



**DFC ANALYSIS | No. 3**

# **MEDIA MONITORING OF THE SERBIAN MEDIA OUTLETS ON THE TOPIC OF MONTENEGRO**

PODGORICA, OCTOBER 2022

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## IMPRESSUM

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**PUBLISHER:** Atlantic Council of Montenegro / **EDITOR IN CHIEF:** Azra Karastanović  
**AUTHORS:** DFC team / **DESIGN AND LAYOUT:** Branka Gardašević  
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НАЦИОНАЛНА БИБЛИОТЕКА ЦРНЕ ГОРЕ, ЦЕТИЊЕ

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# I INTRODUCTION

This report is based on an analysis of a year-long monitoring process from October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022, done by the Digital Forensic Center (DFC). The focus was on Serbian media outlets, which have a significant readership in Montenegro.

The report seeks to identify the primary narratives about Montenegro that the Serbian media outlets spread. This research encompasses 11,510 articles with Montenegro as the keyword and provides insight into narratives and the amount spread by the most-read Serbian news portals in Montenegro.

The analysis showed that during the 12 previous months, the news portals *Alo*, *Espresso*, *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 had it not been dominated by sensational headlines and 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 leading narratives 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:** 01/10/2022 – 30/09/2022

**FOLLOWED MEDIA:**

**Alo**

**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- end 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. A piece 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 cooperation, bi- and multilateral relations, adoption laws, work of political parties, challenges, such as crime and corruption, and elections.

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

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

**Readers' interactions** have also been measured by tracking the number of **comments** left below each article.

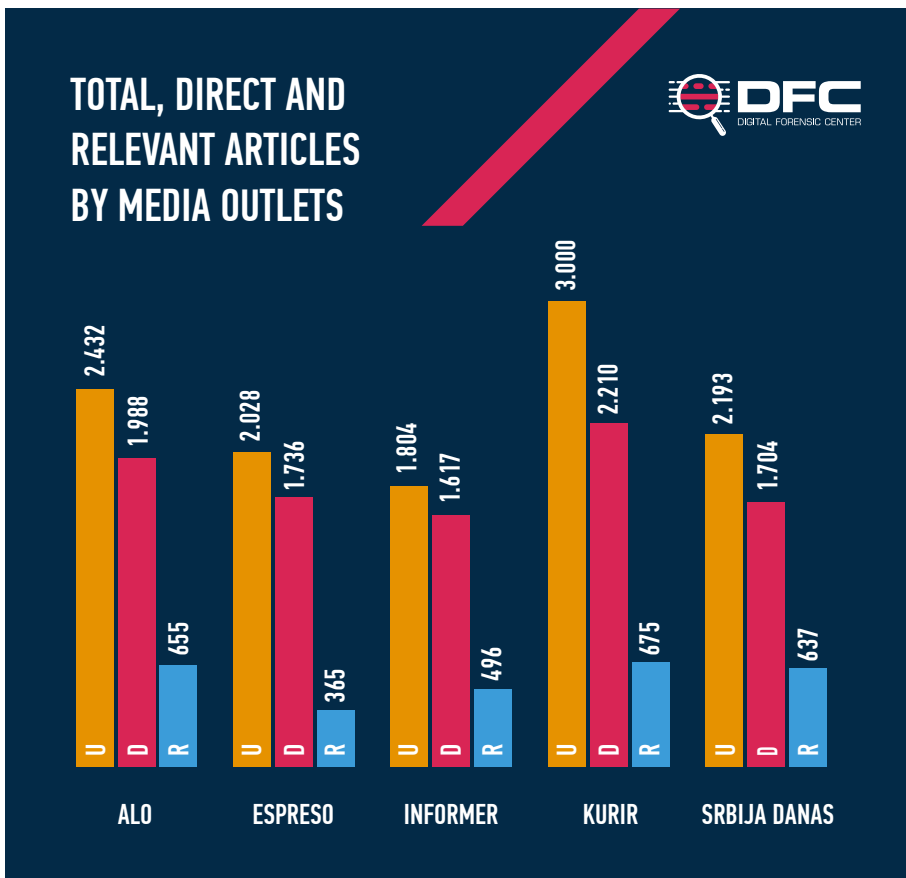
Words used in articles were also analyzed, resulting in a list of the most mentioned, i.e., used **tags**.

