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BALKANS

# The Berlin Process as an Actor in Internal Security and Counter-Terrorism: Opportunities and Pitfalls

By Jelka Klemenc and Ivana Boštjančič Pulko

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# IMPRESSUM

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## INTRODUCTION

After four years, the Berlin process remains a sparsely documented development. There are not many studies or assessments that would provide a comprehensive view and assessment on this significant initiative. Against this setting, this policy brief is intended to fill this gap in the area of internal security. The policy brief seeks opportunities for the potential engagement of the Berlin Process in Western Balkan internal security governance, points at the risks and draws on the lessons from available experience and views of practitioners engaged in regional initiatives and other efforts aimed at regional security cooperation and reform. The recommendations offered below are focusing mostly on how to achieve sustainability of the role of the Berlin Process as a potential internal security actor. The methodology of the paper is based on identification and subsequent analysis and assessment of official declarations, joint statements, public speeches, political statements, and press releases of the main EU and WB6 institutional actors in the field. It is completed with semi-structured interviews with the beneficiaries and implementing stakeholders.

## THE BERLIN PROCESS AND INTERNAL SECURITY

Over the last two decades, the Western Balkans has been and it still is considered to be a region slowly recovering from the conflicts of the 1990s and is on the way of consolidating peace and stability. The fact that approximately 1000 foreign fighters from the region have been recruited to join different fractions in Syria and Iraq from 2012 to 2017 (EUISS 2017, 2) casts a shadow over regional stability and puts violence back on the agenda of the Western Balkans. More than 300 are supposed to return, some 200 have been killed and up to 400 remain in Syria and in Iraq. There are no recorded departures to the conflict zones since 2016. The most vulnerable and preferred demographic group of the recruiters is local youth, but contrary to the widespread expectations and media predictions, massive influx of returning foreign fighters is unlikely to occur (Azinović 2017, 7). However, extremist ideologies and propaganda have taken root in the region and become a shared source of insecurity to the European society as a whole, and this is only exacerbated by the perennial factors of little opportunity, weak economy, and Serious and Organised Crime and Corruption persisting in the Western Balkans. Individuals progressing down the path of radicalisation towards Extremism or Terrorism pose an extreme challenge to regional and EU authorities alike, but also to donors coming in and assisting the WB6 to comply with accession negotiation conditions.

The Berlin Process was intended from the very beginning to advance the region's EU integration, where the policy areas of security and rule of law were reinstated in February this year as the *conditio sine qua non* in terms of the regional EU perspective, also demanding from Western Balkan governments the urgent establishment of "a concrete and sustained track record in tackling corruption, money laundering and organised

crime” (European Commission 2018, 4). The Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU began with an ambitious EU Western Balkan agenda, and the Sofia Summit in May with its Sofia Declaration reaffirmed the commitment to issues of Rule of Law, Security and Anti-Corruption – the shared challenges between the EU and the region, which can only be mitigated if working together. While only ministers of economy, foreign affairs and transport had been convening under the auspices of the state leaders’ Summits from Berlin to Trieste, the UK chairmanship announced earlier in 2018 that it would convene ministers of interior/security of the Western Balkan countries under the auspices of the Summit for the very first time.

The key events of 2017 and especially 2018 thus make this specific new addition to the Process less of a surprise, but the question remains as to the exact objectives and expected outcomes. Policy analysts dealing with the topics of the Western Balkans and security are currently elaborating the possibilities of any kind of legacy and impact the Berlin Process might leave behind after the London Summit. It is also presumed that the Berlin Process is to continue for the foreseeable future as the Warsaw Summit is announced for 2019.

Internal security has not been a strong focus of the Berlin Process Summits. It was only in 2016 that the Paris Summit embedded the topics of Migration, Counter-Terrorism and Anti-Corruption under the set of Berlin Process topics on Regional Cooperation as an additional sub-component. The topic has so far not received any follow-up at policy level, i.e. by means of establishing new initiatives or instruments. The 2017 Trieste Summit strongly emphasised Counter-Terrorism (CT) and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P-CVE), incl. the security implications of returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters, and the shared challenge of Irregular Migration. It also issued a set of joint commitments on Anti-Corruption, resulting from a side event convening regional anti-corruption authorities.

## EXPECTATIONS FROM THE LONDON SUMMIT

In 2018, the Berlin Process creates a new opportunity for the UK as a visible venue for cooperation with the Western Balkans. According to Deputy Summit Co-ordinator Sam Jeremy, UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the UK as chair of the 2018 Summit is to remain committed to helping the Western Balkans and increasing cooperation with the region despite Brexit, and that security remains a key strand of all UK engagement in the Western Balkans, seen through the lens of European security.

