WESTERN BALKANS

EXTREMISM RESEARCH FORUM

LITERATURE REVIEW

RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through an analysis of empirical and non-empirical literature, this review examines treatment of the topic of Islamist radicalisation and violent extremism in the Western Balkans. This literature indicates that regional wars which took place from 1991 to 2001, along with poverty, national and ethnic tensions and the presence of significant indigenous Muslim populations, have been harnessed by Middle Eastern charities in their proselytization and recruitment efforts. Though these organisations are not necessarily involved in radicalisation that leads to violence, Salafi proselytisation is always introduced to contextualise the discussion of Salafi-jihadism – an ideology that has inspired terrorism and has driven foreign fighters to depart from Western Balkans countries for Syrian and Iraqi battlefields.

Thus, authors examining the Western Balkans as a source for foreign fighters inevitably discuss Salafism as a radicalising belief system[1] that has taken hold in some parts of the region attracting increasing numbers of supporters; moreover, there are various drivers of violent extremism that involve those who are disillusioned by numerous complex domestic, regional and international challenges.

The sense of persecution many radicalised individuals feel, combined with numerous factors of radicalisation – such as the habit of converts to withdraw from their former social circles – makes research difficult on two fronts; first, as far as gaining access to participants, and second, in trusting the honesty of individuals who do participate. As such, primary accounts of radicalisation by people who have been radicalised remain rare, and efforts focused on developing a psychological profile of a person likely to be radicalised, or likely to be recruited into committing violence, have failed to fully materialise or to inform an effective intervention model.

This review explores the debate on terminology in this field, and the uncritical use of 'radicalisation' and 'extremism,' and calls for the establishment and use of terminology and benchmarks for Western Balkans countries that are suitable to the region's cultural, religious, and political specificities. Some key drivers of radicalisation are examined as well, including: social exclusion and poverty, foreign influences, online platforms, prisons, and previous criminality. In analysing narratives of radicalisation, the review shows that extremist groups use sophisticated forms of proselytisation but avoid open calls for violence. These

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[1] Some of the literature reviewed for this article indicates that Salafi proselytisation in the region, which is focused on 'purifying' the Islamic traditions of the Western Balkans, may fall within legal bounds but nonetheless represents a security challenge, for two reasons: 1) it creates an environment that is conducive to the development of further extremism and possible violence; and 2) it has the potential to disturb the secular social order of countries in the region.

narratives feature lifestyle prescriptions that restrict women and their freedoms and even address intimate behaviour, and discuss the suffering of Muslims around the world.

This review also considers the foreign fighter phenomenon as it relates to the Western Balkans and gives special attention to gendered aspects of radicalisation in the region.

Finally, this review concludes by identifying gaps in knowledge and research, the most glaring of which is the absence of empirical research mentioned above. The available literature also fails to address the role and position of women in Salafism and in radicalisation processes (and perhaps in de-radicalisation initiatives). Furthermore, there is a lack of systematic research on how recruitment takes place in particular spaces, such as in online forums and in prisons.

AIMS AND SCOPE OF THIS REVIEW

The issue of Islamist radicalisation has been treated as a security concern in the Western Balkans for some time now, and has been the focus of international and domestic policymakers and security agencies. This is not to say that radicalisation does not occur within other religious groups in the region; however, due to the global incidence of Islamist radicalisation and terrorism, these issues are the subject of more extensive research and debate. Still, first-hand research from the Western Balkans is scarce, especially within radicalised communities. But various other sources and normative literature is available, including non-empirical policy papers, opinion pieces, news articles, and critical analyses – all of which are useful in identifying gaps in the research.

Empirical studies of the subject are not abundant,[2] and this review is not a meta-analysis but rather a snapshot of existing literature that provides insight into Islamist radicalisation and related issues and identifies knowledge gaps insofar as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Macedonia (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia are concerned.[3] As opposed to summarising each source, this review aims to paint a picture of the figures and issues that relate to radicalisation in the region, with a critical eye to what has been learned and what questions remain unanswered. In reviewing the literature, priority was given to empirical research, followed by the writing of experts who reference known sources and use theoretical frameworks and analysis, and then opinion pieces and news articles.

The review is structured around the following topics:

- a general background of the Western Balkans region
- religious and socio-political issues in the region
- the language used to discuss radicalisation
- drivers of radicalisation
- the threat of terrorism and related issues
- gaps in research in the field of radicalisation in the Western Balkans.

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[2] For empirical studies see: Shpend Kursani, Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovar citizens involvement as Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq (KCSS, 2015); Gjergji Vurmo, Besfort Lamallari, Aleka Papa, Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania (Tirana: IDM, 2015); Vlado Azinović and Muhamed Jusić, The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent (Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 2016); Edina Bećirević, Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims (Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 2016). Kaltrina Selimi and Filip Stojkovski, Assessment of Macedonia's Efforts in Countering Violent Extremism, View from Civil Society (Analytica, 2016). Vladimir Ilić, Opinion Poll Conducted Among the Sandžak Youth: How Susceptible are the Youth to Islamic Extremism, Helsinki Files No. 35 (Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2016).

[3] On meta-analysis, see: Jay Verkuilen, 'What's the difference between a 'literature review' and a meta-analysis,' Quora, 28 February 2016, https://www.quora.com/Whats-the-difference-between-a-literature-review-and-a-meta-analysis (accessed 22 February 2017). '…meta-analysis is quantitative research synthesis, or quantitative literature review. In this case, some kind of pooled effect size is presented, as well as measures of how well the studies cohere.'

1. THE WESTERN BALKANS REGION: A GENERAL BACKGROUND

The term 'Western Balkans' is used by policymakers in both the EU and US to refer to Albania, BiH, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia – that are currently outside the European Union. The population of the region is just over 18 million, featuring a mix of ethnic groups and religions. The three most common religious adherences are Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, and Islam; with the largest Muslim populations in Kosovo (96 per cent), Albania (57 per cent), and BiH (51 per cent).[4]

Table 1. Western Balkans, demographic profiles

WESTERN BALKANS	POPULATION	URBAN POP.	RELIGIONS (X >2%)	UNEMPLOYMENT		POP. BELOW POVERTY
				OVERALL	YOUTH	
Albania	3,038,594	57%	Muslim: 56.7% Roman Catholic: 10% Orthodox: 6.8% Atheist: 2.5% Bektashi Sufi: 2.1% Other: 5.7% Unspecified: 16.2%	17%	30%	14%
BiH	3,861,912	40%	Muslim: 50.7% Orthodox: 30.7% Roman Catholic: 15.2%	43%	63%	17%
Macedonia	2,100,025	57%	Macedonian Orthodox: 64.8% Muslim: 33.3%	25%	53%	30%
Kosovo	1,883,018	no data	Muslim: 95.6% Roman Catholic: 2.2%	35%	55%	30%
Montenegro	644,578	64%	Orthodox: 72.1% Muslim: 19.1% Catholic: 3.4% Unspecified: 2.6%	19%	41%	9%
Serbia	7,143,921	56%	Serbian Orthodox: 84.6% Catholic: 5% Muslim: 3.1% Undeclared/Unknown: 4.5%	19%	50%	9%

Source: US Central Intelligence Agency, 'The World Factbook,' https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/ (accessed 24 February 2017).

Besides Albania, the countries of the Western Balkans were all part of Yugoslavia before its disintegration. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was one of the largest, most developed, and most ethnically and religiously diverse countries in Southeast Europe. But after the collapse of communism, Yugoslavia saw a rise of militant nationalism, the politicisation of nationalist rhetoric, a proliferation of political parties, and a strong drive for independence in each of the individual republics that formed the SFRY. In 1991, conflict erupted, first in Slovenia, then in Croatia, and then in BiH – where war was the deadliest, claiming more than 100,000 lives and displacing more than half the population.

The war in BiH finally came to end when a peace deal was brokered in the American heartland, in Dayton, Ohio. Yet, in 1998, war again broke out – in Kosovo, between ethnic Albanians and the Rump Yugoslav government – and was eventually resolved through NATO intervention.

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[4] Data gathered from the websites of statistical agencies for each country.

Macedonia also saw violence, beginning in 2001 and lasting for seven months, between state security forces and ethnic Albanians fighting for greater political and economic rights.[5]

Following this decade of conflict, the Western Balkans entered a period of relative stability at the beginning of the new century, with substantial peace frameworks in place in BiH, Kosovo, and Macedonia. The region had received commitments from American and European policymakers regarding state building, diplomacy, and the initiation of reforms, as well as promises to secure peace through peacekeeping and police missions.[6] However, despite this significant support from the international community, Western Balkans countries have been slow to recover from conflict and build competitive economies and infrastructures.

Currently, living standards in the region are significantly lower than in the EU, with GDP per capita at approximately half that of EU states in eastern Europe, one-third that of EU members in southern Europe, and only a quarter that of EU countries in the West (see Figure 1 below).[7] According to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index for 2015/2016, countries in the Western Balkans lag behind the rest of Europe due to underperforming economies and less effective governance, which hinders the business environment and acts as a deterrent to high levels of productivity.[8]

Figure 1. Relative GDP by European region
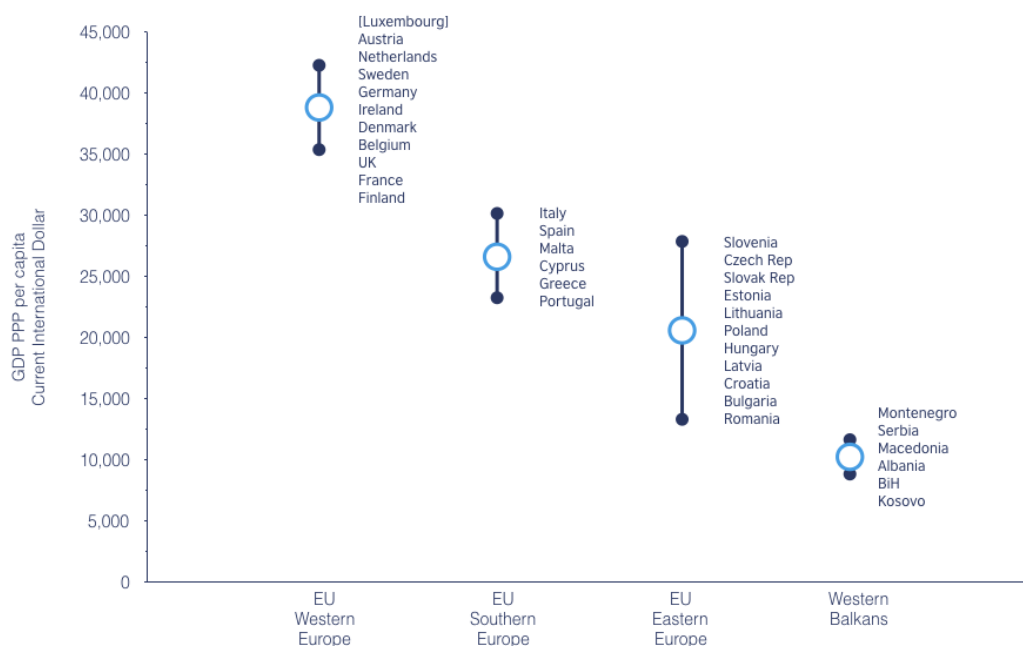
Source: Peter Sanfey, Jakov Milatović and Ana Krešić, *How the Western Balkans can catch up*, working paper no. 186 (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2016), 2.[9]

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[5] For more on this period in Macedonia, see: Lars Jerker Lock, Macedonia: A conflict analysis (SIDA, 2003).

