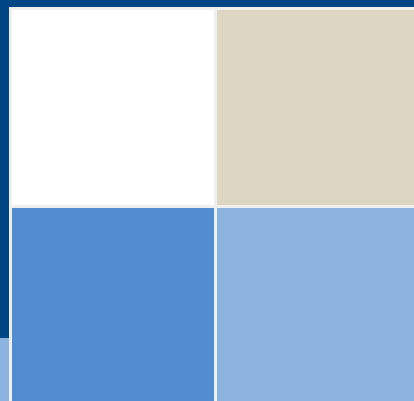


Policy Analysis - No. 05/2016



GROUP FOR LEGAL  
AND POLITICAL  
STUDIES

# The Serbian Media and the Dialogue: Has there been an evolution in how Serbian media perceive Kosovo?



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## Policy Analysis No. 05/2016

### The Serbian Media and the Dialogue: Has there been an evolution in how Serbian media perceive Kosovo?

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# THE SERBIAN MEDIA AND THE DIALOGUE: HAS THERE BEEN AN EVOLUTION IN HOW SERBIAN MEDIA PERCEIVE KOSOVO?

## Introduction

A state's media provide a window into how that state perceives itself and other states. All media make editorial decisions over what issues to cover and how to cover them. These decisions are driven both by individual beliefs within the particular media outlet and by the audience choosing to consume that media.

Media both may try to lead public opinion and be constrained by commercial factors where audiences must consume their reports.<sup>1</sup> In this way, media's editorial decisions betray the issues about which they care and about which they believe their audiences care. Studying media's attitudes towards an issue can therefore give a window into how media thinks about that issue and how media believes their audiences think about that issue.

With this in mind, this report will examine the attitudes of the Serbian media towards Kosovo and how those attitudes have changed as the dialogue has progressed. Changes would indicate that the dialogue has changed either how the Serbian media thinks or how they perceive changes in their audience's opinion. While this report will not examine this question, it is an important issue to keep in mind. In either case, it would show that the dialogue has caused a change in how the Serbian media views Kosovo and a resolution of the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia. If this is true, it could be a leading indicator of shifting public opinion within Serbia where a realistic and permanent resolution and reconciliation between the two states could take place.

To examine if the Serbian media's view of Kosovo has changed over the course of the dialogue, this report will first devise a methodology to give an accurate picture of the national media in Serbia. It is important for this picture to be as comprehensive as possible and be as independent of locality as possible. After this methodology section, the report will take three approaches to the Serbian media's coverage of Kosovo; first examining the topics of articles that mention Kosovo; second examining the attitudes of the Serbian media towards Kosovo's public figures; and third examining the Serbian media's attitude towards the dialogue with Kosovo. It will conclude with a final determination if the media has evolved in its attitude towards Kosovo.

## I. Methodology

To study the Serbian media's attitudes towards Kosovo, three news providers were chosen: the online B92 service, BETA news agency and the state-run Tanjug news agency. All of these news agencies gave nation-wide coverage of Serbia, minimizing the influence of local peculiarities. They also covered the pro-Western spectrum of Serbian news outlets from the highly pro-Western BETA news agency to the more circumspect Tanjug news

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<sup>1</sup> Bovitz, Gregory L., Druckman, James N. and Lupia, Arthur, "When Can a News Organization Lead Public Opinion?: Ideology versus Market Forces in Decisions to Make News," *Public Choice* 117, no. 1/2 (2002): 127-155.

agency, giving insight into the attitudes of this part of the media. They also all provided an English-language news service, allowing for the author's study without the use of translation services.

Articles were retrieved from the news aggregation site World News Connection. Using the search features, the widest possible net was cast, searching for the word "Kosovo" within the text of reports by each news agency. Due to limits to the data that could be acquired using this site for B92, April 1, 2009 was the beginning date for each search with September 30, 2013 used as the end date. To ensure consistency of source type, only written media reports were used. All transcripts of B92 TV broadcasts were discarded. Due to the inconsistent appearance of certain types of BETA publications, only the aggregate source BETA Week was used from the BETA news agency. Since Tanjug only writes wire reports, no restrictions were needed in its case.

Media coverage was divided into three periods: the pre-dialogue period, the early dialogue period and the later dialogue period. The pre-dialogue period, April 2009-February 2011, was chosen to serve as a baseline for what the Serbian media covered before the dialogue began. April 2009 was a beginning chosen by availability of articles from World News Connection for B92, not because it holds any particular significance. February 2011 was the last month before the beginning of the dialogue. Two notable events occurred during this period. First, it covers the entirety of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) process over the legality of Kosovo's declaration of independence. Second, it includes Serbia's formal application to join the EU.

The early dialogue period, March 2011-July 2012, was chosen to examine the coverage of Kosovo during the early stages of the dialogue. March 2011 was the month that the Technical Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia began. July 2012 was the month that Ivica Dacic formed a government in Serbia. This period thus contains the agreements between Kosovo and Serbia under the Cvetovic government and the 2012 Serbian general election that led to a new president in Tomislav Nikolic and a new prime minister in Ivica Dacic.

The later dialogue period, August 2012-September 2013, essentially covers the whole period from the formation of the Dacic government to the end of data collection. The date chosen for the end point was again arbitrary, since a cut-off point had to be made. Since data gathering was completed in early October 2013, the end of September 2013 seemed logical. This period contains the April Agreement, which set the principles for normalizations between the two states, and the fallout from that agreement and its implementation.

Three basic issues were checked: the subject of articles;<sup>2</sup> the attitude of the Serbian media towards the Kosovo Prime Minister and the Kosovo President;<sup>3</sup> and the attitude of Serbian media towards dialogue with Kosovo.<sup>4</sup> The subject of articles was put through a blunt analysis where articles were sorted by subject. The share of coverage given to each subject in each period was then studied to see if any important trends could be determined over the period of the dialogue. Studying these issues allowed for a broad picture of the Serbian media's evolving perspective on Kosovo before and after the dialogue began. The attitudes of the Serbian media towards Kosovo government officials and the dialogue were given a more qualitative analysis where it was determined how the

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<sup>2</sup> See Section III

<sup>3</sup> See Section IV

<sup>4</sup> See Section V

three media outlets chose to portray Kosovo's political leaders and the dialogue and if this portrayal changed across the three periods.

