

WESTERN BALKANS

EXTREMISM RESEARCH FORUM

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The complex political, religious, and interethnic dynamics at play in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) make it an ideal environment for examining the relationships between various forms of extremism and their impacts, but at the same time more difficult for researchers to neatly draw definitive conclusions for policymakers. Global interest in the foreign fighter phenomenon has spurred an intense focus on the extremist ideologies driving groups like ISIS, resulting in a relative lack of attention on other extremisms, be they religiously or politically inspired.

Findings from this research bring forth several important new conclusions: 1) Salafists in BiH represent less of a threat of violence than is insinuated in media and by some politicians, but may pose a more subtly divisive threat to liberal democratic values in a still-dysfunctional Bosnian society; and 2) No form of extremism exists in a vacuum, and the focus on Salafism in BiH that has drawn attention away from other forms of extremism risks obscuring the threat posed by mutual extremisms and reciprocal radicalisation.¹ These findings serve as a reminder that the Bosnian context especially demands a wide-angle view by policymakers, who will only be able to develop effective prevention initiatives and de-radicalisation programmes if they understand the full spectrum of radicalising forces in BiH.

Security sources interviewed for this research generally viewed Salafists as posing little to no risk of violence but many interviewees did express concerns that non-violent Salafi radicalisation may pose a risk to BiH, though one that is difficult to quantify. Still, given the inaccuracy of predictions that returning foreign fighters would represent a terrorist threat, other forms of extremism are again rising to the top of the Bosnian security agenda. In 2016, the Ministry of Security identified “terrorism in all its manifestations,” including any “forms of extremism that aim to jeopardise the territorial integrity” of BiH, as primary tests of domestic security.²

While it is challenging, if not impossible, to develop a profile of the “typical extremist,” findings in BiH strongly point to identity and belonging as common key factors in the radicalisation processes of Salafists.³ The recent history of the region has created an environment in which identity

¹ For example, see: Bailey, G. and Edwards, P. (2017) Rethinking 'Radicalisation': Microradicalisations and Reciprocal Radicalisation as an Intertwined Process. *Journal for Deradicalization* 10: 255-281; and Lenos, S. (2016) Tackling the challenges to prevention policies in an increasingly polarised society. RAN Issue Paper, November 2016. Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/tackling_challenges_prevention_policies_in_increasingly_polarised_society_112016_en.pdf [Accessed 6 January 2017].

² Ministarstvo sigurnosti Bosne i Hercegovine. *Informacija o stanju sigurnosti u Bosni i Hercegovini u 2016. godini* (2017), 9. Available from: <http://msb.gov.ba/PDF/info2017.pdf>

³ This reflects baseline studies. See: Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 92.

formation among Bosnians is tightly tied to religion and ethnicity. The fact that BiH has the *highest youth unemployment rate in the world*,⁴ as well as one of the highest overall unemployment rates must be tackled not only as a matter of economic policy but within de-radicalisation initiatives. Unemployment rates are incredibly high among returned foreign fighters, which may hinder or even render ineffective any efforts directed at re-socialising, reintegrating, or de-radicalising these former combatants. The geography of Salafi extremism in BiH largely reflects legacies of the 1992-1995 war, during which mujahideen set up training camps in remote locations near Zenica, introducing local populations to Salafism.^{5,6} These communities manifest the desire of many extremists to segregate themselves from mainstream society, but over time, Salafism has spread into larger towns and suburban areas. While person-to-person contact, largely facilitated by Salafi citizens' associations, has been identified as the primary mode of radicalisation in BiH, there are certain communities, beyond the geographical context – such as disenfranchised youth – that may face a unique vulnerability to Internet-based recruitment.

A slowdown in EU enlargement has brought increased engagement in the Western Balkans by countries like Turkey and the Gulf States, which many regional leaders have been happy to foster “as a way of widening their foreign policy options.” Previous research has also established that Bosnian diaspora in Vienna, Sweden, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Germany are linked to Salafists in BiH, and that some extremists inside BiH are supported by funds raised through lectures organised by Salafists in these diaspora communities.⁷ Given the impact of still-unresolved narratives of the 1991-1995 war, a project that aims to map community-level susceptibility to the various radicalising forces in BiH – including ethnic nationalism – is recommended. Further research on how mutual extremism feed and inspire each other as well as research on taxonomy of extremist influences operating on the Internet would provide invaluable insight for both P/CVE efforts and de-radicalisation initiatives..

Finally, the question of how and to what extent are foreign influencers shaping domestic ideological narratives in BiH deserves more attention from researchers. This may require the development of a framework by which to measure the impact of funding as a function of actual outcomes, but doing so would facilitate a far more detailed assessment of where foreign investments are directed in BiH – whether toward explicitly religious activities, more secular community-oriented efforts, or purely commercial development projects – and how each of these strains of activity may or may not be tied to attempts to influence specific groups of people.

⁴ According to the International Labour Organization, BiH had a youth unemployment rate of 67.5% in 2017. In the Western Balkans, Macedonia and Montenegro followed with the next highest rates, of 50% and 36% respectively.

⁵ For more on the role of foreign *mujahideen* in the 1991-1995 Bosnian War, see: Azinović, V. (2007) *Al Qaeda in Bosnia: Myth or Reality?* Sarajevo/Prague: Radio Free Europe.

⁶ Some foreign *mujahideen* received citizenship in BiH in the immediate post-war years; but after the September 11th terrorist attack in New York City, the international security framework shifted and BiH rescinded this citizenship from many of these former fighters.

⁷ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 57-61.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The Extremism Research Forum is a UK government funded research project⁸, examining drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism in the Western Balkans – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

The research commenced in 2017, exploring a range of themes and topics with key stakeholders within communities, civil society and government, in order to build a coherent picture of the specific situation in each country. This research seeks to inform and assist in the development of CVE policies and programming, offering key findings that could be relevant to practitioners and policymakers working in the field of countering violent extremism.

Each country study: 1) maps out the forms of extremism; 2) examines drivers and contributing factors of radicalisation (global, regional, national and local drivers, political and socio-economic); 3) develops a profile of at risk communities.

Taking into account the multifaceted nature of extremism, the research also; 4) identifies any potential links with organised crime, money laundering, links to terrorism; and; 5) analyses trans-national co-operation of violent extremist groups.

This study forms one of the six contextual research pieces, presenting findings from in-depth primary research conducted with communities and wider stakeholders with knowledge of the violent extremist threats specific to the country. The findings are based on primary, and where credible, secondary data sources in order to create an informed and nuanced picture of the violent extremist activity or potential threat within the country. Importantly, it is intended that this research usefully informs policy development, providing practical recommendations, while also feeding into an overarching regional report, where broader linkages and key transnational issues that have been identified from the research will be examined.

It is expected that this project will result in an increased understanding of the size of extremist threats emanating from the WB region, and ultimately increased ability of the UK and Western Balkan partners to address radicalisation based on increased understanding of the issues and the problem.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – SALAFISM IN BIH

In the wake of the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Bosnian society has struggled to move past highly polarising narratives that feed extremist movements of all kinds and have potential radicalising effects on youth of all ethnicities. But the rise of jihadi groups like ISIS, and especially ISIS's declaration of a "caliphate" and its recruitment of foreign fighters, has resulted in a sharp focus on Salafism in BiH in recent years. Ironically, the short story of Salafism in BiH –

⁸ Implemented by the British Council, in partnership with the International Conflict and Research Institute (INCORE), Ulster University.

which is only some two decades long – came full circle, from the foreign fighters who began entering BiH territory during the war to fight on behalf of Bosnian Muslims remained after the war's end in 1995 and planted seeds of Salafism across the country, to the intended foreign fighters who began departing from BiH to Syria in 2013.

Before that, this reductionist ideology had been unknown to Bosnian Muslims – who have historically followed the Hanafi legal tradition (*fiqh*) and have practiced an inclusive and open interpretation of Islam that is rich in local tradition, tolerant of other communities, and compatible with liberal Western values. Thus, the ultraconservative message of Salafism was never expected to take hold in BiH; and certainly it was not foreseen that the ideology would spread among the Bosnian population even after most of the foreign *mujahideen* had left the country. Yet, in the last 20 years, the number of Bosnian Muslims who have “converted” to this narrow interpretation of Islam is believed to have grown steadily.

For a number of reasons, Salafism appears to be particularly popular among younger people in BiH. This stems from factors as varied as unfavourable socioeconomic circumstances, war and post-war traumas, a sense of collective victimization, crises of national identity, and structural and personnel weaknesses within the official Islamic Community (IC) of BiH; to the simplicity of the Salafi narrative and generously financed Salafi humanitarian activities; to disappointment in the political West, which is seen to have allowed genocide to be perpetrated against Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks). And indeed, a “Bosnian identity” that exists beyond ethnicity has been complicated by differences in how the three main ethnic groups in BiH prioritise various aspects of identity, with Serbs reporting at the highest levels that their identity is tied to belonging in their own ethnic group.⁹

Salafi missionaries have taken advantage of these multiple structural weaknesses to attract adherents with the offer of a strong religious identity and a network of mutual aid and support. Still, the growth of Salafism in BiH should be viewed in perspective. Given the population of Muslims in the country, early architects of the Salafi network in BiH likely expected far more people to adopt this conservative interpretation of Islam. But ultimately, the biggest obstacle to the spread of Salafism in BiH has been ordinary Bosnian Muslims. As one scholar told researchers, “considering how much they invested into spreading Salafism, not all that many people accepted it. For twenty years now, Bosnians have been exposed to an intensive campaign of Salafi proselytising. Look at their success in other countries, like Indonesia for example, or even some countries in Europe. They have had much more success there than [here].”

Of course, that neither diminishes the value of understanding the dynamics of the Bosnian Salafi movement, nor the importance of recognising how Salafism fits into the wider spectrum of radicalising influences in BiH. It is clear that the impact of Salafism in BiH should not be taken too lightly, and that some areas have been more affected than others by the intersection of Salafi proselytism with legacies of local *mujahideen* and Gulf state investment. Unfortunately, for too long, both the IC and state authorities were wooed by financial windfalls from abroad and essentially turned a blind eye to the efforts of Gulf-funded organisations to supplant the more tolerant Hanafi school of traditional Bosnian Islam with the radical Hanbali (Saudi) school. This financial support may have appeared at first to help the IC, but it actually served to weaken its internal structures and its religious authority, and in many ways it is still scrambling to recover.

⁹ In a 2015 survey, for example, only 10% of Bosniak respondents (and 35% of Croats) rated a sense of belonging in their own ethnic/national group as the most important factor in their identity, compared to 65% of Serbs. What's more, while 83% of Croats and 76% of Bosniaks said that the Dayton Agreement and structure represent major problems for the country, only 25% of Serbs agreed. See: United Nations Resident Coordinator Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Public Opinion Poll Results (Prism, 2015). Available from: http://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/bih/PDFs/Prism%20Research%20for%20UN%20RCO_Report.pdf

As stated earlier, the roots of Salafism were established in the years after the war, which brought an estimated 3,000-4,000 largely Afghan and Arab *mujahideen* to BiH.¹⁰ Though most of these fighters had to leave BiH after the war as a condition of Western allies, some stayed because they were married to local women. In the post-war space, these remaining former fighters were in a position to freely proselytise, and soon, this effort was supported by the publication of local-language literature that echoed their lectures, promoting the key message of Salafism: that it is the only proper and “pure” interpretation of Islam. At the same time, the number of students from BiH in Islamic faculties in Gulf States also dramatically increased, as they were essentially poached without the knowledge or approval of the Islamic Community in BiH. Alongside these efforts to influence Bosnian religious students, Saudi Arabia – and to a lesser extent several other Gulf countries – generously financed the construction of mosques and other Islamic religious and cultural buildings in BiH (see “Transnational Cooperation”). Such development was mostly welcomed in BiH at the time and was viewed through the lens of aid, but it also represented a soft power strategy aimed at affirming Saudi leadership (versus that of Iran) and drawing Bosnian Muslims toward Saudi-aligned beliefs and practices.

But local authorities, and even those on the state level, were too weak to resist such assistance. Rejecting Salafist preachers meant rejecting substantial donations that would finance the rebuilding of mosques, 81% of which were destroyed during the war.¹¹ In the harsh light of the terrorist attack of 11 September 2001, media actors in BiH exposed the Saudi High Commission, as well as other organisations that had been hiding behind a veil of humanitarian assistance (including the Benevolence International Foundation, the Global Relief Foundation, the Al-Haramain Foundation, Al Furqan, and Taibah International), as potential sources of extremism and even terrorism. Under pressure from the international community, a number of Gulf-funded (mostly Saudi) organisations were shuttered and the influence of Salafism in BiH was temporarily muted.¹²

However, in 2006, when domestic reforms aimed at state building started backsliding, the war in Iraq was in its worst stages, and the international community in BiH lost its US leadership,¹³ intensive Salafi proselytising began again. But this time, the Salafi movement had a new strategy – instead of facilitating activities to promote Salafism through Saudi humanitarian organisations, Salafi leaders in BiH started establishing their own NGOs.¹⁴ This was barely noticed by members of the Bosnian public, who were reasonably distracted by a morass of social and political dysfunction and the collective realisation that, more than a decade after Dayton, any post-war “transition” was functionally paralysed.

The attack by Salafi adherent Mevlid Jašarević on the US Embassy in Sarajevo in October 2011 finally drew the attention of the Bosnian public to the Salafi network in BiH.¹⁵ Still, a complete awakening did not come until four years later when, in 2015, two more terrorist attacks occurred – the first on a police station in Zvornik, and the second on Bosnian Army soldiers in Rajlovac, a suburb of Sarajevo. In both of these cases, the attackers were killed, and investigations into their

¹⁰ Azinović, V. (2007) *Al Qaeda in Bosnia: Myth or Reality?*. Sarajevo/Prague: Radio Free Europe.

¹¹ Shatzmiller, M. (2002) *Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-ethnic States*. Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 100.

¹² For more information see Bierstecker, T & Eckert, S. (2008) *Countering the Financing of Terrorism*. Routledge.

¹³ In April 2006, when a constitutional reform package shaped and pushed by the US and EU was narrowly defeated in the Bosnian Parliament, the patience of US actors in BiH began to wane. With the war in Iraq dragging on and other domestic and global crises drawing the attention of the US, Bosnian leaders were left to agree to reforms on their own, but further efforts over the next several years also failed. In 2010, the US and EU again attempted to broker reform talks, which again failed; constitutional reform was essentially sidelined as elections arrived in October of that year, and it remains unrealized to this day. These combined factors brought about the end of strong US leadership in the political realm in BiH, despite continued aid commitments.

¹⁴ For more on this, see: Bećirević, E. (2016) *Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative. Available from: <http://atlanticinitiative.org/images/Salafism-vs.-moderate-islam-web.pdf>

¹⁵ Mevlid Jašarević was convicted for terrorism in a First Instance Judgement and was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment, but this sentence was reduced to 15 years upon appeal. See (in Bosnian): *Mevlid Jašarević osuđen na 15 godina zatvora*. (20 November 2013) *Vijesti.ba*. Available from: <http://vijesti.ba/clanak/179581/mevlid-jasarevic-osuden-na-15-godina-zatvora> [Accessed 20 January 2018].

motives could not draw concrete conclusions.¹⁶ But Azinović and Jusić noted that neither could be considered “typical militant Salafists.” They had both had only minimal contact with members of the extremist Salafi movement, and both suffered from emotional instability. Still, these men were believed to have interacted with Salafists associated with *parajamaats*, or unofficial (and largely extremist) congregations, which are not integrated into the official Islamic Community.¹⁷

Before a recent effort by the IC to bring these *parajamaats* under its purview, they operated entirely outside the oversight of IC authorities, who were criticised in the past as soft on Salafism in BiH; an accusation that was especially levied against former Reis-ul-ulema Mustafa Cerić. Many journalists, as well as experts on this topic, felt Cerić was overly inclusive of Salafi groups and thereby encouraged the spread of Salafism. Yet, a minority of scholars and experts hold the opposite opinion, that Cerić “welcomed the part of the Salafi community that wanted to distance itself from the radical part of the movement,” which they assert “increased the schism within the movement and consequently weakened it.” Either way, after considerable pressure from the public and from security agencies, the IC opened dialogue with Salafi groups and began a process of “inclusion,” whereby IC officials sought to negotiate terms on which these *parajamaats* would agree to come under the umbrella of state authorities.¹⁸ Two years later, the general impression in BiH is that “inclusion” succeeded; yet, out of 38 *parajamaat* leaders who engaged in talks, only 14 signed the Protocol to join the IC and thus to adhere to its standards and submit to its oversight.

Sources from security agencies explained to our research team that, nonetheless, they are satisfied with the inclusion process. They pointed out that Salafi leaders with the largest number of followers were among those who signed the Protocol, including those involved with the non-governmental organisation Minber (which means “pulpit”), who offer most of their activities through the controversial Saudi-funded King Fahd Mosque in Sarajevo. According to these sources, now that they have signed the Protocol, these radical figures are no longer viewed as a security threat. But, some worry that their extremist rhetoric has actually changed very little since inclusion and that the “middle ground” agreement reached by IC and Salafi leaders may do less to pull Salafists toward Bosnian Islam than it does to reshape the fundamental character and practice of Bosnian Islam.¹⁹

1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The broad aim of this research was to assess the forms and threats of violent extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) by conducting primary research, and drawing and building on previous studies, to establish a current baseline.²⁰ This study brought a special emphasis to understanding the appeal of extremist narratives to vulnerable individuals and groups, as well as the levels of organisation among these individuals and groups. Data was collected via interviews,

¹⁶ The attack by Nerdin Ibrić on the police station in Zvornik on 27 April 2015 left one officer dead and two wounded. On 18 November 2015, Enes Omeragić killed two Bosnian soldiers and wounded another soldier as well as a shop assistant in a nearby store. Omeragić also shot at a bus, wounding the driver and two passengers.

¹⁷ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative.

¹⁸ For a more in-depth analysis of the dynamics of inclusion, including interviews with IC officials, see: Bećirević, E. *Salafism vs. Moderate Islam*.

¹⁹ Bećirević, E. (2016) *Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, including 47 and 60. Available from: <http://atlanticinitiative.org/images/Salafism-vs.-moderate-islam-web.pdf>

²⁰ See: Azinović, V. and Jusić, M. (2015) *The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative; Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative; and Bećirević, E. (2016) *Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative. Available from: <http://atlanticinitiative.org/images/Salafism-vs.-moderate-islam-web.pdf>.

focus groups, from court records, and online. Research questions that guided this effort were centred on the following themes:

- Forms of extremism in BiH and the threat they pose
- Drivers and factors of radicalisation
- At-risk communities in BiH
- Links between extremism and organized crime
- Transnational cooperation between extremists

Given that this study follows up on earlier research which focused on Salafi extremism specifically, the aim was not to measure perceptions about violent extremism among the general population in BiH but to (re-)assess the views of individuals who are either a part of the Salafi movement (and their family members) or are professionally engaged with the issues of violent and non-violent extremism – such as imams, police and intelligence officers, prosecutors, defence lawyers, prison psychologists, and social workers (see Annex 1). Some intelligence officials were interviewed twice, at both the beginning and end of the research period, because researchers felt the dynamics of extremism were shifting even as the study was being conducted and sought feedback from these experts regarding new insights obtained in the course of the research.

Beyond data collected in interviews, focus groups, and through the analysis of social media, researchers also examined 22 court judgments in cases with terrorism-related charges (see Annex 2). This offered insight into the treatment of extremist defendants in courts and the way the legal framework is applied by the judiciary. These judgments were also helpful in revealing or confirming the existence of networks among and relationships between radical actors.

1.1. LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

The increasingly sensitive nature of the research topic and the concern of potential research participants that their contributions may be misinterpreted were a challenge to recruitment. Generally, Salafists were wary about discussing their livelihoods, interpersonal networks, and beliefs. As a group, they were less willing to participate in this study than in previous studies because their trust in researchers has eroded over time due to portrayals they view as unflattering.²¹

Sensationalist reporting on returning foreign fighters, which intensified in BiH around the time this research began, also led some participants who were slated for interviews to withdraw from the study. Increased politicisation of the issue over the summer of 2017 forced researchers to move away from initial plans to conduct mixed focus groups bringing together intelligence officials, prosecutors, social workers, and other individuals who deal professionally with extremism. These participants became concerned that they would be misunderstood in a focus group setting, even by other professionals in the field.

²¹ This is not unique to the Salafi community. Researchers who study specific social groups often face this dilemma.

