

ANALYSIS

Serbian media outlets
on the topic of Montenegro



ANALYSIS:

**Media monitoring of the
Serbian media outlets on the
topic of Montenegro**

FOR THE FOLLOWING PERIOD

10/01/20 – 09/30/21

PODGORICA, OCTOBER 2021

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Introduction

This report is based on an analysis of a year-long monitoring process that lasted from October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021, done by the Digital Forensic Center (DFC). The focus was on the Serbian media outlets, which have a great readership in Montenegro.

The report seeks to identify the primary narratives about Montenegro that were spread by the Serbian media outlets. This research encompasses 15.825 articles with Montenegro as the keyword and provides insight into narratives and the amount at which they were spread by the most read Serbian news portals in Montenegro.

The analysis showed that during 12 previous months, the news portals *Alo*, *Espresso*, *Blic*, *Srbija danas*, *Kurir*, and *Informer* had been the most read Serbian media in Montenegro, and at the same time the media that most often were spreading the content of debatable quality.

Daily coverage of the Serbian media on Montenegro would not be particular at all, had it not been dominated by sensational headlines, and the narratives addressing the broad audience. The monthly media reports show that the Serbian media are widely read in Montenegro, which raises concerns even more on the possibility of manipulating the Montenegrin public.

The report explains the main narratives that had been identified as part of the research project, with an analysis of the domains to which they belong, connections with the key social and political events, keywords, and how the audience engaged with the various narratives.

Methodology:

Monitoring includes qualitative and quantitative research. Several media monitoring tools, at our disposal, have been used to find, monitor, collect and filter data referring to Montenegro.

ANALYZED PERIOD: 01/10/2021 – 30/09/2021

FOLLOWED MEDIA:

- Alo
- Blic
- Informer
- Kurir
- Srbija danas
- Espresso

KEYWORD: Montenegro

USED PARAMETERS:

- Direct articles
- Relevant articles
- Comments
- Narratives
- Domains
- Tags

This report understands a **narrative** as an open set of stories, events, and ideas grounded in values and beliefs to resonate with the targeted audience; or as a way the media spread information about a particular event.

Articles from the initial search results were filtered and categorized as **directly** or **indirectly** dealing with the subject in question, in this case, Montenegro. An article was categorized as **directly** relating to the subject only when the subject of interest was addressed. In the case of an article mentioning the subject of interest but primarily regarding another topic/subject, then the article was categorized as **indirectly** dealing with the subject in question.

A second step in the categorization process was taken for all **direct** articles. Those regarding sports, weather, telecommunications, livestock, and others, were excluded from the sampling and labeled **irrelevant** unless a narrative was found. In case a narrative was identified, the article was labeled **relevant** to the research and further studied using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Relevant articles were qualitatively divided across adequate **domains – economic, security, political, and social**, based on the content of an article. An article may be categorized as simultaneously belonging to more than one context.

THE POLITICAL DOMAIN – focuses on stories about foreign affairs, local and/or regional politics, cooperation with the EU and NATO, bi- and multilateral relations, adoption of laws, work of political parties, challenges such as crime and corruption and elections.

THE SOCIAL DOMAIN – combines stories related to social and cultural developments, religion and history, ethnic, religious or social divisions in countries, civil unrest (protests), rising poverty and unemployment, etc.

THE SECURITY DOMAIN – relates to articles concerning armed forces, military capabilities (including armament), military exercises, NATO cooperation, cyber security, criminal offenses of criminal clans and liquidations.

THE ECONOMIC DOMAIN – includes articles about economic developments, trade relations among countries, economic sanctions, foreign investments, etc.

Interactions of readers have been measured as well, through tracking the number of **comments** left below each article.