This study of English-language publications in the Serbian media has both limitations and advantages. The main limit is on the spectrum of the media that can be covered. Only pro-Western news outlets are likely to publish in English, since only they will likely feel the need to accommodate a Western audience.<sup>5</sup> Nationalist and anti-Western media will likely only need to accommodate to a Serbian-speaking audience and will not publish in English. However, missing this spectrum of the media is permissible in that its attitudes are the most hardened and least likely to evolve. It will suffice to note that this study is not representative of the entire media in Serbia and there will be an element in Serbian media that will always be hostile to

The second limit is that this data collection method may not be comprehensive of all the coverage on Kosovo in these outlets. BETA and Tanjug provided inadequate archives themselves for this study, either by not providing them at all (BETA) or not having archives that covered the period before the dialogue (Tanjug). B92 had archives that went back an appropriate distance in time, but had inadequate search functionality to broaden the net to all articles that mentioned Kosovo. This made the use of a news aggregator inevitable.

World News Connection provided the most substantial and easily searchable archives that could be found for Serbian English-language media outlets. There is no guarantee that these are complete data sets of all articles that mention Kosovo published by B92, BETA and Tanjug in English during this period. Given the number of empty patches for B92 and BETA, there are almost certainly gaps in the data sets for these two sources. These gaps are a function of using a news aggregator and are impossible to avoid in this case. The decision to include or not include articles in the data set, however, was not a decision of the author. The same, wide net procedure of searching for the key term "Kosovo" within each media outlet was followed. It is important to note this to clarify that this paper is an analysis of the data *available*, not the data *chosen*.

The third limit actually may double as an advantage: since the reports are written in English, they are targeted at a Western audience. Writers and speakers, especially those writers and speakers that are working in mass communications, tailor their style and statements to their expectations of the expectations of the audience.<sup>6</sup> Serbian writers at these media outlets will change their style and content to match what they think are the expectations of their audience. While this change in style and content means that these reports are not necessarily indicative of the Serbian media's attitudes towards Kosovo, it does indicate how the Serbian media perceive the evolving international position of Serbia in its relations with Kosovo.

The second advantage for using English-language media is that the data set used for this report is available to a wider audience that would be able to check the author's work. Any English-language reader could repeat the procedure used for this report to confirm or refute the author's result. This creates incentives for this report to be done transparently and ensures that the research is repeatable and done in good faith. Admittedly, some of the decisions made in this report are subjective, as will be noted in Section III, but another researcher could perform the same procedure and should be able

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<sup>5</sup> Bell, Allan, "Language style as audience design," *Language in Society*, 13, no. 2 (1984): 145-204

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

to find similar results.

## 2. Article topic

Articles were sorted into the categories on the basis of the main thrust of the article. An article was never sorted into multiple categories. It was often a borderline decision and was a subjective one made by the author. Certain guidelines were clear. An issue related to **Kosovo-Serbia Relations** when Kosovo and Serbia were actively trying to settle an issue, either through negotiations or by bringing the issue to an international organization, e.g. the International Court of Justice, for settlement. Relations between Serbia and international organizations in Kosovo were not sorted into this area, but into Serbia foreign relations. Articles related to **Serbian Politics** included events like parliamentary debates, the forming of coalitions and the general vision for the future of Serbia. If a party was not discussing a particular piece of legislation or another political party, but simply commenting on EU accession, relations with Kosovo, **Kosovo Serbs**, etc., that article was sorted into the topic discussed by the party, not into Serbian politics. Kosovo Serbs was defined broadly to not only include issues involving Kosovo Serbs, but generally to include events in the north of Kosovo.

This may have inflated the totals, but considering how events in the north of Kosovo were so intimately tied to the Serbs in the north, the author made the judgment that this was necessary. **Kosovo Politics**, like Serbian politics, involved the internal machinations of Kosovo political debates. It also included Kosovo's foreign relations, which were mentioned so infrequently that there was little point in creating a special category. **EU-Serbia Relations** included articles about interactions between Serbia and EU institutions as well as meetings between Serbia and EU member states where the article focused on Serbia's desire to join the EU. **Kosovo Domestic Issues** served as a catchall category for articles about issues within Kosovo, such as corruption, crime or economic development. It also included any criminal investigations that actively involved contemporary members of the Kosovo government. Since these investigations appeared to have little effect on Kosovo's political debate, it seemed better to sort these issues in this category. **Minorities in Serbia** broadly included any article about minorities living inside Serbia. In practice, this usually meant either ethnic Albanians in southern Serbia or ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina.

**Serbian Foreign Relations** included articles about Serbia's interactions with non-EU states and international organizations. It also included interactions with EU member states where the article did not focus on Serbia's relationship with the EU. However, if a state was merely discussing another issue, such as Kosovo-Serbia relations or the fate of Kosovo Serbs, in the article, the article was placed under that category. **Serbian Orthodox Church** included articles about the Church, Church officials or the fate of Serbian Orthodox sites in Kosovo. **Serbia Domestic Issues**, similar to the Kosovo Domestic Issues category, served as a catchall category for issues within Serbia, such as the state of the economy, crime or human trafficking. It also included all articles about incidents that occurred on the Serbian side of the Kosovo-Serbia border. Finally, **War Past** included all articles related to the Yugoslav conflict of the 1990s. In practice, this usually included articles about war crimes and alleged war crimes. Since the number of articles across these three periods is uneven for Tanjug and B92 and each news outlet produced a different number of articles mentioning Kosovo, the most important issue to examine will be shares of coverage for



each of these areas.

