

ISLAMISTIC EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Abstract

The paper analyzes, by using content analysis and historical-comparative methods, the causes of the emergence and development of Islamistic extremism and compares the state of affairs regarding the presence and the tendency of further growth of Islamistic extremism in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia. This means practically identifying the inspirers and those who spread extreme Islamistic ideas, their activities, international sponsors and contacts, their active contribution to global jihad, as well as assessing the abilities of above-mentioned Western Balkan societies to defend themselves against this growing danger threatening not only the lives and the property of their citizens, but also their democratic constitutional order. The research has revealed a significant strengthening of the number of Wahhabi believers, the increase of their aggressiveness, the violent takeover of the existing and the building of a large number of new mosques, which are out of control of official Islamic communities in these societies, also the construction of dozens of Wahhabi settlements, where sharia law is applied, not the laws of the home state. The return of their financiers contributed to the intensification of religious propaganda and to the increasing of affection for Wahhabi ideas among the local Muslim population, which resulted in the departure around a thousand fighters from the Balkans to join the terrorist organizations in the Middle East battlefields. Confronting the rising Islamistic extremism in the Western Balkans is blocked by: lack of real and quality prevention, inexperience and poor results in the deradicalization of extremists, and in some areas, the lack of political will. All of the above, mentioned together implies not only intensive cooperation between the police and other security structures of the West Balkan and the surroundings countries, but also the urgent help of adequate institutions of the International community.

Keywords: *Islamistic extremism; Western Balkans; terrorism; Wahhabism; ISIL.*

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Introduction

We live in a time when Islamic¹ extremism and terrorism are very widespread as political and criminal manifestations of the adoption of jihadist ideology (Simeunović, 2016 a). Apart from the continuing conflicts in the Middle East, this is helped by globalization which allows for an increased mobility, from the level of individual to the level of migrant, by large possibilities of Internet abuse for extremist propaganda and mobilization purposes, and by the lack of definition of the extremism and terrorism at the UN level, which would make efforts made by the international community in the field of combating security challenges far more effective.

The literature on the Islamic terrorism has become very numerous after September 11, 2001. However, literature on the Islamic extremism in the Balkans did not follow the same trend, and has begun to appear more massively over the last ten years (Archick, Rollins and Woehrel, 2005) due to the relevance of the topic, not only for the security of the region and its surroundings, but also for the countries of the EU and the US. Also, in the literature on the Islamic extremism in general, it is increasingly noted that a special attention must be paid to the Western Balkans as the part of Europe whose population is multi-religious and multinational (Radeljić, 2010; Vidino, 2006). However, it can be observed that the authors from the Balkans are rather subjective in the treatment of this topic, which is somehow expected in the environments that are burdened with relatively recent war events (Babanovski, 2002).

The main deficiency of this literature is that, it is often not empirically grounded. A significant corrective to this are expert reports and case studies (Azinović and Jusić, 2016, Selimi and Stojkovski, 2016) written for the needs of international institutions and organizations. Most of the literature on the Islamic extremism in the Balkans devotes considerable attention to its history, with some disagreements, especially over the timeline when the Islamic extremism arrived to the Western Balkans and the significance of the cooperation of Balkan extreme Islamists with the Nazis during the Second World War (Kastrati, 2015; Shay, 2008).

Also, the actors of Islamic extremism, the content of their activities and the degree of threat they represent to the surrounding and other

¹ The expression Islamic extremism, "with the suffix -istic, is more political correct than the expression Islamic extremism. It indicates a following, imitative behaviour, and also the potential ideologization and political interpretation of Islam, which reduces the possibility of violating the believers' feelings". See more about on Simeunović, D. (2009). *Terorizam*. Beograd: Pravni fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, p. 197.

European countries (Bardos, 2005; Deliso, 2007) are defined differently. Studies on Islam in the Balkans which try to explain modern Islam and its extreme interpretations objectively, (Bećirević, 2016; Jerotić, 2016) are quite rare. The literature dealing with the future of jihad and, in general, Islamic extremism presents gloomy forecasts for the Balkans (Fares, 2008). There are very few scientific studies on the latest rise in Islamic extremism in the Western Balkans, generated by the wars in Syria and Iraq, as the reason for Balkan extremists to go to these battlefields. This is compensated by territorial reports (Panovski, 2011; Selimi and Stojkovski, 2016), or partial problem reports (Đurđević, Stevanović, Mitič and Kocić, 2016), which, taken separately, do not provide an accurate insight into the whole situation.

For all these reasons, the existing literature on the Islamic extremism in the Western Balkans is treated, in this paper, according to criteria of scientific rigor. Since this paper is an attempt to determine, not so much the causes of the presence and lasting of Islamic extremism in the Western Balkans, but its current state and the reasons for its growth over the last ten years. With this in mind, as the most appropriate method, according to the purpose and the nature of the available sources (Lobnikar, Prprović, German, Banutai, Prislán and Cajner Mraović, 2016) comparative analysis is chosen and used to determine the inspirers, perpetrators and other actors of Islamic extremism in the Western Balkans, sources of its financing, the degree of threat to their own and to other communities, its contribution to global jihad, the relation of extreme religious groups with the official Islamic communities of the Balkan countries, as well as the ability of those countries to resist extremism and eliminate it from their communities.

While qualitative and quantitative analysis of data collected from scientific books, articles in scientific journals and collections, primary and secondary available sources, like reports and other documents from the international and state institutions, respectable newspapers and other various sources, deepens the knowledge of the general view and the main characteristics of Islamic extremism in the Balkans, which creates an objective and true picture of the topic of this work, the historical-comparative method shows us the similarities and differences between the degree of spread and the tempo of Islamic extremism spread in various Western Balkan countries and gives a more accurate assessment of its development in particular communities. The historical-comparative method was also used to compare the situation in different countries in order to determine the specificities in each of these countries. By comparing differences and similarities it was possible to determine whether Islamic extremism is a phenomenon of the same nature or it has a very specific form in each of these countries individually.

The aim of this paper is to give an insight into the current situation of the presence of Islamistic extremism in the indicated Balkan countries in order to make the institutional response to this situation more adequate. Determining the real situation of the spread of Islamistic terrorism in this part of Europe should make it easier to understand it, and thus take more adequate measures to fight this security challenge. The results obtained should help to create better-quality practical solutions which have their application in the fight against Islamistic extremism in the present and the future. The reason for that is not just the number of local Islamic believers, but also the presence of newcomers from the so-called "critical" Muslim countries who have brought and spread the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, and also the large number of Balkan inhabitants who have become members of terrorist organizations over the last decade, which altogether means a potentially large number of returnees from the Middle Eastern battlefields whose potential for intolerance and conflict is extremely high.

The text is systematized in the way that the introduction gives a critical approach to the literature on the subject, gives methods and goals of work, followed by the history of the phenomenon investigated, a part about the types and activities of the actors of extremism, and then a part about the goals of extreme Islamic groups and organizations in the Western Balkan. This is followed by a section on the capability of Western Balkan societies and states to suppress Islamistic extremism as a security challenge. The paper ends with concluding observations on the results of comparative analytical research and recommendations for activities in the field of combating Islamic extremism in the Western Balkans, and a list of references.

