



# CONEKT COUNTRY REPORTS

National Approaches to Extremism

## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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### COUNTRY REPORTS ON NATIONAL APPROACHES TO EXTREMISM

Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans

### BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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## Overview

### COUNTRY PROFILE

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a multi-ethnic country with a population of 3.5 million split along religious lines. The main Abrahamic religions are present in BiH and are the foundation for ethnic divisions in the country: Bosniak Muslims, Catholic Croats, Orthodox Christian Serbs, and a minority presence of Jews. It became independent from Yugoslavia in March 1992 and went through a three-year war that left around 100,000 people dead (BBC News, 2017). The main parties to the war were the three major ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs), in addition to military from Serbia and Croatia, as well as a variety of international forces (most notably United Nations [UN] peacekeepers and North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]). The war ended in 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement that also established the political system of BiH within its international borders. Post-war reconstruction was carried out with massive international assistance and several institutions and symbols of the country were adopted by international administrators, for example even the flag. Since 2000, and especially since 2006, the international presence has been greatly reduced. The country is largely autonomous in its decision-making, albeit with significant influence from its neighbours, Croatia and Serbia, as well as the European Union (EU). BiH submitted an application for EU membership in 2016 and started implementing the Membership Action Plan with NATO in 2018. It is a member and associate member of the UN, Council of Europe, Mediterranean Union, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Central European Free Trade Agreement, and an observer at the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), among others.

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### Government system

BiH has a very complex and devolved system of government established through the Dayton Peace Agreement. The country functions as a consociational democracy where power is shared between three major ethno-religious groups (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs). The presence of group vetoes, territorial group autonomy and the requirement for multi-ethnic coalition governments creates additional layers of complexity and interdependence. Administratively BiH is divided into two regional entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS), and an independent unit, the District Brčko. FBiH is further divided into ten cantons, local self-governance units with a high level of independence, while RS has a centralised government. Although not a federation by name its functioning can most accurately be described as an asymmetric ethnic federation with weak central authority (Kapidžić, 2020). The Peace Agreement established the Office of the High Representative (OHR) as the leading organisation in civilian aspects of implementation of peace in BiH, which has the power to overrule any domestic decision and remove any local actor from office (Dizdarević et al., 2006). The OHR used these powers extensively between 1996 and 2006 but has since largely refrained from interfering in BiH's decision-making.

Government at the state level consists of a directly-elected, three-member collective Presidency (one from each major ethnic group) with very weak executive power, and a central government and Prime Minister approved by Parliament. The state government has limited power and is in charge of foreign policy, security

and defence, customs and immigration, foreign trade and communications, fiscal and monetary policy, human rights and refugees, and facilitating inter-entity coordination and regulation. Other competences are shared with subnational governments or exclusively in the hands of entities and cantons. At an entity level, both FBiH and RS have significant autonomy and are the main arenas of decision-making in BiH. Both have a weak President and strong Prime Minister with cabinet approved by their respective Parliaments. Entities have jurisdiction over policing, justice, finance, labour and welfare, healthcare, energy and industry, education, agriculture, veteran issues, and culture, among others. The Federation is furthermore divided into ten cantons, each with its own government and relative autonomy on local issues such as education and health care (Gavrić et al., 2009; Nešković, 2013). Checks and balances included in consociational power-sharing limit the power of any level of government and give an outsized role to (political party) leaders representing the ethnic groups. Elections are held every four years concurrently for all levels of government (except municipal elections). While they are considered to be mostly free and fair, the dominant role of ethnic parties skews electoral competition and limits country-wide and/or multi-ethnic politics and policies (Kapidžić, 2017).

### Population

According to the latest census of 2013, BiH had a population of slightly over 3.5 million, and this number is declining. In 2020, the projected population will be around 3.25 million (Popis 2013 BiH, n.d.; The World Bank Data, n.d.). In 2013 FBiH had a population of 2,219,220, RS had a population of 1,228,423, and the autonomous district of Brčko had 83,516.

### Main ethnic/religious groups

Bosniaks make up exactly half of the population with 50.1%, in addition to Serbs with 30.8%, and Croats with 15.4% (Table 1). About 2.7% of the population belongs to different groups and are categorised as “Others” (the official term for members of national minorities and people who do not identify with any of the three constituent nations). The census also confirmed that the two entities have a clear ethnic structure, with 92.1% of all Serbs living in RS, while 91.3% of Croats and 88.2% of Bosniaks live in FBiH (Black Insight, 2016).

