CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies

Motivating Factors for Radicalization in Balkan Muslim-majority Countries

Master's thesis

Author: Bc. Jonáš Vlk

Study programme: Security Studies

Supervisor: Doc. PhDr. Emil Aslan Souleimanov, Ph.D.

Year of the defence: 2020

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on   Bc. Jonáš Vlk

3.1.2020

References

Vlk, J. (2020). *Motivating Factors for Radicalization in Balkan Muslim-Majority Countries*. Prague: Master thesis. Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Political Studies. Supervisor Doc. PhDr. Emil Aslan Souleimanov Ph.D.

Length of the thesis: [232,158 characters with spaces]

Abstract

The topic of religious radicalization in the Balkans is gaining attention among academia in recent years. However, motivational factors of radicalization in the region still remain rather under-researched. Furthermore, comprehensive research focusing particularly on the motivational factors of Islamist radicalization in the Muslim-majority countries of the Balkans – countries with a specific context and background unique in the wider Europe – hasn't been yet carried out. This paper thus elaborates on the motivational factors of radicalization in the Muslim-majority countries of the Balkans, which is Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo, by applying generally-known factors of radicalization to this specific theatre. Predominantly secondary sources as well as documents issued by the OSCE which maintains field presence in all of the abovementioned countries are utilized in order to provide a thorough overview of motivational factors of radicalization in each of the selected countries. These are discussed respectively in corresponding chapters. Individual chapters are in dialogue with each other following the same methodology and structure, focusing on similar issues. A comprehensive overview of the motivational factors of radicalization in Balkan Muslim-majority countries is thus presented. Applying the generally-known factors of radicalization on this specific theatre, motivational factors in the selected countries are identified. Furthermore, it is established that some of the motivational factors are truly theatre-specific given a) the fact that Islam is a majority religion in each of the selected countries; b) shared background and historical context of the selected countries.

Abstrakt

V posledních letech narůstá zájem akademické obce o studium náboženské radikalizace v balkánských zemích. Motivační faktory radikalizace však stále nejsou zcela prozkoumány. Rovněž chybí komplexní popis motivačních faktorů radikalizace v balkánských zemích s muslimskou většinou, který je žádoucí především z důvodů specifického – a v Evropě ojedinělého – kontextu těchto států. Tato práce tak pojednává o motivačních faktorech islamistické radikalizace v balkánských zemích s muslimskou většinou, tedy Bosně a Hercegovině, Albánii a Kosovu a aplikuje všeobecně přijímané faktory radikalizace na tuto oblast. Práce tak nabízí komplexní přehled motivačních

faktorů radikalizace ve vybraných zemích, který vychází především ze studia druhotných zdrojů a dokumentů OBSE, která je přítomna prostřednictvím polních misích v každé z vybraných zemí. Motivační faktory radikalizace jednotlivých zemí jsou diskutované v příslušných kapitolách. Výzkum motivačních faktorů v každé z vybraných zemí je prováděn stejnou metodologií a stavba příslušných kapitol koresponduje. Práce tak prezentuje komplexní přehled motivačních faktorů v balkánských zemích s muslimskou většinou. Prostřednictvím výše uvedeného přístupu a metodologie jsou identifikovány jednotlivé motivační faktory islamistické radikalizace. Dále je zjištěno, že některé z identifikovaných motivačních faktorů radikalizace jsou specifické pro vybranou oblast z důvodů a) Islámu jako majoritního náboženství a b) sdíleného historického kontextu a vývoje vybraných zemí regionu.

Title

Motivating Factors for Radicalization in Balkan Muslim-Majority Countries

Název práce

Motivační faktory radikalizace v balkánských zemích s muslimskou většinou

Acknowledgements

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AMC   Albanian Muslim Community

BiH   Bosnia and Herzegovina

DciP   OSCE Documentation Centre in Prague

EU   European Union

FBiH   Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

ICBiH   Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina

ICK   Islamic Community of Kosovo

KLA   Kosovo Liberation Army

NATO   North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OIC   Organization of Islamic Conference

OSCE   Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

P/CVERLT   Preventing and countering violent extremism leading to radicalization

RS   Republika Srpska

Table of Contents

1 Pre-empirical part

1.1 Introduction

In recent years the Balkans drew attention regarding the potential of growing Islamist radicalization hotspots in the region.[1] This was caused predominantly by the phenomenon of so-called foreign fighters, radicalized individuals departing in the name of Jihad to the Middle Eastern countries, namely Syria and Iraq. However, radical tendencies, presence of radical groups and homegrown radicalization are also present in the region. Nevertheless, it is precisely the phenomenon of foreign fighters that enjoys particular – even though, compared to the member countries of the EU, still relatively low – interest of academics and experts in the field. This was probably caused by the fact that among the top five European countries from which foreign fighters origin – when the number of the foreign fighters originating from these countries is measured against their population size – are Muslim-majority countries of the Western Balkans: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo.[2]

However, it is not only the phenomenon of foreign fighters that is troubling the region since radical tendencies, proselytizing and homegrown radicalization are of concern as well, indeed. And even though these issues are reflected also in the national strategies adopted by the respective states in recent years and tackled by efforts of civil society and international organizations, they haven't attracted such attention so far. It is especially the motivational factors of radicalization that remain rather under-researched.

There is a lot of various grievances rooted in the region from which radicalization may stem. And even though there was quite a progress in addressing these issues, the outcomes are still insufficient.[3] To tackle the phenomenon of radicalization, various

---

[1] See e.g. Bardos, G. N. (2014). Jihad in the Balkans: the next generation. *World Affairs, 177(3),* 73-79; Bartoszewicz, G. M. (2013) Radicalization by Stealth:Kosovo Case Study. *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs, 22 (4):* 95-107; Chaminski, B., & Taneski, N. (2015). Militant Islamism as Threat to the Balkan Security. *Dialogues Security, 6(2),* 199-134

[2] Beslin, J., & Ignjatijevic, M. (2017). *Balkan foreign fighters: from Syria to Ukraine*. European Union Institute for Security Studies. doi: 10.2815/660382

[3] Jureković, P. (2016). *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. (F. Ejdus, Ed.). Vienna: Republic of Austria / Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports.

measures including legislation and policy implementations were taken.[4] The region certainly has seen some efforts regarding the employment of such methods designed to prevent and counter radicalization and extremism with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe being also extensively involved in the region.[5] But even though this kind of preventive effort exists in the region, the lack of region-specific literature is still present. This is especially true for the Muslim-majority countries of the Balkans.

Although observed by both international and local scholars,[6] the topic of radicalism in the Western Balkan countries still lacks a sufficient amount of attention and literature with a specific focus on the subject of radicalization and motivational and contributing factors of radicalization in the Balkan region. This was also found by Richardson, Berlouis, and Cameron[7] who summarized the available literature on the predisposing factors involved in the radicalization, as well as on the potential counter-radicalization strategies in relation particularly to the radicalization of young adults in the Balkan states. The mentioned authors further emphasized a lack of research regarding the radicalization of Muslims in Muslim-majority countries of the Balkans. The progress of the research on the motivational factors of radicalization in the region is problematical also due to the fact that the existing papers on this topic are not always in dialogue with each other and there was yet no attempt to present truly cumulative knowledge on this topic in the Western Balkans.[8]

It is also important to mention that the preventive measures and policies preventing radicalization and countering violent extremism are often employed – as was already stated – with the help of Western countries or are at least inspired by similar measures undertaken in the transatlantic theatre. This does make sense since many western-

---

[4] Kursani, S. (2019). *Literature Review 2017 - 2018: Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. London: British Council.

[5] Smit, T. (2017). *Multilateral peace operations and the challenges of of terrorism and violent extremism.* SIPRI.

[6] See e.g. Petrović, P. (2016). *Islamic radicalism in the Balkans.* European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS).

[7] Richardson, C., Berlouis, K., M. & Cameron, P., A. (2017). Radicalisation of Young Adults in the Balkan States: Counter-Measures, Healthcare Provision, and Community Involvement. *Journal for Deradicalization. Summer (11)*, 87-111.

[8] Kursani, S. (2019). *Literature Review 2017 - 2018: Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. London: British Council.

European countries have to deal with religious radicalism – not only – among Muslim minorities and the development and progress regarding the research on this topic was thus immense with the preventive and counter-measures celebrating relative success. This makes perfect sense given the fact that some of the countries are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – as is the case of Albania – or are progressing with the accession to NATO or to the European Union and the bilateral cooperation is developing. However, to adopt similar measures doesn't have to be always fruitful especially in the case of the Muslim-majority countries. As Farhad Khosrokhavar suggests, there are several types of radicalized Islamists and the distinction is often based on which background they come from. Especially the factor of coming from a Muslim-majority or Muslim-minority country is relevant.[9] The approach to radical ideology quite varies as well throughout the region.[10] It is for this reason that country-specific research on motivational factors of radicalization in Balkan Muslim-majority countries is desirable to identify all the complexities and nuances, assess the theatre, and to subsequently allow the preventive and counter-measures to be set accordingly.

So far, the motivational factors of radicalization in Balkan Muslim-majority countries remain under-researched since there is no paper with a focus on presenting cumulative knowledge on the issue nor researching motivational factors of radicalization in the respective countries. Albania is an exception to this with the Institute for Democracy and Mediation involved in the national assessment of enabling factors and drivers of radicalization in the country.

To focus on the theatre comprising all of the three Muslim-majority countries in the Balkans makes sense since there are more similarities in the Muslim-majority countries of the Balkans than just Islam being the majority religion. All of these countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo – were impacted by the era of conflicts in the 1990s following the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. These conflicts brought various grievances into the societies of these states and fuelled the identity struggles. Furthermore, these states underwent a period of turmoil after the end of the conflicts and

---

[9] Khosrokhavar, F. (2017). *Radicalization: Why some people choose the path of violence*. New York: The New Press.

[10] Kursani, S. (2019). *Literature Review 2017 - 2018: Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. London: British Council.

were thus unable to cope sufficiently with poor socio-economic conditions that deteriorated during the conflicts.

Also, the situation in all of the Muslim-majority countries is unique given the fact that there were influences of foreign actors coming from the Middle East that offered humanitarian and financial aid to the by conflicts impacted countries. These Islamic actors found fertile ground as nowhere else in Europe in the selected countries due to the shared religious identity. However, this help came for a high price since foreign influences rooted in the countries, introducing radical schools of Islam that were not known in these countries before, and exerting proselytizing efforts. Due to this development, various pull factors of radicalization emerged. Furthermore, identity issues were exploited by foreign influences and grievances were fuelled. Given this specific development, it is obvious that similar vulnerabilities and motivational factors of radicalization are shared by the Muslim-majority countries of the Balkans. However, comprehensive research on the motivational factors of radicalization of the Balkan Muslim-majority countries is still not existent although such assessment may help to understand root causes and motivations for radicalization in these countries and thus help to adjust the prevention of radicalization programs accordingly to correspond better with the – in wider Europe unique – environment. This paper thus seeks to see to the task of a) researching motivational factors of radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo – since academic research is lacking in this regard; b) presenting cumulative knowledge of motivational factors of radicalization in Balkan Muslim-majority countries since such assessment, which hasn't been carried out yet, may help in understanding of this, in Europe specific, theatre, and thus adjust the trans-Atlantic approach in regards of preventive efforts addressing radicalization in the region. Although the research on motivational factors of radicalization has already been carried out in Albania, it is desirable to include Albanian case in this paper. First of all, it was already mentioned that the development in all of the Balkan Muslim-majority countries was similarly impacted and there are thus similarities in regards to the background and context of radical tendencies. Due to this the development in one country often impacted the situation in another one. As will be presented in the respective sections of this paper, this is especially true for the development in Albania influencing and impacting the situation in Kosovo and thus contributing to some of the local factors of radicalization. To understand the motivational factors of the radicalization of Kosovar Albanians, it is thus desirable to

explore the situation in Albania first since there indeed is a lot of similarities and intersections in these two cases. Secondly, to include the case of Albania is in line with one of the tasks of this paper, which is to present a cumulative knowledge of motivational factors of radicalization in Balkan Muslim-majority countries. Since this paper is limited by its scope and thus cannot follow similar methodology as the already existing research on motivational factors in Albania (that is particularly the field research), chapter on motivational factors in Albania which corresponds with the structure and methodology of the respective chapters on Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo is included to present comprehensive knowledge on motivational factors of radicalization in all of Balkan Muslim-majority countries following the same methodology and corresponding structure.

1.2 Research question

Building on the discussion above it is clear that the research on the drivers of radicalization in the Western Balkan countries is still lacking and a paper on the cumulative knowledge of the motivational factors of radicalization in Balkan Muslim-majority countries is non-existent. More importantly, the fact that there is quite a lot of initiatives and research papers on the prevention of radicalization in the Western Balkans while there is a lack of papers concerning with what motivated individuals to radicalize in the first place is at least surprising. Furthermore, the research on the drivers of radicalization in Muslim-majority countries of the Western Balkans as suggested by Richardson, Berlouis, and Cameron still hasn't been carried out with the exception of Albania.

Therefore this paper seeks to see to the task of identifying the motivational factors of Islamist radicalization in Balkan Muslim-majority countries by applying generally-known factors of radicalization to the selected countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo) thus to complement the existing literature on the radicalization in the Western Balkans offering a comprehensive overview of the situation in this theatre.

The research question of this paper is thus being set as follows: "What are the motivational factors of Islamist radicalization in Balkan Muslim-majority countries?"

1.3 Structure overview

This paper is divided into two respective parts; pre-empirical and empirical. The pre-empirical part introduces multiple theoretical chapters. The first chapter provides the introduction of the context of the researched problematic and presents the relevance of the issue. Chapters on the research question of the paper and the overview of the structure of the paper follow. Subsequently, existing literature on the topic of radicalization is discussed delineating generally known factors of radicalization while simultaneously presenting main definitions as approached by this paper because in the research of radicalism these often differ since there is no universal agreement among academia. A chapter on the methodology and sources of the research follows introducing the process of researching and identifying the motivational factors in the selected countries. The author is aware that the methodology and sources of this research do pose some limitations therefore he discusses those followingly.

The empirical part consists of four respective chapters. Initial three chapters concern with the motivational factors of Islamist radicalization in respective Muslim-majority countries of the Western Balkans – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo. In every chapter, the identified motivational factors are described according to the methodology of the paper and the discussion presented in the literature review. The broader context of radicalization in each of the selected countries is thus explored, possible identity issues (identified as an often crucial motivational factor by the literature review) are then researched. Socio-economic push factors and community pull factors are then presented. Discussion on unique motivational factors of respective social groups together with online radicalization is not omitted. It should be noted that the individual motivational factors are often overlapping and complementing each other and as such the significance of the individual factors can not be fully assessed. Therefore the individual factors are mentioned throughout each chapter in no particular order regarding their significance. Their order is rather intuitive regarding the potential overlaps and intersections. Each of the country-specific chapters is then concluded with a brief summary of the identified motivating factors which serves to the purpose of the clear arrangement of the paper and the final discussion in the final chapter, which subsequently follows the three chapters on selected countries, presenting a summary of the identified factors delineated in the literature review and their intersections together with the discussion on the conclusions of the research and suggestions for additional elaborated research.

1.4 Literature review and definitions

There is quite a lot of studies on the root causes or drivers of radicalization. Some approach this phenomenon similarly, complementing each other, some are, on the other hand, slightly diverging from such approaches. There is no universal understanding – or blueprint if you wish – of the process of radicalization among academia and the same is true even for defining the phenomenon itself. Therefore, it is desirable to present a brief introduction to the approach of researching radicalization that this paper follows as well as present understanding of the definitions related to the phenomenon.

For the purpose of introduction to the theory of radicalization three main papers are compared that is contribution of Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter,[11] research published by the Royal United Service Institute[12] and a study by Tinka Veldhuis & Jørgen Staun.[13] These works were chosen due to their high academic credibility and varying approaches to the study of the process of radicalization since these approaches slightly differ and thus complement each other providing fertile ground for discussion. Denoeux' and Carter's contribution is highly cited by researchers since it provides a truly comprehensive overview of the phenomenon, however, its focus lies predominantly in the references to the Muslim world. On the other hand focus of the work by Veldhuis & Staun lies in the radicalization process in the Western world. A study by Royal United Service Institute is the latest of these three contributions, and relates to both Muslim and Western world, and – more importantly – tests some of the most significant hypothesis of the drivers of radicalization. The discussion based on these three contributions is also valuable since some of them focus especially on the violent radicalization and some proceeds with an inquiry regarding both cognitive and behavioural radicalization. This is especially helpful since these two phenomena are not necessarily connected and the fact that occurrence of cognitive radicalization does not mean that behavioural radicalization will follow.[14] In

---

[11] Denoeux, G., & Carter, L. (2009). *Guides to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*. the United States Agency for International Development.

[12] Allan, H., Glazzard, A., Jesperson, S., Reddy-Tumu, S., & Winterbotham, E. (2015). *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*. Royal United Services Institute.

[13] Veldhuis, T., & Staun, J. (2009). *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model*. Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.

[14] Borum, R. (2011). Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories. *Journal of Strategic Security*, *4*(4), 7–36. doi: 10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.1

order to provide a comprehensive overview of the process of radicalization, the phenomenon must be approached on both levels.

The study by Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter[15] provides a very comprehensive overview of the drivers of radicalization. It's a significant publication in the field of research of this phenomenon that many scholars followed in their research on the theatre-specific drivers. Denoeux and Carter warn against giving too much of emphasis or relying solely on the broad, society-wide, root causes of the radicalization. The authors argue that the problem with such an approach is predominantly that it is the whole society that is exposed to these *push factors* and yet, only a minor fraction of the members of the population actually embrace radical thoughts. More importantly, in such approaches, the role of existing *pull factors* is underestimated. Denoeux and Carter emphasize that the contextual factors indeed matter by creating various grievances and opportunities to embrace radical beliefs in the society, however, the role of human agency is significant in the process of framing such grievances and channeling them in the direction of radical behaviour. Therefore, the role of political figures, ideologues and organizations is crucial since, as the authors argue, created grievances and opportunities might not be sufficient on their own. Denoeux and Carter suggest that these macro-level variables are relevant but typically come into play only indirectly and in combination with other setting-specific variables, and must be thus approached accordingly in respective research. Nevertheless, the economic, social and political factors are widely believed to contribute to the process of radicalization – especially with respect to the feelings of marginalisation by some groups of society.[16]

As Allan, Glazzard, Jesperson, Reddy-Tumu, and Winterbotham found in their study[17], the evidence on the role of economic factors in the process of radicalization is mixed, however, it is obvious that income poverty, deprivation, and underemployment – even though not being sufficient explanations of the radicalization on their own – are at least a

---

[15] Denoeux, G., & Carter, L. (2009). *Guides to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*. the United States Agency for International Development.

[16] Allan, H., Glazzard, A., Jesperson, S., Reddy-Tumu, S., & Winterbotham, E. (2015). *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*. Royal United Services Institute.

[17] Ibid.

contributive factors of radicalization fuelling grievances and creating conducive environment. Similar findings are presented by Veldhuis and Staun[18] who agree that there is no direct connection between economic factors and radicalization but economic grievances do come into play when interconnected with other social and individual factors. In their paper, Denoeux and Carter emphasize seven political drivers of radicalization.[19] That is: denial of basic political rights and civil liberties; harsh and brutal rule that entails gross violations of human rights; widespread corruption and perceived impunity for well-connected elites; presence of poorly governed and ungoverned areas; presence of protracted, violent local conflicts; presence of repressive regimes that are widely viewed as illegitimate and bankrupt (politically, economically, and militarily); provision of previous support to VE movements by governments that once relied on those movements to serve their short-term political or strategic interests. Some of those drivers further help to fuel wide support of the community due to the shared grievances and generally allow radicalized groups to capitalize on the failure of the state structures.[20]

For the case of radicalization in the Muslim-majority countries of the Western Balkans, some of the above mentioned political factors are particularly significant, as will be argued later on in the empirical part of this paper. The factor concerning widespread corruption is certainly relevant since, as Denoeux and Carter suggest, it creates anger, moral outrage, and a sense of injustice among the population. The presence of poorly governed and ungoverned areas, on the other hand, gives rise to various sanctuaries and safe havens for radical groups to flourish.[21] Particularly interesting are then the fifth and seventh political drivers mentioned by the authors. Even though it can be argued that the presence of protracted, violent local conflicts is no longer relevant for Western Balkan countries, its former occurrence is highly relevant since Denoeux and Carter argue that: "*Debilitating internal struggles can create chaos, incapacitate government institutions, or create a power vacuum that VE organizations can exploit. Local conflicts, as in Afghanistan, Bosnia or Chechnya, can operate as magnets for extremists elsewhere. They*

---

[18] Veldhuis, T., & Staun, J. (2009). *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model*. Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.

[19] Denoeux, G., & Carter, L. (2009). *Guides to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*. the United States Agency for International Development.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

also simply may attract volunteers who, initially, are not extremists but join the fight merely out of a perceived duty to act in solidarity with other Muslims whom they view to be under attack."[22] The seventh political driver, Denoeux and Carter explain, unleashes the potential of radical groups that were once serving as proxies of the state – being used in state's short-term political or strategic aims – but the state subsequently lost control over them. These two latter mentioned factors are especially relevant to the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina which not only found itself in the chaos of conflict but it was encountered with imported foreign fighters in the process as the respective chapter of this paper will indicate.

The study by Allan, Glazzard, Jesperson, Reddy-Tumu, and Winterbotham is not that clear on the relevance of the political drivers. They found mixed evidence on the relevance of the ineffective or blocked political participation as well as the widespread corruption of the political process and elite domination. As in the case of economic grievances, the authors suggest that the above-mentioned drivers are not sufficient explanation of the radicalization on their own. They rather suggest that these factors serve as contributive motives of radicalization and can be harnessed in order to promote radical beliefs. However, the authors strongly support the significance of the government failure to provide basic services as well as peace and stability since these may prompt the citizens to seek for some alternative provider to satisfy these needs. The same is, according to Allan, Glazzard, Jesperson, Reddy-Tumu, and Winterbotham, valid regarding the failure of the achievement of desired changes by organized civil society groups that may subsequently resort to alternative means as well after their lack of success.[23]

Additionally, staying on the macro-level, Veldhuis and Staun discusses poor integration of Muslims, international relations and globalisation and modernisation as possible root causes of radicalization. The integration of Muslims argument is not relevant for this paper since there is a majority of Muslims in all of the selected countries. The authors argue that: "*International relations and states' foreign policies are often thought to incubate Muslim fundamentalism, not only at national or local levels, but also at the*

---

[22] Ibid.

[23] Allan, H., Glazzard, A., Jesperson, S., Reddy-Tumu, S., & Winterbotham, E. (2015). *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*. Royal United Services Institute.

international and global level" and that through these incentives Muslims around the world may perceive Islam to be under a threat. However, Veldhuis and Staun relate the discussion mainly to the involvement of Western countries in the Middle East and conclude that once again this case doesn't stand for a driver of radicalization on its own but is rather a contributive factor that depends on social and individual dynamics.[24] Globalisation and modernisation is perceived by Veldhuis and Staun as a tool allowing emergence of "*transnational ideological movements that can easily reach large communities to spread their messages, recruit new followers, and organise collective activities*" and as a driver of conflicts between various culturally, religiously or ethnically diverse groups on the global scale as well as a source of conflicts within the Islamic world further fuelling Islamist fundamentalism.[25]

According to Denoeux and Carter, it is important to scrutinize "*the communities, populations, settings, or institutions that appear to be producing a disproportionate percentage of extremists*" when researching pull factors linked to radicalization. When researching the individual pull factors there is a reason to include the broader, macro-level, context as well since the occurrence of overlaps between the two of the levels might exist.[26] Denoeux and Carter argue that it is desirable to include the approach to drivers from the perspective of the individual since additional valuable insights might be discovered. The authors present five main categories of individual motivations: reasonably circumscribed, concrete and specific political, economic and social grievances; much broader ideological (especially religious) objectives; the search for economic gain, or the pull exercised by prior involvement in illicit economic activities; personal factors (e.g., the desire to avenge a loved one or to follow a friend or relative); intimidation or coercion by peers or the community. However, the authors add that there might be other motivations that can't be categorized in any of their categories and, more importantly, that the actual motivations may cut across several of those five categories since they are not mutually exclusive.[27]

---

[24] Veldhuis, T., & Staun, J. (2009). *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model*. Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Denoeux, G., & Carter, L. (2009). *Guides to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*. the United States Agency for International Development.

[27] Ibid.

On the meso-level of the drivers of radicalization, Allan, Glazzard, Jesperson, Reddy-Tumu, and Winterbotham found strong support for some of their hypothesis that proved these factors to be particularly relevant. It seems that it is especially the matter of identity that is of crucial importance. Be it the search for personal or group identity or the growth of religious and ethnic identities. Either way, the authors argue, there is no doubt that identity is a key factor in radicalization given the social character of the process while religion and ethnicity being most important expressions of identity both of the group or individual.[28] Additionally, the authors argue, there is evidence for the claim that shared experiences regarding discrimination and exclusion make people more susceptible to single narrative which not only links the sources of grievances but also proposes a simple solution. The authors also found strong evidence that the political, social and economic marginalization of ethnic or religious groups significantly increases the risk of radicalization.[29]

The importance of the matter of identity regarding the process of radicalization is emphasized by Veldhuis and Staun as well. The authors, building on studies examining social identity, argue that this factor is one of the most important factors on the social level since it appears that there is a tendency to define oneself in the terms of group identity rather than in terms of self. It is through the identification with a group, Veldhuis and Staun suggest, that the individual achieve self-esteem. It is for this reason that the individuals struggling with their own perception of identity find salvation and satisfaction when adopting the identity of a radical group and thus achieving the sense of belonging.[30] This feeling is further enhanced, it seems, by the collective emotions that are based on the events afflicting members of the group are shared within the group even among group members that were not directly involved in such events.[31]

Veldhuis and Staun further emphasize the role of an authoritative figure arguing that the social context, as well as group-level characteristics, significantly influences one's behaviour. Zealous behaviour and significant sacrifices may thus emerge since the

---

[28] Allan, H., Glazzard, A., Jesperson, S., Reddy-Tumu, S., & Winterbotham, E. (2015). *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*. Royal United Services Institute.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Veldhuis, T., & Staun, J. (2009). *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model*. Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.

