

Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans: A Challenge to European Security

The Western Balkans region has always been an area of great geopolitical and geostrategic importance both to the state and non-state actors. Following the civil wars which profoundly marked the last years of the 20th century, the countries in question entered the phase of transition, characterised by profound socio-political paralysis, economic crisis and hampered consolidation of the rule of law. The inadequacy of the social environment and inefficiency of the systems were crucial in creating the necessary prerequisites for the growing importance of religion, and nowadays for the success of Islamist propaganda in the region. As well as the neighbouring European countries, the region did not stay immune to the influence of the extremist narrative of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, resulting into a growing trend of departures towards the conflict zones in the Middle East. Despite the efforts made in relation to harmonization of — legal and operative frameworks according to internationally accepted instruments and standards entailed by the UN and EU strategies, the counter-terrorism response remains still inadequately due to the lack of knowledge and experience of the states when it comes to dealing with violent extremism. The transnational character and effects of the threat posed by returning fighters and “Unaccomplished émigrés”, and as well as the fact that no country is immune to it, make the reinforcement of information-sharing platform and cooperation on European and international level as being imperative prerequisites for the creation of a stable counterterrorism response.

Key words: violent extremism, radicalization, foreign fighters, jihadism, the Western Balkans

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon, it is its *modus operandi* that has changed over time. Deeply entrenched into connective tissue of — modern culture, the evolution of — terrorism has been a profoundly transformative process, which — assumed many faces, ranging from the Anarchist wave in 1880s, Anti-Colonial and New Left Wave in 1960 s. In the purview of the timeline and gradation, identified by David C. Rapoport, even though the first three waves of modern terrorism did share a religious component, religion itself has not been a determining factor and ideological platform of their actions. It was only with the arrival of the fourth wave that religion became exalted both as a source of moral justification of extremist deeds and a sum of principles upon which

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the New World would be created.¹ Unlike the previous forms of modern terror, which combined both ethnic and religious elements but whose separatist aspirations were primarily focused on creating a secular state, the logic of the religious wave was profoundly rooted into the postulates dictated by Islam. The beginning of the new Islamic century in 1979 and two major political events, namely the Iranian Revolution and Invasion of Afghanistan, created the necessary premises for the establishment and emancipation of terrorist organisations which indelibly changed the face of international terrorism.² On September 11, 2001, the mankind became acquainted with the most notorious and operable terrorist organisation known to the contemporary world — Al Qaeda. At the time, the affirmation of Al Qaeda and several other terrorist groups (such as GIA or al-Gama'a al Islamiyya), aspiring to project their agenda internationally, provoked and introduced significant changes to the existing knowledge; moreover, it posed the foundations for upgraded research and coined several terms that are being constantly elaborated and redefined to date. In the aftermath of the Twin Towers and Pentagon attacks, the figure of “foreign fighter” became an integral part of terrorism studies, even though its roots reach far back in time and is linked to those individuals who intervened or participated in armed conflicts which took place in countries they were not citizens of.³ According to David Malter, the term “foreign fighter” is not an universally established term in political science literature, but is being constantly redefined. Unlike the States which takes part in conflicts in order to protect its political or economic interests, the individuals who join an armed conflict abroad are primarily motivated by ideology, religion, and/or kinship.⁴

Understanding how an individual becomes prone to leave his/her country of origin and engage in paramilitary formations of a certain terrorist group is a rather complex process, implicitly linked to understanding the patterns and factors of radicalisation to violent extremism. Even though, the term “radicalisation” is still poorly defined, it can be perceived as a phenomenon of people embracing opinions and views which are not commonly accepted, that is, can be considered as socialisation to extremism, which may lead to acts of terrorism.⁵

¹ Rapoport David C., *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism*, Terrorism. Critical Concepts in Political Science, Routledge, New York, 2006, pp. 17–21

² *Ibid.*, p. 17

³ The Afghan war following the Soviet invasion in 1979, the Bosnian and Chechen war, recently Iraq and Ukraine are only a few examples of wars in which foreign interventions were documented.

⁴ *Foreign Fighters Under International Law*, Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, Academy Briefing no. 7, October 2014., p. 10

⁵ European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, *Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism*, May 2008, p. 5

Therefore, it is the aim of radicalisation processes to create profound social mutations and to challenge the existing order.

