

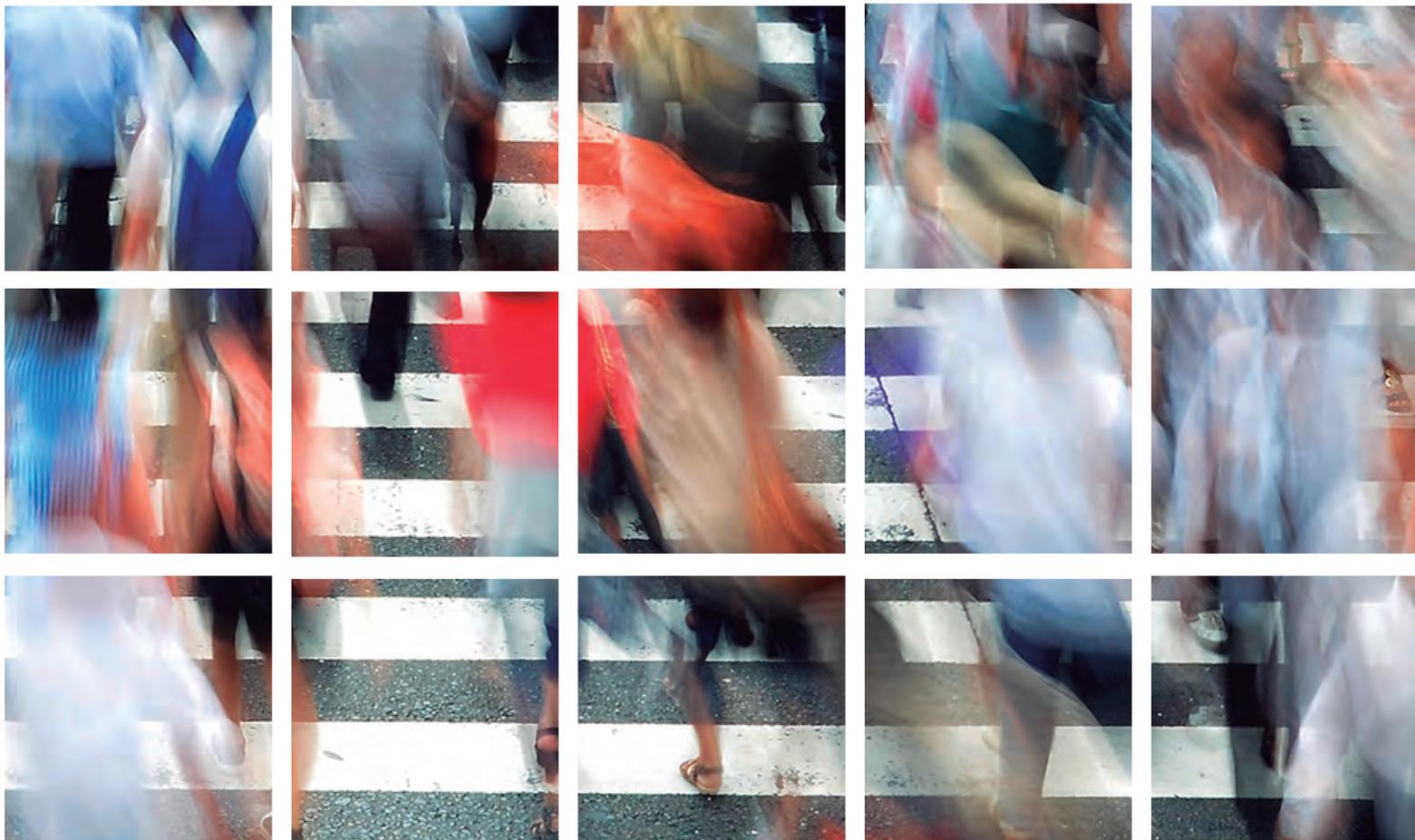


CONNEKT

REGIONALREPORT

Perspectives on radicalisation and violent extremism
in MENA, the Balkans and the European Union

Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne (Eds.)



The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, under Grant Agreement no. 870772



Consortium Members



CONNEKT REGIONAL REPORT

Published by the European Institute of the Mediterranean

D3.3

PERSPECTIVES ON RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN MENA, THE BALKANS AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

This publication is part of the WP3 of the project, lead by the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

Editors: Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne

Reviewers: Lurdes Vidal and Jordi Moreras

Editorial team: Mariona Rico and Elvira García

Layout: Núria Esparza

April 2021

This publication reflects only the views of the author(s); the European Commission and Research Executive Agency are not responsible for any information it contains. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed).



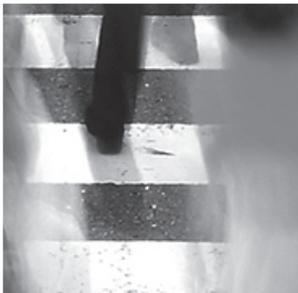
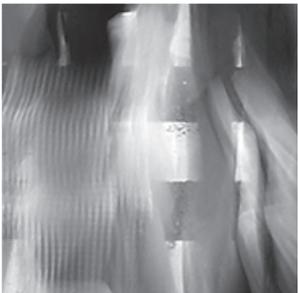
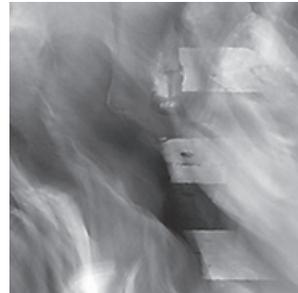
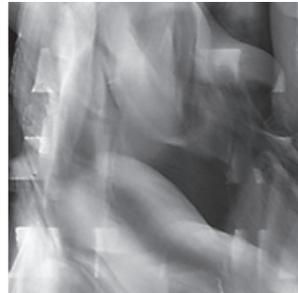
CONTENTS

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN MENA, Eya Jrad, Tasnim Chirchi	3
Introduction	4
Overview of Countries Studied	5
Comparative Findings	7
P/cve Institutions and Strategic Frameworks	14
Concluding Remarks and Ways Forward	28
References	31
Acronyms	38
REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE BALKANS, Lulzim Peci, Agon Demjaha	39
Regional Outlook	40
Definitions of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism	45
Presence of Radicalised and Violent Extremist Groups in the Balkans	48
Public Policies on Prevention and Countering	
Violent Extremism (P/CVE)	54
EU Policies Towards P/CVE in the Balkans	61
Bibliography	65
COMPARED PERSPECTIVES ON RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN MENA, THE BALKANS AND THE EUROPEAN UNION, Florian Bieber, Lura Pollozhani	71
Introduction	72
Structural Similarities and Differences in the MENA	
Region and the Balkans	74
Different and Similar Patterns of Radicalisation and VE	79
State and Civil Society Responses	84
Conclusion and Questions Emerging from the Comparison	87
Bibliography	89
Annex 1	92

Regional perspectives
on radicalisation
and violent extremism
in MENA

Dr. Eya Jrad, Member of the scientific
advisory committee of the CONNEKT
project at JFRC

Tasnim Chirchi, Director, Jasmine
Foundation for Research
and Communication





INTRODUCTION*

Despite the number of studies and initiatives carried out in the P/CVE field by researchers, specialists, civil society organisations (CSO), research institutes and security services, understanding the phenomena of radicalisation and violent extremism (VE) and their drivers remains a very complex endeavour. This report is an attempt to better understand the phenomena of radicalisation and violent extremism through a comparative perspective. It examines the current state of play of CT, P/CVE research and responses in four countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and formulates a list of policy recommendations for the design of more effective policies and responses.

RESEARCH SCOPE

This report covers four selected countries from the MENA region, namely Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. It was compiled based on four national country reports prepared by partners of the CONNEKT Project (CONtexts of extremism iN mEna and balKan socieTies), which is funded by the European Union (EU). This regional report compiles and compares these four country reports (CR) based on desk research.

4

While the origins of radicalisation and VE can be traced back over a long period, the current report focuses on the latest regional developments during the period following the 2011 Arab uprisings to the time of writing (September 2020). The report analyses key trends and developments in VE in the region before advancing to an examination of the national and regional policies and institutional frameworks put in place to prevent and counter radicalisation and VE. The report concludes with recommendations aimed at achieving more effective responses to these phenomena.

* Our sincere thanks go to the other members of the committee for reviewing the report :
Dr Hamza Meddeb, Assistant Professor at SMU and Non-Resident Scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Center; Jihed Haj Salem, Sociology Researcher and Expert on the marginalization, radicalization and politicization of youth in working-class neighborhoods in post-revolutionary Tunisia; Intissar Kherigi, Programs Director at JFRC; Khaoula Ghribi, CONNEKT Coordinator at JFRC.

OVERVIEW OF COUNTRIES STUDIED

GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS

In terms of political systems, the four countries considered show substantial differences: Jordan and Morocco are constitutional monarchies, while Tunisia and Egypt are constitutional republics.

Throughout the past decade, the four countries have gone through very divergent political transitions. While Tunisia has been going through a democratic transition since January 2011, when Tunisians toppled the Ben Ali regime, Egypt engaged in a short-lived democratic transition in 2011-13 that was replaced by military rule following a coup d'état in July 2013. In Jordan and Morocco, in response to the wave of protests sweeping the MENA region demanding political and economic change, both monarchies announced a series of constitutional reforms, although the extent to which these represent real change is contested (Yom, 2017).

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The MENA region has the highest proportion of youth in the world, with more than half of residents under the age of 25 (Oxford Business Group, 2016). The region also has the world's highest youth unemployment rate, standing at 26.7% in 2020 (The World Bank, 2020).

5

TABLE 1. Demographic information on the four countries

Country	Population (million inhabitants, in 2020)	Unemployment rate (%, in 2020)	Unemployment, youth total (% of total labour force, ages 15-24, in 2020)	Urbanisation (urban population in total population) (% in 2019)
Egypt	100.3	9.6	30	42.73
Morocco	36	18	21.9	62.99
Jordan	10.2	23	35	91.2
Tunisia	11.7	18	36.5	69.25

Own production. Sources: CONNEKT Country Reports, 2020; Trading Economics, 2020; Plecher, 2020.

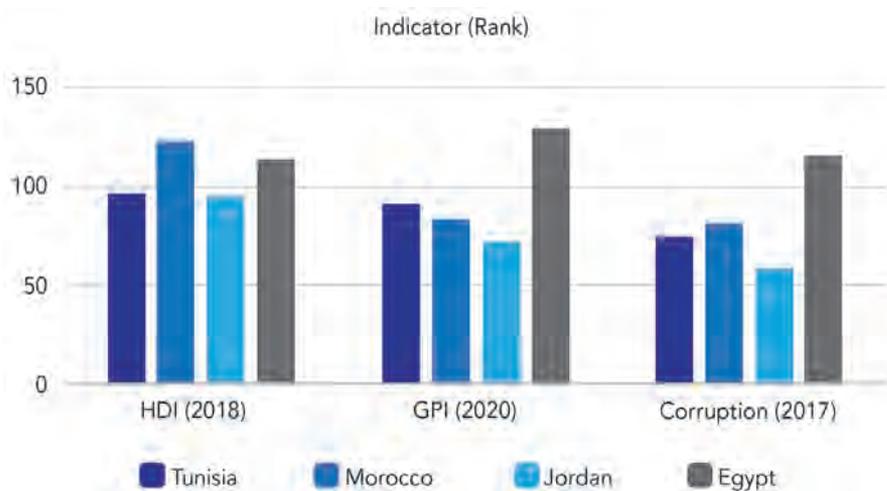
In Tunisia, identity remains a matter of debate but the first article of the constitution states that the official language of the country is Arabic. Morocco has Amazigh and Arab ethnic groups and with Andalusi and European diversity¹ (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020). Egypt is self-identified as an "Arab republic" (Pinfari, 2020). Similarly, 98% of the Jordanian population is Arab (composed of Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians and Iraqis). Jordan is home to large refugee populations, having

¹ In fact, the Moroccan constitution states its Arab-Islamic, Amazigh and Saharo-Hassanian identity and recognizes its African, Andalusi, Hebrew and Mediterranean influences.

opened its borders to its neighbouring countries. As of 2019, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of registered refugees stands at 744,795 (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020). In all four countries, Islam is according to their Constitutions the religion of the state.

In Jordan and Tunisia, extreme poverty is very low, affecting less than 1% of the population, rising to 3% in Egypt and to 8% in Morocco (Abu-Ismaïl and Al-Kiswani, 2018). All four countries rank very low in the Human Development Index (HDI), the Global Peace Index (GPI) and Transparency International’s Corruption Index, showing the relatively critical conditions in which significant parts of the population live.

DIAGRAM 1. Rankings in the HDI, GPI and Corruption Index for the four target countries



Own production. Source: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2019.

TABLE 2. Rankings in the HDI, GPI and Corruption Index for the four target countries

Indicator (rank)	Tunisia	Morocco	Jordan	Egypt
HDI (2018)	95	123	95	115
GPI (2020)	92	83	72	130
Corruption (2017)	74	81	59	117

Own production. Source: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2019.

COMPARATIVE FINDINGS

A DEFINITIONAL DILEMMA

Official Definitions

Official legal texts, policies and public declarations in the four studied countries do not always differentiate between the terms “terrorism” and “violent extremism”. For example, as the Egypt CR notes, “‘violent extremism’ (...) and ‘terrorism’ (...) are typically mentioned together as part of the same ‘threat’ that Egypt faces, with no clear differentiation being drawn between the two concepts” (Pinfari, 2020). Nevertheless, the Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS), which is an Egyptian research institute reportedly very close to governmental institutions, has advocated for a “differentiation between terrorism and radicalisation.” In Jordan, however, the National Plan to Counter Extremism expresses a greater awareness of the “need to use appropriate verbal terminology for the references and meanings implied” (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020).

A common feature among the four studied countries is the absence of an official definition of radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism. All four of these countries’ lists of terrorist acts have been criticised for being overly broad and posing a threat to human rights. The lack of a clear official definition of radicalisation, and its implicit link with terrorism, has an effect on the legal frameworks that apply to these activities.

7

Article 2 of Egyptian CT Law No. 94/2015 includes ambiguous provisions that have been criticised by human rights advocates for undermining the rule of law, and used to incriminate actors such as “trade unions, (...) journalists, human rights defenders, opposition parties and public-sector workers” (Ní Aoláin, 2020). In a similar vein, Jordanian CT Law No. 55 of 2006, as amended by Law No. 18 of 2014, sets out a list of terrorist acts (Art. 2 and 3), which can be used as a justification to curb freedoms in the kingdom. Meanwhile, Articles 228-1 to 218-5 of the Moroccan Penal Code listing terrorist acts² include broad and vague definitions of terrorist acts that are likely to result in violations of freedom of association, sanctioned by the need to protect public order and state security. Finally, Tunisia offers no exception to this trend. In the absence of a consensual definition of terrorism, the Tunisian CT law only sets out a list of “terrorist offences”.³ The list covers acts ranging from accusation of apostasy, inciting or defending hatred, animosity between races, doctrines and religions to receiving, possessing, using or threatening to use, transport, modify nuclear material.... As such, this law gives significant leeway to authorities to prosecute non-violent acts under the CT law.

The absence of official attempts to make a distinction between radicalisation, terrorism and VE give rise to confusion between intellectual radicalisation, behavioural radicalisation (VE) and social or political

² The Moroccan legislators adopted Law No. 03-03 relating to the fight against terrorism promulgated by Dahir 75 No. 1-03-140 of 28 May, 2003 76, the provisions of which are introduced in the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedures.

³ Art. 14 to 36 of the Tunisian Organic Law No. 2015-26 of 7 August, 2015, on the fight against terrorism and the repression of money laundering, as amended by Organic Law No. 9 of 2019, list the “terrorist acts”, while Art. 13 defines the “criminal intention”.

critique. The effects of this ambiguity on the ground can be to create new enemies of the state and legitimise political persecution by labelling opposition groups as “terrorist”. Authoritarian regimes have sought to legitimise themselves as defenders of order against internal enemies using security concerns.

Non-State Definitions

Attempts to provide contextually-informed and locally-relevant definitions of VE and radicalisation were identified in the four countries studied. In particular, Egypt’s ACPSS defined radicalisation as “a multi-level process in which different variables come together to create a tendency towards violence, both psychologically and operationally” (Akl, 2019). However, in Jordan, radicalisation is generally viewed in very broad terms as “the radical ideology that an individual could carry, which can be captured in elements of a dichotomous black-and-white thinking and constant ‘othering’ of different groups” (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020).

The dangers of a very broad or vague official definition of terrorism are also brought up in the CONNEKT Country Reports. On the use of the term “terrorism”, the Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia CRs warn against confounding and “equating (Islamist) extremism with terrorism” (Pinfari, 2020), and using this “to stigmatize a particular group or organization (...) [in order to] discredit or condemn political opposition” (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020).

As for VE, it is generally used and defined in ways that limit it to Salafi Jihadi violence. According to the authors of Morocco’s CR, VE in the Moroccan context “only refers to the Salafi movement [which] does not include the violence of the extreme left in Morocco, especially in the academic world. This definition of violent extremism concerns only the actors from the *Salafiya Jihadiya*, it excludes all forms of violence that exist within the university, whether it is that of the extreme left or the Amazigh movement” (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020). Tunisian experts, such as Sami Brahem, have described violent extremism as “the use of physical armed violence in the name of *jihad*, as a way to change political and social reality in order to achieve what they believe is establishing the law of God in the state and society” (Brahem, 2014, cited in Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020).

However, the Jordanian National Plan to Counter Extremism warns against referring to violent extremists as “Salafi Jihadis”, on the basis that it may “glorify the image of *Takfiris* in the mind of the recipient.” The Jordan CR defines violent extremism broadly as “behavior that entails exercising varying degrees of physical violence” (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020).

Notably, there appears to be little interest in defining the term “extremism” in the four countries since, as the Morocco country report notes, “extremism does not come under the jurisdiction of the courts” (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020). However, Tunisian researchers have sought to define extremism as “the belief in ideas that are very far from what most people consider to be true or reasonable and supporting these ideas (...) any adoption or development of beliefs or ideologies that challenge the status quo and reject dialogue and mutual understanding and are usually followed by profound behavioral changes” (Zoghlemi and Toumi, 2019).

THE CONTEXT: FACTORS AND ACTORS

Factors Enabling Radicalisation and VE

The four CRs have all identified different levels of causal factors for radicalisation and VE, which can be described as macro, meso and micro levels. The reports address the three following factors: structural/institutional factors, community factors, and individual factors.

Macro Level or Structural/Institutional Factors

In 2015, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon remarked: “Missiles may kill terrorists. But I am convinced that good governance is what will kill terrorism” (The United Nations General Assembly - UNGA, 2015). Along these lines, the CRs cited structural and institutional factors as playing a role in radicalisation and VE. The political exclusion of ethnic or religious groups was cited as one of the main drivers of radicalisation and VE in Egypt and Morocco. The Egypt CR suggests that “after the 2013 coup, the exclusion of Islamist groups from government and their systematic and violent repression stopped and then quickly reversed the process [of de-radicalisation initiated in the late 1990s with the members of the *Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiyya*], leading to the recrudescence of terrorist activities and campaigns across the country” (Pinfari, 2020). Likewise, the Amazigh’s “complicated history with the central state [in Morocco] and their marginalisation over a long period of time by the central power (...) [are] perceived to be the reasons behind their radicalism” (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020).

On the other hand, the reform of the religious sphere was seen to play different roles in the radicalisation process. Both tightening the state’s grip on religious discourse and religious institutions and leaving the religious sphere unregulated are cited as drivers of VE in the region. Both Morocco’s and Egypt’s approaches to regulating the religious sphere focus on homogenising religious discourse and imposing a single view and reading of religion (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020). However, leaving religious institutions and personnel without training and guidance is also seen to be problematic. This seems to characterise the religious sphere in Tunisia, which remains “the only Arab-Muslim country that does not have an official institute for training imams (...) 65% of the imams in Tunisia do not even have a high school diploma” (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020).

Furthermore, the presence of corruption, cronyism and distrust in the government (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020) were commonly highlighted as drivers of VE in the four CRs. As expressed in the Morocco CR, radicalisation can be linked to “frustrations related to corruption and the semi-authoritarian character of Morocco” (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020: 58). The same resentments were echoed in Tunisia, where “frustrated young people whose expectations of the revolution were shattered when they were faced with the complex realities inherited from dictatorship (...) saw little change after the revolution” (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020).

Finally, urban planning in the MENA region is seen to be related to radicalisation and VE. Poor urban planning is both an expression of security deterioration, marginalisation and inequality, and contributes to further entrenching inequality. The outskirts around the capital cities of the four countries studied, filled with informal settlements and with poor access to services, appear to create environments that facilitate radicalisation and VE. These findings were noted in the Moroccan, Jordanian and Tunisian

cases, where “marginalized urban spaces (...) are converted into protest spaces in which alternative or ‘self-excluding identities’ are formed” (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020). In Jordan, urban underdevelopment, specifically heightened by lack of spaces to host refugees, further exacerbates existing vulnerabilities. Similarly, three-quarters of Moroccan foreign fighters are reported to come from the “underprivileged social strata living in shantytowns in medium and large cities” (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020).

While simplistic explanations linking poverty to radicalisation and VE are popular, in-depth research studies show that the “terrorism-poverty nexus” may not be straightforward as once thought. As such, a “multidimensional poverty economic, educational and spiritual (religious)” (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020) approach offers a more comprehensive and grounded explanation for the factors involved in radicalisation. However, economic factors are cited as a set of factors among others that can lead to radicalisation. Economic pressures resulting from “increased living costs, high unemployment rates, and the economy, which is at a standstill” (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020) were cited in the Jordan CR, along with the “deterioration in socio-economic conditions” in Morocco (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020), as well as “socio-economic (...) grievances that motivate armed militant groups” in Egypt (Pinfari, 2020).

Community Factors

Firstly, it should be noted that meso level factors are usually under-specified and under-theorised in the existing literature, which can be considered a significant gap in the research around VE.

In fact, few of the CRs have mentioned the supportive or even complicit social environment as a VE driver. For instance, the Jordan CR briefly touches on terrorist groups’ broader constituency in Jordan, which perceives “Al-Qaeda as a legitimate resistance movement” (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020).⁴ In Tunisia, *Ansar al-Sharia*⁵ was considered to be an extremist movement that enjoyed “a large support base” (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi 2020). A similar wider radical milieu exists in Morocco, where “those who engage in violent acts represent a very small percentage compared to those who sympathize, adopt or embrace radical ideologies” (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020).

The link between tribes and involvement in VE groups also remains under-researched. Areas where ISIS and Al-Qaeda tried to establish themselves are often identified as tribal areas, whether in Jordan or in the Sinai. There is a need for further research to understand this link (Collombier and Roy, 2020). Other enabling environments cited are prisons, which are considered to be breeding grounds for radicalisation, as stated in different CRs. In the case of Jordan, the CR highlights the fact that “Al-Qaeda leaders in Iraq are all the results of homegrown radicalization—in some cases a prison-related radicalisation, as in the case of Al-Maqqdisi and Al-Zarqawi” (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020).

⁴ The prevalence of this view dropped from 67% to 6.2% following the 2005 bombings but has not disappeared (see the 2005 Pew Global Attitudes Survey).

⁵ Listed as a terrorist group by the Tunisian government, as well by Iraq, the United Nations, the UAE, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Micro Level or Individual Factors

This section examines the micro level, looking at recurrent individual factors seen to be linked to radicalisation. While it is impossible to extrapolate generalisations from individual life stories, it may be relevant to examine examples of cited individual drivers. This level is generally overlooked by researchers, often replaced by “a simplistic prototype of violent extremists: poor young individuals, with a low level of education, who have to some extent entered into violent extremism, sometimes unaware of their own ideological situation” (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020).

Causal factors at the micro level cited in national reports can be summarised as follows:

Psychological drivers such as the desire to achieve something through violence (having a sense of personal achievement).

Personal experiences: such as trauma and a history of violence (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal 2020); (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi 2020).

The reports also cite that an identity crisis coupled with a feeling of being under-estimated could also potentially create at-risk individuals vulnerable to radicalisation and VE.

CURRENT REGIONAL VE DYNAMICS

Violent Extremism Groups

Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (VE) are an ever-evolving transnational threat. It is, by default, a regional and not a national problem. Furthermore, while at first glance violence in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Tunisia have little in common, a terrorist incident can have a domino effect in neighbouring countries. This risk is further heightened with border porosity and the lack of capacities to effectively manage and control borders.

In the following section, we attempt to survey the main VE actors in the region. VE groups vary according to their international affiliations and domestic agendas. Therefore, strategies, weapons (homemade improvised explosive devices or advanced conventional weapons) and targets (whether targeting civilians or mainly government, military, and police) also differ.

The division between domestic and foreign groups is based on whether the group in question operates and uses violence with or without foreign direction, in furtherance of political or social objectives.