[6] Francisco de Borja Lasheras and Jasmin Mujanović, ''Realpolicy' in the Balkans: Reanimating Democratization and the European project,' Belgrade Security Forum, 7 October 2016, http://www.belgradeforum.org/info/ news/1053/%5BBSF+Paper%5D+'Realpolicy'+in+the+Balkans%3A+Reanimating+Democratization+and+the+European+project.html (accessed 5 February 2017).

[7] Peter Sanfey, Jakov Milatović, and Ana Krešić, How the Western Balkans can catch up, working paper no. 186 (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2016), 2.

[8] Klaus Schwab, The Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016 (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2015). View results of this report online at: World Economic Forum, 'The Global Competitiveness Index 2015-2016,' http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2015-2016/the-global-competitiveness-index-2015-2016/ (accessed 23 February 2017).

[9] Data from the 2015 IMF World Economic Outlook. Note that countries are ordered from highest to lowest and that Luxembourg, which is an outlier, is not included.

All Western Balkans states have been offered Stabilization and Association Agreements by the EU, and overall, the political rhetoric in these countries favours a European perspective. SAAs represent a long-term policy that relies on a political process aimed at helping these countries make successful reforms to strengthen democratic institutions, ensure the rule of law, promote trade and economic development, and to combat 'corruption, ethnic violence, poverty, and social exclusion.'[10] Yet, international politics in the region are increasingly impacted by Russia.

Moscow seems particularly sensitive to the notion of NATO expansion, referring in 2014 to Montenegro's potential membership in the Alliance as a 'major provocation,'[11] but Russia seeks to undermine Western influence generally and 'act as a serious threat to EU integration of the countries in the region.'[12] This it achieves through fomentation of underlying conflicts and ethnic tensions – by endorsing secessionist politics in the Republika Srpska, in BiH; encouraging pro-Serbian and anti-NATO groups in Montenegro; supporting nationalist discourse in Serbia; and generally complicating the already complicated relationship between Serbs and Albanians.[13] Some analysts have noted that a 'weakening of relations with the EU entail an increased involvement of Russia' in the Western Balkans,[14] and many cite 'petro-policy' as a significant tool of Russian influence.[15]

Recently, the effects of the migration crisis have also been felt strongly in the region, which, in 2015, became a main entry point for refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Central Asian countries as they made their way to northern Europe.[16] This stretched institutional capacities in the region to their limits; but Western Balkans countries were largely cooperative in responding to the crisis, with populations that were sympathetic to the plight of refugees and were willing to support humane policies. For political leaders, the refugee crisis was an opportunity to demonstrate their adherence to European values.[17] However, as the needs of refugees became longer-term, the realities of this commitment set in; and during the harsh conditions of this 2016/2017 winter, refugees did not receive proper shelter and protection.

1.1. ISLAMIC PRACTICES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Until 1991, the only Balkan state in which a majority of the population identified as Muslim was Albania.[18] After the breakup of Yugoslavia, Muslim majorities remained in Kosovo, where nearly the entire population is Muslim, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where just over 50 per cent of the population declared themselves Muslim in a recent census. There is also a significant Muslim minority in Macedonia (33 per cent), as well as smaller Muslim minorities in Montenegro (around 19 per cent) and Serbia (around 3 per cent).[19]

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[10] European Communities, The European Union and the Western Balkans: Building the Future Together (2004), 5.

[11] Christian Nünlist, 'The Western Balkans Between Europe and Russia,' CSS Analyses in Security Policy, no. 170, March 2015, 3.

[12] Ibid.

[13] European Communities, The European Union and the Western Balkans.

[14] Tomasz Stępniewski, 'Russia in Global Politics in the Context of the Western Balkans,' in Russia in the Balkans: Threat or Opportunity? Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe, vol. 13, no. 5, edited by Jan Muš (Lublin, Poland: IESW, 2015), 53.

[15] For example, see: Jan Muš, ed., Russia in the Balkans: Threat or Opportunity? Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe, vol. 13, no. 5 (Lublin, Poland: IESW, 2015); and Nünlist.

[16] Predrag Jureković, 'The International Refugee Crisis as a Challenge for Western Balkans,' IKF Monitor International, February 2016.

[17] Francisco de Borja Lasheras, 'Return to Instability: How Migration and Great Power Politics Threaten the Western Balkans,' policy brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, no. 163, March 2016.

[18] There is no official data on the numbers of Muslims in Albania in the last decades of the 20th century, as census data on religious affiliation was collected in 1945 and then not again until 2011 – when roughly 57% of citizens identified as Muslim (see Table 1, above). However, various religious authorities have contested this result, claiming the number is closer to 70%, which would reflect the rate recorded in 1945 and would imply that this rate had held relatively steady for decades. For more on this, see: Olsi Jazexhi, 'Albania,' in Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, vol. 5, ed., Jørgen S. Nielsen, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[19] US Central Intelligence Agency, 'The World Factbook,' https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/ (accessed 24 February 2017).

As Bougarel rightly notes, it is difficult to speak of Muslims of the Western Balkans without taking into account a number of significant differences among them; first, between urban and rural Muslims, but also in terms of cultural practices that have developed due to various languages, ethnicities, and levels of secularization during communist times.[20] The great majority of Muslims in the region are Sunni, attached to the Hanafi *madhhab*,[21] and in Albania and Kosovo there is also the strong influence of the Bektashi order of Sufis. Across the Western Balkans, how national and religious identities are linked also varies widely. For example, the national identity of Muslims in BiH (Bosniaks) and in the Sandžak region (which straddles the border of Serbia and Montenegro) has 'developed based on their religious identity… [whereas] Albanian national identity has, by contrast, developed despite the religious cleavages that run through the Albanian-speaking populations of the Balkans.'[22]

Muslims of the Western Balkans have always lived at a crossroads of cultures. The forms of Islam traditionally practiced in the region have been shaped by this, and they advocate peaceful coexistence with other faiths, built on conventions established during the Ottoman Empire.[23] Due to the process of secularization that followed WWII and continued for fifty years of communist rule, there were no fundamentalist movements in the Western Balkans prior to the 1990s. But, with the collapse of communism, space opened for religious revival – and not only among Muslims, but in Catholic and Orthodox Christian communities as well.[24] This religious renaissance in the region was significant; yet, few foreign analysts saw the potential it had for fostering radical movements. And, indeed, it was not until the war in BiH began in 1992 that radical influences were imported into the region.

1.1.2. Salafism vs. traditional Western Balkans Islam

The Salafism that arrived in Bosnia in the 1990s was its most militant form. Purveyors of this ideology saw Bosnia as a safe-haven to which they could escape from Asia, with some arriving from training camps in Afghanistan, having fought as *mujahideen* in the Soviet-Afghan war until 1989. Following the war in BiH, and the American-led NATO intervention, some *mujahideen* were expelled, but those who remained in the Western Balkans were the key to further developing the region's Salafist movement.

The growth of Salafism in BiH was briefly dampened after the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York City when, under pressure from the international community, some Islamic charities suspected of supporting transnational terrorism were closed. However, Salafist proselytization picked back up around 2006, with a new methodology that relied on establishing local organisations to educate students in the ultraconservative traditions of the Gulf States, which adhere to the Hanbali *madhhab*. Just as the *mujahideen* before them, these organisations and their local staff have promoted intolerance, not only toward other religions, but also toward the more tolerant Hanafi School of traditional Bosnian Islam.

A number of authors have stressed that similar tactics are also being used in other parts of the Western Balkans. According to Spahiu, for example, new Islamist organisations in Albania were

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[20] Xavier Bougarel, 'The role of Balkan Muslims in Building a European Islam,' Issue Paper No. 43, European Policy Center, November 23, 2005, pages 7-8.

[21] A madhhab is a school of thought within Islam. In Sunni Islam, there are four schools: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali. The Hanafi school has the largest number of followers, and as the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, is the most dominant school of thought in the Western Balkans.

[22] Bougarel, 6.

[23] See: Marko Attila Hoare, 'Towards an Explanation of the Bosnian Genocide of 1992-1995,' Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism 14, no. 3 (2014): 33-99; Bernard Lewis The Jews of Islam (Princeton University Press, 1984), 62; and Mark R. Cohen, Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages (Princeton University Press, 1994).

[24] James Kenneth Wither, 'Salafi-Jihadists: A Threat to the Western Balkans' in Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans: Papers presented at the PfPC workshop held in Belgrade, eds. Filip Ejdus and Predrag Jureković (Vienna: National Defence Academy, 2016), 41.