**TABLE 1.** Population of BiH by ethnic/national affiliation

Area	Federation BiH	RS	Brčko	TOTAL BiH (numbers)	Total BiH (%)
<b>Ethnicity</b>					
<b>Bosniak</b>	1,562,372	171,839	17,411	<b>1,769,592</b>	<b>50.11%</b>
<b>Croat</b>	497,883	29,645	8,859	<b>544,780</b>	<b>15.43%</b>
<b>Serb</b>	56,550	1,001,299	14,023	<b>1,086,733</b>	<b>30.78%</b>
<b>Other</b>	79,838	15,324	695	<b>96,539</b>	<b>2.73%</b>
<b>Not declared</b>	18,344	8,189	213	<b>27,055</b>	<b>0.77%</b>
<b>No answer</b>	4,233	2,127	49	<b>6,460</b>	<b>0.18%</b>
<b>TOTAL BiH</b>				<b>3,539,159</b>	

Own production. Source: Census Results 2013

The majority of Orthodox Christians (92%) live in RS, while the majority of Muslims (88%) live in FBiH (Table 3). When we look at data combining religious affiliation and ethnicity, the overlap of ethno-religious identities becomes clear and delineates Muslim Bosniaks, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats.

**TABLE 2.** Population of BiH by ethnic/national affiliation

Area	Federation BiH	RS	Brčko	TOTAL BiH (numbers)	Total BiH (%)
<b>Religion</b>					
<b>Islamic</b>	1,581,868	172,742	35,844	<b>1,790,454</b>	<b>50.7%</b>
<b>Catholic</b>	490,450	28,883	17,000	<b>536,333</b>	<b>15.1%</b>
<b>Orthodox</b>	57,120	999,802	28,838	<b>1,085,760</b>	<b>30.75%</b>
<b>Agnostic</b>	9,425	1,288	103	<b>10,816</b>	<b>0.33%</b>
<b>Atheist</b>	21,508	6,014	331	<b>27,853</b>	<b>0.82%</b>
<b>Not declared</b>	23,672	8,392	636	<b>32,700</b>	<b>0.94%</b>
<b>Other</b>	30,885	9,103	667	<b>40,655</b>	<b>1.16%</b>
<b>No answer</b>	4,292	2,199	97	<b>6,588</b>	<b>0.20%</b>
<b>TOTAL BiH</b>				<b>3,531,159</b>	

Own production. Source: Census Results 2013

### CONTEXTUALISATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION IN THE COUNTRY

According to Azinović, radical ideology was quickly adopted in the BiH (Azinovic, 2017). As a state with a fragile institutional structure, a frozen conflict and unresolved issues of identity and governance BiH provided suitable ground for the development of this ideology. Bećirević (2016) writes in her book *Salafism Vs. Moderate Islam*, that in “a vulnerable Bosnian society with a recent history of genocide and mass violence, even nonviolent radical behaviour deepens the fear of ‘others’ and contributes to general social mistrust and insecurity” (Bećirević, 2016) Bećirević notes that since September 11th, and especially with the rise of Islamic States of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), this research field has become increasingly important and there was an urgent need to explain the concept and define key terms such as radicalisation, extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism. While academic definition and contextualisation of the terms follows Western literature, they are often used simultaneously and placed in the same context, especially by media. This sometimes creates confusion among government officials and decision-makers.

Academic literature provides an answer on how the process of radicalisation begins and how to end violent extremism. Azinović (2018) explains the concept of radicalisation and violent extremism through several phases. The process begins with an initiation, a “human touch”, an interaction, followed by interaction with peers, people in the community, where the group dynamics are reinforced by a very specific worldview. In some cases, he also gives a significant role to social media and the internet. The most critical point of radicalisation, especially for young people, is the separation from their biological family, and inclusion in a new ideological family that provides them with protection and security. Vulnerable, traumatised individuals with unresolved mental health problems become the target of such narratives. When it comes to types of ideological narratives we can distinguish between political and religious radicalisation.

## Overview of radicalisation and violent extremism

### Citizens reported to have joined ISIS and other violent movements inside and outside the country

The departure of citizens from BiH to battlefields in Syria and Iraq was worrying. Azinović and Jusić considered BiH among the European countries most affected by this phenomenon (Azinović and Jusic, 2016). Determining the precise number of persons from BiH that joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq is difficult. Official government data puts the figure at 217 for the end of 2015, and the BiH Minister of Security stated that this number was around 230 in October 2017 (Azinović and Jusic, 2016). Unofficial estimates put the figure at around 330 citizens: for example, the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence suggests in its assessment that BiH provided between 300 and 340 foreign fighters (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2018). Among these 330 BiH nationals, there are some people who have dual citizenship or long-term residence in other countries where they were recruited and from where they travelled. The largest number of departures is between Syria and BiH (Ibid).

