



UNDERSTANDING DIVISIVE NARRATIVES
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH – ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS
Serbia & Kosovo



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INTRODUCTION

A significant part of the survey “Understanding divisive narratives – Serbia and Kosovo”, conducted in collaboration with PCi, was dedicated to understanding the process of creating speech of hatred, confrontation and conflict in Serbian media (both traditional and modern – digital), its promotion, dissemination and finally its impact on public perception.

A total of three series of in-depth, individual, online interviews were conducted with general public representatives of different generational, economic and educational backgrounds, focusing on:

1. understanding different types of divisive narratives promoted via different types of media in Serbia and Kosovo (traditional and modern likewise), and establishing basic typology of hate speech in media.
2. gathering data and insights into different media (print and online) that are carrying out these messages, their respective reach, influence and impact on public opinion.
3. gaining insights into the differences and similarities between hate speech at national and local media level.
4. establishing examples of initiatives, organizations or individuals which are eager to confront hate speech and other examples of othering.

In-depth, online, semi-structured interviews were conducted via MS Teams application with preselected respondents (of moderate political affiliation and attitudes vis-à-vis the relations between Serbia and Kosovo), lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, segregated into three generational categories:

1. One focus group (per territory) with younger generation of respondents (18 to 30) with equal representation of male and female participants. Educational level: max 2 students; 2 primary education; 2 secondary education; 2 higher education.
2. One focus group (per territory) with mature generation of respondents (30 to 45) with equal representation of male and female participants. Educational level: 2 primary education; 4 secondary education; 2 higher education.
3. One focus group (per territory) with older generation of respondents (45 to 55) with equal representation of male and female participants. Educational level: 2 primary education; 4 secondary education; 2 higher education.

FGD ONLINE GROUPS

| Age range | | SERBIA | KOSOVO |
|-----------|------------------------|--------|--------|
| 18-30 | Number of groups | 1 | 1 |
| | Number of participants | 6 | 6 |
| | Gender structure | 3 : 3 | 3 : 3 |
| 31-45 | Number of groups | 1 | 1 |
| | Number of participants | 6 | 6 |
| | Gender structure | 3 : 3 | 3 : 3 |
| 46-55 | Number of groups | 1 | 1 |
| | Number of participants | 6 | 6 |
| | Gender structure | 3 : 3 | 3 : 3 |
| TOTAL | NUMBER OF GROUPS | 6 | |
| | NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS | 36 | |

A qualitative approach and semi-structured guidelines were used for in-depth focus discussions, aimed at gaining the key insights into:

1. consumption of modern and traditional media by general public, both in terms of accumulating daily information about politics, economy and society, as well as information about the relations between Serbia and Kosovo
2. treatment and attitude towards collected information, with specific focus on the matter of confidence in the media and information launched by them
3. media perception and their classification and positioning in experience
4. public opinion about the current Serbia - Kosovo relations and their prospects
5. public opinion about the presence of speech of hatred, confrontation and conflicts in the media and its impact on the perception of Serbia – Kosovo relations
6. typical examples of speech of hatred, confrontation and conflicts in Serbian media and public attitude towards it, as well as potential advocacy of pacification and balanced approach to treating Serbia – Kosovo relations
7. perception of the positive role of media in creating confidence between Serbia and Kosovo, Serbs and Kosovo Albanians.

The collected qualitative data are presented on the pages to follow, at both general level and through the lens of detected specific generational, social and educational differences.

It is worth mentioning that a clear generational line of division has been registered between general public representatives, not referring only to media consumption and respective attitudes, but also to a far broader consideration of political topics and spheres of interest, which was additionally demonstrated on all covered questions and thematic units.

SERBIA

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Survey results suggest, beyond any doubt, that online media play a very significant role, even crucial, in daily informing of general public, particularly the media linked to major publishing or media organizations and companies (Blic, Kurir, N1, Danas, Nova S...). In almost all analysed generations, online media have become a part of daily routine, which general public representatives use for daily communication.

However, while on the one hand young people (18 to 30 years of age) use online media as the sole source of daily information, on the other, for older generations, particularly the eldest (45 to 55 years of age), television holds equally significant position. Middle-aged people (30 to 45 years of age) show mild tendency towards online media. This is in high correlation with Ipsos quantitative data gathered about media habits and most frequent sources of information among Serbian population aged 18+. ¹

It is highly noteworthy that print media (dailies) have almost completely lost importance and impact on respondents of all generations. Their consumption is sporadic, accidental (in a café or restaurant while relaxing) and unsystematic, and their perception ephemeral and highly superficial.

Nevertheless, the leading online media (such as Blic, Kurir, Politika, Večernje Novosti and Danas) that are very „tightly“ connected with their source print media brands, „blur“ the notion of online and print editions' characters to a great extent, so these two notions (of print and online editions) overlap, merge and disable consumers' clear distinction.

Radio has definitely lost the character of informative media and it is mainly used as a background medium for amusement and relaxation (listening to favourite music), while informative content that it offers is usually perceived as local (weather forecast, traffic conditions, public utilities), without „serious“ political content and significance, but also as very useful and needed.

Social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram) have also become an important part of daily routine for majority of general public. They are visited as much as other digital sources are, but different generations perceive them in different ways in terms of their informative role.

While the youngest general public representatives (18 to 30 years of age) consider social media as important source of information as all other digital media are (online editions of daily newspapers, online media portals, browser news services, independent news portals), older generations perceive social media primarily as a means for collecting social information, attitudes, evaluations, assessments, and far less as a „source“ of information.

„I don't read online portals and websites much because I don't trust them. I don't even trust the anti-regime ones (N1, Danas, Direktno, Nova S). I'm simply informed via social media. Interesting topics pop up, things that I'm interested in, info about intriguing events, so then I read what people write about that. I find some really unbiased information there, videos, reviews... It seems to me that this provides a lot more realistic image of the events taking place in the country than official media do. During the „1 od 5 miliona“ protests, I could know what was really happening, how many people attended, with live broadcasts...“

Woman 25, higher education

¹ Ipsos East Adria Media Omnibus 2019.

„Social media can't be a source of information in my opinion, but only a place where I can see how people think, what their attitudes and opinions are. Of course I can find information there about things not covered by the official media, but I still have some kind of a „reserve“ towards everything I read in social media. I still believe more, if at all, in what I see on TV or read in „Blic“ for instance. It is somehow more relevant, especially if several media give the same information.“

Woman 47, secondary education

It seems that young generations consider social media a legitimate „source“ of information, having the same status as any other medium (digital or traditional), while older generations consider social media a place where they collect information about events taking place in their close surroundings, but more as a reflection of „personal perspective“ of the one (group or individual) providing the content. Simply put, younger generation consumes political content available on social media with far fewer „filters“ and weaker „distance“ from the one who launches the content, while older generation „filters“ and „selects“ contents to a far greater extent.

