

Prof. Dr Marija Djoric

**EXTREMISM AND HOOLIGANISM
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

Prof. Dr MARIJA DJORIC

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To my beloved grandmother, Paraskeva

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FOREWORD – Prof. dr Ivana Bodrožić

The two-decade-long scientific opus of Dr Marija Djoric is marked by the research of various political violence phenomena. Along that path, and in this general research idea, emerged this monograph, which, in its revised and supplemented edition, deals with one of the segments of the previously mentioned topic.

Extremism and hooliganism in the Western Balkans, as two pronouncedly harmful and highly socially dangerous phenomena, at the same time represent two quite significant socially engaged topics.

As a researcher at the Institute for Political Studies for many years and Assistant Director for Science at the institute, Dr. Djoric examines in depth and with a current approach the two deviant social phenomena from a political science standpoint.

The monograph is the result of thorough research of many years in the fields of etymology and phenomenology of the said forms of political violence, supplemented with suitable psychological aspects of the analyzed problems, which Dr Djoric succinctly, but at the same time scientifically, presents to the scientific and professional public.

This monograph is marked by recognizable, good and clear style of the experienced author, who is well-known in the academic circles, not only by her efficiently chosen research topics, but also by her writing style, which is well accepted and eagerly read, not only in the academic public, for whom the monograph is primarily intended, but also in the wider readership.

A long time ago, upon reading the first edition of this monograph, I remained in a kind of an extended belief that this topic will be additionally written about, and today, from a point of view of a colleague who was honoured with the chance to write a foreword to the new, amended and supplemented edition of the monograph

Extremism and Hooliganism in the Western Balkans, it is a special satisfaction that my personal, as well as scientific and professional competencies, were on the right track when it comes to predicting the new edition.

The division of the subject matter is characterized by systematicity, adequately used methods, typical of research conducted in the social sciences and the humanities, and primarily the political science.

The widely set bibliographical apparatus is depicted in a vast number of footnotes and relevant sources used as a foundation of this research, make this monograph a significant scientific contribution, and, I believe, an incentive and promotion of the scientific thought developed by Dr Djoric through her work, but also a sort of an inspiration for future research of all the ones who are interested in these phenomena, multidisciplinary speaking.

Be that as it may, and in the sense of metrics, this monograph, besides the fact that this is its second printing, after the previous one was sold out, represents an optimally conceived scientific work in terms of its form, which, in the modern era, which is burdened by speed and necessary conciseness, represents an example of a desirable concept in science – less can be more.

Finally, as a reader, a colleague and a friend of the author, I believe that this edition of the monograph is another in the series of academic successes of Dr Djoric, and thus, I personally offer my full professional and research support, as an author who has been researching terrorism, as one form of political violence, from the criminal law standpoint, for the last two decades.

As a Professor at the University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies, I will, with pleasure, recommend this monograph to my bachelor's, master's, and doctoral students of criminology, as a significant and interesting read for deepening knowledge in the field of extremism and hooliganism. I also recommend it to the wider scientific and professional public as well.

In Belgrade,

Prof. Dr Ivana Bodrožić

Upon Aranđelovdan, November 20, 2025

FOREWORD –

Prof. dr Srđan Blagojević

In front of you is a significant work that holds value both for professionals and the general public. Several reasons support this claim. Only in an idealistic understanding of reality does the modern world represent a harmonious dialectical unity of its diverse constituents, bearing in mind the achieved level of difference, diversity, and variety of subjects and processes that construct it.

When differences achieve the *extremus* level, a potential space for extreme actions, that is, for the emergence of extremism, emerges. Therefore, the first significant feature of this work refers to its permanent actuality since the issue of (extreme) differences in a society, whether we are speaking of a global or singular level, represents a permanently current issue.

Grasping this complex social phenomenon, Dr Marija Djoric is conducting a skilful qualitative analysis of the conceptual determination of extremism, especially complicated by the fact that, here, we are not speaking of an occurrence of a purely political character. It is evident that extremism is present in all fields of social life, in culture, sports, and religion. However, we should not ignore that its destructiveness is most pronounced precisely in the political sphere. The author does not miss a good opportunity to skilfully discuss the link between extremism, radicalism, and terrorism since the modern world is swept by the waves of the previously mentioned occurrences, which form the political and broader social reality, creating fear for the future.

Dr Marija Djoric dedicated special attention in her work to extremism in sports, which form of appearance is well-known under the name hooliganism. Most simply, hooliganism represents violent behaviour (of one part) of the audience at sports events. What gives

a special significance to this segment of the book is the review of the link between politics and extremism in sports (hooliganism). The contemporary world also characterizes the abuse of sports by politics (*politicization of hooliganism*), and Dr Marija Djoric bravely embarks on an expert (political and security) analysis of causal relations and links that exist (or may exist) between politics and hooliganism, spatially operationalizing it in the Balkans. And the hilly Balkans, itself complex, diverse, and myriad, with borders intertwined, both visible and invisible. And as the author said: *These invisible borders are constructed of dreams, emotions, culture, tradition, memories, archetypes, the spirit of the region, etc. Although invisible, they are often stronger than physical borders...*

Keeping in mind the relevance of the topic for our state and the region (and for the international context as well) but also the fact that there is only a handful of relevant and expert scientific work in this field, professor Marija Djoric filled a big scientific void with this monograph, which I deem as quite a significant contribution to the research of extremism and hooliganism in the Balkans.

*Commandant of the Military Academy of Serbia
Colonel Srđan Blagojević, PhD, Full Professor*

PREFACE

This book, which I submit to the public's judgment, binds me in several ways. First, it represents the fruits of many years of my work and summarizes all the experience gained from the previous five monographs published; thus, I hope it also reflects a new dose of scientific maturity. Second, it deals with the eternally elusive and controversial phenomena (hooliganism and extremism), which are, precisely because of this, additionally challenging to me. Finally, the entire focus of this monograph is on the so-called Western Balkans, belonging to the *Otherness* in comparison to Europe, not enough European, yet not enough Oriental, above all, belonging to itself. It is not easy to write about the Balkans; you have to live in it and experience it with all its imperfections and beauties, and the additional aggravating circumstances emerge if you are a *Homo Balcanicus*, a "species" that tenaciously survives for centuries in the fragile area of the Balkan Peninsula.

The moment of creation of this book coincides with tectonic political events. The war in Gaza threatens to ignite conflict throughout the Middle East and beyond, while the situation in Ukraine resembles a miniature world war; the reshaping of the world geopolitical structure, the creation of a new value system, and one stark polarization, in which *Us* and *Them* exist in the form of arch-enemies. In light of these events, I decided to conduct a regional and local analysis of extremism and hooliganism to illuminate the "dark Wilayahs" of the Balkans. As it is impossible for us to behave like a desert island in contemporary international relations, I often drew parallels with Europe and the rest of the world. Nowadays, in the era of globalization, we are more connected than ever, and this is best seen in the example of extremism, which knows no borders and is becoming a "worldwide" phenomenon.

Bearing in mind that I dedicated the most energy and love in my career to working with students, I had not only a desire but also a moral obligation to write a few words dedicated to my younger colleagues. That is why I decided to single out all the pitfalls and obstacles that researchers (at the beginning of their career) dealing with extremism and hooliganism might face. This path is not easy, but it is indeed beautiful. In one section, I explain the research methodology and emphasize that investigating extremism is akin to the “search for the Holy Grail”. Only the persistent ones and those who have faith (in themselves and their knowledge) can persevere on that path of uncertainty.

This monograph addresses many sensitive questions: the return of terrorists from the battlefield, the gender dimension of extremism, the radicalization of vulnerable groups, the emergence of the *coronavirus*, the issue of mental health, etc. I have answered some of these questions, but I am still searching for answers to others.

A particular segment of the book is devoted to hooliganism, a relatively new phenomenon that (officially) only emerged in the 20th century, although violence in sports (and related to sports) is a primordial companion of the human species. At this moment, I would like to stress that, as a woman, I often faced prejudices, but I am grateful for that since they made me stronger and paved the way for some new female researchers. It was worth it.

Hooliganism in the Western Balkans is specific because it is linked to some political circles by steel chains, which gives it an indefinite regenerative power. I name this phenomenon in my research the *politicization of hooliganism*, and it is a *differencia specifica* to our region. There has been a lot of debate about whether hooliganism in the Balkans is a form of extremism (primarily the extreme right-wing). Nowadays, hooliganism in our region is much less extremism but much more organized crime, which is quite a significant change from its decades-long genesis.

Finally, readers can also see an unusual historical case study. Namely, I have decided to present the correlation between sports and politics by analysing the “Sokol” movement and “Young Bosnia”. In this way, young people showed exceptional courage and national integrity in the most difficult political and historical moments.

I thank my dear colleagues Milica, Andrea, Ivana, Veronika and Anastasija, who completed the index of terms and took care of many other precious technical details.

The Balkans. Extremism. Hooliganism. It is as if we are speaking of the Bermuda Triangle, ready to swallow everything close to it. For that not to happen, we ought to know it well. Therefore, I hope that this book will contribute to shedding light and preventing the dark phenomena of extremism and hooliganism in our beautiful and terrifying Balkans. Whether I succeeded, time will tell.

Prof. Dr Marija Djoric

1. ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WERE THE BALKANS...¹

1.1. WHY IS THE BALKANS A DEMONIZED WORD?

The Balkans have a negative image. Its history is written in blood, the conflicts are frequent, and the living standard lags behind Europe's. There are "the curses of small differences", which we can talk about as the narcissism of small nations; the Westerners consider us "the rotten tissue of Europe", which should either be removed or disciplined. The Balkans, in fact, represent a sort of "scarecrow" with which Europe (read as the EU) does not know what to do. They would love to denounce us since we are not European enough, and yet, they do not want to give us to others. Maybe we would like to change as well, but geography is a miracle. It binds us with its strong chains to the land where we were born. As much as we wish to be different, to escape from ourselves and get closer to that "unattainable" European mentality, and in every other way, we face certain limitations. However, these are not only physical borders (rivers, seas, mountains, border crossings, etc.) that limit us. Some much stronger visible limits determine the direction we move (the fatalists would say – the fate). These invisible borders are constructed of dreams, emotions, culture, tradition, memories, archetypes, the spirit of the region, etc. Although invisible, they are often stronger

¹ Taken from: Djoric Marija, „Balkan (i Zapadni Balkan) kao negativni politički pojmovi“, *Nacionalni interes*, No. 1, 2024, pp. 73–90.

than physical borders that surgically cut the lines and show where the European Union begins and ends.

Nowadays, the Balkans has become a demonized word and an unwanted term. Has it always been that way? The negative image of the Balkans can best be seen through the etymology of the word, as the Ancient Latins would say – *nomen est omen* (the name is the omen). The origin of the name of the Balkans dates back to ancient times. It arrived with the Turks, referring to the mountain range formerly known as Hemus. For the first time as a geographical term, the Balkans, that is, the Balkan Peninsula (*Balkanhalbinsel*), was introduced in 1808 by the German geographer Johann August Zeune.² Perhaps the etymology of the word “Balkan” is best described by Inalcik (according to Erin), who derives the basis from the Persian-Turkish word *balk*, which basically means mud, and the Turkish suffix for the diminutive – *an*.³ In accordance with this etymological interpretation, we conclude that the Balkans are actually a metaphor for mud (we would add – “the living mud”), in which the Balkan peoples have languished for centuries. Survival in this “living mud” of ours is not easy at all because we cannot get out of it, and from time to time, we are pushed deeper into it by some “boot”, sometimes from the West and sometimes from the East. Living in such conditions is quite challenging, and therefore, the Balkan people have developed a special urge for survival, rarely found among other European nations. In particular, nowhere does one sing, dance, and enjoy life more beautifully than in the Balkans, and nowhere do people adapt to crises as well as in the “mountainous Balkans”. Maybe because we know how harsh life is, we enjoy it while we can.

Among the many doubts concerning the Balkan Peninsula is the following: Which countries make up the Balkans? According to Hoffmann, Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria represented “the core of the Balkans”, while Greece and Romania are partially Balkan countries.⁴ There are indications that the European part of Türkiye can also be considered the Balkans, while Marija Todorova stresses that

² Cvijić Jovan, *Antropogeografski spisi*, SANU, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 1987, p. 15.

³ According to: Todorova, Marija, *Imaginarni Balkan*, Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 1998, p. 54.

⁴ Hoffmann George, *The Balkans in Transition*, Princeton, Van Nostrand, 1963.

the Balkan peoples are all former Yugoslavs, Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, and Romanians.⁵

In some metaphors, the Balkans are called “the powder keg”; for others, the Balkans are “a comic opera written in blood”⁶; some perceive it in the context of “Otherness”. The Bulgarian scientist Marija Todorova wrote about this “Otherness” (in relation to Europe) as a virtuoso in her book titled *Imaginary Balkans*, in which she attempted to explain the distinction between *Us* (read as “the primitive Balkan people”) and *Them* (read as “the civilized Europeans”). When emphasizing our perceived “Otherness” and the (non)European mentality, some Western sources said that, nowadays, people are getting killed in the Balkans because of something that happened half a century ago, which is unthinkable in the Western world.⁷ However, in all that glorification of the West, they have forgotten that, in turn, they are killing among themselves because of something that happened two thousand years ago, if we consider one of the reasons for the suffering of the Jews during the Second World War.⁸

The succeeding reason for the negative perception of the Balkans is the number of people killed during the Balkan Wars (the First and Second Balkan Wars). However, if we already calculate the number of human victims, isn't the figure of three million Vietnamese victims⁹ during the Vietnam War terrifying? Let's not go that far into the past. It is enough to state that in just three months of the Israeli attack on Gaza (after the terrorist act of “ Hamas ” on October 07, 2023), about 26,000 people were killed, of whom about 50% were children,

⁵ At one point, Todorova debates whether the Slovenians should also be included in the Balkan nations because they were never under Ottoman rule but still decides to include them in the Balkan states because they were part of Yugoslavia.

⁶ Durham, Mary Edith, *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle, Book Jungle, 2008*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/19669/pg19669-images.html>

⁷ See in: Cohen, Roger, “A Balkan Gyre of War Spinning into Film”, *New York Times*, section 2, 12 March, 1995, p. 24.

⁸ According to: Todorova Marija, *ibid*, p. 21. One of the reasons for antisemitism is the fact that, according to these perceptions, the Jews are deemed “the Christ-killers”.

⁹ See more in: <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN19285476/>; Charles Hirschman, Samuel Preston and Vu Manh Loi, “Vietnamese Casualties During the American War: A New Estimate”, *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Dec., 1995), p. 783–812; Westheider, James, *Fighting in Vietnam: The Experiences of the U.S. Soldier*, Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, 2011, p. 142.

while 1.7 million people were forcibly displaced.¹⁰ It is obvious that violence, the killings, and the anti-civilizational measures are not unique to us, the Balkans. Because of this, one can get the impression that, despite all our imperfections, we are too often in the pillory of shame. As such, it is clear that violence is not only the *differentia specifica* of the Balkans but is inherent to the entire human race.

