

Fighting terrorism and radicalisation in Europe's neighbourhood: How to scale up EU efforts

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(eds.)



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PHOTOGRAPHY

AFP Forum

LEGAL DEPOSIT

D/2018/10.825/2

November 2018

With the kind support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

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FOREWORD

Terrorism and radicalisation are difficult topics for social democrats to deal with. They represent the dark side of diverse societies which progressives want to see flourish. They also represent the failure of state institutions that should reduce inequality and provide social security for their citizens. These phenomena are challenging to deal with inside the European Union, and all the more so in increasingly fragile neighbouring states. As a progressive foundation, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is committed to finding durable solutions to the socio-economic problems that cause terrorism and radicalisation all over the world. This book is one of our efforts to promote peace and prosperity by strengthening democratic societies. It is the result of a very fruitful cooperation with the European Policy Centre and contributing authors, who provided the necessary expertise to carry out and publish this research project.

The urgent need for the EU and its neighbourhood to counter terrorism and radicalisation in all its forms should be self-evident, but the strategies to do so may not be. We hope that readers will find the following chapters enlightening and that decision-makers use them to inform their policies. The recommendations described herein are only valuable if they are discussed, debated, perhaps modified and finally turned into action. Words on a page will not suffice to address these serious issues. This book can thus be seen as an impulse for further work to be done in this regard. As tough as the challenges may be, solutions can nevertheless be identified. This book lays no claim to provide all of the answers, but they are at the very least a starting point for further deliberation on how to tackle terrorism and radicalisation in the European Union's neighbourhood.

Renate Tenbusch

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The **European Policy Centre (EPC)** is an independent, not-for-profit think tank dedicated to fostering European integration through analysis and debate.

The Europe in the World Programme scrutinises the impacts of a changing international system on Europe, and probes how the EU and its member states can leverage their untapped potential to advance their interests and values on a regional and global level. It thus examines the evolution of EU relations with major powers, such as the United States, China, and Russia, and how Europe can contribute to a rules-based global order.

Second, the Programme focuses on the role of the EU in fostering reforms, resilience and stability in neighbouring regions. It looks closely at the developments in Turkey and Ukraine.

Third, the Programme examines how the EU can strengthen its security in the face of terrorism, jihadist radicalisation or hybrid and cyber threats. It also seeks to advance the debate on Europe's defence policy.



The **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)** is a non-profit German foundation funded by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, and headquartered in Bonn and Berlin.

It was founded in 1925 and is named after Germany's first democratically elected President, Friedrich Ebert. FES is committed to the advancement of both socio-political and economic development in the spirit of social democracy, through civic education, research, and international cooperation.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is the oldest political foundation in Germany.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Throughout 2018, the European Policy Centre (EPC) and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) EU Office in Brussels partnered in a project on the overarching topic of “Tackling the root causes and impact of terrorism and radicalisation in Europe’s neighbourhood: What role for the European Union?”.

The fight against terrorism and radicalisation leading to violent extremism is a critical challenge for the European Union and its member states. Due to its multidimensional nature, encompassing socio-economic, cultural, and foreign policy aspects, addressing the root causes and impacts of radicalisation and terrorism is likely to remain a clear policy priority for the European Union for the foreseeable future, both domestically and in relations with third countries, particularly in the Western Balkans and the Southern neighbourhood.

In this context, the EPC and FES have carried out an independent assessment of the overall effectiveness of the European Union in helping to address the root causes and the manifold impacts of terrorism and radicalisation in several critical countries in its close vicinity: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Lebanon, and Tunisia. This book aims to identify lessons learnt and best practices, as well as possible failures and room for improvement, in fulfilling the European Union’s objectives on the ground.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Francesca Fabbri is a Policy Analyst in the Europe in the World Programme at the European Policy Centre (EPC), where she focuses on EU external policies and relations with the Middle East and North Africa. Her main research interests include the region's political economy, state-society relations and security.

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Paul is also a Senior Associate Fellow at the International Centre for Policy Studies, a leading Kyiv-based think tank, and Senior Advisor for issues related to the Eurasia region at Stober, Poltavets and Associates Consultants. Amanda has written numerous academic papers and opinion pieces related to her areas of expertise. She has worked as a columnist in the Turkish media for ten years. Since 2016, she has also led EPC projects related to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) leading to terrorism and the challenge of jihadist radicalisation.

Prior to joining the EPC, Paul worked with the Brussels-based Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) and the German multinational, Türk Henkel, in Istanbul. Paul holds an MA in international relations from the University of Staffordshire (UK).

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Fatmir Haxholli is an independent policy expert and researcher. His areas of expertise include public administration, security, the rule of law, democratisation and civic activism. He has worked as a consultant on capacity-building programmes for various international organisations active in Kosovo, such as the UNDP, GiZ, DfID. Haxholli has also conducted research on behalf of non-governmental organisations, such as the Kosovo Local Government Institute. Since June 2018, he has been serving as a policy advisor to the Government of Kosovo. Haxholli has graduated in political science from the University of Pristina (Kosovo). He also holds an MA in Contemporary European Studies from the University of Sussex (United Kingdom).

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Florian Qehaja is the Executive Director of the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS). He serves as an international consultant on security issues cooperating with leading international governmental and non-governmental organisations. Most recently, he has been coordinating the bilateral support of the Norwegian Ministry of Defence to the Ministry of Security Forces. He is non-resident advisor on Countering Violent Extremism to the Director of the Peacebuilding and Human Rights Programme at Columbia University (United States). Qehaja completed a post-doc at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) as a Fulbright Scholar. He holds a PhD in security studies from the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and an MA in Contemporary European Studies from the University of Sussex (United Kingdom).

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Stefano M. Torelli is a Visiting Research Fellow with the Middle East and North Africa Programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations and an Associate Research Fellow at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies. His research topics include international relations in the Middle East and North Africa, jihadist movements, and migration in the Mediterranean. As an expert in Islamic and Middle Eastern issues, he took part in several international projects on the political transition in Tunisia. He also appears regularly on Italian and international media, such as al-Jazeera, BBC, Newsweek, El País, Hürriyet, RSI, RAI, and Sky TV. As a scholar, Torelli has contributed to various books and published several articles in international journals, such as *The British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *Middle East Policy*, *Insight Turkey*, *Terrorism Monitor* (from the Jamestown Foundation), *Open Democracy* and *Jadaliyya*. He holds a PhD in history of international relations from the University of Rome "La Sapienza" (Italy).

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAP	EU Annual Action Programme
AQIM	al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb
BiH	Bosnia-Herzegovina
CEPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CT	Counter-Terrorism
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
Eurojust	European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit
Europol	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
FTDES	Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights
ICITAP	International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IcSP	Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace
ILO	International Labour Organization
Interpol	International Criminal Police Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
ISF	Internal Security Forces
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KCSS	Kosovar Centre for Security Studies
KMSH	Albania's Muslim Community
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSTAP	EU National Strategy against Terrorism and Action Plan
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PCC SEE	Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
RATTA	Rescue Association of Tunisians Trapped Abroad
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
SELEC	South Eastern Law Enforcement Centre
SSR	Security Sector Reform
STRIVE	Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
US	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WBCTi	Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism initiative

INTRODUCTION

Tackling the root causes and impacts of terrorism and radicalisation in Europe's neighbourhood: What role for the European Union?

By **Francesca Fabbri**, *Policy Analyst*,
and **Amanda Paul**, *Senior Policy Analyst*,
European Policy Centre

Radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism is not a new phenomenon. However, the process is now developing at a worrying speed and affecting a growing number of individuals and communities across Europe and beyond.

The fight against terrorism and radicalisation is a crucial challenge for the European Union (EU), its member states and the countries in its neighbourhood. The internationalisation of the response to radicalisation and the involvement of the EU gained momentum after a series of terrorist attacks across Europe and elsewhere in early 2015, and after thousands of citizens from Europe, North Africa and other parts of the world left their home countries to fight for the so-called Islamic State (ISIS).

Addressing the complex roots of radicalisation – encompassing socio-economic, cultural and geopolitical aspects – is a policy priority for the European Union. Strengthened cooperation with international partners has become a vital element of the Union's counter-terrorism policy.

Since the adoption in 2005 of the EU counter-terrorism strategy “to fight terrorism globally and make Europe safer”, the EU has developed targeted policies through a comprehensive approach.¹ The need to prevent radicalisation started to gain prominence in 2008 when the Council of the European Union adopted a strategy for “combating radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism”.

The latter was revised in 2014 in light of evolving trends, such as lone-actor terrorism, foreign fighters, and the use of social media by terrorists.² In 2014, the Council of the EU recognised the need for an effective counter-terrorism policy integrating both internal and external aspects. In 2015, it adopted conclusions “on EU external action on counter-terrorism”, which it further revised in 2017.³

The June 2017 European Council conclusions emphasised the need to reinforce the EU’s counter-terrorism structures, embed the internal-external nexus in EU policies, and strengthen cooperation with affected countries around Europe and with strategic partners. The conclusions also called for increasing the Union’s own response in key thematic areas including, among others, prevention, online recruitment, and the links between terrorism and organised crime.

ON THE FOREIGN POLICY LEVEL

At the same time, on the foreign policy level, the European Union’s Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (2016) highlighted the importance of counter-terrorism and radicalisation leading to violent extremism for Europe’s security. The strategy also called for enhancing the role of the EU in these policy areas as part of its on-going and future effort to increase resilience in its neighbourhood.

In 2016, EU leaders agreed to the appointment of several counter-terrorism experts in some EU Delegations, including in North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, the Western Balkans, Sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia, as a way for the EU to gain stronger leverage on the fight against terrorism in third countries. Involved in the programming of EU support and the local coordination of member states’ individual counter-terrorism cooperation with partner countries, these experts have been deployed to liaise with local authorities and contribute to joint counter-terrorism efforts. The decision to create and subsequently expand the network of experts came with an intensification of counter-terrorism projects and financial support for counter-terrorism programmes in the countries studied in this book.

In this context, this book, jointly published by the European Policy Centre and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, highlights the new prominence of counter-terrorism and the prevention of radicalisation in EU foreign and neighbourhood policies. It assesses the overall effectiveness of the EU in helping address the root causes of radicalisation and terrorism in five key countries in its vicinity: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Lebanon, and Tunisia.

THE WESTERN BALKANS AND THE SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

The Western Balkans and the Southern neighbourhood are considered priority regions not only in the fight against terrorism, but also – and foremost – for developing closer relations with the EU and fostering peace and resilience at the state and societal level. By addressing the policies and programmes designed and implemented with EU support, alongside other measures, this collection of case studies identifies lessons learnt and best practices as well as failures and room for improvement.

The researchers involved in the selected third countries have analysed the local and regional drivers of radicalisation and terrorism, and their understanding by local authorities and EU bodies (i.e. EU Delegations, the European Commission, the European External Action Service, and the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator). At the same time, the case studies assess the level of cooperation and dialogue in these policy areas between the EU and national and local public institutions, civil society representatives and community leaders in the affected countries.

Ultimately, each chapter evaluates the overall effectiveness of the activities addressing radicalisation and terrorism in these third countries and how the EU could help in shaping a more comprehensive response to the root causes of such challenges. The book also provides a conclusion with a set of recommendations for the EU drawn from the main arguments outlined in each of the case studies.

¹ European Union (2005), "[The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#)", Brussels: Council of the European Union.

² European Union (2014), "[Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism](#)", Brussels: Council of the European Union.

³ European Union (2017), "[Council conclusions on EU External Action on Counter-terrorism](#)", Brussels: Council of the European Union.



الضحايا
IN MEMORIAM

المؤسس أحمد بن علي بن صالح	TUN
Ulrika VAN NESTE	NEL
Arturo JAVIER MARTINEZ	COL
Myriam MARTINEZ	COL
Antonio CIBERA PEREZ	ESP
Dolores SANCHEZ RAMO	ESP
Huguette DUPREU	FRA
Nadine FLAMENY	FRA
Christophe TINOIS	FRA
Jean-Claude TESSIER	FRA
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Francesco CALDARA	ITA
Orazio CONTE	ITA
Antonella SESINO	ITA
Chiemi MIYAZAKI	JPN
Haruka MIYAZAKI	JPN
Machyo NARUSA	JPN
Jacek Maria KON	POL
Artur NOWO	POL
Domin	POL
Galina	

► Ahlam, the wife of Tunisian policeman Aymen Morjane who was killed last year in a jihadist assault on the Bardo museum, looks at the memorial inside the museum in Tunis on 18 March 2016, as the country marks the first anniversary of the attack. © AFP PHOTO / DOMINIQUE FAGET

Tunisia

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Over the past seven years in Tunisia, there has been an unprecedented surge in jihadist organisations and cells of all sorts. The threat posed by extremism in Tunisia is one of the multiple symptoms (rather than the cause) of the current instability and disorder in the Middle East and the Mediterranean region. Jihadist groups raise security-related issues. Their progress highlights, nevertheless, the need to develop a comprehensive political response. To mitigate radicalisation, governments must engage in a long-term effort that combines military and security operations with policies promoting and sustaining socio-political development, equality, and inclusiveness.

The study of Tunisia helps to understand how radicalisation and terrorism can escalate in the context of a difficult political transition. It shows that the country's democratic institutions should adopt reforms to adapt to new kinds of threat.

Against this backdrop, the European Union (EU) is implementing policies and initiatives that are crucial both to Tunisian institutions and the EU itself, since the instability in North Africa directly threatens the European continent. Cooperation with third countries is essential to guarantee the security of the European Union.

Radicalisation is not tied to a single cause. It is the result of the compound effects of multiple drivers that have social, economic and political roots. Against this background, Tunisia needs to shift its security and counter-terrorism policies. The priority is security sector reform. This chapter aims at analysing how reforms should take place, highlighting the connection between security sector reform and democratisation. It will review the prospects for an effective counter-terrorism strategy in a reformed environment. It will also look at how to reinforce cooperation between the EU and Tunisia in some areas.

Terrorism and radicalisation in Tunisia

Terrorism in Tunisia is a relatively new phenomenon. Until 2011, the country had only been affected by occasional episodes of terrorism. Over the past seven years, it has become the most critical threat to the country's stability and its process of democratisation. The types of threats vary depending on whether they originate from inside or outside the country. Moreover, today's principal security threat, the radicalisation of thousands of Tunisians, builds on different drivers.¹

The analysis of Tunisia since 2011 shows that, in the beginning, external factors were prominent in explaining the emergence of jihadist terrorism. Between the end of

2012 and the summer of 2014, the terrorist attacks near the city of Kasserine (Jebel Chaambi area) at the border with Algeria reflected the ambition of al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) to expand its range of action in North Africa. The Algerian-born jihadist group tried to exploit the political and institutional crisis that unfolded after the fall of the Ben Ali regime and the start of the transition phase.²

More specifically, between the end of 2012 and the spring of 2013, a jihadist cell affiliated to AQIM, namely Uqba ibn Nafi, organised a series of attacks against security forces, primarily the National Guard. Between 2013 and 2015, the organisation

killed more than 70 Tunisian security forces. The deadliest attack took 15 lives on 26 July 2014.³ At the time, it was the worst terrorist attack in Tunisian history. From a technical point of view, Tunisian security forces were not prepared to respond effectively to such ambushes against soldiers. The Tunisian National Guard had no experience in dealing with this kind of guerrilla-style terrorism.⁴

The internal reform of the security apparatus, combined with international support from the United States (US), Algeria and – above all – the European Union, have improved the training of Tunisian security forces and made it readier to face the jihadist threat in the field.

Meanwhile, another threat to Tunisia's security has emerged with the radicalisation of thousands of young people. It led to the creation of hotbeds of radicalisation and the dissemination of Salafism, an extremist jihadist ideology. On more than one occasion, this radicalisation led to terrorist attacks against security forces or strategic targets, such as touristic sites and Western citizens. Unlike the first wave of terrorism, this second phase – in part still on-going – is characterised by a close correlation between the socio-economic structural characteristics of the country, the political evolution of the transition process and the development of radical ideologies within Tunisia.⁵ The response of the authorities to the climate of insecurity – mostly based on a security-driven approach and the repression of the Islamist/Salafist forms of dissent – failed to address these factors.⁶ Among youth and in the peripheral areas of the country, there is a general perception of marginalisation and exclusion from political decision-making processes. The economic downturn has further worsened the condition of thousands of young Tunisians. The country faced a very high unemployment rate and a general impoverishment due to massive indebtedness and the devaluation of its currency. These factors have also fuelled the resentment of citizens towards the institutions.