[31] Ibid.

individual wants to conform to the norms and opinions of the majority regardless of his standards which might significantly influence the emergence of radicalization, the authors argue. As Veldhuis and Staun put it: "*Majorities, charismatic leaders, and influential network members are capable of exerting strong influence on general opinion formation and behaviour in networks.*"[32]

In their paper, Veldhuis and Staun also mention the role of the internet on the process of radicalization which they categorize as a social- (meso-) level of the causal factors. The authors argue that since the internet offers various opportunities of contact between diverse groups and individuals with varying backgrounds and facilitates interpersonal and intergroup interaction as well as network formation, it can facilitate mobilisation and social involvement in collective action. However, Veldhuis and Staun argue, despite the impact on wide audience, anonymity of communication, enhancement of opinion formation and provision of platform for shared grievances and community building which may appeal especially to identity-seeking youngsters, internet has more of a contributive role than serving as a individual driver of radicalization due to the fact that the radicalization is taking place foremost in the real-world social settings.

Veldhuis and Staun[33] also note the role of prisons as a fertile environment for radicalization: "*Prisons are hostile environments where membership of a morally and physically supportive and protective group can be essential for inmates. Such groups are often formed along ethnic and religious lines and can be vulnerable to radicalisation and recruitment.*" In the hostile conditions of prisons there is an increased perception of collective social marginalization among inmates which may provide them with a strong binding-factor, the authors argue.

Furthermore, Veldhuis and Staun concern with the causal factors on the individual level covering personality characteristics, individual experiences, and personal strategic choices,[34] however, these factors are indeed individual-specific and, in fact, not theatre-related. Therefore to examine these drivers, the methodology and research design would have to be adjusted. Such research does not fall within the scope of this paper and, as the

---

[32] Ibid.

[33] Veldhuis, T., & Staun, J. (2009). *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model*. Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.

[34] Ibid.

matter of fact, there is a mere probability that such research would complement the country-specific knowledge of the radicalization of Western Balkan countries.

From the discussion above it is clear that there are multiple factors behind the process of radicalization and that it is of crucial importance to research the phenomenon in the means of broad context on various levels. That is also true for the process of turning into cognitive radicalization from the behavioural one as Randy Borum suggests further elaborating on the fact that there indeed are multiple factors as well as different pathways to radicalization and, conversely, different individual factors on the same pathway resulting in different outcomes of the process.[35] It is impossible to find a universal ranking of the significance of respective factors since they are variously interconnected and their relevancy often depends on the specific case of radicalization.[36] Therefore in the following chapters in the empirical section of this paper, the motivating factors of radicalization are examined in the country-specific context and are not categorized and arranged in any particular order regarding their relevance. The arrangement of chapters rather follows an intuitive categorization providing a comprehensive overview of the findings on the motivational factors and their context.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that even though this paper works with the term *drivers* of radicalization since it is widely used in the academia and many of the sources of this paper use this term as well, the findings are presented under the term motivational *factors* of radicalization since this term corresponds better with the fact that there is an interplay of motives rather than a single vehicle of radicalization. The same approach is followed by the Royal United Services Institute's publication that reached the same conclusion.[37]

As was already stated, there is no clear consensus among academia on the definition of radicalization as well as the one of extremism. It is thus crucial to present how are some of those terms approached in this paper to avoid further confusion. There is no doubt that the discussion on the definitions of the respective terms could be exhaustive but for the

---

[35] Borum, R. (2011). Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research. *Journal of Strategic Security*, *4*(4), 37–62. doi: 10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.2

[36] Ibid.

[37] Allan, H., Glazzard, A., Jesperson, S., Reddy-Tumu, S., & Winterbotham, E. (2015). *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*. Royal United Services Institute.

sake of the scope of this paper, the concrete understanding of those terms as approached by this paper is rather presented.

As of the term extremism this paper will stick with the Neuman's definition which derives from the *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought* stating that: "*Extremism can be used to refer to political ideologies that oppose a society's core values and principles. In the context of liberal democracies this could be applied to any ideology that advocates racial or religious supremacy and/or opposes the core principles of democracy and universal human rights. The term can also be used to describe the methods through which political actors attempt to realise their aims, that is, by using means that 'show disregard for the life, liberty, and human rights of others.*"[38]

Building on the discussion by Randy Borum, this paper approaches radicalization as a process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs.[39] Furthermore, an individual who went through the process of radicalization is approached as a radicalized individual that is embracing extremist ideologies and beliefs. However, building further on the Borum's discussion[40], this does not necessarily mean that the radicalized individual resorts to violent means while pursuing his ideology and beliefs. In order to distinguish violent from non-violent scenarios, the term violent extremism (or violent radicalism) is used in this paper. Since many of the sources from which this paper derives from are using both terms radicalism and extremism in a similar manner, this paper uses both terms interchangeably to correspond with the original citations. Given the fact that modern Islam does not overtly encourage hatred of non-Muslims, the term *Islamism* is used in this paper in order to refer to a totalitarian political ideology since Islam itself was rather used only as a vehicle of extremist ideology to differ this ideology from the abused religion.[41] *Wahhabism* and *Salafism* aren't strictly defined in this paper and are both referred to as movements within Islam with literalist, strict, orthodox or fundamentalist approaches to Islam in order to correspond with sources of this paper which sometimes use these terms interchangeably.

---

[38] Neumann, P. (2010). *Prisons and Terrorism Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries*. London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence.

[39] Borum, R. (2011). Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories. *Journal of Strategic Security*, *4*(4), 7–36. doi: 10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.1

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

1.5 Methodology, sources & limitations

This paper relies particularly on secondary sources. It builds upon the existing literature on the radicalization and prevention and counter-radicalization programs. While these papers include various qualitative datasets and identify various issues regarding the phenomenon, they can be used to trace the original motivating factors of radicalization.

Regarding this particular task, papers on the phenomenon of Islamist radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo are used in order to ascertain the background and wider circumstances of the radicalization in those countries. Furthermore, the understanding of the background is complemented by building upon the literature on the historical circumstances of Islam in the selected countries, the initial phases of emergence of the radical Islamist ideas, and the perception of Islam itself. After assessing the background of radicalization in respective countries, papers on the preventive measures are researched in order to trace back the incentives explaining why radicalization occurred in the first place. Particularly helpful are papers presenting qualitative data from unique terrain-research and assessment of the questionnaires and statements of relevant respondents. Even though such papers are often focused only on specific aspects of radicalization and its prevention – such as community approach – they can be built upon to compile a comprehensive overview of the respective motivational factors. For this purpose, various academic papers, official government publications, and policies such as national strategies on countering radicalization and violent extremism of respective countries as well as publications of various international organizations and NGOs are assessed and the resulting picture of the motivational factors in the context of the contemporary situation in the selected countries together with the background of the process is presented. To maintain a certain degree of academic rigour this paper examines predominantly contributions of academic publishers and peer-reviewed journals avoiding grey literature where possible.

In order to further affirm the identified motivational factors, the author of this paper conducted research in the in-house archive of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) based in the organization's Documentation Centre in Prague. The OSCE maintains a field presence in all of the selected countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo) and its mandate goes all the way back to the 1990s. This

provides an unique opportunity to research respective reports of the OSCE field missions in each of the selected countries addressed to all of the OSCE delegations as well as the statements of respective delegations at the meetings of the OSCE permanent council together with various press releases, final reports on various workshops and initiatives as well as conclusions from the expert debates and many other additional documents. The field reports are delivered on a regular basis and thus provide a unique overview of the development in each of the selected countries further emphasizing various pressing issues on both local and state levels as well. The OSCE is involved in the prevention and countering of violent extremism efforts in each of the selected countries and the insights obtained from the field missions' reports are thus of the utmost relevance.

While the information in the OSCE documents is often sensitive, the access to such files is restricted and provided only after the clearance of the authorized OSCE officials. The author succeeded in obtaining such clearance and was thus allowed to research these confidential files although he was unable – due to obvious reasons – to directly quote from these files.

All the cited OSCE documents are cited according to the OSCE standard and may be provided upon request by the OSCE Documentation Centre in Prague. The documents under the restricted access are marked as "RESTRICTED" in this paper and their access may be provided only after the mentioned clearance conducted by the authorized OSCE officials.

Considering this methodology, the chapters of the empirical phase of the research concerning with the selected countries thus provide a historical background of the process of introduction of radical ideologies to the respective countries since, as will be later argued, these processes had a crucial role regarding the radicalization in the selected countries. Having discussed the historical circumstances, discussions on the development of radical ideologies and overall Islamist radicalization in the selected countries will follow assessing the situation in the individual countries. Building upon the compiled picture of the development, radicalization process and situation in the individual countries, the motivational factors based on the discussion presented in the pre-empirical section of this paper will be identified and their context will be explained. All of this is further complemented by the presented findings from the relevant OSCE documents which are used to confirm the correctness of the findings.

Due to the above-mentioned methodology, the research certainly presents some limitations. First of all, the limitations posed by the knowledge of languages of the selected countries can not be overlooked. Even though that the governments of the selected countries do provide the key documents in English there might be many minor reports that can prove to be highly relevant for the scope of this research, accessible only in the official language of the state. Furthermore, the same might be true for academic studies and papers conducted on the topic of radicalization in the selected countries not published in English.

Secondly, even though the research is based also on the various papers focused on particular factors or approaches to the problematic introducing qualitative datasets obtained from questionnaires and relevant respondents, these sources can hardly substitute for the field-research focused particularly on the scope of this paper.

With these limitations in mind, the aim of this paper is to complement existing literature and provide an comprehensive overview of the motivational factors of the Islamist radicalization in the Muslim-majority countries of the Western Balkans upon which additional specific field-research might build further broadening the topic rather than present ground-breaking information regarding the research of radicalization in the Western Balkans.

2 Empirical part

2.1 Bosnia and Herzegovina

2.1.1 Beginnings of the radical forms of Islam in the country

In order to fully understand the drivers of Islamist radicalization, we have to first explore the beginnings of the radical ideology in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Given the history of Islam in the country, the emergence of adherents of the Salafi teaching is arguably a very recent phenomenon. Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina is traditionally connected with the Hanafi school of thought that represents a moderate kind of Islam. The very beginnings of the radical teaching in the country are linked with the 1992 – 1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina which also laid foundations of other crucial vehicles of radicalization, as will be argued later. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was probably the bloodiest of all of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia introducing mass atrocities as well as genocide to the country. As the Bosniaks were struggling during the conflict and the information about ethnic cleansing and genocide was broadcasted worldwide, Islamic World reacted by issuing series of fatwas initiating response.

Foreign fighters from Arab countries, so-called mujahideen, came to the country to help fellow Muslims in their cause. Those fighters came mostly from the Muslim-majority Middle Eastern countries and brought Salafi teaching with them – until then, Salafism was used in Bosnia and Herzegovina only as a religious term describing the practices of the first three generations of Muslims and the rigid Salafi interpretation of Islam was almost unknown.[42] And since the Salafi ideology was introduced by these combatants under the circumstances of bloody war, it came in the most militant form.[43] Paradoxically, the mujahideen forces arrived in the country with the knowledge – or even an approval – of Western powers. This Western thinking was connected with the war in Afghanistan in which the – relatively small in numbers – mujahideen forces managed to wear down the superb power of Russian invading forces. As Vlado Azinović puts it,

---

[42] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[43] Bećirević, E. (2018). *Countering and Preventing Extremism in BiH: Learning from International Efforts*. London: British Council.

Western leaders initially perceived the war in the country as an isolated bushfire that would eventually die out after some weariness of all the sides. And the mujahideen forces seemed like a good way to balance the powers.[44]

One of the many flaws of this thinking was that many of those arriving mujahideen were actually keener on converting Bosnian Muslims to Salafism rather than on fighting. El Mujahid, a unit of Muslim fighters, was established at that time and it was particularly successful in this regard. Most of the foreign mujahideen joined the Unit and celebrated success in persuading Bosniak Muslims who joined the Unit to abandon their school of thought and convert to Salafism. The leaders of the El Mujahid unit saw the fight for the cause of their fellow Bosnian Muslim brothers and the proselytizing as duties of equal importance. This was further emphasized when the precondition for Bosnian volunteers to join the Unit was established which meant that their attendance in Islamic seminar was required. This school was led by Egyptian cleric Imad al Misri.[45]

Al Misri wrote a pamphlet called *Some conceptions that we must correct* on which the missionary efforts of mujahideen were based. In the text, al Misri is outraged by local conceptions of Islam in Bosnia and he denounces them together with some local religious traditions such as Sufi ceremonies, presence of cemeteries inside Mosques or visiting tombs of saints. More importantly, al Misri also calls for Muslims to distance themselves from other religions - namely Christians and Jews - as well as from those Muslims who do not live in accordance with the faith. Furthermore, al Misri also quite aggressively attacks ideologies such as democracy, nationalism or communism since he perceives those to be turning people away from following the true teaching of Islam.[46] This pamphlet served as a core text of proselytizing efforts of mujahideen in Bosnia and Herzegovina calling for Bosnian Muslims to convert to "true" Islam. And even though al

---

[44] Azinović, V. (2015). *Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Nexus with Islamist Extremism*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Democratization Policy Council.

[45] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[46] Bougarel, X. (2017). *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Surviving Empires*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Misri was later deported and imprisoned, his text remained present in Islamist circles and maintains its presence especially in online space to this day.[47]

It wasn't only the mujahideen who came to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their arrival brought also an influence of foreign powers, particularly those from the Middle East. Such external influence, which was disguised as a humanitarian help in times of dire war, was projected through the establishment of various humanitarian or non-governmental organizations.[48] One of the many cases is the financing of the mentioned pamphlet *Conceptions we need to correct* which was funded and subsequently disseminated by a Kuwaiti organization called The Society of the Revival of Islamic Heritage.[49] The spread of the Salafi ideology was observed with concerns by the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ICBiH), the independent, self-financed highest representative body of Bosnian Muslims which represents both the authentic religious community in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as those Bosniaks living in foreign countries. The ICBiH thus reacted promptly to the sneaky threat which it managed to notice. Already in the early period of war a preventive policy aimed at containing the spread of Salafi teaching was implemented. A fatwa on mandatory compliance with Hanafi school of thought concerning all religious rituals falling within ICBiH's authority was issued as early as in 1993 by the supreme mufti of the organization (Reis-ul-ulema), Mustafa Cerić.[50] This step, representing a binding decision for the whole organization, clearly demonstrates the concerns raised by the spreading Salafi ideology and the effort in preventing further dissemination. In fact, it wasn't only the ICBiH who observed the development around emerging Salafi ideas in the country with deepening concerns. Foreign mujahideen sparked many conflicts inside the country as they directed their aggression towards locals not living to the Salafi teaching such as shop owners selling alcohol or couples expressing their love in public. But Bosnian officials had no choice but to tolerate and try to deescalate such issues because the arrival of mujahideen to the country was a

---

[47] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[48] Shay, S. (2009). *Islamic terror and the Balkans*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

[49] Bougarel, X. (2017). *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Surviving Empires*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.

[50] Preljević, H. (2017). Preventing Religious Radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Role of the BiH Islamic Community. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *37*(4), 371–392.

precondition for the support of some foreign donors.[51] This only further illustrates the involvement and influence of external powers in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Not only did the foreign mujahideen bring the Salafi teaching to the Bosnia and Herzegovina but many of them also remained in the country after the war and settled.[52] Few Salafi centers were thus established because the Salafi community inclined to settle in rather remote areas outside of the control of the government. And although the ICBiH did undertake some measures, as was discussed above, it wasn't enough to sufficiently contain the Salafi ideology. After the war, the Islamic community was occupied with more pressing issues such as restoration of the religious community, and mosques, which meant increased breathing space for mujahideen and proselytizing. Capitalizing on the structural and financial weaknesses, parallel Salafi congregations were established with a generous financial help of external donors. These so-called *parajamaats* became an alternative to the official jamaats of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It comes as no surprise that these alternative congregations emerged predominantly in areas where the mujahideen settled after the war.[53] As a consequence of this historical development, which was briefly introduced, Bosnia and Herzegovina became a country of autochthonous Salafi ideology.[54]

2.1.2 Identity

It is often described that in countries where Muslims are in minority, one of the main drivers behind Islamist radicalization of individual is his perception of identity. Those individuals, prone to radicalization, often find themselves in a milieu which they perceive as hostile one. Not being able to integrate into majority society, carrying the stigma of adherent of Islam a feeling of injustice, discrimination and marginalization increases. This victimhood perspective may lead to radicalization against the majority identity

[51] Bougarel, X. (2017). *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Surviving Empires*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.

[52] Shay, S. (2009). *Islamic terror and the Balkans*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

[53] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[54] Azinović, V. (2015). *Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Nexus with Islamist Extremism*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Democratization Policy Council.

group as it is perceived as a source of the injustice.[55] In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Muslim population is in majority, the identity issue might thus seem as of rather minor importance. The fact is, however, that the identity struggle is present, although in slightly different manner. As many other things in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this issue also comes down to the 1992 – 1995 war.

In the former Yugoslavia, religious education was quite suppressed[56] and the Muslim communities couldn't be considered religiously inclined. Not only was their Muslim identity languishing but their national identity wasn't particularly evolved either. During the war, Muslims found themselves in an identity vacuum with no national traditions, programmes or institutions. It thus seemed reasonable to recourse to Islam as their unique identity. One of the ways to fill the emerged vacuum was through political ideology and religious radicalization – Salafism.[57]

The case of asserting an unique or separate identity can be illustrated on the very beginnings of the newly-independent Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its first president, Alija Izetbegović, founder of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) which represented some quite radical stances.[58] Although presenting himself and the party as a tolerant and multi-ethnic government, the principles of radical Islam were followed, especially during the war, and behind this guise Izetbegović was rather a Islamic fundamentalist and Bosniak nationalist.[59] However, this feeling of identity vacuum and the need of seeking identity wasn't stemming from the high political levels only. In fact, the feeling of alienation and victimhood was already present within the community. Western powers were increasingly perceived negatively as the belief that they abandoned Bosnian Muslims and left them to be slaughtered by Serbs dominated. This was further

---

[55] Azinović, V. (2018). *Regional Report: Understanding Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. London: British Council.

[56] Zweerde, E. van der (2015) Ina Merdjanova, Rediscovering the umma:

Muslims in the Balkans between nationalism and transnationalism. *Religion, State & Society*, 43(2),

193-198.

[57] Babić, M. (2014). *Two faces of Islam in the Western Balkans: Between Political Ideology and Islamist Radicalization*. doi: 10.3233/978-1-61499-387-2-126

[58] Shay, S. (2009). *Islamic terror and the Balkans*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

[59] Babić, M. (2014). *Two faces of Islam in the Western Balkans: Between Political Ideology and Islamist Radicalization*. doi: 10.3233/978-1-61499-387-2-126

leveraged by the proselytizing done by the mujahideen.[60] Indeed, the sense of collective victimization and the crisis of national identity together with the structural weakness of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina thus allowed Salafism to assert itself. In this vacuum created both by the identity crisis and the weakness of the state - as well as the ICBiH - Salafi missionaries had a lot to offer by providing clear and strong religious identity together with a hospital and accepting environment which provided aid and support. It must be noted that, even though stemming from the war and post-war period when these incentives were definitely extremely strong and ubiquitous, this case is still valid today as the research carried out by Edina Bećirević suggests.[61] Her study shows that the collective victimhood is still present in the Bosnian society and projects itself into the identity matrix. Social alienation is also the case since the "desire for belonging and mutual support" plays a significant role in individual's decision to embrace radical forms of Islam and join extremist structures.

The identity struggle is indeed tangible in present society in the country, and the nationalism as well as both intra- and inter-ethnic tensions are deepening.[62] This doesn't apply only to political level skirmishes between the entities of the federation but also to the community level. This can be illustrated on various hate crimes and bias-motivated incidents that occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina in recent years. OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina offers a good overview of hate crimes in its 2015 monitoring findings.[63] Crimes against Bosniak returnees to Republika Srpska make a strong case as they demonstrate the inter-ethnic tension. Furthermore, the ruling of courts is often problematic as the courts often don't address the crimes to be bias-motivated as 2014 killing in village of Kozluk, Zvornik (Republika Srpska) illustrates. Bosniak returnee was murdered there on Orthodox Easter by his Serb neighbor. Interesting fact is that the homicide was preceded by a quarrel about the 1992 – 1995 war. Even though that the perpetrator was found guilty, no bias motive was investigated.[64]   A telling incident

---

[60] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[61] Bećirević, E. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report*. London: British Council.

[62] OSCE: PC.FR/9/18/Corr.1 (17 April 2018); RESTRICTED

[63] OSCE. (2016). *Hate Crimes and Bias-Motivated Incidents in Bosnia and Herzegovina: 2015 Monitoring Findings of the Osce Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

[64] Ibid.

happened year later in Vrbanjci, Kotor Varoš (Republika Srpska) where violence on another returnee of Bosniak ethnicity happened. Although this time the victim survived, he was injured and there were crosses carved on his body, one on stomach and the other on his back. Only a month later, on the Catholic holiday of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in August 2015, a group of young men of Croat ethnicity attacked a mosque in village Omerovići, Tomislavgrad Municipality (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) by placing a leaking gas container in front of the mosque and subsequently damaging vehicles parked nearby and verbally assaulting Bosniak/Muslim inhabitants on ethnic and religious grounds.[65] Furthermore, none of the victims in these reported incidents were provided legal aid due to the limited rights of the victims in the proceedings which usually depend only on the willingness and ability of the prosecutor.[66]

These incidents, and the way they are handled by official authorities, further contribute to the perception of victimhood and there is no doubt that they may spark a feeling of Bosnian Muslims - or Islam itself - being under threat in some individuals and boost their susceptibility of embracing radical beliefs. Although there seems to be slight improvement since the 2015 OSCE report, the hate crimes remain pressing issue in the country as the country visit of the OSCE Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in May 2017 suggests. During his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Professor Bulent Senay addressed this issue in his speech saying: "*However, difficulties arise in the application of laws, especially in tackling hate crimes against the Muslim community and the returnee population. We have observed positive practices at the local level and encourage replication of these practices in other parts of BiH.*"[67] The need for progress in this regard is realized by the official authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well, as the 2015 *Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for preventing and combating terrorism 2015–2020* suggests by calling for strengthening and speeding up the investigation of hate crimes particularly those driven by the ethnic and

---

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] OSCE: SEC.PR/300/17 (29 May 2017)

religious motivation.[68] It is thus obvious that the hate crimes are indeed related with radicalization and highly relevant regarding prevention programmes.

The identity struggle is not illustrated only by the hate crimes, however. One of the crucial aspects of boosting this issue is a practice carried out in some of the schools in the country. This is especially important because it affects the local youth which is, as will be discussed more in detail later, often very susceptible to radicalization. The mentioned practice is called *two schools under one roof*. It is a remnant of a post-war attempt to support the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Once again the influence of the 1992 – 1995 war is thus present. These so called two schools under one roof were established in order to allow pupils of both Croat and Bosniak ethnicity to attend the same school building while studying separately. Unfortunately, this originally temporary solution has persisted. As of December 2018, 56 two schools under one roof were operating in three cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These facilities, including primary and secondary schools, all share a systematic segregation of pupils based on their ethnicity. Additionally, such practice breaches international conventions as well as domestic legislation with no improvements in sight.[69] There is no doubt that this practice further augments the identity struggle and the inter-ethnic tensions while affecting susceptible children and youth. Interestingly, this issue is reflected by the pupils themselves and since it seems that there was no prospect of brighter future in this regards, students themselves stood up against the 2016 decision to establish new two schools under one roof facility in the Municipality of Jajce in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[70] The link between this discriminatory practice and the security situation in the country was emphasized also by the shared effort of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the U.S. embassy, and the EU Delegation who urged Education Ministers to address this issue as a press release suggests: "*The OSCE Mission to BiH, the U.S. Embassy, and the EU Delegation are united in our concerns regarding the state of education throughout BiH. Education reform can and should be a priority at all levels of government. We encourage leaders and communities to make necessary changes to ensure quality education and guarantee the rights of all students. (...) A fragmented administration,*

---

[68] Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers. (2015). *Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism 2015–2020*. Sarajevo.

[69] OSCE: SEC.FR/870/18 (17 December 2018); RESTRICTED

[70] OSCE: HCNM.PR/10/18 (20 July 2018)

segregated institutions, and ethnically-oriented curricula in the BiH school system impede reconciliation, perpetuate needless divisions across the country, and in some cases violate international human rights conventions. The weaknesses of the current school system, from out-of-date materials to teacher training, limit economic development and jeopardize the long-term stability and security of BiH."[71]

2.1.3 Socio-economic factors

As is the case with the radicalization incentives worldwide, Bosnia and Herzegovina is no exception to economic grievances as one of the contributive factors of adopting radical beliefs. As with many other things in the country, this issue can also be tracked down to the 1992 – 1995 war which left Bosnia and Herzegovina in terrible state of economy. The fact that in the year 1995 the GDP per capita of Bosnia and Herzegovina was about 19,8% of the pre-war economy illustrates that.[72] And even though there were naturally some improvements in the post-war era, BiH remains a state with one of the highest overall unemployment rates in the world.[73] The economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to grow even in 2018 but the progress is still insufficient and the living standards in the country are still lacking behind the rest of Europe. Furthermore, it's not only the weak economic prospects but also the widespread corruption and nepotism that burden the state resulting in large number of people leaving the country.[74] There is a widespread agreement among the existing research and studies of the radicalization and extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina that the economic grievances play significant role in the process of radicalization.[75]

---

[71] OSCE: SEC.PR/714/17 (12 December 2017)

[72] Preljević, H. (2017). Preventing Religious Radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Role of the BiH Islamic Community. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *37*(4), 371–392.

[73] Bećirević, E. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report*. London: British Council.

[74] OSCE: PC.FR/9/18/Corr.1 (17 April 2018); RESTRICTED

[75] See e.g. Bećirević, E. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report*. London: British Council.

Research carried out by Turčalo and Veljan[76] among selected communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina suggests that the communities most affected with the Salafi ideology were those with critical rates of unemployment in the country. On the other hand, the community with the lowest rate of youth unemployment – thus with good overall employment score – was unaffected by the Salafi teachings. Turčalo and Veljan suggest that it is the youth who is particularly receptive to embracing new doctrines given the prospect of limited or non-existing opportunities.[77] This is highly problematic considering the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina has the highest youth unemployment rate in the world[78] which further emphasizes emigration of youth.[79]

Some of the reasons individuals may adopt radical beliefs due to their unfavourable economic situation is the feeling of no prospects of future, feeling of victimhood or search for support and sympathy of community. However, it seems that there may be even more simple reason. Some Salafi communities might offer participation on a business of some kind thus improving one's financial situation. This case was documented among a Salafi community in Iztok neighbourhood of the town of Pazardjik in Bulgaria. Local Salafi community offered participation in informal economic activities which was found to be one of the factors contributing to increased susceptibility to embrace radical ideas.[80]

Poor economic situation in the years after the 1992 – 1995 war opened the door for various foreign NGOs, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Especially various humanitarian organizations from the Gulf countries took roots in the country that were keen on promoting Salafi teaching. It was these organizations who capitalized on the unfavourable economic situation that impacted the population of the country. Arab organizations connected their aim of proselytizing with the material help for affected

---

[76] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Bećirević, E. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report*. London: British Council.