1.2. DEFINING EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION

It is worth noting that international researchers have not reached a consensus definition of terrorism, nor of various associated terms such as *radicalisation*, *extremism*, and *violent extremism*. Some scholars argue that a clear distinction should be made between radicalisation linked to violent extremism and terrorism, and radicalisation aimed at initiating social change through non-violent means.²² The syntagm *radicalisation into violent extremism* thus appears frequently in the literature, and represents an attempt by researchers to avoid demonising individuals and groups that adhere to radical religious ideologies and hold radical religious or political beliefs but are non-violent.²³

As Borum rightly notes, “how we define the threat has profound implications for how we understand and address it.”²⁴ The operational definition of *violent extremism* used by the Western Balkans Extremism Research Forum is the one put forth by USAID: “advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic and political objectives.”²⁵ The adoption or prioritisation of such objectives usually results from *radicalisation*, which is simply “the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs.”²⁶ But, again, radicalisation does not always lead to violence, and this research was concerned not only with violent, but also non-violent extremism, as well as with the process of radicalisation.

Significantly, Borum reminds us that, “though conventionally, the term ‘extreme’ refers to deviations from the norm, that element alone is not a sufficient basis for defining a security threat.”²⁷ In other words, the notion of what is extreme is relative. In BiH and other Western Balkans countries, where it is not uncommon for political narratives to reflect extremist themes, extremist political speech is often not a deviation *from* the norm but is the norm itself. For example, war criminals are so regularly glorified in BiH – by politicians, mainstream media, and many in the general public – that those who *oppose* doing so seem to be deviating from the norm.

Therefore, in the Bosnian context, any analysis of *radicalisation into violent extremism* must acknowledge the process of *reciprocal radicalisation*, wherein mutual forms of extremism feed one another. Security experts have increasingly brought attention to reciprocal radicalisation over the last several years, warning that approaches to extremism that view the phenomenon exclusively through the lens of radical Salafism fail to account for the risk of reactive or co-evolutionary ideological movements.²⁸ While the dynamics of reciprocal radicalisation go beyond the aim and scope of this research, it is important to understand that competing extremist political narratives like those prevalent in BiH can contribute to violent extremism.²⁹

²² Bećirević, E. (2016) Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, including 47 and 60. Available from: <http://atlanticinitiative.org/images/Salafism-vs.-moderate-islam-web.pdf>

²³ For more discussion on terminology, see the Literature Review prepared for the British Council by Atlantic Initiative researchers in 2017.

²⁴ Borum, R. (2011) Radicalisation into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, no. 4: 9.

²⁵ USAID. (2011) The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency, p. 2. Available from: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacs400.pdf [Accessed 6 January 2017].

²⁶ Borum, R. (2011) Radicalisation into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, no. 4: 9.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ A 2016 paper published by the European Commission's Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) concluded that the dynamics of reciprocal radicalisation are actually far more complicated than simply the interaction that occurs between various forms of extremism, because “all of these actors also react to government interventions or an absence of them.” See: Lenos, S. (2016) Tackling the challenges to prevention policies in an increasingly polarised society. RAN Issue Paper, November 2016.

²⁹ Allen, H. et al. (2015) Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review. RUSI. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf [Accessed 6 January 2017].

2. FORMS AND THREATS OF EXTREMISM

2.1. AN EVER-SHIFTING CONTINUUM

Sedgwick notes that the term radical may be used “as a synonym for ‘extremist’ and in opposition to ‘moderate’” and wisely suggests that radicalism and radicalisation must be viewed on a continuum; but he also poses the key question of how moderate positions are identified and where on the continuum they fall relative to radical views.³⁰ In BiH, previous research on radicalisation and extremism within Islam has placed violent Salafists at the radical end of this continuum, relative to the moderate position of the official Islamic Community.³¹ Yet, that research – which showed that some of the narratives emerging from members of the Islamic Community are in fact influenced by Salafism – also revealed weaknesses in this categorisation.

Moving beyond extremisms within Islam in BiH, the radicalisation continuum becomes even more complicated and less clear-cut. Schmid makes a valuable distinction between ideologies that are non-violent and “not-violent,” describing non-violence as always “principled and absolute” and “radical but not extreme,” but explaining that being not-violent is merely a pragmatic and temporal avoidance of violence that may just as well be viewed as “not-*now*-violent” because it lacks a principled component.³² In most contexts, this could be viewed as a reasonable test of moderation versus extremism. But in BiH, the country’s recent wartime past and its dysfunctional political present make it difficult to view any political or religious movement as non-violent in Schmid’s terms, at least as far as the parameter that they be “principled.” Thus, pinpointing the most appropriate relative position of Salafism on the Bosnian radicalisation continuum, in the context of wider Bosnian society and compared to other political and religious ideologies in BiH, is challenging.

2.2. MAIN EXTREMIST THREATS

In the Ministry of Security’s 2016 Annual Report on the State of Security in Bosnia and Herzegovina – which outlines the most pressing international, regional, and domestic security challenges facing BiH – 13 threats to internal security are identified. The State is described as “burdened with internal problems of a political nature, which pose a serious danger to society, politics, and security and general stability in the country.”³³ The Report cites the fight against “terrorism in all its manifestations” as the primary test of domestic security and notes that radicalisation into violence occurs “first through social networks.”

The Report also specifically references “forms of extremism that aim to jeopardise the territorial integrity” of BiH, including by provoking “national, racial, and religious hatred, divisions among citizens, and the obstruction of the return of refugees and internally displaced persons.”³⁴

³⁰ Sedgwick, M. (2010) The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4: 481.

³¹ See: Azinović, V. and Jusić, M. (2015) *The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative; Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative; and Bećirević, E. (2016) *Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative. Available from: <http://atlanticinitiative.org/images/Salafism-vs.-moderate-islam-web.pdf>.

³² Schmid, A. P. (2014) *Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?* ICCT Research Paper, May 2014, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, p.14. Available from: <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Violent-Non-Violent-Extremism-May-2014.pdf> [Accessed 6 January 2017].

³³ *Ministarstvo sigurnosti Bosne i Hercegovine, Informacija o stanju sigurnosti u Bosni i Hercegovini u 2016. godini* (2017), 9. Available from: <http://msb.gov.ba/PDF/info2017.pdf>

³⁴ *Ibid.* Other security challenges mentioned in the Report include: the refugee crisis and the security of borders, the fight against economic crime and corruption, the existence of organised crime networks, high levels of unemployment that contribute to the rise of poverty, the fear of existential threats that can lead to

Četnički Ravnogorski Pokret, the modern Chetnik movement, is described as promoting “radical views” including the “aggressive denial of the legitimacy of the State.” And according to the Report, various Chetnik groups in BiH and Serbia are seeking to form a more cohesive larger movement.³⁵ About the foreign fighter phenomenon, the Report notes that the activities of recruiters have been largely thwarted but that a “project of de-radicalisation” is now especially important for the security of BiH, as is “the need to work with persons already sentenced for terrorism.” Significantly, the Ministry also identifies a “lack of better coordination and communication among police agencies and security institutions in BiH” as a factor that contributes to the degree to which extremism is a threat to BiH.³⁶

Interviews with police and with intelligence and security officials conducted for this research reflected the challenges mentioned in the Ministry of Security Annual Report. When asked about the forms of violent extremism that threaten BiH, most interviewees listed “Salafi groups” (and/or “Takfiri groups”) and “the Serbian radical movement,” and some specifically mentioned “*Četnički Ravnogorski Pokret*,” “*parajamaats*” (unofficial Islamic congregations), and/or “Islamist extremists.” When posed to journalists, Islamic scholars, and academic researchers, this question elicited a broader set of responses that accounted for a wider political context, including ethnic nationalism and Orthodox and Catholic extremism.

According to one journalist who was interviewed, it makes sense “that experts from Sarajevo are focused on ‘Islamist’ terrorism, because the phenomenon of Syrian fighters, and now returnees, is an acute problem, and it has an international dimension. On the other hand, what is going on in the Republika Srpska is rather alarming. Some of us have been investigating Russian investments [meant] to increase the religiosity of Serbs there and, amongst ourselves, we call the Republika Srpska ‘The Orthodox Jamahiriya.’”³⁷

Police and security officials explained that *Četnički Ravnogorski Pokret* was mentioned in the Ministry of Security Report because of its close links to the recruitment of fighters for the war in Ukraine, on the side of pro-Russian forces. One interviewee explained that nine Bosnian citizens have fought in Ukraine, all have returned, and investigations are underway. “However, it is difficult to obtain evidence that will hold up in court,” and thus indictments are not guaranteed.

A journalist interviewed by our team, who closely follows Salafist influences in BiH, echoed other interviewees, noting that: “The threat of Islamist terrorism and violent extremism, and also domestic Islamist radicalisation, is something the whole society needs to work on. But we should not overlook what is going on in the Republika Srpska. Nationalism and religious extremism are also dangerous. In addition to that, the Croatian far right – which is supported by some factions of

individual acts of violent extremism, ecological challenges linked to systemic corruption, problems with war crimes prosecutions, abuse of the visa-free regime, the increased complexity of criminal acts, and the existence of crime bosses.

³⁵ Ibid. 31. Modern-day followers of the WWII-era Serb nationalist ideology of Chetnik Draža Mihailović pay homage to Mihailović by naming their groups after the Ravna Gora Movement. When the Chetnik movement became fragmented for a period during WWII, Mihailović established a headquarters in Ravna Gora (in central Serbia) and named his group “The Ravna Gora Movement” to distinguish it from others. The largest of these modern-day groups are *Ravnogorski pokret otadžbine Srpske* (Ravna Gora Movement of the Serbian Motherland) and *Ujedinjeni ravnogorski pokret otadžbine Srpske* (United Ravna Gora Movement of the Serbian Motherland); and smaller organizations include *Ravnogorski pokret srpskih zemalja za Republiku Srpsku* (Ravna Gora Movement of Serb rights in the Republika Srpska), *Četnički pokret-Ravna Gora-Cića Draža* (Chetnik movement-Ravna Gora-Cića Draža [Mihailović]), *Srpski četnici u otadžbini* (Serbian Chetniks in the Motherland). There are also similar organizations in Serbia with whom these groups cooperate.

³⁶ Ibid. 7-8.

³⁷ This researcher claims there are “around 70 different NGOs, groups, and foundations with an extremist Orthodox agenda, which promote Serbian, pan-Slavic, and pro-Russian clero-nationalism and neofascism” in the RS. Some of these organisations have been established in Serbia, and since 2012, this researcher asserts that an increasing number have been founded with Russian support. The most influential of these organisations is the network of the neo-Chetnik movement. Yet, this researcher also mentioned *Udruženje srpsko-ruskog prijateljstva i jedinstva pravoslavnih naroda Doboja* (The Association of Serbian-Russian Friendship and Orthodox Unity of Doboja), which is building a monastery near Doboja, as well as various other similar organisations in cities across the RS – including in Banja Luka, Bijeljina, Pale, and Sarajevo, among others. Additional independent inquiry carried out by our research team to follow up after this interview not only confirmed the existence of these organisations but found that some of them have an active online presence. Though the specific online activities of these groups were not explored, a brief analysis found that the majority of their activities appear to take place within closed groups.

the Catholic church, as well as by the political mainstream in Croatia and some Croat politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina – is a real threat.”

Interestingly, Croat/Catholic extremism was not mentioned in the Ministry of Security Report. On this topic, another journalist, who tracks Croat ultra-national extremism, told our researchers that: “There are no NGOs among [Croat nationalists] that can be labelled ultra-nationalist or ultra-religiously radical like some Muslim or Orthodox organisations. However, they have webpages and a presence on Facebook, promoting extreme Croat and Catholic perspectives that are framed as reportage on daily events, such as ‘news’ pages and websites like ‘*Hrvatska Republika Herceg Bosnia*,’ Poskok.info, and Dnevnik.ba.”

Despite the fact that extremism among Croats may not be seen as an official domestic security challenge, journalists, intelligence and police sources, and academic researchers who were interviewed expressed that extremism among Croats is becoming mainstream and is being maintained through associations of former soldiers, with the support of radical elements in the Catholic Church and some political elites. These associations have never shielded away from politics, but would hardly be described by most Bosnians as “extremist;” and yet, as one intelligence source explained, the former system of Croat radical networks that promoted Croatian President Tuđman’s ideology “has been formalised through the *Hrvatski narodni sabor* (Croatian National Assembly, or HNS).³⁸ ...each local community with a Croat majority has a branch of Croatian Defenders [Croatian Disabled Homeland War Veterans’ Association, or *HVIDRA*]³⁹ and their representatives are part of the Assembly. This is a powerful group with very strong influence. The HNS also has the Office for Legal Support for Croats who are indicted for war crimes. They are the key supporters of right-wing extremism among Bosnian Croats.”⁴⁰

On top of this, calls from Bosnian Croat politicians for a three-entity “solution” to the protracted constitutional crisis in BiH have been growing louder and more frequent, led by HDZ-BiH head Dragan Čović – who has been described as the current “architect and strong man of the Bosnian Croats.”⁴¹ And as Čović has moved closer to Republika Srpska (RS) leader Milorad Dodik over the past several years, comparisons have been made to wartime Croat-Serb alliances that aimed to separate ethnically-claimed territories from the larger Bosnian state.⁴² Still, in early 2018, opposition to Čović is growing among Croats, especially those living in non-Croat-majority areas of BiH, who are recognising the threat his rhetoric poses and increasingly feel they have been instrumentalised by HDZ-BiH leaders for purposes that may not actually serve their best interests.⁴³ Nonetheless, police and security agencies did not report that they are monitoring extremism among Croats, even though they monitor the activities of *Četnički Ravnogorski Pokret*, radical factions of the Salafi movement, fighters who have returned from Syria, and anyone previously involved in terrorist activities.

³⁸ The *Hrvatski narodni sabor* is a coordinating organisation for Croat political parties in BiH.

³⁹ HVIDRA (*Udruga hrvatskih vojnih invalida iz domovinskog rata*) is an association of veterans who fought on the side of Croatian or Croat forces in either Croatia or BiH from 1991 to 1995. In Croatia, most members are former soldiers of the Croatian Army; while in BiH, most members fought in the Croatian Defense Council (*Hrvatsko vijeće obrane, HVO*), which fought at one time against both Serbian- and Bosnian-backed forces and at others was allied with the latter.

⁴⁰ In BiH, Croat and Serb political and veterans’ organizations are commonly part of larger cross-border organizations or networks (the borders with Croatia or Serbia, respectively). This means, for example, that the messaging and rhetoric of HVIDRA groups in Croatia is reflected in HVIDRA groups in BiH, and thus in their political activism. While an in-depth analysis of the impact of these groups in BiH has not been undertaken, a report on political extremism in Croatia, published in 2017, indicated that HVIDRA has organized protests in which members have engaged in “nationalist chants.” See: Youth Initiative for Human Rights – Croatia. (2017) Report on political extremism in Croatia. Special Report, YIHR. Available from: <http://yihr.hr/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Report-on-Political-Extremism-in-Croatia.pdf>

⁴¹ Rathfelder, E. (2017) The third entity – a fiction?. Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 9. Available from: https://ba.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2017/12/third_entity_by_erich_rathfelder.pdf

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ HDZ 1990 poručio Čoviću: Odbijamo “poziv” na mobilizaciju, Hrvati su ugroženi od vas. (5 February 2018) Faktor.ba. Available from: <https://faktor.ba/vijest/hdz-1990-porucio-oviu-odbijamo-poziv-na-mobilizaciju-hrvati-su-ugrojeni-od-vas-282803> [Accessed 20 March 2018].

2.3. THE THREAT OF SALAFI EXTREMISM IN PERSPECTIVE

Due to the aim of this research to build upon previous studies that focused on Salafist influences in BiH, other forms of extremism were explored only within the context of reciprocal radicalisation and as a push factor. But it is important to highlight that, without fail, security agency officials interviewed by our research team agreed that the Salafist threat in BiH has been unjustifiably magnified. Regional and European media, and the speeches of some political officials from the EU, have marked BiH as a jihadist hotbed and a danger to neighbouring states, but one police source remarked that “the level of threat is lower here than in many other European countries.” Indeed, most research participants pointed out that the number of violent extremist threats in BiH has actually declined over the past two years and said that security agencies are up to the task of prevention despite facing structural challenges and problems with interagency coordination. But with the acute threat of violent extremism relatively reduced, other challenges have emerged; including, as one interviewee emphasised, the need “to determine the difference between non-violent and violent extremist activities, and especially the difference between their narratives.” It is thus critical that researchers explore this issue further.

The difficult task of making such distinctions was clear in a focus group our researchers held with Salafi men in Zenica. These men, who are part of a Salafi congregation that was brought under the IC umbrella, are all assumed to be non-violent, “mainstream” adherents. They were largely ambivalent about topics like multiculturalism and Euro-Atlantic integration but were united in condemning ISIS. Yet, all of them also said that they had known someone who joined an ISIS unit, and they described these individuals as having been “misled” or “manipulated,” or said they were “nice people who wanted to escape a difficult life.” One older man even admitted that he had entertained the idea of going to Syria himself but had been advised by a younger, educated man that “it would be a mistake to go.”

While these men generally held the West in disregard, blaming Western powers for “disagreements among Muslims” and claiming that “ISIS is the result of an American conspiracy,” they did not have a much better opinion of people in some majority Muslim countries. Several spoke openly with disdain about Iranians, saying, “they are Shia, so I think nothing of them,” and Turks, who they called “difficult people.” Still, when it came to the official IC, these men were rather uncritical, and certainly less so than participants in previous research.⁴⁴ What’s more, they expressed relatively liberal views about women’s rights, stating strong opposition to the use of violence to settle marital disagreements and saying they had no problem with a woman getting an education as long as it does not interfere with her duties as a spouse and mother. The variety of sometimes seemingly contradictory views held by these men illustrates the challenge authorities face in identifying which individuals pose a real potential threat.

Still, one group – former foreign fighters who have returned from Syria and Iraq – are invariably viewed as potential violent extremists. And while most interviewees agreed that the threat posed by returnees has been blown out of proportion by media reports, they disagreed about who among this group should be considered a threat and how significant a threat they are. Thus, our team received conflicting answers from security sources regarding the risk factor returnees represent:

⁴⁴ See: Bećirević, E. (2016) Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative. Available from: <http://atlanticinitiative.org/images/Salafism-vs.-moderate-islam-web.pdf>

“I don’t believe that people who have returned from Syria present a threat to this society. They’re insecure, especially those that have been prosecuted. Their own circles consider them traitors, and most of them are lying low. They are trying to get control of their lives. Out of 43 who have returned, only two are still deemed a threat. But we keep monitoring them all.”

“Some of them show signs of de-radicalisation, but honestly we don’t trust them. Once they are radicalised, they are always a risk. According to our assessment, there are four or five that are a serious security threat, but anyone who has been in Syria is under surveillance.”

“We monitor six or seven Salafi groups. Around 60 people are considered a security threat.”

The inconsistency demonstrated in these assessments points to the problem of coordination and information sharing between and among different security and police agencies in BiH. When asked to explain the variety of estimates put forth regarding the number of people identified as security threats, one official admitted that “there is a lack of institutional coordination,” but said that relations among individual security professionals are very good and that “when the real threat appears, we do cooperate.” In his opinion, “personal relationships make up for the lack of institutional cooperation.” And indeed, strong internal and external security and intelligence partnerships have delivered several highly-sought individuals to authorities, including in the case of Mirsad Kandić, a US permanent resident who was wanted by the US for his role as an ISIS recruiter and facilitator. In 2017, through a joint investigation with US intelligence, Kandić was found to be hiding out in Sarajevo, and was extradited to New York City to face charges in US federal court.⁴⁵

In total, over 240 Bosnian adults are believed to have departed for Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2016.⁴⁶ Officials report that 53 Bosnian men (including 4 foreign citizens of Bosnian origin), as well as 3 women and 4 children, have subsequently left Syria and Iraq for the West, but 10 have returned to countries other than BiH.⁴⁷ According to intelligence sources, only two returnees to BiH have known criminal histories, which is surprising given the finding of Azinović and Jusić that at least one-quarter of the Bosnian men believed to have departed for Syria and Iraq from late 2012 to late 2015 had criminal records.⁴⁸ This low rate of criminality among returnees is important to bear in mind in assessments of the threat they pose, since it appears to indicate that the majority of Bosnian foreign fighters with criminal records have so far chosen not to return.

Most of the security professionals interviewed for this research identified the adoption of 2014 legislation criminalising foreign fighting,⁴⁹ repressive measures used against recruiters and organisers, a loss of faith among fighters in the cause of the so-called Islamic State, and new realities on the battlefield as the factors that have contributed to ending departures from BiH to

⁴⁵ For more on this, see: Azinović, V. & Bećirević, E. (2017) A Waiting Game: Assessing and Responding to the Threat from Returning Foreign Fighters in the Western Balkans. Sarajevo: Regional Cooperative Council, 31.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 32.

⁴⁷ These figures were provided by police sources and Ministry of Security officials interviewed for this research. These are also the figures that were published in recent RCC research (Ibid.).

⁴⁸ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 40.