The variety of dynamics at play explains the multidimensional causes of Tunisia's security threats. On the one hand, there are the security aspects, linked to the attempts of different groups and cells to attack by military means the security forces. On the other hand, there is the potential threat posed by radicalisation. To fight the latter, a comprehensive response is needed, involving different institutional stakeholders (Ministries of Interior, Defence, Justice, Education, Economy and Religious Affairs among the most important ones), as well as civil society actors, to build a preventive strategy aimed at avoiding new cases

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of radicalised individuals, by tackling the root causes of radicalisation.⁷ In general, different studies and surveys highlight a nexus between high expectations that have been disappointed by the post-revolution Tunisian government and continued grievances over the lack of economic opportunities, institutional corruption and harassment by security forces.⁸

The leading causes of radicalisation are mostly linked to the marginalisation of particular regions and segments of society, as well as the repressive response of the authorities and the security forces towards Islamists or anyone accused of sustaining radical views. Regarding the first set of causes, one of the main problems is the enormous regional disparity between the Eastern coastal regions and the Western and inner ones.⁹ The rates of poverty and youth unemployment are much higher in the latter than in the former, and the levels of access to essential services such as health and education are lower.¹⁰

For example, 92% of Tunisia's industry is concentrated in the three main cities of Tunis, Sfax and Sousse, which in turn produce 85% of the total GDP of the country. In some eastern areas like Zaghouan and Monastir, the unemployment rate is about 5%, while in Gafsa it surpasses 30%. The average poverty rate in Tunis and the eastern regions is about 4%, whereas in the central-western regions it is higher than 15%. These inequalities reflect themselves in the access to public services: in Tunis, 85% of the population lives within a 15 minutes radius of the nearest bus station, whereas in the western regions the percentage drops to 54% of the population. 77% of all the hospitals are within an hour radius of the main urban centres, and only one in a hundred is located more than two hours from an urban centre.¹¹

As a result of these push factors, radicalisation is one of the most debated issues in the country. It remains one of the most crucial threats to its security and stability. Tunisians make up the largest group among the foreign fighters that have joined the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). According to official data from the Tunisian Ministry of Interior and the UN, about 6,000 Tunisians fought among the ranks of jihadist groups in Iraq, Syria and Libya. Both in absolute number and in relative terms, Tunisia is the country that provided the most foreign fighters. There were 550 foreign fighters per one million people. Many young Tunisians followed a process of radicalisation through the web or peer relations. According to a study published in 2017 by the Tunisian Forum for the Economic and Social Rights (FTDES), 58% of the radicalised Tunisians have been indoctrinated thanks to books or the Internet, and almost 12% by friends or relatives.¹² Contacts with radicalised individuals in prison constitute another possible driver of radicalisation. Unfortunately, there is not enough reliable data on this.

According to data given by the Rescue Association of Tunisians Trapped Abroad (RATTA), Tunisian security forces prevented 12,000 individuals from leaving the country and reaching jihadist groups in Iraq, Syria and Libya. In 2015, Tunisia experienced three major terrorist attacks. At the Bardo Museum in Tunis, at a tourist resort in Sousse, and in a bus carrying police officers in downtown Tunis. In 2016, the security forces prevented an attack in the border city of Ben Guerdane. It had been planned by a cell of dozens of ISIS-affiliated jihadists from Libya shortly after the U.S. bombed the Libyan city of Sabratha, where it had discovered a training camp of mostly Tunisian jihadists.¹³

The Tunisian response to the terrorist threat

Tunisian post-revolutionary governments have addressed the terrorist threat by focusing primarily on the security-related aspects. Much has been done, therefore, to upgrade the equipment and armaments of armed forces. Thanks to cooperation with foreign partners, especially Algeria, Tunisia also regained control of its western borders. On the eastern side, the construction of a protective fence made the border with Libya less porous. However, what the Tunisian authorities have not yet managed to do effectively is elaborate a long-term strategy aimed not only at containing the destabilisation attempts coming from outside and the effects of radicalisation affecting Tunisians, but also at preventing new cases of radicalisation by addressing the causes that determine it.¹⁴ This aspect is the most important one, yet at the same time, it remains neglected.

Little has been done to prevent radicalisation or de-radicalise people. Even when it comes to the involvement of moderate and institutional imams in attempts to de-radicalise and re-integrate radicalised individuals, Tunisia has not reached the level of effectiveness witnessed in other countries, such as Morocco. Over the past years, Morocco underwent a series of reforms by updating religious textbooks, opening a public institute for the training of imams and establishing a de-radicalisation programme.¹⁵

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks that hit the country in 2015, the Tunisian authorities suspended over 150 religious organisations accused of having colluded with terrorist organisations and arrested more than 1,000 people. However, these punitive measures were not accompanied by a constructive approach aimed at involving the religious community in a comprehensive counter-radicalisation

programme. The same is true for returning foreign fighters. When the Tunisian government announced the establishment of a reintegration programme for returnees who had not directly fought or killed people, an influential coalition of police unions, political conservatives and anti-Islamist parties, with the support of public opinion, came together to block the initiative.¹⁶

In 2015, Tunisia approved a new law on terrorism (Law 22/2015) that replaced the one that had been enforced under the Ben Ali regime. The debate on and promulgation of the law took place during one of the most high-strung moments of the country's transition, immediately after the two attacks against the Bardo museum and Sousse. The law thus focused exclusively on the security aspects of counter-terrorism, leaving aside almost entirely the prevention dimension.¹⁷ Some measures in the law, such as the reintroduction of the death penalty and the extension of precautionary custody, went so far as to toughen earlier legislation.

Meanwhile, it does not provide a clear definition of terrorism, which can create uncertainty about which organisations should be considered terrorist cells, depending on different interpretations of the law. In recent years, reported incidents of abuse, torture, arbitrary arrests, and brutal tactics resemble the practices of the previous regime.¹⁸ All this contributes to undermining both the legitimacy and effectiveness of Tunisia's security forces. Reforming the security system and making the security forces more organised, effective and accountable are necessary steps to advance in the fight against terrorism. Tunisia must also develop a long-term approach that can address the causes of radicalisation sustainably and thus prevent terrorism.

The security sector reform: Restoring trust and clarifying roles

While Tunisia has completed a series of deep political and institutional reforms, it has so far failed to take on the essential task of reforming the security sector, a vital component of any democratic transition.¹⁹ Security sector reform (SSR) goes hand in hand with building public trust in the state and its institutions. It can also boost Tunisia's ability to manage internal and external threats. However, the persistent jihadist threat and society's overall sense of insecurity has put extreme pressure on the government and its security forces, who are carrying out their mission under a state of emergency. Such a context undermines the security sector reform process. Several reports show that Tunisia risks reverting to the methods and tactics of the Ben Ali era.²⁰

The persistent jihadist threat and society's overall sense of insecurity has put extreme pressure on the government and its security forces, who are carrying out their mission under a state of emergency.

For several decades, some branches of the Tunisian security forces have resorted to censorship, repression and strict social control.²¹ In particular, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) played an essential role in allowing Ben Ali to retain power thanks to one of the most invasive *mukhabarat* (intelligence) and police services in the Middle East and North Africa. Unlike its counterparts in the region, Tunisia's traditional army held a secondary role compared to the ISF. In post-colonial countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Iraq or Syria, the army controlled the political power.

Before 2011, the ISF employed 200,000 people compared to the army's 37,000. According to data presented at the 12th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 2010, Tunisia has one of the world's highest ratios of law enforcement officers *per capita* – one for every 80 inhabitants, compared to an average of one police officer for every 240 inhabitants. The Ministry of Interior became the top employer and the most influential institution in Tunisia.²² During the Ben Ali era, Tunisia was considered the police state *par excellence*.²³

In the aftermath of the 'Jasmine revolution' in 2011, the two security priorities were to overcome the ISF's widespread unpopularity and restore the credibility of the armed forces in the eyes of the population and the international community. First, a change in the role of the security forces

was needed. During the Ben Ali era, the ISF was focused almost exclusively on protecting the government from its people.²⁴ While this is typical of an authoritarian police state, in a democratic environment, security forces are expected to protect the population from internal and external threats and to ensure compliance with the rule of law.

However, a series of unexpected events, such as the threat from active jihadist cells in the Jebel Chaambi area, along Tunisia's border with Algeria, complicated the overall security situation, hampering the political transition and the security sector reform. The situation even worsened when the Tunisian jihadist cells undertook direct attacks against tourists and civilians in urban and tourist areas.²⁵ The biggest challenge for the Tunisian authorities is to break this vicious circle by providing responses that are both effective and respectful of human rights and the rule of law.

Ensuring Tunisia's long-term security requires a transparent redefinition of roles within its law enforcement forces to establish a clear chain of command and quickly respond to the security threats, especially in rural and border areas. The border regions have the highest level of criminal activity.²⁶ There are many technical and political challenges associated with changing the balance of power and the budget allocations among different ministries and government agencies. When it comes to responsibility for counter-terrorism operations in the peripheral and rural areas, the overlap of roles can compromise the operations themselves. At the very least, according to interviews with officials and analysts from the Ministry of Defence, it exacerbates the rivalries between internal and external security forces.

As a remnant of the Ben Ali regime, the army continues to perceive its internal security counterpart with distrust. During the operations in the Mount Chaambi region, the army units combating jihadist cells refused to follow the leadership of the security and

border agency affiliated to the Ministry of Interior. According to interviews conducted by the author with representatives of the Ministry of Defence, there remains a climate of mistrust that can be detrimental to the effectiveness of security operations.

To reform Tunisia's security sector and make it more effective in the fight against security challenges, a redefinition of roles is needed. The problem arises predominantly in rural areas. A practical solution could be the creation of a joint operational force putting together elements from the different branches under the auspices of the Head of the State and not under the responsibility of the Ministries. Another crucial aspect of SSR is determining the institutional and political responsibilities for change and reform. In the 2014 Constitution, there is an overlap of constitutional powers between the offices of the prime minister and the presidency.²⁷ In some cases, the absence of clear leadership has been intentional, to avoid an Egypt-type scenario with a military strongman potentially able to overthrow a legitimate government in a period of security crisis. Thus, the Ennahda-led government that held power between 2012 and 2014 did not create the position of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, the lack of a coordinating figure contributes to the fragmentation of the security sector and has prevented the implementation of an effective military strategy.²⁸

A clear chain of command is necessary to overcome this situation. Tunisian lawmakers must first establish a clear distinction between the president and the head of government on their roles and prerogatives in the security field. Second, the judiciary must officially install the Constitutional Court. Since the parliament voted for its creation in 2014, it has not yet been entrusted with its full powers. Third, in order to define a more efficient chain of command and to better coordinate the different branches of Tunisian security forces, the appointment of a Joint Chief of Staff is a priority.

The role of the European Union

The EU focuses on strengthening Tunisia's ability to counter terrorism, prevent jihadist radicalisation and promote security sector reforms. The EU has launched a series of initiatives aimed at strengthening the rule of law in Tunisia, boosting good governance through reforms in both the security and the judicial sectors. In September 2015, the first high-level political dialogue on security and counter-terrorism between Tunisia and the European Union took place. It was the first time the EU had engaged at this level and on this matter with a third country from the MENA region. The EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove, met with the then-Tunisian Prime Minister Habib Essid to discuss how to improve bilateral cooperation in the security sector. The EU emphasised the need to work together in the fight against terrorism along with respect for human rights and democratic standards.

In 2015, the EU allocated EUR 23 million under the European Neighbourhood Instrument for the creation of a programme to support the security sector reform.²⁹ A Programme Management unit was set up to assist the Tunisian National Coordinator in the preparation of contracts to be signed under the financing agreement. The officials and experts that the EU seconds to Tunisian institutions work on reform priorities based on Tunisian needs. Between 2015 and 2017, the EU earmarked EUR 300 million for counter-terrorism measures. These initiatives underscore that the EU aims to prevent radicalisation, rather than merely fight its effects, namely terrorism. In January 2017, a second high-level political dialogue on security and counter-terrorism took place.³⁰ A third dialogue is expected to take place in Tunisia by the end of 2018. On the judicial reform side, the EU has allocated EUR 40 million to the justice reform support programme.³¹

In supporting Tunisia's counter-terrorism and security efforts, the European Union has focused its activities on the political institutions rather than the military ones. Individual member states are, for their part, cooperating on specific security aspects. Italy provides training and equipment to fight against human trafficking and patrol maritime borders. France has sold arms while Germany and the US have helped to build a high-technology border control system.

As noted by Gilles de Kerchove, the European Union seeks to assist Tunisia on a methodologic level first, before engaging in more technical issues.³² The objective is to help Tunisia change from merely a security-driven approach, to a multidimensional one. The first outcome of this evolution has been the launch in 2016 of a new strategy by the Tunisian national commission against terrorism. Similar to the EU counter-terrorism strategy adopted in November 2005, it delves on four pillars: prevention, protection, prosecution and response. However, in implementing this strategy, Tunisia has neglected prevention and de-radicalisation, while focusing exclusively on a security-driven approach.

Tunisia has not developed a programme aimed at de-radicalising and reintegrating extremists. To do that, the reform of the prison system is needed, along with a strategy for dealing with the treatment of repentant radicalised individuals, including returning foreign fighters. In January 2016, the European Union Delegation in Tunisia presented a project with a budget commitment of EUR 1.85 million over 30 months to support Tunisia's reform of the prison administration. However, Tunisia needs a much more structured programme to reform its prison system.

The EU is also pushing for a more comprehensive approach. The Report of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee on "EU-Tunisia in the current regional context" listed poverty and social exclusion as significant causes of radicalisation. It called for a joint response to terrorism and a structured reform of the security sector.³³ In particular, it expressed concern about the 2015 Tunisian counter-terrorism law, which could seriously infringe upon civil liberties and undermine respect for human rights.

Recommendations

Tunisia's path towards democracy remains difficult and full of obstacles. A fundamental problem is the role of the security apparatus in Tunisian society. To overcome the dilemmas of the Ben Ali era, a rebalancing of the role between internal security forces (police, national guard and intelligence services) and the army is needed. The EU should focus more on sustaining Tunisian efforts towards this direction, as this is the priority in order to make Tunisian security forces more effective. The leadership of the Ministry of Interior constitutes one of the biggest obstacles since it resists any form of change. Concerted and collective EU actions are indispensable to achieve this shared objective. To evaluate the Union's influence on Tunis, one may consider that the post-Ben Ali strategy on counter-terrorism models that of the EU. It shows the importance and relevance of the EU's experience for Tunisia. The current Tunisian strategy, however, pays too little attention to prevention.

To be more effective, the European Union should:

1 Push for reforms in the social and economic fields to remove causes of discontent that could be exploited by fundamentalist forces to turn new followers against the institutional system. By acknowledging that internal socio-economic and political factors are among the main drivers of radicalisation, the European institutions could launch new actions in those policy areas that could help to stop the surge in radicalised individuals. They could also support the development of a more decentralised system that would put local authorities at the centre of the decision-making process. The process started *de jure* in 2011. Following years of slow implementation, the local elections of May 2018 have created a new momentum. The goal is to transfer powers to democratically elected local

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1

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governments and make them more effective in the fight against corruption and the provision of services that can improve socio-economic conditions.

2 Keep raising the issue of security in Tunisia through the regular high-level meeting process, known as G7+6. It comprises the G7 members, as well as Belgium, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the European Union, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). It can help to improve the coordination of international assistance to Tunisia more effectively. In that regard, it should be extended to include other foreign partners. In the end, the G7+6 could serve as an informal platform that can engage stakeholders in overcoming obstacles and making international funds more effective.

3 Continue the projects that stem from the enhanced political dialogue on security and counter-terrorism, including the mobilisation of European Union experts within the Tunisian administration. A specific project should further support the Tunisian National Guard, which is the security body most exposed to the threat of jihadism. It needs to be modernised and trained better to face new threats such as illegal trafficking at the border and its connection with terrorist groups.

4 Promote regional and thematic projects (on prevention of radicalisation, support to security institutions, border security, foreign terrorist fighters), with the involvement of European agencies such as Europol, CEPOL, Eurojust and Frontex and the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence. In this regard, the EU should assist Tunisia in developing a de-radicalisation programme within the broad counter-terrorist national strategy.

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► Supporters of Lebanese cleric Ahmed al-Assir, a radical Salafi on the run since deadly clashes between his forces and the country's army in June, gather outside the Mohammed al-Amin mosque in downtown Beirut, on 20 September 2013, to demand the halt of the security crackdown imposed on Assir's supporters in Sidon. © AFP PHOTO / JOSEPH EID



Lebanon

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2

Lebanon is a deeply sectarian country, with 18 officially recognised religious groups. It is affected by high unemployment and poverty. Alongside the demographic pressure generated by refugee flows, the combination of poor economic prospects and a fragmented society leads to political and social instability. Despite the flimsiness of the Lebanese political system, the country has managed to preserve a precarious political balance.

Nevertheless, new local and regional crises are threatening this balance. First, the country serves as a sounding board for different political narratives and rival interpretations of the past Syrian occupation. Second, it remains at the centre of a struggle for politico-religious influence between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Third, the spill-over effect of the war in Syria has aggravated the situation further. The conflict stoked a resurgence of sectarian violence in Lebanon. It also heightened political tensions and prompted a rise of violent extremism. An estimated 900 foreign fighters joined the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) from Lebanon.¹ The war has also resulted in over 1 million new refugees settling in the country.