Following the rise of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS), the phenomenon of individuals embracing the narrative of violent extremism assumed an unprecedented dimensions and its in-depth analysis became an imperative. Moreover, the *modus operandi* and agenda of this terrorist organisation deeply challenged previously defined theoretical frameworks and imposed new, almost revolutionary criteria.

Building on David C. Rapoport's theory and taking into account the context and logic of the vertiginous evolution of ISIS, Peter R. Neumann argues that the ISIS-tailored jihadism is a continuation of the fourth wave, but decisively entailing several distinguishing features compared to terrorist groups which operated in past.⁶ Even though the author in the book "Radicalized: New Jihadists and the Threat to the West" does not explicitly write about the new wave of terrorism, it is rather clear that the ambitions of the Islamic State reach beyond the ones endorsed by other paramilitary organisations and, nevertheless, were raised as a product of globalisation.

Deeply enrooted in the geopolitical context created by the two civil wars in the Middle East and perceived repression of Sunnis by the Shi'ite governments in Iraq and Syria, the exponential growth of ISIS during the last few years is a result of two elements: the ample international component and its supreme goal to fight not only for the reversal of the present political regimes or domination in the Islamic world, but for the establishment of a fully functioning and Sharia-regulated state, which would become home to all jihadists in the world. By exploiting the existing socio-political and economic crisis and eroded sovereignty of many states across the world, as well as instruments "generously" offered by the globalist rhetoric, the ISIS's pursuit of jihad temporary resulted in taking control over and maintaining governance in some territories in the Middle East. Although this terrorist organisation has been defeated on ground, the "foreign fighter" component is still very much viable and the hardest battle of all — the battle of ideas — is yet to be fought.

This article aims to understand the founding premises of radicalisation to violent extremism in — the Western Balkans region and its implications on European security, as well as to inquire into some gaps and weaknesses of existing counter-terrorism frameworks.

Violent extremism in the Western Balkans: historical premises and success factors

The Western Balkans region has always been an area of great geopolitical and geostrategic importance for great powers, and historically

⁶ Neumann Peter R., *Radicalized: New Jihadists and the Threat to the West*, I. B. Taurus & Co, London, 2016

inclined to rebellion that in different contexts produced very different results. During the 20th century, the rebellion march saw its fulfillment in creation of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, during the 1990 s in independence wars, and in the 21st century in facilitating the creation and advancement of paramilitary formations aimed at achieving a goal that goes beyond national borders — restoration of the Caliphate.

During the Nineties, the theatres of Yugoslav wars were perceived as the next irresistible front for global jihad and dissemination of Islamic radicalism, steamed from Wahhabi movement. Although the affirmation that the beginning of the war period enabled the revival of Islamic fundamentalism in the Balkans, it is only partially true. The establishment of religious networks throughout the counties, funded by several Arab and Gulf countries, and the arrival of the Mujahideen provoked its evolution on the operational level, while the theoretical premises, in some countries, were already created in the midst of the communist era.⁷ An emblematic example is the book “Islamic Declaration”⁸ which contains an abundant set of conservative ideas referring to inauguration of the new Islamic order in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The achievement of the goals entailed by the pan Islamic movement and religious emancipation of Muslims were narrowly connected with two underlying assumptions: Islamic society is powerless without an Islamic government, and vice versa this government is a mere utopia without a society of Muslims.⁹ Moreover, Alija Izetbegović’s writings offer prospects for breaking the iron chains of Muslim slavery and submission with education (which is not dictated by outside powers, especially Western ones), discipline and struggle for freedom at the heart of the movement.¹⁰ The insight into the “underground” rhetoric of some officials composing one of the most important political fractions provides an elaborated understanding of the ideological roots and underlying motives of radicalization processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose national identity, following the declaration of independence, was primarily built around Islamic religion.

The case of the post-communist Kosovo is different since the Kosovo Liberation Army built its struggle for independence around secular nationalism, while the Mujahideen element did not exist and the quest for religious identity was not a primary factor.¹¹ Nevertheless, during biennium 1998–1999 the network of charities, created during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, played a central role in

⁷ Schindler J. R., *Unholy terror*, Zenith Press, 2007, p. 260

⁸ The book is largely considered the ideological legacy of the late President of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegović.