COLLECTING INFORMATION

As for the process of collecting information about local and global topical events, it seems to be quite „eclectic“, or based on the principle „bits and pieces“. The process of collecting information is usually rather individualized, but with one unique characteristic typical for all respondents, of all generations and educational levels: no one and nothing is trusted unreservedly, and the notion about events is assembled and built gradually, through a kind of „personal scanner“.

„I am luckier than my colleagues because my job (online camera surveillance for a foreign company) requires full focus on my activity for 10 to 12 hours, so I have no internet access then and I can't follow any „external“ events. Once my workday is over, there is already a pile of information about most local and global events, so I can read everything and judge for myself who to trust and how much. I simply take bits and pieces from everyone, information repeated by several media are usually more likely to be true, and then I draw together my perspective of that event and generally form the impression about things “.

Man, 29, higher education

Younger generations search for information on the internet („google“) and social media, collect it and generate their own „personal“ view. Older generations combine different sources of information: television, portals and media websites, independent informative portals, social media, sometimes even daily newspapers, but this information also undergoes some kind of their „personal scanner“, when they reach conclusions and form attitudes and views of daily events.

Generations differ in terms of the scope and reach of collected information. Older generations seem to have far greater reach, the number of media they consult is far bigger, and their „character“ is diversified (pro and anti-regime), while younger focus on fewer media, usually anti-regime (N1, Danas, Nova S, FB groups).

„I watch Pink News, RTS News and N1 News. I used to follow B92 and Prva, but not anymore because they have become pale and without a clear concept. I also read Blic portal and Danas... I just read everything and then see what to take. Sometimes Pink broadcasts accurate and unbiased information. Other times it's N1. They both exaggerate and use sensationalism occasionally. If you are smart and carefully follow all reports, you can always make a correct conclusion“.

Woman, 47, secondary education

INTEREST IN POLITICAL EVENTS

What differentiates our three generations of respondents (general public representatives) most (except for the media they follow and their status) is interest in political events and topics. Younger generation is clearly not very interested in most of national political events. Even when they are interested (relations with neighbouring countries, opposition, Covid crisis), this interest is very selective, limited and rather superficial. As if younger generations (18 to 30 years of age) have some kind of „social distance“ or even show „avoiding behaviour“ in case of political issues.

„To be honest, I’m not really interested in that. Not that I don’t know anything about this, but I am much more focused on the topics that I am personally more interested in. I’m a student of economy and I like it a lot. That’s what I am interested in. I follow everything I can find about economy in our country and I can see that there is exaggerating in both positive and negative direction. But I am more interested in what my friends did, where we will go out, what’s new in the world of music, movies, technology, than daily politics or similar things“.

Man, 25, higher education

„I really try to avoid these topics. It all seems gloomy and hard. I’m sick when I see covers of daily newspapers. Portals and local media websites also. Even Blic that used to be quite neat until recently, started covering stomach-turning themes and darkness that I try to run away from. Our reality includes too many difficult and gloomy things, so I don’t need to see it online too. I am interested in art and I’m totally focused on it. If I want to read about politics, I simply google and read everything available online“.

Woman, 27, secondary education

On the other hand, the middle-aged (30 to 45 years of age) and the oldest (45 to 55 years) are very much interested in political events and they devote much of their day to keeping informed about them.

„I am interested in local and global events. It’s in my „blood“. I keep reading about that on the internet all day long. In the evening, I usually watch TV (mainly N1, but others as well). One must be informed. One must know what’s happening in the country and in the world. Especially during the Corona virus crisis, I kept myself thoroughly updated. But also about economy. How can one not care about that when it will end and we will have to work and economy will have to function...“.

Man, 36, secondary education

MEDIA CLASSIFICATION AND CONFIDENCE

Classification of media into categories seems to be quite harmonized in all three age categories. There are two key elements for media positioning which was made by respondents:

1. Political affiliation: pro- and anti-regime
2. Topic treatment: tabloid and serious

As for the first one, all three categories of respondents agree about the division:

1. Pro-regime media: Pink, Happy, Kurir
2. Anti-regime media: N1, Danas, Nova S, NIN

As for the second one, respondents’ opinions are again quite unison:

1. Tabloid media: Pink, Happy, Kurir, Informer

2. Serious media: N1, Danas, RTS 1, Politika, Večernje Novosti

Such classification reveals two interesting facts:

1. full „scotomization“ of the most extreme tabloid media: Srpski Telegraf, Alo, and somewhat Informer. Namely, these three very prominent representatives of the tabloid print and e-media segments have become invisible for a part of general public with moderate political affiliation who we interviewed. They simply avoid these media and almost „deny“ their existence. They judge of the content and concept by the cover and have very sporadic and unsystematic „contacts“ with them.

„I do read Informer sometimes. I come across it... I can't say that there is nothing to read there. But when I see their cover, and texts highlighted in yellow, images of horror and misery... I simply have no stomach for that. I don't like to read that“.

Woman, 38, secondary education

2. very fluid and diffuse attitude towards some media which they don't know where to position on the continuum pro-regime – anti-regime (RTS 1, Politika, Večernje Novosti), but which they usually consume regularly and respect highly.

„It's hard to say whether RTS 1 or Politika are pro- or anti-regime. They simply seem to be in between. Sometimes I can see clear pro-regime interpretation of an event, but then again, it is somehow moderate, calm, balanced. One also gets the impression of objectivity and professionalism. Yet again, if we observe N1 or Danas, they also exaggerate in the opposite direction. Everything is always wrong, there is nothing good... they are also unobjective and biased sometimes. That's why it's hard to make this clear distinction.“

Man, 42, secondary education

As for having confidence in media, two different attitudes are registered (approaches). On the one hand, part of middle and older generation has high (but not complete) level of confidence in the co-called anti-regime media (N1 and Danas first of all). On the other, complete younger generation and part of the middle and older share highly criticizing attitude towards media overall and tend not to ascribe the status of a trusted media to any.

„I trust N1 and Danas most. They seem to offer clean information without political bias and manipulation. They are most likely to offer news not coloured by comments or views and opinions.“

Man, 48, secondary education

„I think that no media should be trusted. Sometimes Pink launches a very objective information, and when I see its owner with his letters and addressing the public, I feel like jumping out of the window. I really can't watch that. On the other hand, I also follow N1 and Danas and I think that they are also coloured. They are all biased. I don't trust any, but I follow them all and I think that it is important for forming an „objective“ image of the reality.“

Woman, 47, secondary education

In general, there seems not to be full confidence in anyone. Limitless confidence in offered information and its interpretation, in case of Serbian media, is not typical for majority of representatives of general public who we interviewed.

