

The image of Russia in the Kosovo media discourse: comparison between the public and the private media

Muhamet Mavraj

PhD Candidate, University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”
muhametmavraj@yahoo.com

Lindita Tahiri (corresponding author)

Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”
Lindita.tahiri@uni-pr.edu

Summary. Considering the traditional role of Russia in excluding the Kosovo territories from the Albanian state, as well as the recent role of Russia in anti-Kosovo independence diplomatic lobbying, this study aims to identify the dominant narratives in Kosovo media about Russia by comparing three media outlets: the public service broadcaster *RTK*, the daily newspaper *Koha Ditore* and the online newspaper *Gazeta Express*. Different types of framing, such as titles, sources and attitudes are analysed; Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to highlight participants and the kind of actions they undertake in the journalistic discourse, raising questions about narrative choices and their ideological influence in the Kosovar audience. The results of the analysis show that the private outlets and in particular the online medium, which is popular amongst young audiences, tend to construct the affirmative image of the Russian leadership, especially regarding the portrayal of Vladimir Putin. While the affirmative reading for the Kosovar audience is privileged, other kinds of readings are suppressed, thus creating the ground for broader intended strategic objectives of political discourse.

Keywords: Kosovo Media, Russia, CDA, Framing, Ideology

Introduction

The dissolution of former Yugoslavia in the nineties was followed by war in this area, as former republics started declaring independence from the Socialist Yugoslav Federation. Misha Glenny, the British author who has specialized in South East Europe, in his book *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804–2012* recalls how in 1991 he had raised the alarm about the aggravated circumstances in Yugoslavia, saying that while Europe celebrated the fall of communism in 1989 as the beginning of a new era, the leaders of Yugoslavia were “stirring a cauldron of blood that would soon boil over (2012,

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pp. 634-5)". His words turned out prophetic, and while Slovenia gained independence in a 10-day war in 1991, Croatia was granted international recognition in 1992 after one year of armed conflict with Serbia, and needed three more years of military clashes to gain full control of its territories. During the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia the country was estimated to have had a death toll of about 100 000 people and more than 2 million displaced. In contrast, the present North Macedonia, in contrast with the other Yugoslav republics, peacefully gained its independence with a referendum in 1991. (Britannica, 2019)

In 1989 the Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević brought Kosovo directly under the Serbian government and the growing pressure of the majority of ethnic Albanians for greater autonomy escalated in civil war in 1998. The conflict gained widespread international attention and was resolved with the intervention of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) by launching a 77-day air campaign against Serbia which caused significant damage to the Serbian infrastructure. Yugoslav and Serbian forces responded with committing ethnic cleansing and driving out Kosovo's ethnic Albanians, displacing more than one million ethnic Albanians out of the country and another half a million within Kosovo. UN peacekeeping forces were deployed in Kosovo after the ending of the war and the country came under UN administration. (Britannica, 2019)

After the declaration of Kosovo's independence on February 17, 2008, the European Union has initiated the process of mediated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia in order to normalize relations between the two countries and to implement the integration agenda for the Western Balkans. The plan for Kosovar independence negotiated by the former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari was rejected by Serbia, which has still not recognized Kosovo as an independent state, though more than 100 countries do. Up to now the negotiation process has proved unsuccessful due to Serbia's rejection of Kosovo's statehood, which has been backed consistently by its traditional ally, Russia. Reporting on the first foreign trip of Vladimir Putin in 2019 to Serbia, the *Foreign Policy* published an article with the title *There's One Country in Europe Where Putin Is a Rock Star* (Foreign Policy, 25 January, 2019). The article describes the sight of tens thousands of people parading in Serbia's capital Belgrade chanting Putin's name as "a spectacle of two autocratic leaders taking advantage of each other [...] for their own geopolitical games".

The traditional bond between Russia and Serbia, according to the British historian Noel Malcolm (2002), was central for the conference of Great Powers (Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia) which started in December 1912 and where the borders of the new Albanian state were decided. Although Austria-Hungary argued that all Albanian-inhabited lands should be included in the Albanian state, including Kosovo, this idea was opposed most strongly by Serbia's protector-power, Russia (Malcolm, 2002, pp. 255-257). Malcolm states that "whether Kosovo is brought, in the end, to a peaceful solution, [...] will depend to a large extent on the ability of ordinary Serbs to challenge the fixed pattern of thought which has held them in its grip for so long" (2002, pp. 355-356).