⁹ Izetbegović Alija, *Islamska deklaracija*, OKO, 2004., p. 22

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 21

¹¹ Arturo Varvelli, *Jihadist Hotbeds Understanding Local Radicalization Processes*, ISPI, 2016; Florian Qehaja, *Beyond Gornje Maoče and Ošve: Radicalization in the Western Balkans*, p. 80

supporting Kosovar Muslims — financially and militarily.¹² In the aftermath of the war, the attention of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was primarily focused on urban centres of Kosovo, leaving the socio-economic needs of rural communities unaddressed and, consequently, allowing diffusion of the foreign influence through the Saudi Joint Committee for the Relief of Kosovo and Chechnya (SJCRKC).¹³ Moreover, the inquiry into evolution of Islamic extremism — in relation to religious influence on radicalisation processes — shows that, unlike Bosnia and Herzegovina, the roots of violent extremism are not connected to Salafist but Takfiri doctrine, which gradually gained influence in Kosovo via Macedonia-linked channels following the end of Kosovo's war for independence.¹⁴

According to Christopher Deliso, building mosques has also been (and still is) the Islamic way of showing the line of conquest and a platform for projection of soft power, and the author points out hundreds of new ones (Saudi-Wahhabi style) which have been recently built in the region.¹⁵ In addition to reconstructing the religious centres, the Saudi aid agencies helped rebuilding countries' infrastructures and granted scholarships for the elite elected from the public life as well as from cultural, religious and political spheres. In this regard, the influence of *in primis* Saudi Arabia is essential for understanding the motives and success factors of radicalisation to violent extremism as well as the instilment of radical doctrines of Islam, such as Salafism and Takfirism, in traditionally moderate Muslim societies.

The post-Nineties period in the Western Balkans was characterised by profound socio-political paralysis and economic crisis, marginalisation of ethnic minorities, hampered consolidation of rule of law and the consequent growth of corruption and crime. The inadequacy of the social environment and inefficiency of the systems, which continually failed to adequately assert demands or to hear the voice of alienated minorities and youth, were crucial in creating the necessary prerequisites for the growing importance of religion, and nowadays for the success of Islamist propaganda in the region.

Up to the present, there are no precise data referring to the number of fighters originating from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, who travelled to Syria and Iraq to engage in paramilitary formations of the Islamic State. According to the authors of the Atlantic Initiative research, Vlado Azinović and Muhamed Jusić, the consolidation of an accurate database is obstructed due to issues of the initially

¹² Shaul Shay, *Islamic Terror and the Balkans*, The Interdisciplinary Center Herzilya Projects, London, 2009, p. 88

¹³ Isa Blumi, *Political Islam among the Albanians: Are the Taliban coming to the Balkans*, Pristina, 2005, p. 7

¹⁴ Kosovo Center for Security Studies, *Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq*, p. 51

¹⁵ Deliso Christopher, *Islamic terror in Balkans*, Praeger Publishers Inc., U. S., 2007, p. 55

delayed monitoring of departures by the authorities and difficulty to assess the real status of the individuals engaged in conflicts. Moreover, the lack of a consolidated and durable cooperation between national and international intelligence agencies as well as the problem of dual citizenship and inaccuracy of fighters' personal details further hamper the process.¹⁶

The departure trend began during the last months of 2012 and was most intense during 2013, while it almost completely declined during 2016 due to the fact that — the laws which incriminated departures and fighting in foreign countries entered into force. During this period, according to SIPA's assessments, approximately 260 Bosnian citizens had been in Syria and Iraq through the end of 2015.¹⁷ As for the Kosovar contingent with 232 confirmed cases, it was ranked 8th even though the actual figures may be considerably higher.¹⁸

The process of identifying the enabling push and pull factors of radicalisation so far has been a rather disappointing experience, because it is a series of interrelated external and psychological causes that make an individual susceptible to radicalisation — an individual's promptness to embrace extremist ideology, poor education or economic situation, social exclusion and alienation, corruption, organised crime etc. Even though the religious motivation is largely perceived as the most important factor of radicalisation, departures very highly stimulated by difficult social and economic situation the countries. Moreover, given the reality of ethnic and religious discrimination, i. e. social exclusion, in the war shattered societies, in addition to the success of the ISIS's propaganda in the region, the appealing idea of jihad has been perceived by many as an alternative way-out from material and financial difficulties. But in order to come closer to understanding the patterns of radicalisation processes, which have taken place in the region over the last few years, it is essential to entirely comprehend the influence of religious figures, prisons and the Internet.