## BETA

Period	April 2009-February 2011 (Share)	March 2011-July 2012 (Share)	August 2012- September 2013 (Share)
Articles	138 (100%)	141 (100%)	74 (100%)
Kosovo-Serbia Relations	16 (11.59%)	20 (14.18%)	17 (22.97%)
Serbian Politics	32 (23.19%)	46 (32.62%)	25 (33.78%)
Kosovo Serbs	12 (8.70%)	14 (9.93%)	8 (10.81%)
Kosovo Politics	8 (5.80%)	2 (1.42%)	0 (0%)
EU-Serbia Relations	21 (15.22%)	14 (9.93%)	11 (14.86%)
Kosovo Domestic Issues	4 (2.90%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Minorities in Serbia	1 (0.72%)	1 (0.71%)	2 (2.70%)
Serbia Foreign Relations	32 (23.19%)	14 (9.93%)	4 (5.41%)
Serbian Orthodox Church	6 (4.35%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.35%)
Serbia Domestic Issues	3 (2.17%)	2 (1.42%)	5 (6.76%)
War Past	3 (2.17%)	3 (2.13%)	1 (1.35%)

## B92

Period	April 2009-February 2011 (Share)	March 2011-July 2012 (Share)	August 2012- September 2013 (Share)
Articles	527 (100%)	120 (100%)	349 (100%)
Kosovo-Serbia Relations	72 (13.66%)	30 (25.00%)	99 (28.37%)
Serbian Politics	18 (3.42%)	26 (21.67%)	49 (14.04%)
Kosovo Serbs	150 (28.46%)	29 (24.17%)	84 (24.07%)
Kosovo Politics	39 (7.40%)	1 (0.83%)	8 (2.29%)
EU-Serbia Relations	42 (7.97%)	12 (10.00%)	47 (13.47%)
Kosovo Domestic Issues	39 (7.40%)	3 (2.50%)	7 (2.00%)
Minorities in Serbia	12 (2.28%)	0 (0%)	5 (1.43%)
Serbia Foreign Relations	75 (14.23%)	11 (9.17%)	29 (8.31%)
Serbian Orthodox Church	23 (4.36%)	0 (0%)	4 (1.15%)
Serbia Domestic Issues	20 (3.80%)	6 (5.00%)	10 (2.87%)
War Past	37 (7.02%)	2 (1.67%)	7 (2.00%)

## Tanjug

Period	April 2009-February 2011	March 2011-July 2012	August 2012-September 2013
Articles	927 (100%)	1602 (100%)	2019 (100%)
Kosovo-Serbia Relations	150 (16.18%)	350 (21.85%)	588 (29.1%)
Serbian Politics	57 (6.15%)	163 (10.17%)	157 (7.78%)
Kosovo Serbs	201 (21.68%)	547 (34.14%)	427 (21.15%)
Kosovo Politics	17 (1.83%)	16 (1.00%)	54 (2.67%)
EU-Serbia Relations	110 (11.87%)	185 (11.55%)	271 (13.42%)
Kosovo Domestic Issues	52 (5.6%)	77 (4.81%)	79 (3.91%)
Minorities in Serbia	4 (0.43%)	7 (0.44%)	18 (0.89%)
Serbia Foreign Relations	264 (28.48%)	179 (11.17%)	283 (14.02%)
Serbian Orthodox Church	28 (3.02%)	24 (1.50%)	40 (1.98%)
Serbia Domestic Issues	28 (3.02%)	27 (1.69%)	41 (2.03%)
War Past	16 (1.73%)	15 (0.94%)	61 (3.02%)

As would be expected, the share of coverage for Kosovo-Serbia relations increased over time for all three media outlets. As those relations became established through the dialogue, events in the relations between the two states would inevitably garner more coverage. Also as would be expected, the share of coverage for Serbian politics in articles mentioning Kosovo spiked during the early dialogue period, which included a Serbian general election. It is anomalous that the share of coverage for Serbian politics remained at the same level for BETA in the later dialogue period, but BETA consistently gave a higher share of coverage than Tanjug or B92 to Serbian politics when discussing Kosovo, so it giving a high share of coverage to how Kosovo may affect Serbian politics during politically risky negotiations is not necessarily notable.

The data, however, does give two insights that were not necessarily to be expected. First, reporting on events in Kosovo dropped once the dialogue began. After all three media outlets dedicated more than seven percent of coverage before the dialogue to Kosovo's politics and domestic issues other than the fate of Serbs; none of them would do so again. BETA appears to have stopped covering these issues completely by the later dialogue period. Some of this drop in coverage can be attributed to the expanding coverage of Kosovo-Serbia relations after the dialogue began. Other issues within Kosovo became less newsworthy as the dialogue became the dominant issue regarding Kosovo. However, there is also the possibility that the Serbian media stopped covering Kosovo's politics and internal life because they were less willing to denigrate Kosovo as a state. Few of the articles regarding Kosovo's politics and internal issues were positive, as will be seen in the discussion of the coverage of Hashim Thaci in the next section. Less coverage of Kosovo's politics and domestic issues likely meant less negative coverage of Kosovo, though a new analysis would be needed to confirm this hypothesis.

Second, and more significantly, the coverage that mentions Kosovo by all three media outlets of Serbia's foreign relations has dropped precipitously since the beginning of the dialogue. This change in coverage shows a change in what the three outlets considered the most important issue with regard to Kosovo: preventing other states from recognizing Kosovo or reaching a resolution. As the dialogue progressed, relations with Kosovo and with the EU, which was facilitating the negotiations, became much more important than

relations with various other states that Serbia was urging not to recognize—or thanking for not recognizing—Kosovo. This change would indicate a shift in attitudes in the Serbian media that a resolution was more desirable than empty statements of solidarity.

**The blunt analysis of the topics of these articles thus shows Serbian English-language media working its way towards supporting a final resolution on Kosovo.** Declining coverage of Kosovo's internal issues likely means less negative coverage trying to show the Kosovo government as incompetent. Declining shares of coverage for Serbia's foreign relations shows the media tipping closer to resolution of the Kosovo issue instead of supporting international posturing. The next two sections will try to give this data a qualitative context that will determine if this tipping towards a resolution of issues with Kosovo led to a more positive view of the Kosovo leadership and of the dialogue itself.

### 3. Kosovo Political Leaders

In this section, this report will discuss the Serbian media's portrayal of Kosovo government officials. Since most officials may only infrequently appear in the Serbian media, this report will focus on how two officials have been portrayed in the Serbian media before and after the beginning of the dialogue: the prime minister and the president. This analysis will be divided into the same three time periods, but will be a qualitative discussion of coverage, as opposed to a brute force analysis of coverage as in the last section.