[79] OSCE: PC.FR/8/17 (21 April 2017); RESTRICTED

[80] Mancheva, M., & Dzhekova, R. (2017). *Risks of Islamist Radicalisation in Bulgaria: A Case Study in the Iztok Neighbourhood of the City of Pazardzhik*. Center for the Study of Democracy. doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.14106.85443

families. For example scholarships were offered to children of fallen soldiers. But often some preconditions were made such as acceptance of literature promoting Salafi ideology.[81] Poor economic situation of widows was abused as well. As the Bosnian Muslim journalist Senad Pecanin noted, Bosnian widows were pressured to convert to Wahhabism under the promise of 50 USD per month.[82] Indeed, it was these non-governmental organizations that stood behind providing disadvantaged locals access to education. Various scholarships were offered by both financial and material means to families under various preconditions. Sometimes there was a proviso of recipients attending mini-madrassas, sometimes even the attendance of Islamic schools promoting Salafi ideology was a requirement.

There was another level to this effort – provision of scholarships for young Bosnian Muslims arranging their attendance in Islamic universities in Middle Eastern countries. This was done through unofficial channels and targeted both youth expressing interest in the Salafi ideology and youth with increased interest in study of Islam in general. Although, the number of youth acquiring education by these means in one of the Gulf countries remains unknown, the impact on transformation of understanding Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina that these activities had is indisputable.[83] This external influence projected through foreign presence is still present in the country. Foreign policy and ideology of external actors are promoted through such institutions. There are also many mosques in Bosnia and Herzegovina, established by (not only) Gulf countries, although officially under a control of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Provision of scholarships also continues allowing Bosnian Muslims to study in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. Various websites promoting Salafi ideology emerged as well.[84]

---

[81] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[82] Trifunovic, D. (2010, November 15). *Islamic Radicalization Processes in South East Europe.* Retrieved November 2, 2019, from https://www.ict.org.il/Article/587/Islamic Radicalization Processes in South East Europe#gsc.tab=0.

[83] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[84] Preljević, H. (2017). Preventing Religious Radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Role of the BiH Islamic Community. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *37*(4), 371–392.

It should be noted that the shady practice of foreign non-governmental organizations remains to be an issue in present Bosnia and Herzegovina. It seems that some of the NGOs are involved in suspicious investments that can be even linked with financing of terrorist activities or money laundering as the 2015 Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for preventing and combating terrorism 2015 – 2020 suggests.[85]

2.1.4 Community and the failure of state

A 2018 research carried out by Sead Turčalo & Nejra Veljan[86] suggests that foreign influence in the form of arriving mujahideen and operation of various external non-governmental organizations had much deeper impact on Bosnia and Herzegovina than one might think. In fact, mentioned study found that mujahideen settling in particular areas had a tremendous impact on local communities and their susceptibility of embracing Salafi beliefs. The process of replacement of the – in Bosnia and Herzegovina traditional – Hanafi teaching by Salafi ideology was further supported by the foreign relief agencies. Those were using their financial capabilities to boost the fundamentalist missionary agenda.[87] In present Bosnia and Herzegovina, Salafi communities pose a high risk regarding the radicalization and – even more importantly – subsequent embrace of violent behaviour. These entities represent various pull factors that are not only effective but also often remain unaddressed by state authorities, partly due to the unpropitious political situation in the country.

Alternative Salafi congregations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, so-called *parajamaats*, that started emerging following the 1992 – 1995 war, capitalizing on both the political turmoil in the country, weak presence of state and foreign support, were already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Although the post-war chaos ebbed away, the issue with parajamaats remained rather unaddressed. In fact, in 2016 the Islamic Community of

---

[85] Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers. (2015). *Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism 2015–2020*. Sarajevo.

[86] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[87] Antunez Moreno, J. C. (2010). *Foreign Influences in Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina Since 1995*. Sarajevo: Center for Advanced Studies.

Bosnia and Herzegovina reported that there were 64 parajamaats in BiH.[88] Since the parajamaats were increasingly becoming an issue and the pressure from the public and security agencies grew, the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina initiated process of integrating the parajamaats into its structures. But according to Edina Bećirević[89], out of 38 parajamaats leaders engaging in the dialogue only 14 decided to submit to the standards and oversight of the ICBiH by signing the Protocol to join the Islamic Community.

Although parajamaats emerged particularly in areas where the members of El Mujahid unit settled, these congregations succeeded in attracting new – often young – members as well. Here also the economic factor played its role since new adherents were sometimes offered a payment for attending weekly prayers.[90] However, it was hardly only the economic factor that brought newcomers among the Salafi ranks. Once again the issue of identity projects in this matter. The Salafi community offers a feeling of belonging to an individual. One is met with hospitality, support and understanding. All of this matter significantly since the individual finds a community where his grievances might be not only understood and accepted but also shared. Besides the socioeconomic factor, the weaknesses of state structures as well as those weaknesses within the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and war and post-war traumas together with collective victimization play role in a decision of an individual to join the community.[91]

There is one particular factor that increases the impact of the Salafi communities and that is a figure of a strong and charismatic leader.[92] [93] If there is such individual in the community, this person serves as a uniting element of the group and enjoys high trust and

[88] Preljević, H. (2017). Preventing Religious Radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Role of the BiH Islamic Community. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *37*(4), 371–392.

[89] Bećirević, E. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report*. London: British Council.

[90] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[91] Bećirević, E. (2018). *Countering and Preventing Extremism in BiH: Learning from International Efforts*. London: British Council.

[92] See Azinović, V. (2015). *Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Nexus with Islamist Extremism*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Democratization Policy Council.

[93] See Hogg, M. A., & Adelman, J. (2013). Uncertainty-Identity Theory: Extreme Groups, Radical Behavior, and Authoritarian Leadership. *Journal of Social Issues*, *69*(3), 436–454.

devotion of the members. What's more, a charismatic leader can satisfy a need of some individuals susceptible to radicalization through exerting his power by offering a guidance and advice in everyday life. This proved to be a effective policy to broaden ranks of some Salafi groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One case is particularly significant in this regard and that is the parajamaat that emerged in Gornja Maoča (Tuzla Canton, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) – a very isolated community of Salafi adherents which gathered around charismatic leader Jusuf Barčić and his successor (who substituted Barčić after his tragic death), Nusret Imamović. Not only became this community a hotbed of radicalization but through its leaders it became interlinked with other networks of radicals, providing other parajamaats in the country with financial means as well, thus making its leaders taking a position of pivotal figures of Salafist movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[94] The issue of Gornja Maoča became subsequently quite pressing and due to its remoteness and isolation of its members, the state authorities even perceived it as a threat to territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This resulted in police raid on the village on 2nd of February 2010, arresting Nusret Imamović with his companions and seizing, among other things, small quantities of arms, explosives and propaganda material.[95]

Even though unauthorised by the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Salafi parajamaats continue to perform prayers and offer lectures and other kinds of religious education which contradicts the Law on Freedom of Religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[96] The factor allowing the parajamaats to operate is a weak structural presence, or failure if you wish, of the state in this regard which can be thus considered to be another contributing factor in radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Parajamaats indeed operate in areas where there is a weak presence of the ICBiH which embraces the weak presence of the state – thus the legal and social structure – as well.[97] And as a statement of the former Director of the Police of Bosnia and Herzegovina suggests, it is

---

[94] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[95] OSCE: SEC.FR/83/10 (25 February 2010); RESTRICTED

[96] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[97] Preljević, H. (2017). Preventing Religious Radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Role of the BiH Islamic Community. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *37*(4), 371–392.

the citizens of BiH who identify with extremist movements aiming to exploit weaknesses of the system of governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina who pose the greatest threat to the country.[98] And there is no doubt that the weaknesses concerning the governance and the overall political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina tend to stay problematic even today as the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the OSCE stressed at the 1182nd meeting of the OSCE permanent council in 2018: "*The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina does indeed remain complicated. With preparations now under way for the general election in October this year, the internal political crisis is worsening at the general level and throughout the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Breakdowns in inter-ethnic co-operation create problems for the functioning of government bodies, slow down reforms, and encourage the different ethnic communities to step up their efforts to ensure and protect the equal rights and broad autonomy guaranteed by the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dayton Accords).*"[99] This stance was shared by the US representative on that very same meeting, Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry Kamian, who stressed the issue with the political instability in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well in the speech he delivered.[100]

It indeed are the rural and underdeveloped areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the alternative congregations and communities embracing Salafi ideology flourish. These remote places attracted the mujahideen who sought convenient sites to settle far from the reach of the state. This is for instance a case of the Zenica-Doboj canton, a particularly mountainous terrain with isolated villages, which became a stronghold of mujahideen after the 1992 – 1995 war.[101] But the issue with these hard-to-reach areas remained to be a pressing issue addressed also by the OSCE which targeted this problem via its *Local First* initiative aimed at communities in hard-to-reach areas.[102] In the already mentioned study, Sead Turčalo & Nejra Veljan[103] observed that the Bosnian-Podrinje Canton of

---

[98] OSCE: SEC.FR/422/10 (5 August 2010); RESTRICTED

[99] OSCE: PC.DEL/445/18 (19 April 2018)

[100] OSCE: PC.DEL/446/18 (19 April 2018)

[101] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[102] OSCE: SEC.FR/418/09 (19 May 2009); RESTRICTED

[103] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BPC) has seen no departures of the foreign fighters seeking to join the so-called Islamic State in Syria or Iraq. After their inquiry, they found that the canton was largely unaffected by the mujahideen settling and proselytizing in the years after the war. As a result, no parajamaats were established in the canton and the Salafi ideology did not root significantly in the area. This was, the authors argue, also given by a strong structural presence of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the canton which simply didn't provide Salafi preachers with enough breathing space.

However, it is not only the illegal parajamaars raising concerns. It is also non-violent Salafi preachers who accepted the authority of Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina. By accepting this authority, they are not only allowed to preach about their ideology but by doing so – sometimes even in official mosques of the Islamic Community – they further promote and, more importantly, legitimise Salafi ideology. And given the growth of Salafi networks in large cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the impact of these preachers is increasing.[104] The importance of Salafi communities and preachers regarding the radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina is further illustrated by the emphasis on the training of imams in the country who can serve as early warning mechanisms in the community both soothing the tensions or radical thoughts among the community and – if needed – alerting responsible officials. This fact is illustrated by the OSCE efforts in capacity building of the Muslim communities through various seminars and trainings for imams on preventing and countering violent extremism leading to radicalization (P/CVERLT). Those are often carried out in cooperation with the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During 2016 there was a ambitious plan to provide such training to a total of 1,000 imams[105] and this kind of efforts continued throughout the year 2018 as well.[106]

Tensions between the followers of the traditional Hanafi school of thought in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the adherents of Salafi ideology are increasingly visible as well. Reportedly there were fights in mosques across the country in various towns and cities.[107]

---

[104] Bećirević, E. (2018). *Countering and Preventing Extremism in BiH: Learning from International Efforts*. London: British Council.

[105] OSCE: SEC.FR/835/16 (8 November 2016); RESTRICTED

[106] OSCE: SEC.FR/784/18 (13 November 2018); RESTRICTED

[107] Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers. (2015). *Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism 2015–2020*. Sarajevo.

Some incidents followed the funeral of already mentioned former leader of Gornja Maoča, Jusuf Barčić, which was attended by more than 3,000 followers of this Salafi authority, as the attending press reporters were cursed and beaten for photographing this event. Previously, there were no demonstrations of Salafism of this size in the country.[108] It seems that the traditional Bosnian Muslims felt the need for distancing themselves from the radical ideology as it became increasingly linked by terrorism by media. Bombing attack that took place in Bugojno (Central Bosnia Canton, FBiH) on 27th of June 2010 where one of the locals, Haris Čaušević, detonated a bomb damaging a police station, killing one police officer and injuring five others and subsequently throwing grenades during a police pursuit.[109] The attack was meant as a revenge for Rijad Rustempašic, who was tried for terrorism before the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a follow up of the burial of the killed policeman, around 3,000 Bugojno citizens gathered in a spontaneous protest demonstrating their condemnation of the attack and support for authorities in fight against terrorism. The Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina released a statement denouncing the Bugojno attack and condemning any form of terror and violence used to gain political leverage.[110] Building on what was discussed above, there is thus no doubt that the Salafi communities in the country do have a very significant impact regarding the radicalization in present Bosnia and Herzegovina offering various pull factors of radicalization.

2.1.5 Returning foreign fighters and radicalization in prisons

It was stated in the introduction to this paper that the phenomenon of foreign fighters leaving in the name of Jihad to Syria or Iraq to join ranks of the so-called Islamic State was observed in the Western Balkans. Bosnia and Herzegovina is no exception to this trend. However, it is hard to establish how many individuals actually departed to the Middle East due to several issues. First of all, there is a lack of data on departing foreign fighters in the initial phase of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, the first cases of

---

[108] Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers. (2015). *Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism 2015–2020*. Sarajevo.

[109] Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers. (2015). *Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism 2015–2020*. Sarajevo.

[110] OSCE: SEC.FR/384/10 (15 July 2010); RESTRICTED

individuals leaving to the Middle East were observed as early as in 2013.[111] Second problem is that a significant number of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina who left to the Middle East stayed abroad and BiH officials and security services thus did not know about their departure. Some of those individuals who have departed to Iraq or Syria were registered on two or more addresses in different countries which resulted in some cases of them being double-counted by officials. There were also cases of individuals of Slavic names being automatically categorized as the foreign fighters from Bosnia and Herzegovina even though they weren't BiH citizens. Due to all of the above, the number of foreign fighters originating from Bosnia and Herzegovina can't be precisely and reliably established[112] and it can be assumed that due to the above mentioned reasons there is no exact estimate of returned foreign fighters as well.

However, in terms of current radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is precisely the risk posed by the returnees that seems to be of significant importance. Although the threat stemming up from the returning foreign fighters has been present throughout Europe, in Bosnia and Herzegovina this problem might be exacerbated by the unreadiness of the state structures to deal with this issue. In fact, according to the US report on terrorism in Bosnia and Herzegovina[113] it is common practice that the convicted foreign terrorist fighters often receive very mild sentences even below the minimum prescribed by the criminal code of BiH since judges are taking mitigating circumstances into account. Furthermore, if these convicted criminals are sentenced to year or less of incarceration they may pay a fine instead of serving the sentence. This is most certainly a huge problem given that there is a high chance of the returnees embracing their radical beliefs – even if abandoning the violent means – and spreading the radical ideology with a chance of proselytizing other individuals. Returning foreign fighters may thus continue disseminating radical messages and proselytizing upon their return to Bosnia and Herzegovina since many of them were not sufficiently prosecuted and thus involved in reintegration processes.

---

[111] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[112] Azinović, V. (2015). *Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Nexus with Islamist Extremism*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Democratization Policy Council.

[113] United States Department of State (2018). *Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 - Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Retrieved October 31, 2019, from https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bcf1fb54.html

Furthermore, it is not only the returning foreign fighters who either pass unnoticed by the security agencies, don't get successfully prosecuted by BiH authorities or avoid imprisonment by paying a fine. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the incarcerated foreign fighters are posing a possible risk as well. This is due to a fact that there is a high risk of dissemination of radical beliefs by those detained foreign fighters in prisons that can affect their cellmates and other prisoners as well. It is well known that prisons are extremely vulnerable when it comes to receptiveness to radicalization. The prisoners, suffering from strained relationships with society, social frustration, economic and cultural stigmatization, are simply susceptible to embracing radical beliefs. Furthermore, a poor conditions and management of a prison only increase this risk.[114] In Bosnia and Herzegovina, prisons are indeed ill-equipped to deal with radicalized inmates and to effectively implement prison-based programs, not to mention that some of the employees working with radicalized inmates do not have any previous experiences with cases of this kind and often do not attempt any kind of intervention because there is no obligation to provide radicalized prisoners with some kind of therapy.[115] What's more, according to a former Salafi radical from BiH, individuals with troublesome past are seeking redemption through following the most rigid way of rules which is increasing their susceptibility to radical ideologies.[116] The fact that the security officials of the EU Member States – where prisons undoubtedly dispose of more efficient management and sophisticated psychological approach to inmates – are concerned with this scenario of further radicalization in prisons[117] only emphasizes the severity of this issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It seems that these concerns are shared by the OSCE Field Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina as well given the efforts to provide training to imams operating in the prison service.[118]

---

[114] Khosrokhavar, F. (2017). *Radicalization: Why some people choose the path of violence*. New York: The New Press.

[115] Bećirević, E. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report*. London: British Council.

[116] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[117] European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation. (2019). *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019*. doi: 10.2813/788404

[118] OSCE: SEC.FR/784/18 (13 November 2018); RESTRICTED

2.1.6 Social groups and online radicalization

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it seems, youth represents specific case of vulnerability to radical movements. And even though the push and pull factors remain more or less the same as in the case of adult individuals, it is still desirable to discuss the issue of youth radicalization more elaborately.

First of all there is the economic factor. It was already stated that Bosnia and Herzegovina finds itself in a truly poor state of economy. However, it should be emphasized that it is the youth who suffers the most in this matter since BiH has the highest youth unemployment rate in the world.[119] There is thus no doubt that this economic incentive of susceptibility to radicalization increases tremendously when it comes to youth. It is the youth who perceives poor or not at all existent future prospects intensely and is thus prone to feelings of defeatism. Scepticism, impossibility to plan for a future and no prospects of employment linked with concerns about building and supporting a family are present among youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Increasing numbers of Bosniaks are thus seeking stability through alternative means. Additional way of overcoming this trauma can be also seeking a guidance of strong authority.[120] This brings us again back to the factor of strong and charismatic figure in Salafi community. In general, these views can, especially when combined with the influence of radical groups, serve as a motivational factors of adopting radical beliefs taking into account that it is the membership in community offering hospitality, understanding and sense of belonging as well as shared goals and fate that help to ease such grievances.[121] Other motivating factors discussed throughout this chapter are highly relevant regarding the radicalization of youth as well – the failure of governance, social and ethical issues, and the negative post-war developments in the country all contributed to the increasing adoption of violent behaviour and radical beliefs by local youth, Vlado Azinović observes.[122]

---

[119] Bećirević, E. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report*. London: British Council.

[120] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[121] Hogg, M. A., & Adelman, J. (2013). Uncertainty-Identity Theory: Extreme Groups, Radical Behavior, and Authoritarian Leadership. *Journal of Social Issues*, *69*(3), 436–454.

[122] Azinović, V. (2015). *Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Nexus with Islamist Extremism*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Democratization Policy Council.

The role of identity comes up once again in this regard since the discrimination, segregation and the politicization of education – which is particularly problematic as was discussed in the section dedicated to the issue of two schools under one roof – are also key contributing factors of the radicalization of youth.[123] Concerns about radicalization of youth are expressed also in the 2015 Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for preventing and combating terrorism 2015 – 2020 which not only emphasizes the receptivity of youth to radical beliefs but also mentions a link with already mentioned hate speech and hate crimes.[124] Preventive activities of the OSCE such as various trainings for pedagogues and psychologists on countering violent extremism as well as capacity building efforts among young people are also demonstrating the seriousness of this issue.[125] The OSCE efforts involve training for imams in the matter of tackling the radicalization of youth as well which further confirms the significance of Muslim communities in this regard.[126]

As is the case in many other countries, in Bosnia and Herzegovina the phenomenon of the online radicalization occurred as well and it seems that its impact has not been marginal. In fact, in recent years the proselytizing efforts and spreading of radical ideology did indeed shifted into the online space.[127] This issue is interconnected with youth since it appears that youth in the country is particularly receptive of ideas of radical figures disseminated in the online space.[128] Furthermore, it is the activities on various social networks and direct messaging with radical figures and war returnees that inspires radical beliefs in young individuals, often through a well-known scenario of creating a feeling of Islam being under attack and the subsequent urge to defend it.[129] Even though there is a significant difference regarding the online radicalization when compared to other European states, since in Bosnia and Herzegovina radicalization occurs predominantly

[123] OSCE: SEC.FR/133/16 (24 February 2016); RESTRICTED

[124] 2015 Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for preventing and combating terrorism 2015 – 2020

[125] OSCE: SEC.FR/133/16 (24 February 2016); RESTRICTED; OSCE: PC.FR/8/17 (21 April 2017); RESTRICTED

[126] OSCE: SEC.FR/784/18 (13 November 2018); RESTRICTED

[127] Azinović, V. (2018). *Regional Report: Understanding Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. London: British Council.

[128] Bećirević, E. (2018). *Countering and Preventing Extremism in BiH: Learning from International Efforts*. London: British Council.

[129] Azinović, V. (2015). *Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Nexus with Islamist Extremism*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Democratization Policy Council.

via direct contacts with community members, the radicalization in the online space does support this process, serving as a force multiplier, reinforcing new ideas and connecting individuals who share similar beliefs further deepening their connections and trust.[130] The serious risk that the online radicalization pose for the country is further emphasized by various websites and blogs that emerged in Bosnia and Herzegovina some of the promoting the so-called Islamic State.[131] The state officials are concerned with this issue as well as the 2015 Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for preventing and combating terrorism 2015–2020 suggests, calling for preparation of "*a black list of websites inciting to hatred, hate speech, radicalism and violence and incitement to terrorism*".[132] Especially problematic is the presence of various – often self-proclaimed – radical preachers sharing their lectures in online space with this material being further disseminated and shared by their followers.[133] By presence in online space the reach of the Salafi communities which are often quite isolated and estranged is widened. This means increased impact of these groups growing beyond their social circles.[134] Given the role which the Salafi communities play in the drivers of radicalization, this fact shouldn't be underestimated. The OSCE field mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina does reflect on that as well by organizing a series of events focused on capacity building of BiH wide society in terms of preventing online radicalization as well as building a counter-narrative to violent extremism in online space and creating various opportunities for dialogue targeting this problematic.[135]

When speaking about social groups and the drivers behind their radicalization, women and relevant motivating factors shouldn't be omitted. Research elaborating on radicalization of women is relatively new phenomenon and as such, there was no detailed

---

[130] Bećirević, E. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report*. London: British Council.

[131] OSCE: SEC.FR/106/16 (12 February 2016); RESTRICTED

[132] Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers. (2015). *Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism 2015–2020*. Sarajevo.

[133] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[134] Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

[135] OSCE: SEC.FR/106/16 (12 February 2016); RESTRICTED; OSCE: SEC.FR/718/16 (26 September 2016); RESTRICTED; OSCE: PC.FR/8/17 (21 April 2017); RESTRICTED

study on the drivers behind women radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina or the topic of radicalization of women in the country in general. Farhad Khosrokhavar[136] lists as a typical driver of women radicalization desire to avenge death of husband or relative but does not forget about the profound humiliation of women committed by men or the pull factor in a form of strategic interest of various organizations in recruiting women. Additionally, Khosrokhavar mentions women's desire to elevate themselves to the social status of men: "They hope that if women can equal men in heroism in the face of death, it will become more difficult for men to deny women equality in life. Women's deaths as martyrs thus assume an antipatriarchal, even feminist dimension."[137] In the end, Khosrokhavar concludes, the drivers of women radicalization are similar to those of radicalization of men; namely: "a sense of humiliation, deep resentment, an increased capacity to act through an organization or through ad hoc measures developed within a group, and finally, a desire to humiliate the humiliator."[138] Therefore, building on Khosrokhavar's work, the general vehicles behind radicalization of women in Bosnia and herzegovina will probably correspond with those of radicalization of men. A particular case, however, is the sense of humiliation and desire to elevate themselves to the social status of men in some kind of antipatriarchal sentiment. It seems that this might be quite relevant stimulus in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the social status of women suffers badly. The humiliation of women comes – unsurprisingly – back to the 1992 – 1995 war which was a scene of mass rape and forced impregnation of women used as a military tool. This humiliation, however, did not end with the war but rather continues to this day since the women affected by sexual violence suffer from carrying a stigma in their communities. Furthermore, legal protection of victims of sexual violence lacks significantly.[139] What's more, sexual abuse and violence did not ended with the 1992 – 1995 war but continues to be an issue even in present Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the

---

[136] Khosrokhavar, F. (2017). *Radicalization: Why some people choose the path of violence*. New York: The New Press.

[137] Khosrokhavar, F. (2017). *Radicalization: Why some people choose the path of violence*. New York: The New Press.

[138] Khosrokhavar, F. (2017). *Radicalization: Why some people choose the path of violence*. New York: The New Press.

[139] Akyol, R. A. (2019, October 3). *For Bosnian Women, No Justice-and No Seats*. Retrieved October 31, 2019, from https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/03/bosnian-women-balkan-war-no-justice-and-no-political-power/.

OSCE survey on violence against women suggests.[140] The social status of women is further degraded on the political level given the lack of gender equality topics, rare occurrence of women candidates and no promotion of women candidates by respective political parties as well as no policies promoting participation of women in elections.[141] This further emphasizes potential antipatriarchal sentiments and the feeling of women being of less importance. The case of women in the matter of radicalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is reflected in the 2015 Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for preventing and combating terrorism 2015–2020 as well since this document calls for special emphasis given to increased participation of women regarding the radicalism prevention efforts together with strengthening women's role in civil society.[142] Other papers dealing with prevention of radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina mention the issue of women radicalization as well naming for instance "the prerogative of men to control women and the promotion of hegemonic masculinity more generally" and the general promotion of the gender issues.[143] However, the issue of radicalization of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina goes indeed quite unnoticed and further research elaborating specifically on this topic is required.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is yet another social group which seems to be susceptible to adopting radical beliefs and which, as well as is the case with radicalization of women, remains to be, as far as the author of this paper is concerned, absolutely underresearched at least in terms of the radicalization. That is the Roma community in BiH. There is a reason to argue that in the Roma community the motivation factors of radicalization are increased since there is a lot of potential incentives of radicalization. Roma community is the most marginalized and socially excluded minority group in Bosnia and Herzegovina[144] even though it is the largest minority in BiH[145] and Romani people constantly face many challenges in the country. Some of those being: social and

---

[140] OSCE. (2019). *Well-being and Safety of Women: Osce-led Survey on Violence Against Women: Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

[141] OSCE: ODIHR.GAL/56/18 (21 September 2018)

[142] Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for preventing and combating terrorism 2015–2020

[143] Bećirević, E. (2018). *Countering and Preventing Extremism in BiH: Learning from International Efforts*. London: British Council.