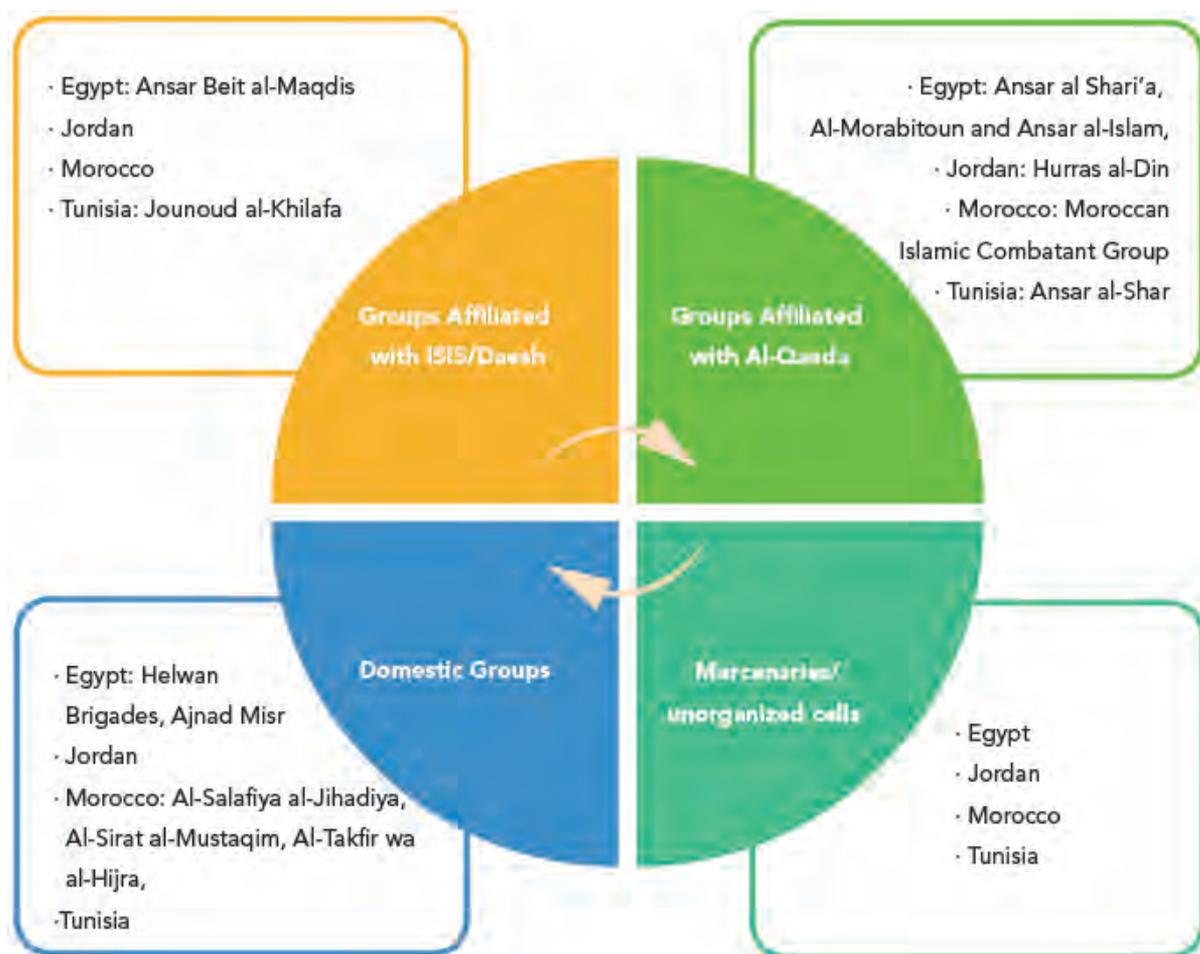
Recent Developments

Currently, the region faces (re)newed challenges in relation to radicalisation and VE. First, since the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS/Daesh) started losing ground and it was defeated, countries in the region have been facing the issue of the so-called “returnees”. This has become one of the biggest VE-related challenges for authorities, and most states have not found a way to address this problem. Typically, such individuals are either imprisoned or disappear from view.

Although Egypt had initiated de-radicalisation efforts in the late 1990s, these efforts have been suspended for the time being (Pinfari, 2020). Egyptian government policy is focused on arrest and

prosecution of returnees upon return. Jordan allows return but does not repatriate. Its policy is centred on criminal sanctions, as well as de-radicalisation and re-integration programmes following foreign fighters' return. Morocco, which does carry out repatriation, launched the *Moussalaha* (Reconciliation) programme in 2016, aimed at de-radicalising violent extremist Jihadis. It might be too soon to evaluate the successes of the programme, but it appears to be the only one of the four countries that has sought to put in place a comprehensive programme focused on de-radicalisation. Tunisia, on the other hand, has adopted a purely punitive approach. Policies are focused on arresting and convicting returnees, with a minority of foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) entering the country undetected (Souli, 2016). In the meantime, the state is not implementing any de-radicalisation or re-integration programmes, which means that "the country's overcrowded prisons continue to serve as a breeding ground for jihadis" (Zelin and Walles, 2018). However, it is worth noting that Tunisia does repatriate the children of ISIS fighters who are Tunisian citizens (but not adults).

FIGURE 1. VE Groups in the MENA region



Secondly, the global Covid-19 pandemic has been viewed by extremists as an opportunity to expand, adapt and re-emerge. As people spend more time online, extremist groups have exploited the pandemic to directly boost their recruitment efforts. Since the start of the pandemic, the Egyptian government has reported a spike in CT-related activities, concentrated around northern Sinai and in eastern Cairo (Shehata and Anani, 2020). In Tunisia, the government announced that it had foiled attempts to weaponise the virus as part of a planned attack on specific targets (Middle East Monitor, 2020).

Moreover, due to the additional economic hardship caused by the Covid-19 crisis, all these countries have witnessed a surge in illegal migration, with most heading to Europe. The general context of socioeconomic hardship, and rise in poverty and unemployment underline the need for greater attention to radicalisation trends.

However, it is unclear what impact the latest crisis is likely to have on the appeal of extremist groups. Many analysts have argued that the MENA region is entering a “post-ideological” era with the “normalisation” or failure of Islamist movements to transform the political economy or the demobilisation of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated movements in Egypt and Jordan, with high levels of repression especially in Egypt (Mahdavi, 2020). The rise of ISIS and Al-Qaeda before it can also be signs of a crisis in the “ideological offer” and of political and social conditions in the region (Hashemi, 2016).

P/CVE INSTITUTIONS AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS

While terrorism and VE may be a common enemy for the four countries, the analysis of government responses shows that they are fragmented and uncoordinated across the region. The following section analyses the four countries' global, regional and national efforts to address radicalisation and VE.

GLOBAL LEVEL

At the global level, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, along with other UN member states, agreed to a common strategic and operational approach to counter-terrorism, namely, the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. However, for the strategy to have effective and sustainable impact, it has to be translated into national action plans and strategies. Accordingly, countries in the region updated their legal CT frameworks but without necessarily adopting consequent comprehensive strategies, as discussed further below.

REGIONAL LEVEL

Regional Organisations

This section examines radicalisation and VE frameworks adopted by the three main regional organisations within the MENA region, namely, the League of Arab States (LAS), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the African Union (AU).

The League of Arab States, formed in 1945, is composed of 22 independent Arab states. LAS operates to "strengthen the relations between the member states, coordinate their policies in order to achieve co-operation between them and to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and a general concern with the affairs and interests of the Arab countries. It has also as its purpose the close co-operation of the member-states, with due regard to the Organisation and circumstances of each state."⁶

The OIC, formed in 1969, is the second largest organisation after the United Nations with a membership of 57 states spread over four continents. According to its charter, the OIC aims to preserve Islamic social and economic values; promote solidarity amongst member states; increase cooperation in social, economic, cultural, scientific, and political areas; uphold international peace and security; and advance education, particularly in the fields of science and technology.⁷

The African Union (AU), formerly (1963-2002) Organization of African Unity, is a continental body consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of the African continent. The OAU Charter spelled out the purpose of the Organisation, namely to promote the unity and solidarity of the African States and to coordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa.⁸

⁶ Charter of the Arab League. Article II.

⁷ Charter of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Chapter I.

⁸ Charter of the African Union, Article II.

FIGURE 2. P/CVE institutions and strategic frameworks in the MENA region

	THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES (LAS)	ORGANISATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION (OIC)	THE AFRICAN UNION (AU)
Discourses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Condemns • Aligns with the UN calls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly condemns • OIC Code of Conduct on Terrorism 1994 	Declaration on the Code of Conduct for Inter-African Relations [AHG/Del. 2 (XXX)]
Instruments	The Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism (ACST)	Convention of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference on Combating International Terrorism (COICCIT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AU Constitutive Act: (Art 4: R2P) • Resolution on the Strengthening of Cooperation and Coordination among African States [AHG/Res. 213 (XXVIII)] • 1999 OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism • An additional Protocol to the 1999 Convention • Dakar Declaration Against Terrorism
Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Peace and Security Council (PSC) • Council of Arab Ministers of Justice and Interior 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AU Special Representative for Counter-Terrorism Cooperation • Peace and Security Council • African Centre on the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT)
Response	Proposal to create a joint military force transformed into an agreement (yet to be implemented)	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The African Standby Force (ASF) (creation of the Multi-National Joint Task Force) • Peacekeeping missions to combat terrorism (for example, in Somalia) • AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism • African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) • African Model Law on Counter-Terrorism

From the table above, we record notable differences. The AU seems to offer a more comprehensive framework to address issues of P/CVE and terrorism. The LAS and the OIC have adopted fewer instruments and established fewer institutions to address terrorism and VE.

Also, notably, human rights advocates have criticised the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism (ACST), labelling it “a serious threat to human rights” (Amnesty International, 2002) and stating that “many of the provisions of the Convention do not conform with the obligations of member states of the LAS under the UN Charter and international human rights law, and the Convention fails to recognise and maintain many other rights and obligations enshrined in human rights and humanitarian law” (Amnesty International, 2002). For instance, the convention lacks guarantee for fair trial, detention, lack of guarantees for freedom of expression and the role of the media or right to privacy, protection of judicial review, extradition, protection of refugees and asylum seekers.

The issue of definitional ambiguity arises again in the definition of terrorism in the ACST, which might lead to abuses and breaches of rights and freedoms. Furthermore, the ACST fails to ensure safeguards for detainees facing terrorist charges. The OIC’s Convention on Combating International Terrorism has also been criticised for its broad provisions and has seen a low level of uptake and ratification, hampering its effectiveness. Arguably, the divergence in member states’ interests and political and institutional contexts hinders a coherent representation of states through these regional bodies, thus preventing the emergence of a clear and consistent strategy and approach.

16

The LAS’s Peace and Security Council has a primarily advisory role, meaning that it lacks executive powers and only issues recommendations. Similarly, the OIC’s outputs are generally non-binding for member states. They are nevertheless politically and diplomatically important.

The AU framework on the other hand, while comprehensive, was adopted years after violent extremist organisations (VEOs) had already caused serious harm throughout the continent. Finally, while the AU has operational P/CVE plans, compared to the LAS which is yet to put any in place, this approach risks of further militarising the continent.

Sub-Regional Level

At the sub-regional level, the Arab Maghreb Union is silent on questions related to radicalisation and VE. Maghreb countries have demonstrated a preference for external alliances with major international powers rather than building/strengthening intra-Maghreb relations. The absence of specialised institutions within the Union tasked with security-related matters further exacerbates this situation. However, the Council of Interior Ministers of the Arab Maghreb Union is the structure that usually discusses P/CVE issues. An analysis of the statements issued by the General Secretariat of the Union and the Union Monitoring Committee meeting minutes shows that the position is generally confined to issuing condemnations of terrorist attacks.

State of Play of Inter-Regional/Inter-Organisational Cooperation on Terrorism and VE

Below is a mapping of the most relevant initiatives involving inter-regional and inter-organisational cooperation on terrorism and VE in the MENA region:

- The Terrorist Prevention Branch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC/TPB) regional initiative seeks to create a Multi-Agency Task Force (MATF) of the MENA region (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime - UNODC, 2017-2019) and foster the development of a new specialised cooperation network, called “MATF”, composed of security and judicial focal points who work together for better CT cooperation in the Region⁹.
- EU/UNODC Global Initiative on Strengthening the Legal Regime against Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Europe (2015-2020) (EU Neighbours Portal, n.d.).
- The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF): The Global Fund for Community Engagement and Resilience (GCERF) is a public-private partnership dedicated to CVE. Its objective is to support targeted initiatives and community initiatives aimed at strengthening the resilience of populations in the face of VE.
- The International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ) is an international body, which aims to improve governance in countries in the region with a focus on CT.

EU Policy Towards P/CVE

EU/southern Mediterranean region security cooperation has been a pillar of EU External Action. Indeed, the European Council of 12 February 2015 declared that the EU needs “to engage more [...] on counter-terrorism, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa...” (European Council, 2015), a sign of the inter-connectedness between EU security and that of its neighbourhood. Reportedly, EU funding in the MENA region for CT and P/CVE amounts to approximately 334 million EUR in 2015 and 399 million EUR in 2016 (European Parliament, 2017: 7). This cooperation focused on four areas: (1) border control; (2) countering the financing of terrorism; (3) fostering regional cooperation; and (4) strengthening the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

On a rhetorical level, the EU’s policy towards its southern neighbourhood has undergone a change in paradigm. As a matter of fact, since the Barcelona Process, The EU portrayed itself as a “normative power”. However, at the wake of the 2011 uprisings, new terminology, such as “resilience”, for instance, has been introduced (Anholt and Wagner, 2020: 17).

In 2015, the EU sought to revise its neighbourhood policy by means of conducting upgraded security and counter-terrorism dialogues with MENA countries.

In the aftermath of the 2017 terrorist attacks in Manchester, London and Barcelona, the European Commission (EC) proposed various measures aiming to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation with third countries, including “the opening of negotiations for agreements between the EU and Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey on the transfer of personal data between Europol [the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation] and these countries to prevent and combat terrorism and serious crimes” (European Commission, 2017b).

⁹ Covering, among other countries, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.

It has also built its new framework around enhancing multilateral and bilateral counter-terrorism cooperation with third countries, regarded as necessary for strengthening the Union's internal security. As such, Europol's cooperation has been strengthened with third countries¹⁰ to fight terrorism and serious organised crime; "for the exchange of personal data between Europol and with the competent authorities of the eight countries for the purpose of preventing and combating terrorism and serious organised crime" (European Commission, 2017a). In addition, the EU has appointed counter-terrorism and security experts at several of its delegations in the region, including in Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon since 2015.

While countering terrorism, the concern is that the EU could repeat past mistakes. In 2011, the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy publicly recognised those mistakes — i.e., supporting and reinforcing Tunisia's repressive state without ensuring effective guarantees against misuse of European assistance (European Commission, 2011). In practice, it has been noted that "the EU has tended to prioritise short-term stability over democratic reforms, as it has been perceived to better serve its own security interests" (Kaunert, Léonard and Wertman, 2020: 94). This trend has been seen in the case of Egypt (below).

Country Specific EU P/CVE Approaches

▪ **Egypt**

The EU has long cooperated with Egypt in the security arena, "making Egypt the largest ENP partner country" (Badarin and Schumacher, 2019: 76) even while "furthest removed from the standards of security sector governance encouraged by NATO" (Larsen and Koehler, 2020: 47). A jointly agreed EU-Egypt counter-terrorism package is being delivered "with particular attention given to the four areas Egypt has raised as priorities: training of prosecutors and digital evidence; Internet Referral Units; exchange of experiences with EU Agencies and EU Member States on counter-terrorism; and strategic communications and financing of terrorism" (European Commission, 2018: 15). Following the adoption of Partnership Priorities with Egypt in July 2017, the EU adopted the Single Support Framework (SSF), which sets the priorities and the financial allocation in key strategic areas of bilateral cooperation with the country. The documents set priorities in establishing an "approach that will address the root causes of terrorism... in order to successfully counter and prevent radicalization" (European Union, 2017). Throughout the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities and the Single Support Framework, Egypt is presented as a democracy in transition, albeit facing "problems" and challenges.

▪ **Jordan**

Jordan is "a key partner of the European Union... [in areas of] cooperation in security, mobility, the fight against terrorism and violent extremism" (European Commission, 2016). At the 2014 Wales Summit, NATO announced a Defence and Related Security Capacity-Building Initiative with countries including Jordan. In 2018 the EU implemented its CVE programme in Jordan, focusing on 1) supporting the work of the relevant unit at the Ministry of Culture, to enable it to devise and develop positive narratives to counter terrorist propaganda and to undertake a comprehensive study into the drivers

¹⁰ Eight countries, namely: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey.

behind violent extremism. 2) Strengthening the state-citizen relationship, using a bottom-up approach. 3) Accompanying Security Sector Reform Processes in Jordan, the different security departments and agencies in Jordan, including the Public Security Directorate, the Gendarmerie, the Civil Defence Directorate and the Jordanian Armed Forces (Ibid.).

▪ **Morocco**

Morocco is a “strategic and vital partner for the EU in preventing radicalisation and in combating terrorism” (European Parliament, 2018). Close cooperation in this area between Europol and Morocco has been established, in particular through exchanges of data, including personal data, during cross-border terrorism investigations. Reportedly, the EU has allocated 75.5 million EUR for justice sector reforms in order to enhance both judicial independence and the protection of rights and liberties (Kaunert, Léonard and Wertman, 2020: 98).

▪ **Tunisia**

The EU has worked closely with Tunisia to combat both the threat of VE and terrorism within their territory and in Europe. As a matter of fact, reportedly, the EU invested 26 million EUR in 2015 in order to strengthen the Tunisian borders against terrorist infiltration (Kaunert, Léonard and Wertman, 2020: 96). As a result, Tunisia has strengthened its border management capacities, including the detection of fraudulent documents. It has also funded 23 million EUR-programme on security sector reform in 2015, which aimed to enhance respect for human rights.

19

International assistance to Tunisia has also been well coordinated. The main mechanism for coordinating security assistance is the G7+6 grouping, comprising the seven leading industrialised countries, as well as Spain, Belgium, the EU, Switzerland, Turkey and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. Each country or organisation takes the lead in providing a specific type of security assistance, a process designed to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure that all Tunisia’s major partners have a substantive role. According to EU officials, the G7+6 coalition helped prevent ISIS from seizing any Tunisian territory. The areas EU member states have chosen to concentrate on reflect their national priorities and domestic political concerns.

NATIONAL LEVEL

Overview of National Frameworks

The table below shows the extent to which the four countries studied have national frameworks and strategies on CT and P/CVE.

FIGURE 3. National frameworks and strategies on CT and P/CVE in the MENA region

		EGYPT	JORDAN	MOROCCO	TUNISIA
POLICIES					
A CT Law		✓ ¹¹	✓ ¹²	✓ ¹³	✓ ¹⁴
A National Strategy		x	✓ A specific strategy for the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) – Arab Army to counter violent extremism and terrorism	✓ ¹⁵	✓
Sectorial/Ministerial Action Plans (APs)		x	✓ ¹⁶ A specific AP of the P/CVE Unit at the Prime Ministry	x	✓
Logistical Measures	Increasing troop deployment rates	✓ ¹⁷	✓ ¹⁸	✓	✓ ¹⁹
	Increase security budgets²⁰	✓	✓ (Amman Centre for Human Rights Studies - ACHRS, 2018)	✓	✓

¹¹ CT Law No. 94 of 2015, as amended by Law No. 15 of 2020 of 3 March 2020.

¹² CT Law No. 55 of 2006, as amended by Law No. 18 of 2014.

¹³ CT Law N. 30 of 2003, as amended by Law No. 10 of 2013 and Law No. 145 of 2012 and Law No. 86 of 2014.

¹⁴ Organic Law No. 2015-26 of 7 August, 2015, on the fight against terrorism and the repression of money laundering, as amended by Organic Law No. 9 of 2019.

¹⁵ It is worth noting that the strategy only covers the Kingdom's airports and all sites potentially targeted by terrorists by increasing security surveillance and patrols.

¹⁶ The National Strategy outlines the general framework on how Jordanian institutions should work towards achieving the goals the plan sets, by developing detailed strategies and plans.

¹⁷ Deployed several battalions in the Sinai.

¹⁸ In addition to its own troops, Jordan also hosts US troops. According to President Trump's June 2020 War Powers Resolution Report to Congress, "At the request of the Government of Jordan, approximately 3,145 United States military personnel are deployed to Jordan to help defeat ISIS operations, enhance Jordan's security, and promote regional stability."

¹⁹ An 8-fold increase.

²⁰ Creation of new positions/salary increases/staff perks.

	EGYPT	JORDAN	MOROCCO	TUNISIA
STRUCTURES				
Specialised Structures	✗	✓	✓	✓
Leading Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoI: The National Security Sector, the Egyptian General Intelligence Service • MoD: Army • Governmental and semi-governmental bodies (the Ministry of Religious Endowments: Awqaf / Al-Azhar / the Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyya) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prime Ministry: C/PVE Unit²¹ • MoI: police/CT special unit/ General Intelligence Directorate/ Public Security Directorate • Community Peace Centre of Jordan's Public Security Directorate • Ministry of Social Development • Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoI: Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation, intelligence services (<i>mqadmin</i>: (auxiliary agents) • Royal Armed Forces • Ministry of Habous/Religious Affairs • Ministry of Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoI: National Guard Special Unit/ The Security Pole for Combating Terrorism and Organised Crime • MoD • The National Committee for Countering Extremism and Terrorism • MoJ: The National Unit for Investigation of Terrorism Crimes/ Counter-Terrorism Judiciary Pole • Parliamentary oversight (Committee on Security Affairs)
OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of a comprehensive strategy to C/PVE • Overly repressive counter-terrorism measures • Controlled religious discourses • Prisons are hotbeds for radicalisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragmented and overlapping responses • A narrowing civic space, particularly when it comes to issues of security as they are viewed through a strong state-centric lens • Tightening control over the religious sphere and cyberspace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard security centred • Control both religious discourse and religious teaching • A process of prison modernisation • A reconciliation process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remain hard security centred • Hostage to political polarisation

Own production. Source: CT laws and National Strategies cited in the table.

²¹ With the creation of this entity, a number of other P/CVE-related units that existed before were cancelled; such as the P/CVE Unit at the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs.

As shown in the table above, national frameworks differ from one country to another. Egypt has failed to comply “with the recommendations of the UN Secretary General to prepare their own National Plans of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism” (Pinfari, 2020). Meanwhile, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia have produced their Plans of Action as required.

Regarding the Jordanian strategic framework, we note the existence of two strategies: a general one, and one that is specific to the Jordanian Armed Forces. This raises the question of eventual overlaps or even conflicts of scopes and competences between the two frameworks. As for Morocco, it is worth noting that the strategy only covers the Kingdom’s airports and sites potentially targeted by terrorists. By increasing security surveillance and patrols, its limited geographic scope makes it limited in effectiveness and impact.

Furthermore, a comprehensive approach requires the implementation of these strategies by means of sectorial/ministerial action plans, which is not fully the case in the countries in question. Notably, the general government approach in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia remains very largely a hard security-based approach, based on repressive CT laws, led by security agencies focused on building up security and military capabilities, which have led to adverse effects on the establishment of the rule of law. There is little reference in CT and P/CVE strategies to measures aimed at addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, including lack of rule of law and violations of human rights, and ensuring that any measures taken to counter-terrorism comply with human rights obligations.

The Tunisian National Strategy for Countering Extremism and Terrorism (NCTS) was written as a result of a decision by the National Security Council (NSC) at its first meeting in February 2015. The hasty genesis of the strategy in response to critical threats, coupled with limited resources of the National Counter-Terrorist Commission, the volatile political and security climate, add friction to a implementing the strategy. The life of the strategy was to be five years and it was to be updated as the situation dictated in the meantime. According to available information, since 2016 the strategy has not been reviewed, updated or re-validated.

Assessing National Frameworks

Inter-Agency Coordination

Where a national CT and CVE strategy does exist (Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan), strategies have failed to include, from the design phase and ongoing, important and influential stakeholders. In both Tunisia and Jordan, ministries of education were not involved. This omission ignores the fundamental role of education in PVE. In Morocco, the royal Mohammadia League of Scholars (*Rabita Mohammadia des Oulémas*) counters radicalisation to violence by producing scholarly research, ensuring conformity in educational curricula, and conducting youth outreach on religious and social topics.

As mentioned above, approaches to terrorism and VE in the region are heavily hard security-driven, led and implemented by security institutions. It appears that security forces are extremely monopolistic in their approach to CT and CVE. This is mostly seen in the case of Egypt, where we note an absence of a national strategy, as well as an exclusive control by law enforcement agencies and security actors over CT and P/CVE.

Morocco's primary CT and CVE actor is a high-level security unit often referred to as the Moroccan FBI, the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ). The Hadar (vigilance) programme put in place to deal with terrorist threats is geographically limited to border entry points and strategic sites, making it a security mechanism rather than a comprehensive strategy. However, despite its hard security focus, Morocco stands out in the region for its attempt to develop different P/CVE related processes, including a prison modernisation process²² launched in 2016 and a reconciliation process launched in 2017, which involves the Direction of Prison Administration and Reintegration, along with the Mohammadia League of Scholars, and the National Council for Human Rights. Indeed, in the past decade, both Egypt and Morocco have gone through a process of reforming the religious sphere and discourse, perceived as part of a P/CVE strategy.

The large number of institutions and actors involved in CT and P/CVE measures²³ poses the question of coordination between these entities. While coordination in P/CVE contexts is an imperative, poor coordination has been noted throughout the different CRs. Egypt, for example, faces "substantial overlaps and conflicts of authority between institutions" (Pinfari, 2020). This is echoed in the US State Department's 2017 report on Egypt, which notes the "limited interagency cooperation and information sharing among the relevant Egyptian government entities" (US Department of State, 2017). Jordan's P/CVE overall response is also characterised by fragmentation and clear tendency to work in silos (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020). Likewise, Tunisia lacks proper communication channels and information-sharing mechanisms between state institutions and with CSOs (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020). Morocco, on the other hand, seems to have managed to establish better coordination between institutions. However, there is still a tendency among most governments in the region towards a highly centralised approach that fails to properly engage non-governmental actors. For instance, in Morocco, MacDonnell et al. (2018) note that "the government has religious institutions, such the Scientific Councils, that are directly under its provision. The government therefore thinks it does not need other religious institutions to collaborate with (...) But there are other religious actors that are not part of the government and are more open and closer to the people. For a good CVE policy, an inclusive approach that engages all those groups is essential."

Coordination between prisons, correctional facilities and other state institutions is particularly important. While Morocco has the *Moussalaha* programme, prisons in the rest of the region have become the main channel for dealing with radicalisation and VE. In Egypt, it is reported that detention conditions and rampant abuses "are fuelling recruitment to ISIS" (Pinfari, 2020). Similarly, in Tunisia, prisoners convicted of terrorism-related charges face harsher conditions than other prisoners. They do not benefit from reinsertion programmes inside prisons, are often subjected to solitary confinement, and are managed by unqualified personnel (Ben Mustapha, 2019: 46). It has also been noted that systems for monitoring released prisoners are lacking, which increases the risks involved in potential recidivism (Ben Mustapha, 2019: 47). Researchers have indicated that failure to ensure proper follow up with prisoners who are released can facilitate a return to radicalisation. For instance, in the Moroccan

²² In 2017, the Moroccan government announced its plan to build 36 new prisons by 2020.

