

# POLICY OPINION

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## Views of the Serbian media on the events of September 24 in Banjska, Kosovo

On Sunday, September 24th, 2023, there was an armed confrontation between a group of Serbs from Kosovo and the Kosovo police, in which an Albanian policeman was killed while two others were injured. Four Serbs from Kosovo also died in the confrontation, which is why September 27th was declared a Day of Mourning in Serbia.

What was known in the media on the same day was that at the entrance to the village of Banjska in the north of Kosovo, the border police noticed that two heavy trucks without license plates were positioned to block the bridge. Then, the police units at the place of the blockade encountered resistance from armed attackers who were equipped with firearms and hand grenades.

On Sunday afternoon, we had the opportunity to hear the emergency address of the President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. Until the address, the citizens of the Republic of Serbia could not be informed about the tragic event, given that no television with a national frequency broadcasted the details of the aforementioned armed confrontation. On that day, there was media silence about this critical event if we consider that even RTS, as a public service, did not fulfil its duty to inform the citizens of the Republic of Serbia about it. The only television reported was N1, as [written](#) by the *Danas* portal.

After the president's address, the citizens still have not gotten an answer to what exactly happened in the village of Banjska. Vučić apologized for his late address because, as he stated, it took a lot of time for them to get the correct information and understand what was happening so that he could tell the truth to the citizens. He stated that "Serbs revolted because they did not want to suffer from Kurti's terror anymore", [reports](#) N1, however, it is still not clear who these "Serbs" are and how it is possible that the state leadership does not have intelligence resources in the North of Kosovo, given the security situation.

It is hard to believe that it was a spontaneous rebellion of Serbs from Kosovo, who have been fighting for their rights for many years. There was an active dialogue about the formation of the Community of Serb Municipalities, and a document was even published in which "it is foreseen that the establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities will be completed by the end of October 2023", [reports](#) N1. What is certain now is that the Serbs are in a much worse negotiating position than before this tragic confrontation. Likely, the dialogue about the CSM will not continue soon, bearing in mind that in the Pristina media, this confrontation is widely presented as a "terrorist act" committed by a "Serbian criminal gang", as N1 [finds out](#).

The question arises about the goal of this "armed rebellion". If we consider the allegations that this was an attempt to attack the Kosovo police, why would there be a blockade in only one place in the North of Kosovo and why the weapons, which were rumored to be in mass quantities, were not used. Many portals report that this was a planned action. However, it is not clear what kind of armed action it was with only thirty (this number is also difficult to verify and is based on the [statements](#) of Kosovo politicians considering that six people were arrested and three were killed) attackers, who, despite the massive Kosovo police and KFOR, simply fled on foot through the forest near the Banjska monastery, as [reported](#) by the *Danas* portal. There are many questions to which the citizens of Serbia still do not have answers, and even if they do, they are far from the truth that the president talked about in his address.

It has already become a common practice that during such conflicts, the culprit is first sought, which was not absent even in the president's public address. "The only one to blame for all that is happening in the north of Kosovo and Metohija, the only one to blame... Admittedly, there is a little bit of blame for those who help him in this, and that is part of the international community." It's Albin Kurti," [said](#) the President of the Republic of Serbia. He added that no pressure from the international community would lead Serbia to recognize an independent Kosovo. Blaming a part of the international community for the armed rebellion near Banjska, he also told them that he was ready for dialogue, which

confused the citizens of the Republic of Serbia, [reports](#) KoSSev. It seems that Serbia's attitude towards actors on the international stage is still not clear.

This event gave Kosovo officials the opportunity to spread various misinformation, so the head of the Kosovo MUP, Dželjaj Svečlja, announced that Milan Radoičić, the vice president of the Serbian List, is actually the leader of this terrorist group and the attack in which the police officer Afrim Bunjaku was killed. He said that "Aleksandar Vučić through the Serbian List, and they through their vice president Radoičić - undertook a terrorist action against the legal and constitutional order of the Republic of Kosovo, trying to destabilize our Republic", [reports](#) Danas. Svečlja [claimed](#) that the armed group that attacked the Kosovo police received weapons from the Serbian Army. The efforts of the Kosovo authorities to connect this conflict with Belgrade and the Serbian authorities are serious. However, considering the international community's attitude towards Kosovo, the Republic of Serbia had no interest in starting any armed rebellion.

