CONNEKT
COUNTRY REPORTS
National Approaches to Extremism

KOSOVO
Lulzim Peci, Agon Demjaha

Consortium Members

Overview

COUNTRY PROFILE

Government system

On 17 February 2008, the Kosovo assembly adopted a declaration of independence which declared Kosovo to be a democratic, secular and multi-ethnic republic. The Constitution of the country established Kosovo as a democratic Republic based on the principle of separation of powers, and outlined the freedoms of its citizens. Article 4 specifies that the Assembly of the country exercises the legislative power, while the Government is responsible for implementation of laws and state policies and is subject to parliamentarian control. The President of Kosovo, on the other hand, represents the unity of the people and at the same time is the guarantor of the democratic functioning of the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo, as provided in the Constitution (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008).

Population

The last official census in Kosovo was held in 2011. According to this census, Kosovo had an overall population of 1,739,825 residents[1]. In recent years, Kosovo has witnessed an ongoing migration, especially of its young population. According to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, during the last decade more than 220,000 citizens have emigrated from Kosovo. The largest number of citizens who emigrated from Kosovo during this period was recorded in 2015, when over 75,000 citizens left Kosovo. Then in 2016 and 2017, emigration decreased, while in 2018, there was again an increase in emigration, respectively over 28,000 people decided to leave the country. This official data refers to both legal and illegal emigration, and the vast majority of citizens who have emigrated belong to young age groups, mainly 25-44 years. In an absence of a more recent official census, the Kosovo Agency of Statistics has estimated Kosovo's overall population at 1,798,506 residents (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2019).

Main ethnic/religious groups

According to the last official census of Kosovo held in 2011, in addition to the Albanian majority of 1,616,869 (92.9%), there were also seven recognised ethnic groups as official minorities: Serbs 25,532 (1.5%), 27,533 Bosniaks (1.6%), Turks 18,738 (1.1%), Ashkali 15,446 (0.9%), Egyptians 11,524 (0.7%), Gorani 10,265 (0.6%) and Roma 8,824 (0.5%). It should be mentioned though, that these results were often contested by certain Albanian and Serb circles in the country. In terms of religion, census results show that 1,663,412 (95.6%) of the population were Muslims, 38,438 (2.2%) declared as Catholic Christians and 25,837 (1.7%) as Orthodox Christians (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2013). It is worth noting that the 2011 Kosovo population census was largely boycotted by the Kosovo Serbs (especially in North Kosovo) who predominantly identify as Serbian Orthodox Christians, and therefore the Serb population was underrepresented (Collaku, 2011).(especially in North Kosovo) who predominantly identify as Serbian Orthodox Christians, and therefore the Serb population was underrepresented (Collaku, 2011).

[1] It should be mentioned that municipalities Leposaviq, Zubin Potok, Zveçan and Mitrovica North were excluded from the census; see Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2013).

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALIZATION IN THE COUNTRY

General overview of radicalisation and violent extremism

Similarly to other post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Kosovo also witnessed a resurgence of religiosity after the fall of communism. With the vast majority of Kosovo Albanians being Muslim, it is understandable that Islam was the most resurgent religion during this period. As a result of multiple internal interacting factors, the process of religious revival in Kosovo was tremendously accelerated after the war in 1999. The societal disorientation, high poverty, weak economy and political void made Kosovo fertile ground for the resurgence of religion (Demjaha and Peci, 2016: 80). Immediately after the war, the situation in Kosovo was chaotic, while public administration was virtually non-existent. The entire Kosovar society was rapidly exposed to a variety of competing ideas, both more liberal as well as more conservative ones. Kosovo war-ravaged population was exposed to different international faith-based organisations that have mushroomed throughout the country after the war. Under the guise of humanitarian aid, such organisations have ruthlessly exploited the poverty and fragmented social conditions of Kosovar Albanians, especially in rural areas, and seriously disrupted cultural hegemony of these communities (Blumi, 2005: 2).

In this context, it is important to assess the role of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës, BIK), as the main institution representing the Muslim community in the country that has an uncontested power in organising the religious affairs of Muslim believers in Kosovo. As such, it is clear that BIK represents an actor that plays an important and multiple role in different aspects of radicalisation and violent extremism. Since it was considered as an institution that should defend traditional Islam, BIK has since the end of the war in 1999 been a target of foreign radical activists. Such attempts were initially curtailed by Mufti Rexhep Boja, who insisted on keeping the Gulf States faith-based organisations outside of the Islamic Community.[2] However, after his replacement in 2003, the control over BIK has been an on-going battle between moderate and radical Muslim imams. As a result, by 2008 BIK was undergoing a deep crisis of legitimacy due to the clash of two schools of thought: the Hanafi school, which had been practising its own theology (legacy of the Ottoman Empire) for the past five centuries, and a second school that believes that Kosovo's Islamic community should be part of the global Islamic community, unconstrained by the boundaries of nation-states and open to various external influences (Rudine and Kraja, 2018: 8). BIK senior officials blame the government for not acting on their warnings on the infiltration of various radical imams that challenged BIK's authority and brought about such a crisis of legitimacy within the ranks of Muslim followers. While BIK officials acknowledge that the government does not technically concern itself with the work of religious associations, they perceive this as a rule-of-law matter since such a challenge poses potential ideological danger to their authority (Ibid).

Recently, the Government has charged BIK with many important responsibilities related to prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. As a result, BIK has been working with the government to gain oversight of all mosques in Kosovo with a goal to control narratives, thus blocking any radical messages from being spread in religious institutions. BIK itself has lately also started to be more proactive in condemning and warning about hate speech delivered in some mosques or by some high-profile imams. However, there are still internal clashes within BIK between so-called "moderate" imams mainly from the

---

[1] The head of the Islamic Community of Kosovo, Rexhep Boja, in 1999 angrily responded to the behaviour of the ultra-orthodox Saudi agencies by noting that "Albanians have been Muslims for more than 500 years and they do not need outsiders [Arabs] to tell them what the proper way to practice Islam is." See Deliso (2007: 55).

Hanafi School of Thought and so-called "conservative" imams. Interestingly, both sides criticise each other for spreading the ideas of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. These disagreements have fragmented practitioners, and are indirectly hampering the BIK's activities in tackling violent extremism and radicalisation in Kosovo (Qehaja et al., 2017: 11). While the role of BIK is essential in preventing extremism and radicalisation, BIK is often viewed not only as a solution to the problem but also as part of it. Therefore, for BIK to successfully fulfil its role in dealing with radicalisation and extremism, it is important to identify the main drivers within BIK that lead to radicalisation and violent extremism, and to tackle conditions influenced by BIK that are conducive to radicalisation and violent extremism.

First signs of radical and extremist views in Kosovo were identified shortly after the war in 1999. Security agencies that were monitoring such individuals saw their numbers rising in the following years. Through a slow and long-term process, inflammatory imams exploited the existing grievances of Kosovo citizens to proselytise Salafi/Wahhabi forms of radical Islam. Although the Ministry of Internal Affairs was aware of the potential threat, there was no serious and coordinated commitment to act until the media began publishing information about Kosovo's foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq (Perry, 2016: 34). When it was reported that Kosovo has the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in the world, until then dormant institutions of Kosovo were forced to act. Accordingly, in August 2014 police searched 60 locations throughout Kosovo and arrested 40 Kosovar citizens suspected to have participated in terrorism in Iraq and Syria. It was reported that the arrests were carried out in accordance with the Kosovo Penal Code to safeguard constitutional order and security in the country. Until January 2015 some 80 people were arrested under similar charges including a number of influential radical imams (Demjaha and Peci, 2016: 57).