The description in the article of the *Foreign Policy* of tens of thousands of Serbs chanting Putin's name is a powerful indicator of what Malcolm calls "fixed pattern of thought" of "ordinary Serbs" regarding the alliance of Serbia and Russia. On the other hand, the opposite can be said about the role of Serbia in the Kosovo history: Russia was a major

opponent of the NATO bombing in 1999 and has played a crucial role in blocking full international recognition of Kosovo through its veto in the United Nations Security Council. Hence, considering the traditional role of Russia in excluding the Kosovo territories from the Albanian state as well as the recent role of Russia in anti-Kosovo independence diplomatic lobbying, the question arises about the dominant image and the prevailing Kosovo media narratives about Russian politics and leadership.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, three Kosovo major media have been selected: *Koha Ditore* daily newspaper, *Gazeta Express* online newspaper, and *RTK* (Radio Television of Kosovo). Inclusiveness, influence, circulation and reputation were criteria of choice of the sample media outlets: *RTK* is the public service broadcaster, *Koha Ditore* is a privately-owned printed daily newspaper, which has the reputation of professionalism and whose owner pretends to be apolitical, whereas *Gazeta Express* is a private online medium considered to be amongst the most popular media in the country. The sampling period ran from 1 December 2017 to 28 February 2018, including the 10th anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Kosovo 17 February 2018, which was the reason for choosing this particular time period in order to include the month before the anniversary, as well as the period around the New Year, when the messages towards the public tend to be more deliberate and ritualized. The articles were identified using the online sources not only for the online paper but also for the other media outlets referring to their portals, respectively *RTKLive* for the public service broadcaster and the online version of the paper *Koha.net* for the printed newspaper. To locate stories, the key words related to *Russia* were used, both as noun and adjective lexemes: 28 stories were generated in *RTKLive*, 72 stories were generated in *Koha.net* and 178 stories in the *Gazeta Express*. A closer examination revealed that not all the stories were relevant for the research, and after careful reading 2 stories were cleared from the *RTK Live* sample, 11 stories from the *Koha.net* sample, and 32 stories from the *Gazeta Express* sample.

The questions addressed in this study are the following:

- RQ1. To what extent do the three media outlets differ from each other in selecting sources and in selecting their attitudes?
- RQ2. To what extent do the three media outlets differ from each other in using headlines, illustrations and the background information?
- RQ3. To what extent do the three media outlets differ from each other in the presentation of social actors and the processes that they undertake?

In order to reveal the underlying narrative of the Kosovo media samples, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been chosen, which, as Bartlett (2010) states, critically illuminates how language can be used by powerful interest groups to maintain their privileged role in society. It is well-known that the issue of power is central in CDA, and this study will help identify the social power relations by analysing what Fairclough and Wodak call “linguistic and semiotic aspects of these social relations” (2010, p.101). The CDA from

its inception was designated as a framework, rather than a singular method of research, and as Wodak and Meyer state, “it is generally agreed that CDA must not be understood as a single method but rather as an approach, which constitutes itself at different levels” (2001, p. 14). According to Blommaert, the origins of CDA can be traced to “a “school” of scholarship led by people such as Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk, Paul Chilton, and others” (2005, p.5). What is shared by these scholars is the assumption of the interdependence between linguistics and politics, and what is more, Wodak uses the term “political linguistics”, proposed by Burkhardt (1996), which would designate the linguistic sub-discipline committed to studying political language (2009, p.6).

The CDA tools applied in this study derive from the multifunctional theory of language known as Systemic Functional Linguistics, a theory particularly related to Michael Halliday (1973, 1978, 1994), According to this theory, language simultaneously functions ideationally, in representing reality, and interpersonally, in constructing social relations and identities, as well as textually, in making the parts of a text into a coherent whole. This theory became the main influence for the development of CDA in the work of scholars such as Roger Fowler (1979, 1991, 2003), Hodge, Kress and Trew (1979), Fairclough (1995, 1997, 2003, 2010), van Dijk (1988, 1998, 2008), van Leeuwen (2005, 2008), Wodak (2009, 2015). Fowler (1981, pp. 40-44) has proposed analytical tools which he calls ‘ideologically interesting’, such as transitivity, participants, actions and processes, vocabulary, syntax, modality, generics, personal pronouns, speech acts, which contain the apparatus used in this study, in particular regarding the third research question. These linguistic categories belong to the ideational and interpersonal functions based on Halliday’s concept of metafunctions, and they serve to point out the kind of actors who participate within the journalistic narratives and the kind of processes that these actors undertake, which is the aim of this research question. By uncovering the linguistic patterns that encode the participant roles, their relations and the way they are presented, a critical approach towards the discourse aims at the ‘denaturalization’ of ideologies (Fairclough, 2010, p. 30). The ‘naturalized’ presentation, according to Jeffries, (2010, p. 9) is one of the most important notions regarding the relation between language and ideology, because it reveals the strategy of positioning readers to view and evaluate social and political reality in particular way by taking opinions as if they were factual statements. Authors Caroline Coffin and Kieran O’Halloran (2010, pp. 112-133) ask questions about how is the positioning established as the reader progresses through a text. They show that evaluative meaning is built up, sometimes even by seemingly neutral sentences, when readers are placed into “groove positions”, as for instance when they read those neutral sentences after a preceding text, which is likely to trigger strong disapproval rather than be read as an impartial statement.

