

WESTERN BALKANS

EXTREMISM RESEARCH FORUM

SERBIA REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violent extremism is not a grave problem in Serbia. Not only have a small number of individuals joined militants in Syria, but there are also few violent extremists present in Serbia. In this regard, the Serbian Ministry of Interior estimated that 49 individuals joined Islamic state or Al-Qaeda affiliates and splinter groups, which are relatively modest figures compared to other Western Balkans countries. In a similar vein, this research estimates that there are no more than 100 violent Islamist extremists who are grouped in to three masjids in Novi Pazar. Most of them are well known to the local community. However, there is still concern regarding the issue of extremism, with a significant pool of not-now-violent extremists, individuals that do not accept current violent ideologies or groups but are willing to defend, with weapons, their “fellows” and “brothers”, as well as their faith. In addition, of great concern is the fact that there is a trend of spreading non-violent extremist and radical beliefs among Serbian citizens, especially among young people and the Roma population.

This trend could be best described with the notions of relative deprivation and culturalization of politics. Research findings suggest that constantly worsening economic situation, widespread (political) corruption and malfunctioning institutions disable many people from satisfying their basic needs and achieving their life aspirations on the one hand, and favour very few people with strong (political) connections and wealth on the other hand. With constant pressure from their community and market economy to be successful and to prove themselves, deprived individuals feel frustrated, which can lead to finding a refuge in extremist groups. The very important mechanism here is a culturalization of politics through which above identified political and economic inequalities are naturalised as cultural differences that are given and can hardly be overcome. Therefore, identitarian/cultural factors are vehicles for exploiting grievances by extremist groups. Poor quality of education in Serbia and lack of critical thinking further facilitates the process of culturalization of politics. There are also two important factors further contributing to radicalisation in Serbia which are country specific. First is a division of Islamic community into two official structures – Islamic Community in Serbia and Islamic Community of Serbia – both fighting for the hearts and minds of Muslim believers. However, this competition only damages legitimacy of both communities leaving the space for extremist to attract dissatisfied believers. Second is a different treatment of foreign fighters who had fought on the pro-Russian side in Ukraine and the anti-Assad side in Syria by Serbian authorities. The former group was prosecuted as foreign fighters while the latter has been tried for terrorism, which has created the impression among many Muslims in Serbia that Serbian authorities are anti-Muslim.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The Extremism Research Forum is a UK government funded research project¹, 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 transnational 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.

THE SERBIAN CONTEXT

Since the violent break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in the 1990s, right-wing and religious extremism has been present in Serbia. During the civil war, extremists were mainly part of various (para) military groups, while after 2000 and the beginning of the Serbian democratic transition, they morphed into associations and movements spreading the hate speech and being involved in violent incidents. However, they did not attract much attention

¹ Implemented by the British Council, in partnership with the International Conflict and Research Institute (INCORE), Ulster University.

of the general public and Serbian authorities. Only violent incidents sparked short-lived public and media attention.² The Serbian authorities' approached extremism similarly, responding reactively to incidents, in an *ad hoc* and repressive manner; in this regard, Serbian authorities banned two right-wing extremist organisations, "Obraz" and "SNP Naši 1389", without forbidding their offshoots and splinter groups.³ Similarly, one group of individuals from Sandžak⁴ were convicted on terrorism charges. But Serbian authorities did not attempt to explore reasons behind the spread of extremism, and nor did they give consideration to introduce preventive measures.

The rise of so called Islamic state (IS) and the fact that 49 Serbian citizens joined IS or other militias in Syria, attracted more public attention. More precisely, it was the news of some foreign fighters threatening NGO activists via social networks and their first deaths in 2014 that raised grave concerns among mainly the local community. The Ukrainian conflict that broke out in 2014 and the fact that around 70 Serbian citizens joined the pro-Russian side only further contributed to higher public interest in this problem. However, the large scale terrorist attacks in Europe committed by foreign fighters from Syria prompted intensive public and government interest in foreign fighters the (violent) extremism phenomenon, and mainly to Islamist extremism. At the same time, the international community started pressuring the Serbian government to criminalise foreign fighters⁵ as well as to adopt preventive policies⁶.

The belated interest of the public and government in this phenomenon has affected the state of research of (violent) extremism in Serbia. Research on extremism is scarce and fragmented both in terms of the research subject and covered time.⁷ There is no baseline study of (violent) extremism in Serbia which in turn raises questions around the effectiveness of any policy aimed at tackling this problem.⁸ For these reasons, this paper is aimed at identifying and analysing the major drivers of (violent) extremism and how these factors intertwine and strengthen each other in spreading extremism.

² Exception to this rule are some non-governmental organization which have been covering extremism, mainly right-wing extremism.

³ Stakic, I. (2013) Odnos Srbije prema ekstremno desničarskim organizacijama. Beograd: BCBP.

⁴ Region in South-western Serbia populated with Muslim majority.

⁵ Criminal Code was amended in October 2014. Zakonik o krivičnom postupku ("Sl. glasnik RS", br. 72/2011, 101/2011, 121/2012, 32/2013, 45/2013 i 55/2014).

⁶ National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Terrorism 2017-2021 with accompanying Action Plan was adopted in autumn 2017.

⁷ For more detailed account on the state of research of Islamist extremism see next section.

⁸ For instance, National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Terrorism doesn't contain section with background analysis of the problem.

METHODOLOGY

This paper represents a baseline study of (violent) extremism in Serbia. The most significant forms of extremism have been identified and assessed to understand to what extent and in which manner they represent a threat to society. Special attention was paid to identifying and analysing the major factors contributing to the rise and spread of extremism, how enduring they are and how they confluence with each other. Although the paper is focused on Islamist extremism, right-wing extremism and Serbian foreign fighters in Ukraine are also identified as a serious concern in Serbia. However, due to limited resources and the scope of this study focussed on Islamist extremism, this issue has not been explored in greater detail. Instead, right-wing extremism has been addressed as a country specific driver of Islamist extremism.

Research on these issues in Serbia is scarce and fragmented, both in terms of research subject and covered time. Two public opinion polls of young people have been conducted,⁹ one research on human security in Novi Pazar¹⁰ and one research on Salafis' activities in cyber space¹¹. A more systematic approach to explore Islamist extremism was employed only recently by Balkan Insight but with journalistic style.¹² Despite mentioned shortcomings, these reports are valuable sources of (initial) data and information. Therefore, our first research task was to collate all existing research findings and identify the major research gaps which were then checked and complemented through interviews and focus groups. Consequently, in the very beginning of the study, desk research was the first steps of data collection. Along with already completed research and news reports, indictments against foreign fighters from Syria were used as a source of information. They were obtained in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act. The Serbian Prosecution Office for Organised Crime did not provide the indictments of foreign fighters in Ukraine, with the explanation that trials have not been completed yet and that disclosure of the requested information could aggravate the relationship of Serbia with the states which citizens are being tried by the Serbian court. However, these principles were not applied for indictments against foreign fighters in Syria, although their trials are also ongoing and citizens of other countries are mentioned in charges.

The main method of data collection and verification was survey research. Two focus groups (FG) with 15 participants and 42 in-depth interviews were conducted. In order to better understand the research subject and its different aspects, as well as to better define questions for survey, six interviews were unstructured. Focus Group participants and interviewees include representatives of both Islamic communities, local and national civil society organisations, academia, media, Roma organisations, local authorities and law enforcement, as well as members of organisations that are considered by many as Islamist extremists. Survey participants were from Novi Pazar and Belgrade. Other than Bosniaks and Roma of Muslim religion, orthodox Serbs were surveyed as well. With 12 surveyed women, men were more represented than women.

This research is not focused only on violent extremism as defined by USAID: “advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to

⁹ CeSID. (2016) *Istraživanje o pokretačima radikalizma i nasilnog ekstremizma među mladima u Srbiji*. Belgrade: CeSID; and Ilić, V. (2016) *Stavovi mladih u Sandžaku: Koliko su mladi otvoreni prema islamskom ekstremizmu*. Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia.

¹⁰ Damad. (2015) *Integrirani odgovor zajednice na izazove po ljudsku sigurnost u Novom Pazaru*. Novi Pazar: Damad.

¹¹ Kladničanin, F. (2013) *Vehabije u sajber prostoru*. In: Jelinčić, J. & Ilić, S. (eds.) *Politički ekstremizam u sajber prostoru Srbije*. Zrenjanin: CRCD.

¹² Balkan Insight. *ISIS in the Balkans*. Available from: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/page/isis-in-the-balkans> [Accessed 14th December 2017].

further social, economic and political objectives.”¹³ It also covers so called non-violent extremism, due to the fact that this could be a breeding ground for violent extremism and therefore represent an alert zone as was suggested by other studies and confirmed in this research as well. More precisely, we accept Schmidt’s distinction of “non-violent” and “not-violent”, extremism where *non-violence* is always “principled and absolute”, “radical but not extreme”. *Not-violent* covers pragmatic and temporal avoidance to resort or advocate violence in the sense of “not-NOW-violent”.¹⁴ This distinction is of crucial importance for better assessment of the scope and level of extremist threat in Serbia, and in order to avoid black-or-white conclusions by either labelling all extremist as violent and thus dangerous, or to diminish the problem.

Figure 1. Interviewed stakeholders

Affiliation	No. of interviews	Profile
Civil society experts	Eleven interviews	Eight interviewees (six males & two females) working in civil society organisations in Sandžak. Three (males) interviewees working in civil society organisations in Belgrade.
Religious civil society organisation	One interviewee	One interviewee (male) from Shia civil society organisation.
Representatives of Roma community	Four interviewees	Four (three males and one female) interviewees members of two Roma associations.
Religious communities	Twelve interviewees	Eleven interviewees (males) from the Muslim Communities. One interviewee (male) from the Orthodox community.
Lawyer	One interviewee	One (male) layer defending individuals with terrorism charges.
Media	Four interviewees	Two TV reporters (one male & one female). One newspaper journalist (male) from Novi Pazar. One newspaper journalist (female) from Belgrade.
Teachers	Three interviewees	One interviewee (male) of Orthodox religious education in secondary school. One interviewee (male) of Islam religious education in secondary school. One interviewee (female) of Civic education in secondary school.
Security institutions	Three interviewees	Three interviewees from the Serbian law enforcement and intelligence.
Local institutions	Three interviewees	One interviewee (male) from Local Self-Government Two interviewees (one male & one female) from local cultural institutions.

¹³ USAID. (2011) *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency*, p. 2.

¹⁴ Schmid, A. P. (2014) *Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?* The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, p. 15.

Figure 2. Focus groups' participants

Focus group's info	No. of participants	Profile
FGD1 – Novi Pazar 25 July 2017	8 participants	Mixed group of male (five) and female (three), 20 – 45 years old; practicing and non-practicing religion; employed and unemployed (student and housewife).
FGD2 – Novi Pazar, 26 July 2017	7 participants	Mixed group of male (five) and female (two) participants; practicing and non-practicing religion; secondary and university degree; 25 to 45 years old; all employed.

1. FORMS AND THREATS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

1.1. ISLAMIST AND RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN SERBIA – AN OVERVIEW

Unlike the majority of the countries of the Western Balkans region, in which Islamist extremism represent the dominant form of violent radicalisation, in Serbia there are two major forms of extremism – Islamist extremism and right-wing extremism. The latter has a rather long tradition in the Serbian society (and in that sense precedes the former), being present in some form or another since the rise of fascism in 1930s. After decades of Yugoslav socialism during which nationalism(s) in SFRY were kept on the political margins, the return of nationalism into the political mainstream in the 1990s during Slobodan Milosevic's rule enabled and contributed to the legitimisation of Serbian right-wing extremism.¹⁵ While Serbian extreme-right groups collaborated with the Serbian regime of the time during the wars of the 1990s and some of them largely operated as paramilitary formations, they continued to exist after the democratic changes of 2000, and even consolidated their positions within the new socio-political structures.¹⁶ In today's Serbia, extreme-right organisations are institutionally marginal, in the sense that the great majority of them remain outside parliamentary politics. However, their public influence is considerably higher, due to the increased tolerance of the state institutions towards them, and, in some cases, due to compatibility of their agendas with the mainstream discourses.¹⁷

According to the assessment of the Serbian Police, there are around 30 active extremist groups in Serbia that, together, number approximately 5,000 members.¹⁸ Apart from two far-right organisations that are parliamentary parties – namely, Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and Dveri, the majority of far-right groups in Serbia are either registered as civil society organisations, such as SNP Naši (Serbian National Movement 'Ours') and SNP 1389 (Serbian National Movement 1389), or they are not registered at all, such as numerous football hooligans' groups¹⁹ and neo-Nazi

¹⁵ Slobodan Milosevic was president of Serbia and Yugoslavia in the late 1980s and through the '90s. His rule is best described as electoral autocracy with strong nationalistic component. His regime had supported Serbian (para)military groups during the civil war that occurred in the former SFRY in the 1990s. After losing power in 2000, he was charged for crimes against humanity before international war crimes tribunal in The Hague for his actions during this armed conflicts. In 2003 he was also indicted with ordering the murder of former Serbian president Ivan Stambolic, and with the attempted murder of opposition leader Vuk Draskovic. Milosevic had died in his cell on March 11, 2006 before verdicts in these cases were passed.

¹⁶ Arguably, nationalism (including the extreme nationalism) is an unbroken thread that connects Milošević's regime with all the succeeding regimes in Serbia that never made a radical break with the nationalist legacy.