[144] OSCE: PC.FR/19/15 (22 May 2015); RESTRICTED

[145] OSCE: ODIHR.GAL/56/18 (21 September 2018)

economic vulnerability, poor education and literacy standards, lack of access to information.[146] All of these factors make Roma individuals susceptible to adoption of radical beliefs due to the very same reasons discussed throughout this chapter. There are the economic incentives, then there is the matter of identity where individuals from the Roma community might seek membership in some cohesive group offering support, understanding and all the other benefits discussed in this chapter. Due to the poor education and literacy standards, Roma may be increasingly susceptible to radical beliefs disseminated through various channels. Predrag Petrović, Executive Director of the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, notes this threat, stating that: "*Militant Salafist ideas have also spread to Muslim members of Roma communities in recent years. Jovan Damjanović, president of the World Roma Organisation, has characterised this as a huge challenge because most members of the Roma community do not understand the threat posed by radical Islamists. The radicalisation of Roma communities – and the manner in which the media reports it – could result with them being viewed as a terrorist threat rather than a vulnerable group.*"[147] There are no studies conducted on the matter of radicalization of Roma community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to elaborate further on this, relevant parallels must be found in other Balkan states. There is a detailed study on Islamist radicalization of Roma community in Bulgaria by Mila Mancheva and Rositsa Dzhekova[148] which may help to shed a light on prospects of Roma radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mancheva and Dzhekova identified a small Roma sub-community inhabiting the Iztok neighborhood of the town of Pazardjik (Bulgaria) since some of the community members adopted radical Salafi beliefs and expresses their sympathies toward radical Islamist organizations. Discussing this specific case, similar patterns with drivers of radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina as described in this chapter are found. In the Iztok neighborhood case, there is a significant role of charismatic Salafi leader, Ahmed Mussa, main propagator of Salafi beliefs in the neighbourhood, interconnected with Salafi communities in Austria and Germany. Not only did, according to Mancheva and Dzhekova, Mussa introduced the Salafi ideology to

---

[146] OSCE: ODIHR.GAL/56/18 (21 September 2018)

[147] Petrović, P. (2016). *Islamic radicalism in the Balkans*. European Union Institute for Security Studies. doi: 10.2815/823418

[148] Mancheva, M., & Dzhekova, R. (2017). *Risks of Islamist Radicalisation in Bulgaria: A Case Study in the Iztok Neighbourhood of the City of Pazardzhik*. Center for the Study of Democracy. doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.14106.85443

the locals (alike in BiH, radical interpretations of Islam are untypical for local religious tradition in Bulgaria) but he did it with an external support from Islamic organizations – which proved to have significant importance in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well, as discussed in this chapter. Subsequently, although lacking official certification from the Chief Muftiate, Mussa established himself as a leader of the emerging Salafi community and gained great authority since his preaching was accessible and resonated among the uncritical and uneducated audience. Although the community initially comprised of few older members, subsequently it grew up to – by various estimates – 100 to 600 persons, predominantly of young age. Mancheva and Dzhekova state that the Roma community was particularly receptive to the Salafi radicalization due to: *"Inefficient social work in a number of Roma neighbourhoods and the absence of strong government institutions there makes it possible for religious movements to penetrate the communities and gain trust relatively fast. Adopting Salafism provides an opportunity to outgrow the Roma stigma and affiliate with a wider Islamic community that is transnational and provides identity beyond the marginal status and the discriminatory attitude at home. The community members' conviction and hope that their faith is Islam's 'purest' and 'humblest' tradition add a positive self-awareness which probably contributes to self-assertion and improves self-confidence."*[149] There is no doubt that there is a clear parallel with the Roma community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. From economic perspective, poor economic situation of Romani people is coupled with low level of education and qualification for jobs. Community is socially alienated from the majority in Bosnia and Herzegovina and struggles from low interest among employers to hire Roma. As a result Roma employment in the country is minimal.[150] And although there are efforts to improve this situation, the statistics remain quite poor.[151] Therefore there are many incentives for receptiveness of radical beliefs supported by the abovementioned pull factors. Poor economic situation for one, since the membership in Salafi community in the Iztok

---

[149] Mancheva, M., & Dzhekova, R. (2017). *Risks of Islamist Radicalisation in Bulgaria: A Case Study in the Iztok Neighbourhood of the City of Pazardzhik*. Center for the Study of Democracy. doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.14106.85443

[150] Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (2012). *Special report on the status of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

[151] OSCE: SEC.FR/271/15 (30 March 2015); RESTRICTED

neighborhood improved the financial situation of some members as well;[152] the receptiveness to charismatic leader, since the Roma community in BiH is often poorly educated and poorly informed as stated above; the desire to divest of the stigma and to be accepted by a wider community; the absence of strong government – as was already argued in this chapter; and the insufficient results of social programmes. There is thus enough incentives suggesting that these motivating factors of radicalization of Roma in BiH are indeed quite relevant. However, elaborative country-specific research in this regard is needed.

2.1.7 Summary

Throughout this chapter, motivating factors of radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina were discussed and put in the context of the development of the situation in the country starting with the 1992 – 1995 war. It was found that the war was absolutely crucial regarding the process of radicalization in the country that it had ignited. The war had a pivotal role due to several reasons. It served as an incentive for foreign mujahideen to come to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the name of assistance to their fellow Muslim brethren in their cause but, as was argued, the duty of proselytizing was perceived as of the utmost importance as well by the mujahideen who brought the radical ideologies to the country which was originally adherent to moderate Hanafi school of Muslim thought. Secondly, the war provided an incentive for many external actors to dispatch assistance in the form of various non-governmental organizations and funds that were seeking to assist reconstruct the damage dealt to the local Muslim community. Besides that, however, these organizations served as a tool of projection of policies of the external actors as well as a tool for proselytizing.

It was illustrated that in Bosnia and Herzegovina the matter of identity is of great importance regarding the process of radicalization too as is in Western countries. Even though Muslims are in majority in the country, their identity was immensely damaged during the 1992–1995 war and the consequences of the war are present ever since as was illustrated in the current cases from the present Bosnia and Herzegovina. This identity

---

[152] Mancheva, M., & Dzhekova, R. (2017). *Risks of Islamist Radicalisation in Bulgaria: A Case Study in the Iztok Neighbourhood of the City of Pazardzhik*. Center for the Study of Democracy. doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.14106.85443

struggle, interlinked with the humiliation and other resentments and grievances stemming from the war and post-war era is complemented by the economic grievances caused by the poor economic situation in the country and terrible rate of unemployment. So-called parajamaats, established through the process of mujahideen settling in the country after the war, capitalize on this situation providing further incentives in a form of various pull factors to radicalization, one of the significant factors being the figure of a strong and charismatic leader able to satisfy the needs of grieving individuals. The impact of parajamaats is increased because of the structural weaknesses of the state and – to some extent – the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina unable to effectively influence hard-to-reach areas in which the parajaamats flourish.

Like many other countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina too recorded cases of individuals departing to the Middle East as a result of the recent foreign fighters phenomenon provoked by the activities of the so-called Islamic State. Even though the process of foreign fighters departing to the Middle East from BiH came to a halt it still poses a risk particularly regarding the foreign fighters who have returned. Either these individuals weren't prosecuted or avoided their sentence by fine or they indeed serve their sentence in jail but due to the lack of effective management in this matter, there is a relatively high risk of dissemination of radical beliefs among inmates once again exploiting the structural weaknesses of the state which makes this issue particularly relevant to the radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Subsequently, various social groups and their susceptibility to radicalization together with the unique relevance of respective motivating factors regarding the radicalization were discussed. The poor economic situation of youth was emphasized leading to feelings of defeatism and fueling possible grievances that might be stemming up also from the identity issues as well as the situation concerning the education system in BiH illustrated mainly, but not only, by the two schools under one roof practice suggest. Youth receptiveness to radical beliefs disseminated online was found to be an issue once again encountering the link with the illegal congregations and especially various – often unofficial – preachers sharing their radical visions in online space. Specific drivers behind the radicalization of women and the Roma community in Bosnia and Herzegovina were addressed as well building on similar cases or available literature on these particular topics since the local-specific studies were not yet conducted. Therefore, further elaborative research of the potential radicalization of the Roma community in Bosnia and Herzegovina was suggested. The majority of the

presented factors and cases were supported by the OSCE efforts in the country. Efforts of the OSCE field mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina were used in order to establish discovered drivers behind radicalization more firmly. 2017 OSCE field report indeed underlines many of the delineated issues such as the religious communities and training for imams, capacity building of teachers, addressing approach to media information, countering the financing of terrorism and building capacity of youth.[153]

---

[153] OSCE: EEF.FR/2/17 (24 January 2017)

2.2 Albania

2.2.1 Beginnings of the radical forms of Islam in the country

When discussing the Albanian case it is desirable to look back to the 1990s era of conflicts in the Balkans since these developments had major impact on the country and contributed to the emergence of various motivational factors of radicalization, as will be argued later.

Although Albania clearly is a Muslim-majority country and thus falls within the scope of this paper it should be emphasized that the situation concerning the religion in the country is rather different from the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although not being part of the former Yugoslavia, Albania too found itself under the communist rule and in this case the communist regime undertook even harsher measures against the religion which subsequently heavily impacted the development of Islam in the country.

The communist regime in Albania aimed to deprive the citizens of their religious identities by enforcing a doctrine of religious denial. Due to this, in 1967 Albania became – at least officially – first atheist country in the world. This state of affairs lasted nearly 25 years until the 1991 constitution allowed freedom of religion and separation of religion from the state.[154] Not only was the public stripped off its religious identities but the Muslim community suffered also through persecution of religious leaders and clerics and destruction or transformation of religious institutions. Over 12,000 mosques were destroyed or transformed to various facilities during this period.[155] Due to this it wasn't only the religious identity but also the foundations of Islam in Albania that took a serious hit.

In 1992 the than Albanian newly elected president Sali Berisha found himself facing severe socio-economic problems. Seeking to boost the economy, Berisha opened gates of Albania by appealing on foreign donors and investors particularly from Arab countries. The following events took very similar development as in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

---

[154] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[155] Hide, E. (2015). *Assessment of risks on national security/ the capacity of state and society to react: Violent Extremism and Religious Radicalization in Albania*. Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies.

Investors from the Gulf countries truly arrived taking on a form of various non-governmental charity institutions creating economical and organizational infrastructure in the country. However, these institutions started to support mujahideen in Bosnia and Herzegovina and later in neighbouring Kosovo. Due to the Berisha's decision to open the gates of Albania, radical Islamic beliefs, so far unknown in the country, were introduced to the country in similar manner as in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[156]

Indeed, the involvement of the foreign organizations was crucial regarding the development of religious freedoms and institutions in the country. There were multiple factors that fueled the influence of those NGOs. Particularly there was a lack of government's interest during 1990s regarding the development of vanished religious freedoms and restoration of religious institutions. Alongside absenting relevant political vision there was no legal framework regulating such institutions. And, possibly most importantly, Albania was in terrible economic situation.[157] Rebuilding religious freedom and institutions was thus hardly a priority.

Capitalizing on this state of affairs, foreign organizations consolidated their position within the country and started to exert influence over the Muslim community in Albania. With the foreign investments radical ideology was imported to the country.[158] While the state's government was dealing with other pressing issues at that time and was virtually not capable of intervening in religious matters, foreign organizations weren't monitored and thus remained outside of state's authorities as well as of Albania's religious institutions mainly because these were in the process of establishment. This lack of control soon proved to be problematic since clashes between the imported Salafi teaching and the local Hanafi tradition of moderate Islam started to occur.[159]

---

[156] Shay, S. (2009). *Islamic terror and the Balkans*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

[157] Hide, E. (2015). *Assessment of risks on national security/ the capacity of state and society to react: Violent Extremism and Religious Radicalization in Albania*. Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies.

[158] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[159] Vurmo, G. et al. (2015). *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

Due to the vacuum created by the lack of interest by state's security institutions, foreign actors gained influence throughout Albanian religious institutions and succeeded in introducing new approach to religious radical doctrines. Moreover, these organizations did support the reconstruction of Muslim institutions by material means – which was something the state wasn't able to provide to to its poor state of economy.[160] Besides gaining foothold in the country through financial support, external actors became even more influencing local Muslim community by providing education to clerics. Similarly as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albanian youngsters were educated in Arab countries in conservative schools of Islam and upon return to their homeland they started to preach school of thoughts that were diverging from the, in Albania traditional, Hanafi school of Islam. Although many of those clerics were aligned with the Albanian Muslim Community, they remained to propagate strict tradition of Islam which caused rifts among the Muslim community.[161]

Nevertheless, the turmoil that Albania experienced during 1990s did not lead only to the introduction of radical teachings to the country and establishment of foreign non-governmental organizations spreading radical forms of Islam. In fact, other socio-economic factors stem from this era that subsequently contributed to the creation of conditions evincing various push and pull factors of religious radicalization. In 1996 Albania found itself in serious economic crisis which led to increasing political instability. The situation culminated in March 1997 during which riots broke out subsequently bringing down central government. Not only did the turmoil encourage radical entities in Albanian society and strengthened the Kosovo Liberation Army, as shall be discussed more in detail in the following chapter concerning with radicalization in Kosovo, but it also further emphasized economic weaknesses of the country and its dependency on foreign aid. Besides this severity of other pressing issues such as the absence of democratic and effective governmental establishment and tradition, and poor infrastructure in the means of transportation, education or energy also increased. These problems remained significant even after the restoration of stability of the state.[162]

---

[160] Jureković, P. (2016). *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. (F. Ejdus, Ed.). Vienna: Republic of Austria / Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports .

[161] Vurmo, G. et al. (2015). *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[162] Shay, S. (2009). *Islamic terror and the Balkans*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

2.2.2 Identity

As was already stated, the situation regarding religion is not quite similar to other Muslim-majority countries of the Western Balkans due to the communist era and the declaration of the regime officially declaring Albania as atheist country. Since this state of affairs lasted nearly 25 years – and included harsh repression of clergy and religion followers – it most certainly impacted local population and its perception of religious identity. The return to Islamic roots wasn't quite easy on both individual and community level as shall be discussed later on. However, Albania does evince unique religious tolerance which is deeply rooted in its society. And even though majority of the population is Muslim, the society in the country is secular and even though being aware of its religious origin and background, majority of locals does not practice religious rituals.[163]

Religion was never a component of national identity in Albania and it was never used as an organizing ideology of the state either.[164] This is mainly because *"traditional culture of mutual exchanges in religious practices and a culture of acceptance and inclusiveness"* is deeply rooted in the country.[165] Building on the discussion above, one might be drawn to assume that the perception of Muslim identity as one of the motivational factors of radicalization as described in the pre-empirical section of this paper is not present in Albanian case. Nevertheless, even though its significance might not be as relevant as in other countries, Muslim identity does find itself under some degree of pressure from the society. It is hard to assess if there is a relevant degree of pressure so it can be stated that Albania is dealing with Islamophobia since there are quite discrepancies among authors concerning with this issue. However, there is no doubt that there are some negative attitudes against Muslims present in the country. According to Gerta Zaimi,[166] negative attitudes towards Muslims are stemming predominantly from the intellectual elite of the country which can be described as atheist, secular and Eurocentric. These attitudes began

[163] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

[164] Jureković, P. (2016). *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. (F. Ejdus, Ed.). Vienna: Republic of Austria / Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports .

[165] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[166] Zaimi, G. (2017). *Religious Radicalization and Violent Islamist Extremism in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo*. Retrieved from https://www.cssii.unifi.it/upload/sub/zaimi-religious-radicalization-and-violent-islamist.pdf

right after the fall of communist regime and were advocated by one of the leading persons of the than Albanian intellectual elite, novelist and poet Ismail Kadare. Kadare wrote a pamphlet called *The European Identity for Albanians* in which he compares Islam in Albania to a fatal mistake in the history of the country and major obstacle regarding Albania to be perceived as a valid member of the "European family". Therefore, Kadari argues, mosques shouldn't be reopened after the fall of communist regime.[167] Another argument Zaimi makes regarding the negative attitudes towards Muslim population in Albania is a position of the former president of Albania, Alfred Mojsiu, who shared Kadari's stance and expressed his strong belief, which he voiced in 2005, that all Albanians are basically Christians and that Islam infiltrated the country in the course of history and is thus nothing traditional in Albania.[168] Zaimi concludes that there is a prevailing perception that Islam is rather inferior religion not compatible with European or Western values with no positive future prospects due to its archaic nature.[169]

After the communist era, there was no doubt that Islam was not going to gain significant importance in the country. Not only wasn't Islam perceived in terms of national connotation but there were voices emerging that advocated for divesting of Islam since it was perceived, by some, as inopportune when it came to the future of the country. It is clear that in this turmoil in which the country found itself after the fall of communist regime, the Muslim community sought to establish itself via rebuilding its institutions and voicing its unique identity. And while the state wasn't particularly helpful in either of those two aspects, foreign organizations substituted state's help regarding the rebuilding of Muslim institutions and the Muslim community sought to establish its unique identity disassociating itself from the state – and thus national identity – and embracing religious identity. Former 1993 statute of Albanian Muslim community stating that its main aim is to "inculcate love for the homeland" was thus subsequently changed in 2005 to: "awaken and strengthen the Islamic faith among Muslim believers and to inculcate love for the homeland."[170]

---

[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid.

[170] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

The identity struggle is indeed present among Albanian Muslims and the aforementioned background of this aspect is only emphasized by the contemporary experiences with negative attitudes against Muslims. Albanian society truly is secular and religious practitioners are negatively perceived by some. Such negative attitudes against Muslims are present especially in state institutions such as municipalities and schools where there are cases of discrimination based on religious background.[171] Quite problematic are identity divergences between individual religious groups and some tensions can be found also when it comes to intra-religious relations which is caused by subscription to different schools of Islamic thought. In Albania, this problem can be emphasized by generation gap since elderly population – who grew up during communist era and thus don't have religious background – sometimes tend to hold to various stereotypes against religious persons. There are also documented cases of discrimination in workplaces or in schools based on the religion.[172]

The presence of Islamophobia in Albania is emphasized by Zaimi, who claims that even though historically Albanian society truly was highly tolerant and peaceful coexistence amongst religions was common, in recent years increasing tensions particularly towards Muslims are observed.[173]Discrimination, exclusion and prejudice are part of Islamophobic tensions in the country, 2015 European Islamophobia Report shows.[174] Paradoxically, perception of discrimination against Albanian Muslims is fueled also by existing P/CVE efforts in the country. Such programs are directed predominantly against Muslims. That is nothing Albania-specific since this trend – so called "Islamisation of P/CVE" – is observed also in different states, however, since this phenomenon directs P/CVE attention exclusively, or at least predominantly, on the groups affiliated with Islam while omitting other religious groups and secular ideologies. This may – and in Albania it does – contribute to stronger feelings of discrimination and such efforts may

---

[171] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

[172] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[173] Zaimi, G. (2017). *Religious Radicalization and Violent Islamist Extremism in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo*. Retrieved from https://www.cssii.unifi.it/upload/sub/zaimi-religious-radicalization-and-violent-islamist.pdf

[174] Bayrakli, E., & Hafez, F. (Eds.). (2016). *European islamophobia report: 2015*. Ankara: SETA.

thus even prove to be quite counterproductive.[175] All of these aspects further emphasize the stigma that some Albanian Muslims may feel. And even though the identity struggle is not as pressing issue as in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it clearly might be at least contributive motivational factor in Albania that serves as a vehicle of isolation that further fuel the process of radicalization.

2.2.3 Socio-economic factors

Similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Albania too various economic factors are present that may contribute to emergence of grievances among Albanian society. Once again, the situation in Albania parallels the one in Bosnia and Herzegovina because of similar historical background and development, mainly – unsurprisingly – the impact of the conflicts in the Balkans in 1990s. It was already mentioned that the overall situation of Albanian economy was indeed poor in 1990s, in fact it was during the last years of communist regime in the country Albania was described as the poorest European state, which subsequently indirectly opened doors for foreign influence to infiltrate the country.[176] This is crucial fact which shall be discussed more in detail later on. Additionally, Albania was struck with serious economic crisis in 1996-1997. And even though there was significant improvement in the economic regard over the following years, Albania is still struggling with some economic problems today. There are two main economic issues related to the problematic of radicalization in the country. First one is the unemployment rate of youth. The youth unemployment rate is worrisome and that is despite the fact that the level of education is gradually rising. When it comes to long-term unemployment, which most certainly means stronger impact, disillusionment and grievances – and thus increasingly impacts individual's susceptibility towards accepting radical ideas – in 2011 over 63 percent of long-term unemployed were young persons and, alarmingly, nearly 55 percent were university graduates who are estimated to be overqualified for the job they do in over 33 percent of cases in Albania.[177] Young persons

---

[175] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Transforming Albania's C/PVE Efforts Into Community Resilience and Development Matrix*. British Council.

[176] Vurmo, G. et al. (2015). *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[177] Vurmo, G., & Sulstarova, E. (2018). *Violent extremism in Albania A national assessment of drivers, forms and threats*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

are generally overrepresented in the unemployment numbers and in some of the Albanian districts their unemployment level exceeds 45 percent.[178] Second main socio-economic problem in Albania is corruption. This issue projects also to other levels of good governance. Furthermore, corruption is connected to organized crime and weak business environment which is closely associated with these problems.[179] Corruption is not problematic only because it hinders the economic development of the country, this issue is quite relevant directly to the radicalization itself because it fuels negative perceptions of the government and boosts grievances among citizens due to increased experience with social and political injustice. Such feelings may further lead to search for alternative model and values which may subsequently materialize in one's susceptibility to radical communities and adopting radical ideology.[180] Crucial importance of corruption regarding radicalization in Albania was found during Qirjazi's and Shehu's fieldwork and was identified as a "factor of vulnerability that may prompt civic disengagement and political apathy [which] can further foster a sense of moral outrage."[181] Furthermore, alternative radical communities and ideologies can capitalize on the perception of the state being corrupt in the form of gaining increased legitimacy and credibility.[182] The perception of the state being corrupt and full of deficiencies further emphasizes – not only – economic grievances also due to the frequent failure of the state to provide citizens with necessary social and economic assistance. Particularly vulnerable categories are thus students and unemployed.[183] Therefore both the unemployment and corruption further emphasizes each other increasing the significance of this issue. Even though fight against corruption is high on government's agenda, Albania is still failing to resolve this issue. In fact, despite adopting Albania's *National Strategy against Corruption 2015-2020* which brought some positive results, the situation deteriorated once again in the year 2017.[184]

---

[178] Jureković, P. (2016). *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. (F. Ejdus, Ed.). Vienna: Republic of Austria / Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports .

[179] OSCE: PC.DEL/1097/18 (27 September 2018)

[180] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

[181] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[182] Ibid.

[183] Vurmo, G., & Sulstarova, E. (2018). *Violent extremism in Albania A national assessment of drivers, forms and threats*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

Regardless some improvements, corruption still undermines the democratic and economic development in the country thus indirectly contributing to susceptibility to radicalization of particularly vulnerable social groups.[185]

High-level corruption is significantly contributing to the importance of political drivers in Albania. However, it is just part of the complexity of the problem. There are other similarly important issues on the political level such as very poor progress towards consolidated rule of law and with that related complicated judicial report. All of these issues are projected in the broadly present distrust of public in institutions.[186] This further projects into low levels of capacity of the civil society which actually suffers of lack of trust between civil society organizations and the government. This contributes to the diminished role of the civil society as a strategic partner of the government in decision-making.[187] Problematic is also the situation regarding education in the country since there is general feeling of frustration with the Albanian education system among students.[188] In the end of the year 2018 crucial reforms aiming at restoring credibility and ensuring effectiveness of Albania's justice system through its unprecedented transformation were initiated.[189] High Prosecutorial Council and High Judicial Council were established in Albania as part of the reform. However, due to the complexity of the problem it is hard to anticipate swift cardinal improvement. The fact is that the corruption is an enduring phenomenon deeply rooted in Albania and as such undermines good governance and the rule of law not to mention the economic progress.[190]

Along the urgency of the corruption issue, the poor state of affairs in Albania regarding the implementation of legislation, development of the law, and the process of overall democratization provided local radicals with incentives that can be – and are – used to exert pressure on Albanian Muslims. Through the failure of the Albanian government on

[184] OSCE: SEC.FR/11/19 (8 January 2019);RESTRICTED

[185] OSCE: PC.FR/31/16 (17 November 2016); RESTRICTED

[186] Vurmo, G., & Sulstarova, E. (2018). *Violent extremism in Albania A national assessment of drivers, forms and threats*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[187] OSCE: PC.FR/25/14 (12 September 2014); RESTRICTED

[188] OSCE: SEC.FR/11/19 (8 January 2019); RESTRICTED

[189] OSCE: PC.DEL/837/19/Rev.1 (15 July 2019); RESTRICTED

[190] OSCE: SEC.FR/11/19 (8 January 2019); RESTRICTED

the political level, such groups are using a narrative presenting Islam as the ultimate solution to these problems.[191] This actually proves to be especially problematic, in regards to radicalization, in hard-to-reach areas - isolated areas at least partly out of the reach of the government which often suffer with poor level of education, employment and institutionalization. Once again, to some extent the situation parallels the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina although the significance and relevance of individual motivational factors differs. This problematic is being identified also by the OSCE presence in the country which initiated initiative aimed at capacity building of voters in such areas.[192]

Remote and isolated areas indeed are quite problematic in Albania when it comes to the process of radicalization. There are several factors behind this phenomenon, however, the poor presence of state and inexistent civil society in these areas are the most salient ones. With this, problems such as lack of concrete actions on poverty as well as community and youth – and with this related often poor levels of education – are connected, creating some kind of power vacuum thus providing religious radicalization with more breathing space in these hard-to-reach areas.[193] OSCE presence in the country perceives the lack of capacity of national and local institutions to be quite disruptive when it comes to the P/CVE efforts calling for enhancement of community-focused responses in form of expert support to community policing and multi-agency community engagement which further proves that the hard-to-reach areas that are particularly lacking in terms of institutionalization are indeed vulnerable towards radicalization.[194]

Poor level of education seems, in fact, to be truly significant factor regarding the susceptibility of individual towards radicalization in hard-to-reach areas. Because of the extremely low levels of education in such isolated places in Albania, radical ideologies bolstered in these areas.[195] However, there are more contributing factors stemming up

---

[191] Hide, E. (2015). *Assessment of risks on national security/ the capacity of state and society to react: Violent Extremism and Religious Radicalization in Albania*. Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies.

