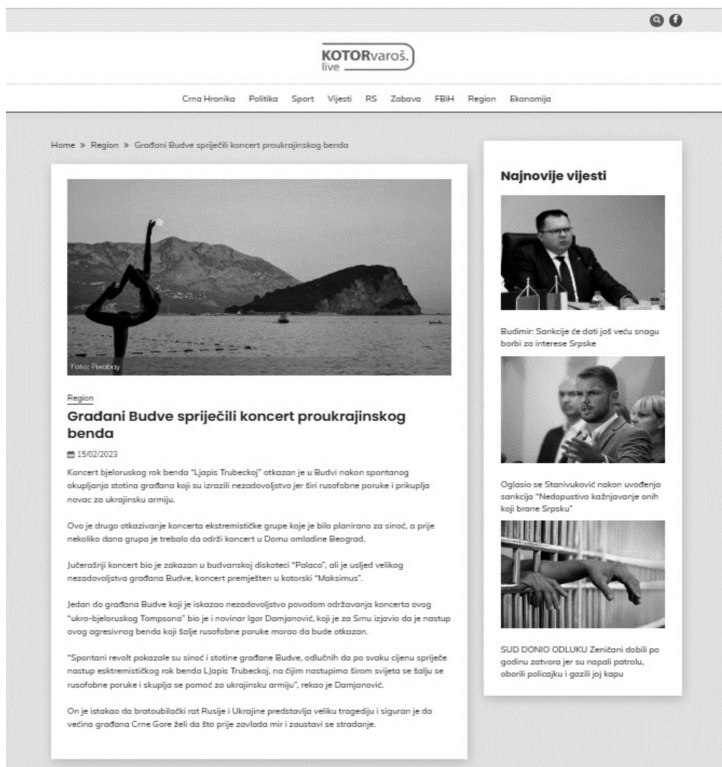


Image 3.

Example of Kotorvaroš.com report on the Budva concert cancellation

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CANCELATION

At the beginning of the campaign for canceling the Lyapis Trubetskoy concert, social media platforms had an important role. Twitter, Instagram and Facebook were used by the leader of Dveri Boško Obradović who openly called for cancellation.

Obradović's Facebook post celebrating the cancellation of the Belgrade concert was shared by dozens of users and webpages. Besides the local branches of Dveri, the post was shared by two disinformation Facebook pages: „Srpsko-Rusko bratstvo – duhovno i istorijsko” (Serbian-Russian Brotherhood – spiritual and historical) and „Oživimo srpsko selo, vratimo se korenima” (Revive the Serbian village, return to the roots) (Brautović, 2022). Similarly, Vladimir Đukanović used his *Telegram* channel for campaigning against the Belgrade concert. Media used their tweets and posts as sources for reporting.



Image 4.
Obradović’s Instagram post celebrating the cancelation of the Belgrade concert

In the case of the Budva concert, social media were not used or at least no public posts were available. Only the Embassy of Ukraine in Montenegro used Twitter to protest against cancellation. We can speculate that different channels were used mainly to keep secrecy of protests performed on the day of the concert. Reasoning could be found in fact that pro-Russian/Serbian groups in Montenegro had to hide their activities as Montenegro is a NATO member and their government had to conduct activities for ensuring the concert in case they were informed in advance.

The table below shows that news about the Budva concert cancelation shared by B&H cluster was most shared on Facebook.

Table 2. Frequency of Facebook shares and reactions

URL	Facebook shares	Facebook reactions
https://pravda.rs/lat/2023/2/15/budvani-sprecili-odrzavanje-koncerta-proukrajinskog-benda/	41	34
https://gradiska.news/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	25	0



https://dubica.info/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	21	0
https://donjizabar.com/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	13	0
https://rudo.news/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	10	0
https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/scena/showbiz/nakon-srba-i-crnogorci-otkazali-koncert-ukrajinskoj-rock-grupi-ljudi-se-bune-oni-su-ukrajinski-thompson-1265064	6	77
https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/regija/u-budvi-otkazan-nastup-proukrajinske-rock-grupe-tvrde-da-se-radi-o-ukrajinskom-tompsonu/230215166	5	1
https://dubrovacki.slobodnadalmacija.hr/dubrovnik/moskar/zabava/nakon-srba-i-crnogorci-otkazali-koncert-ukrajinskoj-rock-grupi-ljudi-se-bune-oni-su-ukrajinski-thompson-1265104	4	11
https://mrkonjicgrad.net/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	1	0
https://petrovo24.com/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	1	0
https://cajnice.com/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	1	0
https://www.pcnen.com/porta1/2023/02/15/gradani-budve-sprijecili-odrzavanje-koncerta-proukrajinskog-benda/	1	36
https://trebinjedanas.com/vijest/zbog-cega-su-gradjani-budve-sprijecili-odrzavanje-koncerta-proukrajinskog-benda	1	0
https://www.trebinje.news/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	1	0
https://www.atvbl.rs/vijesti/region/gradani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda-15-2-2023	1	26