The studies conducted by two think tanks, based in Sarajevo and Prishtina, suggest that a significant percentage of fighters, composing the respective contingents, had previous criminal records. Most often, these persons were investigated, convicted or imprisoned for "terrorism, illegal possession of weapons and ammunition, theft, armed robbery, illicit weapons trade, drug trafficking and human trafficking,

¹⁶ Azinović Vlado, Jusić Muhamed, *The Lure of the Syrian War: THE FOREIGN FIGHTERS' BOSNIAN CONTINGENT*, Atlantic Initiative, Sarajevo, 2015, pp. 31–32

¹⁷ Azinović Vlado, Jusić Muhamed, *The new lure of the Syrian war — The foreign fighters' Bosnian Contingent*, Sarajevo, 2016, p. 20

¹⁸ Neumann Peter R., *Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980 s*, ICSR, January 2015, <http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/>

rape, and domestic violence.”¹⁹ The readiness of the “former criminals” to join formations of the ISIS is not accidental but rather a result of two interconnected factors: the lack of prospects for social reintegration pushes these individuals towards the margins of social life, while the Islamic State was prone to show compassion and ideologically justify their actions.²⁰ The cases of Emrah Fojnica²¹ or Bajro Ikanović²² demonstrate that psychological predisposition for committing serious crimes, combined with external influence, can be an impeller of radicalisation.

The presence of the radical religious authorities can be a further trigger of radicalisation of the former convicts as they are willing to offer the consolation to alienated individuals and present the Holy war as a source of renewed purpose. In this regard, the case of Emrah Fojnica’s radicalisation was emblematic as further facilitated (beside the criminal past and poor education) by the influence of Wahhabi community in Gornja Maoča, led by the imam Bilal Bosnić. Bosnić himself was arrested in the action codenamed “Damask”, conducted by State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) in September 2014 and sentenced to seven years in jail for public incitement to terrorist activities, recruitment of fighters and organisation of a terrorist group, under a new law aimed at stopping people from becoming militants in the Middle East.²³ In Kosovo, actions of radical imams aimed at radicalising and recruiting Kosovar fighters were enabled due to weakness and ineffectiveness of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK) in preventing these processes by propagating commonly accepted religious knowledge. De-legitimisation of West dominated political structures in Kosovo and disappointment with the religious institutions which allegedly failed to achieve the goals many fought for at the end of the 1990 s, pushed many individuals to seek an alternative in extremist ideas and perceive Islamic State as pure Islamic society they are supposed live in. This context facilitated and gave logistic requisites for establishment of an alarmingly high number of parajamats, i. e. ‘unofficial’ mosques, which operated outside the jurisdiction of the Islamic Community. Lastly, most

¹⁹ Azinović Vlado, Jusić Muhamed, *The New Lure of the Syrian War — The foreign fighter’s Bosnian contingent*, p. 40

²⁰ Kecojević Nina, *La radicalizzazione dei combattenti jihadisti nei Balcani Occidentali*, il Nodo di Gordio, n. 13, January — April 2017, p. 193

²¹ Prior to his departure to the Middle East battlefields, Emrah Fojnica was suspected of helping Mevlid Jasarevic organise a terrorist attack on the US Embassy in Sarajevo in 2011 but, due to lack of evidence, acquitted of charges in 2012.

²² In 2007, Ikanović was sentenced to eight years in jail (later reduced to 4,5 years) for explosive supplying and planning suicide bomb attack along with Mirsad Bektasević and Abdulkadir Cesur.; source: Maja Zuvella, *Three jailed in Bosnia for planning suicide attack*, Reuters, January 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL10272178>

²³ Daria Sito-Sucic, *Bosnian imam jailed for recruiting Islamic State fighters*, Reuters, November 5th 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-bosnia-verdict-idUSKCN0SU12920151105>

scholars believe that the first step towards radicalisation is still related to family ties and the level of social integration. Lack (or an unconsolidated presence) of these factors leads to the second step, relating to the power of the Internet in disseminating on one hand, and individual acquiring of extremist ideas of radical Islam on the other. Based on the experience acquired over the last few years, it is possible to conclude that the social media-based propaganda platform has had its fair share in radicalisation and recruitment processes in the Western Balkans. The phenomenon of online radicalisation in these countries can be observed in relation to the content deriving from inside and outside of the region. A perfect example, in this regard, is the case of Jasmin Keserović whose ideological indoctrination was deeply interconnected with Bosnić's preachings and *khutbas* available online. Once Keserović became engaged in formations of the Islamic State, Al Hayat media center "used" him for a propaganda video where he was presented as a true Bosnian Muslim who wages jihad against infidels, making an appeal on his Muslim brothers to make hijra towards true Islamic State where people live under umbrella of Sharia law.