The second research question focuses on the framing produced by headlines, illustrations and background information in the articles. This question puts emphasis on the way how headlines work in conjunction with the other visual aspects of the newspaper text, particularly the pictures (Reah, 2002, p. 23). The effect of the headline in orienting the reader’s interpretation of the information contained in the article has been named “perspective” by Claude Abastado (1980) quoted in Develotte and Rechniewski (2001, p. 3).

As these scholars claim, besides abstracting the story of an article, as Bell says (1991, p.187), the headline also structures a particular view of the world by imposing on information a hierarchy of importance and by implying a particular relation to the reader. The visual metaphor of “perspective” associates with the visual metaphor of “framing”, as it points out the “how” compared to “what”, which in fact is the difference between framing and agenda setting, two notions that are sometimes confused. As Deborah Tannen states (1993, p. 3-4) that since Bateson introduced the concept of framing, it has influenced thinking about language in interaction and has provided the theoretical foundation for the discourse analysis of communication. The framing theory was put forwards in sociology by Goffman (1974), who claimed that people interpret the world through their primary framework, and further on this theory has developed into a multidisciplinary model to study the effect of media in society. One of the most explicable analogies of this concept, the one of the picture frame used by Bateson (1972), points out the double function of the frame, the one of including certain elements within its borders and of excluding other elements out of it. Similarly, Gitlin (1980) argues that frames select and put emphasis on certain messages while ignoring others. Likewise, Norman Fairclough, in his book *Analyzing Discourse* (2003), uses such principles of analysis as: presence and absence (which events or elements of elements are present or absent in a chain of events), arrangement (how are events ordered), abstraction (what is the degree of abstraction of concrete events), addition (what is added to the explanation of events). Although some scholars, such as Weaver (2007), consider that the term ‘frame’ needs a clearer definition, and that sometimes it even causes contradictory interpretations (D’Angelo, 2002), some others, like Reese (2007), consider that there are diverse approaches to framing and that the theory of framing gives an opportunity to bring them together in media research. The concept of framing has been studied for long as the means to construct different interpretations for the audience by scholars (Biocca, 1991; Entman, 1993; Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1996; Rhee, 1997; Van Dijk, 1988, 1993, 1998; Gamson, 1992). One of the leading authors on framing media effects, Shanto Iyengar (2010), has pointed out that even people’s explanations of issues like terrorism or poverty are critically dependent upon the particular reference points furnished in media presentations. All the more, in his interview for the FrameWorks Institute, Iyengar (2009) states that framing effects affect the politically informed and uninformed alike.

The idea of framing effects in interpretation can be traced back to the concept of the act of speech in the philosophy of language. According to the speech act theory (Austin 1961, Searle 1969), the linguistic act comprises of the locutionary act – which is the physical act of uttering; the illocutionary act, which carries the communicative purpose of the speaker’s utterance; and the perlocutionary act, which is the effect of the utterance on the addressee. The greatest attention of studies has focused on the illocutionary force of communication, as the effects of utterances are more difficult to describe. This study will pertain to a similar logic of analyzing the communicative purpose of the sampled media discourse, whereas the effects of rhetorical persuasion of this discourse may be suggested, as the aim of the study is not measuring them through some poll or questionnaire.

Whereas the second research question focuses on the *way* that readers orientate their understanding of the article triggered by framing, on the other hand, the first research question focuses on the *content* of the article, with reference to the dominant quotes and sources of the stories described through these coding categories: ‘Media reporters’, ‘Media experts’, ‘Agencies’, ‘No source’. This research question analyses the sources used in the sample and also examines the dominant source’s attitude regarding the Russian role in the respective issue treated in the article by applying three coding categories: ‘Neutral’, ‘Favourable’, and ‘Unfavourable’. The attitude has been examined only in cases of explicitly articulated content, and not as an implied underlying ideology, as the latter is aimed by the other two research questions. By “explicit content” we infer direct evaluations such as “Russia poses a threat according to the Congress” (as unfavourable), or “These measurements should not threaten the peace process, Kremlin informs” (as favourable), whereas “Russia foresees new interethnic clashes” is classified as neutral, because of the verb ‘foresee’, although the title or the background of the article may imply that Russia is arousing the conflict. Those expressions which are not directly affirmative or negative evaluations and which have inferred meanings that need more interpretation are excluded from this categorization. Hence, the first research question lays the ground for the other two questions by examining quantitatively the content of the sample, which further on is analysed qualitatively within the framework of CDA.

As the corpus of this study is comprised of an online medium, the sensationalistic approach of digital media, which equates headlines with clickbait, will be examined as well. According to Johansson (2007, p.32) the sensationalist style focuses on the private life of the individual and the interplay between news and entertainment, dramatization and visual imagery. Foregrounding of sensationalism, according to Richardson (2007, p.122) aims to directly involve readers in an immediate way into the story. This typical sensationalistic style of digital media, which aspires the clickbait, not only causes what Johansson calls ‘earthquake news’ (2007, p.89), where a single news story is blown up to the extreme, but also causes a shift in the way the audience interprets news – restraining more and more from arguments and facticity and being lured by entertainment.