At the same time, in March 2015, Kosovo's parliament adopted a Law on Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflicts outside State Territory that makes it a crime to "organise, recruit, lead or train persons or group of persons with the aim of joining or participating in a foreign army or police in any form of armed conflicts outside Kosovo." The law also stipulates that engagement in foreign conflicts can be punished with a prison sentence from 5 to 15 years (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2015). Later in September 2015, the Office of the Prime-Minister of Kosovo also prepared a Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020 as well as an Action Plan for the implementation of that strategy. The Strategy provided an overall analysis of the situation in 2015 by explaining the extent of the problem and potential threat within Kosovo, motives of extremism, push and pull factors as well as strategic objectives for early identification, prevention, intervention and de-radicalisation. The measures put forward by the strategy diverged from earlier repressive techniques of the counter-terrorist policy by including soft measures, investments in local communities as well as inclusion of non-governmental actors (Office of the Prime-Minister, 2015).

Citizens reported to have joined ISIS

Nevertheless, the radicalisation of Kosovo Albanian Muslims caught the attention of Kosovo institutions and the wider public only when the first death of an Albanian foreign fighter in Syria was reported in November 2012. When soon after it was reported that Kosovo has the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in the world, hitherto dormant institutions of Kosovo were forced to act (Kursani, 2015: 24). According to the latest data, since 2012 an estimated 403 individuals have travelled from Kosovo to join terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq. Of those, 255 were foreign fighters, while the rest were women and children. Data provided

by authorities show that around 40 children were born in the war theatre to at least one parent of Kosovo origin. Meanwhile, some 135 individuals have returned to Kosovo and are being tried in local courts. An estimated 75 Kosovo foreign fighters are reported killed, while around 190 individuals are supposed to have still remained in conflict zones (Perteshi, 2015: 18).

It is worth mentioning that of those who remained in conflict zones there is an estimated number of only 66 men, who are considered potential combatants. This implies that the majority (around 70%) of those remaining in conflict zones are non-combatants (not directly engaged in fighting), estimated at 47 women and 92 children, or a total of 139 (Kursani, 2018: 18). Another interesting element is that a considerable number of the Kosovo's individuals who joined ISIS and other terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq were from Kosovo diaspora abroad. Out of the 255 foreign fighters from Kosovo who have travelled to conflict zones, 48 of them or some 20% of Kosovo's total number of foreign fighters were young individuals who have no relation to Kosovo or were born in another country (Perteshi, 2018: 30).

Citizens joining other violent movements inside and outside the country

Despite the fact that since the beginning of 2016 there have been no recorded cases of foreign fighters originating from Kosovo, representatives of Kosovo's state institutions continued to view violent extremist threats mainly through the Islamist religious prism. However, in a study that assessed possible violent extremist threats in Kosovo, Kursani suggests that violent extremist threats in Kosovo were mainly politically motivated. He points out that around 80% of executed (actions taken) violent extremist threats were political in nature, while of the unexecuted (actions not taken) threats, close to 70% were religious in nature (Kursani, 2017). In terms of other violent movements, it is worth mentioning the foreign fighter phenomenon, which comes from the Serb population living in the north of Kosovo. Some media outlets have reported that around 300 Serbian foreign fighters funded by the Russian organisation the Kosovo Front have been fighting in the Ukrainian separatist territories (Stelmakh and Kholodov, 2017). While not all these fighters are from Kosovo, it is difficult to determine their exact numbers since usually all of them are referred to as Serb nationals (Velebit, 2017). It is worth noting that, despite being spotted from media reporting, the emergence of foreign fighters in Ukraine has not caught the attention of Kosovo's state institutions. Moreover, although countries in the Western Balkans consider foreign fighting as a criminal act regardless of the destination, returnees from the Middle East face a robust security-based response in their countries of origin, whereas those returning from Ukraine usually remain exempt from prosecution and severe sanctions (Beslin and Ignjatijevic, 2017).

Presence of radical and violent groups in the country

Following the wars after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, similarly to other countries of the Western Balkans Kosovo has witnessed the post-communist nationalism and revived religious passions. Prior to the proliferation of radical forms of Islam, the concepts of "radicalism" or "extremism" throughout the region were mainly linked to nationalism and sports hooliganism (Beslin et al., 2017: 15). Nevertheless, when it comes to radical and violent groups today, the main stakeholders in Kosovo are predominantly preoccupied with Salafism/Wahhabism and the phenomenon of foreign fighters. Moreover, as Perry points out, "other forms of extremism, such as domestic right-wing extremism, are noted as a secondary concern or even not acknowledged at all" (Perry, 2016: 4). As mentioned earlier, Salafi proselytisation in Kosovo started after the war in 1999 mainly through the influence of the humanitarian organisations from Saudi Arabia, other Gulf States, and Turkey. Since then, radical forms of Islam from outside countries have continued to spread among

Kosovo's Muslim population, since over the years these humanitarian organisations have managed to build a base of local representatives that allow them to continue to operate locally even without a physical presence (Center for Research, Documentation and Publication, 2015: 2). Key players of such networks are the local imams who have been educated in the countries of origin of these organisations. Upon return, they have managed to establish a movement of loyal followers as well as utilise certain mosques for their radical teachings (Demjaha and Peci, 2016: 53).

Obviously, it is very difficult to measure the exact extent of radicalisation and the direct level of threat from violent extremism in Kosovo. In terms of adherence to Salafism in the Western Balkans, Qehaja talks about heavily concentrated, moderately concentrated, and less concentrated locations. He claims that in Kosovo one finds less concentrated locations, i.e. municipalities where there are no organised Salafi groups, but there is a significant number of individuals following the Salafi interpretation of Islam (Qehaja et al., 2016: 76). Still, other authors warn about a "contingent of radicalised individuals that has often provided ideological, logistical, or financial support to foreign fighters and at times has been responsible for plotting terrorist attacks." (Shtuni, 2019: 21-22) While the number of foreign fighters represents a small minority of Kosovan society, it also comprises just a fraction of "an extensive network of like-minded militants, supporters, and enablers who not only openly share the same ideology but are also actively engaged in its dissemination and recruitment efforts through physical and virtual social networks" (Shtuni, 2016: 2).

It should be mentioned though that radicalisation does not necessarily lead to violence and therefore it is necessary to distinguish between radicalisation that directly links to violent extremism and terrorism and radicalisation that aims at initiating societal changes through non-violent means (Bećirević et al., 2017: 13). In line with this, Salafis are recognised as rather heterogeneous, and divided into the "mainstream" Salafis who hold conservative non- and often anti-violent views on religious practice and the "rejectionist" Salafis who propagate violence. According to Kursani, the "rejectionist" Salafis have been embraced only by a very small group of individuals in Kosovo compared to the embrace for the "mainstream" Salafis (Kursani, 2018: 301-17). On the other hand, Salafism is not the only outside influence being imposed on the traditions of Kosovo Muslims. Authors note that the Muslim Brotherhood and a small minority of active, violent Jihadists also seek to recruit adherents (Wither, 2016). In addition, Shia influences that mainly target intellectual elites exist as well, but they are less visible and have not managed to develop a more ambitious propaganda of Shiism. In recent years, the Islamist government in Turkey has also attempted to influence Muslims in Kosovo as part of its neo-Ottoman policies of the former Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.[3]

Framing radicalisation and violent extremism

Scientific and academic state of the art

Recently, Kosovo has seen a significant number of research publications in the area of radicalisation and violent extremism produced by many local and international research institutes and organisations. The available literature on radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo has identified several explanatory factors for the phenomenon of radicalisation and foreign fighters in Kosovo. In doing so, authors employ different approaches and levels of analysis, ranging from "situational factors working at the macro level (i.e. country or community-wide), social/cultural at the meso level (i.e. affecting smaller communities or identity groups), and individual

---

[3] For a detailed explanation about the Turkish Islamic influence in Kosovo see Demjaha and Peci (2016).

factors at the micro level." Political factors at the macro level mainly refer to poor state presence and penetration in some areas as well as to the state fragility and instability. Different authors have indeed often mentioned dysfunction of the state apparatus accompanied with limited state penetration, poor governance practices and a lack of political accountability as well as high level of corruption together with low trust towards both local and central institutions as important factors driving radicalisation and violent extremism (Morina et al., 2019; Zaimi, 2017; Krasniqi, 2019; Hunsicker et al., 2015; Shtuni, 2016). At the meso level, economic factors include poor economic conditions, high levels of unemployment, inequality and poverty, while the social ones mainly relate to education and social exclusion. When it comes to the importance of the socio-economic conditions in driving radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo, opinions expressed by various authors differ greatly. Some research suggests that unemployment, poverty, a weak educational system and other socio-economic factors represent an important factor for radicalisation (Qirezi, 2017; Gjinovci, 2016). Selenica (2019) maintains that poorer socio-economic conditions represent an exacerbating factor rather than a driving one. Furthermore, she points out that unemployment and social (im)mobility represent an important driver of violent extremism since foreign fighters' unemployment rate is twice as high as the Kosovo average. On the other hand, other researchers dismiss altogether the importance of socio-economic factors as a driver towards radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo and point out other factors as relevant ones (Demjana, 2018; Demjaha and Peci, 2016; Shtuni, 2016).