¹⁷ Stakić, I. (2016) 'Serbian Nationalism and Right-Wing Extremism', in Ejodus, F. & Jureković, P. (eds.) *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*, Vienna: PfP Consortium Study Group 'Regional Stability in South East Europe', 136. Available from: http://www.filipejodus.com/Public/Uploads/Attach/jurekovic_and_eidus_2016_violent_extremism_579f5bba2729b.pdf [Accessed 14th December 2017].

¹⁸ Račić, Lj. (2011) *Šta čeka Ustavni sud: Srbiji preti 5.000 ekstremista (What the Constitutional Court Can Expect: Serbia Is Threatened by 5,000 Extremists)*. PressOnline. Available from: <http://www.pressonline.rs/info/politika/179192/sta-ceka-ustavni-sud-srbiji-preti-5000-ekstremista.html> [Accessed 14th December 2017].

¹⁹ Some of the football hooligans' groups are: *Ultra Boys, Belgrade Boys, Ultras, Brigate, Alkatraz, Ludaci – Padinska Skela, Anti – Romi, South Family, Head Hunters, Irriducibili – Nbg, Shadows, Extreme Boys, Čuvari Časti, Brain Damage i United Force 1987*. Source: Stjelja, I. (2014) 'Zločin iz mržnje i incidenti motivisani mržnjom u kontekstu delovanja ekstremističkih organizacija u Srbiji' ('Hate Crime and Incidents Motivated by Hate in the Context of Activities of the Extremist Organizations in

organisations Nacionalni stroj (National Alignment), Srbska akcija (Serbian Action) and Krv i Čast (Blood and Honour Serbia).

Besides the Serbian extreme-right organisations that are active “at home”, there is another relatively new phenomenon related to Serbian right-wing extremism, that is the foreign fighters who support pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine. The majority of Serbian foreign fighters in Ukraine are organised in a unit called Serbian Chetnik movement.²⁰ Inspired by the ideology of ultra-nationalism, Serbian Chetniks in Ukraine consider it to be their patriotic duty to support Russia, although they may also be motivated by the financial gains from participation in the war.

The other major form of extremism in Serbia, which has attracted considerably more attention than the right-wing extremism during the recent years, is Islamist extremism. Islamist extremism in Serbia is geographically linked to Sandžak region, the region in south-west Serbia with a dominant Muslim population. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Islamist extremists seek to spread their influence outside this region, by targeting Muslim population in other parts of Serbia. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) report on Sandžak from 2005, Islamist extremist with Takfiri ideology²¹ first came to Novi Pazar (the biggest town in Sandžak) in 1997, when a new imam in a local mosque requested the believers to pray in a Salafi way, although he was subsequently rejected by the local community and expelled from the mosque.²² In the very beginning, Salafis in Novi Pazar kept their activities low-key, their influence was marginal, and the attention that this new phenomenon received was insignificant, as Salafis were not connected to any violent activities. However, since 2000, Salafis in Novi Pazar have gradually become more visible and influential.

In 2006/2007, 15 Salafis from Novi Pazar were arrested, and in 2009, 12 of them were convicted of crimes related to terrorism. It is important to note that the convicted Salafis did not commit terrorist acts, but were convicted of planning terrorist acts (on the territory of the Republic of Serbia), including an attempt of assassination of Mufti.²³ This event gained certain public attention, although still at a relatively low level. Kladničanin (2013) points out that since the beginning of 2010, Salafis in Sandžak have become more active and better organised, and have been receiving more financial support.²⁴ Besides, the split in Islamic Community (IC) in Serbia that occurred in 2007 and resulted in weakening of the IC, opened a space for external (fundamentalist) influences to enter Sandžak region.²⁵

The phenomenon of Islamist extremism came into the spotlight with the beginning of the conflict in Syria, the emergence of ISIS, and the consequent recruitment of Islamic fundamentalists from all over the world going to Syria as foreign fighters. In the same way as Serbian far-right extremists who go to fight at the Ukrainian battlefields, Islamist extremists from Sandžak region

Serbia), in Biserko, S. (ed.) *Ekstremizam: Kako prepoznati društveno zlo (Extremism: How to Recognize the Social Evil)*, Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 108.

²⁰ Named after the Serbian guerilla movement from the WWII that collaborated extensively with the occupying forces, fought against the Yugoslav National Liberation Army, and conducted actions of ethnic cleansing. Serbian Chetnik movement was also active during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, in the form of numerous paramilitary groups with that name that received support from the official institutions. Many of Serbian foreign fighters in Ukraine fought in Yugoslav Wars.

²¹ Salafism is a branch of Sunni Islam that adheres to Hanbali legal school of Islam which is ultra conservative in comparison to other schools - Maliki, Shafi and especially Hanafi. In their everyday life, its followers try to emulate practice of the first three generations of Muslims as close as possible. Spread of Salafism was facilitated by spread of Wahabism in the 18th century and has accelerated by the raise of Saudi Arabia in the late 20th century. Even though considered ultraconservative, Salafism isn't violent per se. Its offshoot Takfirism is violent movement whose followers label other Muslims as not-good-enough Muslims if they don't practice a faith according to their literalistic interpretation of Quran. Takfirists tend to reject components of society, culture and law in Muslim countries, which they consider to have been returning to a pre-Islamic pagan time.

²² International Crisis Group. (2005) *Srpski Sandžak: I dalje zaboravljen (Serbian Sandžak: Still Forgotten)*, Report for Europe No. 162. 25. Available from: http://old.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/europe/162_serbia_s_sandzak_still_forgotten_serbian.pdf [Accessed 14th December 2017].

²⁴ Kladničanin, F. (2013) 'Vehabije u sajber prostoru Srbije' ('Wahabis in Cyber-space in Serbia'), in Jelinčić, J & Ilić, S. (eds.) *Politički ekstremizam u cyber prostoru Srbije (Political Extremism in Cyber-space in Serbia)*. Zrenjanin: Centar za razvoj civilnog društva, pp. 129-130.

²⁵ Perry, V. (2016) *Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe: A Survey of Regional Issues, Initiatives and Opportunities*. Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council, p. 48.

(but also from other parts of Serbia) travel to Syria and Iraq to fight along different terrorist groups, such as ISIS and Al-Nusra. According to police estimates, 49 people from Sandžak region have so far gone to Syria.²⁶ Seven of them have been indicted in the Serbian Court, again – for crimes related to terrorism. Their indictments, as well as the court proceedings against the foreign fighters in Ukraine, will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

1.2. THE EXTREMIST THREAT

It is an open question whether all extremists represent a (security) threat, or only those who are directly engaged in violent activities. This question should be treated as a part of a wider debate about violent and non-violent extremism. The majority of scholars and practitioners seem to agree with this terminological distinction – suggested by the widespread use of the terms “violent” and/or “non-violent” in the context of extremism, which in itself implies the importance of the distinction between the two forms (or rather two types) of extremism. For example, the USAID defines violent extremism as: “advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic and political objectives.”²⁷ Although quite detailed, this definition cannot be characterised as precise and unequivocal, primarily due to a certain level of ambiguity of the terms “advocating”, “otherwise supporting”, etc. Even the definition of violence has been debated.

On the other hand, some authors argue that the terminological distinction between violent and non-violent extremism is obfuscating and misleading. For example, Schmidt (2014) points out that violent and non-violent extremism are basically two sides of the same coin. While discussing different variants of Salafism, he argues that even non-jihadist Salafism is incompatible with the principles on which modern democratic societies are based (secularism, popular sovereignty, gender equality, minority rights, etc.).²⁸ Further, Schmidt claims:

“In the view of knowledgeable observers, even peaceful, apolitical, quietist Salafism can be served as an “antechambre” to terrorism, acting de facto as a “conveyor belt” by facilitating socialisation to violent extremism in the form of terrorism.”²⁹

He introduces another distinction – “non-violent” vs. “not-violent”, pointing out that *non-violence* is always “principled and absolute”, “radical but not extreme” (in Gandhian sense), while the term *not-violent* implies not resorting to violence due to “pragmatic, tactical and/or temporal considerations (in the sense of “not-now-violent”).”³⁰ Along this line, Schmidt rightfully suggests that the term “not-(now)-violent” is more suitable for the Islamist extremists who do not directly engage in violent activities.

What Schmidt argues in regards to Islamist extremists is applicable to the both dominant forms of extremism in Serbia.

The discussion below will focus on extremist activities that resort to violence. As mentioned, Serbian extreme-right groups were operating as paramilitary formations during the wars of

²⁶ Luković, D. (2017) Za ISIS ratuje 49 osoba iz Srbije. *Blic*. Available from: <https://goo.gl/u6mHq3> [Accessed 4th September 2017].

²⁷ USAID. (2011) *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency*, 2.

²⁸ Schmidt, A. P. (2014) *Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?*, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 15.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 16.

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 13-14.

1990s. After 2000, their violent activities shifted from the external to the internal “enemy” – i.e. to the minorities and vulnerable groups within Serbia, such as: LGBT+, Roma, refugees and migrants from the Middle East, etc. Some of the violent activities that were organised or supported by the far-right groups in the past are: the anti-Albanian riots in 2004 (incited by the violence against Serbs in Kosovo) in which two mosques were set on fire; clashes between neo-Nazis and ANTIFA activists in Novi Sad in 2007; the riots after the declaration of Kosovo independence in 2008 in which a number of foreign diplomatic missions and businesses were attacked by the Serbian protesters; riots during the Pride Parade in 2010; attacks on Roma settlements in village Jabuka in 2010, Resnik in 2012, and anti-Roma riots in Zemun Polje in 2013; attacks on shops and bakeries owned by ethnic Albanians in Vojvodina, after the incident with the flag of the ‘Greater Albania’ at the football match between Serbia and Albania in 2014; etc.³¹ Besides the violence committed within Serbia, Serbian right-wing extremists travel to Ukrainian battlefields where they are engaged in warfare. Some of the foreign fighters in Ukraine have also been accused of planning terrorist attacks in the region of Western Balkans, such as Aleksandar Sindelić who allegedly was one of the organisers of the attempted coup in Montenegro in October 2016, and who is currently a witness collaborator before the Montenegrin Court. Even though allegations for coup attempts are highly controversial and court trials are still ongoing, involvement of the key figures that have been arrested (Aleksandar Sindelić and Bratislav Dikić) in violent and criminal activities in the past raise suspicion that they had indeed planned some violent activities, if not a coup d’état.

However, even when far-right actors are not directly involved in violent activities (physical violence), their narratives contribute to the incitement and/or legitimisation of violence, primarily through securitisation.³² Securitisation is a discursive process in which the securitising actor depicts something as a security threat to a valued referent object, thus urging for exceptional measures through which the threat would be removed.³³ In the narratives of the Serbian right-wing extremists, a number of minority groups are presented either as a direct, physical threat to Serbian people or, more often, as a threat to certain social order that is considered to be pivotal for the survival of the Serbian nation.³⁴ Thus, what Schmidt argues for Salafism, also applies to the Serbian far-right (although to a different extent, depending on circumstances, and taking different modalities) – it stands against the constitutive principles of modern democracy, such as minority rights, secularism, etc. In other words, not-violent right-wing extremism “facilitates the socialisation” of violent extremism, by normalising attitudes and positions incompatible with the democratic order.

Islamist extremists in Serbia could also be divided into two provisional categories: violent and non-violent (or, in Schmidt’s terms: not-violent). In fact, several studies of Islamist extremism in the region of Western Balkans insist on such division. For instance, Kursani (2015) proposes a clear distinction between three levels – or three layers of the pyramid – “liberal participationists” of Islam, “non-violent conservatives” and “violent rejectionists/Takfirs”, arguing that the middle layer, “non-violent conservatives”, does not necessarily serve as a conveyor belt or an enabling factor for the transition from non-violent to violent extremism.³⁵ Further, Bećirević (2016) points out that in the discourse in Bosnia and Herzegovina it is generally accepted that not all Salafis are violent. In other words, one must distinguish between non-violent Salafis, on the one side, and

³¹ Stakić, I. (2016) ‘Serbian Nationalism and Right-Wing Extremism’, in Ejdus, F. & Jureković, P. (eds.) *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*, Vienna: PfP Consortium Study Group ‘Regional Stability in South East Europe’ 140.

³² Ibid.

³³ See, for example: Buzan, B., O. Wæver & de Wilde, J. (1998) *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 35-36; Buzan, B. and O. Wæver (2003) *Regions and Powers: the Structure of International Security*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p. 491.

³⁴ Stakić, I. (2016) ‘Serbian Nationalism and Right-Wing Extremism’, in Ejdus, F. and Jureković, P. (eds.) *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*, Vienna: PfP Consortium Study Group ‘Regional Stability in South East Europe’, p. 141.

³⁵ Kursani, S. (2015) *Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens’ involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq*. Prishtina: KCSS, 57.