SERBIA AND SURROUNDINGS

An important part of the discussion about the media landscape in Serbia and the position of media was focused on the regional relations and tensions between Serbia and some surrounding countries and territories (the current conflict with Montenegro about religious matters and the events with Coronavirus; continuous tensions between Serbia and Croatia; Serbia – Kosovo relations).

It should be noted first that the youngest generation is the least engaged in this, or that these topics are in their focus the least. They seem to share clearly rejecting attitude towards all political topics with confrontational character and try to avoid them, either when launched via „official“ media, or via social media or even in personal communication².

„Some of my colleagues were born in Kosovo (Albanians) and in Montenegro. We just avoid all topics that might create an awkward and unpleasant situation. We talk about sports, music, work. I would never think of starting a topic about Kosovo or the events in Montenegro. We simply don't talk about that. And to be honest, I don't even get informed about these topics. I know that there are frictions and conflicts, but I'm simply not interested. I don't want to think about that.“

Man, 25, secondary education

This unusual „non-confrontational“ position of young people is nicely illustrated by one example from our interview, when the issue of „banging pots and pans“ during Covid crisis was mentioned. Based on respondents' statements, it was clear that at least two of them held opposite positions in regard to this initiative and participation in this activity. However, the moment they realised that their positions were confronting, both respondents stopped talking about the subject and quickly shifted to a neutral topic where they created new „manoeuvring“ space for further relaxed and undisturbed communication. . It could be said that it is a characteristic of their political standpoint. They are part of the moderate political standpoint.

However, older generations (30+) show clear interest in political events and information about Serbia's relations with the neighbouring countries, but in this case, this is followed with a kind of „distance“ and reserve. Namely, these topics are followed with heightened attention and interest, but without „excess“ emotional charge and without extreme involvement.

„It is hard to understand what's really happening just based on these media reports. For instance in Montenegro. Who is right and what of all the things happening are just political manipulations? Same with Kosovo. Today I may be under the impression that everything is exaggerated, while tomorrow I may be frightened that war is about to start. One has to be really careful and pay attention to those who want to present things in that way - hot and cold.

I was really annoyed after the earthquake in Croatia during Covid crisis. It was really nauseating to watch some media reports where they gloated over misfortune and destiny of people whose homes were torn down in the midst of the pandemic. I think that even some girl died then. It was disgusting.“

Man, 44 secondary education

² This is a common place for all our FGD's regarding young generation and their attitude toward "political issues". We have conducted at least 200 FGD's in the last few months (concerning incoming elections) and it is our strong conclusion that younger generations is trying to distance themselves from any kind of conflict regarding politics or any other issue which could place themselves into the conflict situation.

On the one hand, it may be concluded that „interior“ political, social and economic events in Serbia are „exciting“ and „turbulent“ enough to provoke considerable emotional and psychological engagement of local public, not leaving much space for „foreign affairs“. On the other, alternating „escalation“ and „relaxation“ of various constituents of Serbia’s relations with neighbouring countries seems to make the media auditorium and general public perceive it as a kind of „trampoline“, one should „rationally“ observe with a kind of reserve, in order to ensure a „safe“ position for reflexion and deduction.

MEDIA VS. POLITICAL CONTAMINATION

The key question imposed by the in-depth group interviews was: Does politics add a dose of „contamination“ to Serbia’s relations with surrounding countries, which is then transferred, via the media, into the perception of general public or media are the only (prevailing) culprits for this kind of contamination?

Although respondents of different generations don’t provide a unique answer to this question, their deductive reasoning seems to include one clear rationale: it is political interest to initiate escalation (or relaxation) of Serbia’s relations with the surrounding countries at a specific moment, but media also tend to intensify (or even push) „crisis“ in these relations because it is their economic interest (boosting viewership or circulation).

Anyhow, young generation, which is by nature quite distant from these issues, claims that media industry interests actually dominate in extremizing relations with surrounding countries (and politics), while older generations agree that it is not possible to create this kind of crisis without political interest involved, but that media use these and similar situations eagerly in order to monetize these issues through their ratings.

„I don’t know how tabloids would survive without such topics. For instance Kurir or Informer. Black, dark, destructive... What would they be writing about if there weren’t for tense relations with Kosovo or conflict with Montenegro about religious issues? Of course, they would have realities and stories about those awkward characters and starlets, but it’s not something that could keep an ordinary reader interested in the long run. Circulation is a lot more extensive if they write about Milo the mobster who wants to establish Montenegrin Orthodox Church than about some starlet. This „hits“ pensioners who read this right at the heart and there they have growing readership of their tabloid“.

Man, 48, secondary education

SERBIA – KOSOVO RELATIONS

Relations between Serbia and Kosovo create a whole complex of topics and events that the youngest generation of Serbian public is not very interested in. The already described attitude of „rejecting“ to follow and take part in any kind of confrontation, as well as their focus on matters of their personal interest, with almost no touchpoints with daily politics, make them practically „intact“ in regard to the problems between Serbia and Kosovo. They neither collect information about this topic, nor are much interested in it.

„I am under the impression that this topic has become somehow sporadic. Ever since the pandemic started, almost no one talks about that. It is somehow good when there is nothing happening with these relations. When there are no news or information. The last thing I remember is when they beat that politician (Marko Đurić). And when they decorated that train with icons and left for Kosovo. I can’t talk about anything more recent than that... Well, yes, I saw just a few days ago, I can’t remember where, in

social media I think, a story about a granny who is the only left Serbian citizen in some village in Kosovo. Some Albanian provided food for her every day during the pandemic. That was really great. That's the kind of stories that we need."

Woman, 27, secondary education

"Yes. I have read it as well, I think on Blic website. Media should tell such stories. I remember some headlines, for instance „Our people in Kosovo have no more food in shops“. And then I enter FB and see that shops in Kosovo have normal supplies and that people live normally there. I think the posts were from Kosovska Mitrovica. OK, the situation may be different there because of Serbian majority, and there really may be parts of Kosovo where Serbs can't buy anything, but they still shouldn't write that Serbs can't buy anything there because Albanians have imposed taxes ".

Man, 25, higher education

"I really try to avoid these topics. This story has to have an ending and no one knows when and how it will end, and I think that we (both Serbs and Albanians) don't really have a say in that. It will be the way America or the EU want it to be. Things may be totally different in 5 or 10 years, but not because we wanted them to be different, but because they would impose a solution that we would have to accept".