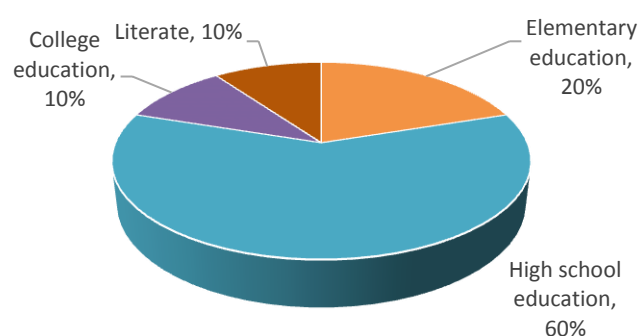
⁴⁹ Legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina criminalises various terrorism-related offenses, including recruitment, training, financing, organizing for a terrorist group and incitement to terror. In 2014, amendments to the Criminal Law were adopted to criminalise the establishment of, or association with, foreign fighting forces. The Law allows for imprisonment of a minimum of five years for participation in foreign armed formations and between three months and 10 years for other activities related to foreign fighting, such as incitement and recruitment; as well as at least three years for recruiting, financing, training or organizing for a terrorist group. Currently, there is discussion about amendments that would increase those sanctions, as presently, legislation allows a sentence of less than a year for foreign fighting to be commuted to a monetary fine. There are two cases in which this has happened, and this practice has caused fierce public reactions.

Syria and Iraq; but some of these factors, such as prosecutions, may also deter returns. Of the 43 former fighters who have thus far returned to BiH from ISIS territory, 23 have been charged, resulting in 22 convictions.⁵⁰ However, many Bosnians have been disappointed by the minimal length of some foreign fighting-related sentences.⁵¹ These cases can be difficult to prosecute, though, particularly because of the challenge of gathering evidence that stands up in court and confirms that an individual was indeed engaged in fighting.

Participants in this research who closely follow terrorism- and foreign fighting-related trials were asked about the problems prosecutors face in these cases. One expert said that “the biggest problem is proving the actual participation of individuals in ISIS fighting units. This is the reason the Prosecution has opted to make plea deals for one-year prison sentences.” Another interviewee explained just how valuable eye witnesses have been to the successful prosecution of foreign fighting cases, remarking that there was “one reliable protected witness, who was in Syria, but returned and apparently self-de-radicalised in prison. He was the key to many prosecution cases. He testified that he saw accused [individuals] in combat uniforms, fully armed, in specific parts of Syria.” The testimony of this protected witness was crucial, for example, in the case of Safet Brkić, whose trial ended in a three-year sentence.⁵² Notably, this witness was also a former fighter, and though his self-de-radicalisation may not be typical, such cases only further blur the lines as far as who is deemed a threat and on what basis.

To gain more insight into the profile of returnees, our research team analysed the biographical data of male fighters who have returned to BiH from ISIS units and found that the majority are under 35 years old. All returned fighters are monitored by security officials, as are several men who never departed from BiH but have been identified as potential threats. These men are mostly in their late 30s and are unemployed and minimally educated. On the whole, returnees tend to have no more than a high school education, and only 10% hold a university degree.

Figure 1. Education level of returning foreign fighters



⁵⁰ From official statistics of the State Court, and reviews of court judgements.

⁵¹ So far, eight plea agreements have been offered for foreign fighting in Syria, whereby the following individuals received year-long sentences: Emin Hodžić, Fatih Hasanović, Senad Koštić, Fikret Hadžić, Mirel Karajić, Almir Džinić, Nermin Šabić, and Nedžad Mujić.

⁵² According to the judgement, Brkić was sentenced for participating in terrorist activities and fighting on the side of the Islamic State in Syria from May 2013 to March 2014.

While international studies have established no clear link between low educational attainment and a higher risk of radicalisation or violence, the one-sidedness of this data reflects the previous conclusions of researchers in BiH that “socio-economic and educational background likely played a role” in the decision of most foreign fighters to depart for Syria and Iraq.⁵³ Further, though research findings have been mixed as to just how causative poverty is in the context of radicalisation (and Allen, et al. observe that “poverty may be a side-effect of some other cause,” making it nearly impossible to isolate⁵⁴), in BiH, research has strongly linked low educational attainment and poverty. In fact, a World Bank study determined that “differences in education account for half of the difference in poverty rates across rural and urban areas.”⁵⁵ What’s more, poorer households in BiH tend to be larger, and yet feature higher unemployment rates among both women and youth (15 to 24 years of age).⁵⁶ Given the conclusion of Allen et al. that “poverty, deprivation, and unemployment...can contribute to other factors, particularly grievances, and may therefore help to create an environment conducive to violent extremist groups,” these various socio-economic indicators must be viewed in their entirety and in the context of the climate of instability and marginalisation they produce.

2.4. THE MESSENGERS

The first Salafi proselytes in BiH were foreign, mostly Arab, *mujahideen* who arrived in BiH during the 1992-1995 war. In late 1995, a group known as Active Islamic Youth (*Aktivna islamska omladina*, AIO) was established in Zenica by locals who received foreign backing, to promote the religious teachings imported to BiH by those *mujahideen*.⁵⁷ From its inception, the mission of AIO was premised on the notion that Bosnian Islam was an aberration and that “Bosnian Muslims... [had] been deprived of 'traditional' Islam for too long, first by the communist regime of the former Yugoslavia, and later by moderate Muslims.”⁵⁸ The AIO was tasked with spreading Salafism far and wide among youth in BiH, and its leader, **Adnan Pezo**, strongly influenced the development of the Bosnian Salafi movement. Eventually, repressive actions taken by the state government in BiH against the organisations funding AIO, which were linked to terrorism, led to its official closure in 2003. But the group continued its activities by establishing youth centres, such as Selam in Zenica and Oaza in Tuzla. This effectively allowed the same ideologues to spread the same radical beliefs.

At the end of 2006, Salafi leaders began more boldly challenging the authority of the Islamic Community, openly referring to Bosnian Islam as “communist Islam” and Bosnian Muslims as *kafir* (non-believers). A key figure in the Bosnian Salafi movement at the time was **Muhamed Porča**, imam of the al-Tawhid Mosque in Vienna, who fashioned himself as the leader of Muslim youth in Europe. Through links he developed with the Bosnian diaspora in Austria, Porča exerted control over the very first Salafi community in BiH, in Bočinja (see Annex 4).

But the domestic Bosnian Salafi movement was developing, too. As more Salafi settlements were established over time, near Bihadž, Gornja Maoča, Maglaj, and Zenica, an unofficial Salafi

⁵³ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 45.

⁵⁴ Allen, H. et al. (2015) *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*, 43. RUSI. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf [Accessed 6 January 2017].

⁵⁵ The World Bank. (2015) *Poverty and Inequality in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2007-2011*, 4. Available from: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/228531467999134102/pdf/97643-REVISED-P132666-P152786-Box393190B-BIH-Poverty-and-Inequality-in-BIH.pdf>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Babić, M. (2013) “Two faces of Islam in the Western Balkans: Between Political Ideology and Islamist Radicalization,” in *Perseverance of Terrorism: Focus on Leaders*, eds., Marko Milosevic and Kacper Rekawek. Amsterdam: IOS Press, 133.

⁵⁸ Latin, E. (2003) *Suspicious Islamic Missionaries: Active Islamic Youth*. Southeast European Times.

congregation, or *parajamaat*, was also established in each location, along with madrassas. Some Salafi adherents who had been living in cities were inspired by the Quranic concept of *hijra* (migration) to relocate to these communities. And though seemingly fragmented, these Salafists looked mostly to the same ideological leaders: first, **Jusuf Barčić**,⁵⁹ and then, after Barčić's death in 2007, **Nusret Imamović**. Imamović had been a close associate of Barčić, had studied Sharia law in the UAE, and had also spent time in Vienna with Muhamed Porča. When Imamović departed to Syria in 2015, **Safet Kuduzović** – another student of Porča – filled the Salafi leadership vacuum and is now one of the most influential *da'is* in BiH.

Indeed, the link between leading Gulf-educated Salafists in Vienna and those in BiH appears to have been a key element in sustaining and spreading Salafism in BiH. Now, the Internet has further facilitated the efficiency and reach of this trans-continental network. As Pall and de Koning explain, the Salafi movement “is made up of networks of individuals... [and] social capital is the most important form of capital in this social field.”⁶⁰ Social capital in extremist movements, even more than in other groups, is linked to interpersonal trust among members; and research suggesting that “being embedded in cohesive networks accelerates the creation of trust” is important to understanding the value of online platforms for the Salafi movement. Unlike in many Western countries, previous research in BiH has found that most Salafists are recruited primarily through direct contact with people in their families or communities and that Internet platforms “mainly serve as a force multiplier... consolidating and reinforcing newly acquired ideas and connecting people who have similar beliefs.” But, in online spaces, these connections sometimes deepen significantly in little time because “the relationship between social capital and trust is not unidirectional but reciprocal,” meaning that mutual interest and shared values can play a role in developing trust but also that high levels of trust increase the willingness of individuals to provide mutual support and adopt a collective identity.⁶¹

The fact that a majority of Salafi adherents are in fact non-violent and have the right to engage in online discussions about their religion makes it incredibly difficult to monitor “online Salafi activity.” Our researchers selected the most popular BiH-based Salafi-oriented websites and social media pages for analysis and found, again, that distinguishing between non-violent radicalism and violent extremism is challenging and is complicated by the fluidity of the rhetoric of Salafi missionaries, which moves them back and forth across this line of distinction. One example of this was a video released online in July 2016, which featured ISIS-style video imagery matched with the audio of an incendiary 1999 lecture by Kuduzović in which he called for violence against Jews. Kuduzović, who is not only popular in BiH but in Montenegro and Sandžak as well, is among the Salafi leaders in BiH who accepted inclusion into the official Islamic Community. Yet, for many Bosnians, hearing this lecture weakened the argument that there is in fact any distinction between the conservative Salafi missionaries who accepted inclusion – that is, those who are “just” radical – and those who advocate violent extremism.

Between 1 June and 31 August 2017, our research team analysed Salafi-oriented websites and social media, monitoring the ten most popular and most active websites, the ten most frequently updated Facebook pages, and five popular YouTube channels. The extremely popular Facebook page of **Elvedin Pezić** (@pezicelvedin), which had about 82,000 followers at the time of analysis,

⁵⁹ Barčić received his religious schooling in Medina, Saudi Arabia and was among the most influential Salafi *da'is* in BiH until he was killed in a car accident near Tuzla. His radical rhetoric made him a very controversial figure.

⁶⁰ Pall, Z. and de Koning, M. (2017) Being and Belonging in Transnational Salafism: Informality, Social Capital and Authority in European and Middle Eastern Salafi Networks. *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 1, 81.

⁶¹ Grabner-Kräuter, S. and Bitter, S. (2015) Trust in online social networks: A multifaceted perspective. *Forum for Social Economics* 44, no. 1, 57 and 60.

was among them.⁶² On a daily basis, an average of 3 new posts were published on the page, garnering between 500 and 1,000 reactions, and in some cases, up to 2,000 shares. These posts pertain to the religious “rules of conduct” for believers living in a “non-believers’ society” – making recommendations, for example, to avoid musical concerts and wear certain clothing, and promoting the obedience of women in marital relations.

Pezić is not the only Salafist who understands the importance of social media and its influence on the public, but he is the most popular in BiH, partly because he is rather humorous and directs his message toward a younger audience. It is evident from his page that lectures and events held by Pezić and other Salafists across BiH are highly coordinated. What’s more, his lectures are regularly live-streamed, regardless of whether they are held in front of an audience in BiH, Germany, or Luxembourg. Pezić also often participates in discussions on his Facebook page, offering answers, explanations, and additional information to followers, and thereby conveying that he is available, open, and has time to attend to his brothers and sisters in faith. This kind of engagement with his followers builds trust and, thus, all-important social capital.

Kuduzović, a mentor of Pezić, is considered a leader of the Salafi movement across the region. He has about 22,000 followers on Facebook and, unlike Pezić, plays the role of a strict authority who offers no direct interaction to his followers. His page is updated every 3 days, and exclusively features videos of his religious lectures, for which the number of views range from 3,000-11,000. The fluidity between the narrative of conservative religious dogma and violent extremism is exemplified by the video mentioned above, which appeared in 2016 on a now defunct YouTube channel (“Dani Ponosa/Days of Pride”) and shone a harsh light on Kuduzović’s past rhetoric.⁶³

The video featured audio from prior lectures by Kuduzović laid atop violent imagery such as that produced by the notorious terrorist media platform *'Amaq*. In one of the lectures, allegedly recorded in 1999, Kuduzović manipulated Islamic sources and hadiths to defend the murder of Jews. In the same lecture, he called for the deaths of people who curse the Prophet and said that non-Salafist Muslims “deserve nothing else but to be killed.”⁶⁴ Still, despite the inclusion effort, which the IC hoped would moderate the messaging of Salafist leaders in BiH, it is widely believed that these now-integrated ideologues offer one narrative in public and another behind closed doors.

In many ways, the Internet operates behind closed doors; and online spaces have allowed Salafists in BiH to interact with Bosnian diaspora in Western Europe – especially Vienna, Sweden, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Germany – who promote and support Salafism. In fact, some extremist networks inside BiH fundraise through a European Salafi lecture circuit.⁶⁵ Many of the key figures on this circuit stream and post videos of their lectures online, employing rhetoric that is at times even more extreme than that of Pezić or Kuduzović. Among these ideologues, the most influential in BiH has been Vienna-born takfiri ideologist **Nedžad Balkan**, known as Abu Muhammed. Before his arrest by Austrian police in early 2017, Balkan had preached among the most extreme interpretations of takfirism (particularly targeting and condemning Muslims who do

⁶² For comparison, the page of Bakir Izetbegović, Member of the Presidency of BiH, had only 28,000 followers. As of this writing, Pezić’s Facebook following has risen to over 95,000 while Izetbegović’s remains just over 28,000.

⁶³ This channel has been removed from YouTube for violating its standards, but was Available from:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTu0SV_NKuYuj9jcb8TikHg

⁶⁴ Kuduzović confirmed the authenticity of this audio recording, but attributed his tone to the different context of 1999, remarking that he had been “holding a pocketknife in his hand” at the time, but that in 2016, “he held a rose.” Though he was not explicit, this may have been a metaphorical reference to his acceptance of Islamic Community inclusion.

⁶⁵ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative.

not adhere to Salafism). He is a hero of violent factions of the Salafi movement in BiH, Montenegro, and the Sandžak. (See “Transnational Cooperation” for more.)

2.5. DE-RADICALISATION AND DISENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMES

There is much talk at the policy level in BiH of de-radicalisation programs, albeit with little concrete activity despite numerous conferences and awareness-raising activities on the topic.⁶⁶ Some security sources expressed pessimism to our research team regarding the international projects currently being pursued in BiH and their potential impact if they are implemented. In general, sentiments among these officials regarding de-radicalisation were rather inconsistent. One interviewee felt that “there is too much talk and very little work.... The process of de-radicalisation is important, and the State is doing nothing.” This same frustration was reflected by another official, who said that “by the time international donors and state ministries decide on the best approach, all [the extremists] will be out of prison, and there will be no one left to de-radicalise.” But another source questioned de-radicalisation efforts altogether, commenting that “after doing so many interviews with returnees from Syria, I do not think de-radicalisation is possible. They are too deeply indoctrinated. The best that can be done with these programs is to keep [returnees] disengaged from violence once they leave prison.”

Notwithstanding, whether the goal is de-radicalisation or disengagement, all the police and security officials interviewed for this research agreed that it is necessary to develop some sort of programming aimed at returnees, and that a lack of such programming could contribute to an increased terrorist threat. These officials overwhelmingly felt that the development of post-penal programs is the best focus in BiH, considering the reality that returnees are serving relatively short prison sentences. Moreover, prisons are ill-equipped to effectively implement prison-based programs. One prison psychologist who spoke with our research team admitted to having no previous experience working with radicalised prisoners, said that it would be difficult to undertake any kind of therapy with this population, and described these prisoners as introverted and intellectually limited. According to this psychologist, prisoners access psychological services “only when there is a problem.... We do not even attempt therapy with them, because it is not obligatory, and because we would not even know how to go about it. They are not allowed to work, because we try to keep them away from other prisoners. Thus, I cannot really say that they’re ‘serving’ their sentences. All they do is lie in their cell all day and read.”

Despite poor or lacking psychological interventions for prisoners in BiH, concerns about prison-based radicalisation were generally dismissed by interviewees, who explained that prisoners known to be radicalised are routinely isolated. The individual perhaps most likely to have the influence to radicalise fellow inmates, and one of the most renowned figures imprisoned thus far for foreign fighting-related charges, has been Bilal Bosnić – a leader of the Salafi community in BiH who was sentenced to seven years for publicly inciting terrorist activities, recruiting for ISIS units, and organising on behalf of a terrorist group. The psychologist our researchers interviewed found Bosnić to be an atypical prisoner, calling him “highly intelligent and manipulative,” and remarking that prison staff does “all that is necessary to keep him away from other prisoners.” But whether this has been effective or not has been questioned. In October 2017, media in the Republika Srpska broke the news that Bosnić had radicalised some 30 people in prison.⁶⁷ Yet,

⁶⁶ With support from the Council of Europe (CoE) and the US government, some prisons in BiH will soon be involved in a project meant to increase the capacities of prison staff to assess radicalized prisoners, with the aim of providing them appropriate rehabilitation. This reflects priorities laid out by the CoE in guidelines for prison and probation services issued in March 2016, which aim to help corrections officials prevent, detect, and counter radicalization in prisons.

⁶⁷ See: *Bilal Bosnić vrbovao tridesetak zatvorenika u Zenici*, (7 October 2017) *Nezavisne novine*. Available from: <https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/hronika/Bilal-Bosnic-vrbovao-tridesetak-zatvorenika-u-Zenici/446214> [Accessed 8 January 2017].

every prison authority contacted by our researchers denied this story, claiming that “Bosnić is not in the position to radicalise anyone.... He gets minimal contact with other prisoners and is under constant observation.”

The development of post-penal programs that engage with these former prisoners at a critical psychosocial stage are clearly necessary, but this prospect brings forth another issue that must be addressed concurrently – the stigma often faced by returnees and by other individuals charged on suspicion of terrorism. An interviewee for this research, who is one of two known self-de-radicalised former prisoners in BiH, experienced significant challenges reintegrating into his home community: “When I came back, some people verbally abused me. I was even physically attacked here in the park several times. They mostly cursed at me, calling me a *mujahideen*, a terrorist.... I contemplated starting to carry a knife in my bag...I just couldn't take it anymore; but now it's okay, things have mostly calmed down.”⁶⁸ Most returnees do not face this problem to this degree, since they return to radicalised communities. But even there, they generally keep a low profile because they are often viewed as traitors by more radical Salafists and because they are on the radar of security agencies.

3. DRIVERS OF RADICALISATION

The key question concerning many terrorism researchers and the newer generation of violent extremism researchers is: Why do people become terrorists? And, increasingly, the role of structural factors, alongside individual motivations, are emphasised. According to a now commonly referenced USAID model, these structural (macro) drivers are called “push” factors because they reflect wider socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions that may push someone toward certain choices or behaviours; and individual- or community-level drivers are called “pull” factors because these motivations – things like personal relationships, adoration for a religious leader, or the draw of social networks – may pull, or attract, a person to certain choices or behaviours.⁶⁹ It is the role of pull factors that helps explain why only some people exposed to the same push factors become radicalised; meaning, push factors may create the underlying conditions that enable radicalising forces, but pull factors “are necessary for push factors to have a direct influence on individual-level radicalisation and recruitment.”⁷⁰

3.1. PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS

The specific balance between push and pull factors in any given case is unique and fluid, which makes it nearly impossible for researchers or policy makers to develop a single profile of the “typical extremist.” Still, research findings strongly point to identity as key factor in radicalisation processes.⁷¹ Identity is a complex concept and identity formation is shaped and defined by any number of influences, which may include religion and ethnicity. Due to the recent history of the Western Balkans region, identity formation among Bosnians is particularly linked to religion and

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ According to USAID, push factors – which may also be thought of as “root causes” – include: high levels of social marginalisation and fragmentation, poor governance, government repression and human rights violations, perceived cultural threats, and endemic corruption. See: Denoeux, G. (2009) *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*. USAID, 8. Also see: USAID. (2011) *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency: Putting Principles into Practice*, 3.

⁷⁰ USAID. (2011) *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency: Putting Principles into Practice*, 4.

