



South East European Network
for Professionalization of Media

On Opposite Sides of the Wall:

Reporting Crisis in Kosovo

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1. Introduction

This report examines an episode in relations between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, one in a long series of political crises. This particular episode had a very concrete conception in the form of the wall erected on 7 December 2016 in the town of Mitrovica, right at the line of delimitation between the two ethnic communities – an event that rubbed salt into still open wounds.

In this study, we analyse some of the patterns of media reporting on this particular controversy, both through content analysis and interviews. The results indicate that the media in Kosovo and Serbia often tended to deepen sharp ethnic divides when reporting about the wall dispute, but that some media also displayed a certain, although limited, ability to step away from the divide.

1.1 The ongoing crisis in Kosovo-Serbia relations

Kosovo's post-war transition has been slow, controversial and painful. This is understandable if we bear in mind the heavy losses that Kosovo suffered during the war of 1998–1999. More than 13,000 people were confirmed dead or missing¹, more than 20,000 women were raped² and at least 188,000 houses and other structures, including 358 schools and 215 mosques, were destroyed or damaged.³

Rebuilding houses and infrastructure has been more or less successful mainly thanks to private initiative by Kosovars, but the healing of other wounds has been much more difficult. Kosovar society is still dealing with the painful legacy of the war in that ethno-national fragmentation still dominates social and political life. Indeed, the extreme level of antagonism between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs became the chief obstacle to Kosovo's post-war process of rebuilding, democratisation and state building. This is why both the international community and local authorities in post-war Kosovo have made interethnic reconciliation and reintegration of minorities a top political priority. Yet, while there has been significant progress in reintegration of non-Serb minorities, success in overcoming animosities and mistrust between Kosovar

¹ According to *The Kosovo Memory Book 1998-2000*, 31,600 documents confirm the death or disappearance of 13,535 individuals in Kosovo between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 2000. Accessed 14 December 2016. Available at www.kosovomemorybook.org

² See Elizabeth Vulaj, "Sexual Violence During the Kosovo War". Accessed 14 December 2016. Available at www.law.gonzaga.edu/gjil/2015/12/2030/, and Juan Cole, "5,000 Hanging Skirts: How Women Remember War Rape in Kosovo". Accessed 14 December 2016. Available at: www.juancole.com/2015/06/hanging-remember-kosova.html

³ "Botohet bilanci zyrtar i Luftës së Kosovës: 11 840 të vrarë", *Koha.net*, 15 May 2013. Accessed 14 December 2016. Available at <http://archive.koha.net/?id=8&arkiva=1&l=145884>

Albanians and Serbs is modest. Interethnic violence in Kosovo has decreased significantly in recent years⁴, but still, reintegration of Serbs into Kosovar society has proven very difficult.

In 2011, a European Union–mediated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia began in Brussels. There were hopes that progress toward normalisation of relations would have a direct and decisive influence on the reintegration of the Serbs in Kosovo. However, six years of dialogue have yielded only modest, and controversial, results. Dissatisfaction with those results rose not only within the Kosovo opposition, but also in the two main ruling parties.⁵ (Throughout this report, references to political parties and elections refer to the situation prior to the parliamentary elections in Kosovo in June 2017.) Although Belgrade and Prishtina have signed several agreements on technical issues, their implementation has been problematic, leading to constant sharp polemics between the two sides on who is to blame.⁶ More importantly, numerous observers are very sceptical about the influence of this dialogue on the situation of Serbs in Kosovo and their integration into Kosovar society and institutions. It has been suggested that the Brussels-sponsored talks worsened and institutionalised the segregation of Serbs in Kosovo.⁷

According to some analysts, the dialogue process enabled Belgrade to have a say over the internal development of Kosovo and gain direct control over Serb members of the Kosovar Assembly, or parliament.⁸ This played a role in the frequent Serb boycotts of Kosovo’s government and Parliament on issues about which Belgrade raised concerns; the Kosovar Serbs’ steady refusal to cooperate on the formation of Kosovo’s armed forces and ratification of a border demarcation agreement with Montenegro are two of the more visible recent examples of this attitude, which has been very frustrating not only for Kosovo’s government but also for its public. However, the Brussels process faced its most serious test during a chain of events in the second half of 2016 and the beginning of 2017, which triggered a dangerous slump in relations

⁴ U.S. Department of State, OSAC, “Kosovo 2015 Crime and Safety Report”. Accessed 14 December 2016. Available at <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=17444>. OSAC reports on Kosovo for 2016 and 2017 do not contain specific data on this issue.

⁵ “Është mbajtur takimi i komisioneve parlamentare rreth procesit të dialogut në Bruksel: Deputetët e shohin Kosovën si humbëse në dialogun me Serbinë” (Meeting of parliamentary committees on Brussels dialogue process: MPs see Kosovo as the loser in talks with Serbia), *Koha Ditore*, 13 April 2017, p. 2

⁶ “Brussels Agreements: Implementation State of Play”, Republic of Kosovo, 25 November 2016. Accessed 8 December 2016. Available at http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Kosovo_Report_on_State_of_Play_in_implementation_of_the_Brussels_Agreements__25_November_2016.pdf

⁷ “Serbët në Kosovë mes integritimit dhe legjitimitimit të segregacionit” (Serbs in Kosovo between integration and legitimation of segregation), *Koha Ditore*, 10 April 2017, p. 10

⁸ See for example the column by Agron Bajrami, “Ra ky dialog e u pamë”, *Koha Ditore*, 15 January 2017, p. 3

between Belgrade and Prishtina that resulted in the Kosovo Assembly resolution of 9 March 2017 calling on the government to suspend the dialogue.⁹ On the Serbian side, after the furore over a train decorated with Serbian symbols and the slogan “Kosovo is Serbia” which was halted at the Kosovo border on 15 January 2017, then-Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic declared there would be “no more (Kosovo) dialogue in Brussels until this has been cleared up.”¹⁰

1.2 The fragmented, vulnerable Kosovar media

The media scene in Kosovo developed rapidly after 1999 thanks to generous support by many donors. Only a year after the war, more than 100 media outlets had started from scratch. The previous decade of Serbian direct colonial rule over Kosovo was marked by systematic police repression of Kosovar journalists, culminating in the closure of all Albanian-language media by the beginning of 1999.¹¹ By 2001 the number of new outlets had risen to 145, including broadcasters sponsored by international organisations such as KFOR, the NATO-led peacekeeping force.¹²

Dozens of these media outlets disappeared soon after international donors left Kosovo, while others that had become unsustainable were left struggling to survive and became more vulnerable to political and economic pressures. As a result, some outlets began running stories favourable to political or economic power brokers in exchange for financial support.¹³

While the printed press has been shrinking, with only five daily newspapers still being published, the online media sector has expanded rapidly. Only a few, including the most influential news sites, accepted self-regulation under the auspices of the Kosovo Press Council, while other small online media remain unregistered and outside any form of regulation.

⁹ “Kuvendi miraton rezolutën, kerkohet pezullimi e dialogut me Serbinë deri në lirimin e Haradinajt”, Telegrafi.com, 9 March 2017. Accessed 9 March 2017. Available at <http://telegrafi.com/kuvendi-miraton-rezoluten-per-haradinajn/>

¹⁰ “‘If Serbs are killed, we’ll send the army to Kosovo’ – president”, B92, 15 January 2017. Accessed 15 January 2017. Available at http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2017&mm=01&dd=15&nav_id=100237

¹¹ Isuf Berisha, “Kosovo/a”, in *Media Ownership and its Impact on Media Independence and Pluralism*, p. 220. Accessed 5 December 2016. Available at <http://www3.mirovni-institut.si/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/media-ownership-and-its-impact-on-media-independence-and-pluralism.pdf>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Isuf Berisha, “Media Ownership and Finances in Kosovo: Legal Vacuum and Lack of Transparency”. Accessed 5 December 2016. Available at http://www.mirovni-institut.si/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Media-Ownership-and-Finances-in-Kosovo_0.pdf

The media market, in a country with a weak economy and only 1.8 million people, is simply too small to permit the sustainable development of all existing media outlets. There are no regular, reliable surveys of the local advertising market. However, according to a study recently commissioned by the broadcast regulator, the Independent Media Commission (IMC), the annual advertising market is around 30 million euros.¹⁴

Although the media sector has made some progress towards sustainability,¹⁵ it remains overcrowded. According to the most recent IMC figures, there are 103 licensed broadcast outlets in Kosovo: 83 radio and 20 TV stations.¹⁶ An additional 48 cable TV channels are registered with the IMC as program service providers.