Source of data: <https://www.sharedcount.com/>

TRANSCENDING NARRATIVES

From the collected articles and contributions, we have identified several narratives about concerts in Belgrade and Budva that can be classified into categories: historical friendship between Serbia and Russia; the band Lyapis Trubetskoy and its frontman are Russophobic; conspiracy theory of the West against Russia, and a Nazi character of Ukraine and its connection with Croatian Nazis. These findings are in line with the general false anti-Ukraine narratives uncovered by Stefan Janjić (2023), in which the Ukrainian

government and population were portrayed as pro-Nazi, or/and with the findings of Murić et al. (2022), fitting the invasion into the narratives of popular conspiracy theories, discrediting and blaming the Ukrainian government, glorifying Russia and fabricating support for Russia, and justifying the invasion by accusing the West of the presence of NATO, etc.

The case was unique because it contained elements of localization with narratives that emotionally appealed to World War II atrocities committed by Croatian Nazis against Serbs and other minorities to enhance their impact.

Table 3. Dominant narratives of news reports

	Number of reports			
	Belgrade		Budva	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Serbia is Russia's last ally in Europe	19	3	40	0
Serbian citizens oppose the introduction of sanctions against Russia	19	2	39	1
Sergei Mikhalek is an enemy of Russia and a supporter of the Maidan Kyiv	7	15	35	5
The band spreads Russophobic messages and collects money for the Ukrainian army	6	16	16	24
The concert was organized by Russian dissidents	19	1	40	0
The concert is part of the West's campaign against Russia	19	2	39	0
Centers of world power enforcing unjust globalization to use Serbian natural resources	20	2	40	0
The band's resemblance to Thompson	19	3	22	18
Russia to free Ukraine from the Nazis	21	1	40	0
The concert glorifies Nazism and the Croatian Ustasha	20	2	40	0

CONCLUSION

The above documented cases of the cancelation of the concerts of the Belarusian pro-Ukrainian punk band Lyapis Trubetskoy in Serbia and Montenegro show that Russia and Serbia use the state-sponsored mainstream and pseudo-media to spread anti-Western, anti-Ukrainian and pro-Serbian/pro-Russian narratives in order to achieve their geopolitical goals in the Western Balkans. Although the role of the Russian state could

not be fully attributed, with the exception of the state-sponsored media, the role of the Serbian counterpart was much clearer and more visible.

The media actors have different roles: the Russian media usually initiate and construct narratives, while the Serbian media disseminate them and the social media amplify them. In addition to amplification, social media were used as proxies and sources for the mainstream media in Southeast Europe.

At the center of influence were the state-sponsored media (*Srna, Tanjug, RT Balkans and Sputnik Srbija*), which initiated, disseminated and amplified the campaign against Lyapis Trubetskoy's concerts. At the same time, pseudo-media such as *Ruserbia.com* and *in4s.net* were used to spread the narratives abroad (in Montenegro) or initiate narratives in Serbia in order to mobilize the committed groups and incite extremists. All in all, the media reinforced the narratives in the region and ensured support for the Russian objectives.

In addition, the legitimization of narratives is done by political leaders and cultural and religious institutions, especially the Serbian Orthodox Church, which support a pro-Russian and pro-Serb stance through traditional and religious narratives. The example of the involvement of the Serbian president's spokesperson best illustrates how a state institution directly contributed to the desired action of not securing the concert in Belgrade, or the role of religious representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church shows how to fuel the narratives when media interest wanes.

A possible solution to limit Russian and Serbian influence could be to train regional journalists in narrative recognition, fact-checking and open-source intelligence (OSINT), to strengthen institutional resilience to influence campaigns and to promote media literacy among the public so that they can better defend themselves against Russian and Serbian influence in the Western Balkans.