# KEY FINDINGS AND DATA

**ANALYZED PERIOD:** 01/10/2021 – 30/09/2022

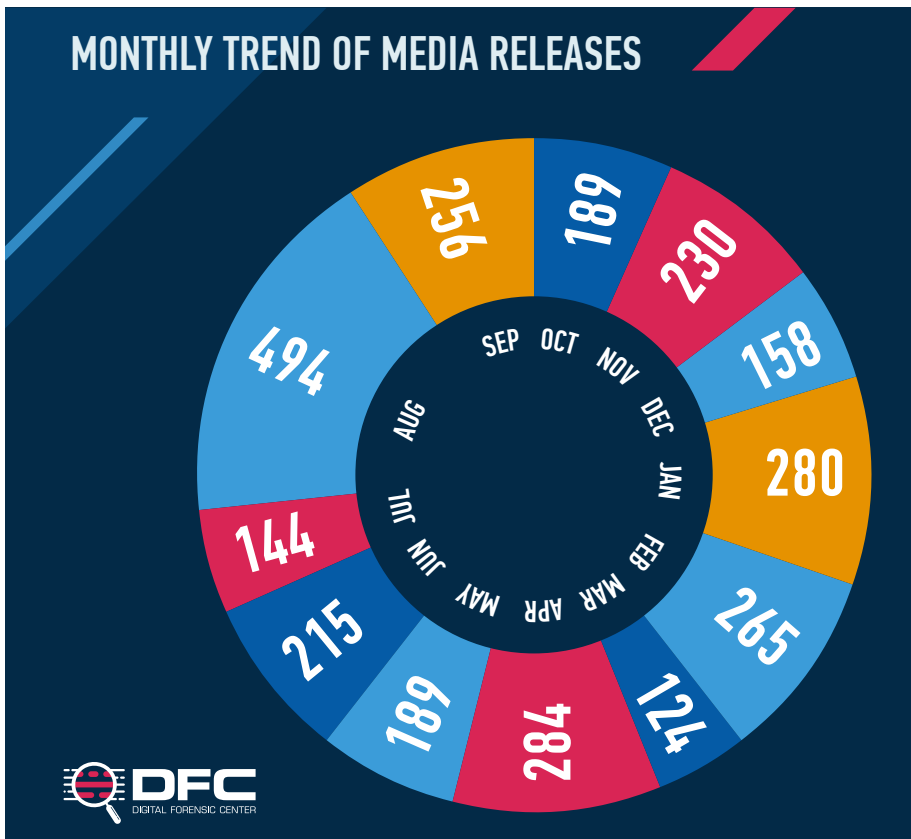
**SUBJECT:** Montenegro

Monitored content on the Serbian media outlets generated a total of 11.510 articles containing the keyword Crna Gora (Montenegro), while 9,244 directly targeted Montenegro and events in it. For the purpose of monitoring, 2.716 relevant articles were identified out of the 9,244 direct ones. We have excluded sports, weather, telecommunications, and livestock articles unless they contain 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 *Kurir* – 3,000, then on *Alo* – 2,432, and the portal *Srbija danas* – 2,193 articles. However, the majority of articles relevant to our research were registered on the news portals *Kurir* – 675, *Alo* - 655, and *Srbija danas* – 637articles.



**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 January, April, and August, which coincides with the fall of the Government of Zdravko Krivokapić, the formation of a new minority Government headed by Dritan Abazović, the signing of the Fundamental Agreement and the vote of no confidence in the Government of Dritan Abazović.