Four fifths of the 103 broadcasters (63 radio and 18 TV stations) operate as private businesses, 18 radio and one TV station are registered as NGOs, while two radio and one TV station are part of the public service Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK). The majority of these media outlets broadcast in the Albanian language (49 radio and 14 TV stations), 28 in Serbian (23 radio and five TV stations), and four in Turkish (three radio and one TV station). Three radio stations broadcast in Bosnian, one in Gorani and one in Romani, while two radio stations broadcast in three or more languages.¹⁷

The prevailing pattern of media ownership in Kosovo puts obstacles in the path of the media fulfilling a public service role, since their owners have almost always put financial concerns before their declared mission of representing and protecting the public interest. The inability to find a sustainable financing model for the public broadcaster RTK only compounds this critical problem of the Kosovar media scene. Since the collapse of its license-fee-based funding model in 2009, RTK has been financed from the state budget, making it more vulnerable to political pressure.¹⁸ There is a widespread perception that RTK for some time has been directly

¹⁴ Management Development Associates, *Advertising Market Research and Analysis in Kosovo*, September 2013. Accessed 19 December 2016. Available at <http://www.kpm-ks.org/materiale/dokument/1389360328.1626.pdf>

¹⁵ IREX, *Media Sustainability Index 2016*. Accessed 5 December 2016. Available at <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2016-full.pdf.pdf>. See also N. Miftari, “Kosovo’s Media Closer to Sustainability”, 25 June 2015. Accessed 5 December 2016. Available at: <http://themediaproject.org/article/kosovos-media-near-sustainability-despite-weaknesses?page=full>

¹⁶ IMC, “Adresai i subjekteve transmetuese të licencuara në Kosovë”, 18 January 2017. Accessed 21 January 2017. Available at <http://www.kpm-ks.org/?mod=dokumentet&faqja=2&gjuha=1>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Isuf Berisha, “Financing from the State Budget Enables Political Pressure and Control”. Accessed 6 December 2016. Available at <http://www.mirovni-institut.si/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Kosovo-Financing-from-state-budget-enables-political-pressure-and-control.pdf>

influenced by the main governing party for the past decade, the Democratic Party of Kosovo or PDK.¹⁹

Kosovo has a relatively solid base of media legislation, drafted with support or under supervision of international organisations such as the OSCE, EU, and others, and therefore is more or less in line with European standards of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Implementation of the laws has, however, been problematic.²⁰ As a consequence Kosovar journalists are not effectively protected by law enforcement agencies from various forms of pressure, including intimidation, threats and physical attacks.²¹ Moreover, according to research on the media environment in 2015, only 33 per cent of Kosovar journalists have employment contracts.²²

It should be noted that the interethnic polarisation and fragmentation of society in Kosovo is also reflected in the media. With Kosovar Albanians and Serbs living in two parallel societies with limited communication and cooperation, it is not surprising that Serb journalists in Kosovo have a separate professional organisation, a branch of the Serbian Journalists Association²³, while the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) chiefly comprises journalists with Albanian-language outlets and media serving the non-Serb minorities. Indeed, as the results of this study of one short episode in Albanian-Serb relations show, Kosovar media played an important role not only in manifesting, but also in spreading interethnic polarisation and fragmentation in Kosovo.

¹⁹ UBO Consulting, *Media Indicators 2015: A thorough study from a journalists' point of view on Kosovo's media freedom and conditions*, p. 12. Accessed 15 December 2016. Available at <http://presscouncil-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Media-Indicators-2015.pdf>

²⁰ "Kosovo Country Report 2016," in *Nations in Transition 2016*. Accessed 6 December 2016. Available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2016/kosovo>. See also Isuf Berisha, "Editors in Kosovo: The struggle for professional integrity amid poor rule of law", 2016. Accessed 6 December 2016. Available at <http://mediaobservatory.net/radar/editors-kosovo-struggle-professional-integrity-amid-poor-rule-law>

²¹ Petrit Collaku, "Indicators for the media freedom and journalists' safety [Kosovo]". Accessed 6 December 2016. Available at: <http://safejournalists.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Indicators-for-the-media-freedom-and-journalists-safety-Kosovo.pdf>. See also Isuf Berisha, "Editors in Kosovo: The struggle for professional integrity amid poor rule of law".

²² UBO Consulting, *Media Indicators 2015: A thorough study from a journalists' point of view on Kosovo's media freedom and conditions*, p. 12

²³ "Budimir Ničić novi predsednik Društva novinara Kosova i Metohije", KiM radio, 29 July 2014. Accessed 18 December 2016. Available at http://kossev.info/strana/arhiva/budimir_nicic_novi_predsednik_drustva_novinara_kosova_i_metohije/2047

2. Kosovo from one crisis to another

After nine years as a protectorate under UN administration, Kosovo declared its independence in February 2008. To date some 114 countries have recognised Kosovo as an independent state.

In contrast to its success internationally, Kosovo's internal development has been less encouraging. The democratisation process has advanced slowly and not without controversy. Kosovo's democracy score last year according to Freedom House was 5.07 on a seven-point scale, with 7 representing the lowest level of democratic progress.²⁴ The European Commission gives poor marks to upholding the rule of law, noting a corrupt judicial system that is moreover slow and inefficient.²⁵ Although Kosovo's economic growth of around 3 to 4 per cent in the last two years is higher than that of most of its neighbours, unemployment remains stubbornly high²⁶, standing at 32.9 per cent in 2016.²⁷ Public services are perceived as being very corrupt²⁸ as well as inefficient, the health system is dysfunctional and the quality of education very low.²⁹ Under these circumstances, euphoria after liberation from Serbian colonial rule and enthusiasm in the wake of the declaration of independence are slowly but surely giving way to mounting frustrations and disappointment.³⁰

Another source of frustration in Kosovo has been its difficult and tricky post-war relations with Serbia. Belgrade has not only refused to recognise the new reality in Kosovo or its independence, but supported by Russia has done everything it can to prevent Kosovo's recognition by other countries and block its membership in international organisations. Serbia has not cooperated in disclosing information on the fate of thousands of Albanian civilians captured by Serbian

²⁴ Kosovo Country Report 2016, Freedom House, 2016

²⁵ *Kosovo 2015 Report*, European Commission. Accessed 5 December 2016. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_kosovo.pdf

²⁶ The World Bank in Kosovo, Country Program Snapshot, April 2016. Accessed 5 December, 2016. Available at <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/419461462386476530/World-Bank-Kosovo-Program-Snapshot-April-2016.pdf>

²⁷ See UNDP, About Kosovo. Accessed 5 December, 2016. Available at <http://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/countryinfo.html>

²⁸ Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2016. Accessed 26 January, 2017. Available at http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016. See also "Kosova, më e korruptuara në rajon" (Kosovo, the most corrupt in the region), *Koha Ditore*, 26 January, 2017, pp. 1,5

²⁹ Kosovo's education system amongst worst in the world," Prishtina Insight, 6 December 2016. Accessed 25 January 2017. Available at <http://prishtinainsight.com/kosovos-education-system-amongst-worst-world/>

³⁰ Public Pulse XI, UNDP Kosovo, May 2016. Accessed 25 January, 2017. Available at http://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/library/democratic_governance/public-pulse-11.html

military and police forces during the war in 1998 and 1999. Furthermore, since 1999, Serbia, through its parallel security and municipal structures in Serb-populated parts of Kosovo, has obstructed the consolidation of statehood and the internal development of Kosovo.

All of these negative factors created fertile ground for the rise of nationalist and other anti-establishment sentiments in Kosovo. Notably, the anti-establishment movement Vetevendosje (Self-determination) won the third-largest number of votes at the previous elections. The rise of Vetevendosje altered the political dynamic. Indeed, since it entered the Assembly, the party has played a “pressing game”, using every possible means to promote its anti-government arguments and mobilise public dissatisfaction through its actions both in the legislature and in the streets. Such “useful” events have not been rare. The popularity of the ruling parties, already undermined by corruption scandals, sank further as dissatisfaction with the unproductive dialogue with Serbia and the border demarcation agreement with Montenegro mounted. Together with two other parties then in opposition, the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) and Initiative for Kosovo (Nisma), Vetevendosje succeeded in keeping the government of Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic under constant pressure from the day it was formed in 2014, through frequent protests that often turned violent. Furthermore, during 2015 and 2016 Vetevendosje and other opposition parties on several occasions disrupted the work of Parliament with tear gas in protest against the 2013 Brussels Agreement, which mandated the formation of an association of Serb-majority municipalities, and the Montenegrin border agreement.

The EU-brokered dialogue that began in 2011 was supposed to help put Kosovar-Serbian relations on a normal footing. However, the dialogue has helped very little if at all. Despite participation in the process, Belgrade continued its campaign against Kosovo on the international stage and its support for parallel structures to undermine the Kosovar authorities in Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo. Recent global events, starting with Brexit and continuing with Donald Trump’s election as president of the United States, seem to have influenced Belgrade’s more aggressive behaviour towards its neighbours³¹, seemingly based on the belief that Trump will deliver long-awaited changes in U.S. policy in the Balkans in a way that will be much more favourable to Serbia. Together with the increasing involvement of ever-more assertive Russia in the Balkans, this seems to have encouraged Serbia to harden its stance towards Kosovo.³²

Prishtina-Belgrade relations began heating up even before the Mitrovica wall affair. In the first serious incident, in late September Serbian police arrested the police chief of the Mitrovica

³¹ “Serbia’s Regional Offensive”, Helsinki Bulletin No. 131. Accessed 14 January 2017. Available at <http://www.helsinki.org.rs/doc/HB-No131.pdf>

³² Ibid.

region, Nehat Thaci, while he was travelling through Serbia.³³ Then, on 7 December, the soon to be notorious wall was built in the northern, predominantly Serb part of Mitrovica, only metres from the Ibar river bridge. Less than month later, on 4 January 2017, French authorities detained former Kosovar Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, at the time leader of the second-strongest opposition party, on the basis of a Serbian arrest warrant.³⁴ Serbia refused to withdraw the warrant and asked France to extradite Haradinaj. Prishtina reacted by blocking Serbian President Nikolic's planned visit to Kosovo over the Orthodox Christmas holiday. Kosovar politicians also blamed Belgrade for a 10 January bomb attack on the government building in northern Mitrovica.³⁵ The last major incident blew up when a train decorated with Serbian flags and Orthodox symbols, bearing the slogan "Kosovo is Serbia" in 21 languages, departed Belgrade on 14 January, bound for Mitrovica.³⁶ For its part, Serbia denounced Kosovo President Hashim Thaci's initiative to transform the small Kosovo Security Force into a full-fledged army as a provocation.³⁷

In an interview with Radio Free Europe, Kosovo Prime Minister Isa Mustafa expressed Prishtina's frustration with these developments. "It doesn't make any sense that we have been negotiating with Serbia for six years on normalisation of relations", he said, "and then one day a wall comes up which is not just symbolic but real, expressing the reality of the will of Serbia and Serbs to separation in Kosovo."³⁸

³³ "Serbia Arrests Kosovo Police Director for 'Terrorism'", *Balkan Insight*, 29 September 2016. Accessed 5 December 2016. Available at <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-police-director-arrested-in-serbia-09-29-2016>