History

Despite the popular opinion which is also shared by the literature on the terrorism, that Islamistic extremism began in the Balkans in the '90s of the 20th century, during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it has a pre-history in the Western Balkans. After the sporadic appearance in the history of the wars conducted in the Balkans, the seed of militant Islam in the region was formally sown during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, in 1939 by establishing the Young Muslims, an organization modelled and named after the youth organization Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt (Stojančević, 2016). In World War II, its members and followers cooperated with the Nazis as members of the Handžar and Skenderberg divisions (Shay, 2008).

During the period of the SFR Yugoslavia, various extremist organizations of Muslim emigrants were active abroad, usually in cooperation

with Ustasha emigration. Also, it is commonly believed that the historic opportunity for the breakthrough into the Western Balkans Islamic extremism had during the 90's, when numerous Islamic militants gathered in Bosnia and became "holy warriors" - mujahedeens. However, according to some authors (Kastrati, 2015), Islamic extremism first arrived in the late 80's in Albania along with the first pro-Iranian fundamentalist ideas from the Middle East (Bardos, 2005; Mahnaimi, 1998), and later, after that in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Their first propagators were Islamic humanitarian organizations. The result was a parallel course of Albania to liberalization and to the "brotherhood of Islamic countries". During the '90s, Osama bin Laden organized camps in northern Albania (Kelley, 2001), while for a number of KLA members an Islamic course was organized in Afghanistan (Hedges, 1999; Ash, 2001). Osama bin Laden was inclined to islamize the KLA, hoping that it would turn the Balkan region "into his main base for Islamic armed activities in Europe" (Sunday Times, 1998). In 2000, a high-ranking Interpol officer informed the US Congress about the connections of al-Qaida, the Albanian state structures and the KLA, (Mutschke, 2000). Also, Kosovo's leader Ibrahim Rugova (Tanjug, 2001) pointed to KLA's increasingly pro-Islamic orientation.

Until 1992, training camps for mujahedeens in Bosnia and Herzegovina had already been established, and funded by Islamic humanitarian organizations together with Al Qaeda. Bin Laden's presence in Albania in 1994, was confirmed from several sources (Mahnaimi, 1998), as well as financing of KLA by Al Qaeda (Raimondo, 2001). Only "between 1993 and 1995 over \$ 900 million had been illegally invested in extremist activities in the Balkans" (Sandić, 2011; Simeunović and Dolnik, 2013). Most of these organizations were later closed under the pressure of the United States, thus the flows of financing Islamic extremism in the Western Balkans were cut, but only for a short time.

Certain number of mujahideen moved to Kosovo in 1998, where they formed the mujahideen unit called "Abu Bakir Sidik" to participate in the battles. At the time of the intensification of the Kosovo conflict, foreign mujahideen from Islamic and Western states began to arrive in Albania again. This was a long process, and that explains the fact that later, they came, in a far greater number, to Macedonia where they were the main propagators of Islamic extremism and participants in armed conflicts. The number of mujahedin and members of Al Qaeda who fought in the Macedonian ONA was around 600 fighters (Babanovski, 2002).

The further development of Islamistic extremism in the Western Balkans was in correlation with the stance of the US and other Western countries towards terrorism. When the Western policy after September 11, 2001 towards the mujahedin began to change, the policy of the Balkan states, like Bosnia and Herzegovina, became less friendly towards them, but with restraint, since a large number of mujahedeen had Bosnia and Herzegovina citizenship (B92, 2007).

The fact that about 750 people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are still under constant surveillance of western intelligence services (The Daily Telegraph, 2004), and that about a thousand extremists from the Western Balkans (of which about 65% are Albanians) went to join ISIL and Al Nusra, tells enough about a potentially high risk of the Islamistic extremism of people from the Balkans, which is mostly manifested in their massive terrorist actions in the Middle East, and occasional terrorist actions in the Balkans and in the US and EU countries.

Actors of extremism: types

Inspirers and propagandists: The vast majority of Islamic believers in the Balkans practice moderate, "national" Islam that has been brought to the Balkans by Turkey, country which still has a great influence on them, so the Balkan Muslims are not only different from the Wahhabis, but at first, they were repelled by Wahhabis aggressiveness.

Nevertheless, many sources, documents, and the testimonies of repentant terrorists (Hamad, 2007) show that the intense presence of, not only various religious and humanitarian Islamic foundations, but also foreign mujahedeen and al-Qaeda members, even Osama bin Laden himself, starting from the late eighties in Albania, in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 90's war, and afterwards in Sandzak, Macedonia, and Kosovo, produced significant propaganda influence on introducing and accepting Wahhabism and, according to some authors (Woehrel, 2005), this propaganda created many supporters of Islamist extremism ready to commit acts of terrorism.

That is the only explanation for the fact that, for example, in Albania, which was "the first atheist state in the world" (Prifti, 1978, p. 100), as early as the first years after the fall of the communist regime in 1990, religiousness was quickly restored primarily among Muslims who now account for 56.7% of all population, plus the number of Sufis who, according to various sources, make around 2.1%.

Several political and economic disturbances that happened, not only in Albania, but in every Western Balkan country, from the beginning of the

process of democratization, facilitated the breakthrough of the Islamicist extremists.

The current state of presence of Islamicist extremism in the Western Balkans is characterized by new trends. The main inspirers and propagandists of jihadist ideology are no longer mujahedins, but people from Balkans, mostly Bosniaks and Albanians, former students at the universities in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, countries which had supported Bosniaks and Albanians in their fights.

These states had already, during the war and especially after it, organized the departure of hundreds of young Islamic believers from the Western Balkans to religious education centres, with the aim that they would, upon return, become the transmitters of "true religion".

All of those who returned from studying, no matter whether they were previously practicing Wahhabism or were members of the Islamic Community, now preach Islam exclusively in accordance with Wahhabi teachings, giving a new impetus to Islamicist extremism in the Balkans (Bećirević, 2016).

The tendency of the growth of Islamicist extremism in Kosovo and Macedonia is closely linked with the sending of young people to Islamic studies and pilgrimage, or just longer stay in the countries – hothouses of religious radicalism (especially Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Malaysia and Egypt), from where they return as high quality propagandists of Islamicist extremism and become Islamicist priests or preachers who frequently change their place of living and hold lectures that attract great attention of the believers.

In Sandzak, an geographical area, administratively divided between Serbia and Montenegro, the former volunteers from the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and students who had attended Islamic universities in Arab states, have all adopted the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, but still in Sandzak, prevailing influence is that of radical Islamists from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The same aim is shared by radical Islamic sites calling for jihad (Lieberman and Collins, 2008) and advocating suicide attacks to kill Christians, such as the Internet site www.kelimetal-haqq.org

The consequence of their extremist propaganda is the establishment of certain number of paramesdzads in private facilities in Sandzak. A strong connection between the extremists from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sandzak was confirmed in 2011, when a Wahhabi from Sandzak attacked the US Embassy in Sarajevo (ICG, 2013; Novosti, 2011).

Characteristic for the way radical Islamists operate in Albania is the establishment of a number of institutes and centres where religious education of believers is conducted according to the Wahhabi Islamic teachings, which

are funded by Munazmat al-Islam, the most influential Islamic fund linked to Al Qaeda, and also by funds from Algeria and Kuwait.

Those who express dedication to this ideology and religious beliefs during the courses, are sent to higher levels of religious education institutions, most often to Islamic faculties in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Pakistan, Yemen and Egypt, where additional indoctrination is conducted, while some of them also undergo military training.

Those returning to Albania continue to spread jihadism and also represent significant support for Islamists with whom they had already established connections (Matoshi, 2001).