Specifically, geographically speaking, we are Europe, but in the mental and emotional sense of the word, we often lean towards Orientalism and the East, which has led us to an “identity crisis” today. Our attitudes reflect the current polarization of the world as we find ourselves “between two fires”. For us in Serbia, for example, our reason lies in the West, and the heart is in the East, like in cheap romance movies. The specificity of Serbia’s position creates the “geopolitical magnetism that attracts global and regional powers”.¹¹ Those *laws of attraction* are not always for our own good. We want to enjoy the material benefits of the West while representing the East spiritually and in values, which has led to our identity crisis – Huntington called this phenomenon the *cleft countries*.¹² Such states are not only unstable but also nationally, religiously, and culturally heterogeneous, with a tendency towards new conflicts, disunity, and unification. When you are small in the contemporary world (as all the Balkan countries are), you have no right to your absolute sovereignty. In fact, almost no country today enjoys the so-called absolute sovereignty, meaning the ability to act and make decisions solely on its interests (except a few major powers, such as America, Russia, China, etc.).

Many theoreticians have often explained the Balkan disobedience and violence with the influence of Orientalism (especially in terms of Eastern cruelty). But the Balkans are not only the Orient. It is an amalgam combining Turkish Orientalism (lasting at least 500 years) with Byzantine influence, which lasted a little longer than Orientalism (a whole millennium). However, there is one common thread that connects the Balkans and the Orient, which is, according to the perception of some researchers – the return to the medieval milieu.¹³

¹⁰ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/01/1146067>, 01.02.2024.

¹¹ Despotović Ljubiša, Glišin Vanja, „Geopolitički identitet Republike Srbije i strategija nacionalne bezbednosti“, *Politika nacionalne bezbednosti*, No. 1, 2021, p. 25.

¹² Huntington, Samuel, *The Clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*, Touchstone, New York, 1997.

¹³ Herbert Vivian, *The Serbian Tragedy with some Impressions of Macedonia*, Grant Richards, London, 1904, pp. 252-253.

In addition, unlike the “intangible Orient”, as Todorova stresses, the Balkans are bound by firm geographical and historical borders. Or at least it was like that because, as of recently, every country that enters the EU from the Balkan region denies any connection with the Balkans (which is deemed the ugly past life).

Despite all the shortcomings and flaws Europe and the West highlighted, the Balkans remain an important geopolitical point where the great powers vie for influence. Firstly, the Balkans significantly correlate with the wider geographical environment, such as Asia Minor, Central Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Black Sea, etc. Despotović believes that the one who rules the Balkans also rules Europe because the Balkans are “the entrance and exit gate of Europe for its living space to the East”.¹⁴ His observations correspond with those of Halford John Mackinder, who stated that control over Eurasia requires dominance over the central part of the Eurasian space. For major powers—particularly those from the West—to achieve their strategic goals, controlling the Balkans is essential, as it fulfils two chief objectives:

1. The German transit through the Danube towards the Near and Middle East is put under control.
2. Through Türkiye, the Black Sea straits are blocked, and Russia’s door to the Mediterranean is closed.¹⁵

The fundamental problem of the Balkans is that it has always been seen as a (disobedient) periphery of Europe, which had to be restrained by the action of the great powers of the Centre. It is also seen as the cancerous tissue that should be either “cured” or removed. The Balkans are also a fertile ground for the development of “European Orientalism”, given that it is the “glue” (or border) between the East and the West. If that “glue” is not strong enough, the borders are unstable, torn, and difficult to control. Consequently, global powers frequently assume the role of “big brother”, overseeing this troubled region. And yet, perhaps it is better to talk about the concept of *fragmented individuality* instead of “the Otherness” when speaking of the Balkans. And who is fragmenting that individuality of ours? Well, usually, some

¹⁴ Despotović Ljubiša, „Antinomija nacionalne (ne)moći: globalizacijski i geopolitički kontekst nacionalne bezbednosti Srbije“, *Politika nacionalne bezbednosti*, No. 2, 2016, p. 31.

¹⁵ According to: Nišić Stanko, *Globalna sila i bezbednost Balkana*, VIZ, Beograd, 2002, p. 161.

Others who, as a rule, are not from the Balkans but would like to govern it. The Balkans is like a puppet theatre, where the puppets are seen on stage while someone *Else* pulls the strings from the background.

1.2. BALKANIZATION AND HOMO BALCANICUS

One of the most principal terms derived from the word Balkan is – *balkanization*. This is, in fact, a pejorative name for a condition Andrew Hammond explained once upon a time as a division into fragments of related nations that are opposed to each other (as we would say, “the curse of small differences”).¹⁶ If we add primitivism, anarchy, disrespect for institutions, and lack of rule of law to this determinant, and “spice it up” with the influence of the great powers too¹⁷, we get *balkanization* as a compromised term. Todorova explains *balkanization* as a dismemberment of great geographical units (on a national basis) into small, mutually conflicted and usually problematic small countries.¹⁸ Still, *balkanization* is not exclusively linked to its geography. The *New York Times* wrote in 1918 about the so-called “balkanization of Europe”, describing a pessimistic future of the Old Continent.¹⁹ In postcolonial Europe, the term *balkanization* was used to denote the problem faced by the newly formed African states (concerning the French colony). The newspaper *The Listener* wrote in 1962 that in Western Africa, all conditions were met for the emergence of *balkanization*.²⁰ Therefore, balkanization became a universal synonym for violence and fragmentation of big entities into small ones, which no longer only referred to the Balkans but to the rest of the “problematic” world as well.

Due to the violence, wars, and harshness to which it is exposed, the Balkans are unequivocally associated with the so-called “macho

¹⁶ See more in: Hammond Andrew, *The Balkans and the West: Constructing the European Other, 1945-2003*, Routledge, London, 2016.

¹⁷ Acting, in this case, usually according to the *divide et impera* (divide and rule) principle.

¹⁸ Todorova, Marija, *Imaginarni Balkan*, Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 1998, p. 65.

¹⁹ *New York Times*, December 20, 1918, p. 3.

²⁰ Todorova, op. cit., p. 69.

image”. Compared to the Orient, which is usually painted through female metaphors, the Balkans is a story of “machismo”. The metaphor of our men (derogatorily called the Balkanians) was not exactly of a bright character at the beginning of the 20th century. Foreign travel writers and historians wrote that a typical Balkan man is “uncivilized, primitive, harsh, cruel, and by no exception – messy-haired”.²¹ Interestingly, the same travel writer had a diametral opposite opinion of the women from the Balkans, stating that they are “feminine to the core”.²² We do not know whether these statements were motivated by his subjective experience, although our image is not what we think of ourselves, but how others see us.

The inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula were even given a Latin name, like some plant or animal species. The term *Homo Balcanicus* appeared for the first time in the work of Svetlozar Iglov as an antithesis to the “civilized European”.²³ In defence of the Balkans, the author of this text could cite many facts about how anti-civilizational could be found in that Europe as well, which was a colonizer, a slave owner, and much more in the context of the Crusade wars, the Inquisition, the death camps during the Second World War... Due to the negative perception of the Balkans, which predominantly arrives from the West, we cannot help but ask – how does it affect the *Homo Balcanicus*? It seems we have both-handedly accepted this negative determinant and our “Otherness”, and thus the inferiority as well, in comparison to Europe. Always at the civilizational crossroads, the Balkans might be deemed the unfinished East and the unfinished West, which has again built its own particular identity.

Trapped between Byzantium and Rome, Christianity and Islam, the East and the West, the Balkans have always been a significant region. It was believed that the peace in the Balkans equalled the peace in Europe and even the entire world. Let us remember how the First World War started, and let us remember which empires broke down after the end of this war. And we cannot help but ask whether the great powers forgave the Balkans for that?²⁴

²¹ Howden Smith, Arthur, *Fighting the Turk in the Balkans, An American's Adventures with the Macedonian Revolutionists*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1908, pp. 1–3.

²² Ibid.

²³ Todorova, Marija, *Imaginarni Balkan*, Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 1998, p. 75.

²⁴ In this case – Serbia *in concretum*.

The question arises whether there is some nicer (and non-compromised) name for the Balkans that we could use. The term *Southeastern Europe* would be a much more sophisticated and nicer term. Albeit, it did not “spread like fire” throughout this specific Balkan soil of ours. The idea of Yugoslav geographer Josip Roglić from the period after the Second World War to use the term *Southeastern Europe* instead of *the Balkan Peninsula* was rejected due to the correlation of this term with Nazi Germany.²⁵

In the meantime, the Balkans went through another *neo-balkanization*, which refers to the wars in the 1990s of the 20th century and the consequent dismemberment of Yugoslavia. Once again, violence, the creation of small, mutually conflicted states, and chaos all became the symbols of the Balkans. After numerous conflicts in which (according to an unwritten rule) the great powers got involved, the Balkans are nowadays once again integrating through a new phenomenon called the Western Balkans.

1.3. THE WESTERN BALKANS AS A POLITICAL TERM

A few years ago, a new term was formed in the Balkans, which is now known as the *Western Balkans*. It is a political construct that defies all laws of geography. To understand this “clinch” between geography and politics, one should determine which countries in fact make up the Western Balkans: Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Albania. At this point, we emerge at the formula of the Balkans, which would mathematically be constructed as follows:

(Former Yugoslav countries – Croatia and Slovenia) + Albania = Western Balkans

We will list a few specificities that emerge from the aforementioned formula:

²⁵ Hoffmann George, *The Balkans in Transition*, Princeton, Van Nostrand, 1963, pp. 11–12.

1. What is common to this region is the fact that all peoples of the Western Balkans speak the same (or similar) language, except in Albania.
2. They are bound by a common past through the “community of fate” (especially the former Yugoslav countries – Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia, which used to have the same nation as well, that is, the Yugoslavs).
3. In the recent past, unfortunately, the majority of these countries were linked through internecine wars during the nineties.
4. None of the Western Balkan countries is an EU member.

These are some of the crucial similarities and differences, but the strongest bond between these countries is the “dream” of the European Union. Metaphorically speaking, the Western Balkans could be called the EU waiting room. We all know how uncomfortable it is in waiting rooms – some push each other to get in line, many search for a connection to get better treatment, some come into conflict with each other due to the long wait, and some even decide to join forces to make the wait more bearable. A good example of such joining of forces is the “Open Balkan” initiative, which links Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania, primarily in the economic sense of the word, facilitating an easier flow of goods, people, and capital.²⁶

The initial idea of economic integration of the Western Balkans was known as the “Mini Schengen” when these three countries signed the accession declaration in 2019 in Novi Sad. This initiative will later be renamed “Open Balkan”. The focus of the declaration was on the essential idea which guides its signatories – the significance of joint European integration, with the goal of mutual help on the path towards the EU. In fact, the main idea of the “Open Balkan” was to create a unique market, following the example of the EU. The fact that the support for the initiative in the founding member states is great is confirmed by the research conducted by the *International Republican Institute (IRI)*. In Serbia, 75% of respondents support the “Open Balkan”, in North Macedonia, 61% of them²⁷, while the

²⁶ There are indications that the rest of the Western Balkans countries will join this initiative as well. To fulfil that, many political obstacles must be overcome.

²⁷ International Republican Institute. 2022. “IRI Western Balkans Poll Shows Support for Pro-Western Institutions, Persistent Ethnic Tensions, and Commitment

support in Albania is measured at 63.3%.²⁸ The support for this initiative came from the US, Russia, and certain EU representatives as well, since it was seen as a possibility for acceleration within the European integration processes.²⁹

Even though this initiative seems productive at first glance, many political subjects oppose it, which creates dissonant tones among the Western Balkans members. The biggest resentment was expressed by the Prime Minister of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo, Albin Kurti, as well as the former representatives of the Montenegrin government (Milo Đukanović). Uneven acceptance of this initiative can also be seen in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which further complicates the integration of the Western Balkans. The possible reasons for the refusal of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro to join the “Open Balkan” lie in the challenge of the sovereignty of these countries over the assessments of state and nation-building, as well as in the distortion of the public image of their position in the process of EU integration.³⁰ Apart from the mentioned criticisms, numerous benefits of the existing initiative are evident as well.

The latest benefit of this integration is free access to the labour market for citizens of North Macedonia, Albania, and Serbia, who will be able to work without any administrative obstacles in all three countries from March 1, 2024.³¹ The point of this agreement is that anyone who has an account on the *eUprava (eAdministration)* portal will be able to apply for a job in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, and that all three countries will have a single database of all vacancies.

to the Open Balkan Initiative”. June 29, 2022. <https://www.iri.org/news/iri-western-balkans-poll-showsupport-for-pro-western-institutions-persistent-ethnic-tensionsand-commitment-to-the-open-balkan-initiative/>

²⁸ Euronews Albania. 2021. “What do Albanians think about ‘Open Balkan?’”. December 16, 2021. <https://euronews.al/en/what-do-albanians-think-about-open-balkan/>, 01.12.2021.

²⁹ See more in: Stanković Marko, Krstić Zoran, „Perspektive srpsko-albanskih odnosa u svetlu inicijative ‘Otvoreni Balkan’“, *Nacionalni interes*, No. 2, 2023, p. 118.

³⁰ Surlić Stefan, Andrijana Lazarević, and Ljiljana Kolarski. „Integracija vs. suverenizacija. ‘Otvoreni Balkan’ u okvirima statusnih i identitetskih sporova“, *Srpska politička misao*, No. 3, 2020, pp. 57–78.

³¹ Based on the Protocol on Connecting the Electronic Identification Schemes for Citizens of the Western Balkans and the Protocol for the Implementation of the Conditions for Free Access to the Labour Market in the Western Balkans, signed between the three states on January 22, 2024.

It can be said that this almost resembles the EU in the “Balkan way”. Some individuals and countries belonging to the Western Balkans fear that this type of integration could slow down the EU accession, which is not justified, because, if the EU is integrated, why can’t the Western Balkans do the same? Other sceptics of the “Open Balkan” cite as an argument against it the possible collision that could arise with the Berlin process (which is the progenitor of the EU and the forerunner of the idea of the integration of the Balkan states). Unfortunately, some Balkan states (such as Türkiye)³² waited so long that they completely stopped believing in the illusion that they would ever become part of the European family. There are also those like North Macedonia, which was even ready to change significant identity features, such as the name of the state, certain parts of history, and numerous political concessions. And yet, all that was not enough for them to become a new star on the EU flag. There is something stronger than real facts, the rule of law, and the criteria for admission to the EU, and that is political fitness. This “magic of politics” is such that it turns the unfit into fit, and vice versa. This is exactly the kind of situation that creates a growing mistrust among the citizens of the Western Balkan countries towards the EU. This is probably the reason why they lost all hope of becoming equal members. Albeit hope dies last.