'taking advantage of Albania's favourable environment as a new and inexperienced democracy.'
[25] Perhaps the most important work on the subject of Saudi influence in the region is that of Isa Blumi, who warned of coming Hanbali proselytization as early as 2005. Blumi offers a detailed analysis of Kosovo, but links it to a pattern of radicalisation across the region. What distinguishes his work is that he views Saudi proselytization in the context of religious homogenisation policies implemented by communist Yugoslavia in the post-WWII period, which were set on destroying the Kosovo-Albanian spiritual heritage, known for religious syncretism.[26]

While the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo are rightly emphasized as a main factor that has facilitated the spread of Salafism in the region, the case of Albania – which did not experience armed conflict in the 1990s – shows that other factors are also at play. During communism, Albania was the most secular of all the Western Balkans countries, due to a total ban on religion by dictator Enver Hoxha. But in 1992, Albania joined the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, and some experts point to this as the 'cornerstone move that enabled Islamist factions to access terrain during the Balkan wars.'[27]

The radical influences that arrived in the Western Balkans during this time period were also conditioned by powerful petrodollars, accepted by political elites in exchange for their turning a blind eye to troubling signs of a campaign to change the nature of traditional Islamic practices in the region. And it was not only Balkan political elites that looked the other way from Salafist influences. In an article published in the *New York Times*, Carlotta Gall conducted interviews with a wide range of insiders and officials, and concluded that radicalisation in Kosovo had taken place 'under the watch of American officials.'[28] As Gall noted, Kosovo was once amongst the most pro-American Muslim societies in the world. Unlike in Bosnia, where the American-led intervention that ended nearly four years of war and genocide was perceived by many to have come too late, in Kosovo, NATO had acted pre-emptively to prevent the Serbian Army from committing genocide. 'Since then…Saudi money and influence have transformed this once-tolerant Muslim society at the hem of Europe into a font of Islamic extremism and a pipeline for jihadists.'[29] These jihadists, according to Gall, are thought to have been radicalized 'by a corps of extremist clerics and secretive associations funded by Saudi Arabia and other conservative Arab gulf states using an obscure, labyrinthine network of donations from charities, private individuals and government ministries.'[30]

Long before Gall, Isa Blumi, a researcher from Kosovo, also asserted that Saudi influence there had risen while UN and European organisations on the ground ignored it or failed to notice. In 2005, Blumi warned that Saudi financing of schools in Kosovo, through the Islamic Endowment foundation, might 'create a new generation of Albanian Muslims whose increasing sense of persecution and neglect is translating into a generation of young men and women whose

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[25] See: Ebi Spahiu, 'Foreign Fighters, Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania and Western Balkans,' in Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans: Papers presented at the PfPC workshop held in Belgrade, eds. Filip Ejud and Predrag Jureković (Vienna: National Defence Academy, 2016), 68. Also see: Mieczysław P. Boduszyński, 'The Gulf and the Balkans: Islam, Investment, and Influence,' Monthly Monitor Report, January 2015.
[26] Isa Blumi, Political Islam Among the Albanians: Are the Taliban coming to the Balkans? (Pristina: Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2005).
[27] Fred Abrahams, 'From Albania to Bosnia: Brothers Need Arms,' Balkan Insight, 1 June 2015, http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/from-albania-to-bosnia-brothers-need-arms-1/1431/150 (accessed 15 January 2016). Spahiu also points to the role of Salafi/Wahhabi groups in Albania. Her work has an empirical dimension and she quotes an Albanian imam, an adherent of the Hanafi school, who complains of a Hanbali Saudi influence. See: Spahiu, 'Foreign Fighters, Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania and Western Balkans.'
[28] Carlotta Gall, 'How Kosovo Was Turned into Fertile Ground for ISIL,' New York Times, 21 May 2016.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

loyalties are not with Kosovo and sustain a volatile intolerance to anyone who contradicts their training.'[31]

However, some researchers view this link between violent extremism and the proselytization activities of Saudi and other Middle Eastern charities as much weaker. According to Shpend Kursani, the attitudes of the 300 fighters from Kosovo who have joined ISIS since its creation do not reflect those of the Kosovar population generally regarding the West. He cites a recent Gallup poll showing that the vast majority of people in Kosovo approve of American leadership in the world (88 per cent).[32] Kursani does acknowledge the role of Saudi Arabia in introducing more conservative religious ideas and practices to the Western Balkans, but 'does not find it to be the core or direct cause of pulling people towards violent extremism and violent extremist groups in Syria.'[33]

Salafism is not the only outside influence being imposed on the traditions of Western Balkans Muslims. As noted by Wither, the Muslim Brotherhood and a small minority of active, violent jihadists also seek to recruit adherents.[34] And, there are Shia influences as well, though they are less visible because they target intellectual elites and have not developed the ambitious propaganda of Salafism. The Islamist government in Turkey is also attempting to influence Balkan Muslims; beginning with the neo-Ottoman policies of former Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu.[35] Some Bosnian leaders are particularly dubious of Turkey's intentions and there are some fears in the region that Turkish policy aims to 're-establish hegemony over the Balkans.'[36] While Turkish influences have not been linked to violent extremism, they join the array of actors from majority Muslim countries trying to bolster their political and business interests by attracting Western Balkans Muslims toward their religious interpretations and cultures.[37] Even non-radicalising influences among these may serve to fragment traditional religious communities in the region; and this fragmentation may weaken some of the structures that can play a role in intervening in the radicalising process.

With the fight for the hearts and minds of Muslims in the region very much active, each of these influences deserves careful consideration. Still, the Salafist movement stands out in terms of the scope of its proselytization and a dedication to altering long-standing social values in order to radicalize traditionally moderate Muslim believers. And, because militant Salafists are often recruited from the mainstream movement, their discourse is almost always the focus of literature discussing religious radicalisation in the Western Balkans.

This attention on Salafism is also linked to actual violent extremism. In recent years, countries in the Western Balkans have experienced an increasing number of low-level terrorist incidents and foiled terrorist plots (see section 4.2). There are reports of a relatively high number of foreign

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[31] Isa Blumi, Political Islam Among the Albanians, 15.

[32] Shpend Kursani, 'Two myths about Kosovo's 'ISIS problem,'' Prishtina Insight, 8 June 2016, http://prishtinainsight.com/two-myths-kosovos-isis-problem (accessed on 18 March 2017). Kursani rightly notes that these 300 fighters represent just 0.167% of a 1.8 million person population that is overwhelmingly pro-Western.

[33] Shpend Kursani, Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq (Kosovar Center for Security Studies, 2015).

[34] Wither, 42.

[35] Edina Bećirević, 'The Theory and Practice of Ahmet Davutoglu,' Democracy and Security in Southeastern Europe 1, no. 1 (2010): 56-60. There is also a significant network of Fethullah Gülen schools in the region, which have considerable influence; this will be explored in future research. See: Gordana Knježević, 'Bosnia's Gulenist Network,' Radio Free Europe, 22 July 2016 http://www.rferl.org/a/bosnia-gulenist-network/ 27873908.html (accessed 24 February 2017); and 'Education in the Balkans: Filling the Gulen Vacuum,' Europe Next Policy Briefs, http://europenext.eu/2016/09/28/education-in-the-balkans-filling-the-gulen-vacuum/ (accessed 24 February 2017). Isa Blumi has also explored the influence of the Gulenist network in Albania.

[36] Robert E. Hamilton, 'Keep Your Eye on the Balkans,' Foreign Policy Research Institute, 9 March 2017, http://www.fpri.org/article/2017/03/keep-eye-balkans/#_ftn20 (accessed 16 March 2017).

[37] For example, see: Michael Birnbaum, 'Turkey brings a gentle version of the Ottoman empire back to the Balkans,' The Guardian, 2 April 2013.

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fighters in Syria and Iraq from the region, especially from BiH, Kosovo, Albania, and Macedonia. Some of these fighters have joined ISIS, which is a concern for Western and regional security agencies (see section 4.1). The challenge posed by fighters who have recently returned and will return from combat is yet another security threat in a region already faced with so many political, social, and economic struggles.[38]

2. UNDERSTANDING THE LANGUAGE OF RADICALISATION

Literature that has emerged recently on the topic of violent extremism and radicalisation is focused on identifying the motivations for individuals to join violent extremist groups. In this effort, a RUSI literature review distinguishes between 'situational factors working at the macro level (i.e. country or community-wide), social/cultural at the meso-level (i.e. affecting smaller communities or identity groups), and individual factors at the micro level.'[39] While the value of these inquiries should not be underestimated, part of what they reveal is that much of the research in this field does not answer some of the questions researchers feel are crucial to developing effective prevention programmes. Ideally, researchers would be able to create a profile, or at least several profiles, of the men and women most at risk of being radicalised into violence. But, unfortunately, a new generation of violent extremism (VE) researchers faces the same challenges as the previous generation of terrorism researchers: Determining why individuals decide to commit terrorist acts or turn toward violent extremism is incredibly difficult.

While the developing research still lacks enough insight to answer this key question, new literature does attempt to bring more theoretical clarity. There is new terminology; and an effort to make a distinction between 'radicalisation,' 'extremism,' and 'violent extremism.' The syntagm 'radicalisation into violent extremism' also appears frequently, and this new language clearly reflects the challenge researchers face to avoid stigmatising individuals and groups that adhere to radical religious ideologies and hold radical religious or political beliefs within the legal bounds of liberal democratic societies. But this new terminology underscores one of the main problems in both analysing the issue and developing successful prevention programmes – that the core rights of any free society include the right to radical beliefs. This freedom poses an obstacle to prevention programmes because the differences between indoctrination into radical beliefs versus into violent radical beliefs are often a matter of subtleties. And sometimes, it is also a question of personality whether those beliefs inspire violence in an individual or not.

While some Western Balkans authors give special attention to terminology, most do not.[40] In research studies and literature from the region, the terms 'radicalism' and 'violent extremism' are often interchanged. Causes of this confusion around terminology and definitions are explained in detail in a 2015 study by the Institute of Democracy and Mediation (IDM) in Tirana, the authors of which stressed the importance of making a clear distinction between violent extremism and religious radicalism.[41] Also, Valery Perry has attributed this inconsistency to a lack of agreement

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[38] Vlado Azinović and Muhamed Jusić, The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent (Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 2016).

[39] Harriet Allan, et al., Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review (Royal United Services Institute, 2015). Also see: Guilain Denoeux, 'Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism,' USAID, February 2009; and James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation, Whitehall Report 2-16 (London: RUSI, 2016).