Violent extremism and the EU-tailored counter-narrative in the Western Balkans

In the course of the past few years, the so called "Western Balkans Six" countries have assumed many commitments in order to harmonize their criminal codes and legal frameworks in accordance with internationally accepted instruments and obligations as well as with the UN and EU (prevent, protect, pursue and respond) strategies. The national strategies represent the continuation of those which were previously adopted and promote development of new approaches and mechanism in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism.

Despite the testified commitment and dedication of the respective law enforcement and police agencies in countering acts related to violent extremism and terrorism, there are many issues that need to be more carefully addressed. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, cooperation among mentioned agencies and with their international partners remains still profoundly hampered by the problem of overlapping jurisdictions.²⁴

In addition to institutional efforts, the support of the civil society, through engagement of Inter-religious council, families, education facilities and NGOs, must be improved in order to fully exploit the means and potential at disposal when it comes to combating the vicious logic of extremist radicalisation.

²⁴ Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, *Country Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257516.htm>

The hampered path of Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic integration and external perception of this young country as a source of danger further complicate process of ensuring internal safety and represents a problem to Kosovo's foreign policy. Solving difficult economic situation and increasing labour offer, as well as breaking the isolation through visa liberalisation and enhancing cooperation in the field of intelligence and information sharing, remain the main presuppositions of effective counterterrorism efforts. The national strategy emphasises that the threat of violent extremism concerns not only stability and security of Kosovo, but security of the whole Balkan region given the success of extremists efforts in recruiting and radicalising individuals in Albania, Sandžak region of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina where the majority of population is Muslim and the process is facilitated by easy movements between the borders.²⁵ Even though, the Strategy against Terrorism (for the period 2012–2017) stressed lack of Kosovo's internal capacities and resources to counter the large-scale terrorist attacks, it emphasised possibility to cope and to address the domestic terrorist threats.²⁶ Moreover, the spread of extremist ideology in Kosovo has been made possible thanks to persistent ethnic and religious intolerance, thereby the government must promote reconciliation among the citizens and differences (especially the one concerning non-recognition of the Republic of Kosovo from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) among the neighbouring countries must be overcome in the view of the regional cooperation.

Beside the foreign fighters who left for Syria and Iraq, another lingering problem concerning the security of both the region and neighbouring European countries, is the lack of well-defined de-radicalisation mechanisms aimed at addressing the issue of the "unaccomplished émigrés" and returnees from the conflict zones.

Over the years, fighters engaged in formations of Islamic State repeatedly made appeal to their co-regionalists to wage jihad at home in case were unable to perform *hijrah*. In this regard, the individuals who were prevented from departing to conflict zones represent a source of concern as they might act as "lone wolves" and carry out terrorist attacks locally in order to redeem themselves before Islamic State. The cases of the attacks carried out in Sarajevo in 2011 and more recently against the police station based in Zvornik clearly reflect the imminence of extremist threats. Nevertheless, violent extremism is not limited to the sole region of Western as the limited ability of these countries to provide efficient control and rule of

²⁵ Republic of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister, *Strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism 2015–2020*, Pristina, September 2015, p. 9 file: [///C:/Users/user/Desktop/deradicalisation/KOSOVO/STRATEGY_parandalim_-_ENG.pdf](file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/deradicalisation/KOSOVO/STRATEGY_parandalim_-_ENG.pdf)

²⁶ *Republic of Kosovo National Strategy Against Terrorism 2012–2017*, Pristina, June 2012, p. 15, file: [///C:/Users/user/Desktop/deradicalisation/KOSOVO/REPUBLIC_OF_KOSOVO_NATIONAL_STRATEGY_AGAINST_TERRORISM.pdf](file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/deradicalisation/KOSOVO/REPUBLIC_OF_KOSOVO_NATIONAL_STRATEGY_AGAINST_TERRORISM.pdf)

law within their national borders seem to further facilitate the creation of a transnational net of violence and insecurity. The operation “Van Damme” which was conducted by Kosovo and Italian police, resulting in arrest four individuals were arrested, suspected of having directed IS propaganda towards citizens of Balkan countries and planning to carry out attacks against Pope Francis and Tracy Ann Jacobson, the U. S. Ambassador to Kosovo.²⁷²⁸ This operation reflects the necessity of joint cooperation in countering terrorism, points out that no country is immune to extremist threat and therefore places the focus on establishing regulations or recommendations concerning social reintegration and rehabilitation programs for vulnerable individuals.