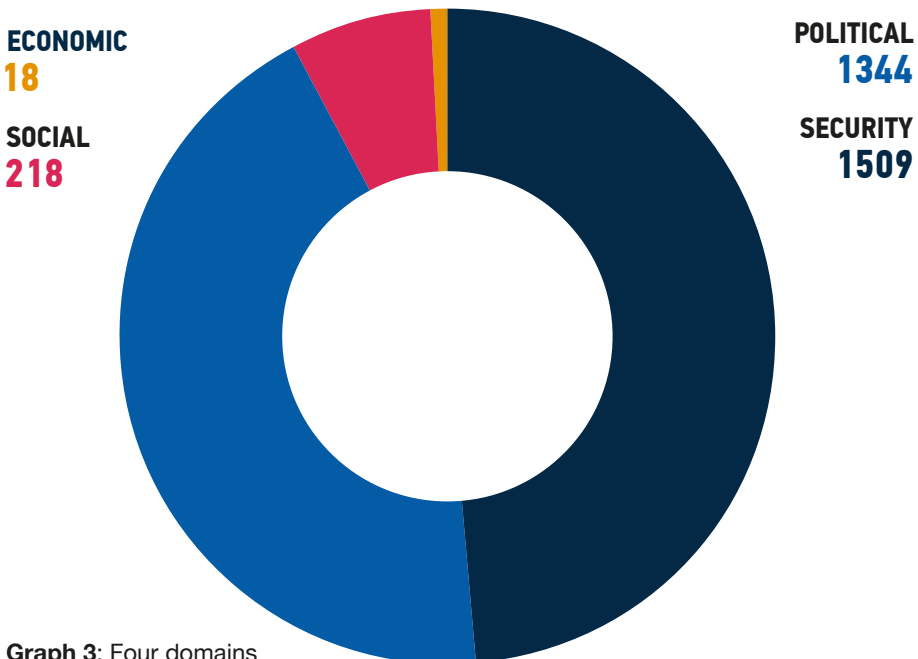
Quantitative and qualitative analysis was performed for all articles from the selected media outlets. Quantitative monitoring included recording data on the number of published articles on Montenegro, the

number of comments on articles, and the number of key narratives and topics. Qualitative monitoring involved noticing narratives, describing the article’s content, and observing domains related to the topics being reported.

# DOMAINS

Relevant articles were qualitatively divided into 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 primarily referring to the security domain amounted to 1.509 articles in total. A total of 1.344 articles referred to the political domain, 218 articles directed to the social domain, and 18 articles referred to the economic domain (**Graph 3**). It is important to emphasize that monitoring covered the year marked by political turmoil. All these political events and the phenomena, such as the fall of the Government, arrests, divisions, and tensions, affected the social community. It is interesting to note that the least articles are registered in the economic domain.



Graph 3: Four domains



# COMMENTS

Regarding the number of comments that readers left on the relevant articles, the articles on the portal *Kurir* attracted the most attention with 7,025 comments for one year. On all other portals, there were less than 1,000 comments during the twelve-month period, which is displayed in the table below (**Table 1**). The articles with the most comments dealt with political relations, the decision to dismiss Zdravko Krivokapić's Government and form a minority government headed by Dritan Abazović ([link](#)), events between Montenegrin criminal clans ([link](#)), allegations that the President of Montenegro is involved in crime ([link](#)). Additionally, in the articles reporting Montenegro is imposing sanctions on Russia ([link](#)), comments can be seen that Montenegro is not an honest country. Strong support for the Serbs in Montenegro is expressed because they are allegedly going through injustices, insults, and provocations. Also, a large number of comments were noticed under the article published by *Kurir*, about the alleged plan of Montenegrin criminal groups to assassinate the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. Comments supporting President Vučić and stating that others are bothered by the success of Serbia under his leadership have been noticed ([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 and swear words dominated the discourse, but there were also ones in which a positive tone was 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 and contributes to better relations between Serbia and Montenegro.

Regarding negative comments, insults on national grounds are present, as well as negation of Montenegro, Montenegrins. Negative comments and criticisms also were directed at the Montenegrin Government, politics, and politicians for certain decisions.

Media	Comments
Kurir	7.025
Espresso	610
Informer	243
Alo	338

**Table 1:** Number of comments per media

# NARRATIVES

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

<b>Montenegro is a criminal and captured state</b>	criminal clans, drugs, police, murder, corruption, nepotism, private state	12 months	<b>1.632</b>
<b>Political crisis in Montenegro</b>	political crisis, betrayal, promises, elections, parliamentary majority	October - April	<b>461</b>
<b>Betrayal of the electoral will in Montenegro and a new government will be formed</b>	Government incompetence, ignorance, ministers, parliamentary majority, electoral will, opposition	November - April and September	<b>183</b>
<b>Montenegro attacks Russia and leads an anti-Russian campaign</b>	Russia, sanctions, cyber-attacks, expulsion, diplomats, Moscow	February - September	<b>181</b>
<b>Anti-Serb campaign in Montenegro</b>	human rights, religious rights, language, culture, rejection, attacks	12 months	<b>179</b>
<b>Signing the Fundamental Agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church leads to a political crisis in Montenegro</b>	Abazović, Fundamental Agreement, Joanikije, komite, Đukanović, protests, tensions	January - April	<b>81</b>
<b>Attempts to revive DPS</b>	Đukanović, Abazović, pact, parliamentary majority, elections	januar – april	<b>64</b>
<b>Zdravko Krivokapić and his Government do not have support and they must resign</b>	Krivokapić, Vlada, experts, resignation, electoral will	November - February	<b>53</b>
<b>Serbs in Montenegro are endangered</b>	Serbs, religion, language, work	October - January	<b>48</b>
<b>Milo Đukanović and DPS were involved in numerous scandals and affairs</b>	Đukanović, DPS, arrests, affairs, corruption	November - December and August	<b>43</b>