[40] Notable authors from the region who do pay attention to terminology include: Adrian Shtuni, Besfort Lamarari, Vlado Azinović, and Muhamed Jusić. See: Adrian Shtuni, 'Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo,' Special Report 397, United States Institute of Peace, December 2016; Besfort Lamallari, 'Dealing with Returning Foreign Fighters,' TRAIN Programme, 2016; and Azinović and Jusić.

[41] Gjergji Vurmo, et al., Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania (Tirana: IDM, 2016), 21.

on definitions, and arriving at clear definitions of these terms is obviously the key to reaching more uniformity in their use.[42]

Recently, authors and researchers have begun to employ these terms with more caution and with the acknowledgement that radicalisation does not necessarily lead to violence. And, the argument has been made that it is necessary to distinguish between radicalisation linked to violent extremism and terrorism, and radicalisation aimed at initiating societal changes through non-violent means.[43] This has led to experimentation with terms that more concisely communicate this distinction by qualifying different types of radicalisation; for example, 'cognitive radicalisation' that implies only a shift in beliefs versus 'violent radicalisation' that implies an extreme shift in behaviour. Indeed, some scholars assert that 'cognitive radicalisation is a distinct phenomenon from violent radicalisation and the two should not be conflated.'[44]

A popular but rather vague definition of radicalisation offered by Peter Neumann, that it is 'what goes on before the bomb goes off,' serves to illustrate that radicalisation does not always imply the use of violence, but also refers to the process that *may* lead to violence.[45]

A similar understanding is put forward in the 2015 IDM report (mentioned above), in which the authors argue that, at its most basic, radicalisation is 'the active pursuit or acceptance of the use of violence to attain the stated goal,' but, 'in a broader sense...[is] the active pursuit or acceptance of far-reaching changes in society.'[46] This latter, broader definition does not suggest that radicalisation must lead to violence.

In 2015, Perry argued that holding radical views does not mean an individual will 'act to promote these views; they may be closely held, yet intensely personal views, with little broader social impact.'[47] In fact, many of those 'who dabble in or embrace radical or extremist ideology' do not actually engage in violent acts.[48] Thus, according to Perry, it is crucial to understand the range of realities that exist 'between internalisation of extremist views and mobilisation.'[49] The IDM report echoes this, noting that an assumption that radicalisation leads to violence 'bears the risk of leading to wrong conclusions and qualifying radical stances as inherent indicators of terrorism.'[50]

The question of language has also been problematised by Selimi and Stojkovski, who encountered conceptual issues whilst conducting research in Macedonia in 2016.[51] They reported that respondents in Tetovo 'struggled to use this terminology [of 'radicalisation'], since they could not provide arguments why it is bad as a phenomenon, or oftentimes the process itself involves turning more to religion, which is not seen as doing anything wrong.'[52] In the course of their research at other sites in Macedonia, they encountered a wide variety of ideas of what it means to be radicalised, including: attending a certain mosque, socializing with imams

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[42] Valery Perry, 'Countering the Cultivation of Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Case for Comprehensive Education Reform,' DPC policy note, September 2015, 5.
[43] Edina Bećirević, Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims (Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 2016).
[44] Kumar Ramakrisha, 'Radicalisation into Violent Extremism: A New Synthesis?' in State, Society and National Security: Challenges and Opportunities in the 21st Century, ed., Shashi Jayakumar (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2016), 156. Also see: Vurmo, et al. Some authors also contrast 'cognitive radicalisation' with 'behavioural radicalization.' For example, see: Marc Sageman, 'On Radicalisation,' in Jayakumar (above). Sageman calls these two concepts 'related but quite distinct' (page 105).
[45] Ibid.
[46] Vurmo, et al., 21.
[47] Perry, 'Countering the Cultivation of Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina,' 5.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Vurmo, et al., 21.
[51] Kaltrina Selimi and Filip Stojkovski, Assessment of Macedonia's Efforts in Countering Violent Extremism, View from Civil Society (Analytica, 2016).
[52] Ibid., 64.

known to reject the authority of the Official Islamic Community, 'misinterpretations of religion,' a certain kind of social media sharing, or simply how a person speaks or behaves (e.g. they are aggressive).[53] For the most part, Selimi and Stojkovski found that people were unclear about what radicalisation actually entails. 'Most of the participants were confused as to how to define a 'radical' and most of them did not see radicalism as something that is against the law; they just expressed their remorse for [radicalised] individuals as they become isolated from their friends and do not actively contribute to society.'[54]

An important discussion on radicalisation, extremism, and relevant conceptual underpinnings is offered by well-known researcher Alex P. Schmid, who argues that:

> *The concept of radicalism ought to be differentiated from the concept of extremism – despite the fact that both radicals and extremists are, at a given time and place and in a given context, by definition, situated outside the mainstream political thinking of a given society…radicals are not per se violent and while they might share certain characteristics (e.g. alienation from the state, anger about a country's foreign policy, feelings of discrimination) with (violent) extremists, there are also important differences such as the willingness of radicals (at least those in the European political tradition) to see all human beings as equals while extremists (not only in the European political tradition) tend to be authoritarian. A major difference between radicals and extremists appears to be that the first have a (more) open mind while the second group has a (more) closed mind, as exemplified, for instance, in the observation that a Salafist 'will not listen to a non-Salafist.'[55]*

Ramakrisha asserts similarly that 'while radicals can on occasion be violent, they can be negotiated with and brought back into the mainstream; hence perhaps the policy challenge is posed by extremists, who's profound zeal in attaching themselves to the anti-social beliefs embedded in their ideologies arguably make them a relatively greater threat to public order in globalised, multicultural societies.'[56]

Elaborating on radicalisation and extremism among Muslims in multicultural contexts, Schmid examines the conceptual definitions of a moderate Muslim in Western Europe. He refers to a survey of 9,000 Muslims in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, conducted in 2008 by the Science Center Berlin, which reported surprising findings: A majority of Muslim immigrants in these countries believe that only one interpretation of the Qu'ran is valid; and this view is as widespread among younger Muslims it is as among older generations. The important findings and discussions Schmid puts forth from the Western European context can certainly inform dialog and research on these concepts in the Western Balkans.

Still, in using these terms – radicalisation and extremism – it must be noted that Muslims in the Western Balkans are culturally and historically different from Muslims who have migrated to Western Europe from every corner of the world. So, in finding a conceptual baseline from which to measure radicalisation and extremism in Western Balkans countries, there is a need to develop regionally- and culturally-specific benchmarks. Indeed, Mark Sedgwick has argued for the need 'to recognise the inherently relative nature of the term 'radical,' and cease treating

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[53] Ibid., 56-58
[54] Ibid., 58
[55] Alex P. Schmid, Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin? (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2014). Available at: https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Violent-Non-Violent-Extremism-May-2014.pdf (accessed 24 February 2017).
[56] Ramakrisha, 163.

'radicalisation' as an absolute concept.'[57] Yet, he admits that this requires placing radicalism 'on a continuum of opinion, [whereby] two main problems result: the problem of whether there is a continuum in the first place, and the problem of where to draw the line.'[58]

On the other hand, Selimi and Stojkovski make a strong argument for the importance of having clarity about these terms. They claim that without a full understanding of the concepts at hand, efforts to counter violent extremism are made more difficult, because a 'vague concept of radicalisation often leaves youth, which is believed to be most targeted demographic [for radicalisation] in Macedonia, unprotected and unequipped with the needed counter-arguments or understandings for how not to fall into the traps of extremist propaganda.'[59]

3. ORIGINS OF TERRORISM AND RADICALISATION IN THE REGION

According to the research conducted by Perry, the South East Europe professional community views violent extremism mainly through the prism of the threat of ISIS. Her research also finds that "other forms of extremism, such as domestic right-wing extremism, are noted as secondary concern, if acknowledged at all."[60] This marks a turn from discussions of 'radicalism' or 'extremism' in the region that took place just over a decade ago, when these concepts were strongly tied to nationalism and sports hooliganism.

As noted in the Introduction, Muslims across the Western Balkans have lived for most of history in peaceful coexistence with their non-Muslim neighbours. But post-communist nationalism, the conflicts of the early 1990s, and revived religious passions have produced social divisions in and among the Western Balkans. And while this review addresses Islamic radicalisation, it is important to mention, in line with Perry's argument, that extremism is indeed present among all religious groups in the Western Balkans.

Perhaps it is no surprise that Salafism has found fertile soil in a socio-political climate in which the glorification of war criminals, an undermining of state structures, and inflammatory nationalist speech are norms across the region.

The literature that touches on these issues is considerable and now extends back some time, especially addressing the dissolution of the SFRY, transitional justice mechanisms, state-building, and challenges to democratisation. To include these sources here would require straying both too far from the topic at hand and too far into a historical background that should be well known to researchers working in the region

3.1. THE ORIGINS OF RADICALISATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, IN BRIEF

Azinović and Jusić have been tracking radicalism in BiH for a number of years and have analysed the historical causes and social drivers of radicalisation today, putting forward evidence that radicalisation was imported to BiH by foreign fighters who arrived during the 1992–1995 war. These fighters later joined with others who embraced Salafism, and settled with their families

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[57] Mark Sedgwick, 'The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion,' Terrorism and Political Violence 22, no. 4 (2010), 479.
[58] Ibid., 490.
[59] Selimi and Stojkovski.
[60] Valery Perry, Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe: A Survey of Regional Issues, Initiatives and Opportunities (Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council, 2016), 4.

along former military front lines.[61] Bećirević argues similarly, when discussing the structure of the Salafist movement in BiH that it developed from *mujahideen* who remained after the wars, and was financed by Islamic charities. In the early post-war years, BiH authorities did not interfere in burgeoning Salafist communities; but after September 11, 2001, some Islamic charities suspected of supporting terrorism were shut down and the Bosnian citizenship of most remaining *mujahideen* was revoked.