²³ In Egypt, the Ministry of Religious Endowments/Awqaf, Al-Azhar and the Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyya. In Morocco, several institutions intervene in the religious sphere (9 institutions besides the King).

context, Kenza Berrada (2019: 34) notes that “one of the major criticisms over the [Moussalaha] programme is that it lacks continuity after the incarceration period. When programme beneficiaries leave prison, they find it difficult to reintegrate into society (...) The *Moussalaha* programme includes some aspects related to the development of social skills, but economic reintegration and support for families are still lacking.”

Existence of Monitoring and Assessment Mechanisms

Critical evaluation and feedback are of utmost importance in order to capitalise on successes and act upon lessons learned. Based on information publicly available, it appears that no review or evaluation processes has been conducted to assess the effectiveness of existing strategies. In Egypt, P/CVE programmes lack a clear set of goals and targets against which progress can be measured. The four countries’ strategies made little reference to monitoring and evaluation, and their governments have not issued evaluation studies of CT or CVE measures or programmes. However, it is worth noting that Tunisia’s National Strategy to Combat Extremism and Terrorism (NSTCET 2016) contains a monitoring and evaluation section, which sets out the possibility of updating the strategy “according to the evolution of the terrorist phenomenon” (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020).

The Role of Civil Society

▪ **As an Oversight Actor**

The role of CSOs is of special importance in exercising oversight over governmental policies, programmes and spending. However, their role in the four countries studied as monitoring bodies both in terms of assessing strategic frameworks and their implementation appears to be almost non-existent. Few examples exist where CSOs conducted critical assessment of strategies. However, one of these is the study by the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) Institute²⁴ and Jasmine Foundation, which reviewed radicalisation and VE approaches in Jordan and Tunisia through the involvement of all stakeholders through a series of workshops and focus groups, and subsequently formulating policy recommendations (Bondokji and Mhadeen, 2019). Additionally, it should be noted that some foreign embassies in the countries have put in place CVE-related platforms that do involve government agencies and CSOs, such as the Counter-Narratives Platform in Tunisia, implemented by the Ministry for Human Rights and Independent Constitutional Commissions, and supported by the British Embassy. These experiences should be analysed and evaluated further in order to examine whether they can provide effective ways of building in civil society oversight of government programmes in this field.

▪ **As Contributors to P/CVE Policies and Programmes**

When it comes to the involvement of civil society in implementing P/CVE programmes, there is a very wide gap between the four countries. In Egypt, the political situation and widespread repression imposes significant restrictions on civil society to act in the P/CVE sphere. This was evidenced by the inability to identify any relevant civil society P/CVE initiative in the Egypt CR. The Moroccan context faces similar challenges and restrictions as noted by the CR, as civil society is rarely involved in drafting P/CVE policies (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020).

²⁴ A think tank based in Amman, Jordan.

The Jordanian process of drafting the national strategy has also involved only government actors (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020). In Tunisia, however, a vibrant civil society exists that has even made significant contributions to drafting national policies, including as part of the NSTCET. This has allowed the formation of “a group of multi-disciplinary experts and representatives of civil society” who are able to weigh in on P/CVE policies (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020).

CVE remains the exclusive jurisdiction of security and law enforcement agencies in all countries studied, based on the idea that CVE is exclusively a matter of national security. However, PVE remains, par excellence, the area of intervention by CSOs. In Jordan and Tunisia there are numerous CSOs-led initiatives on PVE. However, these initiatives have a tendency to be donor-driven rather than responsive to local contexts. The high number of initiatives also raises the problem of duplication of efforts and loss of valuable time and resources. While Tunisia possesses a national database for CSOs that are registered in Tunisia²⁵ in addition to an unofficial database,²⁶ no similar databases exist to track non-governmental work in P/CVE. Furthermore, short project cycles and changing donor priorities can lead to limited opportunities for CSOs to develop their capacities and specialisation in particular themes, along with very limited evaluation frameworks.

Transparency and Communication

While communication is key to strategic engagement of civil society and the public, we note a general reluctance by governments in the region to communicate in relation to P/CVE. In Jordan, for instance, although the National Strategy is reported to have been designed in a participatory manner, it is still classified as a “confidential” document (Al-Sharafat, 2018). In Morocco, communication mainly focuses on security successes in dismantling terrorist cells, as the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations (BCIJ) holds regular press conferences to communicate nationally and internationally on national threats.

On a similar note, the Tunisian National Committee on Combating Terrorism, while regularly updating its website and social network pages, does not communicate to the wider population and its media presence is inexistent. Spokesmen of the MoI, the Security Pole for Combating Terrorism and Organized Crime and the Judicial Pole for Combating Terrorism communicate in the event of a VE/terrorist incident. Yet, the norm remains “restricting information and considering everything related to security to be top secret and not open to discussion” (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020).

There are also gaps related to transparency in P/CVE programming. For instance, in Egypt, there is very little transparency around P/CVE programmes involving state and religious authorities, and there are few means to hold these institutions accountable. Virtually the same criticisms were formulated towards the Jordanian strategy, which “attempted to absolve the ministry [of Awqaf]”²⁷ without any consultation (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020). Meanwhile in Morocco, the choice of prisoners to be enrolled in the Moussalaha programme is perceived not to be taken on the basis of clear and objective criteria (Ben Mustapha, 2019: 329). The lack of transparency and communication provides

²⁵ The Center for Information, Training, Studies and Documentation on Associations.

²⁶ Jamaity: www.jamaity.org

²⁷ Assessing Jordan’s National Strategy to Combat Violent Extremism (Op.cit.)

ample space for the emergence of conspiracy theories and further deepens mistrust towards state institutions.

Limited Resources of Specialised Structures

All CRs highlighted the challenge of inadequate resources –financial, human and logistical – that are allocated to specialised P/CVE structures, preventing them from effectively carrying out their mandates. The Jordanian C/PVE Unit, reportedly, lacks the proper budgetary means to play a more proactive role within the P/CVE field in the country. In addition, its constant transfer between different ministries, as well as the frequent change of administrations and high turnover of its already small number of employees, affects its effectiveness and impact (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020).

In a similar vein, the Tunisian National Commission, established to coordinate ministerial actions and to act as the focal point in relation to P/CVE programmes, lacks adequate resources to undertake its mission.

While Egypt lacks the specialised institutional framework, the Moroccan BCIJ is reportedly “endowed with confirmed and highly qualified human resources” (Kingdom of Morocco, 2015). In 2015, reputedly 6.7 million Dirhams were allocated to the BCIJ (Lagzouli, 2015).

Gender Mainstreaming and Youth as Cross-Cutting Issues

Examining gender dimensions of P/CVE programming reveals that it is clearly not a priority in the four countries in question. In Egypt for example, policies are directed towards the promotion of a “conservative personal status law that curtails the rights of women and that reinforces patriarchal norms” (Pinfari, 2020). In Tunisia, while there are numerous P/CVE programmes especially targeting young people, the role of women seems to be centred on PVE rather than CVE. As a matter of fact, the national strategy evokes women only once, in the prevention pillar.

None of the other strategies mentions women as an actor of P/CVE or as a perpetrator.

Knowledge Production

National reports demonstrate the nascent state of knowledge production in the countries studied. The field of knowledge production is still highly affected by a state monopoly on information. Access to relevant information remains limited, and independent researchers’ relations with authorities are often described as conflictual and contentious. Also, methods of data collection and information to be relayed in research publications are pre-controlled and approved, which obstructs the task of researchers in analysing, explaining and monitoring.

Difficulties in obtaining reliable data were highlighted in the different CRs. In Egypt, the Egyptian state appears to be the only official source of information about security-related events.²⁸ This is coupled with restrictions on reporting on any terrorism-related events and harsh sanctions for those who attempt to

²⁸ Ahrum Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS) / Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCPA).

do so.²⁹ The CR highlighted the “particular attention” paid to those who decide to report on issues involving national security or the role of the security forces and political authorities. As a result, most of the information landscape is occupied by state-owned media, leaving researchers no other option than to report from abroad. The Washington DC-based think tank Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy is most known for researching and publishing reports on Egypt’s security situation.

A similar trend exists in Jordan, where security and law enforcement have been generally reluctant to disclose information. Data production is “largely led by the state’s capable security apparatus” (Mhadeen, Bint Feisal and Stikovac Clark, 2020). Empirical research on P/CVE is reported to be very restricted, “with only a handful of national institutions and actors generating local knowledge on the issue” (Ibid.). As such, the Centre for Strategic Studies (University of Jordan) is considered to be one of the few providers of knowledge in Jordan, along with international actors (such as UNDP, Mercy Corps, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, etc.), and a small number of national CSOs, such as the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) Institute.

In Morocco, the CR notes that “most [P/CVE research] has been reports sponsored by institutional actors” (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020). Researchers are not spared from the challenges other researchers in the region are facing. Indeed, research tends to be restricted to purely descriptive studies and historical tracing of the evolution of the phenomena of terrorism and VE in the country, while the main empirical tools are essentially data found in newspapers or provided by security services, which is largely explained by the “difficulty of access to the field” (Ibid.). Thus, sociological, in-depth research is still lacking in Morocco as reported by the CR.

27

On the other hand, there is a nascent field of local knowledge production on radicalisation in Tunisia. Along with national state institutions (such as the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies and the National Observatory on Youth) and international organisations (including UNDP Tunisia and the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt), local organisations are navigating these topics, such as national universities, the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights and the Jasmine Foundation for Research and Communication.

Research in Tunisia faces the same challenges as in other parts of the region, such as the fact that it is still hindered by lack of funding by Tunisian authorities. The reliance on international funding through various donors’ active partnerships and support for local CSOs raises dilemmas for CSOs concerning the independence of their work. Limited funding also restricts the ability to work on large sample sizes, thus preventing findings that can be generalised.

²⁹ That might go as far as calling off events, incarceration...

Concluding Remarks and Ways Forward

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this report, formulating comprehensive P/CVE frameworks is a pressing need in all countries studied. The region is facing a complex problem that calls for a concerted and coordinated approach. Yet, several key challenges prevent the emergence of such an approach.

A key consideration when designing CT and P/CVE strategies is the conceptualisation of this phenomenon and knowledge of its causes and contributing factors. These remain vague and under-researched in the four countries studied. A key obstacle to introducing integrated and comprehensive strategies is the dominant perspective that CT and CVE are hard security issues requiring hard security responses monopolised by armed and security forces. Confronting the process of radicalisation must begin with holistic strategies that respect human rights and the rule of law, as well as addressing the broader factors involved in the radicalisation process. Hence, formulating national strategies, supported by regional and international collaboration, is critical at this point.

Furthermore, lack of communication and transparency are holding back the effectiveness of national strategies and measures by failing to fully engage with non-governmental actors and the wider public. For immediate security risks, certain restrictions on the duty to inform and communicate are valid. However, such restrictions must not prevent the building of relations and cooperation between state authorities, on the one hand, and researchers, CSOs and other non-governmental actors, on the other.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the comparison of the four CRs, we can formulate a list of recommendations in relation to the various gaps identified.

To National Governments

Short-Term Recommendations

- Introduce a precise definition of terrorism and related notions.
- Operate a shift in discourse from just condemning VE to formulating concrete actions to be implemented.
- Undertake or support ongoing research to understand the risk factors and changing processes of radicalisation.
- Encourage a more dynamic, in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through:
 - Facilitating access to data to researchers (clarify exceptions to access to information based on national security).
 - Provide incentives for research.
 - Ease restrictions on research.

- Provide the space for researchers and CSOs to engage in formulating and assessing P/CVE policies and programmes.

Medium and Long-Term Recommendations

- Shifting the P/CVE paradigm: moving away from hard security approaches to more comprehensive approaches to radicalisation and VE that address the root causes of the problem not just its symptoms.
- Set up P/CVE strategies (Egypt).
- Initiate urgent reviews of existing strategies and update them according to changing needs and contexts, taking into account the benefits of:
 - A holistic approach (starting from PVE to follow-up and re-integration of returnees or former prisoners).
 - A participatory approach to design and implementation, including all relevant actors, especially CSOs.
- Encourage CSO participation in designing, implementing and assessing P/CVE programming.
- Dedicate resources to specialised structures to ensure effective coordination, while instituting clear accountability frameworks.
- Establish clear guidelines and communication protocols between different stakeholders.
- Subject strategies and structures to monitoring and evaluation processes.
- Ensure that communication channels remain open between researchers and decision-makers in order to translate research into policies.
- Reform justice (including prisons) and security sectors.
- Reform and train religious actors.
- Address concerns over legitimacy and accountability of religious leaders and actors.
- Encourage women and youth involvement in P/CVE programming (by providing for procedural or financial incentives).
- Seek to ensure that CT and P/CVE strategies are not completely overhauled with each change of government but enjoy some level of stability.
- Give committees responsible for overseeing and implementing CT and P/CVE strategies resources and a degree of institutional autonomy to be able to coordinate and ensure implementation.
- Give greater attention to regional and sub-regional cooperation in P/CVE issues as a matter of mutual benefit.

To the European Union (EU)

Short-Term Recommendations

- Encourage countries to align their strategies with international standards.
- Encourage involvement of CSOs, women and youths in P/CVE programming (by providing for procedural or financial incentives and involving them in steering or coordination committees).
- Involve CSOs in monitoring and oversight of P/CVE programmes.
- Facilitate regional information sharing and exchange of best practices and cooperation.
- Share the EU's own expertise on the matter and learn from the region's initiatives.
- Coordinate donors' engagement in order to avoid duplication and assist national governments

to put in place mechanisms for mapping P/CVE initiatives.

- Support governments to establish research programmes on radicalisation, in cooperation with local universities, research institutes and CSOs.

Medium and Long-Term Recommendations

- Support security and judicial reform processes in the region through capacity-building programmes.
- Support initiatives aiming at strengthening rule of law and accountability, in particular through building the capacity of parliamentary bodies, media institutions and CSOs.
- Encourage information-sharing by law enforcement agencies.
- Impose conditions on CVE/CT assistance (respect for human rights, cyclical reviews).
- Accompany national government in designing communication strategies with regard to P/CVE and evaluate these.
- Increase funding opportunities for priority communities, and seek to put in place multi-annual funding for CSOs rather than very short project cycles.
- Provide core funding for CSOs specialising in P/CVE issues to help them build their capacity and carve out a niche in this field.

References

BOOKS

Anholt, R. and Wagner, W. (2020) Resilience in the European Union External Action. In: Cusumano, E., and Hofmaier, S. eds. *Projecting Resilience Across the Mediterranean*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Badarin, E. and Schumacher, T. (2020) The EU, Resilience and the Southern Neighbourhood after the Arab Uprisings. In: Cusumano, E., and Hofmaier, S. eds. *Projecting Resilience Across the Mediterranean*. London: Palgrave Macmillan

Collombier, V. and Roy, O. eds. (2017) *Tribes and Global Jihadism*. London: Hurst Publishers.
Cusumano, E., and Hofmaier, S. eds. (2020) *Projecting Resilience Across the Mediterranean*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kaunert, C., Léonard, S. and Wertman, O. (2020) EU Counter-Terrorism Cooperation with the Middle East and North Africa In: Cusumano, E., and Hofmaier, S. eds. *Projecting Resilience Across the Mediterranean*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Larsen, J. A. and Koehler, K. (2020) Projecting Stability to the South: NATO's "New" Mission? In: Cusumano, E., and Hofmaier, S. eds. *Projecting Resilience Across the Mediterranean*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

E-BOOKS

Ben Mustapha B. A., E. (2019) *Returning Foreign Fighters: Understanding the New Threat Landscape in Tunisia*. In: R. Thomas, ed. 2019. *Returnees in the Maghreb: comparing policies on returning foreign terrorist fighters in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia*. [e-book] Brussels: Egmont Papers 107, pp. 35-48. Egmont – The Royal Institute for International Relations. Available through the Archive of European Integration of the University of Pittsburg website <aei.pitt.edu> at: <http://aei.pitt.edu/97375/1/EP107-returnees-in-the-Maghreb.pdf> [Accessed November 2020].

Berrada Kenza, K. (2019) *Morocco's Response to Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Tighter Security and Deradicalization*. *Returnees in the Maghreb: comparing policies on returning foreign terrorist fighters in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia*. [e-book] Brussels: Egmont Papers 107, pp. 23-34. Egmont – The Royal Institute for International Relations. Available through the Archive of European Integration of the University of Pittsburg website <aei.pitt.edu> at: <http://aei.pitt.edu/97375/1/EP107-returnees-in-the-Maghreb.pdf> [Accessed November 2020].

Mahdavi, M. (2020) *Whiter Post-Islamist: Revisiting the Discourse/Movement After the Arab Spring* In: Mohamed E., Fahmy D. (eds.) *Arab Spring. Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice*. [e-book], pp.

15-38. *Palgrave Macmillan, Cham*. Available through the Springer Link website <link.springer.com> at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-24758-4_2 [Accessed November 2020].

PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

European Commission (2011) *Joint Statement by Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, and Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy, on the Constituent Assembly Elections in the Republic of Tunisia*. EC Press release, 17 January [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_11_747 [Accessed January 2021].

European Commission (2016) *EU-Jordan: towards a stronger partnership*. EC Press release. Brussels, 20 July [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_16_2570 [Accessed January 2021].

European Commission (2017a) *Security Union: Strengthening Europol's Cooperation with third countries to fight terrorism and serious organised crimes*. EC Press release, Brussels, 4 June [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/security-union-strengthening-europols-cooperation-third-countries-fight-terrorism-and-serious_en [Accessed January 2021].

European Commission (2017b) *Security Union: Commission presents new measures to better protect EU citizens*. EC Press release. Brussels, 18 October [pdf] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/security-union-commission-presents-new-measures-better-protect-eu-citizens_en [Accessed January 2021].

European Commission (2018) *Report on EU-EGYPT relations in the framework of the revised ENP (2017-2018)*. High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Brussels, 5 December [pdf] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/report_on_eu-egypt_relations_in_the_framework_of_the_revised_enp.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

European Council (2015) *Informal meeting of heads of state government or government, 12 February 2015*. [online] Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2015/02/12/> [Accessed January 2021].

EU Neighbours Portal (n.d.) *EU-UNODC Global Initiative on Criminal Justice Responses to Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) (2015-2020)*. [online] Available at: <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/south/stay-informed/projects/eu-unodc-global-initiative-criminal-justice-responses-foreign> [Accessed November 2020].

European External Action Service (EEAS) (2014) *Declaration adopted at the Third European Union–League of Arab States Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting*. [pdf] Athens, 10-11 June. Available at:

https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/declaration_adopted_at_the_third_european_union-league_of_arab_states_foreign_affairs_ministerial_meetingjune_2014.pdf [Accessed November 2020].

European Parliament (2017) *Counter-terrorism cooperation with the Southern Neighborhood*. Directorate-General for External Policies Policy Department. [pdf] PE578.013 February 2017 Available at: https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/EXPO_IDA%282017%29578013_EN.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

European Union (2017) *EU-Egypt partnership priorities 2017-2020* [pdf] Brussels, 16 June. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/23942/eu-egypt.pdf> [Accessed January 2021].

Immenkamp, B., Pawlak, P. and Barzoukas, G. (2017) EU efforts on counter-terrorism – Capacity-building in third countries. *European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS)*. [pdf] PE 614.644. December 2017. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/614644/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)614644_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/614644/EPRS_BRI(2017)614644_EN.pdf) [Accessed November 2020].

Kingdom of Morocco Portal (2015) *Inauguration in Salé of the premises of the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation* (Translated from French). [online] 20 March. Available at: <https://www.maroc.ma/fr/actualites/inauguration-sale-des-locaux-du-bureau-central-dinvestigations-judiciaires-bcij> [Accessed November 2020].

Ní Aoláin, F. (2020) Egypt's updated Terrorism Law opens the door to more rights abuses, says UN expert, *The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights)*. [online] Geneva, 9 April. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25787> [Accessed November 2020].

UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) (2018) *UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*. [online] 26 June. A/RES/60/288). Available at: <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy> [Accessed November 2020].

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2000) *The Arab Convention For The Suppression Of Terrorism*. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/images/tldb-f/conv_arab_terrorism.en.pdf [Accessed November 2020].

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2008) *International Instruments related to the Prevention and Suppression of International Terrorism*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/Int_Instruments_Prevention_and_Suppression_Int_Terrorism/Publication_-_English_-_08-25503_text.pdf [Accessed November 2020].

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2017-2019) *Fact sheet of the Multi-Agency Task Force (MATF) of the Middle East and North Africa region*. [pdf] Available at:

https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/MATF/Fact_Sheet_MATF_-_New.pdf [Accessed November 2020].

United States Department of State (2017) *Country Reports on Terrorism*. [online] Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2017> [Accessed November 2020].

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (2015) *High-level thematic debate on promoting tolerance and reconciliation: fostering peaceful, inclusive societies and countering violent extremism*. [online] 21-22 April. Available at: <https://www.un.org/pga/69/hltd-promoting-tolerance-and-reconciliation/> [Accessed November 2020].

The World Bank (2020) *Unemployment, Youth Total - Middle East & North Africa*. [online] Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?end=2020&locations=ZQ&start=2020&view=bar> [Accessed November 2020].

REPORTS AND ACADEMIC JOURNALS

Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (2018) *The negative effects of terrorism on the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms: The case of Jordan*. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/AdvisoryCom/Terrorism/AmmanCenterHumanRightsStudies.pdf> [Accessed November 2020].

Amnesty International (2002) *The Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism: a serious threat to human rights*. [pdf] 9 January. IOR 51/001/2002. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/120000/ior510012002en.pdf> [Accessed November 2020].

Bondokji, N. and Mhadeen, B. (2019) *White Paper: Towards More Effective Human Security Approaches in the Context of the Emerging Threat of Violent Radicalization in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia*. [pdf] WANA - West Asia-North Africa Institute. Available at: http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/English%20White%20Paper_0.pdf [Accessed November 2020].

Chirchi, T., Kherigi, I. and Ghribi, K. (2020) *Tunisia Country Report* In Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne, eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing violent extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). [pdf] Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/tunisia-country-report-on-national-approaches-to-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

Institute for Economics & Peace (2020) *Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World*. [pdf] June. Available through the Reports Archive of the Vision of Humanity website <<http://visionofhumanity.org/reports>> at: https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/GPI_2020_web.pdf [Accessed November 2020].

Hashemi, N. (2016) The ISIS Crisis and the Broken Politics of the Middle East. [pdf] November. *Henry Luce Foundation, Boston University*. Available at: <https://www.bu.edu/cura/files/2016/12/hashemi-paper1.pdf> [Accessed January 2021].

McDonnell, A., Patton, J. and Zgheib Salloum, Y. (2018) Engaging Salafi Religious Actors in Morocco, The Role of Inclusion in Countering Violent Extremism. *International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD)*. [pdf] Available at: <https://icrd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Morocco-Report-Full-10.16.2018.pdf> [Accessed November 2020].

Mhadeen, B., Bint Feisal, A., and Stikovac Clark, J. (2020) Jordan Country Report. In Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne, eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing violent extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). [pdf] Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/jordan-country-report-on-national-approaches-to-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

Mouna, K.; Lahmidani, M. and Agudal, J. (2020) Morocco Country Report. In Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne, eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing violent extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). [pdf] Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/morocco-country-report-on-national-approaches-to-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

35

Pinfari, M. (2020) Egypt Country Report. In Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne, eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing violent extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). [pdf] Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/egypt-country-report-on-national-approaches-to-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (2019). *Multidimensional Poverty Analysis for the Middle East and North Africa (MDPA)*. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.sida.se/globalassets/sida/eng/partners/poverty-toolbox/mena-multidimensional-poverty-analysis.pdf> [Accessed November 2020].

Yom, Sean (2017). "Jordan and Morocco: The Palace Gambit". *Journal of Democracy*. 28 (2). P132-146.

Zoghlemi, M. and Toumi, H. (2019). Rethinking the Concept of Human Security and Its Approaches to Preventing and Combating Violent Extremism in Tunisia. *WANA - West Asia-North Africa Institute*. [online] 22 July. Available at: <http://wanainstitute.org/en/publication/rethinking-concept-human-security-and-its-approaches-preventing-and-combating-violent> [Accessed November 2020].

WEBSITES & OTHER ELECTRONIC SOURCES

A Akl, Z. (2019) Countering radicalisation in Egypt - Opinion. *Ahram Online*. [online] 20 November.

Available at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/4/0/356196/Opinion/Countering-radicalisation-in-Egypt.aspx> [Accessed November 2020].

Abu-Ismaïl, K. and Al-Kiswani, B. (2018) *Multidimensional poverty in the poorest parts of MENA: agenda for action*, *The Economic Research Forum. Policy Portal* [online] 13 February. Available at: <https://theforum.erf.org.eg/2018/02/13/multidimensional-poverty-poorest-parts-mena-agenda-action/> [Accessed November 2020].

Al-Sharafat, S. (2018) *Assessing Jordan's National Strategy to Combat Violent Extremism*, *The Washington Institute*. [online] 10 August. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/assessing-jordans-national-strategy-to-combat-violent-extremism> [Accessed November 2020].

Lagzouli, A. (2015) *Finance Law 2016: more than dh 6.5 billion allocated to the interior and the DGST* (Translated from French), *Le 360*. [online] 2 November. Available at <https://fr.le360.ma/politique/loi-de-finances-2016-plus-de-65-milliards-de-dh-alloues-a-linterieur-et-la-dgst-56001> [Accessed November 2020].