Local fragility and grievances compound the external and geopolitical factors. Such a complicated situation has heightened

existing conflicts and political violence, including terrorism. It has created multiple paths towards radicalisation. The relative weakness of traditional Sunni organisations or political parties further exacerbates a sense of alienation. In the impoverished neighbourhoods of Tripoli, Sunni Islamist leaders are exerting a negative influence on youth as a result of the lack of control of Dar al-Fatwa, the primary Sunni public institution. Consequently, Sheikh Salem Rafei, a Salafi jihadist heading the Muslim Clerics Association, has been able to galvanise youth into fighting against the injustice and tyranny of the Syrian regime and the Alawite community.

This chapter focuses on the causes of violent extremism and violent radicalisation in Lebanon and the role of the European Union (EU) in supporting Lebanon's efforts to counter this threat. The first part of the chapter focuses on demographics in Lebanon and how those living in deprived areas are most at risk of violent radicalisation. The second part looks at the violent radicalisation process, the response of the Lebanese government and the cooperation with the European Union. The conclusions present steps that could be taken by the Lebanese authorities and the European Union going forward.

Socio-economic inequalities in a diverse society

In 2016, according to World Bank estimates, the Lebanese population totalled 6 million people (including non-nationals).² It includes 250,000 migrant workers who serve as domestics, 174,422 Palestinian refugees, and 976,002 registered Syrian refugees.³ In August 2008, a study carried out by the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs and the

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) revealed that 28.5% of Lebanese nationals (or 1.07 million individuals) were considered poverty-stricken, living on less than USD 4 a day.⁴ About 300,000 individuals were deemed extremely poor, living on less than USD 2.4 a day. As such, they are unable to meet basic food needs.

In Lebanon, disparities in income are compounded by inequality in access to public services (e.g. education, healthcare, transport). The private sector only serves those who can afford the price, which exacerbates inequality.⁵ Such a situation has left the door open for the emergence of sectarian welfare services that are replacing state-funded social services.

Regional disparities are also striking. Overall, poverty is highest in the Northern and Southern parts of the country, where poverty rates hover above 30%. A 2015 report by the Central Administration for Statistics in Lebanon and the World Bank confirmed that in 2011-12 the most impoverished region was still the Bekaa with a poverty rate of 38%.⁶

The majority of non-Lebanese, including youth, live in the peripheral regions, where poor socio-economic conditions have political and security implications.⁷ According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 986,942 Syrian refugees were registered as of 30 April 2018.⁸ The concentration of Syrian refugees is high in the most impoverished areas of Lebanon, and their presence exacerbates already harsh living conditions.

Palestinian refugees reside in camps, where poverty is more frequent and severe than in gatherings.⁹ In 2015, they faced a poverty rate of 65%. 3% were living in extreme poverty.¹⁰ Country-wide poverty is more frequent and severe in camps than gatherings. Palestinians are also prohibited from working in 36 professions and acquiring property.¹¹

In addition, more than 250,000 migrant domestic workers reside in Lebanon.¹² However, their institutional and legal protection remains very weak. Efforts to ensure decent working conditions are limited. Since 2005, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Lebanese Ministry of Labour have boosted the protection of migrant workers, focusing on developing relevant legal instruments and capacity-building programmes. Lebanon has ratified 50 ILO Conventions, including many dealing with human rights.

In the end, the compound effect of heterogeneity and disparity provides fertile ground for radicalisation.

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Violent radicalisation and extremism in Lebanon

There is no single cause but a complex mix of factors that can lead to violent radicalisation and acts of terrorism.¹⁵

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES

There are structural drivers of violent radicalisation, such as economic segregation or political marginalisation, that are prompting more and more individuals into violent actions to challenge a situation they experience as unfair.

First, as detailed above, many areas in Lebanon suffer from inequality and poverty. The failure of Lebanese policies at all levels, as well as the absence of transitional justice after the civil war, have exacerbated the situation and created a general climate of insecurity. Furthermore, in the North, the areas near the Syrian border, where ISIS is fighting the Syrian regime, are particularly problematic. Affected by poverty, segregation, marginalisation, and inequality, both the Northern and the Bekaa regions are portrayed by media and public opinion as incubators of 'terrorism'.

Second, urbanisation and housing market issues have reinforced segregation and created isolated or invisible categories of people. For example, adjacent to Palestinian camps, marginalised neighbourhoods have been receiving a growing number of poverty-stricken Lebanese and migrant workers, attracted by cheap accommodation.¹⁴ Their isolation from the rest of the city produces 'urban islands' populated by a complex mix of nationalities and socially disparate groups.

Society as a whole usually stigmatises those people from deprived areas, the

periphery or Palestinian camps. Today, discrimination translates into prejudice, racism, and high unemployment. In the end, in the process of radicalisation, the ethnic and socio-economic factors are far more instrumental than ideological convictions.¹⁵

DISENFRANCHISED YOUTH

The destitution of youth in Lebanon is particularly acute. According to a 2016 UNDP study, youth (age 15-29) accounts for 27% of the population (1.6 million people). Youngsters come from various backgrounds.¹⁶ Most are Lebanese citizens. But large segments are either Palestinian refugees or displaced Syrians.

Lebanese youth from impoverished neighbourhoods are often subject to stigmatisation. They are inactive, anonymous, with no viable personal and social endeavours. They must also confront discrimination and institutional violence.¹⁷ They suffer from an unequal access to public education and social services. In the end, as a result of government neglect and limited public policies, youth is increasingly disenfranchised. Consequently, they become tempted to assert themselves as 'we' versus the rest of society. Their radicalisation can eventually lead to violence.

These youth living on the fringe of society incrementally identify themselves with and become active in a project that gives them a purpose. Religion becomes a pretext. Some of them choose to become jihadists in the name of God as a way to flee exclusion. They end up being recognised as 'martyrs'. In their eyes, they reinforce their existence by becoming inexistent, but 'visible' in

death, while attacking symbols of the system that has rejected them.

CYBER-JIHAD

Radicalisation can also take place digitally. “The existence of radical milieus, whether in a particular neighbourhood or the virtual social space of the Internet can be such a point of attraction for vulnerable young people in search of comradeship, a new role, identity, and status, especially when push factors like discrimination, marginalisation, and humiliation... contribute to a break with a past that is perceived as intolerable.”¹⁸

New technologies of information and communication have created ‘emotional communities’ providing communication that is user-generated, highly personalised, interactive, instantaneous, and mobile.¹⁹ These communities target the fragile and alienated individuals, listen to them, and offer them an alternative world of righteousness.

FROM JAIL TO JIHAD

Prison is a particularly fertile recruiting ground for terrorist groups. Conditions are ideal for inmates to accept radical ideas. They find meaning in the current version of ‘prisons’ Islam’, among their incarcerated peers. This version directs their anger against the state and crystallises it under an ideological and religious umbrella. This sense of persecution and injustice drives individuals to identify with a simplified version of Islam. This new religious identity entices them to Islam and to identify with persecuted groups or individuals. Once outside the prison, they travel through Syria, Iraq, Yemen and other countries to train in *jihād* via the jihadist network they have built links with in jail.

SYRIAN SPILL-OVER EFFECTS

Lebanon is connected historically and geographically to Syria. However, the relationship between the two countries has always been problematic due to the frequent interventions by Syria into Lebanon. These interventions produced a ‘longing for revenge’ mentality among Lebanese Sunni groups.²⁰ Those groups who had suffered directly from the Syrian regime during the civil war and today oppose President Bashar Hafez al-Assad – such as al-Moukawama al-Sha’biya, the popular struggle movement led by Khalil Akkawi ‘Abou Arabi’ – encouraged some Lebanese from border cities to participate in the Syrian conflict. Given the historical enmity between Palestinians and Lebanese towards the Syrian regime, some Lebanese and Palestinian youth have fought, and continue to fight, against the Assad regime.

The Syrian War has had a significant impact on Lebanon. It has led to growing sectarian and political divisions, shifting demographics with refugee influxes, and increasing economic hardship and political marginalisation for impoverished Sunnis. The most significant impact of the war is arguably the influx of refugees who now account for more than 25% of the total population.²¹ Lebanese political leaders are also divided, with Sunnis feeling more impoverished, marginalised, and frustrated, primarily as a consequence of Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria.

According to Khashan, Lebanese Sunnis were willing to support whoever could defeat their enemy and restore their pride.²² Some of them have, therefore, joined the ranks of ISIS. The war in Syria amplified the vacuum created by poverty and sectarian hostility, leading to the rise of influential sheikhs who have played a significant role in violent radicalisation. Sheikhs gathered followers in impoverished areas all over Lebanon calling for *jihād*, mobilising them to fight in Syria to restore their security and pride.

The role of international organisations

To prevent and counter violent extremism, Lebanon adopted the United Nations (UN) approach to prevent violent extremism and launch the process to establish a national strategic plan in September 2016.

ADOPTING THE UNITED NATIONS APPROACH

In December 2015, the UN published an action plan to prevent violent extremism (PVE), building on the strategic and operational counter-terrorism (CT) framework adopted in 2006 alongside the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.²³ The plan stresses the necessity for each member state to set national priorities to address the local drivers of violent extremism and to complement national CT strategies by including PVE into the mandate of special political missions and UN country teams.

The UN General Assembly has not defined violent extremism. In fact, definitions of ‘terrorism’ and ‘violent extremism’ are the prerogative of member states. They must, however, be consistent with their obligations under international law, particularly human rights law.²⁴ The approach, adopted by the General Assembly, can help the Lebanese government to identify and address conditions that might spur violent extremism. In Lebanon, the UN approach separates PVE from CT components as PVE strategies focus on addressing the causes of violence while CT is a curative approach aiming at working on the symptoms of violent extremism. One is upstream and the other downstream.²⁵

The Lebanese strategy to implement the UN’s PVE approach builds on the commitments made in seven priority areas: conflict and dialogue; prevention; strengthening governance and human rights; community engagement; empowering youth; gender equality and employment facilitation; education skills, development; and strategic communications, the internet, and social media. This process is overseen by a steering committee with the participation of relevant stakeholders to provide guidance as needed.

Disparities in income are compounded by inequality in access to public services (e.g. education, healthcare, transport).

Overall, poverty is highest in the Northern and Southern parts of the country, where poverty rates hover above 30%.

COOPERATION WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

The framework for bilateral cooperation between the European Union and Lebanon is strong and wide-ranging. It is rooted in the EU-Lebanon European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan adopted in 2004 and the Association Agreement signed in 2006.

The action plan prioritises strengthening cooperation on issues of international and regional interest including the Middle East peace process, the fight against terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In addition, the EU has committed to supporting Lebanon in various areas, including political dialogue, economic and social reform, sustainable development, as well as market and regulatory reform.

The EU and Lebanon also cooperate in the fields of justice, freedom and security. This cooperation programme includes border management, airport and civil aviation security and combating terrorism. The CT action plan aims to implement the provisions of the Euro-Mediterranean code of conduct on CT; fight against terrorism financing, develop law enforcement agencies and judicial cooperation; fight against cyber-*jihad* activity; and counter violent extremism under a holistic approach that includes prevention.

A NEW DEFINITION OF TERRORISM?

The EU is also working with the Lebanese authorities to update a 1958 law defining terrorism. Article 314 of the present law defines acts of terrorism as “all acts whose purpose is to create a state of alarm, which have been committed by means likely to produce a common danger, such as explosive devices, flammable materials, toxic or corrosive products, infectious agents, or microbial”. The EU is coordinating with a national committee led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to reach a consensus on a more precise definition of terrorism.

A fundamental divide exists, however, between the March 8 and March 14 movements concerning the classification of Hezbollah.²⁶ In Lebanon, most see Hezbollah as a resistance movement that is a component of the parliamentary majority supporting the current government. The latter includes Hezbollah’s allies from the March 8 Coalition, the Free Patriotic Movement, the Lebanese Democratic Party, and Amal. Hezbollah is also deeply rooted in Lebanese culture and society. Due to this complexity, there is no consensus on a national CT strategy. However, following parliamentary elections in May 2018 and the formation of the new government, there may be scope for progress towards a consensus on a shared CT approach and definition of terrorism.

THE NATIONAL PVE STRATEGY

It took more than one year for the Lebanese government to establish the Office of the National PVE Coordinator in December 2017. The National Coordinator led a process to develop a national PVE strategy and is now working on elaborating a national action plan for implementation.

The national PVE strategy builds on nine pillars of work: enhancing good governance; justice, human rights, and the rule of law; urban development and engaging local communities; equality and empowering women; education and skills development; economic development and job creation; strategic communication, information technology, and social media and empowering youth.

As part of the formulation of the strategy and the consensus-building process, the Cabinet endorsed a national definition of violent extremism. It is “the spread of individual and social hatred that may lead to community-based violence, the rejection of diversity and non-acceptance of the other, and the use of violence as a means of

expression and influence are the behaviours that threaten the social values ensuring social stability”.²⁷

EU financial support for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) comes from the Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace Instrument (IcSP). For the period 2014-2020, the EU has earmarked 26% of the EUR 478 million budget for CT-P/CVE-related actions in the European neighbourhood (EUR 124 million). This funding supports the STRIVE (Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism) initiative aimed at identifying drivers for youth extremism, empowering women, promoting community dialogue, strengthening local actors, and improving media and education capacities to counter radicalising ideologies. STRIVE in Lebanon is implemented through the cooperation between different institutions such as the British Council, the Berghoff Foundation, and the National PVE Coordinator.

Lebanon also receives a share of the 2016 EU Annual Action Programme (AAP) under the IcSP, which earmarks EUR 4 million for the ‘prison de-radicalisation’ programme in ENP countries. In January 2018, the EU launched a three-year plan targeting violent extremists in Lebanese prisons, focusing on the rehabilitation of young adult prisoners to deter and prevent terrorism.

The EU assistance in Lebanon takes into account the big challenge Lebanon faces in hosting refugees. Due to this, Lebanon may benefit from supplementary allocations. More specifically, the EU mobilises a range of funding instruments within its toolbox, such as the IcSP, the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) Special Measures as well as the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis (‘Madad’ Fund) and humanitarian assistance.

The EU will also make use of more innovative financial vehicles such as blending loans with grants as well as concessional financing to support or scale up the interventions from

the ENI Single Support Framework (SSF) for the period 2014-2020. The indicative allocation for Lebanon for the period 2014-2020 is roughly EUR 350 million.²⁸ The sector breakdown is as follows:

- ▶ Promoting growth and job creation (30%).
- ▶ Fostering local governance and socio-economic development (30%).
- ▶ Strengthening the rule of law, enhancing security and counter-terrorism (25%).
- ▶ Civil society support (10%).
- ▶ Capacity development and institution building (5%).

As noted above, the EU supports the process towards a more precise definition of terrorism. However, given the lack of consensus on this politicised issue, the EU Delegation in Lebanon has shifted its focus from CT to P/CVE. The EU hopes to go beyond measuring the causes and effects of violent extremism and develop an alternative system of punishment and imprisonment to increase the capacity of the Government of Lebanon to manage violent extremist prisoners and to prevent radicalisation in the prison system. Facilitating factors are the accessibility of Lebanese politicians and their capacity for listening and dialogue, while the challenge is political fragmentation and multiple political visions in the government.

Recommendations

The structural deficiencies of the Lebanese political system constitute fertile ground for the rise of violent extremism in the country. An inclusive system based on active participation and real representation is urgently needed to create a strong sense of belonging to the state. Hence equal opportunities and equal rights are essential prerequisites.

SOCIAL COHESION

In a context like Lebanon with a high number of refugees, active citizenship would help to ensure their protection and facilitate their economic and social integration. Similarly, working on a shared value system would have the potential to strengthen social cohesion and spur a sense of shared responsibility among all residents.

Addressing these prerequisites calls for a real effort to combat poverty and exclusion and overcome human rights violations more systematically. In today's interconnected world, it must be a shared responsibility. The international community thus has a role to play. For example, the EU should step up its efforts to meet the objectives of the EU-Lebanon action plan agreed in July 2005. It should measure its results. Developing indicators and collecting baseline figures through an open process with full accountability and double monitoring by independent experts are essential steps to measure any progress.

URBAN PLANNING

Urban segregation plays a vital role in radicalisation. It facilitates the development of sleeping cells and creates recruiting zones for terrorist groups. The EU can support the monitoring efforts that would ensure that the government implements decree #2366 regarding the Master Plan of Spatial Planning in Lebanon, approved by the Ministerial Council of 2 April 2009. The plan aims to prioritise the development of Lebanese territories, depending on their needs, through urban and economic development strategies established in 2005.²⁹ Rural areas need more investments in agriculture, as well as improved education and health services. The plan should help to address different challenges including education, economic development, and infrastructure, while at the same time help strengthen unity between different communities.