The emergence of jihadism in Montenegro is related to the import of Wahhabi ideology and its acceptance by extremists among the local Muslim population, concentrated mainly in the northern part of the state, in the municipalities which once were parts of Sandzak.

The Wahhabis from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia had a significant influence on the occurrence and spread of Wahhabism in the north part of Montenegro, while the radical Muslims from Albania made a greater impact on the Montenegrin coast (Rakić i Jurišić, 2012).

In addition to that, the extent of the previous repulsion of Muslim believers in the Western Balkans towards Wahhabism has also been significantly reduced.

According to the IRI data from 2017, about 15% of the Bosnia and Herzegovina population approves Wahhabism, while 3% approve suicide attacks (IRI, 2017). According to the IOM (International Organization for Migrations) Regional Report on the vulnerability and resilience of local communities towards violent extremism from June 2017, the percentage of family participation in the Bosnia and Herzegovina in the process of radicalization is 6.61%, which is less than the usual percentage in Islamic environments (Atran, 2015), but is twice as high as in other Balkan environments (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2017).

According to the western services, as well as the intelligence services of Macedonia, in 2013 there were more than 7,000 followers of the Wahhabi Islamic doctrine in this country (Simeunović and Dolnik, 2013).

The growing support for Wahhabists in the region can also be seen from the number of group members on social networks. As individual actors of Islamist extremism in the Western Balkans – the main promoters, preachers and religious teachers who spread religious radicalism, persons like Sulejman Bugari and Nezim Halilović-Muderis from the Bosnia and Herzegovina (Vecernje novosti, 2005), could be pinpointed, as well as their followers who have status of a formal or non-formal membership.

The individual actors of Islamist extremism in the Western Balkans are, as a rule, of modest social background. These are young people of poor financial status, from the suburbs of large cities or from the interior regions. They rarely complete more than secondary school education, unless they have studied at faculties of religious studies. They mostly do poorly paid jobs in the private sector and tend to turn to petty crime (Simeunović, 2008).

There is an obvious correlation between, more or less bad economic situation of the Western Balkan societies and the enlisting of individual actors of Islamist extremism. The unemployment rate, as an indicator of this situation, is highest in those areas where religious radicalism has the highest growth rate, such as the Bosnia and Herzegovina, where rate of unemployment among young people reaches almost 40%, and in Kosovo, where the unemployment rate is permanently high, despite the fact that Kosovo has attracted foreign investments larger than the other countries in the region.

While unemployment in Albania amounted to 15.3% in the period from 1993 to 2017, in Montenegro 17.29% in the period from 2002 to 2018, in Serbia 17.81% in the period from 2008 to 2017, unemployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina amounted to 42.65% in the period from 2007 to 2017, reaching up to 46.10%, and in the period from 2001 to 2017, it amounted to an average of 30.60% per year, reaching, in some years 57% (Trading Economist, 2018; Trading Economist, 2018a; Trading Economist, 2018b; Trading Economist, 2018c; Trading Economist, 2018d).

The reasons for the rise in the number of Islamic extremists in Albania are of a somewhat different nature. Recent research confirms that in Albania, a high percentage of respondents consider that Islam in this country affects the social and, more importantly, the private life of citizens (Cinar and Gonzalez, 2013), and that Islam has its own political institutions, which leads to the rise of Islamic extremism.

The supporters of extreme Islamist ideology in the Balkans now act in one of two factions: "neotakfir" and "reformers". The so-called fraction "neotakfir" acts through Wahhabi organizations whose objective is establishing a Balkan Islamist state by force – an emirate ruled by the Sharia law, which would include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Sandzak and Macedonia. "Reformist" fraction operates within the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the same objective, but advocates non-violent methods (Simeunović, 2016b).

A particularly high level of impetus to Islamist extremism in the Western Balkans, as in many other countries of the world, was given by ISIL's big successes in the war-torn areas of Iraq and Syria over the past decade,

resulting in an extremely large response from young extremists from the Balkans to enter this criminally -religious organizations.

There has also been a significant change, not only on the propaganda plan, but also in the leadership. While in the first years of the existence of Islamicist extremism in the Balkans, the main authorities were foreign mujahedeens, with the decline in their number and level of financial support, the leadership positions in paradzemates and radical groups have been taken over by Bosniaks and Albanians – Takfirs, which are considered the most aggressive Wahhabis i.e. Salafists (Baer, 2008).

Financiers: The first and the largest, and as it has been proven, permanent financiers of Islamicist extremism in the Balkans, were and still remain donors of numerous humanitarian Islamic foundations from Iran and rich Arab countries, primarily from Saudi Arabia, as the collective actors of Islamicist extremism.

Apart from them, Wahhabists and generally Salafia religious groups and communities, paradzemats and different cultural, sports and traditionalistic associations of citizens, and specialized non-governmental organizations can be labelled as collective actors of Islamicist extremism in the Western Balkans (Azinović, 2015).

Although these groups and organizations are not financiers of extremism, they act as a transmission mechanism for financing Islamicist extremism. During the last decade of the 20th century, these and similar foundations were also financiers of the terrorist activities of Al Qaeda and other Islamicist terrorist organizations, and because of these and other criminal activities were under attack from the international community, banned and their activists condemned to long term sentences (BBC, 2012).

However, after a certain period of time, these organizations renewed their work in the Western Balkans, working not only under the different, but also under the same names, often employing the same staff who used to work for similar organizations whose work had also been forbidden. Apart from the activities for which they are registered, these organizations are engaged in transmitting the Wahhabi-Salafi interpretation of Islam and, generally, the idea of Islamist radicalism.

The more important ones are: WAMY, Kuwait Joint Relief Committee (KJRC), Islamic World Committee (IWC), Al Waqf al-Islami Organization (WIO), Global Relief Mondial Service (GRMS), Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS), Islamic Youth Forum (IYF) and Bamirsia (Tok, Calleja and El – Ghaish, 2014).

These organizations operate through their branches throughout the Balkans, but not in the central Serbia, where no organizations or branches of this kind have been registered. However, these organizations do not operate only within the borders of their host countries. The example for that are Islamic cultural centres in Albania, whose activities strongly influenced the recruitment of young Albanians from Kosovo for jihad.

Moreover, the states which spread their own religion teachings are also the financiers of Islamistic extremism. While Iran was engaged financially in the late 80's in Albania, and after that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Saudi Arabia, is present today and was present in the past in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Jihadists in Macedonia are mostly financed by donations from Pakistan, but also from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Iran.

Obviously, the attention of the international community weakened when it comes to funding Islamic extremism in this region. It can be concluded that, after the energetic reactions from the United States and other Western countries following September 11, 2001, the flows of financing Islamistic extremism in the Western Balkans were cut, but only for the short time, and were restored at the beginning of this decade (Sandić, 2011).

Al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations were and still remain the financiers, which gave money to radical Islamists in the Balkans, with the aim to open the "third front" in this area. Al Qaeda sent money, not only to the extremists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also in Kosovo, while in Macedonia, Al-Qaida gave \$ 7 million to the terrorist organization ONA and by doing this, at the same time, did "money laundering" (Taneski, 2010, p. 94). Al Qaeda's links to Montenegrin Wahhabists were confirmed in 2007 when the Montenegrin police confiscated money and propaganda material, sent by the Taliban and Al Qaeda, on how to perform suicide and other terrorist attacks (Rakić i Jurišić, 2012).