³⁴ "Kosovo ex-PM arrested in France on Serbian warrant," *Reuters*, 4 January 2017. Accessed 4 January 2017. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-kosovo-idUSKBN14O24N?il=0>

³⁵ Alarm për destabilizim të Kosovës nga Serbia (Alarm over Serbian destabilisation of Kosovo), *Koha Ditore*, 12 January 2017, pp. 1, 3

³⁶ "Serbian Nationalist Train Halts at Border with Kosovo", *The New York Times*, 14 January 2017. Accessed 14 January 2017. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/14/world/europe/kosovo-serbia-train.html?_r=0

³⁷ "Kosovo's president asks for creation of a regular army", *Associated Press*, 7 March 2017. Accessed 8 March 2017. Available at <https://apnews.com/93a8004a35e0448cac6669c1735a50ad/Kosovo-s-president-asks-for-creation-of-a-regular-army>. See also "Kosovska vojska destabilizuje region" (Kosovo army is destabilising the region), *Politika*, 8 March 2017. Accessed 8 March 2017. Available at <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/375714/Kosovska-vojska-destabilizuje-region>

³⁸ "Muri në Mitrovicë sinjal për ndryshimin e dialogut" (The Mitrovica wall is a signal to change the dialogue), *Radio Europa e Lirë*, 17 December 2016. Accessed 18 December 2016. Available at <http://www.evropaelire.org/a/28180303.html>

3. The wall of ethnic division

Our research examined news coverage of the crisis that was triggered by the erection of the wall in Mitrovica in northern Kosovo. The 2.5-metre high wall was built in the middle of the main road in the northern part of Mitrovica, hard by the famous bridge over the Ibar River which since 1999 has marked the *de facto* line of division between southern, predominantly Albanian Mitrovica and the smaller northern part almost exclusively populated by Serbs. The bridge was scheduled to reopen a few weeks later, on 20 January 2017, but the wall controversy forced a postponement.

North Mitrovica Mayor Goran Rakic and Belgrade officials claimed the wall was part of a bridge revitalisation project sponsored by the EU on the basis of an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia.³⁹ Kosovo's government strenuously denied this⁴⁰ and directly accused Belgrade of ordering the wall to be built.⁴¹

It goes without saying that this event attracted a great deal of attention in the Kosovar media, where every development was followed closely from the moment the wall was erected to its demolition on 5 February 2017. The concerns of Kosovo Albanians were perhaps best expressed in the headline of a front-page story in *Koha Ditore*, the main Kosovar daily, on 8 December 2016. The headline "Division of Mitrovica cemented" topped the lead story, which also filled the entire third page.⁴² The sub-head ran, "Serbs cement division of Mitrovica by building a 2.5-metre wall very close to the Ibar bridge".⁴³ Some international media saw the event in a similar light. For example, a 19 February 2017 story in *The New York Times* on the situation in the Balkans cites Albanian-Serb confrontations over the wall as an example of Belgrade stirring up trouble with the backing of Moscow. Reporter Barbara Surk writes, "The Serbs erected a

³⁹ "Rakiq: Muri, pjesë e marrëveshjes për urën" (Rakic: The wall is part of the bridge deal), Telegrafi.com, 28 December 2016.

⁴⁰ "Tahiri: The wall in Mitrovica North in violation with Brussels Agreement", Gazeta Express, 7 December 2016. Accessed 7 December 2016. Available at <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/en/news/tahiri-the-wall-in-mitrovica-north-in-violation-with-brussels-agreement-171585/>

⁴¹ "Mustafa: Muri në veri, lojë e ulët e Serbisë" (The wall in the north – Serbia's dirty game), Telegrafi.com, 2 January 2017. See also "Qeveria e Serbisë urdhëroi ndërtimin e murit" (Serbian government ordered the wall built), Telegrafi.com, 19 January 2017

⁴² "Betonohet ndarja e Mitrovicës" (Division of Mitrovica cemented), *Koha Ditore*, 8 December 2016, pp. 1, 3

⁴³ Ibid.

concrete wall separating the northern, predominantly Serb part of Mitrovica from the ethnic Albanians in the southern part.”⁴⁴

Kosovo opposition parties were quick to use this situation to reinforce their anti-government rhetoric. They claimed the wall was a result of the government’s mismanagement of the dialogue with Serbia. Initiative for Kosovo leader Fatmir Limaj accused the government of fooling the people, because the wall, according to him, originated in secret government agreements.⁴⁵ A parliamentary discussion of the issue on 23 December 2016 featured fierce debates between opposition and ruling parties and reciprocal accusations of treason.⁴⁶ A week later, the Kosovo Assembly adopted a resolution that obliged the government to demolish the wall by the end of January⁴⁷, after the opposition agreed to drop the point in its draft proposal calling on the government to resign. The wall was still standing when the deadline passed, prompting the opposition on 1 February 2017 to call for the government’s resignation.⁴⁸

As described above, the already high tensions over the wall ramped up after France detained Haradinaj on 4 January 2017⁴⁹ and soon climbed even higher when the train proclaiming “Kosovo is Serbia” departed Belgrade on 14 January, headed for Mitrovica. Eventually it stopped before reaching the border, where Kosovar special police forces were waiting to prevent its entrance into Kosovar territory.⁵⁰ This threw more fuel on the crisis, as each side blamed the other for escalating the situation with destructive intent. Thaci accused Serbia of arming Serbs in the north and planning to annex northern Kosovo⁵¹, while his Serbian counterpart Nikolic

⁴⁴ “Russia Stirs Frictions in Balkans, as NATO Keeps an Uneasy Peace”, *The New York Times*, 19 February 19 2017. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/19/world/europe/russia-nato-balkans.html>

⁴⁵ “Limaj: Muri në Mitrovicë u ndërtua me marrëveshje të fshehta të Qeverisë” (Limaj: Secret government agreements led to the erection of the wall in Mitrovica), *Gazeta Express*, 13 December 2016.

⁴⁶ “Pozita dhe opozita vajtojnë murin me akuza për tadhti” (The position and the opposition lament the wall with accusations of treason), *Koha Ditore*, 24-25 December 2016, pp. 1-2

⁴⁷ “Kuvendi miratoi rezolutën për rrënimin e murit në veri të Mitrovicës” (Assembly adopts resolution to bring down the wall in north Mitrovica), *Telegrafi.com*, 29 December 2016. Accessed on 29 December. 2016. Available at <http://telegrafi.com/kuvendi-miratoi-rezulton-per-rrenimin-e-murit-ne-veri-te-mitrovices-dokument/>

⁴⁸ “Opozita: Pasi nuk e rrëzoi murin, të bjerë Qeveria” (Opposition: Government should step down because it did not bring down the wall), *Koha Ditore*, 2 February 2017, pp. 1, 3

⁴⁹ “Merr intensitet ‘lufta e ftohtë’ mes Kosovës dhe Serbisë” (“Cold war’ between Kosovo and Serbia is intensifying), *Koha Ditore*, 7-8 January 2017, pp. 1, 3

⁵⁰ “Tensions flare as Serb nationalist train halts at border”, *Associated Press*, 14 January 2017. Accessed 14 January 2017. Available at <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/b0a5b246046e4af1824a21d5281a6eca/serbia-sends-train-kosovo-north-despite-pristina-protest>

⁵¹ “Thaçi: Serbia po armatos veriu, muri do të rrënohet” (Thaci: Serbia is arming the north, the wall will be destroyed), *Koha Ditore*, 26 January 2017, pp. 1, 3

threatened to send the army to Kosovo if necessary to protect the Serb population there.⁵² Although there were no reported cases of attacks on Serbs in Kosovo during this tense time, Serbian leaders warned that Serbs would be killed if the situation escalated into open conflict.⁵³ Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic (now the president) claimed Kosovo's ambition was "to provoke a conflict, to start a wider conflict".⁵⁴

With much difficulty the EU managed to calm the situation somewhat by hosting meetings between the heads of state and government of both sides in Brussels on 23 January and 2 February 2017.⁵⁵ Eventually both sides relented under pressure from Brussels and Washington and signed a face-saving agreement to pull the wall down.⁵⁶ As a result the local authorities in northern Mitrovica bulldozed the wall on 5 February.⁵⁷ Two days later they began building a new wall or "concrete structure" only two metres away from the site of the demolished one.⁵⁸ However, the new wall did not trigger additional tensions because it was permitted by the bilateral agreement, as the Kosovo government admitted.

⁵² "If Serbs are killed, we'll send army to Kosovo" – president", B92, 15 January 2017. Accessed 15 January 2017. Available at http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2017&mm=01&dd=15&nav_id=100237

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ "Tensions flare as Serb nationalist train halts at border", Associated Press, 14 January 2017

⁵⁵ "Kosovo, Serbia Presidents Meet to Ease Tensions", Balkan Insight, 24 January 2017. Accessed 24 January 2017. Available at <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/the-presidents-of-serbia-and-kosovo-to-meet-in-brussels-01-23-2017>. See also "Kosovo-Serbia Talks Fail to Defuse Tensions", Balkan Insight, 2 February 2017. Accessed 2 February 2017. Available at <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/dialogue-of-normalizations-or-tensions-02-02-2017>

⁵⁶ "Marrëveshja Mustafa-Apostolova-Rakiq: Serbët do ta heqin vetë murin" (Mustafa, Apostolova, Rakiq agree: Serbs will remove the wall), *Koha Ditore*, 31 December 2016, pp. 1, 3. See also "Mitrovica wall to be demolished on Sunday (Document)", *Gazeta Express*, 4 February 2017. Accessed 4 February 2017. Available at <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/en/news/mitrovica-wall-to-be-demolished-on-sunday-document-172057/>

⁵⁷ "Rrënohet muri në Mitrovicë, paralajmërohet ndërtimi i tjetrit" (Mitrovica wall pulled down, building of new one announced), *Koha Ditore*, 6 February 2017, pp. 1, 3

⁵⁸ "Veriorët ndërtojnë mur me 'kontrollor'" (Northerners are building a wall with a 'controller'), *Koha Ditore*, 7 February 2017, pp. 1, 3. See also "'Structure' is being built in K. Mitrovica to replace 'wall'", B92, 7 February 2017. Accessed 8 February 2017. Available at http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2017&mm=02&dd=07&nav_id=100446

4. Methodology

Our study focuses on media reporting on the Albanian-Serb confrontation in late 2016 and early 2017 over the wall in northern Mitrovica. The aim was to pick out some patterns of reporting on this crisis of interethnic relations.