3.2. THE ORIGINS OF RADICALISATION IN ALBANIA, KOSOVO, AND MACEDONIA, IN BRIEF

The rise of Salafism in Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia cannot be traced to *mujahideen* as in BiH, but the spread of the ideology was similar to what could be called the 'second phase' of Salafist proselytisation in BiH – when Salafism was preached by covert missionaries known as *da'i*s, facilitated by charities from Saudi Arabia. On the surface, these activities appeared, and were in some cases, aimed at reducing poverty; but Salafists used goodwill to cover their dissemination of Salafism.[62]

In Albania, the official Muslim Community received significant funding from ultraconservative Muslim groups that sought to change how Albanian Muslims practice Islam; this effort is still evident in the numerous mosques in Albania that now preach an extreme, *takfiri* version of Islam, despite the fact that the Muslim Community has explicitly distanced itself from this ideology.[63] Salafism took root in Kosovo around the end of the 1999 war, due to links that had been created between Kosovo and the rest of the Muslim world during the conflict. The main influence came from organisations in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, and Turkey. In Kosovo, Salafist proselytisation was aimed at controlling the population's spiritual life, politicising Islam, and encouraging intolerance toward secularism. Still, the main aim was to introduce and strengthen the cause of Muslim extremism; and this created frictions within the Islamic Community of Kosovo.

As in BiH, Kosovo's main secular political parties failed to address visible signs of radicalisation among Albanian Muslims in Kosovo, apparently to avoid losing political capital.[64] And recent research confirms that Muslim traditions from outside countries continue to spread among Kosovo's population, where foreign Muslim organisations have taken hold by building a base of local representatives over the years, allowing them to continue to operate locally without being physically present.[65]

3.3. THE ORIGINS OF RADICALISATION IN SERBIA, IN BRIEF

In Serbia, particularly in the Muslim dominated region of Sandžak, there is concern that young people are increasingly at risk of religious extremism.[66] An opinion poll conducted among youth in the region shows that a small but significant portion of young people in Sandžak are potentially or absolutely open to Islamist extremism, with one out of ten (10 per cent) claiming that going

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[61] Azinović and Jusić.

[62] Florian Qehaja, 'Beyond Gornje Maoče and Ošve: Radicalization in the Western Balkans,' in Jihadist Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalization Processes, ed., Arturo Varvelli (Milan: ISPI, 2016), 76.

[63] Ebi Spahiu, 'Ethnic Albanian Foreign Fighters and the Islamic State,' Terrorism Monitor 13, no. 10, 15 May 2015, https://jamestown.org/program/ethnic-albanian-foreign-fighters-and-the-islamic-state/ (accessed 24 February 2017).

[64] Agon Demjaha and Lulzim Peci, What happened to Kosovo Albanians: The impact of religion on the ethnic identity in the state building-period (Prishtina: KIPRED, 2016).

[65] Center for Research, Documentation and Publication, 'Public Security in Kosovo: Religious Radicalization of Citizens,' March 2015.

[66] Vladimir Ilić, Opinion Poll Conducted Among the Sandžak Youth: How Susceptible are the Youth to Islamic Extremism, Helsinki Files No. 35 (Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2016).

abroad to defend Islam is justified. This may be related to the fact that Muslim youth in Sandžak 'see themselves more as Muslims than Bosniaks' (or Serbs).[67] That study cited what Fahrudin Kladničanin wrote about the influence of Wahhabis on the youth in Sandžak:

> *Wahhabis are usually focused on recruiting young people 19–27 years old with little education, who are poor and often come from dysfunctional families. The youth are being indoctrinated in private places of worship (masjids), which are either rented or owned by Wahhabis, and in certain religious objects (mosques) whose imams support Wahhabi teaching, and prayers in these mosques are always led by Wahhabis.[68]*

This recruitment potential is also reflected in a report by Perry, which states:

> *The communities in Sandžak are viewed as most at risk, due both to minimal social and economic opportunities, but also due to the increasing influence of foreign, conservative forms of Islam (including Salafist practices). Sandžak is a traditionally poorer and less developed part of Serbia, and there is some disagreement on how to define and refer to the region.[69]*

3.4. THE ORIGINS OF RADICALISATION IN MONTENEGRO, IN BRIEF

To date, there have been no baseline studies on violent extremism or radicalisation in Montenegro. Still, while most experts agree that Montenegro faces the fewest problems with violent extremism in the region, radicalisation is nonetheless affecting Montenegro as well. Official data on foreign fighters from Montenegro indicates that only 14 have departed and 2 have returned.[70]

Yet, some media reports claim that around 30 Montenegrins have departed to fight in Syria.[71] And in June 2015, Montenegro established a special prosecutor's office to investigate terrorism.

In Perry's recent regional study, some respondents in Montenegro 'noted changes in society and political life that could lead to potential problems' with extremism.[72] Despite the few foreign fighters that have emerged from the country, Perry found that authorities are aware of the risk of ISIS-inspired terrorism and have the two foreign fighters who have returned under surveillance. What's more, some respondents highlighted the presence of extremists from Orthodox communities, including some who left Montenegro to fight in Ukraine. Those interviewed for the study were alarmed by the fact that Montenegrin youth are 'becoming more radical on a range of issues from religiosity to women's issues to lack of tolerance against difference, including LGBT rights.'[73]

Though Montenegro has been relatively unaffected by the foreign fighter phenomenon, its government has been eager to develop a national strategy to counter the risk of violent extremism; and a CVE Strategy and Action Plan has resulted from domestic efforts supported by

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[67] Ibid., 39.
[68] Fahrudin Kladničanin, 'Vehabije u sajber prostoru Srbije,' in Politički ekstremizam u cyber prostoru Srbije, eds., Jelinčić and Ilić (Zrenjanin: Centar za razvoj civilnog društva, 2013), 130, as cited in Ibid., 3.
[69] Perry, Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe, 48.
[70] Perry, Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe, 45.
[71] For example, see: 'U Siriji 30 Crnogoraca,' Dan Online, 28 March 2016, http://www.dan.co.me/?nivo=3&rubrika=Drustvo&datum=2016-03-28&clanak=539386&naslov=U%20Siriji%2030%20Crnogoraca (accessed 15 March 2017).
[72] Perry, Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe, 45.
[73] Ibid.

international experts.[74]As a part of new counter-terrorism measures, Montenegrin security services have expanded their intelligence-gathering capacities by creating a unit specifically focused on radicalisation, and by designating a dedicated team whose task is to flag Internet content related to terrorism and violent extremism. Montenegro has also taken legal measures that echo those taken in neighbouring countries, criminalising fighting in foreign conflicts.[75] However, despite these efforts and more, the issue of radicalisation is 'rarely covered by the media or discussed by politicians' in Montenegro.[76]

The process of radicalisation in Montenegro is believed to be similar to the process in other countries in the region. But, there is no formal baseline study or analysis of the drivers of radicalisation there.[77] Nonetheless, some understanding can be gleaned from the feelings of exclusion and/or betrayal expressed by Montenegrin foreign fighters, many of whom reportedly 'felt highly marginalised in their home country.'[78]

4. OVERALL LEVELS OF RADICALISATION IN THE REGION

In spite of the often sensationalist picture presented by media (especially in BiH and Kosovo) regarding the threat of terrorism, Qehaja argues that, in truth, there are 'neither jihadist hotbeds nor typical conservative Islamic hotbeds in the Western Balkans.'[79] He insists that supporters of these ideologies are too spread out and, even though they represent higher concentrations than others in certain places, these places cannot be classified as hotbeds of extremism due to their general heterogeneity. In this regard, he outlines three types of locations in the region: heavily concentrated, moderately concentrated, and less concentrated in terms of adherence to Salafism. Notably, Qehaja concluded that the density of extremists in these areas did not alone explain recruitment patterns, saying this was 'only one part of the story.'[80] In fact, he emphasised that 'the machinery of recruitment therefore should not be depicted only through the perspective of [these] locations.'[81]

The following list is adapted from Qehaja, showing various sites in the Western Balkans with varying levels of concentration.

- In the region, the two most concentrated locations are in BiH, in Gornja Maoča and Ošve. In these places, Salafists are unfriendly to outsiders, live in isolation, and have repeatedly challenged the rule of law and the authority of the state with attempts to influence education curricula. These villages are also known for providing foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq. However, only some 30 per cent of Bosnian foreign fighters come from these places. Qehaja makes a point that conservative locations, such as Gornja Maoča and Ošve were not the only "suppliers" of jihadists and that the causes of violent extremism and terrorism are not always grounded around these concentrated locations.[82]

- Gazi Baba, a municipality of Skopje, Macedonia, is listed as a typical moderately concentrated location – where *takfiri* ideology is openly supported but no attempts have

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[74] Ibid., 46.
[75] Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Balkan Jihadists, 34.
[76] Ibid, 32.
[77] Perry, Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe, 45.
[78] BIRN 2016, 35.
[79] Qehaja, 76.
[80] Ibid., 90.
[81] Ibid., 82.
[82] Ibid., 81-83.

been made to influence educational curricula. Gazi Baba has supplied dozens of jihadists to the wars in Syria and Iraq.[83]

- Less concentrated locations are the municipalities where there are no organised Salafi groups, but there is a significant number of individuals following Salafi interpretation of Islam. They live in the environments where secular or traditional Islamic narratives are dominant. Qehaja singles out: Kaçanik, in Kosovo; Pogradec, in Albania; and Sjenica, in the Serbian part of Sandžak. Kaçanik is among the poorest municipalities in Kosovo, bordering Macedonia in the southeast. Salafism is not commonly preached in official mosques in Kaçanik, but is practiced in private locations also referred to as mosques, which challenges the authority of the Islamic Community of Kosovo. Pogradec County in southeast Albania is said to be home to radicals who have tried to challenge the secular nature of Albanian society in this part of the country. Sjenica, in Sandžak, has some supporters of Salafism, but they are a minority compared to more traditional Muslims; their presence is nonetheless creating insecurity among local citizens. Dozens of foreign fighters have departed from all of these areas to Syria and Iraq.[84]

4.1. FOREIGN FIGHTERS

When it comes to the phenomenon of foreign fighters, BiH and Kosovo are the most frequently cited in the literature for producing the largest numbers of fighters per capita. Azinović and Jusić, who surveyed law enforcement and intelligence sources across the Western Balkans, reported the figures below.[85]

WESTERN BALKANS	FOREIGN FIGHTERS 2012–2015	RETURNED	KILLED	REMAIN IN SYRIA / IRAQ
Albania	136	40	20	76
BiH	260	43 men 6 women	44 men 2 women	77 men 48 women 46 children
Macedonia	135	80	20	35
Kosovo	314	110 men 6 women 1 child	57	75 men 38 women 27 children
Montenegro	Up to 30			
Serbia	42	9	11	22

Azinović and Jusić uncovered that a significant number of children were being taken to Syria and Iraq, and highlighted the problems associated with this practice – including that children taken to conflict zones are very likely to lose one or both of their parents, as has been the case for 20 of these children from BiH. In addition, it appears that boys as young as 13 are undergoing military

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[83] Ibid., 83-86.
[84] Ibid., 86-89.
[85] Azinović and Jusić.

training and being deployed into fighting formations. One Bosnian youth has been killed in this way, and three others were killed in an airstrike.[86]

Researchers have raised various issues related to foreign fighters returning home, and there is debate on the extent to which repressive versus re-integrative measures should be applied and which better prevent further violence. This is a topic that warrants further research in the region, where it appears that only repressive police measures have so far been used. The psychological impact of war is also a significant concern; for, foreign fighters are expected to suffer posttraumatic stress and other mental illnesses in the post-war period, just as soldiers in state armies do. How this may intersect with re-integration or de-radicalisation initiatives is unknown.