Man, 27, secondary education

On the other hand, older generations follow everything about the relations between Serbia and Kosovo very carefully, but their conclusions and attitudes are almost identical to those of younger generation members. They are most likely to assess that the relations currently have the status of a „frozen conflict“ or „status quo“, but that this, on the one hand, suits the political structures on both sides, and on the other, that this status is unsustainable and that some solution, under the pressure of the EU and the USA will be imposed to both sides very quickly.

"I am under the impression that he (A.V) keeps talking about compromises and tough decisions, but that he also basically muddies the waters and intensifies tension, while presenting himself as rational and reasonable. However, their politicians seem to have more extreme demands than ours, but we can see how they also have to cool off when America stops helping them. It is all a game of chess in which our and their politicians are just pawns ".

Man, 47, secondary education

"The situation there is grave, I'm sure of that. I was there a few months ago and I saw it with my own eyes. Some live a good life, while others barely survive. No matter what I think of Kosovo and all that, it is clear that something will have to be done. In a month or a year or ten years, it doesn't matter. Something has to happen. I would like Kosovo to stay within Serbia, my ancestors are from Kosovo, but I know that this is impossible. Maybe in some form, but I doubt it. It will be as someone from „above“ orders and they can wiggle as much as they want, but someone will decide for us all (both Serbs and Albanians)".

Woman, 47, secondary education

All this implies that the share of general public who we talked to is very „rational“ in terms of Serbia – Kosovo relations and treatment of this topic in the media. They think that media treat these topics selectively, opting for „one side of the story“. Even in case of positive examples, this part of the public clearly identifies political (but also media) interests behind launching „stories“.

However, irrespective of different levels of „personal involvement“ in following and treating this topic by members of different generations, one (younger) rather intuitively, and the other (older) rather rationally, come to the same conclusions:

1. political and media manipulation with topics and their treatment (hot-cold) in regard to Serbia-Kosovo relations is clear, obvious, present on both sides (in the context of two territories and two people, and relative to interior political and media spectrum) and serving specific interests (political and media)
2. the current situation is unsustainable and a solution is expected (in some cases very shortly, and in other very much postponed) through a platform imposed to both sides by the EU and the USA
3. the current situation has reached the point of „absolute fatigue“ of material and attention of majority of general public and media auditorium members in Serbia, so (any) solution is awaited without much passion or emotional charge, as necessary and inevitable.

HATE, DIVISION AND CONFLICT SPEECH IN TREATING SERBIA-KOSOVO RELATIONS

As for presence of hate speech in both political and media landscape in Serbia, it is a general impression that it is far more present in the media than among politicians. All respondents agree that, except for a few extremes (V. Šešelj, B. Obradović), hate speech related to Serbia-Kosovo relations is not so visible and exponent among politicians. This is very specific standpoint of our respondents. They do not see so much hate speech among politicians, but they see a lot in the media sphere (especially among tabloid newspapers and their websites). Except mentioned two extremists in politics (V. Šešelj I B. Obradovic, which are by the way far from the mainstream/official political standpoint in Serbia), respondents could not name any other politician with such divisive and confrontational speech as theirs

However, respondents share a unanimous attitude that, quite certainly, media (at least tabloids) do not insist on this form of communication without silent (perhaps even explicit) political support.

„Not many politicians use this kind of speech nowadays. Everything seems neat, fixed, seemingly tolerant and conciliatory. Even obvious threats are kind of camouflaged: „Our army forces are on full alert because of the escalation of the situation in Kosovo“. However, Informer, Kurir, Alo and other tabloids propagate hate speech clearly and unambiguously: slaughterer Haradinaj wants to slaughter again; war criminal Tachi...; the so-called Kosovo Prime Minister who became rich during the war with his shadowy business Kurti... But this kind of speech wouldn't be possible without political support, without having some kind of a blessing to write and report in that way. They wouldn't dare write in that way if it weren't in someone's interest. These are pro-regime media and they must have some kind of permission for that. It is all quite obvious.“

Woman, 47, secondary education

As for the youngest generation with moderate political orientation, they don't identify any examples of speech of hatred, divisions and confrontation because they basically „run away“ from such topics. They mainly communicate, via social media, with their social environment that doesn't use this vocabulary. That's why they were not able to specify concrete examples of such speech, although they were aware of it.

On the other hand, older generations detect this type of media vocabulary clearly, on several levels:

1. **Personal:** war criminal; slaughterer; mobster; verified killer... descriptors usually associated with Kosovo political leaders.
2. **Status 1:** so-called republic; so-called president; false Prime Minister; descriptors usually associated with the provisional authorities in Kosovo

3. **Status 2:** Serbian enclaves; Serbian sanctities; the cradle of Serbian statehood; ancestral homes; Pogrom '91; suffering Serbian population; descriptors usually used for describing the status of Serbian minority in Kosovo, Serbian religious and spiritual heritage, the whole territory of Kosovo and Metohija
4. **National:** Shiptars; Shiptar nationalists; Shiptar extremists; descriptors used for defining the entire Albanian, Kosovo population.

Interestingly though, majority of older generation respondents (above 30 years of age) believe that most media use some of these forms of stigmatization or stereotypes in their reporting about Serbia-Kosovo relations, irrespective of their political profile or position within the described categories. The only media where presence of these forms of speech hasn't been noticed are N1 and Danas. However, in all the other media, to a greater or lesser extent, some kind of hate speech is present.

Respondents have clearly recognised distinctive specificities in using different levels of hate speech in different media categories (milder terms in non-tabloid and serious media vs. explicit, rough and impassioned terms in tabloids), but they generally agree that this kind of speech is present in all media, even those with a respectable status (RTS 1 and Politika for instance).

„Of course we won't hear the words slaughterer or war criminal on RTS 1. At least not these days. But they will subtly interweave a story about so-called presidents and prime ministers or tormented Serbian people... It is the same with Politika or Blic. They don't use extreme hate speech anymore. I don't think that Blic has ever used it. But flirting with „mild“ terms is present everywhere. Tabloids are unbeatable of course: Informer, Kurir, Alo. Also Srpski Telegraf. I don't read it, but I have seen a few covers and it was horrible. I think that is the worst possible language.“

Woman, 42 higher education

One more quite general impression was created while talking to majority of respondents from all three generations. It refers to the official language of „politics“ as a source of hate speech present in the media. Namely, large share of respondents conclude that the highest authorities (first of all the president of Serbia) generate the image in which: *we are (quite unjustifiably) always treated unjustly and unfairly, evermore pressured to make more and more concessions opposite to our national interests, while the other side (backed by numerous international allies) has extreme demands and expectations and is not willing to make any compromises or concessions.* Majority of respondents agree that actually such position of the official politics creates a manoeuvring space for open and hidden outbursts of media hatred and provide an alibi for using such vocabulary.