The research methodology used content analyses of reports in the Kosovar media combined with in-depth interviews with prominent representatives of the Kosovar media community.

Nine media outlets in both Kosovo and Serbia, primarily online news sites, were selected for the study, and 20 articles were analysed. In addition, we conducted six interviews with media/political analysts and representatives of media regulatory and self-regulatory bodies and journalism associations. One interview was conducted by online communication; the rest were face to face interviews.

The time frame of the research covers the period from December 2016 to mid-February 2017. In some cases information was added on developments after this period.

4.1 Selection of media content

Selection of media outlets was based on four criteria: audience reach, relevance of reporting on the crisis, audience diversity, and finally the availability of their content. Based on the final criterion, the sample was limited to online media and daily newspapers.

Given the nature of the wall controversy, it was extremely important to include both Albanian-language and Serbian-language outlets. Among Albanian-language media, the privately owned Gazeta Express was selected as the most visited Albanian-language news site not only in Kosovo but also in Albania. Also included were another popular Kosovar news site, Telegrafi.com, and Koha.net, which is one of the most trusted news providers and is perceived as not compromising standards of professional journalism for the sake of higher readership.

Koha Ditore was included as one of the most influential dailies in Kosovo and a representative of the so-called traditional media, but mostly because it covered the controversy in great detail. Among the sampled outlets, its reporting on the wall crisis was the best-informed and most balanced, with voices of all relevant parties represented.

The private outlet Radiokim.net and the second Serbian-language channel of public television RTK 2 were selected among the Kosovar media in the Serbian language. In addition, three Belgrade media were included because they were important in terms of how the crisis was communicated. In terms of impact on the audience, Belgrade outlets totally drowned out

Serbian-language media in Kosovo during the crisis.⁵⁹ B92 was selected for its informed reporting of press conferences by Nikolic and Vucic on 15 January 2017, while *Kurir* and *Informer* were included as examples of the sensationalist reporting by some Belgrade dailies during the crisis.⁶⁰

Twenty articles from the selected media were chosen for analysis. The sample is not representative, but the results of the research illustrate different patterns of media reporting in the time frame of this report.

Articles were selected so as to bring out the patterns of reporting in their respective outlets and as covering major aspects and developments of the wall crisis.

5. Research results

5.1 Range of voices presented

Giving space to a range of views is a key criterion for journalism in general, but its importance cannot be overstressed in a case such as this, when the Kosovo media reported on events or situations involving interethnic relations, confrontations and conflicts.

The case of the wall in northern Mitrovica is one short episode in a history of confrontation and conflict between Serbs and Albanians over Kosovo. This crisis proved to be a very delicate and challenging test of professionalism for all media outlets. In the reports in our sample, most media outlets did not pass this test with flying colours. In most cases online media produced their news based on one source only, with the exception of one Koha.net article that mentions all relevant perspectives on the issue and one item on Radiokim.net which presented some variety of voices (see Table 1). The sampled reports in online media generally presented the views of one side of the interethnic confrontation. Belgrade media outlets also typically based their reporting on government or pro-government sources.

⁵⁹ Interview with Budimir Nicic, chairman, Kosovo branch of the Serbian Journalists Association, Prishtina, 16 February 2017.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Table 1. Level of pluralism in news content

	One interest group represented	More pluralism, but lacking key perspectives	High level of plurality	Number of articles per outlet
<i>Koha Ditore</i>			6 items	6
Koha.net	1 item		1 item	2
Gazeta Express	2 items		1 item	3
Telegrafi.com	2 items			2
RTK 2	1 item	1 item		2
Radiokim.net	1 item	1 item		2
B92	1 item			1
<i>Kurir</i>		1 item		1
<i>Informer</i>	1 item			1
Totals	9	3	8	20

Note that the analysis does not necessarily support the conclusion that the selected reports reflect the editorial policy of their respective media. Another possible argument is that the sampled articles also reflect the online outlets' rush to scoop the competition and attract more readers in an environment of merciless competition. Online media in Kosovo often fall back on a kind of quick-fire reporting style based on a single source.⁶¹ Other studies have concluded that these media outlets in fact are not closed to the views of the "other side", but when its representatives appear, they too are the sole source of information.⁶² The single-source stories in the sample are generally based on political leaders' statements or their Facebook posts. It is not surprising that this kind of reporting usually resulted in superficial articles absent the voices of relevant sources.

Koha Ditore can be considered a good example of how to present a range of views. All its articles analysed gave the views of all relevant or concerned parties. The government's perspective on certain issues was always confronted with that of opposition and other relevant voices, such as the general public or political and media analysts. *Koha.net* provided articles with both low and high levels of pluralism. This is not surprising, since *Koha Ditore* has generally been praised for its decent professional standards.

⁶¹ Concerns about reporting without consulting sources with different views were raised by the heads of both the Albanian- and Serbian-language journalist associations, Shkelqim Hysenaj and Budimir Nicic.

⁶² See for example "Goran Rakiq: Muri nuk rrenohet" (Goran Rakic: The wall will not be demolished), *Gazeta Express*, 8 December 2016. Accessed 8 December 2016. Available at: <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/goran-rakiq-muri-nuk-rrenohet-290048/?archive=1>, and "Rakiq: Insistojmë në zgjidhje paqësore" (Rakic: We insist on a peaceful solution), *Telegrafi.com*, 3 February 2017. Available at: <http://telegrafi.com/rakiq-insistojme-ne-zgjidhje-paqesore/>. The *Telegrafi.com* news archive contains 53 articles in which Rakic is the only, or a major, source.

Journalists are also hampered by difficulties in moving between the two sides of Mitrovica. Journalists from Albanian-language media can face security problems when trying to visit northern Kosovo. Serbian journalists also have experienced complications in trying to reach Kosovo Albanian sources. In addition, with rare exceptions, Kosovo Serbs, including journalists with Serbian-language media, do not speak Albanian.

Among the three selected Belgrade media outlets, B92 stands out for its careful reporting on Nikolic’s statements about sending the army into Kosovo, without explicitly siding with the government position. On similarly sensitive issues, the daily *Kurir*, even though it uses several sources, produced a sensationalist story dominated by government and pro-government positions. The *Informer* piece is based on unidentified pro-government sources that refer to information provided by Russian intelligence and “another friendly intelligence agency”.⁶³

5.2 Framing the wall debate

The ways of framing the problem around the wall dispute in the Albanian and Serb media in Kosovo reveal more than anything else the level of mistrust and animosity between Belgrade and Prishtina and how their relations do not simply reflect but also have an impact on the ethnic polarisation and fragmentation of Kosovar society. The most important frames we identified stand in binary opposition. For example, for Mitrovica Serb leaders and Belgrade the wall was part of the Brussels agreement to revitalise the bridge over the Ibar, whereas Kosovo’s government categorically denied this, insisting the wall was no part of the agreement but rather an element in Serbia’s policy of dividing Kosovo.

Table 2. Framing the crisis

Main frame	Sub-frame and examples	Media outlet and frequency ⁶⁴
The wall as an element in Serbian politics	a) The wall is a separatist move and a political provocation by Serbia and Serbs “The wall ... is not only symbolic, but the reality of the will	Gazeta Express (1), <i>Koha Ditore</i> (2), Koha.net (1),

⁶³ “ŠIPTARI NAPADAJU! RAZOTKRIVEN PAKLENI PLAN: U februaru će pokušati da osvoje SEVER KOSOVA!” (ŠIPTARS ARE ATTACKING! INFERNAL PLAN REVEALED: In February they will try to occupy the NORTH OF KOSOVO!), 26 January 2017. Accessed 27 January 2017. Available at <http://www.informer.rs/vesti/politika/115636/SIPTARI-NAPADAJU-RAZOTKRIVEN-PAKLENI-PLAN-februaru-pokusati-osvoje-SEVER-KOSOVA>

⁶⁴ Reports by Belgrade media are omitted from this table, because their references to the wall were drawn from government or pro-government statements which fall more comfortably into the “scenario/solution” category (see Table 3).

