

Montenegro: Profile of Media Ownership and Potential Foreign Influence Channels

Emily Dumont, Jonathan Solis, and Lincoln Zaleski

Table of Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Russian Media Footprints..... | 2 |
| Top Media Outlets..... | 3 |
| Media Ownership..... | 5 |
| Results..... | 7 |
| Television..... | 7 |
| Print..... | 9 |
| Radio..... | 10 |
| Online..... | 12 |
| Conclusion..... | 13 |

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge Vera Choo, Samantha Custer, and Rodney Knight for their advice and assistance in the research and compilation of this profile. We additionally want to acknowledge AidData’s team of student Research Assistants who collected data for this project, including Diane Frangulea, Maggie Herndon, Daniel Highland, Katherine Hughes, Sonia Kelly, Morgan King, Deb Kornblut, Amelia Larson, Abby Maher, Daniella Marx, Harper Ortlieb, Caroline Prout, Andrew Tanner, Emmeline Walker, Sophia Zaman, and Noa Zielinski.

Introduction

What are the entry points for foreign actors to shape and influence the narrative in the Montenegrin media market? This profile seeks to address some of the entry points related to media ownership and Russian state-owned media. AidData recognizes that malign influence may affect narrative creation in other ways, including the republishing of foreign content in domestic media outlets, interactions on social media, and through journalist biases. However, this project focuses solely on direct and indirect ownership of traditional domestic media outlets to identify potential entry points for Russian influence through elites and media owners. By better understanding Montenegro's domestic media ownership environment, including what media outlets citizens consume and who the owners of those outlets are, we can anticipate entry points where malign actors may try to influence domestic narratives.

In August 2020, the Montenegrin government passed the new Media Law which enacted legal requirements for increasing ownership transparency.¹ Prior to that time, data on media ownership was limited, and many hidden owners controlled the media landscape through proxies.² While this new law has not yet been widely enforced and some hidden owners persist, the law is a step in the right direction for increasing transparency.³ Since owners of top media houses have the potential to influence the content and tone of topics covered by journalists in their employ, understanding who owns the media is crucial to identifying avenues for influence and potential bias in reporting. In this profile, we begin to close this gap with an in-depth look at media ownership in Montenegro.

¹ Smiljanic, Veljko and Bojan Vuckovic. "Revising the Regulatory Environment for Media in Montenegro." Karanovic and Partners. Published September 16, 2020.

<https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=1af28765-3e3e-4095-bf64-d73ecbf96a54>

² "Montenegro 2019: Media Sustainability Index." International Research and Exchanges Board. Published 2020.

<https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2019-montenegro.pdf>

³ Vukovic, Dragoljub and Daniela Brnic. "Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Montenegro." European University Institute. Published July 2021.

https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/71967/montenegro_results_mpm_2021_cmpf.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

This media ownership profile and the supporting data were prepared by AidData, a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute.⁴ The data for this profile was collected manually by AidData staff and student research assistants. We began by conducting web searches to identify a list of media in Montenegro, and then identified a list of the top-ranked outlets in terms of overall consumption. We then used this information to gather the ownership data. We primarily used cross-country sources when available (e.g., Alexa⁵), as well as survey data, media watchdog sources, media articles, and other open source data.

In the following sections, we provide summary data on the presence of Russian state-owned media, top outlets, and media ownership in Montenegro as of 2021 (or the most contemporary data available). This profile focuses on the ownership of traditional broadcast, print, and online media outlets. Social media is not included in this analysis. By mapping out the ownership and influence of traditional forms of media, these profiles lend insight into potential channels for foreign influence of the top consumed outlets.

Russian Media Footprints

The most direct form of Kremlin influence in Montenegro's media landscape is via Russian state-owned media (see Table 1). Only two of the eleven Russian state-owned media outlets we tracked have a physical presence in Montenegro, which provides the Kremlin with a weak channel to directly communicate with, and ultimately influence, Montenegrin citizens. Physical presence includes physical infrastructure, such as cable packages, physical office space or local bureaus, and radio broadcasters, but excludes satellite broadcasting and online or streaming availability. Table 1 provides a basic footprint of Russian state-owned media presence in Montenegro, but does not speak to how well-consumed each outlet is by Montenegrin citizens.

⁴ This profile is part of a collaboration with the USAID E&E Bureau made possible through a buy-in to a Higher Education Solutions Network cooperative agreement (AID-A-12-00096) in place between USAID/LAB/HESN, AidData, and William & Mary.