On the other hand, cultural factors in the case of Kosovo mainly refer to the issue of Islamophobia and the urge to aid Muslims across the world (Kursani, 2019: 17). Several authors believe that Islamophobia can play a significant role as a motivational factor of religious radicalisation in Kosovo due to the struggle between a Western identity, that is secular, and an Oriental one, that is Muslim, identity. Many Muslims feel that their Muslim identity is being deliberately diminished in order to prove statute of Kosovo in the West and its belonging to Europe. Moreover, according to some researchers Western characteristics of stereotyping Islam further fuel Islamophobia in the country, erasing Kosovar Muslim identity (Speckhard and Shajkovci, 2017; Ferizaj, 2019). Similarly, some researchers point out that the urge to aid Muslims across the world has motivated many foreign fighters from Kosovo to join the wars in Syria and Iraq. This is often linked with the legacy of the Kosovo war during which the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervened to save Kosovo Albanians from the Serb paramilitaries. In turn, many Kosovars felt a duty and strong responsibility to assist their Sunni Muslim "brothers and sisters" against Assad's atrocities in Syria (Goshi and van Leuven, 2017; Hunsicker, 2015; Shtuni, 2016; Speckhard and Shajkovci, 2017).

Another motivational factor that has dominated the literature about radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo is linked to the proselytisation activities of different international charities. Most of the authors see the role of Gulf-backed foundations and organisations, especially from Saudi Arabia and Turkey, as crucial in introducing the Salafi/Wahhabi form of Islam in Kosovo. Researchers also claim that these charities have been actively involved in promoting radicalisation and recruitment of young Kosovars through a combination of private mediators, extremist imams and donations (Demjaha and Peci 2016; Shtuni 2019; Krasniqi 2019; Goshi and Van Leuven 2017; Shtuni 2016; Gall 2016). In addition to researchers, such views are predominantly shared by the representatives of various state institutions in Kosovo. However, some authors claim that "there is little (if any) evidence that the often-mentioned cases of Middle East funded religious based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) directly recruited people into violent extremist ideological groups, or exacerbated the phenomenon" (Kursani 2018a: 4).

At the micro level, the available literature has addressed aspects such as individuals' identity issues and close family/relative ties as drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. In an in-depth analysis employing both qualitative research and empirical data, the Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED) has explored the impact of religion on the ethnic identity of Kosovar Albanians during the state-building period. The analysis concludes that the ideological paradigm represents "the explanatory framework for significant social and identity shifts among Kosovo Albanians, namely from secular ethnic identity and religious cohabitation into a rapid ethnic religiosity and gradually increasing religious intolerance and extremism." (Demjaha and Peci, 2016: 82). Shtuni (2016:7), on the other hand, claims that various Islamic countries used religion as a foreign policy tool to aggressively promote religious identity and a conservative Islamic way of life in open tension with Kosovo's religious tradition and Western liberal democracy. Similarly, a study about security issues in the region claims that "individuals most vulnerable to violent extremism are those that are exposed or live in areas where identities are in flux, and where societal surroundings are more heterogeneous" (Stojanović-Gajić, 2018: 4). Likewise, some authors have warned about the importance of close family/relative ties as potential drivers towards radicalisation and violent extremism. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been first to point out that close bonds may have played a role in, at least, increasing the numbers of those who have joined conflicts in Syria and Iraq (Xharra and Gojani, 2017). Other studies have also presented certain evidence that families and social connections might play a role as a driver towards radicalisation and violent extremism. This has been especially true for the recruitment into violent extremism, with more than 70% of those who have joined the conflict in Syria and Iraq being ones who have very close family/relative connections. Still, it should be acknowledged that there have no comprehensive studies related to the issue of family/relative connections as potential drivers to radicalisation and violent extremism and this requires further research (Jakupi et al., 2018: 11; Krasniqi, 2019: 78; Kursani, 2018a: 32).

Prominent studies

KIPRED has as early as 2005 published one of the most important work on the subject of Saudi influence, which warned about the first signs of radicalisation amongst Muslim Albanians in rural Kosovo. The paper offered a detailed analysis of the situation in Kosovo and pointed out that various international faith-based organisations operating throughout the country under the guise of humanitarian aid attempted to spread radical forms of Islam. KIPRED cautioned that activities of these organisations linked to political forces that are not bound to local interests might soon create a Kosovar identity which will be hardly controlled by political forces based in Prishtina or the region. Moreover, the study rightly predicted that an eventual war somewhere in the "Islamic world" in 10 years from now would seriously challenge the loyalties of Muslim Albanians in Kosovo (Blumi, 2005). Unfortunately, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and other international organisations on the ground ignored or failed to notice the activities of such faith-based humanitarian organisations. The newly created Kosovo institutions and its political elite manifested similar negligence towards Islamic radicalisation as their international counterparts at the time the paper was written. It was only in 2012, when the foreign fighters' phenomenon made headlines in local and international media, that local and international research institutes and organisations started conducting and publishing research related to radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. The main points of these research publications will be summarised in the section below. Other prominent studies related to radicalisation and violent extremism worth noting are KIPRED's paper *What Happened to Kosovo Albanians: The Impact of Religion on the Ethnic Identity in the State-Building Period* authored by Agon Demjaha and Lulzim Peci, and the Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Koso¬vo's citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria

and Iraq of the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) authored by Kursani, which have substantially contributed to identifying key issues and providing a better understanding of the problem related to radicalisation and violent extremism.

Main research and knowledge producers

As noted above, recently a significant number of research publications in the area of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo has been produced by many local and international research institutes and organisations. Still, among them only few are academic publications, while most of the research is published in the form of non-empirical policy reports, research papers, opinion pieces, news articles and critical analyses. It should be mentioned that until 2016 first-hand research in Kosovo related to radicalisation and violent extremism was scarce, especially when it comes to studies within the radicalised communities. This was also true for research related to "how specific individual characteristics may play a role in the radicalisation process, what strategies are effective for radicalisation prevention efforts in the Western Balkans, and what roles different professionals can play in preventing radicalisation" (Bećirević et al., 2017: 26). Since 2016, progress has been made in addressing new topics related to radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo, though certain gaps remain, especially when it comes to literature that examines de-radicalisation efforts. This being said, it should be noted that the research conducted in Kosovo in this field after 2016 has occurred in completely different reality on the ground, since no foreign fighters from Kosovo have travelled to Syria and Iraq during this period. Consequently, the focus of the new literature has shifted mainly towards the issue of returnees and the associated threats, while continuing to be focused on the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism.

The information provided in section 1.2.2.1 clearly shows that the number of academic studies related to the issue of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo is rather limited. In addition to two journal papers (Kursani, 2018: 301-17; Shtuni, 2019), there are only two academic books (Elbasani and Olivie, 2015; Krasniqi, 2019), one paper in an edited publication (Selenica, 2019), and two Master thesis (Vlk, 2020; Kefalas, 2017) dealing with radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. Most of the available studies related to radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo are produced by non-govermental organizations (NGOs), both local and international. These studies are mainly published in the form of policy papers, policy reports and research papers. Since main findings of academic studies and those produced by NGOs were presented in detail in section 1.2.2.1, the rest of this section will focus primarily on governmental studies.