⁷¹ Allen, H. et al. (2015) *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*, 2. RUSI. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf [Accessed 6 January 2017].

ethnicity, both of which are deeply interwoven through expressions of political and socio-cultural belonging. Indeed, Azinović and Jusić have noted that, in the absence of a functioning Bosnian state, “citizens were offered a placeholder – their *identity*, defined by religion, ethnicity, language, and territory,” resulting in a society that is “reduced to and defined only by identity.” Moreover, they argue that “collective victimhood, present and past, is the backbone of every Bosnian identity matrix.”⁷² This social context adds further significance to psychological studies which have found that “appeals to identity are crucial in motivating, legitimising and sustaining involvement in violent extremist groups.”⁷³

While issues of identity appear to play a substantial role in motivating many people to radicalise, identity formation is a universal experience that does not drive most people toward extremism. And so, again, any individual’s susceptibility to radicalisation is due to a specific recipe of micro- and macro-level factors; and in the push-pull model, these macro-level, or structural, factors serve as potentially fertile soil for micro-level predispositions to extremism. Research carried out in 2016 by the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA) on drivers of violent extremism in BiH found that the structural factors at play in BiH reflect those in other international contexts. The CIJA found that, “faced with poverty, exclusion, long-term unemployment, exacerbated by the widespread corruption, individuals feel victimised and are likely to radicalise.” Importantly, the CIJA report highlighted specific dangers in BiH related to the impacts of exclusion and unemployment.⁷⁴

Indeed, BiH holds the dubious distinction of featuring the highest youth unemployment rate in the world,⁷⁵ as well as among the highest overall unemployment rates, and police records of known extremists and foreign fighters from BiH frequently indicate that these individuals are unemployed.⁷⁶ This research found that, among returnees, unemployment rates are also incredibly high, and employment is often seasonal. Testing the hypothesis that “underemployed young men with frustrated aspirations and a limited stake in society are particularly susceptible to radicalisation,” Allen et al. found some evidence that militant groups actually “recruit from the ranks of the unemployed and underemployed.”⁷⁷ In BiH, this marks an especially large portion of society as potential targets for recruiters and could have implications for de-radicalisation and prevention.

Previous research on foreign fighters also established that a substantial number of the individuals who have departed to Syria and Iraq from BiH have come from the so-called margins of society. Many have been economically and socially disenfranchised, minimally educated, and have had lengthy criminal records.⁷⁸ These factors are linked to the dysfunction of political, social, and economic institutions in BiH, which has contributed to the erosion of pre-war values and norms as well as soaring unemployment rates.⁷⁹ But *non-violent* radicalisation is also commonly spurred by a sense of social alienation, and interviewees in earlier studies who showed no propensity for violence frequently expressed that a desire for belonging and mutual support had been a factor

⁷² Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 92.

⁷³ Allen, H. et al. (2015) *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*, 11. RUSI. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf [Accessed 6 January 2017].

⁷⁴ Commission for International Justice and Accountability. (2016) *Assessment Report: Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 36. This Report was produced by the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA) as part of the inception phase of a community-based pilot project designed to prevent violent extremism in BiH. The project was implemented by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and this assessment is based on 114 interviews, 607 micro-narratives, 565 media posts, and 121 social network data points collected in January, February, and March 2016.

⁷⁵ According to the International Labour Organization, BiH had a youth unemployment rate of 67.5% in 2017. In the Western Balkans, Macedonia and Montenegro followed with the next highest rates, of 50% and 36% respectively.

⁷⁶ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 44.

⁷⁷ Allen, H. et al. (2015) *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*, 45. RUSI. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf [Accessed 6 January 2017].

⁷⁸ See: Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2015) *The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*, 42. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative; Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*, 44. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative.

⁷⁹ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2015) *The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*, 42. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative.

in their decision to convert to Salafism. Many were drawn to Salafi circles by their need “to be a part of something, as opposed to a rejection of mainstream religion.”⁸⁰ And, among these non-violent Salafists, any pattern of psychosocial factors that may emerge in the profiles of violent extremists is barely reflected, as far fewer are unemployed and many more hold higher degrees.⁸¹

3.2. IDEOLOGICAL FACTORS

The baseline studies on which this research builds found that the reductionist interpretation of Islam promoted by Salafists is another one of the factors that attracts new adherents in BiH to the ideology.⁸² This overly simplistic narrative can feel to some like an island of order – structured by prayer and shaped by strict lifestyle prescriptions – within a sea of modern-day complexities. And, according to Allen et al., “the use of such simplified narratives to justify, recruit and motivate is near universal among extremist groups.”⁸³

The narrative of Salafism in BiH, even in non-violent circles, positions the West against a subjugated Muslim *ummah*.⁸⁴ This framing, which relies on an unsophisticated ‘single narrative,’ “interprets the world through a lens of injustice and humiliation...[and is] meant to initiate sympathy for the collective suffering of Muslims.”⁸⁵ This narrative has been linked to ‘proxy humiliation’, wherein a “group identity is sufficiently powerful to make individuals feel grievances without experiencing them directly.”⁸⁶ As Azinović and Jusić explain, “revenge for real or imagined injustices can sometimes be an even stronger motivator” than the religious narrative put forth by extremist leaders.⁸⁷

Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, almost two-thirds of Salafi participants in one baseline study had limited to no previous knowledge of religion before adopting Salafism.⁸⁸ A lack of religious education may limit the ability of individuals to think critically about extremist rhetoric or place it within an ideological context. This data also defies some popular stereotypes of Muslim extremists, which depict deeply indoctrinated and hyper-religious young men trained in madrassas and set to erupt in violence. But in fact, research does not support the notion that madrassas promote extremist ideologies or facilitate recruitment and training. As Allen et al. discovered, “the problem of madrasa-based radicalisation has been significantly overstated.”⁸⁹

In the case of BiH, it is necessary to make a distinction between religious education provided through madrassas of the official Islamic Community and through informal Salafi networks. The research of Azinović and Jusić has revealed that foreign fighters from BiH all received some level of Salafi religious education prior to their decision to depart. Of course, this education alone does

⁸⁰ Bećirević, E. (2016) Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 68. Available from: <http://atlanticinitiative.org/images/Salafism-vs.-moderate-islam-web.pdf>

⁸¹ Ibid. 94.

⁸² Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 72-74; and Bećirević, E. (2016) Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 70. Available from: <http://atlanticinitiative.org/images/Salafism-vs.-moderate-islam-web.pdf>

⁸³ Allen, H. et al. (2015) Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review. RUSI, 31. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf

⁸⁴ Ibid. 41.

⁸⁵ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 72.

⁸⁶ Allen, H. et al. (2015) Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review. RUSI, 32. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf

⁸⁷ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 72.

⁸⁸ Bećirević, E. (2016) Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 70. Available from: <http://atlanticinitiative.org/images/Salafism-vs.-moderate-islam-web.pdf>

⁸⁹ Allen, H. et al. (2015) Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review. RUSI, 40. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf

not lead individuals to violence; but having received such an education is a common trait of all the violent extremists accounted for in these previous studies. Yet, imams from the Islamic Community in BiH who were interviewed for this research spoke dismissively about the true religiosity of violent extremists, regardless of their education. One asserted that these individuals “were extreme before they became religious. Salafi *da’is* just gave them an excuse, a way to cover their extreme beliefs with religion.” Another noted that certain psychosocial factors make some individuals particularly susceptible to the ‘single narrative’ of Salafism: “Most of them have some psychological issues and were either drug addicts or heavy drinkers. Those I know come from broken families. The preaching of Salafi *da’is* is ultraconservative, simplistic, and often militant. That is just what [these individuals] need to channel their anger toward society and justify their personal destinies. Their attraction to Salafism has little to do with religion.”

However, significant in-depth research by Hegghammer, including interviews with former jihadists around the globe, led him to conclude that “their religiosity needs to be taken very seriously.” According to Hegghammer, “ongoing debate about how knowledgeable jihadis are about religion...is not very helpful because you have to distinguish between the depth of knowledge and intensity of belief.”⁹⁰ Moreover, he argues that violent extremists operate within a specific culture, in this case a “jihadi culture,” which he proposes serves two main purposes: to signal trustworthiness between ideological cohorts who constantly fear infiltration, and to “shape the beliefs and preferences of [extremists], ultimately affecting their decision to join, stay in, or perform certain tasks for the group.”⁹¹

Whether Bosnian imams view extremists as “religious” or not, other interviewees indicated that many extremists do view themselves that way. One psychologist noted that “even when they show signs of cooperation [in therapy], they stick to their religious beliefs, and their views are very extreme in comparison to the majority of Bosnian Muslims.” In fact, according to one intelligence source, “there are only two [known] cases of self-de-radicalisation” in BiH.

3.3. WOMEN AND RADICALISATION

Within Salafi communities, a notable finding of previous studies was that a shift in the ideological motivations of individuals who left BiH for Syria and Iraq occurred in 2014. While the earliest departures, in 2012, were of men who viewed the defence of their Muslim brethren through the lens of justified *jihad*, later departures of women and children reflected the desire of entire families to undertake *hijra* by migrating to the “Islamic State.”⁹² This resulted in a Bosnian contingent in ISIS territory that had more and older women than those from other countries.⁹³ Azinović and Jusić classified Salafi women from BiH with links to foreign fighting into three groups: those who departed to Syria alongside, or to join, their husbands; those who refused to depart BiH and stayed behind; and a small number of women who travelled to Syria and Iraq on their own. In this third group, women were motivated either by ideology alone or a combination of ideology and romantic recruitment.⁹⁴ Except in one case, women are thought to have

⁹⁰ Anthony, A. (2017) *The art of making a jihadist*. The Guardian. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/23/the-culture-that-makes-a-jihadi-thomas-hegghammer-interview-poetry-militancy> [Accessed 9 January 2018].

⁹¹ Hegghammer, T. (2015) *Why Terrorists Weep: The Socio-Cultural Practices of Jihadi Militants*. Paul Wilkinson Memorial Lecture, University of St. Andrews. Available from: http://hegghammer.com/_files/Hegghammer_-_Wilkinson_Memorial_Lecture.pdf [Accessed 10 January 2017].

⁹² *Ibid.* 32 and 50.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 28.

⁹⁴ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 68. According to Azinović and Jusić, “something of an online dating service has been established, interwoven with elements of proselytism, aimed at supporting efforts to recruit and send people from BiH to Syria and Iraq.”

undertaken traditional roles in Syria and Iraq and, if they arrived unmarried, were met by pressure to either get married or be provided with guardians.⁹⁵

Women who identify as Salafists participated in this research through focus groups, to explore their views on a variety of topics, from the Syrian War and the official Islamic Community in BiH to women's rights. In one focus group, these women were members of a Zenica-based NGO known for (and open about) its Salafi orientation. The director told researchers that the NGO offers courses in traditional homemaking skills, but also in religion, and that "most of the women who come to us and attend our courses accept deeper religious beliefs. Almost all of them start wearing niqab or hijab." Yet, all of the women the director asked to participate in the focus group wore only hijab, and researchers wondered if women had been selected for this reason. What's more, the idea that there are Salafist women who do not wear niqab was interesting, and our research team discussed this with an Islamic scholar who studies the Salafi movement in BiH and who said that this reflected "a softer version of Salafism, which is better accepted by mainstream society and fits better within the Islamic Community."

Earlier research with non-violent Salafi communities in BiH found Salafists to be highly and openly critical of the Islamic Community and concluded that "negative views about the Islamic Community had a direct relationship to more extreme Salafism."⁹⁶ Two years later, it is obvious that something has changed and that the decision by a number of Salafi congregations to accept the authority of the IC has had an effect, at least on the narrative expressed by adherents. This was particularly obvious in the focus group with Salafi men. However, in focus group discussions with women, some criticism of traditional Bosnian Islam also emerged. When the group was asked to explain the differences between Bosnian Islam and Salafism, for example, one participant said that "traditional Bosnian Islam went sideways," and claimed that "before the First World War, niqabs and hijabs were normal, and all women covered." Another told researchers that "Muslims went astray" because "communists forbade us to practice our religion."

But Salafism does not stand in contrast only to Bosnian Islam, but in many ways, to the Bosnian Constitution and the Rule of Law – particularly when it comes to Salafi discourse on issues like polygamy and the right of women to an education and freedom of movement.⁹⁷ Researchers raised the issue of polygamy with women Salafists, and while none admitted themselves to marrying as a second or third wife, half had a positive opinion of polygamy. One woman admitted that she had been opposed to polygamy but asked, "who are we to be against something that Allah allowed?" She added that women "need to be obedient to our husbands." These women also shared stories to illustrate how polygamy could be helpful, describing it in almost humanitarian terms: "We have a friend who got divorced and was left alone with her children. Her ex-husband did not provide for them. And then she got the opportunity to marry as a second wife. We recently saw her, and she was over the moon."

Generally, the Salafi women our researchers spoke with clearly sought to present their lives in a favourable light, especially in comparison to women from mainstream society who work outside the home. When asked about the advantages of their way of life, they claimed that Salafi families are stronger, saying that "our husbands do not drink and they take care of the women and children;" and that it is a benefit that Salafi women do not have to get jobs, making comments

⁹⁵ Ibid. 48. Also see: Mazurana, D. (2015) Why Women and Girls Join ISIL. *Reinventing Peace*, World Peace Foundation at Tufts University. Available from: <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2015/08/20/why-women-and-girls-join-isil/> [Accessed 15 March 2018].

⁹⁶ Bećirević, E. (2016) Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 55. Available from: <http://atlanticinitiative.org/images/Salafism-vs.-moderate-islam-web.pdf>

⁹⁷ For more on this, see: Ibid.

such as: “our husbands provide for us, and unlike other women, we are not obliged to work;” “we have more time to spend with our children;” and “we are not as stressed as women who work.” These women did not object to some of the most conservative elements of Salafi ideology, such as limits on their freedom of movement that stipulate they must have a male guardian accompany them for travel over 75 km.

While all the women in focus groups tried to distance themselves generally from Salafi women who had departed for Syria – arguing for instance that “they are not even Salafists” – they were less concrete in their condemnation of women who departed from families in their local communities, and some offered rationalisations, arguing that these women had been “misled by false promises” or “had to follow their husbands.” The attempt by women in focus groups to draw a line between themselves and women who have departed to Syria made it obvious that ultra-conservatism is a problem troubling their community. One woman talked with disappointment about the departure of a particularly young woman, who “left literally from school. She was 17 years old [and] did not even finish high school. Communication with her is difficult, and when her family speaks to her, she tells them they are not on the right path.”

While Salafi women refused to speak with our researchers about domestic violence, a police source said that domestic violence is more common in these communities than in the rest of BiH, claiming that “women who enter these marriages are not aware at first of what is waiting for them. Once they are in, they have no way out. Violence is frequent, but they rarely report it.” This was corroborated by two social workers and several sources close to the Islamic Community, who said that Salafi women do often experience domestic violence, especially in communities located in isolated villages. They claim to have “heard about some cases of female genital mutilation,” but say there is nothing they can do to intervene.

The fact that Salafi women face conditions that are reportedly more dangerous in locations that are more rural and remote is notable given that Salafists in some of these outpost settlements are particularly extreme and have produced high numbers of foreign fighters; and Women Without Borders and Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE) have noted that “the capacity of women to spot and react to extremism in their families ranges greatly based on their education, local awareness, and geographic remoteness.” They found that mothers, “especially those with less formal education, struggle to recognise the warning signs” of radicalisation, and may perceive increased religiosity in their children as a positive change.⁹⁸ Such studies reaffirm the importance of exploring the potential for knowledge sharing and support programmes for women in extremist communities. Any such programming must be adapted to the Bosnian context specifically and must account for the fact that issues of gender are often subverted by other group-based identities. According to Bartulović, the focus on ethnic parity among the three constituent nations in BiH “masks other aspects of inequality, including gender discrimination.”⁹⁹ But women, and especially mothers – who are typically “a continuous presence in their children’s lives, with deeply rooted connections and an understanding of...what excites them, upsets them, and might seduce them” – remain an untapped resource in BiH.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *The Roles and Capabilities of Yemeni Women Against Violent Extremism*. Report from a SAVE Yemen Workshop, 5 February 2010. Available from: <http://www.women-without-borders.org/save/reports/7/> [Accessed 10 January 2018].

⁹⁹ Bartulović, A. “Islam and Gender in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina: Competing Discourses and Everyday Practices of Muslim Women,” in *Gender (In)equality and Gender Politics in Southeastern Europe: A Question of Justice*, eds., Christine M. Hassenstab and Sabrina P. Ramet (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 277.

¹⁰⁰ Schläffer E. & Kropuinnig, U. (2015) *Can Mothers Challenge Extremism? Mothers’ perceptions and attitudes of radicalization and violent extremism*. Vienna: Women Without Borders/SAVE, 2.

3.4. CASE STUDIES: THREE STORIES FROM BIHAĆ

As Borum has emphasised, any effort to understand the radicalisation process, and how people move from holding radical beliefs to becoming violent extremists, must seek to understand “not only *what* people think, but *how* they come to think what they think, and, ultimately, how they progress – or not – from thinking to action.”¹⁰¹ Alongside a number of other authors who suggest that any useful framework must take into account both micro- and macro-level factors,¹⁰² Borum reminds us that any such framework “must account for the fact that ‘one size does not fit all’ when it comes to creating a violent extremist.”¹⁰³

Yet, in interviews with security officials, prosecutors, religious leaders, social workers, and psychologists, these individuals offered such uniform responses about the factors that push individuals toward extremism that they almost sounded rehearsed; listing commonly cited but rather generic factors such as poverty, a search for identity, a criminal history, psychological instability, and addiction issues. Still, many research participants did stress that young people living in the vicinity of *parajamaats* might be at greater risk of radicalisation. Thus, our researchers interviewed friends and relatives of three foreign fighters from the Bihać area to learn more about their lives – including details of their childhoods and family backgrounds – and to discover nuances not captured in police records and media reports. The following case studies summarise what researchers learned (see Annex 3 for more detailed versions of these summaries).

Ines Midžić is well known across BiH after shocking the country in 2015 by threatening the Bosnian public with terrorist attacks in an ISIS-style video posted online. Using the alias Salahuddin al-Bosni, Midžić encouraged aspiring fighters who couldn’t travel to Syria or Iraq to “fight over there! [in BiH] ...put explosives under their cars, in their houses. ...take some poison and put it in their drink or food.”¹⁰⁴ In early 2018, Bosnian media reported that Midžić’s death in Syria had been confirmed by Interpol, though security officials in BiH have not yet publicly corroborated this.¹⁰⁵

One elderly man, a friend of the Midžić family, told researchers that Ines had a difficult childhood. Born out of wedlock, he “was rejected and mocked by his community because his father never accepted him.” Further, the man claimed Midžić’s mother had been “psychologically unstable and abandoned him when he was eight years old.” Midžić then lived with his grandfather in extreme poverty, often going without food.

Despite having endured these hardships, a female friend called Midžić “the nicest person I knew.” According to another friend, he was “passionate about music,” and “loved editing video clips.” So, when the opportunity arose in 2013 to edit video professionally for the NGO Solidarnost, Midžić eagerly accepted. One of his professors asserts that “editing those documentaries changed him,” and several other interviewees echoed this sentiment, saying the previously outspoken and social young man they knew had started avoiding them after his work with Solidarnost began.

¹⁰¹ Borum, R. (2011) Radicalisation into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, no. 4: 8.

¹⁰² For example, see: Veldhuis, T. and Staun, J. (2009) *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model*. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendale. Available from: https://www.diiis.dk/files/media/publications/import/islamist_radicalisation.veldhuis_and_staun.pdf [Accessed 8 January 2017].

¹⁰³ Borum, R. (2011) Radicalisation into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, no. 4: 9.

¹⁰⁴ See: Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 85.

¹⁰⁵ *U Siriji poginuli bh. Državljeni Ines Midžić i Naser Arnaut?* (11 March 2018) *Dnevni Avaz*. Available from: <http://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/359785/u-siriji-poginuli-bh-drzavljeni-ines-midzic-i-naser-arnaut> [Accessed 20 March 2018].

So, what was it about this job that triggered a radicalisation process in Midžić? Solidarnost, the organisation he was working for, helps vulnerable and persecuted Muslims around the world through humanitarian aid, and the videos he was editing highlighted their plight.¹⁰⁶ Notably, Solidarnost has no affiliation with Salafism; but for Midžić, just being exposed to the suffering of Muslims seems to have been a key factor in his radicalisation. Soon after beginning his editing job, Midžić's professor "noticed that he started using religious words in everyday conversations" and was spending time with a religious studies professor.

The example of Ines Midžić reflects what Allen et al. found, that "there is a strong relationship between perceived grievances and violent extremism" – an issue they explored in the context of the "legitimising 'single narrative'" put forth by extremist groups, "which binds together multiple sources of resentment and proposes a simple solution."¹⁰⁷ The term 'single narrative' was introduced in 2004 to describe the ideology promoted by al-Qaeda, which framed the suffering of Muslims around the world as a Western conspiracy. According to Staniforth, in the UK, "this single narrative, when combined with complex social and economic factors, served to manipulate individuals towards extremist perspectives."¹⁰⁸ In Midžić's case, underlying factors such as the discrimination and poverty he experienced in childhood may have made him more susceptible to the influences of such a narrative, the themes of which were validated by what he saw in the videos he edited for Solidarnost. As Schmid points out, any narrative is essentially "a collection of stories that illustrate...something we would all like to believe to be true," and for some vulnerable individuals, the tale of redemption for those who have been persecuted or oppressed can be seductive.¹⁰⁹

The death of **Samir Begić** in February 2014 was a leading news story in BiH, and sent shockwaves across the region of Bosanska Krajina, especially in the small town of Bužim, where Begić was from. Bužim is a wealthy village featuring large, luxurious houses, and while the Begić home is not the largest, by Bosnian standards they live quite well. So, why did the 25-year old join an ISIS unit in Syria?