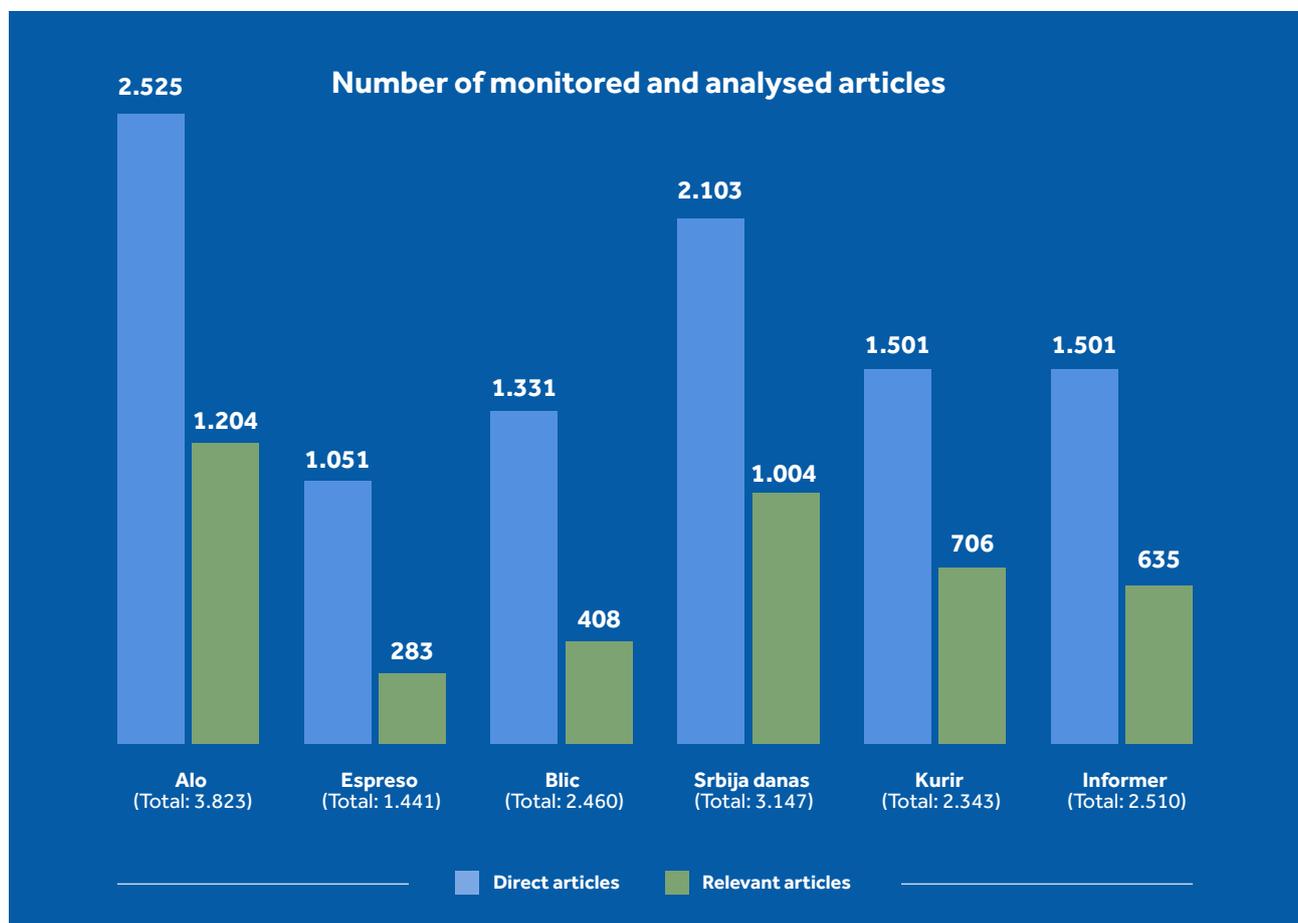
Words used in articles were also analyzed, resulting in a list of the most mentioned, i.e. used **tags**.