The countries in the region lack knowledge and experience when it comes to dealing with violent extremism, and therefore need support from their Western partners with regard to implementation of new regulations. Even though, relevant counterterrorism strategies do identify = strategic objectives such as early detection, prevention and intervention, and establishment of effective and efficient de-radicalisation and reintegration programmes (primarily focused on penitentiary institutions), they lack knowledge on mechanisms necessary for their effective implementation. In this regard, the cooperation on European and international level is imperative, and admission of Kosovo to Interpol and reinforcement of information-sharing platform among the Balkan countries constitute essential prerequisites of a stable counterterrorism response.

Final considerations

The territorial defeat of the Islamic State is an important step, but only a partial victory. The phenomenon of returning fighters reflects the severity of the upcoming threat and reveals many inconsistencies in our responses to the rhetoric of violent extremism. Given the disappearance of the territorial limit, the threat of the suicide bomber attacks became even more imminent.

The partial victory implies the need to review the achieved results and examine responsibility in relation to the evolution of terrorism on micro, meso and macro level. Moreover, it is important to finally move forward from the narrative of limited responsibility and understand that terrorists are created by circumstances and contexts within which they failed to make their voice heard. It is the absence of State to create jihadists.

²⁷ Matteo Albertini, *Italy and Kosovo Intensify Actions against another ISIS-linked Group*, Balkan Analysis, December 2015, <http://www.balkananalysis.com/kosovo/2015/12/06/italy-and-kosovo-intensify-actions-against-another-isis-linked-group/>

²⁸ Kecejević Nina, *La radicalizzazione dei combattenti jihadisti nei Balcani Occidentali*, il Nodo di Gordio, n. 13, January — April 2017, p. 195

It has been over seven years now since the war in Syria started and almost thirty years-long experience of frozen conflicts in the Western Balkans. Only by taking and understanding the individual responsibility, the respective countries and the world itself can overcome the common threat. By genuinely choosing democracy over the stability, the EU and the Western Balkans, as its future integral part, can fight against and win the rhetoric of extremism and populist threats.

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NASILNI EKSTREMIZAM NA ZAPADNOM BALKANU:
IZAZOV ZA EVROPSKU BEZBJEDNOST

Region zapadnog Balkana je oduvijek predstavljao područje of velikog geopolitičkog i geostrateškog značaja kako za državne tako i za nedržavne aktere. Nakon građanskih ratova koji su neizbrisivo obilježili poslednje godine 20. vijeka, period tranzicije ovih zemalja je karakterisan dubokom socio-političkom paralizom, ekonomskom krizom i otežanom konsolidacijom vladavine prava. Neadekvatnost društvenog okruženja i limitirana efikasnost sistema bili su ključni u stvaranju neophodnih preduslova za porast značaja religije, a u skorije vrijeme i olakšavajući faktori u relaciji sa uspjehom islamsističke propagande u regionu. Kao i susjedne evropske zemlje, region nije ostao imun na uticaj ekstremističkog narativa Islamske Države u Siriji i Iraku, rezultirajući porastom trenda odlaska ka konfliktnim zonama na Bliskom istoku. Uprkos uloženim naporima u vezi sa harmonizacijom zakonskih i operativnih okvira, u skladu sa međunarodno prihvaćenim instrumentima i standardima sadržanim u strategijama Ujedinjenih Nacija i Evropske Unije, odgovor na terorističke prijetnje ostaje i dalje nedovoljno definisan, usljed nedovoljnog znanja i iskustva zemalja regiona. Transnacionalni karakter i efekti prijetnje koju predstavljaju povratnici sa ratišta i neostvoreni polaznici, kao i činjenica da bezbjednost nijedne zemlje nije imuna na istu, čine jačanje platforme za razmjenu informacija i saradnju na evropskom i međunarodnom nivou imperativnim preduslovima za stvaranje stabilnog odgovora na retoriku terorizma.

Ključne riječi: Nasilni ekstremizam, radikalizacija, strani borci, džihadizam, Zapadni Balkan