Our team met with a friend of the family who knew Begić well and described him as "a really nice guy, very quiet and well behaved." This man said he "never noticed any extremism in [Begić's] behaviour. He did not look like a Salafi, until suddenly he started praying differently in the mosque. Shortly after that...he left for Syria." According to this man, Begić's parents "were devastated" and tried to persuade him not to go to Syria by reminding him of the hadith in which "Muhammed a.s. forbids children to go to war without their parents' consent." But his father told the man that Begić had been convinced by someone he referred to as "sheikh" that he did not need parental approval.

It was local Salafi leader Bilal Bosnić that Begić had come to see as a "sheik." The testimony of witness B2 in the trial of Bosnić, who Begić knew from childhood, confirms some of what Begić's father told our researchers about sudden changes in his son's behaviour, and explains the mechanisms of recruitment that led Begić to become radicalized into violent extremism and to eventually fight for ISIS. In fact, his recruitment was used by the Prosecution in the Bosnić trial to

¹⁰⁶ To see the work of the organisation, view their website at: <http://www.solidarnost-bosnia.com/>

¹⁰⁷ Allen, H. et al. (2015) Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review, 31. RUSI. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf

¹⁰⁸ Staniforth, A. and Sampson, F. (2013) The Routledge Companion to UK Terrorism. Abingdon: Routledge.

¹⁰⁹ Schmid, A. P. (2014) Al-Qaeda's 'Single Narrative' and Attempts to Develop Counter-Narratives: The State of Knowledge. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, p. 7-8. Available from: <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/Schmid-Al-Qaeda%27s-Single-Narrative-and-Attempts-to-Develop-Counter-Narratives-January-2014.pdf> [Accessed January 9, 2017].

illustrate the recruiting techniques used by his network.¹¹⁰ Witness B2 also characterised Begić as “a nice guy.... [who] suddenly he changed and withdrew” after meeting new people. This witness felt that Begić had “been creeping [toward] Islamic radicalism, through the media and TV,” at the time that these people entered his life and further influenced him. It’s unclear what first attracted Begić to radical ideas, but witness B2 testified that after attending a lecture by Bosnić, Begić “started talking only about that.”

This witness also described a personal experience that might have been a pull factor in Begić’s radicalization: early in Begić’s adoption of Salafism, he asked his girlfriend – whom he loved very much – to start wearing hijab and change her name “because her name was modern and did not fit Islamic regulations.” She rejected his request, refused to follow him on the path toward extremism, and left him. For a while, Begić apparently agonized over this, and witness B2 felt that extremist actors in his life had “taken advantage of [Begić’s] moment of weakness.”

Witness B2 also testified about how a network of Salafi “brothers” had expanded across the Krajina and then through the Federation, eventually bringing Begić into contact with Ramo Graović, a foreign fighter recruiter who lived in Austria and was the “right hand of Bilal Bosnić.” According to witness B2, Begić constantly posted on his Facebook profile about activities linked to Bosnić and Graović and discussed how his “cell” in Bosanska Krajina was “connected with other groups in Sarajevo, Zenica, Tuzla.” Begić, a graphic designer, was tasked with designing the emblem for a flag to be flown by those departing to Syria from BiH and told the witness that fighters would return with the flag to BiH “to establish the Sharia and the Caliphate.”

According to witness B2, it was clear that Begić had become mentally disturbed. Begić confided to this witness that he had lied to his parents about being involved in humanitarian work; and he admitted selling drugs at one point while working at a coffee shop. But, Begić felt his Salafi “brothers” had inspired him to change, and moreover, seemed to believe that they had helped him find purpose. A psychiatrist our researchers spoke with, who followed the Bosnić trial and takes a special interest in matters of radicalisation, told us that Begić’s is a typical story. It turns out that the “transformation of the ‘drug seller in the café’ into extremist with the help of skilled and experienced local leaders and gurus,” is not all that unique. According to this psychiatrist, “all the elements are there in Samir’s story – the need to belong, and ‘brothers’ who provide all sorts of help, material as well as spiritual. Potential holes in the individual’s identity are filled with a strong sense of belonging, a group identity, and a divine goal.” What’s more, the psychiatrist told us, the Bosnić trial demonstrated that the recruitment of followers (and fighters) by extremists “and brainwashing them through lectures, video presentations, and secret meetings” is organized and systemized, and is designed to intersect with the vulnerabilities of certain target audiences.

Indeed, research has shown identity formation to be among the factors most strongly correlated with radicalisation into violent extremism, and Allen, et al. reviewed studies going back to the early 1980s that have made this link. They note that “where identity is as yet unformed (especially in adolescence) or complex (e.g. among second-generation immigrants) it can become a significant source of vulnerability. Causes which promote activism in the pursuit of high ideals, the reformation of society, or correcting grave injustices are potentially powerful solutions to “the needs driving” individuals’ search for meaning and identity.”¹¹¹ In the case of

¹¹⁰ All quotes related to the trial are drawn from the case Judgement. See: Judgement, *Prosecutor v. Husein Bosnić*, No. S1 2 K 017968 15K, 5 November 2015. An English translation is available at the Court of BiH website: <http://www.sudbih.gov.ba/pretraga/odluke?keyword=Bosni%C4%B7> [Accessed 12 January 2018].

¹¹¹ Allen, H. et al. (2015) Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review, 18. RUSI. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf

the young men who came to surround “sheikh” Bilal Bosnić, there was an undeniable social element to their ideological activism. Azinović and Jusić discovered that Bosnić regularly performed *ruqya* – sometimes known as Qur’anic healing – on would-be followers and established a makeshift “spiritual rejuvenation centre” in his home. What’s more, it appears that some individuals who later became foreign fighters first contacted Bosnić for healing in order to break free from substance abuse.¹¹²

Grappling with the question of why the process of identity formation makes some people more susceptible to radicalisation than others, Wiktorowicz developed a useful model that attempts to illustrate the importance of certain intersecting factors and highlights the role of a “persuasion mechanism.” In the specific context of religious extremism, he discusses three conditions – a cognitive opening, a “religious seeking,” and frame alignment – that precede a fourth, socialisation, at which point an individual undergoes the kind of identity-construction that facilitates their indoctrination into a new ideology.¹¹³ According to Wiktorowicz, even individuals who reject a religious movement as “extreme” or “irrational” can, when faced with a personal crisis, experience “a ‘cognitive opening’ that shakes certainty in previously accepted beliefs and renders an individual more receptive” to radicalising influences.¹¹⁴ In the case of Samir Begić, it is possible that his girlfriend’s decision to end their relationship just as he began exploring a new religious identity may have represented such a crisis.

Individuals like Begić, who regularly attended mosque, may be especially predisposed to the “religious seeking” Wiktorowicz describes – wherein “an individual searches ‘for some satisfactory system of religious meaning to interpret and resolve his discontent.’” When a prospective adherent is thus open to new belief systems, radicalised members of extremist groups may “foster ‘guided religious seeking,’” by involving the person in activities related to the movement and/or helping them “‘shop around’ and sample different religious products while subtly guiding him or her toward the conclusion that the movement ideology is the most reasonable and appealing.” Wiktorowicz notes that this “latter strategy is typically more effective,” because if recruiters are shrewd enough, their recruits have a sense of personal agency and empowered choice-making.¹¹⁵

But subtle suggestions made even by respected mentors or cohorts may not have near the power as those made by someone widely viewed as a healer; and in the case of Bilal Bosnić, whose cult developed in part around his rumoured gifts of spiritual healing, this may have been a powerful enticement to be part of his inner circle. This factor would particularly influence the process of socialisation, in which “well-attested psychological phenomena such as ‘group shift’ (where attitudes move towards the group’s centre of gravity), the need for social approval... and the influence of charismatic individuals” are at play.¹¹⁶

The story of **Dino Pečenковиć** is in many ways an outlier. Despite having lived in a Salafi community, he self-de-radicalised and became estranged from his family. Meanwhile, his mother, father, and brother departed for Syria, and when Pečenковиć spoke with our research team in late October 2017, he said his brother had been killed there. His father, Edin, is on Interpol’s Red Notice list. Reflecting on the process of his family’s radicalisation, Pečenковиć cited a traumatic

¹¹² Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 64.

¹¹³ Wiktorowicz, Q. (20 October 2003) *Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam*. Department of International Studies, Rhodes College. Available from: <http://insct.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Wiktorowicz.Joining-the-Cause.pdf> [Accessed 14 January 2017].

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 7.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 9.

¹¹⁶ Allen, H. et al. (2015) *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*, 19. RUSI. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf

event in his father's life as decisive. "My father was a communist, and then in 1997, he fell from the roof of the house to the cement floor of the courtyard, and that's how it all started. After that, he began going to the mosque. First, he was a normal believer. I mean, he just went to the regular mosque. After a while, he got to know some local Salafis."

Asked if he knows who influenced his father's radicalisation, Pečenković mentioned Bilal Bosnić,¹¹⁷ but also two professors from the Islamic Pedagogical Faculty of Bihać, who Pečenković says urged his father to accept extremist beliefs. Soon, his father imposed Salafi lifestyle prescriptions on the family. His mother welcomed this change and "was among the first women in Bihać to start wearing niqab." In 2008, his parents made the decision to move to Gornja Maoča, the Salafi enclave in northern BiH infamous for producing high numbers of foreign fighters.¹¹⁸

Pečenković offers a rare and valuable insider's account of life in Gornja Maoča. He told researchers that he did learn to enjoy certain aspects of the communal nature of life there, structured by strict religious laws, after initially resisting both the ideology and lifestyle of Salafism because he was in love with a Catholic girl from Croatia. Pečenković now says Gornja Maoča offers "a nice life, for those who like a rural lifestyle." Still, he describes himself as rebellious and claims he never respected certain rules – such as restrictions on which books to read or prohibitions on watching television or playing videogames. But there were also other features of life in Gornja Maoča that Pečenković could not reconcile, including what he characterised as illegal arrests and maltreatment. "One guy was arrested for alleged espionage. They detained him in a house, and then harassed him and exposed him to various kinds of abuse."

While his disappointment with leaders in Gornja Maoča, along with Pečenković's generally rebellious nature, may have played a role in his self-de-radicalisation, it is also linked to his arrest as an accessory to the 2012 terrorist attack on the American Embassy in Sarajevo. While Pečenković claims he had no prior knowledge of the impending attack, he drove attacker Mevlid Jašarević from Gornja Maoča to Sarajevo on the day he attacked the Embassy. Pečenković spent several months in prison after his arrest, which he says was a wake-up call for him regarding the danger of Salafism. He cooperated with police and prosecutors and was never charged, and since 2012, has lived in Bihać. By all accounts, Pečenković appears to be totally de-radicalised, and made continuous efforts to emphasise to our research team that he is no longer at all religious.

The case of Dino Pečenković may not be typical, but the context of his self-de-radicalisation makes recent research on this phenomenon worth examining. Muhanna-Matar, for example, took an inside-out approach to research on de-radicalisation, challenging "the state-led religious rehabilitation approach" by exploring the pathways followed by Salafists in Tunisia who, without exposure to state-led programs, "shifted from being radical – belonging to, or supporting, Jihadi-Salafi groups – to...adopting a reformist interpretation of Salafism that denounces violence and supports political engagement."¹¹⁹ She asserts that the prevailing approach, which "aims to correct the mindset of radicals through replacing their absolutist Salafi/Jihadi ideology with an absolutist secular liberal ideology" has failed to appreciate that "the shift from one disposition to another is arguably not comprehensive, linear, or entrenched." Linking self-de-radicalisation with

¹¹⁷ Pečenković testified in the trial of Bilal Bosnić, and stressed to researchers that Bosnić had been a key player in recruiting fighters for Syria.

¹¹⁸ For example, see: Azinović, V. and Jusić, M. (2015) The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 40.

¹¹⁹ Muhanna-Matar, A. (2017) The limit-experience and self-deradicalisation: the example of radical Salafi youth in Tunisia. *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10, no. 3 (2017): 453-475, 2.

the notion of problematisation put forth by Foucault in his theory of critique and experience, Muhanna-Matar describes it as “a critique of self in relation to others [that] does not mean complete destruction and denial of the radical identity” but a testing of normative assumptions.¹²⁰

In other words, the complete de-radicalisation displayed by Pečenković, in which he has rejected religion altogether, may represent an extreme outcome; but there is much to be learned from stories of self-de-radicalisation, which Muhanna-Matar contends all feature a “limit-experience” – which, in the simplest of terms, might be thought of as a breaking point “that tears the subject from itself.”¹²¹ For Pečenković, his arrest in the wake of Jašarević’s terrorist attack appears to have served as this factor. And indeed, Schmid has noted that “radicals might change their ways not due to push factors associated with incentives offered by de-radicalisation programmes but also as a result of more or less independent pull factors.”¹²²

4. ‘AT-RISK’ COMMUNITIES

Previous research on radicalisation in BiH has been focused on Muslim extremism, and since 2013, on the Muslim foreign fighter phenomenon specifically. Thus, the at-risk communities discussed here, which are all in the Federation of BiH, are those known to intelligence sources and researchers as Salafi strongholds that have produced high numbers of foreign fighters. Places that may be particularly vulnerable to other extremisms, such as ethnic nationalism, were not within the scope of this research and were therefore not a focus of this study. But, given the political dynamics in BiH, still-unresolved narratives of the 1991-1995 war, and concerns that extremism is rising generally, a project that seeks to map community susceptibility to all the various radicalising forces in BiH may be highly instructive.

To a large degree, the geography of Salafi extremism in BiH is linked to wartime history. During the 1991-1995 war, *mujahideen* – some of whom had been radicalised in Afghanistan – began arriving in BiH and setting up training camps in remote mountain locations near Zenica. Eventually, these fighters together with Bosnian volunteers were formed into a special detachment known as the El-Mujahid Unit, which regularly engaged militarily in the area between Zenica and Tuzla.¹²³ When the war ended, a number of *mujahideen* chose to remain in the country and marry local women; and some established themselves, alongside other Salafists, in and around the isolated mountain villages they had encountered while fighting in central and northeast BiH.¹²⁴ It is no coincidence that this is where the highest numbers of foreign fighter departures to Syria and Iraq were recorded, with at least a quarter of would-be fighters thought to have temporarily or permanently lived in these Salafi communities.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Ibid. 6.

¹²¹ Foucault, M. (1991) Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori. Trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito. New York: Semiotexte, 31. The concept of a limit-experience was developed by Foucault, along with his fellow French philosophers Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot. Foucault explained it as “a point in life which lies as close as possible to the impossibility of living” (Ibid.). Martin Jay described a limit-experience this way: “a curiously contradictory mixture of self-expansion and self-annihilation, immediate, proactive spontaneity and fictional retrospection, personal inwardness and communal interaction.” See: Jay, M. (1998) Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

¹²² Schmid, A. P. (2013) Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review. ICCT Research Paper. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, p. 44. Available from: <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf> [Accessed 13 January 2018].

¹²³ For more on the role of foreign *mujahideen* in the 1991-1995 Bosnian War, see: Azinović, V. (2007) Al Qaeda in Bosnia: Myth or Reality?. Sarajevo/Prague: Radio Free Europe.

¹²⁴ Some foreign *mujahideen* received citizenship in BiH in the immediate post-war years; but after the September 11th terrorist attack in New York City, the international security framework shifted and BiH rescinded this citizenship from many of these former fighters.

¹²⁵ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 37.

Salafi settlements in mountainous northeast BiH reflect the tendency of many extremists to sequester themselves from mainstream society. But over time, Salafism has “increasingly spread from traditional and isolated enclaves into larger towns and suburban areas” in BiH.¹²⁶ Partly facilitating this are Salafi citizens’ associations, often funded from abroad, meant to amplify Salafi messaging and attract followers; which are now in “bigger urban centres like Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, and Bihac.”¹²⁷ Of course, while person-to-person contact has been found to be the primary mode of radicalisation in BiH, there are certain communities, beyond the geographical context – such as prison inmates or disenfranchised youth – that may face a unique vulnerability to Internet-based recruitment. As the attention of security agencies has heightened, Salafi ideologues, and especially extremist leaders of violent groups, have grown more cautious about in-person recruitment and have turned to Internet and social media platforms. Still, in BiH, previous research has indicated that Internet and social media platforms “are secondary to traditional social and family ties,” as radicalising forces.¹²⁸ Thus, the physical network of Salafi-linked NGOs and Salafi settlements in BiH, and their geographical reach, remain key elements of the extremist movement in a way that may not be reflected in other countries where the Internet is considered a *primary* radicalising influence.

The role of these Salafi networks in the recruitment and radicalisation process in BiH is part of what blurs the line between non-violent conservatism and violent extremism. Earlier research has determined that person-to-person interactions with similar religious actors played a significant role in the recruitment of every Salafist participant, both violent and non-violent.¹²⁹ This was reflected in this study as well, and each of the three men highlighted in case studies above were radicalised in a process that began through interactions with non-violent groups. As these cases illustrate, the important and lingering P/CVE and policy question of why some non-violent Salafists become vulnerable to recruitment into violent groups is hard to answer with certainty. Thus, identifying which communities or individuals within the spectrum of Salafism are at risk is incredibly difficult, and it shouldn’t be surprising that participants in this research often conflated violent and non-violent Salafi adherents. This also echoes research findings that the Bosnian public, including most Bosnian Muslims, “see almost all Salafists as radical.”¹³⁰

And so, unlike most international contexts, in which the topic of recruitment is discussed mostly as it pertains to *violent* extremism, professionals dealing with these issues in BiH have come to view recruitment into both violent and non-violent extremism as concerns. When violent extremist groups in BiH came under the increased scrutiny of security agencies after individuals began departing to the battlefields of Syria and Iraq, their connection to Salafism rightly became a central security issue. One police source felt that authorities had successfully “applied additional pressure after the law criminalising fighting in foreign wars was adopted. And it is obvious that repressive measures” forced recruiters to change their tactics. But if recruitment into *non-violent* Salafism is seen as a threat-in-the-making, repressive measures alone cannot be effective, given democratic ideals and religious and human rights.

The framing used by the security and police representatives our team interviewed, along with some psychologists, imams, teachers, and social workers – which linked recruitment and “at risk communities” but discussed recruitment into violent *and* non-violent “extremist groups” –

¹²⁶ Ibid. 38.

¹²⁷ Bećirević, E. (2016) Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 60. A great deal of the funding for these associations, which are almost always established as NGOs, comes from Gulf region sources. For more on this, see “Transnational Cooperation.”

¹²⁸ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 74.

¹²⁹ Bećirević, E. (2016) Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 66.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 39.

reflects the challenge in drawing a line between non-violent religious conservatism and violent religious fanaticism. As one interviewee from a police agency explained, “it is difficult to determine when non-violent ultraconservative rhetoric moves into hate speech and into incitement to violence.” This is further complicated by the fact that even non-violent Salafi adherents undergo a “radicalisation of behaviour” that shapes their “personal and group identity formation.”¹³¹ Additionally, differentiating between violent and non-violent groups in BiH, and establishing their impact on at-risk communities, has become even more challenging since a large number of Salafi leaders accepted inclusion into the official Islamic Community and thus moderated their (public) messaging.

There is little confusion about the risk posed by Salafi leaders who did *not* agree to inclusion in the IC, though, and young people living near *parajamaats* (unofficial congregations) were most often cited by interviewees as at risk of radicalisation. An imam from the Islamic Community identified “several *parajamaats* in the area around Tuzla, Zenica, Zavidovići, and Sarajevo,” as the most extreme, and told researchers that “we have no idea what is it they do now, nor how many members they have. After they refused inclusion...they basically went underground.”