**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: the fall of the Government of Zdravko Krivokapić, the formation of a new minority government, the signing of the Fundamental Agreement, a vote of no confidence in the Government of Dritan Abazović, cyber-attacks, arrests, a political crisis that had brought about narratives of their own, the negative narratives were launched almost daily.

**1** The most common narrative is that **Montenegro is a criminal and captured state** with 1,632 articles and was present in the Serbian media throughout all 12 months. Despite the change of two governments, 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 originate 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 suggesting bad conditions in Montenegro are: state institutions are captured, Montenegro as a country will not survive ([link](#)), the political elites are part of the cigarette smuggling scheme ([link](#)), and the President of Montenegro, Milo Đukanović, is trying to stage a coup ([link](#)) and aims to create a private state.

**2** In the first half of the year, there was a narrative that there was a **political crisis in Montenegro**. The increasingly frequent disagreements of the parliamentary majority regarding all relevant issues for solving the political and institutional crisis ([link](#)) are presented in texts with this narrative. The articles point out that a political crisis is shaking Montenegro and that protests are being planned as a result ([link](#)). Disagreements between the ruling majority cause political turmoil that harms the state, its institutions, and its citizens.

**3** The third most represented narrative (183 articles) is that there has been a **betrayal of the electoral will in Montenegro, and a new government will be formed**. It is stated that the citizens of Montenegro, especially the Serbs, did not vote for the policy led by Zdravko Krivokapić's Government, that the Government is not functioning, and that the reconstruction of the Government and its fall is needed ([link](#)).

The texts also contain accusations between the Democratic Front and Prime Minister Krivokapić and Vice President Abazović ([link](#)).

**4** Montenegro's decision to impose sanctions on Russia for its aggression against Ukraine fueled the narrative that **Montenegro attacked Russia and led an anti-Russian campaign**. The texts state that Montenegrin President Milo Đukanović attacked Putin and Russia because he condemned the declaration on the recognition of the independence of Donetsk and Lugansk ([link](#)), Russian aggression against Ukraine and because he declared that the Russian Orthodox Church is a tool and instrument in the hands of Putin's politics ([link](#)).

**5** A significant number of articles contain the narrative **Anti-Serbian campaign in Montenegro**. The articles point out that a dirty campaign is being waged in the region against strong Serbia and President Vučić, especially in Montenegro and Croatia, because they allegedly cannot stand Serbia's economic stability. It is stated that the media, as well as certain political actors in the region, especially President Đukanović, do not hesitate to attack Serbia, the Serbian people, the SPC, and its president Vučić ([link](#)).

**6** The narrative that **signing the Fundamental Agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church led to a political crisis in Montenegro** was current during July and August. In the analyzed Serbian media, it was emphasized that the survival of the Government of Montenegro also means the survival of the Fundamental Agreement ([link](#)), as well as that Dritan Abazović is being expelled from Montenegro because of the Agreement with the SPC ([link](#)) and that he is being dismissed from the post of Prime Minister ([link](#)). It is said that President Đukanović has gone with sole because of the Basic Agreement because an initiative for a vote of no confidence in the Government has been launched ([link](#)). Spreading negative narratives about this topic had its own goal - to create even more tension.

**7** In the texts with the narrative **attempts to revive the DPS**, it is emphasized that all those who intend to overthrow the Government in Montenegro want to revive the DPS in this way ([link](#)). It is stated that some political actors were instructed by the DPS, and that is why they are helping them to come to power again, which is characterized as an

attack on the electoral will. It is especially noteworthy that Dritan Abazović will form the Government with the help of Milo Đukanović ([link](#)).