1.4. WHY THE WESTERN BALKANS ARE NOT “WESTERN”?

Given that we have explained the current situation in the Western Balkans and bound it with (political) borders, the time has come to say a few words about the geographical controversies of its name. There were words about the Western Balkans (in the contemporary context) even in the 1990s of the 20th century. This term has been informally used by the European bureaucracy since 1997, while it entered full

³² Even though not belonging to the Western Balkans, Türkiye is still a Balkan country, that is, its European part is. It is often listed “in the package” with the Western Balkans in numerous projects of different international organizations.

operational use in 1998.³³ It is quite important to distinguish between the term Western Balkans as a media construct and as a political term. Even though this term appeared in the media discourse much earlier, its political formation is linked to the European Union Summit in Thessaloniki in 2003. That is when the EU institutions³⁴ that define the relations with the Western Balkans are officially established. That was probably the moment when the Western Balkans began to be recognized simultaneously as a political and geographical term. And just like that, the Western Balkans became a part of a political project (albeit at the expense of geography). It is interesting that the Western Balkan countries neither participated in the creation of this term nor were they asked. Some authors deem it a practical political-economic term.³⁵ According to others, it is an example of “geographical stripping of the term and geopolitical manipulation”.³⁶ According to Stepčić, the goal of such a political construct is the stabilization of an un(unstable) region and preparation for its further Euro-Atlantic integration.³⁷

Let's see why the Western Balkans are not indeed “western”. The first objection will be made by geographers who are not used to dividing this peninsula based on the sides of the world. This is supported by the capital work of one of the greatest Balkanologists, Jovan Cvijić, who divided the Balkan Peninsula into three main units (without mentioning the Western Balkans): the Pindus-Dinaric Region, the Aegean Region, and the Continental Block.³⁸ Stepčić believes that Serbia *in concretum* cannot under any circumstances be part of the Western Balkans since it lies in the centre of the Balkans (Central Balkan state).³⁹ By that logic, then, according to him, only the territory west of the Drina river could be the “real Balkans”, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia.⁴⁰

³³ Stepčić Milomir, „Zapadni Balkan: primer geografskog raspodjeljivanja i geopolitičkog manipulisanja“, *Nacionalni interes*, No. 3, 2012, p. 21.

³⁴ The Commissioner, the Commission, the Directorate, etc.

³⁵ Vuletić, Dejan, „NATO i Zapadni Balkan“, *Vojno delo*, No. 7, 2018, p. 41.

³⁶ Stepčić Milomir, „Zapadni Balkan: primer geografskog raspodjeljivanja i geopolitičkog manipulisanja“, *Nacionalni interes*, No. 3, 2012, pp. 9–34.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Cvijić Jovan, *Balkansko poluostrvo*, drugo izdanje, sabrana dela, Book 2, SANU, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Beograd, 1991.

³⁹ Stepčić, op. cit.

⁴⁰ It is a known fact that, upon entering the EU, Croatia and Slovenia “left” the company of the rest of the Western Balkans states, and thus this idea is not applicable in practice.

Even though there is clear (geographical) proof that the Western Balkans are not Western, the political logic (as usual) prevailed over the geographical, and thus, nowadays, this region can be spoken of as a largely established political construction. A discourse has been created in the media about the Western Balkans, the official political and institutional documents recognize it under that name, and thus, we can say that this term is widely accepted.

It is interesting to note that the Balkans are the “Otherness” in relation to Europe, but the Western Balkans is nowadays also the “Otherness” in relation to the rest of the Balkans as well, that is, in relation to the countries that managed to join the EU (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, etc.). For the time being, the Western Balkan countries are still not “fit” to be a part of the European family, and thus, there is a strict border between *Them* (the EU) and *Us* (the Western Balkans). This border is irresistibly reminiscent of the demarcation the Ancient Greeks made between those who lived in the *polis* and the rest who lived outside the *polis*. In fact, life outside the *polis* was reserved for barbarians or gods (let each of us choose which category we belong to).

As a problematic region (especially after the wars of the nineties), the Western Balkans are under the watchful eye of the great powers. The tragedy lies in the fact that numerous *proxy wars* have often been waged through this region, so the problems of high world politics are being resolved “over the hump” of the Balkan people. And the Balkan people seem never to wise up and learn that there were enough wars for several generations to come and that the time has finally come to deal with linking and integrations and abandon the conflicts and tragedies that have become an integral part of our Balkan archetype. Personally, as a human being, but as well as a researcher, I believe that the Balkans (western, eastern, northern, southern... whatever they end up calling us) should represent, if nothing else, at least a “community of fate”.⁴¹ At least while we are in the EU waiting room, which will probably take some time.

⁴¹ Otto Bauer used this syntagm to determine a nation. The intention of the author in this case is not to speak of the Balkan nation, but only to stress that the contemporary Balkan states, besides exhibiting numerous differences, are also linked by certain fateful misfortunes. Besides that, the Balkan people are to a great extent mutually mixed, and thus, the syntagm “the community of fate” represents an adequate metaphor for nations that are much more similar than different, and thus, they are “bound by fate”. Regarding the depiction of a nation as a community

1.5. CAN THERE BE PEACE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS?

The question of peace in the Western Balkans can be deemed ontological for the simple reason that it deals with the essence and being of this region. It is also the question that concerns the rest of Europe as well, especially bearing in mind that in the 1990s of the 20th century, the bloodiest conflict in Europe after World War Two was fought in this region.⁴² Because of all of the above, the Western Balkans is under the watchful eye of the EU, which constantly controls (and sometimes even creates) certain tensions and unresolved conflicts.

Besides numerous assessments of fitness and unfitness of the (Western) Balkan people, the so-called local index (*Balkan Peace Index* – BPI)⁴³, quantifying peace in the region and assessing the quality of peace was recently introduced. It is obvious that the BPI was modelled after the already famous *Global Peace Index* (GPI)⁴⁴, though the Balkan index has a regional context, with the use of certain indicators.

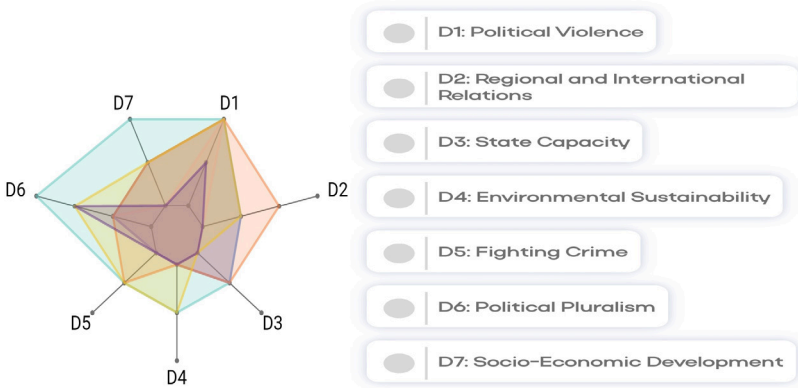
By comparison, the GPI is a composite index that measures peace around the world, and it consists of 23 quantitative and qualitative indicators (where each is pondered on a scale from one to five). On the other hand, the *Balkan Peace Index* (BPI) consists of seven domains, and each of them has three or more indicators. Two domains are constructed in the context of *negative peace* (the fight against crime and political violence), while five domains are created on the side of *positive peace* (state capacity, regional and international relations, ecological sustainability, socio-economic development, and political pluralism).

of fate, see more in: Otto Bauer, „Pojam nacije“, *Politička misao*, No. 1, 1983, pp. 99–116.

⁴² See more about the conflicts in the Balkans in: Džuverović Nemanja, “Balkan Peace Index 2022: Trends and Analysis”, *Journal of Regional Security*, 18 (2), 2023, p. 27.

⁴³ This project emerged as a result of cooperation between the Faculty of Political Science and the Faculty of Organizational Studies in Belgrade.

⁴⁴ See more: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/#/>



BPI graph with explanation of political domains.

Source: <https://bpi.mindproject.ac.rs/>

The data presented in this index show that the Western Balkans has been a peaceful region during the last 20 years (without any armed conflicts). Only the Kosovo and Metohija Province was struck by a violent crisis in 2022, which continued into 2023, while all other members of the Western Balkans had political crises and non-violent conflicts.⁴⁵

When speaking of the qualification of the concrete state of peace, Albania and Croatia⁴⁶ are deemed the countries of *consolidated peace*; Serbia and Montenegro are seen as the states of *polarized peace*; Bosnia and Herzegovina had it the worst, depicted as a country with the so-called *contested peace*, while, according to BPI, North Macedonia is the safest country, with *stable peace*.⁴⁷

It is obvious that the countries of the Western Balkans region have progressed in terms of establishing negative peace, but it is evident that a lot is yet to be done to establish positive peace.⁴⁸ Bearing in mind some historical experiences that have caused a high level of violence in this region (World Wars One and Two), as well as being the place and the cause of World War One (the Sarajevo

⁴⁵ Džuverović Nemanja, “Balkan Peace Index 2022: Trends and Analysis”, *Journal of Regional Security*, 18 (2), 2023, p. 29.

⁴⁶ It is interesting that this index, apart from the already listed countries of the Western Balkans (Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Albania), includes Croatia as well.

⁴⁷ <https://bpi.mindproject.ac.rs/>, 12.02.2024.

⁴⁸ See more on positive peace in: Galtung Johan, *Mirnim sredstvima do mira: mir i sukob, razvoj i civilizacija*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd, 2009.

assassination), the Western Balkans is under the watchful eye of not only the EU but the rest of the great powers as well. Their goal is not only peace in the Balkans, but in Europe as well, and as experience has shown, without peace on the Balkan Peninsula, there is no peace in the world. The second reason is the geostrategic position of the Western Balkans (*the East in the West and the West in the East*), which makes it attractive for the actions of the great powers. Let's only hope that they will never again use the well-tested recipe for the rule over the (Western) Balkans, which is *divide et impera*.

It is not easy to write about the Balkans if you were not born on its soil. It can be seen based on the texts written by numerous travel writers throughout history, who saw the unexplained mysticism in the Balkans. For someone to adequately perceive the Balkans, they have to live in it, feel its energy, and understand its contradictions. Maybe this is why the negative image of the Balkans emerged, primarily due to the inability of the Western travel writers to understand it. And maybe their reasons were founded, maybe they attempted to expose our reality through the prism of rationality. On the other hand, it is not an easy task to write about the Balkans even if you are born in it, given that the dose of subjectiveness and emotionality threatens to blur the realistic image of it. But who knows it better than us, the *Homo Balcanicus*? We, who are condemned (or privileged) to live exactly in this place, where the East and the West meet, have the right to say a few words about this "living mud of the Balkans" in which we skilfully survive.

Perhaps the greatest misfortune of the Balkans is precisely that it did not "Europeanize" and Westernize enough, as much as the West wanted it to. It can also teach a lesson because it did not distance itself enough from the Orient, even though the East does not deem it oriental enough. The bottom line is that it was perceived as *Otherness* precisely because of the eternal semi-colonial position it had in relation to Europe. Many countries can change their political system, the form of government, institutions, laws, and even political culture, but the place on which the country was built cannot be changed. It is also the curse of the Balkan states, located on the "wind rose" of the great powers.

The position of the so-called Western Balkans, which, as a new political (not geographical) construct, is still not suitable for Europe, is particularly interesting. We come to the point of curiosity that, just as the Balkans represent “Otherness” in relation to the EU, so do the countries of the Western Balkans represent “Otherness” in relation to the rest of the Balkans (which became part of the European Union). The relation between the general and the particular can be seen very well in these examples, so it is not difficult to understand that the inferiority of the Balkans was imposed from the outside, but that it was also accepted among us as a self-determinant.

The point of this reflection on the Balkans was not its apology or defence, but only an attempt to better understand the soul of a region, the spirit of a time in which so many different, and yet so familiar identities live, linked by a community of fate. The bottom line is that the Balkans indeed is a little bit East, a little bit West, but mostly its own. Despite the negative perception, it remains an important geopolitical point that at the same time unites and divides the East and the West, all as necessary and depending on the interests of the great powers.

2. EXTREMISM IN THE BALKANS

2.1. THE ORIGIN AND EMERGENCE OF EXTREMISM

Extremism is one of the most elusive phenomena in the social sciences. Its nature is changeable, its forms are amorphous, and therefore its “infiniteness” represents quite a problem for researchers. The essential question is as follows: **How can we fight something without knowing what it is?** At first glance, extremism is linked with negativity and violence, and thus it is not unusual that it is listed within the corpus of *demonized* phenomena (such as, for example, terrorism).

The author of this book believes that the nature of a phenomenon can be well perceived based on word etymology – as the Latin proverb says: *Nomen est omen* (the name is the sign). If we follow this saying, we will see that the origin of the word extremism is related to extremity (lat. *extremus* has numerous meanings: ultimate, last, highest, excessive, exaggerated).⁴⁹ The excessive feature of extremism reaches certain limits in which the allowed and the forbidden meet. It is often the case that extremism “flows” between the permissible and the forbidden, with a tendency to cross the “red line”. We cannot speak of extremism exclusively as a behaviour implying activism, but also as an opinion, that is, the value system that is often toxic.

⁴⁹ Djoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2021, p. 48.

*Extremism is a behaviour and/or opinion that is on the border of the permissible, with a tendency to cross that border, which is contrary to legal, customary, and cultural norms of a society.*⁵⁰

As such, “extremism is an unwanted phenomenon, which does not correspond with the value system of the contemporary democracy, since it directly undermines the state of law and the rule of law. Its crucial characteristic is the use of violence or inclination towards violence (which does not always need to be realized).”⁵¹

Even though violence is a loyal companion of extremism, it need not be explicit, and thus we distinguish violent from non-violent extremism.⁵² Violence is inherent to a man, but it can manifest in numerous ways – not only as a bare use of force but also through perfidious modalities, such as hate speech, psychological violence, etc. Extremism skilfully flirts with different forms of violence, through the labyrinths of different ideas and opinions, and thus it can be said that there is no religion (nor ideology) “cured” from extremism. But all the same, we cannot afford to think that any religion should be charged with extremism. Extremism is not a religion. Religion is not extremism.

The point is that extremism can happen everywhere and to everyone, but the non-democratic societies, in which penetration of extremist content is facilitated, are the most vulnerable. To make the paradox even greater, extremism can also be encountered in countries with a high degree of democracy, precisely because of the freedom of speech, opinion, and unhindered political action.

