COUNTERING TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: BALKAN COUNTRIES' EFFORTS AND THE ROLE OF THE EU AND RUSSIA

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Introduction

International terrorism as a global criminal network structure uses exclusively extremely violent and exceedingly brutal methods for the achievement of its political and economic goals. Acting globally, international terrorist organizations represent one of the main threats to the very existence of the world system as a whole, and to Europe in particular. Due to historical, cultural-religious, political, socio-economic and geopolitical reasons, the Western Balkans region is a particularly vulnerable zone in this context, including the challenge of extremist doctrines proliferation. Currently, the region is becoming an important strategic junction of international terrorism and, in recent years, has become a transit corridor for radical Islamists and terrorists aiming to relocate from the Middle East countries to the region. Starting from the 1990s, we are witnessing a gradual creation of the so called "Balkan Caliphate" – the creating of a radical Islamic political space uniting all territories where Muslim minorities lives in the region (Albania, BiH, Bulgaria, Greece, partly recognized Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro) through a Wahhabi religious colonization and connecting them with the Middle East and Turkey. Currently, there are four major destabilizing processes in the region: 1) increase in the number of "outlaw zones" (locally known as paradzemati); 2) the expansion of Wahhabis' settlements (Galijasevic 2017, p. 23); 3) the new Balkan "mosque route" (runs through Albania, Montenegro or Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina) – through it migrants from Asia and Middle East, including hidden members of terrorist organizations (ISIS, the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaida) are trying to get into Western European countries[1]; 4) the returning of foreign terrorist fighters from conflict areas to Western Balkans which are forming "sleeping" terrorists cells in their home countries and, thus, posing a potential threat not only to the security of the Balkan countries, but also to Europe as a whole.

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The countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and partly recognized Kosovo) are not members of the EU, but are nevertheless placed high on the European agenda. The stability of Europe as a whole largely depends on the security of this region. It is therefore essential that the above mentioned extremely dangerous and highly destructive regional processes are to be subjected to a highly effective and intransigent counteraction.

The international Islamist terrorist organizations' modus operandi and infrastructure in the Western Balkan region

Despite all the internal factors that are creating fertile ground for these threats to expand in the region, it is the external factor that plays a key role in the destabilization of the region. The regional extremist and terrorist groups receive information, logistic, financial and even political support from abroad, primarily from some structures of the major players in world politics such as NATO, USA, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, international terrorist organizations and criminal groups (ISIS, Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda), a number of private military companies, in the first place the Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI) and foreign intelligence services (MI6, CIA, Turkish, Iranian intelligence and others) (Ponomareva and Dimitrovska 2018/a, p. 39).

The Western Balkan's areas inhabited predominantly with Muslim population (Bosnia and Herzegovina, south Serbia, north-western Macedonia, partly recognized Kosovo, Albania, parts of Montenegro) represent a strategically significant zone in terms of radical Islam proliferation and recruiting militants to participate in "hot spots" in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. In addition, the Balkan region is increasingly turning into a transit point and a recovery base for terrorists and their families who have illegally returned from war zones and receive material, medical, social, ideological and political support here. For the cause a regional set of "outlaw zones" (paradzemati) is actively operating, and its overwhelming number is located on the territory of Bosnia and Hercegovina (64 paradzemats) – communities existing outside the legal and political system of the country where indoctrination, combat training and other actions are taking place. Nowadays, 22 of those 64 paradzhemats are not part of the Islamic community of BiH and continue to operate promoting extremist positions and encouraging holy jihad (Galijasevic, 2016). According to some estimates, in Albania 10-200 mosques are operating out of the Albanian Islamic community (Komuniteti Mysliman Shqiptarë) without its support and recognition, including several mosques responsible for the recruitment of nine Albanian foreign fighters dismantled in 2015 (Counter terrorism project, 2018). Apart from the paradzemats, there are training camps working as a preparatory machine of future

fighters. Balkan camps are popular among terrorists – the number of combatants is increasing from year to year. In 2014, 120 militants from BiH fought on the side of ISIL, 93 from Serbia (mainly from Sanjak), more than 30 from Kosovo, 60 from Macedonia and Montenegro. From the Balkan Wahhabis was created a separate combat brigade called Yeisch Muhammed Katiba. According to the leadership of the Free Syrian Army, this unit is the most extremist military unit in Syria. It is significant that its leader, Bairo Ikanovich, was convicted of terrorism in BiH [2].