**8** The narrative **Zdravko Krivokapić and his Government do not have support, and they must resign** was present in 53 relevant texts. The reason for this narrative lies in the failure of politicians to fulfill their election promises ([link](#)). It is said 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. Zdravko Krivokapić was also criticized in the Serbian media for not signing the Fundamental Agreement with the SPC ([link](#)) and not meeting Patriarch Porfirije ([link](#)).

**9** As in previous years, the 10 most represented narratives include the narrative that **the Serbs in Montenegro are endangered**. This year, this narrative was observed in the period from October to January. The media point out that the new Government in Montenegro has not taken any action regarding the threat to the Serbian people in Montenegro and discrimination against their rights. As they have for years, Serbian tabloids point out that the Serbian people are being persecuted in Montenegro ([link](#)). The narrative presents Serbs in Montenegro as threatened in terms of human rights and freedoms ([link](#)). Moreover, they are deprived of their right to Serbian values and religion ([link](#)).

**10** Among the ten most common narratives was the narrative that **Milo Đukanović and DPS were involved in numerous scandals and affairs**. These are texts in which it is pointed out that Montenegrin President Milo Đukanović is involved in multiple scandals. The latest accusations are that he is involved in a money laundering affair with an Albanian oil company tycoon ([link](#)). Đukanović is accused of secret agreements ([link](#)) and secret flights to Switzerland ([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: *The West is influencing the political situation in Montenegro, Montenegro is courting NATO and the EU, Progress in relations between Montenegro and Serbia, Montenegro is projected to be a small Ukraine, Attacks on the Serbian Orthodox Church and an attempt to there is a split within it, Montenegro should be part of the Open Balkans, Milo Đukanović causes a political crisis and a coup d'état, etc.*

During the analysis, a narrative was observed that Western allies and embassies influence Montenegrin politics. Before the formation of the Government, there was a narrative that Western partners interfered in the process of forming the Government. Later, there was a narrative that Western embassies make decisions on the Government's behalf and direct the foreign policy course of Montenegro. It is also stated that Montenegro flatters NATO and the EU by conducting its internal and external policy.

When it comes to the relations between Montenegro and Serbia during the analyzed period, there were conflicting reports on that topic. On the one hand, the bad relations between Montenegro and Serbia were deepened by the alleged anti-Serbian campaign from Montenegro. In numerous texts, it is pointed out that Milo Đukanović and the DPS, together with some Croatian politicians, are leading a campaign against a stable and strong Serbia. On the other hand, after the accession of Dritan Abazović to the post of Prime Minister of the Government of Montenegro and his visit to Serbia, the narrative changed to a positive one - progress in the relations between these two countries.

The attempt to market the narrative that Montenegro was designed to be a small Ukraine, which could also be heard from Metropolitan Joanikije, should not be ignored either.

There have also been claims that DPS and Milo Đukanović are attacking the Serbian Orthodox Church and its clergy in Montenegro and are

trying to create a split within the church through their actions.

In the analyzed period, the narrative that Montenegro should be part of the Open Balkan Initiative is noticeable. Only certain aspects of this Initiative are emphasized and an attempt is made to influence public opinion and political elites in Montenegro on this matter.

Serbian tabloids continued to support the Democratic Front, while criticizing the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and the President of Montenegro, Milo Đukanović, accusing them of causing political instability and a coup d'état.

## CONCLUSION

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

The narratives dominating the Serbian media outlets encourage feelings of unease, insecurity, and worry. If we look back, the image of Montenegro as a criminal state, a 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 began with the fall of Zdravko Krivokapić's Government and the formation of a new government, and later with the vote of no confidence of Dritan Abazović's Government, political crisis, arrests, cyber-attacks, and attempts to form a new government. A whole range of Serbian media outlets has become a creator and filter for channeling several threatening narratives into our media space. Instead of contributing to calming the sensitive situation in Montenegrin society, the media additionally heated it with their reporting.

The fall of the Government of Zdravko Krivokapić, the political conflict of the parliamentary majority, the formation of the Government of Dritan Abazović, and after a little more than 100 days, the vote of no confidence of the same Government, as well as numerous conflicts of criminal groups 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 authorities 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 this narrative 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 the human moral code of conduct.





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