As already mentioned, in September 2015, the Office of the Prime-Minister of Kosovo also prepared a Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020 as well as an Action Plan for the implementation of that Strategy. The Strategy was created to be a comprehensive response to radicalisation in Kosovo by addressing the many push and pull factors that influence people to turn towards Islamist ideologies. The measures proposed in the strategy are divided into four target areas: Early identification; Prevention; Intervention; and De-radicalisation and reintegration. In the early identification area, the primary initiatives focus on raising awareness, capacity for prevention, and identification of at-risk individuals (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 18). More concretely, measure one has the objective of organising training programmes for local officials, educational staff, and local police to initially identify at-risk youth and how to approach them. In addition, this measure also includes civil society and national institutions to provide the training, with support being provided by international organisations to create the guidelines of necessary action. Measure two, on the other hand, emphasises the need to createa national team to collect

data on the radicalisation trends in the country in order to identify radicalisation "hot spots". Measure three foresees dissemination of the information acquired during the research phase to schools and religious, public and educational institutions to implement the necessary mechanisms. Finally, measure four aims to take the identification process to a regional level through regional and international cooperation, by including schools, security institutions, social services, national intelligence, and governments (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 19).

The Strategy has given special attention to the prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation by assigning 10 specific measures to this objective. The first five measures within this objective are in fact counter-communication measures that aim to develop a thorough counter-narrative and effective information campaign. In line with this, measure one aims to create an overall plan on communication, while measure two focuses primarily on training journalists and scholars with an overall aim to create a counter-narrative on media and in educational institutions (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 21). Similarly, measure three promotes the creation of a public information campaign through the development of an information brochure to be handed out in lectures and training sessions. The primary aim of measures four and five is to promote tolerance and critical thinking of individuals. As such, measure four targets the religious communities with the creation of lectures and religious preaching that counter the arguments of radical ideologies and dissuade acts of violence and promote tolerance and coexistence. Finally, measure five aims to establish a commission to analyse any religious content online with the objective of translating moderate sermons and religious content into Albanian to promote tolerance (Ibid). On the other hand, the remaining five measures within the prevention goal are focused on supporting resilience-building in Kosovo. Consequently, measure six intends to provide grants for businesses, youth centres and NGOs that would create inclusion programmes for youth through sports, community service and traineeships. Measure seven foresees the establishment of safe environments in schools as direct support for frontline workers in educational institutions dealing with prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism. Measure nine is directly concerned with violent extremist offenders, and aims to prevent the recruitment of other individuals in prison by enhancing security and surveillance of extremist prisoners. Finally, measure ten initially proposes an overall assessment of the existing legislation with the aim of preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. Afterwards, the Office of the Prime, Minister in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and experts from the field, are supposed to update or create new legislation to enable effective prevention initiatives (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 22).

In the objective of intervention for radicalised individuals, the Strategy proposes only three measures. First two measures foresee involvement and support to the radicalised individuals by family members and community networks. As such, measure one suggests the establishment of a rapid response team in local municipalities that would work directly with at-risk or radicalised individuals. To secure quick reaction to any signs of radicalisation, this measure insists on the inclusion of psychologists, religious leaders, police and social workers. On the other hand, measure two proposes the creation of a hotline through which family members, friends and peers could anonymously report suspected individuals or organisations that support or promote extremist ideologies (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 24). The final measure three suggests increased cooperation among youth organisations and educational institutions for the purpose of discussing the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Such cooperation should be enhanced through the organisation of workshops, seminars, lectures, conferences and other activities that include at-risk youth (Ibid).

The section on de-radicalisation and reintegration of radicalised individuals covers only a small section of the National Strategy, and has only two proposed measures. Measure one aims at providing counselling for extremist prisoners, as well as providing any necessary social support for their families. Among others, such support includes the participation of psychological professionals and religious leadership who are specialised in offering support and counselling in cases of radicalisation and extremism. On the other hand, measure two of the de-radicalisation and reintegration strategy intends to create new reintegration programmes to help these individuals. Among others, the measure suggests creation of employment programmes in cooperation with local businesses in order to give a sense of meaning and responsibility to the rehabilitated individuals (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 25).

The Government of Kosovo has also drafted the National Action Plan, which provides a detailed description of the activities divided by each of the objectives of the Strategy, and also specifies the institutions in charge of implementing the activity. The Action Plan was supposed to help in defining countermeasures and preventive actions for relevant government ministries and agencies based on their capacities and expertise by providing clear indicators of success. The Kosovo Security Council (KSC) was responsible for monitoring the implementation of the government's National Strategy and the respective Action Plan. A larger government working group, which includes relevant ministries and representatives of NGOs, religious communities and others who lead the actions indicated in the Action Plan is also involved in the implementation process (Office of the Prime Minister, 2018). Although KSC should regularly report to the Government of Kosovo about the outcomes of the implementation and monitoring process, so far it has produced only an annual report for 2018 and a six-month report for 2019.

Defining violent extremism and radicalisation
It should be mentioned that until recently, authors in Kosovo gave little attention to the terminology and therefore terms such as "radicalism" and "violent extremism" were often used interchangeably. Later, efforts were made to distinguish between "radicalisation", "extremism" and "violent extremism", while at the same time employing definitions for these terms. Selenica (2019:4) claims that definitions about the concepts of radicalisation and violent extremism are unclear and that there is hardly a consensus in Kosovo over their meaning and use. According to her, a prominent local imam has defined radicalisation as "everything against religious norms that causes violence," while for a local researcher, radicalisation was "the process that leads to extremism but not necessarily to violence". The Berghof Foundation's report defines the concept of extremism as "any ideology that opposes a society's core values and principles." While acknowledging that extremists do not necessarily engage in violence, the report defines violent extremism as the one that occurs "when extremist worldviews are accompanied by the justification and use of extreme violence against those who do not share the same belief or ideology" (Morina et al., 2019: 4).

On the other hand, the UNDP study has utilised definitions of these terms given by the Oxford Dictionary. Accordingly, extremism is defined as "the holding of extreme political or religious views [or] fanaticism," while violent extremism is defined as direct usage of violence or as "encouraging, condoning, justifying or supporting the commission of violent acts to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals" (Qirezi, 2017: 26). In his study, Krasniqi defines radicalisation and extremism exclusively through the prism of Islam. He defines "Islamic radicalism" as all forms of actions that are "manifested mainly through the discourse of the conservative doctrines of Islam's interpretation that exhibit a high degree of puritanism and religious

intolerance." Though it is not necessarily manifested through violence, Krasniqi claims that "Islamic radicalism is a dynamic process of embracing and manifesting extreme perceptions of a religious ideology, which may also affect the legitimacy of terrorist acts" (Krasniqi, 2019: 10). By the same token, Krasniqi defines the notion of "Islamic extremism" as "actions against constitutionalism characterised by the active opposition of any other religious doctrine or ideology" (Ibid).

Definition targets
As indicated by the section above, the definitions of radicalisation and violent extremism of most of the authors cover only Islamic religious communities. Few of them adopt more general definitions that, in addition to religious, also encompass political, ideological and social groups and individuals.

Ethnic or religious communities considered by violent extremism and radicalisation approaches
Almost all studies in Kosovo focus primarily on radicalisation and violent extremism stemming from the Salafism/Wahhabism, and thus primarily take into consideration Albanian Muslims. Other ethnic or religious groups linked with radicalisation and violent extremism are rarely considered. As already mentioned, other forms of extremism, such as domestic right-wing extremism, are seen as a secondary concern, not only by state institutions but by researchers as well. Moreover, although violent extremist threats in Kosovo are thought to be mainly politically motivated, there are no specific studies about such phenomenon. As a matter of fact, the Kosovo government has underlined the additional risk of violent extremism in North Kosovo among ethnic Serbian Kosovars. It has cautioned that these Serbian extremist groups might engage in "various acts of violence against [Kosovan citizens of Albanian ethnicity], institutions as well as local and international presence in [the north] of the country" (Goshi and Van Leuven, 2017: 22). Still, no concrete preventive actions have been taken by the government, nor have any specifically focused studies been conducted. The same is true about the emergence of foreign fighters in Ukraine, which despite being spotted from media reporting did not receive the attention of state institutions and researchers.