Majority of in-depth interviewees are also under the impression that this kind of aggressive approach and treatment of the issue of Serbia-Kosovo relations, finds its proliferating ground among older population (above 60 years of age), among people with lower education, who are actually the major part of the media and political auditorium in the country at the moment. Continuous creating and imposing of this kind of speech, topics and approach, in the opinion of majority of respondents, is a permanent source of tensions and fear spread in this population, and also an excellent means of manipulation.

At the same time, all three generations of participants in in-depth interviews gave very lucid conclusion that this kind of political and media manipulation was basically a matter of country politics, or that it actually meant holding country's own „electorate“ constantly „alert“ and „tense“, so constantly mobilized. Many also believe that this condition helps keep the electorate „under control“, having no

other use or purpose. Moreover, they believe that this status is being sustained in order to persuade the public, when the time comes, that „we need to accept what has to be accepted, in order to prevent...“.

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN PACIFYING SERBIA-KOSOVO RELATIONS

What might be the potential role of media in Serbia in pacifying Serbia-Kosovo relations or in alleviating tensions, gradual creating of confidence and understanding and finally accepting a compromise as a solution? It is quite obvious that majority of respondents recognise the immense importance of media in this aspect.

However, majority of general public representatives with moderate political orientation understand that, without a political decision or pressure to take a different direction, media, by themselves, won't make such a decision. Even those that are into anti-regime reporting, take this position reluctantly.

When asked about prominent media or political figures in Serbia, except for a few very sporadic mentioning of people who haven't been much engaged in this topic (M. Brkić, T. Vojtehovski, A. Gujon, Č. Čupić), respondents find it almost impossible to single out one authoritative and influential figure whose word and authority would matter and count in regard to pacification and treatment of this topic. However, one respondent made an interesting remark that sent us back to the sphere of politics as the primary area for positive impact on the peace-making process:

„I don't vote for him. He is not my choice, but I suppose that if A. Vučić made the decision to approach the topic of Serbia-Kosovo relations differently, all media would, either by order or spontaneously, accept it. I will repeat that I don't vote for him, but he is the only one with the importance, influence and power to change things in the positive direction “.

Man, 51, secondary education

So, an opinion leader, a figure of authority, importance and influence on general public who would be the convenient communicator of the positive treatment of topics referring to Serbia-Kosovo relations, is not clearly recognised in our respondents' statements. However, the way how media reporting could achieve this is clear:

„I mentioned that I was in Kosovo a few months ago. Before the Corona crisis. I must say that I have seen difficult and sad stories, and how people really live there. I have seen our churches guarded by foreign soldiers and I was being searched when I wanted to enter a church. But I also witnessed people approaching and greeting us in Priština because they saw Serbian car plates. An Albanian gave us a special discount for a golden necklace that we bought because we were his first customers from Serbia after so many years. And in the restaurant, they treated us as their dearest guests, even better than they treated local guests. That's what media should write about. That normal and hospitable people live there, same as we are, and that they don't care about politics and politicians and that they are glad to see us“.

Woman, 47, secondary education

„I travelled there last year also. We had to settle administration for some inheritance. I met some Albanians who used to live with my family before we left. I saw that their life was also quite hard, same as ours here. It's hard to live, earn a living, get educated there. Same as here. I would really like to hear about these stories in our media. We all share the same destiny and things are the same for most of us. It all becomes different when you share the same stories with them. And there is no division, no them and us anymore. We are all we then“.

Woman, 45, secondary education

So, majority of our respondents agree that „stories that connect“ and not divide are real, normal stories from everyday life. A *slice of life* that we share regardless of ethnicity, religion, political affiliation. It is hard to find such realistic stories in Serbian media (Serbian granny and Kosovo Albanian who brought her supplies every day), both from Kosovo and Serbia. And these stories are the best possible conformation of the psychological principle that prejudices and stereotypes can't be defeated by persuading, but by direct and immediate, positive experience with the source or subject of our prejudices or stereotypes. And for the end, a very good illustration of this quite widespread attitude among our respondents.

„There was a TV show a few years ago, a kind of TV parliament where people of different ages, mainly young, discussed some very important and difficult political issues, with politicians from the region as guests³. I think the Albanian Prime Minister Rama was one of the guests, and Voja Žanetić also. It was very interesting. You watch people of different political attitudes and beliefs, members of peoples that used to be at war till yesterday, sitting, talking, confronting their opinions and views, able to talk to each other and part smiling. That's what we miss“.

Man, 38, higher education

KOSOVO

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND TRUST IN MEDIA

Regarding the media monitoring, television and online media (especially web portals) are two media groups that are mostly used as source of information about political, social and economic issues among the respondents of different group ages. Printed media are hardly used at all, while radio has little use as a source of information, but they are considered reliable media.

"Depending on the type of information, I check the source, the company website, the competent institute to verify it. For example, as for COVID 19, it has been very easy to access the official WHO website and get accurate information and not trust the information coming out of various media, which information may be unverified and most interestingly the source is often unknown ..."

Women 24, student

When it comes to more detailed information on a topic, the television as a medium prevails. In terms of trust, television also dominates as the most reliable medium providing more filtered, confirmed and more accurate information.

"I trust television more. I believe that social media and newspapers can write anything, while televisions provide a video for the news and this way making the news more credible“.

Women 27, higher education

"I trust television more, it's the most reliable approach because usually the people involved in the event are pronounced, and that actually makes that information credible.“

Women 24, student

³ TV series *Okruženje (VICINITIES)* financed and supported by the European Fund for The Balkans; GIZ; CDRSEE; Regional Cooperation Council

While TV is perceived as the most reliable source of information, as the most trusted TV stations by respondents of different group ages remain: KTV (Koha TV), Klan Kosova, TV Dukagjini, TV21 and T7. While RTK is considered the most unreliable television station due to the political bias that is considered to have as state television.

"... I said it a little earlier that I hear all the news throughout the day (in various media), and in the end I still hear it from Klan Kosova (for confirmation) ..."

Women 27, higher education

"Even from the televisions we are disappointed, that is the radio and television of Kosovo which is state-owned and is taking a side towards politicians."

Men 20, student

Internet portals and social networks are used as a source of information, but they are considered less reliable because according to the respondents they transmit unverified information just to get more clicks.

Even that are quite much used especially among 18 – 30 and 31 – 45 group ages, media they trust the least are the web portals. The views are unified that the web portals are subjective, transmitting unverified information just to get more likes. However, they point out that most TVs also have their own portal and social media sites where they post information, but still the information transmitted through TV is considered to be more filtered, confirmed and more accurate information.