Kharijites, who are willing to use violence, on the other.³⁶ Nevertheless, Bećirević continues with the following observation:

“It is important to note, too, that even though a majority of Salafis live peaceful lives, they abide by an ideology obsessed with “pure Islam” and thus with purifying traditional Bosnian Islam. The fact that most da’is stop short of advocating violence does not mean they do not help create a discourse and culture that raises hostility toward everyone outside their circles; and this culture is a breeding ground for radicalism that does not stop short of advocating violence.”³⁷

According to our research findings based on the interviews, there are around 7,000 people who fall under the label of Islamist extremists, which is a slightly higher figure than right wing extremists.³⁸ One thousand of them could be labelled as not-(now)-violent extremist since they are indeed ready to defend their fellow Muslims in Syria. “I guarantee to you that there are 1,000 of us, beardcores that would go to Syria to defend our brothers that are being slaughtered by Assad. But we don’t want to join ISIS. They are evil”.³⁹ Both Salafis and followers of Hanafi Madhab agree that there are up to 100 Takfirs in Sandžak who are organised in Furkan and Al-Tawhid masjids. “These guys have always been problematic. Many of them are known in town as local bullies. They are high-conflict people. There are currently two Al-Tawhid masjids because their members pick a fight with each other and split.” Three interviewees told that they were threatened by those groups, and that some imams who are even very close to Salafis received threats as well.

But people in Sandžak are not only worried about Takfiris, they are also afraid of peaceful Salafis as a door to violent extremism. However, this sentiment of Sandžak people could go unnoticed at first glance, since they have nothing against Salafism when speaking about it in general. Their deep worries emerge only when they start sharing their personal experiences with Salafism. One of the focus group participant in the beginning of the discussion said that there is nothing wrong with Salafism, but later he said:

“My brother used to go clubbing which often involved binge-drink. But he had changed overnight. He became very religious, a Salafi. And then I started being worried. I would check his mobile phone frequently. How could I know that he isn’t visiting dangerous webpages.”

Another interviewee explained at the very beginning of his interview that the Hanbali School of Islam is among the legally recognised schools in Islam, as Hanafi, Maliki and Shafi schools are, and therefore there is nothing wrong with following Salafism. However, later in the interview he expressed his concern about the spread of Salafism because he was accused by Salafis of not being a good enough Muslim.

“I’m praying five times a day. I’m a very dedicated Muslim. Despite this fact a few Salafis told me that they cannot wait a moment to cut my head off with a sabre.”

³⁶ Bećirević, E. (2016) *Salafism Vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims*. Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 36-37.

³⁷ Ibid, 37.

³⁸ Račić, Lj. (2011) ‘Šta čeka Ustavni sud: Srbiji preči 5.000 ekstremista’ (‘What the Constitutional Court Can Expect: Serbia Is Threatened by 5.000 Extremists’), *PressOnline*, 03. 10. 2011. Available from: <http://www.pressonline.rs/info/politika/179192/sta-ceka-ustavni-sud-srbiji-preci-5000-ekstremista.html> [Accessed 14th December 2017].

³⁹ Interviewed member of Salafi community.

Many other interviewees are concerned with the fact that Salafis have different habits and circles of friends which alienate them from the majority of Muslims. Also, Salafis tend to be very assertive in practicing their faith which can put them in conflict situations with other people, and some of them may be vulnerable to manipulation by other radical members.

As one Islamic scholar puts it:

“Salafism isn’t a threat per se, but it is a red zone. You never know who will become violent or when.”

1.3. CHANNELS OF DISSEMINATION OF EXTREMIST MESSAGES

It is well known that Islamist extremists today, most importantly the IS, are technologically savvy and sophisticated. They use numerous online platforms – including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube – to spread their messages and reach new followers. As indicated by Byman (2017, cited in Byers and Mooney), the number of those who have been inspired by the IS online propaganda to travel as foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq is estimated at more than 20,000, while numerous others have been radicalised online and encouraged to become “lone wolf” attackers in the Western world.⁴⁰

Islamist extremists from Sandžak are present online, which enables them to reach wider audiences. There are several websites and Facebook pages that propagate Takfiri ideology and incite discrimination and hatred towards many groups, including Muslims who belong to the traditional, Hanafi school of Islam. As Kladničanin (2013) points out, the calls for violence at these web pages are generally not direct and blatant. They carefully and skilfully conceal their violent propaganda behind general discussions about Islam and, most importantly, behind the emotionally-charged topics, such as Srebrenica genocide, suffering of Muslims in Palestine, Syria and Iraq, with the emphasis on suffering of Muslim children. Further, the cyber activity of Sandžak Salafis – as virtually all other extremists today – abounds in visual materials, including graphics, photographs, as well as video clips.⁴¹ Such materials add emotional weight to the discussed topics, and also serve to attract attention and gain support of technologically savvy young people. Violent propaganda on these pages are also wrapped in a humorous tone. For instance, the way Shia Muslims pray is made fun of in the videos.

Moreover, they tend to resort to historic photos in order to show that their practices aren’t “Arabic” and thus alien to local Muslim population. It is usual now that they post photos displaying a group of women wearing a niqāb, concluding that that practice was widespread before communist rule.

Online propaganda is not the only channel of radicalisation and recruitment of Islamist extremists in Sandžak. Sandžak Salafis gather in masjids that exist outside the Islamic Community, although an interviewee pointed out that Salafi masjids are “approved and maybe even organised by the IC”. Salafis recruit followers from Hanafi Muslim community by “pulling them out of the mosques”. They target especially vulnerable individuals, for example those who recently may have lost a

⁴⁰ Byers, A. & Mooney, T. (2017) ‘Marketing to Extremists: Waging War in Cyberspace’, in *Small Wars Journal*, July 9, 2017. Available from: <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrn/art/marketing-to-extremists-waging-war-in-cyberspace> [Accessed 14th December 2017].

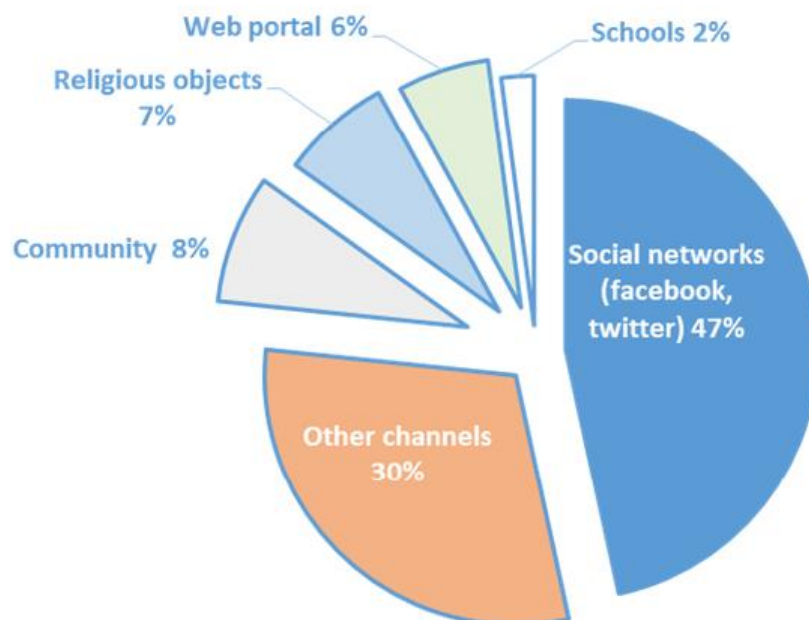
⁴¹ Kladničanin, F. (2013) ‘Vehabije u sajber prostoru’. In: Jeličić, J. & Ilić, S. (eds.) *Politički ekstremizam u sajber prostoru Srbije*. Zrenjanin: CRCD.

family member. The same interviewee stated that there were Salafi masjids in virtually every neighbourhood of Novi Pazar, however, not all of them were necessarily a threat.

“Maybe not all the [Salafi] masjids are threat, but you never know which are and which aren’t, until something happens.”⁴²

The findings of a public opinion survey conducted among young people from Sandžak show that almost a half of the respondents (46.7%) think that social networks (Facebook, Twitter) are the most important tools of extremist propaganda, while much lower percentage of the respondents - 5.9% - believe that web portals are the main spot from which the extremists spread their messages. Altogether, more than a half of the respondents (52.6%) see online platforms as crucial for propagating extremists’ ideas. Only 7.1% think that extremists spread their messages mainly from religious objects, while 8.3% believe that they do so “in the community”.⁴³ This finding indicates the importance of internet as a channel of dissemination of extremist messages.

Figure 3. How extremist ideas are being spread⁴⁴



Members of masjids where violent extremists gather also make full use of other modern technology.

“I saw that they are using conference videos for broadcasting their meetings and discussions to other masjids, even to other states. This communication goes in both directions. For this reason, field visits of the leaders from other countries are not as important as they used to be in the past”⁴⁵

⁴² Interviewed stakeholder from Novi Pazar.

⁴³ Ilić, V. (2016) *Stavovi mladih u Sandžaku: Koliko su mladi otvoreni prema islamskom ekstremizmu*. Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, p. 30.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 30.

⁴⁵ Interviewed stakeholder from Novi Pazar.

2. DRIVERS AND FACTORS OF EXTREMISM

Religious radicalisation and violent extremism are the result of a variety of factors and drivers that are interlinked and context-dependent. Therefore, in studying them, it is important to take into account the complex dynamics among various factors and drivers, as well as the specificities of a local context. For the purpose of methodological clarity, drivers and factors of radicalisation and violent extremism are usually grouped into several categories. There are different methodological frameworks that could be employed in analysis of drivers. For example, Denooux and Carter (2009) propose three different categories of drivers of violent extremism, namely:

- 1) **Socioeconomic drivers** (perceptions of social exclusion and marginality; social networks and group dynamics; societal discrimination; frustrated expectations and relative deprivation; unmet social and economic needs; greed or the proliferation of illegal economic activities);
- 2) **Political drivers** (denial of political rights and civil liberties; harsh government repression and gross violations of human rights; foreign occupation; political and/or military encroachment; endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites; poorly governed or ungoverned areas; local conflicts; state support; discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions; intimidation or coercion by VE groups; and perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples);
- 3) **Cultural drivers** (Islam under siege; broader cultural threats; and “proactive” religious agendas).⁴⁶

Further, the UNDP study from 2016 identifies seven (groups of) drivers of violent extremism:

- 1) Role of global and regional politics;
- 2) The convergence of horizontal inequalities (including economic exclusion, unemployment and limited opportunities for upward mobility, and political exclusion and shrinking civic space);
- 3) Injustice, corruption and mistreatment of certain groups;
- 4) Rejection of the socio-economic and political system;
- 5) Rejection of growing diversity in society;
- 6) Weak State capacity and failing security; and
- 7) Changing global culture and banalization of violence in media and entertainment.⁴⁷

As we can see, the UNDP’s framework also reflects (in a certain sense) the distinction between socioeconomic, political and cultural drivers. A public opinion survey conducted in November 2016 entitled “Research of Drivers of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism among Young People in Serbia” employs the UNDP’s methodological framework.⁴⁸ In this research, three distinct geographical areas were surveyed, namely: South-West Serbia (Novi Pazar, Tutin, Prijepolje and Sjenica) with its dominant Bosniak Muslim population, South Serbia (Preševo and Bujanovac) with a dominant Albanian population, and the biggest cities in Serbia (Beograd, Novi Sad, Kragujevac

⁴⁶ Denooux, G. & Carter, L. (2009) *Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism: A Guide to Programming*. USAID.

⁴⁷ UNDP. (2016) *Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity A development response to addressing radicalization and violent extremism*. UNDP.

⁴⁸ CeSID. (2016) *Istraživanje o pokretačima radikalizma i nasilnog ekstremizma među mladima u Srbiji*. Belgrade: CeSID.

and Niš) each with a Serb majority. For the purposes of this study, we will focus on the findings of the survey related to South-West Serbia.

Figure 4. Drivers of extremism in South-West Serbia⁴⁹

Driver	Weak	Medium	Strong	Very strong
Role of global and regional politics				
The convergence of horizontal inequalities				
Injustice, corruption and mistreatment of certain groups				
Rejection of the socio-economic and political system				
Rejection of growing diversity in society				
Weak State capacity and failing security				
Changing global culture and banalization of violence in media and entertainment				

As the findings of the public opinion research show, the strongest drivers of radicalisation of youth from South-West Serbia are: 1) the convergence of horizontal inequalities – which includes both economic and political drivers, and 2) the rejection of growing diversity in society – which is a purely cultural/identitarian driver. Other socioeconomic and political factors – such as injustice and inequality, rejection of the socioeconomic and political system, and lack of trust in state institutions – are not identified in this study as strong drivers. Moreover, in other two geographical areas that were surveyed – South Serbia and the four biggest cities – even the convergence of horizontal inequalities is not seen as equally strongly as identitarian drivers.⁵⁰

However, one should be very careful in assessing the importance/strength of cultural vs. socioeconomic and political factors. Undoubtedly, as the research findings suggest, identity and culture (including religion) play a very important role in radicalisation that leads to violent extremism. Still, such findings need to be interpreted in a wider context, i.e. taking into account the general trend of acculturation of politics.

In short, the culturalisation of politics implies that political and economic inequalities are naturalised/neutralised as cultural differences that are given and cannot be overcome.⁵¹ This global trend of the de-politicisation of politics is further intensified by the recent rise of right-wing populism. Populists worldwide seek to exploit the already existing citizens' fears – fear for security, fears of poverty, marginalisation and further disempowerment – by transposing them into the discursive field of culture/identity, where the fear is always expressed as the fear of the

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 15.

⁵¹ Žižek, S. (2007) *Tolerance as an Ideological Category*. Available from: <http://www.lacan.com/zizek-inquiry.html> [Accessed 14th December 2017].