Methodologies employed to study violent extremism and radicalisation

As mentioned earlier, except for a few, most of the studies related to radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo are non-empirical ones. The majority of empirical studies are in fact mixed ones that combine desk research as well as quantitative and qualitative research methods to conduct research related to radicalisation and violent extremism (Kursani, 2015; Demjaha and Peci, 2016; Kelmendi, 2016; Goshi and van Leuden, 2017; Qirezi, 2017).

Strategies to Counter/Prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalization C/PVE

C/PVE INITIATIVES

Mapping of C/PVE actors

There is a number of relevant stakeholders working on countering and preventing violent extremism in Kosovo. The most important are public institutions such as state officials working in different ministries, departments, municipalities, education institutions, and justice-related institutions. More specifically, these include relevant institutions such as the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Council of National Security, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and Municipal Community Safety Councils. High-level officials and directors of education and social welfare in certain municipalities where the number of foreign fighters was much higher than in others are also considered as important stakeholders. In addition to state institutions, other relevant stakeholders include representatives of civil society and local experts in Kosovo as well international donor organisations that have actually funded the bulk of the research and projects related to this topic. Last but not least, the BIK plays an important multifaceted role in different aspects linked to violent extremism.

Public policies and programs

Almost all key Kosovo institutions are involved in prevention and countering of violent extremism and radicalisation.[4]

The Assembly of Kosovo (AoK) as a directly elected institution in Kosovo has a role to review and adopt draft legislation initiated by the government. In addition, the Assembly has an important responsibility for overseeing the implementation of legislation as well as for the strategic documents produced by the executive. The Assembly has to certain extent been proactive regarding countering violent extremism through the adoption of relevant laws, but it was rather passive with respect to overseeing the implementation of the Strategy. The Oversight Committee on Internal Affairs, Security and Supervision of the Kosovo Security Force and the Oversight Committee on the Supervision of the Kosovo Intelligence Agency have proved to be highly inactive when it comes to monitoring the activities of the Kosovo Government in the field.

The Kosovo Security Council (KSC) is a consultative body that brings together the main security-related representatives of Kosovo. It is responsible for the coordination of the implementation of the National Strategy on the prevention of violent extremism in Kosovo. The Secretariat of the KSC is in charge of harmonising all activities of state institutions regarding the prevention of violent extremism.

Having in mind the need for a holistic approach to CVE, there is a broader spectrum of involvement from different ministries and agencies of the Kosovo Government, including municipalities. Nevertheless, the Strategy clearly defines that not all ministries have an equal role in implementing the legislation and other strategic policies in this area.

---

[4] For a detailed information on mapping of different C/PVE actors in Kosovo see Qehaja et al. (2017).

The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) has a primary role when it comes to implementation of all state policies in Kosovo, and thus represents the leading mechanism in the process of drafting a National Strategy. It is responsible for supervising the progress made, in close cooperation with KSC, while at the same time serving as a focal point in discussions with international actors.

The role of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is primarily viewed from the perspective of the role of the Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS), which falls under the responsibility of MoJ. Moreover, the justice system in Kosovo through the KCS aims to rehabilitate and reintegrate all individuals who commit crimes, including those related to violent extremism. In addition, the Ministry has primary responsibility for implementation of re-integration and de-radicalisation programmes, particularly within the KCS. KCS, on the other hand, represents the third most important link in the judicial system, which is to reintegrate individuals who committed crimes or have been sentenced following a ruling by the courts. Prisons may often serve as a place for the radicalisation of inmates. This set the need for significant investment in the KCS reintegration programmes that focus on vulnerable and radicalised individuals. The International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) funded by the US State Department has been engaged with de-radicalisation programmes within the correctional system in Kosovo by doing risk assessment of prisoners that are subject to violent extremism.

Since unemployment and a lack of institutional care have very often been pointed out as factors bringing young Kosovans closer to violent extremism, it is clear that the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) plays a crucial role in the prevention of CVE. Similarly, because quality education is a key component in preventing violent extremism, the role of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) is very important. However, although MEST is responsible for the implementation of 40% of the activities of the Strategy, there is no budget line or financial means to ensure implementation of its activities. With an average of 75% of Kosovo's population being under 30, it is clear that the role of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS) is considered crucial in prevention efforts. Since youth is the group most at risk of violent extremism and radicalisation, its high level of unemployment and very limited cultural and sports facilities are considered to be very important for preventing youth from violent extremism and radicalisation.

The Kosovo Police (KP) is the only institution with the legal responsibility to provide safety and security for all citizens of Kosovo and to ensure the rule of law in the entire territory of Kosovo. As the only institution in Kosovo with solid capacity to deal with issues related to terrorism, KP is the most active and most successful institution in the field. It has been very active in investigating and arresting many citizens who have participated in foreign conflicts in Syria and Iraq as well as others who have recruited for, financed and supported the ideologies of the extremist organisations in Kosovo. The Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA), on the other hand, plays a crucial role in collecting and disseminating information to the Government of Kosovo and security institutions. Although the agency does not have any executive responsibility, the prioritisation of CVE has made KIA focus its capacities on collecting information that identifies any activity that might be detrimental to the national security of Kosovo.

The Municipalities of Kosovo should play an important role in preventing violent extremism according to the National Strategy on CVE, especially since out of 40 municipalities in the country some have been seriously affected by extremist ideology. Furthermore, all municipalities count on a Municipal Community Safety Council led by the respective mayors and where representatives of municipal assembly and government, security institutions, ethnic community, religious and civil society, media and business representatives participate

(Ministry of Local Government Administration, 2014). In this direction, municipalities should increase cooperation with BIK and the central government regarding CVE. They also play an important role in improving the education system at the local level, increasing social welfare for families affected by violent extremism and foreign fighters and increasing sports facilities for young citizens at the local level. While, in general, municipalities lack funds and human resources to address the challenges of CVE, it is encouraging that they have all expressed their willingness to cooperate with any NGO or organisation willing to contribute in the field of CVE.

Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation
The Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020 of the Kosovo Government defines "Violent Extremism" as "extremism which involves the use of violence; including but not limited to terrorism" and "Radicalisation" as the "process of approving extremist religious beliefs and in some cases converting into a violent extremist" (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 8).

Civil society

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Kosovo undoubtedly represent one of the most important stakeholders in awareness-raising, de-radicalisation and prevention of violent extremism. Currently, there are only two organisations in Kosovo that are continuously involved in C/PVE projects: Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED) and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

KIPRED was established in February 2002 as the first think tank in post-war Kosovo. Its work is based on principle values such as the rule of democratic principles; full impartiality; cooperation with public institutions and citizens' groups to promote democracy; and cooperation with institutions of a similar nature, whether local, regional and international. In the field of radicalisation and violent extremism, KIPRED combines the knowledge of the territory with a solid experience in the field of research with a particular approach to development and violent extremism. It has produced several policy reports related to the topic, including the first one ever in Kosovo *Political Islam among the Albanians: Are the Taliban coming to the Balkans* in 2005.

KCSS is an NGO and think tank in Kosovo that has contributed to awareness-raising and prevention of violent extremism. It has established a specific programme to conduct research, work on awareness-raising and advocate in the field. KCSS has been intensively engaged in organising various workshops, roundtables and discussions with the majority of local and central stakeholders in Kosovo.

In addition, there are some other NGOs with limited involvement in the field such as: Partners Kosova, ATRC, BIRN, Youth Council in Kosovo Municipalities and a few small NGOs from Gjakova, Center for Research of Security Policies, D+, Koha Vision, Foltash and Balkan Research Group.