"I trust television more, in a way there is the cream of the crop for all journalists. For example, for the evening news there is enough time throughout the day to verify and review them, so that in the end the correct news with arguments are given. While regarding portals and other online media, anyone can open a page and bring different news with copy paste. There can be a portal with a journalist or two who may not even have completed college at least. Whereas on television this is not possible so I believe television is more accurate.."

Men 28, student

All group ages claim that they trust the media more than trusting their friends, colleagues when it comes to the information about political and related issues.

Television is the primary and most common medium in terms of consuming and receiving information for group age 46 - 53. It is the most efficient way of informing. While for the ages 18 - 30 and 31 - 45 the portals and social networks are quite frequented due to the ease of access through the phone and in different environments (such as at work), but TV remains the most accurate source of information.

In general, respondents of group age 46 – 55 trust the media more than younger group ages.

MEDIA PERCEPTION

Based on some features, the media grouping gave the following views among **youngest respondents**:

According to the speed of information transmission, TV stations and web portals prevail as the fastest transmitters of information.

"... the portals and the media that operate on the Internet transmit the news the fastest. On television (transmitting information through the screen) there may be a certain agenda of the shows and only if the news is very very important then there will be a breaking news, otherwise on the internet you can shoot the news within a few minutes and be informed online on real time about what is happening. However, every television has its own portal ... (and this way they can also provide fast information)".

Men 28, student

"Usually at work I keep a television websites open (on computer of phone), and I can see that they report the news every minute, but they still can't be faster than portals as they publish news in seconds."

Women 24, student

Of the web portals, two respondents stated that the most objective is kallxo.com, while the web portal indksonline.com was listed by two respondents as objective and as unobjective and political by one respondent.

In terms of objectivity, the dominant view of respondents is that television as a medium is the most objective information transmitter because it has the structure of editors who check the information before it is published. After television, the newspapers and portals follow the list. The web portals are mentioned as unobjective media, but it was also emphasized that the public television service RTK is unobjective, i.e., that it is under political influence. The same answers were obtained regarding the comprehensiveness and thoroughness of informing, which means that television is perceived as the most comprehensive medium.

"... definitely television first, then the portals that I trust, while the information that is disseminated by certain individuals through social networks I do not consider them news at all."

Women 24, student

"(In terms of inclusion) ... here I can make a more clear difference because I believe that televisions have a much bigger advantage at this point, because when they report they often try to get the opinions of different parties which are involved in the particular event."

Men 28, student

"In addition to getting the opinions of many parties, televisions also give us a visual view of any news, which makes the news more credible."

Women 27, higher education

In terms of the spread of hatred and tolerance, the television is perceived as the most tolerant medium. The web portals include sharper and more conflicting headlines, although in general respondents did not mention that they use hate speech.

"I think that television mainly reports news peacefully and with tolerance, while portals have more pretentious, not direct pretensions but more hate speech."

Women 24, student

When it comes to which media is preferred by the younger generation and which by the older ones, respondents were clear that the younger generation largely follows the web portals and social media as smartphone technology makes it possible. The general picture is that the older generation watches television and reads newspapers the most.

"No doubt that younger generations follow these online media, portals and social networks, while the older generation of 50 years and older watch the news on television or in a print newspaper..."

Men 28, student

The relation between the media and the educated (less educated) people, the websites of the institutions and the links of TV channels and newspapers are perceived as preferred more by educated people.

The whole set of questions about extreme views and intolerance of the media and social networks resulted with the opinion that in general the media in Kosovo do not use hate and conflict speech (except for one respondent who emphasized that there is conflict speech in the media, although it is not very noticeable and not very intense).

In terms of specific media and persons that are more tolerant or more extreme, the respondents singled out Adriatic Kelmendi, a journalist in Klan Kosova, as the most tolerant and the portal Gazeta Express as a medium that uses conflicting headlines and statements.

Based on some features, the media grouping, among representatives of **medium generation**, gave the following views:

According to the speed of information transmission, TV stations and web portals prevail as the fastest transmitters of information.

"In my opinion, portals are the ones that bring the news the fastest, but even through television you can get information quickly..."

Women 40, primary education

In terms of objectivity, respondents cite television and radio as the most objective information transmitters. The respondents state that they have confidence in these media when the program goes live, such as news broadcast. Web portals are also seen as the most biased media. Regarding the comprehensiveness and thoroughness of informing, television is perceived as the most comprehensive medium.

"It is known that TV has the most accurate information, in principle TV has more objectivity"

Men 36, secondary education

In terms of the spread of hatred and tolerance, respondents cite web portals as the most conflicting media, but several respondents also think that television is intolerant media.

"I think that portals are the ones that use more hate speech and they do this to achieve more clicks but also because of political divisions."

Women 33, secondary education

In terms of which media is preferred by the younger generation and which by the older ones, respondents were clear that the younger generation largely follows the web portals, social media and radio, while the older generation watches television and reads newspapers.

The middle age group also believes that web portals are followed by people with extreme political views, while people with moderate political views mostly listen to the radio. The tolerance of the media in Kosovo is (as one respondent put it) 50:50, which means that there is a sense of tolerance but there are also outbursts of extreme views. Hate speech is noticed in web portals, such as the newspaper / web portal Gazeta Express and the portal indeksonline.com.

Regarding specific media and persons that are more tolerant or more extreme, the respondents singled out TV 21 and RTV Dukagjini as tolerant media, as well as the Insider and Periscopi web portals, while Ron Gjinojci, Blerim Latifi, Fidan Rama, Adriatic Kelmendi, Halil Kastrati were cited as the most tolerant persons and Baton Haxhiu and Berat Buzhala as journalists who use conflicting views and statements.

The eldest group of respondents, the media grouping gave the following views:

According to the speed of information transmission, the television as a medium prevails. In terms of objectivity, respondents cite television and radio, as well as newspapers as the most objective information transmitters. The daily newspapers are slower information transmitters, but they are the richest in information and at the same time they are comprehensive and transmit the information in much more detail. Regarding the comprehensiveness and thoroughness of informing, they put television in the first place because it unequivocally transmits the information through articles and videos. Social media and portals are viewed with distrust because they use dubious sources to convey information and often place misinformation.

Related to the use of fake news and misinformation, respondents consider social media and portals to be the most conflicting media. In terms of which media is preferred by the younger generation and which by the older ones, respondents were clear that the younger generation is largely influenced by the social media, while the older generation watches television and reads newspapers.

"Television and radio are followed by the older people, while young people follow more portals and social networks."