#### *Former Prime Minister*

In the pre-dialogue period (April 2009-February 2011), the Serbian media had very little positive coverage about former Prime Minister Hashim Thaci. Before March 2011, there was consensus across the three sources that Thaci was a controlling politician, a hardline nationalist and a protector of corruption. BETA reported in December 2009, "according to critics, over the past year the Kosovo prime minister has turned into an absolute ruler,"<sup>7</sup> one who controls all the major institutions and pressures the media to stay on message. B92 also notes a lack of tolerance for civil servants speaking on political matters<sup>8</sup> and Tanjug implied in December 2010 that he was trying to control the votes of individual citizens.<sup>9</sup> All three sources made sure to note nationalist strains in Thaci's positions, painting him as the "radical" member of the Kosovo government.<sup>10</sup> All three also covered his need to protect former Transport Minister Fatmir Limaj from corruption investigations and that he was defying EULEX in the process.<sup>11</sup>

There were some divergences in the coverage by the individual media outlets. Tanjug was the least kind to Thaci, painting him in December 2010 as a bullying war criminal who, "by announcing to disclose the names of Albanians who helped the Council of Europe Rapporteur Dick Marty to prepare his report on human organ trafficking, was threatening witnesses and calling for their lynching."<sup>12</sup> While BETA found Thaci controlling,

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<sup>7</sup> BETA, "Thaci's government shaken up," *BETA Week*, 4 December 2009

<sup>8</sup> B92, "Kosovo premier sacks police chief for making political statements," *Radio B92*, 16 October 2010

<sup>9</sup> Tanjug, "Official election campaign starts at midnight," Tanjug, 1 December 2010

<sup>10</sup> Tanjug, "Lavrov: Russia worried over Berisha's statement," Tanjug, 5 October 2009; B92, "Serbia denies considering recognition of Kosovo," *Radio B92*, 15 July 2009; BETA, "The invisible shift," *BETA Week*, 8 October 2010

<sup>11</sup> BETA, "Targeting the elite," *BETA Week*, 13 May 2010; B92, "EU mission chief denies corruption probes are destabilizing Kosovo," *Radio B92*, 4 June 2010; Tanjug, "Jeremic: ICJ opinion opportunity for compromise on Kosovo," Tanjug, 18 May 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Tanjug, "Vekaric: Thaci is calling for lynching of witnesses," Tanjug, 27 December 2010

it was less willing to declare Thaci a bullying war criminal, preferring to state, “Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci, who used to be the KLA's commander, finds himself in a very unpleasant position and the credibility of the Pristina government is seriously shaken,” when the organ trafficking report appeared.<sup>13</sup> B92 did not find Thaci to be a bullying war criminal, though it did note in July 2009 that he led a party including indicted war criminals.<sup>14</sup> B92 and BETA were also more willing to put any of Thaci's controlling behavior in context than Tanjug, noting that Thaci participated in an underdeveloped political system with potentially violent rivals,<sup>15</sup> something not present in Tanjug's reports. However, before the dialogue, only B92 had any willingness to report positive quotes or information about Thaci. In September 2009, it reported, “Kosovo PM Hashim Thaci says that the provincial government will continue to allocate funds for all those wishing to return to their homes in northern KM [Kosovo-Metohija].”<sup>16</sup> It was a notable gesture of cooperation in a process of returning displaced persons that has been fraught with political challenges. BETA and Tanjug chose to avoid any positive details about Thaci.

In the early dialogue period (March 2011-July 2012), coverage of Thaci in all three media outlets improved slightly. All three outlets noted cooperative behavior<sup>17</sup> and his encouragement for Kosovo to engage “in a dialogue with all of its neighbors, including Serbia, as the dialogue is the only solution for problems, primarily in relations with Serbia.”<sup>18</sup> Coverage of any nationalist tendencies was swapped out for noting a pragmatic streak in his behavior, trying to gain as much as he can from negotiations.<sup>19</sup> However, all three continued to note how Thaci was literally untouchable for Serbian politicians.<sup>20</sup> Tanjug pushed this narrative to include other states, suggesting in April 2012, “The fact that the US President has not received the Kosovo Prime Minister shows that Thaci is not welcome.”<sup>21</sup>

Dissent remained over whether or not Thaci was a war criminal. B92 made no mention of war crime allegations beyond noting that Thaci was the target of unspecified accusations by Serbia.<sup>22</sup> Tanjug continued to carry coverage of political leaders calling for Thaci's arrest.<sup>23</sup> BETA stiffened its position to argue, “If EULEX were to remain the sole entity in charge of the investigation, there is fear that the high officials of Kosovo, led by Thaci, would not be held responsible, which is contrary to Belgrade's interests.”<sup>24</sup>

The dialogue also opened an intriguing divide between the news outlets over how much control Thaci had over his party and government. Tanjug and BETA reported

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<sup>13</sup> BETA, “Albanians Sentenced by Belgrade Court,” *BETA Week*, 28 January 2011.

<sup>14</sup> B92, “Ruling party deputy head goes on trial for war crimes in Kosovo,” *Radio B92*, 9 July 2009.

<sup>15</sup> B92, “Kosovo PM reportedly attacked by supporters of rival Albanian leader,” *Radio B92*, 12 November 2009; BETA, “Tension, status and economic crisis,” *BETA Week*, 23 July 2009

<sup>16</sup> B92, “Kosovo PM vows to step up rebuilding work in disputed area,” *Radio B92*, 15 July 2009

<sup>17</sup> B92, “Merkel: Pristina, Belgrade to jointly reach solution,” *B92 Online*, 19 December 2011; BETA, “Pristina Dissatisfied,” *BETA Week*, 1 March 2012; Tanjug, “Taci: I am ready to talk with Serbs from north,” *Tanjug*, 28 November 2011

<sup>18</sup> B92, “Merkel: Pristina, Belgrade to jointly reach solution,” *B92 Online*, 19 December 2011

<sup>19</sup> B92, “We must not say we won't go to war over Kosovo,” *B92 Online*, 23 November 2011; BETA, “Pristina Dissatisfied,” *BETA Week*, 1 March 2012; Tanjug, “Stefanovic: We will fight till the end,” *Tanjug*, 23 February 2012

<sup>20</sup> B92, “Jeremic says he will not leave Democratic Party,” *B92 Online*, 9 July 2012; BETA, “Political Trade,” *BETA Week*, 27 June 2011; Tanjug, “Cohen: Thaci lost plenty of credibility, negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina to be difficult,” *Tanjug*, 1 March 2011

<sup>21</sup> Tanjug, “Obama has not received Taci,” *Tanjug*, 6 April 2011

<sup>22</sup> B92, “Jeremic says he will not leave Democratic Party,” *B92 Online*, 9 July 2012