Middle East Monitor (2020) *Tunisia announces failure of a 'terrorist plot' to spread coronavirus*. [online] 17 April. Available at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200417-tunisia-announces-failure-of-a-terrorist-plot-to-spread-coronavirus/> [Accessed November 2020].

Muasher, M. (2011) *Jordan's Proposed Constitutional Amendments—A First Step In The Right Direction*, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. [online] 17 August. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2011/08/17/jordan-s-proposed-constitutional-amendments-first-step-in-right-direction-pub-45366> [Accessed November 2020].

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (n.d.) [online] Available at: https://www.oic-oci.org/search/?x_key=terror&x_do=1&lan=en&x_where=news [Accessed November 2020].

Oxford Business Group (2016) *Meeting the needs of a growing youth population in the Middle East* in *The Report Abu Dhabi 2016*. [online] Available at <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/analysis/dividend-or-liability-meeting-needs-region%E2%80%99s-growing-youth-population-0> [Accessed November 2020].

Plecher, H. (2020) *MENA Countries: Urbanization in 2019*, *Statista*. [online] 4 August. Available on a subscription basis at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/804824/urbanization-in-the-mena-countries/> [Accessed November 2020].

Roy, O. (2020) *The political dimension of the Covid19 epidemic in the Middle East*, *MEDirections Blog - The Middle East Directions Programme Blog*. [online] 4 May. Available at: <https://blogs.eui.eu/medirections/political-dimension-covid19-epidemic-middle-east/> [Accessed November 2020].

Shehata, S. and Al Anani, K. (2020) Egypt, *Wilson Center*. [online] Available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/egypt> [Accessed November 2020]

Souli, S. (2016) Tunisia: Why Foreign Fighters Abandon ISIL, *Al Jazeera*. [online] 3 March. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/3/3/tunisia-why-foreign-fighters-abandon-isil> [Accessed November 2020].

The Global Community Engagement Resilience Fund (GCERF) (n.d.) [online] Available at: <https://www.gcerf.org/> [Accessed November 2020].

The International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (n.d.) [online] Available at: www.theiij.org [Accessed November 2020].

Trading Economics (2020) Unemployment Rate. [online] Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/unemployment-rate> [Accessed November 2020].

Zelin, A. and Walles, J. (2018) Tunisia's Foreign Fighters, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. [online] 17 December. PolicyWatch 3053. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/tunisias-foreign-fighters> [Accessed November 2020].

Acronyms

CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CR	Country Report
CT	Countering Terrorism
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NSTCET	National Strategy to Combat Extremism and Terrorism
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
VE	Violent Extremism

Regional perspectives
on radicalisation
and violent extremism
in the Balkans

Lulzim Peci, Executive Director, Kosovo
Institute for Policy Research and
Development (KIPRED)

Agon Demjaha, Senior Research Fellow,
Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and
Development (KIPRED)





REGIONAL OUTLOOK

POLITICAL CONTEXT

All four countries under consideration used to belong to the communist bloc and are in fact rather young democracies. However, while Bulgaria was already an independent state, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), North Macedonia and Kosovo were constitutive parts of former Yugoslavia and became independent after its disintegration.¹ After the end of the Cold War and collapse of communism, all four countries entered a long and painful transition period towards democracy and free-market economy. In addition, they all adhered the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) one of their key foreign policy strategic priorities. Membership of these two organisations was seen by all four countries as the best way for the development of a functional democracy and coherent security system. Today, Bulgaria and North Macedonia are members of NATO and BiH started implementing the Membership Action Plan in 2018, while Kosovo is lagging behind in its efforts to join the Alliance.² On the other hand, Bulgaria became a member of the EU in 2007 and North Macedonia has been a candidate country since 2005, while both BiH and Kosovo signed Stabilisation And Association Agreements with the EU in 2008 and 2015, respectively.

In addition, all four countries have made considerable progress in creating effective, impartial and authoritative institutions that guarantee the rule of law and respect for human rights and freedoms. To achieve these goals, in addition to the EU and NATO, membership of the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was also of the utmost importance for all these countries. The CoE is undoubtedly one of the key international organisations for upholding human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe. On the other hand, within its comprehensive approach to security, the OSCE addresses a wide range of security-related concerns, which among others include human rights, national minorities and democratisation. Still, all four countries need further comprehensive reforms on their path towards fully consolidated democracies. This is especially true for the three Western Balkan countries that require crucial reforms related to the rule of law, fight against corruption and organised crime, economy and competitiveness as well as regional cooperation and reconciliation (European Commission, 2019). These internal issues, coupled with political instability, weak economy and relatively high levels of poverty, have turned these countries into fertile ground for radicalisation and violent extremism.

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION

The size of the overall population of the four Western Balkan countries that are subject of this report differs greatly. Kosovo has the smallest population (1,739,825 residents) and Bulgaria the largest

¹ BiH declared its independence on 15 October 1991, North Macedonia on 8 September 1991, and Kosovo on 17 February 2008.

² Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic integration process has been hindered because five EU member states – Spain, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Cyprus – have not yet recognised its independence. The first four countries are also NATO members.

(7,364,570 residents), while BiH and North Macedonia are somewhere in between with 3,531,159 and 2,022,547, respectively.³ In all four countries, the population is quite diverse and dynamic. Since the collapse of communism, all four countries have witnessed an ongoing migration, especially of their young population. Population in all four countries is rather mixed both ethnically and religiously. The ethnic composition of the population in Bulgaria, BiH, Kosovo and North Macedonia is given in Table 1.⁴

TABLE 1. Population by Ethnic Affiliation

BULGARIA Total 7,364,570	BiH Total 3,531,159	KOSOVO Total 1,739,825	NORTH MACEDONIA Total 2,022,547
Bulgarian 6,245,155 (84.8%)	Bosniak 1,769,592 (50.11%)	Albanian 1,616,869 (92.9%)	Macedonian 1,297,981 (64.18%)
Turkish 567,072 (7.7%)	Serbian 1,086,733 (30.78%)	Bosniak 27,533 (1.6%)	Albanian 509,083 (25.17%)
Roma 360,864 (4.9%)	Croat 544,780 (15.43%)	Serb 25,532 (1.5%)	Turk 77,959 (3.85%)
Russian 15,595 (0.21%)	Others 96,539 (2.73%)	Turk 18,738 (1.1%)	Roma 53,879 (2.66%)
Armenian 9,978 (0.13%)	Not declared 27,055 (0.77%)	Ashkali 15,446 (0.9%)	Serb 35,939 (1.78%)
Roma 8,824 (0.5%)		Egyptian 11,524 (0.7%)	Bosniak 9,659 (0.48%)
		Gorani 10,265 (0.6%)	Vlach 20,993 (1.04%)
		Roma 8,824 (0.5%)	

Source: CONNEKT Country Reports. Own production.

Table 1 shows that, in terms of ethnic composition of the population, Kosovo and Bulgaria are the two most homogenous countries, with Albanians constituting 92.9% and Bulgarians 84.8% of the total population in Kosovo and Bulgaria, respectively. It is interesting that although the proportion of minorities in Kosovo is very small, it has the highest number: seven recognised ethnic groups as ethnic minorities. In Bulgaria, in addition to Bulgarians, Turks with 7.7% and Roma with 4.9% represent two others large ethnic minorities in the country. On the other hand, BiH is made up of three major constituent nations/ethnic groups, while other minorities are insignificant. As can be seen from the table, Bosniaks make up exactly half of the

³ Official data from the latest census in respective countries. It should be noted that the last census in Bulgaria and Kosovo took place in 2011, in BiH in 2013 and in North Macedonia as early as 2002.

⁴ Unless indicated otherwise, data used in all tables is taken from CONNEKT Country Reports of BiH Kapidžić, Dudić, Kadić et al., (2020), Bulgaria (Dzhekova, 2020), Kosovo (Peci and Demjaha, 2020) and North Macedonia (Georgieva, Kambovski and Trajanovski, 2020).

population with 50.1%, while Serbs and Croats account for 30.8% and 15.4%, respectively. It should be clarified that the category “Others” that makes up around 2.7% of the total population in BiH refers to the members of national minorities and people who do not identify with any of the three constituent nations. In North Macedonia, Macedonians and Albanians represent the two major ethnic groups with 64.18% and 25.17%, respectively. It is worth noting that, except in BiH, ethnic Turks are present as an official minority in all other countries.

On the other hand, as already mentioned, the four countries under consideration are also quite heterogeneous in terms of religious affiliation of the population (Table 2). It should be noted that, although religious affiliation in these countries most of the time is intrinsically linked with ethno-national identities, there are also exemptions with many groups for whom religious, linguistic and ethnic markers do not correspond to such a classification. While the majority of Bulgarians, Macedonians and Serbs are Orthodox, there are also Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (Pomaks), Macedonian-speaking Muslims (Torbesi), and Serbian-speaking Muslims. On the other hand, while a huge majority of Albanians in Kosovo are Muslims (95.6%), there are also Catholic and Protestant Albanians in the country. In addition, it must be noted that there are significant historical differences among Muslims living in various countries of the Western Balkans in terms of numerous languages and ethnicities (Peci and Demjaha, 2020).

TABLE 2. Population by Religious Affiliation

	BULGARIA	BiH	KOSOVO⁵	NORTH MACEDONIA
	Total	Total	Total	Total
	7,364,570	3,531,159	1,739,825	2,022,547
Orthodox	4,374,135 (59.4%)	Muslim 1,790,454 (50.7%)	Muslim 1,663,412 (95.6%)	Orthodox 1,310,184 (64.78%)
Muslim	577,139 (7.84%)	Orthodox 1,085,760 (30.75%)	Catholic 38,438 (2.2%)	Muslim 674,015 (33.32%)
Protestant	64,476 (0.87%)	Catholic 536,333 (15.1%)	Orthodox 25,837 (1.7%)	Catholic 7,008 (0.35%)
Catholic	48,954 (0.66%)	Atheist 27,853 (0.82%)	Other 1,188 (0.07%)	Protestant 520 (0.026%)
Armenian-Gregorian	1,715 (0.023%)	Agnostic 10,816 (0.33%)	No religion 1,242 (0.071%)	Other 30,820 (1.52%)
Jewish	706 (0.01%)	Not declared 32,700 (0.94%)	Not declared 2,495 (0.14%)	
No answer	1,605,476 (21.8%)	Other 40,655 (1.16%)	Prefer not to answer 10,265 (0.59%)	
		No answer 6,588 (0.20%)		

Source: CONNEKT Country Reports. Own production.

⁵ 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 and Orthodox religion were underrepresented. See Collaku, 2011.

According to Table 2, it is clear that the Orthodox and Muslim religions are dominant in the four countries under consideration. Another important factor is that in all four countries under consideration a significant proportion of the population is made up of Muslims. In Bulgaria, Orthodox religion constitutes 59.4%, while Muslims make up only 7.84%. However, one cannot ignore the fact that 21.8% of the citizens in Bulgaria did not answer the question about their religious affiliation. In Kosovo, on the other hand, with 95.6%, Muslims make up by far the most dominant religious group in the country. It is worth noting that, in addition to the majority of Albanians, all other ethnic minorities except Serbs also belong to Islam. In North Macedonia, the majority of the population are Orthodox (64.78%), while 33.32% belong to the Muslim religion. In BiH, similarly to ethnic composition, religious affiliation of the population is also more balanced with 50.7% Muslims, 30.75% Orthodox and 15.1% Catholic. It should be noted that except for the case of Croat Catholics in BiH, Catholic and other religions in these four countries are represented in symbolic percentages.

Significantly, the collapse of communism in the four countries under discussion left an ideological vacuum that provided space for the strengthening of nationalism and revival of religiosity, which then gave rise to strong ethno-religious identities. The roots of such complex ethnic/religious structures in all four countries actually go back to the *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire. This system created an institutional structure for administratively integrating increasingly growing numbers of Balkan non-Muslims into the Ottoman state. It organised the Ottoman Empire according to religious adherence, rather than by territory, economic status or ethnic background. All *subjects* were distributed among three *millets* that represented the most important existing non-Muslim faiths: (1) the Orthodox Christians, (2) the Jews, and (3) the Armenian Christians (Daskalov and Vezenkov, 2015: 386). Obviously, the Muslims de facto constituted the fourth *millet*, making at the same time the Muslims of the Balkans members of the Ottoman-Turk "political nation" regardless of their mother tongue (Hupchick, 2002: 133). Such *millet* identification eliminated all considerations of ethnicity, and thus lacked any territorial connotations associated with the Western European concept of nation. *Millet* affiliation governed one's life no matter where one lived within the empire, or how mixed the population was. Consequently, for all Ottoman subjects the homeland was anywhere within the borders of the empire, thus increasingly leading to mixed ethnic populations throughout the Balkans (Hupchick, 2002: 134).

Since in the *millet* system the national communities had no geographical boundaries, every cultural community considered all territories in which its congregation was a majority as its own. As a result, once the Ottoman Empire started disintegrating, the newly-emerged Balkan nations claimed each others' territories as their own. In that way, such a system from the beginning carried in itself the possibility of bloody wars that followed after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. However, it is worth noting that while in the case of other Balkan nationalisms religion as a factor of unification for the population played a positive role in the development of nationalism, in the Albanian case it certainly had a divisive role.⁶ Since both the Ottoman Empire and its neighbours insisted on dividing

⁶ Albanians were basically divided into three religions: Islam, Orthodoxy, and Roman Catholicism. Muslims who made up about 70% of the population were further divided into Sunni Muslims (forming the majority) and Bektashi Muslims, a liberal Shiite sect which was a heterodox and syncretic order that harboured the first pioneers of nationalism among Albanian Muslims. See Demjaha and Peci, 2016: 11.

Albanians along religious lines, for the Albanians it was crucial to overcome the religious division by opting for a secular Albanian national identity based on “cultural and linguistic unity” (Misha, 2002: 41). After the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, history has basically repeated itself with the ethnic and religious background of adversaries reinforcing each other. In Croatia, Catholic Croats fought against Orthodox Serbs, while in BiH, Orthodox ethnic Serbs fought against Muslim ethnic Bosniaks and Catholic ethnic Croats, though at some points during the war everybody fought against everybody. In Kosovo, the police, military and paramilitary forces made by Orthodox ethnic Serbs fought against predominantly Muslim ethnic Albanians, and in Macedonia the conflict was basically between Orthodox ethnic Macedonians and Muslim ethnic Albanians.

DEFINITIONS OF RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

OFFICIAL DEFINITIONS STEMMING FROM NATIONAL STRATEGIES

Official definitions of radicalisation and violent extremism were outlined in the National Strategies for preventing and countering violent extremism that were adopted in all four countries under consideration.⁷ Since the drafting of these strategies in all countries was heavily assisted by international experts, especially American, in many aspects they are quite similar, and basically also employ similar definitions. It is interesting that the “Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism, 2015-2020” 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. In terms of definitions, the Strategy only builds on the definition by the OSCE, that is: “Violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism.” Kosovo’s “Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism, 2015-2020” 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.”

45

On the other hand, the Bulgarian “Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (2015-2020)” defines “radicalisation” as “a process of adopting extreme opinions, views, beliefs and ideologies, to the extent of fierce rejection of all alternatives.” Also, according to the Strategy, “radicalisation” is “characterised by a decisive readiness for imposing one’s views and principles over the rest of society, through rejecting the constitutional foundations of democracy and non-respect for fundamental human rights. In some cases, it can lead to adopting the ideology of violence.” In addition, the Strategy defines “radicalisation which leads to violence” as “a phenomenon where individuals or groups of people adopt opinions, views and ideas, which might lead to acts of terrorism,” and “Violent extremism” as “a phenomenon where individuals or groups of people support or carry out ideologically motivated violence to achieve their ideological goals.” Similarly, in North Macedonia, according to the “National Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia for Countering Violent Extremism 2018-2022” “violent extremism” refers to “the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to pursue radical ideological, religious, or political views.”

⁷ BiH and Kosovo were the first two countries in the Western Balkans to adopt the National Strategies. In July 2015, BiH adopted the “Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism, 2015-2020”, while in September 2015, Kosovo adopted the “Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism, 2015-2020”. On the other hand, Bulgaria adopted the “Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (2015-2020)” in January 2016, while in North Macedonia the “National Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia for Countering Violent Extremism 2018-2022” and the “National Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2018-2022” were adopted only in March 2018.

DEFINITIONS IN ACADEMIC WORK

In addition to official definitions of radicalisation and violent extremism discussed above, the academic community from all four countries under consideration has also made serious efforts to distinguish between “radicalisation”, “extremism” and “violent extremism,” while at the same time developing definitions for these terms. However, these efforts came with a certain delay since, until recently, authors in the Western Balkans gave little attention to the terminology related to radicalisation and violent extremism. During recent years, attempts were made to conceptually distinguish between the terms “radicalisation” and “extremism” (often used interchangeably) as well as “violent extremism” and “terrorism” (also often used interchangeably) (Becirevic, 2016). Academic experts believe that, in addition to being a weakness, the unclarity of terminology represents a serious concern because official definitions are an important aid in developing a common understanding of how to structure and implement P/CVE activities.

In Bulgaria, the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) has in its numerous studies published since 2016 mainly adopted official definitions described in the country’s National Strategy. However, the CSD has also provided a review of the state of the art in academic discourses on definitional issues (Dzhekova et al., 2015), which is used as a reference point for other authors. The CSD often points to the difference between violent and non-violent radicalisation in its work. It also uses definitions by the EU and United Nations (UN) institutions such as the European Commission (EC) definition of radicalisation as “a process of socialisation leading to the use of violence” (European Commission’s Experts Group on Violent Radicalisation, 2008: 5), as well as the CoE’s definition of violent extremism: “promoting, supporting or committing acts which may lead to terrorism and which are aimed at defending an ideology advocating racial, national, ethnic or religious supremacy and opposing core democratic principles and values” (Council of Europe, 2015). It should be noted that other authors in Bulgaria either adopt the official state definitions, refer to foreign academic works or do not provide a definition at all.

In Kosovo, definitions about the concepts of radicalisation and violent extremism are still unclear and there is hardly a consensus within the country about their meaning and use. Nevertheless, a number of researchers have utilised various definitions about the concepts of radicalisation and violent extremism. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study has used 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). On the other hand, a report by Berghof’s Foundation defines only 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). Interestingly, 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” (Krasniqi, 2019: 10). In North Macedonia, several researchers adopt Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins’s definition on radicalisation, as a process which “involves adopting an

extremist worldview, one that is rejected by mainstream society and one that deems legitimate the use of violence as a method to effect societal or political change” (Hafez and Mullins, 2015: 260).⁸

It is worth noting that, when discussing definitions related to radicalisation and violent extremism, researchers try to avoid 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. According to Bećirević, Halilović and Azinović, authors and researchers have begun to employ these terms with more caution because they acknowledge 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 (Bećirević et al., 2017). As a result, phrases such as “radicalisation into violent extremism” or “radicalisation towards terrorism” are used more frequently by different authors. For instance, a 2018 study in Macedonia published by the OSCE provides a compound definition of “radicalisation towards terrorism” as a “dynamic process in which a person accepts the terrorist violence as a possible, even legitimate action” (OSCE, 2018). Such an approach towards radicalisation was later recreated in the aforementioned National Strategy⁹ of North Macedonia and other governmental documents. Bećirević, on the other hand, insists 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 (Bećirević, 2018). Although Krasniqi also acknowledges that “Islamic radicalism” is not necessarily manifested through violence, he 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). Similarly, Krasniqi defines the notion of “Islamic extremism” as “actions against constitutionalism characterized by the active opposition of any other religious doctrine or ideology” (Krasniqi, 2019: 10).

It should be noted that the official definitions adopted in National Strategies are rather broad, and in principle cover all types of radicalisation and violent extremism. However, in reality the main focus of law enforcement and intelligence efforts has predominantly been on Islamic radicalisation. To a certain extent the same is also true for the academic literature since most of the authors cover only Islamic religious communities. Due to donor-driven research priorities, academic literature on violent extremism and radicalisation in BiH mostly mention the Salafi movement and studies are exclusively concerned with Islamic radicalisation (Kapidžić, Dudić, Kadić et al., 2020). In Kosovo, only a few of the authors adopt more general definitions that, in addition to religious, also encompass political, ideological and social groups and individuals (Peci and Demjaha, 2020). In reality, extremism is also present among all religious groups in the four countries under consideration. The same applies to far-right radicalisation and ethnically and politically motivated acts of violence. Unfortunately, such forms of radicalisation and violent extremism are often overlooked and remain largely under-reported, under-researched and often under-prosecuted (Dzhekova, 2020). For the time being, representatives of state institutions in all four countries continue to view violent extremist threats mainly through the Islamist religious prism.

⁸ For the studies by the Macedonian researchers using this definition, see Stojkovski and Kalajdzioski, “Perspektivi na Zaednicata”, Selimi and Stojkovski, “Assessment of Macedonian efforts”, and Stojkovski and Kalajdzioski, “Report on Macedonia”.

⁹ For more details see “National Counterterrorism Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia (2018-2022)”, Government of the Republic of Macedonia. National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism (2018), 11.

PRESENCE OF RADICALISED AND VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS IN THE BALKANS

FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND RETURNEES

The proportion of Muslim population in the countries being discussed in this report is of special importance since nearly all who departed to join various insurgent groups in Syria and Iraq were Muslims. It should be noted that determining the exact number of persons from these countries that have joined Daesh/ISIS is rather difficult. In many cases entire families have travelled to Syria and Iraq. While in most cases such family travel was either initiated or imposed by a senior member of the family, it is difficult to distinguish whether only men were engaged in combat activities. Another factor that complicates the foreign fighters picture is the fact that a considerable number of individuals who travelled to conflict zones either have dual citizenship or long-term residence outside of the four countries under consideration. Accordingly, different sources and authors operate with different figures, and the ones under discussion represent the best possible estimates.

Apart from Bulgaria, which had only one citizen who has allegedly joined Daesh, the number of citizens that have travelled to Syria and Iraq from the other three countries was rather worrisome. The distribution of numbers of men, women and children from Bulgaria, BiH, Kosovo and North Macedonia who have travelled to conflict zones in Syria and Iraq is given in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Numbers of Men, Women and Children in Syria and Iraq

Countries	Men in Syria/Iraq	Women in Syria/Iraq	Children in Syria/Iraq	Total
Bulgaria	1	0	0	1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	188	61	81	330
Kosovo	255	53	95	403
North Macedonia	140	14	No data	154
Total	585	128	176	889

As already mentioned, despite claims by certain foreign sources that up to 10 Bulgarian citizens may have joined Daesh (ICCT, 2016), according to the official data, during the period (2013-2016) only one Bulgarian citizen of Syrian descent fought with Daesh (ДНЕВНИК, 2017). In general, the Ministry of the Interior and the State Agency for National Security (SANS) consider that Bulgaria acts primarily as a transit zone for foreign fighters travelling to Syria and Iraq.¹⁰ On the other hand, as shown in Table 3, a total number of 188 men, 61 women and 81 children travelled to Syria and Iraq, from BiH and from the Bosnian diaspora between 2012 and 2015, with the largest number of departures being registered during 2013 (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2018). In Kosovo, according to the latest data,

¹⁰ According to the State Agency for National Security, around 332 FTFs passed through Bulgaria between 2013 and 2015 en route to Syria and Iraq. See Stolova, 2016, "The Roma and the Radicals: Bulgaria's Alleged ISIS Support Base", Balkan Insight.

since 2012, an estimated 403 individuals travelled from Kosovo to join terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq, of whom 255 were men, 53 women and 95 children (Perteshi, 2018: 18). It is interesting to note that the size of the contingent of Kosovo and BiH in conflict zones has increased due to children born in Syria and Iraq to Kosovan and Bosnian parents. According to official data, as of early 2019 there were 78 children born to Kosovan nationals and 77 born to Bosnian nationals (Shtuni, 2019: 18-19). Finally, Table 1 shows that 140 men and 14 women travelled from North Macedonia to Syria and Iraq during the period from 2012 to 2017, while there is no data about the eventual number of children (Azinović, 2018). It is also worth mentioning that, according to the available data, it is estimated that 75 foreign fighters from Kosovo have been reported killed in conflict zones (Perteshi, 2018: 18). In April 2018, BiH authorities made public in the media death certificates for 76 fighters with BiH citizenship (including five women and four children) who were killed in Syria (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2018). The reported number of casualties in North Macedonia stands at 27 men (Šutarov, 2018).

Once Daesh started losing most of its controlled territory in Syria and Iraq, the number of returnees increased rapidly, while the number of foreign fighters joining the conflict zones declined considerably. By mid-2016 intensified efforts of authorities in BiH and Kosovo contributed to a complete halt of new departures to conflict zones. Meanwhile, the only citizen from Bulgaria who joined Daesh returned to Bulgaria in 2017 (Дневник, 2017). In BiH 47 men and 8 women came back by the beginning of 2016, while by the end of 2017 a total of about 50 adults returned to BiH from Syria and Iraq (Azinović, 2018). In 2019, BiH authorities managed to repatriate only 7 more foreign fighters. On the other hand, Kosovo authorities not only succeeded in preventing further departures of its citizens to conflict zones but have been rather successful in returning Kosovo citizens from Syria and Iraq. Out of the total estimated number of 135 returnees, 110 were repatriated in April 2019, of whom 74 are children, 32 women, and 4 alleged male foreign fighters (Shtuni, 2019: 19). In North Macedonia, the number of foreign fighters travelling to Syria and Iraq also considerably declined from 2017, and completely stopped in 2018.¹¹ Meanwhile, the number of returnees to North Macedonia from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq was estimated at around 80 (Georgieva, Kambovski and Trajanovski, 2020). However, a considerable number of citizens from these countries still remain in Syria and Iraq. It is believed that as of December 2018, 98 adult Bosnian citizens (49 men and 49 women) still remain in Syria and Iraq (Atlantic Initiative, 2018). However, Shtuni claims that in 2019 BiH nationals made up the largest group from the Western Balkans that remained in Syria and Iraq, since there were still some 102 Bosnian adults in conflict zones (Shtuni, 2019: 19). On the other hand, around 190 individuals from Kosovo are supposed to have remained in conflict zones (Perteshi, 2018: 18). However, of those remaining, there is an estimated number of only 66 men who are considered potential combatants, since it is believed that some 70% of them or 139 (47 women and 92 children) were non-combatants (not directly engaged in fighting) (Kursani, 2018: 18). According to various security sources, the number of citizens from North Macedonia still remaining in conflict zones is somewhere between 25 and 35 (Azinovic, 2017: 10; Georgieva, Kambovski and Trajanovski, 2020).