Women 55, secondary education

In terms of which media is preferred by people with extreme political views and which by those with more tolerant, the views vary. One respondent stated that people with extreme political views use daily newspapers the most. Another respondent stated that more tolerant people follow all the media. In general, the older age group also believes that web portals are followed by people with extreme political views, while people with moderate political views mostly watch TV, listen to the radio, and read newspapers. Hate speech is noticed in web portals, such as the web portal indeksonline.com

Regarding specific media and persons that are more tolerant or more extreme, the respondents singled out RTV Dukagjini, Klan Kosova and KTV as tolerant media, while the persons Jeta Xharra, Milaim Zeka, the humanitarians Halil Kastrati and Elvis Nachi and Adriatik Kelmendi were mentioned as the most tolerant and Baton Haxhiu and Berat Buzhala as journalists who use conflicting views and statements.

RELATIONS BETWEEN KOSOVO AND SERBIA

Regarding the current relations and the relations in recent months between Kosovo and Serbia, respondents in youngest group think that they are the same, that there is no difference compared to many years ago. This means that respondents believe that there are almost no relations and that there are relations only between Kosovar and Serbian politicians.

"In recent months, I think Kosovo-Serbia relations are on hold. Waiting for the processes that are being considered to come. That is, they are frozen, they are as they were before, which means not good. These are mostly unfair reports I would say. In other words, Serbia does not recognize Kosovo as a state, and Kosovo does. Kosovo responded with the measure of reciprocity and tax so far, until these two days, even until yesterday, and this will now enable the resumption of dialogue initiated by The US and the EU. From this dialogue I believe there will be some results, at least officially. Here we will not talk about the extinction of all those interstate and inter-ethnic hatreds, but at least there will be changes in official relations which will be driven especially by the US."

Men 28, student

They place all the responsibility on politicians and political leaders who do not manage the situation at the required level. Regarding the role of the media in creating an attitude and image of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, the general view is that the media have no role in this process, that the relations between Kosovo and Serbia are completely influenced by political parties and their leaders.

"I personally think that the media, in terms of the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia, are simply a reflection of the current situation and I have not noticed any portal or television in Kosovo that has the direct purpose of creating a certain image or attitude. "

Women 24, student

"I don't think the reports are not good, and I don't think that we will fix them because they are moving based on political parties."

Women 32, secondary education

Related to obtaining information about the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, the prevailing view is that the respondents are informed, but they are expressed as very neutral. Here dominates the current topic of negotiations and that they are under the full control of politicians.

Regarding the information about Kosovo's relations with Serbia, the youngest respondents state that they are being informed through television and web portals, and they also refer to foreign media to get information about the relations between Kosovo and Serbia. When asked why, the respondents' view was "to see what the position is and how they report on an event that affects both countries." Among the media mentioned were CNN and the media in Albania.

"For serious issues, namely those related to dialogue and relations between the two countries, I usually listen to the news on television because I think the information is more secure and more objective, I did not follow the portals for this. I follow the foreign media in cases where there is something that is a little bigger, such as in cases when there was a tax, tax imposition, tax abolition ... issues that have a very big

impact, not on the Serbian state but internationally. I follow them to see how they perceive our situation from their side.”

Women 27, higher education

The older generation of respondents consider the relations between Kosovo and Serbia to be bad. They believe that these relations are moving in the wrong direction. The respondents blame the Serbs for such relations because according to them they have no interest in improving relations but in dividing Kosovo. Regarding the role of the media in creating a standpoint and image of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, it is considered that the media do have a certain role.

Related to obtaining information about the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, the prevailing view is that the respondents are informed, but they think that there is not enough concrete information and this is not due to media but due to politicians that don't offer information of what is really going on, and they mention as an example the dialogue between presidents of two countries.

"I think I'm well informed with the information that media is offering us, but I don't think the media is offering much of what is going on in the dialogue. I don't see these media is to blame because dialogue is usually taking place between our president and the Serbian president and media do not have much information. So I think that there is information, but it is truncated ... ”

Men 28, student

Regarding the information about Kosovo's relations with Serbia, the respondents state that they are being informed through television and web portals and that they trust the domestic media in this regard. Foreign media such as the New York Times, CNN, etc., are also browsed to get information on how the current situation between Kosovo and Serbia is seen from outside. Respondents say they trust these foreign media because, unlike the local media, they reflect a situation that is not emotionally charged, as can happen with local media. They also follow the statements of European representatives on various issues regarding the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia.

The third age group has the strongest views on the relations between Kosovo and Serbia. The whole set of questions on this topic was guided by the position that Serbia is to blame for everything, that they have committed crimes in Kosovo. The general view was that they did not believe that relations between Kosovo and Serbia could improve in the next few years. The respondents consider the relations to be extremely bad and the Serbs are to blame for that. Regarding the role of the media in creating an attitude and image of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, it is considered that the media do not have a role and cannot influence the improvement of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

Related to obtaining information about the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, the prevailing view is that the respondents are informed, and they emphasized that they do not need to be informed about these relations. One respondent highlighted the events in Gjakovica during the Kosovo war by which the population is still affected.

HATE SPEECH

Regarding the use of hate speech about the relations with Serbia in the Kosovo media, the respondents in youngest generation group of respondents, generally think that there is no hate speech. They were also asked whether they could single out a person or a medium that uses more extreme or conflict

language for Kosovo's relations with Serbia, and which media, journalist, editor or other public figure is more constructive and more tolerant in this regard, the respondents did not single out any media or individual. It was mentioned that KTV is very objective and tolerant in this.

"I have not encountered or noticed any incitement to hatred, on the contrary, there are many advertisements that have been used to promote cooperation and tolerance (between the Kosovar and Serbian people)."

Women 20, student

For the direct contacts with friends, colleagues, individuals from Serbia, only two respondents stated that they have contacts with people from Serbia.

Regarding the dominant attitude of the domestic public towards Serbia, the prevailing view is that it is neutral. Only two respondents stated that the dominant attitude of the domestic public is negative.

"I think that ordinary citizens of Serbia do not have hatred towards Kosovo and Kosovars. They are Serbian politicians who have a negative attitude and hatred toward Kosovo, and this to a greater extent than Kosovo's politicians towards Serbia."

Men 20, student

On the contrary, the respondents of middle age group think that the Serbian public has a predominantly negative attitude towards Kosovo because according to them, Serbs believe that Kosovo has been taken away from them, and in fact, the reality was quite the opposite, i.e., Serbia is responsible for all the deaths committed in Kosovo.

"I think Serbs have a language of hatred towards Kosovo and Kosovars. This may be because they think that Kosovo has always belonged to Serbia. Here I would single out the young people, young generations as I think that they probably don't even know where Kosovo is. But when we talk about middle age people, they are different and this may be due to the fact that they were raised and educated with the opinion that Kosovo belongs to Serbia, they were educated in hate speech and with the approach that they are not guilty and that they have been wronged."