The identities have been established of 188 men, 61 women and 81 children who are believed to have travelled to Syria and Iraq from BiH and from the Bosnian diaspora between 2012 and 2015. The largest number of departures was registered during 2013 (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2016). Azinović (2017) gives a revised figure of 240 foreign fighters from 2012 to 2016 that joined ISIS. This is “the largest contingent of foreign fighters from the Western Balkans and the second-highest number of foreign fighters per capita out of any European country after Belgium” and Kosovo (Tzvetkova and Mancheva, 2019). While this estimated number puts BiH among the top European countries of origin for foreign fighters, if the ratio of foreign fighters to the total Muslim population is taken into account, the number for BiH is just below the average for the EU (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2018).

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By the beginning of 2016, 47 men and 8 women came back, while 50 men and 1 woman were killed. This did not change much by the end of 2017 when a total of about 50 adult returnees came back to BiH from Syria/Iraq (Azinović, 2018). Since mid-2016 intensified efforts of BiH authorities contributed to a complete halt in both departures and returns. Death certificates for 76 fighters with BiH citizenship (including five women and four children) who were killed in Syria were made public in BiH media in April 2018 (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2018). As of December 2018, 98 adult Bosnian citizens (49 men and 49 women) remained in Syria/Iraq (Atlantic Initiative, 2018). According to Shtuni (2019), BiH nationals composed the largest group from the Western Balkans that remained in Iraq/Syria in 2019. While Kosovo accepting the repatriation of 110 foreign fighters in 2019, BiH repatriated only seven foreign fighters in 2019. Those who have returned in the early phase of the conflict may present a risk for further radicalisation, extremism and potential terrorist activities.

Currently, there are no violent movements within BiH. At the same time BiH citizens have joined violent movements and wars outside the country. In addition to Iraq and Syria, Ukraine is considered a destination where a small number of BiH nationals go to fight for foreign armed separatist groups. The number of BiH foreign fighters in Ukraine is estimated at seven, but the dark number is believed to be much higher. These fighters travel through Serbia, being assisted by the Movement of Serbian Chetniks Ravna Gora, in order to join pro-Russian paramilitary formations where they fought in the “Serbian Hussar Regiment” along with fighters from Serbia. In October 2017, according to BiH police agencies, there was only one BiH national on trial for fighting in Ukraine (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2018). An Atlantic Initiative Survey of 2,110 citizens and

12 focus groups in BiH found much higher support among Serbs for fighters going to Ukraine than from Bosniaks for fighters going to Iraq or Syria (Atlantic Initiative, 2018). They show that for Serbs, ethno-nationalist violent extremism was “associated with feelings of stability, agency, and safety” and this has not been condemned by political or religious leaders (Ibid).

#### Presence of radical and violent groups in the country

Most of the literature on extremism in BiH focuses on Islamic groups among Bosniaks. Azinović and Jusić (2016) write that since mid-2015, the Islamic Community in BiH has been working to gain insight into the actions of Muslim organisations, groups and individuals who carry out religious services and teaching outside its authorisation. Some of these groups have usurped the property of the Islamic Community, hindering its own work, and some operate from private houses and apartments. Among them are officially non-recognised Salafi and Shiite congregations, i.e. *jamaats* (Arabic for “assembly”). Any groups operating outside the purview and bureaucratic structures of the official and state-recognised Islamic Community in BiH are known colloquially as *para-jamaats*. There have been 38 identified *para-jamaats*,<sup>1</sup> out of which 14 have agreed to rejoin the Islamic Community.

Research conducted by the Atlantic Initiative indicates that the groups centred around these *para-jamaats* act as typical sects, i.e. religious congregations. Members blanket each other in “brotherly and sisterly love”, “kindness and respect” and “good energy” and consider themselves morally superior to people in the community surrounding them, who they perceive as sinful and apostate. Indeed, members see themselves as part of a small, select group of true believers. These communities have been identified as fertile grounds for radicalisation and recruitment. Initially, Salafism in BiH was concentrated in smaller settlements in North BiH, Bihać, Maglaj, Ošve, and Gorna Maoća, but has since spread. The villages of Ošve and Gornja Maoća have especially high concentration of salafis. Gorna Maoća is very isolated and hostile to outsiders, following strict rules based on *Sharia* law and there are reports that Ošve used to house a training camp for jihadists (Tzvetkova and Mancheva, 2019).