Research participants from intelligence and police agencies were among those who expressed concern about the activities of *parajamaats* and their influence on youth living in their vicinity; but they also routinely told researchers that they worried about increasing numbers of urban youth from Sarajevo, Tuzla, and Zenica being attracted to non-violent Salafi narratives. An Islamic scholar explained that, “since their acceptance into the Islamic Community, [Salafists] have increased their online presence. But they are also much more present now in local communities, offering lectures. They are now much more organised. When they agreed to come under the umbrella of the IC... the agreement was that they can organise gatherings and lectures at non-IC premises if they tone their message down, but they don’t even respect that. In some towns where local imams are friendly to them, they even hold these lectures inside Islamic Community mosques.”¹³²

Security officials told researchers that urban centres like Sarajevo, Zenica, Tuzla, and Bihac were not the focus of Salafi preachers until just a few years ago, but that “spreading toward the cities gives them much better access to young people.” Yet interestingly, while the area around Bihac was a significant centre of recruitment for ISIS fighters until 2015, this appears to have hinged partly on the cult of personality that surrounded key recruiter Bilal Bosnić, and dissolved in his absence, and partly on the success of authorities in bringing Bosnić to justice. After a number of youth from the area departed to fight in Syria, and Bosnić was arrested (and eventually handed a seven-year prison sentence), police in Bihac began taking a more robust approach to their surveillance of local extremist elements. “We monitored them, followed them, invited them in for questioning. They were not immune to our intimidation techniques and stopped feeling safe, especially after the arrest of Bosnić.”

Pall and de Koning make some interesting and useful observations about Salafism that help explain the popularity and power Bosnić achieved in northwestern BiH, and also why the Salafi movement there essentially disintegrated after his arrest, noting that Salafism “is characterised by a loosely linked non-hierarchical network structure which usually mobilises in segments,” and that “formal institutions are not totally absent...rather they are not linked to a centralised

¹³¹ Bećirević, E. (2016) Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 95.

¹³² This was confirmed during a research visit to an official IC mosque in Zenica, where researchers attended a lecture given by a Salafi *da'i*.

structure.”¹³³ This affords a unique influence to individuals viewed as spiritual leaders (and in the case of Bosnić, he was also revered as a healer), whose authority “is based on their perceived profound knowledge of how religion was practiced by the Prophet himself.” Moreover, a “strong relationship between informality and trust” is part of why Salafists are “not only motivated by rational interests but also by a sense of fellowship or ‘brotherhood’.”¹³⁴

Our researchers visited two villages in the Bihać area, Miostrah and Stijena, previously known to have extremist *parajamaats*, to gauge the impact of increased police repression. What they found in Miostrah was a virtual ghost town, with no sign of violent or non-violent Salafists. In fact, even the official mosque was locked, and the imam was not at home. A local woman told researchers that, “over the past two years, the Salafists moved away; but not only them. Almost 80% of population has moved abroad.” In Stijena, there had again been a significant decrease in the Salafi population in recent years. A local man explained that “there are only a few of them now. There used to be many more living here. Some that still have addresses here work temporary jobs in Austria and Slovenia. Some others are engaged in cattle breeding.” Notably, he told researchers that villagers “don’t consider them to be a threat.”

The story of Bihać, where violent extremists found a foothold before they were apparently eradicated, may offer some lessons regarding the toxic power of charismatic leaders and the role of police and intelligence actors in affecting a community’s susceptibility to extremism. But while it is instructive to look at communities where levels of extremism have been or are high, it is also important to explore the dynamics at play in communities where levels of extremism are very low or almost non-existent. For example, no individuals departed from Goražde to fight in Syria, and a police inspector there told researchers that radicalisation simply “is not a security issue at all. We don’t have the problems the rest of the country has.” Nonetheless, he did confirm that the small number of Salafists who do live in Goražde, though they are believed to be non-violent, are under police observation. So, what makes Goražde unique?

Goražde, which is located in the eastern part of the Federation of BiH near the Sandžak region, is considered one of the most prosperous municipalities in the country. The municipality is majority Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) and accounts for the bulk of the population of Bosnian-Podrinje Canton. The mayor of the municipality claims that Goražde has the lowest *real* unemployment rate in BiH, at 17%.¹³⁵ It would make sense, then, to compare the unemployment rates of Goražde and areas of BiH that are affected by radicalisation; yet, any analysis or comparison of unemployment rates in BiH is complicated by the unreliability of official statistics due to the country’s sizeable grey economy. Indeed, unemployment rates in BiH have been described as “a subject of estimation at best.”¹³⁶

Still, Goražde’s rate of unemployment may not be as relevant as the way in which the municipality has gone about developing its economy in recent years, which has made it one of several “industrial clusters” in BiH. These clusters are located in places that feature “dynamic mayors or entrepreneurs, and strong links to Germany.”¹³⁷ In Goražde, this has translated into valuable trade

¹³³ Pall, Z. and de Koning, M. (2017) Being and Belonging in Transnational Salafism: Informality, Social Capital and Authority in European and Middle Eastern Salafi Networks. *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 1, 79 and 83.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 84.

¹³⁵ Jašar-Opardija, M. (11 March 2015) *Positivna priča: U Goraždu posla ima za sve koji hoće raditi*. N1. Available from: <http://ba.n1info.com/a30726/Vijesti/Vijesti/Positivna-prica-U-Gorazdu-posla-ima-za-sve-koji-hoce-raditi.html> [Accessed 5 January 2018].

¹³⁶ Efendić, A. and Hadžiahmetović, A. (2016) *Post-war Economic Transition in Bosnia and Herzegovina – A Challenging Transformation in State-Building and Democratization in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, eds., Soeren Keil and Valery Perry. Routledge, 119.

¹³⁷ *Balkan brakelights: From cluster bombs to industrial clusters*. (23 March 2013) The Economist. Available from: <https://www.economist.com/news/business/21574014-cluster-bombs-industrial-clusters-balkan-brakelights>

relationships with both Germany and Austria, which view short delivery times from Bosnian production facilities to European markets as an advantage over competitors further afield.¹³⁸

According to a politician from the area, “Goražde was not always a success story of economic progress. This is a town that was devastated by the war and its economic recovery was not easy.” He attributed the lack of radical influences in Goražde to two things: “[First], in a majority of Salafi circles, Muslims from Eastern Bosnia are not considered good raw material for accepting Salafi dogma. [Salafi missionaries] came after the war and were met with fierce resistance by the local population. We never had any *mujahideen* here during the war, so we didn’t owe them anything.... The other reason is that when a Gulf country offered to rebuild local mosques destroyed in the war, the consensus of Bosniak politicians and Islamic Community imams was that we would not accept their donation. We knew from the experience of other regions that mosque rebuilding comes with a price. The pattern was the same across Bosnia – first they rebuild mosques, then they start distributing their books, re-educating imams, and giving scholarships, and that’s how the shift from traditional Bosnian Islam to Salafism occurs.”

Eastern Bosnia has so far remained free from investment by Gulf region states, and this may be linked to the greater degree of hostility some Bosniaks in this part of the country express for Salafism, which is considered a Saudi import to BiH. The suspicion of a *quid pro quo* raised by the politician from Goražde is just one reflection of this. A researcher from our team also visited the central mosque in Goražde during the main Friday prayer, where he saw 15 to 20 Salafists praying, while people around them openly displayed disapproval.¹³⁹ This treatment by fellow Muslims during prayer, and the suspicion expressed by the wider community, may conceivably lead Salafists in Goražde to “see themselves as disadvantaged minorities who must constantly answer to other members of society,” as Salafists interviewed for previous research have.¹⁴⁰

Yet, if Salafists in Goražde view themselves as aggrieved or discriminated against, this does not appear to be predisposing them to radicalisation into violence, despite evidence that there is a “strong relationship between perceived grievances and violent extremism.”¹⁴¹ As Allen et al. note, however, the extent to which this relationship is *causative* is less clear; and it is ambiguity such as this that makes it so difficult to establish with any surety which communities are at risk, and when. Still, in visits to mosques across BiH – in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, Mostar, Bihać, Velika Kladuša, Bužim, Cazin, Sanski Most, and Bosanska Krupa – our researchers did find that non-violent Salafism is more entrenched in certain parts of the country than in others.

In a visit to Zenica, for example, the growing prevalence of Salafism was observable not only in the mosque but in the streets. Bosanska Krupa, in northwest BiH, is also seeing an increase in non-violent Salafism. The imam there spoke with researchers and said that he is friendly with local Salafi adherents, whom he does not consider a threat. He was specifically sceptical that they have recruited any other adherents, and characterised them as “mainly former drug addicts, from poor families, some with criminal records.” He expressed little worry that local Salafists “will have success in attracting many people to their circle,” remarking that Bosnians are “very stubborn people [who] do not like ideas that come from abroad and go against our traditions.” But not all imams were this confident that Bosnian traditions stand as such a bulwark against

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ One of the things that distinguishes Bosnian Islam from Salafism is the manner in which prayer is practiced.

¹⁴⁰ Bećirević, E. (2016) Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 79.

¹⁴¹ Allen, H. et al. (2015) Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review, 31. RUSI. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf

extremism, and some are quite concerned that non-violent Salafism is attracting more and more adherents in BiH.

5. LINKS TO ORGANISED CRIME

Among 14 police and intelligence sources we interviewed, half told us decisively, even before we asked, that there are no links between organised crime and extremism in BiH. The other half said they were aware or suspicious that such links exist but have no way to prove it. This inconsistency may, again, be due partly to the indistinct line between legally protected conservative religious proselytising and potentially criminal organising, which adds to ambiguity among officials regarding the legality of certain funding streams linked to Salafism in BiH. Bosnian law criminalises any financing of terrorism or foreign fighting, and a variety of related activities, including recruitment and organising; but the degree to which certain religious activities or organisations are viewed as forces of recruitment or radicalisation varies.

It is also possible that some security officials view organised crime as encompassing only more traditional regional smuggling and trafficking networks and not elements of what some authors have called the “trans-state Islamic network” that developed in the post-war space.¹⁴² Still, there have been cases in which prosecutors in BiH have linked Salafi extremism and organised crime, such as that of Muradif Hamzabegović – who was charged under organised crime statutes for his involvement in human trafficking. Hamzabegović, who received a six-year prison sentence, fled to Syria to avoid detention.¹⁴³

Some interviewees did acknowledge that funding from Gulf region countries may be supporting extremist elements in BiH. One source told researchers that “there is a possibility that the money [funding extremism] comes from the Ministry of Religion in Saudi Arabia. But air traffic between BiH and Gulf countries has increased, and we suspect that this money comes in the form of cash because we have not identified any illegal bank transactions.” This reflects a 2015 assessment by the Council of Europe’s Committee of experts on anti-money laundering measures and the financing of terrorism (MONEYVAL), which expressed concern about “the effectiveness of the system for control of the physical cross border transportation of currency” in BiH and noted that “competent authorities are not clear as to their powers,” despite recent efforts to harmonise entity- and federal-level legislation with EU standards.¹⁴⁴

Of course, the challenge for prosecutors of terrorism- and extremism-related cases lies in proving the existence of organised financial support from abroad for criminal activities in BiH, which is why prosecutors have rarely attempted to do so thus far. The first case in which prosecutors took this approach was that of Bilal Bosnić, when prosecutors tried to prove that financing for Bosnić’s organisation had originated in Kuwait. In the First Instance Judgment, the prosecution’s argument was accepted, but in the Appeals process, this part of the judgment was removed for the highly banal reason that the prosecution didn’t even include the “financing of a terrorist organisation” charge in Bosnić’s updated indictment. Some lawyers interviewed for this

¹⁴² For example, see: Grigorova Mincheva, L. and Robert Gurr, T. (2013) *Crime-Terror Alliances and the State: Ethnonationalist and Islamist challenges to regional security*. New York: Routledge. They explain that international identity networks “provide the basis for militant organizations,” sometimes by establishing criminal networks and sometimes by allying with already existing networks, creating more complex “hybrid networks.” See more on foreign involvement in domestic religious spaces in BiH in “Transnational Cooperation.”

¹⁴³ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 42.

¹⁴⁴ Council of Europe Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism. (17 September 2015) Report on Fourth Assessment Visit – Executive Summary: Bosnia and Herzegovina, No. MONEYVAL(2015)30 SUMM, p. 5. Available from: <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-fourth-assessment-visit-executive-summary-anti-money-launder/1680715b44> [Accessed 18 January 2018].

research said they believed this second indictment was formulated improperly for political reasons, for example telling researchers that, “[i]f they had confirmed a direct relationship between Kuwait and Bosnia and Herzegovina in relation to the financing of terrorism, that could have opened a Pandora’s Box and put a strain on diplomatic relations with Kuwait.” This is an area in which more research would be helpful to establish the facts.

6. TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

According to an August 2017 report published by the EU Institute for Security Studies, “the slowdown of the EU enlargement process in recent years has emboldened Turkey and the Gulf States to further intensify their presence in the Western Balkans,” but Western Balkans states have also “welcomed the increased political presence of non-EU actors as a way of widening their foreign policy options. Increasingly weary about the uncertain prospect of the European project more broadly, states in the region have sought to diversify their partnerships to hedge their bets.”¹⁴⁵ The EU has also significantly cut foreign direct investment (FDI) in BiH, halving it in just three years from 2010 to 2013; and from 2014 to 2015 alone, overall FDI in BiH fell 39%. By June 2017, BiH had dropped to the bottom of the region in the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business ranking and a report by the US State Department called the Bosnian economy “the least competitive economy in Southeast Europe.”¹⁴⁶ This has opened the door to new foreign influences and has led to active development partnerships and trade agreements between BiH and Gulf region countries (among others), paving the way for billions of dollars of promised investments. Concerns have been raised, including by some of the sources interviewed for this research, that many of these recent investment commitments come with costly strings attached.

6.1. THE INFLUENCE OF GULF STATES AND SAUDI ARABIA

Gulf state investment, which is concentrated in Sarajevo and Zenica and includes everything from mosque construction to commercial real estate development to support for NGO-run schools, has been linked to the surge in Salafi proselytization in BiH. The issue of foreign funding for social and educational organisations in BiH, particularly from Saudi Arabia, was raised by the EU Directorate-General for External Policies in a 2013 study, which emphasised that “education funded by Islamic charities [has] played an important role” in the spread of Salafism, especially in the immediate post-war period.¹⁴⁷ And Morrison notes that this aid has come with conditions. “Saudi money has indeed helped fund social programmes and reconstruction of mosques, but the character of Islamic places of worship has changed significantly as a consequence.”¹⁴⁸

While much of what Saudi Arabia has spent in BiH has been under the cover of “aid” – outlaying some USD 500 million between 1992 and 2001 – much of this money funded projects and activities that set the foundation for the spread of Salafism in the country, including by offering

¹⁴⁵ Lange, S. Nechev, Z. and Trauner, F. eds. (2017) *Resilience in the Western Balkans*. Issue Report No. 36. Paris: EUISS, 53-55.

¹⁴⁶ US Department of State. (August 2017) Bosnia and Herzegovina: 2017 Investment Climate Statement. Available from: <https://ba.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/270/2017/08/BiH-ICS-FINAL-2017.pdf>. See World Bank Doing Business data online at: <http://www.doingbusiness.org/data> [Accessed 2 March 2018].

¹⁴⁷ European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union. (June 2013) Salafist/Wahhabite Financial Support to Educational, Social and Religious Institutions. Policy Department Study PE 457.136. Available from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/457136/EXPO-AFET_ET\(2013\)457136_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/457136/EXPO-AFET_ET(2013)457136_EN.pdf)

¹⁴⁸ Morrison, K. (February 2008) Wahhabism in the Balkans. Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 5. Available from: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/50179/2008_March_Wahabism.pdf [Accessed 18 January 2018].

scholarships to Bosnian religious students at conservative Saudi institutions. In 2011, as the Saudi aid program in BiH came to an end, “the Islamic Development Bank, Al Baraka, and other Saudi Arabian investors formed a group valued at USD 50 million” to focus on infrastructure development. Since then, Gulf investors have committed to a number of particularly high-dollar projects across the region.¹⁴⁹

It is nearly impossible to measure the precise degree to which Gulf investments, and Saudi funding particularly, have solidified the foothold of Salafism in BiH or, even more concerningly, flowed into the coffers of violent extremist groups; but a recent assessment by the European Parliament estimates that “the Saudi kingdom has allegedly spent hundreds of millions of euros for the Muslim cause [in the Western Balkans], mobilising volunteer Islamic fighters, providing humanitarian help and facilitating clandestine arms transfers.”¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, security officials interviewed for this research offered varied assessments of how this foreign funding impacts the domestic threat of extremism. For example, while there may be an incentive for unemployed youth to join Salafi circles in order to gain employment in Gulf-owned companies or Gulf-backed NGOs – many of which prefer to employ Salafists, especially if they speak Arabic – some police sources pointed out that this can also serve as an incentive for radicalised individuals to at least temporarily disengage from violence. A police official told researchers that “some former Syrian fighters have found jobs with companies run by Arab businessman. I know that two of them now work as drivers. They earn decent money and do not have time to be engaged in *parajamaats* or be obsessed with proselytising and recruiting new members.”

However, other police sources are not convinced that Gulf state investments contribute at all to disengagement from violence, and view Gulf-funded enterprises as a threat. In fact, two police officers interviewed in Mostar expressed concern that they are a cover for criminal activities, and explained that, in the past, extremist groups in the area “were financed through Salafi NGOs and private businesses; mainly businesses selling and fixing mobile phones and IT equipment. But in the last year, they’ve changed their modus operandi. Now they are opening tourist agencies, most of which are Sarajevo-based with branches and coordinators in Mostar. But foreigners are in charge of the logistics. Most of them arrive here in expensive cars, with dark windows, and their drivers are people from Salafi groups they trust. And we have seen some indications that they are not engaged only in the business of tourism...”

Our researchers also spoke with members of the Bosnian public as well as some Bosniak intellectuals (see Annex 1), many of whom spoke openly against Gulf state real estate projects and some of whom earnestly warned that plans to build a number of resorts in BiH meant for Gulf region tourists could contribute to the radicalisation of Bosnian Muslims. Similar caution has been shared publicly by a number of intellectuals, including by respected Arabic literature professor Esad Duraković, who gave a dramatic 2016 interview in which he asserted that there was “an international project to create a “Muslim land’ in the Federation of BiH.”¹⁵¹ Experts and Islamic scholars interviewed for this research indicated that they felt Arab investments were far more dangerous for BiH than for Serbia or Montenegro, because they believe BiH is seen as fertile ground for the imposition of Salafism while non-Muslim majority countries in the region are not.

¹⁴⁹ Boduszynski, M. P. (2015) The Gulf and the Balkans: Islam, Investment, and Influence. *Gulf State Analytics Monthly Monitor Report*.

¹⁵⁰ European Parliament. (2017) Saudi Arabia in the Western Balkans. *At a Glance*. Available from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/614582/EPRS_ATA\(2017\)614582_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/614582/EPRS_ATA(2017)614582_EN.pdf) [Accessed 20 January 2018].

¹⁵¹ Duraković, E. (30 November 2016) *Arapima prodajemo najvrednije resurse*. N1. Available from: <http://ba.n1info.com/a125102/Vijesti/Vijesti/Esad-Durakovic-Arapima-prodajemo-najvrednije-resurse.html> [Accessed 20 January 2018].

One expert who researches the issue of foreign investment in BiH noted that “in the hotels and shopping centres they build in Bosnia, they forbid serving alcohol, for example. They have a preference for employees who are Salafist, which gives young people who are not Salafists an incentive to change their lifestyle in order to get a job.” He expressed concern that with more investment, more young people will be motivated by the possibility of employment to adopt or accept Salafism. “That is just something [these investors] would not dream of doing in [predominantly Orthodox] Serbia,” another expert added, “in Serbia, investments are just that – investments. But in Bosnia, investments from the Gulf always come with demands to follow their religious teachings and...their lifestyle.” And indeed, these investments are focused in areas of BiH with the largest Muslim majorities, primarily in Sarajevo and Visoko, which seems to indicate that, at the least, local religious dynamics are a consideration of Arab investors in BiH.

While links between Saudi projects and the spread of ultra-conservatism in BiH are widely accepted, not all the individuals interviewed for this research associated what they viewed as mere real estate business with any larger social engineering objectives. One scholar rebuked the notion, saying that “people who see any danger in that have a provincial mind. It is not only investments they are worried about, they are bothered by Arab tourists, burkas, people who look different. And it seems to me that this bothers local Muslims more than Christians! Why is this a problem? Why is it not a problem to see that on the streets of London and Vienna, and it is a problem in Sarajevo?” Another interviewee made similar comments and emphasised the “need to distinguish between respectable businessman who come to invest, and *parajamaats* and extremists who are a security threat. We cannot put everybody in the same basket. That’s just racist.”

The influence of Gulf region investment in BiH and the Western Balkans does not manifest only in domestic spaces, though, and the network of regional Salafists with a Gulf education has had wider impacts. Intelligence sources indicate that Bosnian diaspora in Vienna, Sweden, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Germany are linked to Salafists in BiH. And some extremist networks inside BiH raise money through a European lecture circuit organised by Salafi-oriented members in these diaspora communities.¹⁵²

6.2. TIES TO THE DIASPORA

Several key figures have acted as bridges between European diaspora and Salafi groups in BiH. In the context of violent extremism specifically, the most significant of these has been Vienna-born takfiri ideologist Nedžad Balkan, known as Abu Muhammed, who has roots in the town of Tutin, in the Serbian region of Sandžak. After completing studies in Medina, Balkan returned to Vienna preaching among the most extreme versions of takfirism, and had a profound influence on violent factions of the Salafi movement in the Balkans; not only in BiH, but in Montenegro and the Sandžak as well. Indeed, it was the aim of Balkan and his followers to reach Muslims who understood Bosnian wherever they were “and not just Muslims living in Bosnia and Herzegovina.”¹⁵³ In early 2017, he and 14 other takfirists were arrested by Austrian police.