Key findings and data:

ANALYZED PERIOD: 01/10/2020 – 30/09/2021

SUBJECT: Montenegro

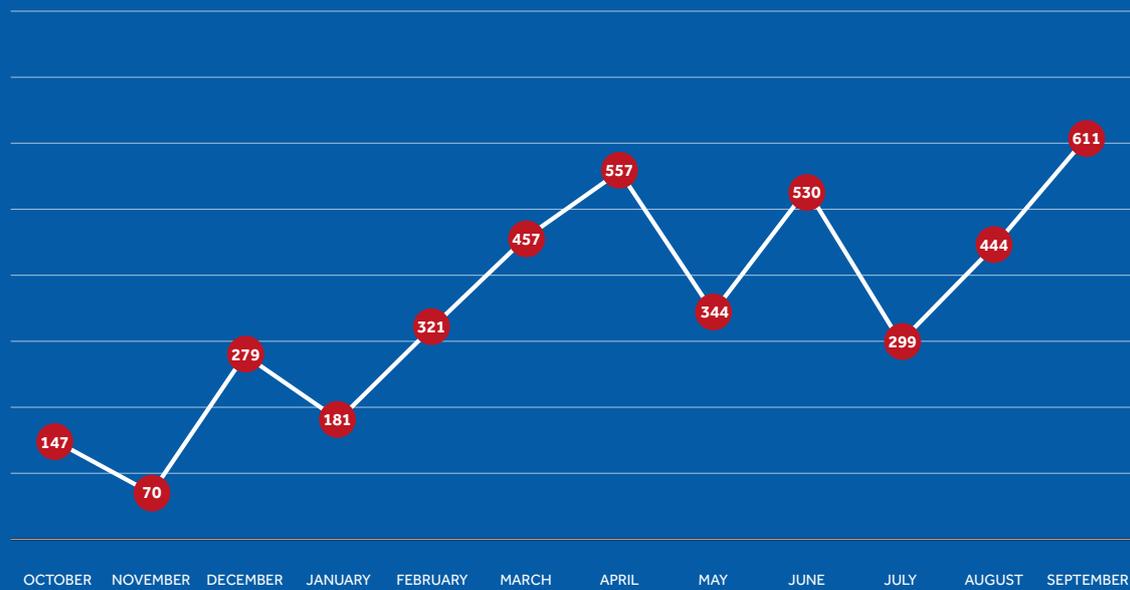
Monitored content on the Serbian media outlets generates a total of 15,825 articles containing the keyword *Crna Gora* (Montenegro), while 9,698 of them were directly targeting Montenegro and events in it. For the purpose of monitoring, 4,265 relevant articles were identified out of the 9,698 direct ones. We have excluded articles related to sports, weather, telecommunications, and livestock unless they contained a particular narrative.



Graph 1: Total, direct and relevant articles by media outlets

The graph (**Graph 1**) shows the number of total articles, the number of direct articles, and the number of relevant articles by media. The majority of texts with the keyword Montenegro were published on the portal *Alo* – 3,823 then on *Srbija danas* – 3,147 and the portal *Informer* – 2,510 articles. However, the majority of articles relevant for our research were registered on the news portals *Alo* – 1,204 and *Srbija danas* – 1,004 articles.

Monthly trend in the number of media releases of relevant articles



Graph 2: Monthly trend of media releases

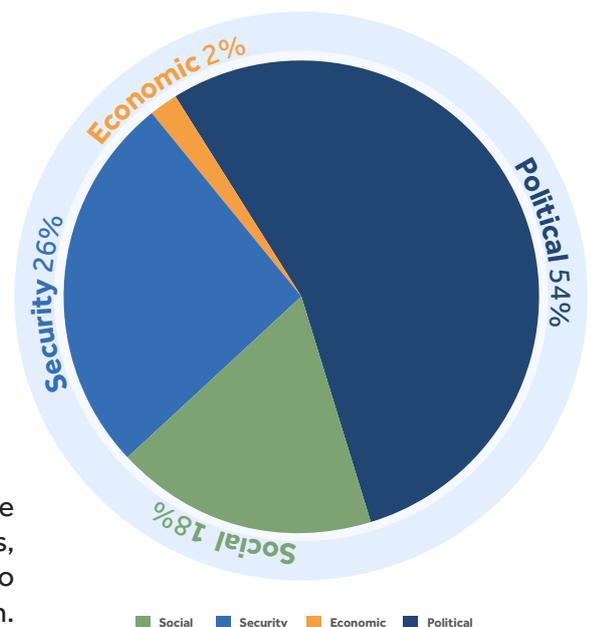
This trend of publishing by month (**Graph 2**) shows that the Serbian media outlets were the most active in April, June, and September, which coincides with the periods when Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic has proposed the removal of Minister of Justice Vladimir Leposavic when the Parliament of Montenegro passed the Resolution on Srebrenica and anointment of Metropolitan Joanikije.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis was performed for all articles from the selected media outlets. Quantitative monitoring included recording data on the number of published articles on Montenegro, the number of comments on articles, and the number of key narratives and topics. Qualitative monitoring involved noticing narratives and describing the content of the article and observing domains related to the topics being reported.