[192] OSCE: SEC.FR/489/17 (3 July 2017); RESTRICTED

[193] Vurmo, G. et al. (2015). *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[194] OSCE: PC.FR/27/17 (17 November 2017); RESTRICTED

[195] Jureković, P. (2016). *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. (F. Ejdus, Ed.). Vienna: Republic of Austria / Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports .

from remote and isolated areas besides the low levels of education. It seems that residents of such areas often nourish various grievances about the quality of their lives especially when compared to the residents of urban areas. This comes as no surprise given that the statistics do quite differ when comparing rural and urban areas. It is the mountainous and rural areas that show the lowest figures of socio-economic development. Residents of those areas sometimes tend to perceive themselves as inferior to the generally better educated urban folk with higher living standards. This fact does greatly support the vulnerability to manipulation and susceptibility to embrace radical beliefs of the residents of those isolated hard-to-reach areas in Albania.[196]

Indeed, hard-to-reach areas proved to be very relevant to radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was proved also by the activities of the OSCE presence in the country which were discussed in the previous chapter. In the Albanian case, OSCE country presence follows similar goals and is also heavily involved in the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism. In this regard, hard-to-reach areas are once again identified as highly problematic in Albania with the OSCE presence in the country targeting rural and underdeveloped areas aiming to support active participation of local citizens and to build stronger civil society in these areas.[197] The relevance of the hard-to-reach areas in regard to the process of radicalization and violent extremism is emphasized also in the Albanian National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism which calls for increasing capacities of community policing in such areas.[198] Indeed, the issue with remote and rural areas in Albania is twofold. While the government fails to increase its presence in the areas, capacity of local civil society is generally rather poor and the civil society thus can not fulfil its role – that is being a capable strategic partner of the government – acceptably.[199]

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the issues that the isolated hard-to-reach areas are facing are not exclusive only to the remote mountainous and rural areas in Albania. In fact, isolated communities are emerging also in the most populated Albanian cities.

---

[196] Vurmo, G. et al. (2015). *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[197] OSCE: PC.FR/27/17 (17 November 2017); RESTRICTED

[198] Republic of Albania Council of Ministers. (2015). *Albanian National Strategy Countering Violent Extremism.*

[199] OSCE: PC.FR/20/13 (25 October 2013); RESTRICTED

However, this issue seems to be largely connected with the peripheral and remote areas of Albania in the first place since such isolated communities in the urban areas emerged as an aftermath of influx of the former residents of remote peripheral areas in Albania who came particularly from the northern, north-eastern or southern areas and settled in Albanian cities, living in communities very isolated from other city residents, often establishing their own mosques. The main problem regarding the process of radicalization is than the foreign influences and actors in Albania who seem to target these isolated communities offering material support and exerting their influence on these communities seeking to persuade them to embrace radical beliefs.[200] As was already argued in the previous chapter, such isolated communities are often extremely interconnected and once such external influence succeeds in infiltrating the community, there is a risk that it will spread quite fast through the family ties and tight social relations within the community.

2.2.4 Community factors

The external influence afflicting a community and infiltrating radical beliefs among its members is not a problem exclusive only to the isolated communities in major cities. In fact, foreign influence capitalized and keeps on capitalizing on shortcomings of Albanian government and civil society and exploits increased vulnerability of specific communities to adopting radical beliefs. The influence of foreign actors is closely linked also with the hard-to-reach and remote rural areas especially due to the poor state of economy in these places. This was particularly true after the fall of the communist regime in Albania. During 1990s foreign charitable organizations exploited the worrisome economic conditions – not only – in rural areas, offering scholarships for young males. Hundreds of those youngsters left to study in various Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia or Kuwait. Needless to say that upon their return – similarly to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina – many of them brought back different religious habits and radical interpretations of Islam.[201]

---

[200] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

[201] Zaimi, G. (2017). *Religious Radicalization and Violent Islamist Extremism in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo*. Retrieved from https://www.cssii.unifi.it/upload/sub/zaimi-religious-radicalization-and-violent-islamist.pdf

These foreign actors influenced the local Muslim communities on different levels by exploiting the weakness of the Albanian Muslim Community that was in the process of revival and wasn't capable of dealing with foreign meddling. Besides cultivation of new Albanian clerics, the foreign actors also financially supported revival of various religious institutions as well as construction of schools and mosques.[202] Some of the charitable non-governmental organizations in Albania indeed worked under the disguise and were suspected to have connections with terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, Egyptian Islamic Jihad or Algerian Islamic Armed Group. More importantly, representatives of the charitable organizations were granted citizenship by Albanian government without any relevant identity verification.[203] From this point on, it wasn't particularly hard to infiltrate local Muslim communities by offering material and financial help to poor households, scholarship offers and construction of mosques or distribution of medicines and religious books and other investments into the community. The communities struggling with low level of unemployment and education, and overall poverty were particularly exposed to such influences.[204]

Foreign influences and radical preachers or recruiters infiltrated to Albanian communities present high-risk threat due to the function of Albanian society. This is given by the fact that the overall trust in state's institutions in Albania is very low. International institutions enjoy higher levels of trust than the national ones in Albania. But most importantly, it is the family or territorial structures that are considered most trustworthy.[205] Given the fact, discussed in the previous chapter, that the family ties and other close relations are most significant when it comes to the proselytizing process, the pull factors within community such as charismatic leader can be particularly dangerous in the Albanian case.

Furthermore, Muslim communities in Albania are particularly vulnerable towards the proselytizing by radical clerics and foreign influences because of the perception of the Albanian Muslim Community. In Albania Islamic institutions experienced great loss of

---

[202] Ibid.

[203] Vurmo, G. et al. (2015). *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[204] Ibid.

[205] Zaimi, G. (2017). *Religious Radicalization and Violent Islamist Extremism in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo*. Retrieved from https://www.cssii.unifi.it/upload/sub/zaimi-religious-radicalization-and-violent-islamist.pdf

credibility among believers due to the feelings that the Muslim Community – allegedly absorbed by power dynamics – is corrupt and lacking capability to deal with religious matters.[206] To make things worse, there was lack of coordination between the Albanian Muslim Community, Albanian government and local communities.[207] Albanian Muslim Community was facing worrisome situation during the years of its revival after the fall of communist regime in Albania. It wasn't only the shortages of resources but also the clashes between different schools of thought, namely the Hanafi tradition and Salafi teachings brought into the country by foreign non-governmental organizations. AMC had to deal with youngsters returning from Arab countries where they received religious education on the grounds of offered scholarships. All of these internal issues subsequently culminated in the year 2014 when the problem with foreign fighters departing from Albania to Iraq or Syria erupted. This well illustrates the struggle of the Albanian Muslim Community since the authorities were hesitant to involve the state in their internal affairs due to the fears of additional loss of its already undermined credibility. Given that the state was uninterested and the AMC too weak to intervene, the problem truly culminated in the emergence of the phenomenon of foreign fighters in the country.[208] Besides the problems outlined above, the Albanian Muslim Community had another issue to deal with in the era of its revival immediately after the fall of the communist regime in the country. Given the oppression of the religions by the communist regime and AMC found itself lacking clerics after the fall of the regime. This problem was later exacerbated when new imams with experiences from Middle Eastern countries came to the country and became challenging traditional religious views of older generation of local imams which wasn't quite prepared for this due to the lack of qualification caused by the years of deprivation of Islam under the communist rule. Once again, weak structure and leadership of the Albanian Muslim Community thus contributed to radical ideas infiltrating the country.[209]

---

[206] Ibid.

[207] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[208] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

[209] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

The internal struggles are still present within the Albanian Muslim Community. One of the main internal problems is indeed the poor education of AMC's clerics. Main deficiencies are present in the education and specific theological edification of imams while only a limited number of imams dispose of education from secular university.[210] Once again, the issue with the hard-to-reach areas projects into this problematic since it is predominantly the imams from rural and remote areas that are experiencing a crucial lack of education. These clerics are either self-taught or have obtained the necessary education in various courses and trainings or in madrassas. It is mainly because of these different professional levels of imams that the Albanian Muslim Community deals with internal divergences that further undermine its credibility and capacity.[211] Due to this the role the AMC should play in the prevention of radical proselytizing is further limited which further increases the breathing space of various pull factors of radicalization in the country.

The poor education of the Albanian Muslim Community's clerics is given by the oppression of Islam in the country during the communist era. After the fall of the communist regime, not only was there significant lack of Muslim clerics but, more importantly, the educative religious institutions were lacking capacity to educate and train new generation of imams.[212] This fact is clearly related to the operational space available for foreign influences in the country which introduced radical schools of thought to Albania, as was discussed earlier in this section. However, besides the Albanian Muslim Community, the government of Albania is also to be blamed for this development because it absolutely failed in providing the AMC support it needed and the government never allocated sufficient amount of resources designated for the education of new imams.[213]

---

[210] Vurmo, G. et al. (2015). *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[211] Ibid.

[212] Jureković, P. (2016). *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. (F. Ejdus, Ed.). Vienna: Republic of Austria / Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports .

[213] Hide, E. (2015). *Assessment of risks on national security/ the capacity of state and society to react: Violent Extremism and Religious Radicalization in Albania*. Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies.

The situation in the Albanian Muslim Community regarding the lack of its capacity together with unsatisfactory levels of education among AMC's imams is indeed crucial regarding the process of radicalization in the country. It is precisely the poor knowledge of Islam that is being identified as a crucial element in the radicalization process in Albania, even though combination of other factors has to be considered. The poor knowledge of Islam, among other things, support the susceptibility to the narrative of radical ideology providing for an alternative model and values that present a tempting offer for vulnerable individuals.[214] Although the lacking capability of the Albanian Muslim Community and poor levels of education – and to this related poor performance – of its clerics cannot be blamed as the only vehicle of poor knowledge of Islam in the country, given that there are most certainly individuals radicalized in the online space or by other means who never actually visited mosques or perceived themselves as religious persons and thus were absolutely out of the possible reach of the Albanian Muslim Community, this issue can still be perceived as crucial regarding the radicalization in the country.

From the research conducted by Quirjazi and Shehu[215] emerged that particularly young people in Albania are often confused with how to perceive Islam and are increasingly susceptible to various radical narratives and disinformation. Because of this, they are vulnerable to accept narratives of Islamist propaganda and often perceive the wars in Middle East as being waged as wars against Muslims. This situation may result in radicalization of such individuals who may perceive Islam as being under threat and thus become increasingly susceptible to radicalization.

The structural weaknesses of the Albanian Muslim Community are projecting also to its ability to control Muslim jamaats in Albania. As is the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, parajamaats exist in Albania, although in quite smaller scale. This fact proved to be particularly problematic in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the links with the failure of the state regarding its institutional presence particularly concerning the hard-to-reach areas were found. Since the parajamaats exist outside of the reach of the official Muslim community and are, in fact, violating the law, radicalization flourishes in such

[214] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

[215] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

congregations because it is often the stricter and orthodox kind of Islam that is preached in the parajamaats which is the main reason why these congregations evade being integrated to the official structures of the Muslim community.

Similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the parajamaats in Albania are also at least to a certain extent linked to the foreign actors active in the country and also with the already mentioned returnees who were granted scholarships by foreign actors to study in Arab countries. Some of these individuals, influenced by the Salafi ideologies, were benefiting from the financial support even after their return.[216] And even though the Albanian Muslim Community claims to have full control over its religious education institutions and mosques there are cases of illegal mosques as well as clerics propagating forms of Islam that are not in accordance with the local Hanafi tradition. Once again, the isolated and peripheral areas are significantly threatened by this phenomenon due to the lack of resources that the AMC is able to provide them with. Besides that, religious facilities exist in Albania also outside the authority of the Albanian Muslim Community. In fact, this issue is part of a political narrative in Albania through which some political parties are seeking to increase their popularity promising to legalize such informal areas and illegal buildings. Problem is, however, that these facilities were indeed often built with the help of foreign donors and, as in the case of some illegal mosques, became a source of religious extremism in the country. [217]

The existence of the so-called parajamaats, Muslim congregations outside the authority of the Albanian Muslim Community is indeed problematic because it is not only the preaching of orthodox or even radical forms of Islam that are worrisome regarding the radicalization. Crucial in this regard is the ability of the parajamaats to attract individuals among the ranks of the congregation's community. It was discussed earlier how personal ties are crucial to the proselytizing. It is not an exception in Albania that the Muslim congregations drag individuals into their circles which leads to the process of the individual increasingly identifying with the (para)jamaat and subsequently organizing his life around the congregation's activities. Subsequently, the family of such individual becomes increasingly involved in the (para)jamaat's routine as well. This leads to further

[216] Vurmo, G. et al. (2015). *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[217] Ibid.

isolation of such individuals and families from their former everyday life, social circles and, ultimately, wider society while new social relationships are made within the community. This process, causing the isolation of the community and alienation from the "outside world" is particularly problematic because even if the community is not in fact preaching radical beliefs, its extreme isolation and alienation radically increases its vulnerability towards radicalization.[218]

Given the discussed susceptibility and vulnerability of individuals, groups and communities, self-proclaimed imams and other persons disseminating radical messages are posing a threat regarding radicalization in Albania. Furthermore, this doesn't include only the self-proclaimed imams and individuals outside of official religious authority but also some of the imams officially under the authority of the Albanian Muslim Community which is caused by their poor knowledge of Islam and – to some extent – by the already discussed incapability of the AMC.[219] The situation in Albania parallels to some extent the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina where illegal imams operating in parajamaats played crucial role in disseminating radical messages, proselytizing and departures of foreign fighters to the Middle Eastern countries as was discussed in the previous chapter. In Albania, unofficial and self-proclaimed imams had also crucial role in disseminating radical messages and even arranging the departures of foreign fighters. It should be emphasized that it was once again remote and isolated peripheral, hard-to-reach, areas that were mostly targeted by activities of such individuals.[220] As was the case with Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Albania too there was a network of faithful and loyal couriers and businessmen that were involved in the departures of the foreign fighters, however, it was the imams with transnational links that were on the top of the chain thus

---

[218] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[219] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

[220] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

having the most significant role in the process. Without their blessing, one could hardly depart to Syria or Iraq.[221]

The OSCE presence in Albania does note this problematic as well reporting on a case of a former imam from a village in Korça region who was involved in recruitment of Albanians to depart as a foreign fighter to join the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Subsequently, this individual left to join the Islamic State himself.[222] There are cases of arrested and convicted imams involved in radicalization in Albania as well.[223] Although the number of arrested imams is rather low, their impact was far from marginal as the case of two imams arrested on charges of "Recruitment of persons for committing acts with terrorist purposes or financing of terrorism", "Incitement, public call and propaganda for committing crimes with terrorist purposes", and "Inciting hate or disputes on the grounds of race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation" suggests. These two individuals succeeded in convincing more than 70 individuals to join the conflict in the Middle East in the name of Islam.[224] There is no doubt that such individuals dispose of strong international network having connections to extremist groups including the ones in Kosovo. The crucial role of foreign influences in Albania which was already emphasized several times in this chapter is further proven by the case of imam from Albania, Genci Balla, who obtained education in Saudi Arabia. Balla was arrested in 2014 with several of his collaborators – who had strong ties to extremist groups in Kosovo – on the suspicion of arranging departures of foreign fighters, direct involvement in their transfer and leading the network of recruiters.[225]

---

[221] Zaimi, G. (2017). *Religious Radicalization and Violent Islamist Extremism in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo*. Retrieved from https://www.cssii.unifi.it/upload/sub/zaimi-religious-radicalization-and-violent-islamist.pdf

[222] OSCE: SEC.FR/504/15 (18 June 2015); RESTRICTED

[223] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

[224] Vurmo, G. et al. (2015). *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[225] Hide, E. (2015). *Assessment of risks on national security/ the capacity of state and society to react: Violent Extremism and Religious Radicalization in Albania*. Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies.

2.2.5 Returning foreign fighters and radicalization in prisons

Indeed, Albania did not avoid the phenomenon of foreign fighters. The first departures were recorded in 2012. Similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the exact number of foreign fighters who departed from Albania is not known.[226] The estimates usually reckon less than 200 individuals to have joined conflicts in the Middle East. It should be emphasized, however, that approximately third of these individuals returned to Albania.[227] Since the year 2015 no new cases of foreign fighters departing from Albania were documented.[228]

Regarding the radicalization, it is the returnees in Albania that should be the most of the concern when it comes to the phenomenon of the foreign fighters. Albania criminalized the participation in – and recruitment to – armed conflicts abroad in its 2014 Penal Code amendments. However, it is the contact between regular inmates and people under such prosecution in prisons that is quite problematic in the country due to the poor capacities of the state regarding the management of operation of prisons.[229] Having already established in the pre-empirical section of this paper and in the respective section on returnees in Bosnia and Herzegovina that prisons are often a hotbed of radicalization, it should be noted that this issue is particularly salient in Albania. The radicalization in prisons in Albania is perceived as crucial problem regarding the P/CVE efforts also by the OSCE presence in the country as well as the issue with reintegration and rehabilitation.[230] Problematic are especially the capacities of the prison and probation service also when it comes to the human-rights aspect of handling of violent extremism cases and related interventions.[231] It is not only the treatment of the violent extremism cases, however. As was already discussed in the respective section of the chapter on Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is a need for specific treatment of the radicalized individuals in prisons who have to be under particular scrutiny to prevent the possibility

---

[226] For some of the issues with estimates of foreign fighters see section on foreign fighters in previous chapter.

[227] Hide, E. (2015). *Assessment of risks on national security/ the capacity of state and society to react: Violent Extremism and Religious Radicalization in Albania*. Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies.

[228] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

[229] Ibid.

[230] OSCE: SEC.FR/215/17 (24 March 2017); RESTRICTED

[231] OSCE: PC.FR/27/18 (20 September 2018); RESTRICTED

of further dissemination of radical messages and proselytizing. This is, however, quite problematic in Albania given the poor management of local prisons and the fact that overcrowding is seemingly not an unusual issue in Albanian prisons.[232] Due to this, the treatment of the inmates suffers in terms of provision of medicines or adequate healthcare or processing of inmates official applications for parole.[233] Due to this non-adequate treatment additional grievances might add to the already vulnerable inmates making them more susceptible to radical messages. The ongoing OSCE activities and support to the Albanian General Directorate of Prisons and the General Directorate of the Probation Service that was initiated upon the request of these two authorities further proves that the vulnerability of prisons remains problematic in the country and so does the issue with imprisoned returnees and recruiters.[234] Although quite specific, motivational factors stemming from this problematic cannot be underestimated regarding the radicalization in Albania.

2.2.6 Social groups and online radicalization

Similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, youth is particularly vulnerable social group when it comes to susceptibility to religious radicalization in Albania. Even though the unemployment and overall economic situation of youth in Albania isn't that dire as is the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, youth in Albania still has quite a few reasons to develop grievances. This is particularly problematic given that Albania is one of the youngest countries in Europe when it comes to the average age of its population. Furthermore, less than 30 percent of young people actually complete high school and only 50 percent are able to access the job market.[235] The level of unemployment among youth is thus one of the problems even though there was quite significant improvement during the recent years. As of the Quarterly Labour Force Survey, the official youth unemployment rate was nearly 21 percent in the second quarter of 2019. Youth is thus over-represented in the statistics of unemployment given that the overall level of unemployment was less than 12

---

[232] OSCE: PC.FR/31/16 (17 November 2016); RESTRICTED

[233] OSCE: SEC.FR/357/15 (28 April 2015); RESTRICTED

[234] OSCE: PC.FR/27/17 (17 November 2017); RESTRICTED

[235] Zaimi, G. (2017). *Religious Radicalization and Violent Islamist Extremism in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo*. Retrieved from https://www.cssii.unifi.it/upload/sub/zaimi-religious-radicalization-and-violent-islamist.pdf

percent.[236] When it comes to the perception of future opportunities of youth in Albania it is thus not surprising that these are perceived rather negatively. This is especially true for the youth in peripheral and rural areas.[237] Indeed, there is high level of unemployment and disillusionment of the youth in such areas that makes local young people particularly vulnerable to the radicalization.[238] However, not only the hard-to-reach areas are problematic in this regard, it is also the already mentioned isolated communities in urban areas that are particularly vulnerable when it comes to the radicalization of youth.[239]

The grievances that may develop among unemployed youth and which can be further took advantage of in the means of radicalization since they increase the susceptibility of youth to radical ideas are perceived as problematic also by the Albanian National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism which states that "*Jobless youth in areas with limited employment opportunities are vulnerable targets of extremist propaganda and recruitment.*"[240] It is not just the economic grievances, however. Youth is particularly susceptible to adopting radical beliefs also because of their overall situation that is quite gloomy in Albania. Young people are thus prone to seek narratives that may enable them to gain respect and adopt a provoking identity so that they will – at least seemingly – rise above the local poor situation by distinguishing themselves from the rest of the youth.[241]

The particular vulnerability of youth given the poor social situation of young people in Albania is identified also by the OSCE which expresses concerns about youth regarding its vulnerability towards various exploitations and trafficking which further proves its increased susceptibility towards possible radicalization.[242] The youth in Albania is also particularly vulnerable towards radical messages disseminated through online social

---

[236] Albanian Institute of Statistics. (2019). *Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Second quarter 2019.* Retrieved from http://www.instat.gov.al/media/6224/lfs-q2-2019.pdf

[237] Hide, E., & Llubani, M. (2018). *The Role of Albania's Civil Society in Countering Violent Extremism*. Tirana: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

[238] Vurmo, G., & Sulstarova, E. (2018). *Violent extremism in Albania A national assessment of drivers, forms and threats*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[239] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

[240] Republic of Albania Council of Ministers. (2015). *Albanian National Strategy Countering Violent Extremism.*

[241] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

[242] OSCE: SEC.FR/129/17 (22 February 2017); RESTRICTED

networks and in online space generally. This fact is substantiated also by the activities of the OSCE presence in the country which aims to build resilience of youth in regard to presence of young people in online space as part of its P/CVE efforts.[243] Scrutinizing OSCE documents, it is clear that the susceptibility of youth towards radicalization in Albania is perceived by the organization with similar urgency as is the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina not only on the level of online radicalization but also on the community and identity levels.[244]

There are initiatives aimed at preventing radicalization in Albania that target particularly women, it is thus clear that women present another vulnerable social group in regards to radicalization in Albania.[245] This is further substantiated in the Albanian National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism which emphasizes the need for support of public and private initiatives increasing women's economic empowerment.[246] However, in comparison to Bosnia and Herzegovina, it seems that at least the push factors regarding female radicalization in Albania are less salient. This is particularly because of the fact that the gender agenda and issues are quite addressed in the country and women's participation in decision-making process is supported along with better gender representation at local level[247] together with capacity-building efforts aimed at the newly-elected women officials[248] and initiatives providing newly-elected women officials with networking opportunities.[249] Besides that, international efforts aimed at providing women officials with training further increasing their capability in decision-making are present.[250] There is currently a 50 percent quota for women in party lists for local council elections which, after being adopted, resulted in triple increase in participation of women

---

[243] OSCE: SEC.FR/40/16 (19 January 2016); RESTRICTED

[244] OSCE: SEC.FR/714/16 (23 September 2016); RESTRICTED

[245] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[246] Republic of Albania Council of Ministers. (2015). *Albanian National Strategy Countering Violent Extremism.*

[247] OSCE: SEC.FR/473/17 (27 June 2017); RESTRICTED

[248] OSCE: SEC.FR/971/15 (3 December 2015); RESTRICTED

[249] OSCE: SEC.FR/454/16 (17 June 2016); RESTRICTED

[250] OSCE: SEC.FR/845/16/Rev.1 (10 November 2016); RESTRICTED

in municipal councils.[251] However, even though women are considerably better represented in the public life, decision-making and generally on the political level, there are still gender-related issues in Albanian society that might generate various grievances increasing women's susceptibility towards adopting radical beliefs.[252] It seems, that there are still some gender-related stereotypes rooted in Albanian society and even though there are various initiatives launched by government targeting such social problems in Albania, these issues, such as domestic violence against women, remain to be of a concern in Albania[253] and even though there certainly have been positive progress, these issues are rooted deep in the Albanian society and radical improvement will require "sustained changes at many levels, including changes in attitudes and relationships, changes in institutions and legal frameworks, changes in economic institutions, and changes in political decision-making structures."[254] Therefore, it can be anticipated that these issues will remain to be relevant regarding susceptibility of women towards radical messages in Albania even for following years.

Besides the youth and women, minorities – concretely the Roma communities – are targeted by radicalization prevention efforts in Albania as well.[255] Even though similarly to the gender issue Roma minority is not in such dire struggle as is the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are still particular issues from which various motivational factors of radicalization may stem. This is further substantiated by the fact that minorities are mentioned in the Albanian National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism as particularly vulnerable group susceptible towards radicalization and the Strategy calls for increased community outreach and engagement in this regard.[256] Indeed, the need for such engagement due to the lack in equality, diversity and inclusion is being emphasized also by the OSCE presence in the country which calls for increased protection of rights of

---

[251] OSCE: SEC.FR/758/18 (5 November 2018); RESTRICTED

[252] For detailed discussion on such process see respective section on social groups in the previous chapter.

[253] OSCE: PC.FR/25/14 (12 September 2014); RESTRICTED

[254] OSCE: PC.DEL/240/14 (6 March 2014)

[255] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[256] Republic of Albania Council of Ministers. (2015). *Albanian National Strategy Countering Violent Extremism.*

Roma minority.[257] In the year 2013, the then Head of the OSCE Presence stated that Roma suffer from systemic discrimination together with lack of access to basic services and that there is a overall failure of representation of Roma in the political life in Albania which excludes Roma from public sphere as well as from any participation on the decision-making process in the country.[258] Roma minority suffered from various obstacles that have been produced by ill-governing such as order banning private garbage collection – one of few self-employment opportunities for Roma community members[259] which further illustrates the poor economic conditions that Roma communities have to deal with and which might be one of the factors of susceptibility towards radical messages,[260] or various cases of evictions and displacements of Roma families without provision of any alternative accommodation which was accompanied by insufficient response of government authorities.[261] Even though there were some efforts to improve Roma situation in Albania such as voter education projects aiming to educate voters from minority groups in Albania ahead of local government elections, promote women's participation in politics[262] or initiatives aimed at delivering training to law enforcement agencies on the subject of hate crimes and diversity,[263] the rule of law and human rights regarding the Roma community remained problematic in the following years[264] as well as did the evictions and lack of provision of alternatives in the form of social housing which remained to be an issue due to a problematic implementation of municipalities' development plans.[265] However, there are ongoing campaigns aimed at raising political awareness among Roma communities, educating members of Roma minority on the subject of elections and providing them with additional support to reach some satisfactory

---

[257] OSCE: PC.FR/20/13 (25 October 2013); RESTRICTED

[258] OSCE: SEC.FR/168/13 (24 April 2013); RESTRICTED

[259] OSCE: SEC.FR/387/12 (8 August 2012); RESTRICTED

[260] For elaborate discussion on such vulnerabilities and possible motivational factors of Roma community members see respective part in section on social groups in previous chapter.