The described mechanisms of Russian and Serbian influence in the WB show the complexity and multi-layered dynamics that involve not only the online ecosystem and actors, but also real actors such as radical and religious groups, which should be explored in future studies.

References

- >Aktuelno.me. (2023, June 2). MVP Hrvatske oštro osuđuje izjavu gradonačelnika Tivta: Očekujemo od crnogorske vlade da zaštiti svoje građane. *Aktuelno*. <https://www.aktuelno.me/politika/mvp-hrvatske-ostro-osudjuje-izjavu-gradonacelnika-tivta-ocekujemo-od-crnogorske-vlade-da-zastiti-svoje-gradjane/>
- >Atlantic Council of Montenegro. (2020). Russia's narratives toward the Western Balkans: Analysis of Sputnik Srbija. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. Retrieved August 16, 2023, from <https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/russias-narratives-toward-the-western-balkans-analysis-of-sputnik-srbija/56>
- >Basenkov, V. (2023, February 11). НО ТЫ КИНУЛА! «Ляпис Трубецкой» НЕ СЫГРАЕТ В БЕЛГРАДЕ. *Ruserbia.com*. <https://ruserbia.com/politika/no-ty-kinula-ljapis-trubeckoj-ne-sygraet-v-belgrade/>

- >Balkan Free Media Report. (2022). *Social media and the information war in the Balkans*. Balkan Free Media Initiative. Retrieved June 3, 2023, from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/607edb92071ad0422f427dcb/t/624414f8e92d772d1859b723/1648628995459/BFMI+Social+Media+Report.pdf>
- >Beta. (2023a, February 11). Dveri traže otkazivanje koncerta beloruskog benda Ljapis Trubeckoj. *N1info.rs*. <https://n1info.rs/vesti/dveri-traze-otkazivanje-koncerta-beloruskog-benda-ljapis-trubeckoj/>
- >Beta. (2023b, February 11). Stranke traže zabranu koncerta beloruskog benda u Beogradu. *Danas.rs*. <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/stranke-traze-zabranu-koncerta-beloruskog-benda-u-beogradu/>
- >Brautović, M. (2022). *Mapping COVID-19 disinformation ecosystem in Croatia*. (Report No.1) Pro-fact: Research, education, fact-check and debunk Covid-19 related disinformation narratives in Croatia. Gong. <https://pro-fact.gong.hr/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Mapping-COVID-19-Disinformation-Ecosystem-in-Croatia.pdf>
- >Brautović, M. (2023). *Mapping Ukraine War Disinformation Ecosystem in Croatia and Slovenia*. (Report No.1) Adria Digital Media Observatory. University of Dubrovnik. https://admohub.eu/download/hr/istrazivanje/izvjestaj-dezinformacijski-ekosustav-u-hrvatskoj-i-sloveniji-o-ratu-u-ukrajini/WebHome/ADMO_report_1%20%282%29.pdf?rev=1.1
- >Bush, D. (2020). *"Fighting Like a Lion for Serbia": An Analysis of Government-Linked Influence Operations in Serbia*. (White paper) Stanford Internet Observatory Cyber Policy Center. https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/serbia_march_twitter.pdf
- >CdM.me. (2023a, February 15). Podržavaoci Rusije spriječili nastup ukrajinskog benda u Budvi, Ambasada Ukrajine: Alarmantan signal za sve. *CDM Cafe del Montenegro*. <https://www.cdm.me/politika/podrzavaoci-rusije-sprijecili-nastup-ukrajinskog-benda-u-budvi-ambasada-ukrajine-alarmantan-signal-za-sve/>
- >CdM.me. (2023c, February 16). Da li smo mi i dalje NATO? *CDM Cafe del Montenegro*. <https://www.cdm.me/kolumne/da-li-smo-mi-i-dalje-nato/>
- >Cohen, D., & Bar'el, O. (2017). *The use of cyberwarfare in influence operations*. Blavatnik Interdisciplinary Cyber Research Center. Tel Aviv University. Yuval Ne'eman Workshop for Science, Technology and Security. https://icrc.tau.ac.il/sites/cyberstudies-english.tau.ac.il/files/media_server/cyber%20center/cyber-center/Cyber_Cohen_Barel_ENG.pdf
- >Conley, H. A., & Melino, M. (2019, May 14). Russian malign influence in Montenegro: The weaponization and exploitation of history, religion, and economics. *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russian-malign-influence-montenegro-weaponization-and-exploitation-history-religion-and>
- >Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA). (2022, January 26). Media outlets – positive on Russia and China, negative on the EU and the USA. *Istinomer*. <https://english.istinomer.rs/analyses/media-outlets-positive-on-russia-and-china-negative-on-the-eu-and-the-usa/>
- >Cruz, M. (2021). Russia in the Western Balkans: Interests and tools of influence. In H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, A. Chochia, & T. Kerikmäe (Eds.), *The Russian Federation in Global Knowledge Warfare: Influence Operations in Europe and Its Neighbourhood* (pp. 315–333). Springer.
- >Digital Forensic Center (DFC). (April 2021). The Serbian world – an originally borrowed concept. *Digital Forensic Center*. <https://dfcme.me/en/publikacije/the-serbian-world-an-originally-borrowed-concept/>
- >Digital Forensic Center (DFC). (October 2022). Who governs our extreme right-wing? (DFC Analysis No.2) Atlantic Council of Montenegro. <https://dfcme.me/wp-content/uploads/Analiza-Ekstremne-grupe-ENG.pdf>
- >Domomladine.org. (2023, February 12). Koncert: Lyapis Trubetskoy // OTKAZANO. *Dom omladine Beograda*. <https://domomladine.org/koncerti/koncert-lyapis-trubeckoy/>
- >Đukanović, V. (2023, February 11). Telegram Messenger [Mobile App.] <https://t.me/s/analizastanja>