<sup>23</sup> Tanjug, “JS leader: both Mladic and Taci belong in The Hague,” *Tanjug*, 30 May 2011

<sup>24</sup> BETA, “Political Trade,” *BETA Week*, 27 June 2011

frequently that Thaci was losing control of both and that early elections may be inevitable.<sup>25</sup> Tanjug carried the allegations of Serbian officials that “the economic and social situation in Kosovo is catastrophic” and that Thaci “is helpless in this area.”<sup>26</sup> BETA, taking the accusations of organ trafficking by Thaci more seriously, thought there was a possibility that the accusations against Thaci could bring down the government and destabilize Kosovo.<sup>27</sup> B92 noted none of these possibilities and treated Thaci as if he was authoritatively speaking for Kosovo and faced few domestic political threats.<sup>28</sup>

Progressing into the later dialogue period (August 2012-September 2013), coverage of Thaci was a mix of the previous two periods in the Serbian media. Thaci stopped being untouchable, but coverage of Thaci’s desire to control the narrative of his government came back, with extensive coverage of Thaci insisting that concessions were not made in negotiations in March 2013<sup>29</sup> and of the resignation of the first liaison officer from Pristina to Belgrade in June 2013 after his statement that Belgrade had to recognize Kosovo.<sup>30</sup> Thaci was shown as a combination of the aggressive pragmatist trying to gain as much as he could in negotiations and the radical nationalist, with his declarations that Serbia had essentially recognized Kosovo with the April 2013 agreement<sup>31</sup> and his pushing UNMIK to allow Kosovo Albanians to build houses where they please.<sup>32</sup> Throughout all of this coverage, however, all three outlets show Thaci as cooperative in the dialogue process and willing to implement the agreement by cooperating with Kosovo Serbs.<sup>33</sup>

Divergences on discussing Thaci as a war criminal issue remained. In December 2012, BETA praised Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dacic for taking “a risky role in direct negotiations with Kosovo Premier Hashim Thaci, who is charged by the Serbian judiciary with war crimes committed in Kosovo.”<sup>34</sup> Tanjug continued noting the organ trafficking charges against Thaci in April 2013, more than two years after the allegations were originally made.<sup>35</sup> B92 continued to refer only vaguely to Thaci’s past and potential crimes, not specifying war crimes or discussing organ trafficking in connection to Thaci.<sup>36</sup> B92 and Tanjug gave Thaci additional credit by noting the tremendous courage that he took to negotiate. B92 carried EU High Representative Catherine Ashton’s comment that both Thaci and Dacic “knew how to take chances” and “were not afraid of it.”<sup>37</sup> Tanjug noted a Serbian diplomat’s response that Thaci “would not be welcomed with applause”

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<sup>25</sup> BETA, “Political Trade,” *BETA Week*, 27 June 2011; Tanjug, “Police Blocks Self-Determination on Roads,” Tanjug, 22 January 2012

<sup>26</sup> Tanjug, “Kosovo requires special solution, says Ljajic,” Tanjug, 14 September 2011

<sup>27</sup> BETA, “Political Trade,” *BETA Week*, 27 June 2011

<sup>28</sup> B92, “Merkel: Pristina, Belgrade to jointly reach solution,” *B92 Online*, 19 December 2011

<sup>29</sup> BETA, “New age, old faces,” *BETA Week*, 14 March 2013

<sup>30</sup> B92, “Pristina’s new liaison officer to arrive July 17,” *B92 Online*, 9 July 2013; Tanjug, “Dismissal procedure started against Peci,” Tanjug, 20 June 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Tanjug, “Taci: Agreement means recognition of Kosovo,” Tanjug, 19 April 2013

<sup>32</sup> B92, “KFOR blocks Kosovo Police unit in tense neighborhood,” *B92 Online*, 22 November 2012

<sup>33</sup> Tanjug, “Taci: Serbs to vote in polls with valid documents,” Tanjug, 10 June 2013; B92, “We should not celebrate just yet, EU’s Ashton says,” *B92 Online*, 27 April 2013; BETA, “Homework,” *BETA Week*, 5 November 2012

<sup>34</sup> BETA, “Great expectations,” *BETA Week*, 6 December 2012

<sup>35</sup> Tanjug, “Vekaric, Brussels deal important for solving crimes,” Tanjug, 30 April 2013

<sup>36</sup> B92, “Serbian officials won’t speak with Kosovo PM,” *B92 Online*, 24 September 2012

<sup>37</sup> B92, “We should not celebrate just yet, EU’s Ashton says,” *B92 Online*, 27 April 2013

for the steps into agreement.<sup>38</sup>BETA had less admiration for Thaci, however, giving all of the credit for courage to Dacic while assuming that Thaci's political weakness had forced him into negotiations.<sup>39</sup>

### *President*

Unlike Hashim Thaci, who brought up many passions in the Serbian media, the various presidents of Kosovo appear to have received only a lukewarm response. All of them received much less coverage than Thaci and much of it was less accusatory. The three news outlets note that President Fatmir Sejdiu was a powerful political figure in Kosovo and that he had a large presence in Kosovo's foreign policy during his presidency.<sup>40</sup> They also note that he had to resign his position in September 2010 because he was the president of a political party at the same time as being president of Kosovo.<sup>41</sup> However, only B92 goes beyond these statements, characterizing him as somewhat combative and uncooperative with Serbia for blaming Belgrade for the slow rate of returns to Kosovo for displaced persons.<sup>42</sup> Tanjug and BETA did not note Sejdiu or his temporary successors (Jakup Krasniqi and Bexhet Pacolli) as being particularly conducive to cooperation with Serbia, but they do not treat any of them as an impediment either.

The three news sources all agree that, after the dialogue began and Atifete Jahjaga became president, the position was mostly depoliticized. All three note the high level of legitimacy she holds internationally and that the president of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolic, is willing to have talks with her, but not Hashim Thaci.<sup>43</sup> All three also note that she is highly cooperative and willing to implement agreements between the two states.<sup>44</sup> However, B92 is more critical of Jahjaga, noting a constant desire to be represented as a "sovereign independent state" that is barely mentioned, if at all, in the articles from Tanjug and BETA.<sup>45</sup>

### *Analysis*

In the cases of both the Prime Minister and the President, **there was a clear increase in the amount of positive coverage for Kosovo government officials as the dialogue started and progressed.** Before the dialogue, BETA and Tanjug avoided any positive coverage of Hashim Thaci, with only B92 noting that he had any cooperative attitude with Serbia. This expanded to consensus coverage in the Serbian media that Thaci was being cooperative with Serbia in the early dialogue period to Tanjug and B92 running statements about Thaci's courage as a prime minister. While BETA did not cover this opinion, it is clear that positive coverage of Thaci increased as the dialogue went on.