The failure of Lebanese policies at all levels, as well as the absence of transitional justice after the civil war, have exacerbated the situation and created a general climate of insecurity.

As a result of government neglect and limited public policies, youth is increasingly disenfranchised.

When it comes to local policies, municipalities are the relevant players to lead on these reforms. For that, they need to be equipped with skills, competences and a budget. Local authorities should also be given more powers to take measures when it comes to issuing decrees facilitating inclusivity and equal opportunities. Municipalities must identify the most impoverished neighbourhoods, slums and camps in the city, evaluate the most critical problems for each group of residents (Lebanese, displaced or refugee persons), and develop a tailored action plan for each group.

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Given the historical enmity between Palestinians and Lebanese towards the Syrian regime, some Lebanese and Palestinian youth have fought, and continue to fight, against the Assad regime.

The government should also embrace a broader strategy that grants more responsibility to civil society and engages all communities. That policy must promote social justice, improve the professional skills and job opportunities for people, and strengthen citizens' national loyalty. It implies fostering a good level of local governance and citizen participation in city management as well as strategic planning in conflict areas. Lebanon needs an economic and urban development programme that involves both the national and local levels. Giving all residents equal access to social policies will address the urban/rural divide.

Sheikhs gathered followers in impoverished areas all over Lebanon calling for *jihād* and mobilising them to fight in Syria to restore their security and pride.

The EU should push the Lebanese government to design a neutral institution with multiple governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to lead the P/CVE national strategy. Such a neutral institution would play a pivotal role in restructuring Lebanon's legal system and monitoring human rights law and discriminatory measures against refugees, especially the Palestinians who have settled in the country since 1948.

In a nutshell, the critical driver of radicalisation is not poverty, but an explosive combination of poverty, population density, and a sense of marginalisation or oppression. Such a highly volatile mix calls for a comprehensive solution that goes beyond the current short-sighted, isolated and small-scale interventions. A global and inclusive society-wide approach is needed in Lebanon to counter and prevent violent extremism and to ensure sufficient social cohesion as well as necessary societal consensus.

- ¹ Neumann, Peter (2015), "[Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980](#)", London: King's College, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation.
- ² See country data from the [World Bank](#).
- ³ See data from UNHCR and the Government of Lebanon (last accessed on 18 August 2018).
- ⁴ Yaacoub, Najwa and Mayssaa Daher (2015), "[Measuring poverty in Lebanon using 2011 HBS, Technical Report](#)", Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, Beirut: Central Administration of Statistics.
- ⁵ Ministry of Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (2008), "[Poverty, Growth and income distribution in Lebanon](#)", Beirut: Ministry of Social Affairs.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ See data from the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR).
- ⁹ Gatherings are defined by Fafo (Ugland, 2003) as neighbourhoods located where 25 or more Palestinian refugees live together. There are 42 gatherings in Lebanon, divided into five areas: Sidon region (11), North Lebanon (7), Bekaa (7), Tyre (12), and Beirut-Mont Lebanon (5).
- ¹⁰ Chaaban, J., Salti, N., Ghattas, H., Irani, A., Ismail, T. and Batlouni, L. (2016), "[Survey on the Socioeconomic Status of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon 2015](#)", Report published by the American University of Beirut and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).
- ¹¹ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (2016), "[Employment of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon](#)", Beirut: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).
- ¹² See data from the [International Labour Organization](#)
- ¹³ Kortam, Marie (2017), "The Jihad of People from Tripoli in Syria: From Revenge to searching for meanings" (in Arabic), *Arab Reform initiative*.
- ¹⁴ Kortam, Marie and Nicolas Pouillard (2017), "Future without hope? Palestinian youth in Lebanon between marginalisation, exploitation and radicalisation", Beirut: Norwegian People's Aid. Kortam, Marie (2013), *Jeunes palestiniens, jeunes français : quels points communs face à la violence et à l'oppression* (Palestinian youth, French youth: Common struggles against violence and oppression), Paris: L'Harmattan.
- ¹⁵ Kortam, Marie (2018), "[Palestinian refugee children: Violence in school and family](#)", *International Sociology*, Volume 33, Issue 4, pp 486-502.
- ¹⁶ Chaaban, Jad and Alexander El-Khoury (2016), "[Spotlight on youth in Lebanon](#)", Beirut: United Nations Development Programme.
- ¹⁷ The use of force by public or private institutions such as police, army, or schools can stem from an abuse of power. *Op. cit.* Kortam, Marie (2017). Khashan, Hilal (2013), "[The political isolation of Lebanese Sunnis](#)", *The Middle East Quarterly*, Volume 20, Issue 3, Philadelphia: Middle East Forum.
- ¹⁸ Schmid, Alex P. (2013), "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review", Research paper, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT).
- ¹⁹ Crettiez, Xavier (2016), "Penser la radicalisation. Une sociologie processuelle des variables de l'engagement violent", *Revue française de science politique*, Volume 66, Issue 5, pp. 709-727.
- ²⁰ Seurat, Michel (1985), "Le quartier de Bab Tebbané à Tripoli (Liban): Étude d'une asabiyya urbaine", in CERMOC (Ed.), *Mouvements Communautaires et Espaces Urbains au Machreq*. Beirut, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain (CERMOC).
- ²¹ Chaaban, Jad, and Alexander El-Khoury (2016), "[Spotlight on youth in Lebanon](#)", Beirut: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- ²² *Op. cit.* Khashan, Hilal (2013).
- ²³ United Nations (2006), "[The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#)", New York : United Nations.
- ²⁴ United Nations General Assembly (2015), "[Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism](#)", New York: United Nations, p. 2.
- ²⁵ United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator for Lebanon (2016), "[Preventing Violent Extremism in Lebanon: An All-of-UN Approach](#)", Beirut: United Nations, p. 4.
- ²⁶ Their names stem from the dates on which the demonstrations that followed the death of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri took place. March 8 is dominated by the two major Shia parties, Hezbollah and Amal, allied with Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement; March 14 is led by the Future Movement founded by Hariri, allied with the Lebanese Forces party.
- ²⁷ The Lebanese government (2017), A national strategy to prevent violent extremism, Beirut: Government of Lebanon.
- ²⁸ For more details, see Programming of the European neighbourhood Instrument (2014-2020), "[Single Support Framework for EU Support to Lebanon \(2017-2020\)](#)", Brussels: European Commission.
- ²⁹ Conseil du Développement et de la Reconstruction (2005), "[Schéma directeur d'aménagement du territoire libanais](#)", Beirut: Government of Lebanon.



► A Kosovo police officer stands in front of a court in Pristina on 12 August 2014. The day before, Kosovo police arrested at least 40 people in a major operation on suspicion of having fought with Islamic extremist groups in Syria and Iraq. Weapons, ammunition and explosives were seized as hundreds of police officers and special police units raided 60 locations. © ARMEND NIMANI / AFP

Kosovo

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3

The beginning of the 21st century saw a global rise in radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism. The European Union (EU), alongside Western Balkan states and countries from the EU's southern neighbourhood, was directly affected by this phenomenon. States, societies and institutions were largely unprepared for this development and how to deal with it.

Fighting radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism cannot be confined to a single policy area. Instead, it requires a holistic approach that considers the complexity of identity, cultural, socio-economic and political factors and drivers, including diverse views and interpretations of Islam. Additional triggers that can lead to radicalisation relate to group dynamics, the influence of groomers, a lack of understanding of the origins of conflicts and wars in the Middle East, a sense of solidarity and identification with oppressed people, the role of social media and issues related to identity crises.² This broad assessment also applies to the situation in Kosovo.

Given Kosovo's long tradition of inter-religious tolerance, the country was mostly unprepared for the threat emanating from radicalisation. Meanwhile, Kosovo, with a population of 1.8 million, has produced more foreign fighters *per capita* than any other country in the region.³ Over 300 citizens joined the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) and other Islamist extremist groups following the creation of its caliphate. In July 2014, the Kosovo police arrested more than 40 returning foreign fighters. The involvement of Kosovar nationals in foreign wars under ISIS, and Jabhat al-Nusra, Ansar al-Sham from 2012 to 2017, came as a surprise to Kosovo's authorities and society.⁴ This development sounded the alarm bell for Kosovo's security services as well as in society at large.

This chapter aims to discuss the issues of radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism in the Republic of Kosovo with a particular focus on priorities for cooperation between the EU and Kosovo in preventing and countering these challenges.

Preventing and countering violent extremism

For Kosovo, violent extremism is only partially a home-grown problem. Most of it has been imported from Middle Eastern countries. Immediately after the 1998-99 war with Serbia, external religious influences swept through the country, importing radical and fundamentalist approaches to Islam and creating extremist networks that remain active today, particularly in the southern part of Kosovo.

To date, measures implemented to prevent violent extremism have involved the creation of relevant policy and legal

frameworks. In 2015, the Government of Kosovo adopted a national strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism. It also modified its criminal law legislation and initiated broader institutional reforms. The main objectives of the nation's CVE strategy are promoting counter-narratives to weaken the legitimacy of violent extremist messages, raising awareness of radicalisation among community stakeholders, and building their capacity to fight it. More specifically, the aim is to make local players aware of the radicalisation 'traps'.⁵ These include

recruitment via online propaganda or through informal religious gatherings with unauthorised preachers. In both instances, young people are particularly vulnerable.

The activities of extremist groups appear to be more successful in a context where there is a general lack of awareness. For example, the most widespread method involves the use of Internet-based propaganda. However, the scope for online extremist propaganda has been gradually decreasing as a result of national awareness raising campaigns and measures to strengthen law enforcement bodies. They have led to the prosecution of a few individuals associated with extremist and terrorist organisations. A relevant example was the prevention of a potentially major terrorist attack against the visiting Israeli football team in Albania. On that occasion, several people, who were reportedly planning a terrorist attack, were arrested and later sentenced.⁶

In 2016, the establishment of a referral mechanism in the municipality of Gjilan further underlined Kosovo's commitment to countering extremism. The aim of this pilot project is to bring together local officials, religious leaders, and civil society representatives to address community concerns about violent radicalisation, provide support to vulnerable groups and individuals that can be exposed to extremists, and coordinate responses at the

local level. Furthermore, a de-radicalisation programme in Kosovo's correctional facilities, launched in 2016, is ongoing. The plan is implemented by the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), a US-backed bilateral law enforcement programme. It targets individuals who took part in foreign conflicts.

Overall, government and civil society initiatives have enhanced the prevention of extremism and reduced the flow of foreign fighters leaving Kosovo. Nevertheless, the picture remains mixed. The country still needs to demonstrate that it is effectively able to respond to the challenge posed by returning foreign fighters, including women and minors. Presently, a majority of returning fighters are prosecuted and sent to prison. However, the fact that people are sentenced does not automatically mean they have entered into a de-radicalisation process. Instead, as in many other countries, prisons have become a hotbed for radicalisation due to ineffective policies.

Radicalised individuals are targeting other inmates and indoctrinating them with extremist ideologies. Rehabilitation and de-radicalisation programmes in prisons are not sufficient. Reintegration programmes are also missing. It means that once they are released, ex-prisoners are very likely to spread violent extremist ideologies within their families and communities.

The role of the European Union

International actors, including the EU, have played an essential role in supporting local efforts to prevent radicalisation in Kosovo. However, this involvement has come late. Initially, the EU had mainly a monitoring role. EU progress reports would regularly record the headway the Kosovar authorities were making in the fight against terrorism

and the prevention of extremism. But EU officials and experts made a limited, albeit direct, contribution to the development of Kosovo's approach to these challenges.

For instance, during the preparation of Kosovo's strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation

leading to terrorism, there has been a wide participation of official and non-governmental representatives. A few foreign representatives were involved.

A SLOW START

There was, however, no substantial contribution from the EU or member states.⁷ Compared to the United States (US), sponsoring research and community related projects, including know-how assistance for government and law enforcement institutions, the EU involvement was limited to the participation of a representative of its office in Pristina, who could only give a symbolic contribution. Furthermore, the EU has a patchy record regarding participating in other such initiatives. For example, in a one-week training course for officials in charge of programming interventions to implement the strategy, no high-profile EU or member state counter-terrorism experts were involved. EU initiatives such as the Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism initiative (WBCTi) were still in their infancy when Kosovo started developing its strategy, which means that the EU played a limited role in guiding Kosovo's institutions. The EU's potential involvement would be particularly helpful in sharing know-how and expertise on how to tackle violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorist activities. In other words, one would expect a more proactive role from the EU presence in Kosovo, in supporting law enforcement institutions in dealing with violent extremism and radicalisation.

Regarding financial commitments, EU member states mainly funded small-scale projects or offered technical support, including the programme 'Increasing the role of community/citizens against spreading extremism and radicalism in Kosovo', supported by the Netherlands. The EU Office has limited its support to a few local non-governmental organisations through tenders to engage in small projects on de-radicalisation at the local level. In

2015, it provided a small fund to the Kosovo Centre for Security Studies for this purpose.⁸

To date, support for official and non-governmental initiatives to address radicalisation and extremism, through the provision of technical, financial and training support, has come primarily from the US Embassy.⁹ Overall, when dealing with grassroots projects and government initiatives, the EU and its member states were less active than the US.

STEPPING UP INVOLVEMENT

The EU's involvement became more visible with the project 'Further support to Kosovo's institutions in fighting organised crime, corruption and violent extremism', launched in 2016 under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA).¹⁰ This project, jointly implemented by international and domestic partners, marks a milestone in the EU's involvement in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) activities. It aims to tackle in parallel the three security challenges that Kosovo is facing: corruption, organised crime and violent extremism.¹¹ It foresees capacity-building activities for different institutions, both law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and other administrative services that are involved in the prevention and fight against organised crime, including violent extremism. It comprises both hard and soft measures, including preventive ones to raise awareness about the risks of radicalisation among different target groups including youth.

THE ROLE OF EULEX

Compared to other Western Balkan countries, the EU's involvement in countering violent extremism, radicalisation, and terrorism in Kosovo is quite distinct. During the country's transition from international administration to a fully-fledged sovereign and independent state, the EU established EULEX (the EU rule of law mission). The mandate of EULEX,

as the largest civilian mission undertaken by the EU under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), consisted of monitoring, mentoring, and advising the national authorities as well as taking executive decisions on matters of justice and internal security. As a matter of fact, though the focus of EULEX was the rule of law and the implementation of agreements between Kosovo and Serbia, and as such not connected to P/CVE, there were nevertheless areas of activity directly related to terrorist threats. For example, in April 2008, EULEX hosted a training on “evidential issues surrounding the prosecution of terrorism-related offences”. It could thus prove useful to enhance the role of EULEX further to cover P/CVE issues, although this would require the unanimous agreement of EU member states over the mission’s new mandate.

THE PROSPECTS OF EU MEMBERSHIP

Kosovo wants to actively engage with the EU because it considers cooperation necessary in the context of its aspiration to join the bloc. A variety of initiatives demonstrate the growing readiness of Kosovo to work with the EU to confront terrorism and radicalisation. They include the nation’s political will to develop the necessary institutional capacities to prevent radicalisation, its legislative reforms and its growing capacity to successfully identify those who are directly or indirectly linked to extremism and radicalisation.

Recently, the EU’s approach seems to have further shifted towards increasing its cooperation with the Western Balkan countries. The EU’s strategy for the Western Balkans (2018) points to the fact that the EU intends to pay greater attention to and strengthen its efforts to counter radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism in the region. The strategy expands the scope of EU engagement with a reference to joint action plans, the deployment of counter-terrorism expertise

and cooperation through specialised agencies, including the need for increased awareness and capacity-building in the area of cyber-security.¹²

That said, despite this positive progress, cooperation between Kosovo and the EU in the field of counter-terrorism remains hampered by the opposition of five member states to Kosovo’s statehood.¹³ This opposition narrows the room for a pragmatic approach when it comes to countering extremism and terrorism. In particular, the EU remains unable to conclude a strategic cooperation agreement between Europol and Kosovo, or promote the country’s membership of Interpol.

Reaching an agreement with Europol would put Kosovo in a better position to benefit from information exchange and cooperate actively with the members of this organisation. Membership in Interpol would enhance the potential of Kosovo’s police to deal with transnational organised crime.

Similarly, the political deadlock prevents the inclusion of Kosovo in relevant regional law enforcement initiatives, such as the South Eastern Law Enforcement Centre (SELEC) in Bucharest or the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe (PCC SEE) based in Ljubljana.

Recommendations

Overall, Kosovo has shown its readiness to engage seriously in tackling violent extremism. However, it is vital that the European Union and the United States help Kosovo to continue strengthening its domestic capacity. Eventually, Kosovo aims to become an integral part of the European and international security umbrella. For this purpose, there is a need for an exchange of experiences in the region and a further strengthening of internal capacities. Equally important is to support grassroots initiatives.