Findings and discussion

After the redundant articles were cleared from the initial sample, the remaining number of the generated sample was twice as much in *Gazeta Express* (146), compared with *Koha.net* (61) and six times higher than *RTKLive* (26). The average words per story in the online medium *Gazeta Express* was about 140, for *Koha.net* approximately 180, and for *RTKLive* was about 210, however even though the stories in the online medium were shorter, still the large number of generated stories shows that *Gazeta Express* has assigned more space to Russia related issues. Findings in tables one and two show that the use of the sources is more transparent in the public service broadcaster *RTKLive* compared to *Koha.net* and *Gazeta Express* because the public service broadcaster has indicated sources and authorship in the majority of texts. The prevailing number of anonymous sources is in *Gazeta Express* – more than 75 per cent of the total number of articles, or

as many as 110; the next is *Koha.net*, with as much as 32 articles or more than 50 per cent of the total number, whereas only 11 per cent of the articles in *RTKLive* are with no sources. More than 50 per cent of *RTKLive* sources are Western, and there is an overt critical and unfavourable attitude towards the role of Russia in Serbia and Balkans, and furthermore the same attitude is expressed by Kosovo sources. On the other hand, *Koha.net* expresses unfavourable attitudes towards the Russian policy in Serbia and Balkans only when sources are Western, which comprise 23 per cent of the sources. The articles in the *Gazeta Express* with no sources and they seem to originate from Russian sources suggesting from the linguistic calques and unnatural Albanian expressions. Many of the attitudes towards the Russian role in Serbia and Balkans which are classified as neutral may be understood as favourable with a more detailed analysis including illustrations which accompany the text and in particular because of the inferred meanings.

Table 1. Comparison of use of the sources.

	RTKLive	Koha.net	Gazeta Express
Media reporters	/	1	/
Kosovo agencies	2	1	6
Experts	5	3	3
European agencies	5	6	14
American agencies	9	8	11
Serbian agencies	1	/	4
Russian agencies	1	10	3
No source	3	32	110

Table 2. Comparison of the attitude of dominant sources

	RTKLive	Koha.net	Gazeta Express
Neutral	11	31	55
Favourable	/	8	47
Unfavourable	14	22	44

Headlines, illustrations and background as framing

It has been already stated in the comparison of the attitudes expressed by the dominant sources in the sampled media that attitudes with inferred affirmative tones about the role of Russia in the Balkans, which need more interpretation, are not classified as favourable. Attitudes are hinted through the headline in particular in cases when there are negative references to Russia within the article; however, the headline is in collision with the content of the article and does not reflect the critical tone, but rather reflects the editorial perspective. For instance, in *RTKLive*, in the case of the interview with Eliot Engel taken from the *Voice of America*, the strong accuses against Russia are not part of the headline

at all – on the contrary, there is negative framing about Europe: *Thaçi Accuses Europe for Disunited Approach Towards Kosovo* (RTKLive, 6 December, 2017). This headline is semantically in contradiction with the text, which includes a lot of affirmative declarations about the European and American support to Kosovo and therefore the inference about the five European states that have not recognized Kosovo is not sufficient for such a generalization in the headline. In the prevailing number of articles in RTKLive, the headlines, as well as subtitles, reflect the similar attitude as articulated in the text, as: *The American Senate: Russia Is an Obstacle for the Integration of Kosovo* (RTKLive, 16 January, 2018), or *Britain Cannot Ignore Actions of Russia* (RTKLive, 22 December, 2017).

Regarding the illustration in RTKLive, photos of American officials are typically foregrounded as opposed to photos of Russian officials, which are marginalized or in a neutral position. On the other hand, the background information is missing and in particular regarding the last war in Kosovo. Such is the case when the visit of Vladimir Putin in the Russian KFOR is mentioned without giving relevant facts about the positioning of the Russian KFOR in the Prishtina airport right after the end of the war (RTKLive, 9 January, 2018). Instead of the additional historical and factual information about the action of the Russian forces in the Prishtina airport right after the end of the war, a humorous tone is used, which is in tune with sensational tendencies that are commercially more successful for the media.