Religious communities

The Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK) is the main institution representing the Muslim community and the sole organisation responsible for the religious life of the Muslim population in Kosovo. Although BIK has over 600 mosques under its control and over 600 imams under its supervision across the entire territory of Kosovo, due to the lack of a Law on Religious Freedom BIK is registered only as an NGO and its mandate is not

regulated by Kosovan law. Without a regulated legal status and no bank account of its own, BIK's annual estimated budget of several million euros has gone through personal pockets or personal bank accounts of few individuals within the community, thus making both its budget as well as its activities vulnerable to manipulation and abuse. Such lack of financial transparency and accountability has resulted in some imams receiving uncontrolled funds from the Gulf States to build their own mosques (Kursani, 2015: 98). These practices have clearly enabled Wahhabi organisations to penetrate into BIK's ranks and radicalise it from inside. The fact that some of the more radical imams within BIK were arrested for inciting hatred and recruiting for terrorism indicates that at least some individuals in BIK have been engaged in spreading radical Islam in the country (Demjaha and Peci, 2016). All in all, BIK has at least initially not been optimally proactive in dealing with the issue of C/PVE. Recently, it has started to be more proactive in condemning and warning about hate speech delivered in some mosques or by some high-profile imams. The involvement of BIK in all activities aiming to prevent extremism and de-radicalise individuals is essential.

Methodologies

Stakeholders involved

The Kosovo Security Council (KSC) is the body responsible for monitoring implementation of the government's National Strategy and the respective Action Plan. The Council is comprised from a five-person working group (technical) and a larger government working group that is involved in the implementation process. The larger working group includes relevant institutions such as the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Labour and Social Welfare, Education and Science and Foreign Affairs, security and intelligence institutions, as well as representatives of NGOs, religious communities and others who lead the actions indicated in the Action Plan (Perry, 2016: 36). BIK was charged with many responsibilities to combat radicalisation that included giving lectures at mosques and community centres, as well as creating a counter-narrative for those who are at risk of becoming radicalised (Kefalas, 2017: 13-14).

KSC has organised meetings with local mayors to present the National Strategy and to inform them about the role of municipalities in implementing the strategy. It has produced a yearly report on the implementation of the state strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation in Kosovo. In November 2016, KSC organised a workshop in Peja by bringing together all relevant state and non-governmental stakeholders. The aim was to review the Action Plan of the Strategy and to discuss the next steps with respect to further coordination of the relevant stakeholders and implementation of the Strategy (Qehaja et al. 2017: 7).

Kosovo is an environment where a wide spectrum of institutions and organisations are involved in developing and acting on methodologies to combat radicalisation and violent extremism. Law enforcement institutions play key roles in combating radicalisation and the spawn of violent extremism. The Kosovo Intelligence Agency and the Kosovo Police play main roles in accessing critical information by identifying and evaluating potential individuals and groups seeking to either join or recruit others into their radical belief ecosystems. Government institutions covering social, economic and educational functions play important roles in employing strategies of prevention, intervention and reintegration. The "international community" consisting of international governmental and non-governmental organisations mainly provides capacity-building and assumes advisory roles although it is important to mention that they contribute the absolute majority of funding to local NGOs combating radicalisation and violent extremism. These governmental institutions have established working relationships with local NGOs of which for example, KIPRED, KCSS and the Advocacy Training and Resource

Center (ATRC) involving them in the working group of the Strategy and Action Plan on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation leading to Terrorism (2015-2020). Provided that local NGOs can add value and contribute knowledge and data to combating these phenomena, they are seen as important stakeholders. It is important to acknowledge that the involvement of BIK in all activities aiming to prevent extremism and de-radicalise individuals is essential. However, significantly only moderate imams are involved in such a process. KIPRED's study concluded that the main factor contributing to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism in two municipalities under consideration was the rejection by local BIK officials and imams of organisations and individuals who have insisted on preaching radical forms of Islam. They collaborated early on with municipal authorities and also engaged actively on the ground in order to develop close ties with the population to understand their problems and needs. Moreover, despite objections and disapproval by the central BIK, and even serious tensions, local BIK officials have rejected the appointment of any imam for whom there was evidence that they were involved in preaching radical forms of Islam (Demjaha, 2018).

Targeted populations

Young people, particularly men aged 15-29, pose the highest risk for extremism and violence as they usually comprise individuals who seek other pathways in life due to structural failures in education and economic development in tandem with a lack of institutional capacities and integrity. Ideological motives tend to be the primary driver, while not excluding the socio-cultural environment, identity seeking, financial motive and/or the desire for adventurous endeavours. Online radicalism is considered a target environment that has played a crucial role in spreading radical religious views, mainly via Facebook, where tools of propaganda and recruitment are used to lure individuals in social networks with radical and extremist dispositions. The National Strategy fails to uncover the extent to which this tool is used to recruit but intelligence and law enforcement agencies in Kosovo have acknowledged that the cyber environment is fruitful for recruiters since they are usually being approached by individuals who follow their content instead of trying to actively recruit individuals. On the other hand, "radical leaders" are also a target group and are usually imams who through radical preaching play an encouraging role in planting religious extremist ideology in their follower base. Increasingly, these imams have been using social networking platforms to widen their follower base instead of being limited to a certain number of individuals who participate in their religious congregations.

Enforcement mechanisms for the C/PVE initiatives?

Enforcement mechanisms exist in the legal and policy framework of the Republic of Kosovo. Terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism are covered in the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo which addresses the aspects related to recruitment, financing, assisting and promotion. In 2015, the Republic of Kosovo adopted the Law on Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflicts outside State Territory, which serves as an annex to the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedural Code. The law covers in detail elements of organising, recruiting, leading and training of individuals or groups with the aim of joining or participating in a foreign army or police, paramilitary formations or sort of organised groups operating in armed conflicts outside the territory of Kosovo.

The Policy framework was initially governed by the Counter-Terrorism Strategy of Kosovo adopted in 2009; however, due to the necessity to address imminent threats the strategy was renewed for the period 2012-2017 without significant change. The need to adopt a broader strategy led to the drafting of the Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism (2015-2020) concluded in

September 2015. Additional frameworks that have aided the implementation of government actions in C/PVE initiatives include the National Strategy for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons in Kosovo 2014-2016, National Strategy and Action Plan for Community Safety 2011-2016, National Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo for the Prevention and Combating the Informal Economy, Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes 2014-2018, and the Action Plan. Public policies governing education, youth empowerment and diaspora have also been part of mechanisms that have steered preventive initiatives.

A junction of legal and policy frameworks enabled a bottom-up approach when the first P/CVE Referral Mechanism was established in the municipality of Gjilan in 2016. This mechanism was part of a municipally-led effort to prevent young people from travelling to conflict zones. Administered by the mayor's office, members included representatives of local institutions, including police, education, social work centres, hospitals and members of the religious community. By May 2018, it was reported that the Referral Mechanism had successfully dealt with seven cases, of which five individuals reported were identified and prevented to leave the country whereas two cases proved unsuccessful and they were referred to the prosecution. Due to the perceived success of the referral mechanism, many stakeholders have proposed or supported the idea of establishing the Referral Mechanism in each municipality, but no concrete steps have been undertaken by relevant government bodies.

Available resources

Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Strategy aims to cover four strategic objectives with EUR 2,801,600 for the 2017-2020 timeframe. The budget is designed to be allocated by relevant governmental institutions and in a few cases, by international donors, including international NGOs present in Kosovo (Office of the Prime Minister, 2018). Due to the individual budgeting policies of each institution involved in the Action Plan, there have been reported cases in 2019 that reported a lack of budget line allocated towards the implementing of the Strategy, although the institution has not been identified. In addition, there are various donors located in Kosovo or abroad who have supported Kosovo's civil society efforts in the area of C/PVE and de-radicalisation. The main donors include the US Embassy in Kosovo, the European Union (EU) Office in Kosovo, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission in Kosovo, UNDP, the UK Embassy in Kosovo and the British Council, as well as many other donors with smaller contributions. The exact budgets of each of these donor organisations to support C/PVE and de-radicalisation activities are not known.