	<p>and demand by Serbia and Serbs for the division of Kosovo”(PM Isa Mustafa); “Division of Mitrovica cemented”; “Wall divides the country”; “Serbia’s dirty game”; “Hoxhaj: Walls are Serbian policy.”</p> <p>b) The wall is illegal “We will not allow new walls and barricades, because they are in violation of Kosovo’s laws and the Brussels agreement” (Minister for Dialogue Edita Tahiri); “Construction ... contrary to the Brussels agreement ... is carried out by parallel municipal structures tele-commanded by Serbia” (Tahiri)</p> <p>c) “Walls belong to the past”</p>	<p>Telegrafi.com (1)</p> <p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (6), Telegrafi.com (1)</p> <p>Telegrafi.com (1), <i>Koha Ditore</i> (1)</p>
<p>Wall as failure of Kosovo government</p>	<p>a) Wall as a result of dialogue with Serbia</p> <p>b) Secret agreements of Kosovo government</p> <p>c) Kosovo tensions directly coordinated by Thaci and Vucic “All this is a deal between Vucic and Thaci”; “(Former Serbian Foreign Minister) Vuk Jeremic yesterday said rising tensions over Kosovo are directly coordinated between Thaci and Vucic, with an eye on upcoming elections in Serbia.”; “When you want to spread a mist over what is going on – that unemployment is rising and tens of thousands of youngsters are leaving the country – then before the presidential elections you create tension with Kosovo, even though there is no basis for that now,” Jeremic said, adding that this is what “Milosevic and Tudjman did when they wanted to extend their power for 10 years”.</p> <p>d) Government mismanagement of dialogue with Serbia “Government reacted only in wake of media reports”; “Prime minister will not use ‘muscle’ in Mitrovica”; “Opposition: Government should step down because it did not bring down the wall”; “This government, without a concept, without any conditions and completely unprepared, continues the dialogue and submission to Serbia, which is undermining and imperilling Kosovo’s statehood. The dialogue promised to bring recognition, internal integration and EU membership, but instead it brought Zajednica,* the wall and Haradinaj’s detention in France on the basis of Serbia’s arrest warrant.” (opposition)</p>	<p>Koha.net (1)</p> <p>Gazeta Express (1)</p> <p><i>Kurir</i> (3)</p> <p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (5)</p>

<p>Wall is/is not part of Brussels agreement</p>	<p>a) Wall as element in EU-funded Ibar bridge project “Everything that has been done here complies with the agreements achieved in Brussels.” (North Mitrovica Mayor Rakic);</p> <p>b) EU project does not envision walls “Local authorities have the right to decide what will be built, but the wall is not needed and sends a wrong message.” (S. Ferati, Kosovo Assembly member)</p>	<p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (2), Radiokim.net (2)</p> <p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (1), RTK 2 (1)</p>
<p>No more walls</p>	<p>Kosovo and EU officials “have given assurances that there will be no more walls in Mitrovica”; “A senior Brussels official guaranteed there will be no more walls”; “There will be no more walls”(head of EU Prishtina office Nataliya Apostolova); “There will be no more wall” (Minister F. Shala); EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini “added that regional political leaders have demonstrated courage and vision by pulling down the walls and focusing on building bridges”.</p>	<p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (5)</p>

* *Zajednica is part of the Serbian name of the Association of Serb Municipalities of Kosovo, which is foreseen to be established as a result of the Brussels negotiations*

Albanian-language media typically applied frames suggesting the division or “cemented division” of Mitrovica and Kosovo on ethnic lines in the context of the dispute over the wall. The frame of political confrontation over the wall dominated news reports on the crisis.

Kosovo government officials used language such as “provocation” and “dirty game” to describe Serbia’s actions, also declaring that “the wall belongs to the past” and similar statements. President Thaci went further in describing Serbian intentions in such terms as “destructive”, “annexation of northern Kosovo” and “arming Kosovo Serbs”.

Kosovar opposition parties framed the crisis using such terms as “secret agreements”, “a consequence of the damaging dialogue with Serbia”, “incompetence”; “mismanagement” of the talks and “division of the country”.

Serbian-language media included in this research typically presented frames employed by Serbian officials, for instance describing the wall as “part of the Brussels agreements”. They also put forward arguments that the wall was in fact a supporting wall to level the street as part of the project to revitalise the Ibar bridge. Including the three Belgrade media outlets in our sample allowed the study to encompass the framing strategies employed by Serbian leaders, as interpreted by Serbian media. The sampled articles quote Serbian leaders discussing the crisis in such terms as “provoking conflict”, “Albanians want war”, “If Serbs are killed, we’ll send the army to Kosovo”, “we do not want war, but Serbia has to protect its citizens”, “mobilisation of

Serbs”, “fighting for truth”, “justice”, “dedication to peace”, “ensuring peace”, etc. Most of the selected Albanian-language media also presented the views of the Serbian side.⁶⁵

The bulk of the analysed content conveyed the frames used by political actors without attempting to balance them with the views of other concerned parties. The one-sided framing reflected the over-reliance on single sources for news stories. Three of the four selected Albanian-language outlets also conveyed the Kosovo opposition’s framing of the crisis, but again this was based mainly on single-source reporting.

The analysed reports in Kosovo Serbian-language media, in contrast, overlooked the opposition’s stance on the tense situation. This seems to be the case as well for other outlets serving the Kosovo Serbs. According to the head of the Kosovo branch of the Serbian Journalists Association, the views of the opposition were completely missing from their coverage of the crisis.⁶⁶

Two pieces in Kosovo Serbian-language media touch on the views of the “other side”: In one report, RTK 2 presents pro-government attitudes through an interview with a member of Parliament, and one item on Radiokim.net mentions Albanian views about the wall controversy. The perspective of the “Albanian side” is missing or is deformed in the three selected reports by Belgrade outlets. B92’s report is based only on statements by Serbian leaders. *Kurir* refers in one sentence to the Kosovar president’s concerns about “Serbia’s campaign” which is “arousing fear and interethnic hatred” within the Serb community in northern Kosovo, while *Informer* mentions a statement of Thaci’s only to denounce it as a provocation and untrue (“without any evidence”). None of the five Serbian-language media outlets included in our sample presented or mentioned the views of the Kosovo opposition.

Koha Ditore is again the best example of balanced reporting and critical evaluation of the frames used by political leaders. For example, in an article that mentions Thaci’s claim that Serbia was arming Serbs in the north of Kosovo, its reporter asked if he had any concrete facts about this alleged activity. Thaci replied that “definitely Serbia is using the model Russia employs in Ukraine”.⁶⁷ The paper then turned to the Ministry of Interior Affairs for information about Serbia arming Serbs in northern Kosovo, and reported the answer: ask the president’s office and the

⁶⁵ Three of the four media sampled, in eight of 13 articles, referred to the attitudes of political leaders and other sources on the Serbian side.

⁶⁶ Interview with Budimir Nicic, 16 February 2017

⁶⁷ “Thaçi: Serbia po armatos veriun, muri do të rrënohet” (Thaci: Serbia is arming the north, the wall will be destroyed), *Koha Ditore*, 26 January 2017, pp. 1, 3

Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA).⁶⁸ The KIA did not respond to the paper’s questions concerning Thaci’s claims.⁶⁹

5.3 Framing solutions: The wall as problem or problem-solver

The main frames used to diagnose possible developments and potential solutions to the Prishtina-Belgrade confrontation over the Mitrovica wall are again set in binary opposition. While for both Kosovar media and political leaders pulling down the wall was a must in order to reject what they saw as Serbia’s goal of Kosovo divided on ethnic lines, Serbian media and politicians argued that precisely this demand to demolish the wall despite Serbian opposition was the source of a problem that could lead to unpredictable consequences.

Framing of future prospects and solutions was again dominated by political leaders on both sides of the confrontation. However, while the Kosovar Albanian-language media tended to report opposition views, this was not the case with Serbian-language media (see above).⁷⁰

Table 3. Framing scenarios and solutions

Frame of scenario/ solution	Sub-frames and examples	Media outlet and frequency
Demolish the wall	<p>a) Demolition by legal means</p> <p>b) Demolition by force of law if necessary</p> <p>c) Best solution is for those who erected the wall to pull it down</p>	<p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (4)</p> <p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (2)</p> <p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (2)</p>
Pulling down the wall would escalate the situation	<p>a) Pulling down the wall would raise tensions and destabilise the situation in Mitrovica and Kosovo</p> <p>“Kosovo’s and Serbia’s commitment to reduce tensions and continue dialogue might be damaged if Prishtina goes all the way on its promise to remove the illegally constructed wall in Mitrovica.”</p> <p>b) Belgrade is “alarmed” over Prishtina’s preparations to demolish the wall</p> <p>“Belgrade is ‘alarmed’ that Prishtina is preparing action in the north to demolish the wall in Mitrovica”;</p> <p>“Serbia’s ‘alarm’ about imperilled Serbs in the north is propaganda, Kosovo says.”</p>	<p>Radiokim.net (3), RTK 2 (1), <i>Koha Ditore</i> (1)</p> <p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (2)</p>

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Interview with Budimir Nicic, 16 February 2017

<p>Peaceful solution</p>	<p>a) Prospects for a peaceful solution “People in northern Mitrovica expect politicians to solve the issue of the wall in a peaceful way.”; “I believe there are still smart people who will solve this in a peaceful way.” (ordinary citizen)</p> <p>b) Use legal means, not force “Prime Minister Mustafa says he will respond by law and not by force to the erection of the wall in Mitrovica.”</p> <p>c) Common solution</p>	<p>RTK 2 (2)</p> <p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (3)</p> <p>RTK 2 (1)</p>
<p>Pressure from EU for a peaceful solution</p>	<p>a) Continuation of Kosovo-Serbia dialogue “... in the coming days it is necessary to continue dialogue and safeguard stability in the region”(office of President Nikolic); “The president added that there would be ‘no more dialogue in Brussels (with Kosovo) until this has been cleared up’.”</p> <p>b) Pressure to avoid escalation “Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic asked Federica Mogherini to react publicly and ‘condemn the unprofessional behaviour of the Albanian side’.”</p>	<p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (1), <i>Kurir</i> (1), B92 (1)</p> <p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (1)</p>
<p>Danger of provocations</p>	<p>Avoid provocations “We should not allow ourselves to be victimised by these provocations by Serbian politicians”(Mustafa); “(I) ask all citizens and political actors not to fall for any provocation or incitement”(Speaker of Kosovo Assembly K. Veseli); “On behalf of the Serbian state ... I beg Kosovo Serbs to stay calm at all costs” (Vucic); “Regardless of the situation that might develop, I ask residents of Mitrovica to stay calm. ... At the same time I appeal to Serbs not to allow tensions to rise, because Kosovo’s institutions will act in the best possible manner” (A. Bahtiri, mayor of southern Mitrovica); ““My message to the Serbs of Kosovo and Metohija is: Stay calm at all costs, be dignified, do not leave your homes, we will fight for you’, said Vucic.”</p>	<p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (3), Telegrafi.com (1), <i>Kurir</i> (1)</p>
<p>Escalation of tensions</p>	<p>a) Serbian media inflame the situation “Serbian media inflame the situation: Serbian gendarmerie ready to intervene in Mitrovica”; “Serbian media reported that gendarmerie forces have deployed in the Ground Safety Zone at the base in Bujanovac”; “ ‘Gendarmerie deployed in the GSZ, the most secure part of Bujanovac base. All forces that patrol the GSZ are in full readiness’, Serbian MUP (MIA) said unofficially, writes Blic, according to Gazeta Express.”; “Gendarmerie sent additional forces to the Safety Zone”</p> <p>b) “Orchestrated’ tension after leaders meet” “Belgrade has raised the ‘alarm’ that Prishtina is preparing action in the north to pull down the wall”; “Only a day after the meeting (on decreasing tensions, held in Brussels), Serbian state leaders claim to have mobilised to address the threatened security situation in northern Kosovo, ‘since Prishtina is preparing action in the north to demolish the wall’.”; “Serbia raises alarm about possible attack on Serbs in northern Kosovo”; “Radical leader Vojislav Seselj also calls for mobilisation of Serbs in Kosovo, saying</p>	<p>Gazeta Express (2), <i>Koha Ditore</i> (2), <i>Kurir</i> (1)</p> <p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (6)</p>