- > Foster, N. (2021). Propaganda gone viral: A theory of Chinese and Russian "COVID diplomacy" in the age of social media. In H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, A. Chochia, & T. Kerikmäe (Eds.), *The Russian Federation in Global Knowledge Warfare: Influence Operations in Europe and Its Neighbourhood* (pp. 123–145). Springer.
- > Giles, K. (2016). The next phase of Russian information warfare. *NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence*. https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/download/keir_giles_public_20-05-2016.pdf
- > Headliner.rs. (2023, February 11). Najkontroverzniji koncert ovog vikenda u Beogradu... Kupi kartu za Lyapis Trubetskoy da – Zelenski kupi dronove. *Headliner*. <https://headliner.rs/2023/02/11/najkontroverzniji-koncert-ovog-vikenda-u-beogradu-kupi-kartu-za-lyapis-trubeckoy-da-zelenski-kupi-dronove/>
- > Ilić, S. (2023, February 18). Ljapis Trubeckoj. *Peščanik*. <https://pescanik.net/ljapis-trubeckoj>
- > In4s.net. (2023a, February 11). Antiruska emigracija u Beogradu organizuje koncert bjeloruskog „Thompsona“: Kupite kartu za Zelenskog da biste kupili dronove. *IN4S*. <https://www.in4s.net/antiruska-emigracija-u-beogradu-organizuje-koncert-bjeloruskog-tompsona-kupi-kartu-da-zelenski-kupi-dronove/>
- > In4s.net. (2023b). Kontroverzna Trubeckaja bolesna?! Otkazali koncert u Beogradu, ali zakazali u Budvi!? *IN4S*. <https://www.in4s.net/trubeckoj-bolestan-otkazao-koncert-u-beogradu-a-zakazao-u-budvi/>
- > Janjić, S. (2023). Disinformation in Serbia. In C. Nehring & H. Sittig (Eds.), *Blurring the truth: Disinformation in Southeast Europe* (pp. 231–256). Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.
- > Kisić, I. (2022, March 21). The pro-Russian media campaign in Serbia. *Atlantic Initiative – Centre for Security and Justice Research*. <https://atlanticinitiative.org/the-pro-russian-media-campaign-in-serbia/>
- > Kosanović, S., Subotić, I., & Janjić, S. (2023, July 7). Bot-armija: Najaktivniji su Kruševac i Šabac, a Mali Zvornik i Novi Kneževac prvi „po glavi stanovnika“. *Fake News Tragač*. <https://fakenews.rs/2023/07/08/bot-armija-najaktivniji-su-krusevac-i-sabac-a-mali-zvornik-i-novi-knezevac-prvi-po-glavi-stanovnika/>
- > Krupalija, R., Zulejhić, E., Brkan, D., Škrbić, A., Puljić, T., Janjić, S., Radojević, V., & Jovanović, M. (2021). *Disinformation during COVID-19 pandemic*. Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung. https://www.freiheit.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/disinformation_covid-19_march_2021.pdf
- > Kuloglija, N., & Husarić Omerović, A. (2022, March 8). Serb volunteers answer call to fight in Ukraine. *Balkan Investigative Reporting Network*. <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/03/08/serb-volunteers-answer-call-to-fight-in-ukraine/>
- > Mareš, T. (2021). Mass media instrumentalization in foreign policy of states: Russian strategic toolset. In H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, A. Chochia, & T. Kerikmäe (Eds.), *The Russian Federation in global knowledge warfare: Influence operations in Europe and its neighbourhood* (pp. 79–106). Springer.
- > Marsili, M. (2021). The Russian influence strategy in its contested neighborhood. In H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, A. Chochia, & T. Kerikmäe (Eds.), *The Russian Federation in global knowledge warfare: Influence operations in Europe and its neighbourhood* (pp. 149–172). Springer.
- > Mušanović, J. (2022, February 16). The regional danger of Serbia's government disinformation machine. *Just Security*. <https://www.justsecurity.org/80242/the-regional-danger-of-serbias-government-disinformation-machine/>
- > Murić, D., Zulejhić, E., Živković, I., Nikolić, M., & Radojević, V. (2022). *150 dana rata u Ukrajini i preko 1500 dezinformacija u regionu*. SEE Check. <https://zastone.ba/app/uploads/2022/08/Globalni-narativi-i-lokalni-akteri-150-dana-rata-u-Ukrajini-i-preko-1.500-dezinformacija-u-regionu-8.pdf>
- > Nimmo, B., Franklin, M., Agranovich, D., Hundley, L., & Torrey, M. (2023, February). *Quarterly adversarial threat report*. (Report No. Q4 2022) <https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Meta-Quarterly-Adversarial-Threat-Report-Q4-2022.pdf>
- > Novosti.rs. (2023, February 11). Kontroverzni koncert u Beogradu: Kupi kartu da Zelenski kupi dronove. *Novosti.rs*. <https://www.novosti.rs/kultura/vesti/1201965/kontroverzni-koncert-beogradu-kupi-kartu-zelenski-kupi-dronove>