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<sup>38</sup>Tanjug, "Simic: meeting will reduce tension with Brussels," Tanjug, 19 October 2012

<sup>39</sup> BETA, "Piloted scandal," *BETA Week*, 25 February 2013

<sup>40</sup> Tanjug, "Ivanovic: Sejdiu's resignation has nothing to do with talks," Tanjug, 27 September 2010; BETA, "Targeting the elite," *BETA Week*, 13 May 2010; B92, "Kosovo 'postpones' meeting of regional leaders," *Radio B92*, 23 December 2009

<sup>41</sup> Tanjug, "Ivanovic: Sejdiu's resignation has nothing to do with talks," Tanjug, 27 September 2010; BETA, "Serbs divided," *BETA Week*, 17 December 2010

<sup>42</sup> B92, "Kosovo president blames Serbia for lack of returnees," *Radio B92*, 9 July 2009

<sup>43</sup> BETA, "AtifeteJahjaga—US Candidate," *BETA Week*, 14 April 2011; BETA, "Piloted scandal," *BETA Week*, 25 February 2013; Tanjug, "Nikolic for talks with Jahjaga and EU integration," Tanjug, 30 April 2012; B92, "Nikolic: we will cooperate, but not recognize," *Radio B92*, 26 July 2013

<sup>44</sup> BETA, "AtifeteJahjaga—US Candidate," *BETA Week*, 14 April 2011; Tanjug, "Ashton: Nikolic, Jahjaga are committed to dialogue," Tanjug, 6 February 2013; B92, "Nikolic: we will cooperate, but not recognize," *Radio B92*, 26 July 2013

<sup>45</sup> B92, "Nikolic, Jahjaga, Ashton meet in Brussels," *B92 Online*, 6 February 2013

In the case of the President, there was also an increase in positive coverage, but this increase correlated with a change in presidents, not with the dialogue. Fatmir Sejdiu and his temporary successors were treated as highly politicized figures and the Serbian media tended not to comment on their legitimacy or competence. Positive coverage of the President of Kosovo only increased when Atifete Jahjaga became president. She was praised throughout the dialogue process for a cooperative attitude and holding a high-level of legitimacy. However, it would appear that the increase in positive coverage of the presidency with the beginning of the dialogue was coincidental with the Jahjaga's presidency beginning just over a month after the start of the dialogue.

Negative coverage of the Prime Minister is more difficult to fit into a trend. The positions of the three media outlets on Thaci's potential past war crimes barely changed at all. BETA was the only one that changed, going from treating the war crimes accusations as an inconvenience no matter their verity to a proven fact that could bring down the government. This was a slight increase in negative coverage. The coverage of Thaci's controlling behavior does not appear to correlate at all to the dialogue. It was heavily covered before the dialogue, barely covered during the early dialogue period and then received some coverage during the later dialogue period. His potential nationalist leanings also receive erratic coverage. They are considered self-evident before the dialogue, no longer existent in the early period of the dialogue, and combined with his new pragmatism later in the dialogue. Finally, the potential weakness of Thaci's control over government and party varies widely by source and time period. It is not mentioned before the dialogue. BETA and Tanjug consider Thaci to have little control over his party and government in the early part of the dialogue, while B92 considered the government solid. Tanjug dropped the story of Thaci's weakness in the later period, but BETA continued to use it to explain why an agreement on normalization of relations was reached. **In terms of negative coverage of Thaci, it is difficult to find a discernable pattern for whether the dialogue affected the Serbian media.**

The Serbian media gave too little attention to the Kosovo Presidency to bother with much negative media coverage before the dialogue. After it began, only B92 gave any sustained negative coverage of Jahjaga as pushing an independence agenda in her talks with Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic. This was constant throughout the dialogue, again seeming to show that the beginning of the dialogue and changes in the coverage of the Kosovo presidency appear only to coincide with a new Kosovo president.

## 4. Dialogue

The attitudes of the three Serbian media outlets studied towards the dialogue all seem to be relentlessly positive in the sense that all three push the belief that the dialogue is a positive. Tanjug and B92 both tend to present the government position on dialogue uncritically, even as the dialogue evolved and changed. Before the dialogue began, both outlets parroted the government position that Serbia desired to renew the status-related dialogue "to resolve all problems in Kosovo peacefully, in a constructive, pragmatic way."<sup>46</sup> In the early dialogue period, when the negotiations were over technical issues, not status issues, the two outlets included some opposition voices, but only over whether or not particular agreements in the dialogue constituted recognition of Kosovo, not over criticism

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<sup>46</sup> B92, "Serbian minister says Kosovo's March 2004 violence 'further persecution of Serbs,'" *Radio B92*, 17 March 2010

of the dialogue shifting to technical issues. Comments by then Minister for the Interior Ivica Dacic that “it was in Serbia’s best interest to have the Kosovo and Metohija crisis and all technical issues resolved as soon as possible”<sup>47</sup> and by For a European Serbia whip Nada Kolundzija that Serbia was resolving legitimate interests in Kosovo through dialogue<sup>48</sup> passed without comparison to the point that only status issues were supposed to be discussed. In the later dialogue period, prominence was given to voices saying that the dialogue had to continue and for agreements from the dialogue to be respected.<sup>49</sup> B92 and Tanjug thus appear to give uncritical support to the dialogue and generally accept the government positions on the necessity of the dialogue without challenging the changing narrative.

BETA is similarly supportive of dialogue, but for the reason that it consistently considered any lack of dialogue to be a waste of time. Putting off dialogue to ensure they proceeded more according to Serbian interests would “bring no tangible results, because in any talks that would follow, Serbia would not be able to count on any progress without support from the great powers that will play the key role in the talks.”<sup>50</sup> When talks eventually began in the early dialogue period, BETA rhapsodized, “Negotiations, at Last” in its headline.<sup>51</sup> When the agreement normalizing relations was reached in the late dialogue period, BETA celebrated “a break with the longtime, fruitless effort to keep sovereignty over Kosovo.”<sup>52</sup> While Tanjug and B92 pushed the government line on the necessity of talks uncritically, BETA gave the much more critical perspective that any talks were better than no talks, because Serbia’s policies were otherwise wasting precious time.