In the case of *Koha.net*, the headlines do not reflect the negative references about the role of Russia, in particular in the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, and the framing is either favourable or neutral. For instance, the interview with Eliot Engel, which contains strong blames against Russia, does not express any of them in the headline *Kosovo Has to Get Free from the Obstacle of the Border Agreement* (Koha Ditore, 6 December, 2017). This sentence assigns a duty to Kosovo which is portrayed in weak tones and there is no explanation of the cause for this action. In other cases, the role of Russia is given favourable framing compared to Western actors, even if there are arguments for negative framing of Russia, as, for instance, in the headline *USA Worried About Russian Influence in the Balkans* (Koha Ditore, 27, December 2017), where the semantic role of the USA is the experiencer and the semantic role of Russia is that of an actor, although the article claims that USA will not make any compromise with Russian aggression. In other cases Russia has the syntactic role of the subject, and if there are negative elements associated with it, they are strategically given at the end of the article, and this happens not only in articles of political nature, but even in an article about sports, with the headline *Russia Forbidden to Participate in Olympics* (Koha Ditore, 5 December, 2017) where the reason for the suspension of Russia from the Olympic games, which was the consumption of dopamine by Russian athletes, is mentioned shortly at the end of the article. The role of Russia as a victim is foregrounded, and in articles like this one, where the source is not stated, there is an inference that the text has been copied by Russian agencies without any changes in the structure. When the Russian agencies are cited as sources, headlines retain the favourable framing of the original, as in the *Russian Satellite Is Lost, the Fault of Navigation* (Koha Ditore, 12 December, 2017), where the Russian scientists are not associated with the failure of launching the satellite and their positive image is retained in spite of their responsibility for the malfunction. The Kosovar media imitates the struc-

ture of the text taken from Russian agencies, retaining the evaluative perspective and the orientation of the original Russian text, which happens even in non-political texts dealing with the daily events.

The title *The USA and Russia Collide in Twitter about Kosovo* (Koha Ditore, 7 December, 2017) displays a humorous tone, and as a consequence the important declaration of Russia that “Kosovo is Serbia” is left in the margins. The perspective of the text is neutral and it is said that “the office of the Democratic Party did not share this opinion”, hinting accuses about those which did not agree with Russia. The text neutralizes the negative image of Russia in spite of the declaration that Kosovo is Serbia and furthermore blames those who do not agree with this declaration and strives to make fun with it. Similarly, the lack of critical perspective is stunning in the headline *Thank You Russia* (Koha Ditore, 8 January, 2018) where at least irony could have been produced with usage of parenthesis. When the used sources are Western, headlines have neutral framing, as in *Pentagon: Russia Is not Withdrawing from Syria* (Koha Ditore, 12 December, 2017), where the headline omits the Russian deceit about withdrawing its military forces from Syria.

If the Kosovo reader repeatedly reads headlines with positive framing of Russia as opposed to the West, this kind of affirmative reading is privileged and other readings will be suppressed, with effects of persuasion and manipulation. According to Reah (2002, pp.28-31) headlines can be written to influence the opinions of the reader by presenting one point of view to the exclusion of any other. For example, in the article *Tension in the Air: the Russian Plane Threatens the American One* (Koha Ditore, 30 January, 2018), the text includes this formulation: “The American State Department pretends that the Russian plane came close”, where the verb “pretends” makes the action uncertain and suspicious. There are cases when more Russian declarations and sources are quoted and still the text is not balanced, as in the headline *Reactions After the Publication of the List of People Close to Kremlin* (Koha Ditore, 30 January, 2018), where the favourable framing for the Russian role is foregrounded and the information about what kind of list it is, is omitted.

When there are two opposite perspectives in the text, there is confusion about the dominant and supported perspective, as in the article about the Russian intrusion in Brexit (Koha Ditore, 19 December, 2017), where the British declaration of accusing Russia about intrusion is given side by side with the Facebook data about Russian activities in social media. The text ends with a saying that the author of the study of the Facebook activity, Philip Howard, has declared that “the Russian activity during Brexit has been minimal”, thus suggesting the lack of intrusion by Russia by privileging the affirmative reading of the Russian role and by suppressing the argument of the accuser. Even in cases when Western sources are cited, the framing belongs to the Russian favourable perspective. The timing of publication is equally strategical, as right after the celebration of the anniversary of the Kosovo independence, a lot of space is given to the Russian criticism about the intrusion of the West in the Balkans as in the headlines: *Lavrov: the West Is Making Tensions Worse in the Balkans; Russia Criticizes the Attitude of the West in the Balkans* (Koha Ditore, 20 and 22 February, 2018). As for illustrations in *Koha.net*, they are in compliance with the dominant framing of the headlines and they foreground Russian officials as powerful and self-confident.