⁵ Alexa is an online analysis tool. AidData Staff used Alexa's API to gauge website traffic. <https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo>.

Table 1: Russian state-owned media in Montenegro, 2021

| Television | | Print | | Radio | | News Agency | |
|-------------|---|--------------------|---|---------|---|-------------|---|
| Russia I | ✓ | Rossiyskaya Gazeta | ✗ | Sputnik | ✗ | TASS | ✗ |
| Russia 24 | ✗ | | | | | Sputnik | ✗ |
| Russia K | ✗ | | | | | | |
| RTR-Planeta | ✗ | | | | | | |
| TV Centre | ✗ | | | | | | |
| Channel One | ✗ | | | | | | |
| RT | ✓ | | | | | | |

Other indirect forms of Russian influence are possible, including domestic outlets republishing narratives and the presence of pro-Russian journalists in-country. In this profile, AidData has captured direct Russian channels of influence through state-owned media infrastructure.

Top Media Outlets

Table 2 identifies the top five most-consumed media outlets in Montenegro by medium (television, print, radio, and online) based on cross-sectional indicators such as viewership share and circulation. According to a NATO study, television and online outlets are the top consumed mediums for information in Montenegro and are therefore likely more influential, while radio and print media are less consumed.⁶ While we make no claims about the exact influence of each individual outlet, we can assume that outlets that reach higher numbers of consumers have greater potential to influence more citizens. Despite the presence of two Russian state-owned media outlets in

⁶ Svetoka, Sandra and Tihomira Doncheva. "Russia's Footprint in the Western Balkan Information Environment: Susceptibility to Russian Influence." NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. Published October 2021. <https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/russias-footprint-in-the-western-balkan-information-environment-susceptibility-to-russian-influence/216>.

Montenegro, none of the tracked Russian state media appears in the top five outlets for any medium.

AidData used a weighted average of media consumption survey rankings from 2017 to 2021 to determine the top media outlets in Montenegro. This strategy offers a more long-term perspective of top media outlets, rather than a snapshot of the top media outlets right now. As such, the top outlets may not exactly reflect the current order of most consumed outlets, but do show a solid picture of the media landscape over the past five years. Recent rankings are weighted more heavily to adjust for new changes.⁷

Table 2: Top Montenegrin media outlets ranked by overall consumption

| Rank | Television | Print | Radio | Online |
|------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| 1 | TV Vijesti | Dan | Radio Crne Gore (RCG) (Radio Montenegro) | vijesti.me |
| 2 | TVCG | Vijesti | Radio Antena M | cdm.me |
| 3 | Nova (formerly TV Pink) | Pobjeda | Atlas Radio (RTV A1) | portalanalitika.me |
| 4 | Pink M | Dnevne Novine | Radio D | rtcg.me |
| 5 | Prva TV | Blic Crna Gora (Blic Montenegro) | Radio 98 (R98) | in4s.net |

According to findings from an AidData survey of regional and local media experts in 2021, the majority of top Montenegrin outlets mirror the results of open-source data collection by AidData researchers. Additional outlets excluded from this top outlet list but ranked highly by local experts include the online outlets Antena M (antenam.net), Montenegrin News Agency (mina.news), and PCNEN (pcnen.com).

⁷ Television, Print and Radio rankings: Television, radio and print rankings were calculated using multiple publicly available surveys and circulation data, including an AidData survey of country and regional experts conducted in summer 2021. Additional survey data came from: IREX's Media Sustainability Index (2019), NATO Strategic Communications Centre for Excellence Russia's Footprints report (2021), IRI's Public Opinion in Montenegro survey (2017), and Digital Forensic Center's public opinion survey (2021). Online rankings: Alexa, April 2021.

Media Ownership

Table 3 lists the ownership information of top Montenegrin media outlets by medium (television, newspaper, radio, and online). Following the passage of the new Media Law in August 2020, media outlets are required to publicly report all owners with greater than a five percent share in the outlet. The new Media Law requires transparency of online outlets, in addition to traditional print and broadcasting outlets. However, the government has not widely enforced the law as of early 2021, which means that ownership transparency has not yet caught up to the new legal requirements in Montenegro.⁸ Further examples of ownership ties and relationships are discussed in the following section.