Extremism does not represent a constant, since it is predisposed by time and space. This is another problem faced when researching extremism. In fact, something that was considered normal (that is, socially acceptable) many centuries ago can nowadays be deemed extreme: for example, torture, as a legal method of interrogation, used by the Inquisition. Or, for example, the geographical conditionality of extremism – some phenomena that are considered normal in Afghanistan can be deemed extreme in America, and *vice versa*.

⁵⁰ Djoric Marija, *Ekstremna levica: ideološki aspekti levičarskog ekstremizma*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2014, pp. 37–52.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 22.

⁵² See more in the segment on the classification of extremism.

2.2. RADICALIZATION AS A PROCESS

For someone to become an extremist, they have to go through the process of radicalization first. That process is individual, which means that it differs from person to person. The triggers for radicalization are different, and can be predisposed by the emotional structure of a personality, the influence of the environment, stressogenic factors, etc. We usually categorize them as follows:

1. Push factors
2. Pull factors
3. Individual factors

PUSH FACTORS	PULL FACTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sense of rejection from society, relative deprivation * Frustration-aggression (unfulfilled wish breeds frustration) * Big social and economic differences * Inability to integrate into the existing sociopolitical system. * Inexistence of equal opportunities for all citizens in a society * Unemployment * Isolation of the youth from the rest of the world (inability to travel, exchange experiences with their peers from the surrounding countries and abroad, apathy...) * Discrimination on national, racial, and religious grounds, and the feeling of injustice * Collapsed state of law and rule of law, weak institutions * A bad education system that does not incite critical thinking * Post-conflict society * Disrespect of basic human rights * Radical and selective understanding of religious dogmas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sense of belonging, which is quite developed among extremist groups. The active role of extremist recruiters, who are always there for potential future members * Radicalization in virtual space (social networks, encrypted apps) and the influence of propaganda * An identity crisis that is overcome by joining an extremist group * Manipulative approach of extremists, who always have “easy answers” and so-called logical explanations in “harsh times.” * Financial aid provided by extremist groups * Feeling of respect and significance (the feeling of “exclusiveness” a new member gets from extremist groups) * Adventurism * Influence of close individuals regarding the adoption of extremist ideology (friends, relatives, religious authorities) * Award for the sacrifice in the name of a certain extremist group (for example, “going to Heaven”, martyrdom, shahid status)

Table no. 1: Djoric Marija, *Priručnik za prepoznavanje, prevenciju i suzbijanje radikalizacije i nasilnog ekstremizma kod učenika*, Biro za operativnu koordinaciju – Nacionalni operativni tim, Podgorica, 2020, p. 25.

PERSONAL FACTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Pathology (some sort of personality disorder)· Dysfunctional family· Domestic violence· Emotional problem· Loneliness· Authoritarian type of personality· Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Table no. 2: Djoric Marija, *Priručnik za prepoznavanje, prevenciju i suzbijanje radikalizacije i nasilnog ekstremizma kod učenika*, Biro za operativnu koordinaciju – Nacionalni operativni tim, Podgorica, 2020, p. 25.

All listed factors can be a stressor for the radicalization process (often acting jointly, as a group of different factors). The radicalization process itself is conditioned by time and can last from a few weeks to several years. None of the previously listed factors doesn't need to be a direct indicator of radicalization, and thus the activities of the individuals indicating terrorism should be monitored. There are a few indicators of radicalization that should be monitored to get a comprehensive picture of potential terrorists/extremists. Those are as follows:

- Changes in communication and relations with others;
- Changes in physical appearance;
- Changes in behaviour;
- in online activities;
- Changes in living space.⁵³

During my lectures at the university, I often use two metaphors so that my students understand the radicalization process.

The first metaphor implies a comparison of radicalization with the **“brainwashing” process**, during which the individual adopts certain contents in the value system that differ from those previously acquired. For example, if an individual subjected to the radicalization process used to believe in values such as love, peace, and good, as time passes by, the same individual will begin to adopt a system in which the central value categories are hate, war, and evil.

The second metaphor implies comparing radicalization with **the process of climbing the stairs**. Imagine a building with ten floors.

⁵³ Vidaković Dragana, Vuković Mladen, Logunov Oliver, Plavšić Aleksandar, *Prevenција radikalizacije i terorizma*, Misija OEBS u Srbiji, Beograd, 2020, p. 16.

Some individuals will enter it, and some of them will reach the first floor, some the second, and some the third floor. But only the ones who climb the tenth floor would have completed the radicalization process.

Radicalization is a dangerous process, given that it is a pathway towards becoming a terrorist. For an individual to come onto the path towards terrorism, they must first commence the radicalization process, where in the first phase, they become extremists, and only in the second phase can (and do not have to) become terrorists. That is why it is essentially important to prevent radicalization from the beginning, since in that way, we prevent not only extremism but terrorism as well.

Some theoreticians⁵⁴ analysed 11 case studies based on which they identified four phases of radicalization:⁵⁵

1. Pre-radicalization – In this phase, the individual has not yet come into contact with toxic ideological ideas, but there are certain conditions for taking up the radicalization process.
2. Pre-identification – A phase that focuses on researching ideology and its value system. A certain stressful event can serve as a stimulus for the advancement of this phase, which can speed up the process.
3. Indoctrination – This is the phase in which the individual already starts to ideologize and adopt the basic principles of a certain extremist/terrorist group.
4. “Jihadization” is the final stage, in which the individual adopts the complete violent value system, based on which they are ready to start with operationalization, that is, practical use.

When speaking of types of radicalization, we can single out two basic ones:

1. Direct, which implies direct contact (“face to face”). This would mean the recruiters come from close surroundings (emotional partner, relative, teacher, or some form of authority). As a sub-type of direct radicalization, we can single out radicalization in prisons. In fact, according to estimates of experts who were in direct contact with convicts charged with the criminal act of terrorism, about 40% of terrorists in Western Europe were

⁵⁴ Rauf Ceylan, Michael Kiefer, *Salafismus: Fundamentalistische Strömungen und Radikalisierungsprävention*. Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2013, p. 162.

⁵⁵ It is important to note that this type of radicalization is based on the analysis of jihadist ideology.

predominantly radicalized in prisons.⁵⁶ This would mean that someone who, for example, committed theft, upon entering prison, can radicalize in the meantime and become a terrorist.

2. Indirect radicalization boils down to modern techniques and technology, that is, the Internet. Many call it online radicalization as well. It does not need to include direct contact with terrorists, but the emphasis is on acquiring online ideological content. The fact that trends in extremism and terrorism change is especially evident in the fact that it is no longer necessary for terrorists to meet in person or organize training in training camps (which requires a lot of money and time), but it is enough to have *wi-fi* access. This type of radicalization is to a great extent responsible for the creation of the phenomenon of the so-called lone wolves.

When speaking of the Western Balkans (in comparison to Europe), direct radicalization is dominant, even though, in recent times, online radicalization has intensified more and more in our region as well. Apart from the use of official social networks and apps (*Facebook, TikTok, Telegram*, etc.), alternative networks are used as well, including the dark web.

2.3. TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM⁵⁷

Different trends in contemporary extremism can be divided into several groups:

1. Impact of modern techniques and technology
2. “Individualization” of extremism
3. Ideological controversies
4. Gender approach

⁵⁶ Due to the Chatham House Rule, the author of this book cannot disclose the source of the data.

⁵⁷ The majority of this segment in the book is based on the following paper: Djoric Marija, „Trendovi u savremenom ekstremizmu: izazovi i pouke“, *Politička revija*, No. 4, 2023, pp. 71–92.

To understand all of these categories, one should start with an overview of the current situation on a global level. It is a known fact that the “Islamic State”⁵⁸ terrorist organization made quite an impact on extremists and terrorists worldwide. Their ideology served as motivation for numerous violent acts that resulted not only from the actions of other terrorist organizations but also from individuals (lone wolves). Nowadays, the “Islamic State” is almost defeated in the field, many of its members and leaders are arrested and killed, and the caliphate remains an unfinished dream of many jihadists. Does this mean that the “Islamic State” is destroyed for good? No, because the idea of it remains, and it is almost indestructible. In this lies the main problem of contemporary extremism and terrorism. The idea, which is the main generator of the violent activities of extremists, is an immaterial construct that moves, motivates, and justifies the actions of its followers. If there is a strong idea that “intoxicates” the minds and drives individuals into action, its followers will persist. The weakness of the contemporary counter-terrorism approaches lies in the fact that they only treat the consequences, and not the causes of violent extremism and terrorism.

Looking at the current statistics, according to the *Global Terrorism Index*⁵⁹ ISIS remains (eight years in a row) the deadliest terrorist organization in the world, which organized 21 terrorist attacks worldwide during the previous year.⁶⁰ At the time being, chapters of the “Islamic State” are most dominant in the Sahel.⁶¹ (Africa), as well as in South Asia. It has a significant number of forces concentrated in Afghanistan, where the “Islamic State of Khorasan” was formed, which is the biggest opponent to the “Taliban” regime. The increased activities of the “Al-Shabaab” organization are noticeable outside Somalia as well, and thus, religious, that is, jihadist extremism and

⁵⁸ Besides this one, there are also other names in the form of acronyms, such as ISIS, IDIL, IS, and DAESH, etc., all relating to specific temporal periods, in which this terrorist organization developed differently.

⁵⁹ This statistic is created on the sample of 163 countries and includes about 99.7% of the world population.

⁶⁰ <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/> 29.06.2023.

⁶¹ The Sahel has become increasingly problematic during the last 15 years, while the mortality rate from terrorism has risen by more than a thousand percent between 2007 and 2021. According to: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-04112022.pdf>, 01.07.2023.

terrorism might be changing the course of action, but their ideology remains present.

Even though the four deadliest terrorist organizations in 2022 include those belonging to the ideology of religious extremism⁶², the statistics are quite different on a global level. Namely, during the period from 2007 to 2022, there were many more attacks with a background in ideologically motivated extremism (the extreme left-wing and the extreme right-wing) than those motivated by the ideologization of some religion.⁶³ The second place is taken by ethnic separatist and nationalist attacks, while religiously motivated terrorist attacks take up only the third place. Why then is the impression that religiously funded extremism is the most dominant? The answer is simple – during the previous few years, religiously funded terrorist attacks were quite spectacular (the use of the media and propaganda), morbid, and quite destructive (for example, the 9/11 attack). Besides that, a few years ago, for the first time emerged a hybrid (ISIS – as a combination of a quasi-state and a terrorist organization) emerged, which surpassed all other terrorist organizations by its violence, mobilizational capacities⁶⁴, and destructiveness.

On the other side, ideologically motivated extremism is gaining momentum. According to the estimates of many theoreticians and practitioners, the growth of the extreme right wing is expected worldwide, which will represent an answer to many significant global events, such as the migration crisis, the war in Ukraine⁶⁵, and the COVID-19 pandemic. As a response to the extreme right wing, as an unwritten rule, the extreme left wing strengthens as well, which Europol has already shown in previous years. The strengthening of the extreme left is also favoured by the contemporary economic crisis, to which there is no end in sight for the time being. Such “reciprocity

⁶² Those are “Islamic State”, “Al-Shabaab”, “Islamic State of Khorasan” and JNIM (Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin) – a chapter of “Al-Qaeda”. According to: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/GTI-2023-web-170423.pdf>, str. 12, 30.06.2023.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 35.

⁶⁴ According to UN estimates, it is believed that around 40,000 people from 120 countries of the world joined ISIS, which, along with the local population from Syria and Iraq, made up almost 100,000 terrorists. Source: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/expertise/foreign-terrorist-fighters.html>, 01.07.2023.

⁶⁵ See more on the Ukrainian crisis in: Stošić Sanja, „Kubanska i Ukrajinska kriza u svetlu globalne geopolitičke dinamike“, *Politička revija*, No. 1, 2023, pp. 11-43.

of extremisms”⁶⁶ leads to something we might call a “vicious circle of extremisms”, from which it is difficult to get out. An additional aggravating circumstance for contemporary extremism is the phenomenon of *lone wolves*, that is, individuals who self-radicalize⁶⁷ without direct contact with an extremist group.

2.3.1. Influence of modern techniques and technology

The emergence of the Internet, artificial intelligence, and the contemporary robotization of society are only some of the challenges faced by contemporary humanity.⁶⁸ Besides its positive influence, since it facilitates the life of a contemporary man, technological innovations can be abused in many ways, if they find their way into the hands of extremists and terrorists. In this segment, we will discuss the use of drones and 3D-printed weapons⁶⁹, which are becoming increasingly popular among extremist circles.

Even though Nicolas Grossman called drones “the flying robots”⁷⁰, it should be noted that they can be active on the soil and in the water as well. Drones are, in fact, robots that, besides the ability to capture photographs and video footage (reconnaissance feature), can be weapons as well. The drones were used as a weapon for the first time by America in 2002 in Afghanistan to eliminate Osama bin Laden.⁷¹ Only four years later, “Hezbollah” became the first extremist

⁶⁶ Becker Michael, “When Extremists Become Violent: Examining the Association Between Social Control, Social Learning, and Engagement in Violent Extremism”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 44, no. 12, 2019, pp. 1104–1124.

⁶⁷ Such radicalization method is predominantly conducted online, via the Internet.

⁶⁸ Aware of the dangers introduced by AI, the UN Security Council held its first session on this topic on July 18, 2023, with a suggestion to form a supervisory body for artificial intelligence. “The malicious use of AI systems for terrorist, criminal or state purposes could cause horrific deaths and destruction, widespread trauma and deep psychological damage of unimaginable proportions”, stated the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Source <https://www.danas.rs/svet/pozivi-za-stvaranje-tela-un-za-nadzor-vestacke-inteligencije/>, 20.07.2023.

⁶⁹ Or weapons printed by 3D printers.

⁷⁰ Grossman, Nicholas, *Drones and Terrorism: Asymmetric Warfare and the Threat to Global Security*, I. B. Tauris, Bloomsbury, 2018.

⁷¹ Sifton, John, *A Brief History of Drones*, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/brief-history-drones/>.

group to use drones for conducting an attack on enemy positions.⁷² The statistic shows that in the period from 2001 to 2021, the opposing parties used drones in at least 26 countries.⁷³ The wars in Afghanistan and Yemen⁷⁴ (and nowadays in Ukraine as well) demonstrated the real function of drones in conflicts. France used unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in the territories of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Turkey intensively engaged UAVs in Libya and Syria. Israel also makes extensive use of drones in Gaza and Syria. Azerbaijan relied heavily on drones during the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore, the use of drones is quite established in modern conflicts. Besides countries, there are also the so-called non-state actors using drones, such as extremist and terrorist organizations.