¹¹ The reasons for these developments, besides the demise of the Daesh controlled territory, are reported to be the new legislation on terrorism in North Macedonia, as well as the novel and practical obstacles for reaching the war zones in Syria and Iraq (Stojkovski and Kalajdziovski, 2018: 4-5). See also the National Counterterrorism Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia (2018-2022) by the Macedonian Government and the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism published in February (2018).

It is worth noting that at a certain point Kosovo and BiH were considered to have the highest number of foreign fighters per capita out of any European country (Peci and Demjaha, 2020; Kapidžić, Dudić, Kadić et al, 2020). However, it seems that such numbers tend to be blown out of proportion and are the result of calculating the number of fighters per one million inhabitants of a certain country. As Azinovic points out, “such calculations are subject to the (un)reliability of counts of these individuals and, moreover, must be interpreted within the appropriate framework” (Azinovic, 2017: 9). Namely, if the ratio of foreign fighters to the total Muslim population is taken into account, the number of foreign fighters for Kosovo and BiH is actually slightly below the average of the EU (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2018). By way of example, let us compare the rates of citizens’ engagement in Belgium with those in BiH, Kosovo and North Macedonia.

Initially, let’s compare the total number of foreign fighters with the overall population in these respective countries (Table 4).

TABLE 4. Comparison of the Number of Foreign Fighters in Overall Population

Country	Total Population	Number of Foreign Fighters ¹²	FF per 1,000,000 people	Prevalence of FFin general population
Belgium ¹³	11,370,000	498	44	1 in 22,727
BiH	3,531,159	249	70	1 in 14,289
Kosovo	1,739,825	308	177	1 in 5,649
North Macedonia	2,022,547	154	76	1 in 13,157

Source: CONNEKT Country Reports. Own production.

In terms of overall population, Table 4 clearly shows that all three countries of the Western Balkans have a higher rate of citizen engagement than Belgium in the fighting in Syria and Iraq. Among the countries of the Western Balkans, Kosovo with 177 foreign fighters per 1 million citizens has the highest rate, followed by North Macedonia (76 per 1 million) and BiH (70 per 1 million). Belgium, on the other hand, has registered only 44 foreign fighters per 1 million citizens (Azinović, 2018: 5). However, assuming that the accounted number of foreign fighters in the available data refers almost exclusively to Muslims, it is interesting to make the comparison of the rates of Muslim citizens’ engagement in Belgium with the three countries of the Western Balkans (Table 5).

Table 5 clearly shows that when statistics about the foreign fighters in Belgium, BiH, Kosovo and North Macedonia are placed within the context of the Muslim population in each respective country, the comparison yields different results. Now the rate of citizen engagement in Belgium in the fighting in Syria and Iraq is higher than all three countries of the Western Balkans. Namely, in this case there are 83 foreign fighters for every 100,000 Muslims in Belgium (Azinović, 2018: 5), meaning one foreign fighter

¹² The overall number of foreign fighters includes citizens of fighting age, both men and women, in Syria and Iraq.

¹³ Data for Belgium is taken from Azinović (2018: 5).

in every 1,204 Muslims in Belgium. Table 5 also shows that, in this scenario, it is North Macedonia with 23 foreign fighters per 100,000 citizens (1 in 4,348 Muslims) that has the highest rate among the countries of the Western Balkans. North Macedonia is followed by Kosovo with 19 foreign fighters per 100,000 citizens (1 in 5,263 Muslims) and BiH with only 14 foreign fighters per 100,000 citizens (1 in 7,143 Muslims). The analysis conducted shows that statements that Kosovo and BiH had the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in Europe might be blown out of proportions and should be taken with caution.

TABLE 5. Comparison of the Number of Foreign Fighters among the Muslim Population

Country	Total Muslim Population	Number of Foreign Fighters ¹⁴	FF per 100,000 Muslim inhabitants	Prevalence of FFin Muslim population
Belgium	600,000 ¹⁵	498	83	1 in 1,204
BiH	1,790,454	249	14	1 in 7,143
Kosovo	1,663,412	308	19	1 in 5,263
North Macedonia	674,015	154	23	1 in 4,348

Source: CONNEKT Country Reports. Own production.

OTHER VIOLENT MOVEMENTS: THE CASE OF UKRAINE

In terms of cases of citizens of these four countries having joined other violent movements abroad, the only worrisome one is the phenomenon of foreign fighters in Ukraine. Namely, it has been reported that a small number of BiH nationals has been fighting as part of foreign armed separatist groups in Ukraine. While the official number of these fighters stands at seven, it is believed that the real number is much higher. Predominantly, these fighters from BiH travel to Ukraine through Serbia and are assisted by the Movement of Serbian Chetniks Ravna Gora. In Ukraine, they join pro-Russian paramilitary formations, together with fighters from Serbia as part of the "Serbian Hussar Regiment". Despite the phenomenon, according to BiH police agencies, in October 2017 only one BiH national was on trial for fighting in Ukraine (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2018). It is interesting to note that according to the Atlantic Initiative Survey of 2,110 citizens and 12 focus groups in BiH, there is a much higher support among Serbs for fighters going to Ukraine than from Bosniaks for fighters going to Iraq or Syria (Atlantic Initiative, 2018). A similar phenomenon of foreign fighters has been also reported in Kosovo, with Serb individuals living in the north of Kosovo having travelled to Ukraine. According to certain media reports, 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).

¹⁴ The overall number of foreign fighters includes citizens of fighting age, both men and women, in Syria and Iraq.

¹⁵ According to Azinovic, the total number of Muslim population in Belgium is around 700,000. See Azinović (2018: 5).

In Bulgaria it is not possible to provide the exact number of individuals who have joined violent movements abroad, since such information is gathered by security authorities and is subject to classification. However, according to the Mirotvorets Center established by the pro-Western Ukrainian government, five Bulgarian citizens have either fought in Donbas or aided pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine (Club Z, 2016). North Macedonia is the only country under consideration that has not reported any foreign fighter to be in the war zone in Ukraine, although the country officially refused to apply sanctions and restrictive measures on Russia for annexing Crimea in 2014 (Beslin and Ignjatijevic, 2017). It is worth mentioning that, 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).

ISLAMIC RADICALISATION VERSUS OTHER FORMS OF RADICALISATION

As already mentioned, the disintegration of the Daesh-controlled territory has basically ended the departure of foreign fighters from the four countries to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. However, as Azinović has pointed out, the end of Daesh as the world has known it “does not mean the end of the radicalisation and recruitment into extremism and violence in the region” (Azinovic, 2018: 4). In fact, representatives of state institutions in all four countries have continued to view violent extremist threats mainly through the prism of radical Islam. Other forms of radicalisation and extremism, despite being more prevalent and resulting in more violence in comparison to the highly publicised instances of so-called Islamist radicalisation, have not received as much public attention and have not been subject to any sustained efforts at assessment or counteraction. In Kosovo, the 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, neither have any concrete preventive actions been taken by the government, nor have any specifically focused studies been conducted. On the other hand, a study that assessed eventual possible violent extremist threats in Kosovo has suggested that violent extremist threats in Kosovo were mainly politically motivated. The study 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: 6). The situation is similar with the far-right and ultra-nationalist groups in Bulgaria that have been associated with numerous completed violent acts (including by political party members) (Nova, 2015), as opposed to violent manifestations of Islamist radicalisation. Members of such far-right groups and movements that operate within the country are mainly ethnic Bulgarians, and their actions are enabled by an environment of widespread prejudice towards minorities like the Roma (Галъп Интернешънъл, 2015) and worsening attitudes towards other minorities like homosexuals (Дневник, 2019). In North Macedonia one can also hardly speak of any serious tendency towards voicing radical Islamic views in a political framework, since such views are predominantly confined to the private sphere and individual religious practice (North Macedonia Country Report, 2020: 123). Consequently, it can be said that in North Macedonia no real religious rhetoric has been established in public discourse, although this

discourse does have greater religious content than before (Savevski and Sadiku, 2012). However, within the country there are several fringe organisations, which sometimes evoke certain violent symbols and use militant discourse and hate speech. The March 2019 case of the arrest of the leader of the Macedonian Christian Brotherhood, a far-right formation, after his public threats to the former Macedonian Prime Minister is one of the most prominent examples (Mkd.mk, 2019).

In BiH, some media and civil society organisations (CSOs) are often reported as radical, or their followers as radicalised, Serb and Croat groups being driven by ethnic nationalism and Orthodox and Catholic extremism. These are right-wing groups that 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 for these groups to 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 (Kapidžić, Dudić, Kadić et al., 2020).

It might be concluded that, although other forms of radicalisation and violent extremism also exist in all four countries, representatives of state institutions have continued to view violent extremist threats mainly through the prism of radical Islam. These other forms of radicalisation and extremism related to far-right extremism, especially hate crime, despite being much more numerous, have received much less attention both by law enforcement and the media. The same is true of the emergence of foreign fighters in Ukraine, which despite being spotted from media reporting in BiH, Kosovo and Bulgaria, did not receive the attention of state institutions and researchers. 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).

PUBLIC POLICIES ON PREVENTION AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (P/CVE)

PUBLIC POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

The four Balkan countries included in this report show some general commonalities, in terms of their policies and programmes on P/CVE, but they also differ on some particular aspects. The overall approach of the four countries is shaped by the security-oriented paradigm that puts Islamic religious fundamentalism at the centre of attention and perceives terrorism as its most aggravated manifestation. The other forms and factors that nurture radicalisation and violent extremism assume less attention, if any, in policies and programmes on P/CVE. This includes extremist political ideologies, ethnic nationalism or Christian religious fanaticism.

In a practical realm, the four Balkan countries have adopted National Strategies for Countering Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (hereafter: National Strategies) and implemented Action Plans.

The leading role in coordinating multi-agency efforts for implementation of National Strategies is played by the security sector institutions, particularly ministries of interior. The degree of involvement of non-state actors in drafting the National Strategies is higher, as compared to the process of their implementation.

54

Some of these countries have adopted special legislative acts to buttress policies and programmes to counter radicalisation and violent extremism (e.g., Kosovo has adopted special law), and other countries have either amended their Criminal Codes (BiH and Bulgaria) or have not taken any special legislative step (North Macedonia).

PRODUCING P/CVE KNOWLEDGE

There are two general categories of analysis and documents, pertaining to the P/CVE, which are produced in the four countries of the Balkans included in this report. First, official documents such as national strategies, action plans, various public data, and analysis. The second category includes a vast and diverse array of research and other publications produced by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organisations, media, academic community and other non-state actors.

In line with the dominant perception mentioned above, the majority of official and non-official documents, and other publications, focus on the nexus between radicalisation and violent extremism with Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. In this context, although the phenomenon of Islamic radicalism started to attract the attention of the security institutions as well as think tanks and academic pundits very early,¹⁶ the

¹⁶ Bulgaria, for example, imposed a more restrictive regime on the operations of externally-funded Muslim organisations and foundations, since the mid-1990s. See Троева (2012: 7). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the origins and sources of radicalisation and violent extremism, along ethnic and religious lines, is a reflection of the war and post-war situation of the first half of 1990s. See on this, Azinovic (2017).

publications related to this issue were scarce before the mid-2010s. Thus, in Kosovo, for example, one of the early studies was published in 2005, by KIPRED, with the title: “Political Islam among the Albanians: Are the Taliban coming to the Balkans?” (KIPRED, 2005). In BiH, as Bećirević emphasises, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and particularly the rise of Daesh, have increased the research and publications on radicalisation, extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism (Bećirević, 2016: 5). However, as the country reports show, the majority of the research and publications by the non-state actors have been conducted since the mid-2010s and this is related to the rise of Daesh and the problem of foreign fighters from the Balkans who joined terrorist organisations in Iraq and Syria.

Most of the studies and reports produced by the non-state actors investigate the socio-political, economic and historic context and factors that nurture radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism – in addition to providing facts and data. They advocated a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach to radicalisation and violent extremism. An approach that, as Stojanovski and Kalajdzioska assert, embraces a “soft approach”, as opposed to a “top-down” approach (Stojkovski and Kalajdziovska, 2018: 7). Or, as Azanovic argues, an approach that avoids the logic of “one-size-fits-all” (Azanovic, 2017: 7).

However, most studies and reports that have been produced in the four Balkan countries have leaned towards case-study and descriptive methodologies, more than towards empirical and/or comparative methodological approaches. In relation to this, Kursani noted that “up until 2016 research on violent extremism in the Western Balkans was not thoroughly grounded on evidence-based research” (Kursani, 2019: 7). The same conclusion has been underlined by Kapidžić, Dudić, Kadić, Turčalo in their country report on BiH. They underline that 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 (Kapidžić, Dudić, Kadić et al., 2020).

The overall importance of analytical studies on the issue of radicalisation and violent extremism lies in the fact that they raise public awareness and boost professional knowledge and expertise on this issue. However, only the documents adopted by the public institutions serve as a framework within which the state/institutional policies towards P/CVE are implemented.

In this regard, the most important official document adopted by all countries included in this study are their respective National Strategies, which were adopted between 2015 and 2018. Before highlighting the major components of these National Strategies, it is important to bring to attention two slight differences between the four countries of the Balkans that are subject of this study.

First, these countries have not used standard titles to name their National Strategies and this is a reflection of their conceptual approach to the junction between violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism. Thus, in BiH, it is called the “Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combating Terrorism for 2015–2020”; in Bulgaria, the “Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (2015-2020)”; in Kosovo, the “Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020”; and in North Macedonia, the “National Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia for Countering Violent Extremism 2018-2022”. Furthermore, North Macedonia has also adopted a separate “National Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2018-2022”. Kosovo has adopted complementary strategic documents,

including the “National Strategy for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons in Kosovo 2014-2016”, the “National Strategy and Action Plan for Community Safety 2011-2016”, the “National Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo for the Prevention and Combating of Informal Economy, Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes 2014-2018”.

The second difference has to do with the fact that, apart from North Macedonia where the two National Strategies were adopted by the parliament in 2018, in the other three countries, namely Bulgaria, BiH and Kosovo, their respective National Strategies have been adopted by the governments. National Strategies have been supplemented by the Action Plans in all these countries.

MAPPING THE ACTORS

The four countries included in this report have adopted multi-agency approach towards P/CVE. Their National Strategies and Action Plans envisage involvement of a broad range of institutions and actors. This includes state institutions and mechanisms (central and local), religious communities, NGOs, media, and schools. In general, National Strategies in all four countries of the Balkans anticipate involvement of three categories of actors: first, national/public institutions at central and local level (with a leading role of the security institutions); non-state actors (NGOs, media, other CSOs); and religious organisations. These institutions and actors have been involved, in various degrees, in the phase of drafting of National Strategies, and they are supposed to play a key role in their implementation (mostly through the Action Plans).

From the country reports, it transpires that the only visible difference in this context is the involvement of international actors. Thus, in Kosovo, BiH and North Macedonia, international organisations and donors play an important role in supporting and influencing national policies and programmes on P/CVE (particularly through financial donations and expertise). This is not the case in Bulgaria, as the respective country report does not indicate any meaningful role of the international organisations or actors in supporting P/CVE policies and programmes.

TARGETED POPULATION

In a broader sense, the targets of the strategies and efforts towards radicalisation and violent extremism are persons and groups that are exposed to the risk of radicalisation and those that have already radicalised. In concrete terms, in each of the four countries this includes primarily youngsters and also persons who are socioeconomically and psychologically vulnerable, former foreign fighters, religious leaders (particularly radical imams), and far-right and ethno-nationalist ideological groups. The above groups are primary targets, as they are more likely to become radicalised and get involved in violent extremism and terrorism. In addition, the target group includes parents and teachers, journalists, police and prison officers and other law enforcement officials, local communities and specific regions/locations that are more exposed to the risk of radicalisation. This targeted group is in a position to play an important role in preventing and combating radicalisation and violent extremism.

Beyond general commonalities in terms of the targets, country reports highlight some differences in this regard in the National Strategies of the Balkan countries included in this study. These differences have to do with the fact that some countries give more importance to specific targets than the others do. Thus, Bulgaria's National Strategy aims to address both Islamic and far-right radicalisation (this is not the case in the other three countries, where far-right groups are either excluded or receive negligible attention). North Macedonia includes explicitly the Public Prosecutor and Ombudsman in its National Strategy, whereas BiH puts particular emphasis on the religious communities. The National Strategy of Kosovo gives special place to online radicalisation and correctional services (prisons).

ENFORCEMENT MECHANISMS FOR THE P/CVE INITIATIVES

There are two dimensions of the institutional efforts to enforce P/CVE initiatives; first, creating an appropriate legal basis and, second, setting the corresponding institutional mechanisms.

Regarding the legal framework, all countries of the Balkans included in this study have provisions in their criminal laws on offences related to terrorism, extremist acts and hate crimes. The legal basis is formed primarily by the Criminal Codes and Criminal Procedural Codes, but also by other relevant laws, such as laws on prevention of money laundering and financing of terrorism, e.g., in North Macedonia (Assembly of Republic of Macedonia, 2014). Some countries have amended their Criminal Codes (BiH in 2014, and Bulgaria in 2015) to make them more compliant with the need to prosecute the new waves of radicalism and the phenomenon of foreign fighters going from or through the Balkans in the conflict zones in the Middle East. Kosovo went a step further to adopt a special law, namely the "Law on Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflicts outside State Territory". It is important to emphasise that this legal framework, in all Balkan countries, is construed within the normative confines of their general constitutional orders, which embody the fundamental principles of secularism and individual human rights (including freedom of speech, freedom of belief, conscience and religion). Hence, the fight against radicalisation and violent extremism, in the legal sense, hinges on a delicate balance between secular constitutional order, individual liberties and public safety.

As to the institutional apparatus for the enforcement of the P/CVE initiatives, some of the Balkan countries included in this study have set up specific enforcement mechanisms. In some countries, this role is played primarily by conventional institutions while in some other there are no specific enforcement mechanisms for P/CVE initiatives.

Thus, BiH has not established any specific enforcement mechanisms for P/CVE initiatives that would make any part of P/CVE obligatory for participants. As the country report on BiH emphasises, most initiatives rely on a combination of community pressure and personal contacts. North Macedonia has established the National Committee for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and the Fight against Terrorism, which has the leading role in implementing the Action Plans. This Committee involves in its work a wide spectrum of other actors and institutions, including the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Local Self-Government, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Agency for Youth and Sports and the Committee on Relations between Religious Communities and Religious Groups,

civil society, religious leaders, local communities, and the media. In Kosovo, the Kosovo Security Council plays a key role in monitoring the implementation of the National Strategy and the respective Action Plan. The Council comprises a five-person working group (technical) and a larger government working group that includes relevant ministries, security and intelligence institutions, as well as representatives of NGOs, religious communities and other stakeholders. In Bulgaria, the Security Council at the Council of Ministers is responsible for strategic decision-making related to P/CVE. An inter-institutional working group operating under the umbrella of the Ministry of Interior is in charge of developing the strategy and action plans and drafting implementation reports (which are then approved by the Council of Ministers).

It is important to add that the local approach plays an important part in the implementation of P/CVE initiatives. Accordingly, some countries have established specific, locally-based mechanisms in regions and municipalities with higher exposure to radicalisation and violent extremism (e.g., projects in Cair, Gostivar and Kichevo in the Republic of North Macedonia, the pilot “Referral Mechanism” in Gjilane, Kosovo, or International Organisation for Migration (IOM) projects with local stakeholders in BiH). As a final point on the issue of enforcement mechanisms, in line with the general security-oriented paradigm through which the problems of radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism are interwoven, in all countries of the Balkans included in this study, the Ministries of Interior/Security play a key governmental role in dealing with P/CVE.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Financial resources (budget) are one of the major challenges for the implementation of the National Strategies and execution of Action Plans in all four Balkan countries studied. Furthermore, as it is specified in the respective country reports, the picture is different in each of these countries. In Bulgaria and North Macedonia no specific state budget has been allocated to the implementation of the National Strategies and execution of Action Plans. From the country reports, it appears that BiH has allocated limited resources for P/CVE (Kapidžić, Dudić, Kadić et al., 2020). In the Republic of Kosovo, the 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 (Peci and Demjaha, 2020). Furthermore, in BiH, Kosovo and North Macedonia, a significant portion of the budget for the implementation of the National Strategies, as well as the projects of civil society on P/CVE, come from international donors.

MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED

The overall objective of the policies and programmes of countries, as reflected in their National Strategies, is to create an official framework for a coordinated, multi-layered and multi-agency approach towards the phenomenon of violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism. The wide range of measures and actions included in the National Strategies and Action Plans have two general goals: first, prevention, and second, addressing/tackling radicalisation and violent extremism. In concrete terms, these include measures aimed at early identification of vulnerable individuals/groups, prevention

of their radicalisation, de-radicalisation and re-integration. In the practical realm, the goals are reached through activities, such as raising awareness in the local communities, schools, religious institutions, training of imams, teachers, police officers, journalists, dissemination of information and public campaigns, creation of ad-hoc bodies at regional and local levels, and so on. These measures go hand in hand with conventional actions taken by the law enforcement and justice institutions, which aim at prosecution of violent extremism and terrorist activities.

In their National Strategies all four countries emphasise prevention as one of their paramount strategic goals and this is a very rational approach. They differ, however, only on the degree and manner in which they gear towards reaching this goal. BiH, for example, initially focused more on detection and countering and, in recent years, shifted its attention more towards prevention (Kapidžić, Dudić, Kadić et al., 2020). Bulgaria in practice focuses more on detection and countering, although the National Strategy spells out objectives of detection and countering, as well as prevention and reversing radicalisation (Dzhekova). As noted in the country report, the National Strategy of Kosovo encompasses four strategic objectives, whereas early identification and establishing prevention mechanisms are spelled out as complementary, yet separate goals (Pezi and Demjaha, 2020). In the case of North Macedonia, the National Strategy refers to the goal of “prevention” in somewhat aspirational tone by underlining that “a preventive approach to radicalisation and violent extremism is the most economical way to deal with this problem, which must not be treated insufficiently or in general ignored, given that the use of force is always the last, not the first and unique answer option” (Georgieva, Kambovski, Trajanovski, 2020).

EXISTENCE OF CRITICAL EVALUATION SYSTEMS

The Balkan countries included in this study have not established any independent mechanism with the specific mandate to evaluate P/CVE initiatives. Consequently, different reports about P/CVE, prepared by various bodies, are the only evaluation mechanisms. These reports are presented by the relevant state institutions or/and by the various CSOs, international donor organisations or media. At the institutional level, periodic reports are prepared mostly by the Ministries of Interior and the intelligence agency (in Bulgaria) or other relevant state institutions (e.g., in Kosovo such reports are presented by the Secretariat of Kosovo Security Council). However, as the country reports underline, all these countries lack independent critical evaluation systems for P/CVE. This appears to be a critical loophole in the policies and programmes on P/CVE of the four Balkans countries included.

IMPACT OF P/CVE PROGRAMMES ON THE THREAT OF RADICALISATION

Two factors hinder any genuine assessment of the impact of P/CVE on the threat of radicalisation at individual, community and macro level. The first factor has to do with the lack of a comprehensive evaluation system at the national level, which would provide consistent and comprehensive data and information about the practical effect of the national policies and strategies vis-à-vis the threat of radicalisation. The second inhibiting factor has to do with the fact that any trend pertaining to

radicalisation and violent extremism is a product of numerous causes and dynamics, which operate at national and supra-national milieu. Against this backdrop, one of the parameters provided from the country reports is the trend of foreign fighters from the Balkan countries who join Daesh or other terrorist groups in the Middle East. According to the country reports, the number of foreign fighters from the Balkans who have joined terrorist groups in the Middle East has rapidly declined since 2016 (Kosovo and BiH have reported no new cases of individuals joining foreign terrorist organisations in Syria or Iraq since 2016). This can be related, at least partially, to the disintegration of the Daesh-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq. However, from the country reports it can be inferred that national governments and the non-governmental sector (including religious communities) have pursued aggressive policies to counter radicalisation and violent extremism – with a major focus on Islamic religious fundamentalism. This has had a positive effect, particularly in raising general awareness about the perils of radicalisation and violent extremism. In this context, it should be underlined that the trend of decrease in the number of citizens who joined Daesh from the four Balkan countries coincided with the adoption of the National Strategies and Action Plans, as well as with the more vigorous actions taken by the security and justice systems in these countries.

In relation to this issue, it should be emphasised that the phenomenon of the foreign fighters who have joined the Russian-backed forces in the Ukrainian separatist territories is largely outside the purview of the general national policies and programmes towards radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism. As the country reports indicate, this includes mostly ethnic Serbs from BiH (Kapidžić, Dudić, Kadić et al., 2020) and Kosovo (Peci and Demjaha, 2020) but possibly also few Bulgarian nationals (Dzhekova, 2020).

The existence of mechanisms and models for the measurement of the practical impact of P/CVE strategies on radicalisation at individual, community and macro level is an indispensable factor for a successful public policy on this issue. This component is lacking in the four countries of the Balkans analysed.

EU POLICIES TOWARDS P/CVE IN THE BALKANS

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September 2001 and attacks in the UK and Spain in 2004-2005 made terrorism and ideological radicalism as a key security concern for the EU. The EU policy on radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism has been articulated within the area of freedom, security and justice (AFSJ), as well as Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). On this issue, Kudlenko underlines that “it was within the AFSJ that the EU formulated its Counter-Terrorism Strategy of 2005, which remains the key document in the field until today. The CFSP, on the other hand, has been instrumental in allowing the EU to establish partnerships and cooperation agreements with third countries and regional organizations” (Kudkleno, 2019: 4).