Another permanent and growing source of funding Islamistic extremists' activities in the Western Balkans comes from different criminal activities of Islamistic extremists (CSSTR, 2011), mainly illegal drug trafficking, arms (Farnam, 2003) and human trafficking (Brisard, 2002). These activities lead to the creation of a hybrid profile of extremist organizations and groups which are not any more only political-religious, but become criminal organizations also. This phenomenon is, in theory, called narcoterrorism.

An example for this is ANA (Albanian National Army), which was, at the time, simultaneously put on two lists in the United States – as a terrorist and also as a criminal organization. While, in 2003, UNMIK proclaimed ANA a terrorist organization, because it was more Islamistically oriented than the

KLA, and this was completely in line with the advanced process of extreme Islamization of the Balkans (Matoshi, 2001).

In Montenegro, the extremists receive money mainly from Islamic organizations, but also from drug smuggling. Proof that these funds are aimed at spreading Islam is an increasing number of newly built mosques, so when it comes to the number of mosques in relation to the number of inhabitants, Montenegro has the highest rate in the region (Islam Montenegro, 2011).

The term "Islamic Network" which has been used increasingly in the criminalistics to mark various forms of illegal trafficking in an area from the Middle East to EU countries, also includes criminal activities of fundamentalist religious circles from the Western Balkans, primarily from Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Sandzak and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which include "heroin smuggling from Afghanistan by the Talibans and Al Qaeda" (Makarenko, 2004, p. 132), and in recent years, also by the Kurdish PKK (Dikici, 2008; Simeunovic and Dolnik, 2013).

In Macedonia, the Pakistani missionary movement Tablig Jemath (Jamaat Teblig) occasionally smuggles weapons. In recent years, Sandzak has become an important link with drug cartels, although Kosovo is in the forefront of it. In 2004, the FBI launched a comprehensive investigation into the links between the Albanian Islamic Network and international terrorist financing (Frieden, 2004).

Objectives and methods of action used by extremist Islamic believers in the Western Balkans

Objectives classification: The objectives of extremist Islamic believers in the Western Balkans can be classified, according to their significance, to historical, strategic, tactical and operational goals. The general goals of their fight include historical and strategic goals, while the goals of particular groups or organizations of Islamic extremists in the Western Balkans include operational, tactical and most of their strategic objectives (Simeunović, 2009).

The historical goals of Islamic extremists in the Balkans are the most important ones and, at the same time, the most comprehensive, while the moment of their achievement is located in the far future. The basic historical goals of all the groups and leaders of Islamic extremism in the Western Balkans are to impose Islam as the one and only world religion and to create ummah, a world state and society that would include all the Muslims in the world (Fares, 2008).

The strategic goals are more numerous and their implementation should lead to the achievement of the already set historical goals. These include: the spread of a radical version of Islam, the mass enlisting of followers into Wahhabi teaching, the formation of combat organizations, the unification with all similar Salafi groups and movements, the self-identification of masses with the actions of radical Islamists, the liberation of the "enslaved brothers" in other countries and contribution to global jihad by personal participation.

The main strategic goal of all Islamistic extremists in the Western Balkans is the creation of a Balkan emirate, caliphate or vilayet (depending on the expression used by different preachers in different communities), which do not have the same meaning, but could be, in the end, defined as a kind of Balkan religious state that would include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Sandzak, meaning not only Sandzak's part in Serbia, but also a part of the territory of Montenegro.

The proof that the strategic goals of the Islamistic extremists in the Balkans do not have necessarily to be identical in all communities, is shown by the territorial pretensions of Islamistic extremists in Macedonia, which are not limited only to the territory of that state, but, as the former chief mufti of Bulgaria, Nedim Gandzhev's statement confirm, these extremists tend to create a fundamentalist triangle between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and the Western Rhodope Mountains in Bulgaria. (Deliso, 2007).

In the operationalization of the goals of Islamistic extremists in the Balkans, tactical goals are those which lead to the actualization of the strategic ones and from which they are derived as their important segment. For example: performing concrete actions of "retaliation" with the aim of weakening the power of their opponents, strengthening their positions in a particular community, establishing of paradzemats, performing various concrete actions with the aim to improve the number, personnel and financial reinforcement and the use of mass media to propagate their ideas and mobilize membership.

As operational ones, specific individual goals of the lowest level of generality can be determined, because they are substantially exhausted at the level of tactical concretization. So, for example, concretization of the "retaliation" as a tactical goal of Islamistic extremists in the Western Balkans includes the realization of the following operational goals: attack on facilities of political significance, attack on church facilities, direct strike "in the heart" of the state by murdering persons on high political, police or military position, causing anxiety of life among citizens of other religions by periodic violence

etc. (Azinović, 2015; Bardos, 2005; Deliso, 2007; Hamad, 2007; Shay, 2008; Simeunović i Dolnik, 2013).

Contents and methods of operation: Despite the initial mistrust of Islamic believers towards Wahhabis, and their frequent confrontations with official Islamic communities in the Balkans, Wahhabis managed to maintain a presence in this area, due to the money which they received from Saudi Arabia and other donor countries (Sandic, 2011). This is very important, bearing in mind that Western Balkan societies are impoverished, and, as we have noted, the unemployment rate in some of them is extremely high (Trading Economist, 2018).

Wahhabis activities range from the ordinary or permissible religious activities like building their own places of worship in the Western Balkans (Islamic Community of Montenegro, 2011; Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2015) in order to create as distinctive pro-Islamic atmosphere as possible, spreading their teaching of Islam through lectures, books, by creating websites and the use of social networks on the Internet in order to attract new members (Kosovar Center for Security Studies [KCSS], 2018), to aggressive actions such as taking over by force the mosques which are under the jurisdiction of the official Islamic Communities in the Western Balkan countries, spreading hate speech of religious and national animosity (Vecernje novosti, 2005), recruiting volunteers to go to the Middle East battlefields in order to join terrorist organizations, like ISIL and Al Nusra in the first place, and persuading individuals and groups to carry out terrorist activities in a domicile country or surrounding areas, and more and more lately on the US and the EU territory (Selimi i Stojkovski, 2016; Simeunović, 2012, 2014).

For these purposes, Wahhabis set up camps in the region, to provide the paramilitary training, based on Islamic military tradition, for their members. In order to attract young people, who are their most important target group, they organize, in big cities, courses not only in Arabic, but more and more lately in English language, and also different computer courses for young population. In Kosovo, one radical preacher set up TV station called "Peace TV", on which the ideas of Islamistic extremism are constantly very aggressively propagated, hate speech spread against not only non-Muslims, but also against Muslims who do not accept Wahhabism, and bin Laden is glorified (Al-Alawi, 2012; Utrinski vesnik, 2010). One of the Islamistic forums, in 2010 for the first time in Albania, broadcasted a song dedicated to bin Laden (Utrinski vesnik, 2010) in Albanian language, and since then, religious extremism has been extensively spreading in Albanian, as well as in Bosniak language. Also, so called Islamic State publishes some of its materials, not only

in four major world languages and Arabic, but also in Bosniac and Albanian Telegraf, 2017).