There are reports of Serb and Croat groups being driven by ethnic nationalism and Orthodox and Catholic extremism, who often identify themselves as followers of the Serbian Chetniks and the Croatian Ustasha who were active during the Second World War. The Serb organisations and groups, working on an “extremist Orthodox agenda”, are often supported by Russia, whilst the Croatian formations are often backed by the “radical elements of the Catholic Church and some political elites” (Becirević, 2018) It is not uncommon that these groups display neo-Nazi characteristics, engage in violent acts, and call for separation of territories inhabited by their respective ethno-religious groups from the state of BiH.

There is at least one secular organisation that can be classified as far-right. The Bosnian Movement of National Pride (BPNP) is a far-right Bosniak organisation based on ethnicity rather than religion. Formed in 2009, the BPNP calls for the creation of the socialist and national state of the Bosniak nation. The movement rejects the attachment of the Bosniak identity to a single religion and states that the Bosniak nation includes only those belonging to the European genetic and cultural heritage (BPNP, n.d.). It can be considered as nationalistic and

<sup>1</sup> 13 in Zenica, 12 in Sarajevo, 17 in Tuzla, 3 in Bihać, 2 in Mostar, and 1 in Travnik.

unitarian, working against Serb and Croat efforts to increase autonomy, in addition to harbouring anti-Semitic and anti-communist views.

## **Framing radicalisation and violent extremism**

### **Scientific and academic state of the art**

In recent years violent extremism and radicalisation has been studied extensively in BiH. Many research projects were conducted by domestic and foreign researchers through non-governmental organisations. The issue of violent extremism and radicalisation has been treated as a security concern in BiH for almost a decade, especially following domestic terrorist attacks, and has been the focus of international and domestic policy-makers and security agencies. While empirical research from BiH is still scarce, especially within radicalised communities, descriptive and normative literature is available, including non-empirical policy papers, opinion pieces, news articles, and critical analyses – all of which are useful in identifying gaps in the research.

An outlier is the significant study on perceptions of Salafis by Puhalo (2016), which is based on surveys and a statistical analysis of perceptions and values among 130 salafis in BiH. This socio-psychological study is supplemented by perceptions of a sample of BiH citizens and analysis of news reports on salafis. Another is a study by Turčalo and Veljan (2018) that aimed to identify common and distinctive factors of vulnerability, as well as resistance to violence extremism in BiH communities with the highest number of foreign fighters, and the influence of key actors on these factors. Bećirović (2016) produced another qualitative study based on interviews and focus groups with 165 individuals (around half of whom were adherents of Salafism) examined the strategies used by Salafists to spread their ideology and explored why an increasing number of individuals are abandoning the centuries-long tradition of inclusive Islam in BiH for more radical interpretations (Ibid).

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### **Prominent studies**

Several studies that focus on BiH and the broader Western Balkans are prominent, but none stands out. Most are written by Vlado Azinović, Edina Bećrovi, Muhamed Jusić and Sead Turčalo, among others, and published by the Atlantic Initiative and other domestic and international think tanks and civil society organizations (CSOs). Some prominent examples are: Azinović, *Western Balkans Extremism research forum - Regional report understanding violent extremism in the Western Balkans*" (British Council, 2018); Turčalo and Veljan, *Community Perspectives on the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina*" (Berghof Foundation, 2018); Azinović, *Between salvation and terror: Radicalization and the Foreign fighter phenomenon in the Western Balkans* (Atlantic Initiative, 2017); Bećirović, Halilović and Azinović, *Western Balkans extremism research forum - Literature review Radicalisation and violent extremism in the Western Balkans* (British Council, 2017); Azinović and Jusić, *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent* (Atlantic Initiative, 2016); Bećirović, *Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims* (Atlantic Initiative, 2016); Puhalo, *Selefije u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Salafis in Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Pro-Educa, 2016).