The prevailing number of headlines in *Gazeta Express* have favourable framing from the Russian perspective, and the image of Vladimir Putin is foregrounded as a powerful symbol of the country, as in *Putin Brings Together Two Legends of Football* (*Gazeta Express*, 2 December, 2017). Instead of glorifying the personality of Putin, the headline could have produced a neutral formulation, such as *Sport United Two Legends of Football, Olympic Games United...* or alike. The exaltation of his personality is noticeable in the headlines of articles about his personal life, such as *Putin Talks About His Childhood and the Time When He Did Not Own a House* (*Gazeta Express*, 8 December, 2017), where the framing of a strong human personality and patriotism is heightened. Illustrations portray him in very popular tones, with beaming smiles, and the same text about his childhood is repeated a couple of times with a variety of positive headlines and illustrations as well as with videos of his interviews. Describing his life as simple and ordinary in difference from other global leaders, his lifestyle is foregrounded in the article with the headline *Putin Dives in the Frozen Lake* (*Gazeta Express*, 19 January, 2018), and this text is repeated a couple of times in positive framing. He is presented both politically and physically strong, and the illustrations depict him riding a horse half-naked, or diving in a frozen lake, as a humble person who admires nature and is close to the people, who does not have a smartphone and does not use the internet a lot (*Gazeta Express*, 8 February 2018). In the article with the headline *What Would Putin Become if He Does Not Win the Elections* (*Gazeta Express*, 2 February, 2018), he declares he wants to be a farmer, confirmed with a fitting illustration. In an article about the most expensive airplane amongst global leaders, he is claimed to have a plane fit for a “tsar” (*Gazeta Express*, 21 December, 2017). These headlines and illustrations portray him as a preferred cultural model, and his is even literally described as the most esteemed one in the headline *Putin Is Preferred More than Trump in Macedonia* (*Gazeta Express*, 31 January, 2018). This text similarly is repeated a couple of times with favourable framing from the Russian perspective. Putin receives superior framing in the headline *Putin Thanks Trump for Preventing Terrorist Attacks* (*Gazeta Express*, 17 December, 2017) which is repeated a couple of times during two days, where Putin is always in the semantical role of the actor and Trump is in the role of receiver, with illustrations of positive framing for Putin. The headline *Putin Makes a Terrible Demand to the Security Forces: Don't Arrest, Kill* (*Gazeta Express*, 28 December, 2017) uses positive framing even in the context of cold-hearted orders, as the courage and strength of a statesman who punishes crime is foregrounded. Compared to the other media, *Gazeta Express* displays strongly the sensationalist style, with the stories about the personal lifestyle of Putin often stretch out over the course of several days and even news that would not ordinarily be considered significant are strongly highlighted.

The Russian perspective of framing is reflected in the syntactic arrangement within headlines: in the five headlines of the articles about the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, ‘Kosovo’ is the first part of the pair only once, and typically ‘Serbia’ is listed as the first lexeme in the pair, hinting a second-hand role of Kosovo in the dialogue. Similarly, a couple of times the name of the country ‘Kosovo’ is substituted with the capital ‘Prishtina’, minimizing the notion of statehood of the country.

In the headlines of *Gazeta Express* Russia is associated with Turkey, thus producing a Muslim-friendly framing of Vladimir Putin, as in the headline *Erdogan and Putin Get Together to Threaten Trump* (*Gazeta Express*, 12 December, 2017), *Erdogan Talks to Putin by Telephone* (*Gazeta Express*, 19 February, 2018). The same kind of framing is used in the headline *Putin: Traditional Islam is Important for Russia, We Will Open Universities* (*Gazeta Express*, 29 January, 2018) which pursues the sensitivity of the Muslims in Kosovo who compose the majority of the population. Furthermore, in 11 December and 12 February there are articles teaming Putin with Erdogan while displaying worry about Trump's decision for Jerusalem, foregrounding both of them as 'saviours' of the Muslim world, therefore appealing to the Kosovo public.

It is of importance to notice that the negative framing of Russia is avoided even when the article points it out, as in the headline *Gadafi in 1999 Gave 59 Tons of Oil to Serbia During the War in Kosovo* (*Gazeta Express*, 12 December, 2017): although Russia is mentioned in the text as the supplier of oil to Serbia during the war, the headline omits this information. Another article, which is taken by BBC and which talks about the intrusion of USA and Europe in the elections of other countries such as the former Yugoslav states, gives the declaration of Putin that "Russia does not intrude in foreign affairs" as a subtitle to the headline (*Gazeta Express*, 13 December, 2017). Consequently, positive framing of Russia is foregrounded as opposed to USA and Europe, although the text mentions manipulations in Russian elections and the Russian perspective of framing prevails even in this text of non-Russian source. This is obvious in the headline *Do You Know for How Long Has Serbia Been Boycotted by American Presidents?* (*Gazeta Express*, 20 January, 2018), which presents Serbia as a victim and American Presidents as guilty, as well as in the headline *Russia Criticizes USA for Accuses* (*Gazeta Express*, 14 December, 2017), which presents the Russian perspective of the American blame rather than the perspective of the Russian intrusion. The article about Putin's visit in Kosovo (*Gazeta Express*, 16 January, 2018) omits the background information about the location of Russian troops in the Prishtina airport right after the war and gives a humorous tone to the article. The Russian perspective is highlighted not only in the headline but also in the structure of the text. Similar framing is used in the article about the weapons that Serbia receives from Russia, where the sentence "Serbia will not only be strong in the air but also in the ground" (*Gazeta Express*, 22 December 2017) glorifies the Serbian military power and produces a completely anti-national framing.

On the other hand, the neutral perspective in *Gazeta Express* without any foregrounded Russian perspective is depicted in articles that are published by the international media project *Project Syndicate*, which is almost the only case when this online medium offers investigative journalism for the Kosovo readers.

Presentation of participants and processes in social events

The third research question focuses on the role allocation of the main social actors in news articles and the processes that they undertake, which is presented in their relation with predicates.