As to the exact planned outcomes of London 2018, a needs assessment was conducted between mid-2017 – May 2018 by the team composed of UK FCO and UK Home Office. A series of regional preparatory meetings have been held – in Wilton Park, Kolašin, Struga and Tirana – to prepare the agenda for the interior ministers' meeting on July 9th. According to Jeremy, from the very beginning, the Summit team has attempted to address the recommendations of the Civil Society Forum (CSF) meeting in Vienna<sup>1</sup>. Gaps, needs and other open issues of regional and EU-Western Balkan cooperation were identified together with representatives of WB6 police services, border authorities, customs administrations and ministries of interior/security at different levels – from senior management to expert level. The principle of ensuring regional ownership in the process took precedence, as well as prevention of any duplication with the work of existing initiatives of regional cooperation and reform.

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<sup>1</sup> 'CSF Vienna Working Groups' Recommendations' are available at <http://wb-csf.eu/documents/csf-vienna-working-groups-recommendations/>



“We had no intention of establishing any new mechanisms – the Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group [to be established by interior ministers] is not going to be a new structure; it will merely involve 2 annual meetings to ensure a better monitoring of commitments made within the Berlin Process and fill the gap of previously lacking continuity” (Jeremy 2018).

The prepared draft of a regional joint declaration in the area of information exchange is to be signed by the ministers of interior and is to deliver top-level commitment to further enhance the sharing of information between the authorities.

“When looking at the prevailing challenges to Western Balkan security services, such as Terrorism and Violent Extremism, modern forms of Serious and Organised Crime, financial crime investigation, fighting corruption, the common denominator – and precondition – is efficient information exchange, where WB6 officials provided us with ample testimony of persisting obstacles. This is not to say that the EU information exchange is perfect – in fact, after the terrorist attacks shook Europe a couple of years ago, efficient EU terrorism prevention turned out to be depending on efficient information exchange, mutual trust and reciprocity. We are all interconnected and improving information exchange is in all of our interests. Our intention is to address the underlying issues with legal, regulatory and practical improvements after careful analysis, and we intend to use the Summit as a political moment to obtain further backing for follow-up action” (ibid).

Interior ministers on July 9th were also foreseen to sign statements on their countries’ Anti-Corruption commitments. In this area of absolute priority, however, the competences in most Western Balkan countries are shared between the ministry of interior and other agencies, i.e. when involving issues like corruption prevention, transparency of public procurement, whistleblower protection, etc., while only the investigation dimension of corruption as a

form of Serious and Organised Crime is in the competence of the ministers of interior. The signing is therefore not taking place in London. The ministers are also to endorse the regional draft roadmap for the Western Balkans aimed at combatting illicit trafficking, proliferation and misuse of Small Arms and Light Weapons and ammunition<sup>2</sup>, and sign a call to action to end Trafficking in Human Beings, Modern Slavery and Forced Labour in order to reinforce their commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>3</sup>. The ministers are establishing the 'Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group', which will convene at senior management level, involving interior and foreign affairs sectors in order to monitor implementation. The UK chairmanship has established significant cooperation with the heads of Financial Intelligence Units in the WB6, who require facilitation of their cooperation at regional level. This is planned to be achieved also via provision of additional expertise to each country via national secondments in the upcoming years. To aid the professionalization of police, UK is contributing a fellowship programme for mid-career professionals from all strands of the security sector, to attend 8-week courses at UK educational institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Prepared under the auspices of SEESAC (South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons) with the assistance of France and Germany.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. Objective 8.7, available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>.

## CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES OF COUNTER-TERRORISM (CT) AND PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (P-CVE) IN THE WESTERN BALKAN REGION

The Berlin Process Civil Society Forum (CSF) policy brief on security issued in April 2018 places strong emphasis on the regional approach to P-CVE, referring also to the mechanisms of WBCTi<sup>4</sup>. Countering any expectations, and despite the fact that it makes up a priority area of focus for the EU and region during 2014-2018, the upcoming Summit however does not explicitly turn to CT and P-CVE. However, we expect the Berlin Process' future commitments and policy involvement to expand to this policy area in the future, therefore this policy brief offers some of the lessons learned and points at the main pitfalls of any involvement in the field of P-CVE.