Drones were significantly used by the “Islamic State” in Syria and Iraq. This terrorist organization predominantly used “quadcopters, worth about 650-1,000 USD, which can fly for 10 to 30 minutes and can be controlled from a distance of seven kilometres”.⁷⁵ The case of extremist provocation during the European Championship qualifying match between Serbia and Albania, when, on October 14, 2014, the flag of “Great Albania”, carried by a drone, was released at Marakana Stadium, should not be forgotten as well.⁷⁶

Therefore, it is evident that drones can be used not only by state actors, for different purposes, but that this opportunity is available to extremist and terrorist organizations as well (as well as the self-radicalized individuals). Easy access to drones, implying simple procurement and low price, is only one of the advantages. If you add to that the fact that the use of drones protects people from suffering or capture by the enemy, then it is not odd that this type of unmanned aerial vehicle is becoming increasingly popular among extremists.

The next type of trend in the context of the advancement of technics and technology, which can serve extremists, is the use of the

⁷² Djoric Marija, Milošević Tanja, „Zloupotreba veštačke inteligencije u ekstremističke i terorističke svrhe“, *Srpska politička misao*, No. 1, 2021, p. 210.

⁷³ Dawies Shawn, Petterson Therese, Öberg Magnus, “Organized violence 1989–2021 and drone warfare”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 59(4), 2022, pp. 593–610.

⁷⁴ Djoric Marija, Milošević Tanja, „Zloupotreba veštačke inteligencije u ekstremističke i terorističke svrhe“, *Srpska politička misao*, No. 1, 2021, pp. 201–221.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 213–214.

⁷⁶ The moment the Serbian football player Stefan Mitrović took down the flag, an incident broke out with two Albanian players, who pounced on him. Riots at the stadium broke followed as well.

so-called 3D-printed weapons. For the use of this type of weapon, a 3D printer, which can be found on the market for a couple of hundred dollars, is needed. The material is easily accessible and cheap, and instructions for manufacturing this type of weapon were, until recently, available on the Internet. The problem with 3D weapons lies in the fact that they do not have a serial number and thus are not subject to the control of official institutions; on the other side, they can eliminate the target (as is the case with conventional weapons). So was, for example, the former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was killed exactly with this type of weapon.⁷⁷ From 2019 to nowadays, there were nine cases when extremists attempted attacks (or succeeded) in the territory of Europe and Australia, with the use of 3D-printed weapons.⁷⁸ Even though this type of weapons is predominantly used among the extreme right-wing, this does not diminish the possibility that other extremists might take up its production as well. By the way, it is believed that 3D-printed weapons were used for the first time in Myanmar when speaking of official state conflicts.⁷⁹ Understanding the scope of danger of the use of such types of weapons, Europol organized a conference in 2022 and adopted the following conclusions:⁸⁰

1. Strengthen the cooperation between state institutions and the private sector that deal with this issue, to facilitate easier control.
2. Create an international network of experts.
3. All recommendations from the conference shall be distributed to relevant subjects, to stress the dangers of this weapon.

⁷⁷ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/07/10/national/crime-legal/diy-gun-abe-assassination/>, 02.07.2023.

⁷⁸ <https://gnet-research.org/2022/06/23/the-future-is-now-the-use-of-3d-printed-guns-by-extremists-and-terrorists/>, 01.07.2023.

⁷⁹ <https://arquebus.uk/3d-printed-firearms-the-implications-for-conflict-and-security/>, 01.07.2023.

⁸⁰ <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/printing-insecurity-tackling-threat-of-3d-printed-guns-in-europe>, 30.06.2022.

2.3.2. “Individualization” of extremism

It is known that, by the type of actor, extremism is categorized as individual, extremism of organizations (and groups), and institutional.⁸¹ In contemporary times, we are witnessing the surge of the so-called “post-organizational violent extremism and terrorism” (POVET), which was distinguished as a phenomenon in 2020 by Bruce Hofman and Colin Clarke.⁸² What is specific for this type of violent extremism is that there is no specific group, that is, organization; it is characterized by “leaderless resistance”, including predominantly acts conducted by “lone wolves”. POVET is, in fact, extremism within which the emphasis is on the “internal enemy”. While the US, for example, has for years been oriented towards the external enemy⁸³, nowadays this type of violent extremism is in focus, implying the emergence of some new forms, such as the *Boogaloo Bois*, the INCEL (*Involuntary celibate*) movement, *Atomwaffen Division*, etc.

The new forms of violent extremism and terrorism have the Internet as the foundation of their radicalization, insufficiently structured leadership, as well as numerous individual violent acts. This significantly complicates the work of the security sector since, if there is no firm structure and leadership, then it is far more complicated to monitor extremist, and thus their actions as well. Research conducted by the FBI indicates that the average age of “lone wolves” is predominantly 30-34 years⁸⁴, that about 70% of them are divorced (or single), and as for the racial structure, the majority of these extremists belong to the white race (65%).⁸⁵ Interestingly, a dominant number of these extremists are highly educated (38% went to college, 23% graduated from college, 10% gained a master’s degree, while 4% of extremists even have doctorates).⁸⁶

⁸¹ According to: Djoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2021, p. 60.

⁸² <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/01/trends-in-terrorism-whats-on-the-horizon-in-2023/>, 02.07.2023.

⁸³ First Afghanistan and Al Qaeda, and then ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

⁸⁴ This is quite interesting information if we compare it to the average age of jihadist-oriented terrorists, among which the age average is around twenty.

⁸⁵ FBI, *Lone Offenders: A Study of Lone Offender Terrorism in the United States (1972 – 2015)*, National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, 2019.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Besides *single-issue extremism*, this phenomenon is nowadays especially characteristic among certain extreme right-wing groups, but also among certain types of left-wing extremism as well.

2.3.3. Ideological controversies

When speaking of ideology, it is nowadays quite multifarious and often links incompatible elements. It often happens that an amalgamation of quite contradictory ideologies, such as the extreme left wing and the extreme right wing, occurs. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic emerged *COVID-related extremism emerged*, against which jointly acted the extreme left and the extreme right, most often in the form of protest. In Serbia, “Levijatan” started with the idea of protection of animal rights, which brought it closer to the *single-issue* extremism ideology (and in some forms the extreme left), to end up being categorized as clearly right-wing when speaking of its ideology, value system, narratives, and activism. The evolution of the skinhead movement throughout history, from the extreme left-wing to the extreme right-wing (for example, *Hammerskins*), is also evident, while contemporary times witness one quite controversial phenomenon⁸⁷, such as the emergence of the gay skinhead movement (*queerskin*), active predominantly in the West. The extreme left and the extreme right join at another key value – anti-globalism⁸⁸. The problem lies in the fact that their reasons for animosity are quite different: while the extreme left criticizes globalism because the rich are becoming richer, and the poor are becoming poorer, the extreme right cannot accept the ideas of denationalization and de-sovereignization, towards which globalism strives.

Due to ideological confusion and linking incompatible elements, sometimes it is difficult to identify the type of extremism, although it is always good to be guided by the final (historical) goals to

⁸⁷ The controversy emerges from the idea that the skinheads, no matter belonging to the extreme left or the extreme right, perceive themselves as a “macho” subculture. This phenomenon, however, shows that value systems of ideologies can be combined in different ways in practice, and thus the rules do not exist anymore.

⁸⁸ Globalism is an ideology, while globalization is a process.

which certain extremist organization, groups, or movements (or an individual) strives, and therefore we will not make a mistake.⁸⁹

2.3.4. Gender approach

One of the biggest prejudices in contemporary extremism is that it is a predominantly “male phenomenon”. The hypothesis we will attempt to prove in this paper is that women can equally as men play equally significant (and dangerous) roles in violent extremism. For now, we have succeeded in identifying three key roles women can play in violent extremism: women as victims, women as perpetrators, and women as mothers.

In the majority of cases, as (physically) weaker sex, women were usually, when speaking of war conflicts and terrorist activities, perceived as victims. This is not far from the truth if we take into consideration some contemporary examples of violent extremism and terrorism. ISIS, as a terrorist organization, had quite a brutal attitude towards women (especially those belonging to the so-called enemy groups). In 2014, ISIS organized an attack on the northeastern part of Iraq (Sinjar, a town predominantly inhabited by Kurds). During this operation, 6,800 people were kidnapped, while 3,100 of them were killed.⁹⁰ Among the most numerous victims were the Yazidi women, who were used as *khums* – tax to the spoils of war. These women went through different forms of abuse in the camps organized for them by the terrorists, of which there will be more in a separate part of this book.

Besides ISIS, “Boko Haram” is one of the contemporary terrorist organizations that expresses great animosity towards women. To this testify numerous kidnappings of girls from schools, who are often victimized by this terrorist organization. What is common to women survivors of rapes by ISIS and “Boko Haram” terrorists is the fact that

⁸⁹ On challenges and mistakes in the extremism research problem, see more in: Djoric Marija, “Challenges faced by young scholars in researching extremism”, *The Policy of National Security*, special issue, 2022, pp. 7-21.

⁹⁰ Cetorelli Valeria, Sasson Isaac, Shabila Nazar, Burnham Gilbert. *Mortality and kidnapping estimates for the Yazidi population in the area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014: A retrospective household survey*. PLoS Med. 2017 May., <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28486492/>, 07.07.2023.

they were stigmatized by their communities as well, and thus can rightfully be characterized as double victims.⁹¹

The second role women play within extremist and terrorist organizations is related to women as perpetrators of violent acts. Here, another habit of perceiving women exclusively as the “weaker” and “gentler” sex is broken. Women were not only active participants in many extremist organizations, but they also performed leadership functions in many of them (especially the left-oriented organizations)⁹². To this testify the examples of Ulrike Meinhof, the leader of the German leftist terrorist organization “RAF” (*Rote Armee Fraktion*), or the leader of the “Japanese Red Army” (Fusako Shigenobu). In the present day, a good example of women as perpetrators of violent extremist acts is crystal clear within the ISIS framework, where the “Al-Khansaa Brigade”, a type of moral police consisting exclusively of female members, existed.⁹³ Moreover, members of the “Black Widows”, the Chechen terrorist group, among whom the revenge for the loss of a male family member was the main generator of radicalization, should be mentioned as well.

Female activists of right-wing extremist organizations should be mentioned as well. They are rarely the leaders but are increasingly often found in the roles of recruiters and propagandists, and play a significant role in the collection of funding as well. Their propagandistic actions are more visible on “mainstream” social networks and channels such as X (former *Twitter*), *YouTube*, and *Instagram*. The contemporary literature on this topic is quite obscure, and thus, there is a scientific void that should be filled. A typical *modus operandi* used by female recruiters in right-wing extremist organizations is reduced to live *vlogs*, thus creating some form of “network intimation”.⁹⁴ The emergence of the “red pill”⁹⁵ in this

⁹¹ At the same time, they experience the violence of terrorists through rape, and then the rejection of the environment in which they live.

⁹² The left-wing ideology (including its extreme forms) perceives women and men predominantly as equals.

⁹³ They were most active in the territories of Raqqa and Mosul.

⁹⁴ Followers can leave comments directly and participate in communication as well, thus creating a sense of closeness and participation.

⁹⁵ The “Red pill” is a euphemism adopted from the movie *Matrix*, in which the lead character is offered a red and a blue pill. The red pill is a symbol of truth, while the blue one represents delusion and escape from reality. By this, the extreme right-wing members symbolically show that their ideology is based on “the truth”.

context is quite interesting, representing the first step in extreme right-wing radicalization.

The third position women take in contemporary extremist organizations is reduced to the role of a mother. At this point, we can speak of the dual role of women: while mothers, on one hand, can have quite an important role in the prevention of violent extremism among their children; on the other, they can be most responsible for their radicalization as well.⁹⁶ The level of significance of gender approach in the prevention of extremism and terrorism is seen in the fact that the UN passed a Security Council Resolution 1325, in which the role of women in prevention of violent extremism - PVE (*Preventing Violent Extremism*) is explicitly stressed.

Contemporary violent extremism (and terrorism) is quite a dynamic phenomenon, which represents a significant security challenge for modern society. Exactly due to its dynamic and variable nature, extremism is hard to follow, which is much needed for several reasons. The first reason is the identification of the existing threats, which change under the influence of different social and political conditions; the second is the need for the prevention of the same threats.

New trends, among which are the influence of modern technics and technology, “individualization” of extremism, ideological controversies, and gender approach to the research of this phenomenon, represent the starting basis for the identification and prevention of violent extremism. The contemporary progress of the *IT* sector and artificial intelligence has led to new possibilities, such as the use of drones and *3D*-printed weapons. Such a type of challenge can be prevented only through additional education of members of the security-intelligence sector⁹⁷, as well as through

⁹⁶ Guillaume Denoix de Saint Marc, Stéphane Lacombe, “The Roles of Women in Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism: Motivations, Experiences, and Methods of Engagement”, *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, ed. Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger & Rafia Bhulai, Hedayah and The Global Center on Cooperative Security, Abu Dhabi, 2016.

⁹⁷ See more on the work of the security sector in: Lazić Radojica, *Službe bezbednosti Jugoslavije: od Brionskog plenuma do raspada države* (knjiga 1), Neven, Fakultet za

perfecting the surveillance in the online space (especially on social networks). The growing emergence of “lone wolves” is evidence of the so-called “individualization” of extremists. Once upon a time, it was necessary to make contact with the extremist group and ensure vast material funds, and travel was made difficult due to the existence of numerous borders. Nowadays, all you need for radicalization is an online connection and an interest in certain ideologies. The creation of ideological hybrids might sometimes confuse the theoreticians and practitioners, but this is a lesson to us, teaching us that there aren’t any static forms of violent extremism and that this phenomenon often connects the incompatible. And finally, the gender approach to violent extremism must not be neglected. To this testifies a multifaceted role of a woman (victim, perpetrator, mother), which can be multilayered, depending on the approach to the phenomenon of extremism. The return of terrorists from the battlefield (Syria) and the intensification of a new war (Ukraine), have all opened up the Pandora box, from which we can expect the “unexpected”.

What lessons can we draw from the previously mentioned trends in contemporary extremism?

Above all, extremism should be observed from different angles. It is an occurrence that can spread to every segment of society and a phenomenon no one is “vaccinated” from. Exactly because it knows no gender, race, nation, or religion, extremism can (but does not have to) appear everywhere and in different forms. From this emerges the need to overcome all stereotypes and prejudices, since extremism is often difficult to predict. If we do not prevent one form of extremism, it will easily provoke some new form of extremism, which leads to a “vicious circle” of violence (*reciprocity of extremism*) that is hard to escape from. The advancement of technics and technology has facilitated communication and connection of people on a global level, but this applies to extremist organizations and groups as well.⁹⁸ When

diplomaciju i bezbednost; Beograd, 2022.