[261] OSCE: PC.FR/25/14 (12 September 2014); RESTRICTED

[262] OSCE: SEC.FR/357/15 (28 April 2015); RESTRICTED

[263] OSCE: SEC.FR/591/14 (25 September 2014); RESTRICTED

[264] OSCE: SEC.FR/705/15 (28 August 2015); RESTRICTED

[265] OSCE: PC.FR/31/16 (17 November 2016); RESTRICTED

levels of political representation among Roma community.[266] Building on this it can be anticipated that the motivational factors stemming up from the perception of political under-representation are not that salient among Roma community in Albania – contrary to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, given the economic situation of Roma communities, government-produced obstacles to possibilities of Roma self-employment and poor educational levels among Roma community,[267] primarily economic grievances of Roma community members may presumably serve as motivational factors of radicalization as was illustrated on the case of radicalized Roma community in Bulgaria in the previous chapter.

In Albania, after the 2014 Penal Code amendments and the overall tightening of course of action against radicalization, extremist ideologies, recruitment and involvement in armed conflicts abroad, the online radicalization increased on importance in the country as the peer-to-peer radicalization deadened due to the increased surveillance and tougher stance of the government and law enforcement agencies.[268] However, despite increased efforts of the state in this regard, Albanian government is still lacking behind when it comes to the threats stemming up from the presence of radical groups in the cyberspace and online radicalization while the content promoting radicalization in the online space is on the rise.[269] Similarly to the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, social media seem to play a significant role regarding the online radicalization in Albania as well, providing shelter for radical ideas, serving as catalysts of radicalization in the country[270] and connecting radicals with susceptible individuals.[271] Even though mainly problematic is the online presence of various self-proclaimed imams or charismatic figures preaching radical ideas, as was discussed in the respective section of chapter dealing with Bosnia and

---

[266] OSCE: SEC.FR/625/17 (29 August 2017); RESTRICTED

[267] OSCE: SEC.FR/625/17 (29 August 2017); RESTRICTED

[268] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

[269] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[270] Jureković, P. (2016). *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. (F. Ejdus, Ed.). Vienna: Republic of Austria / Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports .

[271] Hide, E. (2015). *Assessment of risks on national security/ the capacity of state and society to react: Violent Extremism and Religious Radicalization in Albania*. Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies.

Herzegovina, there is also online presence of international jihadi group, the Islamic state, in the online space that was threatening Balkan countries including Albania and calling on local Muslim brethren to either join the Islamic State or conduct attacks in the Balkans.[272] The risk of online radicalization is further reflected also in the Albanian National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism which proposes measures towards online radicalization by "[reducing] *the impact of violent extremist propaganda and recruitment online by using social media to develop and disseminate alternative positive messages.*"[273] In fact, the threat of online radicalization was recognized in Albania even before the introduction of the Albanian National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism. As soon as in 2013 there were initiatives aimed at raising awareness about the issue and increasing resilience of youth regarding this threat.[274] Indeed, the role of the online space is highly relevant regarding the process of radicalization in Albania since online media seem to play important role in disseminating radical messages and to have a significant impact predominantly on young people in Albania.[275] This fact is further substantiated by the actions of the OSCE presence in the country which directs part of its P/CVE efforts towards the spreading awareness about the topic of online radicalization.[276] However, although the role of the online space is quite significant regarding the radicalization in Albania, similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, peer-to-peer radicalization cannot be underestimated.[277]

[272] OSCE: SEC.FR/504/15 (18 June 2015); RESTRICTED

[273] Republic of Albania Council of Ministers. (2015). *Albanian National Strategy Countering Violent Extremism.*

[274] IFAP supports a pilot project in Albania to counter online violent extremism and cyber bulling. (2019, May 15). Retrieved December 10, 2019, from https://en.unesco.org/news/ifap-supports-pilot-project-albania-counter-online-violent-extremism-and-cyber-bulling.

[275] Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

[276] OSCE: SEC.FR/40/16 (19 January 2016); RESTRICTED

[277] Vurmo, G. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

2.2.7 Summary

The context of motivational factors of radicalization in Albania is in multiple cases very similar to that in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Albania too was in this particular regard quite impacted by the chaotic era in the 1990s. However, it seems that in the Albanian case the preceding era of the communist regime was crucial as well when it comes to the background from which current motivational factors of radicalization stem up. The communist regime did impact predominantly the motivational factors relevant to identity since the Muslim identity in Albania was significantly diminished if not nearly entirely ruined given the oppression of Muslims and Islam under the communist rule in the country.

This fact not only made the subsequent restoration of religion and Muslim institutions in the country following the fall of the communist regime much harder but also provided an incentive for activities of foreign actors in the country. This development not only led to the introduction of radical forms of Islam to the country which was, similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, pursuing moderate Hanafi tradition of Islam but also had quite a crucial impact on the Muslim community. It is the foreign influence that had a significant role on creating various pull factors on the community level that are still present in contemporary Albania be it imams preaching radical beliefs both within and outside of the authority of the Albanian Muslim Community, Muslim communities concentrated around illegal mosques or influence over illegal Muslim congregations, so-called parajamaats. This background provides for various pull factors that are further capitalizing on socio-economic factors in the country by seemingly providing an attractive alternative to the current system in Albania. Besides the issue with identity, it is exactly the socio-economic factors that play a significant role as the push factors of radicalization in Albania. While economic grievances surely have their own share in motivational factors of radicalization, it seems that it is the poor level of governance, corruption as well as very poor progress towards consolidated rule of law and with that related complicated judicial report that have the crucial impact regarding the overall distrust in state's institution and various political grievances. Similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, such motivational factors in Albania are finding a fertile ground predominantly in the peripheral, rural and isolated hard-to-reach areas where the presence of the state and with that related presence of the civil society is poor. In combination with the poor economic situation, low levels of education and employment which result in quite significant

disillusionment and related grievances, hard-to-reach areas indeed are crucially vulnerable towards radicalization in Albania. However, it was found that a similar context is present in isolated communities in urban areas in the country and these thus shouldn't be underestimated either since resembling grievances resonate in those communities.

Even though there were quite strict measures undertaken in Albania to diminish the phenomenon of foreign fighters, this issue, similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, present a threat regarding the homegrown radicalization in Albania due to the relatively high number of returnees. Building on the discussion presented in the pre-empirical section of this paper, prisons were identified as problematic regarding the process of radicalization in the country. This is especially true not only for the relatively high numbers of returnees but especially for the poor capacities of Albanian authorities in regards to the management of prisons and dealing with the process of integration of prisoners. Overcrowding is also a significant issue in regards to prisons in Albania which further diminishes not only the quality of care of the radicalized inmates but also increases grievances among incarcerated individuals and thus provides for motivational factors of adopting radical beliefs.

Similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, some social groups were identified to be particularly vulnerable toward radicalization in Albania due to increased susceptibility to various motivational factors. Youth in Albania is particularly vulnerable in this regard due to grievances caused by the poor economic situation, relatively high levels of unemployment and with this connected disillusionment and negative perceptions in regards to one's future. Furthermore, especially youth from peripheral and rural areas was exposed to such grievances and thus particularly vulnerable towards radical messages. Women in Albania are another vulnerable social group given the gender-based stereotypes which are persistent in the country together with cases of domestic violence against women. However, the situation seems to be improving over time and especially the representation of women on the political level is on the rise which at least partly diminishes relevant political grievances which were identified as one of the main motivational factors of women's susceptibility towards radical messages in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To some extent, the situation in Albania parallels the one in Bosnia and Herzegovina also in the case of the vulnerability of the Roma minority. Even though the situation of Roma seems to be improved in comparison to Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are still factors negatively influencing the Roma community in regards to various

motivations – predominantly economic and political – that may lead to susceptibility towards radicalization. However, it has to be emphasized that even though such relevant factors were identified, additional research focusing specifically on the radicalization of Roma in the country is necessary in order to verify these claims.

With the strict measures against extremism undertaken by the Albanian authorities in order to suppress the recruitment and departures of foreign fighters, the significance of online radicalization increased in Albania. Quite problematic in this case is not only the presence of home-grown recruiters and proselytizers but there are also foreign influences in this regard in the Albanian online space. However, despite the increased significance of online radicalization, peer-to-peer radicalization remains to be quite relevant and not to be underestimated.

2.3 Kosovo

2.3.1 Beginnings of the radical forms of Islam in the country

Although the context and perceptions of Islam differ slightly in each of the Muslim-majority Balkan countries, be it Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Muslim identity seemingly plays a huge role in the contemporary society, Albania, where after being declared the first atheist country in the world by the communist regime Muslim identity was diminished or Kosovo, where the struggle of Kosovar Albanians seemingly undertook predominantly ethnic grounds, all these countries share similar background rooted in the conflicts following the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia.

Kosovo is thus no exception to this background discussed in both previous chapters on Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina and to understand the context of – at least some of the – motivational factors of radicalization one has to explore the development of the situation in the 1990s first.

The beginnings of radical Islamist ideologies in Kosovo can be tracked down to the year 1995 which marks the end of the war in Bosnia. In this year, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was formed. Even though being a nationalist organization, Muslim identity was widely used in the narrative of the KLA since, after Serbia denied KLA's demand to recognize Kosovo as an independent republic in the Yugoslavian Federation, Kosovo Liberation Army called for establishment of an independent Islamic state covering all of

the Balkans – so called "Greater Albania" – which would reunite all Albanians by including Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. Although the Kosovo Liberation Army was initially involved in the smaller-scale terror against Serb government as well as against moderate Albanian liberation movement in Kosovo led by the then president of the partially recognized Republic of Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova, in late 1990s the violence escalated in war between Serbs and isolationist Albanians.[278]

In the case of Kosovo the parallel development in neighbouring Albania is significant. In the previous chapter, the 1990s turmoil in Albania was discussed together with the then-president Sali Berisha's policies aimed at improving and stabilization of the situation in the country. It was stated that Berisha sought to improve economic situation in the country by obtaining financial help from Muslim countries which was the reason Albania joined the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in the year 1992. As a result, visas were granted unilaterally to citizens of most Arabic countries and in some cases, Arabic states were even excluded from the visa requirements. As a result, various radical Islamist structures coming from the Arab countries penetrated Albania and through tight ties and Albanian support to Kosovo their impact projected also to Kosovo. This development thus significantly influenced the religious awakening in Kosovo as well as local empowerment of Islam.[279]

It was also the Kosovo Liberation Army which enjoyed the support of Sali Berisha. Not only was thus KLA provided with safe haven in Albania but Albanian police force and army was providing KLA with combat and logistics means. This support persisted even under new Albanian government after the end of Berisha's term.[280] However, the penetration of radical Islamist beliefs to Kosovo was not caused only through the gate opened by Albania. Significant development was the end of the war in Bosnia and the arrival of mujahideen from Bosnia to Kosovo where they joined the Kosovo Liberation Army. These fighters with war experience helped to train KLA fighters and, subsequently, similarly to El Mujahid unit in Bosnia, mujahideen Abubaker Sadeq Unit was established under the command of Abu Ismaili – a former commander of mujahideen

---

[278] Shay, S. (2009). *Islamic terror and the Balkans*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

[279] Krasniqi, K. (2018). Islamist Extremism in Kosovo and the Countries of the Region. *Perspectives of Law and Public Administration* , 7(1), 60–66.

[280] Shay, S. (2009). *Islamic terror and the Balkans*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

unit in Bosnia.[281] It was already discussed in the chapter concerning with the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina how mujahideen were crucial for the spread of radical Islamist ideologies in the country since besides fighting by side of their Muslim brethren they were involved in proselytizing efforts which they perceived of similar – if not higher – importance.[282] After their arrival to Kosovo it is thus no doubt that they exerted efforts in similar manner.

Foreign organizations from Arab countries were indeed involved in the country during the conflict. Their activities in Kosovo made a good use of the already existing infrastructure in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania which were created in early 1990s. Similarly to both mentioned countries, in Kosovo too these organizations established a network of charities which were providing humanitarian and financial aid to Muslims in Kosovo but also served as a disguise for penetration of foreign influence in the country. Islamic influence of foreign actors was thus exerted through this network similarly to the case of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina.[283]

The activities of foreign organizations truly increased on volume immediately after the war. Large number of Islamist relief organizations sought to set up branches in the country. These organizations, coming mainly from Saudi Arabia, the United Arabian Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait and Turkey capitalized predominantly on the poor situation in the country after the war and the poor governance of the state. Kosovar state organs were dealing with high levels of inefficiency since they had to be newly established, economic situation, accompanied by high levels of poverty and corruption, was poor as was the educational system in the country. These conditions created perfect environment for activities of various non-governmental organizations which were left unchecked by the state authorities due to the turmoil in the country. Indoctrination activities of such organizations were thus exerted on all levels of society in Kosovo.[284] Similarly to the development in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, the moderate Hanafi school of Islamic thought which was traditionally practiced in Kosovo was thus encountered with

---

[281] Ibid.

[282] For detailed discussion on this topic see respective section of chapter on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

[283] Shay, S. (2009). *Islamic terror and the Balkans*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

[284] Krasniqi, K. (2018). Islamist Extremism in Kosovo and the Countries of the Region. *Perspectives of Law and Public Administration* , 7(1), 60–66.

new, more orthodox and radical, schools of Islamic belief such as Salafism and Wahhabism which created some religious confusion among the Kosovars.[285]

2.3.2 Identity

In Kosovo, there is a highest proportion of Muslims relative to population size in the Western Balkans since more than 90 percent of Kosovars are either observant or nominal Muslims. However, Islam has quite a lesser significance regarding the identity in Kosovo. Unlike the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Muslim identity served as an ethnic marker, in Kosovo it is the Albanian ethnic identity that is of the most significance. Similarly to Albania, the long suppression of Islam under the communist regime which diminished the role of religion in the society is to be blamed.[286]

However, the aforementioned fact does not mean that the religious identity doesn't play a role in contemporary Kosovo. In fact, such identity issues are present and even abused by various radical Islamist groups. Once again the root causes of this have to be searched for in the war and post-war era. In Kosovo, religious identity was resurrected during the war, similarly to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and number of people identifying with Islam was growing steadily. Due to this development, radical interpretations of Islam increased on popularity in the country.[287] This development was, once again, significantly influenced by foreign actors from the Middle East. Through the investment channeled by various charitable organizations primacy of religious identity was aggressively promoted in the country and the conservative Islamic beliefs were put in the conflict with the Western liberal values.[288]

Similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the increased significance of religious identity perceived by some individuals might further escalate and project itself in the conflict

[285] Speckhard, A., & Shajkovci, A. (2017). *Drivers of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo: Women's Roles in Supporting, Preventing & Fighting Violent Extremism*. Washington, DC: International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism.

[286] Shtuni, A. (2016). *Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

[287] Bartoszewicz, M. G. (2013). Radicalisation by Stealth: Kosovo Case Study. *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, *22*(4), 95–106.

[288] Shtuni, A. (2016). *Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

which is still present in the contemporary Kosovo. Even though perceived by the majority as an inter-ethnic conflict, some individuals might perceive this as a religious struggle and an aggression towards Islam which may lead to further embracement of increasingly radical beliefs. Hate crimes and bias-motivated crimes may thus be an issue in the country similarly to the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Problematic of hate crimes is reflected also by the OSCE presence in the country which is involved in efforts to improve the dealing with hate and bias-related crimes by local authorities seeking to facilitate effective response and adequate measures of prevention.[289] Even though the war in Kosovo is long time over, the inter-ethnic conflict is still looming large in the country. Evident hate-crimes where a member of one ethnic group is threatened by members of the other are present in the contemporary Kosovo.[290] And, especially if not addressed appropriately by the respective authorities, the issue might further project into the individual perceptions of threat to religious identity as well. This ascertainment is even more pressing due to the fact that, as was identified by the OSCE, there is quite a few issues regarding the way hate crimes are dealt with in the country by official authorities.[291] In fact, dealing with the hate crimes or bias-motivated crimes was identified as a "long-identified" gap by the OSCE presence in the country which perceives particularly problematic that such crimes were addressed as regular crimes which followingly led to a lighter judicial prosecution.[292]

However, besides the confusion between ethnicity and religion as markers of identity there is one issue that is seemingly more significant regarding its role as a motivational factor of religious radicalization in Kosovo. That is the struggle between a western, that is secular, and oriental, that is Muslim, identity. Indeed, local discourses exists in such orientalist dichotomies and tensions are thus stemming up in the country where Muslim identity is being deliberately diminished in order to prove statute of Kosovo in the West and that Kosovo belongs to Europe. In their elaborative report on Islamophobia in Kosovo, Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez[293] identify yet another one identity issue in the

---

[289] OSCE: SEC.FR/483/19 (12 July 2019); RESTRICTED

[290] OSCE: SEC.FR/70/18 (30 January 2018); RESTRICTED

[291] OSCE: SEC.FR/429/18 (22 June 2018); RESTRICTED

[292] OSCE: PC.FR/3/17 (27 January 2017); RESTRICTED

[293] Ferizaj, A. (2019). *Islamophobia in Kosovo: National Report 2018*. SETA.

country. That is the *good European Muslim* argument, as the authors put it, which was already partly discussed in this paper in the chapter on Albania where it was identified as one of motivational factors of radicalization. The same seems to be true in the Kosovar case where this discourse of "good European Muslims" against the "bad non-European Muslims" is used again by the Kosovar Albanian elites on a political level to obtain bonus points when dealing with the Euro-Atlantic community. This necessarily projects to other levels of Kosovar society causing Islamophobic tensions. Bayraklı and Hafez further argue that Western characteristics of stereotyping Islam further fuel Islamophobia in the country, erasing Kosovar Muslim identity. Similarly to the Albanian case, there are cases of Muslims being marginalized on some levels of the Kosovar society.[294]

This issue might be even more pressing than it is in Albania since Kosovar Albanians experienced years of life in a socio-political reality which made them feel unequal. Struggling under discrimination and attempts for assimilation by Slavic majority, Kosovans tended to increasingly gravitate towards Islam and their unique Muslim identity.[295]

This is especially problematic regarding possible grievances considering the fact that in contemporary Kosovo Islamophobia is used as a tool of foreign policy to demonstrate alignment of Kosovo to the Euro-Atlantic club.[296] Indeed, "Muslimness" is presented as something that has no place in contemporary Kosovo by both Kosovar media and politicians with social media being no exception to this.[297] Such narratives are appearing also among the public in Kosovo demonstrated by incidents such as demonstrations against construction of mosque and requests to build education facility or public health centre instead.[298] However, there is yet another fact the fuels the frustrations and causes grievances. That is the fact that even though Kosovars are willing to diminish their Muslim identity in order to appeal to the Euro-Atlantic club, the European Union still perceives them as lesser. This issue is especially tangible regarding the talks between the

---

[294] Ibid.

[295] Shtuni, A. (2016). *Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

[296] Ferizaj, A. (2019). *Islamophobia in Kosovo: National Report 2018*. SETA.

[297] Ibid.

[298] OSCE: SEC.FR/430/19 (25 June 2019); RESTRICTED

EU and Kosovo concerning visa regime that, despite Kosovar efforts, still haven't been successful. There is no doubt that frustrations are stemming from this problematic that impacts predominantly young Kosovars which feel frustrated and isolated because of this cause.[299] The perception of the European Union being unjust towards Kosovo is, however, present also on the political level in the country and there are feeling of alienation and frustration stemming from this injustice being unnoticed by the EU since there are perceptions in Kosovo that the respective criteria were successfully fulfilled and that Kosovo should enjoy the benefits of the Schengen Zone.[300]

Due to this reasons, the supranational European identity is thus becoming increasingly elusive for Kosovars. Combined with the frustration from the Albanian identity that seems unfeasible due to the lack of will of the international community to accept border changes or unification with Albania and the confusion stemming from the prescribed fluid national identity, Muslim identity is ever more appealing in the light of these issues and is gaining on relevance with more than third of Kosovar Albanians identifying primarily or exclusively as Muslims rather than Albanians.[301]

Building on the discussion above, it is clear that the already worrisome situation with the inter-ethnic tensions is becoming further problematic and that the identity truly is a source of confusion in the country. The Muslim identity is increasingly appealing albeit it is simultaneously attacked and diminished by the Kosovar majority. This complicated situation indeed is a fertile soil for frustrations and grievances that may become a crucial motivational factor of susceptibility and adoption of radical Islamist beliefs.

2.3.3 Socio-economic factors

Similarly to the case of both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, there are serious socio-economic weaknesses in Kosovo that hinder the development in the country and cause poor living conditions. The situation is resembling the two aforementioned states since they underwent similar difficulties in the form of experiencing conflict – or at least

---

[299] OSCE: SEC.FR/23/19 (11 January 2019); RESTRICTED

[300] OSCE: PC.FR/24/19 (30 August 2019); RESTRICTED

[301] Shtuni, A. (2016). *Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

civil unrest – followed by a political turmoil which, naturally, resulted in worsening of the economic situation as well as in the need for establishment of new governments and state institutions due to the transformation of regimes in these countries. The same was true for the civil society which was diminished by the communist regimes and had to be newly established.

As in the other cases, economic and social weaknesses, poor state of institutional capacity and the overall level of its integrity are perceived as a long term weaknesses of the state which are still not sufficiently addressed and which are causing wide range of issues. These weaknesses and the situation stemming from these issues are thus perceived as crucial motivational factors of radicalization in the country.[302] Indeed, Kosovo is seriously affected by such socio-economic weaknesses. Since the war in Kosovo has ended in 1999, there is one of the lowest rates of unemployment in the Europe in the country.[303] High levels of inactivity and very low levels of unemployment were identified as one of the key challenges in contemporary Kosovo also by the working document of the European Commission reporting on Kosovo[304] which reports that the 2018 unemployment rate was "very high" reaching nearly 30 percent. Furthermore, only roughly 25 percent of employed persons in Kosovo have a permanent work contract whereas nearly 75 percent of employed individuals dispose only of a temporary work contracts.[305] This might prove to truly problematic in regards to motivational factors of radicalization since such unstable situation of individual produces uncertainty which may further project into the poor perceptions of one's future supporting additional grievances and thus creating an increased vulnerability towards radical beliefs. Even more of a concern is unemployment rate among youth that reached over 55 percent in the year 2018. Given the already discussed fact throughout this paper that youth is particularly vulnerable social group when it comes to radicalization, this finding is indeed significant and shouldn't be underestimated at least in this regard. The report of the European Commission also found that the unemployment rate of women in Kosovo is higher than

---

[302] Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister. (2015). *Strategy of Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*. Prishtina

[303] Ibid.

[304] European Commission. (2019). *Commission Staff Working Document: Kosovo 2019 Report*. Brussels. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-kosovo-report.pdf

[305] Ibid.

that of men by roughly six percent.[306] However, this difference is hardly as staggering as the one between the unemployment of adults and youth and no relevant conclusions can be inferred from this. Motivational factors specific to radicalization of social groups in Kosovo should be thus further explored in respective section of this chapter. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate is indeed serious and there is no doubt that the disastrous socio-economic conditions that the unemployment only adds to create fertile ground that can be linked with radicalization in the country.[307]

Similarly to the Albanian case, it is the corruption that paralyzes the economic development in Kosovo and has impact on the perception of governance in the country. In 2018 Corruption perception Index issued by Transparency International, Kosovo scored only one point higher above Albania, interrupting the increasing improvements which were growing steadily from the year 2015, and thus ranked, together with Macedonia, in top three countries riddled with corruption in the Balkans.[308] Building on the discussion on corruption in Albania in the previous chapter which identified corruption not as a salient motivational factor of radicalization but quite significant contributing factor, it can be assumed that in the Kosovar case, given the already poor and yet deteriorating situation regarding corruption, corruption will be of similar importance in regards to the process of radicalization in the country. Indeed, the link between corruption and radicalization in Kosovo is identified also by the Kosovar *Strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism 2015-2020* which states that *"Besides economic and social factors, Kosovo faces various challenges such as public administration reform, fighting the corruption and the increase of the integrity of public administration, and these are other factors that can lead to extremism."*[309] thus marking corruption as one of the contributing factors.

Similarly to the Albanian case, the issues with corruption and nepotism in Kosovo further projects into the perception of government and governance by public society. In the

---

[306] Ibid.

[307] Zaimi, G. (2017). *Religious Radicalization and Violent Islamist Extremism in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo*. Retrieved from https://www.cssii.unifi.it/upload/sub/zaimi-religious-radicalization-and-violent-islamist.pdf

[308] Corruption Perceptions Index 2018. (n.d.). Retrieved December 15, 2019, from https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018.

[309] Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister. (2015). *Strategy of Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*. Prishtina

respective section of chapter on Albania in this paper, it was already discussed how such issues negatively impact trust in the governance and the state. Not only do they combine with, and thus further emphasize, other socio-economic grievances but once there is a perception that the system within the state is corrupt and that the level of nepotism is high which leads to decrease or even a loss of trust to state institutions by citizens, gates open for new incentives in the form of increased vulnerability which might subsequently lead to susceptibility to radicalization and finally adopting radical beliefs. It was already discussed throughout this paper that such factors are rather contributive and can't be identified as the only drivers of radicalization. On the other hand such contributive push factors might prove crucial regarding debilitating the resilience of community or an individual – a scenario on which various radical influences in form of radical groups, communities or radical preachers and other pull factors may capitalize on. Considering the fact that in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania such influences are present and the Kosovar case is no exception to this, as shall be discussed later in this chapter, these issues and the contributive factors they present can not be underestimated regarding the process of radicalization in Kosovo.