The following policy recommendations could advance the fight against violent extremism in Kosovo. At the same time, they would strengthen cooperation between the EU and Kosovo in the field of security and justice in general.

Overall, Kosovo has shown its readiness to engage seriously in tackling violent extremism. However, it is vital that the European Union and the United States help Kosovo to continue strengthening its domestic capacity.

1 Europol: Finalise the strategic partnership between Europol and Kosovo in the field of security and intelligence sharing.

2 Interpol: The EU should promote Kosovo's full membership in Interpol by speaking with a single voice on a matter which should be considered exclusively pragmatic and not political.

3 EULEX: Find a consensus on enhancing the role of EULEX to cover the capacity-building of Kosovo's institutions to address P/CVE and counter-terrorism issues.

4 Donor coordination: Support the Government of Kosovo in coordinating donors already involved in P/CVE programmes. The resulting improvement in resource allocation would help both Kosovar society as a whole and grassroot organisations at the local level.

5 Complementarity: Design programmes based on needs and that can complement the existing work of the United States and other bilateral actors. The European Union should focus on strategic communication and capacity-building to prevent violent extremism.

6 Coalition building: The EU should strengthen strategic cooperation with think tanks, media, and national experts, either through government programmes or directly. Similarly, the government should work closely with all relevant parties, including political parties in Kosovo, as well as religious institutions.

7 Technical assistance: Envisage exchange programmes between EU experts and the relevant Kosovo authorities to strengthen the expertise and capacity of law enforcement institutions in dealing with violent extremism and radicalisation. This would be especially relevant in matters related to returning foreign fighters, radicalisation in prisons, and cooperation with local communities.

¹ Fatmir Haxholli currently works as a policy advisor to the Government of the Republic of Kosovo. He worked on his contribution to this volume as an independent consultant prior to joining the government. The views expressed in this chapter are personal and do not reflect the position of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo.

² Radicalisation Awareness Network (2016), "[The Root Causes of Violent Extremism](#)", RAN Issue Paper. It includes references to Ranstorp, Magnus and Peder Hyllengren (2013), "[Förebyggande av våldsbejakande extremism i tredjeland](#)", Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies, Swedish Defence University; Hafez, Mohammed and Creighton Mullins (2015), "[The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism](#)", Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Volume 38, Issue 11, pp. 958-975; and Dalgaard-Nielsen, Anja (2010), "[Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know](#)", Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Volume 33, Issue 9, pp. 797-814.

³ Paraszczuk, Joanna (2015), "[Report Finds Alarming Outflow Of Kosovars To Islamic State](#)", Radio Free Europe, 15 April 2015.

⁴ Xharra, Behar and Nita Gojani (2017), "[Understanding Push and Pull Factors](#)", Pristina: United Nations Development Programme, p. 7.

⁵ For more, please see www.qkss.org and the actions at the community level aiming to prevent violent extremism.

⁶ For more, please see Radio Free Europe (2018), "[Kosovo Sentences Eight Men To Prison Over Plot To Attack Israeli Soccer Team](#)", Radio Free Europe.

⁷ The co-author of this chapter, Fatmir Haxholli, was part of the working group that was mandated to prepare the national strategy on preventing violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism (2015-2020).

⁸ Qehaja, Florian and Skënder Përteshi and Mentor Vrajolli (2017), "[Mapping the state of play of institutional and community involvement in countering violent extremism in Kosovo](#)", Pristina: The Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, p. 9.

⁹ As an example, the Kosovo Centre for Security Studies received support for their research and awareness projects on youth. Representatives of the Kosovo government also benefited from training by US experts. More recently, the United Nation Development Fund expressed its acknowledgement for the technical and research project support it received from the US Embassy.

¹⁰ For more, please visit the website of BSEurope.

¹¹ IPA Programme (2016), "Further support to fighting corruption, organised crime and violent extremism", Brussels: European Commission.

¹² European Commission (2018), "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans", Brussels: European Commission, p. 11.

¹³ Spain, Cyprus, Slovakia, Romania and Greece still do not recognise the independence of Kosovo.

► A former jihadist, David Vallat, who was convicted in the 1990s for terrorism, poses for a photograph on 15 April 2016 in Lyon (France). From the petty crime between Lyon and Grenoble to the 1995 attacks, via Bosnia-Herzegovina and Afghanistan, the *jihad* led David Vallat to prison. 20 years later, he testifies of his radicalisation as a defender of the republican ideal. © AFP PHOTO / ROMAIN LAFABREGUE



Bosnia- Herzegovina

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4

A resilient Muslim community in a dysfunctional state

The state of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) owes its survival to a peace agreement that neither resolved nor sought to resolve the fundamental dispute that triggered the 1992-1995 war. Instead, the state institutions have merely absorbed the conflict. At the time, the problem negotiators grappled most with was not whether the country should be ethnically divided, but to what degree and how.¹ Ethnic divides have shaped the country's political, social, and economic dynamics to this day and have limited its capacity to respond effectively to almost any significant challenge.

Bosnia-Herzegovina comprises no less than three presidents for two ethnically homogeneous entities and one mixed district, 16 police agencies, 14 governments and parliaments, four criminal justice orders, and three educational systems.

From late 2012 through early 2016, up to 240 Bosnian adults (177 men and 63 women) have gone to Syria and Iraq.

ELABORATE INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP

BiH comprises no less than three presidents for two ethnically homogeneous entities and one mixed district, 16 police agencies, 14 governments and parliaments, four criminal justice orders, and three educational systems. This elaborate institutional set-up explains, alongside other reasons, why the Democracy Index 2017 ranked BiH 101 out of 167 'hybrid regimes'.² The country is marred by the consequences of frozen conflict, state capture, endemic corruption, a lack of political accountability, high unemployment, economic hardship, and a dysfunctional public administration. It remains torturously stretched between an unsettled past and an unclear future. In short, for over two decades, BiH has nurtured a context that is conducive to all sorts of radicalising extremist narratives.

Since 2012, the departure of would-be fighters with potential terrorist intent to Syria or Iraq has represented the most obvious threat stemming from radicalisation into violent extremism in BiH. From late 2012 through early 2016, up to 240 Bosnian adults (177 men and 63 women) have gone to Syria and Iraq. This number includes people thought to have died or remained in those countries and those who have returned home. In general, intelligence sources classify male exiles as foreign fighters and women exiles as non-combatants. The Bosnian contingent in so-called Islamic State (ISIS) territory is also thought to have included at least 60 children under the age of 18, who accompanied

their parents and grandparents, as well as an unknown number of children who were born there between 2012 and 2018.

Extensive research on the socio-demographic profiles of Bosnian foreign fighters reveals that many come from low-income families, possess little education or marketable skills, and suffer from underlying psychosocial and mental health conditions. More than one-third (40%) already had criminal records before departure. More than one-quarter have resided, worked, or spent time in the West as part of the Bosnian diaspora.⁵

Bosnians who fought in Syria and Iraq had various motives, usually a mix of personal drivers and overarching ideological objectives. Many were running away from an unhappy marriage, the burden of debt, criminal prosecution, or substance abuse. Others were looking for something, such as adventure or a sense of belonging and purpose. At the same time, most felt they were following a divine order (to perform *jihad* or *hijra*).⁴

'PARALLEL' RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS

The radicalisation and recruitment process mainly took place within family and friend circles, often during social gatherings in the privacy of people's homes that amount to 'illegal' or 'parallel' religious congregations (*jamaats*). Many experts consider these 'para-*jamaats*' – as the official Islamic Community of BiH⁵ calls them – as the gateway to religious radicalisation and recruitment into Salafi extremism, not solely in BiH but also in Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia.

Despite the growing influence of radical Salafi figures on the Internet, radicalisation in BiH is still mostly initiated through the 'human touch' of a religious authority figure that usually leads a 'para-*jamaat*'. Peer-to-peer interaction and group dynamics within

the community then reinforce a particular worldview. In BiH, the role of social media and the Internet in radicalising and recruiting foreign fighters appears to have been merely a multiplier. It is the location and number of 'para-*jamaats*' in the country that have shaped the patterns of radicalisation and recruitment.⁶ Activities would take place in traditional Salafi strongholds within remote mountain communities, such as Gornja Maoča, Dubnica, Ošve, and Liješnica. They have gradually moved to areas in and around major cities like Sarajevo, Zenica, and Tuzla as the establishment of 'para-*jamaats*' has mushroomed in these places over the past couple of years. A whole network of small businesses, community centres, and charities provide financial backing for this effort, supporting what are essentially 'pop-up mosques'. In addition to establishing these parallel religious communities, these groups are also slowly building parallel structures in other vital areas, such as education and healthcare. They are filling the gaps left by failing public services plagued by incompetence, corruption, and nepotism.

A RESILIENT MUSLIM COMMUNITY

While the impact of the radical Salafi movement should not be dismissed or diminished, a closer look at radicalisation and recruitment in BiH reveals three particularly noteworthy findings. First, rates of radicalisation and recruitment into foreign fighting in BiH may not be as dire as they appear at first glance. Most researchers who study and compare the phenomenon across countries use ratios that can be potentially misleading. They use the share of combatants per 1 million inhabitants. With this approach, BiH has a higher rate of its citizens engaged in the war in Syria and Iraq than Belgium. With a population of around 11 million, Belgium has sent 498 foreign fighters or about 45 per 1 million inhabitants. With a population of 3.5 million, BiH has sent 240 foreign fighters or 68 per 1 million inhabitants. According

Many experts consider these 'para-jamaats' – or parallel religious communities – as the gateway to religious radicalisation and recruitment into Salafi extremism, not solely in Bosnia-Herzegovina but also in Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia.

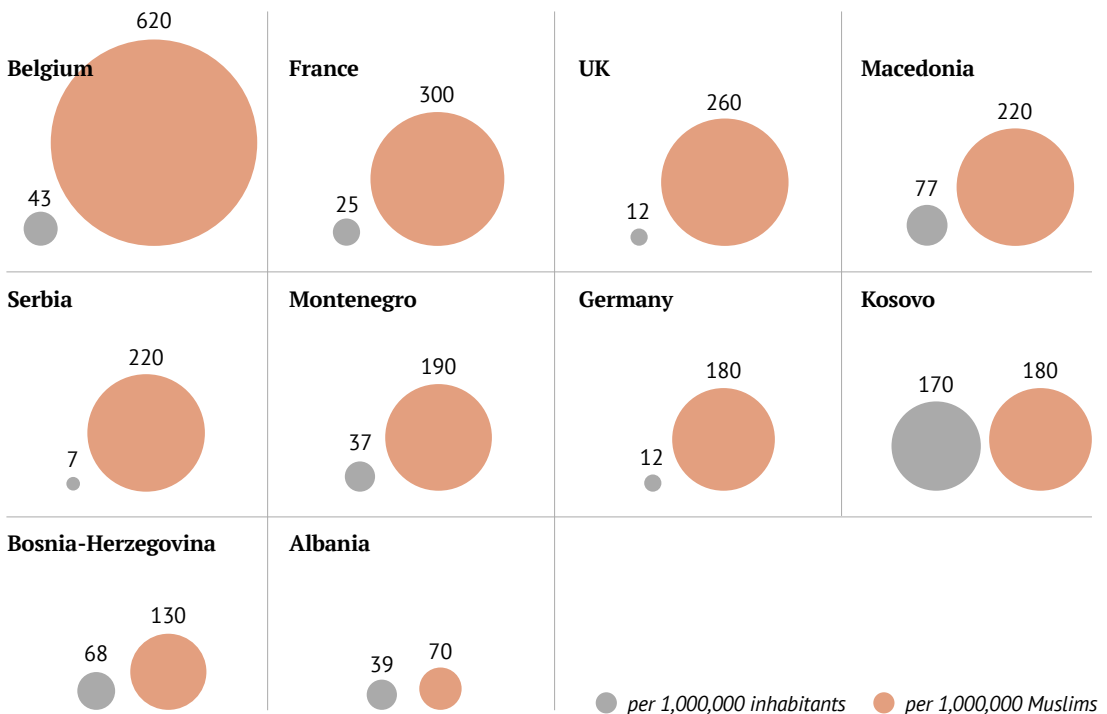
to these figures, extremist recruiters have been more successful in BiH. This approach fails, however, to account for a critical fact: nearly all foreign fighters (and even the non-combatants) who have joined various insurgent groups in Syria or Iraq are Muslims recruited among Muslim communities.

Meanwhile, if we measure radicalisation and recruitment in both Belgium and BiH as a share of the total Muslim population living in each country, figures are different. In Belgium, with a Muslim community of 700,000 people, there were 620 foreign fighters for 1 million Muslims. In BiH, where 1,769,000 Muslims live, there were 130 foreign fighters for every 1 million Muslims. From this perspective, ISIS recruitments in Belgium were nearly five times more successful than in BiH (see table below).

Furthermore, Western Balkan countries with a relative majority of Muslims – such as Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo – have been more resilient to the foreign fighter phenomenon than those Western Balkan countries with a

Table 1.1

The number of foreign fighter among the total population and the Muslim community – EU and Western Balkans countries



relative minority of Muslims – such as Serbia and Macedonia (see table below). This reality lends support to the notion that minority groups and diasporas are often more vulnerable to radicalisation into violent extremism. Members of minority groups sometimes grow to believe or can be led to believe that the majority identity group surrounding them is the source of (real or perceived) injustice and discrimination, as well as the cause of political, social, and economic marginalisation.

Militant groups of all kinds thrive on this mentality of victimhood, which they utilise in their recruitment narratives. Groups that target Muslim recruits specifically tend to focus their rhetoric on the past (and current) oppression inflicted on Muslims by their non-Muslim neighbours.⁷

LITTLE VIOLENCE AT HOME

Thirdly and finally, there is a need to be accurate when evaluating the level of risk posed by both returned foreign fighters and domestic terrorists inspired by ISIS and similar groups. Beyond the frenzy, careful analysis of the dynamics of radicalisation in BiH and the Western Balkans – compared to the West – reveals a notable difference in the rate at which violence is brought to fruition at home.

Given the number and *modus operandi* of terrorist attacks in Western Europe over recent years, radicalised individuals in the Western Balkans appear so far to be less violent and less driven by revenge against their respective communities. For example, starting in late 2015, France, Germany, and Belgium experienced a series of cruel acts of terror involving multiple players and high levels of coordination that resulted in mass civilian casualties.

In the same period, BiH saw just two lone-actor attacks aimed at security forces, not citizens.⁸ It would be interesting to

examine whether and why radicalisation in the Western Balkans is less likely to result in violent acts. This issue is particularly relevant against the startling perception created and sustained by some media and political elites that BiH and Kosovo are immanent threats to regional and international security. Both countries have been consistently portrayed as “hotbeds of radical Islam” or “terrorist safe havens” in Western Europe.⁹

The recruitment and departure of foreign fighters from BiH to Syria and Iraq, which peaked in 2013 and early 2014, had mostly ceased by mid-2016. Thus, analysts have had well over a year to evaluate the threat posed by returnees. Alarming predictions of a massive and uncontrolled influx of returning foreign fighters proved to be unfounded. Instead, any further returnees are expected to be “*ad hoc* and random”.¹⁰

Bosnian security officials are mostly concerned about the identity of the citizens who have yet to return. They are tracking their locations and statuses in earnest. For example, the Kurdish Regional Government in Northern Iraq has imprisoned three foreign fighters. In Turkey, the authorities have jailed another one.

Besides, according to law enforcement and intelligence sources who have asked to stay anonymous, there were at least two small groups of Bosnian women and children remaining in old conflict zones in May 2018. The fate of these women and children is uncertain. It has emerged that their captors in Syria are gradually returning them to the few areas still controlled by ISIS units amid an apparent outbreak of tuberculosis that has gone untreated and has reportedly killed some women.¹¹ Nonetheless, the Bosnian government does not seem particularly eager to facilitate their return. Officials claim there is little they can do to repatriate them. If they do return, these women and children will need to rely on the coordination of various social services to re-socialise and reintegrate.

Domestic and international responses

Since the first departures of would-be fighters from BiH to Syria or Iraq, the Bosnian approach to fighting radicalisation into violent extremism has improved. In June 2014, the government criminalised the participation of Bosnian citizens in foreign armed units.¹² Subsequently, a national strategy to prevent and counter violent extremism (2015-2020) was adopted, along with an action plan for its implementation.

A NATIONAL STRATEGY

The strategy mostly echoes the security-biased model – ‘prevent, protect, pursue, and respond’ – developed by the EU in 2010. It focuses on policing, community outreach, and education to counter extremist propaganda and hate speech, as well as monitoring the use of the Internet for terrorist activities. The strategy argues for a multisector approach as well, emphasising the critical role of local stakeholders and civil society. The document also lays out a doctrine of proportionate responses ranging from soft to hard. The state, as well as each administrative unit – the entities of the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska, along with the Brčko District – also have action plans in place that include measures aimed at rehabilitating returned foreign fighters through, for instance, the promotion of tolerance and dialogue as well as by strengthening and supporting the capacities of local communities. However, these measures have yet to be further developed and operationalised.