Table 3. RTKLive presentation of Russia and the West as social actors.

Participant	Process
EU	Facilitates the normal relation between Kosovo and Serbia
	Does not have a clear strategy about Western Balkans
	Cannot cope with the Russian influence in the Balkans
USA	Is active in Western Balkans; Has to strengthen its role in Western Balkans
	Should destabilize the regime of Vladimir Putin.
EU and USA	Facilitate the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia
Russia	Makes propaganda by financing extremist groups; Fights ideological war
	Takes an active role in the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia
	Destabilizes the Region; Doesn't want reconciliation between Kosovo/Serbia
	Creates subversion in USA and Europe; Interfered in elections in USA
Vladimir Putin	Attacks democracy in Russia and Europe
	Cannot even dream to visit Kosovo
Russia and Serbia	Make pressure through the Special Court;
Serbia	Opens the door to Russia to take it away from EU
Russia and China	Are exerting more repression
Turkey	Is a strategic partner for Kosovo

As table 3 shows, the dominant role of Russia in *RTKLive* emerges in the support towards Serbia and the spread of propaganda in Western Balkans. It is a social actor that is part of negative processes not only in the verbal domain, as propaganda, but also in criminal activities, such as financing extremist groups. EU and USA are portrayed in important decision-making roles, with the USA in the leading position. However, the statehood of Kosovo is refuted in the articles about the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, when instead of the country 'Kosovo', the name of the capital 'Prishtina' is used, negating the statehood of the country. This perspective is due to the mechanical integration of the texts by Russian sources.

Table 4. Koha.net presentation of Russia and the West as social actors.

Participant	Process
EU	Woke up due to the Russian ambition to strengthen its influence in Balkans
USA	Reacts severely against the Russian intrusion; Worried about Russian influence in Balkans; Oppose the dominance through intimidation
Trump	Thanks Putin about the nice words
	Is part of the fake news about the intrusion of Russia in elections
NATO	Responds against the Russian threat

Participant	Process
Russia	Opposes the American demand for sanctions; Accuses Washington for provocation;
	Declares the consequences of the sanctions as minimal
	Amongst the first countries to recognize Montenegro; Makes tactical moves in Montenegro and the Region; Criticizes the Western approach towards Balkans
	Negotiates free trade with China and India; Reduces the flights from USA
	Decides where to locate its military forces
	Geo-political and geo-strategical opponent of the West and the Balkans; Prohibits free press; Launches propaganda against EU and NATO; Poses threat through a perfect strategy; Aims to destroy the Western democracy
Putin	Criticizes American investigations about the Russian intrusion in elections
Turkey	Coordinates with Russia

As table 4 shows, Russia as a social actor appears in *Koha.net* as more potent compared to the Western social actors, as it is in charge of decision-making actions. Even its verbal actions are aggressive and powerful (decides, denies, criticizes, orders) and they receive positive connotations (talks, coordinates, recognizes) and high evaluations (perfect strategy), whereas the USA and EU roles are weaker semantically (wakes up, worried, opposes) and mainly in the role of one who experiences. This opinion is strengthened, as the Russian perspective of framing has been retained in the texts from Russian sources.

Table 5. Gazeta Express presentation of Russia and the West as social actors.

Participant	Process
EU	Will get tired from the sanctions
USA	Has not been able to stop the Russian intrusion
	Should strengthen its role in the Balkans: Has left Balkans in hands of Russia
	Explains the global danger from Russia; Should oppose the threat of Russia
	Has published the black list of the Russian officials
Trump	Makes Putin angry; Is overshadowed by Russia; Is not happy with cooperation
	Is catastrophe for the human rights
Russia	Destabilizes the Region; Ready to facilitate the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia; Ready to accept and agreement between Serbia and Kosovo; Accuses US
	Supports extremists in Serbia; Violates international sanctions
Putin	Enjoys the support of 80 per cent of the people of his country
	Hopes for the improvement of relations with the USA
	Discusses about the stability in Middle East; Shares with Erdogan his worry
	About the decision of Trump in Jerusalem
	Hides secret weapons; Rejects fully the American criticism
	Prepares the power against drones

Participant	Process
Russia and Turkey	Discuss the missile supply
Russia and China	Invite for peaceful solutions

As table 5 shows, in *Gazeta Express*, the semantic roles of action and decision-making of Russia as a social actor are mainly attributed to its leader Vladimir Putin, who personifies the state. His role is omitted in the case of negative context, where he is not mentioned at all as the doer, such as in headlines like: *Human Rights Activist Is Arrested* (*Gazeta Express*, 10 January, 2018), *USA Ambassador Attacked* (*Gazeta Express*, 2 February, 2018), *Comedy about Stalin Is Banned* (*Gazeta Express*, 7 February, 2018), where the passive constructions cause the actor to disappear and the events to happen with no obvious reason. On the other hand, there is a selective positive framing of Putin, which is highlighted as in headlines such as *Putin Raises the Salaries* (*Gazeta Express*, 10 January, 2018), where he is in the emphasised semantic role of the subject.