Domains

Relevant articles were qualitatively divided among four domains – political, social, security, and economic. This decision was based on the primary topic of the article. Each one could be categorized as belonging to more than one domain.

Articles mostly referring to the political domain amounted to 3,012 (54%) articles in total. A total of 1,433 articles (26%) referred to the security domain, then 981 (18%) articles referred to the social domain, and 141 (2%) articles referred to the economic domain (**Graph 3**). It is important to emphasize here that monitoring covered the year marked by political turmoil. All these political events and the phenomena, such as protest, processions, arrests, divisions and tensions affected society. It is interesting to note that the least articles are registered in the economic domain.



Graph 3: Four domains

Comments

When it comes to the number of comments that readers left on the relevant articles, the articles on the portal *Kurir* attracted the most attention with 12,896 comments for one year period. On all other portals, during the twelve-month period, there were less than 5,000 comments, which is displayed in the table below (**Table 1**). The most commented articles treated the relations between parliamentary relations ([link](#)), Krivokapić's decision that Mandić and Knežević could not be part of the Government ([link](#)), the rights and position of Serbs in Montenegro ([link](#)), communication between Montenegrin criminal clans ([link](#)), that Montenegro is on the verge of bankruptcy ([link](#)), events surrounding the anointment of the Metropolitan Joanikije ([link](#)) and that Milo Đukanović's supporters provoke riots and violence ahead of the anointment of the Metropolitan Joanikije ([link](#)). The article in which the statement of President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic ([link](#)) was transmitted referred to the situation of the expulsion of ambassador Bozovic and relations between Montenegro and Serbia. A large number of comments were noticed on the articles about the adoption of Resolution on Srebrenica ([link](#)). A large number of comments were also registered on the article, published by *Kurir*, stating that the Government will fall, because the Democratic Front will remove Krivokapić for striking the Serbs ([link](#)).

Most comments are dominated by a narrative of support or criticism of a particular political option,

person, or action. All analyzed media portals had comments with elements of disputable content, although in different volumes. Comments containing severe insults, hate speech, swear words dominated the discourse, but there were also ones in which a positive tone is present. The positive comments that stand out were those praising president of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic and presenting him as someone who will help Serbs in Montenegro, who contributes to better relations between Serbia and Montenegro.

When it comes to the negative comments, insults on national grounds are present as well as negation of Montenegro, Montenegrins, and Montenegrin language. Negative comments, and criticisms also were directed at the Montenegrin government and politics for certain decisions, such as the adoption of the Srebrenica Resolution. The readers' comments found on the analyzed news portals included the following: *a serious anti-Serbian campaign is being waged in Montenegro; Montenegro makes it clear to us that we are not friends, all Montenegrins who have lived in Serbia for years should be expelled*, etc. Strong support to the Serbs in Montenegro was expressed in the comments because they allegedly go through injustices, insults, and provocations.

Within the comments, the readers could find requests not to visit Montenegro during summer vacation since everyone knows that Serbs are unwanted there.