De-radicalising former foreign fighters is a complex process.[87] Some authors argue that it is more realistic to focus efforts in this vein on disengagement and disruption from recruitment.[88] To that end, disengagement approaches used around the world offer important lessons for Western Balkans countries.

Every country in the Western Balkans has developed a legal framework that allows law enforcement to arrest and process people who engage as foreign fighters; and so far, a number of arrests have been made, and cases tried and sentenced in the courts.[89] Nonetheless, we still know very little about the threat that former foreign fighters truly pose to their communities, because no reliable assessments have been developed. While some former fighters may become disillusioned in Syria and Iraq and provide a powerful counter-narrative to radicalisation through this first-hand experience, others may just as easily be instructed by ISIS to carry out terrorist acts once they return home.[90] The role that prisons play in radicalisation, or *could* play in de-radicalisation, is increasingly important to assess, as more of these fighters fill cells across the region. What's more, the potential role that law enforcement and judicial professionals may be able to play throughout the prosecutorial process to encourage or incentivise de-radicalisation must be examined.

4.2. TERRORIST INCIDENTS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

A few relatively small-scale terrorist attacks have taken place in the region in recent years. In 2015, in BiH, a man attacked a police station in Zvornik, leaving one police officer killed and two others injured. Later that year, in a suburb of Sarajevo, two members of the BiH Armed Forces were killed and then others on the scene were injured when the 34-year-old assailant tried to escape.[91] These attacks followed previous terrorist events in the country in 1997,[92] 2003,[93] 2010,[94] and 2011.[95]

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[86] Ibid., 29.
[87] Enri Hide, Assessment of risks on national security/the capacity of state and society to react: Violent Extremism and Religious Radicalization in Albania (Tirana: AIIS, 2015).
[88] J.M. Berger, Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach based on Process Disruption, ICCT Research Paper, May 2016.
[89] Azinović and Jusić.
[90] Ibid.
[91] US Department of State, 'Chapter 2. Country Reports: Europe Overview,' Country Reports on Terrorism 2015, https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257516.htm (accessed 25 February 2017).
[92] Colin Soloway, 'Car Bombing Injures 50 at Bosnian Apartments,' The Washington Post, 20 September 1997.
[93] Merima Spahic, 'Return to Killing,' Transitions Online, 27 February 2003, http://www.tol.org/client/article/8986-return-to-killing.html?print (accessed 25 February 2017).
[94] Daria Sito-Sucic, 'Bosnian court jails Islamist for 45 years over bomb attack,' Reuters, 20 December 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-verdict-attack-idUSBRE9BJ14L20131220 (accessed 25 February 2017).
[95] Robert Gladstone, 'Gunman Fires at U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo,' New York Times, 29 October 2011.

In Kosovo, five people were arrested in 2015 attempting to poison the main water supply for Pristina. Two of the individuals were returned foreign fighters from Syria.[96] While the charges for poisoning the water were dropped, they were given stiff sentences of 10 to 13 years each, for planning terrorist acts against the constitutional order.[97] Macedonia saw a security incident in 2015, too, along its border with Kosovo, when approximately 40 people 'seized weapons, ammunition, and radio communication supplies from a border police station.'[98] The police response resulted in the death of eight police officers and 10 people from the group. Also, that year, an improvised explosive device was left outside a court building in Macedonia, and a series of small explosions were detonated outside government buildings and political party offices.[99]

In 2016, in a somewhat bizarre incident in Albania, a man was arrested for attempting to 'pull three people into his car over a two-hour period while proclaiming, 'Allah Akbar,' 'I have been sent by Allah,' and 'I want to kill you all.''[100] Should this officially be treated as a religiously-driven act, the event will become the first instance of terrorism in Albania.[101]

4.3. NARRATIVES OF RADICALISATION

Most adherents of Salafism do not advocate violence, and whether they are from the Western Balkans or elsewhere, simply wish to live in accordance with their own interpretation of Islam. Still, research in BiH shows that most Bosnians see Salafists as 'radical' due to their visibly different appearance and proselytising activities, which many Salafists focus much time on, using online platforms and free lectures delivered by *da'i*s to attract more followers.[102] The targets of this kind of proselytising are frequently vulnerable youth with a history of substance abuse or crime, who often have little or no religious background – which limits their 'capacity to place [Salafist teachings] into context or think critically about them.'[103] Reports indicate that youth with mental health issues are also sometimes 'treated' by imams from the Salafist movement, who perform ceremonies akin to exorcisms and in doing so, develop power dynamics that facilitate the recruitment process.[104]

Salafists in BiH strive to influence and pull converts away from traditional Bosnian Islam, which they believe needs to be purified. In their lectures, *da'i*s discusses religious doctrine, ethics, righteousness, and the afterlife. They also lecture about the daily habits that make a 'true Muslim' and impose various rules that are new to Muslims from the region, especially for women – claiming, for example, that women should focus on their role as wife and mother, that women should not travel alone, and that they should undertake an education only for 'appropriate' professions. These lectures are abundant with misogynous and discriminatory rhetoric; but they are successful in attracting new members because they harness the simplified message of Salafism. This message contains little reference to complex Islamic culture and history, referencing only the lifestyle of the Prophet and the first three generations of Muslims after him.

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[96] US Department of State, 'Chapter 2.'
[97] Skender Govori, 'Kosovo Terror Suspects Given Stiff Sentences for Planning Terrorist Acts,' BIRN, 18 July 2016. According to the verdict, the group was planning to record an ISIL propaganda video.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ambassador Donald Lu, remarks at the George C. Marshall Center Conference 'Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Irregular Migration Routes,' Garmisch-Parkenkirchen, Germany, 14 September 2016.
[101] Fatjona Mejdini, 'Albanian Police Arrest 'Terror Attack' Suspect,' Balkan Insight, 18 August 2016, http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albania-police-charge-a-man-from-kosovo-with-terrorism-08-18-2016 (accessed 25 February 2017).
[102] Bećirević, 2016.
[103] Azinović and Jusić, 72.
[104] Ibid., 62-65.

Many converts find it easier to navigate the complexities of modern life, with its multitude of choices, while walking a simplified path.[105]

In Albania, an analysis of religious extremist discourse in the media was conducted by the Albanian Media Institute in 2016. Using the Extremism Media Index proposed by Daniel Holbrook, the study uncovered that materials identified as moderate and content that resembled mainstream religious teaching (which does not convey hate toward others or endorsements of violence) dominated the media. The study also identified a considerable amount of fringe material based on ultraconservative, isolationist discourse, expressing anger toward certain groups – such as unbelievers – but still not legitimizing violence. Small portions of online material fell into the extreme category, and those materials contained endorsements and glorifications of violence. The authors concluded that extremist discourse in Albania does not necessarily mean, to paraphrase Peter Neumann, that the bomb will go off. Still, while this may appear to indicate a diminished threat, extremist discourse does present a danger to liberal democratic values by promoting isolation and propagating a way of life that runs counter to human rights principles. It would be wise to undertake similar analyses of extremist discourse in media from all Western Balkans countries.

5. DRIVERS OF RADICALISATION

Though the drivers and processes involved in radicalisation and recruitment are highly individualised, researchers make efforts to identify common factors that may contribute to radicalisation and understand why some individuals become radicalised when other don't.[106] This is important, because without an in-depth understanding of the drivers of radicalisation, it is difficult to design and implement effective de-radicalisation programmes. For that reason, this section will look at some of the key drivers of radicalisation recognised by researchers and academics who focus on the Western Balkans.

5.1. SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Overall, there is agreement in the literature that social exclusion and a lack of opportunity in deprived areas are drivers of radicalisation. For instance, in Macedonia, Selimi and Stojkovski highlight the role of exclusion and of unemployment or a lack of opportunities for youth, based on statements made by Islamic Community officials and by young people they interviewed. In that case, representatives of the Islamic Community specifically pointed to the high rate of unemployment and a generally bad economic situation as a factor in radicalisation, remarking that 'in a situation where young people see no hope for a better tomorrow, they are easier targets for manipulation.'[107]

A 2015 UNDP study identified a lack of upward mobility, governmental oppression, and rising inequality as drivers of radicalisation. This aligns with realities in the region, where ethnic divisions, inequalities, and discrimination based on religion certainly exist.[108] Azinović and Jusić also discuss poverty and deprivation as reasons some recruits depart for Syria. They offer the example of one man who lived in Gornja Maoča in such catastrophic living conditions that these

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[105] Bećirević.
[106] Paolo Magri, 'Introduction,' in *Jihadist Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalization Processes*, ed., Arturo Varvelli (Milan: ISPI, 2016).
[107] Selimi and Stojkovski, 79.
[108] Caleb Odorfer, Root Causes of Radicalization in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (New York: UNDP, 2016), 42.

conditions caused the death of his two-year-old daughter, but in Syria, he was given a new house.[109]

5.2. MOSQUES AND NGOS

As for the actors literally driving radicalisation and recruitment processes in the region, a BIRN report underlines the role of an Islamic Youth organisation known as Furkan, based in Novi Pazar:

> *Prosecutors allege all five [accused] were part of 'a network of Islamic extremists that targeted marginalised groups' and used the Furkan premises from 2012 to 2014 as a meeting place and base from which to send an unknown number of fighters to Syria and Iraq. In addition, the prosecution claims the accused organised recruitment and preparatory meetings across Serbia and arranged visits to the north-eastern Bosnian town of Gornja Maoča, hosted by its former imam Nusret Imamović.[110]*