“Enemy Other”, i.e. of someone with the identity different than ours. This trend has not bypassed the Western Balkans either. Harsh nationalist rhetoric is successfully instrumentalised by political (and religious) elites throughout the region, tending to obfuscate and draw attention away from socio-economic problems. In that sense, the perception of major drivers of violent extremism are partially distorted by the populists’ narratives and by the general trend of culturalisation of politics, and cultural/identitarian drivers often appear stronger than socioeconomic and political drivers.

2.1. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DRIVERS

Study of the attitudes of young people in Sandžak towards extremism, based on a public opinion research conducted by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in May 2016, points to several important issues related to the drivers of radicalisation and extremism. The findings of this research indicate that young people in Sandžak are well aware of the economic problems. Among the responses to the question: What is the major problem in your community?, “unemployment” is the answer with the highest frequency, while “poverty” and [problems with] “water” [supply] are ranked second and third.⁵² However, the majority of young people in Sandžak (58%) think that there is nothing they can do to solve the problems that bother them the most.⁵³

These findings should be interpreted as mutually reinforcing. Namely, trust in state institutions is extremely low among young people in Sandžak. The great majority of the respondents have trust only in their family members, emotional partners and friends, which testifies to a severe degradation of public sphere. The only public figures that enjoy certain trust are the religious leaders - 11% of respondents have trust in them, while, for example, only 5% trust the police, and only 2% trust the judiciary.⁵⁴

According to a public opinion survey conducted by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy in January 2017, more than a third of citizens of Serbia see corruption and crime (35%) as the main internal security threats, while 31% believes that the major threat is poor governance/the behaviour of politicians. Among the respondents of Bosniak nationality, even a higher number is primarily concerned with corruption and crime – 41%, while the second ranked threat is also poor governance (27%). Almost nine out of 10 Bosniaks (87%) think that the risk of corruption is high, which is a larger percentage than within other ethnic groups.⁵⁵ These findings suggest that the population of Sandžak experience even more problems with corrupted politicians, civil servants, law enforcement officers, and so on, than the rest of the population of Serbia.

Many interviewees’ statements confirm these findings, and one of them explained the situation in this way:

“In Novi Pazar magnum 357 rules. To get a low grade job you need to bribe local boss with 3,000 euros, for better posts 5,000 euro is needed, and for good jobs 7,000 euros is minimum. The problem is that I’m with university diploma and I can only dream about 3,000 euros, not to mention 7,000.”

⁵² Ilić, V. (2016) *Stavovi mladih u Sandžaku: Koliko su mladi otvoreni prema islamskom ekstremizmu*. Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, p. 9.

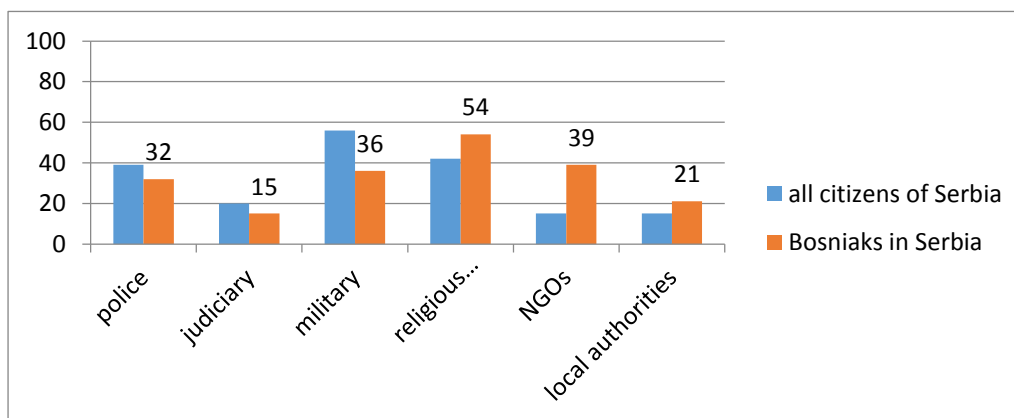
⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. 9-10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁵⁵ For example, 72% of ethnic Serbs believe that the risk of corruption is high, while only 52% of Hungarians in Serbia think so.

The same survey also shows that Bosniaks in Serbia generally have less trust in state institutions than other ethnic groups. For example, at the national level (all citizens of Serbia), 39% of respondents trust the police (partially or completely), while among Bosniaks 32% have complete or partial trust in the police; every fifth citizen of Serbia (20%) trust the judiciary, while 15% of Bosniaks in Serbia trust the judiciary; as for the military, the discrepancy is the most striking – while at the national level 56% of respondents have partial or complete trust in the military, that percentage within Bosniak minority is only 36%. On the other hand, Bosniaks in Serbia have more trust than the national average in religious institutions (54% of Bosniaks vs. 42% of all citizens of Serbia) non-governmental organisations (39% vs. 15%), and in the local authorities (21% vs. 15%). The lack of trust of Bosniaks in the Serbian state institutions might also be a consequence of the collective grievances related to the experience of the 1990s wars, i.e. suffering of Bosniaks during the war, and the aftermath in which this suffering has never been properly acknowledged by the official Serbian institutions.⁵⁶

Figure 5. Trust in institutions



Political leaders from Sandžak appear to be despised by the local populace.

“Every one of them participates in the central government, or they did it at some point in the past. What they have done for local community and its people so far? Nothing! They are only getting richer, while people are getting poorer.”⁵⁷

From the above, we can conclude that citizens of Sandžak are very aware of the economic and political injustices, but the lack of trust in state and political institutions prevents them from engaging in political struggles. One of the interviewees pointed out that young people from Novi Pazar are increasingly becoming members of political parties. However, he continued:

“Their membership in political parties should not be mistaken with genuine political activity. They are not politically active. They see political parties as the only way out from the misery and poverty, i.e. as the only way to find employment.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ For instance, the Serbian officials refuse to call the Srebrenica genocide ‘the genocide’, but refer to it as ‘the crime’.

⁵⁷ Interviewed citizen of Novi Pazar.

⁵⁸ Interviewed civil society representative.

Findings from this research are not exclusive to Sandžak. The latest report on the position of young people and their needs in Serbia⁵⁹ shows that 77% of young people think that they have no influence on political decisions while 83% are of the opinion that political parties don't work in the interest of young people. It is little wonder that 72% have a negative attitude towards political parties and that 76% of young people do not trust any political leader. This negative stance is transferred to other state institutions as well.

Instead of being politically active, young people from Novi Pazar (and Serbia as well) find refuge in private sphere and in the religion, whereas the dominant identitarian discourses transform their dissatisfaction with the socio-economic and political system into the hostility towards the groups that are perceived as the Enemy Other. Alain Badiou (2015), in his paper that analyses Islamist terrorism, explained this transformation through the relation between three contemporary subjectivities – the Western subjectivity that is essentially the subjectivity of the middle class, characterized by the possession of material goods, luxury, arrogance, etc.; the desire for the West, the subjectivity of those who are economically and politically marginalised and excluded from the global market (both as employees and as consumers) and who desire to participate in the “Western way of life”; and the third is the nihilist subjectivity, the one that emerges as a result of one's inability to satisfy the desire for the West. This third subjectivity is a violent desire for revenge and destruction that is, according to Badiou, “often expressed, formalised, in reactive mythologies, in the exaltation of traditionalisms that one claims to be defending, possibly by force of arms, against the Western way of life, against desire for the West.”⁶⁰ In other words, Badiou argues that the violent extremism is primarily driven by economic and political injustices, while the religion as such is merely a pretext, a “form of subjectivisation” and, thus, a factor of secondary importance.

Could Badiou's analysis be applied to the radicalisation (or, in Badiou's vocabulary – fascisation) of the Muslims from Sandžak? The empirical data provided by the above mentioned, but also other research, confirm the serious economic problems in Sandžak region. While the official unemployment rate in Serbia is around 15% and the average net salary 412 EUR,⁶¹ the unemployment rate in Novi Pazar is almost 60% and the average net salary 291 EUR.⁶² When it comes to young people, the problem of unemployment is even more severe - the youth unemployment rate in Serbia 37% and in Sandžak it is even higher, as it is the one of the least developed regions. One of the interviewees pointed out:

“The main cause of the religious radicalisation of Sandžak young people is the catastrophic economic situation. More specifically, unemployment and insecurity of jobs. Unemployment creates frustration and susceptibility for extremist ideas.”⁶³

Confluence of drivers: relative deprivation

Not only are unemployed young people excluded from the global market, but the majority of the employed also experience relative deprivation, as a result of widening gap between rich and

⁵⁹ Stojanović, B. (2017) *Alternativni izveštaj o položaju i potrebama mladih u Republici Srbiji*. Belgrade: Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije. pp. 69-87. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2DrZvHX> [Accessed 14th December 2017].

⁶⁰ Badiou, A. (2015) *Our Wound is Not So Recent*. P. 18. Available from: https://miguelabreugallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/AlainBadiou_OurWoundisNotSoRecent.pdf, [Accessed 14th December 2017].

⁶¹ Anon. (2016) Average salary in Belgrade 600 euros, 5% unemployment – Novi Pazar, average salary 280 euros, unemployment 60%. *SandzakPress*. <https://goo.gl/Ax4eiM>

⁶² Baza opština, Novi Pazar. Available from: <https://goo.gl/QQ8oN8> [Accessed 14th December 2017].

⁶³ Interviewed representative of local authorities.

poor.⁶⁴ This relative deprivation and the increased class stratification in post-socialist Balkan countries is a factor that has, so far, been under-researched and underestimated as a driver of extremism. The scope and severity of economic problems that young people from Sandžak face is obscured by a number of issues. First, an increasing percentage of young people are enrolled in (private) universities, which creates an “illusion that the city is functioning properly”. As indicated by one of the interviewees:

“A high number of young people are getting university degrees, but then, the majority of them are unable to find jobs in their professional fields, which creates frustration and anger among them.”⁶⁵

As a result of this frustration many young people have been migrating to EU countries in an organised manner.⁶⁶

“Look at the bus station during the weekend and you will notice that hundreds of young are going to EU countries in a search for work. This is even organised by some agencies who make a business out of it. It started a several years ago and it is still happening. What a shame for town and a country. We are educating people for other states, while scum are getting jobs here.”⁶⁷

Research findings on internal and external migrations in Serbia shows that Bosniaks along with Roma make up the majority of the external migrant group. The top three destination countries are Austria, Germany and Switzerland, and the major reason for migration is economic.⁶⁸

However, it is important to note that participant observation in Novi Pazar would not identify poverty as one of the most pressing issues in this city. On the contrary – cafes and restaurants in the mains streets of Novi Pazar are full of young people who do not differ in appearance from their peers from other cities in Serbia or even in Western Europe. An image of relative welfare would arguably be the dominant impression of an impartial observer. However, as several interviewees emphasized, the majority of the inhabitants of Novi Pazar have relatives who live abroad (in the Western European countries) and who help their families in Sandžak financially.

“The majority of people in Novi Pazar are dependent on the money from diasporas, and that creates a false image that people here live decent lives.”

“Diaspora supports the entire region.”

This is in fact what Badiou calls the desire for the West. Through mass media, young people from Novi Pazar are continuously exposed to the “spectacle of the luxury and arrogance” (of the Western subjectivity). They try to imitate it – by adopting certain behaviours and practices (e.g. clothes, pop-cultural preferences, etc.) – but without having the means to achieve the Western subjectivity (middle class). And this is where religion as a factor of radicalisation comes into play

⁶⁴ The widening gap between rich and poor is a global trend that affects both developed and developing countries. Today, in OECD countries, the richest 10% of the population earn 9.6 times the income of the poorest 10%. In the 1980s this ratio was 7:1, during the 1990s 8:1, and 9:1 in the 2000s. (See: OECD (2015) *In It Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All*). The situation in developing countries is even gloomier – in 2013, more than 75% of the population in these countries lived in societies where income was more unequally distributed than it had been in the 1990s. (See: UNDP (2013) *Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries*).

⁶⁵ Interviewed teacher from Novi Pazar.

⁶⁶ Sandžak Press. (2015) *Ovako izgleda egzodus iz Novog Pazara*. Available from: <https://goo.gl/7JRCUa> [Accessed 9th August 2017].

⁶⁷ Interviewed citizen from Novi Pazar.

⁶⁸ Bašić, G. (2015). *Uticaj obrazovanja na jezicima nacionalnih manjina na spoljašnje i unutrašnje migracije pripadnika nacionalnih manjina*. Belgrade: IOM, SDC, UNDP, p. 10. Available from: <https://goo.gl/shM9Hc> [Accessed 14th December 2017].

and becomes increasingly important. The next section will discuss the identitarian/religious drivers of extremism, i.e. how religion and religious narratives contribute to the rise of extremism in Sandžak.

2.2. IDENTITARIAN DRIVERS

Low trust in state institutions, as well as the perception that economic and political problems cannot be solved through institutions or political activism, certainly contributes to the increased religiosity among young people in Sandžak. Confronted with the degradation of public sphere and various forms of communal life, people turn to religion in search of belonging, identity and solidarity. According to the findings of a survey conducted in May 2016, religious identification among Sandžak young people is extremely high. Almost two thirds of the respondents (62%) claim that they are strict believers who do not question any religious teaching of their faith,⁶⁹ half of them (50%) say that religious community has strong influence over them,⁷⁰ while every fifth respondent (20%) justifies violence as a means to defend their faith.⁷¹ Religious belonging is identified by the survey participants as the most important form of belonging. Belonging to the (local) religious community is important or very important for 57% of the respondents, belonging to Islam is (very) important for 64%, while only 44% consider national belonging as (very) important. This finding indicates that the identity of young Bosniaks from Sandžak is predominantly religious, rather than national.