For two years the number of Balkan militants has increased several times. According to the information provided on June 22, 2016 by the President of Republic of Macedonia Gjorge Ivanov, 110 fighters from Macedonia are fighting in Syria, 25 are registered as dead, and another 86 have already returned to the republic (Ivanov, 2016). In April 2015, the Economist cited other figures: 232 individuals from Kosovo, 330 from Bosnia, 90 from Albania, 70 from Serbia and 12 from Macedonia, actively participate in the war in the Middle East. However, more important are the tendencies. Sh. Kursani, who studied the growth of extremism in 22 European countries, came to the conclusion that Kosovo ranks first in the number of jihadists per capita, BiH – the second, and Albania – the fourth [3]. As of 2016, 314 Albanians from Kosovo and Metojiha entered the ranks of ISIL, including two suicide bombers (Gall, 2016). Increasingly, women and children are traveling to Syria and Iraq together with the militants.

Another serious threat represents the expanding Wahhabis settlements. This community exceeds 6,200 radical Islamists and is one of the largest cells of the Islamist movement in Europe, having more than 100,000 members (Galijasevic 2017, p. 23). The Wahhabi ideology and the modern jihadist movement was imported in the Balkans in the 1990s during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina when on the call of Alija Izetbegović a large number of mujahideen arrived to Bosnia from the Middle East, Near East and South Africa and formed the Mujahideen Battalion in order to fight alongside the Bosnian Muslims against the Serbs and Croats. Thus, Bosnia became the cradle of modern jihadist movement wherefrom the radical Islam spreads throughout the region. In this sense, the most vulnerable and jeopardized is the Muslim population in the region: Boshnaks (Bosnian Muslims), Albanians – Muslims (Albania, Kosovo and Metohija, north-west Macedonia), Torbeši (Muslim Macedonians), Serbian Muslims in South Serbia.

Also amid the refugee crises a new Balkan route – the so-called "mosque route" (mosques along the route support refugees in their movement) – is being created (RTS, 2018). It runs through Albania, Montenegro or Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina. The migrants from Asia and Middle East, including hidden members of terrorist organizations (ISIS, the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaida) are trying to get into Western European countries through this route.

However, Islam itself is not the cause of the radicalization among Muslim population. According to the former chief of the counterintelligence department of Macedonia, Zoran Mitevsky, Vienna and Milan are coordination centers for Islamic fundamentalism in the Balkans (Joksić, 2013/b). Mosques, Islamic institutions, charitable foundations accumulate serious funds from the countries of the Middle East, which are used for buying literature, financing paramilitary training camps and regional Islamist media. Also, according to him, in 1996 when he was chief of the counterintelligence department of Macedonia, a variety of Tirana-based charity NGOs, such as IIRO, the Saudi High Commission and Islamic Relief came up asking for permission to register shop in Macedonia. Later on their requests were disclosed by the Macedonian officials as they knew what they were up to, the American official started to call them undemocratic for doing that. The Helsinki Human Rights Committee attacked the government for not allowing the Laden's charities to enter the country at that time (Deliso 2007, p. 81).

According to Dževad Galijasevic, a prominent security expert, the terrorists in the Balkans are mostly funded through Vienna. The main funding centers in Vienna are the Jamaat of Salafi Dava, headed by Muhammad Porcha from Sarajevo, who is under special control of the Austrian security services; the "Salafi-Wahhabi Jemat" headed by Abu Muhamed Nedzad Balkan, originally from Sanjak; IZBA (Regular Islamic Community of Bosnians in Austria)", connected with structures in Sarajevo; Organization headed by Irfan Buzar, the brother of Adnan Buzar who married the daughter of the first terrorist in the world Abu Nidal. All of these organizations are interrelated and regularly send financial assistance to terrorists in BiH and Sandzak [4].