Main objectives of the strategies and initiatives implemented

The National Strategy objectives are designed to employ the entire spectrum of tools to combat the phenomenon of radicalisation and extremism, thus being a strategy geared towards detection, countering and prevention. The National Strategy has four strategic objectives that cover early identification activities, establishing prevention mechanisms, intervention and ultimately de-radicalisation and reintegration of radicalised individuals.

Early identification primarily focuses on individuals or groups deemed as potentially exploitable by other groups or individuals that have radical or extremist views.

Prevention mechanisms mainly feature capacity-building activities for stakeholders (government, educational sector, law enforcement, local businesses, civil society, and religious communities). According to the National

Strategy, to organize effective campaigns towards prevention it is crucial to have a productive cooperation with religious communities and to develop a strategic plan of communication for use in media, social media, public lectures and other public events. Provisions on trainings for journalists and scholars covering violent extremism are also an important activity of prevention.

Intervention is aimed to address greater cooperation among law enforcement, local communities and other institutions to properly establish a community-based response as a mechanism for intervention on individuals exposing signs of violent extremism. These measures include building trust among community members, social employees and law enforcement officials, consequently creating partnerships with local communities.

The fourth strategic objectives refers to *de-radicalisation and reintegration* of radicalised persons. Specific measures among others include provision of help for radicalised individuals, assessment of the risk posed from individuals who returned from foreign conflicts, and awareness-raising within the correctional system.

Existence of critical evaluation systems
Impact of CVE-PVE on the threat of radicalisation
The Kosovo Security Council does not employ an advanced critical evaluation system to measure the impact of the strategies employed and whether they have proved to weaken the threat of radicalisation. On a macro level, it is important to note that no individuals have joined foreign terrorist organisations in Syria or Iraq since 2016, although this may be a result of the engagements of the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in MENA countries. The evaluation of the threat of radicalisation prior, during and after the implementation of the National Strategy or the supporting work by international governmental organisations or local non-governmental organisations is not part of any official evaluation system.

The Secretariat of the Kosovo Security Council produced an annual report for 2018 and a six-month report for 2019 on the monitoring of the implementation of the National Strategy. Referring to the Action Plan 2017-2020, these reports only identify challenges met during the implementation of activities and the rate to which planned activities have been completed or are ongoing. The *Annual Report 2018* shows the level of implementation of the planned activities for the four strategic objectives. Strategic objective 1 (Early Identification) has had a 91% implementation rate; Strategic objective 2 (Prevention) has had 70% implementation rate; Strategic objective 3 (Intervention) has had a 73% implementation rate and, lastly, Strategic objective 4 (De-radicalisation and reintegration of radicalised persons) has only had a rate of 36% implementation (Kosovo Security Council, 2018). The report covering January to June 2019 shows that 91% of the activities have been reported as in progress or completed whereas 9% have not begun implementation (Kosovo Security Council, 2019). The *Annual Report 2019* was due to be shared as a document with relevant stakeholders in early 2020 but changes in government leadership may have contributed to such reporting being delayed.

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES ADDRESSED TO WOMEN AND YOUTH
Although it was acknowledged that women in Kosovo were also being radicalised, their position and role has not been sufficiently addressed either by concrete projects or in the available literature. The few available studies try to explore how women participate in extremist movements or what motivates them. The report by Jakupi and Kelmendi has found very diverse pathways taken by extremist and potentially extremist Kosovo

women. Some were married women who have joined the conflict voluntarily, but there are also cases of women who were forced into joining the conflict in Syria and Iraq as a direct consequence of their dependency on their families and husbands (Jakupi and Kelmendi, 2017). Xharra, on the other hand, suggests that many women in Kosovo were radicalised prior to going to conflict zones, while some of them used to run women's camp for ISIS in Syria and were also engaged in online recruitment of ethnic Albanian females (Xharra (2016). The report by Speckhard and Shajkovci revealed "instances of women willing to defy cultural norms and embrace the adventurous path to extremism and violence, including spiritual and materialistic rewards promised in Syria and Iraq". Still, many questions about why women agree to travel to war zones with small children, and whether they are coerced into doing so are not yet fully answered. Also, the role of women as recruiters and perpetrators has also been almost entirely ignored or significantly downplayed (Bećirević, 2017: 28). In terms of concrete activities specifically addressing women in Kosovo, there is evidence only for certain activities related to rehabilitation and reintegration of women who have returned from conflict zones. The Government rehabilitation and reintegration programme for women and their children includes home visits, individual and family sessions, outdoor activities and a process of reintegration into society through school and training courses (Perteshi and Ilazi, 2020; Manisera, 2019).

There is an overall agreement that youth represents the main community at risk of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. On the one hand, most of the foreign fighters who had travelled to Syria and Iraq were 20-30 years old, while on the other, youth evidently is especially vulnerable to radicalisation, both online and through direct contacts.[5] This being said, it is clear that almost all C/PVE activities undertaken address youth as the main target group. The Action Plan for implementation of the National Strategy has foreseen a set of activities specifically for young people within prevention and intervention measures. To prevent radicalisation and violent extremism, training and information sessions for young people are planned in order to develop critical thinking among youth. Also, the Action Plan foresees capacity-building of youth centres and youth organisations for inclusion of young people with extremist learnings in civic education programmes and projects. As part of intervention measures for the purpose of preventing of risk from violent extremism, the Action Plan anticipates support for young people to design campaigns against violent extremism through educational programmes, debates and other activities. Unfortunately, there are no data whether any of these measures has been implemented.

---

[5] For instance, those who consume the most violent extremism online content are individuals between 18 and 34 years old. (Vlk, 2020: 109).

Conclusion

Initially, concerns on the risks posed by violent extremism and radicalism in Kosovo were raised almost 15 years ago by a local think tank. Nevertheless, these concerns were neglected during the tenure of UNMIK (1999-2008) and the Kosovo Government until 2014, when it became visible that the country has one of the highest numbers of foreign terrorist fighters per capita in Europe participating in the Middle East conflict zone.

Against this backdrop, since 2014 plenty of the policy-oriented literature has been produced mainly by local academics and professionals, and the state structures got mobilised to deal with the violent extremism and radicalisation. However, no research with a strict academic methodology that would explore micro, meso and macro factors of violent extremism and radicalism in depth has been conducted until now in Kosovo.

It must be noted that there are significant historical differences among Muslims living in various countries of the Western Balkans, especially in terms of numerous languages and ethnicities as well as levels of secularisation during communist times. Moreover, any serious analysis should take into consideration that Muslims in the Western Balkans are culturally and historically different from Muslims who have migrated to Western Europe from different countries around the world. Therefore, the planned comparative analyses of these factors with the countries of the region and the Near Middle East would provide a deeper understanding of these factors from a broader perspective. The inter-linkage of these two research components by the CONNEKT will provide original research outputs and much deeper understanding of violent extremism and radicalism in Kosovo.

Bibliography

ACADEMIC WORKS

Deliso, Ch. (2007) *The Coming Balkan Caliphate: The Threat of Radical Islam to Europe and the West. Westport* and London: Praeger Security International.

Elbasani, A. and Olivie, R., eds. (2015) *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Kefalas, M. (2017) *Combating Islamic Radicalization that Leads to Violent Extremism in Albania and Kosovo.* Master Thesis, Leiden University, Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs.

Krasniqi, K. (2019) *Islamist Extremism in Kosovo and the Countries of the Region.* Cham: Springer.

Kursani S. (2018) Salafi Pluralism in National Contexts: The Secular State, Nation and Militant Islamism in Kosovo, Albania, and Macedonia. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies,* 18(2), 3 April, pp. 301-17.

Selenica, E. (2019) Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization in Kosovo: International, State and Societal Responses and their Consequences. In: I. Armakolas et al., eds. *Local and international determinants of Kosovo's statehood.* Prishtina: Kosovo Foundation for Open Society.