### **Main research and knowledge producers**

The academic community has produced many scientific publications with conceptualisation and definition of key terms. The purpose of this work is to answer what radicalisation and violent extremism is based on, and to make recommendations for prevention. The BiH government and several CSOs, both domestic and foreign, are attempting to develop national and regional strategies and policies based on this literature and recommendations. In recent years, the media is particularly important in reporting on extremist groups and



radicalisation in BiH. Most objective reporting and investigative journalism has been done by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network and Balkan Insight. At the same time there is a strong temptation for the media to focus on violence and sensationalism. Mainstream media in BiH (including some public broadcasters) predominantly follows ethnic lines and focuses on radicalisation of other ethnic communities. Reporting in a way that serves political elites and encourages ethnonational polarisation rather than informing the public. Hodzic and Sokol (2019) consider selective focus, one-sided and false reporting with unverifiable sources as common practice. This reporting overemphasises the danger of terrorism arising from other religious groups and portrays it in a negative light as a source of danger and instability (Raskrinkavanje.bo (n.d.)).

### Defining violent extremism and radicalisation

Definitions are mostly bundled with the terms “radicalism” and “violent extremism” often used interchangeably in research studies, government policies and literature. BiH adopted The Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combating Terrorism 2015-2020 in 2015. The Strategy does not explicitly define “terrorism” or “violent extremism”, It refers in various ways to “terrorism and terrorism-related phenomena” or “violent extremism that can lead to terrorism” and cites “new terrorist challenges” that include foreign fighters but never defines any of these terms. However, efforts are being made in BiH to distinguish between radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism, with important contributions from the academic community. Academic experts identify the unclear terminology as a weakness and express concern because official definitions are an important aid in developing a common understanding of how to structure and implement P/CVE activities. For definitions they often rely on foreign authors. For example, Bećirević (2016) points to the difficulty in searching for the best way to conceptually distinguish between the terms “radicalisation” and “extremism” (often used interchangeably) and “violent extremism” and “terrorism” (also often used interchangeably). She also points out that the phrase “radicalisation into violent extremism” is used too frequently. This neologism clearly reflects the challenge researchers face in avoiding stigmatisation of individuals and groups who adhere to radical religious ideologies and hold radical religious or political beliefs within the legal boundaries of liberal democratic societies. However, Bećirević, Halilović and Jusić (2017) consider that authors and researchers have begun to employ these terms with more caution and with the acknowledgement that radicalisation does not necessarily lead to violence. They argue that it is necessary to distinguish between radicalisation linked to violent extremism and terrorism, and radicalisation aimed at initiating societal changes through non-violent means. Therefore, Bećirević (2018) writes that in the Bosnian context any analysis of “radicalisation into violent extremism” must acknowledge the process of reciprocal radicalisation, wherein mutual forms of extremism feed one another. Security experts have increasingly brought attention to reciprocal radicalisation over the last several years, warning that approaches to extremism that view the phenomenon exclusively through the lens of radical Salafism fail to account for the risk of reactive or co-evolutionary ideological movements. It is important to understand that competing extremist political narratives like those prevalent in BiH can contribute to violent extremism.

### Definition targets

The Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combating Terrorism 2015-2020 does not include a clear definition of violent extremism or terrorism, so the scope of action and focus on target are equally vague. It states that its primary objective is the early detection of all terrorist activity, and rapid repression of individuals, groups and networks with terrorist intent. On the other hand, academic literature on violent extremism and radicalisation in BiH mostly mentions the Salafi movement and studies are exclusively

concerned with Islamic radicalisation, in line with donor-driven research priorities. However, it is important to note that extremism is present among all religious groups, which is often overlooked by donor-driven academic research concerned with Islamic radicalisation and foreign fighters.

*Ethnic or religious communities considered by violent extremism and radicalisation approaches*

Definitions do not specifically mention other extreme ethnic or religious groups. Yet, these are included in the broad (and vague) official government definition (Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers, 2015). Radical groups, such as those linked to the Chetnik and Ustasha movements (Serb Christian Orthodox and Croat Catholic, respectively) are often described as radical, or their followers as radicalised, in media and CSOs reports.

[Methodologies employed to study violent extremism and radicalisation](#)

There is a lack of empirical studies in radicalisation and violent extremism in BiH and most research uses secondary sources from security services and agencies or rely on a limited number of expert interviews.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, research on extremism in BiH has expanded but individual drivers linked to radicalisation have not yet been explored beyond the confines of Salafi-Jihadism. This represents a clear gap in the literature that needs to be filled. No research has looked at foreign fighters and radicalisation among the Serb and Croat communities. Also, research on community drivers of de-radicalisation is not well developed.

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<sup>2</sup> Section "What is the scientific/academic state of the art in BiH?" elaborates on results of the most significant studies.