“Over the last decade, people have turned to faith in large numbers. The majority of cafes in Novi Pazar stopped serving alcoholic drinks. The reason for that is strictly commercial – the owners figured out that it would be profitable for them.”⁷²

Nevertheless, the question that could be asked is: what kind of religiosity is predominant among young people in Sandžak? The data collected through interviews in Novi Pazar indicate that the majority of young people, while identifying themselves as believers, know very little about Islam, i.e. their knowledge of religion is superficial and, as a consequence, they become susceptible to various (literal) interpretations of religious narratives. As pointed out by one of the interviewees, older Imams in Sandžak do not have sufficient knowledge of Islam and, therefore, they are not able to meet the spiritual needs and curiosity of young people. As for religious education within the state schools, the general impression among the interviewees from Novi Pazar is that religious classes are of poor quality and potentially dangerous. While some believe that the main problem is not the curriculum, but individual teachers who offer problematic interpretations of Islam, or demand sheer memorisation -others are against religious education as such. *“Religious classes contribute to segregation and spreading of religious intolerance and hate. They should be eliminated from the school curriculum.”*

Civic education does not exist in Sandžak. The law of the Republic of Serbia prescribes a compulsory choice between civic education and religious education.⁷³ However, although students/parents can opt between religious classes and civic education, virtually all opt for religious education, an important indicator of the increased religiosity in this region.

⁶⁹ Ilić, V. (2016) *Stavovi mladih u Sandžaku: Koliko su mladi otvoreni prema islamskom ekstremizmu*. Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 16.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 15.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 19.

⁷² Interviewed stakeholder from civil society in Novi Pazar.

⁷³ This has been introduced in 2006.

Another factor that contributes to the religiosity of young people in Sandžak is the fact that many of them go to study abroad, at Islamic universities in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, where they “become more religious than they were before”. As put succinctly by one of the interviewees:

“My brother had been educated in Saudi Arabia. Now we have many conflicts which are small but very annoying since they are completely unnecessary. For instance, during a family lunch he had insisted that we all sat on the ground and not at the table. He explained that all Muslims should do this, given the fact that this had been practiced by very first followers of Muhamed. When I had responded by asking him why he wasn’t riding a camel on his way to my place instead of driving a car, we had a quarrel.”

The reasons why young people go to religious universities in the Middle East are not only related to educational quality or the search for alternatives, but are also connected to economic and political factors:

“Young people cannot afford higher education in Serbia, because at the Serbian universities they would have to pay high tuition fees. So, they started going to Turkey and Saudi Arabia where the education at Islamic universities is completely free– they do not pay tuition, and they also get accommodation and meals for free. In addition to that, Muslim parents were afraid to send their children to study in Belgrade and other university towns in Serbia.”⁷⁴

The high costs of studying at state universities in Serbia makes education *de facto* inaccessible for children from families with lower income. This is particularly relevant for Balkan countries where education was free during socialist Yugoslavia and more accessible for people from working class. Furthermore, fear among Muslim parents of sending their children to the cities with a Serbian majority indicates that the rights of religious minorities in Serbia are not adequately protected and that ethnic/religious tensions are still very alive within the Serbian society.

Clearly, the increased religiosity of people from Sandžak is not *per se* a driver of Islamist extremism. However, the evident turn to religion of a large portion of Muslim population, coupled with the general trend of deregulation of the entire public sphere – from economy to education – allows for various influences and interpretations of Islam to “move in”. The divided Islamic community in Serbia is an additional factor that opens a space for harmful influences, i.e. problematic interpretations of Islam that might lead to violent extremism.

“The problem is that people who become believers ‘overnight’ do not know much about religion and, consequently, they are much more susceptible to extremist influences. Young people who have very little knowledge of Islam are especially vulnerable. We now have the inflation in religious teaching, many of which are dangerous.”⁷⁵

Another factor contributing to the radicalisation of Muslims in Sandžak (as in other parts of the world) is a developing narrative about the suffering of Muslims around the world (in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, in the Balkans in Bosnia and Kosovo, etc.) and about the injustices done to Muslim population by others. While such problems certainly exist, and ought to be addressed by the states and the society, Islamist extremists exploit such narratives in order to incite a desire for

⁷⁴ Interviewed school teacher from Novi Pazar.

⁷⁵ Interviewed Islamic scholar.

violent revenge. In other words, they manipulate data about violence, exploitation and discrimination against Muslims, transforming it into emotionally-charged stories, with the aim of fuelling religious hatred towards others.

2.2.1 Memories of ‘the good old days’

Many interviewees have memories of ‘the good old days’ when Novi Pazar was strong industrial town and when ethnicity as well as religion weren’t as important as today.

“During socialism many big factories employing thousands of people had been working successfully. People had certainty. They could plan their future. Even during the authoritarian rule of Slobodan Milošević who discriminated and treated Bosniaks harshly in so many respects, industry especially textile, was better off than is today. Now economy of Novi Pazar is composed of small and mid-size enterprises which future is uncertain in the context where market laws haven’t been efficient. Many businesses operate in grey zone – don’t pay taxes, underpay and don’t declare workers, force workers. The list can go on indefinitely.”⁷⁶

According to the Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development of Novi Pazar, in this town only 0,38% of companies are large, 2,15% are mid-size and 97,47% are small enterprises. The majority of mid and small size are trade and process companies.⁷⁷

Nostalgia is very present in the older generations, but is also transferred to young people and appears to contribute additionally to their frustrations making them vulnerable to extremist ideas.

2.2.2 Negative image in central media and feeling of isolation

Almost all interviewees were annoyed by the fact that Sandžak region and especially Novi Pazar was represented in central media very negatively. Only news related to crime and violent incidents are reported creating an image that people of this region have been historically problematic, and that extremism is just one feature natural to this kind of environment.

“Two weeks ago, Balkan Championship in Athletics was held in Novi Pazar. Serbia won 20 medals.⁷⁸ The central TV stations scarcely reported about it. Why? That isn’t exception, but rule that they report only about violence, drug dealers despite the fact that there are many good stories here.”⁷⁹

These negative emotions of the Sandžak populace are further reinforced by the fact that this area is geographically isolated.

“All the main roads bypass Novi Pazar. And Tutin is a real dead end in Serbia... Maybe will something change to better if highway to Montenegro is built near Novi Pazar.”⁸⁰

This negative image of the region combined with the other factors described above creates a siege mentality and may also contribute to passiveness among the local population.

⁷⁶ Interviewed representative of local authorities.

⁷⁷ Strateški plan održivog razvoja opštine Novi Pazar 2008-2012, Opština Novi Pazar. Available from: https://www.novipazar.rs/images/dokumenti/strategije/strateski_plan_odrzivog_razvoja_novog_pazara.pdf [Accessed: December 28, 2017].

⁷⁸ Championship took place from 15 to 16 November, 2017. <https://goo.gl/6MgqAW> [Accessed: December 28, 2017].

⁷⁹ Interviewed journalist of media from Novi Pazar.

⁸⁰ Interviewed resident of Novi Pazar.

“Raška town is only 20km afar from Novi Pazar, and there are only sporadic joint events and initiatives. Residents of Novi Pazar only pass through Raška on their way to other towns and cities, usually Kragujevac, Kraljevo or Belgrade.”⁸¹

3. WHO ARE THE VIOLENT EXTREMISTS?

The profile of violent extremists can be roughly sketched on the basis of official data (indictments) on the individuals who committed acts of violence motivated by extremist ideologies, indicating which parts of the population are at risk of becoming violent extremists.

The indictments of seven individuals accused of acts of terrorism before the Serbian courts (one from 2014 and the other from 2016) provide relatively detailed data about those charged. All of those charged were accused of terrorism and recruitment and training for terrorist acts, while six of them were also accused of financing terrorism.

Figure 6. Profile of individuals charged for terrorism

Name	Born	Gender	Religion	Ethnicity	Education/ Occupation	Place of residence	Property	Previous convictions	Family
Abid Podbićanin	1979	M	Muslim	Bosniak	Not known	Novi Pazar	Not known	Not known	Not known
Sead Plojović Sejo	1983	M	Muslim	Bosniak	Stonecutter / High school	Novi Pazar	No property	No	Married, 3 children
Tefik Mujović	1980	M	Muslim	Bosniak	Not known	Novi Pazar	Not known	No	Not known
Izudin Crnovršanin Zudo	1989	M	Muslim	Bosniak	Commercialist / High school	Novi Pazar	No property	No	Married, 2 children
Ferat Kasumović	1984	M	Muslim	Roma	Manual worker /Elementary school	Belgrade	No property	unlawful keeping of narcotics (Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia, art. 246(3)), on 8 June 2007	Married, 2 children

⁸¹ Interviewed civil society representative from Novi Pazar.

Goran Pavlović Abdulah	1966	M	Muslim Former Orthodox Christian	Serbian	Not known	Belgrade	Not known	smuggling (Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia, art. 230(1)), on 30 July 2012	Not known
Rejhan Plojović Bato	1986	M	Muslim	Bosniak	Not known	Novi Pazar	Not known	tax evasion (Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia, art. 230(1)) on 28 June 2011	Not known

According to the indictments, five out of seven indictees travelled to Syria and joined the so-called Islamic State. One of them died fighting in Syria, three are fugitives, while three are in custody and pleaded innocent before the Serbian court. All the indicted are Muslim and male, and two brought their wives and children to Syria.

Data about education/occupation is only available for those remanded in custody. Of these, two finished high school, while one finished seven grades of elementary school in Germany. None of the three in custody (nor the members of their families) has any property registered under their name. Three of those charged were previously convicted of unlawful keeping of narcotics, smuggling, and tax evasion. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that their previous criminal activities were related to organised crime.

Five of this sample are residents of Novi Pazar, while two of them are residents of Belgrade. However, those who were recruited by the seven indicted were not all from Sandžak, but came from Smederevo and Zemun (Belgrade). Additionally, according to the indictments, some of the accused organised lectures and meetings in Raška, Novi Sad, Sremčica, Zemun, Smederevo for the purposes of recruitment. Apart from the locations in Serbia, the indictments indicate that the accused had well-established connections with Islamist extremists from Gornja Maoča, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as links with Bosniak diasporas in Germany, Luxembourg and Croatia.

According to available media information on individuals who have travelled in Syria but who have not yet been prosecuted, most are male with an average age of 29 years old. There are also 11 women on the list.⁸²

⁸² See annex no. 1.

4. AT RISK COMMUNITIES

Information acquired from the interviewed stakeholders on communities at risk, include only the interviews with various stakeholders in Novi Pazar, with indicated several societal groups that are at particular risk of becoming radicalised and potentially violent.

1) Young people

There was general consensus among the interviewees from Novi Pazar that young people are more at risk of becoming radicalised and violent than the older population. Data about foreign fighters from Serbia (the indictments analysed above, as well as media reports) confirm that the majority of extremists are young (in their twenties or early thirties), which is also in line with data on a global level. Several factors may make young people more susceptible to extremist ideas than the generation of their parents – higher youth unemployment rates than in the general population, studies abroad at Islamic universities, search for personal identity, etc. Moreover, as pointed out by one of the interviewees:

“Young people have strong desire to prove themselves as respected individuals and valuable members of the community. It is normal, everyone wants to be accepted within their community. However, young people in Novi Pazar nowadays don't have the opportunity to 'prove themselves', they don't feel as a part of the community, and consequently, they turn to extremist -groups that give them the sense of belonging and identity.”⁸³

This appears to indicate a general degradation of community life and points to the fact that various forms of solidarity that existed before are disintegrating under the pressure of general trends of market liberalisation, privatisation and competition. As a consequence, young people feel that they have been left alone, without any material or emotional support from the immediate of broader community they live within. On the other side, they feel pressure to compete, “achieve”, acquire material wealth, etc. This pressure is sometimes personified in family members, relatives, or peers, but even if it is not, there is a structural pressure that results in what Badiou calls the desire for the West.

Therefore, it can be argued that young people experience different kinds of pressures than their parents as a consequence of neo-liberal market and the disintegration of communal life, especially in the post-socialist space.

2) The relatively poor and deprived

There was no consensus among the interviewees on whether the extremely poor are at greater risk of becoming extremists than others. Some claimed that among the extremists there were individuals of different material statuses, while others pointed out that the majority of religiously radicalised people in Novi Pazar are from the lowest class.

⁸³ Interviewed professor from Novi Pazar.

“The great majority of religious radicals are people of poor economic status. They are extremely helpful to each other. No matter how little money they have, they will give it to one who needs it more.”⁸⁴

Of course, this solidarity extends only to the members of their group. As was the case with a sense of belonging and identity, extremist groups also provide material support to their members. The data about foreign fighters from Serbia who have been accused before the Serbian Court also indicate that the accused are arguably of lower economic status. None of them has any property registered in their name. Still, one should be careful with such conclusions, as the majority of young people in Serbia do not have registered property.