	Albanians are planning armed assaults in four northern municipalities”	
Conflict	<p>a) Serbia is provoking conflict “... with this wall Belgrade is trying to incite internal conflicts in Kosovo” (Mustafa); “Thaci: Serbia is arming the north, the wall will be demolished”; “Thaci: Serbia is sending arms to the north”; Thaci “demanded that the EU and NATO warn Serbia against inciting new conflict in Kosovo and the region”.</p> <p>b) Prishtina is provoking conflict Prishtina “tried to provoke large-scale conflicts”(Vucic); “Albanians ... sent a special unit ... aiming to provoke conflict” (Vucic); “Prishtina sent 17 armoured vehicles” (Vucic); “Everything was on the brink of a conflict that would have led to dozens of deaths”(Nikolic)</p>	<p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (3), <i>Telegrafi.com</i> (1)</p> <p>B92 (9)</p>
War	<p>a) Albanians want war “The appearance of (Kosovo) ROSU units (in northern Kosovo) was a sign that Albanians want war”(Nikolic); “Albanians are preparing for war!”; “The Albanian side’s behaviour clearly shows that they are ready to use arms”; “Albanians are planning an armed intervention in the coming days in four northern Kosovo municipalities” (Seselj); “Kosovo PM Isa Mustafa and his police minister plan intervention by ROSU special units in northern Kosovo in next two days” (Vucic); “Thaci, Mustafa and Veseli are preparing a swift surprise attack on Serbs”; “Šiptar extremists plan surprise attack”; “Šiptars are attacking!”</p> <p>b) Albanian leaders’ concern over new U.S. president’s policies is behind their rush to occupy northern Kosovo Thaci, Mustafa and Veseli “are in a hurry to occupy northern Kosovo because they are afraid of Trump’s new policy”; “Šiptar leaders are in a hurry to occupy the north because they are afraid of the policies of new U.S. President Donald Trump, who could leave the Balkans to Putin and Russia.”; “In February they will try to occupy northern Kosovo!”; “Planned attack (on northern Kosovo) could happen in the first half of February, since Prishtina is in a hurry owing to fear of Trump’s Balkan policy”; “Albanians in fact are trying to exploit the vacuum in the U.S. administration, which until Donald Trump became U.S. leader was openly on the side of Prishtina.”; ““We are afraid that they will try to intervene in the north before Trump properly takes office, in order to forestall any eventual USA-Russia deal’, our source said.”</p> <p>c) Serbia doesn’t want war, but ... ““As long as I am president, I will make an effort not to go to war with anyone ... we don’t want to go to war ... But if Thaci threatens to go to Mitrovica ...’ Nikolic said, without finishing the sentence.”; “If Serbs are killed, we’ll send the army to Kosovo" (Nikolic); “The president said Serbia was ready to send its armed forces to Kosovo and Metohija if the Serb population in that province comes under threat.”; ““If Serbs are being killed, yes’, Nikolic said.”</p>	<p>B92 (2), <i>Kurir</i> (4), <i>Informer</i> (5)</p> <p><i>Informer</i> (3), <i>Kurir</i> (3)</p> <p>B92 (3)</p> <p>Radiokim.net (2)</p> <p>B92 (1), <i>Kurir</i> (1)</p>

	<p>d) The situation is explosive “The situation is like a powder keg, anything could cause a spark.”</p> <p>e) Russia will be informed “Russia will be informed this evening that Prishtina is ‘playing war games’” (Vucic); “Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic yesterday held urgent meetings with the ambassadors of Russia, the USA and China.”</p> <p>f) NATO should step aside and let us solve our problems ourselves “If NATO has not fulfilled its role, then, as far as I’m concerned, they are not needed in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija ... then they should step aside and we’ll solve our problems ourselves.”(Nikolic)</p>	B92 (1)
Peace	<p>a) Serbia is dedicated to peace, but ... “Serbia is dedicated to peace in the region” (Vucic); “Peace is the most important thing for the Serbs” (Vucic); “Serbia wants peace, I call on Serbs to remain calm, but my last warning and plea to the Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija is not to try to attack Serbs with weapons, because Serbia will not allow this.” (Vucic)</p> <p>b) Hopes for help from EU and NATO “Thaci hopes that with the EU as facilitator an agreement to normalise relations and establish peace and security will be achieved.”; “(Nikolic) stressed that neither the EU nor NATO ‘gave the right response’”; “... the EU has a big role” (Nikolic); Vucic said he informed EU foreign policy chief Mogherini that “he is disappointed with the reaction of the EU to these events”.</p>	<p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (2), B92 (1)</p> <p><i>Koha Ditore</i> (1), B92 (3)</p>

The predictions of possible developments of the crisis, chiefly those by political leaders on both sides of the confrontation, were worrying and sometimes alarming. While Prime Minister Mustafa termed the erection of the wall “illegal” and called for a legal solution instead of using force (“I am not going to use muscle”), President Thaci and Assembly Speaker Veseli took harder positions with demands to pull down the wall. For the opposition, the government’s resignation would have resolved this and other problems in Kosovo.

Serbian leaders framed the consequences of demolishing the wall by force in terms such as “increased tensions”, “unpredictable consequences”, “provocation of clashes”, “wider conflict” and even “war”.

It goes without saying that both sides also declaratively called for a “reasonable” or “peaceful” solution, “dialogue”, “looking to the future”, “European values”, etc. Both sides called on the international community and especially the EU to put “pressure to the other side” in order to “avoid escalation”, “reduce tensions” and find a “peaceful solution”. Indeed, Belgrade and Prishtina both looked to Brussels, the facilitator of the talks on normalising relations, for solutions to this latest crunch point in their relations.

5.4 Which way did the media lean?

Most of the Kosovo media outlets selected for this research took sides with the opposition or anti-government positions in their coverage of the Mitrovica controversy. Implicit or explicit siding with opposition or anti-government views was seen in eight of the 17 articles analysed (see Table 4 below). *Koha Ditore* demonstrated this in four out of six articles by giving more space to the opposition and voices critical of the government, or through open criticism of the government. One item in Koha.net and another in Gazeta Express use only one, opposition, source. In two other Gazeta Express reports and in one by Koha.net there was no visible siding.

Table 4. Political leanings of selected media outlets

	Anti-government	Pro-government	No apparent side-taking	Number of items per outlet
<i>Koha Ditore</i>	4 items		2 items	6
Koha.net	1 item		1 item	2
Gazeta Express	1 item		2 items	3
Telegrafi.com		2 items		2
RTK 2	1 item	1 item		2
Radiokim.net	1 item		1 item	2
B92			1 item	1
<i>Kurir</i>		1 item		1
<i>Informer</i>		1 item		1
Totals	8	5	7	20

Telegrafi.com was the only outlet that did not fit this profile. Its two stories in the sample were based on single government sources, indicating a lean toward pro-government views.

There was some leaning to anti-government views in the Serbian-language media in Kosovo, specifically in one report in Radiokim.net that supports Serbian leaders' interpretation of the wall controversy. There was no apparent taking of sides in the site's other analysed report.

The Serbian-language channel of public television RTK 2 is widely seen as supportive of the government. In one analysed story, this tendency is only indirect, since the story is based on an interview with a Kosovo Assembly member. However, the other RTK 2 report shows explicit siding with anti-government views, since it adopts the arguments of Serbian officials in Mitrovica and Belgrade concerning the wall dispute.

In the case of Belgrade media outlets, *Kurir* and *Informer* demonstrate clear siding with the views of the Serbian government by adopting official frameworks in descriptions and interpretations of the escalation in Belgrade-Prishtina relations. The B92 report does not

obviously lean toward the government view, although it is based only on statements by the Serbian president and prime minister at press conferences.

We found no reporting on the views of the opposition in Kosovo's Serbian-language media. This finding is supported by the head of the Kosovo branch of the Serbian Journalists Association, Budimir Nicic, who sees it as a result of political manoeuvring in Belgrade to divert public attention from the underlying reasons for the crisis.⁷¹

The piece by Belgrade outlet *Kurir* mentions Serbian opposition figure Vuk Jeremic's explanation of the crisis as resulting from direct coordination between Vucic and Thaci, but then goes on to denounce Jeremic as a traitor for his alleged support of Kosovar leaders.