In order to highlight which outlets may be more susceptible to Russian influence, AidData staff has devised a four-point scale, color-coded shades of red, to indicate 1) Direct Russian ownership, 2) Known Russian ties, 3) Suspected Russian ties, and 4) No Russian ties. Montenegro has one outlet with suspected Russian ties, the online news outlet IN4S, which acts as a consistent reposter of Kremlin-owned Sputnik Srbija. No known relationship between IN4S and the Russian government exists, but the continued use of Russian state media articles in Montenegro implies a potential relationship. State-owned media is color-coded blue in the table below; as such, IN4S is highlighted in red to denote “suspected Russian ties” and four state-owned outlets are highlighted in blue below to denote state ownership.

Table 3: Ownership of top Montenegrin media outlets by share

| Medium | Rank | Outlet | Owner, Company | Owner, Individuals | Owner (%) |
|------------|------|------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| | | | | Media Development Investment Fund | 30.725 |
| Television | 1 | TV Vijesti | Daily Press LLC | Filip Ivanovic | 22.05 |
| | | | | Katarina Perovic | 22.05 |
| | | | | Stefan Mitrovic | 18.175 |

⁸ Vukovic, Dragoljub and Daniela Brnic. “Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Montenegro.”

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|
| | | Marijana Bojanic | 7 |
| 2 TVCG | Radio i Televizija Crne Gore | | 100 |
| | | BC Partners | 52.3 |
| | | Senior management | 38.5 |
| 3 Nova (TV Pink) | United Group | Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR) | 6.8 |
| | | EBRD | 2.4 |
| 4 Pink M | Pink International Company | Zeljko Mitrovic | 100 |
| 5 Prva TV | Kopernikus Corporation | Srdjan Milovanovic | 100 |
| | | Mladen Milutinović | 50 |
| 1 Dan | Jumedia Mont LLC | Slavica Jovanović | 25 |
| | | Vojin Jovanović | 25 |
| | | Media Development Investment Fund | 30.725 |
| 2 Vijesti | Daily Press LLC | Filip Ivanovic | 22.05 |
| | | Katarina Perovic | 22.05 |
| | | Stefan Mitrovic | 18.175 |
| | | Marijana Bojanic | 7 |
| 3 Pobjeda | Media Nea | Petros Stathis | 99.9 |
| | | Boris Darmanović | 0.01 |
| 4 Dnevne Novine | Savana Group | Veselin Mijač | 100 |
| | | Ringier Family | 37.5 |
| | Ringier Group | Marc Walder | |
| | | La Mobilere | 12.5 |
| | | Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR) | 17.8 |
| 5 Blic Crna Gora (Blic Montenegro) | | Friede Springer | 11.3 |
| | | Mathias Döpfner | 11 |
| | Axel Springer | CPPIB | 6.5 |
| | | Axel Sven Springer | 2.5 |
| | | Ariane Melanie Springer | 0.5 |
| | | Friede Springer Foundation | 0.5 |

| | | | | | |
|--------|---|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------|--------|
| Radio | 1 | Radio Crne Gore (RCG) (Radio Montenegro) | Radio i Televizija Crne Gore | 100 | |
| | 2 | Radio Antena M | Antena M LLC | Darko Sukovic | 100 |
| | 3 | RTV A1 | Atlas Group | Dusko Knezevic | 100 |
| | 4 | Radio D | M.D. Company LLC | Ljiljana Martinovic | 50 |
| | | | | Dejan Raznatovic | 50 |
| | 5 | Radio 98 (R98) | Radio i Televizija Crne Gore | 100 | |
| Online | | | Media Development Investment Fund | 30.725 | |
| | 1 | vijesti.me | Daily Press LLC | Filip Ivanovic | 22.05 |
| | | | | Katarina Perovic | 22.05 |
| | | | | Stefan Mitrovic | 18.175 |
| | | | | Marijana Bojanic | 7 |
| | 2 | cdm.me | Media Nea | Petros Stathis | 99.9 |
| | | | | Boris Darmanović | 0.01 |
| | 3 | portalanalitika.me | Portal Press LLC | Petros Stathis | 100 |
| | 4 | rtcg.me | Radio i Televizija Crne Gore | | 100 |
| | 5 | in4s.net | IN4S | Gojko Raičević | 100 |

Results

Television

Television is the most popular news medium in Montenegro, with 67 percent of Montenegrins watching television daily.⁹ While the second most-watched television outlet in Montenegro is the state-owned Television Crne Gore (TVCG), the remaining four most-watched television channels are all privately run and are fully or partially owned by media companies from outside of Montenegro.

⁹ Svetoka, Sandra and Tihomira Doncheva. "Russia's Footprint in the Western Balkan Information Environment: Susceptibility to Russian Influence." NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. Published October 2021.