BiH is also participating in the US-led global coalition to counter ISIS and is a party to the Council of Europe conventions on preventing and countering terrorism. With the support of international partners, the Bosnian authorities have put

capacity-building initiatives in place for law enforcement, gradually enhancing investigative capacities, increasing counterterrorism personnel, and developing cyber-counterterrorism capabilities. Border control has also improved. Major border crossings are now more adequately equipped and border police better trained.

Since 2012, security agencies in BiH have blocked many aspiring foreign fighters from travelling to Syria and Iraq and have thwarted at least one terrorist plot in 2015. Dozens of terrorism suspects have been detained and questioned, and so have foreign fighter returnees. More than 20 of these individuals have so far been charged – and sentenced to a total of 40 years of imprisonment – for their involvement in recruiting for, financing, or participating in terrorist groups such as ISIS or Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (formerly known as the al-Nusra Front or Jabhat Fateh al-Sham).¹⁵

INEFFECTIVE FOREIGN FUNDING

In addition to capacity-building in law enforcement and intelligence, increasing amounts of money committed by Western governments for the prevention of violent extremism in BiH are being spent on conferences, seminars, trainings, and workshops for government employees and national stakeholders. Financial aid has thus far failed to reach communities most affected by or vulnerable to radicalisation into violent extremism. Grassroot civic initiatives, mental health professionals or social services that could effectively contribute to community resilience remain overlooked and their needs unaddressed.

Six years on after the emergence of the foreign fighter phenomenon, foreign funding continues to be directed mostly

at ‘baseline research’ into patterns and drivers of radicalisation, despite an already unique body of research on these issues. As one American academic put it, BiH and the region have been the subject of ‘research on steroids’ over the past few years, typically funded by foreign governments. No less than four baseline research efforts are being carried out in BiH and the Western Balkans. The EU plans to commit additional funding in 2019, through its Horizon 2020 Programme, to research the “drivers and contexts of violent extremism in the broader MENA region and the Balkans”.¹⁴

At the same time, the EU and individual member states have thus far funded only a few concrete programmes to assist BiH in implementing elements of its national strategy to prevent and counter violent extremism (2015-2020).

THE WESTERN BALKANS COUNTER-TERRORISM INITIATIVE

The in-country EU Delegation sits on the Oversight Committee, a government body tasked with monitoring the implementation of the strategy. The EU has also developed a Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism initiative (WBCTi), endorsed by the Ministerial Council of the European Union in 2015. Subsequently, the initiative translated into a first multiannual WBCTi action plan for the period 2015-2017. The WBCTi is neither an implementing entity nor an organisation; it is merely a process aimed at strengthening EU cooperation with its neighbouring countries, whose security has vast implications for its own. The plan includes coordination with and the streamlining of activities of national beneficiaries of the region, bilateral projects, regional and international instruments and organisations, EU member states, institutions and agencies, and third state donors. However, none of these activities has so far borne significant results. The convoluted bureaucratic structure of the WBCTi, which assigns responsibilities to various international entities that typically lack both capacity and knowledge of regional complexities, seems designed to chase elusive goals rather than address real-life challenges.

In November 2016, the EU established the office of the Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism Expert in Sarajevo. Its role is to liaise with international players as well as with the relevant local authorities to achieve “the priorities set by the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy concerning counter-terrorism (CT) dialogues, workshops and action plans”. According to

The national strategy to counter and prevent violent extremism mostly echoes the security-biased model – ‘prevent, protect, pursue, and respond’ – developed by the EU in 2010.

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an internal memo, he is also tasked with providing “advice on the implementation of the IPA Multi-Country Action programme 2017-2019... in the field of serious and organised crimes”. IPA is the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. Most of the regional expert’s efforts have thus far focused on improving cooperation between the individual Western Balkans countries and relevant national security agencies.

For its part, the US has invested heavily in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) in BiH. While this has mainly been through assistance

to security agencies and the judiciary, USAID has also had a role, primarily via its Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), and through a partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). These efforts mainly focus, however, on countering Salafist radicalisation specifically and not on combatting extremism in general. In addition, IOM is now somewhat burdened with the job of P/CVE in BiH, especially as the country’s Ministry of Security, tasked with P/CVE and CT, oddly decided to outsource (or abdicate) its responsibility in this area to IOM, citing its lack of internal capacity.

Future challenges

Overall, the fight against radicalisation into violent extremism in BiH remains overly politicised, securitised, and bureaucratised due to the complicated and failing political structure of the country. BiH has a complex web of political, judicial, and police authorities that are in constant (ethnic and political) power struggle with one another. The goals and actions of domestic and international players remain impaired by a lack of strategic coordination. Moreover, the involvement of international bodies that fail to understand the context and pursue unclear goals is counterproductive.

POLARISATION BREEDS NEW THREATS

Shaped not only by economic and political dysfunction but also by extremist rhetoric that recalls the 1992-1995 war, the context is both frozen and shifting. While the attention has been fixated primarily on Salafism and foreign fighting, new forms of extremism have (re-)emerged in BiH. They include non-violent Salafism, ethno-national movements, and a neo-anti-Western right mostly inspired by

malignant foreign influences. What all of these developments share is the potential, independently or in concert, to disrupt and even prevent the accession of BiH to both NATO and the EU.¹⁵ In BiH, underlying conditions may foster ‘cumulative extremism’ or ‘reciprocal radicalisation’ (in which these radical movements feed off one another) making their potential destabilising impact even greater. A failure to recognise emerging threats that emanate from the changing extremist landscape in BiH, combined with a narrow focus on long-standing perils, could damn the country to a futile routine of applying old or partial solutions to current problems.

If the West does not commit to engaging in ‘whole-of-society’ P/CVE efforts that are informed by local context and expertise in BiH, it could end up being an accomplice to the failure of the Bosnian state, with potentially devastating consequences that could include, but are not limited to, the break-up of the country. Any polarised state gradually produces an underachieving or failing society. Today, Bosnian society is as polarised as ever. It is naïve at best and

negligent at worst to believe that such a body – which is unable to restore the shared values and norms on which it was once based – can alone develop a compelling counter-narrative to extremist ideologies.

THE NEED FOR A UNIFYING NARRATIVE

Indeed, what BiH lacks is a unifying narrative of any sort, and therefore any shared vision of its future. Against this backdrop, a more steadfast political support of the accession of BiH to the EU from both European institutions and member states could help provide such a unifying narrative, one that would resonate with a majority of Bosnians. A 2017 public opinion poll conducted by the International Republican Institute in BiH found that nearly 75% of Bosnians supported the country's accession to the EU, with only 13% expressing strong opposition.¹⁶

Meanwhile, in polling conducted in 2017 by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in the Western Balkans, Bosnians indicated a relative pessimism about accession occurring anytime soon. Under 40% of respondents in BiH said they expected it to be achieved by 2025 whereas one-third that it would 'never' happen. In comparison, in Montenegro – where the RCC found that a similar number of people supported and opposed EU accession – respondents were far more optimistic about integration (only 17% said it would never happen) with nearly 60% feeling that it would occur by 2025.¹⁷

An adjusted approach to the country's integration process that continues to rely on conditionality but also recognises the need for proactive action could enable early negotiations on chapters 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (Justice, freedom and security). These critical steps would underpin the necessary and attainable goal of anchoring Bosnian society in political accountability, competence, and justice. They would not only move BiH closer to accession but would also support efforts to prevent violent extremism by addressing some of the systemic factors that allow radicalisation to advance.

Meanwhile, for this to happen, it will not be enough for the EU to reinvent its strategy for Bosnian accession. Bosnian political elites will need to abandon the pursuit of their immediate interests to instead work in the real best interest of their respective constituencies.

If the West does not commit to engaging in 'whole-of-society' P/CVE efforts that are informed by local context and expertise in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it could end up being an accomplice to the failure of the Bosnian state.

Recommendations

Evidence shows that the EU accession agenda and P/CVE efforts in the Western Balkans generally, and BiH in particular, are inherently complementary. If fully implemented, these two processes could be mutually sustaining and could have a powerful transformative effect that engenders positive democratic, political, economic, and societal changes in the region. Against this broader context, there is a need to enhance effectiveness by sharpening the approach to prevent radicalisation into violent extremism.

1 First, actions against radicalisation and violent extremism should be **more concrete** and benefit society as a whole. In that regard, there is growing consensus that the ‘five-star-hotel-conference approach’ to P/CVE should be replaced by a concrete set of carefully developed and executed activities on the societal level, in communities and with the people most vulnerable to both violent and non-violent extremism. In that regard, the existing P/CVE strategy should be improved to evolve from a ‘whole-of-government’ into a ‘whole-of-society’ approach that could help to raise awareness of radicalisation among community stakeholders and build local competencies to fight it. A civil society-based approach should enhance capacities primarily in areas such as education, professional development and employment, social welfare, and mental health care.

2 Second, there is a need to boost **effectiveness**. To make activities effective, avoid overlaps and address gaps promptly, more coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of P/CVE efforts, both domestically and regionally, is required. Outside support for regional institutions and communities that lack capacity or funding should also be embedded in existing public

policy structures and services (e.g. schools, social services, mental health centres). Furthermore, systematising the transfer of knowledge and expertise across state institutions would help to ensure that efforts are sustainable and that any additional capacity is correctly employed.

3 Third, actions should become **more tailored** to the specific needs of each situation. While the EU’s recent strategy for the Western Balkans¹⁸ recognises some of these issues, one should remember that radicalisation into violent extremism is very often a context-driven phenomenon and that local contexts differ from community to community, even in a small country like BiH. Therefore, balanced, context-specific, and tailor-made approaches are essential in ensuring the success of P/CVE efforts. Country and context-specific appraisals of needs and priorities should become a precondition for any resource commitment to P/CVE. These efforts would benefit immensely from research-based policy development centres and think tanks, possibly with regional participation and focus.

- ¹ Nena Tromp, who has analysed in depth the various peace negotiations for BiH as part of her work at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, observed that ethnic separation became a *fait accompli* for Western negotiators, some of whom openly voiced the opinion that Serb territorial gains on the ground made their job easier. Tromp, Nevenka (2017), *Prosecuting Slobodan Milošević: The Unfinished Trial*, Routledge.
- ² The Economist Intelligence Unit (2018), "[Democracy Index 2017: Free speech under attack](#)", London: The Economist Intelligence Unit.
- ³ While some had received official papers (e.g. citizenship, residency or work permit), others had made occasional visits, or resided and worked illegally. Azinović, Vlado and Muhamed Jusić (2016), "The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent", Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative.
- ⁴ Azinović, Vlado (2017), "[Between Salvation and Terror: Radicalization and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in the Western Balkans](#)", Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative
- ⁵ The Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina is a religious organisation of Muslims founded in 1882 during the Austrian-Hungarian rule. It is the highest representative body of Muslims in the Western Balkans, including in Serbia (especially the Sandžak region), Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Hungary, but also among the Bosnian diaspora. The congregation accounts for four million Muslims around the world.
- ⁶ Bećirević, Edina (2016), "[Salafism vs Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and the Minds of Bosnian Muslims](#)", Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative.
- ⁷ Piazza, James A. (2018), "Transnational Ethnic Diasporas and the Survival of Terrorist Organizations", *Security Studies*.
- ⁸ Since 2012, EU countries with the highest number of foreign fighters have faced a series of indiscriminate and brutal terrorist attacks on their soil that were linked to, inspired or instigated by ISIS (France, Belgium, Germany and the UK).
- ⁹ Gall, Carlotta (2016), "How Kosovo Was Turned Into Fertile Ground for ISIS", *New York Times*, 21 May 2016; "[Radicalization in Bosnia: Islamists Gaining Ground](#)", Deutsche Welle (video), 27 March 2018; Georgievski, Boris (2017), "Could Balkan nations become the new hotbeds of Islamist extremism?" *Deutsche Welle*, 30 May 2017; "Militant Islam gains ground in the Balkans", *Deutsche Welle*, 12 October 2010; Neubert, Nils (2015), "Sarajevo's struggles to contain jihadism", *Deutsche Welle*, 21 March 2015; Feilcke, Adelheid (2016), "Is Kosovo a breeding ground for Islamists?", *Deutsche Welle*, 23 December 2016; and Mayr, Walter (2016), "Bosnia's Islamic State Problem", *Der Spiegel*, 5 April 2016.
- ¹⁰ Clarke, Colin P. (2017), "Round-Trip Tickets: How Will Authorities Know When Foreign Fighters Have Returned?", *Lawfare*, 24 September 2017.
- ¹¹ "Many women from here have now been returned to dawla [the Islamic State]... We are anxious about our own fate... A 26-year old sister has just died of tuberculosis. They just let you drop dead, and no one cares! They did

not even medicate her... And, more women and children are suffering from the disease. It is dreadful in here." Compiled from two letters written by Bosnian women detained near the Kurdish city of Qamishli to their families in BiH, seen by the author.

- ¹² These changes also made various related activities illegal, namely incitement to, recruitment for, participation in, financing or organisation of military action in a foreign country.
- ¹³ Azinović, Vlado and Edina Bećirević (2018), "[A Waiting Game: The Western Balkans and Returning Foreign Fighters](#)", Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council.
- ¹⁴ European Commission (2017), "[Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2018-2020](#)", Brussels: European Commission.
- ¹⁵ For more on some of these influences, see for example: Weise, Zia (2015), "Turkey's Balkan comeback", *Politico*, 15 May 2015; Hopkins, Valerie and Laura Pitel (2018), "Erdogan courts Turkish diaspora at election rally in Sarajevo", *Financial Times*, 20 May 2018; "Turkey's Erdogan rallies supporters in Bosnia-Herzegovina ahead of elections", *Deutsche Welle*, 20 May 2018; Maxim Samorukov, Maxim (2017), "[Russia's tactics in the Western Balkans](#)", *Strategic Europe* (blog), Brussels: Carnegie Europe; Carpenter, Michael and Mieczysław P. Boduszynski (2018), "[Does the West have a vision for the Western Balkans?](#)", *War on the Rocks*, 13 April 2018; Erlanger, Steven (2018) "In a New Cold War With Russia, Balkans Become a Testing Ground", *New York Times*, 10 April 2018; Galeotti, Mark (2018), "Do the Western Balkans face a coming Russian storm?", Policy Brief n°250, London: European Council on Foreign Relations; and Bajrovic, Reuf, Richard Kraemer and Emir Suljagic (2018), "Bosnia on the Russian Chopping Block: The Potential for Violence and Steps to Prevent It", Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute.
- ¹⁶ Center for Insights in Survey Research (2017), "[Bosnia-Herzegovina: Attitudes on Violent Extremism and Foreign Influence](#)", Washington, D.C.: International Republican Institute.
- ¹⁷ Regional Cooperation Council (2017), "[Balkan Barometer 2017](#)", Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council.
- ¹⁸ European Commission (2018), "[A Credible Enlargement Perspective For An Enhanced EU Engagement With The Western Balkans](#)", Strasbourg: European Commission.



► On 11 March 2014, Albanian Muslims stand in front of a mosque in Tirana, where the imam was arrested together with five believers accused of allegedly recruiting local men to enlist with opposition fighters in Syria. Albanian police arrested seven people suspected of "acts of terrorism related to Syria" that include allegedly recruiting and training volunteer fighters, justice officials said. The seven were arrested in various locations in the capital Tirana and several other Albanian towns and police seized a large quantity of ammunition, the prosecutor's office said in a statement. The men were suspected of recruiting and training volunteers to join opposition forces fighting the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria, local media reported. © AFP PHOTO / ROMAIN LAFABREGUE

Albania

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It has been four years since the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) declared the creation of a caliphate in captured territories in Syria and Iraq. Among the thousands of supporters that flocked to join the group, citizens from the Western Balkans stood out in the pool of fighters and recruits. In Europe, significant numbers came from second generation migrant communities in Western European countries, opening large debates on the root causes of radicalisation and the appeal of ISIS' narrative for targeted audiences. Albania saw over 150 of its citizens join the war theatre, including women and children as non-combatants who are now trapped in territories remaining under ISIS control or captured by other groups. As the debate on the root causes of radicalisation across communities in the Western Balkans unfolds, the dynamics of radicalisation and violent extremism are shifting at a fast pace.

The root causes of radicalisation in areas across the Western Balkans are widely analysed and discussed. It is commonly believed that violent extremism and radicalisation have emerged out of the political and social vacuums created by high levels of corruption, inadequate social services and continuous divides on ethnic lines across communities in the region. Most of the literature available on violent extremism and radicalisation highlights the role that religious ideology (in particular Wahhabi-Salafi) and indoctrination (spread via both social media and through direct outreach to communities) have played in convincing individuals to join ISIS or other terrorist groups.