Shtuni, A. (2019) Western Balkans Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Jihadis: Trends and Implications. *CTC Sentinel,* 12(7).

Vlk, J. (2020) *Motivating Factors for Radicalization in Balkan Muslim-majority Countries.* Master Thesis., Institute of Political Studies, Charles University.

REPORTS

Ferizaj, Adem (2019) "Islamophobia in Kosovo: National Report 2018," in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, European Islamophobia Report 2018, Istanbul, SETA, 2019, pp. 497-520.

Goshi, A. and van Leuven, D. (2017) *Kosovo-wide Assessment of Perceptions of Radicalization at the Community Level.* Prishtina: UNDP and Government of Kosovo.

Kelmendi, V. (2016) *The Citizens' Views against Violent Extremism and Radicalization in Kosovo, Special Edition, Kosovo Security Barometer.* Prishtina: Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

Kursani S. (2017) *Kosovo Risk Assessment Report since Independence: February 2008 − June 2017.* Report. Prishtina, Kosovo: Kosovar Center for Security Studies.

Kursani S. (2018a) *Extremism Research Forum: Kosovo Report.* BPritish Council.

Kursani, S. (2015) *Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.* Prishtina: Kosovar Center for Security Studies.

Morina et al. (2019) *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism: Lessons learned from the Western Balkans,* Research Report. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.

Perry, V. (2016) *Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe: A Survey of Regional Issues, Initiatives and Opportunities.* Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council.

Perteshi, S. (2018) *Beyond the Triggers: New Threats of Violent Extremism in Kosovo.* Prishtina: Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

Perteshi, S. and Ilazi, R. (2020) *Unpacking Kosovo's response to returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq.* Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

Shtuni, A. (2016) *Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo.* Special Report 397. United States Institute of Peace.

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

Xharra B. and Gojani N. (2017) *Understanding Push and Pull Factors in Kosovo: Primary Interviews with Returned Foreign Fighters and Their Families.* Independent Commissioned Report. Prishtina, Kosovo: United Nations Development Programme.

CASE-STUDY REPORTS

Demjaha, A. (2018) *Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Lessons from the Positive Cases of Podujevo and Suhareka Municipalities.* Policy Report. Prishtina: Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development.

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

Jakupi, R. and Kelmendi, R. (2017) *Women and Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned from Kosovo.* Prishtina: Kosovar Center for Security Studies.

Qehaja, F. (2016) Beyond Gornje Maoce and Ošve: Radicalization in the Western Balkans. In: A. Varvelli, ed. *Jihadist Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalization Processes.* Milan: Italian Institute for International Political Studies.

POLICY PAPERS

Bećirević et al. (2017) *Literature Review: Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans.* Policy Report, Extremism Research Forum. London: British Council.

Blumi, I. (2005) *Political Islam among the Albanians: Are the Talibans coming to the Balkans?.* Policy

Research Series, Paper No. 2. Prishtina: Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2005.

Demjaha, A. and Peci, L. (2016) *What Happened to Kosovo Albanians: The Impact of Religion on the Ethnic Identity in the State-Building Period.* Policy Paper No. 1/16. Prishtina: Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development.

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

Qehaja, F. et al. (2017) *Mapping the State of Play of Institutional and Community Involvement in Countering Violent Extremism in Kosovo.* Kosovo Centre for Security Studies.

Stojanović-Gajić, S. (2019) *Security Issues in the Western Balkans.* Civil Society Forum Series, Western Balkans Summit.

WEBSITES

Assembly of Kosovo - http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/

Islamic Community of Kosovo - https://bislame.net/

Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) - http://www.qkss.org/en/Home

Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development - http://www.kipred.org/

Kosovo Intelligence Agency - https://www.aki-rks.org/

Kosovo Police - https://www.kosovopolice.com/

Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports - https://www.mkrs-ks.org/

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology - https://masht.rks-gov.net/

Ministry of Internal Affairs - https://mpb.rks-gov.net/

Ministry of Justice - https://md.rks-gov.net/

Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare - https://mpms.rks-gov.net/

Municipalities Websites of the Republic of Kosovo - https://kk.rks-gov.net/

Office of the Prime-Minister of Kosovo - https://kryeministri-ks.net/en/

The Kosovo Correctional Services - https://shkk.rks-gov.net/

United Nations Development Programme - https://www.undp.org

United Nations Mission in Kosovo - https://unmik.unmissions.org/

OTHER

Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo (2008) *The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo.* Prishtina, 15 June.

Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo (2015) *Law on Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory.* Prishtina, 15 March.

Beslin, J. and Ignjatijevic M. (2017) *Balkan Foreign Fighters: From Syria to Ukraine.* Studies Brief, 16 June. Paris: European Union Institute for Security. Available at: https://www.iss.europa.eu/ content/balkan-foreign-fighters-syriaukraine.

Center for Research, Documentation and Publication (2015) *Public Security in Kosovo: Religious Radicalization of Citizens,* March. Prishtina: CRDP.

Collaku, P. (2011) Kosovo Census to Start Without the North. *Balkan Insight,* 29 March. Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2011/03/29/kosovo-census-starts-without-northern-kosovo/

Gall, C. (2016) How Kosovo Was Turned into Fertile Ground for ISIL. *The New York Times,* 21 May. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/world/europe/how-the-saudis-turned-kosovo-into-fertile-ground-for-isis.html

Gjinovci, R. (2016) Kosovo's education system amongst worst in the world. *Prishtina Insight,* 6 December. Available at: https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovos-education-system-amongst-worst-world/

Hunsicker, D. et al. (2015) *Kosovo Violent Extremism Risk Assessment April-May 2015.* United States Agency for International Development, May.

Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2013) *Kosovo Population and Housing Census 2011: Final Results.* Prishtina: Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 6 March. Available at: http://esk.rks-gov.net/rekos2011/?cid=2,40.

Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2019) *Estimation of Kosovo Population 2018.* Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Prishtina: 6 March. Available at: https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/5022/estimation-population-2018.pdf

Kosovo Security Council (2018) *Annual Report (January 2018 – December 2018)* on Implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan for Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020. Prishtina: Office of the Secretariat, December.

Kosovo Security Council (2019) *Six Months Report (January 2019 – June 2019)* on Implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan for Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020. Prishtina: Office of the Secretariat, July.

Manisera, S. (2019) After ISIS: how Kosovo is rehabilitating women and children repatriated from Syria. *The National,* 25 July. Available at: https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/after-isis-howkosovo-is-rehabilitating-women-and-children-repatriated-from-syria-1.890533

Ministry of Local Government Administration (2014). *Manual: Municipal Community and Safety Councils.* Prishtina.

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

Office of the Prime Minister (2018) Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy on *Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020.* Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo, September.

Qirezi, A. (2017) *Public pulse analysis on prevention of violent extremism in Kosovo.* Prish: UNDP Kosovo, June.

Stelmakh, A. and Kholodov, P. (2017). How Russia recruits Serbian mercenaries into the ranks of its fighters in Donbas. *Euromaidanpress,* 30 October. Available at: http://euromaidanpress.com/2017/10/30/how-russia-recruits-serbian-mercenaries-into-the-ranks-of-its-fighters-in-donbas/

Velebit, V. (2017) Serb fighters in Ukraine continue to worry the West. *European Western Balkans,* 29 December. Available at: https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/ 2017/12/29/serb-fightersukraine-continue-worry-west/

Wither, J. K. (2016). Salafi-Jihadists: A Threat to the Western Balkans. In: F. Ejud and P. Jurekovi , eds. *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans: Papers presented at the PfPC workshop held in Belgrade.* Vienna: National Defence Academy, 2016.

Xharra, A. (2016) Few but Fanatical the Kosovo Women who go Over to ISIS. *Balkan Insight,* 26 January. Available at: http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/few-butfanatical-the-kosovo-women-who-go-over-to-isis-01-22-2016

Zaimi, G. (2017) *Religious Radicalization and Violent Islamist Extremism in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo.* Selected Papers: Terrorism Experts Conference. Ankara: Centre of Excellence: Defence Against Terrorism, February.

CONNEKT

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.