The recruitment process for terrorism always starts in mosques. Therefore, one of the most import driving factors for radicalization among the Western Balkans' youth is the mosques building boom in the region which has been going on since the mid-1990s. As a rule, mosques are built at the expense of private companies and NGOs from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar, Libya, Turkey. Still, not rare are the cases where sponsor are the governments of these countries. For example, in Macedonia, only along the way from Skopje to Gostivar, 88 new mosques were built. Practically, in every village of Macedonia today there is a mosque. Even in villages where there is no Muslim population at all. In Sarajevo, 140 mosques have already been built, including the King Fahd mega-mosque. Bosnian mosques are mainly financed by Saudi Arabia. Only for the period from 2003 to 2013 the Saudis spent about one billion euros on the spread of Islam in the Balkans. "600 million was spent on building mosques, paying men for wearing beards, women for wearing burqa, paying full scholarships and travel costs to Balkan students for studies in Saudi Arabia [5]. The situation is similar in Kosovo where after 1999, 240 mosques were built with Saudi Arabia's

money. In total, on its territory there are 800 new mosques (Gall, 2016). In the mosques and the religious schools the Pakistani method of indoctrination and terrorist training is being practiced. The Imams of the new mosques who actually are military instructors, but at the same time act as preachers to promote radical Islam ideology and implement direct orders from the intelligence agency of the Saudis. The instructors are al-Qaeda fighters that fought in Afghanistan against USA and also Iraqi and Iranian military figures (Gulevich, 2009).

The center of all Islamic operations in the Balkans is located in Sarajevo, where the main ISIS contact person for Europe lives – the Imam Al Misri, member of the Muslim Brotherhood (Obradovic and Adzic, 2015). A whole network of Islamic NGOs is engaged in the indoctrination process of the youth and financing the spread of radical Islam in the region. The most odious among them only in Kosovo are as follows: the Saudi Joint Relief Committee; Al Haramain Humanitarian Foundation; Al Wakt l Islami; World Association of Muslim Youth; Islamic International Relief Organization; Global Relief Foundation; The Kuwait-based Revival of Islamic Heritage Society; Kalliri Il Millerise. The headquarters of the Saudi Joint Relief Committee is in Riyadh. The head of its Kosovo branch is Jael Hamza Dzalaidan, who is linked to Osama Bin Laden. The mission of the Kosovo branch is to coordinate the activities of all Saudi NGOs in the region established to spread the Wahhabi ideology (Gulevich, 2009). This so called humanitarian web of NGOs has several functions: it act as a channel for the creation of terrorist cells in particular areas; as a cover for terrorist and extremist activities in the region; as an instrument for smuggling weaponry, money and terrorist to Kosovo. The former chief of the OSCE intelligence agency in Kosovo (1999 – 2004) and retired USA marine Thomas Gimble claims that since 1999 Kosovo has been the largest reservoir of jihadists and that Al Qaeda is investing a tremendous amount of capital in the region. According to his sources, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Bahrain, Al-Qaida and Hezbollah are working jointly to form an Jihadists army in Europe, which is to have 750,000 soldiers. Recruitment centers are located in mosques built with funds from Arab countries throughout Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania (Drecun, 2007).

The situation is similar in Albania. There are a number of structures involved in the promotion of radical Islam and attracting not only citizens of Albania, but adherents of Islamic fundamentalism from Bosnia, Sanjak, Kosovo and Macedonia. Thus, the Hafizi Center in the city of Sauk is funded by the Drita Foundation, which in turn is financed by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The Khafizi centers in the cities of Gotz and Kawaya are funded by the Islamic Foundation Munazmat al Dawa al Islamiyah, which, according to some sources, is associated with al Qaeda. The Abu Hanifa Institute in the city of Bulchiza is funded by the Taibah Foundation which receives money from Algeria, Syria and Kuwait. However, the most famous among such structures is the El-Hagri Institute in

the city of Elbasan. It is funded by the Kuwait "Committee of Kindness". All centers and institutes have their own private schools where the Qur'an is studied in Arabic. Students of these institutes selected by various criteria are later sent to Islamic schools in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Yemen, Egypt. Upon returning to Albania after four years of study, young people form their own groups or cells, tightly integrated into the network of international Islamic structures (Joksić, 2013/a). Currently, Albania has a well-organized network of military training camps for militants, closely connected with recruitment centers in the region, primarily in Kosovo, as well as with the Albanian drug mafia, international terrorist organizations, foreign special services and Albanian political circles.