The EU policy towards P/CVE in the Balkans is formulated within the general approach and capacity of the Union to combat violent extremism and terrorism. In this regard – as the EU official documents constantly emphasise – the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism is primarily the responsibility of the member states. Hence, the EU’s role is to support the efforts of member states, primarily by providing expertise, and strengthening cooperation and coordination (European Commission, 2020).

In this context, it is important to highlight that the Counter-Terrorism Strategy of 2005 laid down four directions through which the EU bolsters the efforts of the member states in combating terrorism: first, strengthening national capabilities; second, facilitating European cooperation; third, developing collective capability; and four, promoting international partnership (Council of the European Union, 2005).

EU APPROACH TOWARDS THE BALKANS

The EU’s approach towards the Balkans, in relation to P/CVE, is influenced by the general socio-political context of this region. Four interrelated factors need to be particularly emphasised: political and economic transition, weak state structures, high level of crime and corruption, and ongoing security system reforms.

In line with its general approach on P/CVE, the EU’s role in the Balkans is primarily to support the efforts of the countries of this region in their efforts to respond to violent extremism and to counter terrorism. The EU’s focus is on combating terrorism, which is perceived primarily as a security-related matter. This serves the twin objective of preserving the stability of the Balkans and boosting the security of the EU. In referring to this intersection, some authors have observed that although the Balkans has experienced very few terrorist attacks, terrorists and weapons with links to the Balkans were involved in a range of attacks in EU member states, the US and even the Middle East (Azinović, 2018: 7; Wensink et al. 2017: 69; Shtuni, 2016).

When it comes to the relation of the EU with the four countries included in this report, it is crucial to underline the fact that Bulgaria is a member state of the EU, which is not the case with the other three countries (BiH, Kosovo, and North Macedonia). This means, by default, that the EU cannot have the

same policies and relations with all countries of the Balkans included in this report. This is so because Bulgaria, as an EU member state, must fully align its security policies with the Union, as well as with other political, economic, judicial and administrative standards under the Copenhagen criteria (European Council, 1993).

Conversely, the key to understanding the EU relations with BiH, Kosovo and North Macedonia is the EU's enlargement policy in the Western Balkans through the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) and the framework of relations set by the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA). A series of EU-WB Summits have been held in order to better orchestrate this integration process through the endorsement of bilateral agendas.

As the European Union Institute for Strategic Studies Institute (2017) points out, the "potential EU accession is the driving force behind the democratic and economic transformation of Western Balkan societies." The three non-EU countries under study, in turn, have different statuses: North Macedonia as a candidate country, and BiH and Kosovo as potential candidates.

North Macedonia has been a candidate since 2005 and, despite having signed the historic Prespa Agreement with Greece and resolved a long-standing dispute over its name (Petříček et al., 2019), the launch of negotiations is paralysed. Corruption is still a deep problem in many spheres of society, and respect for fundamental rights needs to be improved since hate speech, police impunity and the detrimental situation in prisons are not properly addressed. Relations with the neighbourhood have changed for the better and this should follow the spirit of the agreement signed with Greece and the Treaty on Good Neighbourly Relations with Bulgaria. In terms of the economy, the coronavirus crisis is reversing the positive trends of 2019 and it is having a strong economic and social impact on the performance of the market (North Macedonia 2020 Report, 2020).

BiH is a potential candidate since the political and economic criteria, the public administration reform, the area of the judiciary, fundamental migration rights, and the fight against corruption and organised crime are held back by a significant lack of progress. Significant reforms are pending to guarantee freedom of assembly and freedom of expression and of the media, among others. On the economic front, progress is limited, and COVID-19 has further deteriorated the functioning of the economy (Kapidžić, Dudić, Kadić et al., 2020). Thus, it is still at an early stage of fulfilling the obligations of EU membership.

Kosovo is a potential candidate, which, unlike the other WB countries, has an additional obstacle: the fact that it has not yet been recognised as an independent state by five EU member states (see footnote 2). As of 2020, it is imperative for the country to reach an agreement with Serbia on the normalisation of their bilateral relations so that both can advance in their respective accession processes. Corruption is widespread and limited progress has been made, human rights legislation is not sufficiently prioritised, and the economic front is still a challenge (Kosovo 2020 Report, 2020).

The EU's approach towards the Western Balkan countries is "an investment in the EU's security economic growth and influence" and it is based on very diverse initiatives that have paid attention to

the weaknesses and strengths of cross-regional relations. In general terms, the situation in the Western Balkans is dominated by a serious concern about corruption which is not properly tackled yet, bad performance in terms of institutions, public administration and judiciary, slow GDP growth, and still some unresolved legacies from the past (Dabrowski and Myachenkova, 2018: 5-19).

The EU's institutionalised cooperation with the Western Balkans, related to the domain of terrorism, goes back to the year 2006. In that year, the Council of the European Union adopted the Action Oriented Paper on Improving Cooperation, on Organized Crime, Corruption, Illegal Immigration and Counter-Terrorism, between the EU, Western Balkans and relevant ENP Countries (Council of the European Union, 2006).

In 2008, the Council of the European Union adopted the Conclusions on Cooperation with Western Balkan Countries on the Fight against Organised Crime and Terrorism (Council of the European Union, 2008). This document was adopted with the aim of aligning the anti-terrorism policies of the Western Balkans countries with the EU's Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Subsequently, a series of visits to the Balkans were carried out by counter-terrorism experts from Europol and EU member states between 2008 and 2010. The major conclusion drawn by these visits was that most states of the region approached terrorism as part of organised crime and were only in initial stages of developing legal frameworks and administrative capacities for countering radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism (Kudlenko, 2019: 6). It is worth underlining in this regard that, in 2011, the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator who was engaged in reviewing the progress of the EU Action Plan on combating terrorism emphasised that the Western Balkans was a priority for the EU and, therefore, the EU should support countries of this region in their efforts on counter-terrorism (Council of European Union, 2011: 34).

The most important documents adopted in this regard is the Initiative on Integrative and Complementary Approach to Counter-Terrorism and Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans, which was adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2015 (known by its acronym: WBCTi).¹⁷ This document was followed by the successive Integrative Plan(s) of Action (2015-2017; 2018-2020), which are not legally binding documents.

The WBCTi proclaims its major goal of "eliminating duplications and overlapping in countering terrorism and violent extremism activities in the Western Balkans region through a new cost-effective concept, which builds upon the needs and priorities identified together with the Western Balkans countries and strategic partners active in the region, and uses a combined bottom-up and top-down approach" (Council of the European Union, 2015a: 3). The WBCTi and the Integrative Plans of Action (WBCTi iPA) make an intrinsic connection between violent extremism and terrorism. Thus, the WBCTi iPA 2015-2017, refers to the "activities, which address jointly identified needs in the area of countering terrorism as well as countering violent extremism, including the earliest stages of prevention [...]" (Council of the European Union, 2015b: 3).

¹⁷ The WBCTi originates from the Brdo Process regional ministerial framework chaired by Slovenia, where the ministers of interior/security of the Western Balkans have strongly expressed the demand for a more coordinated action in this policy field.

At the 2018 EU-Western Balkans summit in Sofia, several flagship initiatives were presented within the Western Balkans Strategy and, among them, one initiative of reinforcing the engagement in security and migration. Under this enunciate, counter-terrorism and the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism stood as important priorities. Cooperation at the operational level, on migration and border management, support for capacity-building in the area of cyber-security, and the creation of an EU Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) inter-agency Task Force were the main tools conceived to enhance stability.

At the EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Forum on Justice and Home Affairs, held in October 2018, the representatives of the six Western Balkan countries and the EU Commission (Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos) signed a Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans. The EU and the Western Balkan countries undertook to work together towards reaching five major objectives by December 2020. These five objectives are listed as follows:

- 1: A Robust Framework for Countering Terrorism and Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism: Institutional Set-up and Legal Alignment, Implementation and Enforcement Capacity;
- 2: Effective Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism;
- 3: Effective Information Exchange and Operational Cooperation;
- 4: Building Capacity to Combat Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing;
- 5: Strengthening the Protection of Citizens and Infrastructure (EU Commission, 2018).

Subsequently, the fight against terrorism has assumed an important place in the regular progress reports that the EU Commission issues every year to measure the advancement of the Balkan countries in their EU membership process (this includes BiH, Kosovo and North Macedonia). Most of these reports have reviewed the progress of these countries on terrorism, in conjunction with the security and rule of law and, to a lesser extent, with ideological radicalisation and extremism.

Any general conclusion on the effects of the EU's policy on P/CVE in the Western Balkans has to take into account two crucial facts. First, the EU does not have the principal role in confronting P/CVE and terrorism in the Western Balkans. This role belongs to the countries of this region, whereby the EU plays an important role in boosting their efforts. Second, the EU is not the only international actor that plays an important role in the security dynamics of the Western Balkans. NATO and its key member states (particularly the US), and to a lesser extent the OSCE, also play important roles in this regard. Therefore, the EU's endeavours in combating P/CVE in the Balkans need to be coordinated not only with the countries of this region but also with the other international stakeholders.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Clayer, N. (2012) *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit Shqiptar: lindja e një kombi me shumicë myslimane në Evropë*, Tiranë, Botime Përpjekja.

Hupchick, D. (2002) *The Balkans: from Constantinople to Communism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Misha, P. (2002) Invention of Nationalism: Myth and Amnesia. In Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd Jürgen Fischer, eds. *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*. Indiana University Press.

Roumen Daskalov and Alexander Vezenkov eds. (2015), *Entangled Histories of the Balkans - Volume Three: Shared Pasts, Disputed Legacies*, Brill.

E-BOOKS

Šutarov, V. (2018) The Threat Posed by Foreign Terrorist Fighters to the Republic of Macedonia and the Western Balkans, in *Between Salvation and Terror: Radicalization and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in the Western Balkans*, ed. by Vlado Azinović, 103-125. [e-book] London: *The Atlantic Initiative*. Available through Central and Eastern European Online Library website <ceeol.com> at: <https://www.ceeol.com/search/book-detail?id=830477> [Accessed January 2021].

JOURNAL ARTICLES

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 1*(16). Pristina: Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development.

Hafez, Mo. and Mullins, C. (2015) The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38(11).

Kudlenko, A. (2019) The Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism Initiative (WBCTi) and the Capability of the EU as a Counter-Terrorism, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 28(4).

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.

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

PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

Assembly of Republic of Macedonia (2014) *Decree on promulgation of the Law on prevention of money laundering and financing terrorism*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/7904/file/fYROM_prevention_money_laundering_financing_terrorism_2014_en.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers (2015) *Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism 2015-2020*. [pdf] Available at: http://msb.gov.ba/PDF/STRATEGIJA_ZA_BORBU_PROTIV_TERORIZMA_ENG.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

Council of Europe (2015) *Conclusion of Radicalization and Expression of Hate, Guidelines for Local and Regional Values*. [pdf] Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/090000168071b338> [Accessed January 2021].

Council of the European Union (2005) *The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy*. [pdf] Available at: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2014469%202005%20REV%204> [Accessed January 2021].

Council of the European Union (2006) *Action Oriented Paper on Improving Cooperation, on Organised Crime, Corruption, Illegal Immigration and Counter-terrorism, between the EU, Western Balkans and relevant ENP Countries*. [pdf] Available at: <https://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2015001%202006%20INIT> [Accessed January 2021].

Council of the European Union (2008) *Presidency conclusions*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/101346.pdf [Accessed September 2020].

Council of the European Union (2011) *EU Action Plan on Combating Terrorism*. [pdf] Available at: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2015893%202010%20REV%201> [Accessed January 2021].

Council of the European Union (2015a) *Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Member States Meeting within the Council on the Integrative and Complementary Approach to Counter-Terrorism and Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. [pdf] Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14986-2015-INIT/en/pdf> [Accessed January 2021].

Council of the European Union (2015b) *EU Western Balkan Counter-terrorism Initiative: Integrative Plan of Action*. [pdf] Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13887-2015-INIT/en/pdf> [Accessed January 2021].

European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008) *Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism*. Brussels: European Commission. [pdf] Available at: https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20080500_cscp_report_vries.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

European Commission (2018) *Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans*. [pdf] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/signature-joint-action-plan-counter-terrorism-western-balkans_en [Accessed January 2021].

European Commission (2019) *Communication on EU Enlargement Policy*. [pdf] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-communication-on-eu-enlargement-policy_en.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

European Commission (2020) *A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond*. [pdf] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/pdf/09122020_communication_commission_european_parliament_the_council_eu_agenda_counter_terrorism_po-2020-9031_com-2020_795_en.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

Government of the Republic of Macedonia (2018) *National Counterterrorism Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia (2018-2022)*. Skopje: Government of the Republic of Macedonia. National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism. [pdf] Available at: https://wb-iisg.com/wp-content/uploads/bp-attachments/6135/ct_national_strategy_eng_translation_sbu.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

Министерски съвет [Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria] (2015a) Стратегия за противодействие на радикализацията и тероризма (2015 – 2020 г.) [*Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (2015 – 2020)*]. [pdf] Available at: [https://www.mvr.bg/docs/default-source/strategicheskidokumenti/%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%B5-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%B8-%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BC%D0%B0-\(2015-2020-%D0%B3-\).pdf?sfvrsn=66f863d4_2](https://www.mvr.bg/docs/default-source/strategicheskidokumenti/%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%B5-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%B8-%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BC%D0%B0-(2015-2020-%D0%B3-).pdf?sfvrsn=66f863d4_2) [Accessed January 2021].

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

OSCE (2018) *Ulogata na Gragjanskoto opštество vo Sprečuvanje i Sprotivstavuvanje na Nasilen Ekstremizam i Radikalizacija koi Vodat kon Terorizam. Vodič za Jugoistočna Evropa*. Skopje: Organizacija za bezbednost i sorabotka vo Evropa.

Qirezi, A. (2017) *Public pulse analysis on prevention of violent extremism in Kosovo*. Pristina: UNDP Kosovo, June. [pdf] Available at: https://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/library/democratic_governance/public-pulse-analysis-on-prevention-of-violent-extremism-in-koso.html [Accessed January 2021].

Republic of Kosovo (2015) *Law No. 05/L-002 on prohibition of joining the armed conflicts outside state territory*. [pdf] Available at: <https://wb-iisg.com/wp-content/uploads/bp-attachments/6114/Law-on-Prohibition-of-Joining-the-armed-conflicts-outside-state-territory.pdf> [Accessed January 2021].

Wensink, W., B. Warmenhoven, R. Haasnoot, R. Wesselink, B. van Ginkel, S. Wittendorp, C. Paulussen, et al. (2017) *The European Union's Policies on Counter-Terrorism: Relevance, Coherence and Effectiveness*. Directorate-General for Internal Policies. Policy Department. [pdf] Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583124/IPOL_STU\(2017\)583124_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583124/IPOL_STU(2017)583124_EN.pdf) [Accessed January 2021].

REPORTS

Atlantic Initiative (2018) *Countering Violent Extremism Baseline Program: Research Findings – Bosnia & Herzegovina*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative. [pdf] Available at: <https://atlantskainicijativa.org/wp->

content/uploads/CVE-Baseline-Research-Findings-December-2018.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

Azinović, V. and Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War - The foreign fighters' Bosnian contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative. [pdf] Available at: <file:///C:/Users/agarcia/Downloads/The%20New%20Lure%20of%20the%20Syrian%20War%20%20The%20Foreign%20Fighters%20Bosnian%20Contingent.pdf> [Accessed January 2021].

Azinović, V. (2017) *Between Salvation and Terror: Radicalization and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in the Western Balkans*. Atlantic Initiative. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.rcc.int/swp/docs/146/between-salvation-and-terror-radicalization-and-the-foreign-fighter-phenomenon-in-the-western-balkans-2017> [Accessed January 2021].

Azinović, V. (2018) *Regional report: Understanding violent extremism in the Western Balkans*. British Council: Western Balkans Extremism Research and Policy Analysis Forum. [pdf] Available at: https://www.britishcouncil.ba/sites/default/files/erf_report_western_balkans_2018.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

Bećirević, E. (2016) *Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative. [pdf] Available at: <http://www.helsinki.org.rs/doc/Edina%20Becirevic%20-%20Salafism%20vs.%20Moderate%20Islam.pdf> [Accessed January 2021].

Bećirević, E. (2018) *Bosnia and Herzegovina report*. London: British Council, Western Balkans Extremism Research and Policy Analysis Forum [pdf] Available at: https://www.britishcouncil.ba/sites/default/files/erf_bih_report.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

Bećirević, E., Halilović, M. and Azinović, V. (2017) *Literature Review: Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*. London: British Council, Western Balkans Extremism Research and Policy Analysis Forum [pdf] Available at: https://www.britishcouncil.ba/sites/default/files/erf_literature_review_2017_radicalisation_and_violent_extremism.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

Beslin, J. and Ignjatijević, M. (2017) *Balkan foreign fighters: From Syria to Ukraine*. Brussels: European Union Institute for Security Studies. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%20%20Balkan%20foreign%20fighters.pdf> [Accessed January 2021].

Dabrowski, M. and Myachenkova, Y. (2018) *The Western Balkans on the road to the European Union*. Bruegel Policy Contribution Issue No. 04. [pdf] Available at: http://aei.pitt.edu/93432/1/PC-04_2018.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

Dzhekova, R. (2020) Bulgaria Country Report. In Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne, eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. Brussels: Université Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). [pdf] Available at: https://h2020connekt.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Bulgaria_CONNEKT_Approaches_to_extremism.pdf [Accessed February 2021].

Dzhekova, R., Stoyanova, N., Kojouharov, A., Mancheva, M., Anagnostou, D. and Tsenkov, E. (2015) *Understanding Radicalisation: Review of Literature*. Sofia: CSD. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309732865> [Accessed January 2021].

Georgieva, L. Kambovski, V., and Trajanovski, N. (2020), North Macedonia Country Report. In Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne, eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism:*

Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans. Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). [pdf] Available at: https://h2020connekt.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/North-Macedonia_CONNEKT_Approaches_to_extremism.pdf [Accessed February 2021].

Goshi, A. and van Leuven, D. (2017) *Kosovo-wide Assessment of Perceptions of Radicalization at the Community Level*. Pristina: UNDP and Government of Kosovo. [pdf] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327653770_Kosovo-Wide_Assessment_of_Perceptions_of_Radicalisation_at_the_Community_Level [Accessed January 2021].

Hamidicevic, S. and Plevljak, B. (2018) *Bosnia and Herzegovina*. In: *Returning from violence: How to tackle the foreign fighters' problem in the Western Balkans?* Budapest: Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

ICCT (2016) *The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union*. The Hague: ICCT.

Kapidžić, D. Dudić, A., Kadić, V. and Turčalo, S. (2020), *Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Report*. In Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne, eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). [pdf] Available at: https://h2020connekt.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Bosnia_CONNEKT_Approaches_to_extremism.pdf [Accessed February 2021].

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

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

Morina, E., Austin, B., Jan Roetman, T. and Dudouet, V. (2019) *Community Perspectives on Violent Extremism*. Berlin: Berghof Foundation. [pdf] Available at: <https://berghof-foundation.org/library/community-perspectives-on-preventing-violent-extremism-lessons-learned-from-the-western-balkans> [Accessed January 2021].

Peci, L. and Demjaha, A. (2020) *Kosovo Country Report*. In Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne, eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). [pdf] Available at: https://h2020connekt.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Bosnia_CONNEKT_Approaches_to_extremism.pdf [Accessed February 2021].

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

Savevski, Z. and Sadiku, A. (2012) *The Radical Right in Macedonia*. Skopje: FES Policy Paper. [pdf] Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/moe/09568.pdf> [Accessed January 2021].

Selimi, K. and Stojkovski, F. (2016) *Assessment of Macedonia's efforts in countering violent extremism*. Skopje: Analytica. [pdf] Available at: https://www.analyticamk.org/images/Files/extremism-en-updated-FINAL-web_ceb98.pdf [Accessed January 2021].

Shtuni, A. (2016) *Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo*. Special Report 397. United States Institute of Peace. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12438> [Accessed January 2021].

Stojkovski, F. and Kalajdziovski, N. (2018) *Community perspectives on the prevention of violent extremism in Macedonia*. Berlin: Berghof Foundation. [pdf] Available at: <https://berghof-foundation.org/library/community-perspectives-on-the-prevention-of-violent-extremism-in-macedonia> [Accessed January 2021].

Tzvetkova, G. and Mancheva, M. (2019) *Country report: Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Florence: GREASE - Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing together European and Asian Perspectives.

WEBSITES & OTHER ELECTRONIC SOURCES

Club Z. (2016) Украйна може да съди още един български наемник. *Clubz*, 1 March. [online] Available at: https://clubz.bg/36204-ukrajna_moje_da_sydi_oshte_edin_bylgarski_naemnik [Accessed January 2021].

Collaku, P. (2011) Kosovo Census to Start Without the North. *Balkan Insight*, 29 March. [online] Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2011/03/29/kosovo-census-starts-without-northern-kosovo/> [Accessed January 2021].

Дневник (2017) Задържаният в София командир на 'Ислямска държава' е заснет във видеа на групировката. *Dnevnik*, 14 October. [online] Available at: https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2017/10/14/3059754_zadurjaniiat_v_sofia_komandir_na_isliamska_durjava_e/ [Accessed January 2021].

Дневник (2019) Българите все по-масово не приемат хомосексуалните, особено като колеги и политици. *Dnevnik*, 23 October. [online] Available at: https://www.dnevnik.bg/evropa/2019/10/23/3979489_bulgarite_vse_po-masovo_ne_priemat_homofoseksualnite/ [Accessed January 2021].

Галъп Интернешънъл [Gallup International] (2015) Хипотези за обществените нагласи спрямо ромите. *Gallup-international*, 29 July. [online] Available at: <https://www.gallup-international.bg/33662/hypotheses-on-attitudes-towards-the-roma/> [Accessed January 2021].

Mkd.mk (2019) Poradi smrtni zakani do Zaev uapsen e vodačot na Hristijanskoto bratstvo. *Mkd*, 29 March.

NOVA (2015) Осъдиха България в Страсбург заради 'Атака.' *Nova*, 24 February. [online] Available at: <https://nova.bg/news/view/2015/02/24/102872/%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%85%D0%B0-%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B2-%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B1%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B3-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8-%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0> [Accessed January 2021].

Stelmakh, A. and Kholodov, P. (2017) How Russia recruits Serbian mercenaries into the ranks of its fighters in Donbas. *Euromaidanpress*, 30 October. [online] Available at: <http://euromaidanpress.com/2017/10/30/how-russia-recruits-serbian-mercenaries-into-the-ranks-of-its-fighters-in-donbas/> [Accessed August 2020].

Velebit, V. (2017) Serb fighters in Ukraine continue to worry the West. *European Western Balkans*, 29 December. [online] Available at: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/12/29/serb-fighters-ukraine-continue-worry-west/> [Accessed January 2021].

Zornitsa, S. (2016) The Roma and the Radicals: Bulgaria's Alleged ISIS Support Base. *Balkaninsight*, 11 January. [online] Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/01/11/the-roma-and-the-radicals-bulgaria-s-alleged-isis-support-base-01-10-2016-1/> [Accessed January 2021].

Compared perspectives
on radicalisation and violent
extremism in MENA,
the Balkans and
the European Union

Florian Bieber, Professor, Centre for
Southeast European Studies,
University of Graz

Lura Pollozhani, Researcher, Centre
for Southeast European Studies,
University of Graz





INTRODUCTION

Radicalisation and violent extremism (VE) have received considerable attention from governments, media and civil society in Europe and the Middle East in the past decade, albeit to varying degrees. The decision of thousands of citizens and residents from countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and Europe to join and fight for Daesh (ISIS) in the mid-2010s has been an important catalyst for a transnational concern and reflection on the issue. Yet, the causes, dynamics, origins and responses vary greatly across the regions covered by the CONNEKT project. In some countries, radicalisation and government responses date back several decades. In others, incidents of VE were either previously limited or took a different direction and only became a subject of public debate in recent years. Furthermore, what is understood by radicalisation and VE differs and shifts both in terms of research and policy-making. While in recent years, radicalisation and VE have often been treated synonymously with radical and violent movements which base their claim on religion, in particular a militant understanding of political Islam, there are other radical and violent movements across the regions covered, both historically and currently. These include far-left and far-right movements, nationalist groups and other extremist groups that have committed acts of violence.

The background against which radicalisation and VE takes place also varies across the regions and countries. The nature of government differs with the range from authoritarian to liberal democracies, including a number of hybrid regimes that combine different authoritarian and democratic features. The socioeconomic background also differs, with disparate levels of social and economic inequality, overall prosperity and different dynamics of growth. Finally, the recruitment basis for radicalism differs greatly, depending on the types of radical movements and the countries. Radical nationalist movements have been recruiting from majorities and minorities. Minorities at times of minority marginalisation and repression, as in Kosovo and North Macedonia during the 1990s and early 2000s. Radical majority nationalist movements are closely linked to a rise of the far-right and anti-immigrant rhetoric. Islamist extremist groups and associated radicalisation are also shaped by the demographic picture. In some countries, minorities have been the main recruiting ground for radical and extremist groups, as is the case in the countries where Muslim communities constitute a minority, such as North Macedonia (Kambovski, Georgieva and Trajanovski, 2020) or Bulgaria (Dzhekova, 2020). This mirrors the pattern of recruitment in the European Union (EU), even though the Muslim minority groups in the Balkans have not been a product of migration during the past decades. In both cases, the religious background mattered more than specific levels of religiosity within families or communities. In other cases, it is the majority population that has been the most vulnerable, particularly in reference to religion and also to age group, for instance in countries with a growing young population, where youths are particularly vulnerable to radicalisation, such as Egypt (Pinfari, 2020) and Kosovo (Peci and Demjaha, 2020).