In *Gazeta Express*, the image of Russia as a powerful political and social actor is presented, personified with its leader, in contrast with EU and USA, which are engaged mainly in verbal actions and are portrayed as militarily inferior. The prevailing entertaining and sensationalist discourse of this medium portrays Putin as an attractive cultural lifestyle model. The sensationalistic style merges with the nationalistic strategy of glorifying the leader, and as Connell states, this style transforms rationalist discourses into sensationalist discourses (1998, pp. 11-31).

Conclusion

The findings of the study show that the online medium *Gazeta Express* has assigned more space to Russia-related issues compared to other two media. More than 75 per cent of the articles in *Gazeta Express* have anonymous sources, which, due to linguistic calques, look as if originating from Russian sources. Direct unfavourable attitudes about Russia are expressed mostly in the public broadcaster *RTKLive*, where more than 50 per cent of the sources are Western. On the other hand, the private medium *Koha.net* has more than 50 per cent of neutral attitudes towards Russia based on the direct evaluations of the used sources.

The further analysis of *Koha.net* shows that the apparent neutrality of attitudes collides with the information in the article and the headlines do not reflect the negative references about the role of Russia, in particular in the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, presenting Russia in the potent semantic role of the supreme political actor and decision maker, as opposed to the Western social actors whose activities are mainly verbal. The headlines in this medium retain the favourable framing of the original when Russian agencies are cited as sources. Furthermore, illustrations in *Koha.net* are in compliance with the dominant framing of the headlines, and they foreground Russian officials as powerful and self-confident.

The online medium *Gazeta Express*, which has the reputation of high popularity amongst the Kosovo young audiences, foregrounds the image of Vladimir Putin as powerful, dignified and close to nature and people. The prevailing entertaining and sensationalist discourse of this medium portrays him as an attractive cultural model – and he is presented with Erdogan, thus producing a Muslim-friendly framing appealing to the Kosovo public with its majority Muslim population. Putin is assigned the semantic roles of action and decision-making and the arguments inside the text do not appear in the headline if they give any negative framing of him. The image of Russia as a powerful political and social actor is presented, personified with its leader, in contrast with EU and USA, which are engaged mainly in verbal actions and are portrayed as militarily inferior. This online medium copies with complete faithfulness the framing strategies of the Russian source, both in cases when they are quoted and when not. The Russian perspective of framing is reflected in the syntactic arrangement within headlines of the articles about the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, where ‘Serbia’ is listed as the first lexeme in the pair in 80 per cent of the cases, hinting a second-hand role of Kosovo in the dialogue. Similarly, the name of the country ‘Kosovo’ is substituted with the capital ‘Prishtina’, dissolving the notion of statehood of the country.

In difference for the other two media, the public broadcaster *RTKLive*, Russia is mainly framed as neutral, with few negative portrayals, in particular in its role as the strong ally of Serbia and as a source of propaganda in Western Balkans. It is a social actor that is part of negative processes not only in the verbal domain, as propaganda, but also in criminal activities, such as financing extremist groups. However, in some cases, the headlines do not reflect the critical tone about Russia articulated in the text. The historical background is often missing in the media narratives, in particular regarding the last war in Kosovo. The focus on the process of negotiation with neglecting the historical relations between Kosovo and Serbia and with the lack of additional explanations and interpretations creates a disconnection with the derivation of the social events and loses the critical role of the voice of the media. *RTKLive* uses mainly positive framing for USA and less for EU, and if this kind of framing is repeated often and becomes an automatized perception for the public, then the image of USA as the prototype of the Western political factor and the global decision-making power will be reinforced in the Kosovar public opinion, as opposed to the minimalized role of the EU.

Moreover, the tendency of the three analysed Kosovar media to reproduce Russian sources without any interpretation to the information taken by Russian and Serbian sources fall into the trap of what scholars refer to as a “strategic ritual” in reporting, when the mere listing of facts in chronological narration insulates them from accusations of bias or distortion (Volcic and Erjavec, 2009). The journalists aiming at “objectivity” through the presentation of facts and reliable sources do not fulfil their role of investigation and of rousing the critical thinking of the audience; on the contrary, they produce and reproduce social realities through transforming social beliefs. (Richardson, 2007, p. 115)

Taking into account the results regarding the dominant narratives about Russia in the journalistic discourse of three Kosovo media outlets, it can be concluded that the private media differ from the public broadcaster due to the privileged affirmative narrative of

Russia as a powerful political player, personified with its leader Putin, in contrast with the less powerful EU and USA. On the other hand, the public broadcaster builds up a more neutral image of Russia as the strong ally of Serbia and as source of propaganda in Western Balkans. The cumulative ideological effect of these ‘naturalized’ narratives in the Kosovo may be persuasive, manipulative or even harmful, building a popular base for political positions or mobilizing people behind policy decisions.

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