Indeed, the above-mentioned issues truly negatively impact the trust of citizens in the state institutions which hit an all-time low in recent years. Kosovar institutions are considered weak and lacking capacity when it comes to justice in the country or inclusion in Kosovar society.[310] In its May 2016 Focus Group Report the Kosovar National Democratic Institute similarly reported little trust of Kosovar citizens in most of the state's institutions and confirmed that the institutions are perceived as largely corrupt, self-interested and lacking capability regarding addressing important public issues. Therefore, despite improvements on the socio-political levels, there are still strong perceptions of failed leadership efforts, corruption and unmet expectations of citizens.[311] This situation is then also interconnected with the poor socio-economic situation in the country which encircles the overall situation and further impacts the trust of citizens in

---

[310] Jakupi, R., & Kraja, G. (2018). *Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Country Case Study 3.* Berlin/Pristina: Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

[311] Shtuni, A. (2016). *Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo.* Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

state institutions some of which enjoy as low numbers of trust as less than 15 percent.[312]
The fact that the situation concerning low trust of citizens in the state institutions is quite
pressing is further substantiated by the activities of the OSCE presence in the country
which is involved in efforts to increase capabilities of the institutions.[313] The connection
between the poor capacity and inactivity of state institutions and the rise of religious
extremist tendencies in the country is perceived also by the citizens on both sides that is
both Kosovar Albanians as well as Kosovar Serbs.[314]

2.3.4 Community factors

When it comes to various pull factors that are present in Kosovo, the situation resembles
the case of Albania as well as of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Once again the era of conflicts
in the Western Balkans which impacted all of the selected countries of this paper proved
to be of crucial importance regarding the socio-economic development in all of the
countries which generated various grievances serving as a contributing factors of
radicalization; the significance of identity in the countries which is regarded as of
fundamental importance in the process of radicalization, as was discussed in the pre-
empirical section; and the emergence of various foreign actors from the Middle East that
penetrated the theatre during, and especially after, the conflicts not only introducing
radical beliefs to the selected countries but exerting influence on the Muslim communities
thus vastly contributing to the emergence of the pull factors in Albania and Bosnia and
Herzegovina. In this section, it shall be discussed that the resemblance of the selected
cases is present also in this regard since Kosovo is no exception to such development.

In the initial part of this chapter it was already presented that the foreign influences
indeed introduced radical teachings to the country. However, activities of foreign actors
weren't limited just to this. Through the presence of various non-governmental and
charitable organizations, foreign influences impacted the Kosovar society much deeper
capitalizing on the state of affairs and poor conditions in Kosovo after the war which kept

---

[312] Vrajolli, M. (2017). *Kosovo Security Barometer: Citizens' perceptions on Violent Extremism*. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

[313] OSCE: SEC.FR/430/18 (22 June 2018); RESTRICTED

[314] Jakupi, R., & Kraja, G. (2018). *Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Country Case Study 3*. Berlin/Pristina: Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

local government occupied with at that time more pressing issues and thus left the activities of foreign organizations unchecked.[315] It can be anticipated that the shortcomings of Kosovar government and poor capacity of the state institutions, which was discussed earlier, still results in a favourable situation for the foreign influences, as is the case in Albania which was discussed in the previous chapter.

In Kosovo, foreign organizations followed similar blueprint to the one used in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania. Capitalizing on disastrous economic situation, these charities offered financial aid[316] but also stepped up their proselytizing efforts by offering educational scholarships to hundreds of young Kosovars while simultaneously impacting local Muslim community by building a network of unlicensed mosques or offering sponsorship to Koranic schools and local religious organizations that were often led by fundamentalists that were educated at religious institutions in the Middle East.[317] Similarly to Albania, the initial weaknesses of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (ICK) that were naturally present after Kosovo broke free from the Yugoslavian yoke were thus taken advantage of by the foreign organizations.

However, the struggle within the ICK is still present even today and it is caused precisely by the abovementioned factors. The issue is the clash of Islamic ideologies that surfaced during the crisis of legitimacy of the Islamic Community of Kosovo in the year 2008. Nevertheless, this issue was present within the ICK long before, emerging in the years after the war in Kosovo when two schools of thought emerged in the ICK – one promoting ICK's unique approach to Islam based on the Hanafi tradition stemming from the Ottoman era and the other one advocating that the Islamic Community of Kosovo is a part of global Islamic entity thus not being bound by nation, calling for opening up to external influences. Soon enough, the ICK was infiltrated by various imams preaching radical beliefs and challenging ICK's legitimacy. And once again – as in the case of

[315] Krasniqi, K. (2018). Islamist Extremism in Kosovo and the Countries of the Region. *Perspectives of Law and Public Administration* , 7(1), 60–66.

[316] Shay, S. (2009). *Islamic terror and the Balkans*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

[317] Shtuni, A. (2016). *Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

Albania – this development was caused by the unwillingness of the Kosovar government to listen to the ICK's problems.[318]

Therefore the significance of the community influences – or the pull factors – are further exacerbated not only by the rather poor state of governance which is interconnected with worsened operation of the civil society in the country since it doesn't provide sufficient support as was discussed in the previous chapter but also by the fact that the Islamic Community of Kosovo doesn't enjoy particularly high levels of trust either – while struggling to put its inner matters in order. Even though the trust of citizens in the religious institutions is higher than the one in government and judiciary there is a trend of declining trust in ICK which began in the year 2013 and remains to persist. Considering the previous levels of trust in the Islamic Community of Kosovo it can be thus stated that the current levels of trust in this institution are rather low which seems to be partially a result of increasing extremist tendencies in the country.[319] Once again the situation in Kosovo thus to certain extent parallels the one in Albania where the lacking capacity and trust of the Albanian Muslim Community undermined the role that the Community play in the prevention and deadening of radical tendencies in the country.[320] It can be thus anticipated that the Islamic Community of Kosovo faces similar difficulties.

This new school of thought that emerged within the ICK appealing to the supranational Islamic identity and crafting bond with the Ummah is used by the radical imams in Kosovo who exploit the grievances present in the society, recast them as a oppression against Muslims and thus spreading radical tendencies and supporting radical beliefs in the country.[321] Such activities often take place in unofficial mosques that are present in Kosovo outside of the official authority of the Islamic Community of Kosovo and further increase the polarization of local Muslim communities.[322] Indeed, the emergence of such

---

[318] Jakupi, R., & Kraja, G. (2018). *Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Country Case Study 3.* Berlin/Pristina: Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

[319] Vrajolli, M. (2017). *Kosovo Security Barometer: Citizens' perceptions on Violent Extremism.* Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

[320] For detailed discussion on this topic see chapter on Albania of this paper.

[321] Shtuni, A. (2016). *Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo.* Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

[322] Goshi, A., & Van Leuven, D. (2017). *Kosovo-wide Assessment of Perceptions of Radicalisation at the Community Level.* Government of the Republic of Kosovo.

illegal mosques was also partly caused by the development within ICK and the inability of ICK and unwillingness of the Kosovar government to address the issue regarding foreign religious influences which resulted, besides the unofficial mosques, with a set of breakaway preachers that are using alternative means to proselytize Kosovar population. Such activities exerted also by imams from Middle Eastern countries are no exception to this and the overall influence of these breakaway imams grew gradually.[323]

The research did not found sufficient amount of information related to existence and increased radical tendencies or proselytizing efforts regarding hard-to-reach areas in Kosovo. However, this doesn't mean that such issue doesn't exist in the country. It is clear that remote and rural areas are distinct in some ways related to the issue of the process of radicalization. Although it seems that no reliable data are present on the exact socio-economic conditions in such areas, for instance levels of education are perceived as insufficient and religious institutions are crucial in regards to substitution to public facilities in such areas.[324] There are thus some indications that the problematic of the hard-to-reach areas regarding to radicalization exists in Kosovo, similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania. Additionally, previous research proved that there are cases of charismatic leaders in remote areas that enjoy a social authority over a community.[325]

Nevertheless, hubs of radicalization exist in Albania as the case of Albanian imam, Kastriot Duka, whose mosque was regarded to be a centre of radicalism in the country and who subsequently opened a religious school where strict rules of orthodox Islam were followed.[326] However, this is just one occurrence of many cases involving imams preaching radical beliefs in the country some of whom were also targeted by police raids.[327] The issue with such breakaway imams is reflected also in the Kosovar *Strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalization* which states that their activities

---

[323] Jakupi, R., & Kraja, G. (2018). *Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Country Case Study 3.* Berlin/Pristina: Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

[324] Zaimi, G. (2017). *Religious Radicalization and Violent Islamist Extremism in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo*. Retrieved from https://www.cssii.unifi.it/upload/sub/zaimi-religious-radicalization-and-violent-islamist.pdf

[325] Kursani, S. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Kosovo Report*. London: British Council.

[326] Bartoszewicz, M. G. (2013). Radicalisation by Stealth: Kosovo Case Study. *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, *22*(4), 95–106.

[327] OSCE: PC.FR/7/15 (5 February 2015); RESTRICTED

contribute to the development of religious extremist ideology in the country.[328] The impaired credibility and capacity of the Islamic Community of Kosovo may, in some cases, lead to a emergence of various alternative spaces for religious purposes that are outside the official mosques and thus outside of the authority of the ICK which results in alienation and isolation[329] which is particularly important given the fact that the isolation, both social and individual, was identified as a part of radicalization process and a potential driver of radicalization in Kosovo.[330]

Similarly to the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, various imams are a crucial component of departures of the Kosovar foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq since imams are providing the soon-to-be foreign fighters with guidance and information regarding the possibilities of departure to these countries.[331] Similarly to the situation in both aforementioned countries, a network of imams involved, besides radical preaching, in recruiting and influencing of the prospective foreign fighters operates – or at least operated– in the country.[332]

2.3.5 Returning foreign fighters and radicalization in prisons

Throughout this paper, the threat of proselytizing and radicalization posed by the returned foreign fighters was discussed. This risk is of a high level also in the case of Kosovo due to the high numbers of departed foreign fighters which subsequently started to return to their homeland, and insufficient level of preparedness of the state when it comes to reintegration programs for such individuals. Although it seems that the situation regarding the operation of detention facilities in Kosovo is not that dire as it is in neighbouring Albania, the possibility of radicalization in prisons can not be ruled out,

---

[328] Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister. (2015). *Strategy of Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*. Prishtina

[329] Jakupi, R., & Kraja, G. (2018). *Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Country Case Study 3*. Berlin/Pristina: Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

[330] Goshi, A., & Van Leuven, D. (2017). *Kosovo-wide Assessment of Perceptions of Radicalisation at the Community Level*. Government of the Republic of Kosovo.

[331] Kursani, S. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Kosovo Report*. London: British Council.

[332] Jakupi, R., & Kraja, G. (2018). *Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Country Case Study 3*. Berlin/Pristina: Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

building on the discussion presented in the pre-empirical section of this paper and considering the fact that such concerns exist also in prisons of the Western European states that undoubtedly dispose with higher capacity and support obtained from their respective governments.

Indeed, in Kosovo the threat emanating from the returning foreign fighters involved in spreading radical beliefs is truly high. This is because particularly high numbers of individuals departing from the country to join fellow Muslim brethren in their struggle of waging jihad in Syria and Iraq. In fact, Kosovo has the highest per capita number of citizens departing to Syria and Iraq since 2011 of all of the states of wider Europe.[333] First departures of foreign fighters from the country emerged in the year 2012. This phenomenon came to halt in 2016 since when there have been no new reported cases of departures of foreign fighters from the country. However, during the 2012 - 2016 period, it is estimated that 355 Kosovo citizens departed to join conflict in the Middle East. 256 of those were men, 52 women and 47 children. However, more importantly, the rate of those foreign fighters returning to their homeland is particularly high in Kosovo since 242 citizens of Kosovo have returned.[334] The majority of those foreign fighters who have returned are men who have been prosecuted and incarcerated upon their return. These individuals undoubtedly pose a challenge for the Kosovar authorities since they dispose of combat skills, are trained to use weapons and, what is particularly worrisome regarding the risk of spreading radical beliefs, have connections to international radical networks. The government in Kosovo thus faces challenges upon the return of foreign fighters stemming from both reintegration and re-socialization of these individuals as well as from the risk posed by possibility of further radicalization efforts exerted by these returnees.[335]

Indeed, such threat of imprisoned returned foreign fighters radicalizing other inmates is relevant in Kosovo as was confirmed by an official from the Kosovo Intelligence

---

[333] Speckhard, A., & Shajkovci, A. (2017). *Drivers of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo: Women's Roles in Supporting, Preventing & Fighting Violent Extremism*. Washington, DC: International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism

[334] European Commission. (2019). *Commission Staff Working Document: Kosovo 2019 Report*. Brussels. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-kosovo-report.pdf

[335] Jakupi, R., & Kraja, G. (2018). *Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Country Case Study 3*. Berlin/Pristina: Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

Agency.[336] This threat is also reflected in the Kosovo Strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalization which calls for *"enhancing the security of prisoners for activities related to extremism in order to prevent them from recruiting other prisoners"*; *"raising awareness within the correctional system on the risk posed from imprisoned terrorists or suspects for terrorism and building capacities of the system for rehabilitation of such prisoners"*; and *"provision of psychological and religious counselling for prisoners in relation to illegal activities associated with extremism, as well as social support for their families."*[337] Based on these recommendations, it is clear that there is a need of enhanced capability and improved treatment of imprisoned foreign fighters which, although the situation is seemingly not that worrisome as the one in Albanian prisons, may increase the risk of religious radicalization in prisons.

However, as was already stated, the problem with returned foreign fighters is two-fold. It is not only the risk of radicalization in prisons but also the proselytizing and spread of radical ideology once these individuals serve their terms in prisons. This might be a high-level threat, indeed, given the statement of prosecutor from the Special Prosecution of Kosovo dealing with the cases of returned foreign fighters in the country who expressed concerns in this regard stating that *"we should not ignore the real risk, which is the ideological risk. Except for a few, the majority do not regret what they have done. When they return, they return with the mission to spread the ideology and indoctrinate others"*. It is particularly for this reason that the reintegration and re-socialization of these individuals have to be properly in place. If the returned foreign fighters struggle to reintegrate back to the society, they may become increasingly isolated, previous or additional grievances may (re)occur and such individuals may once again retire to an alternative system. However, it seems that the reintegration and re-socialization processes in the country are hampered from the very beginning, regardless the capacity of the state. This is because of the feelings shared by the majority of society that perceives the returned foreign fighters quite negatively. From the research examining the perceptions of the Kosovar society regarding the returned foreign fighters followed that 226 of the 356 (63 percent) respondents would feel *"either at risk, threatened, in danger, scared, unsafe, fearful, worried, and disappointed, shocked, very bad, sad or vulnerable at the potential*

---

[336] Kursani, S. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Kosovo Report*. London: British Council.

[337] Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister. (2015). *Strategy of Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*. Prishtina

of returned fighters in their neighbourhood". Only sixteen respondents, that is 4.5 percent, stated that they would be open towards giving returned foreign fighters a chance to reintegrate and re-socialize into the society.[338]

There is no doubt that the feelings within the Kosovar society are truly quite negative and that however well the reintegration program for returned foreign fighters would be operated, such efforts could be hampered from the very beginning by the approach of the society or local community. The urgency of this issue becomes truly clear when the actual statements of the respondents of the aforementioned research reacting to a prospect of former foreign fighters returning to their community are presented. These include statements such as: *"I would not socialise with them." "At risk, but until he or she is released by the state I am okay." "I would kill that person." "I would be rough with them, I don't want them in our neighbourhood." "I am scared of them because they could cause problems in our neighbourhood." "Even if they regret [what they did], I would not feel safe." "Always [living] with the fear that they will organise something similar in our country." "Happy that they are alive, but I don't want them in my society, I would be afraid." "Not safe; they will start spreading radical views, propaganda and extremism." "F - them* [sic]*! I would feel in danger, but we are able to throw bombs too."[339]*

Building on the discussion above, it is clear that the returned foreign fighters present a threat in regards to radicalization in Kosovo. Indeed, this is stated in the Kosovo Strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalization as well. Furthermore, besides the fact that the concerns about the link of radicalization and returned foreign fighters are expressed in the Strategy, the link between this threat and radicalization of youth is identified.[340]

2.3.6 Social groups and online radicalization
Indeed, it is the youth that seems to be particularly at risk regarding radicalization in Kosovo. Besides the Kosovo Strategy on prevention of violent extremism and

---

[338] Goshi, A., & Van Leuven, D. (2017). *Kosovo-wide Assessment of Perceptions of Radicalisation at the Community Level*. Government of the Republic of Kosovo.

[339] Ibid.

[340] Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister. (2015). *Strategy of Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*. Prishtina

radicalization this fact was confirmed also by an official from the Kosovo Intelligence Agency who expressed his concerns about the radicalization of youth in the country stating that "*extremism usually touches the younger age-groups and those with tough social conditions*".[341] In the case of youth in Kosovo, however, some of the socio-economic issues seem to be even more pressing than is the case of the overall situation.

In the respective part of this chapter where the socio-economic factors were discussed, the rather dire situation concerning employment of youth in Kosovo was presented. The rate of unemployment regarding the youth in Kosovo reached over 55 percent in 2018 which is almost twice as high as the average unemployment rate in the country.[342] There is thus no doubt that regarding this issue there are relevant incentives for grievances that may occur regarding the Kosovar youth. This is especially true due to the fact that the government of Kosovo actually failed to successfully implement the 2018-2022 sector strategy and the action plan to tackle youth unemployment and the situation thus remains insufficient in the regard of dealing with this issue.[343] The severity of the situation is then further emphasized by the poor levels of quality of the education system in the country which does not prepare the graduates for the labour market sufficiently.[344] The fact that Kosovar youth perceives this to be a truly pressing issue is substantiated by a 2019 demonstration of students voicing their disapproval of worrisome level of education system in the country as well as high levels of nepotism and sexism in Kosovo.[345] The unsatisfactory levels of preparedness of youth to enter labour market are also reflected by the activities of the OSCE presence in the country which is invested in supporting youth to effectively compete in the formal labour market.[346] It was already discussed in the chapter on Bosnia and Herzegovina how young people are particularly vulnerable to a poor socio-economic situation in the country which contributes to a

---

[341] Kursani, S. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Kosovo Report*. London: British Council.

[342] European Commission. (2019). *Commission Staff Working Document: Kosovo 2019 Report*. Brussels. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-kosovo-report.pdf

[343] Ibid.

[344] Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister. (2015). *Strategy of Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*. Prishtina

[345] OSCE: SEC.FR/2/19 (2 January 2019); RESTRICTED

[346] OSCE: SEC.FR/274/19 (23 April 2019); RESTRICTED

development of poor or non-existent perspectives of their future when it comes to finding a satisfactory job, affording satisfactory level of living conditions, and generating enough income to provide for a family – which is an issue that typically worries predominantly young males. In Kosovo, however, it is not only the high levels of unemployment of youth and poor level of quality of the education system. The already discussed issue with identity projects significantly into grievances of young people in the country. Kosovo being the only European country that doesn't dispose of visa-free travel within Europe is causing feelings of isolation and alienation among Kosovars. And it is particularly the youth who perceives this as especially frustrating.[347] This undoubtedly further contributes to youth's negative perceptions of the future since young Kosovars are lacking broad range of possibilities that are available within Europe.

Indeed, the socio-economic issues in Kosovo contribute to a emergence of grievances and the local youth is particularly vulnerable to such occurrence. The increased vulnerability and susceptibility towards radical ideologies is being abused by radical elements in the country where various youth camps and sermons were organized by radical imams targeting precisely the local youth.[348] It is also specifically the identity issue that is abused by Muslim groups funded by foreign sources. Such groups are particularly popular among young Kosovar Muslims wishing to discover their identity. The fact that the Islamic Community of Kosovo deals with credibility issues further increases the severity of this issue since the foreign imams operating in Kosovo capitalize on the rhetoric of not being tainted and corrupted by the local establishment.[349] It is for this reason why the strategies for prevention of radicalization call for increased social integration of youth[350] and increased involvement of the civil society in such efforts.[351]

---

[347] Shtuni, A. (2016). *Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

[348] Jakupi, R., & Kraja, G. (2018). *Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Country Case Study 3*. Berlin/Pristina: Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

[349] Bartoszewicz, M. G. (2013). Radicalisation by Stealth: Kosovo Case Study. *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, *22*(4), 95–106.

[350] Jakupi, R., & Kraja, G. (2018). *Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Country Case Study 3*. Berlin/Pristina: Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

[351] Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister. (2015). *Strategy of Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*. Prishtina

The severity of the problematic concerning vulnerability of youth towards radicalization in Kosovo is reflected also in activities of the OSCE presence in the country that are aimed concretely at capacity building of youth increasing resilience towards radicalization.[352] In this regard, the Islamic Community of Kosovo alongside with the civil society is also involved in such activities by the OSCE further proving that the role of the ICK and the local civil society is of significant importance in tackling this issue.[353] Besides these efforts, the activities of the OSCE presence in the country reflect also the urgency of the identity issue in Kosovo dealing with youth perception of hate crimes, tolerance, freedom of religion and increasing awareness of youth on preventing radicalization which further proves the relevancy of these issues discussed above.[354]

Building on the discussion on motivational factors of radicalization specific to women which was presented in the chapter on Bosnia and Herzegovina, it can be stated that similar issues that may lead to emergence of grievances resulting in increased vulnerability and susceptibility of women to radical beliefs can be found in Kosovo. And although there are some initiatives that target gender issues and aim at increasing capacity of women,[355] from the research of the OSCE documents follows that such initiatives are not that frequent in Kosovo compared to the case of Albania despite the gender issues are of similar – if not graver – seriousness in Kosovo.[356] In Kosovo there are most certainly incentives to grievances stemming from both gender discrimination and the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions. Women are dealing with gender discrimination especially in private sector where obstacles are present due to an insufficient system of maternity and parental leave in Kosovo. Additional barriers are limited access to child care in the country or availability of flexible or family-friendly work arrangements. Due to these issues women are encountering difficulties in the labour market.[357] However, the situation is unfavourable also on the political level on which

---

[352] OSCE: SEC.FR/180/19 (13 March 2019); RESTRICTED

[353] OSCE: SEC.FR/326/19 (14 May 2019); RESTRICTED

[354] OSCE: PC.FR/28/18 (5 October 2018); RESTRICTED

[355] OSCE: SEC.FR/390/18 (7 June 2018); RESTRICTED

[356] For the discussion on the vulnerability of women to radicalization in Albania see respective section of the chapter on Albania.

[357] European Commission. (2019). *Commission Staff Working Document: Kosovo 2019 Report*. Brussels. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-kosovo-report.pdf

women remain vastly underrepresented especially in local decision-making positions. From the 38 Kosovo municipalities, 38 positions of mayors are occupied by men. From the 38 positions of chairpersons of the municipal assemblies, only 6 are occupied by women.[358] Similar issue accompany municipal elections where the participation of women remains rather low despite the Kosovo Gender Equality Law.[359] Negative perceptions from underrepresentation of women in Kosovo are thus quite possible given also the fact that the initiatives aimed at increasing women's capabilities and involvement in decision-making processes are rather lacking. The gender issues present in the private sector coupled with a lack of women in senior positions, lack of access to public kindergartens and healthcare services focused on women's needs that are often present in the country[360] may only fuel such incentives. Gender-based violence and domestic violence are also an issue in Kosovo.[361]

The link between women and radicalization is substantiated also by efforts of the OSCE presence in the country. Initiatives aimed at empowering and mobilizing women regarding prevention of radicalization were established. For instance, the OSCE aimed such efforts at community level by training policewomen on the role of women in regards to violent extremism and radicalization. Significance of such role of women was also conveyed to representatives of civil society and religious groups.[362]

In Kosovo, there is quite a relation between women and the issue with returned foreign fighters which was discussed earlier in this chapter. Indeed, besides women who departed to the Middle East accompanying their husbands, there are cases of women who left to Iraq or Syria to become directly involved in the jihadi struggle. Some of those women joined the so-called Islamic State by joining ranks of its *Shariapolice* that monitors morality of women. Others were involved in propaganda and recruitment efforts.[363] This fact gives a sign that not all of the women departing from Kosovo to go to the Middle

---

[358] Ibid.

[359] OSCE: SEC.FR/343/19 (21 May 2019); RESTRICTED

[360] OSCE: SEC.FR/47/19 (22 January 2019); RESTRICTED

[361] OSCE: SEC.FR/416/18 (18 June 2018); RESTRICTED

[362] OSCE: PC.FR/21/17 (25 August 2017); RESTRICTED

[363] Zaimi, G. (2017). *Religious Radicalization and Violent Islamist Extremism in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo*. Retrieved from https://www.cssii.unifi.it/upload/sub/zaimi-religious-radicalization-and-violent-islamist.pdf

East were just obediently accompanying their husbands and return of such individuals might thus pose additional threat similar to the return of former foreign fighter male combatants.

As of August 2019 no female returnee was successfully prosecuted in Kosovo contrary to 85 successfully prosecuted male returnees.[364] It can be thus expected that female returnees, often spouses of imprisoned male foreign fighters, are living in Kosovar communities, experiencing social stigma and extreme vulnerability. This thus presents an area of concern given that such women are also in need of reintegration and re-socialization programmes which seem to be largely overlooked.[365] Furthermore, there are cases of women leaving to the Middle East with their husbands and subsequently re-marrying while there and bearing children with another Kosovar combatant. This further increases the stigmatization in conservative Kosovar society upon their return which is only augmented in the cases of women bearing children of husbands not originating from Kosovo.[366]

Building on the discussion of prejudices and negative perceptions in Kosovar society regarding the returnees, it is clear that female returnees are most likely exposed to social stigmatization and lacking capacity of reintegration and re-socialization programmes with focus on female returnees, incentives to further isolation and alienation are present and may subsequently lead to (recurrent) susceptibility to radical beliefs and search for alternative system.

Although the socioeconomic conditions of the Roma minority in Kosovo are quite similar to Albania or Bosnia and Herzegovina, meaning that Romani people in Kosovo are dealing with poor economic situation,[367] issues regarding education[368] as well as

---

[364] Bytyqi, K., & Mullins, S. (2019). Returnee Foreign Fighters from Syria and Iraq: The Kosovan Experience. *CTC Sentinel*, *12*(7), 25–30. Retrieved from https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2019/08/CTC-SENTINEL-072019.pdf

[365] Speckhard, A., & Shajkovci, A. (2017). *Drivers of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo: Women's Roles in Supporting, Preventing & Fighting Violent Extremism*. Washington, DC: International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism

[366] Kursani, S. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Reintegration of Returnees: The Challenge of State and Community Response in Kosovo*. London: British Council.

[367] OSCE: PC.FR/7/15 (5 February 2015); RESTRICTED

[368] OSCE: SEC.FR/397/18 (11 June 2018); RESTRICTED

integration to the society,[369] and cases of marginalization and discrimination,[370] the situation regarding the Islamist radicalization of Roma minority in Kosovo is vastly different due to the fact that, contrary to both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, most of the Romani people in Kosovo are Christian Orthodox. Although there are some Muslim Romani people in Kosovo, the whole minority is quite dispersed.[371] Therefore the situation regarding radicalization of Romani people in Kosovo is much more difficult to assess only on the ground of initial discussion on this topic presented in the respective section of the chapter on Bosnia and Herzegovina of this paper and elaborative research on this topic is thus required to obtain sufficient amount of data to discuss the possible motivational factors of Roma minority in Kosovo. Such research, however, is outside the scope of this paper.

Similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, online radicalization seems to be a pressing issue in Kosovo. Radical religious propaganda and books and other literature featuring radical Islamist content in Albanian language are being disseminated through tens of online portals. Social networks such as Twitter, and Facebook are also no exception to the dissemination of radical messages in Albanian cyberspace.[372] This problematic is truly significant in Kosovo where despite its poor economic situation and rural underdevelopment, internet penetration rate and the amount of the internet users are comparable to the European Union countries being the highest in the region.[373] Building on the discussion concerning the online radicalization in neighbouring Albania presented in the previous chapter, there is no doubt that the online radical content present in the Albanian online space is accessible for the Kosovar Albanians as well which only multiplies the severity of the situation. However, the online presence of various extremist

---

[369] OSCE: SEC.FR/419/19 (19 June 2019); RESTRICTED

[370] European Commission. (2019). *Commission Staff Working Document: Kosovo 2019 Report*. Brussels. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-kosovo-report.pdf

[371] Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. (2018, March). Retrieved December 15, 2019, from https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-9/.

[372] Goshi, A., & Van Leuven, D. (2017). *Kosovo-wide Assessment of Perceptions of Radicalisation at the Community Level*. Government of the Republic of Kosovo.

[373] Çela, L. (2018). *Weaponization of Social Media and Islamic Extremism - the Case of Kosovo*. Prishtina: Hasan Prishtina.

groups[374] as well as breakaway imams from Kosovo exists in the country as well. There are even cases of official Kosovar imams building their online presence on various social media to reach to young Muslims and limit the impact of online Kosovar preachers.[375] It comes as no surprise that the Kosovar youth is much more exposed to online radical content by being more predisposed to consume online content in general and using social media. In fact, individuals aged 35 or younger use the online news portals and social media as main source of information significantly more often in comparison to older generations.[376] Indeed, the youth truly is especially vulnerable towards online radicalization. Kosovo is no exception to this given that the consumers of violent extremism online content are individuals between 18 and 34 years old.[377]

The issue of online radicalization in the country is thus reflected also in the efforts of the OSCE presence in the country which is involved in preventing online radicalization in Kosovo while emphasizing precisely the vulnerability of youth.[378] Furthermore, the issue of online radicalization is reflected also in the Kosovo Strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalization which calls for reviewing religious content in the online space and engagement in the form of disseminating moderate religious content in Albanian language in the Kosovar online space.[379]

2.3.7 Summary

The situation regarding radicalization in Kosovo seems to be evincing a combination of the context and motivational factors present in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in

---

[374] European Commission. (2019). *Commission Staff Working Document: Kosovo 2019 Report*. Brussels. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-kosovo-report.pdf

[375] Jakupi, R., & Kraja, G. (2018). *Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Country Case Study 3.* Berlin/Pristina: Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

[376] Vrajolli, M. (2017). *Kosovo Security Barometer: Citizens' perceptions on Violent Extremism*. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

[377] Infographic: Violent Jihadism in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina - Moonshot CVE. (2019, August 5). Retrieved December 17, 2019, from http://moonshotcve.com/jihadism-in-kosovo-and-bosnia-and-herzegovina/.

[378] OSCE: SEC.FR/116/18 (16 February 2018); RESTRICTED

[379] Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister. (2015). *Strategy of Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*. Prishtina

Albania. It can be assumed that this is partly due to the fact that 1) there was a shared development with Bosnia and Herzegovina given the conflicts with Serbs in former Yugoslavia; 2) there is a shared ethnicity with Albania and the historically tight relations Albania has with the Kosovar area.

These two parallels are visible also regarding the identity issue in Kosovo which was identified as of significant importance regarding radicalization in the country. The repercussions of the war in Kosovo are impacting the perception of the identity of Kosovar Albanians and there are increasing tendencies to resort to the Muslim identity. This is further fuelled by both increasing Islamophobia that is present in the country and the influence of foreign actors exerted through various non-governmental organizations that capitalize on the vulnerabilities of Kosovar Albanians caused by the identity issues. Furthermore, there were various socio-economic issues identified in the country that may play at least a contributive role to the religious radicalization in Kosovo. Similarly to both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, these issues emerged especially during the era of turmoil in the 1990s and weren't successfully addressed. Therefore, similarly to the previous discussion on both aforementioned countries, in Kosovo too high levels of unemployment, corruption, nepotism, and issues concerning the education system were identified to be contributive to the emergence of various grievances creating additional vulnerabilities of Kosovar society. The low levels of trust in the government and judicial institutions and the dissatisfaction with how is the country perceived and isolated by the European Union further fuel negative perceptions of the future thus contributing to such vulnerabilities.

In the discussion presented in the pre-empirical section of this paper, it was illustrated that it is the combination of various push and pull factors leading to radicalization. And in the case of Kosovo, the aforementioned push factors have their pull counterpart, indeed. Similarly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were foreign influences and arrival of mujahideen linked to the introduction of radical ideologies that were earlier unknown in Kosovo, as well as proselytizing efforts. The involvement of the foreign actors then escalated after the end of the war in Kosovo through the establishment of the network of various charitable organizations that were boosting proselytizing efforts and that served as the main vehicle of the establishment of a radical breakaway Muslim communities through financing construction of illegal religious institutions. These efforts further impacted the situation within the Islamic Community of Kosovo the credibility of which

was compromised and which had to deal with such breakaway imams preaching radical beliefs. Once again, the weakness of the state proved to be an important factor in this regard since there was no significant intervention limiting the impact of such development. There is no doubt that through this development fertile ground and breathing space for radical tendencies were created in the country which subsequently resulted in the presence of illegal imams preaching radical ideologies as well as in the emergence of alternative spaces where such beliefs are disseminated.

Having the highest per capita number of citizens departing to Syria and Iraq since 2011 of all of the states of wider Europe and being impacted by a relatively high numbers of returnees, Kosovo has to deal with possibility of proselytizing and radical messages spread by such individuals in prisons which was identified as a significant threat regarding the motivational factors of radicalization in the discussion presented in the pre-empirical section of this paper. Furthermore, in the case of Kosovo from the available literature followed that there are quite negative perceptions of returnees in the Kosovar society which may diminish efforts regarding reintegration and re-socialization of the returnees. Given the fact that such programs are already weak, this is a matter of concern, indeed. Furthermore, there are also female returnees in Kosovo who were not successfully prosecuted and, although elaborative research hasn't been yet carried out, it can be anticipated that these individuals are dealing with negative perceptions in the communities upon their return and, considering that reintegration and re-socialization programs targeting these non-prosecuted female returnees are not existent in Kosovo, there is quite a room for additional grievances of such females that may serve as motivational factors of their (re)radicalization.

Similarly to the case of both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, in Kosovo too the youth was identified as a particularly vulnerable group when it comes to susceptibility to radicalization. This is because of the above mentioned socio-economic factors that are exacerbated in the case of youth given the overrepresentation of youth in the unemployment levels and the fact that the perceptions of future – which are particularly negative in the country due to the socio-economic issues – are more acute for this social group. Once again the feelings of isolation of Kosovo particularly due to the visa-regime issue are of significant importance in this regard. Furthermore, it was established that the grievances and vulnerabilities of youth are exploited by various radical imams and groups in Kosovo. The female-specific grievances should be also of concern in Kosovo. There

are employment issues, especially in the private sector. The underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions is also an issue as well as the gender-based violence and domestic violence in the country. Interestingly, the link between women and radicalization is emphasized also in the OSCE efforts in the country which indicates the urgency of this issue.

Online radicalization was also identified as of significant importance in Kosovo. Various portals disseminating radical content and literature are present in Kosovar online space. The impact of online radical content is then increased considering the accessibility of similar websites operated in Albania featuring spreading radical messages in the Albanian language. Cases of breakaway imams establishing presence in the online space involved in proselytizing efforts are also present in Kosovo. Given the high internet penetration rate in the country, there is no doubt that online radicalization is of a concern in the country. Due to the fact that most of the consumers of radical content in Kosovo are young individuals between 18 and 34 years, the vulnerability of youth shouldn't be underestimated.

3 Conclusion

When applying generally known factors of radicalization that were presented in the pre-empirical section to the Muslim-majority countries of the Balkans, that is Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo, it was found that there truly is no sole vehicle – or driver if you wish – of radicalization in these selected cases. It is rather the combination of various motivational factors, some of which are more significant than the others depending on the country that drives an individual towards radicalization. However, it was established that there indeed is an intersection of generally known drivers (or factors) of radicalization discussed in the pre-empirical section of this paper and the motivational factors of radicalization identified in the selected countries.

From the discussion on the generally known factors of radicalization followed that it is important to include the comprehension of context in the theatre to fully understand the milieu from which the motivational factors stem. Such an approach proved to be particularly relevant in the selected countries since it was established that the current

setting from which motivational factors of radicalization stem is particularly interconnected with the historical development in the respective countries and the region in general. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, it was found that it is particularly the war and post-war era that heavily impacted the setting regarding the factors of radicalization in the countries. Although the pre-war period was also significant in these states since it impacted the perception of identity in both these theatres. However, it seems that it is the case of Albania in which the impact of the communist regime had the most salient effects on the identity issue.

In all of the selected countries, these periods of war and post-war turmoil (or in the case of Albania period of the civil unrest) projected heavily into the aggravation of the already quite severe socio-economic issues. In the initial discussion, it was established that the existing research on which the discussion was build is in quite a concordance in regards to the impact of the socio-economic issues – even though these do not pose a sole vehicle of radicalization, their contributive impact can be still significant. Similar findings were identified also in the selected cases of this paper establishing that such factors are indeed present in the selected countries and that they truly may have at least a contributive role in regards to susceptibility to radicalization. Furthermore, from the rather superficial assessment of the situation concerning the motivational factors of radicalization of Roma minority in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania followed that a rather unique setting may occur among this social group in which it is the socio-economic factors that can actually be of significant importance along with some other factors such as identity issues.

Denoux and Carter[380] identified seven political drivers of radicalization some of which projects also to the theatre in the selected countries. The widespread corruption and perceived impunity for well-connected elites – or at least nepotism – were identified as highly relevant to the radicalization in all of the selected countries. Not only all of the respective governments struggle with high levels of corruption but this issue is quite negatively perceived also by the society in each of the selected cases and together with nepotism causes loss of credibility of the respective government and judiciary institutions. The presence of poorly governed and ungoverned areas was also established

---

[380] Denoeux, G., & Carter, L. (2009). *Guides to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*. the United States Agency for International Development.

to be an issue regarding the radicalization. This factor was identified to be most salient in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, in Albania, remote and isolated areas without the sufficient presence of state institutions and civil society were identified to be of significant importance as well. Regarding the case of Kosovo, a sufficient amount of data wasn't found to conclude that poorly governed and ungoverned areas are a significant factor of radicalization. Nevertheless, some evidence supporting such a claim was found and it can be assumed that additional research with particular focus on this driver would confirm the relevance of this factor in Kosovo.

Denoux and Carter state that some of the political drivers further help to fuel wide support of the community due to the shared grievances and generally allow radicalized groups to capitalize on the failure of the state structures. It can be argued that this partly projected also to the selected countries where in some cases negative perceptions of the state in regards to the by Denoux and Carter mentioned denial of basic political rights and civil liberties may occur due to the presence of hate crimes and bias-motivated crimes and the way they are addressed by the respective government, increasing islamophobic tensions and discrimination on the religious grounds. The presence of the political driver featuring the presence of protracted, violent local conflicts listed by the authors can be to a certain extent also included since the conflicts truly significantly impacted the development at least in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo and as of today, they haven't been successfully overcome although their violent phase is over.

The study published by Royal United Services Institute[381] supported the significance of the government failure to provide basic services as well as peace and stability as a motivational factor of radicalization since these may prompt the citizens to seek for some alternative provider to satisfy these needs. This precise case was identified in the selected theatre of this paper since inclinations to the alternative systems were noted in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania – and to some extent also in Kosovo. The study also further confirmed the contributive role of various socio-economic factors and emphasized the fact that these push factors can be harnessed in order to promote radical beliefs. Similar findings were established in this paper where it was found that the radical milieu from

---

[381] Allan, H., Glazzard, A., Jesperson, S., Reddy-Tumu, S., & Winterbotham, E. (2015). *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*. Royal United Services Institute.

which various pull factors are stemming truly capitalizes on the existing socio-economic issues in the theatre.

Veldhuis and Staun[382] discuss poor integration of Muslims, international relations and state's foreign policies as possible root causes of radicalization. Even though the poor integration argument is not applicable to the selected countries, there is some evidence that the international relations, and to some extent the globalization, arguments are relevant in the theatre. This is particularly evident in the case of Albania and Kosovo since negative perceptions of the West and grievances stemming from the foreign policies of these countries were identified. The study published by Royal United Services Institute also established that the matter of identity is of crucial importance – be it the search for personal or group identity or the growth of religious and ethnic identities. In this paper, it was established that the identity issue is relevant for all of the selected countries and that the religious identities are increasing on importance in some of the selected states. Based on this finding and the initial discussion presented in the pre-empirical section of this paper it can be concluded that identity issues truly serve as one of the main motivational factors in the selected theatre. Veldhuis and Staun[383] further confirm these claims of the importance of identity regarding the radicalization and emphasize the role of the figure of the charismatic leader in this process. The existence and impact of charismatic leaders and their radical influence they enjoy over Muslim communities was established in all of the selected countries. However, the pull factors in the theatre are not limited only to such an occurrence. Given the development in the theatre and the impact of foreign actors, various radical communities, parajamaats, alternative spaces led by breakaway imams and self-proclaimed preachers are present in the selected countries. The role of the pull factors of radicalization is thus truly significant in the theatre.

Furthermore, the importance of the role of both the internet and prisons was established in this paper and that is in all of the selected countries although the level of their impact seemingly slightly differs. The online radicalization is particularly relevant in the theatre since there are portals spreading radical content and literature in the language of the respective nationalities, radical messages are disseminated also on the social networks

---

[382] Veldhuis, T., & Staun, J. (2009). *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model*. Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.

[383] Veldhuis, T., & Staun, J. (2009). *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model*. Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.

and the presence of radical preachers involved in proselytizing efforts is also no exception in the theatre's online space. Additionally, it is especially the youth that is particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon. The relevancy of the role of prisons in regards to radicalization was also found in each of the selected countries. The operation of detention facilities, treatment of incarcerated individuals and poor capacity of probation service was identified as main factors in this regard. It was established that the presence of the foreign fighter returnees is also quite significant in this matter due to the lack of a tailored approach to such individuals. However, it is not only the radicalization in prisons where the impact of such returnees is significant. It was found that in each of the selected countries the approach to returned foreign fighters is not sufficient and that these individuals – either non-prosecuted or after they served their term – can pose a high risk in regards to spreading radical beliefs and proselytizing. This issue is particularly pressing in the case of Kosovo.

Additionally, similarly to the factors of radicalization of Roma minorities, some potential female-specific motivational factors of radicalization were identified. These findings provide ground for future research with a specific focus on the social groups in the Muslim-majority countries of the Balkans since there is a significant lack of available sources on this topic and the female- and especially Roma-specific factors of radicalization remain vastly under-researched.

In general, it was established that the Balkan Muslim-majority countries share similar motivational factors of radicalization due to the resembling development and context. However, although the motivational factors to some extent correspond, the significance of each of the factors differs as well as the level of their relevance and respective context. Therefore, when speaking of addressing the issues of the radicalization in Balkan Muslim-majority countries, a tailored approach is desirable to correspond with the specific setting from which motivational factors of radicalization stem.

4 List of references

Akyol, R. A. (2019, October 3). *For Bosnian Women, No Justice-and No Seats.* Retrieved October 31, 2019, from https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/03/bosnian-women-balkan-war-no-justice-and-no-political-power/.

Albanian Institute of Statistics. (2019). *Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Second quarter 2019.* Retrieved from http://www.instat.gov.al/media/6224/lfs-q2-2019.pdf

Allan, H., Glazzard, A., Jesperson, S., Reddy-Tumu, S., & Winterbotham, E. (2015). *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review.* Royal United Services Institute.
Antunez Moreno, J. C. (2010). *Foreign Influences in Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina Since 1995.* Sarajevo: Center for Advanced Studies.

Azinović, V. (2015). *Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Nexus with Islamist Extremism.* Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Democratization Policy Council.

Azinović, V. (2018). *Regional Report: Understanding Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans.* London: British Council.

Babić, M. (2014). *Two faces of Islam in the Western Balkans: Between Political Ideology and Islamist Radicalization.* doi: 10.3233/978-1-61499-387-2-126

Bartoszewicz, M. G. (2013). Radicalisation by Stealth: Kosovo Case Study. *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, *22*(4), 95–106.

Bayrakli, E., & Hafez, F. (Eds.). (2016). *European islamophobia report: 2015.* Ankara: SETA.

Bećirević, E. (2018). *Countering and Preventing Extremism in BiH: Learning from International Efforts.* London: British Council.

Bećirević, E. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report*. London: British Council.

Beslin, J., & Ignjatijevic, M. (2017). *Balkan foreign fighters: from Syria to Ukraine*. European Union Institute for Security Studies. doi: 10.2815/660382

Borum, R. (2011). Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories. *Journal of Strategic Security*, *4*(4), 7–36. doi: 10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.1

Borum, R. (2011). Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research. *Journal of Strategic Security*, *4*(4), 37–62. doi: 10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.2

Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers. (2015). *Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism 2015–2020*. Sarajevo.

Bougarel, X. (2017). *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Surviving Empires*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Bytyqi, K., & Mullins, S. (2019). Returnee Foreign Fighters from Syria and Iraq: The Kosovan Experience. *CTC Sentinel*, *12*(7), 25–30. Retrieved from https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2019/08/CTC-SENTINEL-072019.pdf

Çela, L. (2018). *Weaponization of Social Media and Islamic Extremism - the Case of Kosovo*. Prishtina: Hasan Prishtina.

Corruption Perceptions Index 2018. (n.d.). Retrieved December 15, 2019, from https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018.

Denoeux, G., & Carter, L. (2009). *Guides to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*. the United States Agency for International Development.

European Commission. (2019). *Commission Staff Working Document: Kosovo 2019 Report*. Brussels. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-kosovo-report.pdf

European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation. (2019). *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019*. doi: 10.2813/788404

Ferizaj, A. (2019). *Islamophobia in Kosovo: National Report 2018*. SETA.

Goshi, A., & Van Leuven, D. (2017). *Kosovo-wide Assessment of Perceptions of Radicalisation at the Community Level*. Government of the Republic of Kosovo.

Hide, E. (2015). *Assessment of risks on national security/ the capacity of state and society to react: Violent Extremism and Religious Radicalization in Albania*. Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies.

Hide, E., & Llubani, M. (2018). *The Role of Albania's Civil Society in Countering Violent Extremism*. Tirana: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Hogg, M. A., & Adelman, J. (2013). Uncertainty-Identity Theory: Extreme Groups, Radical Behavior, and Authoritarian Leadership. *Journal of Social Issues*, *69*(3), 436–454.

IFAP supports a pilot project in Albania to counter online violent extremism and cyber bulling. (2019, May 15). Retrieved December 10, 2019, from https://en.unesco.org/news/ifap-supports-pilot-project-albania-counter-online-violent-extremism-and-cyber-bulling.

Infographic: Violent Jihadism in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina - Moonshot CVE. (2019, August 5). Retrieved December 17, 2019, from http://moonshotcve.com/jihadism-in-kosovo-and-bosnia-and-herzegovina/.

Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (2012). *Special report on the status of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

Jakupi, R., & Kraja, G. (2018). *Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Country Case Study 3*. Berlin/Pristina: Berghof Foundation and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

Jureković, P. (2016). *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. (F. Ejdus, Ed.). Vienna: Republic of Austria / Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports.

Khosrokhavar, F. (2017). *Radicalization: Why some people choose the path of violence*. New York: The New Press.

Krasniqi, K. (2018). Islamist Extremism in Kosovo and the Countries of the Region. *Perspectives of Law and Public Administration* , *7*(1), 60–66.

Kursani, S. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Kosovo Report*. London: British Council.

Kursani, S. (2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Reintegration of Returnees: The Challenge of State and Community Response in Kosovo*. London: British Council.

Kursani, S. (2019). *Literature Review 2017 - 2018: Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. London: British Council.

Mancheva, M., & Dzhekova, R. (2017). *Risks of Islamist Radicalisation in Bulgaria: A Case Study in the Iztok Neighbourhood of the City of Pazardzhik*. Center for the Study of Democracy. doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.14106.85443

OSCE. (2016). *Hate Crimes and Bias-Motivated Incidents in Bosnia and Herzegovina: 2015 Monitoring Findings of the Osce Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

OSCE. (2019). *Well-being and Safety of Women: Osce-led Survey on Violence Against Women: Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

Petrović, P. (2016). *Islamic radicalism in the Balkans*. European Union Institute for Security Studies. doi: 10.2815/823418

Preljević, H. (2017). Preventing Religious Radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Role of the BiH Islamic Community. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *37*(4), 371–392.

Qirjazi, R., & Shehu, R. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania. Country Case Study 4*. Berlin/Tirana: Berghof Foundation and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

Republic of Albania Council of Ministers. (2015). *Albanian National Strategy Countering Violent Extremism.*

Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister. (2015). *Strategy of Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*. Prishtina

Richardson, C., Berlouis, K., M. & Cameron, P., A. (2017). Radicalisation of Young Adults in the Balkan States: Counter-Measures, Healthcare Provision, and Community Involvement. *Journal for Deradicalization. Summer (11)*, 87-111.

Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. (2018, March). Retrieved December 15, 2019, from https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-9/.

Shay, S. (2009). *Islamic terror and the Balkans*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Shtuni, A. (2016). *Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

Smit, T. (2017). *Multilateral peace operations and the challenges of of terrorism and violent extremism.* SIPRI.

Speckhard, A., & Shajkovci, A. (2017). *Drivers of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo: Women's Roles in Supporting, Preventing & Fighting Violent Extremism*. Washington, DC: International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism.

Trifunovic, D. (2010, November 15). *Islamic Radicalization Processes in South East Europe.* Retrieved November 2, 2019, from https://www.ict.org.il/Article/587/Islamic Radicalization Processes in South East Europe#gsc.tab=0.

Turčalo, S., & Veljan, N. (2018). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Country Case Study 2*. Berlin/Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative and Berghof Foundation.

United States Department of State (2018). *Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 - Bosnia and Herzegovina.* Retrieved October 31, 2019, from https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bcf1fb54.html

Veldhuis, T., & Staun, J. (2009). *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model*. Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.

Vrajolli, M. (2017). *Kosovo Security Barometer: Citizens' perceptions on Violent Extremism*. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

Vurmo, G. ((2018). *Extremism Research Forum: Albania Report*. London: British Council.

Vurmo, G. (2018). *Transforming Albania's C/PVE Efforts Into Community Resilience and Development Matrix*. British Council.

Vurmo, G. et al. (2015). *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

Vurmo, G., & Sulstarova, E. (2018). *Violent extremism in Albania A national assessment of drivers, forms and threats*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

Zaimi, G. (2017). *Religious Radicalization and Violent Islamist Extremism in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo*. Retrieved from https://www.cssii.unifi.it/upload/sub/zaimi-religious-radicalization-and-violent-islamist.pdf

Zweerde, E. van der (2015) Ina Merdjanova, Rediscovering the umma: Muslims in the Balkans between nationalism and transnationalism. *Religion, State & Society*, 43(2), 193-198.

4.1 OSCE documents

[available at the OSCE Documentation Centre in Prague]

OSCE: SEC.FR/418/09 (19 May 2009); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/83/10 (25 February 2010); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/384/10 (15 July 2010); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/422/10 (5 August 2010); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/387/12 (8 August 2012); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/168/13 (24 April 2013); RESTRICTED

OSCE: PC.FR/20/13 (25 October 2013); RESTRICTED

OSCE: PC.DEL/240/14 (6 March 2014)

OSCE: PC.FR/25/14 (12 September 2014); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/591/14 (25 September 2014); RESTRICTED

OSCE: PC.FR/7/15 (5 February 2015); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/271/15 (30 March 2015); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/357/15 (28 April 2015); RESTRICTED

OSCE: PC.FR/19/15 (22 May 2015); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/504/15 (18 June 2015); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/705/15 (28 August 2015); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/971/15 (3 December 2015); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/40/16 (19 January 2016); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/106/16 (12 February 2016); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/133/16 (24 February 2016); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/454/16 (17 June 2016); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/714/16 (23 September 2016); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/718/16 (26 September 2016); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/835/16 (8 November 2016); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/845/16/Rev.1 (10 November 2016); RESTRICTED

OSCE: PC.FR/31/16 (17 November 2016); RESTRICTED

OSCE: EEF.FR/2/17 (24 January 2017)

OSCE: PC.FR/3/17 (27 January 2017); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/129/17 (22 February 2017); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/215/17 (24 March 2017); RESTRICTED

OSCE: PC.FR/8/17 (21 April 2017); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.PR/300/17 (29 May 2017)

OSCE: SEC.FR/473/17 (27 June 2017); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/489/17 (3 July 2017); RESTRICTED

OSCE: PC.FR/21/17 (25 August 2017); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/625/17 (29 August 2017); RESTRICTED

OSCE: PC.FR/27/17 (17 November 2017); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.PR/714/17 (12 December 2017)

OSCE: SEC.FR/70/18 (30 January 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/116/18 (16 February 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: PC.FR/9/18/Corr.1 (17 April 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: PC.DEL/445/18 (19 April 2018)

OSCE: PC.DEL/446/18 (19 April 2018)

OSCE: SEC.FR/390/18 (7 June 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/397/18 (11 June 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/416/18 (18 June 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/429/18 (22 June 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/430/18 (22 June 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: HCNM.PR/10/18 (20 July 2018)

OSCE: PC.FR/27/18 (20 September 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: ODIHR.GAL/56/18 (21 September 2018)

OSCE: PC.DEL/1097/18 (27 September 2018)

OSCE: PC.FR/28/18 (5 October 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/758/18 (5 November 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/784/18 (13 November 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/870/18 (17 December 2018); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/2/19 (2 January 2019); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/11/19 (8 January 2019); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/23/19 (11 January 2019); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/47/19 (22 January 2019); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/180/19 (13 March 2019); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/274/19 (23 April 2019); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/326/19 (14 May 2019); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/343/19 (21 May 2019); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/419/19 (19 June 2019); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/430/19 (25 June 2019); RESTRICTED

OSCE: SEC.FR/483/19 (12 July 2019); RESTRICTED

OSCE: PC.DEL/837/19/Rev.1 (15 July 2019); RESTRICTED

OSCE: PC.FR/24/19 (30 August 2019); RESTRICTED