A comparative and cross-national perspective also needs to consider the transnational dynamics of radicalisation and VE. While the context is also national, it is strongly shaped by influences that are international. These include the lure of Daesh, which was able to recruit fighters from all countries covered in the project, but also the war in Ukraine (Kapidžić et al., 2020; Peci and Demjaha, 2020; Balkan

Regional Report 2020) and other earlier conflicts (Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina [BiH]). It is not just conflicts acting as sites for recruitment; the reporting and narrative developed by the media which has contributed towards increased Islamophobia have also contributed to the radicalisation of individuals. Furthermore, transnational networks have been important in radicalisation and recruiting individuals for VE, facilitated by social media in recent years. Diasporas have also exposed communities to each other and acted as transmission belts of radicalisation.

In short, a comparative analysis across Europe and the Middle East, with a focus on the Balkans and the MENA region, helps to draw comparative lessons, but also to highlight transnational networks and to show that radicalisation and VE do not take place in a nationally contained environment. Responses are also transnational, as governments cooperate to fight VE and often engage in joint policies, as is the case with the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism (ACST) (see the MENA Regional Report). Civil society forms yet another angle as foreign governments, through embassies and funding schemes, are involved in funding civil societies in these regions with the aim of researching and advocating for certain responses towards VE and radicalisation.

STRUCTURAL SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE MENA REGION AND THE BALKANS

The comparison between the Balkan and MENA regions raises important questions about the types of radicalisation, VE and the recruitment methods. One of the weaknesses of the debate in the past decade has been the nearly exclusive focus on Islamist extremism. This bias is understandable in the light of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and subsequent terrorist attacks in Europe, as well as the recruitment of foreign fighters by Daesh. However, reducing VE to this one dimension is both methodologically flawed and ahistorical. There have been and are VE groups, individuals and networks that have committed acts of mass violence and terrorism that are motivated by other ideologies in Europe and the Middle East. These include far-right, white nationalist and racist ideology, radical nationalism, and, at least in the past, far-left ideology. While Islamist extremism might prevail in some contexts at the moment, it is not the only type of VE, as the case of Bulgaria particularly shows (Dzhekova, 2020), nor is it specific in terms of radicalisation patterns or the violence committed.

While the countries included in the project from the MENA region are overwhelmingly Muslim, with very small Christian and Jewish minorities and small numbers of agnostic and atheist citizens, the picture is very different in the Balkans. In the Balkans, two countries, BiH and Kosovo, have a Muslim majority. In BiH, this majority is slight, with a nearly equal number of Christians (Orthodox and Catholic). Kosovo, on the other hand, has a larger Muslim majority, comparable to the MENA case studies. However, a substantial section of the Muslim population is secular and non-practising, at a proportion greater than in the MENA region. The other two, Bulgaria and North Macedonia, have Muslim minorities, which are in turn constituted by different national minorities. Muslim communities in the Balkans are long established and predate the emergence of nation states in the 19th and 20th century, unlike in Western or Central Europe (Bieber, 2000).

Muslim communities in the Balkans identify strongly with particular nations, as there is an overlap of the national or ethnic identity and the religious identity (Öktem, 2011). In the case of BiH, the Bosniak nation largely coincides with the population with an Islamic background. In Kosovo and North Macedonia, the largest Muslim population group is Albanians. There are other smaller Muslim communities, including Roma (Egyptian and Ashkalia), as well as Turks, Gorani and Torbeshi (Slavic Muslims). Albanians, unlike most other nations in the Balkans, include adherents of different religions and there are both Orthodox and Catholic Albanians. In Bulgaria, the Muslim minority identifies as Turkish, Roma or Pomak (Slavic Muslims), thus again Muslim communities are associated with specific national, linguistic or ethnic markers (Öktem, 2010: 5).

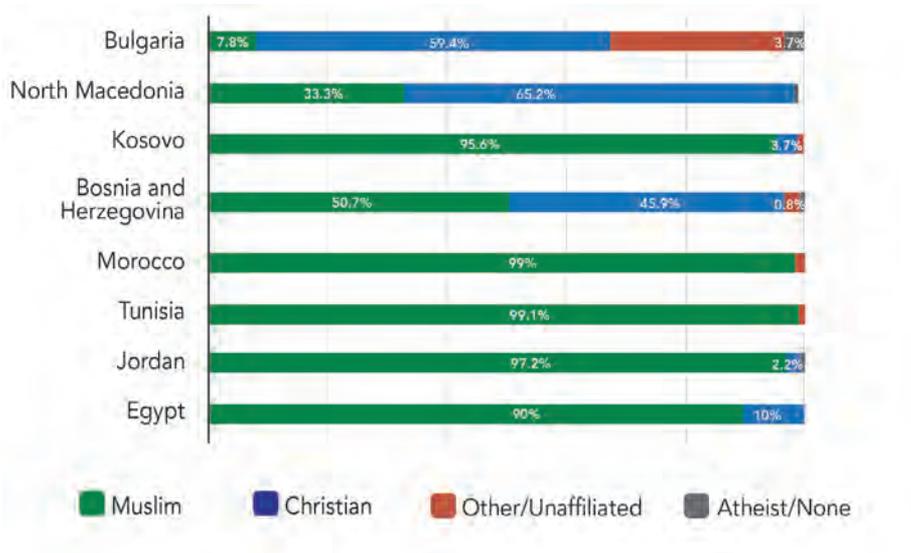
The main social and political identity in the Balkans is national rather than religious. While religious and national identity often, but not always, coincide, national identity generally prevails over religious affiliation. In BiH, being a Bosniak is closely linked to being Muslim and neither Croats nor

Serbs would be Muslims but rather Catholic and Orthodox, respectively. Thus, religious affiliation is linked to markers of difference from other nations in the same state, rather than as markers of larger transnational communities. Of course, all three religious groups are part of these larger networks, which are potential networks of identity and solidarity, although this matters mostly when they coincide with national demands. For example, some Serbs have fought with secessionist forces in Ukraine, just as Greek nationalists have fought during the Bosnian war on the Serbian side. Yet, this has been based on demands for nationalist solidarity, underpinned by religious affinity rather than religious ideology itself. In North Macedonia and Bulgaria, where Muslims are a minority, they are also associated with one or several national minorities: in the case of North Macedonia mostly with Albanians, and in Bulgaria mostly with Turks. This duality is by no means reconciled, and there is an ongoing debate on the influence that religious or national affinities have on phenomena such as radicalisation and VE, as also shown by the discordant outcomes of this report and the Balkan Regional Report. However, there is a consensus to the effect that these affinities are influential, the national and the religious identities are often used for the same purpose and serve as an “escape from the limits of individual morality” (Rasza, 2015: 63). Indeed as Malešević (2013: 181-182) maintains when referring to arguments on the prevalence of religious identification in the “Muslim world” more broadly “globalization has in fact strengthened most nation-states, fostering the proliferation of nationalist ideology [...] the apparent religious revival did not arise at the expense of nationalism: instead most religious rhetoric and practice tends to be highly syncretic not only in blending nationalist and religious discourse but also in articulating alternative visions of the desirable social and political orders.” The research on the MENA region and the Balkans must therefore be embedded within the historical, geographical and local contexts of identity formation and affinities.

In the context of the Balkans, there are substantial population groups that are not potential recruitment grounds for Islamist extremism but rather for other forms of radicalisation. As national and religious distinctions largely coincide, there is also less conversion-related radicalisation than in some countries in Western Europe. Other forms of radicalisation and VE are largely not based on religion but on nationalism, racism, homophobia and cultural or civilisational categories. The four MENA countries of the project, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan, all have an overwhelming Muslim majority and also a strong Sunni Arab tradition with few other Muslim communities, such as Shia, and some few relevant Christian communities, such as the Copts in Egypt. As a result, as reflected in Table 1, the cases include countries with relatively high levels of homogeneity in the MENA region and others with considerable religious diversity in the Balkans. Indeed, besides Amazigh in Morocco there are no large non-Arab communities in the MENA region. And we also have to note that some authoritarian states are highly reluctant to publicly acknowledge this internal diversity. However, the case study countries do not reflect the entire region and it is important to contextualise them in the larger regional context. There are several MENA countries that have a higher level of religious diversity, such as Lebanon, or at least in terms of intra-Muslim heterogeneity, such as Syria and Iraq. In the Balkans, other countries only have Muslim minorities, such as Montenegro, Greece, Serbia and Romania, whereas Albania has a Muslim majority but is characterised by a high level of secularisation.

In contrast to the MENA region and the Balkans, in Western and Central Europe, Muslim communities are based on migration, mostly over the past 50 years, from the Mediterranean region.

TABLE 1. Religions in MENA and Western Balkan countries



Source: CIA World Factbook. Own production.¹

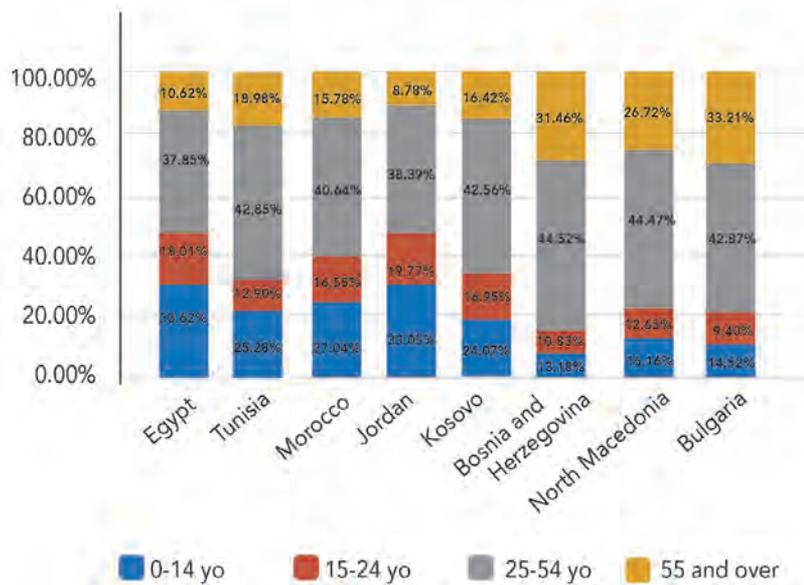
A crucial difference between the regions is the demographic picture. The Balkans is a region characterised by an overall aging population, low or decreasing birth rates, with the exception of Kosovo (see Table 2 below). On the other hand, several countries in the MENA region have a broad-based age pyramid. The differences are significant for a number of reasons. First, the population of MENA countries is mostly increasing, with Egypt and Morocco particularly having an increasing young population, whereas in the Balkans the population has been shrinking, often at a high pace due to the additional factor of migration, to which the paper will return later. Second, the share of young people varies as a consequence, with Balkan countries having a smaller proportion of the population in the younger age groups. This does not only result in lower levels of youth unemployment but also in a smaller basis for recruitment of radical and violent extremist groups.

Another important regional variant is the nature of political regimes. This variety matters in multiple dimensions. The nature of the regime in terms of the scale of authoritarianism vs. democracy shapes the nature of recruitment for VE, as well as the state response. Radicalisation and VE can draw on those citizens dissatisfied with the lack of political participation, and the line between political opposition and radicalisation is easily blurred. More authoritarian regimes are also more likely to

¹ CIA World Factbook is a resource developed by the CIA for US policy-makers, combining numerous resources in order to provide the same information on all countries.

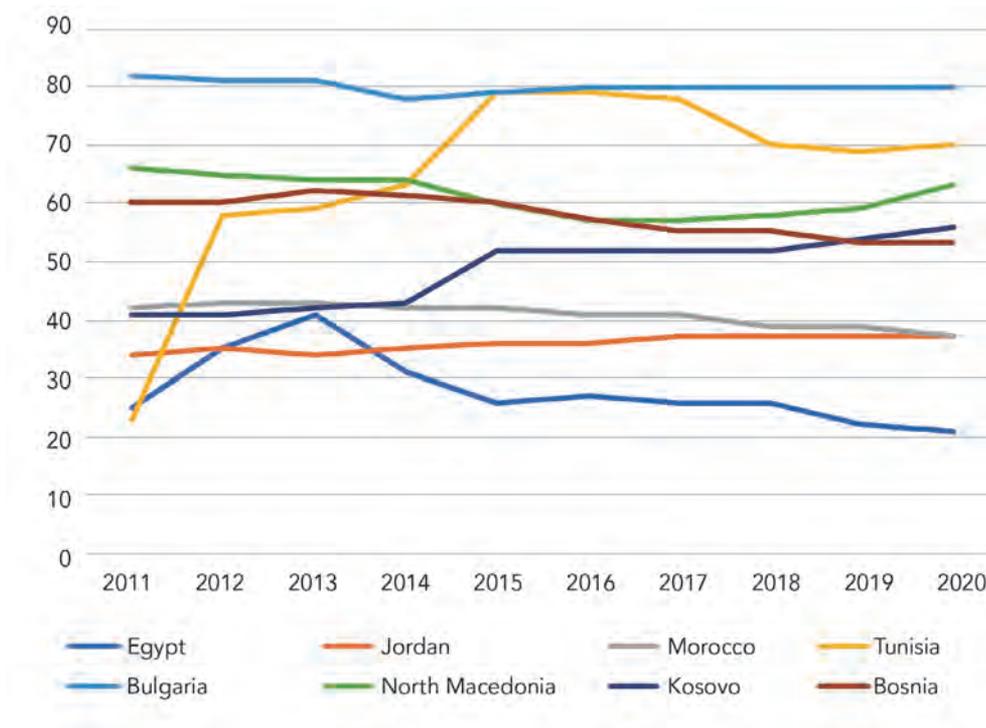
take a security-driven approach and are less able or willing to include civil society and human security approaches in confronting VE. Furthermore, there is a risk that authoritarian regimes obscure the distinction between legitimate political opposition and VE and characterise demands for rule of law, democracy and human rights as being signals of radicalisation. Violent state responses towards legitimate democratic demands can also further increase radicalisation and VE trends. Moreover, authoritarian regimes also lack a number of options to include political dissatisfaction in the political system and thus encouraging extra-institutional means that can more easily lead to the endorsement of violence. As for 2020, Freedom House ranks only Tunisia (since 2015) and Bulgaria as free countries, based on political rights and civil liberties. Egypt is the only country considered not free (since 2014), whereas all the others are in the intermediate category of partially-free countries. This describes hybrid regimes with elections and some civil liberties, but considerable restrictions. With the exception of Bulgaria, all countries included in this research are characterised by instability and uncertainty, including high levels of polarisation, and recent experience of violence. Finally, state capture, high levels of corruption and low trust in institutions are challenges confronted in both regions.

TABLE 2. Population by age groups in MENA and Western Balkan countries



Source: CIA World Factbook. Own production.

TABLE 3. Political rights and civil liberties score, Freedom House



² The data is extracted from the scores provided by the annual Freedom in the World report, combining the political rights score (0-40) and the civil liberties score (0-60), which are calculated with equal weight to score countries (0-100) in three different status categories: Free, Partly Free and Not Free. In 2020, Bulgaria and Tunisia were evaluated as Free, Jordan, North Macedonia, Morocco, Kosovo and BiH were evaluated as Partly Free and Egypt was evaluated as Not Free.

DIFFERENT AND SIMILAR PATTERNS OF RADICALISATION AND VE

Radicalisation and VE in the MENA region and the Balkans have taken very different paths but also share some experiences. Most countries in both regions experienced authoritarian regimes during the second half of the 20th century, which often rested on a narrow base of legitimacy. These regimes have lost power in recent decades in both regions: in the Balkans at the end of the Cold War in 1989 and in the MENA region several fell in 2011. However, differences are marked. Whereas both promoted nationalism and the communist regimes in the Balkans operated within nation-states or multinational states (like Yugoslavia) and could build on pre-existing strong national identities, the strength of national identities was weaker in many parts of the MENA region and state-centred nationalism had to compete with transnational ideologies, such as pan-Arabism and later political Islam or Islamism.

In the Balkans, the main line of polarisation was between anti-Communists and Communists. The anti-Communist forces often adopted nationalist rhetoric and claimed to advocate democracy. While the post-1989 period also brought about an end to enforced secularisation and a return of religion, religion and secularism had not been an important theme in the Balkans. Increased religiosity in fact mostly occurred where it reinforced national identity. As nations in the Balkans often coincide with a particular religion, and which is a marker of distinction from other nations, in particular minorities, it is religion that became another lens through which to emphasise national belonging rather than a challenge to the nation. In many countries in the MENA region, religion has been a source of legitimacy for the regimes in place, clearly for monarchies having a religious nature but also for more secular republics, where it has been historically instrumentalised to serve the interests of nation-states. The rise of political Islam has been undermining or challenging existing states and attempts to build political nations based on national affiliation. This challenge is based on the ideological claim to represent the larger transnational Muslim community (*ummah*) and the strategies of violence that often undermine states and fought secular nation-states (Roy, 2017; Ehteshami, Rasheed, and Beaujouan, 2020).

For the MENA region, the 2000s and in particular the aftermath of 9/11 were an important turning point for an increase in VE, but there had been a previous history of VE. In the Balkans, on the other hand, the highest levels of VE occurred during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. While some of the violence was perpetrated by paramilitary groups, they were mostly controlled and encouraged by states. This violence was primarily associated with nationalism rather than other ideologies. In Kosovo and North Macedonia, radicalisation occurred along nationalist lines, with Albanian movements opposing the Serbian and Macedonian states and their policies, starting in the 1980s. These groups did resort to violence, mostly in the period between 1998 and 2001 and attempted to create Albanian majority states or in the case of Macedonia change the nature of the state. While the conflict confronted Albanians against the Serb or Macedonian majority, the radical groups (the Kosovo Liberation Army in Kosovo and the National Liberation Army in Macedonia) were secular

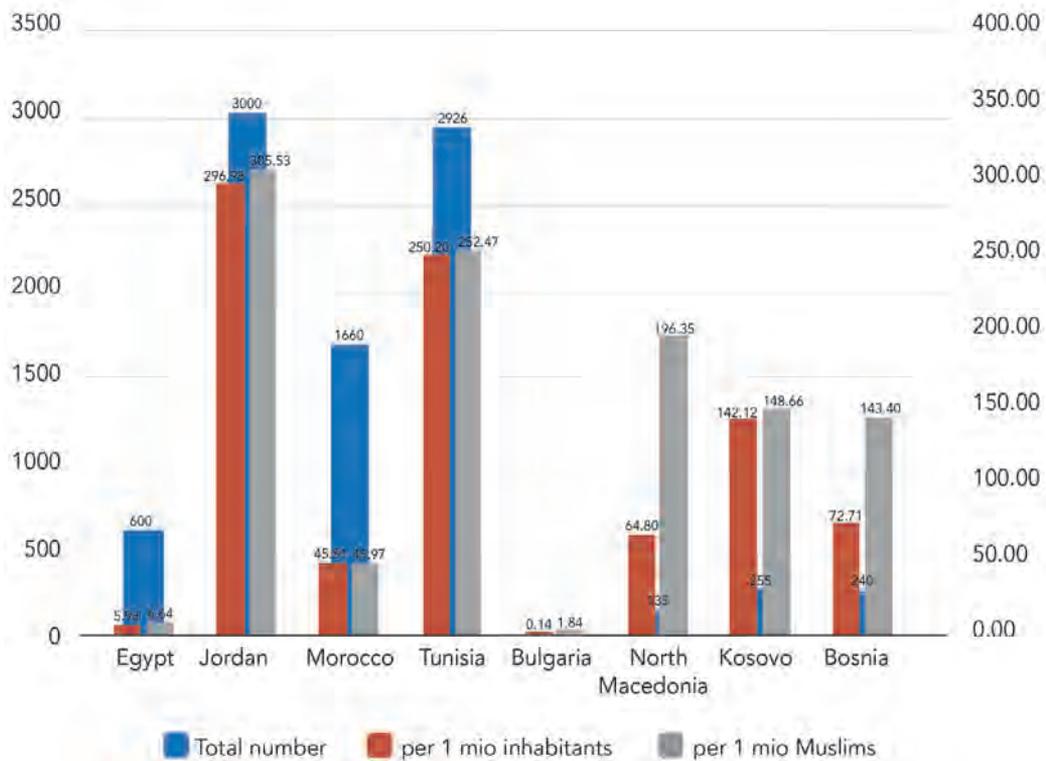
nationalist. In the case of Serbia, they also confronted an authoritarian and nationalist state that had marginalised and repressed Albanians. In BiH, the main case of VE occurred in the 1990s when the Serb party, with the support of Serbia, created a para-state with the assistance of the army and para-military groups and engaged in expulsions, murder and other war crimes, including genocide. This triggered the Bosnian war that encouraged radical and extremist groups, including Croat and Bosniak paramilitary groups, as well as foreign fighters on all sides, who were organised into different formal and informal army units. The foreign fighters were, in the case of the Bosnian Serb army, mostly Orthodox Christians from countries such as Greece and Russia; in the case of the Bosnian army, from Muslim majority countries in the MENA region. Thus, the motivation of foreign participants was religious or civilisational but the war was distinctly national, even if religious arguments and themes were instrumentalised.

Key differences between MENA and Balkan regions are the scale of Islamist radicalisation and participation in VE groups abroad or domestically. The main indicator for VE is the number of foreign fighters that went to Syria and Iraq to fight for Daesh or support it. Comparisons are difficult as neither absolute numbers nor numbers per capita are indicative. Namely, in regard to the foreign fighters from the Balkan region who have gone to fight for Daesh, a differing narrative presents itself. While the Balkan region has become notorious for the high number of foreign fighters per capita of the entire population, this number becomes less significant if the data is interpreted when considering the Muslim population within these countries as the main target group. With this interpretation, the number of foreign fighters proportional to the Muslim population in each of the Balkan countries under research becomes lower than the proportion in the EU (Balkan Regional Report 2020: 11; Hamidičević and Plevljak, 2018: 58). The regional and country reports further show that there are other forms of radicalisation, particularly in the Balkans, with foreign fighters to Ukraine (see Balkan Regional Report), and the far-right nationalist groups in Bulgaria (Dzhekova 2020).

Radicalisation and VE have a multi-dimensional transnational component in all countries of the MENA region and the Balkans. Throughout the regions, the main types of radicalisation are focused on one of four dimensions. The first, and most frequent, is based on a radical interpretation of religion, in particular Islam. There are also radical and sometimes violent extremist groups based on Christianity and Judaism in the two regions, not to mention other religions elsewhere. The second type of VE is based on "civilisationalism"; namely the idea that certain transnational groups of people are superior to others. This most commonly includes white supremacist movements and groups who claim some racial or civilisational category. While such VE is more common in the EU, North America and Australia, it exists in some of the countries under study, such as Bulgaria. Closely linked are nationalist movements that claim superiority of one nation and often seek to change existing borders to create nation-states based on new borders. Such movements exist in the regions covered by the project and have been more significant in the past, for instance in BiH. Finally, one can consider ideological movements as a basis for radicalisation and VE. These include far-left groups, such as Marxist movements, and far-right groups, which are commonly linked to civilisational or nationalist ideas. Often, the different categories serve merely as ideal types and, in reality, they overlap. Nationalist movements might also take on religious tones, especially when religion and nation coincide, and the main "other" differs in both

categories. For example, Serb nationalist groups emphasise both belonging to the nation and the importance of Orthodox Christianity. Furthermore, civilisational groups often have strong nationalist underpinnings. Groups patrolling the Bulgarian border, harassing and attacking refugees and migrants, framed their actions as both protecting the nation and protecting Europe from migrants.

TABLE 4. Foreign fighters for Daesh



Source: Soufan Group (2017). Own production.³

While all ideological categories might be restrained to state borders, they often occur in a transnational environment, often challenging existing state borders. Ideological movements often seek ideological kinship in other states, and civilisational groups base their understanding on transnational communities. Religious-based radicalisation and VE also commonly transcend borders and imagine themselves to belong to an international community of believers that is rarely bound by state borders. Radical ideas and groups based on an extreme interpretation of Islam have long rejected the boundaries of modern states, and Daesh has been particularly adamant in its effort to undermine and reject the existing state system. Even nationalist groups and ideas often reach beyond borders, as they commonly seek to change existing borders and unite national groups in multiple states, such as Kurds in Turkey, Syria and Iran, Amazigh in North Africa, or Albanians and Serbs in the Balkans, to give a few examples.

³ Soufan Group Methodology, data gathered in study based on multiple data sources.

Beyond the level of ideas, radicalisation and VE occur in a transnational environment. The places of radicalisation, mobilisation, recruitment, communication and participation are often transnational. Radicalisation often occurs through large-scale international events that attract attention beyond state boundaries. These include the conflict between Israel and Palestine since the UN Partition Plan in 1947, the wars in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the Bosnian war in the 1990s, the war in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s and the war in Syria in the 2010s, to name just a few conflicts that have been particularly relevant in the regions under discussion. These wars galvanised public opinion and dominated headlines for years. The wars and media representation often clearly identify the conflict in one of the above-mentioned frameworks, which allows citizens in other countries to identify with a particular party, often victims of violence, and become radicalised on this basis. This does not yet translate into mobilisation, i.e., moving beyond passive observation. The mobilisation constitutes the next step in terms of getting individuals to consider acting on behalf of their positioning. This might take place less through conventional media and its interpretation of conflicts, and more through more biased and one-sided news. Often, this is available through social media and by-passes established institutional channels, whether conventional religious hierarchies, parties or other social actors. These dynamics are commonly transnational, allowing national restrictions and censorship to be by-passed. In post-conflict countries such as Kosovo and BiH, humanitarian and other charitable organisations from other Muslim-majority countries, in particular in the Gulf, had an important function in spreading more conservative and radical ideas in the post-war period. While Bulgaria did not experience conflict, charities and missionaries had a similar effect. This resulted not just in a transfer of ideas of a less moderate Islam but also in the establishment of personal ties.