The most popular television station in Montenegro is TV Vijesti.¹⁰ In May 2008, with the help of US-based Media Development Investment Fund, Vijesti newspaper launched a nationwide television station in Montenegro. While the owners of Vijesti have changed many times since the newspaper's original launch in 1996, the current Montenegrin owners include journalist Filip Ivanovic, Vijesti co-founder Katarina Perovic, Stefan Mitrovic, and CEO of TV Vijesti, Marijana Bojanic. In addition to these domestic owners, the largest single shareholder of Vijesti is the Media Development Investment Fund, a US-based media investment non-profit with financing from George Soros' Open Society Foundation. Prior to December 2020, TV Vijesti was often critical of the former Djukanovic regime; however, following the 2020 parliamentary elections, Vijesti has been highly supportive of the newly elected opposition government.¹¹

The third most-watched television station is Nova M, formerly known as TV Pink until owner Zeljko Mitrovic sold the outlet to the United Group in 2018. The United Group is owned by a coalition of Western businesses, including British-owned BC Partners, US-owned Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR), and a minority share from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Interestingly, Mitrovic, a Serbian businessman, reinstated a new Pink M channel in Montenegro in October 2018, competing against his former company. Currently, the new Pink M is the fourth-most watched television outlet in Montenegro.

Prva TV is the fifth-most watched television station in Montenegro. Srdjan Milovanovic's Kopernikus Corporation owns Prva TV, a popular outlet in Serbia. Milovanovic controls a large share of media outlets in the Western Balkans, including online outlet B92, television channels O2 and Prva TV, and radio station Play Radio (formerly B92 Radio).

Four of the top five television stations in Montenegro are either fully or partially owned by media companies from outside Montenegro. Serbian media moguls Zeljko Mitrovic and Srdjan Milovanovic own Pink M and Prva TV respectively, while Western owners hold considerable shares in Nova M and TV Vijesti. According to a 2021 NATO StratCom Report, Montenegrins perceive Serbia to be the greatest foreign security

¹⁰ "Public Opinion Survey – Media Literacy and the Citizens of Montenegro." Digital Forensics Center.

¹¹ USAID has informally confirmed Vijesti's pro-government bias in consultation with AidData. AidData staff could not externally confirm the validity of this statement.

threat to Montenegro, which may be due in part to significant Serbian ownership of top Montenegrin outlets.¹²

Print

While print media has declining readership in Montenegro, the owners of most top newspapers also own top outlets in other mediums. The owners of most-read print outlet Dan, formerly owned Radio D. The owners of the second most-read outlet, Vijesti, also own Vijesti TV and the Vijesti online news portal. Petros Stathis, the main owner of third most-read outlet Pobjeda, also owns top online outlets Portal Analitika and Cafe del Montenegro (CdM).

Founded by Dusko Jovanovic in 1998, Dan is currently the most-read newspaper in Montenegro. Initially an opposition newspaper closely tied to the Socialist People's Party, Dan was largely critical of the Djukanovic government. In 2004, founder and editor-in-chief Dusko Jovanovic was assassinated.¹³ Half of Jovanovic's shares were split between his wife, Slavica Jovanovic, and his son, Vojin Jovanovic. Mladen Milutinovic, the current editor-in-chief of Dan, received the remaining half of the shares and remains the head of the Dusko Jovanovic Foundation.

Vijesti, the second most-read newspaper, is owned by the same owners as TV Vijesti and, like Dan, is considered critical of the incumbent government. While initially a pro-Djukanovic newspaper, following the 2006 independence referendum from Serbia, Vijesti developed a more critical stance against the long-time leader.

Pobjeda, the third most-read newspaper in Montenegro, is a former state-run newspaper. Purchased by Greek business tycoon Petros Stathis in 2014, the newspaper remained pro-Djukanovic government, and Stathis was considered a "strategic partner" of the Montenegrin regime.¹⁴ In November 2014, as Pobjeda was on the verge of bankruptcy, Stathis purchased the pro-government media conglomerate

¹² Svetoka, Sandra and Tihomira Doncheva. "Russia's Footprint in the Western Balkan Information Environment: Susceptibility to Russian Influence." NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. Published October 2021.

¹³ "Dusko Jovanovic." Committee to Protect Journalists. Last updated: March 2021. <https://cpj.org/data/people/dusko-jovanovic/>

¹⁴ Freedom House. Nations in Transit 2018 - Montenegro. Published April 11, 2018. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3cc278a.html>.