The divide makes itself much more apparent, however, in how the dialogue is portrayed by the three different media outlets. While B92, Tanjug and BETA all generally agreed that negotiations and the dialogue were beneficial across all three periods, B92 and Tanjug were much less critical of the Serbian government’s role in the dialogue than BETA. Tanjug and B92 throughout the dialogue process present rather uncritically the government position that Serbian officials behaved very cooperatively while Kosovo tried to undermine the dialogue. Before the dialogue, Tanjug published, without qualification, an official comment that “negotiations on Kosovo's status are inevitable, and even the Kosovo Albanians realize this now, although their leaders are trying to delude them by saying that the negotiations will be of a purely technical nature.”<sup>53</sup> In the early dialogue period, Kosovo negotiators were frequently reported to be impeding progress by insisting on recognition of Kosovo instead of focusing on the subject of the dialogue.<sup>54</sup> In the early and later dialogue periods, Kosovo’s negotiators are always portrayed as unyielding and unwilling to compromise in comparison to the flexible, agreement-minded Serbs.<sup>55</sup> Tanjug’s reports thus give an image of the compromise-minded Serbian negotiators having to treat with the querulous Kosovo government. B92 gives a similar image, though it does give space for voices critical of how the Serbian

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<sup>47</sup> B92, “Kosovo status issue should not be avoided,” *B92 Online*, 21 November 2011

<sup>48</sup> Tanjug, “Kolundzija: North Kosovo crisis brings uncertainty,” *Tanjug*, 28 November 2011

<sup>49</sup> Tanjug, “Nikolic says no to granting all Pristina’s wishes,” *Tanjug*, 25 September 2012

<sup>50</sup> BETA, “Acting without support,” *BETA Week*, 9 August 2010

<sup>51</sup> BETA, “Negotiations at last,” *BETA Week*, 3 March 2011

<sup>52</sup> BETA, “BETA sees Kosovo agreement definitely turning Serbia toward EU future,” *BETA Week*, 29 April 2013

<sup>53</sup> Tanjug, “Ivanovic: negotiations on Kosovo’s status are inevitable,” *Tanjug*, 4 June 2010

<sup>54</sup> Tanjug, “Stefanovic: Top Officials’ Agreement on All Steps of Talks,” *Tanjug*, 4 May 2011; *Tanjug* August 15, 2011

<sup>55</sup> Tanjug, “Situation Complex, Government Handles Crisis Well,” *Tanjug*, 7 February 2012; *Tanjug*, “No trap in last item in agreement, says Stefanovic,” *Tanjug*, 28 February 2012



government approached the dialogue. Before the dialogue, B92 reports without comment a comment by Boris Tadic that while an attack on a Kosovo Serb home was “aimed at sabotaging a solution that would lead to negotiations,” it would not impede Serbia’s desire to reach a diplomatic solution.<sup>56</sup> However, B92 also reported critical civil society voices in this period that concluded from Belgrade’s policies “somebody wanted the negotiations to fail or expected them to.”<sup>57</sup> In the early dialogue period, Serbian negotiators are reported to be valiantly continuing the dialogue process in spite of pressure from politicians in Pristina to force Serbia to call off the dialogue.<sup>58</sup> In the later dialogue period, Serbian negotiators are reported to be committed to a deal, but face a Kosovo government refusing “to accept any Serbian proposal regarding a community of Serb municipalities” and an EU that “believed that Serbia would do anything to get a date for the start of the EU accession negotiations.”<sup>59</sup> Kosovo is constantly seen as trying to impede the dialogue and the agreements that came out of it while Serbia remains committed to dialogue and implementation.<sup>60</sup> B92 did report the opinions of the opposition who found that Serbia might have had trouble getting a commitment with Kosovo either because its negotiating platform was too vague or because it was too unrealistic.<sup>61</sup> However, the dominant narrative present throughout B92’s work is that Kosovo’s authorities blocked dialogue while Serbia was willing to compromise and reach a solution.

BETA found this narrative unconvincing, however. Before the dialogue, Serbian officials are portrayed as delusional, impeding talks because they refused to accept that “preserving Kosovo as a part of Serbia has been completely unrealistic all along.”<sup>62</sup> BETA does not question Kosovo’s commitment to dialogue, but openly wonders about whether Serbian officials are willing to participate in “an appropriately serious way.”<sup>63</sup> In the early dialogue period, BETA argues that Serbia’s appearance of flexibility is not due to its magnanimous nature, but due to a need “to show a certain degree of willingness to cooperate.”<sup>64</sup> BETA was, in fact, skeptical of any agreements being reached, believing that the two states’ governments lacked the political will to face their oppositions and achieve a deal in the early dialogue period.<sup>65</sup> Discussions of preserving Kosovo are considered propaganda that political parties use to avoid voicing unpleasant truths.<sup>66</sup> BETA sees the Serbian government as being remarkably inflexible in the early dialogue period,<sup>67</sup> not the beacon of cooperation described by Tanjug and B92.

In the later dialogue period, BETA does change its position slightly with the new government. It believes government policy changed from doing as little as possible to “bracing for negotiations which, if supported strongly by most influential Western actors, could produce a long-term, if not permanent, solution.”<sup>68</sup> The image of the Serbian

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<sup>56</sup> B92, “Serbian president warns UN of ‘sinister plan’ targeting Kosovo Serbs,” *Radio B92* 7 July 2010

<sup>57</sup> B92, “Serbia’s choice of talks’ team head shows negotiations to fail-director,” *Radio B92*, 1 December 2010

<sup>58</sup> B92, “Minister accuses ‘Pristina and some supporters,” *B92 Online*, 20 February 2012

<sup>59</sup> B92, “Still no deal with Pristina, prime minister reiterates,” *B92 Online*, 15 March 2013

<sup>60</sup> B92, “Rejection of amnesty bill ‘big problem,’” *B92 Online*, 5 July 2013