MEDIA	COMMENTS
KURIR	12,896
BLIC	4,037
ESPRESO	1,792
INFORMER	1,262
ALO	998

Table 1: Number of comments per media

Narratives

All relevant articles underwent quantitative and qualitative analysis, and 10 different narratives were identified as the main ones (**Table 2**)

	Narrative	Tags	Timeline/event	Number of relevant articles
1.	Montenegro is a criminal and a captured state	Criminal clans, drugs, police, murder, corruption, nepotism, private state	12 months	1.754
2.	Krivokapic, Abazovic and Becic are traitors	Traitors, betrayal, promises, elections	October – December, March – September	700
3.	Serbs are endangered in Montenegro	Human rights, religious rights, language, culture, refusal	12 months	495
4.	The DPS and Djukanovic are reviving the past, working against the state, and their supporters are rioting	Processions, police, beating, arrest, DPS, corruption, Djukanovic, komitas	12 months	385
5.	Lies and deceptions of the new government/non-expert government	Government, incompetence, ignorance, ministers, parliamentary majority	March – September	343
6.	The anointment ceremony of Metropolitan Joanikije in Cetinje is a high-risk event	Joanikije, Cetinje, anointment, komitas, Djukanovic, riots, tensions, blockades	August – September / anointment of Metropolitan Joanikije	271
7.	Political crisis in Montenegro	Institutional crisis, state, parliamentary majority, agreement, mandates	June – September	235
8.	The resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica is directed against Serbia and the Serbian people	Adoption, Parliament, DPS, opposition, parliamentary majority, genocide, Serbian people, Serbia	June – September / adoption of the Resolution on the Genocide in Srebrenica by Parliament of Montenegro	103
9.	The DPS is manipulating the elections in Niksic	Elections, Niksic, votes, DPS, opposition parties, irregularities	January – March / Local elections in Niksic	149
10.	The former regime is persecuting the Serbian Orthodox Church and wants to seize the Serbian shrines	SOC, shrines, church, Cetinje monastery, property	October – February, September	147

Table 2: Identified narratives with a number of articles, related keywords, and events

Given that the Montenegrin social and political scene this and last year was marked by big events: local elections in Niksic, adoption of the Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica, dismissal of the Minister of Justice, political crisis, processions resulting therefrom, coronavirus, and anointment of Metropolitan Joanikije that had brought about narratives of their own, the negative narratives were launched almost on a daily basis.

1

The most common narrative is that **Montenegro is a criminal and captured state** with 1,754 articles, and was present in the Serbian media throughout all 12 months. Despite the Government change, this narrative has remained the most present one among the analyzed Serbian media. The adjective *criminal* sends out a message that the criminal activities in the region are originating from Montenegro and that the most notorious criminal organizations ([link](#)), the most vicious homicides, robberies, kidnapping, and drug dealing ([link](#)) have their roots in Montenegro. While *captured* means that it is captured both politically and socially. Some of the messages sent out and suggesting bad conditions in Montenegro are: state institutions are captured as they are dominated by corruption ([link](#)) and nepotism, non-independence is present in all three branches of government, the Montenegrin regime does not respect human or religious rights ([link](#)) and it aims at creating a private state ([link](#)).

2

Throughout almost the entire year (except during January and February), there was a narrative that **Krivokapic, Abazovic, and Becic were traitors and manipulators**. The reason for this narrative was found in the non-fulfillment of election promises by these leaders. Apart from this reason, there is an insinuation that those leaders tend to make an agreement with the defeated Milo Djukanovic ([link](#)). It is stated that they betrayed the Serbian voters who brought them to power and that no one trusts them anymore and that they have lost the trust of the parliamentary majority ([link](#)).

3

The third most represented narrative (with 495 articles) is the one that **Serbs in Montenegro are endangered**. As it was the case in the previous year, this narrative is in the third place when it comes to the number of articles. Media outlets are pointing out the failure of the new Government in Montenegro to do anything on the issue of endangerment of the Serbian people in Montenegro and discrimination of their rights. For a whole year, this narrative has been *filling* the Serbian media columns. It presented Serbs in Montenegro as endangered people in terms of human rights, freedoms ([link](#)). Moreover, they are deprived of the right to Serbian values, religion ([link](#)), and of learning the Serbian language. Due to the abovementioned, they cannot find a job ([link](#)) and assimilate into society. The articles also read that the Serbian authorities will do their utmost to protect the directly affected interests of the Serbian people in Montenegro. ([link](#)).