- >Novović, B. (2023, February 15). U Budvi spriječen koncert benda Ljapis Trubeckoj. *Sputnjik Vesti*. <https://lat.sputnikportal.rs/20230215/u-budvi-sprijecen-koncert-benda-ljapis-trubeckoj-video-1150986442.html>
- >Obradović, B. [@BoskoObradovic]. (2023, February, 12). *Једина исправна одлука: ОТКАЗАНО! Београд не сме бити место за подршку украјинским неонацистима и трагедију два словенска и православна народа у ратном сукобу који је испровоцирао НАТО након обојене револуције у Кијеву. Знам да би неки исто желели и у Србији, али неће проћу!* [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/BoskoObradovic/status/1624697026989416449>
- >Peruško, Z. (2023, June 14). *Digital news report 2023: Croatia*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023/croatia>
- >Raskrinkavanje.ba. (2023). In4s.net. <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/medij/in4s>
- >RT Balkan. (2023, February 15). Неће моћи: Након Београда и у Будви отказан концерт „ukro-beloruskog Tompsona“. *RT Balkan*. <https://lat.rt.rs/srbija-i-balkan/19324-ljapis-trubeckoj-otkazan-koncert-budva-beograd/>
- >Ruserbia.com. (2022a, December 21). Майдан в Белграде или рады ли сербы Ляпису Трубѣцкому? *RuSerbia.com*. <https://ruserbia.com/politika/majdan-v-belgrade-ili-rady-li-serby-ljapisu-trubeckomu/>
- >Ruserbia.com. (2022b, December 31). Сербские патриоты все? Или как антироссийская пропаганда поднимает голову в Сербии. *RuSerbia.com*. <https://ruserbia.com/politika/serbskie-patrioty-vse-ili-kak-antirossijskaja-propaganda-podnimaet-golovu-v-serbii/>
- >Ruserbia.com. (2023). О Србији на руском. *RuSerbia.com*. <https://ruserbia.com/>
- >Stanicek, B., & Caprile, A. (April 2023). Russia and the Western Balkans geopolitical confrontation, economic influence, and political interference. (EPRS Briefings, No. PE 747.096) *European Parliament - European Parliamentary Research Service*. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/747096/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)747096_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/747096/EPRS_BRI(2023)747096_EN.pdf)
- >Stopfake.org. (2016, November 12). Fake: Ukrainian armed forces recruiting mercenaries from Croatia. *Media Reforms Center StopFake*. <https://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-ukrainian-armed-forces-recruiting-mercenaries-from-croatia/>
- >Tanjug. (2023). Грађани Будве спречили одржавање концерта прouкрајинског benda. *Tanjug*. <https://www.tanjug.rs/region/politika/14146/gradani-budve-sprecili-odrzavanje-konceta-proukrajinskog-benda/vest>
- >Thomas, T. L. (1998). Dialectical versus empirical thinking: Ten key elements of the Russian understanding of information operations. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 11(1), 40-62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518049808430229>
- >Varga, B. (2023, February 16). Kolektivna histerija 'srpskog sveta' na signal iz Moskve. *Autonomija Portal građanske Vojvodine*. <https://autonomija.info/boris-varga-kolektivna-histerija-srpskog-sveta-na-signal-iz-moskve/>
- >Vijesti.me. (2023, February 17). Ruski opozicioni aktivisti iz Crne Gore: Protest u Budvi budi neugodne asocijacije na fašiste u Rusiji. *Vijesti Online*. <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/drustvo/643809/ruski-opozicioni-aktivisti-iz-crne-gore-protest-u-budvi-budi-neugodne-asocijacije-na-fasiste-u-rusiji>
- >Zečević, N. (2021, January 13). Pop i "crvena beretka" Mijajlo Backović stoji iza bratstva. *Pobjeda*. <https://www.pobjeda.me/clanak/pop-i-crvena-beretka-mijajlo-backovic-stoji-iza-bratstva>