5.5 Sensationalist reporting and hate speech

The majority of the sampled items by Kosovo media avoided sensationalist reporting of the crisis. Only two out of the 17 news reports contained elements of sensationalist reporting. One was the article in Radiokim.net that uses part of a quote by a member of the public on the situation in Mitrovica in the alarming headline "Mitrovica residents: Situation is like a powder keg". The other occurs in the Gazeta Express story under the headline "Serbian media make situation worse; Serbian gendarmerie ready to intervene in Mitrovica". In this case the title derives from the sensationalist framing used by Serbian media *Blic* and *Tanjug*. Moreover, Gazeta Express failed to verify its information or consult any other source or opinion on this issue.

No elements of hate speech were present in any of the 17 articles in Kosovar media. The biggest and most influential media in Kosovo appear to be largely free of hate speech and only rarely resort to sensationalism, but the situation with many small online media is different, with some of them sliding into sensationalist reporting on the crisis.⁷²

The journalists and analysts interviewed for this study were not in total agreement about the extent of sensationalist reporting. According to Nehat Islami, executive director of the Kosovo

⁷¹ Interview with Budimir Nicic, 16 February 2017.

⁷² See for example "EKSKLUZIVE/Ish-paramilitarët e Arkanit stërvitën në veri të Kosovës" (Exclusive: Arkan's former paramilitaries are training in north Kosovo), DailyNews.al, 26 January 2017. Accessed 27 January 2017. Available at: www.google.com/#q=EKSKLUZIVE/Ish-paramilitar%C3%ABt+e+Arkanit+st%C3%ABhttps://www.rtklive.com/sq/gallery/news_original/132794oN0F77Ggct.jpg+ABrvit%C3%ABn+n%C3%AB+veri+t%C3%AB+Kosov%C3%ABs. See also "Ish strukturat paramilitare serbe, manovra ushtarake në veri" (Former paramilitary structures, military manoeuvres in the north), Kosova.info, 27 January 2017. Accessed 27 January 2017. Available at <http://informativeness/is-strukturat-param-ilitare-serbe-manovra-ushtarake-ne-veri/>

Press Council, coverage of the confrontation in Mitrovica was more or less accurate, without cases of sensational or provocative reporting.⁷³ Political and media analyst Halil Matoshi, on the other hand, thinks that although the crisis was artificial, both sides exploited it for nationalist mobilisation, from which the media were not immune. This he believes led to unbalanced reporting and alarmist headlines like “War is coming back to Kosovo”, “Russia might intervene in northern Kosovo”, “Armed people are seen in the north” and others.⁷⁴

Shkelqim Hysenaj, chairman of the Association of Journalists of Kosovo, observed that single-source reporting based on unconfirmed sources contributed to the tense atmosphere, such as when some Albanian-language media ran unconfirmed statements attributed to Serbian politicians. Serbian-language outlets similarly used unverified statements by Kosovar Albanian politicians. Such practices and, for example, reports that ran every day for a week announcing “the wall will be demolished tonight” were clear violations of professional ethics on the part of online media, Hysenaj believes, while traditional media were much less prone to sensationalism.⁷⁵

Similarly, Koha.net editor-in-chief Zenun Celaj observed a tendency toward sensationalism in some coverage of the Mitrovica dispute. One cause of this was the difficulty in verifying Serbian sources, as well as the financial insecurity of online media, since some online media are ready to do anything in order to survive.⁷⁶

The differences in these evaluations probably in part stem from the analysts’ different targets: Islami directed his remarks to leading, influential print and online media which belong to the Kosovo Press Council, while Hysenaj and Celaj widened the scope of their analyses to small online media and social networks like Facebook.

We found somewhat different results in the case of the Serbian media included in the sample. Both *Kurir* and *Informer* openly employed sensational and deliberately provocative language. The latter used discriminatory language about Albanians (the term “Šiptar”). The alarming headline of B92’s article “‘If Serbs are killed, we’ll send the army to Kosovo’ – president” is based on Nikolic’s repeated statements at his press conference of 15 January 2017.

Our findings regarding Serbian-language media found partial support by Budimir Nicic. According to him, Serbian-language media in Kosovo “did not pour oil on the fire” and their

⁷³ Interview with Nehat Islami, executive director, Kosovo Press Council, Prishtina, 12 February 2017

⁷⁴ Interview with Halil Matoshi, former editor-in-chief of *Zëri* and *Lajmi*, former editor of *Gazeta Express* and *Koha Ditore*, Prishtina, 12 February 2017

⁷⁵ Interview with Shkelqim Hysenaj, chairman of the Association of Journalists of Kosovo, Prishtina, 16 February 2017

⁷⁶ Interview with Zenun Celaj, editor-in-chief of *Koha.net*, Prishtina, 12 February 2017

reporting was accurate. However, some of them republished unbalanced reports from Belgrade media. There were front-page stories in the dailies and their online portals using terms such as “dramatic” and “urgent” in stories on Vucic’s meeting in Raska with representatives of the Kosovo Serbs and Nikolic’s meetings with the Chinese, Russian and American ambassadors. Nicic argues that these media ignored the most significant aspects of the situation and their reports helped raise the level of tension. Readers may have been alarmed at the fact that Vucic met Kosovo Serbs in an army barracks, along with the defence minister, the army minister and a high-ranking Serbian general. Fear of imminent war spread among the Serbs in Kosovo, Nicic says. He argues that the “crisis” was an artificial one and did not deserve the intense media attention, and attributes the situation in part to the overwhelming influence of the Belgrade media, which silenced or “suffocated” Kosovo’s Serbian-language outlets.⁷⁷

6. Ethnic divides, inaccessible sources and resource-poor media

Our content analysis shows that single-source reporting was one of the most common features of online media coverage of the crisis. This seems to be at least partly a result of fierce competition for readers and site visits. As a consequence, in their rush to publish journalists and editors rely on the first source available, without waiting to verify the information by consulting other sources or opinions. The background of this problem is a media environment which is overcrowded and unable to support the sustainable development of the sector. The weak advertising market merely compounds the problem for most media outlets. One serious consequence that arises is a lack of commitment to the public interest on the part of most private media.

For small online media, lack of human resources is also a major issue. These media simply do not have the reporters to send out when a story breaks, and their staff often are not trained journalists.

Restriction on freedom of movement for journalists was another limiting factor as the wall controversy raged. According to Shkelqim Hysenaj, it is almost impossible for Albanian-language journalists to consult Serbian sources when they cover events in the north. Serbian-language media are in the same situation when they report from southern Kosovo. Hysenaj suggests that under these circumstances it is impossible to check facts about events in the other language community. One-sided reporting that ignores or distorts the view from the other side contributes to rising tension and prevents media from fulfilling their mission, Hysenaj believes.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Interview with Budimir Nicic, 16 February 2017

⁷⁸ Interview with Shkelqim Hysenaj, Prishtina, 16 February 2017

Inaccessibility of official sources further complicated the media's job. EU officials in both Brussels and Prishtina were not always available to the media during the wall crisis. They avoided commenting on the situation in the first few days after the wall was built⁷⁹, adding to an already confused situation. In this information vacuum, the polemics of local political leaders about whether the wall was part of the EU-funded Ibar bridge revitalisation project or not added to the strain. Only several days later did the head of the EU Office in Prishtina, Nataliya Apostolova, state that walls like the one in Mitrovica cannot be EU projects.⁸⁰

This problem was acute when it came to journalists seeking sources from the "other side". Budimir Nicic argues that Belgrade politicians were almost unreachable for Serbian media in Kosovo and likewise, officials in Prishtina were not available to Serbian media. Lack of transparency about the Brussels dialogue process was another root of the crisis, he says.⁸¹

Absent or poor communication and cooperation between professional associations of Albanian- and Serbian-language media is another limiting factor. Better cooperation would encourage their members to exchange information with their colleagues in the other language community, help them reach sources on the "other side" and consequently improve their reporting on events that concern both communities.

Language barriers also played a role. Since most Kosovo Serbs do not speak Albanian, journalists from the community find it difficult to communicate with Albanians. This is becoming a problem as well for young Albanian journalists. Kosovo Albanians who grew up in the 1990s and later have had few social contacts with Serbs and generally do not speak their language. More importantly, Kosovar Albanians and Serbs stopped learning the other's languages following the abolition of Kosovo's autonomy by Serbia in 1989–90.

7. Reactions to media reporting on the crisis

The Kosovo Press Council (KPC) addresses cases of violations of its ethics code in the print media when its members, other organisations or readers submit complaints. According to KPC executive director Nehat Islami, no complaints were submitted about reporting by KPC members on the crisis over the Mitrovica wall.⁸² Although the KPC does not monitor media content,

⁷⁹ "Kryeministri nuk do t'i përdorë 'muskujt' në Mitrovicë" (Prime minister will not use "muscle" in Mitrovica), *Koha Ditore*, 9 December 2016, pp. 1, 3

⁸⁰ "Apostolova: Muret si ai në Mitrovicë nuk janë projekte të BE-së" (Apostolova: Walls like the one in Mitrovica are not EU projects), *Koha.net*, 14 December 2016. Accessed 15 January 2017. Available at <http://archive.koha.net/?id=27&l=147219>

⁸¹ Interview with Budimir Nicic, 16 February 2017

⁸² Interview with Nehat Islami, 12 February 2017

according to Islami, as far as he could see, reporting by KPC members was careful and more or less accurate and without evident provocative intent.⁸³

The broadcasting regulator IMC likewise received no complaints during the crisis concerning violations of the code of conduct by broadcast media that it monitors.⁸⁴

However, there were media reports about the Kosovo Police's suspicions that an RTK news story about an Airsoft club contained the false information that club members were organising paramilitary training exercises.⁸⁵ In its 27 January 2017 "Udhëve" program, the station did broadcast a story based mainly on photographs from the club's website showing people in military uniforms with weapons and Serbian flags.⁸⁶ According to the Kosovo Police, the club held Airsoft games in northern Kosovo in August 2016 when its uniformed members and guests from Serbia and the Serbian entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina used imitation weapons.⁸⁷