In Macedonia, the Wahhabi movement has been developing since the mid-1990s (Koshinovski, 2012). The most influential Wahhabi communities are located along the border with Kosovo – in Kumanovo, Tetovo, Gostivar, Struga, as well as in communities around Skopje (Zafirovski, 2005/b). The ethnic composition of the movement – mainly Albanians and Macedonian Muslims (Torbesi), also involves a small number of Bosnians and Turks. Leaders are Albanians from communities around Skopje, who have strong ties with similar structures in Kosovo and Metohija. Since 2002, mujahedin militants from Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo and Chechnya have been operating in some parts of northern-west Macedonia (Kosovo.net, 2002). One of the main goals of these organizations is the formation of a sustainable basis for an Islamic society in the country, including via the promotion of ideas of radical Islam among young people (Zafirovski, 2005/a). In Macedonia, as well as in other countries of the region, there are Islamic NGOs associated with the radical structures' international network.

It should be emphasized that all fighters from Macedonia profess Islam, and a significant proportion of them are Albanians. Among them there are former government officials who before taking government positions were members of Albanian terrorist organizations operating both in Macedonia and during the conflict in Kosovo in 1998-1999. For example, 38-year-old Seydul Alili, who participated in the ranks of ISIS in Syria and died there, previously fought in the ranks of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and then in the Liberation National Army in 2001 in Macedonia. After the events of 2001 and the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, he "deserved" employment in the regional division of the Ministry of Defense for the municipality of Chair in Skopje, and then in the Institute of Albanian Spiritual Heritage. In July 2014, he left the country to fight in the Middle East and died as a jihadist in the ranks of the Islamic State in Syria [6].

The counterterrorism efforts of the Western Balkan countries: the case of Albania and Bosnia and Hercegovina

In order to counter these challenges and threats, starting from 2012, the Western Balkan countries started adopting and implementing new national strategies and relevant action plans to combat terrorism and to counter violent extremism and radicalization, introducing both repressive and preventive measures, as well as programs for rehabilitation, reintegration and de-radicalization of the returned fighters and their family members. In the development of these documents active participation has been taken by the security and intelligence agencies of countries from the region and of the EU and USA, experts, local Islamic religious communities, NGOs and other interested parties (Ponomareva and Dimitrovska 2018/b, p. 246). It is worth noting that many of the adopted and implemented programs for rehabilitation, reintegration and de-radicalization of the returned fighters and their family members pose a serious risk to the regional security, and give the appearance of self-sabotage with regard to the counterterrorism efforts made at the same time. It is such such programs that provide the opportunity not only for local terrorists to return legally and integrate into society. Furthermore, they open the doors to Islamists who have acquired Balkan passports, usually in illegal ways. This trend threatens the formation of a terrorist rear in the Balkans that will reproduce and intensify the terrorist threat in other regions of the world and thus significantly increase the problem of international terrorism. The regional interstate cooperation is at a very low level and it mainly has to do with the intelligence information exchange.

All countries in the region have criminalized terror-related activities and have introduced changes to the criminal codes to confront the specific threat of foreign fighters by criminalizing the recruitment and facilitation of foreign fighting.

In 2015, Albania adopted the National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism and in October 2017 adopted the relevant Action Plan for its implementation for the period 2017-2019 (Ponomareva and Dimitrovska 2018/b, p. 247). The Strategy focuses on four areas: 1) education – the Ministry of education efforts to help facilitate awareness of dangers related to violent extremism ideology 2) engagement with religious leaders – cooperation with religious leaders of the Albanian Islamic community to support countering violent extremism and religious radicalism ideology in the religious centers throughout the country 3) economic opportunity – Ministry of social welfare and youth efforts to introduce new measures for improving economic and social conditions for individuals at higher risk, especially Albanian youth 4) research – a research center was set up to better study, understand and suggest solutions for countering effectively the foreign terrorist fighting phenomenon.

The Strategy also includes measures and programs for rehabilitation and reintegration of the returning militants in the society.