Media Nea through his investment firm First Financial Holdings. Stathis owns 99.99 percent of Pobjeda through Media Nea, but allowed the CEO and founder of Media Nea, Boris Darmanovic, to own the remaining 0.01 percent of the newspaper.

Stathis and Darmanovic also owned the fourth most-read newspaper in Montenegro, Dnevne Novine, until Veselin Mijac purchased the newspaper in early 2021. A Montenegrin citizen, Mijac has lived in Sweden for decades, eventually establishing the Swedish company Savana Group. Through Savana Group and negotiations with Stathis, Mijac purchased Dnevne Novine.

Most sources report that Montenegro only has four daily newspapers: Dan, Vijesti, Pobjeda, and Dnevne Novine.¹⁵ However, in the 2021 AidData survey of local experts, Blic Crna Gora, the Montenegrin branch of the Serbian outlet Blic, was ranked the fifth most-read newspaper in Montenegro. Blic is owned by Swiss publishing house, Ringier Axel Springer Media AG, in turn owned by the Ringier and Springer families, as well as the aforementioned US owners of Nova M, Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR). In sum, the declining print media sector in Montenegro has given way to foreign ownership, such as Greek owner Petros Stathis, Western owners in Vijesti and Blic, and Swedish-Montenegrin owner Veselin Mijac.

Radio

Radio stations in Montenegro seem to be more locally owned than other mediums in Montenegro. The government of Montenegro owns two of the top five radio stations: the most-listened radio station, Radio Crne Gore, and the fifth-most listened radio station, Radio 98. The remaining outlets are all private with Montenegrin owners.

The second-most popular radio station is Radio Antena M, owned by Montenegrin journalist Darko Sukovic. Sukovic is CEO, owner, and the editor-in-chief of Radio Antena M and online Portal Antena M. Sukovic has no apparent ties to either the Montenegrin government or foreign governments.

¹⁵ Freedom House. Nations in Transit 2018 - Montenegro. Published April 11, 2018. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3cc278a.html>.

The third-most popular radio station is RTV A1 (formerly Atlas Radio), owned by Montenegrin businessman Dusko Knezevic. Knezevic is the founder and President of Atlas Group Corporation (AGC), a major conglomerate owning financial services, media outlets, and banks in Southeastern Europe, the United Kingdom, and Russia. Knezevic is one of the wealthiest Montenegrins, and holds a pro-Western and pro-NATO stance despite his business dealings in Russia.¹⁶ In January 2019, a video surfaced of Knezevic handing a \$100,000 check to the Mayor of Podgorica, supposedly to support the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS) re-election bids.¹⁷ As a result of the perceived corruption, mass protests erupted in Montenegro calling on President Milo Djukanovic and other DPS leaders to step down. In response to the protests, Montenegrin authorities filed money laundering charges against Knezevic and the Mayor of Podgorica, though no early elections were called.¹⁸ Knezevic supposedly lives in London now, but remains the sole owner of RTV A1 through Atlas Group.¹⁹

The fourth-most popular radio station is Radio D, co-owned by Ljiljana Martinovic and Dejan Raznatovic. Radio D was formerly owned by the owners of Dan newspaper, Mladen Milutinovic, Slavica Jovanovic, and Voljn Jovanovic. However, the Electronic Media Agency of Montenegro ruled in 2013 that the owners of Dan had to sell their stakes in Radio D to prevent media concentration. This ruling was regarded as potentially politically motivated, as Dan was considered to be an opposition newspaper.²⁰ As a result of this government-forced sale, Martinovic and Raznatovic are the owners of Radio D, while Milutinovic remains the “authorized representative” of the radio station. Radio stations in Montenegro are owned exclusively by local owners and

¹⁶ Freeman, Colin. “Montenegro Tycoon fights to end 29-year reign of ‘Milo the Czar’ from London exile.” Telegraph UK. Published August 29, 2020.
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/08/29/montenegro-tycoon-fights-end-29-year-reign-milo-czar-london/>

¹⁷ Tomovic, Dusica. “Montenegro Protesters Demand President’s Resignation.” Balkan Insight. Published February 23, 2019.
<https://balkaninsight.com/2019/02/23/montenegro-protesters-demand-presidents-resignation/>

¹⁸ Kajosevic, Samir. “Montenegro Capital’s Ex-Mayor Indicted for Money-Laundering.” Balkan Insight. Published September 24, 2021.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2021/09/24/montenegro-capitals-ex-mayor-indicted-for-money-laundering/>

¹⁹ Freeman, Colin. “Montenegro Tycoon fights to end 29-year reign of ‘Milo the Czar’ from London exile.”