⁹⁸ Some authors, upon analysing the series of false bombing threats in Serbia via e-mails and phone, defined this phenomenon as so-called *phone terrorism*. See more in: Mijalković Saša, Milašinović Srdan, „Metodološke smernice za naučno istraživanje lažnih dojava o podmetnutim eksplozivnim napravama u Republici Srbiji“, *Sociološki pregled*, No. 4, 2023, pp. 1257–1278.

speaking of individuals (“lone wolves”), they are the most difficult to monitor, and thus, prevention in the sense of education, creation of a tolerant society, and critical thinking among youth is something we should all do. Only in this way can we prevent extremism from evolving into a higher level of security threat, which is terrorism.

2.4. WHAT SHOULD YOUNG SCHOLARS KNOW ABOUT RESEARCHING TERRORISM?⁹⁹

The search for knowledge about extremism sometimes resembles the quest for the Holy Grail. So far, no one has been able to formulate a universally acceptable definition of extremism, and yet, everyone is still persistently searching for it. Extremism, in fact, is quite a tempting phenomenon in the eyes of young researchers, precisely due to its ambiguity, security aspect, and amorphous definition. At the very beginning, a logical question arises: How can we research something that we have not defined? This is precisely where the charm of researching extremism lies, given that researchers constantly encounter its many faces and forms that denote the extremely dynamic nature of this phenomenon. This dynamism of extremism is attractive, especially to young researchers, yet one should keep in mind that that attractiveness is in fact a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the dynamics by which extremism changes and adapts to the modern age make this phenomenon interesting; on the other hand, it is precisely this continuous chain of changes that makes researching extremism laborious, requiring an absolute commitment of researchers, which can be very demanding for young scientists.

Let us first deal with the elementary things regarding extremism. To understand a social phenomenon, one should primarily define its essential characteristics (that is, its nature). While in natural sciences researchers, for example, know for certain the content of atoms (protons, electrons, neutrons) or Pythagoras’s theorem = $(a^2 + b^2 = c^2)$,

⁹⁹ This segment was taken from the following paper: Djoric Marija, “Challenges faced by young scholars in researching extremism”, *The Policy of National Security*, special issue, 2022, pp. 7–21.

the situation in social sciences¹⁰⁰ is quite different. Contrary to natural phenomena, which are exact (and thus, their forecast is simpler and more precise as well), in social sciences, nothing is quite simple and precise.¹⁰¹ Even though people have attempted since ancient times to foresee occurrences of phenomena in a society based on a cycle (cyclic theories)¹⁰², rectilinear movement (linear theories)¹⁰³, theories of progress (Condorset, Antoine Nicholas, Anne Robert, Jacques Turgot), etc., they often forgot one significant factor – human beings and their unpredictable actions. Given that extremism is, first of all, a social (and then political, psychological, legal, etc.) phenomenon, it is clear that (when speaking of the long-term) it is difficult to predict its development and movement.

Exactly due to all of the above, young researchers must understand the nature of extremism to finally be able to make predictions regarding this phenomenon. Then, one should examine all the forms of manifestation of extremism, determine classification criteria, and find similarities and differences (*genus proximum* and *diferentia specifica*) between extremism and other similar phenomena (terrorism, radicalism, fundamentalism, etc.). It is quite significant to take into consideration the time and space in which extremism is being examined, since what is nowadays deemed as extremism might have been once in the past a widely accepted occurrence or behaviour. The same should be said for spatial context as well – if something is perceived as extremism by, for example, the West, it might be a common norm in Afghanistan and *vice versa*.

Only when they perceive all these elements can young researchers be able to understand (or even create) the definition of extremism. Here we face a new problem, given that there isn't a universally accepted definition of extremism (the UN still hasn't managed to do that for terrorism, let alone for extremism), and thus, interpretations are different and quite often coloured by ideology. Contrary to

¹⁰⁰ On correlation of social sciences and security, see more in: Milošević Zoran, Stojadinović Miša, „Društvene nauke i nacionalna bezbednost“, *Politika nacionalne bezbednosti*, No. 1, 2024, pp. 27–44.

¹⁰¹ For example, there isn't a formula used for precisely determining the occurrence and course of a coup with clearly defined actors, goals and final results; the same is true for terrorist attacks as well.

¹⁰² For example, Plato, Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee.

¹⁰³ For example, Augustine of Hippo.

terrorism, extremism is not exclusively a political phenomenon, and thus its dispersive nature asks for a multidisciplinary approach.

As it can be noted even in the mere beginning, researching extremism is a difficult, complex, uncertain, albeit quite an exciting and interesting process. The beauty of it all lies in the fact that, when researching extremism, the youth are knocking on the door of a new cognitive process that will make a significant contribution to society, as depicted in the prevention of terrorism. Whether some of them shyly open this door a little bit or enter the research world of extremism with pride depends on their persistence, dedication, hard work, and a little bit of luck.

2.4.1. Know well the nature of extremism

To determine the basic characteristics of the phenomenon of extremism, one should first of all perceive its essence, that is, its nature. We wouldn't be wrong if we said that this is one of the most elusive social phenomena.¹⁰⁴ There are several reasons why it is hard to research the phenomenon of extremism:

1. **Extremism is interpreted differently depending on temporal and spatial context.** Let us firstly deal with the temporal context, using the example of the Inquisition. During several centuries of the existence of the Inquisition, torture of the accused was legalized by passing a papal bull entitled *Ad extirpanda*.¹⁰⁵ In contemporary times, this would represent the use of extreme means and methods, and it is known, for example, that torture in prisons is forbidden by the *European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, as well as by numerous other international and domestic legal documents. Regarding spatial context, suffice it to say that stoning to death is still a legal punishment method in some countries, while, for example,

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Heywood stated in his works that ideology is one of the most uncatchable phenomena, but this can rightfully be said for extremism as well. See more about the phenomenon of ideology in: Heywood Andrew, *Political ideologies: an introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2020.

¹⁰⁵ This bull was passed by Pope Innocent IV in 1252. See more in: Wood Barry, *Invented History, Fabricated Power: the Narrative Shaping of Civilization and Culture*, Anthem Press, London, 2020, p. 229.

in the majority of countries of the contemporary world, this is perceived as extreme.¹⁰⁶

2. **Extremism is often identified with related phenomena (especially with terrorism).** However, for example, while terrorism represents exclusively a political phenomenon exclusively, we cannot say the same for extremism. We have previously stressed its dispersive nature, and thus, extremism can be found in sports as well (for example, football hooliganism or extreme sports¹⁰⁷), arts¹⁰⁸, religion, and finally, in politics. The next main difference between terrorism and extremism lies in the fact that every terrorism is at the same time also extremism, while *vice versa* does not apply. The next main difference between terrorism and extremism lies in the fact that every terrorism is at the same time also extremism, while *vice versa* does not apply. Namely, it is not necessarily that every extremism should grow into terrorism. To understand the relation of extremism and its related manifestations, we will provide an illustration that points to the fact that extremism intertwines and, in many cases, comes into contact with terms such as radicalism, fanaticism, fundamentalism, populism, etc., but these are not identical phenomena. These circles that are mutually intertwining (but are not identical) in the illustration represent a relation between extremism and its related terms.

¹⁰⁶ The Iranian judiciary, for example, imposed a moratorium on stoning only in 2002; in Afghanistan, the Taliban continue to implement this method of punishment; in Suan, individuals were sentenced to stoning in 2022; Brunei recently passed a new law stipulating that the act of homosexuality should be punished by stoning to death, etc. It is believed that a dozen countries worldwide still practice this form of punishment.

¹⁰⁷ Mountain biking, bungee jumping, scuba diving with sharks...

¹⁰⁸ Let us take the example of the Nazi idea of the so-called *degenerative art* which mocked creations of certain artists (expressionists) and exiled them from the country, while other ("eligible") artists were used for glorification of the Third Reich. See in: Wasensteiner Lucy, *Twentieth Century German Art Exhibition: answering degenerate art in 1930s London*, Routledge, [S.l.], 2021.

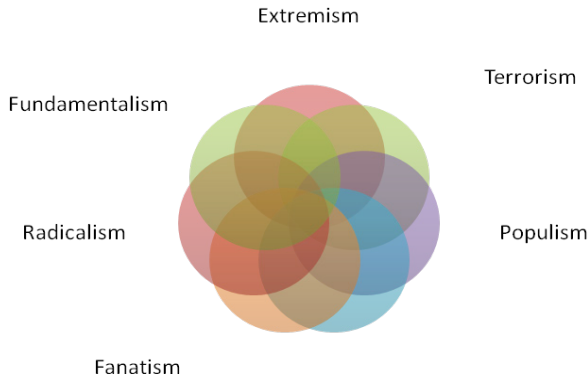


Illustration no. 1: Đoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2021, p. 51.

3. **There is no single universally accepted definition of extremism.** Even though it was definitely present among people as a social phenomenon for a long time, extremism was established within the scientific system only in the 1980s of the 20th century, primarily thanks to researchers (Uwe Bakes and Erkhart Jesse).¹⁰⁹ The fact that it was just recently established within the scientific discourse does not mean that extremism did not exist before. As far back as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, we find an analysis of extremism, albeit not under that name, but as *akrai* (extreme), opposite to moderate action (*mesotes*), which was most desirable for life within the political community.¹¹⁰ Besides that, it should be stressed that short definitions of extremism¹¹¹ are not productive and lead to its simplified perception. During my many years of professional research, I encountered numerous definitions of extremism,

¹⁰⁹ See more in: Backes, Uwe, *Politische Extreme: eine Wort – und Begriffsgeschichte von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2006; or Backes Uwe, Jesse Eckhard, *Gefährdungen der Freiheit: extremistische Ideologien im Vergleich*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2006.

¹¹⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Penguin Publishing Group, 2020.

¹¹¹ Short definitions are inherent to natural sciences, while social sciences demand wider and more comprehensive definitions to provide as detailed as possible description of characteristics of social phenomena. Moreover, one should keep in mind that definitions of social phenomena are prone to change, given that we are speaking of quite dynamic phenomena.

but I believe that it can be best understood when compared with the phenomenon of love:¹¹²

Every individual perceives love differently, in their own way, and even though we cannot find the right words to define love, each of us knows how to recognize it. It is similar in the case of the phenomenon of extremism.

Even though the previous statement cannot be qualified as a scientific definition, it depicts the nature of extremism in the best way possible.

4. **There isn't a unique psychological profile of a terrorist.** Many international organizations, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and even states themselves¹¹³, have spent vast amounts of funds to profile a violent extremist/terrorist. Almost all these attempts failed due to a simple reason – every radicalization process is individual, and thus factors that motivate an individual towards extremism differ from one to another. However, Professor Kruglanski and his associates managed to identify three drivers of violent extremism: needs, narratives, and networks (networking).¹¹⁴ Apart from *pull* and *push* factors, there are also individual factors that drive an individual to extremism (psychological characteristics, emotional problems, etc.). What we can conclude is the following: every radicalization process is individual, albeit this is true for the deradicalization process as well.

¹¹² This paraphrasing is motivated by the definition of power provided by Joseph Nye: "Power is also like love, easier to experience than to define or measure, but no less real for that." Nye S. Joseph Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York, 2004.

¹¹³ For example, France spent around 2.5 million EUR for a deradicalization program conducted outside prisons, organized in 2016 in Château de Pontourny. This was a pilot program of this sort (lasting for ten months) in France, employing 27 individuals, among whom were psychologists, social workers and special educators. It was planned that another 13 centers of that sort were to be open. Attendance was supposed to be voluntary, primarily for youth aged 18 to 30, obsessed with extremist ideas. Despite big financial investments and efforts made by the educators, the program was unsuccessful. <https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/la-stampa-in-english/2017/09/02/news/what-we-can-learn-from-france-s-failed-deradicalization-center-1.34412986/>, 10.03.2024.

¹¹⁴ Kruglanski Arie, Jasko Katarzyna, Webber David, "The Making of Violent Extremists", *Review of General Psychology*, Vol. 22, br. 1, 2018, pp. 107–120.

To better grasp the nature of extremism, we must research its form. Here, a characteristic problem emerges because young researchers often, with no relevant criteria, conduct a classification of extremism, singling out the following: violent, right-wing, left-wing, individual, etc. Such an approach is wrong because it is not systematic. There are different classifications of extremism, but for each of them, the most important thing is that there is a **criteria** based on which it will be conducted. For example, Uwe Backes used two criteria for the classification of forms of extremism: according to the dimensions of civil equality and civil liberty: anti-democracy and anti-constitutionalism.¹¹⁵ The most common criteria based on which classification of extremism is being conducted are the following: violence (violent/non-violent extremism), program-goal orientation (ideological, ethnic separatism, religious extremism), number of actors (individual-lone-wolf/group), relation towards political sphere (political/non-political extremism), etc.¹¹⁶

2.4.2. How to research extremism?

Even the ancient Greeks stressed that knowledge can be increased by reading, observation, contemplation, and participation (which will all be explained in the example of extremism in the following pages). Guided by this ancient Greek hypothesis, we can say that, for every beginner planning on researching extremism, it is advisable to first read up on the existing literature from this field (*desk research*). The best is to start with shorter texts (research papers published in scientific journals), and then analyse scientific monographs and encyclopaedia. Platforms such as *Google Books* and *Google Scholar* can be a good first step in finding relevant literature (based on keywords). After this step, a researcher can start searching for literature (in available libraries or electronic databases). Reference lists created by authors we are reading can also be a significant helping hand in selecting relevant literature.

¹¹⁵ Backes Uwe, "Meaning and Forms of Political Extremism in Past and Present", *Central European Political Studies Review* IX, No 4, 2007, p. 251.

¹¹⁶ See more in: Djoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2021, pp. 55–58.

Observation is also quite significant for young researchers who have embarked on the path of researching extremism. There are two types of observation: with participation and without participation. Having in mind security challenges carried along with the phenomenon of extremism, it is better to choose the latter. For example, when researching football hooliganism (which represents a sort of extreme behaviour), researchers can go to a high-risk football match and observe the behaviour of hooligans along with the rest of the regular audience. In such moments, it is important not to reveal the true reason for attending the match, but to act as a “regular spectator”. Mimicry is exactly what is expected from individuals dealing in scientific research of extremism. Observation doesn't necessarily mean going to high-risk events¹¹⁷, but it can imply observation of such events online, on TV, etc. The most important thing for researchers when observing some form of extremism is – their safety. They must foresee all security risks threatening them and organize observation in a maximally secure manner.¹¹⁸

On the other hand, observation with participation is not recommended due to security risks to which the researcher might be exposed.¹¹⁹

Finally, contemplation represents the “mother” of all methods of increasing knowledge. It implies wise reflections on the given phenomenon, synthesis of the entire previously acquired knowledge, use of the inductive-deductive method of making conclusions, and, above all, logic. Hermeneutics is also often used in researching extremism, especially when speaking of symbols of extremist groups, which are quite diverse and useful for the identification of extremist ideology. Dialogue can also have an inspirational impact on the contemplation process, given that it is thought-provoking. The questions asked by others (or the ones we pose to them) might represent quite exquisite *brainstorming*, bringing us closer to making

¹¹⁷ Despite everything, the best impression is made during live observation on the spot.