Some media outlets and prominent journalists reacted against sensationalism and the tendency of some politicians to manipulate the crisis. *Koha Ditore* is again the best example. In all its selected reports, the paper confronted government views with those of the opposition and other relevant sources. Among Kosovar leaders President Thaci came in for the largest share of criticism from this daily. Political and media analysts and representatives of the opposition who were asked to comment on the increasingly tense situation strongly criticised Thaci's behaviour during the crisis.⁸⁸ According to one analyst Thaci was trying to take over leadership of the Brussels dialogue from Prime Minister Mustafa and thus become irreplaceable to the

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Interview with Mirand Tafarshiku, head of monitoring division, Independent Media Commission, Prishtina, 16 February 2017

⁸⁵ "Policia demanton lajmet e RTK-së se serbët po përgatiten për luftë" (Kosovo Police deny as untrue RTK news that Serbs are preparing for war), *Drenicapress.info*, 28 January 2017. Accessed 28 January 2017. Available at <http://drenicapress.info/policia-demanton-lajmet-e-rtk-se-se-serbet-po-pergatiten-per-lufte/>

⁸⁶ "Ish strukturat paramilitare serbe, manovra ushtarake në veri" (Former paramilitary structures, military manoeuvres in the north), RTK, 27 January 2017. Accessed 28 January 2017. Available at <https://www.rtklive.com/sq/news-single.php?ID=132794>

⁸⁷ The Ministry of Public Administration temporarily suspended the Vukovi Airsoft club on the grounds that "one activity that this NGO organised contravenes the security interests" of Kosovo. (See "Maxhuni: Ushtrimet në veri-lojë sporti, jo stërvitje paramilitare", *Koha Ditore*, 14 February 2017, p. 3.) According to *Koha Ditore*, the suspension was requested by a representative of the club. (See "Kërkohet pezullimi i 'OJQ-së militare' serbe", *Koha Ditore*, 15 February 2017, p. 3, and "Pezullohet 'OJQ-ja militare' serbe", *Koha Ditore*, 18 February 2017, p. 2.)

⁸⁸ "Qëllimi 'destruktiv' i Thaçit në dialog me Serbinë", (Thaci's 'destructive' intentions in dialogue with Serbia), *Koha Ditore*, 31 January 2016, p. 3

international community as a way of protecting himself from possible prosecution by the special court for war crimes in Kosovo.⁸⁹

Another reaction was that of analyst Halil Matoshi, who strongly criticised sensationalist reporting on the interethnic confrontations in Mitrovica in his column for *Koha Ditore*, “There is no war, no tanks ... let’s talk!”⁹⁰ Another well-known journalist, Adriatik Kelmendi, denounced political manipulation of the crisis in his column “Please, do not kill Serbs, Vucic said”, where he questions the rationale behind the rhetoric about the possibility of Serbs losing their lives, when there had been no incidents of ethnically motivated killings in Kosovo in more than 10 years.⁹¹ In another column titled “Imagine yourself in the position of a Serb in the north” he wrote that neither Serbs nor Albanians in Kosovo wanted to fall into these cheap traps: “Neither Kosovar Serbs nor Kosovar Albanians have any cause to spill their blood or remain hostages of careerist politicians in Belgrade! Or hotheads in Prishtina!”⁹²

8. Conclusions

Reporting the Mitrovica wall controversy and the underlying long-lasting interethnic conflicts in Kosovo was a litmus test for the media outlets selected for this study. While reporting by so-called traditional media such as the daily *Koha Ditore* was more or less professional, with all relevant sources or voices of concerned parties represented, most reports in the online news sites analysed demonstrated serious shortcomings. The one-sided framing of the crisis adopted by most online media, typically using only one source for each story, contributed to a situation where views of the wall polarised into two opposing camps.

The views of political elites dominated news stories and voices from other sectors were largely missing in the majority of selected media outlets. While *Koha Ditore* critically evaluated the stances of political leaders, most online media ran superficial coverage, lacking critical distance from the political elites.

The main problem was framed in two contrasting ways. One saw the construction of the wall as the crucial issue, while the other treated opposition to the wall as the problem. In different interpretative contexts, one or the other frame was presented as a factor that contributed to worsening interethnic relations in Kosovo.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ “S’ka luftë, s’ka tanke ... ejani të bisedojmë!”, *Koha Ditore*, 18 January 2017, p. 10

⁹¹ “Ju lutem, mos i vrisni Serbët, tha Vuçiq ... “ *Koha Ditore*, 19 January 2017, p. 10

⁹² “Paramendoje veten në pozitën e një serbi në veri”, *Koha Ditore*, 9 February 2017, p. 10

However, our survey found that most media in the small sample avoided sensationalist reporting. No elements of hate speech were identified in any of the reports by Kosovar media outlets. This seems to reflect an improvement in this regard compared to past incidents, for example the communal violence in March 2004, when media were blamed for helping escalate the crisis.⁹³

Yet the fact remains that reporting on the wall crisis often reflected polarised opinion and did little to pacify the rhetoric of national elites. As we have noted, this reflected the problems of single-source reporting, partly a result of fierce competition in the online news market, but also security concerns that prevented the free movement of journalists and dissuaded them from getting sources from the “other side”, and, particularly in small online media, a scarcity of human resources and trained journalists.⁹⁴

The study did find instances of sensationalism in reports by Belgrade-based media, with discriminatory language found in the *Informer* article, while the alarming title of B92’s piece “If Serbs are killed, we’ll send the army to Kosovo” – president” echoed the president’s own words.

In the Albanian-language media, terms such as “separation” or “cemented separation” were used frequently in connection with the wall crisis. Government officials, heavily reported in the media, often employed such language as “provocation”, “dirty game”, “the wall belongs to the past” and the like in their comments on the crisis. The opposition tended to explain the crisis as a result of the “damaging dialogue with Serbia”, supporting their views with terms such as “division of the country”, “treason”, “secret agreements” and “incompetence”.

Serbian media and officials, according to the Kosovar media, tended to frame their interpretation of the situation in language such as “provoking conflict”, “war”, “sending the army to Kosovo”, “protection of Serbs”, “fighting for truth”, “justice” and “preserving peace”.

Most of the Kosovar media outlets included in sample sided with anti-government or opposition views. This might seem a surprising finding, partly explained as the outcome of the Kosovar public’s growing frustration with the developments in Prishtina-Belgrade relations. However, this result was probably not representative of the Kosovo media. It might be more correct to say that it stemmed from the choice of media outlets and their reports in this study. It is not that surprising that *Koha Ditore* and *Koha.net* sided with opposition or anti-government views, since the outlets of the *Koha* Group were consistently critical towards the parties in power at the time of the crisis. The over-representation of *Koha Ditore* in the sample also contributed to this result. *Gazeta Express*’ apparent lean toward opposition views in one of its items was simply the outcome of one-source reporting, since its two other pieces contain no visible siding. Similarly, the pro-government siding of the news portal *Telegrafi.com* again reflected its reliance on single

⁹³ Miklos Haraszti, “The Role of the Media in the March 2004 Events in Kosovo”. Accessed 6 December 2016. Available at <http://www.ian.org.rs/kosovo-info/zajednicke/vesti/OSCEviolance.pdf>

⁹⁴ Interview with Shkelqim Hysenaj, 16 February 2017

sources. The explicit siding of Radiokim.net with positions of Serbian leaders is not surprising. However, the same tendency in one report by the Serbian-language second channel of public broadcaster RTK challenges the perception of the station as a platform for the government of Kosovo.

9. Recommendations

1. The Kosovo Press Council, together with journalist and media associations and legislators, should address the situation of small online media, seek to have them registered as businesses or NGOs and urge them to be more accountable. In addition, KPC should launch a campaign to encourage small online media to join the organisation and sign on to its code of ethics.
2. The government of Kosovo should improve communications with media in both the Albanian and Serbian languages, especially during incidents such as the Mitrovica wall controversy.
3. The office of the EU Representative for Foreign Affairs and the EU Office in Kosovo should improve communications with the media during such incidents.
4. The government of Kosovo should join with the EU to insist that the Brussels agreements with Serbia on freedom of movement and revitalisation of the Ibar river bridge are fully implemented as soon as possible.
5. Associations of Albanian and Serbian journalists in Kosovo should advocate together for the government and EU to pay more attention to concerns about free movement of their members in Mitrovica and Kosovo.
6. Associations of Albanian and Serbian journalists in Kosovo should improve communications and cooperation and encourage their members to do the same.
7. Associations of Albanian and Serbian journalists in Kosovo should organise a joint conference on lessons learned from the media coverage of the wall crisis and the incidents that led up to it.
8. The EU and other donors should aid associations of Albanian and Serbian journalists in Kosovo to hold joint training sessions on reporting crises and interethnic relations. Participants should be informed about the ethical standards of professional journalism with special attention to the obligation to consult sources from all sides of an issue and avoid sensationalist and provocative reporting.
9. The associations of Albanian and Serbian journalists in Kosovo should sponsor Albanian and Serbian language courses for their members.

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Zenun Celaj, editor-in-chief, *Koha.net*, Prishtina, 12 February 2017

Shkelqim Hysenaj, chairman of the Association of Journalists of Kosovo, Prishtina, 16 February 2017

Nehat Islami, executive director, Kosovo Press Council, Prishtina, 12 February 2017

Halil Matoshi, former editor-in-chief of *Zëri* and *Lajmi*, former editor of *Gazeta Express* and *Koha Ditore*, Prishtina, 12 February 2017

Budimir Nacic, chairman, Kosovo branch of the Serbian Journalists Association, director of Media Centre in Caglavica, Prishtina, 16 February 2017

Mirand Tafarshiku, head of monitoring division, Independent Media Commission, Prishtina, 16 February 2017