# Strategies to counter/prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalisation (C/PVE)

## C/PVE INITIATIVES

### Mapping of C/PVE actors

The most relevant stakeholders working on P/CVE in BiH are:

- The **Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina** (Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, n.d.) is the main government institution at the national level that is responsible for dealing with P/CVE. The ministry has a dedicated office that deals with C/PVE and closely cooperates with other stakeholders. At the same time it does not implement many programmes itself and has little funding available.
- The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** (IOM, n.d.) works actively on PVE in close cooperation with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners in BiH. Since October 2015, the IOM has been active in increasing resilience of both communities and individuals in selected locations against radicalising influences but does not work on de-radicalisation. Through this work, the IOM has developed strong relationships with national and local stakeholders and carried out projects in more than 15 Bosnian communities that aimed to assess the drivers and prevalence of radicalisation. In October 2017, the IOM started a US government-funded project, Institutional Strengthening: Establishing a Formal Referral Mechanism for Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, following a pilot in six communities, with the aim to promote engagement and build resilience among youth. The project envisions work with families, media, employment centres, mayors, police, the Islamic Community and youth, in essence a local referral mechanism approach to identify at risk individuals and respond early and appropriately.
- The **OSCE Mission** (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (n.d.) in BiH works closely with the BiH government and other authorities in training and assisting them to improve relevant strategic documents on combating terrorism and C/PVE in a way that supports the rule of law and ensures respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Part of this work focuses on improving interagency, civilian-military and multisectoral cooperation, but also on spreading awareness among municipalities, CSOs, educational institutions, social care centres, mental health centres, police and religious communities at the local level on preventing and combating violent extremism. The Mission implemented a project, Support to Dialogue on Prevention of Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Polis, 2016), from September 2015 to April 2016 with a focus on early warning and response.
- The **United Nations Development Program (UNDP)**, acting as the main UN presence in BiH, works under the concept of prevention through promoting inclusive development, tolerance and respect for diversity. It has been active in coordinating a collective response by engaging local governments and international partners and facilitating the development of programme interventions and policy papers through its Human Security Programme, as well as addressing prevention of violent extremism in prisons.

- **Other stakeholders working on P/CVE efforts:** Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Embassy of the United States, Embassy of Norway, Embassy of the United Kingdom, Embassy of Italy, International Republican Institute, Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency.

### Public policies and programmes

In the summer of 2015, BiH adopted the Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combating Terrorism for 2015-2020, followed by an Action Plan for implementation in October 2016 (Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers (2015)). A significant portion of the Strategy consists of general measures directed at preventing individuals and groups from adopting violent extremist ideology. It also addresses the consequences of violent extremism, such as prosecutions and sanctions. This was reflected in changes made in 2014 to the BiH Criminal Code, which criminalised and stipulated sanctions for individuals who depart to fight in foreign wars. The focus on fighting in foreign wars is evident in the Strategy, perhaps to the detriment of broader prevention efforts. The activities laid out in the strategy fall into seven key areas: legislation, institutional capacity-building, education, prevention, protection, investigation, and responses to terrorism. The action plans derived from the Strategy have not been implemented yet, despite the fact that implementation was supposed to begin in 2016. However, the Strategy is considered by international experts as comprehensive and essentially aligned to relevant international standards and human rights.

### *Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation*

The single relevant official document is the aforementioned Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combating Terrorism. It does not give a definition but builds on the definition by the OSCE: violent extremism and radicalisation that leads to terrorism.

### Civil society

- One of the most important local think tanks active on the topic is the Atlantic Initiative (Atlantic Initiative, n.d.), which is also a local partner to all major international programmes. The think tank has been active in efforts to improve communication and coordination on C/PVE, in addition to mapping factors and actors of vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in select communities (in Sarajevo, Zenica-Doboj, and Bosnian-Podrinje cantons). The Atlantic Initiative has prepared two reports on foreign fighters, looking at trends and patterns of radicalisation and recruitment in BiH, with data from document review, focus groups and interviews, as well as several other relevant research publications. The Atlantic Initiative also organises public academic events, such as presenting the Countering Violent Extremism Baseline Program Summary of Survey Findings – Bosnia and Herzegovina (Atlantic Initiative, 2018).
- Two international CSOs are active on C/PVE in BiH: the Berghof Foundation (Berghof Foundation, n.d.) and the European Youth Foundation. (Council of Europe, n.d.) Berghof cooperates with several local partners and is primarily concerned with better understanding of the drivers of violent extremism and supporting work that promotes tolerance and inclusivity. They are involved through the Opportunities for Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) in the Western Balkans (Berghof Foundation, n.d.). The European Youth Forum aims to build capacities of youth workers, activists, young teachers, volunteers and teachers on building peaceful societies by having an active role on preventing violent extremism. One of their more important projects is Violent Extremism vs Intercultural Dialogue and Peace aimed at young people.