The Albanian government has been working with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to open its Anti-Radicalism Center in Tirana (Counter Terrorism Project, 2018). Also, during a conference against violent extremism, which took place in Tirana, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov made an announcement stating that a coordination center for former ISIS fighters returning to the Balkans will be established in Albania [7]. The Albanian government has appointed a National Coordinator on countering violent extremism. It is assisted by the USAID to implement the National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism. Also, USAID aims to establish Community Advisory Panels at the municipal level for high-risk youth and women that will enable young people and women to speak directly with local government, policing officers, regional education officials, civil society, religious and business leaders (USAID, 2018). Also the European Commission has allocated a total of 334.845 euros to finance the program "Civil Society countering violent extremism" which is being implemented in coordination with the Albanian Helsinki Committee, Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Together for Life and the Netherlands Helsinki Committee. The program focuses on preventing the spreading of violent extremism among high-risk groups that are an easy target for radicalization by empowering the NGOs, non-governmental bodies and public security institutions on countering violent extremisms and radicalization in Albania (Netherlands Helsinki Committee, 2017).

The government has recently formed the Counter-terrorist Directorate unit to address domestic terrorist threats in Albania. The Albanian unit officers were trained on protecting human rights in the fight against terrorism by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. A counter-terrorism expert from USA facilitated the course (OSCE Presence in Albania, 2017). The Serious Crimes Prosecutor's Office and the Serious Crimes Court in Albania are responsible for the investigation and prosecution for cases involving terrorism (Ponomareva and Dimitrovska 2018/b, p. 248). The Albanian police forces made a series of arrests in 2015, 2016 and 2017 (Counter Terrorism Project, 2018).

In 2015 Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the Strategy for Preventing and Combating Terrorism for the period 2015-2020. The strategy introduces both severe and soft measures. The state as a whole, as well as its subjects (entities) – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska and the Brcko region – have their own plans to counter terrorism, the main focus of which are measures aimed at rehabilitating returned foreign fighters (Ponomareva and Dimitrovska 2018/b, p. 252).

The key role in investigating and collecting intelligence information on crimes related to terrorism is played by institutions with national jurisdiction. These

are the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) and the Intelligence-Security Agency of BiH (OSA). Due to the unique political structure of the country, the police agencies of the Federation of BiH, the Republika Srpska and the Brcko District are also involved in the investigation process. An important role in this regard also plays the Ministry of Security specialized units and agencies, including the sectors for combating terrorism, organized crime, corruption, war crimes and drug abuse, as well as the financial intelligence unit (operating under the SIPA) and the border police.

In Vojkovici near Sarajevo a new state high-standard prison with maximum security has been built. It occupies 24,000 m2, 348 cells of which 298 for prisoners and 50 for detainees [8]. Construction works are expected to be completed by the end of May. The construction was financed with funds from a loan taken from the Council of Europe Development Bank to the amount of 19.3 million euros. Another 6.45 million euros were invested by the federal government. Donations amounted to 9.15 million euros and the technical assistance from the European Commission amounted to 1.7 million euros, the donation of Sweden – 2 million euros. And the US government donated $ 1.1 million for training of the prison staff [9].

In early November 2017, the authorities of BiH extradited Kosovo-born Mirsad Kandic, one of the most wanted alleged associates of Islamic State, from Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United States to face terror charges [10]. A joint investigation with the representatives of the American intelligence showed that he had been hiding in Sarajevo for almost a year. Kandic, who was born in Kosovo, entered BiH with a Ukrainian passport under a false name. He was found after activating a phone card purchased in the United Arab Emirates.

Serious criticism deserves the situation where some prosecutions of persons who have returned to the country and are suspected of being participants in war zones abroad are being "frozen" due to the fact that they had joined the foreign army before the adoption of the legislation which criminalizes participation in armed conflicts abroad in 2014 (Regional Cooperation Council, 2017). Also, another target of criticism should be the often plea-bargain practice between the court and the accused which always results in more lenient sentences (Metodieva, 2018).

The government is making efforts to counter radical Islam and violent extremism propaganda. The Bosnian Islamic community actively trains Imams on countering such propaganda. Also, the OSCE and other international organizations are implementing short-term projects for this purpose. At present there are no effective mechanisms and programs in BiH for re-socializing and reintegrating women and children who have accompanied foreign fighter abroad to war zones. From April 2017 to March 2018, under the auspices of the Council of Europe and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a project was implemented in BiH to support the reintegration

of prisoners who have served sentences for participation in extremist and terrorist activities (Colak, 2017). The main goal is to prevent prisoners from returning to violent extremism after being released.