<sup>61</sup> B92, “Kosovo platform presented to opposition leaders,” *B92 Online*, 20 December 2012

<sup>62</sup> BETA, “The Kosovo compromise,” *BETA Week*, 16 September 2010

<sup>63</sup> BETA, “A step forward,” *BETA Week*, 14 October 2010

<sup>64</sup> BETA, “Negotiations at last,” *BETA Week*, 3 March 2011

<sup>65</sup> BETA, “Means for achieving some other goals,” *BETA Week*, 22 July 2011

<sup>66</sup> BETA, “Propaganda Maneuver,” *BETA Week*, 22 March 2012; BETA, “Compromise,” *BETA Week*, 18 May 2012

<sup>67</sup> BETA, “On hold,” *BETA Week*, 25 November 2011

<sup>68</sup> BETA, “Partition without partition,” *BETA Week*, 27 September 2012

government in this period thus becomes something closer to the one described by Tanjug and B92: a government that is open to negotiations and ready to compromise.<sup>69</sup> However, it does not include the discussions of the Kosovo government being obstructive, showing both sides as constructively striving for a solution.

### *Analysis*

**There was very little evolution over time within the three media outlets as the dialogue progressed.** All three maintained a constant position that talks were desirable. Tanjug continuously and uncritically reported the government image of a cooperative Serbian government having to suffer an intransigent Kosovo government. B92 similarly followed the government line, though it more frequently reported opposition voices that challenged the government narrative. Only BETA appeared to evolve in any sense, from a position where the Serbian government's fear of the opposition and unrealistic expectations made it uncooperative to a belief that Serbia was ready to cooperate later in the dialogue. It rarely reported the Kosovo government to be obstructive, though it did express some skepticism in the early dialogue period over whether the Kosovo government could face down the opposition.

**Overall, Serbian press appears to approve of the dialogue, while being overwhelmingly critical of Kosovo's role in it.** Only BETA ever acknowledged Kosovo playing a constructive role at any point, portraying it as rising from a previously obstructive crouch due to domestic opposition. Tanjug's overwhelmingly positive coverage of the Serbian government compared to B92's slightly more balanced coverage and BETA's overwhelmingly negative coverage in the first two periods would indicate that **there were two narratives in Serbian media about the dialogue.** In the first narrative, promoted by the government, **Serbia was a constructive force that consistently wanted to reach out to a recalcitrant Kosovo.** In the second narrative, promoted by BETA and alluded to by B92, Serbia was a delusional partner that often demanded too much in negotiations and was rarely willing to make tough choices for fear of domestic political backlash. **Kosovo, in the second narrative, was not a perfect partner, but the Serbian government's positions made cooperation unrealistic.** The narratives do merge, somewhat, in the later dialogue period, though the government and Tanjug narrative still paints Kosovo as recalcitrant while BETA views Kosovo constructively.

## Conclusion

The Serbian media presents something of a mixture about its attitudes towards Kosovo as the dialogue progressed. On the one hand, there was a clear evolution in how all three media outlets covered Kosovo during the dialogue. The decrease in articles about domestic issues and politics within Kosovo showed that the Serbian media's interest in presenting negative coverage of the Kosovo government waned as the dialogue progressed. In addition, the Serbian media appeared to become more practically minded; the articles about Serbia's foreign relations, which often involved Serbia pleading for states not to recognize Kosovo, waned over time. At the same time, positive coverage of Prime Minister Hashim Thaci and the Kosovo presidency increased, though, in the latter case, it likely had more to do with the change in president than due to the dialogue.

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<sup>69</sup>BETA, "New age, old faces," *BETA Week*, 14 March 2013; BETA, "Agreement on the horizon," *BETA Week*, 23 May 2013; BETA, "Pressure on the North," *BETA Week*, 19 July 2013

On the other hand, negative coverage of Kosovo government officials was erratic and appeared to have very little to do with the dialogue. As for coverage of the dialogue itself, this remained almost constant. All media outlets reporting in English supported a dialogue, though they gave different reasons for that support. There was also a deep cleavage in who to blame for the dialogue's failures, as Tanjug and B92 parroted the government line that it was the fault of Kosovo's obstruction while BETA argued that the Serbian government's delusions and then fears prevented it from acting seriously until later in the dialogue. Kosovo's "obstruction," according to BETA, had just as much to do with Serbia's unreasonable demands as it did with Kosovo's domestic politics. It is curious that, on a topic that went through so many transformations during the period studied was given such consistent coverage. It is also curious that Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci and President Atifete Jahjaga were characterized as cooperative by all three media outlets during the early and later dialogue periods, but B92 and Tanjug considered Kosovo to be generally obstructionist. These curiosities speak to media outlets that may have simply fallen back on a default view of the dialogue without taking on a more critical perspective, even as their other coverage may have changed.

There are a myriad of explanations for the changes in coverage that did occur. Since the main audience of these English-language articles was likely a Western, English-speaking audience coming from states that had recognized Kosovo, the media may have shifted to less reporting on Serbia's campaign to keep Kosovo from being recognized, which would prove unpopular with their audience. The Serbian media itself may have had a change of opinion, thinking that a more practical policy was required and that more practical elements should be emphasized in coverage. There also may have been a change in where the Serbian media wanted to lead public opinion about the Kosovo issue, away from emphasizing non-recognition and towards giving Serbia leverage in negotiations, though the negative coverage of Kosovo's leaders and the coverage of the dialogue is too erratic to prove or disprove this concept.

Regardless, the Serbian media appears to have taken a much more practical attitude towards a potential agreement with Kosovo and taken a softer position on Kosovo's leaders. However, attitudes towards the dialogue itself appear to have hardened and negative coverage of Kosovo's leaders appears to function independent of the results of the dialogue. This would indicate that the window for a final, practical resolution might be opening for Serbia's pro-Western media, though real reconciliation with Kosovo might be a long way off.

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### **Policy Analysis**

Policy Analysis in general is a policy advice paper which particularly aims to influence the key means through which policy decisions are made in both local and central levels of government. The purpose of Policy Analysis is to address, more in-depth, a particular problem, to examine the arguments related to a concerned policy, and to analyze the implementation of the policy. Through Policy Analysis, Group for Legal and Political studies seeks to stimulate wider comprehensive debate on the given issue via presenting informed policy-relevant choices and recommendations to the key stakeholders and parties of interest.