On the other hand, not only the extremely poor are drawn to religious extremism. Individuals who are not in need of direct financial/material support can also be attracted to extremist groups for economic reasons, and this could be explained by the concept of relative deprivation, as well with Badiou’s notion of ‘desire for the West’. The increased class stratification and the widening gap between the very rich and everyone else, contributes to the frustration and anger of the majority of population – not only the most vulnerable ones, but also those who are *relatively* deprived of economic welfare. As Badiou argues, unsatisfied desire for the Western subjectivity, i.e. the lifestyle of the rich, could potentially turn into the nihilist subjectivity and desire for violent revenge.

3) Those who do not know much about religion (who lack religious education)

The majority of interviewees from Novi Pazar agree that those individuals who turn to religion “overnight” are at greater risk of becoming violent extremists than those who were religious for a longer period of time.

“The majority of Wahhabis are people who were not religious before.”

“People who don’t know much about religion are ‘easy prey’ for extremists.”

As indicated in the previous chapter, the lack of knowledge about Islam opens the door for various problematic interpretations that could lead to violent extremism.

4) Those who went to study abroad, in the Middle East

A large number of young people from Sandžak go to study abroad, at the Islamic universities in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, where they “become more religious than they were before” and, in the view of a number of the interviewees, with greater potential for radicalisation.

5) Salafi community

Given the fact that all violent Islamist extremists follow the Salafi interpretation of Islam, Salafi community could be identified as a specific ‘group at risk’. Resorting to violence is more the result of the way in which Islam is practiced than of specific beliefs. Salafis tend to be literalist and uncompromising when it comes to their approach to Islam and how it is practiced regardless of context. As one interviewee said:

⁸⁴ Interviewed journalist from Novi Pazar.

“The mosque was crowded with believers. There was very little space for prayer. However, one Salafi was trying to do a prayer in his way at any price, by taking wide stance. He was pushing me and trampled my feet. And then I had a quarrel with him. I mean, If everybody took wide praying stance in overcrowded mosque, a very few could really pray.”

These individual cases of conflicts can easily become something bigger since some Salafis have a very strong group identity and sense of solidarity with each other no matter if one is right or wrong. Many interviews witnessed to very fast mobilisation of Salafis in “crisis” situations (see for example section on Roma radicalisation).

Finally, the total commitment of some Salafis to their faith, to the extent that they are ready to sacrifice their lives for it, make them susceptible to manipulation by violent extremist groups.

“I’m already a dead man. So it’s important how you’ll spend your life... I can guarantee you that there are 1,000 of us, beardcores who would go to Syria tomorrow.”⁸⁵

“Let me tell you a one short story. There is a one man who lost all his sons, four of them. He would just calmly say inshallah. Everything is in the God’s hands.”⁸⁶

“Islam will prevail in Europe. Even Nostradamus was explicit about that.”⁸⁷

We cannot conclude that all Salafi are prone to violence. However, where other factors come together in a given group of Salafis, then they could be described as a ‘group at risk’.

Almost all of these risk factors can also be found among Roma Muslims in Serbia, which is elaborated in greater detail in the section on Roma radicalisation.

5. LINKS TO ORGANISED CRIME

Over the course of this research links to organised crime and extremism have not been confirmed. Many interviewees suspected that such links exist, on the basis that “how come that some radical preachers who had nothing yesterday now drive super expensive cars and are able to provide good life to a large families.”⁸⁸ However, both the followers of Hanafi Islam and peaceful Salafi Muslims point to the fact that violent extremists organised in Furkan and Al Tawhid masjids in Sandžak have had previous experience of violence and petty crime. “Members of these masjids are local bullies.” Insight into the indictments against seven Serbian citizens who joined ISIS shows that three of them had records of petty crime (unlawful keeping of narcotics, smuggling and tax evasion). Also, it was reported that Mirza Ganić, a foreign fighter from Novi Pazar who died in Syria, was a football hooligan. More, thorough research on this issue is still required.

⁸⁵ Interviewed follower of Salafism.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Interviewed resident of Novi Pazar.

6. TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Connections among extremists in the Balkans are present and mostly revolve around language. Thus, extremists in Serbia have their most intensive cooperation with “brothers” from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro (Plav, Rožaje). While connections with Kosovo exist, they are rare since they depend mostly on older Kosovars who speak Serbian/Bosnian. It is reported that Idriz Bilibani had been contact between Kosovo Albanians and Bosniaks, especially in Prizren area and Bosniaks in Serbia and Montenegro.⁸⁹

Cooperation traditionally comes in the form of visits of da'is who give religious lectures and book presentations, but there are also humanitarian activities. The most intensive contacts with extremists from EU countries are those where a Bosnian diaspora is present such as in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands and Luxemburg. Indictments state that suspects had their most intensive links with Austria, Germany and Luxemburg, where they received a limited amount of financial support. The media reported that Safet Šaćiri spent some time in Switzerland before leaving for Syria and that Alma Smailović left for Syria from Austria. Field visits remain important, although not as intensively as in the past, since modern technology facilitates exchange of information. One interviewee witnessed that, in one masjid, gatherings are broadcasted to another via internet. Since conclusions in this chapter are mainly drawn based on secondary sources, more field research is needed for broadening the research findings about this topic.

7. COUNTRY SPECIFIC ISSUES

7.1 DIVISIONS AND POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN ISLAMIC COMMUNITIES

There are two official Islamic bodies operating in Serbia: The Islamic Community of Serbia (ICoS) headquartered in Belgrade and The Islamic Community in Serbia (ICiS) with headquarters in Novi Pazar, operating under the auspices of the Islamic Community in Bosnia, based in Sarajevo. The conflict between the two organisations escalated over the influence of the local Bosniak population in Sandžak, as the two organisations fought for influence and legitimacy. ICoS strongly opposed the idea that Muslims and their religious community should be subject to the Islamic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, representatives and believers of ICiS interviewed for this project claim that ICoS only represent a small number of Muslims in Serbia, mainly in Belgrade and does not enjoy legitimacy among the majority of Muslim believers.

Even the attempt by Turkey to broker the unification of the two Islamic communities failed. In 2011 Turkey proposed a unification plan composed of 14 points. It was envisaged that ICiS and ICoS would merge together into single structure. But the major substantial requirements were that key representatives of both ICiS and ICoS would not occupy any high positions within newly unified structure, or that religious representatives would not take part in political activities, either inside or outside Mosques.⁹⁰

All these facts and events have only further damaged the legitimacy of the official ICs structures and representatives, sending a message to Muslims that ICs representatives are obsessed with

⁸⁹ Refik, A. (2013) *Iz Kosova u rat u Siriji*. Deutsche Welle. Available from: <http://www.dw.com/hr/iz-kosova-u-rat-u-siriji/a-16918070> [Accessed 2nd July 2017].

⁹⁰ RTV. (2011) *Islamsku zajednicu u Srbiji ujedinjuje Turska?* Available from: <https://goo.gl/2JHCG2> [Accessed 8th July 2017].

power struggles. Believers in Sandžak think that unification of the ICs is necessary for addressing the issue of radicalisation, but “...this isn’t enough. IC posts should be occupied by real religious leaders. Those who can gather people and are trusted by people. Imams that enjoy legitimacy”.⁹¹

The fact that larger reforms of ICs are needed to tackle violent extremism are best exemplified by the account of one Salafi member who was asked who should have a leading role in the unification and in the future life of Muslims, IC in Serbia or IC of Serbia. He simply answered: “Islamic community”.⁹²

But concerns of divisions among Muslims do not end with these issues. They are worried by the fact that there is also the spread of Salafism, and that Shia Islam is taking root. “There are no more than 2,000 Shia Muslims in Serbia, but given the fact that there were under a few hundred only a couple of years ago, that is worrying.” The impression among interviewees was that the division among Muslims is being intentionally maintained, and exacerbated.

7.2. ROMA RADICALISATION

In recent years, there has been a trend of militant Salafi ideas spreading to Muslim members of Roma communities, especially among the Ashkali Roma community that immigrated from Kosovo after the Kosovo War in 2000. There have also been cases of Christian Roma being converted to Islam under the influence of Salafi imams. Roma communities are ideal targets for radical movements because they are generally extremely poor, underemployed and with very low levels of education. They are often centred around isolated, illegal settlements. Members of Roma communities are also frequently involved in petty criminal activity, which further distances them from the majority population. Furthermore, they are also often the victims of verbal and physical abuse by extreme right-wing groups, leaving members vulnerable to radicalised ideas.

Those propagating radical Islamist ideas approach members of the Roma community, saying they can provide various kinds of support to impoverished and persecuted believers, such as help finding work abroad and so forth. They also offer them sense of belonging to a broader community, where differences on nationality, race and socio-economic position are no longer important. Everybody is equal as Muslims. As one non-Roma Salafi from Novi Pazar said: “We are all the same, whether we are Bosnians, Roma... We are Muslims.” As they gain their trust, they begin to promote radical religious teachings and practices. Their mission among the Roma is eased by the fact that most Roma Muslims have poor knowledge of Islamic customs. “Roma Muslims adopted practices from other religions as well. Therefore it is very easy for Salafis to criticize them and to offer real Islamic practice composed of simple rules.”⁹³

Salafis also use very sensitive individual life moments for recruiting new members.

“I’ve witnessed on several occasions that they are very active when somebody dies, when people come to express condolences and offer comfort and help to family members.

⁹¹ Interviewed Islamic scholar.

⁹² Interviewed follower of Salafism.

⁹³ Interviewed representative of Roma community.

When people mourn over the deceased, they start propagate their ideology step-by-step.”⁹⁴

The radicalisation of members of Roma communities is a trend that is particularly noticeable on the outskirts of Belgrade, Novi Sad and Smederevo. According to several Roma interviewees in each mahalla there are several dozen Muslim Roma who follow the Salafi interpretation of Islam.⁹⁵ Even though most of the Salafi Roma are peaceful, eleven Roma have travelled to Syria and Iraq according to media reports, some of them taking their families with them as well.⁹⁶ Some individuals also reported serious incidents with members of Salafi community. One interviewee from Belgrade suburb of Zemun claims that he had to move from his house due to a series of violent incidents involving Roma Salafis. Initially, a personal dispute between two individuals, it very quickly turned into a violent incident when other members of Salafi movement supported his fellow.

“I have never experienced such a level of fast mobilisation in my life. All of sudden they were showing up from everywhere. But what is worst is the fact that they didn’t leave me and my family alone until we moved.”⁹⁷

He also explained that due to this aggressiveness of Salafi Roma, a few more residents of this neighbourhood also had to move.

State responds with force

On May 26, 2017 the Serbian authorities demolished a building that was being used by Roma Muslims in the Belgrade suburb of Zemun polje as a place of prayer. The official explanation was that the building did not have construction permits.⁹⁸ However, several interviewees from the Roma and Islamic Community of Serbia confirmed that a very active Salafi community was present there and suspected that this was the real reason for demolishing the building. Otherwise, it is very difficult to explain the many other “illegal” buildings being built across Serbia.

“At a distance of 300 meters from demolished mosque there is an orthodox church without permits. Also, the Islamic Community in Serbia is putting up a building in the very centre of Novi Pazar without the necessary licences.”⁹⁹

Whatever the reasons for demolishing the building, this action by state authorities sparked outrage among the Muslim population in Serbia and in the wider Balkan region as well.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ According to 2011 census, 147604 Roma live in Serbia out of which 35591 are Muslims. The most Muslim Roma lives in Belgrade as well as in East and South Serbia. Radovanovic, S. & Knezevis, A. (2014) Roma in Serbia. *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia*. Available from: <https://goo.gl/UC7jGy> [Accessed 13th July 2017].

⁹⁶ For the full list see appendix no. 1.

It is also reported that Saciri recruited two individuals from Belgrade suburb Zemun polje for joining ISIS- Veljij Mehmeti and Mevludin Kopilji. Anon. (2015) *Ovo su teroristi iz Srbije koji se bore za Islamsku državu*. Blic. Available from: <https://goo.gl/hA9JfK> [Accessed 22nd July 2017].

⁹⁷ Several interviewees from Novi Pazar experienced the same-very fast mobilization of Salafists in incidents and conflict situations.

⁹⁸ Živanović, M. (2017) Serbian Mufti Denounces Demolition of Illegal Mosque. *Balkan Insight*. Available from: <https://goo.gl/dgcPcK> [Accessed 22nd July 2017].

⁹⁹ Interviewed representative of Roma community.

7.3 DIFFERENCE IN TREATMENT OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS FROM UKRAINE VS. FOREIGN FIGHTERS FROM SYRIA

Serbia's criminal law was amended in the fall of 2014. The amendments make participation in a war, affiliation with armed groups, or organisation of participation in war or armed conflict in another country, punishable by up to 10 years of imprisonment.¹⁰⁰ Thus far, however, Serbian citizens who participate in foreign conflicts in Ukraine and Syria or Iraq have been treated very differently under the amended law. This difference in treatment presents not only a legal issue, but a social and political one that, with time, could evolve into a serious security threat.