4

Departure from the power of the Democratic Party of Socialists gave rise to the narrative that **the DPS and Djukanovic are reviving the past, working against the state, and that their supporters are rioting**. On a daily basis, they were reporting that the former regime is working against the state and the new government, that they are trying to turn Montenegro into a ravaged country ([link](#)). Djukanovic obstructs, does not work on cohabitation, and calls on his supporters who are causing riots at the protests ([link](#)). The articles with this narrative state that the reformed and free institutions will examine the thirty-year work of Milo Djukanovic ([link](#)). It is also pointed out that the DPS is boycotting the work of the Parliament ([link](#)), and that it is trying to destabilize the political and social life in Montenegro with its supporters through protests ([link](#)).

5

A significant number of articles have narrative **Lies and deceptions of the new government/non-expert government**. Parts of the parliamentary majority are not satisfied with the work of the Government ([link](#)) and they accuse each other of undermining the Government ([link](#)). The articles also read that Government is causing scandals by announcing sanctions against Russia, as well as by the fact that the Government has appointed Milo Djukanovic at the session of the United Nations Assembly ([link](#)).

6

Narrative **The anointment ceremony of Metropolitan Joanikije in Cetinje is a high-risk event** that was current during August and September. Judging by the analyzed Serbian media, Cetinje is a center of Montenegrin separatism and anti-Serbian ideologies. Besides launching disinformation, Belgrade-based tabloids were frequently alluding to civil war and bloodshed. This narrative emphasizes the importance of the anointment of the Metropolitan of the Serbian Orthodox Church Joanikije in Montenegro. Serbian media in their reporting used the terms bloodshed ([link](#)), civil war, armed protesters ([link](#)), riots ([link](#)), violence, and so on, which further contributed to tensions in Montenegrin society. It is also pointed out that DPS, Djukanovic, and their supporters are trying in every way to stop the act of anointment([link](#)). After the narrative on calling for blood and unrest in Cetinje, along with those on the state of war and the lynch of Serbs, the Serbian pro-regime tabloids started to report on the unsuccessful coup in Cetinje immediately upon the anointment.

7

The increasingly frequent disagreements of the parliamentary majority concerning all relevant issues in the country are represented in texts with a narrative about a **Political crisis in Montenegro** ([link](#)). Right on, these disagreements between the ruling majority are causing a political crisis that harms the state, its institutions, and its citizens. The accusations between the Democratic Front and the Democrats, but also between the Democratic Front and Prime Minister Krivokapic are also present in the texts ([link](#)). These articles also provide advice and recommendations on how to resolve the political crisis in Montenegro ([link](#)).

8

Media outlets in Serbia paid great attention to the adoption of the Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica. The spread of negative narratives that were present from June to September had a goal of its own – to create more tensions. The dominant narrative was that **the resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica is directed against Serbia and the Serbian people** ([link](#)). This turned out to be fake news. The articles consist of the Serbian officials' statements ([link](#)) but also of media interpretations ([link](#)) that the Resolution is against the vital interests of the Serbian people.

9

The narrative that **the DPS is manipulating the elections in Niksic** with 149 articles in January, February, and March says that DPS dealt with manipulations during and after the elections - vote buying ([link](#)), threats, blackmail, change of electoral will, protests, various other plans to regain power, blaming Serbia for electoral defeat ([link](#)), and causing incidents and riots ([link](#)).

10

In the ten most common narratives, there was also the narrative that **the former regime is persecuting the Serbian Orthodox Church and wants to seize the Serbian shrines**. It is emphasized that the President of Montenegro Milo Djukanovic and his party DPS want to destroy the Serbian church. It is stated that the former regime does not allow the Serbia Orthodx Church to perform its rituals ([link](#)), that they want to seize the property of the Serbian church (Cetinje Monastery) ([link](#)) and ask the religious communities to prove that the church and monasteries are theirs ([link](#)).