The attention of the international community to Islamic extremism in the Western Balkans increased with the emergence of ISIS, their recruitment in the region and the first assessments revealing the numbers of departed Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), nationals of Western Balkan countries. This contributed to the overwhelming focus of Western Balkan governments on a response to mainly this type of extremism. The EU and the Western Balkans might hold these challenges in common, but practice has shown that there is no one-size-fits-all strategy for efficient P-CVE, nor can it succeed without taking into consideration other forms of (home-grown) extremism, heritage to inter-ethnic conflicts and unfinished state-building in the region. Religion plays an important role in

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<sup>4</sup> Prepared under the auspices of SEESAC (South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons) with the assistance of France and Germany.

radicalisation, but also in the demanding efforts of de-radicalisation or disengagement. Localised approaches are needed to engage with communities and multi-agency cooperation is vital to preventing radicalisation and countering violent extremism (RAN 2018, 1- 3).

Also present in the region is the right-wing extremism in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which also resulted in sending FTFs to the conflict in Ukraine. Right-wing ethnic extremism is also an explicit driver of Islamic extremism in Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro, but also has spill-over effects to the neighbouring countries with majority Muslim population such as Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some of these right-wing groups are supported by foreign actors from Russia, but also Western right-wing groups (Stojanović Gajić 2018, 13).

The penetration of ultraconservative ideologies into traditionally moderate and tolerant Muslim communities creates new challenges, calling for a response from multiple actors. Some domestic factors have contributed to the spread of foreign radical Jihadi ideologies in the communities, like insufficient state support or provision of basic services and in some areas, alternative solutions are provided by religious organisations with a more extremist viewpoint (RAN 2018, 2). The region can be divided in two camps based on the language barrier: Albanian speaking communities in Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and Southeast part of Serbia, and Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian speaking Muslim communities in the Sandzak region of Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. A majority of Balkan Muslims namely practice non-violent teaching of Sunni Islam. Takfiri ideology is a relatively new phenomenon introduced to the region during the conflict in BiH and through the education of Muslim clerics in Qatar or Saudi Arabia (150 students from Kosovo are reported to currently be studying in the Gulf States.) It spread through local mosques in the border areas of Western Macedonia with Albania and Kosovo, as well as from Sandzak to Montenegro. A relatively small number of individuals fall in to the category of violent

extremists throughout the region in comparison to Western Europe. However, what is still worrying is that there is a significant pool of “not-now-violent” extremists, as well as a trend of spreading extremist beliefs among youth of both the majority and minority populations (Stojanović Gajić 2018, 13-16).

Insecurity and other major social disturbances contributing to radicalization and escalation into violence present an important public policy concern. This has put the understanding of the triggers and factors leading to Violent Extremism or Terrorism on the priority agenda of each country. The influence of social media in this process should not be overlooked either. With the appearance of ISIS, the dissemination of violent Salafi ideology was mediated also through social media and the number of websites promoting radical content has not decreased with defeat of ISIS in the field, taking also into consideration that social networks are the most important tools of extremist propaganda for youth. For those returning from the conflict zones, there also are not many rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, including the provision of health and psychological care, which is worrying.

Between 2015-2017, we have been witnessing an overwhelming number of external assistance actions targeting P-CVE in the WB6, and yet quite uneven progress of reform. Donors do not normally obtain a sufficient overview of what the other stakeholders are contributing or planning at the time in their targeted area, leaving the local authorities with the only “choice” of merely accepting or refusing an activity, which had already been embedded into a project-based endeavour. Furthermore, the expertise is occasionally also irrelevant (Interview no. 2 & 3). “An example would be the transfer of the Finnish model of multi-agency P-CVE platform, which does not comply with two crucial pre-conditions, both required by the EU’s own approach, namely expanding ownership beyond law enforcement structure, and establishing support on behalf of state institutions. Transfer of EU and other relevant international standards can be based on models from EU Member States, but it has to be viewed critically and so do the national circumstances, which may sometimes by

themselves impede long-term sustainability of a policy solution, not to mention the costly investments of human and other resources” (Kozmelj 2018).