While Furkan denies its radicalising influence (they maintain that two radicalised individuals have visited but did not spend much time there), national, regional, and international security services continue to monitor their premises and have even stepped up surveillance.[111]

In Sandžak, radicalisation appears to occur in unofficial mosques, established in the same model as they have been across the region, known as para-*jamaats*. BIRN reports that 'extremists, said to be linked to Wahhabi communities in Sandžak with strong links to groups in Bosnia, are operating through 'unofficial' mosques, known locally as *paradžemati*.'[112] While the Serbian state views the Bosniak population as most linked to this radicalisation, there have also been reports of 'at least 10 people from Roma communities [going] to Syria.' This may be linked to the financial benefits offered to foreign fighters, or it may be a function of the social exclusion of Roma, which is a known driver for radicalisation. The issue of potential Roma radicalisation due to severe discrimination and social exclusion is a topic that deserves further exploration.[113]

Unofficial mosques, Salafist NGOs, and the Salafist lecture network are identified in the literature not only as means of radicalisation but also of recruitment, where foreign fighters are groomed from across the region for the battlefields in Syria and Iraq. Still, while the majority of researchers in the Western Balkans take this view, Srdjan Puhalo has come to different conclusions. He has conducted predominantly quantitative research in Bosnia and Herzegovina, showing that Salafists are more social, more honest, less 'dogmatic,' and more 'open to different values' than other citizens of BiH.[114]

His research contradicts all other similar research efforts conducted in the region, and thus calls for careful examination of whether studies that rely on questionnaires are an appropriate method by which to analyse the attitudes of radicalised individuals and groups. Beyond potential issues with the design of such questionnaires, there is also the issue of whether or not radicalised individuals are likely to respond honestly.

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[109] Azinović and Jusić, 44.
[110] Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Balkan Jihadists: The Radicalization and Recruitment of Fighters in Syria and Iraq (BIRN, 2016), 38.
[111] Ibid., 39.
[112] Ibid., 40. BIRN quotes Serbian intelligence records for this assessment
[113] Ibid.
[114] Srđan Puhalo, Selefije u BiH (Banja Luka: Pro Educa, 2016), 191.

5.3. DIRECT CONTACT

Common among radicalisation processes is the critical role of peer-to-peer interaction, which can take place online, via social media and secure messaging applications, but more often occurs in person.[115] Research from BiH confirms the importance of this peer-to-peer contact and suggests that recruitment is not only about religious doctrine. Participants in a study undertaken by Bećirević related feeling a sense of brotherhood, social support, and friendship with other Salafists, and they welcomed the potential of finding suitable marriage partners and employment opportunities, in contrast to the social alienation they felt before. These individuals talked about the kindness they saw Salafists exhibit toward each other and how impressed they were by the dedicated support Salafists offered to those in need.[116]

Apart from peer-to-peer interaction, Soufan and Schoenfeld argue that the presence and influence of one or more charismatic figures already committed to the jihadist cause is another key driver to radicalisation. These figures are focused on preaching extremist rhetoric that is tailored to local grievances, which is especially effective in places where people lack a sense of purpose:

> *The confluence of peer-to-peer interaction coupled with the ubiquitous connectivity of social media creates the 'perfect storm' for recruitment, with prospective recruits able to directly connect with recruiters or friends already in the so-called Caliphate, and therefore well-positioned to provide first-hand accounts of the Caliphate's ostensible appeal.*[117]

Perry has also confirmed the importance of social connections in the radicalisation process. She notes that individuals who are vulnerable to radicalisation are poorly integrated into society and feel socially excluded.[118] Selimi and Stojkovski argue along the same lines, asserting that, while the Internet is a powerful tool for extremist propaganda, its potential is limited compared to the impact of someone speaking directly to another person.

Therefore, direct contact with a recruiter is believed to be an element in the decision of every foreign fighter who decides to go to Syria or Iraq.[119] Selimi and Stojkovski provide an example of the social context that may lead one to radicalisation in Macedonia:

> *These imams attract mainly young groups of males, and usually preach in cafes, basements, or in the official mosques such as in Jahja Pasha Mosque in Skopje. There is information that even after police operation 'Cell,' extremist preaching is still happening. The practice is for the extremist imam and followers to wait for the initial prayer by the IRC imam to end, and after that, the imam they recognise starts his own prayer.*[120]

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[115] Arturo Varvelli, ed., Jihadist Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalization Processes (Milan: ISPI, 2016).
[116] Bećirević.
[117] Ali Soufan and Daniel Schoenfeld, 'Regional Hotbeds as Drivers of Radicalization,' in Jihadist Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalization Processes, ed., Arturo Varvelli (Milan: ISPI, 2016), 19.
[118] Perry, Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe, 41.
[119] Selimi and Stojkovski, 59.
[120] Ibid., 54.

This mosque plays a role as a meeting and gathering site for young men, and some of the interviewees who met with Selimi and Stojkovski reported feeling pressure to join these gatherings. There were also instances of radicalisation occurring within families.[121]

5.4. ONLINE INTERACTIONS

Overall, there seems to be a lack of research evaluating whether cases of radicalisation have been driven purely by online interactions, even though online spaces are so frequently cited as significant in radicalisation. In some countries, such as in Albania, authorities have shut down websites created for recruitment purposes; but these sites will remain online as long as other countries in the region do not take similar actions. In Macedonia, for example, 'there is no coordinated effort to identify or take down extremist sites.'[122]

Azinović and Jusić also discuss the influence of online interactions in the radicalisation and recruitment of women to Salafism. Online exchanges between men and women contribute toward romanticising the idea of marrying a jihadist and joining the 'caliphate.' In 2016, Bećirević also analysed online content, showing that radical Islamist viewpoints are being freely aired on YouTube without censorship. Clearly, there are openings for both general and focused research on the topic of online recruitment.

5.5. FOREIGN INFLUENCE

Another driver that must be discussed is the role of foreign influence. Many countries in the region have seen students leave for the Gulf States, where they are being educated in the more conservative, Hanbali school of Islamic thought. Upon their return to the region, these students continue to advocate for the 'purification' of traditional Islam.[123] The core of the Salafi proselytisation effort revolves around Bosnians educated through this scholarship scheme, who have established local NGO's and *madrassas*.[124]

Research that explores the extent to which foreign influences play a radicalising role and thus contribute to violent extremism in the region, and in diaspora communities, is crucially important. Analysis of links between Gulf-funded scholarship schemes, the funding of Salafist NGOs, and a recent influx of foreign investments could prove incredibly valuable to uncovering patterns that inform policy-level intervention strategies.

Recent research by Adrian Shtuni has confirmed that, in Kosovo, 'Rather than a simple by-product of socioeconomic or political dynamics, these outcomes are as much the fruit of sustained and targeted investments by various Islamic countries that use religion as a foreign policy tool – often aggressively promoting religious identity and a conservative Islamic way of life in open tension with Kosovo's religious tradition and Western liberal democracy – as they are the result of a people's quest for a more constant identity that transcends competing and at time confusing national, state, and supranational identities.'[125]

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[121] Ibid.
[122] Perry, Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe, 41.
[123] This issue is explored in detail by Azinović and Jusić, as well as Bećirević. Most regional authors who deal with issues of radicalisation and violent extremism mention these scholarships offered by Saudi Arabia and other majority Muslim countries that adhere to the Hanbali madhhab.
[124] Azinović and Jusić.
[125] Shtuni, 7.

Simply stated, Shtuni's research shows that very poor regions of Kosovo, which have not been touched by the activities of Gulf-funded charities, do not suffer from problems of radicalisation or violent extremism. This appears to be true across the region, and demands that diplomatic pressure be used to compel Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries to stop funding organised Salafist proselytisation. For, this is clearly the main pull factor for radicalisation away from traditional regional Islam generally, and for radicalisation into violent extremism specifically.

Many Western donors, out of respect for religious freedom, but also due to financial links with Gulf States, are not yet ready to support projects that focus on the deconstruction and delegitimisation of Salafist discourse. Instead, they support programmes that only indirectly address this issue, which complicates efforts to distinguish between 'legal radicalisation' and 'violent radicalisation.' Deconstructing Salafist discourse and making links between these two phenomena would significantly contribute toward serious prevention efforts.

5.6 PREVIOUS CRIMINALITY

Previous criminality as a driver of radicalisation is generally underexplored in any systematic way, even though it is often referred to in research. For instance, previous criminality is mentioned as a factor of radicalisation in *Jihadist Hotbeds*, but without any data on the degrees to which criminality correlates with extremism or violence. Azinović and Jusić have provided a more complete picture from BiH, based on police and court documents, showing that 26 per cent of people who have travelled to Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters have had criminal records. These records included everything from thefts and armed robbery, to domestic violence and child abuse, to tax evasion and drug trafficking.

In addition, Azinović and Jusić identified the presence of mental health issues in a number of people who departed to Syria and Iraq from BiH; recording at least 20 cases in which 'men and women had departed to Syria having first confided to family members and friends that *jinn* (supernatural evil spirits) had overcome them. Due to the stigma attached to mental illness…these people rarely seek assistance within the healthcare system, instead visiting 'folk healers' for alternative and more discrete treatment.' They also found that some foreign fighters had 'received spiritual healing known as *ruqya* from…two key leaders of the Salafi movement.[126] Further, they analysed documentation which indicated that many foreign fighters had come from dysfunctional or broken families with histories of alcohol and domestic violence.[127] Issues of mental health and criminality, and how they are linked to radicalisation, but also to violent extremism, certainly deserves more attention in the regional literature.

6. GAPS IN THE LITERATURE AND IN RADICALISATION PREVENTION EFFORTS

In reviewing literature from the Western Balkans, a number of gaps emerged, especially related to how specific individual characteristics may play a role in the radicalisation process, what strategies are effective for radicalisation prevention efforts in the Western Balkans, and what roles different professionals can play in preventing radicalisation. Perhaps the most notable gap, though, is in literature that examines de-radicalisation efforts; and this is because those efforts

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[126] Azinović and Jusić, 62-63.
[127] Ibid.

are incredibly limited. While countries in the region have developed CVE strategies and have successfully implemented changes to their legal frameworks, de-radicalisation programmes continue to be discussed almost entirely in futuristic terms.