Serbian citizens who go to Syria do so illegally, and secretly, informing their families about their departure only after they leave the country.¹⁰¹ According to the Serbian authorities, a total number of 49 Serbian citizens left Serbia to join the conflict in Iraq or Syria.¹⁰² So far, the prosecution has filed charges against a total of seven people for terrorism-related offences, including radicalisation and recruitment. Four individuals have been accused of financing terrorism.¹⁰³

Unlike the fighters who go to Syria, those who travel to Ukraine do so legally, under the pretence of delivering humanitarian aid or going to work in Russia, and they often also announce their intentions to do so on social media.¹⁰⁴ However, it is important to note that this has changed since the amendments to the law came into force in 2014, reducing their presence on social media. Furthermore, news about the death of Serbian citizen fighting in Syria, revealed the fact that many Serbs who fought on pro-Russian side in Ukraine are now fighting for Assad's forces through engagement of Russian private military company known by the name Wagner.¹⁰⁵

Most of returned fighters from Ukraine have made a deal with the Prosecution and pleaded guilty, receiving suspended sentences rather than time in prison. The exact terms of the settlements are not known or available to the public. Those who return from Syria, on the other hand, are getting charged not with the participation in the foreign conflict, but with terrorism (under the article 391), which will significantly increase their sentences and which presents the main difference in treatment of these two groups of fighters. As per the charges pressed against Goran Pavlović and Rejhana Plojović, the returnees from Syria who have been charged thus far face punishment under the article 393a related to financing terrorism, and article 391 related to threatening Serbian citizens with terrorism, radicalisation and recruitment.¹⁰⁶ This presents the strongest difference in treatment of the fighters from Ukraine and fighters from Syria, and it has made easier to justify by the fact that Islamist fighters are tied to internationally acknowledged

¹⁰⁰ Serbian Criminal Law. Article 386. Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia. No. 85/2005, 88/2005, 107/2005, 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014 and 94/2016) Available from: http://paragraf.rs/propisi/krivicni_zakonik.html [Accessed 14th December 2017].

¹⁰¹ Anon. (2017) *Transkript: Tajno delovanje - javne posledice*. In: *Insajder*. Available from: <https://goo.gl/Za7H7E> [Accessed 15th June 2017].

¹⁰² Luković, D. (2017) *Za ISIS ratuje 49 osoba iz Srbije*. *Blic*. Available from: <https://goo.gl/u6mHq3> [Accessed 4th September 2017].

¹⁰³ European Commission, Non-paper on the state of play regarding chapters 23 and 24 for Serbia May 2017. Available from:

http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/eu_dokumenta/non_paper_ch23_24_eng.pdf

¹⁰⁴ See: Počuča (<https://www.facebook.com/para.bellum2>) and Beric (<https://www.facebook.com/milojko.ludi.9843>) on Facebook – they are very open about their participation in the war and use Facebook as a platform to communicate with other potential fighters as well as the Russian and Serbian audience that supports them.

¹⁰⁵ Stanić, M. (2017) *U SMRT ZA 5.000 DOLARA Srbin poginuo ratujući na ruskoj strani protiv džihadista u Siriji*. *Blic*. Available from: <https://goo.gl/nr2pfo> [Accessed 4th September 2017].

¹⁰⁶ Viši sud u Beogradu. Potvrđena optužnica podignuta protiv okrivljenih Gorana Pavlovića i Rejhana Plojovića („predmet VEHA BIJE 2“). March 22, 2016. Available from: <http://www.bq.vi.sud.rs/lt/news/sluzba-za-odnose-sa-javnoscu-vesti-i-saopstenja/potvrdjena-optuznica-podignuta-protiv-okrivljenih-gorana-pavlovica-i-rejhana-plojovica-predmet-vehabije-2.html>

terrorist groups¹⁰⁷, while those who go to Ukraine are associated with and join the groups that are not labeled as such.¹⁰⁸

According to the defence lawyer of those charged with terrorism, the Serbian Criminal Code does not criminalise membership of terrorist organisations, but instead lists concrete acts that are treated as terrorism.¹⁰⁹ Holding a rifle in Syria is not regarded as evidence for terrorism. Many foreign fighters claim that they left for Syria to defend civilians being killed by the Assad regime. It is unclear how it could be proven that they committed terrorist planned or financed terrorist acts.¹¹⁰ On the other hand foreign fighters in Ukraine not only posted photos of themselves holding rifles but they openly claimed that they took part in direct combat operations. Indeed, some of them were wounded several times.¹¹¹

The fact that both groups of fighters are potentially dangerous for Serb society was demonstrated in a recent alleged attempted terrorist attack in Montenegro and the subsequent arrest of Aleksandar Sindelić¹¹² who was not sentenced to prison, but rather given a status of a "witness-collaborator" even after he admitted to planning the attack.¹¹³ During the court trial he accused Dejan Berić, who is one of the most famous Serbian volunteers in Ukraine, of planning the assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, and of being behind the stockpile of weapons found near the Vučić family home.¹¹⁴

Although it might ultimately be proven that no terrorist attack (or coup d'état) was planned, the way that state institutions and media in Montenegro and Serbia addressed this issue created an impression that right wing and Islamist extremists are not treated equally. For instance, the terms of Sindelić's and other agreements the accused have made with the Prosecution are not publicly available, creating an added level of scepticism and distrust that can further radicalise both sides. On the one hand, lax treatment of the returnees from Ukraine signals that punishment is not severe and that it is still worth joining the battlefield, while on the other hand giving the Salafi recruiters another argument to add to their narratives of unjust treatment of Serbian Muslim communities they target.

Indeed even among interviewees who practice Hanafi Islam, many believe that the state is acting unfairly to Muslim foreign fighters.

"Look at Počuča. I saw him in a very down town of Belgrade. He is walking freely and proudly. He had made an agreement with prosecution for Ukrainian case, and was later freed of charges for threatening Women in Black.¹¹⁵ He wasn't even charged for

¹⁰⁷ https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list
[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2368\(2017\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2368(2017))

¹⁰⁸ The ICJ has decided that Ukraine didn't provide enough evidence to prove that Russia sponsors terrorist groups in Ukraine. See decision of the court published on April 19, 2017: <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/166/19412.pdf> [Accessed 4th September 2017].

¹⁰⁹ See appendix No. 2.

¹¹⁰ It is expected anyway that they will be sentenced because Serbian authorities want to prove that they are a good ally to western countries, and that they have also spent years in prison.

¹¹¹ For instance, Bratislav Živković, the leader of Serbian Chetnik unit "Jovan Šević", who returned from Ukraine spoke openly to media about taking part in combat operations. http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno_290.html:505591-U-Ukraini-puca-Srbina-na-Srbina-Dejan-Beric-who-is-still-in-Ukraine-was-several-time-wounded-and-decorated-by-pro-Russian-forces. <http://www.vesti-online.com/Vesti/Srbija/460877/Dejan-Beric-dobio-i-sesto-odlikovanje-Novorusije> [Accessed 14th October 2017].

¹¹² Aleksandar Sindjelic is a member of Serbian ultra-nationalist organization - Chetnik movement. In June 2017, Montenegrin authorities indicted him and 13 individuals among which are 2 Russian citizens for Coup d'état in Montenegro during election night of October 16, 2016. He is also wanted by Ukrainian authorities for taking part in armed conflict on pro-Russian side in Ukrainian Donbas region. Tomovic, P. (2017) *Optužnica za pokušaj državnog udara u Crnoj Gori*. Radio Slobodna Evropa. June 8, 2017. Available from: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/crna-gora-optuznica-drzavni-udar/28535777.html> [Accessed 14th October 2017]. And Lukac, J. (2016) *Sindelić svedok-saradnik u Crnoj Gori*. Danas. November 16, 2016. Available from: <https://www.danas.rs/politika/sindjelic-svedok-saradnik-u-crnoj-gori/> [Accessed 14th October 2017].

¹¹³ Anon (2016). *Aleksandar Sindelić pušten iz zatvora*. Blic. November 23, 2016. Available from: <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/aleksandar-sindjelic-pusten-iz-zatvora/t21xg6x> [Accessed 14th October 2017].

¹¹⁴ Anon (2016). *ALEKSANDAR SINDELJIĆ OTKRIO: Vučića ciljao snajperista Berić?* BalkansPress. Available from: <http://www.balkanspress.com/index.php/vesti/hronika/10098-aleksandar-sindjelic-otkrio-vucica-ciljao-snajperista-beric> [Accessed 14th October 2017].

¹¹⁵ Serbian CSO promoting feminist and antimilitaristic values. Available from: <https://goo.gl/Cof4HZ> [Accessed 14th October 2017].

threatening with death to Prime Minister Vučić on facebook.¹¹⁶ What a mockery of justice.”¹¹⁷

According to interviewees from Sandžak, Serbian institutions discriminate not only against Muslim foreign fighters but also against members of the Salafi community who have been experiencing different types of harassments. One of them witnessed police parking a patrol car with the rotary light on in front of his house in the middle of the night. “They treat me as if I’m a terrorist, and the main reason is that I visited Maoča in the past. But I’m just a true Muslim who prays with his heart.”¹¹⁸ Another interviewee was detained at the airport without explanation. “Even if terrorists are among those people, shouldn’t state institutions work in a more subtle manner, targeting individuals without causing further distrust within Muslims. Shouldn’t intelligence services be working like that?”

The fact that Serbian authorities only recognise Islamist extremism as a security threat is evidenced in official documents. The recently-adopted National Strategy for Prevention and Fight against Terrorism¹¹⁹ makes no mention of right-wing extremism and foreign fighters that fought in Ukraine whatsoever, despite the fact that many Serbian think-tanks, and experts criticised this step and recommended that Serbian nationalist extremism should be included by working group drafting the Strategy. As one representative of CSO from Sandžak said “It is obvious that all Serbian governments are fine with right-wing extremists using them for different shady jobs.”

¹¹⁶ Malisic, S. (2015). *Počuča: Vučiću, proći ćeš ko Čaušesku!*, Kurir. Available from: <http://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/1933725/jezive-pretnje-streljanjem-pocuca-vucicu-proci-ces-ko-causesku> [Accessed 10th September 2017].

¹¹⁷ Interviewed resident of Novi Pazar.

¹¹⁸ Maoča is a village in Bosnia and Herzegovina with strong Salafi community.

¹¹⁹ The Government of Serbia. (2017). *National Strategy for Prevention and Fight against Terrorism*. Belgrade: The Government of Serbia.

CONCLUSION

Our research findings suggest that a relatively small number of individuals fall into the category of violent extremists. However, it is worrying that there is a significant pool of not-now-violent extremists, as well as a trend of spreading extremist beliefs among Serbian citizens, especially among young people and the Roma population. This trend could be best explained by notions of relative deprivation and culturalisation of politics. Our findings point to the fact that the constantly worsening economic situation, widespread (political) corruption and malfunctioning institutions prevent many people from satisfying their basic needs and achieving their life aspirations on the one hand, and favour very few people with strong (political) connections and wealth on the other hand. With constant pressure from their community and market economy to be successful and to prove themselves, deprived individuals may find a refuge in extremist groups who provide them with comfort, solidarity and the ability to achieve themselves. Or at least to feel like that.

In addition, political and economic inequalities are naturalised as cultural differences that are given and can hardly be overcome. Therefore, identity/cultural factors can be mainly understood as vehicles for exploiting grievances by extremist groups. For instance, the poor economic situation is not specific to Sandžak area where the majority of the populace are Muslims. Similarly, the demolition of an unofficial mosque in Belgrade by the state authorities may also be a result of the fact that Muslims that had been gathering there were poor and without enough (political) power. Otherwise it is difficult to explain why authorities illegally demolished buildings in property of Serbs in the very centre of Belgrade on the one hand, but did not demolish a building that is being built illegally in Novi Pazar.

Other factors contributing to spread of extremism specific to Serbia, such as the Islamic community divide and the different treatment of foreign fighters that fought in Syria and Ukraine by the Serbian authorities, are very important, but their solution might only provide short term relief. Albania and Kosovo do not have these concerns and yet the issue of Islamist extremism is more severe there than in Serbia.

Similarly, reform of the education system to meet real market demands is essential. Equally important is the improvement of religious and civic classes enabling knowledgeable teachers to conduct classes focusing on critical thinking and to introduce lectures where other religions could be taught in comparative, sociological and historical perspectives. But without addressing the problem of relative deprivation, these reform efforts will not be sustainable. If new jobs were created but they could be filled only through bribery, nepotism and political corruption, then the situation may not improve significantly. On the contrary, it would only worsen the situation - when after a period of crises, the capabilities and expectations of a population grows, and sudden drop in capabilities leads to greater frustration of the population.