According to a representative of the Montenegrin Police, “the law enforcement sector (police) has been the actuator of national policy reform toward a multi-stakeholder approach advocated by the EU, as we believe may be the case with our neighbours as well as with most EU Member States. It is the awareness of other sectors, like health, education, social affairs on their own roles that is lacking. Systemic solutions are required, integrated into the national legal environment and in line with the practitioners’ needs that would assist the implementation of our national P-CVE strategy and in the end also satisfy the European Commission. Most donors lack the capacity to engage, based on an in-depth overview, and to apply relevant expertise. They would rather stick to basic trainings and awareness-raising” (Interview no. 5). Under the auspices of the regional policy coordination process of Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG), contributions of external assistance on P-CVE are currently being streamlined with the assistance of the IISG first pillar – the Western Balkan Counter-Terrorism Initiative (WBCTi) – towards a unified policy concept aimed to achieve sufficient national capacities to counter radicalisation cases which might lead to Violent Extremism or Terrorism, while establishing a multi-stakeholder policy solution in each country, incorporating good EU practices and involving both the state and community levels (Kozmelj 2018).

Other internal security policy fields addressed by external donors are not without flaws either, nor has the EU been able to demonstrate consistency of action. It is an area characterised by duplications and lack of coordination (RCC 2014, 6), but also high complexity and impediments lowering the rate of ground implementation. Numerous external donors, state and non-state, as well as bilateral forms of technical and other assistance contribute to existing solutions, incl. regional legal bases for cross-border law enforcement cooperation, regional hubs for countering serious and organized crime and

information exchange, EU-Western Balkan policy-level (both strategic and operational) networking, all locally or externally hosted and initiated. They have all been building the capacities of local authorities, as well as the capacities at regional level to cope with multiple security challenges at international level.

The current architecture does not only include regional cooperation initiatives (originating from the time of the dissolution of the Stability Pact), but also the more recent technical policy solutions in different thematic areas of strategic and operational cross-border law enforcement cooperation at different levels – operational and strategic, supported by different external donors and involving various geographical scopes. It is especially important to also consider that the venues of EU-Western Balkan cooperation (inter-regional scope) evolved especially during 2014-2017. Not a lot of analyses have addressed this area to any considerable extent, which is mostly due to the lack of access and confidentiality characteristic of these efforts. The EU retains the leading role in the reform of the countries' security sectors as the primary external security actor, but also other donors to policy implementation in the region base their actions and policy objectives on the EU's leverage of conditionality. National interests of the EU Member States (incl. members of the Berlin Process) have many times prevailed over coordinated policy reform and have caused duplications, incoherence and lack of rational solutions.

The Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG) was launched to primarily address the issue of coordination and alignment, also in terms of EU action. WBCTi represents its first policy pillar, achieving closer alignment and coordination of action in areas of CT and P-CVE (European Commission 2018, 11). The IISG is implemented and thus also co-owned by both EU entities as well as other international community actors contributing to regional security cooperation and reform, focusing on areas of CT and P-CVE, countering Serious and Organised Crime, and Border Management, which includes addressing Irregular

Migration. The IISG governing Board convenes at least once per year and brings together at least fifty actors<sup>5</sup>. As to embedment, other relevant political governance processes in the Western Balkans are to be considered as they are being convened with the support of various actors<sup>6</sup>.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the next years, regional security authorities will continue to face dire challenges of meeting the EU standards and countering threats to the security of its citizens at the same time, incl. the costly and most challenging undertaking ahead of ensuring efficient prevention of Radicalisation and Extremism. The latter have taken root in the region enfeebled by the perennial internal factors of instability as well as contemporary external influences. The enactment of their political commitments will be thoroughly monitored by the EU leading up to 2025. On the other hand, most donors themselves possess a poor knowledge of the capacities currently in place and of the actual existing gaps, and future efforts require accountable action and jointly agreed direction. Therefore, efficient,

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<sup>6</sup> The Trieste Summit declaration acknowledged the IISG, but it has not been taken into consideration in the formation of further internal security tasks of the London Summit. The geographical scope of the Berlin Process is reciprocated, in addition to also fully involving Kosovo and to having possibilities to involve other Southeast European countries.

<sup>6</sup> This includes the Brdo Process, the Brdo-Briuni Process, the EU-Western Balkans Summit on Justice and Home Affairs, the Southeast European Cooperation Process (SEEC) and the IISG governing Board. In addition, up to eleven other regional meetings of ministers of interior/security have been convening annually or semi-annually, supported by different external and regional actors, who tend to produce each their own set of priorities relating to internal security policies. The IISG Board (ministers of interior/security), established in September 2017, represents the first comprehensive framework with the widest support and ownership, involving WB6, EU entities as well as all relevant international (incl. UN agencies), regional actors and 3rd state donors, streamlining the previous political fragmentation in security cooperation and reform.



comprehensive efforts to work toward societal resilience in the Western Balkans can well benefit from the boost and added transparency and strengthened accountability of the Berlin Process for further reform through what has to be more than just a declaratory, non-transparent or at worst a duplicating involvement.