¹¹⁸ This can be achieved by observation from a safe distance or by leaving the event if it is estimated that the situation might become dangerous.

¹¹⁹ This form of collecting data is more characteristic of operatives engaged in the security sector.

conclusions. This is like the old, well-known Socratic “elenctic method (maieutic), that is, “giving birth” to knowledge”.¹²⁰

While we have listed some methods of gathering information, it is important to know that information on extremism can be gathered from open, as well as confidential sources. Open-source information represents information gathered from all publicly available sources (books, scientific papers, media, etc.), while confidential sources are problematic, given that the researcher cannot adequately quote them. In such conditions, information gathered from confidential sources can be best used for making better judgements and analysis of the phenomenon, no matter the fact that the source cannot be quoted.¹²¹ Scientific gatherings and conferences can be quite useful for young researchers when collecting information. Not only do they enable an exchange of ideas with older and more experienced colleagues, but during such sorts of events, young researchers might even learn of some exclusive information still not listed in monographs and research papers. At this moment, it is important to stress that scientific ethics reiterates that the ideas and thoughts (especially innovative ones) of others must be quoted, even if they were collected in oral form. In this case, the name of the quoted individual must be listed, along with the type of scientific gathering, place, and time. Such a form of scientific honesty is more than needed, given that, in this way, we are, first of all, paying tribute to our colleagues and their work, but also, we are protecting ourselves from possibly unverified information presented in oral form.

For young researchers to know how to prepare for researching extremism, they should, first of all, ask themselves several questions:

1. **Why am I interested in this topic?** This is quite a significant question since it speaks of our motivation. A man is capable of even moving the mountains, if necessary, only if guided

¹²⁰ At this point, it is important to stress that not only our colleagues, professors, academicians and other subjects of academia can provoke our thought process, but the non-expert public, eager to find out something new, as well. Specifically, during my professional engagement as a university professor, on many occasions, my students inspired me to new ideas, thoughts and conclusions with their creative questions and constations – which was precious for my research work.

¹²¹ These sources partially refer to, for example, the *Chatham House Rule*, implying that information collected from a gathering where a sensitive topic is being elaborated can be quoted, albeit the source must not be listed. This usually refers to meetings of international organizations/institutions, when the topic is sensitive.

by the right motive. The best motive in this case would be “the thirst for knowledge”, a common trait of the nature of every man, as stated by Aristotle.¹²² This motive is one of the strongest (and at the same time the most honest ones), since it implies “knowledge for the sake of knowledge”, which is the basis of every scientific research work, given that such work asks for the “entire body and soul”. The humane, philanthropic motive, can be singled out as well, referring to the fight “against evil” (extremism) as a sort of contribution to the common good. There are other motives, such as adventurism, social status, and competition among colleagues, etc., but they are all short-term and do not produce long-term results.

2. **What do I want to achieve in theoretical/empirical research?** Even though researching extremism seems exciting at first glance, young academic workers should know that it is not a “James Bond job” and that they will spend much more time in the office, library, and at their work stations, than in the field. For example, to conduct one valid empirical research (*in the field*), the researcher must beforehand be well-versed in theoretical knowledge.¹²³ Moreover, it is of great importance to set a scientific research goal (so that the research paper does not end up being too broad and thus lose its sense and purpose), which is most often done through choosing a research question, that is, a general hypothesis of the research.
3. **What aspect of extremism do I wish to analyse?** It is quite important to know that, contrary to terrorism, which is a *par excellence* political phenomenon, extremism can occur in almost all spheres of life. Because of that, it is of crucial importance to study its psychological, social, criminal-legal, political, economic, and cultural nature, etc. It is best to start from single segments and then evolve to general, and thus, for example, one could first research extremism in one segment of society (for example, in sports, in the form of football hooliganism), and then arrive at other manifestations of extremism, only to finally form a general image of extremism. *It is*

¹²² Aristotle, *Politics*, Mint Editions, 2020.

¹²³ And this can be achieved only through a long-term and detailed examination of theory and literature.

also useful to research specifics of extremism in one region (or one state) and then focus on another, and finally, with the use of the method of comparative analysis, discover their similarities and differences. For example, the root of extreme right-wing is not the same in the EU, the US, and the Western Balkans. While the right-wing extremism in the EU is generated primarily from xenophobia, which emerged as a result of migrations (from the Middle East and North Africa), the extreme right-wing in the US still has a racist background, which testifies to the continuing existence of the Ku Klux Klan and other similar racist organizations.¹²⁴ In the Western Balkans, yet, the situation is different, and the main generator of the extreme right-wing can be found in the post-conflict heritage, based on the civil wars of the nineties. Besides this “old” generator of extremism, it turned out that there are also new ones, among which are the COVID-19 pandemic and the migration crisis.¹²⁵

2.4.3. Most common challenges for young researchers

First of all, we must state that it is not the same if you research extremism in Africa or, for example, in some countries of the West. In the latter case, resources are richer and more available, which significantly eases the research process. For example, libraries at some American or European university campuses are equipped with the most contemporary literature, and the present staff are very eager to give a helping hand and instantly order new books if they are needed by students or researchers. Such an approach to work significantly eases the research process. On the other hand, the lack of resources drives young researchers to turn to some other forms of gathering knowledge, to go to the scene of the action, to use an empirical approach (fieldwork), and to give an original contribution. It all depends on the approach, as well as the motivation of young researchers.

¹²⁴ See more in: Djoric, Marija, *Ekstremna desnica: međunarodni aspekti desničarskog ekstremizma*, Udruženje Nauka i društvo Srbije, Beograd, 2014, p. 245-252.

¹²⁵ See more on new generators of extremism in the Western Balkans in: Djoric Marija, Klacar Bojan, *Potential Generators of Right-Wing Extremism in The Era of COVID-19 Pandemic*, IRI, Sarajevo, 2021.

Besides the **lack of literature**, one of the most common challenges is – **the relevance of literature**. Fifteen years ago, when I first started researching this phenomenon as a young teaching assistant, not only did I face the lack of literature on extremism (usually papers on terrorism could be found), but also, at the time, I faced sensationalist writing about extremism (which was not scientifically founded). Even though sometimes even journal articles, podcasts, *YouTube* videos, and social media postings can be used for data gathering, it is important to make a distinction between scientifically valid and non-scientific, non-valid sources of information. It is very important to approach every (even scientific) reference from a critical standpoint. The fact that someone represents “the Alpha and Omega” of the academic world does not mean that their statement or conclusion must be unmistakably accurate. This is exactly why young researchers should examine different, and if possible, opposite approaches and make their own conclusions from them. For this to happen, a researcher must possess significant foreknowledge, acquired only through dedicated work when examining literature (desk research).

The second challenge is of a **security nature**.¹²⁶ Namely, researching such a security-sensitive topic might represent some sort of risk to researchers. The case of Professor Adrian Guelke¹²⁷ from Queen’s University in Belfast, a well-known expert in the field of researching terrorism, speaks the best of itself. In 1991, he was shot in the early morning while asleep in his house in South Belfast. Members of the loyalist terrorist organization from Ireland claimed responsibility for the attempted murder (he survived the attack).¹²⁸ This does not mean that everyone who researches security topics¹²⁹ will be a potential target of extremists and terrorists, but

¹²⁶ See more on security challenges in: Gaćinović Radoslav, „Osnovne funkcije države u procesu izgradnje sistema bezbednosti“, *Politika nacionalne bezbednosti*, No. 2, 2020, pp. 277–295.

¹²⁷ Some of his most known works: Guelke Adrian, *Rethinking the rise and fall of apartheid: South Africa and world politics*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2017; Guelke Adrian, *Peace Settlements and Political Transformation in Divided Societies: Rethinking Northern Ireland and South Africa*, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2022; Guelke Adrian, *Politics in deeply divided societies*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2012. etc.

¹²⁸ See more in: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/guelke-adrian>, 15.09.2022.

¹²⁹ See more on the security topics in: Djoric Marija, Milošević Tanja, „Uticaj Saudijske koalicije na nacionalnu bezbednost Jemena“, *Politika nacionalne bezbednosti*,

surely, they will be a subject of their interest. Due to all of this, researchers must be strictly professional when writing or speaking of the phenomenon of extremism. This would entail citing relevant research sources, elaborating firstly on the phenomenon, and not individuals in extremist/terrorist groups, and always being objective when making conclusions (without dealing with politics, ideology, and emotions¹³⁰).

The next challenge refers to **gender-sensitive issues**, which especially reflect on female researchers. Prejudices stating that politics (as a public sphere of action) is predominantly a “male thing” (especially in patriarchal environments) might represent a sort of Gordian knot for women.¹³¹ They will often encounter contestation, and they might need a longer time to prove themselves and express their knowledge. In this case, a piece of advice should be given to women researching extremism through support and promotion of a motto that **knowledge is the only authority**. The moment when you start having a good command of the subject you deal with (which is exclusively the result of your work, effort, and love for your work), no one will care about your gender, where you come from, what your religion is, etc. Besides, sometimes it can be easier for women researchers of the so-called “male phenomena” (such as extremism) to observe some events in which extremists take part (for example, football hooligans) since they are perceived as “benign occurrences”¹³². Moreover, women can stand out faster from the crowd of predominantly male researchers exactly due to the “oddity” of the topic they deal with. To conclude, success in academia should not be predisposed by gender, but it should exclusively be based on knowledge and results. And when speaking of prejudices, they

No. 2, 2020, pp. 153–174.

¹³⁰ The latter is sometimes quite difficult since we are all human beings, made of flesh and bones, with a specific emotional set – but still, we must work to achieve the highest possible level of objectiveness.

¹³¹ Prejudices about the fact that politics is a predominantly “male sphere of action” originate from ancient times. Namely, even in Ancient Greece, it was believed that participation in governing the polis, and thus politics, as a public sphere of action, are all related to men. Contrary to that, *oikos* (as a synonym for a house, infield) belonged to women, as a private sphere. Of course, many centuries passed since then, but in primitive and misogynistic environments, these stereotypes persist.

¹³² This would mean that hooligans in a football match do not even assume that a woman could observe them, exactly due to prejudices. This is an example of prejudices working “for” women researchers.

can sometimes stand in our way, but they must not prevent us from fulfilling our goals. After all, prejudices exist so that they can be refuted. My advice to all female researchers is to follow their dreams in science (and in their personal lives as well), and that no one has the right to prevent them from reaching them. The fight against prejudices is, in fact, a fight for freedom every human being in this world deserves, whether it be a man or a woman. One should just step in, bravely and with dignity, and good fortune – follows the brave.

Besides the previously listed challenges, financial problems, faced especially by young researchers, should be mentioned as well. Namely, it is quite expensive to travel to a scientific gathering abroad at your own expense. However, there are always grants for young researchers that might provide financial support, it is only necessary to express an interest on time and write a good paper that will be accepted. International contacts are quite desirable, not only for the exchange of knowledge but also for the creation of a network of contacts with colleagues worldwide, which will be quite precious at one point in the future.

Even though this paper was written with the good intention of the author to stress the most important issues faced by young colleagues who decided to research extremism, this does not mean that all existing challenges were analysed. They will be conditioned by the correlation of socio-political events, personal factors of researchers, working environments, and many other factors. Scientific work can sometimes resemble the Sisyphean work (especially at the beginning of the research), but quite often it provides a significant feeling of satisfaction in the end.

The goal of this a little bit unusual paper was to encourage all those who decided to dive into the adventure known as – researching extremism, but also to light the way for all of them preparing themselves for researching extremism. It is much easier when we know what awaits us, and it is good to prepare on time for scientific research challenges and possible obstacles on the way.

Besides the fact that the basic characteristics of extremism, its forms and definitions, should be examined, every young researcher also needs a certain dose of dedication. This dedication will serve as a

“tailwind” that will push us forward when the days of hardship in the process of research arrive (and they always arrive). Apart from that, we need the audacity to go to places never stepped into before. And, of course – the love of knowledge, which should be the predominant motivating factor. Some of us were pushed into research by the need to pass knowledge to the arriving younger generations (students).

As stated in the beginning, the quest for knowledge on extremism is like the quest for the Holy Grail. None of us may ever find it, but we will set many hypotheses along the way which will, let us hope, one day become scientific laws. For every great piece of work, it is necessary to stand out and make the first step, which is usually the hardest thing to do. As the Chinese wise man Lao Tzu said: *The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.*

2.5. RETURN OF FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES TO THE WESTERN BALKANS¹³³

Foreign Fighters and Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Is there any difference?

One of the most common mistakes that can be found in the works of both theoreticians and practitioners is the equation of terms *foreign fighter* and *foreign terrorist fighter*. Thus, we will first explain the phenomenon of *foreign fighters*, which, for example, was often linked with the Spanish War (waged between 1936 and 1939).¹³⁴ At that point, on Franco's side, participated combatants loyal to Hitler, Mussolini, and Salazar, while on the side of the Republic fought volunteers (from 35,000 to 40,000 of them) originating from more than 50 countries of the world.¹³⁵ We should also mention the wars waged in the ex-Yugoslav region in the 1990s of the 20th century, or the wars in Chechnya or in Afghanistan, as good examples of wars in which foreign fighters took part. We do not even have to dive into the past that deeply, since there is a war in Ukraine evolving before our eyes, in which a large number of foreign volunteers are taking part (as foreign fighters) on both the Russian and the Ukrainian side.

Among numerous definitions, we will single out the one promoted by the *Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights*, which defines *foreign fighters* as "individuals who leave their country to join an armed group abroad, driven by

¹³³ The majority of data presented in this segment was taken from the following research: "How to deal with violent extremism in the Western Balkans?" International Conference: How to deal with uncertainties in an increasingly complex environment: (the new cartography of risk and crises): proceedings of the international scientific conference held in Cavtat – Dubrovnik, September 27-29, 2022 / [editors Zoran Keković, Ratko Duev, Jadranka Polović]. – Skopje: Faculty of Philosophy – Institute for Security, Defence and Peace "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" University; Belgrade: Centre for risk analysis and crisis management (CARUK), 2023, pp. 11-24.

¹³⁴ In this war, around 1,700 volunteers from Yugoslavia took part as well. Source: Muzej istorije Jugoslavije, *U čast španskih boraca: arhivski materijal, svedočenja, sećanja*, Muzej istorije Jugoslavije, Muzej istorije Jugoslavije, Beograd, 2006.