Albanian media also transmitted false information that right-wingers Radomir Počuča and Pavle Bihali were killed in northern Kosovo during an armed conflict, as *Alo* [finds out](#). However, Počuča soon denied the false allegations about his death, when he posted on social networks. "I have not died, nor do I plan to - there is still no bullet with my name on it," he [wrote](#), reports the portal *Danas*.

As the event took place near the monastery of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the media mentioned the possible involvement of the Serbian Orthodox Church and priests in the armed conflict. "The Diocese of Raško-Prizrenska reiterated that the priests and pilgrims in the monastery did not take part in the tragic incidents", *Radio Free Europe* [finds out](#), thus denying the allegations of many [media](#) that an armed person pointed a firearm at the priest in the Banjska monastery and that shooting is heard throughout the day.

It is certain that this situation suits the Kosovo authorities and Kurti, both for political support and for spreading disinformation narratives. Once again, the tragedy was used to raise the rating of the ruling parties, as well as to score political points. It is difficult to predict what the further course of events will be, but what is certain is that the Serbs in Kosovo are in a much worse position after this turning point than they were, as can be seen from the [demands](#) of the President of Kosovo, Vjosa Osmani, who even requested the introduction of EU sanctions Serbia because of these unfortunate events.

Although it is impossible to make reliable claims, the most likely scenario is that the traffic police caught a group of armed Serbs from the north of Kosovo committing illegal acts. That these people belong to a group that is afraid of contact with the police was confirmed by President Vučić in his speech, [saying](#), "Those who are pursued by the police are constantly moving on the route Central Serbia - Kosovo and Metohija to avoid arrest by Kurti's police". In addition, considering the amount of weapons found, it can be speculated that hiding, storing or trading weapons was the primary intention of this group of people from the north of Kosovo.

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## Further development,

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The vice president of the Serbian List, Milan Radoičić, admitted that he personally organized the rebellion in Kosovo in an open letter to the public on September 29. "I inform all the on-duty persecutors of the Serbian people that I made all the logistical preparations for the defence of the Serbian people against the occupiers, and this act has nothing to do with my previous political involvement. I did not inform anyone from the Serbian authorities or local structures about this." At the beginning of his letter, he emphasized that he was born in Peć, in the Republic of Serbia, clearly emphasizing his origin and the motive for starting this kind of rebellion. He pointed out that on September 24, he "returned to the north of Kosovo and Metohija to protect his people who are exposed to Kurti's terror every day." While this statement seems farfetched, we can conclude that Radoičić did not succeed in such intention, given that three Serbs were killed, while the rest were either arrested or run away.

Radoičić said that he is ready to respond to the invitation of the competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia, however, his legal representative Goran Petronijević, who read the mentioned letter to the public, said that "there is no need for any state body of the Republic of Serbia to ask any questions to Radoičić", [reports](#) N1. For now, it is certain that Milan Radoičić will not answer to the authorities of the Republic of Serbia for organizing a rebellion that resulted in the death of several people.

Although Radoičić's confession denied the involvement of the Republic of Serbia and its officials in the armed rebellion in Banjska, the Kosovo media began to publish disturbing footage about the possible involvement of Aleksandar Vučić and the Serbian Army. Namely, there are videos from a drone that allegedly show exercises and preparations for the attack in Banjska carried out in central Serbia, i.e. on Kopaonik and Pasuljanske livade, where a unit of the Training Command of the Army of the Republic of Serbia is located, [reports](#) Nova.rs. The Kosovo authorities keep presenting alleged evidence of Belgrade's involvement, and for now, we have to hear and see the evidence from the Serbian authorities, considering that we only had the opportunity to hear the confession of Milan Radoičić.