One important and more and more lately widespread content of Wahhabis work in the Western Balkans, has been the swift establishment of the network of settlements called paradzemats, atypical not only for Europe but also for the Balkans, in which they live with their families, not practicing the laws of the local state, but Sharia law and educating children using religious teaching programs. In mid-2015, the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina reported that there are 64 paradzemas in Bosnia and Herzegovina under the absolute control of the Wahhabis (Vecernji list, 2016, Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2015), comparing with the few years before, precisely 2011, when there were only four paradzemas. In Macedonia also, the Mujahideen organization called Tablig Dzemat set up several paradzemats and camps (Deliso, 2007). The largest number of paradzemas camps is placed in Kosovo, in former training centres which were used by KLA (Simeunović, 2009). Wahhabis' activity in Montenegro is characterized by gatherings in the camps in Plav and in the border region with Kosovo, attended by Islamists from the country and the surrounding areas (Rakić i Jurišić, 2012).

According to the statements of extremists published in their public media, the formation of the so-called Islamic State on the ground of Iraq and Syria has inspired the Islamicist extremists to try similar attempt in the Balkans, to establish a "punctate caliphate" composed of a network of linked paradzemats, usually not territorially interconnected, with the tendency of further growing until this "Balkan Emirate" does not include, apart from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Raska-Polimlje region, Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania (Allah's grace 2013).

Methods of Wahhabis work include increasing abuse of democratic mechanisms of social and political activity, such are the establishment and operation of non-governmental organizations, cultural societies, religious sport societies and traditionalist associations (Azinović, 2015), whose proselytism leads to illegal activities such are organizing the departure of extremists to the battlefields, a drastic restriction of women's rights, abuse of the Internet and the media with the aim to spread hate towards members of other religious communities and glorifying Islamic terrorist activities as ethically and religiously correct.

Also, some paradzemats, like Teblig in Macedonia in 2001, organized and sent their members into armed conflicts between Albanians and Macedonian security forces (Deliso, 2007). In this way, it is again confirmed as correct, the thesis about the relation between terrorism and democracy, in

terms of creating increased possibilities for concealed extremist gathering and activities due to the existence of a number of democratic rights and freedoms (Wilkinson, 2002).

In all the countries of the Western Balkans, there is an increase in the activities of Islamicist extremists, which is neither so fast nor as dramatic as it is sometimes presented in the media, but definitely it is constant. The highest level of increase is in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and in Macedonia. The characteristics of Islamicist extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina are paradigms, which are far less widespread in other Balkan areas, while the characteristics of the Islamicist extremist milieu of Kosovo is a mixture of nationalistic, extremist religious and criminal activities all taken by the same individuals and groups. In Macedonia, there is a specific insistence of Islamicist extremists on the actions of the masses which lead to a deep religious, not just ethnic division of Macedonian society.

The Islamicist extremism of the Western Balkans as a regional and global security challenge

Participation in global jihad: The activities of Islamicist extremists with which, they think they contribute to the global jihad are mainly taking place in three fields: the conduct of terrorist actions in the Balkans, the joining of Islamicist terrorist organizations such as ISIL, Al Nusra, and earlier Al Qaeda, and in the execution of "homegrown" terrorism acts on the territory of "hostile countries" such as the US and the EU countries. The conduct of terrorist activities in the Balkans by Islamicist extremists can be described as periodic but constant. All this is a logical consequence of the degree of development of the Islamic radical population in the Balkans and its traditional determination to fight for its goals by using violence. The latest trends in the activities of the Balkan Islamicist extremists are the departure for the Middle East battlefields and there, although in fewer numbers, participation in the "home-grown" extremist activities on the territory of the EU and the USA (The New York Times, 2009; Simeunović, 2014; Thachuk, Bowman and Richardson, 2008).

The number of volunteer fighters from Serbia who are on the Iraqi or Syrian battlefield is 28, including two women. Eleven of these fighters were killed, while ten returned to Serbia. Three of them were arrested and are waiting for a trial, three escaped to Kosovo, two went to Austria, and one person was arrested in Greece where he had come from Sweden. Most of them left Serbia and went to the battlefields in 2013 and 2014 through the territory of Bulgaria and Turkey. By the end of 2016, another five new departures for

the battlefields (Simeunović, 2016) were recorded. In the period from 2012 to 2015 only, 314 volunteers from Kosovo departed to fight for ISIL and Al Nusra (Azinović and Jusić, 2016).

It is assumed that the total number of Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens who fought in the Middle East battlefields, in the period from 2012 to 2017, was 286 persons, although Bosnia and Herzegovina officials also mentioned different numbers that ranged up to 350. During 2016 and 2017 there were no recorded departures, but two attempts of departure were prevented, one in 2016 and one in 2017, so it can be said that the trend of departure of Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens to the battlefields had almost stopped, which was mainly due to the defeat of so-called Islamic state. (Azinović and Jusić, 2016)

The number of Islamistic extremists who left Macedonia to fight in the Middle East in 2015 amounted to about 150 (Azinovic and Jusic, 2016). While this figure, according to the statement of the President of Macedonia, George Ivanov, fell to about 110 in 2016, because 25 of these fighters were killed and 86 returned to Macedonia (Selimi and Stojkovski, 2016). The reaction of the Macedonian authorities to the departure of its citizens for foreign battlefield resulted in police operations in 2016, when twenty people were arrested, and the key organizer of the volunteers' departures to the Middle East militias, a radical imam, was sentenced to seven years in prison (Selimi and Stojkovski, 2016).

Over the past five or six years, Islamistic centres in Albania, which are the main centres for recruiting young people for jihad, sent around 150 extremists from Albania to the Middle East to join ISIL (Simeunović, 2016) and different Al Qaeda affiliates, such as Džabat Al Nusre, but due to the possibility of the influence of various informal groups, this estimation can rise up to 200 (Tadić, 2017).

The jihadist trend of departing for the Middle East battlegrounds did not overlook Montenegro. The presence of Wahhabism in Montenegro resulted in about 40 volunteers from Montenegro, between 2012 and 2015, (Azinović and Jusić, 2016) joining the Middle East forces, among them a few women.

The Islamistic extremism began to manifest itself in the field of suicide terrorism. The first suicide bomber from the Balkans was a Kosovo Albanian who committed a terrorist act in Iraq at the end of March 2014, killing 52 people (Svetinje Braničeva, 2014). The suicide acts of other Balkan jihadists, which followed afterwards, proved the readiness of the Balkan extremists to commit suicide attacks, although experts had been expressing doubts about the possibility of such attacks for a long time.

In the last few years the number of local extremists departing for the Middle East battlefields, had declined, firstly, due to the adoption of the legal

measures in all Western Balkan countries against participation of their citizens in wars on the territory of foreign countries, and secondly, due to the defeat of so-called Islamic State. Therefore, the main security challenge of Islamistic terrorism in all Western Balkan countries remains the possibility of occasional terrorist incidents and the activities of returnees from the Middle East conflict.

Influence in the country and abroad: Although it has long been known that the main sources of extremism in the Balkans are Wahhabist centers (the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2015, the Islamic Community of Montenegro, 2011), Islamistic extremism is not only present in the Wahhabi communities as it is commonly thought, since a quarter of a century long presence of Wahhabism in The Balkans has proven that not all the Wahhabis are extremists, as it also shows that not all the members of the official Islamic communities in the Balkan countries have been immune to extremism any more. Given that of the fact that a slow, but stable increase in the number of supporters of Islamistic extremism as well as a growth of their activities in the Balkans and the world, especially in the Middle East and the US and the EU has been observed, the Western Balkans have been marked, not only by a number of authors, but also by representatives of the international community, as one of the "black spots" with regard to the human resources base and logistics of Islamic terrorism (Archick, Rollins and Woehrel 2005; Shay, 2008). The growing influence of violent and expansive extremist Islamistic ideologies in the Western Balkans is a serious security challenge not only for the Balkan and the surrounding countries, but also, through the realization of "home-grown" terrorism connected with the Balkan, increasingly for both the EU and the US (Simeunović, 2012).