Appendix

The list of the media in the WB that copied *Sputnik News Srbija/Srna* narrative/facts about canceled concert in Budva

Medium	Country	URL	Source mentioned
<i>Sputnik News Srbija</i>	RU	https://sputnikportal.rs/20230215/u-budvi-sprijecen-koncert-benda-ljapis-trubeckoj-video-1150986442.html	<i>Sputnik Srbija</i>
<i>RT Balkan</i>	RU	https://lat.rt.rs/srbija-i-balkan/19324-ljapis-trubeckoj-otkazao-koncert-budva-beograd/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Index.hr</i>	HR	https://www.index.hr/magazin/clanak/srbi-i-crnogorci-otkazali-koncert-ukrajinskom-bendu-oni-su-ukrajinski-thompson/2438581.aspx	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Dubrovački vjesnik</i>	HR	https://dubrovacki.slobodnadalmacija.hr/dubrovnik/moskar/zabava/nakon-srba-i-crnogorci-otkazali-koncert-ukrajinskoj-rock-grupi-ljudi-se-bune-oni-su-ukrajinski-thompson-1265104	<i>Srna/Klix.ba</i>
<i>Slobodna Dalmacija</i>	HR	https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/scena/showbiz/nakon-srba-i-crnogorci-otkazali-koncert-ukrajinskoj-rock-grupi-ljudi-se-bune-oni-su-ukrajinski-thompson-1265064	<i>Srna/Klix.ba</i>
<i>Tanjug</i>	SRB	https://www.tanjug.rs/region/politika/14146/gradani-budve-sprecili-odrzavanje-konceta-proukrajinskog-benda/vest	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Politika</i>	SRB	https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/537818/Zitelji-Budve-sprecili-odrzavanje-konceta-proukrajinskog-benda	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Borba</i>	ME	https://borba.me/sinoc-otkazao-koncert-benda-ljapis-trubeckoj-rusofobni-eskremisti-nemaju-sta-da-traze-u-budvi/	<i>In4s.net</i>
<i>Una</i>	SRB	https://una.rs/vesti/region/budvani-sprecili-odrzavanje-konceta-proukrajinskog-benda	<i>Srna</i>
<i>ATV</i>	SRB	https://www.atvbl.rs/vijesti/region/gradani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda-15-2-2023	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Pravda</i>	SRB	https://pravda.rs/lat/2023/2/15/budvani-sprecili-odrzavanje-konceta-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Krstarica</i>	SRB	https://www.krstarica.com/vesti/svet/gradjani-budve-sprecili-odrzavanje-konceta-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Tanjug</i>



