



**KCSS**  
Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

**POLICY MEMO**

# **Countering Disinformation and Radicalization in Kosovo**

Policy actions for government, media, and international partners to foster resilience against disinformation that targets interethnic relations in Kosovo

December 15, 2025, Prishtina

## I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Disinformation and ethno-political radicalization remain persistent problems in Kosovo, affecting both Albanian and Serbian communities and undermining trust in institutions and media. The DISRUPT project's research and local consultations show that disinformation is amplified by weak editorial standards, lack of accountability, and limited fact-checking capacity. Local media decline and reliance on centralized or foreign sources have left communities exposed to targeted narratives, especially during political crises.

The most urgent challenges are media manipulation and lack of transparency, vulnerability of youth and older generations to false information, decline of local media and trusted information sources, insufficient institutional response—especially in bilingual communication—and political polarization. These challenges are interconnected and require coordinated action from government, municipalities, media, civil society, and international partners.

Recent consultations highlight the importance of appointing bilingual spokespersons—Serbian-speaking in central institutions and Albanian-speaking in Serb-majority municipalities—to improve communication and build trust across communities. There is also a clear need for more frequent, live press conferences and direct engagement with the public, rather than relying solely on written statements. These steps can help reduce ambiguity, clarify official positions, and counter the spread of false narratives.

To address these issues, the memo recommends establishing and funding independent, bilingual fact-checking units at national and municipal levels, strengthening editorial standards and accountability in media, supporting community-based media initiatives and media literacy programs, and integrating counter-disinformation measures into national security and regional cooperation strategies. The EU, OSCE, and other international partners should provide dedicated, regular reporting on normalization dialogue and interethnic disinformation, and support local monitoring mechanisms. These actions are necessary to reduce the impact of disinformation, improve public trust, and support Kosovo's progress toward EU integration and regional stability.

## 2 STATE OF AFFAIRS

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Kosovo's information environment is undergoing profound transformation, shaped by both internal dynamics and external pressures. Disinformation has evolved from sporadic misinformation into a persistent, systemic challenge that directly impacts the country's prospects for European integration and regional security cooperation. The past several years have seen a marked increase in the sophistication and reach of disinformation campaigns, with foreign actors—particularly from Russia and Serbia—actively exploiting local grievances and unresolved historical tensions. These campaigns are not limited to isolated incidents; rather, they are woven

into the fabric of everyday life, influencing public perceptions, political discourse, and interethnic relations.

The media landscape in Kosovo is highly fragmented and polarized. Online platforms such as Telegram, Facebook, and TikTok have become primary battlegrounds for competing narratives, often amplifying sensationalist and emotionally charged content. Traditional media outlets, meanwhile, struggle with declining resources, editorial independence, and financial transparency. The closure of local media and the absence of robust correspondent networks have left many communities reliant on centralized or foreign sources of information, which frequently lack contextual understanding and accountability. This vacuum has been filled by partisan outlets and social media influencers, whose content is often tailored to reinforce existing fears and divisions.

Institutional responses to disinformation remain uneven and, in many cases, insufficient. While there have been efforts to develop national strategies for cybersecurity and information integrity, these measures are often fragmented and lack the comprehensive, bilingual approach needed to address the realities of Kosovo's multiethnic society. The absence of rapid response teams, dedicated fact-checking units, and inclusive communication strategies has allowed disinformation to flourish, particularly during periods of political crisis or heightened interethnic tension. The lack of trust in public institutions further exacerbates the problem, as citizens increasingly turn to alternative sources of information that may not adhere to professional standards.

Looking ahead to the next 12–24 months, Kosovo faces a critical juncture. The interplay between domestic vulnerabilities and external influence campaigns will continue to shape the trajectory of interethnic relations and the country's integration into European and regional frameworks. The concept of operational integration—targeted agency-level cooperation among the Western Balkans (WVB6)—offers a pathway to resilience, but only if accompanied by coordinated reforms, trust-building measures, and inclusive initiatives. Failure to act decisively risks entrenching polarization and undermining the very foundations of democratic governance and social cohesion. Conversely, strategic interventions and cross-sector collaboration can transform these challenges into opportunities for gradual normalization and sustainable peace.

### 3 CHALLENGES

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Addressing the complex landscape of disinformation and ethno-political radicalization in Kosovo requires a clear understanding of the most pressing obstacles. Each challenge outlined below is rooted in the findings of the DISRUPT project and reflects the lived experiences of communities, institutions, and stakeholders across the country.

**Pervasive Media Manipulation and Lack of Accountability.** One of the most significant challenges is the widespread manipulation of information by media outlets, particularly in the online sphere. Editorial standards are often weak, and mechanisms for correcting misinformation are nearly absent, especially at the local level. Financial opacity and lack of transparency in media

ownership further erode public trust, leaving citizens vulnerable to sensationalist and biased reporting. This environment enables the rapid spread of disinformation, undermining efforts to foster informed public debate and social cohesion.

**Vulnerability of Youth and Older Generations.** The impact of disinformation is felt acutely among both younger and older generations. Young people are frequently exposed to emotionally charged, ethno-political narratives on social media, which can shape their attitudes and behaviors in ways that reinforce division and mistrust. At the same time, older generations often lack the skills or resources to verify the credibility of information sources, making them susceptible to manipulation. The generational divide in media literacy and resilience to disinformation presents a unique challenge for policymakers and educators.

**Decline of Local Media and Information Ecosystems.** The closure of local media outlets and the lack of municipal support for community-based journalism have created a vacuum in the information ecosystem. Communities are increasingly dependent on centralized or foreign sources, which may not reflect local realities or priorities. This decline in trusted, contextualized reporting weakens the ability of citizens to engage meaningfully with public affairs and contributes to the spread of divisive narratives.