In Macedonia, the emergence of Islamistic extremism and terrorism is closely linked with the factors that have already demonstrated their influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo (Babanovski, 2002; Panovski, 2011; KCSS, 2018; Selimi and Stojkovski, 2016). Terrorism in Macedonia finds its source not only in the ideology of extreme Albanian nationalism, but also in religious exclusiveness. The violence of Albanian extremists that has been destabilizing Macedonia since 2001, turning the country into a state of permanent crisis, consists not only of ethno-separatist tendency but also of radical religious-Islamic dimension, whose source comes from jihad postulates (Grizold and Zupancic, 2008).

The reactive nationalism which emerged among the Christians in Macedonia only makes the situation worse, affecting the security of the entire region. A significant security threat is posed also by the actions of the Wahhabi

groups from the South of Serbia, whose aims of Islamistic extremism and separatism are merged together (Huszska, 2007). These groups, which sent almost half of total number of fighters from Serbia to the Middle East war, also pose a threat because of their close ties with extreme Wahhabis in Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania. The activities of radical Islamists in Albania are characterized by the establishment of several Wahhabi institutes and centres that intensively gather radical Islamists from all over the region and therefore represent a security risk for the entire region. Today, even Albanians themselves consider that Albanian political Islamism poses a threat to the Western countries (Cinar and Gonzalez, 2013).

However, this does not apply to Albania itself, where, unlike neighbouring Kosovo or Macedonia, despite the Muslim majority, there is a tradition of mutual tolerance towards the citizens of other religions (Babuna, 2003). The reason for this is the religiously homogeneous society in Albania, mostly inhabited by Albanians (95%), with insignificant percentage of minorities. The situation in Montenegro is specific, not only because the Wahhabis are numerous and deeply rooted in some cities with the Muslim population in Montenegro, while not present at all in others cities, but partly because of the extreme activities of the Albanian Catholics, who formed a terrorist organization (B92-Vesti, 2007) with the aim of threatening primarily Muslims in Montenegro. The radical Catholics claimed that Muslims they have much more rights than the Catholics in this country.

The ISIL or Al Nusra returnees pose a threat to the entire Western Balkan and the surrounding countries, since after participation in the fighting; they became case-hardened terrorists. When they had set off to the Middle East, most of them were not really dangerous, they were mainly religious fanatics, without any combat experience, and as such, on arrival to the battlefield, often got killed in their first battles, like other new fighters. However, those who survived the Middle East war hell, are those who probably had carried out a series of terrorist acts and killed certain number of people, which means they can be viewed as people with a high capacity for destruction. A significant risk of their return lays in the fact that, after the return they become "heroes" and great examples to young people in their surroundings. For example, the Bosnian salafists who carried out terrorist attacks in Zvornik and Sarajevo in 2015 had been, before committing the acts, in contact with returnees from the Syrian war zone for months (Azinović, 2015).

Taking into consideration that returnees from the Middle East battlefields could face legal charges and long prison sentences in all the Western Balkan countries, it can be expected that they will not return in

greater numbers to their home countries, but some of them will remain in the Middle East, while others will use migrant or some other routes to reach the EU countries, which increases the risk of "home-grown" terrorism in these countries, and requires extra caution regarding organizations and individuals who have or have had contacts with extremists. For that reason, the Bavarian Service for the Protection of the Constitutional Order confirmed in 2017 that the KLA is on their list of militant extremist organizations (B92-info, 2017), although this organization was formally dissolved a long time ago.

The radical Kosovo Islamists, who have become particularly militant over the past few years, are increasing the "home-grown" threat to America and the EU (Lieberman and Collins, 2008), like in 2007, when several Albanians arriving from Macedonia and Kosovo planned to kill the president of the United States and the US soldiers at Fort Dix, or in 2011 when an Albanian from Kosovo killed two US soldiers at the airport in Frankfurt (Simeunović, 2014). The gravity of their intentions and actions is indicated by the fact that all of them were sentenced to life sentences in the US and German courts (Stars and Stripes, 2012).

The ability of Balkan societies to combat the Islamistic extremism

Characteristics of combating Islamistic extremism: The aim of this section is not to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the capabilities of each Western Balkan country to confront Islamistic extremism, but to determine certain characteristics of each of them in this field. There is almost no high-quality prevention against Islamistic extremism or successful de-radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but mainly, the uneven, repressive practice towards the extremists is implemented (Southeast European Times, 2008).

One of the reasons for that, could be, according to the statement of Sredoje Novic, the Minister of the Government of the Federation of BiH, "that in the political structures of Bosnia and Herzegovina there are a certain number of individuals who are not only prone to extremist ideas, but also belong to such organizations" (B92-info, 2015). Because of the insufficient confrontation against Islamistic extremism, Bosnia and Herzegovina and its institutions constantly come under criticism of leadership and high representatives of international institutions and organizations.

Kosovo, despite all the efforts of EULEX and other international institutions to create rule of law and legal system in it and liberate Kosovo from organized crime and rising extremism, failed to get out of poverty and high unemployment rate, despite the fact that in the last couple of years it has attracted the largest foreign investments in the Balkans. The social poverty

and still relatively poor education level of the population considerably ease the spread of Islamistic extremism, because of the fact that together with its inflammatory ideas always goes some money. The statement of the UN Secretary General at the beginning of 2018, that Kosovo had regressed in all aspects, became part of the UN document on February 17, 2018.

In the framework of the prevention of Islamistic extremism and organized crime in Sandzak, Serbia strategically started to cooperate with Turkey, a country with a traditionally strong influence on Bosniaks. Because of promoting moderate Islam, Turkey is considered as an important factor in combating Wahhabi extremism in the region. In Albania, the situation in terms of the capability to confront Islamistic extremism has improved since Albania joined NATO, which provides this country with considerable assistance in this regard.

Albania's efforts to distance itself from Islamistic extremism are certainly helped by the developed traditions of mutual religious tolerance because of its religiously homogeneous society (Babuna, 2003). These efforts are being hampered by the fact that the process of restoring religiosity in the whole Albanian society is still massive.

For the sake of prevention, Montenegrin police, have been announcing in the media that it observes the Wahhabi centres and prominent individuals, and their contacts with the Wahhabis from Sandzak (Dan online, 2012). According to the assessment of the Police Directorate and the National Security Agency of Montenegro there are about 150 Wahhabis in that country, and according to other sources, this number is larger and could rise to 200 persons. Until recently, the authorities of Montenegro largely denied the presence of Wahhabism in their territories, or were silent about it, fearing that this could impede their entry into NATO.