- Other relevant CSOs are: the Democratization Policy Council, Global Analitika, Transkulturalna psihosocijalna obrazovna fondacija, Hopes and Homes for Children, Humanity in Action, Centar Modernih Znanja CMZ, PRONI Youth Development Center in Brčko District, and GEA - Centar za istraživanja i studije.

### Religious communities

The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the organised and institutionalised presence of the religion in the country with the organisation's roots going back to 1882.

The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina is an independent institution and activities organised by the Islamic Community are not managed by the government. The Islamic Community is a significant factor in prevention. In the *Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combating Terrorism* (Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers, 2015), religious communities are recognised as a protective factor in the active fight against all forms of violent extremism and terrorism. Therefore, through cooperation the Islamic Community actively participates in projects to combat violent extremism by developing a positive communication approach. It has been persistent in its attempts to take back control of all Islamic religious activity in BiH mosques, including radical interpretations, and to discontinue the activities of para-*jamaats*. In 2016, the Islamic Community called upon members of the para-*jamaats* to join the Community or face legal consequences. In what is heralded as a big success, approximately 90% of the known para-*jamaats* did so, thus giving the Islamic Community the authority to supervise their activities and appoint their imams (Perry, 2016). For the most part, imams of the Community are not accustomed or prepared to deal with radicalisation and violent extremism or its consequences – for instance, with the social re-integration of returnees. In 2017, the Ilmiyyah Association of the Islamic Community organised eight seminars for imams focusing on their duties, religious radicalisation and violent extremism (Ibid). The Islamic Community in cooperation with the OSCE has organised trainings for more 1,000 imams and developed an online module on violent extremism, hate crimes, and discrimination. With support from the EU Delegation to BiH, further training was provided for parents and adolescents. The Islamic Community also developed a strategic document regarding the integration of groups and individuals acting outside the purview of official Islamic Community structures, which included P/CVE measures focused on the education of imams and religious teachers. Additionally, the Islamic Community has established a youth network, with branches in communities across BiH, and has appointed coordinators for female activism.

As for Catholic and Christian Orthodox religious communities, they do not work to prevent violent extremism and view it as a problem related to Islam. Other radicalised groups, such as right-wing nationalists, neo-Chetnik Serbs, and neo-Ustasha-Croats are not directly affiliated with religious institutions.

## Methodologies

### Stakeholders involved

There is usually a well-defined dynamic of involvement in C/PVE. International donors, mostly governments acting through embassies or international organisations, set the agenda and give financial support for programmes, while local civil society, religious and even government institutions implement the programmes. This goes to the extent that a significant portion of government regulations is heavily influenced by expertise coming from abroad. International assistance is often bundled and channelled through multilateral organisations, such as the UN or

OSCE. Local implementation often relies on small, community-based CSOs or citizens' groups, such as the forumi za bezbjednost građana in RS, centres for social work, as well as the Islamic Community.

#### Targeted populations

In all domestic and foreign projects and programmes, youth were one of the most important target groups. Also, some programmes (such as those organised by the Islamic Community) targeted religious community leaders (imams). Many projects are organised in communities identified as particularly at risk. Recently, trainings have been organised for teachers and parents on how to present violent extremism in young people.

#### Enforcement mechanisms for the C/PVE initiatives

There are no specific enforcement mechanisms for C/PVE initiatives in BiH that would make any part of C/PVE obligatory for participants. Most initiatives rely on a combination of community pressure and personal contacts. A significant soft mechanism is the narrative put forward by the Islamic Community that excludes extremism as a religiously accepted option.

#### Available resources

The means in terms of budget are impossible to enumerate as almost all funding has been made available by foreign donors and has not been disclosed. For example, the IOM does not publish figures on its budget for C/PVE in BiH. Also, as several international organisations act simultaneously and cooperatively on C/PVE activities, acting through several local intermediaries, budgets for individual actions are often blurred. It is evident that donor funding for C/PVE has been increasing since 2012. At the same time, very few resources are made available through the budgets of BiH institutions.