The potential of the Berlin Process in the area of internal security is not to be neglected, especially since rule of law and security are essential for building sound economies, whereby an extra boost on the part of the Berlin Process to regional progress and resilience could turn out to be crucial in the next foreseeable period. At the same time, the Berlin process has not yet focused on security to any significant extent. A stronger focus on internal security appeared just recently in the preparatory phase leading up to the London Summit. Consequently, concrete results cannot be expected at this stage. However, the UK places great focus on these topics in line with its intentions to continue strong engagement in Western Balkan security. As we can also expect a follow-up at the next summit in Warsaw, as well as a launch of additional policy work in this area over the next year, the recommendations provided in this brief target the overall involvement at any level of the Berlin Process on internal security. The aim is to contribute to a potential beneficial role of the Berlin Process in this crucial period where the WB6 will be counting on the leading transformative power of EU integration to manifest in efficient EU external action in EU support to regional security reform.

1. The Berlin Process should aim to contribute to policy fields enhancing EU-Western Balkan engagement, acknowledging and promoting all those pillars of reform in the Western Balkans that are based on the reasoning of mutual dependency within a single security community, encouraging reciprocity and mutual solidarity instead of viewing the region as a factor of insecurity. This could be achieved via sufficient embedment in the existing and highly complex and multi-fold regional security architecture, which is currently upholding the efforts of cooperation, external assistance and reform, as well as the multiple venues of EU conditionality-based rule transfer.

2. The Berlin Process should aim to increase the effectiveness and produce tangible results (also in response to the prevailing critiques of the Berlin Process (Nechev et al. 2017, 9; BiEPAG 2017) of any policy initiatives or actions, the Berlin Process should encompass existing regionally-owned processes (such as also, e.g., IISG) in order to achieve greater transparency and visibility of agenda preparation, systematic monitoring of progress and results (instead of ad hoc assessments leading up to each Summit or new initiatives), a better use of existing mechanisms with embedded regionally owned prioritisation (instead of submitting priority topics to the choice and national interests of Berlin Process members), a systematic addressing of a limited number of topics, while also getting the EU to own up to the Berlin Process to a greater extent (taking into full consideration suitable existing regional cooperation frameworks, which the European Commission and the Member States have formally acknowledged), establishment of an additional level of accountability in regional cooperation and reform, a greater effect of the input offered by the CSF through a systematic and more comprehensive overview achieved by linking the Process to the multi-level governance of regional cooperation and reform, use of the opportunities for efficient embedment of policy-political processes operating in line with regional ownership principle into the Berlin Process, and thus addressing the prevailing and persisting obstacles to progress in internal security in the Western Balkans more efficiently and effectively.
3. In addition to monitoring the Berlin Process security commitments, the tasks of the Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group should fully consider regional priorities as established within regional processes with a wide support of external donors and regional initiatives, such as the IISG Integrative Plans of Action endorsed by the ministers of the interior. Ministries of interior should consistently be included in the work of the Group in coordination with other sectors with relevant competence.

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## INFORMATION ABOUT SEE THINK NET

The SEE Think Net Network was established in mid-march 2018 with the generous support of the European Fund for the Balkans as the first regional network composed of civil society organisations that aim to monitor the topics related to the Berlin Process. The Network encompasses think tanks, civil society organisations and individuals from the 6 Western Balkan countries plus Croatia and Slovenia. Besides the Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” (IDSCS) which will coordinate the Network, the SEE Think Net Network includes the Network of the European Movement in Serbia (NEMinS), Open Society Foundation for Albania and its affiliate, the EU Policy Hub, Adnan Ćerimagić, Politikon Network from Montenegro, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, the Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO) from Croatia and the Centre for European Perspective (CEP) from Slovenia. The goal of the SEE Think Net Network is to produce significant policy inputs and provide policy recommendations on topics that derive from the Berlin Process. As such, its activities are devised in order to closely monitor the Berlin process and the policy areas the process encompasses.

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# INFORMATION ABOUT THE EUROPEAN FUND FOR THE BALKANS

The European Fund for the Balkans is designed to create and support initiatives aimed at strengthening democracy and fostering European integration by enabling inclusive policy making, supporting capacity development and creating a platform for exchange and co-operation in the Western Balkans. The Fund was launched in 2007 by four European private foundations (King Baudouin Foundation, Erste Foundation, Robert Bosch Stiftung and the Compagnia di san Paolo), within the framework of the Network of European Foundations.

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