Other narratives

In addition to these ten narratives that dominated the Serbian media outlets about Montenegro in the previous year, the following narratives were also present and should not be neglected.

During the analyzed period, we recognized the following narratives: *Bad relations between Montenegro and Serbia*, *Dirty campaign against Serbia and Vucic*, *Politics in Montenegro is run by western embassies*, etc.

Poor relations between Montenegro and Serbia have been deepened by an alleged anti-Serbian campaign led from Montenegro. Numerous articles are emphasizing that Milo Djukanovic and the DPS, together with certain Croatian politicians, are campaigning against a stable and strong Serbia. Another item that affected the relations between the two countries is that the new Government of Montenegro did not withdraw the decision on the expulsion of the Serbian Ambassador Vladimir Bozovic from Montenegro, which was made by the previous regime.

There were also claims that the DPS dragged Montenegro into a deep economic crisis, as well as that due to its debt, China is threatening Montenegro by taking away part of its territory. All this is complemented by the narrative that the European Union does not want to help Montenegro.

During the analysis, a narrative was noticed that western allies and embassies influence Montenegrin politics. Before the formation of the Government, there was a narrative that Western partners interfere in the process of forming the Government, and later there was a narrative that western embassies make decisions on behalf of the Government and direct the Montenegrin foreign policy course.

In the analyzed period, narratives concerning the ruling majority in Montenegro are noticeable. Although the members of the three winning coalitions were praised and supported after winning the elections and forming the Government, the Serbian media changed their writing over time due to unfulfilled promises to voters. The support of Serbian tabloids remained with the Democratic Front, while Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic, Vice President Dritan Abazovic, and President of the Parliament of Montenegro Aleksa Becic found themselves under fire from critics as the main traitors of the Serbian people.

Conclusion

This quantitative and qualitative analysis of the Serbian media outlets' content on Montenegro reveals the effort to combine real facts with the fake ones, the exaggerations, or the presentation of facts out of the context in order to shape public opinion.

The narratives dominating in the Serbian media outlets encourage feelings of unease, insecurity, and worry. If we look back, the image of Montenegro as a criminal state, mafia organization, where human rights are violated and elections are held under numerous irregularities, has been continuously created during the past few years.

Tensions in Montenegro have begun with the elections both parliamentary and local, forming a new Government and later on with the adoption of the Resolution on genocide in Srebrenica, political processions, political crisis, and anointment of Metropolitan Joanikije. A whole range of Serbian media outlets has become a creator of and a filter for channeling several threatening narratives into our media space. Instead of contributing to calming the sensitive situation in the Montenegrin society, the media additionally heated it up with their reporting.

The elections, political conflict between the parliamentary majority, the adoption of the Resolution on genocide in Srebrenica, the coronavirus pandemic and the anointment of Metropolitan Joanikije are the key events, which were followed by a large number of narratives in the Serbian media outlets.

To deepen the already existing tensions between Podgorica and Belgrade, the media distributed a narrative that relations between Montenegro and Serbia are bad, that Serbs are endangered in Montenegro, emphasizing that the Montenegrin au-

thorities had a problem with the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) and the Serbian people.

The narratives we explored and presented aimed at undermining democracy, radicalizing the political circumstances, encouraging the fight for the church property, and portraying Montenegro as a criminal and a captured state. Additionally, it should be emphasized that the goal of these narratives was to provoke the emotional charge of the citizens and result in additional divisions and tensions.

Such reporting had led to dangerous prejudices against Montenegro, its citizens, and institutions among a large number of people in Serbia, but also in Montenegro, having in mind the reach and the readership of these portals in our country as well. It is evident from the foregoing that the Serbian media have been paying great attention to Montenegro, but in an extremely sensationalist and inciting way, often taking information out of the context, violating journalism ethics and human moral code of conduct.