#### Main objectives of the strategies or initiatives implemented

Initially, more focus was set on detection and countering but in recent years this has shifted more towards general prevention. The National Strategy includes both elements and gives them equal weight. Yet, BiH government institutions at all levels have limited capacities in operationalising and implementing the set goals. There is no systematic data collection, and existing official policy measures do not fully reflect issues identified by civic and international organisations. In particular, prevention is mostly left to the civil sector and religious leaders. Some of the goals in recent C/PVE programmes funded by donors are much broader and include enhancing community cohesiveness, strengthening civic components of interaction, community building and strengthening social capital.

#### Existence of critical evaluation systems

There is no critical evaluation system for C/PVE actions taken at any government level in BiH. Various donor organisations have their individual evaluations for each programme upon implementation, and conducted by in-house team-monitoring or by an outside agency. This evaluation is mostly conducted as an audit of the implementation mechanisms and not so much as a critical assessment of programme impact.

#### Impact of CVE-PVE on the threat of radicalisation

Such an assessment of C/PVE programmes has not been conducted. C/PVE programmes are generally considered to have some impact and continue to be supported by several international donors in BiH. Especially the mechanisms of C/PVE on reducing the threat of radicalisation are not studied in BiH.

### **SPECIFIC INITIATIVES ADDRESSED TO WOMEN AND YOUTH**

Most C/PVE programmes in BiH specifically target youth and there are several examples below. On the other hand, no C/PVE initiatives could be identified that specifically address women.

- The IOM organised the project Institutional Strengthening: Establishing a Formal Referral Mechanism for Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They engaged with youth in vulnerable communities who enjoy local credibility in order to get suggestions of what young people and community leaders think is needed to strengthen that community. The general goal is to promote more youth engagement. A project Steering Board with donors, as well as other stakeholders, serves as a mechanism to monitor the project, as well as to share information on PVE/CVE more generally.
- The Youth Resource Centre (YRC) (Council of Europe, n.d.) has carried out several projects harnessing education and awareness raising to prevent violent extremism, including with the funding of foreign governments and international organisations (OSCE, IOM, USAID...). Examples of projects include the IOM-supported Catch Me If You Can campaign and Youth Against Violent Extremism project, which encourage greater involvement by youth in PVE, and the Young Activists in Combating Violent Extremism project, which aims to build capacity among young activists to detect and report radical behaviour among youth, both in person and online.
- Other projects include: Against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in the BiH Public Space – strengthen the media and information literacy of young people (Nasa zajednica), Improving engagement of youth in vulnerable communities (CSO PUŽ Tuzla and VIZIONAR Bugojno), Misuse of the internet for extremist messaging (Islamic Community), Global ethics in schools (Transkulturalna psihosocijalna obrazovna fondacija), Expressing stories of individual radicalisation into violent extremism through drama (OSCE Mission to BiH), Online communication campaign aimed at prevention and awareness-raising: United in CVE (OSCE), Insult Gallery - A wall of shame in public discourse (IOM, USAID and Boris Divković Foundation), the capacity-building project Violent Extremism vs. Intercultural dialogue and Peace (European Youth Foundation), No Extremism campaign with celebrities (Global Analytics).

## Conclusion

- There are several points that arise out of the state of the art in BiH for the future CONNEKT research.
- Research on violent extremism and its prevention in BiH has been ongoing for almost a decade. There is much published material and even more experience noted in internal reports of international organisations that are not publicly available.
- Focus on youth and on the meso (community) level is prominent in most programmes aimed at C/PVE. Youth is viewed as the most vulnerable group but also as a key component of preventing peer-radicalisation.
- The analysis of different contexts and drivers of radicalisation is not fully developed and the interaction between levels of drivers is not explored in the BiH literature. This will be a novel contribution of CONNEKT.
- Many C/PVE programmes exist and have been run for several years. An analysis of their mechanisms, effects and impact would be beneficial as it would allow us to identify best practices and can be tested in other countries.



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What drives youth to violent extremism? How can they turn from being “the problem” into “the key” for a solution? By engaging youth in the research, CONNEKT will raise young voices to become stakeholders in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

CONNEKT is a research and action project which analyses seven potential radicalisation factors among youth aged between 12 and 30: religion, digitalisation, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, transnational dynamics, socio-political demands, and educational, cultural and leisure opportunities and evaluates them on three levels: transnational/state, community and individual.

Its aim is to establish a multi-dimensional map of drivers of extremism among youth in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, and to identify the interplay between them. Based on the empirical research findings, the project will end up recommending tools and measures for the prevention of violent extremism from a social and community perspective both for the regions of study and the European Union.

Under the coordination of the European Institute of the Mediterranean, (IEMed), the project gathers a multidisciplinary Consortium involving 14 partners from MENA, the EU and the Balkans.



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