Among the primary steps required to address the issue of extremism in Serbia are therefore:

- improvement of the economic situation,
- shrinkage of political corruption, and
- recovery of institutional efficiency

with the aim of decreasing the gap between the rich and poor and providing more equal opportunities.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN MEDIA REPORTS

Foreign fighters – Ukraine

1. **Bratislav Živković** – Commander of the Chetnik Movement (Živković said that his unit numbered 15 volunteers from Serbia who arrived in Lugansk in Ukraine via Russia by having only tourist visa in their passports. <https://goo.gl/qSdXRZ>
2. **Aleksandar Sinđelić** – wanted by Ukrainian authorities. Arrested in Montenegro for taking part in Coup d'état. He is now protected witness - (<https://goo.gl/H2VDih>; <https://goo.gl/4HCsb8>;))
3. **Zoran Andrejić** – Deputy Commander of the Chetnik movement. There is no information about his whereabouts.
4. **Radomir Počuča** – He got year and a half suspended sentence - <https://goo.gl/GQ4uR5>
5. **Dejan Berić** – He is still in Ukraine. Very active in (social)media. <https://goo.gl/wPfwY>
6. **Zdravko Pešić** – There is not much information about him - <https://goo.gl/eNEctL>
7. **Milutin Mališić** - Commander of Chetnik guard unit “Wolf”. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srpski-cetnici-na-krimu/25288046.html>
8. **Vladimir Stanimirović** – Died on the battlefield <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/2405571-srbin-vladimir-stanimirovic-poginuo-braneci-rusiju-u-ratu-u-ukrajini>
9. **Sasa Karan** – After the end of hostilities in Ukraine, he left for Syria where he died fighting within Russian units. <https://goo.gl/cD8HYU>

Foreign Fighters – Syria

1. **Bojan Kalaković** – according to media sources still in Syria fighting on Assad side - <http://sandzakpress.net/ekskluzivno-nove-informacije-o-srpskim-dobrovoljcima-u-siriji>; <https://www.facebook.com/bojan.kalakovic.1>
2. **Mirza Ganić (19)**– football hooligan from Novi Pazar, died in Syria - <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/vehabija-iz-novog-pazara-poginuo-na-ratistu-u-siriji/7vljq3j>
3. **Eldar Kundaković (27)** – from Novi Pazar, died in Syria - <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/tema-dana/borci-dzihada-iz-sandzaka-ratuju-u-siriji/3lrmyfd>
4. **Mujo Hamidović (41)**, from Sjenica, died in Syria. http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/povezanost_vehabija_sa_al_kaidom.55.html?news_id=278072
5. **Abid Podbićanin (35)** – died in Syria - <http://www.avaz.ba/clanak/163506/voda-sandzackih-vehabija-i-stanovnik-gornje-maoce-abid-podbicanin-poginuo-u-siriji>
6. **Goran Pavlović (49)** from Belgrade. Nicknamed Abdulah. He is being tried *in absentia* before Serbian court under terrorism charges. He was at the same unit as Plojovic and Podbićanin. He used to be Orthodox Christian. Upon converting to Islam, he moved firstly to Bosnia.
7. with his wife **Mirjana (47)** and
8. daughter **Nevena (23)**, and then they left for Syria <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/18-imenam-ovo-su-teroristi-iz-srbije-koji-se-bore-za-islamsku-drzavu/xb8svk6>
9. **Rejhan Plojović (29)** from Novi Pazar went to u Syria in November 2013.
10. with his wife **Emina Plojović (28)** and **two children**. Close associate of Abid Podbićanin. His wife was performing a duty of Nurse in ISIS. She was previously active in „Furkan“. Rejhan is being tried before Serbian court under terrorism charges. <http://arhiva.alo.rs/vesti/aktuelno/oni-nam-prete-iz-sirije/101357>

11. **Tefik Mujović (35)**, nicknamed Abdulah, from Tutin. Active in propagating Takfiri ideology in the region. He has accepted radical ideas in Yemen where he studied theology. His *nom de guerre* is Ebu Talha Yemeni. Other than being engaged in combat operation he was also transferring foreign fighters to Syria via Turkey. He is being tried *in absentia* before Serbian court under terrorism charges.
12. **Sead Plojović (30)** - Novi Pazar – He is being tried before Serbian court under terrorism charges. <http://www.naslovi.net/2015-03-16/slobodna-evropa/beograd-pocelo-sudjenje-organizatorima-odlaska-na-sirijsko-ratiste/13806884>
13. **Izudin Crnovršanin (25)** - Novi Pazar - He is being tried before Serbian court under terrorism charges. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-radikalizam-sirija/28223244.html>
14. **Agnes Čeković** – from Novi Pazar – He is witnessing against Mujovic - <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/367886/Svedok-Isao-sam-u-Siriju-da-ratujem-za-ID>
15. **Eldan Emrić (34)**, nicknamed Hamza, from Novi Pazar. He was very active member of CSO „Furkan“. He was involved in transferring foreign fighters from Balkans to Syria. Emrić left for Syria in 2012 where he served as sharpshooter in the unit headed by Ebu Beida. His *nom de guerre* is Hakan.
16. He brought to Syria his wife **Selma Hadžić (33)**. He was arrested in Turkey and transferred to Serbia where he is being tried for terrorism sharges. <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/srbija-ce-biti-republika-islamske-drzave-strasne-pretnje-teroriste-iz-tutina/1vmc52f>
17. **Asmir Avdulović (26)**, nicknamed Zeid, from Novi Pazar. Left to Syria in November 2013 where he joined the Balkan Unit. It is speculated that he died in combat operations, but never confirmed.
18. **Edin Martinović (23)** from Novi Pazar, died in Syria in September 2014. <http://sandzakpress.net/jos-jedan-pazarac-poginuo-u-siriji>
19. **Aldin Galjević (25)** from Novi Pazar. He is a member of unit that is under command of Bosnian Nusret Imamović. He is very close to Asmir Biševac, one of the prominent member of „Furkan“. Prior going to Syria, He spent some time in Turkey.
20. **Fikret Krečo (33)** - <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/1679516-ovo-su-najopasniji-islamski-teroristi-u-srbiji-naoruzani-su-do-zuba-vrbuju-ljude-za-sveti-rat-evo-gde-ce-prvo-napasti-srbe-foto>
21. **Lejla Brahović (19)** from Novi Pazar , left to Syria in December 2014. She was a student of the last grade in madres „Gazi Isa-beg“ of the Islamic Community in Serbia. Allegedly, she was an active member of female section of „Furkan“.
22. **Alma Smailović (25)** from Novi Pazar. She left for Syria with **two children** in august 2014. She left her husband Jasmin and remarry for Rama Grahović, from Bosnia, who she met through internet. They went to Syria together from Austria.
23. **Samir Šaćiri (29)** Roma Muslim from Smederevo. Before going to Syria he was working in Switzerland. He was recruiting foreign fighters in Serbia. He have recruited:
24. **Veljija Mehmetija (26)** Roma Muslim from Belgrade and
25. **Mevljudina Kopiljija (27)** Roma Muslim from Zemun polje, Belgrade suburb.
26. **Anita Šaćiri (19)**, Roma Muslim from Smederevo, nicknamed Sumeja. She merried Emin Hodžić from Bosnia. They spent some time in Syria. Upon return, Emin was arrested in police action “Damask”.
27. **Ashim Šaćiri (49)**, Roma Muslim, father of Anita Šaćiri.
28. **Bahrija Šaćiri**, Roma Muslim, mother of Anita Šaćiri.
29. **Amira Šaćiri (22)**, Roma Muslim, sister of Anita Šaćiri. <https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/22181/sigurnosna-prijetnja-drzavljanica-srbije-anita-saciri-protjerana-iz-bih.html>

30. **Safet Šaćiri (23)** Roma Muslim from Smedervo. brother of Anita and Samir Šaćiri. Allegedly, he returned from Syria and is hiding on the relation Bosnia-Montenegro. ? <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/srpkinja-koja-je-sa-muzem-mudzahedinom-ratovala-u-siriji-proterana-iz-bih/3z55kt0>
31. **Ferat Kasumovic (29)** – Belgrade, Roma Muslim- <http://sandzaknews.rs/u-prostorijama-furkana-u-novom-pazaru-glavno-mesto-za-regrutaciju-islamista-za-siriju/> He brought with him to Syria his blind wife:
32. **Makrifeta Šaćiri (29)** along with **two kids**. <https://www.srbijadanas.com/vesti/region/borci-isil-iz-srbije-sudbine-porodica-dzihadista-sa-ovih-prostora-2017-08-30>
33. **Fahredin Šaćiri (27)**, Roma Muslim, brother of Makrifeta, died in Syria near Azaz.
34. **Musa Ahmeti (23)** – Albanian Muslim from Bujanovac, South Serbia. When he went to Syria he had been studying at Kairo University. He died in Syria. <http://bujanovacke.co.rs/2015/08/21/mladi-sa-juga-srbije-na-ratistima-bliskog-istoka-3/>
35. **Faton Jusufi (29)** – Albanian Muslim from Vranje, South Serbia. Under the influence of Džafer Ibraimi i Alban Alili, and upon the order of Ulvi Fejzulahu, he joined rebel forces in Syria. <http://www.alo.rs/rodeni-vranjanac-bori-se-za-isis/3748>

ANNEX 2: EXCERPT FROM SERBIAN CRIMINAL CODE

CRIMINAL CODE

(Official Gazette of RS, Nos. 85/2005, 88/2005, 107/2005, 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016)

Terrorism

Article 391

(1) Whoever, in an intention to seriously threaten the citizens or force Serbia, a foreign country or international organisation to do or not to do something, or to seriously threaten or violate the fundamental constitutional, political, economic or social structures of Serbia, a foreign country or international organisation:

- 1) attacks the life or limb or freedom of another person;
- 2) kidnaps or takes hostages;
- 3) destroys a state or public facility, traffic system, infrastructure including the information systems, platform in the epicontinental basin, common good or private property in a way threatening people's lives or causing serious damage for the economy;
- 4) hijacks an airplane, ship or other vehicle for public transport of people or goods;
- 5) produces, possesses, provides, transports, supplies or uses nuclear, biological, chemical or other weapons, explosive, nuclear or radioactive material or devices, including the research and development of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons;
- 6) releases contaminating material or causes a fire, explosion or flood or undertakes other risky actions that may threaten the life of people;
- 8) prevents or stops the supply of water, electricity, or other natural resource which may threaten the life of people,

Shall be punished with imprisonment from five to fifteen years.

(2) Whoever threatens with committing a criminal offence referred to in para 1 of this article,

Shall be punished with imprisonment from six months to five years.

(3) In case of death of one or more persons or serious destruction due to an act referred to in para 1 of this article,

The perpetrator shall be punished with imprisonment of minimum ten years.

(4) If, committing an offence referred to in para 1 of this article, the perpetrator committed premeditated killing of one or more persons,

They shall be punished with imprisonment of minimum twelve years or imprisonment from thirty to forty years.

Public Instigation of Terrorist Acts

Article 391a

Whoever publicly expresses or disseminates ideas that directly or indirectly instigate a criminal act referred to in article 391 hereof,

shall be punished with imprisonment from one to ten years.

Recruitment and training for terrorist acts

Article 391b

(1) Whoever, in an intention to commit a crime referred to in article 391 hereof, recruits another person to commit or take part in the commission or to join the terrorist conspiracy, shall be punished with imprisonment from one to eleven years.

(2) The punishment specified in para 1 of this article shall also refer to whoever, in an intention to commit a crime referred to in article 391 hereof, gives instructions on how to make and use explosive devices, fire arms or other weapons or dangerous or harmful matter, or whoever trains another person to commit or take part in the commission of such criminal act.

Use of deadly device

Article 391c

(1) Whoever, in an intention to kill, inflict severe bodily harm or destroy or seriously damage a state or public facility, the system of public transportation or other facility that is important for the safety or supplying of citizens or for the economy or functioning of public services, makes, transfers, keeps, give to another, sets or activates a deadly device (explosive, chemical, biological or radioactive substance), in a public place or in a facility or near a facility, Shall be punished with imprisonment from one to eight years.

(2) If, committing the act referred to in para 1 of this article, the perpetrator premeditatedly inflicted bodily harm or destroyed or seriously damaged a public facility, They shall be punished with imprisonment from five to fifteen years.

(3) If, committing the act referred to in para 1 of this article, the perpetrator premeditatedly killed one or more persons, They shall be punished with imprisonment from thirty to forty years.

Destruction and damaging of a nuclear facility

Article 391d

(1) Whoever, in an intention to kill someone, inflict severe bodily harm, threaten the environment or cause significant damage to property, destroys or damages a nuclear facility in a manner that releases or may release radioactive substances, shall be punished with imprisonment from two to ten years.

(2) If, committing the act referred to in para 1 of this article, the perpetrator premeditatedly inflicted severe bodily harm or destroyed or seriously damaged a nuclear facility, Shall be punished with imprisonment from five to fifteen years.

(3) If, committing the act referred to in para 1 of this article, the perpetrator premeditatedly killed one or more persons, They shall be punished with imprisonment of minimum ten years or imprisonment from thirty to forty years.

Endangering of person under international protection

Article 392

(1) Whoever kidnaps or uses other form of violence against a person under international protection, or attacks their official premises, private home or means of transportation, shall be punished with imprisonment from one to ten years.

(2) If, due to an act referred to in para 1 of this article, one or more persons were killed, The perpetrator shall be punished with imprisonment of minimum five years.

(3) If, committing the act referred to in para 1, the perpetrator premeditatedly killed someone,
They shall be punished with imprisonment of minimum ten years or imprisonment from thirty to forty years.

(4) Who threatens the safety of the person referred to in article 1 of this article by seriously threatening to attack them, their official premises, private home or means of transportation,

Shall be punished with imprisonment from six months to five years.

Financing Terrorism

Article 393

(1) Whoever directly or indirectly gives or collects funds with the intention to use them or knowing that they will be used, fully or partially, for commission of criminal acts referred to in articles 391 to 392 hereof or for financing of persons, a group or organised crime group who intend to commit these acts,

Shall be punished with imprisonment from one to ten years.

(2) The funds specified in paragraph 1 of this Article shall be seized.

Terrorist conspiracy

Article 393a

(1) If two or more persons are conspiring for a longer period of time in order to commit criminal acts referred to in articles 391 to 393 hereof,

they shall be punished with the punishment envisaged for the act for which the conspiracy was organised.

(2) The perpetrator referred to in para 1 of this article who by revealing the conspiracy or otherwise prevents the commission of criminal acts referred to in para 1 of this article or contributes to its detection,

Shall be punished with imprisonment up to three years, or may be acquitted



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