**Insufficient Institutional Response and Bilingual Fact-Checking.** Government and independent institutions have struggled to develop effective responses to the disinformation crisis. The absence of rapid response teams, bilingual fact-checking units, and inclusive communication strategies has allowed false narratives to proliferate unchecked. Without coordinated and proactive measures, both Albanian and Serbian communities remain exposed to targeted campaigns that exploit linguistic and cultural divides.

**Political Polarization and Instrumentalization of Ethnic Tensions.** Political actors, both domestic and foreign, continue to exploit disinformation for strategic gain. The instrumentalization of ethnic tensions serves to consolidate power, delegitimize opponents, and fuel societal division. Institutional neglect of inclusion and language rights—such as the prolonged vacancy of the Language Commissioner post—sends negative signals and reinforces perceptions of marginalization. This environment of polarization not only undermines trust in public institutions but also complicates efforts to advance normalization and integration.

## 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

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### 4.1 FOR NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (GOVERNMENT, MUNICIPALITIES, INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS)

- ⇒ **Communicate Clearly and Proactively.** Shift from written-only statements to regular, live press conferences—especially during crises or sensitive developments. This allows for direct questions, reduces ambiguity, and builds public trust. Ensure all official

communications are concise, factual, and avoid vague or politicized language. Designate spokespersons who are trained in crisis communication and interethnic sensitivity.

- ⇒ **Establish Rapid Response and Fact-Checking Teams.** Create dedicated, bilingual rapid response teams within ministries and municipalities to address emerging disinformation in real time, especially on social media. Fund independent, multiethnic fact-checking units at both central and municipal levels, with clear mandates and public reporting.
- ⇒ **Appoint Bilingual Spokespersons.** Ensure all central government ministries and agencies have Serbian-speaking spokespersons who proactively engage with Serbian-language media and communities. In Serb-majority municipalities, appoint Albanian-speaking spokespersons to facilitate communication with Albanian-language media and residents. Both roles should be visible, accessible, and regularly participate in press conferences and community outreach.
- ⇒ **Institutionalize Monitoring and Transparency.** Require all ministries and municipalities to publish regular (e.g., quarterly) transparency reports on their communication activities, including responses to disinformation and outreach to minority communities.
- ⇒ **Support Local Media and Media Literacy.** Provide grants or technical support for the revival of local media outlets, especially in multiethnic municipalities. Integrate media literacy modules into school curricula and community programs, targeting both youth and older generations.
- ⇒ **Strengthen Legal and Regulatory Frameworks.** Review and update media and information laws to include clear penalties for deliberate disinformation, hate speech, and failure to correct false reporting.

### 4.2 FOR MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY

- ⇒ **Launch Joint Monitoring and Reporting Initiatives.** The Association of Journalists of Kosovo, in partnership with civil society, should establish a regular monitoring mechanism for interethnic disinformation. Publish monthly or quarterly reports tracking trends, incidents, and responses. Develop a shared online platform where verified cases of disinformation can be reported, analyzed, and publicly discussed. Launch joint Albanian–Serb media monitoring coalitions to track and publicly report disinformation trends across language spaces.
- ⇒ **Promote Collaborative Journalism.** Encourage coalitions of Albanian and Serbian journalists to co-author investigative pieces, share resources, and conduct joint fact-checking. Organize regular workshops and exchanges for journalists on professional standards, ethical reporting, and crisis communication.
- ⇒ **Increase Public Engagement and Education.** Host open forums, town halls, and media literacy campaigns in communities most affected by disinformation, with

participation from local leaders, educators, and youth groups. Civil society organizations should develop toolkits and guides for citizens on how to identify and report disinformation.

- ⇒ **Advocate for Editorial Accountability.** Media outlets should adopt and publicly display clear editorial guidelines, including requirements for multi-source verification and corrections. Establish ombudsman roles or independent review panels within major media organizations to handle complaints and ensure accountability.

### 4.3 FOR THE EU AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS (EU, OSCE, UN, DONORS)

- ⇒ **Provide Dedicated, Regular Reporting.** The EU and OSCE should publish periodic (e.g., biannual) public reports on the normalization dialogue, with a dedicated section on the role and impact of disinformation and interethnic narratives. Support the development of a regional dashboard or index tracking disinformation incidents, responses, and trends in Kosovo and the Western Balkans.
- ⇒ **Fund and Facilitate Monitoring Mechanisms.** Provide technical and financial support for independent monitoring of interethnic disinformation, including capacity-building for local fact-checkers and media watchdogs. Encourage international organizations to partner with local institutions for joint monitoring missions and public briefings.
- ⇒ **Strengthen Strategic Communication.** EU and international missions in Kosovo should increase the frequency of live press briefings and Q&A sessions, especially during sensitive periods, to clarify positions and counter false narratives. Develop and disseminate clear, accessible materials explaining the normalization process, EU integration steps, and the risks of disinformation.
- ⇒ **Support Media and Civil Society Innovation.** Fund pilot projects for new media formats (e.g., podcasts, video explainers, interactive platforms) that promote interethnic understanding and counter disinformation. Facilitate visits for journalists, civil society leaders, and public officials to the north of Kosovo and vice-versa to deepen understanding of the context.
- ⇒ **Provide technical assistance to the Independent Media Commission** to conduct regular audits of media outlets for compliance with editorial standards and transparency.
- ⇒ **Support narrative-building initiatives** that promote alternative stories of cooperation, everyday life, and shared challenges, using formats that compete in online spaces with disinformation.