¹⁵² Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 57-61.

¹⁵³ Hećimović, E. (2008) *Radical movements – a challenge for moderate Balkan-Islam?* Austrian Armed Forces: 93-109. Available from: http://www.bundesheer.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/rel_exterm_vs_fried_beweg_05_radical_movements_moderate_balkan_islam_e_hecimovic_17.pdf [Accessed 18 January 2018].

Though Balkan's teachings are so extreme that he did not have a significant number of followers in BiH, his arrest is generally viewed as beneficial to undermining the activities of the most violent extremists and sympathisers in the country. But one intelligence source interviewed by our researchers indicated that extremist links with Austria remain strong: "We are not talking about one person or a couple people. There is a very strong infrastructure of extremist organisations in Austria and it can't be dismantled overnight with a couple of arrests." This aligns with the findings of Azinović and Jusić, that a network of Bosnian diaspora in Austria and Germany "plays an important role in radicalisation and provides logistic support" for extremist activities in BiH. They note that diaspora communities "living outside their original identity corpus are easily blamed by the majority community surrounding them for real or imagined injustices," which can be a mobilising narrative for radicalisation.¹⁵⁴

The *non*-violent Salafi movement in BiH has strong links to another European country – Sweden. The Swedish Dawah Organisation, for example, offers key support to some Salafi groups in BiH. Saudi Sheikh Rabee al-Madkhalee, the leader of a conservative but non-violent branch of Salafism, has a number of followers among the Bosnian diaspora in Sweden.¹⁵⁵ And Pall and de Koning point out that in fact "most of the preachers active in Europe are originally from Arab countries."¹⁵⁶ They argue that the decentralised and informal nature of the Salafi movement, combined with "effective missionary activity, or 'missionisation'... [and] the presence of Muslim communities with immigrant backgrounds in Europe" helps facilitate the spread of Salafism.¹⁵⁷

This "transposability of the religious message" means the Salafi movement does not require formal structures or hierarchies to gain traction in a new location, and that it "easily adapts to different socio-political contexts."¹⁵⁸ But the Internet – an inherently transnational platform – is indisputably tied to the spread of extremist ideologies of all kinds; and given the decentralised character of Salafism, can serve as a particularly important tool, not only for presenting and sharing ideas but also for developing social capital. In this context, the potential threat of Internet-based radicalisation in BiH is not just that explicitly extremist voices such as that of Nedžad Balkan can be amplified, but that the less extreme rhetoric of figures like al-Madkhalee may become normalised in online communities where social capital plays a role in developing trust, which heightens the willingness of members to adopt a collective identity.¹⁵⁹ When that identity is radical relative to the mainstream, this can lead to what Bailey and Edwards call *microradicalisation*, or the "small movements that contribute to parts of society or state becoming more conflictual or less harmonious with other parts of the social whole." Functionally, this amounts to "changes in aggregate attitudes."¹⁶⁰

Indeed, one could argue that nationalist rhetoric in Bosnian politics has already grown more brazen as a result of increased far-right online community-making that is often driven by actors outside of BiH. A mapping project undertaken in 2017 by BIRN found more than 60 sites based in the Western Balkans "promoting the idea of ethnically pure nation states, neo-Nazism, violent homophobia and other radical right-wing policies," run by a new generation of regional

¹⁵⁴ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 58.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 70.

¹⁵⁶ Pall, Z. and de Koning, M. (2017) Being and Belonging in Transnational Salafism: Informality, Social Capital and Authority in European and Middle Eastern Salafi Networks. *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 1, 85.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 79-81.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 99. On the concepts of transposability and missionisation, Pall and de Koning refer to Csordas. See: Csordas, T. (2007) Introduction: Modalities of Transnational Transcendence. *Anthropological Theory* 7, no. 3: 259-272.

¹⁵⁹ Grabner-Kräuter, S. and Bitter, S. (2015) Trust in online social networks: A multifaceted perspective. *Forum for Social Economics* 44, no. 1, 57 and 60.

¹⁶⁰ Bailey, G. and Edwards, P. (2017) Rethinking 'Radicalisation': Microradicalisations and Reciprocal Radicalisation as an Intertwined Process. *Journal for Deradicalization* 10, 265.

extremists who are “even more radical than those who split up the former Yugoslavia.”¹⁶¹ This means a renewed and intensified focus on carving mini-states out of BiH. Indeed, BIRN reported that of the groups it analysed, almost all have transnational links to similar groups in Europe and “all agree on wanting a piece of Bosnia” – a goal that is common to Croat and Serb nationalists but is also espoused by some groups aligned with radical Islam.¹⁶²

7. CONCLUSION

BiH features a unique and complex political, social, and religious context in which to examine the effects of and interplay between various forms of extremism. Yet, these dynamics also complicate research on radicalisation, which is burdened in any environment with the challenge of translating and defining a *process*, and one that can be bi-directional and highly unpredictable. Still, by building on previous studies, this research was able to identify certain trends, as well as some new opportunities for policy interventions and further study. While recent international attention on ISIS, the foreign fighter phenomenon, and the return of those fighters to their home countries has led to a laser-like focus on the Salafi movement in BiH, this has also resulted in a relative lack of attention on other radical elements, in BiH and elsewhere.

There have been no departures of foreign fighters to Syria from BiH since 2016, security sources report that no returned fighters pose a threat of violence, and the Ministry of Security has highlighted the need not for repressive measures against these individuals but for a “project of de-radicalisation.”¹⁶³ At the same time, the Ministry still identifies “terrorism in all its manifestations” as the most pressing test of domestic security, along with “forms of extremism that aim to jeopardise the territorial integrity” of BiH, including *Četnički Ravnogorski Pokret*, the modern Chetnik movement.¹⁶⁴

Regardless of the extremist ideology to which an individual is attracted, anyone who becomes radicalised is motivated by a distinctive combination and balance of macro- and micro-level factors. Still, in BiH *findings strongly point to identity as common key factor in the radicalisation processes of Salafists*.¹⁶⁵ Azinović and Jusić argue that the region’s recent history has made Bosnians especially vulnerable to manipulations of identity, which is strongly linked to religion and ethnicity, and thus to political and socio-cultural belonging. They assert further that “collective victimhood, present and past, is the backbone of every Bosnian identity matrix.”¹⁶⁶ The research concludes that “appeals to identity are crucial in motivating, legitimising and sustaining involvement in violent extremist groups,”¹⁶⁷ meaning that the issue of identity in BiH – though deeply emotional and complex – takes on new urgency as a topic that must be addressed by actors in various sectors.

Radicalised individuals are of course unlikely to have adopted extremist beliefs due solely to a crisis of identity. Indeed, each person experiences a unique interaction between structural

¹⁶¹ Ristic, M. et al. (5 May 2017) *Far-Right Balkan Groups Flourish on the Net*. Balkan Insight. Available from: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/far-right-balkan-groups-flourish-on-the-net-05-03-2017> [Accessed 1 March 2018].

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Ministarstvo sigurnosti Bosne i Hercegovine. (2017) *Informacija o stanju sigurnosti u Bosni i Hercegovini u 2016. godini*, 7-8. Available from: <http://msb.gov.ba/PDF/info2017.pdf>

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶⁵ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 92.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Allen, H. et al. (2015) *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*, 11. RUSI. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf

factors and individual-level predispositions to extremism. In BiH, the structural factors that influence radicalisation reflect those in other international contexts and include “poverty, exclusion, long-term unemployment, [and] widespread corruption”¹⁶⁸ Such factors tend to coexist with other socio-economic factors, such as larger household size and lower educational attainment.¹⁶⁹ This may be part of the reason that the reductionist interpretation of Islam that is promoted by Salafists has also been identified as a factor that attracts new adherents to the ideology in BiH.¹⁷⁰ This simplistic narrative, and its routinised lifestyle prescriptions, feel to some people like a calm amidst the storm of modernity. It is notable, too, that many Salafists in BiH have had limited or no previous knowledge of religion before adopting Salafism.¹⁷¹ This may limit their ability to think critically about extremist rhetoric.

Another finding of this research, which echoes earlier studies, is that the *geography of Salafi extremism in BiH largely reflects legacies of the 1992-1995 war*, during which foreign *mujahideen* established training camps near Zenica before creating post-war settlements in remote locations in central and northeast BiH.¹⁷² These isolated communities – including Gornja Maoča, Ošve, Bočinje, Dubnica, and Liješnica – saw high levels of departures of foreign fighters to Syria from 2012 to 2016, amounting to at least a quarter of the Bosnian contingent.¹⁷³ But *Salafism has “increasingly spread from traditional and isolated enclaves into larger towns and suburban areas” in BiH*,¹⁷⁴ where Salafi citizens’ associations, often backed by foreign funding, work to attract new followers.¹⁷⁵

The existence of foreign influence in the Salafi movement in BiH is rather inherent given the way Salafism found its way into the country. Since wartime, and then especially in the immediate post-war period, Gulf region money flowed into BiH under the guise of aid, but often funded radicalising initiatives, such as scholarships for Bosnian religious students at conservative Saudi institutions. The role that foreign-funded social and educational organisations, particularly those backed by Saudi Arabia, have played in spreading Salafism in BiH was raised by the EU Directorate-General for External Policies in a 2013 report, and previous research on this kind of investment in BiH found that “the character of Islamic places of worship has changed significantly” as a result.¹⁷⁶ Even more concerningly, a November 2017 assessment by the European Parliament alleged that Saudi Arabia has “spent hundreds of millions of euros for the Muslim cause [in the Western Balkans], mobilising volunteer Islamic fighters, providing humanitarian help and facilitating clandestine arms transfers.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁸ Commission for International Justice and Accountability. (2016) *Assessment Report: Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 36. This Report was produced by the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA) as part of the inception phase of a community-based pilot project designed to prevent violent extremism in BiH. The project was implemented by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and this assessment is based on 114 interviews, 607 micro-narratives, 565 media posts, and 121 social network data points collected in January, February, and March 2016. Also see: Azinović, V. and Jusić, M. (2015) *The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 42; and Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 44.

¹⁶⁹ The World Bank. (2015) *Poverty and Inequality in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2007-2011*, 4. Available from: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/228531467999134102/pdf/97643-REVISED-P132666-P152786-Box393190B-BIH-Poverty-and-Inequality-in-BiH.pdf>

¹⁷⁰ See: Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 72-74; and Bećirević, E. (2016) *Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 70.

¹⁷¹ Bećirević, E. (2016) *Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 70.

¹⁷² For more on the role of foreign *mujahideen* in the 1991-1995 Bosnian War, see: Azinović, V. (2007) *Al Qaeda in Bosnia: Myth or Reality?* Sarajevo/Prague: Radio Free Europe.

¹⁷³ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters’ Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 37.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 38.

¹⁷⁵ Bećirević, E. (2016) *Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 60. A great deal of the funding for these associations, which are almost always established as NGOs, comes from Gulf region sources. For more on this, see “Transnational Cooperation.”

¹⁷⁶ Morrison, K. (2008) *Wahhabism in the Balkans*. Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 5. Available from: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/50179/2008_March_Wahabism.pdf [Accessed 18 January 2018]. Also see: European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union. (2013) *Salafist/Wahhabite Financial Support to Educational, Social and Religious Institutions*. Policy Department Study PE 457.136. Available from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/457136/EXPO-AFET_ET\(2013\)457136_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/457136/EXPO-AFET_ET(2013)457136_EN.pdf)

¹⁷⁷ European Parliament. (2017) *Saudi Arabia in the Western Balkans. At a Glance*. Available from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/614582/EPRS_ATA\(2017\)614582_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/614582/EPRS_ATA(2017)614582_EN.pdf) [Accessed 20 January 2018].

As EU enlargement in the region has slowed, countries like Turkey and the Gulf States have seen an opening for new development and trade partnerships with BiH. And many Bosnian leaders, faced with an economy described by the US State Department in an August 2017 report as “the least competitive economy in Southeast Europe,”¹⁷⁸ do not feel they are in a position to reject overtures from potential partners. But this has invited new and renewed foreign influences that some sources told researchers may come with costly strings attached.

And, while in-person contact has been identified as a main factor of Salafi radicalisation in BiH, with the influence of the Internet only secondary, the importance of the Internet to extremist movements of all sorts in BiH may be increasing as a result of repressive and legislative action taken by the state in the last several years as well as a reliance on diaspora networks. Bosnian diaspora in Vienna, Sweden, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Germany have been linked by researchers to Salafi groups in BiH, some of which are supported by fundraising efforts in these diaspora communities.¹⁷⁹ In fact, according to Azinović and Jusić, a network of Bosnian diaspora in Austria and Germany “plays an important role in radicalisation and provides logistic support” for extremism in BiH.¹⁸⁰

7.1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Research carried out over the last five years on Salafism in BiH has created a valuable baseline for understanding and mapping the Salafi movement, not just in BiH but in the region more broadly. But this focus on Salafism has diverted scholarly attention from other radicalising forces, resulting in a limited knowledge base when it comes to the dynamics of other extremist movements in BiH and even less analysis of the interplay between and among extremists. Yet, given continuing socio-political dysfunction, still-unresolved narratives of the 1991-1995 war, and the concerns of security officials that extremism is rising generally, research that aims to map community-level susceptibility to various radicalising forces in BiH – including ethnic nationalism – is recommended.

Further, research that explores the dynamics of reciprocal radicalisation in BiH is recommended. Previous research on the phenomenon of reciprocal radicalisation in other contexts indicates that a hyper-focus on any one radicalising ideology may fail to account for the risk of reactive or co-evolutionary movements.¹⁸¹ The way in which ideology is politicised and even weaponised in BiH creates a climate in which this danger may be particularly heightened. Thus, research on how mutual extremists feed each other would provide insight for both P/CVE and de-radicalisation initiatives. Such initiatives would also be informed by a more in-depth analysis of the radicalising forces affecting BiH from online spaces. Therefore, research that seeks to develop a taxonomy of extremist influences operating on the Internet is also recommended.

Finally, research that examines in more detail how and how much the influence of foreign actors shapes domestic ideological narratives in BiH is recommended. A broad study of this sort may require the development of a framework by which to measure the impact of funding as a function of actual outcomes, but such an exercise would facilitate a far more detailed assessment of

¹⁷⁸ US Department of State. (2017) Bosnia and Herzegovina: 2017 Investment Climate Statement. Available from: <https://ba.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/270/2017/08/BiH-ICS-FINAL-2017.pdf>.

¹⁷⁹ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 57-61.

¹⁸⁰ Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 58.

¹⁸¹ Lenos, S. (2016) Tackling the challenges to prevention policies in an increasingly polarised society. RAN Issue Paper, November 2016.

where foreign investments are directed in BiH. Understanding, for instance, how much foreign funding flows to overtly religious activities, to secular community-oriented projects, or to commercial development, and having the ability to systematically assess how each of these strains of activity may or may not be tied to efforts to influence specific groups of people, would be valuable to both security actors and policymakers.

7.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

BiH can claim the highest youth unemployment rate and among the highest overall unemployment rates in the world.¹⁸² It is important that policymakers recognise this as a potential driver of extremism and thus confront unemployment not only as a matter of economic policy but as part of a wider array of de-radicalisation efforts. Being unemployed may create vulnerability among the not-yet-radicalised, but findings from this research also indicate that unemployment rates are incredibly high among returned foreign fighters, which may complicate or counteract initiatives to re-socialise, reintegrate, or de-radicalise former combatants.

Though the Ministry of Security cites “forms of extremism that aim to jeopardise the territorial integrity” of BiH as a main threat, and many security sources mentioned both “Salafi groups” and “the Serbian radical movement” as radical elements, few of these sources expressed the same concern about Catholic or Croat extremism. Yet, journalists, scholars, and researchers all view ethnic nationalism as a worry generally, as well as nationalism manifested as religious extremism of any kind. Given the risk of reciprocal radicalisation, it may be wise for policymakers to adopt this broader perspective. Indeed, research on reciprocal radicalisation serves as a reminder that the Bosnian context demands policymakers take a wide-angle view and develop prevention initiatives and de-radicalisation programmes that appreciate the full spectrum of radicalising forces in BiH as well as how different forms of extremism feed one another.

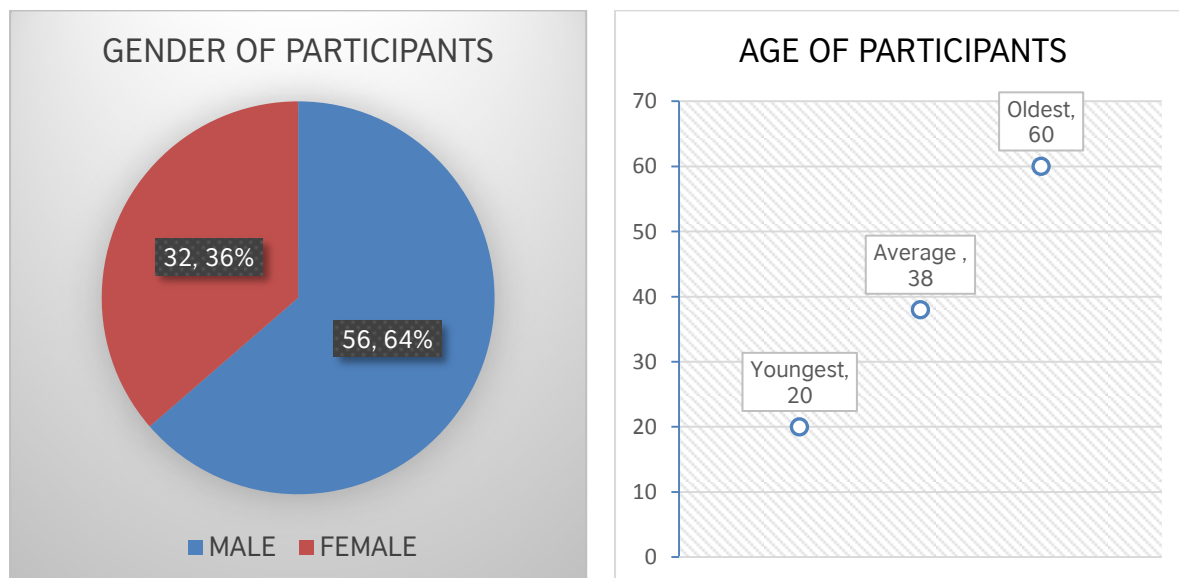
¹⁸² According to the International Labour Organization, BiH had a youth unemployment rate of 67.5% in 2017. In the Western Balkans, Macedonia and Montenegro followed with the next highest rates, of 50% and 36% respectively.