Albania has a long history of religious tolerance and cohesion. However, regional instability in the 1990s, soaring crime rates, and ineffective border security allowed al-Qaeda and other Islamist groups to gain a foothold there. Since then, Albania has taken vital steps to address these issues. Tirana has strengthened borders and counterterrorism laws, expanded counter-extremism programmes nationwide

and is building the necessary capacities of local stakeholders to prevent radicalisation or help rehabilitate returnees. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. The European Union (EU), which Albania aims to join, is a crucial player shaping the country's foreign policy objectives and democratic transformation. Counter-terrorism cooperation is also an important pillar of bilateral relations.

This chapter looks at the impact of the wars in Syria and Iraq on Muslim communities in Albania, the Albanian authorities' response to tackling the threat of jihadist radicalisation, and the role of the EU in this process. It concludes with a set of recommendations for both partners.

RADICALISATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND THE QUESTION OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS

Radicalisation in the Western Balkans affects both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Christian Orthodox Slavic communities in the region have been affected by waves of political and religious radicalisation, with some individuals joining the war theatre in Ukraine in support of pro-Russian or pro-Ukrainian forces fighting there.¹

In recent years, analysts have debated the role Russia has played in encouraging Slavic populations and adherents of the Orthodox Church to join the war in Ukraine. The issue has been much less researched and ignored by international donors. This omission has nurtured suspicions that initiatives aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) would deliberately target Islamist radicalisation and fuel Islamophobia. In this regard, pro-Russian forces continue to influence regional populations by taking antagonistic positions on contentious issues concerning areas where ethnic Albanians live, such as the recognition of Kosovo's independence and potential territorial swaps between

Kosovo and Serbia.² These narratives are much more prevalent in Slavic-majority territories. However, this chapter focuses on the emergence of violent Islamist extremism as a consequence of the war in Syria and Iraq.

Media reports and expert analyses across the Western Balkans suggest that up to 1,000 individuals from countries in the region travelled to Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2016.³ There is general agreement that this number includes combatants that have participated in warfare, as well as women, children and other family members who joined the war as non-combatants.⁴ The majority of citizens from the region that travelled to Syria and Iraq come from predominantly Muslim populations in Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has a sizeable Muslim population, and the minority Muslim communities residing in Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, and Macedonia.

According to estimates, between 2013-2015, during the peak of ISIS' emergence on the international stage, some 150 Albanian citizens and over 500 ethnic Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia joined terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq.⁵ Like other recruits from the Western Balkans, many Albanians initially gathered around the al-Nusra Front (renamed as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham), al-Qaeda's official franchise, but subsequently joined ISIS when the group broke up.⁶

Moreover, demographics reveal that the foreign fighter phenomenon attracted a diverse group of individuals, ranging from migrants formerly residing in the West to marginalised youth, as well as women and children that accompanied male fighters.⁷ However, regional and country-specific research focusing on the involvement of women and children remains limited. It does not provide a clear picture explaining the motivation behind the participation of women in terrorism. Some research suggests that women have mainly had non-combatant roles during their time in Syria and Iraq. Nevertheless women have sought to contribute to the creation of a new generation of militant fighters that would continue fighting under the ISIS flag.

Since 2015, there has been no recorded travel from Albania to ISIS-held territories in the Middle East. According to security officials, about 40-44 people have been able to return.⁸ However, many individuals continue to remain trapped with their families in Syria and Iraq, with no apparent prospect of return. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been occasional travel by ISIS supporters from Albania to the war theatre in territories held by ISIS since the first contingent joined the group, and only a handful of women have returned with their children. However, additional research is yet to confirm these reports while no further information is available on the current situation of fighters that are still in ISIS-held territories.

Drivers of radicalisation and propaganda channels

In recent years, most local and regional experts have listed economic and social hardship or corruption as the drivers of radicalisation. Initially, they have pointed

to economic and social vacuums and poor education as factors explaining the appeal of the promise of a better life under the rule of the caliphate in Syria. Some early reports

Following the military defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq in the summer of 2017, the group's approach to its supporters in the Western Balkans became unclear. At the peak of its successes in acquiring land and declaring the caliphate, ISIS made concerted efforts to reach out to audiences in the region.

Radical preachers no longer issue calls to action over war-torn territories. Nevertheless, the use of hate speech and the incitement of polarisation seems to be increasing and intensifying through sectarian divides within the Muslim community.

on foreign fighters from the Balkans indicated that some recruiters would give financial incentives to convince citizens to join the group, conduct *hijra* or become *jihadists*. Despite some support for these assumptions, investigations have not yet provided concrete evidence.⁹ The premise that the foreign fighter phenomenon grew out of the region's economic and social hardship has been frequently challenged by analysts who suggest that the effectiveness of recruitment depended on both political and religious ideological factors.¹⁰ This included the established networks of 'parallel' religious authorities, particularly 'para-jamaats'.

THE ROLE OF 'PARA-JAMAATS'

The 'para-jamaats', based in unofficial mosques in Unaza e Re and Mezez (both located in the outskirts of the country's capital, Tirana) challenged the moderate practices and the secular nature of more traditional indigenous Islamic communities. As a result, various 'para-jamaats' adopted more conservative strains of Islam promoted by radical preachers who began criticising the country's secular traditions and interfaith relations. They vilified the moderate nature of Muslims' religious practices, arguing that they were not consistent with true Islamic teachings. Since the early 1990s, the more radical Islamist ideologies had been introduced primarily by Wahhabi and Salafi groups. Both contributed to creating a fertile ground for the recruitment of foreign fighters. Thus, radical religious leaders could more easily warrant joining the war as a 'religious duty' for Muslims or call on fellow Muslims to assist opposition groups fighting against the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.¹¹

THE RISE AND FALL OF ISIS PROPAGANDA

Following the military defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq in the summer of 2017, the group's approach to its supporters in the Western Balkans became unclear. At the peak of its successes in acquiring land and declaring the caliphate, ISIS made concerted efforts to reach out to audiences in the region. Most of these efforts focused on the translation of propaganda material into local languages, including Albanian. In spring 2015, for example, ISIS released *Honour is in jihad*, a propaganda video with foreign fighters from the region who had joined the group. It featured notorious figures such as Almir Daci from Albania (accused of terrorism by local and international authorities) and Ridvan

Haqifi. A key recruiter for ISIS in Kosovo, he is also known as a commander of the Albanian-speaking unit within ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Other propaganda efforts were more local and limited to the Facebook profiles of crucial recruiters or material disseminated on other social media.

Since 2017, however, online propaganda by radical preachers and other figures has markedly decreased. It shows that the counter-extremism strategies adopted across the region have had an impact. They have put recruiters and propaganda mouthpieces who exploited social media platforms under growing scrutiny. They have also removed a lot of material from social media, thus exposing fewer people to violent content. If open social media plays a much lesser role, encrypted online applications have become the new *modus operandi* for recruitment purposes. Propaganda via encrypted Telegram channels still exists, although significantly less than before. Telegram had been the ‘app of choice’ for terrorists, and specifically for ISIS due to its end-to-end encryption that prevents anyone except the sender and receiver from accessing the content of the message.¹²

Besides, leading Albanian mouthpieces of ISIS propaganda, including well-known leaders such as Lavdrim Muhaxheri, Almir Daci, and Ridvan Haqifi, were reportedly killed by coalition airstrikes.¹³ Their defeat and subsequent death have created a leadership vacuum for ISIS supporters in Albanian-speaking communities and uncertainty over who will take over the roles these leaders once held.¹⁴

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

At the same time, radicalisation continues in non-violent forms. Following the arrests of several alleged recruiters and preachers for their links to terrorism in Kosovo and Albania in 2014, many radical preachers, who were later released due to lack of

evidence, became more conscious of the level of scrutiny they were under. Most of them consequently abandoned promoting participation in conflicts or confrontation with state authorities. Instead, they continued to indoctrinate followers on social issues and relations between different communities.

Radical preachers no longer issue calls to action over war-torn territories. Nevertheless, the use of hate speech and the incitement of polarisation seems to be increasing and intensifying through sectarian divides within the Muslim community. Each community is subject to polarising messages from various regional powers, including Turkey, or from conservative Salafi and Wahabi forces that are looking for greater involvement in Albania’s religious life. These players are introducing more conservative strains of religious practices and trying to take control of the leadership of Albania’s Muslim Community, locally known as KMSH.¹⁵ External pressure is commonplace. For example, recently Turkey’s President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, offered KMSH support to reconstruct different religious sites, in exchange for ousting some KMSH leaders allegedly tied to Fetullah Gulen. The latter currently lives in exile in the US. Erdoğan accuses him of masterminding the 15 July 2016 attempted coup.¹⁶

As a result, KMSH has become increasingly fragmented and vulnerable to external political influences and Albania’s majority Muslim population is at risk of fragmentation between the followers of different strands of Islam (Wahabi, Salafi or others). Foreign influences are challenging the country’s long-standing traditions of religious harmony and peaceful co-existence with Christian communities. They also aim to garner popular support to undermine the country’s aspirations to join the EU – a goal supported by 80% of the population according to recent polls conducted by local research institutes.¹⁷

Government response and the role of the EU

Albania's national strategy to counter violent extremism, adopted in 2015, includes a detailed action plan for its implementation. The strategy focuses on countering extremist propaganda and hate speech, monitoring the Internet for terrorist-related activity, policing, community outreach, and education. Other Western Balkan countries have adopted similar strategies that call for a 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' approach, which envisions the involvement of stakeholders in prevention, and de-radicalisation and rehabilitation programmes.¹⁸

Following the adoption of the national strategy and action plan on countering violent extremism, the Council of Ministers established the Centre for Countering Violent Extremism. It functions as a coordination hub that supports the capacity development of local stakeholders and frontline practitioners involved in efforts to counter violent extremism in Albania and the region. Activities include sharing best practices and developing effective evidence-based responses to counter the threat of violent extremism. The Centre is administered by the Prime Minister's Office and funded by the national budget.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR SMALL GRANT INITIATIVES

International partners, including the United States (US) and the EU, have provided significant support for the Centre and other CVE initiatives implemented by local civil society organisations prior to the creation of the Centre and the adoption of the strategy. Some of the projects focus on community outreach and counter-narrative initiatives, and building the capacities of

local government, community agents and civil society organisations.

The EU Delegation and the US Embassy have supported a range of small initiatives via grants for civil society organisations and religious communities. Both are important players in building trust with marginalised groups. However, the majority of initiatives are still primarily focused on reinforcing social cohesion in communities and awareness-raising campaigns aimed at strengthening interfaith relations. Support has also gone to boosting the coordination between security sector institutions, such as the police, including community policing officers, and local players, who can respond more effectively to individual cases.

According to interviews conducted for this chapter, the EU has played a central role in engaging local civil society organisations through small grants programmes to address bullying in school environments or preventing radicalisation through awareness raising campaigns. Thus far, it has allocated more than EUR 334 million to empower civil society organisations, non-governmental bodies and public security institutions to counter violent extremism and radicalisation in Albania.¹⁹ The amount is administered by the Albanian Helsinki Committee and *Terres Des Hommes* – two leading human rights organisations in the country. Both organisations have distributed funds to local civil society entities across Albania based on a meticulous selection process.²⁰ Focus areas include boosting the inclusion of youth and women, facilitating dialogue between religious communities and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups.

In the end, the majority of initiatives have primarily focused on reinforcing social

cohesion, interfaith relations and awareness among local communities. As a result, too little support has gone on counselling and rehabilitation measures for individuals targeted by or vulnerable to radicalisation. Furthermore, local civil society and field experts insist that the donor community should focus specifically on capacity-building for frontline practitioners, including social workers and psychologists.

The EU Delegation in Albania should remain engaged in the fight against violent extremism. Nevertheless, according to interviews conducted by the author with EU officials in Albania, some wonder whether countering violent extremism initiatives will remain a top priority in the future. According to the EU Delegation's internal assessments, the threat of violent extremism in Albania remains low compared to regional neighbours who seem to be more vulnerable to destabilising external influences (e.g. Kosovo, BiH or Macedonia).

INVESTING IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

As a mostly secular society, Albania has a long legacy of peaceful coexistence between religious communities. The church is separate from the state. Religious authorities have limited influence on the country's domestic and foreign policies. As such, Albania's secular traditions provide a counterweight to violent extremism. However, local civil society organisations, interviewed for this chapter, maintain that radicalisation continues to pose a severe problem in Albania.

According to the author's interview with Klejda Ngjela, a former official from the Helsinki Committee in Albania, "Albania is a mosaic of influences. There are minority communities, such as the Roma in Lezhë. In this predominantly Catholic area, they are exposed to radicalisation because they feel marginalised and isolated. In these areas, we see the heavy influence of religious

authorities that often replace the state who should be responding to their everyday needs." Ngjela maintains that stories of marginalisation and discrimination often emerge and fuel tensions during the meetings with the beneficiaries the Helsinki Committee has engaged with since 2017.

Ngjela is a field expert who has led many small-scale training programmes with government and non-governmental organisations on human rights and other social justice matters in the past. According to her, there is still little awareness among stakeholders about the role they can play to counter radicalisation and violent extremism. She argues that P/CVE is experiencing today the same response as human rights when they were first debated among local stakeholders in Albania. "I used to train local stakeholders on gender discrimination and violence against women. Their reaction would be the same because discrimination against women was so normalised. I fear that we are struggling with the same issue: that hate speech and radicalisation are also as normalised. We need more awareness-raising campaigns," says Ngjela.

Investing in local communities is also central to the Albanian government's approach to deal with returning foreign fighters and their families. Until now, Albania has monitored returning foreign fighters and their families but has not carried out any prosecutions even though some of these foreign fighters pose security threats, according to recent reports.²¹ It remains unclear why the government has declined to prosecute returnees. The choice of 'softer' responses to violent extremism signals that the country prefers a series of preventative measures in local communities instead of punitive measures that could create frictions in a politically fragile environment. That said, direct engagement with returnees through rehabilitation and reintegration efforts at the local level has fallen short of what is required.

Recommendations

Radicalisation and violent extremism have various drivers and take different shapes. When considering its future involvement in CVE initiatives in Albania, the EU should consider several factors. Today, militant jihadists are no longer travelling to battlefields in support of terrorist groups. Nevertheless, external geopolitical influences intersect in critical ways with religious and political polarisation and fosters the confluence between nationalism and Islamism.

In response to the revival of ethnic nationalism mixed to religious radicalisation in the Western Balkans, the EU should highlight the Balkans' historical ties to Europe, inspire a path for Balkan nations towards European integration and guarantee their future within the EU. In Albania, the EU should increase its efforts in supporting capacity-building of independent institutions able to deal with threats to social cohesion, as one of the critical tools necessary to counter the radical ideologies that seek division between communities.

In Albania, a wide range of players including interior and foreign ministries, military, judicial, and penitentiary authorities as well as social services, faith groups and non-governmental actors, need to align and coordinate efforts against radicalisation risks and address causes at the local level.

THREE STEPS FOR THE EU

Due to the country's history of peaceful coexistence between religious groups, the EU does not seem to consider CVE and radicalisation a priority concern in Albania. Nevertheless, with the domestic context slowly changing, the EU should pay more attention to the rhetoric and narratives used on a variety of social issues that may

fuel divides and threaten social cohesion. Several measures could help ensure that the EU plays an important and guiding role in building capacities at the institutional level and support initiatives at the local level.

1 The EU should be at the forefront of encouraging relevant authorities, such as the Commissioner on Human Rights, the Ombudsman, local media agencies and civil society organisations in **calling out hate speech and divisive rhetoric**.

2 The EU should continue to support relevant agencies, such as the Centre for Countering Violent Extremism and civil society organisations, in identifying the groups targeted by extremist propaganda and the stakeholders that require further support to cope with that, including psychologists and social workers. The priority should be to **build capacities** in counselling, rehabilitation and the provision of services **for individuals affected** by radicalisation and violent extremism. Another priority is to deal with foreign fighters returning to Albania.

3 There is a need to increase support for **local expert communities** and online analysis platforms where researchers and analysts can share their findings on violent extremism and radicalisation trends in Albania. In recent years, there has been a strong focus on ISIS-inspired radicalisation. Other forms of radicalisation, including other politically- or religiously-inspired ideologies that increase social divides, should also be prioritised by local expert communities and relevant authorities.