Despite the above-mentioned efforts that are being undertaken by the regional states to combat terrorism and radicalization, many experts argue that the Bosnian authorities led by the President B. Izetbegovic, as well as some Albanian political structures in both Albania and Macedonia do not simply lack the political will to genuinely fight terrorism and the spread of radical Islam in the region. On the contrary, they are allegedly paving the way for strengthening terrorists' and radicals' positions. Indeed, here the question arises as to how the progressive spread of radical Islam, the functioning of militant training camps, the continuous work of the so called Islamic humanitarian NGOs and the permanent construction of new mosques in the region is possible without the consent of the regional state authorities and the support on behalf of the part of the international community led by the organization having military bases in the region.

Also, taking into consideration the global character of this threat, the response to tackle it that the Western Balkans countries are striving to develop in cooperation with other countries has to be of an all-encompassing nature based on a broader geographical scope in terms of counter-terrorist experiences not only by close cooperation with western countries and by taking into account their experience in the field which cannot be considered as a complete success (having in mind the domestic grown terrorism, radicalization, foreign fighters phenomenon, terrorist acts etc. that they are facing in their homelands, and, even sometimes their success by itself can represent a dangerous challenge for the regional security bearing in mind that their core goal is not to eliminate the threat but to control it and use it against the geopolitical enemies in different regions of the world including the Balkan Peninsula), but also by establishing a channel of cooperation and exchange of experiences and information with the relevant authorities of Russian Federation, the CIS countries and organization such as the Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Center (CIS ATC) that coordinates the activity of the CIS competent authorities in the sphere of combating international terrorism and other acts of extremism. Russia has accumulated unique experience in the field both globally as well as domestically in the face of the Russian National Antiterrorism Committee, responsible for coordination and organization of counterterrorism activities of government bodies at the federal level, at the level of the subjects of the Russian Federation and local governments. The Committee develops counterterrorism measures, participates in international cooperation, prepares proposals to the President of Russia on the formation of national policy and the improvement of counterterrorism legislation, as well as ensures public awareness of emerging terrorist threats and neutralizing thereof. On the other side, the CIS ATC can be taken as a role model for regional capacity building in

terms of creating a similar body in the Balkan region. And secondly, it can be an excellent source of information and practice sharing in case of creating a special inter-states academic commissions or bodies between the Balkan countries and the CIS ATC for sharing information and exchanging experiences and practices in the field. Nevertheless, this is unlikely to happen taking into account the current global geopolitical reality and the regional political conjuncture.

Conclusion

The Western Balkan region is a particularly vulnerable zone before the challenges of extremist doctrines proliferation and global terrorist actions. Currently, the region is becoming an important strategic junction of international terrorism. Staring from the 1990s, we are witnessing a gradual creation of a radical Islamic political space uniting all territories inhabited predominantly with Muslim population through a Wahhabi religious colonization and connecting them with the Middle East and Turkey. These territories represent a strategically significant zone in terms of radical Islam proliferation and recruiting fighters to participate in armed conflict abroad in the ranks of the international terrorist organizations. Acting in order to minimize the risks and eliminate the consequences from the aforementioned developments, starting from 2012, the Western Balkan countries have introduced significant changes into their legislations aiming to combat terrorist threats and counter violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism. The relevant strategies of the Balkan countries give priority to measures and programs for rehabilitation and reintegration of the returning militants that pose a serious threat to society, preliminary to Muslim environments, and threaten to destroy the already vulnerable inter-ethnic relations. Regional intelligence services work closely with international organizations (United Nations, EU, OSCE, Interpol, Europol, etc.), as well as with the security services of the United States, some EU countries and Turkey. Many experts argue that some efforts of the regional authorities pose a serious risk to the national security of the countries from the region, and the results of their work in the field give the impression that they are paving the way for the strengthening of terrorists' and radicals' positions in the region by turning a blind eye to many destructive processes and tendencies. Also taking into account the current geopolitical dynamic in the region, it is unlikely that the Western Balkans countries will demonstrate a political will to initiate cooperation of any kind with the relevant authorities of Russia, the CIS countries and organization such as the Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Center (CIS ATC).