82

The recruitment for VE movements often takes place in a transnational context. While there are sometimes interlocutors in the respective countries, either associated with informal groups or with established institutions, which is more exceptional, these are commonly linked across national borders. Recruitment can also occur entirely transnationally through social media and other online networks that reduce the risk of recruitment as they are not in the jurisdiction of the people targeted. Participating in acts of VE can take place in the state framework, such as in terrorist attacks, but also might be taking place in other countries, such as foreign fighters going to Daesh and secessionist forces in Eastern Ukraine. An important feature of these transnational networks are diasporas. All the countries of the project have substantial diaspora communities, most frequently in the EU. These diasporic communities have often resided in EU member states for several generations. Linguistic links, shared identity and solidarity, as well as mobility and remittances, have ensured that the connections between diaspora and the country of origin remain. This is also reflected in regard to radicalisation and VE. The causes and patterns of radicalisation are often very different between members of the diaspora and the homeland. This is the result of different political systems, divergent socioeconomic positions and changing identity of individuals in their context. Despite this divergence, the ties often do allow for communication and transmission of ideas. In terms of VE, be it violent nationalism or radical Islamic ideas, diasporas have often been important in communicating these messages.

Radicalisation is often linked with communities that are marginalised. These might be some Roma communities in Bulgaria that became adherents of Salafi Islam (Dzhekova, 2020: 44) or Amazigh youths in northern Moroccan cities such as Tangier and Tetouan, where they are often exposed to uncontrolled

urbanisation, youth unemployment, crime and marginalisation (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020). Other than minorities, individuals from ethnic, national or religious majorities can also be susceptible to radicalisation. While this is often explained with socioeconomic deprivation, inequality and lack of opportunities, it is not possible to ascribe radicalisation solely to socio-economically disadvantaged communities. Notably, while these markers form a key part of the research on radicalisation, they offer a broad spectrum of factors that contribute to radicalisation. A study in Tunisia found 33 diverse factors (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020; Ayari, 2017), while research on other countries also offers numerous causes of radicalisation that often blur the analysis and show the necessity for further empirical and in-depth research.

Lastly, the scale of VE varies significantly across the case studies. In some countries, such as North Macedonia or Kosovo, there have been very few acts of terrorism or VE within their territories in the past decade (Kambovski, Georgieva and Trajanovski, 2020; Peci and Demjaha, 2020; Bieber, 2020).⁴ There have been sporadic acts of violence on national and ethnic grounds, although not to a scale that could be considered as significant levels of VE. VE elsewhere in the Balkans over the past decade has also been limited. In Bulgaria, the most important act of terrorism targeted Israeli travellers in the seaside resort of Burgas in 2012, but it appears that the attack was connected to Hezbollah and not to any domestic causes (Dzhekova, 2020). In BiH, the only significant attacks were two lone wolf attacks against a police station in 2010 and a shooting in front of the American embassy the following year. The few radical communities in the region are small and isolated, such as the hamlet Donja Maoca in BiH. They received considerable media attention, but do not present a central challenge to state authority. On the other hand, regions like the Sinai in Egypt and Tunisia's north-west have been areas of operation for VE groups. In terms of terrorist attacks, Morocco has experienced a few attacks in the past decade, most prominently the attack on the main square of Marrakech in 2011 (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020). Similarly, Jordan was only the site of one major terrorist attack in 2016 at Kerak Castle, an important tourist destination. Tunisia and Egypt have both faced more substantial terrorist attacks than the other countries over the past decades (Pinfari, 2020; Chirchi, Kherigi, and Ghribi, 2020). The number of incidents of VE offers only limited insight into the overall scale of radicalisation, as the incidents are also a reflection of divergent opportunity structures and the nature of state responses.

⁴ The Albanian group that was confronted in a shoot-out with government forces in 2015 is the only exception. While the government has alleged the group was planning acts of terrorism, the motivations and plans of the groups are unclear.

STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSES

In examining the differences between state and societal responses, it is important to consider both the nature of state responses themselves, as well as the level of cooperation with other actors, including civil society, religious institutions and other international actors and governments. Furthermore, the level of coordination between different government responses and the relevant actors within government varies, as different agencies and ministries often pursue different, and at times contradictory, policies. State responses commonly include a conventional security-driven approach that relies on combating VE through force and criminal prosecution. This might be matched or preceded by human security approaches that focus on prevention and de-radicalisation. Overall, one can map out strategies of governments in three categories: 1. Prevention and moderation; 2. Repression of radicalisation and VE; and 3. De-radicalisation.

Prevention and moderation strategies can target developmental, economic and social policies to address vulnerable population groups, including policies on employment and educational programmes for youths and religious leaders in several of the case studies. However, due to a lack of monitoring and evaluation of such policies it is unclear whether such policies are being implemented and whether they are effective. Other examples focus on promoting moderation in terms of religion, such as the strategies pursued by the Moroccan authorities. Repression is usually enveloped under hard security approaches pursued through the repression of VE by security forces and the judicial prosecution of cases against those committing acts of violence or those involved in recruitment and training. Finally, de-radicalisation projects focus on dealing with individuals who have become radicalised. This might be an alternative to prosecution or engagement with individuals jailed for VE. These three steps are in line with broader policies that deal with prevention, conflict reduction and post-conflict measures. While most governments, such as Morocco, have policies and strategies for all three dimensions, some, such as Egypt, have been focused on repression more than on prevention or de-radicalisation. However, it must be noted that these approaches are mostly applicable to Islamists and extremism or radicalisation that leads to violence. Far-right and other forms of extremist ideologies are not regulated to the same extent, such as the case of Bulgaria, where most violent acts within the country are perpetrated by far-right and anti-LGBTQ groups, despite receiving less attention by the state and the media (Dzhekova, 2020). The case of foreign fighters going to fight in Ukraine from BiH and the north of Kosovo and the lack of adequate state responses further illustrates this point (Balkan Regional Report, 2020).

Confronting radicalisation and VE was on the agenda of all governments in the MENA region, the Balkans and the EU in the past decade, in particular during the peak of Daesh activity. However, the focus and centrality of the issue diverged. In most MENA countries, there has been a long-established pattern of mostly security-based responses to radicalisation and VE. There are also episodic attempts to either co-opt or instrumentalise radical Islamic movements to confront other political challenges, as had been the case of Morocco (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020). During the brief period of political pluralism (2011-13) Egypt was dominated by the Freedom and Justice Party, a party linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. The more radical Salafi El Nour Party also emerged as a strong political force,

but it continued its political activities after the 2013 coup. In the Balkans, parties representing Muslim voters are mostly secular and nationalist, rather than religious. Attempts at creating Islamist parties have either been absent or failed. The largest Bosniak party in BiH, the Party for Democratic Action (SDA), has close links to the Islamic community and a conservative Muslim outlook, but does not advocate an Islamist programme, such as the introduction of Sharia law. It is comparable to the Ennahda Movement in Tunisia for combining Islamic conservatism with endorsement of democracy. Thus, throughout the countries under study, radical and extremist political parties are marginal or inexistent.

An important role in both the causes of radicalisation and in regard to strategies of de-radicalisation is played by existing institutions, in particular religious ones. Especially regarding Islamic extremism, official Islamic communities are important actors. These official Islamic communities are not sources of radicalisation in any of the countries. Instead, they are either divided and weak or in some cases effective agents against radicalisation. Organised religious institutions have a variety of relations to the state. This diversity also matters for the larger ability to curtail radicalisation. The following patterns exist across the two regions, in particular in regards to Islamic communities. The state recognises one institutional expression of the dominant Sunni Muslim community. In some cases, as in Morocco, this is based on the leadership role of the monarchy over the Islamic community. In the MENA region, Islam is always recognised constitutionally as the religion of the state. Although in the case of republics they tend to formally present themselves as more secularised systems, they also control and regulate religious communities. The level of intrusion of the state matters in regards to the legitimacy of the religious institutions before the community of believers. Tunisia and Egypt are examples where historically authoritarian regimes have sought to control official religious institutions to secure their loyalty. This has undermined institutions' legitimacy and made them less effective in confronting extremism.

Radicalism and VE are often closely linked to religious illiteracy, both in the Balkan (Morina et al., 2019) and the MENA region (Baffa et al., 2019). Many young men and women who were radicalised and joined to either fight for Daesh or engage in domestic terrorism have very limited knowledge of Islam. This made them susceptible to radical and often very selective interpretations of religion. Religious illiteracy has different causes across the cases but is linked to limited training of imams in some, such as in Tunisia, or limited exposure to organised mainstream religion in others, including Roma communities in Bulgaria, or the low credibility of official religious institutions. In post-Communist countries, Islamic communities had been tightly controlled and had limited impact in everyday life. This created a vacuum that was filled at times by radical and conservative groups from the 1990s onwards. In a minority setting, Muslim communities have often been subject to discrimination, Islamophobia and nationalism. This discrimination, based on religion and national affiliation, often facilitated radicalisation.

With a moderate tradition of Islam in most countries under study, a common response has been to emphasise the moderate tradition and criticise radical Salafism and other Islamist groups as alien and imported. Indeed, throughout the two regions under study in regards to Islamist extremism, there is an emphasis in policy responses as far as the "right version" of Islam is concerned whereby state institutions invest in religious literacy. In Morocco, this involved the promotion of *wasati Islam* or the

“Islam of the golden mean” (Mouna, Lahmidani and Agudal, 2020). In this case, it included increased state control over mosques and imams, both within the country and in the diaspora. Furthermore, it also included strong state control over religious education. But the emphasis on moderation and control of mosques did not originate from the state everywhere. In the Balkan region, the respective Islamic communities have been heavily involved in educational programmes as well as in governing religious practices (Kapidžić, 2020; Kambovski, Georgieva and Trajanovski, 2020). In BiH, for example, where the state is weak and fragmented, the strong Islamic community has been re-asserting its control of *para-jamaats* and other parallel and informal Islamic activities. In other cases, such as Kosovo, the weakness of the Islamic community resulted in an internal power struggle that gave more radical and transnational clergy greater influence. Only after government intervention has the Islamic community there been able to curb the influence of radicals.

Throughout the MENA region and the Balkans, civil society is often supported and funded by external actors, including international donors and European and North American governments, party foundations and embassies. This is the result of a difficult working environment in many countries, often the result of hostile or at least sceptical governments and societies with limited resources or a tradition of funding non-profits. As radicalisation and VE became a global concern, in particular in the context of Daesh, external funding for research became available. As a result, a considerable share of attention by civil society in the regions has been driven by external funding. This means that the focus on radicalisation and VE in civil society is often less driven by domestic concern than by external donor priorities. Another challenge is the cooperation between state institutions and civil society. Relations vary greatly, with some countries that have little civic space, such as Egypt, to allow for the independence of civil society, and others that have close ties between civil society and government and a history of cooperation, such as Kosovo and North Macedonia. The Balkan countries seem to be more inclusive of external stakeholders, and have the policies, at least on paper, to address a wider target of groups of interest in P/CVE (see the Balkan Regional Report). The MENA countries, on the other hand, have a more exclusive strategy development, where civil society is often absent. Besides, responses are channelled through limited target groups which do not address women or alternative methods of P/CVE outside the security sector, with exceptions, such as the education of imams, which is largely a common policy with the exception of Tunisia (MENA Regional Report 2020).

CONCLUSION AND QUESTIONS EMERGING FROM THE COMPARISON

Radicalisation and VE have been on the agenda in all the regions covered by the project. This interest peaked in the mid-2010s with the foreign fighters joining Daesh. In particular in the EU and the Balkans, the attention has largely faded and, if at all, focused on the question of the return of foreign fighters and their potential reintegration into society. In the MENA region, this has also been a pressing issue, yet radicalisation and VE have found other directions. There continue to be regional conflicts and fragile states, such as Syria and Libya, which constitute a focal point for VE, even if the appeal is no longer as global as it was five years ago. In addition, domestic sources of radicalisation remain relevant, including socioeconomic inequalities and a sense of lack of perspective. Reduced attention in the EU, the MENA region and the Balkans to radicalisation has both advantages and dangers. The attention on radicalisation, in particular of Muslim communities, has contributed to Islamophobic sentiments in Europe and reinforced exclusion and populist and far-right politics against Muslim communities in Europe. Thus, public attention reinforced those conditions that facilitated radicalisation in the first place. However, reduced attention is also problematic, as it might result in less attention paid to confront the causes that led to the participation of mostly young Muslim men and women in Daesh from Europe, including the Balkans, particularly as they return home and seek to reintegrate into their societies. While the issue of foreign fighters is regulated by adapted Criminal and Penal Codes in the various countries, the issue of the women and children returning from the conflict zones remains unaddressed, and poses risks if the causes and influences, as well as their traumas, are not addressed.

The cross-regional comparison also raises questions regarding the focus of research and policy-making towards radicalisation and VE. The unifying type of radicalisation in the EU, the Western Balkans and the MENA region is based on radical Islam, although the extent varies considerably. However, this neglects other forms of radicalisation and VE, as outlined in this paper. In Europe, there have been different groups and networks that have promoted radicalisation and VE based on racism, far-right ideology, homophobia, civilisationalism and virulent nationalism. Including these groups and networks in the study of radicalisation, and VE is important not only to confronting possible biases towards Islam-based radicalisation but also in addressing the blind spots that such an approach and focus creates. A focus on religion, and in particular Islam as the main source of radicalisation ignores the fact that the mechanisms of radicalisation and recruitment of VE are often identical across different ideologies (Malešević, 2013: 114). From the use of social media and transnational networks to the creation of surrogate “families” and social ties, radicalisation patterns often operate similarly, despite the seemingly different ideological foundations.

The comparison raises a number of important cross-national and cross-regional questions. First, what are the micro, meso and macro drivers of radicalisation? The country studies do not offer a conclusive picture as to what motivated the participation in radical and violent movements. While individuals who are disadvantaged and lack perspectives might be susceptible, such observations are too imprecise to clearly identify individuals or groups that are most susceptible, with research on women and youths

being particularly lacking. As several country studies point out, such as the one on Tunisia, it is hard to draw clear causal links between deprivation and marginalisation, on the one hand, and between radicalisation and VE, on the other. Furthermore, the link between radicalisation and VE merits further understanding; namely, of what the causes are that facilitate individuals to engage in violence to pursue a radical world view. While radicalisation is a pre-condition for VE, not all instances of radicalisation lead to VE and there are examples throughout Salafi communities that are rejecting existing social and political structures yet do not engage in violence. The lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of the state responses further intensifies the need to understand the roots, causes and most effective ways to address radicalisation, extremism and VE.

Finally, the transnational dimension of radicalisation and VE is a core unifying theme from all the country studies. Radical movements are mostly transnational, and the communication of ideas, resources and information occurs commonly through such channels, including social media and diaspora networks. The role of social media and other channels of communication as well as the links to the diaspora are still not well understood and should be given central attention, as these appear to have often played a greater role than radical communities or individuals through interpersonal contacts. The new methods of radicalisation and VE show the need for further research that balances theory and empirical research. An analysis of the different level of factors and influences, the national and the transnational, the methods used by states in countering extremism and radicalisation and those used by recruiters in turn and the ideologies fuelling radical and extremist behaviour all form part of the web of research that is in need of further in-depth analysis in order to advance the understanding of these phenomena.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Ehteshami, A., Rasheed, A. and Beaujouan, J. (2020) *Islam, IS and the Fragmented State. The Challenges of Political Islam in the MENA Region*. Basingstoke: Routledge.

Roy, O. (2017) Introduction. In: Colombier, V. and Roy, O. eds. *Tribes and Global Jihadism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Available in pdf at: <https://the-eye.eu/public/Books/A%20Library/Politics/Tribes%20and%20Global%20Jihadism%20-%20Virginie%20Collombier%20%26%20Olivier%20Roy.pdf> [Accessed February 2021].

Rasza, M. (2015) *Bastards of Utopia: Living Radical Politics after Socialism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

E-BOOKS

Malešević, S. (2013) *Nation States and Nationalisms: Organization, Ideology and Solidarity*. [e-book] Cambridge: Polity. Available through the Research Gate website <researchgate.net> at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272161566_Nation-States_and_Nationalisms_Organization_Ideology_and_Solidarity [Accessed February 2021].

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Bieber, F. (2000) Muslim identity in the Balkans before the establishment of nation states, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 28(2), pp. 13-28. DOI: 10.1080/00905990050002434

Öktem, K. (2011) Between emigration, de-Islamization and the nation-state: Muslim communities in the Balkans, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 11(2), pp. 151-169. DOI: 10.1080/14683857.2011.587249

REPORTS

Ayari, M. (2017) *Violent Extremism and its Motivating Factors in Tunisia in the 2010s*. [pdf] UNDP Analytical Review. Available at: <http://opev.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AYARI-Michae%CC%88l-Revue-analytique.-Les-facteurs-favorisant-l%E2%80%99extre%CC%81misme-violent-dans-la-Tunisie-de-s-anne%CC%81es-2010-ENG.pdf> [Accessed July 2020].

Baffa, R.C., Vest, N., Wing, Y.C. and Fanlo, A. (2019) *Defining and Understanding the Next Generation of Salafi-Jihadis*. [pdf] Rand Corporation. Available at: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE300/PE341/RAND_PE341.pdf [Accessed February 2021].

Barrett, R. (2017) *Beyond the Caliphate Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*. [pdf] The Soufan

Center. Available at: <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf> [Accessed March 2021].

Chirchi, T., Kherigi, I. and Ghribi, K. (2020) Tunisia. In: Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne, eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. [pdf] Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean. Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/tunisia-country-report-on-national-approaches-to-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

Dzhekova, R. (2020) Bulgaria. In: Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne, eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. [pdf] Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean. Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/bulgaria-country-report-on-national-approaches-to-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

Hamidičević, S. and Plevljak, B. (2018) Bosnia and Herzegovina. In: Anna Orosz, ed. *Returning from violence: How to tackle the foreign fighters' problem in the Western Balkans?* [pdf] Budapest: Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade. Available at: https://kki.hu/assets/upload/kki_west_balkan_pdf_final.pdf [Accessed February 2021].

Kambovski, V. Georgieva, L. and Trajanovski, N. (2020) North Macedonia. In: Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne, eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. [pdf] Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean. Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/north-macedonia-country-report-on-national-approaches-to-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

Kapidžić, D., Dudić, A., Kadić, V. and Turčalo, S. (2020) Bosnia and Herzegovina. In: Torrekens, C. and de le Vingne, D., eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. [pdf] Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean. Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/bosnia-and-hercegovina-country-report-on-national-approaches-to-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

Morina, E., Austin, B., Roetman, T.J. and Dudouet, V. (2019) *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism: Lessons learned from the Western Balkans*. [pdf] Berlin: Berghof Foundation. Available at: <https://berghof-foundation.org/library/community-perspectives-on-preventing-violent-extremism-lessons-learned-from-the-western-balkans> [Accessed February 2021].

Mouna, K., Lahmidani, and Agudal (2020) Morocco. In: Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne, eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. [pdf] Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean. Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/morocco-country-report-on-national-approaches-to-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

Öktem, K. (2010) Muslim communities in the Balkans: Emigration, De-Islamization and new nationalisms. In: *New Islamic actors after the Wahhabi intermezzo: Turkey's return to the Muslim Balkans*. [pdf] Oxford: European Studies Centre, University of Oxford. Available at: https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/attach/126/126845_Oktem-Balkan-Muslims.pdf [Accessed February 2021].

Peci, L. and Demjaha A. (2020) Kosovo. In: Torrekens, C. and de le Vingne, D. eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. [pdf] Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean. Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/kosovo-country-report-on-national-approaches-to-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

Pinfari, M. (2020) Egypt. In: Torrekens, C. and de le Vingne, D. eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. [pdf] Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean. Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/egypt-country-report-on-national-approaches-to-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

Štikovac Clarck, J., Mahdeen, B. Bint Feisal, A. (2020) Jordan. In: Torrekens, C. and de le Vingne, D. eds. *Country Reports on National Approaches to Extremism: Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans*. [pdf] Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean. Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/jordan-country-report-on-national-approaches-to-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

Torrekens, C. and de le Vingne D. (2020) *Concepts and Analytical Framework Debating Notions and Approaches to Radicalisation and Violent Extremism*. [pdf] Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean. Available at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/publications/concepts-and-analytical-framework-debating-notions-and-approaches-to-radicalisation-and-violent-extremism/> [Accessed February 2021].

WEBSITES AND OTHER ELECTRONIC SOURCES

CIA The World Factbook (n.d.) CIA.gov [online] Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/> [Accessed February 2021].

Freedom House (n.d.) Freedom in the World Research Methodology. *FreedomHouse.org* [online] Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology> [Accessed February 2021].

ANNEX 1

COUNTRY	LAW/STRATEGIC DOCUMENT	ADOPTION
Kosovo	Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020 and Action Plan	September 2015
Kosovo	Law on Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory	March 2015
Kosovo	Kosovo Penal Code	
North Macedonia	National Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia for Countering Violent Extremism 2018-2022 (NS/CVE)	March 2018
North Macedonia	National Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2018-2022	March 2018
North Macedonia	National Plan for the reintegration, resocialization, and rehabilitation of returnees from foreign wars and the members of their families (women and children)	June 2020
North Macedonia	Criminal Code	
North Macedonia	Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing Terrorism	
Bulgaria	National Strategy for Countering Radicalization and Terrorism 2015-2020 and Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy (Annual 2016,2018, 2019 + Implementation Reports)	December 2015
Egypt	No Strategy or National Plan	
Egypt	Counter Terrorism Law No. 94/2015	
Tunisia	National Strategy to Counter Extremism and Terrorism	November 2016
Tunisia	National Strategy to Counter Terrorism	2014 (not adopted)
Tunisia	Organic Law on Countering Terrorism and Prevention of Money Laundering	August 2015
Morocco	Law 03-03 on the Fight Against Terrorism	
Morocco	Strategy only covering airports and sites of potential terrorist targets	
Jordan	Strategy for the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) – Arab Army to counter violent extremism and terrorism	
Jordan	Action Plan of the P/CVE Unit at the Prime Ministry	
Jordan	Counter Terrorism Law No. 55	2006 amended by CT Law No. 18 in 2014

COUNTRY	LAW/STRATEGIC DOCUMENT	ADOPTION
Bosnia and Herzegovina	The Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combating Terrorism 2015-2020	Summer 2015
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Action Plan for Implementation of the Strategy	October 2016
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Criminal Code	Changes in 2014

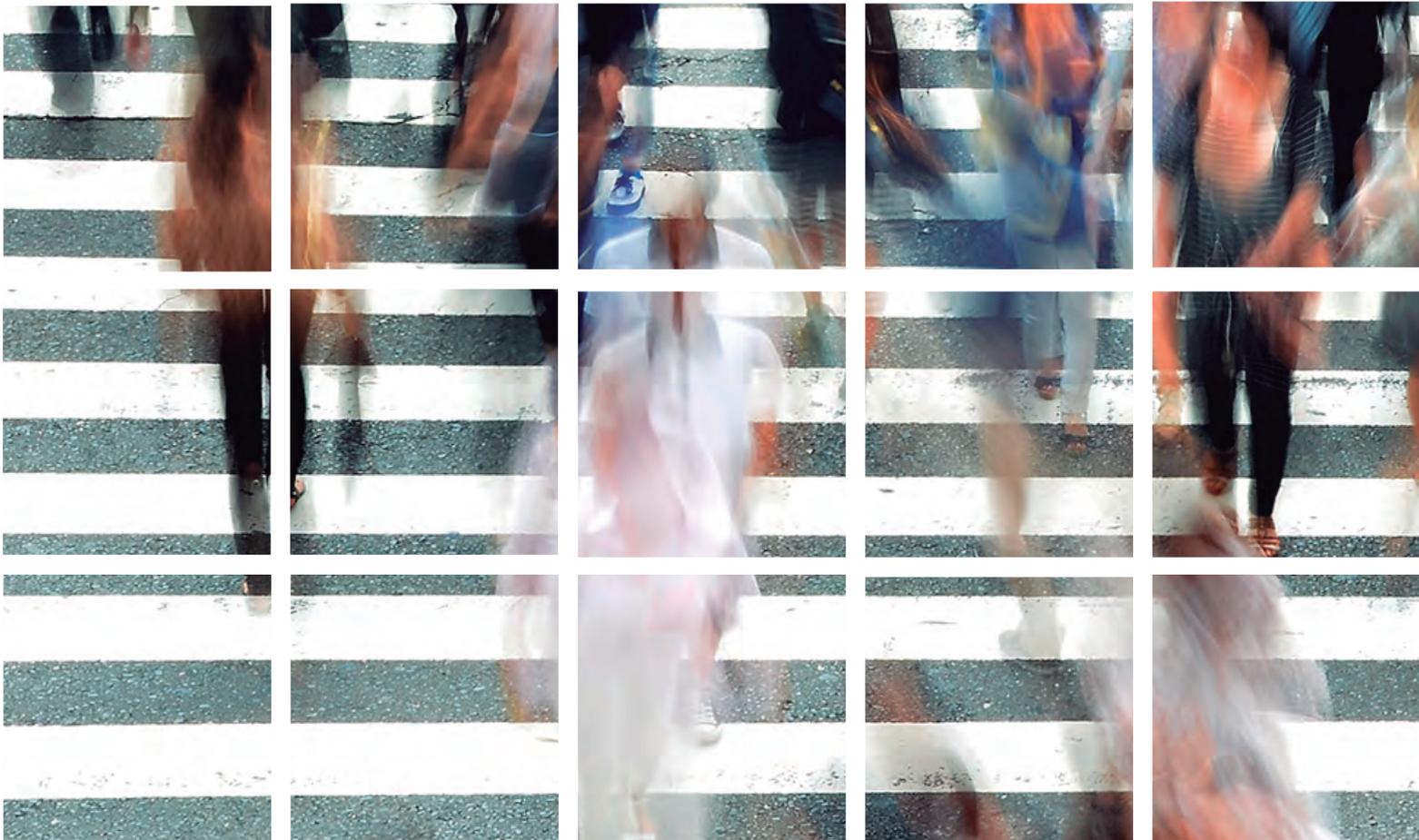


What drives youth to violent extremism? How can they turn from being “the problem” into “the key” for a solution? By engaging youth in the research, CONNEKT will raise young voices to become stakeholders in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

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.



The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, under Grant Agreement no. 870772