- ¹ Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (2018), "[Ukraine Lists Serbs Fighting for Russian Unit](#)", *Balkan Insight*, 2 February 2018.
- ² Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (2018), "[Russia and Turkey Remain Rivals in the Balkans](#)", *Balkan Insight*, 18 September 2018.
- ³ Bogdani, Aleksandra (2016), "[Balkan Jihadists, The Radicalisation and Recruitment of Fighters in Syria and Iraq](#)", Ljubljana: Integrative Internal Security Governance.
- ⁴ Azinović, Vlado (2017), "[A Waiting Game: Assessing and Responding to the Threat from Returning Foreign Fighters in the Western Balkans](#)", Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Spahiu, Ebi (2017), "[Western Balkans Struggles With Returning Militants and Religious Identity](#)", *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume 15, Issue 2, Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation.
- ⁷ Kelmendi, Vese R.J. (2017), "[Women in Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned from Kosovo](#)", Pristina: Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).
- ⁸ *Op. cit.* Azinović, Vlado (2017).
- ⁹ Vurmo, Gjergji (2015), "[Radikalizmi Fetar dhe Ekstremizmi i Dhunshem ne Shqipëri](#)", Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation.
- ¹⁰ Hide, Enri (2018), "[Ekstremizmi i dhunshëm dhe radikalizmi fetar: Shqipëria dhe Rajoni përballë një sfide të re sigurie](#)", *Feja, Shoqëria, Shteti dhe Demokracia*, Tirana: Albanian Media Institute
- ¹¹ *Op. cit.* Spahiu, Ebi (2017).
- ¹² Speckhard, Anne, Ardian Shajkovci, Lorand Bodo and Haris Fazliu (2018), "[Bringing Down the Digital Caliphate: A Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter-Narratives Intervention with Albanian-Speaking Facebook Accounts](#)", London: King's College London, International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE).
- ¹³ Telegrafi, "[Zyrtari amerikan: Lavdrim Muhaxheri është vrarë në Siri](#)", August 2017. *Balkan Insight*, "[Kosovo ISIS Commander Haqifi Reported Dead in Middle East](#)", February 2017.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ Albanian Muslim Community (Komuniteti Mysliman Shqiptar, KMSH) is the officially recognised religious organisation that administers mosques and provides orientation on religious practices and sermons to religious institutions under the Hanafi Islamic jurisprudence.
- ¹⁶ Spahiu, Ebi (2016), "[Jihadist Threat Persist in Kosovo and Albania Despite Government Efforts](#)", *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume 14, Issue 13, Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation.
- ¹⁷ Institute for Democracy and Mediation (2016), "[Trust in Governance 2016](#)", Tirana: United Nations Development Programme.
- ¹⁸ Shtuni, Adrian (2018), "[The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Focus on South Eastern Europe](#)", Vienna: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.
- ¹⁹ Albanian Helsinki Committee (2017), "[AHC starts the implementation of the project civil society countering violent extremism](#)", Press release, 11 May 2018.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ Cook, Joana and Gina Vale (2018), "[From Daesh to 'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State](#)", London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalization.



► In his office at European Council headquarters in Brussels, EU counter-terrorism chief, Gilles de Kerchove, gives an interview on 13 January 2015 a week after the deadly terrorist attacks in Paris. De Kerchove said "we cannot prevent 100 per cent" a new Islamist attack like the one in Paris. He also said he opposed jailing jihadists who return to Europe from Syria or Iraq, calling prison a 'massive incubator' of radicalisation. © AFP PHOTO / EMMANUEL DUNAND

Conclusion

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This book illustrates the increasingly complex challenges that Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Lebanon, and Tunisia face in their fight against radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism. Despite the lack of a commonly agreed definition of radicalisation, in all five chapters, entrenched societal, economic and political issues are at play. Instability, dysfunctional states, ideologies, and external geopolitical influences have had a significant impact on the spread of radicalisation. In all cases, radical Islamic doctrines – Salafism and Wahhabism – remain a significant driver. Ideologies have been mobilised to skilfully exploit a wide range of perceived or real socio-economic, cultural and

foreign policy grievances at a collective or individual level, via sophisticated narratives of ‘victimisation’. In that regard, the **younger generation**, which faces very high levels of unemployment and social disenfranchisement, is particularly at risk.

As such, the ideological component of radicalisation needs to be promptly addressed by counter-narratives. In the end, radicalisation calls for a multifaceted response that includes the mobilisation of expert knowledge, the promotion of liberal democratic principles (through awareness campaigns and education), and the empowerment of local players (to reverse the radicalisation processes of vulnerable individuals).

Returning foreign fighters

Returning foreign terrorist fighters, home-grown extremists and lone-actors pose a particular challenge across the countries surveyed in this book. There has been a lack of capacity to address the problem, in particular, the one posed by returning foreign fighters. The issue has been dealt with by both hard (revoking citizenship, prosecution and jail) and soft responses (rehabilitation measures or simply allowing fighters to return to their communities).

While in the majority of cases returnees have been sent to prison, this has often proven to be counter-productive. In several cases, radicalisation in prisons is a severe problem. Rather than helping to de-radicalise and rehabilitate radicalised individuals, **prisons increasingly serve as incubators for radicalisation**. Many perpetrators of jihadist attacks adopted their radical beliefs in prisons, which serve as a source of recruits. In other instances, foreign fighters have merely returned to

the communities they had left, which has led them grooming vulnerable individuals in some cases.

Returning women, often the wives of foreign fighters, and their children also pose a challenge. Often, women are perceived as taking on mere domestic functions – supporting their militant husbands and raising children to carry on ISIS’ work. However, their role has evolved. Recently, women have been called to arms. Compared to male foreign fighters, their roles are less understood. There is no common approach as to what to do with them when they return to their home communities.

Mechanisms to rehabilitate these individuals to enable them to reintegrate into society are broadly missing. There is a **lack of rehabilitation facilities and de-radicalisation** projects. However, reintegration will only be effective if returnees do not encounter the same conditions that pushed them to espouse radical ideologies

and leave their countries in the first place. The United Nations action plan on preventing violent extremism (PVE) has called on

states to address the conditions conducive to radicalisation as part of their national PVE strategies.

External influences

The five case studies underline the common threat posed by external influences, including from the Gulf States, Turkey and Russia. External influences are visible in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), particularly in Lebanon where regional and geopolitical struggles are at play. In Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, for example, external players endeavour to exert their influence by all means, including the nurturing of radical elements. Gulf state investment includes everything from mosque construction to support for schools along with scholarships to Bosnian religious students at conservative Saudi institutions.

For Western Balkan states, this is nothing new. Gulf-funded humanitarian and social rehabilitation efforts in the post-war years were often conditional on specific religious requirements. The aim was to shift Balkan Muslims away from their

traditional religious practices towards more conservative teachings and views that are alien to indigenous Muslim communities. The threat from the promotion of these conservative strains of religion has become more challenging over time. Local populations are the targets of polarising messages. For example, in Albania, this is dangerously undermining the country's long tradition of religious harmony and peaceful coexistence.

Furthermore, the challenges posed by **the use of new technologies and online propaganda in recruitment** remain significant across all case studies. Despite international efforts to curb terrorist propaganda online, the Internet remains a crucial recruitment and propaganda tool for ISIS as well as al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations. Terrorist groups continue to use the Internet to groom and recruit.

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The importance of counter-narratives

As highlighted in the case of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo, there is an urgent need to **develop effective counter-narratives to extremist ideologies**. In fragile and polarised societies such as those described throughout this volume, it is necessary to provide unifying discourses and shared visions for the future. The lack of a long-term strategy to contain the destabilisation attempts coming from outside also needs to be addressed.

Against this background, closer ties with the European Union are the most effective tool to counter jihadism and Islamic radicalisation in the Western Balkans. They will bring stability and serve as an engine for domestic reform processes. According to the authors, progress along the long path of accession to the European Union represents the most effective way to counter radicalisation in candidate countries.

The prospects of EU membership can also explain **differences between Western Balkan countries and the MENA region**. In Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the prospect of EU membership means that EU engagement in their transformation – including in areas related to human rights,

security, and justice – is much stronger than in MENA countries. For example, while Tunisia has tried to address the terrorist threat primarily focusing on the security-related aspects, the Western Balkan countries have developed a much more comprehensive approach.

More targeted and local support from the EU

Turning to the role and impact of the EU, the case studies reveal that the Union and some member states have significantly increased their engagement in counter-terrorism (CT) cooperation with all of these countries over the past few years. The EU has elaborated actions plans with individual countries, which have led to improvements in coordination, monitoring and evaluation.

At regional level, **coordination** between Western Balkan countries and international partners is crucial. Today, the Western Balkan Counter-Terrorism initiative (WBCTi) coordinates EU, international and regional efforts in the CT field. It aims to minimise duplications and maximise cost-benefit efficiency. To date, however, neither Bosnia-Herzegovina, nor Albania or Kosovo have fully implemented comprehensive programmes aimed at preventing and countering radicalisation. The challenge now is to ensure that the WBCTi and its corresponding integrated plan of action for the region are fully implemented. The EU should increase its assistance to Western Balkan countries implementing their national strategies. For example, so far, the financial support of the EU and its member states to Bosnia-Herzegovina has been limited.

It remains unclear, however, whether the introduction of CT experts in the EU Delegations has boosted the role of the EU

in the prevention of radicalisation, beyond better coordination between individual member states and the relevant national security agencies in third countries. At the same time, the authors highlight that the lack of coordination at EU level, with competing and overlapping initiatives of the EU and its member states, still remains a problem. Furthermore, the five studies suggest that CT experts should be better associated with the conception and implementation of programmes. It was the objective envisaged by the European Union when the policy was first initiated in 2016.

In the end, all case studies underline that there is a need for more targeted involvement. The root causes of radicalisation are **context-driven**. Even within the countries themselves, local dynamics may differ. The countries analysed in this book vary in their societal, political and institutional settings. Hence, their capacity to implement effective policies to cope with radicalisation and terrorism diverge. Ultimately there is no single or simple recipe for the fight against radicalisation leading to violent extremism or terrorism. There still is a long way to go. Going forward, differentiation will be critical. A thorough evaluation of each context is also paramount.

Some of the authors report that the EU spends too much money on conferences

and seminars, or research on the drivers of radicalisation and the training of government officials. Finance has failed to adequately reach communities, grassroots civic initiatives or frontline practitioners (e.g. social services and mental health specialists). More focus needs to be placed on building the resilience of communities and the capacities of local players to fight radicalisation. Efforts in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) need to be informed by the local context and expertise. To make EU-financed activities more effective and address gaps, there needs to be better coordination, monitoring and evaluation of P/CVE efforts both domestically and regionally.

It emerges from the five case studies that the European Union and its **counter-terrorism strategy has exerted considerable influence in the formulation of policies at national level**. The four pillars at the basis of the European Union counter-terrorism strategy

‘prevent, protect, pursue, and respond’ and their articulation constitute a complete toolbox that can significantly contribute to actions in different contexts. Neighbouring countries have broadly endorsed the EU approach. Such support should encourage further EU efforts and the push for reforms in various relevant fields, not least in the social and economic fields along with security sector reform.

Pushing partners to focus on prevention is also important as in the majority of the case studies this was a particularly weak element. While the challenges are enormous, it is clear that the Union needs a zero-tolerance approach towards radicalisation along with a long-term, multistakeholder strategy to prevent this threat. To successfully address radicalisation and keep EU citizens (and others around the world) safe from further terrorist attacks, intensified cooperation between member states and third countries needs to remain a priority.

Recommendations for the EU

A number of essential lessons and recommendations can be drawn from the five case studies concerning the role of the EU and its member states:

1 The European Union should make a greater effort to put in place **carefully assessed and balanced, comprehensive approaches**. There is no one-size-fits-all formula. Such a multidimensional challenge requires a multifaceted response. As a consequence, P/CVE and CT efforts need to be conducted as part of a broader approach under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Western Balkans Strategy.

2 The European Union should better integrate its efforts in the national reform agendas. The differences across

the five country cases demonstrate that the **identification of the underlying trends and causes of radicalisation must take into consideration the national and local contexts**. The support of the European Union and its member states to P/CVE efforts should be supported by and streamlined in the broader policy and reform agendas of the countries themselves. **Box ticking exercises should be avoided**.

For example, cooperation with countries in transition such as Tunisia – where a far-reaching security sector reform is required – will have different institutional reform needs than a more stable and consolidated EU accession candidate country such as Albania. In Tunisia, post-revolutionary governments have

addressed the terrorist threat by primarily focusing on the security-related aspects. They have failed to give enough attention to prevention or the uprooting of the causes of radicalisation. Hence, the EU could focus its support there on institutional and socio-economic reforms.

In all cases, radical Islamic doctrines – Salafism and Wahhabism – remain a significant driver. Ideologies have been mobilised to skilfully exploit a wide range of perceived or real socio-economic, cultural and foreign policy grievances at a collective or individual level, via sophisticated narratives of ‘victimisation’.

3 Much more should be done to reconcile and coordinate different initiatives at both the European and member state levels. Such an approach currently does not exist. Even if there is a clear intention to address challenges in a more comprehensive and coordinated manner, the actions and programmes on the ground reveal that the EU and its member states could do more to avoid a silo approach that undermines long-term success. **All activities need to be thought of as complementary and mutually supportive.** Efforts towards the accession and reform agenda and those aimed at addressing radicalisation and terrorism should go hand-in-hand to achieve a more effective and lasting transformation. Projects and programmes in place call for careful design and coordination, in an effective and targeted manner. However, as of yet, there is an insufficient impetus in this direction. Although political declarations at high-level meetings and in policy papers are ambitious, there is still a lot to be done.

4 **Social and economic inclusion are essential.** Given that citizens in the region appear to be strongly influenced by religious figures as well as by family and friends, it is crucial that **grassroots-level participation** is encouraged in both the planning and implementation stage of ‘**whole-of-society**’ efforts to counter extremism. While the necessity of this engagement is acknowledged in the CVE strategies and action plans of each country, putting this into practice has proven quite difficult, not least because these countries all face considerable economic obstacles and there is often limited political will from the authorities to address these challenges. The EU should design a concrete set of activities in communities for people who are most vulnerable to radicalisation. It should also increase support for capacity-building in counselling programmes as well as for organisations that can reach out to returnees and their families and provide opportunities for rehabilitation. Furthermore, local context and expertise should inform ‘whole-of-society’ and P/CVE efforts.

5 The EU needs to **focus its funding** better. Funding should privilege concrete programmes and projects that have an impact on communities (e.g. ‘whole-of-society’ approaches), support the work of frontline practitioners and reach out to the most vulnerable people. The five

case studies call for a greater focus on ‘whole-of-society’ approaches and greater involvement of women, youth, and civil society, victims of terrorism, and religious community leaders as agents of change in society. For example, more representatives of the younger generation should be invited to participate in the planning of national strategies.

It is particularly crucial that the EU engages in efforts to support capacity-building for frontline workers, including teachers, police officers, healthcare workers, probation staff and relevant local authorities, as there is currently a lack of awareness on the critical role that they can play in countering radicalisation.

In this framework, designing programmes based on needs and that complement existing work – rather than duplicating it – is also essential. There should also be better coordination between the European Union and other donors, especially the United States.

6 There is a need for **exchanges between the EU and its member states and third countries on how to deal with returnees**, in particular, foreign terrorist fighters. For example, the countries examined in this book would greatly benefit from shared experiences, and best practices in these areas and the network of EU CT experts would be a useful platform in this respect. Furthermore, when it comes to minors, robust and tailored programmes should be developed to effectively disengage, de-radicalise and rehabilitate juveniles who have travelled to Syria and Iraq with their parents or who have been born or raised with ISIS.

7 In all case studies the **challenge of radicalisation in prisons**, along with the reintegration of released radicalised prisoners back into communities is flagged as a critical priority. There is an urgent need to prevent the indoctrination of vulnerable individuals with dangerous ideologies, especially in prisons. It is also crucial to further develop programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration of (former) terrorists to minimise the chances of future violence. Given that many EU member states are facing the same challenges sharing experiences – particularly between the prison and probation services – would be useful.

There is an urgent need to prevent the indoctrination of vulnerable individuals with dangerous ideologies, especially in prisons.

When it comes to minors, robust and tailored programmes should be developed to effectively disengage, de-radicalise and rehabilitate juveniles.

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Throughout 2018, the European Policy Centre (EPC) and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) EU Office in Brussels partnered in a project on the overarching topic of ‘Tackling the root causes and impact of terrorism and radicalisation in Europe’s neighbourhood: What role for the European Union?’.

The fight against terrorism and radicalisation leading to violent extremism is a critical challenge for the European Union and its member states. Due to its multidimensional nature, encompassing socio-economic, cultural, and foreign policy aspects, addressing the root causes and impacts of radicalisation and terrorism is likely to remain a clear policy priority for the European Union for the foreseeable future, both domestically and in relations with third countries, particularly in the Western Balkans and the Southern neighbourhood.

In this context, the EPC and FES have carried out an independent assessment of the overall effectiveness of the European Union in helping to address the root causes and the manifold impacts of terrorism and radicalisation in several critical countries in its close vicinity: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Lebanon, and Tunisia. This book aims to identify lessons learnt and best practices, as well as possible failures and room for improvement, in fulfilling the European Union’s objectives on the ground.