Notes

[1] See RTS. 2018. "Nastaje dzamijska ruta migranata" [The "mosque route" of migrants is emerging]. Available at: http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/ci/story/3/region/3156514/nastaje-dzamijska-ruta-migranata.html (Last accessed November, 2018)

[2] See "Vise od 300 islamista moglo bi da se vrati u CG, Srbiju, BiH, Makedoniju, Kosovo" [More than 300 Islamists could return to Montenegro, Serbia, BiH, Macedonia, Kosovo]. In *Vjesti online*, 2014. Available at: http://www.vijesti.me/svijet/vise-od-300-islamista-moglo-bi-da-se-vrati-u-cg-srbiju-bih-makedoniju-kosovo-171133 (last accessed November, 2018)

[3] *The Economist*, 2015. "Balkan warriors abroad: Fight the good fight". Available at: http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21648697-western-balkans-peace-some-go-abroad-look-war-fight-good-fight (last accessed November, 2018)

[4] See "Chetiri centra sa zapada finansiraju teroriste na Balkanu" [Four Centres in the West Fund Terrorists in the Balkans]. In *Novi Standard* from Augist 9, 2015. Available at: http://standard.rs/2015/08/09/cetiri-centra-sa-zapada-finansiraju-teroriste-na-balkanu/ (Last accessed November 10, 2018)

[5] See "V Makedonii rastyot chislo nelegalnyh mechetej finansiruemyh arabskimi stranami" [The number of illegal mosques funded by Arab countries is growing in Macedonia]. In *Ruskaya narodnaya linia* from February 13, 2013. Available at: http://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2013/02/19/v_makedonii_rastyot_chislo_nelegalnyh_mechetej_finansiruemyh_arabskimi_stranami/ (last accessed November, 2018)

[6] See "Vojuval vo ONA, rabotel vo MO vo Makedonija – zagina kako dzhihadist vo Sirija" [Worked in NLA, worked in MoD in Macedonia – killed as a jihadist in Syria]. In *Press 24* from October 29, 2014. Available at: https://www.press24.mk/vojuval-vo-ona-rabotel-vo-mo-vo-makedonija-zagina-kako-dzhihadist-vo-sirija (last accessed November, 2018)

[7] See "Former ISIS Fighter Coordination Center Planned in Albania". In *Exit* from June 5, 2018. Available at: https://exit.al/en/2018/06/05/former-isis-fighter-coordination-center-planned-in-albania/ (last accessed November, 2018)

[8] See "State Prison to be opened by the end of May?" In *Sarajevo Times* from May 1, 2017 [online]. Available at http://www.sarajevotimes.com/state-prison-opened-end-may/ (last accessed November, 2018)

[9] See "U BiH zatvorima slobodno jedno mjesto: Kaznu izdržava 3220 osoba" [One free place in BiH prisons: 3220 people are serving sentences]. At Radiosarajevo.ba, from April 4, 2017. Available at https://www.radiosarajevo.ba/metromahala/teme/bh-zatvori-ukupni-kapaciteti-3221-mjesta-a-na-na-izdrzavanju-kazne-3220-lica/258333 (last accessed November, 2018)

[10] See "Mektić o hapšenju u Sarajevu: Saradnik ISIL-a koristio deset identiteta" [Mektic on arrest in Sarajevo: ISIL associate used ten identities]. In *Balkans*

Aljazeera from November 1, 2017. Available at http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/mektic-o-hapsenju-u-sarajevu-saradnik-isil-koristio-deset-identiteta (last accessed November, 2018)

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COUNTERING TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: BALKAN COUNTRIES' EFFORTS AND THE ROLE OF THE EU AND RUSSIA

Abstract

The Western Balkans plays an important role in the international Islamist terrorist organizations' structure. The region is becoming an important strategic junction of international terrorism and has been witnessing an active proliferation of the imported militant Pan-Islamist ideology aiming at gradual creation of the so called "Balkan Caliphate". Starting from 2012, the Western Balkan countries have been making serious efforts to counter these threats and with the active participation of the international community they have stared adopting and implementing new relevant national strategies and legislation.

Key words: Western Balkans, (countering) extremism and terrorism, Salaf-Wahhabi movement

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