The attitude of Islamic communities in the Western Balkans toward Islamistic extremism: The Rijaset of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, under the threat of Wahhabism, has distanced itself several times from Wahhabis, but mildly, without openly mentioning Wahhabism. Instead, formulations like "inadequate aggressiveness of individuals and groups in the interpretation of Islam, which is upsetting Muslims" were used (Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2015). The most important measure taken by the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina was the Resolution on the interpretation of Islam, adopted by Rijaset in March 2006, whose formulation was very mild and unclear. Furthermore, following requests from representatives of the international community, the Reis of the Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2016 launched an

action aimed at integrating paradzemats into the Islamic Community of the Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In Sandzak, the existence of Wahhabi had been denied until 2007, but even before that, the local religious Muslim leaders had often complained that the extremists had terrorized them and accused of betraying Islam. According to the ICG (International Crisis Group) report of 8 April 2005, Wahhabis had already controlled by force several local mosques in Sandzak. Since then, the Wahhabis have begun to act more and more aggressively, causing numerous incidents in local mosques and public places, trying to, like they did in Bosnia, Macedonia and Montenegro, take over, primarily by force the mosques of the Islamic Community in Sandzak. With that in mind, they have made numerous attacks on the official imams and their supporters.

Like in other parts of the Balkans, in Macedonia also, Wahhabi and Salafi factions funded by Islamistic organizations are constantly in confrontation with traditionally moderate local Muslims. From 2003 to 2006 the Wahhabi was extremely aggressive, and in that period, "in Macedonia there were numerous incidents in which they were taking leading part. In particular, their aggressive behaviour towards other imams from the Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia was evident." (CSSTR, 2007) Later also, a number of aggressive attempts were made to gain control over mosques by Wahhabis, but from 2010 in Macedonia, numerous mosques have been taken over by radical groups, in forced and unlawful manner (CSSTR, 2011; Öktem, 2010). The specificity of the Islamic Community of Macedonia, comparing with the other Islamic communities in the Western Balkans, is that it has been increasingly under the influence of the radical Wahhabi imams since the mid-1990s, and that they, today, dominate its leadership.

Since taking over of mosques became a form of Wahhabi activity in the Western Balkans, the same pattern was applied in Montenegro, where the Wahhabis took control of certain mosques and physically hurt imams. The Reis of the Islamic Community in Montenegro has warned, several times, that Wahhabis justify terrorist actions and call followers to jihad.

The Islamic Community of Montenegro took very similar measures against Islamistic extremists (also with little effect), like Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, condemning the "aggressiveness of individuals and groups in the interpretation of Islam" and their physical and verbal attacks on followers and officials of the Islamic Community, but without mentioning Wahhabism (Casoli, 2007).

Conflicts between the the Islamic Community of Serbia and the Islamic Religious Community of Montenegro in 2014, have helped the Wahhabi to boost religious activities within private masjids and mosques which are not

part of the Islamic Community's system, and because of these conflicts, Wahhabi managed to attract new followers, especially young people.

Conclusion

Islamistic extremism, as a wide fertile soil for the most important modern type of terrorism, is not losing its battle against the leading democratic orders as considered by most of the authors today, but only suffers from occasional defeats, in order to re-emerge, not giving up, at any moment, violence as a mean of achieving its goals. The proof of Islamistic extremism's vitality is the persistent and systematic spread of its ideology and the constant increase in the number of its sympathizers around the world, despite all the efforts of the international Community. Even the Balkan countries, with bigger or smaller percentage of native Muslim population, did not escape that trend. These countries, known under the name of the Western Balkans, are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia.

By analyzing the causes of the emergence of Islamist extremism, the factors of its survival and growth, as well as detecting main individual actors and extremist organizations, leads to the conclusion that the Islamistic extremism has been present, but not continuously, in the recent history of the Balkans especially during the wars, but that the Balkans for the last quarter of a century has become a fertile ground for non-traditional religious ideologies and religious-political movements such as Wahhabism and that Islamistic extremism is now continuous and very present in all the Western Balkan countries, not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, as it was two decades ago.

The main contribution of this paper is that, unlike the rest of existing literature on the subject, it determines that the rising trend of Islamistic extremism in the Western Balkans and, in particular, the growing number of its followers, is caused by several factors, ranging from unhealed interethnic tensions that are always religious in origin, a new wave of "domestic" preachers of extremism trained in Islamic countries, the restoration of the presence and the financial support of Islamistic humanitarian organizations, to the inevitable reflections of the Middle East wars that cause emotional reactions of a certain number of Balkan Muslims in the spectrum from empathy to the perpetration of terrorist violence in the Balkans, the US and the EU countries, and in the units of terrorist organizations in the Middle East, all for the revenge of suffering of their co-believers.

The new big incentive to Islamistic extremism around the world, also in the Western Balkans, was ISIL's attempt to build an authentic

fundamentalist Islamic state in the war-torn territories of Syria and Iraq. Also, the lack of good governance in the Western Balkan states has contributed significantly to the growth of radical Islam in these countries (Tadić, 2017).

An insight into the goals, methods and contents of the work, and the types of activities of the actors of Islamic extremism in each of the analyzed societies in the Western Balkans, where Islamic extremism is present, makes it possible to conclude that, with full respect for the literature offering evidence for the differences in the manifestations of Islamic extremism in each of these particular societies, Islamic extremism in the Western Balkans must be treated as a unique political and religious phenomenon.

This assessment has been obtained not only from the fact that they have identical goals, inspirers and foreign financiers, methods and contents of their work, but also from the close connection and frequency of contacts between Islamic extremists from all Western Balkan countries and their joint participation in various activities such as religious lectures, gatherings, training, armaments, financing of mosques and other joint projects, but also their cooperation in the planning and execution of terrorist actions. The most important thing they have in common is jihadist ideology and the readiness to achieve its postulates by force, even at the cost of their own lives.

The main goal of Islamic extremists in the Western Balkans is the building of an Islamic society and the formation of its own government based on Sharia law in the merged areas of Albania, BiH, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and Sandzak. For this purpose, the embryo of the projected future Balkan caliphate is created as punctate network of extremist settlements and paradržemats. This network, for the time being, is mostly widespread in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is the main regional hotspot of Islamic radicalism, with the tendency of spreading its network to the other countries in the region.

The swing of Islamic extremism is obvious from the fact that, besides Bosnia and Herzegovina, traditionally a main regional centre of Islamic extremist activity, with the passing of time, Kosovo has become the "black dot" on the map of Islamic extremism in Europe. The proof for this is the number of Kosovo Albanians who went as foreign fighters to join terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq. In Serbia, Montenegro and Albania, the current state of the threat of Islamic extremism can be assessed as still bearable, whereas Macedonia, due to the growing religious-ethnic tensions and accelerated radicalization of one part of Islamic believers, is in danger of becoming the third major hotbed of aggressive fundamentalism on Balkan.

The connections between radical Islamists from Kosovo, southern Serbia, Albania and Macedonia are a bit stronger than ties they have with

Islamists soul mates from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sandzak, while radical Islamists from Bosnia and Herzegovina have the strongest ties with their soul mates from Sandzak and Montenegro. This leads to the conclusion that it is possible to speak about two action areas of Islamic extremist in the Western Balkans. In addition, this division should not be seen as an intentional strategy but rather, as a consequence of language differences of the Balkan Islamists of Slavic and Albanian origin that, because of their relatively low level of education and knowledge of foreign languages, are hampered from more intensive mutual communication. However, Sandzak is the core that connects them all.

As a new tendency in Islamic extremist in the Balkans, it can be noted that the extremism can no longer be equated with Wahhabism, nor extremists are found only in the Wahhabi communities, but extremists are almost equally present among the believers from the official Islamic communities in the Balkan countries. The reason for this may lay in the fact that the extreme Wahabites and Islamic communities in the Western Balkan countries are financed by the same countries and the same donor organizations.