The most recent reports of the European Commission, in the context of the EU Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, note that both BiH and Kosovo have yet to implement such programmes; and in Kosovo, 'challenges remain with the lack of programmes on prevention, de-radicalisation and reintegration, considering the high number of returned foreign fighters.'[128]

6.1. ONLINE PLATFORMS

There is no clear data on the extent to which online platforms are effective as tools of radicalisation, and little discussion of how authorities can censor online messaging if these online platforms are indeed found to be influential. In fact, the impact of the Internet is mentioned in almost all the literature, but a systematic content and discourse analysis of Salafist videos posted to YouTube and social media is largely non-existent. The 2016 study by the Albanian IDM, mentioned above, did begin to address this issue, but further research is needed across the region.

Similarly, the ways cybersecurity relates to radicalisation have gone almost totally un-researched, including activities on the dark web. Investigating these more shadowy online spaces may not only inform cyber-initiatives aimed at preventing radicalisation, but may also reveal links between recruitment networks and other criminal elements that operate in these spaces.[129] And, due to the prevalence for gender-based criminal activities on the dark web, especially related to human trafficking,[130] this kind of research could be particularly important when it comes to understanding the pressures and incentives facing women and the roles they play in the Salafist movement, which limited analysis indicates range from armed engagement to serving as bait to young male recruits.[131]

6.2. THE POSITION AND ROLE OF WOMEN

The position and role of women has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature, despite acknowledgements that women are also being radicalised.[132] Little is known about how women participate in extremist movements in the Western Balkans or what motivates them, and the acceptance of Salafism by women is puzzling because this way of life is anathema to the ideas of gender equality that have been promoted in the region, at least on the normative level. The individual and social factors that drive women to accept this ideology and abandon ideals of independence and equality, even accepting becoming a second and third wife, are largely not understood.

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[128] European Commission, Kosovo: 2016 Report, 9 November 2016, 71. Also see: European Commission, Bosnia and Herzegovina: 2016 Report, 9 November 2016.

[129] See: Daniel Moore and Thomas Rid, 'Cryptopolitik and the Darknet,' Survival: Global Politics and Strategy 58, no. 1 (2016): 7-38; Gabriel Weimann, 'Terrorist Migration to the Dark Web,' Perspectives on Terrorism 10, no. 3 (2016): 40-44; and Steven D'Alfonso, 'Why Organized Crime and Terror Groups Are Converging,' Security Intelligence, 4 September 2014, https://securityintelligence.com/why-organized-crime-and-terror-groups-are-converging/ (accessed 15 March 2017).

[130] For example, see: Johnathan Mendel and Kiril Sharapov, 'Human trafficking and online networks,' policy briefing, CEU Center for Policy Studies, October 2014; and Kristin Quinn, 'Modern Slavery: Cognitive Computing and Geospatial Technology Could Help Law Enforcement Track, Locate, and Rescue Human Trafficking Victims,' Trajectory Magazine, no. 4 (2016).

[131] Jessica Davis, Women in Modern Terrorism: From Liberation Wars to Global Jihad and the Islamic State (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017). Also see: Azinović and Jusić.

[132] A recent study from Kosovo addresses the issue of radicalization as well and violent extremism among women: Jakupi Rudine, Vese Kelmendi, Women and Violent Extremism (KCSS, 2017).

But many questions about the role of women remain, including why women agree to travel to war zones with small children, and whether they are coerced into doing so. The role of women as recruiters and perpetrators has also been almost entirely ignored or significantly downplayed. Except for Sibel Halimi, who wrote about this in the context of Kosovo, both regional and international researchers have done very little to scratch the surface of this issue.

Interestingly, women's rights organisations are remarkably disconnected from the issue of radicalisation. International and local organisations that advocate for women's rights and equality are widespread in the region, yet they are not engaged with women adherents of Salafism. With the proliferation of Gulf-funded NGOs that meet many social needs of women and serve as recruitment spaces, the involvement of women's rights organisations could now be even more important, and could contribute to unpacking complex ideas related to will and self-determination, and whether women in Salafist circles are able to express these freely. The discourse of women's rights has been very successful in critiquing and fighting the explicit and implicit oppression of patriarchy; yet in the case of religion and religious communities, there are few resources and actions challenging the subordination of women. Perhaps the time has come to more seriously research this issue and develop practical solutions, since the current discourse on radicalisation only reinforces traditional and patriarchal ideas of masculinity and femininity.

6.3. ILLEGAL ASPECTS OF RADICALISATION

Apart from legally sanctioning individuals who recruit foreign fighters, engage in foreign fighting, or incite such violence, the role of the judiciary has also been largely underexplored as it relates to radicalisation in the Western Balkans. For instance, the judiciary has not been involved in determining precisely whether the teachings of Salafism violate the individual human rights and freedoms of women and children, or when those teachings cross the line into hate speech. This is an understandably sensitive topic and one that must be handled with care to avoid disenfranchising adherents to Salafism who reject violence and do not associate their beliefs with hate.

What's more, the question of what legally constitutes hate speech varies, and so the concept is not universal across contexts. However, it is important to situate the issue of hate speech within the contemporary history of the Western Balkans. While recent discussions of extremism, as mentioned earlier in this review, tend to centre around Salafism, radicalism in the Western Balkans has taken on many dimensions over the last several decades. Responding to hate crimes and intervening in hate speech are matters of security, particularly given the transitional political and social spaces in which many regional countries still exist.[133] And, for many former Yugoslav states now frozen in the midst of half-finished state-building projects, there is a symbolic significance in maintaining any rights conquered in the post-conflict period. But the balance that must be struck – between fostering religious freedom and pluralism, and preventing or responding to incitements to violence based on religion – is undoubtedly a delicate one.[134]

Many *da'i*s in BiH record YouTube videos to promote their ideology, posting lectures that frequently discuss women and suggest restrictions on their freedoms.[135] Whether this is contrary to laws in BiH or is protected by freedom of speech is difficult to say, but the issue deserves

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[133] Neil Chakraborti and Jon Garland, eds., Responding to Hate Crime: The case for connecting policy and research (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2015), 80.
[134] For more on this, see: Asma T. Uddin and Haris Tarin, Rethinking the 'Red Line': The Intersection of Free Speech, Religious Freedom, and Social Change, U.S.-Islamic World Forum Papers (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2013).
[135] Bećirević, 2016.

careful consideration by judicial experts. This could potentially contribute toward radicalisation prevention efforts. In addition, it would be useful to assess the level of familiarity of judicial professional with the radicalisation process and with extremism generally, which could enable the development of training curricula to improve their understanding of these topics and increase their professional competence.

6.4. PRISONS

Across the region, there also seems to be little to no information on the impact of prisons on the spread of violent extremism. While laws in many Western Balkans countries make foreign fighting illegal, these laws have not been matched by follow-up analysis of what happens to returned fighters when they are imprisoned. There has been some research on this in Kosovo (which found a lack of 'psycho-social support'[136]).

One study from Macedonia reported that 'no respondents noted information on real or potential radicalisation in the country's prisons, nor of efforts to pro-actively prevent this from happening.'[137] Analysing not only whether returned fighters maintain their earlier levels of radicalisation, but whether they attempt to radicalise other prisoners – who, we know from other research, are particularly vulnerable to this influence – will be important as more fighters return and face prosecution.

6.5. OTHER LESS RESEARCHED ISSUES

In Serbia, BiH, and Kosovo, the role of large Diasporas in radicalisation deserves examination. Members of the Diaspora may be recruited themselves, but may also serve as potential funding sources for radicalisation efforts. 'Wire transfers and cash transactions – from foreign organisations or Diaspora contacts – are viewed as potentially significant, though little hard data is available.'[138] In the case of BiH, Azinović and Jusić found that 1 in 5 foreign fighters had ties to the Bosnian Diaspora.[139] They caution that members of diaspora communities are susceptible to radicalisation because 'members of minority communities living outside their original identity corpus are easily blamed by the majority community surrounding them for real or imagined injustices.'[140] To more accurately assess the impact and role of these communities, more information must be collected.

There is also a notable relative lack of data regarding radicalisation in Serbia. Specifically, there is little research on the role of social media and on people who have left the Sandžak region. Regional reports mostly mention Serbia only in passing; for example, commenting that: 'There are, indeed, supporters of this ideology with the predominant concentration in north-eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, south-eastern Kosovo, north-western Macedonia, and southwestern Serbia.'[141]

This is also true in Montenegro.[142] Gaps in the research in any Western Balkans country inhibit efforts to fully understand by what means radicalisation and recruitment may occur across

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[136] Perry, Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe, 35.
[137] Ibid., 42.
[138] Ibid., 28.
[139] Azinović and Jusić, 38.
[140] Ibid., 58.
[141] Qehaja, 76.
[142] Perry, Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe, 45.

borders. This is a prominent issue that should be studied further, but which will benefit greatly from more comprehensive research on several specific areas in the region.

Further, while it is not a gap per se, because literature on the topic abounds, the lack of agreement among practitioners on terminology represents an obstacle to clarity and consistency in research. As a starting point, current proposals to divide the concept of radicalisation into two streams – radicalisation of belief versus radicalisation of behaviour – would reflect the importance of this emerging distinction. As Sedgwick advises and the regional context demands, it would also be valuable to define the 'radicalisation continuum' that applies in each country in the region by establishing what 'moderate' implies in every context. And, given the shift that has occurred over the last ten to 15 years, toward defining and discussing radicalisation and extremism almost exclusively through the prism of Islam, it may be useful to re-examine research on other forms of radicalisation in the region and engage in new inquiry as to the links between ethnic/nationalist discourse and religious discourse.

In order to fully assess the situation in the region and develop necessary counter-extremism measures, these gaps in the research need to be addressed. Finally, there is literature from Western Europe on 'exit strategies' for individuals who join Salafist circles and then change their mind. Anecdotal reports indicate that leaving these communities is not an easy task; and yet, state institutions are not equipped to adequately support those who wish to do so. The need for an interdisciplinary approach here is apparent – with psychologists, social workers, teachers, and civil society organisations working together to develop and promote effective and safe exit strategies for these individuals.

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