Medium	Country	URL	Source mentioned
<i>Euronews Srbija</i>	SRB	https://www.euronews.rs/evropa/region/78127/ambasada-ukrajine-protestuje-zbog-otkazivanja-koncerata-belorusko-ukrajinskog-benda-u-budvi-slucaj-bez-presedana/vest	<i>Srna/Tanjug</i>
<i>Alo!</i>	B&H/ SRB	https://aloonline.ba/region/ekstremisticki-rok-bend-skupljaju-novac-za-rat-gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>N/a</i>
<i>Klix.ba</i>	B&H	https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/regija/u-budvi-otkazan-nastup-proukrajinske-rock-grupe-tvrde-da-se-radi-o-ukrajinskom-tompsonu/230215166	<i>Srna</i>
<i>RTRS</i>	B&H	https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=503218	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Trebinjedanas.com</i>	B&H	https://trebinjedanas.com/vijest/zbog-cega-su-gradjani-budve-sprijecili-odrzavanje-koncerta-proukrajinskog-benda	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Trebinje.news</i>	B&H	https://www.trebinje.news/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Visegrad.live</i>	B&H	https://visegrad.live/gradani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Derventainfo.com</i>	B&H	https://www.derventainfo.com/gradani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Kotorvaros.live</i>	B&H	https://kotorvaros.live/gradani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Rudo.news</i>	B&H	https://rudo.news/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Istocnosarajevo.news</i>	B&H	https://www.istocnosarajevo.news/gradani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Gradiska.news</i>	B&H	https://gradiska.news/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Dubica.info</i>	B&H	https://dubica.info/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Kalinovnik.com</i>	B&H	https://www.kalinovnik.com/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Pale24.com</i>	B&H	https://pale24.com/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>



<i>Mrkonjicgrad.net</i>	B&H	https://mrkonjicgrad.net/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Donjižabar.com</i>	B&H	https://donjizabar.com/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Petroco24.com</i>	B&H	https://petrovo24.com/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Čajniče.com</i>	B&H	https://cajnice.com/gradjani-budve-sprijecili-koncert-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>
<i>Programer.ba</i>	B&H	https://www.programer.ba/u-budvi-otkazan-nastup-proukrajinske-rock-grupe-tvrde-da-se-radi-o-ukrajinskom-tompsonu-4090.html	<i>Srna/Klix.ba</i>
<i>PCNEN</i>	ME	https://www.pcnen.com/porta1/2023/02/15/gradani-budve-sprijecili-odrzavanje-koncerta-proukrajinskog-benda/	<i>Srna</i>

OTKRIVANJE MEHANIZAMA RUSKIH I SRPSKIH INFORMACIJSKIH OPERACIJA: ANALIZA PREKOGRANIČNOG ŠIRENJA NARATIVA NA ZAPADNOM BALKANU

Mato Brautović :: Romana John

SAŽETAK Ovaj rad istražuje isprepletenost ruskih i srpskih informacijskih operacija na zapadnom Balkanu, s posebnim fokusom na usklađene napore oblikovanja narativa koristeći različite medijske kanale. Oslanjajući se na studiju slučaja otkazanih koncerata proukrajinskog benda Ljapisi Trubeckoj u Beogradu (Srbija) i Budvi (Crna Gora), ovo istraživanje prikazuje međusobnu povezanost različitih aktera uključenih u informacijske operacije. Kampanju su na društvenim mrežama započeli radikalni i proruski srpski političari, dok su istovremeno ruski državni mediji, odnosno Sputnik Srbija i RT, odigrali važnu ulogu u iniciranju i širenju narativa u skladu s ruskim interesima. Štoviše, ti su narativi odjeknuli i u srpskim i crnogorskim medijima, a prenijeli su ih i hrvatski i bosanski mediji. Analizirajući prekogranično širenje narativa, ova studija otkriva mehanizme kojima Rusija i Srbija utječu na javno mnijenje na zapadnom Balkanu i u EU-u. Rezultati istraživanja doprinose boljem razumijevanju ruskih informacijskih operacija i njihova utjecaja na regiju te prikazuju složenu dinamiku na kojoj se takve operacije temelje.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

RUSIJA, SRBIJA, ZAPADNI BALKAN, INFORMACIJSKE OPERACIJE, DEZINFORMACIJE, MEDIJI

Bilješka o autorima

Mato Brautović :: Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Fakultet za medije i odnose s javnošću :: mbraut@unidu.hr

Romana John :: Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Fakultet za medije i odnose s javnošću :: romana.john@unidu.hr