Women 33, secondary education

Regarding the use of hate speech in the Kosovo media about the relations with Serbia, the position of the respondents in second (medium aged) group is that hate speech is used in the media, but they also did not have a clear position. They were also asked whether they could single out a person or a medium that uses more extreme or conflict language for Kosovo's relations with Serbia, and which media, journalist, editor or other public figure is more constructive and more tolerant in this regard, Baton Haxhiu and Berat Buzhala were mentioned as such public figures.

Regarding direct contacts with friends, colleagues, individuals from Serbia, none of the respondents from middle age group stated that they have contacts with people from Serbia, but some of the respondents stated that they have contacts with Serbs living in Kosovo.

Regarding the dominant attitude of the domestic public towards Serbia, the prevailing view of middle age group is that it is negative. Also, the Serbian public according to respondents has a predominantly negative attitude towards Kosovo.

In the third age group of respondents, regarding the use of hate speech in the Kosovo media about the relations with Serbia, the position of the respondents is that hate speech is used in web portals. They were also asked whether they could single out a person or a medium that uses more extreme or conflict language for Kosovo's relations with Serbia, and which media, journalist, editor or other public figure is more constructive and more tolerant in this regard. Baton Haxhiu and Berat Buzhala were specified as journalists who use conflicting views, while Ermal Panduri and Adriatik Kelmendi were mentioned as objective and tolerant journalists.

For the direct contacts with friends, colleagues, individuals from Serbia, none of the respondents stated that they have contacts with people from Serbia.

Regarding the dominant attitude of the domestic public towards Serbia, the unanimous view is that it is negative. Also, Serbian public according to respondents has a predominantly negative attitude towards Kosovo.

"I think that Serbs also have a negative opinion of Kosovo. I am mainly talking about the political class because in terms of individuals there are individuals even there who do not have a negative mindset about Kosovo."

Men 55, secondary education

MEDIA ROLE IN EASING TENSIONS

Being asked on how the media can contribute to easing tensions and conflicts between Kosovo and Serbia, the respondents in youngest group of respondents had a unified view that the media can play a major role in this regard by promoting good cooperation and relations between Serbs and Albanians through the realization of debates and television shows which would highlight positive aspects in common. The most the media can do is to make a video that calls for dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance, similar to what KFOR is already doing in Kosovo.

"... let's try, with all that has happened, to forgive each other and together to be motivated to create a common future because we have no other option since we are very close, we are neighbors. So, there is no other way but to try to improve the relationship, and this could happen by commenting on common values, trying to avoid the shortcomings and divisions we have. For example, through various lobbying of young people by both parties, through joint activities to try removing the current disruption and the energy that both parties are expending to prevent each other in achieving their goals, to spend it on common paths that help both sides achieving to where they want, such as EU integration, economic growth, and a better life for both sides."

Men 28, student

Only one respondent gave a specific name of a medium or a person that could be significant or contribute to calming relations between Kosovo and Serbia and that was Kim Mehmeti.

In a second age group of respondents said that the media can contribute to easing them, but no respondent said specifically what can be done in that respect.

The respondents did not specify a media, but they mention journalist Jeta Xharra as a person that can have impact to general public and could contribute to calming relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

Similar situation has been with the third age group where respondents were very passive and did not express a specific opinion on how the media can contribute to easing tensions and conflicts between Kosovo and Serbia

"A public figure who can have more competencies and influence on people can be, for example journalist Jeta Xharra who cooperates with BIRN which is regional organization, and collaborates with BIRN in Serbia, Belgrade. They (BIRN) certainly have an impact like a media."

Men 36, secondary education

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If we analyse the key findings of the qualitative survey on the attitudes of general public representatives with moderate political orientation, we are under the impression that we are observing one and the same image, but from two different perspectives.

On the one hand, we register clearly identified experience of hate speech in Serbian media (first of all e- and digital media), and predominant and obvious allocation of responsibility for the negative public opinion regarding Serbia-Kosovo relations to the media. Serbian public predominantly believes that media are mainly responsible for the current frictional attitude of Serbian public towards Kosovo, while responsibility of politicians is relatively implied, not equally clearly defined, although unavoidable.

On the other hand, Kosovo public representatives predominantly believe that the responsibility for the attitude local Kosovo public has towards Serbia and Serbia-Kosovo relations belongs to the political establishment that generates hate speech, stereotypes and prejudices. Responsibility of the media is far less recognized (except in extreme cases). Moreover, impression is that Kosovo public largely allocates responsibility to Serbia as a state and to its territorial pretensions, to Serbian politicians and even Serbian public overall.

In a word, while in the analysed portion of Serbian public we can identify hints that responsibility for the current situation is shared (both sides are responsible), respondents from Kosovo seem to consider the other side the only (or predominantly) responsible for this situation.

However, the issue of the role of media in pacification of relations and their influence on the opinion of these two populations, is inevitable. Survey results clearly suggest which media are prominent, whose “word” is considered significant and which are “worthy”, irrespective of their political position. In addition, survey results also reveal which media representatives act destructively and explicitly in the direction of intensifying and provoking conflicts and divisions.

The key question is how to accomplish focused media activity directed towards alleviating “affects” and creating “safe” media space with possible:

- dialogue
- confrontation of different opinions, perceptions and attitudes
- tolerance and accepting different opinion

Although our respondents were not very illustrative in this aspect, we can still, based on their testimonies, draw two parallel or perhaps successive lines of communication that might be the foundation for such “conciliatory” media platform:

1. “Slice of life”. Neither Kosovo nor Serbian public basically seem to have any real and objective information about “the other side”, about everyday life, problems, situations. And these are universal life situations that we all share and experience. Media presentation of aspects (even negatives: living standard, problems in healthcare system, education and young people leaving the EU...) that basically connect us and that we largely share through our life experience, might be a kind of introductory, “soft” thematic frame for creating quality media *content* implying understanding and tolerance.

2. “Direct Dialogue”. The second stage might be a media platform designed for direct dialogue about the key issues of Serbia-Kosovo relations. Choosing adequate opinion leaders of moderate political orientation from both sides, with neutral, but “serious” dialogue moderator, would pave the road to opening a dialogue about all “painful” topics of the present and past. A good example of a similar media platform is the serial “Okruženje”, which made a positive impression on the audience in the region a few years ago.

These may be two small, but certainly significant steps that would, from the viewpoint of the role of the media in creating high-quality public opinion, surely initiate positive trends in this rather gloomy media landscape in both Kosovo and Serbia.