²⁰ Cadenovic, Ivan and Mila Radulovic. “Montenegro: double standards in regulating media concentration.” Centro per la Cooperazione Internazionale. Published April 27, 2017.
<https://www.cci.tn.it/eng/Areas/Montenegro/Montenegro-double-standards-in-regulating-media-concentration-179589>

appear to have fewer potential channels for foreign influence than other traditional mediums.

Online

Many of the same owners of top outlets in Montenegro own the most popular online outlets as well. Petros Stathis, the Greek owner of top newspaper Pobjeda, also owns the second and third most-visited online outlets in Cafe del Montenegro (CdM) and Portal Analitika, respectively. Vijesti is the most popular online outlet through the portal vijesti.me. The owners of Daily Press LLC, the parent company of Vijesti, control the television, the newspaper, and the online outlet. Finally, the government of Montenegro owns rtcg.me, the fourth most-visited online outlet.

Gojko Raicevic, the owner and founder of IN4S news portal, is the only new name in the list of owners of top online outlets in Montenegro. IN4S is the fifth most-visited outlet in Montenegro, and is outwardly pro-Russian. According to analysis conducted by NATO, IN4S is the largest republisher of content from Sputnik Srbija in Montenegro. Sputnik Srbija is the Serbian version of Russian state-owned media Sputnik, and IN4S often exactly duplicates or repurposes content from the Russian state media site.²¹ As a result, IN4S provides an indirect but potent channel for Russian content and narratives to reach the Montenegrin population.

Due to the popularity of online outlets in Montenegro (second in consumption only to television), the content and ownership of online outlets is particularly important.²² The majority of top online outlets in Montenegro are, like television, foreign-owned. In addition, the popularity of IN4S, a clear channel for Russian state media to further narratives in Montenegro, highlights subtle ways that Russia can influence the Montenegrin public.

²¹ Svetoka, Sandra and Tihomira Doncheva. "Russia's Footprint in the Western Balkan Information Environment: Susceptibility to Russian Influence." NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. Published October 2021.

²² "Public Opinion Survey – Media Literacy and the Citizens of Montenegro." Digital Forensics Center.

Conclusion

In this brief, we have presented an overview of the domestic media ownership environment of Montenegro. The collected data highlight three trends in Montenegrin media ownership. First, many media outlets in Montenegro are owned by foreign owners. Second, Russian narratives have channels for subtle but potent influence in Montenegro. Third, media transparency and ownership in Montenegro is dynamic and appears transitional.

Montenegrin top media outlets are mostly centered around foreign owners. Of the most-consumed mediums, television and online, eight of the ten measured television and online outlets are foreign-owned and many of these foreign owners own multiple top outlets in Montenegro. For example, Greek businessman Petros Stathis owns two top online outlets and a top newspaper outlet, and Serbian media mogul Srdjan Milovanovic owns a top television station. As such, Montenegrin media is flush with foreign influence coming from Serbia, Russia, Europe, and the United States. This openness to foreign ownership in top media could lead to a potential channel for Russian influence, as there are few norms preventing Russian owners from purchasing outlets in Montenegro.

While there is no direct Russian ownership of top outlets in Montenegro, Russian narratives in Serbian and Montenegrin outlets are present. Montenegrin top online outlet IN4S is a major republisher of Russian state media content, as are some Serbian-owned online and television outlets. These channels provide the Russian government with a potent channel of influence, as Kremlin narratives can be disguised as local insights.

Lastly, with the passage of the new Media Law in 2020, Montenegro is taking steps toward increased media transparency and ownership. However, the Montenegrin government's unequal enforcement of many components of this law, in combination with recent developments in the media landscape, has created a rapidly changing media environment. Many media outlets, such as Nova M and Vijesti, look more Western in nature with a plurality of owners from different backgrounds. Other ownership structures, such as RTV A1 and Prva TV, are still based on older models of

control, with political and economic elites from both Montenegro and abroad controlling the media. If the law becomes applied more evenly, there is potential for Montenegrin media ownership to diversify to combat corruption and foreign influence, though the steps for this have been preliminary at best.

In sum, Montenegro has some channels for Russian influence. While there are only two Russian state-owned outlets present in Montenegro, the repurposing of Russian state-owned content by local outlets allows Kremlin narratives to directly influence the Montenegrin public. In addition, the dominance of foreign ownership and ownership by political elites provides vulnerabilities for potential Russian ownership or influence in Montenegro.