ANNEXES

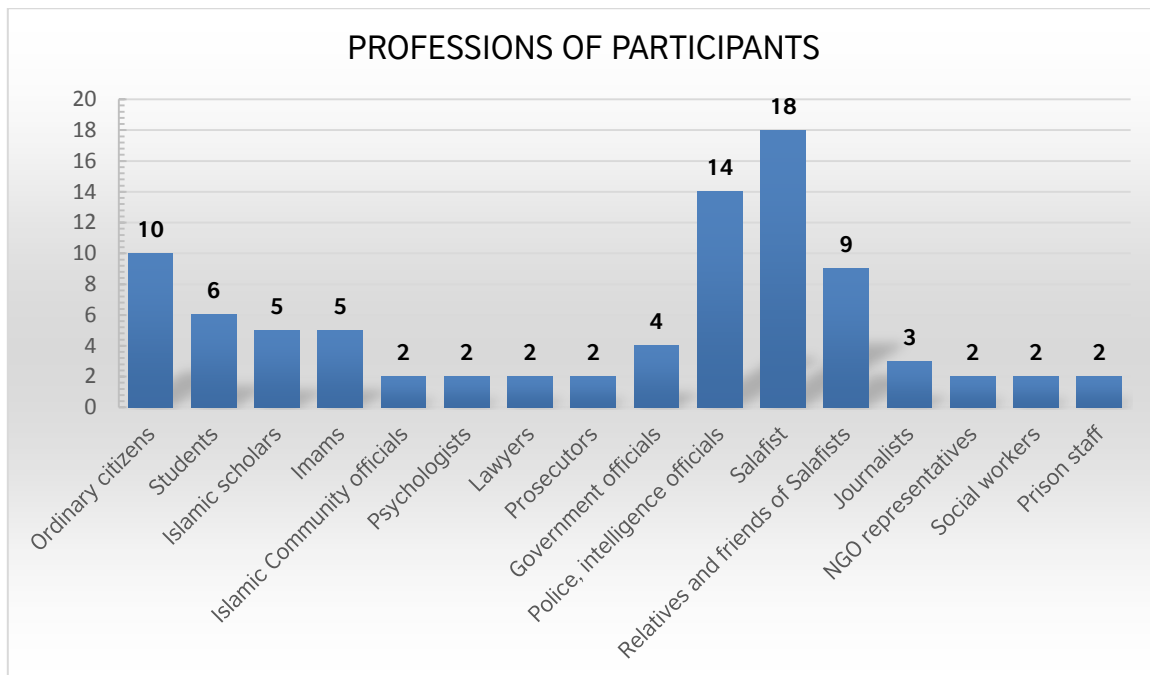
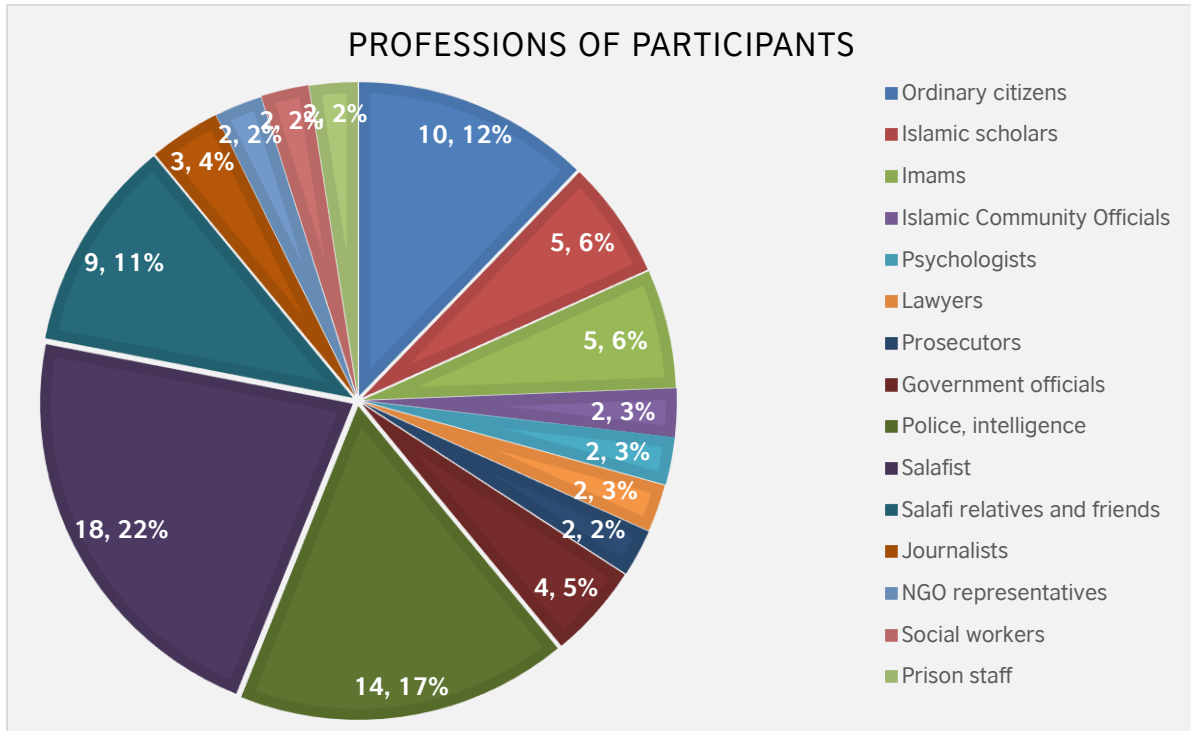
ANNEX 1: SAMPLE DATA

From June to October 2017, 88 individuals took part in research activities, ranging from semi-structured interviews to focus groups. The research was conducted throughout BiH in locations chosen for several reasons, including because they feature high concentrations of Salafi adherents, such as in: *Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, Mostar, Bihać, Velika Kladuša, Bužim, Cazin, Sanski Most, and Bosanska Krupa*. Because this research follows up on baseline studies of violent extremism and non-violent radicalisation conducted in BiH in 2015 and 2016, research locations were partially chosen due to the determination of previous studies that high numbers of individuals had departed from these places to Syria or Iraq. But research was also conducted in municipalities that featured very few or no such departures, such as Goražde, Bosanska Krupa, and Mostar. Goražde is considered (almost) free of extremist influences; Mostar was chosen as a research location because online analysis and data mining revealed a high level of Mostar-based interest in extremist and violent extremist websites; and Bosanska Krupa was chosen because of reports that non-violent extremism is increasingly prevalent there.

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling and were chosen primarily because they are: 1) a member of a Salafist community, 2) a member of the family of a foreign fighter, or 3) someone professionally involved with the issues of extremism and radicalisation. This strategy was complemented by snowball sampling whereby new participants were recommended by already-active participants.



The total number of interviews conducted was 88. There were 56 male respondents (63.63%) and 32 female respondents (36.36%). The youngest interviewee was 20 years old, while the oldest was 60. The average age of interviewees was 38.



Participants were drawn from all walks of life and various professions, but particularly from professions that deal on a regular basis with the issue and/or effects of extremism in BiH.

ANNEX 2: DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected in individual interviews and focus group interviews, through the observation and analysis of websites and social media, and by scrutinizing court judgments. These methods offered necessary insights and, combined, helped overcome issues of validity and reliability.

Interviews and focus groups were audio recorded with the permission of participants, and then transcribed.¹⁸³ Informal observations, frequently recorded by qualitative researchers in field notes, were a useful complement to data collected in interviews.¹⁸⁴

Researchers **analysed 22 court judgments in cases with terrorism-related charges**, along with media reports and related social media engagement. The analysis of court judgments is increasingly employed in qualitative research, and in this research, proved quite valuable, especially in revealing the networks and relationships between various parties.

Content analysis of Salafi-oriented social media and websites was useful in helping to confirm and sometimes contradict data obtained in interviews and focus groups. Research of websites focused on those featuring lectures on Salafism and recruitment videos, sampled through keyword searches, including the names of popular Salafi preachers.

¹⁸³ This data was analysed using content and discourse analysis. Content analysis allowed researchers to make sense of large amounts of material and separate it into categories and themes, while discourse analysis added additional layers of meaning. Indeed, the language employed by Salafi adherents is very telling; what they say strongly reflects their behaviour and lifestyle. For more on this, see: Hammersley, M. (2002) *Discourse Analysis: A Bibliographical Guide*. Available from: http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/files/Hammersley_guide.pdf [Accessed 6 January 2017].

¹⁸⁴ Alongside other research methods, these observations help researchers capture a more holistic view of participants or subjects. See: Delamont, S. (2004) "Ethnography and Participant Observations" in *Qualitative Research Practice*, eds. Clive Seale, et al. London: SAGE Publications.

ANNEX 3: CASE STUDIES

Ines Midžić

Ines Midžić is well known across BiH after shocking the country in 2015 by threatening the Bosnian public with terrorist attacks in an ISIS-style video posted online. Using the alias Salahuddin al-Bosni, Midžić encouraged aspiring fighters who couldn't travel to Syria or Iraq to "fight over there! [in BiH] ...put explosives under their cars, in their houses. ...take some poison and put it in their drink or food."¹⁸⁵ According to Bosnian media reports, Midžić resided in Bihać (in northwest BiH) until August 15, 2012, when he departed for Syria. His friends told researchers they were shocked to see him appear in an extremist video. In early 2018, Bosnian media reported that Midžić's death in Syria had been confirmed by Interpol, though security officials in BiH have not yet publicly corroborated this.¹⁸⁶

One elderly man, a friend of the Midžić family, said Ines had a difficult childhood. Born out of wedlock, he "was rejected and mocked by his community because his father never accepted him." Further, the man said, his mother had been "psychologically unstable, and abandoned him when he was eight years old." Midžić then lived with his grandfather in extreme poverty, and often had no money for food.

Yet, despite having endured these hardships, a female friend called Midžić "the nicest person I knew." She was stunned when she saw him in the video and said she "disassociated the Ines I knew with the one I saw on the screen." After all, the Midžić she knew studied English literature at the University of Bihać. He was, according to another friend, "passionate about music," and "loved editing video clips." So, when the opportunity arose in 2013 to edit video professionally for the NGO Solidarnost, Midžić eagerly accepted.

According to one of his professors, "editing those documentaries changed him," and several other interviewees echoed this sentiment. Friends agreed that the previously outspoken and social young man they knew had started avoiding them after his work with Solidarnost began. So, what was it about this job that triggered the radicalisation process in Midžić's case? Solidarnost, the organisation he was working for, helps vulnerable and persecuted Muslims around the world through humanitarian aid, and the videos he was editing highlighted their plight.¹⁸⁷ Notably, Solidarnost has no affiliation with Salafism; but for Midžić, just being exposed to the suffering of Muslims seems to have been a key factor in his radicalisation. Soon after beginning his editing job, Midžić's professor "noticed that he started using religious words in everyday conversations" and was spending time with a religious studies professor.

Samir Begić

The death of Samir Begić in February 2014 was a leading news story in BiH, and sent shockwaves across the region of Bosanska Krajina, especially in the small town of Bužim, where Begić was from. Bužim is a wealthy village featuring large, luxurious houses, and while the Begić home is not the largest, by Bosnian standards they live quite well. Our team met with an elderly friend of the family who knew Begić well. He told us Begić "was a really nice guy, very quiet and

¹⁸⁵ See: Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 85.

¹⁸⁶ *U Siriji poginuli bh. Državljeni Ines Midžić i Naser Arnaut?* (11 March 2018) Dnevni Avaz. Available from: <http://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/359785/u-siriji-poginuli-bh-drzavljeni-ines-midzic-i-naser-arnaut> [Accessed 20 March 2018].

¹⁸⁷ To see the work of the organisation, view their website at: <http://www.solidarnost-bosnia.com/>

well behaved. He was a believer, and after he finished *makhtab*,¹⁸⁸ he continued attending prayers in the mosque. I never noticed any extremism in his behaviour. He did not look like a Salafi, until suddenly he started praying differently in the mosque. Shortly after that...he left for Syria. His parents were devastated.” According to this man, Begić’s father was unhappy with his son’s adoption of Salafism, and tried, along with his wife, to persuade him not to go to Syria by reminding him of the hadith in which “Muhammed a.s. forbids children to go to war without their parents’ consent.” Begić’s father told the elderly man that, at first, Begić considered his parents advice, but was then told by someone he referred to as “sheikh” that he did not need the approval of his parents.

Begić’s father, who attends mosque regularly, is disappointed that the Islamic Community of BiH never offered condolences after his son died, and when he met our researchers the first time, he expressed this immediately, remarking that he is “upset that the only state representatives that kept contacting us were from security institutions. Only SIPA and the police came to question us. Nobody from the local [religious] authorities came to give their condolences.” He spoke of his son with tears in his eyes, remembering that “he was so curious and knowledgeable from the time he was a little boy. When he was 13 years old, I got him a computer from Germany.... When the elementary school got their first computer they couldn’t teach him anything new, because he already knew everything there was to know about it. He was very computer savvy, a fast learner. And he knew about everything, not only computers.”

According to Begić’s parents, he held seasonal jobs at local cafes before finding a position as a graphic designer in a local marketing company. Though he was reportedly very social, Begić’s father says he did not know his son’s friends. “I know they were collecting humanitarian aid for Syria,” he told researchers, but knew no more details. In the beginning of November 2013, Begić and his father discussed his plans to travel to Syria. His father explained, “I disagreed [with his choice] and tried to talk him out of it. But I had no one to turn to for advice.” The testimony of witness B2 in the trial of Bilal Bosnić, who Begić knew from childhood, confirms some of what Begić’s father told our researchers about sudden changes in his son’s behaviour and explains the mechanisms of recruitment that led him to become radicalized into violent extremism and eventually fight for ISIS. In fact, the recruitment of Begić was used by the Prosecution in the Bosnić trial to illustrate recruiting techniques used by his network.¹⁸⁹

During the trial, witness B2 testified that Begić had been “a nice guy, outgoing, enjoying life.... But suddenly he changed [and] withdrew” after meeting new people. This witness felt that Begić had “been creeping [toward] Islamic radicalism, through the media and TV,” at the same time these new people entered his life and further influenced him. It’s unclear what first attracted Begić to these radical ideas, but witness B2 testified that after attending a lecture by Bosnić, Begić “started talking only about that.”

This witness also described a personal experience that might have been a pull factor in Begić’s radicalization. According to witness B2, early in Begić’s adoption of Salafism, he asked his girlfriend – whom he loved very much – to start wearing hijab and change her name “because her name was modern and did not fit Islamic regulations.” She rejected his request and refused to follow him on the path toward extremism, and so she left him. For a while, Begić apparently

¹⁸⁸ Religious classes for children, organised in BiH by the Islamic Community of BiH.

¹⁸⁹ All quotes related to the trial are drawn from the case Judgement. See: Judgement, *Prosecutor v. Husein Bosnić*, No. S1 2 K 017968 15K, 5 November 2015. An English translation is available at the Court of BiH website: <http://www.sudbih.gov.ba/pretraga/odluke?keyword=Bosni%C4%B7> (accessed 12 January 2018).

agonized over this, and witness B2 felt that extremist actors in his life had “taken advantage of [Begić’s] moment of weakness.”

Witness B2 also testified about how a network of Salafi “brothers” had expanded across the Krajina and then through the Federation. Begić had talked about meetings and lectures held by Bosnić that were meant to prepare for a “holy war” in Syria. Eventually, Begić came into contact with Ramo Graović, a foreign fighter recruiter who lived in Austria and was the “right hand of Bilal Bosnić.” Begić soon boasted to witness B2 that he had been selected to lead a so-called “cell” made up of “Bilal’s guys from Krajina.” The organization he described echoed a military force, with Bosnić – who followers called “sheikh” – at the head and Graović responsible for fighters’ field readiness.

According to witness B2, Begić constantly posted on his Facebook profile about activities linked to Bosnić and Graović and discussed how his “cell” in Bosanska Krajina was “connected with other groups in Sarajevo, Zenica, Tuzla.” Begić apparently had a habit of disappearing for a few days with his “brothers” to visit extremists in other towns, which the witness said was meant to keep these groups ideologically united, to ensure that no one would “change his mind and give up on going to Syria.” Begić, the graphic designer, was tasked with designing the emblem for a flag to be flown by those departing to Syria from BiH. Begić told the witness that he and his fellow fighters would fight under the flag he designed and would return with it to BiH “to establish the Sharia and the Caliphate.”

Witness B2 told police that Begić had become mentally disturbed, and that this was clear to everybody who had known him. Begić had confided in this witness that he lied to his parents about being involved in humanitarian work; and admitted that he had been selling drugs at one point while working at a coffee shop. But, Begić felt his Salafi “brothers” had helped him stop, and moreover, seemed to believe that they had helped him find purpose.

Dino Pečenковиć

The story of Dino Pečenковиć is in many ways an outlier. Despite having lived in a Salafi community, he self-de-radicalised and became estranged from his family. Meanwhile, his mother, father, and brother departed for Syria, and when Pečenковиć spoke with our research team in late October 2017, he said his brother had been killed there. His father, Edin, is on Interpol’s Red Notice list. Reflecting on the process of his family’s radicalisation, Pečenковиć cited a traumatic event in his father’s life as decisive. “My father was a communist, and then in 1997, he fell from the roof of the house to the cement floor of the courtyard, and that’s how it all started. After that, he began going to the mosque. First, he was a normal believer. I mean, he just went to the regular mosque. After a while, he got to know some local Salafis.”

Asked if he knows who influenced his father’s radicalisation, Pečenковиć mentioned Bilal Bosnić,¹⁹⁰ but also two professors from the Islamic Pedagogical Faculty of Bihać, who Pečenковиć says urged his father to accept extremist beliefs. Soon, his father imposed Salafi lifestyle prescriptions on the family. His mother welcomed this change and “was among the first women in Bihać to start wearing niqab.” In 2008, his parents made the decision to move to

¹⁹⁰ Pečenковиć testified in the trial of Bilal Bosnić, and stressed to researchers that Bosnić had been a key player in recruiting fighters for Syria.

Gornja Maoča, the Salafi enclave in northern BiH infamous for producing high numbers of foreign fighters.¹⁹¹

Pečenković offers a rare and valuable insider's account of life in Gornja Maoča. Eventually, he told researchers, he enjoyed aspects of the communal nature of life there, structured by strict religious laws. But, he initially resisted both the ideology and lifestyle of Salafism because he was in love with a Catholic girl from Croatia. When they started living together, his family tracked him down in Croatia, brought him back to BiH, and forbade them to see each other. Pečenković says that, after that, he gave into his father's wishes to live with them in Gornja Maoča. "It's a nice life, for those who like a rural lifestyle. The whole village prays five times a day. If you don't go to the mosque one time they will come to check on you." Still, Pečenković described himself as rebellious and said he did not respect certain rules – such as restrictions on which books to read or prohibitions on watching television or playing videogames.

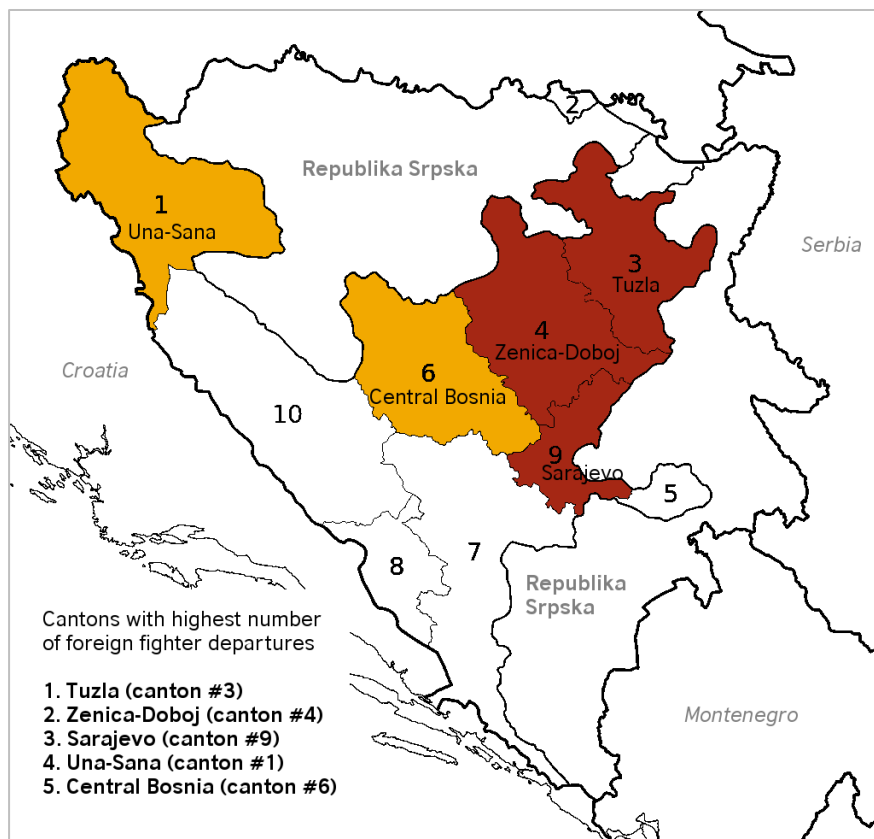
When Pečenković moved to Gornja Maoča, the leader of the village was Nusret Imamović, who departed for Syria at end of 2013; and an episode involving Imamović was also among the factors that estranged Pečenković from the Gornja Maoča community. For six months, Pečenković was married to a Salafi woman, before her first husband arrived in Gornja Maoča "claiming he never divorced her." Imamović "returned the wife to her first husband." But there were other details about life in Gornja Maoča that troubled Pečenković, too, including what he characterised as illegal arrests and maltreatment. "One guy was arrested for alleged espionage. They detained him in a house, and then harassed him and exposed him to various kinds of abuse."

In 2012, Pečenković was arrested as an accessory to the terrorist attack on the American Embassy in Sarajevo carried out by Mevlid Jašarević. While Pečenković claims he had no prior knowledge of the impending attack, he drove Jašarević from Gornja Maoča to Sarajevo on the day he attacked the Embassy. Pečenković spent several months in prison after his arrest, which he says was a wake-up call for him regarding the danger of Salafism. He cooperated with police and prosecutors and was never charged, and since 2012, he has lived in Bihać. By all accounts, Pečenković appears to be totally de-radicalised, and made continuous efforts to emphasise to our research team that he is no longer at all religious.

¹⁹¹ For example, see: Azinović, V. and Jusić, M. (2015) *The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 40.

ANNEX 4: MAPPING 'AT-RISK' COMMUNITIES

At-risk cantons, by number of departures of foreign fighters



At-risk communities, by numbers of departures of foreign fighters



Data Source: Azinović, V. & Jusić, M. (2016) The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative.



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