Not only the islamization itself, but also the criminalization of extreme political, primarily nationalist movements and organizations, due to their increasing participation in organized crime, such as drug smuggling, human and weapons trafficking, led to the creation of hybrid criminal-religious-nationalist organizations and groups, on the territory of Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia in the first place, but even more, in Sandzak, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. The new trends and characteristics of the West Balkan Islamic extremist include the positioning and the firm organizing of radical Islamists in large cities where Muslims are not a significant part of the population, like in Belgrade, and also an increasing percentage of Roma and converts to Islam who take part in terrorist activities.

For Islamic extremist in the Balkans, it is characteristic that statistically looking, a percentage of the family role in religious radicalization is relatively low, comparing to the other communities with this phenomenon. This can be explained by the absence of extremists in previous generations, but this percentage is steadily rising, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the highest.

Along with the growing presence of Wahhabism in the Western Balkans, not only the number of their organizations and members, paradzemats and settlements rise, but also the number of terrorists from their ranks, and also from the ranks of their followers living in the Diaspora, which altogether results in an increasing number of "home grown" terrorists who

originate from the Balkans, and who present a threat to citizens and goods of the US and the EU countries.

The fact that about a thousand volunteers (65% of whom are Albanians) from the Western Balkan countries joined the terrorist organizations like ISIL and Al Nusra must be a cause for worry. Therefore, the level of caution and prevention must be much higher than it has been up to now, regarding the elimination of Islamistic extremism from Western Balkan societies, not only because of the possible return of the terrorists to their homelands, which would give a new impulse to radicalization, but also because, obviously, in the Western Balkan countries nothing much has been done so far, about the prevention of Islamistic extremism and deradicalization of its actors and sympathizers.

The situation is further complicated by the mass migrations from the Middle East and Africa that have plagued Europe over the past few years. Taking into account that almost all migrants are Muslim, there is a real possibility that Islamistic extremists are infiltrated and hidden in their ranks, though not in large numbers.

It is evident that the rising threat of Islamistic extremism in the Western Balkans is accompanied not only with the lack of genuine and high-quality prevention, inexperience and poor results regarding the deradicalization of extremists, but in some areas, with the lack of political will as well as the ability of the official Islamic communities to fight against Islamistic extremists more decisively. All above-mentioned together implies not only intensive cooperation between the police and other security structures of the states of the West Balkans and the countries in their surroundings, but also the urgent help of adequate institutions of the international community, first of all, the competent EU bodies.

Although being a general threat, the Islamistic extremism requires an approach that should be adapted to each particular community, while being led from the same centre. The EU's foreign and security policy strategy demands an approach that must be based on a full understanding of the local characteristics and on the creation of a wider and lasting regional framework for cooperation in that regard. The growth of Islamistic extremism in the Western Balkans and its manifestations requests urgent measures, such are the mandatory exchange of information between national police forces and Interpol and Europol, proactive cooperation with the European Counter-Terrorism Centre and the Police Cooperation Common Centres, the implementation of the conventions like the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe and stronger joint action on the border control (RECOM, 2017).

The abuse of the Internet for extremist purposes should be hindered with the help of specialized EU institutions such as the EU Internet Forum. Particularly important are the timely, organized programs for deradicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration of the extreme Islamists into the normal social flows. For this purpose, NGOs and local communities should be engaged, as well as the prominent influential individuals and groups, and cooperation should be fostered with European bodies such as the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) in order to stop the further impact of radical religious ideology in the societies of the Western Balkans.

The sustainable prevention of radicalization requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account the socio-economic situation, and especially the necessity of reducing the youth unemployment rate. In general, any form of supporting activity from the EU through initiatives like the Western Balkans Counter Terrorism Initiative and Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG) is more than necessary (WBCTi, 2017, IISG, 2017).

It is encouraging that WBCTi and partners have already shown the necessary synergy by working on several new and useful solutions for the countries of the Western Balkans in order to eliminate the shortcomings in their strategic, political and operational cooperation so far, and also because of the introduction of new and improved standards. In this regard, particularly important and inspiring for further cooperation is Prevent-Refer-Address (P-R-A) concept derived from the WBCTi platform, which has been developed intensively in the region since 2016 as a part of the "First Line" project under the guidance of the Slovenian Ministry of the Interior (WBCTi, 2017).

The P-R-A concept includes the involvement of all the competent bodies at the national and local levels, including those that have not traditionally been involved in counterterrorism, i.e. educational and health institutions, civil society and non-governmental organizations, academic communities, religious communities, prisons and local communities, state authorities responsible for strategic communication, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, ministries responsible for culture, youth, sports, etc.

This concept also implies two-way instructions – firstly, instructions developed at the state level, according to relevant EU, regional and international standards and sent to practitioners at the local level who are dealing with concrete cases of radicalization and violent extremism in order to support measures they take in early prevention: and secondly, feedback information from these local experts sent to the state level about deficiencies and good practices.

Furthermore, good effects are achieved by establishing effective and coordinated procedures for early prevention in the local community, and by

timely development of skills and abilities to cope with the existing and every new radicalization *modi operandi*; this implies optimal use of existing state and local structures, also the EU and international platforms, including national coordination structures, structures established within P/CVE national strategies; the transfer of knowledge of the RAN (The Radicalization Awareness Network – RAN) of the Emergency Situations Centre of the EU and the existing RAN networks focused on different sectors.

Within the P-R-A concept, the academic community has a special place through its research, to identify the most sensitive areas of violent extremism in the Western Balkans region, conducted by a consortium involving the most relevant research institutions with a specially developed methodology; which all together implies identifying synergies within the WBCTi and selecting the sustainable solutions (IISG, 2017; WBCTi, 2017).

From the findings of this paper, and according to the results of the previous engagement of the relevant institutions and initiatives to combat violent extremism, it can be concluded that there is a clear need for the far greater cooperation between the countries of the Western Balkans in the fight against Islamicistic terrorism than before, and in order to have more successful results in combating Islamicistic extremism and terrorism in the Western Balkans, there must be urgent move toward the maximum intensification of cooperation between the police and other security structures of the Western Balkan and the countries in their surroundings, all in coordination with the relevant institutions and bodies of the EU and other international actors.

Apart from strengthening the security information flow and developing its stability as an essential prerequisite for the successful fight against extremism and the mutual adjustment of legal measures to combat terrorism as primary tasks, also, an intensive organized social work on the protection and promotion of basic democratic values is essential, a comprehensive and legally regulated prevention of all aspects of religious intolerance, as well as much more fundamental scientific and professional dealing with the causes of extremism in the Balkans so that it can be eliminated as efficiently as possible. It is, also, necessary to adopt not only the latest international legal standards in the fight against extremism and terrorism, but also technological innovations developed for this purpose (Đurđević, Stevanović, Mitic and Kocić, 2016, p. 55; Mitic, Kocić, Tidrow and Fecht, 2017).

It is very important to realize, as soon as possible, that avoiding facing the truth and the reality about the degree of presence and the prospects of the advancing of Islamicistic extremism in the Western Balkans, and not taking appropriate measures against it, allegedly in the name of good inter-faith or

interethnic relations, deteriorates the fight against Islamistic extremism as an global enemy of democracy, and opens up larger spaces for its spreading and amassing, even more than the Islamistic extremism itself would do it.

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