¹³⁵ Muzej istorije Jugoslavije, *U čast španskih boraca: arhivski materijal, svedočenja, sećanja*, Muzej istorije Jugoslavije, Muzej istorije Jugoslavije, Beograd, 2006.

ideology, religion, or kinship”.¹³⁶ The problem with this definition lies in the fact that terrorism is not explicitly mentioned, thus making the evident difference between foreign fighters and foreign terrorist fighters (FTF). In fact, the main distinction between these two phenomena is in the fact that foreign terrorist fighters exclusively fight within terrorist groups, while foreign fighters generally participate in wars, as part of some rebel group, etc. Even though, at first glance, this difference seems unimportant, the essence lies in the fact that war and terrorism are not the same.¹³⁷ If we wish to find a point of contact between foreign fighters and foreign terrorist fighters, it will definitely be the fact that both categories leave their countries (of origin or domicile) to participate in conflicts abroad.

How should we define foreign terrorist fighters, then? The Security Council adopted Resolution 2178 to draw attention to this global problem. Paragraph 6 of Resolution 2178 (2014) defines foreign terrorist fighters as “individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training.”¹³⁸ It should be stressed that the term *foreign terrorist fighter* was mentioned for the first time in 2014, in the UN Security Council Resolution 2170 (without providing its definition at this point). This Resolution explicitly condemned violence conducted by terrorist organizations “Islamic State” and “Al Nusra Front”.¹³⁹ Other international documents put the phenomenon of FTFs in focus as well. One of such documents is the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism from 2015 (which consists of several articles which directly or indirectly deal with this topic: Article 4. Travelling abroad for the purpose of terrorism; Article 5. Funding travelling abroad for the

¹³⁶ Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights. Briefing No. 7 – Foreign Fighters under International Law. Geneva: Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, 2014.

¹³⁷ These are complex forms of political violence that differ among themselves based on certain specificities.

¹³⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Guidance to States on Human Rights Compliant Responses to the Threat Posed By Foreign Fighters, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UN, New York, 2018, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/newyork/Documents/Human-Rights-Responses-to-Foreign-Fighters-web_final.pdf, 02.11.2025.

¹³⁹ As an Al Qaeda chapter.

purpose of terrorism; Article 6. Organizing or otherwise facilitating traveling abroad for the purpose of terrorism).¹⁴⁰

It is believed that the foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon developed in three waves:

- “**The first wave** is linked to the war in Afghanistan (the fight against the Soviets in the 1980s of the 20th century), when usually Arabs from the Middle East joined “Al Qaeda”,
- **The second wave** mostly included the Middle Eastern elite studying in Western countries, who went to “Al Qaeda” teaching camps in Afghanistan upon their return in the 1990s.
- **The third wave** was based on the principle of “leaderless jihad” and implied a non-fragmented structure that did not need a departure to a camp, but founded its power predominantly on the Internet and social networks.”¹⁴¹

There is also an opinion that the emergence of the “Islamic State” as an organization generated the **fourth wave** of foreign terrorist fighters, which is distinguished by massiveness and network communication.

Foreign terrorist fighters in the Western Balkans

In the period from 2012 to 2016, more than 1,110 individuals from the territory of the Western Balkans travelled to Syria and Iraq.¹⁴² Three countries from the Western Balkans region (Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Montenegro), as well as the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, belong to the list of the top ten countries with the highest number of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) per capita.¹⁴³ This information itself is quite an “alarm”, not only for the representatives of the intelligence sector but

¹⁴⁰ Council of Europe, *Explanatory Report to the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism*, 2015, <https://rm.coe.int/168047c5ea>, 04.05.2025.

¹⁴¹ Ђорић Марија, Обреновић Страхиња, „Страни терористички борци као безбедносни проблем Републике Србије“, *Српска политичка мисао*, бр. 5, 2024, стр. 9-26.

¹⁴² Buljubašić Mirza, Azinović Vlado, *Krivično procesuiranje stranih terorističkih boraca u Bosni i Hercegovini*, Atlantska inicijativa, Sarajevo, 2023, p. 20.

¹⁴³ Richard Florida, “The Geography of Foreign ISIS Fighters”, <https://www.bloombergenews.com/news/articles/2016-08-10/the-geography-of-foreign-isis-fighters>, 10.06.2024.

to the academic community as well, signalling that more attention should be directed towards them.

In most Western Balkan countries, the repatriation process develops in four key phases: 1) preparation, 2) logistics, 3) rehabilitation, and 4) reintegration and resocialization. The biggest challenge is the lack of relevant experience in each country and the issue of the readiness of multi-departmental teams to receive these individuals of a sensitive category.

1. **The preparation phase** is the broadest and includes a set of strategic, institutional, and legal measures that each country must pass. These measures include relevant strategic documents, laws, and defining competent institutions to handle this task, etc. It is of essential significance to identify citizens, as well as their location. Afterwards, negotiations follow, with the help of international organizations (usually the International Committee of the Red Crescent or Red Cross), to see whether they are willing to return home from the camps they find themselves in. The preparation phase also implies educating staff who will work on the reception of the returnees from the battlefield, which is quite a challenging process.
2. **The logistics phase** includes direct return, usually from Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps, to the country of origin. The returnees are given notice, usually 24-48 hours before their return to their country of origin.¹⁴⁴ Women and children usually decide to return. Men predominantly fear that they will be processed.¹⁴⁵ The experience showed that potential returnees are insufficiently informed about their rights and obligations.
3. **The rehabilitation phase.** In this phase, the returnees to their country of origin are usually kept in institutions¹⁴⁶ previously dedicated to the reception of such individuals for up to 72 hours to conduct security, health, and other necessary check-ups. Afterwards, the rehabilitation process, implemented on an individual basis, begins. Namely, given that the radicaliza-

¹⁴⁴ Dedeker Kijara, Ozbourn Kevin, *Repatrijacija stranih terorističkih boraca iz Sirije: lekcije sa Zapadnog Balkana*, https://resolvenet.org/sites/default/files/Policy%20Note%20%20Repatriating%20FTFs%20from%20Syria_Serbian.pdf, 12.06.2024.

¹⁴⁵ This is also logical, given that predominantly men participate in terrorist activities.

¹⁴⁶ The locations where they are staying are usually not shared with the public due to security reasons.

tion process is of an individual (and thus different) character, the rehabilitation process should be conducted as such as well. It is noticeable that, in this phase, in certain countries of the Western Balkans region, women and children are, generally speaking, always perceived as victims. We believe that, in this situation, a professional approach is necessary since it is not impossible that women and children, besides being traumatized, were also subjected to the radicalization process. Thus, adequate screening and assessment of their not only physical state but also potential ideologization¹⁴⁷ must be conducted as well. The rehabilitation phase is challenging and uncertain because the evaluation process is slow and demands 24/7 working hours, putting a heavy burden primarily on social work services. At this moment, the significant role of the civil sector should be stressed, albeit solely for those who possess knowledge and skills in this quite sensitive process, coloured by uncertainty to the end. In this phase, state institutions and the civil sector must work in tune and professionally. The role of the media is quite significant and can be both productive and counterproductive. In certain countries, there was an “information leak”, and thus, quite sensitive information from the investigation found its way into the media, which rendered the processing senseless.¹⁴⁸ It turned out that this phase has the most shortcomings due to the insufficient preparedness of the teams in reception centres.

4. **The reintegration and resocialization phase** refers to the greatest extent to the help of civil society. It includes the provision of psychological and social aid, with the intention of returning to a safe environment. Religious education is worth

¹⁴⁷ During my work on a project which dealt with foreign terrorist fighters, I had a chance to meet people who directly contacted women and children who returned from Syria. Their assessment states that the children, to say the least, were traumatized, that they “feared the silence” (due to the state of war in Syria and the violence they were subjected to). Many children saw walls for the first time in their lives (since they lived or were born in tents) and some mothers were radicalized and could, through the education process, transfer that same radicalization to their children. In one Balkan state, mothers did not allow their children to take food and water in reception centres. When the psychologists asked them why they do not allow their children to eat, they responded: “We are not sure that the food is halal”.

¹⁴⁸ The names of many women perceived as potential witnesses found their way into the media, which damaged the investigation.

mentioning as well, being quite significant, bearing in mind that returnees from the battlefield and their families were subjected to violent religious ideologization. In this phase, the work is directed toward enabling a person to return to the community and train them for new types of work; “art therapy” is often used to develop their creativity.

Even though it is difficult, and sometimes even unflattering, to define common traits of terrorists originating from the Balkans, according to UNODC, there are some points of contact linking them.

- Strong links with the diaspora (especially in Germany and Austria).
- Lack of higher education.
- Characterized by a criminal past.
- The majority of them are unemployed and poor, which incites radicalization.
- They lived in dysfunctional families.
- They are prone to mental illnesses.

All the previously mentioned traits should not be taken lightly, simply because radicalization that leads to terrorism is an extremely individual process, and thus, generalization should be avoided. Namely, all the previously mentioned characteristics can be present among other terrorists as well (and not necessarily exclusively among the ones coming from the Western Balkans). We especially stress that mental illnesses should not always be causally linked to violence, including terrorism.

To classify foreign terrorist fighters, it is necessary to determine relevant criteria, as well as their motivation. To understand the radicalization process, it is quite significant to determine the push and pull factors. Guided by these criteria, some researchers have divided foreign terrorist fighters as follows:

1. **Revenge seeker.** Here we are speaking mainly about frustration aggression, which reaches catharsis in the form of a “relief” through terrorist activities.
2. **Status seeker.** We are speaking of individuals who feel a need to gain respect, i.e., status, through a system of destructive values (such as terrorism).
3. **Identity seeker.** Since every living being needs to belong to someone or something, that primal feeling of belonging is reflected through the creation of an identity within a terror-

ist group. Terrorist organizations and groups often represent some form of a surrogate family (or some form of an “extended family”) to individuals who join them.

4. **Thrill seeker.** These are the individuals with an adventurous spirit (and often an adrenaline type of personality), who see in terrorism excitement and a challenge that moves them and often gives them a new sense of living.

We must stress that this classification primarily targeted members of Al Qaeda, but can also be applied to members of other terrorist groups.

Besides this (general) classification, it is possible to construct, based on the criterion of motivation, two basic groups of foreign terrorist fighters referring exclusively to the Balkan region:

1. “The first category would consist of the ones recruited for ideological reasons. The triggers of their radicalization could be the post-conflict society (for example, the wars of the 1990s), the sense of injustice, and/or discrimination, etc. This category is, at the same time, most difficult to work with in the process of eventual deradicalization, since we are speaking of the ideologization of religion.
2. The second category consists of mercenaries, popularly called “war dogs”. Those are individuals whose fundamental motive is money and who will be a part of a group and participate in a conflict as long as there is a lucrative interest, i.e., money.”

Here, a third category could come into consideration, referring to individuals with some sort of mental disorder. However, we must be very careful in drawing such conclusions. Even though there is a chance that depression, narcissistic personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc., can be generators for terrorist action, we must not treat this as a rule. Some scientists have found a direct link between trauma and terrorism, while the newest empirical research shows that, among some individuals, mental disorders had an inhibitive effect regarding terrorist activities (though this is more of an exception than a rule).

When we sum it all up, it is a fact that, nowadays, the term “foreign terrorist fighter” usually (but not exclusively) refers to members of the “Islamic State” and its ideologically familiar organizations who departed to Syria and Iraq to wage war. Some researchers (wrongfully) assume that the fight against the “Islamic State” is finalized because its

infrastructure is destroyed, leadership neutralized, and the territory once controlled by it freed.

The author of this book believes that the destruction of the “Islamic State” is nothing but a smoke screen set before the eyes of the public. Namely, everyone who seriously and responsibly researches terrorism as a phenomenon knows that it is a “phoenix-phenomenon”. Terrorism is reborn again and again, thanks to its indestructible ideology. We can eliminate terrorist leaders, their followers; we can take away their weapons and power, but there is something far more powerful than any weapons or force – an idea. The idea of contemporary terrorism is so strong that there isn’t a weapon strong enough to neutralize it. The only solution lies in removing the cause of terrorism, which is now a complex philosophical-ontological issue. In concretum, the “Islamic State” is to a great extent neutralized in Syria and Iraq, but all facts point that it has spread its “tentacles”, like an octopus, into the Sahel region in Africa.

Besides terrorist cells spread on a global level (besides “sleepers” and supporters), an additional question emerges: what will happen with terrorists and their families who are “stuck” in camps in Northeastern Syria (i.e., Al Hol and Al Roj)? According to the estimates (OCHA) for the time being, there are around 2,600 individuals, of whom 65% children, in Al Roj camp. On the other hand, Al Hol camp is much bigger and is currently housing around 23,000 individuals from more than 60 different countries from all parts of the world (not including Syria). The dominant group consists of children (over 61%), then women (around 30%), while only 6% are members of the male population. The fundamental question is when (and will) they return to their countries of origin?

Two political events will to a great extent predispose the fate of the returnee terrorists and their families:

1. The fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria and the rise of Al-Shaara (*Ahmad Hussein al-Sharaa*) as the head of this state.
2. Donald Trump’s victory in the US presidential elections.

The collapse of Assad’s regime drew many regional and world players into the fight for Syria. The arrival of the “rebranded” terrorist Al-Shaara in his place has shown the flexibility of politics. Interestingly, the new Syrian Government awarded high military positions to some

foreign Islamist fighters¹⁴⁹, among whom is an Albanian from North Macedonia, Abdul Samrez Jashari (also known by the name Abu Qatada al-Albani), as well.¹⁵⁰ This Islamist who is, by the way, under US sanctions since 2016, is the leader of the “Xhemati Alban” group, predominantly consisting of Jihadists of Albanian origin.¹⁵¹ However, what is more significant for the camps in the Northeastern Syria is the decision of the US President Donald Trump that they will no longer finance their maintenance, for which the Kurds were in charge. This implies the following question: What will happen to terrorists and their families? The only logical solution is for them to return to their countries of origin. However, this sounds much easier said than done in practice. If we take into consideration the fact that the camps predominantly house children (over two-thirds), this entails many problems.

- At the very least, the children will be traumatized (and even radicalized as well), given the catastrophic conditions they have been living in for years.
- The integration of older children will especially cause problems, given that, in the majority of cases, they do not speak the language of their country of origin.
- The problem of missing school curriculum will arise among children who are on the verge of adulthood, but have never attended school. This will imply new social and economic problems, since it will be challenging to prepare them for existence in new environments.
- The issue with radicalized mothers, that they are not willing to attend deradicalization and/or disengagement programs.

¹⁴⁹ <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20241230-foreign-jihadists-in-syria-leader-s-pick-for-army-officers-monitor-experts>, 28.11.2025.

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/strani-borci-sirija-albanac-sjeverna-make-donija/33268259.html>, 28.11.2025.

¹⁵¹ This information is quite significant when speaking of the return of terrorists and their families to the territory of the Western Balkans, because it can have specific security implications for the region. Moreover, it should be stressed that from the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, around 500 Jihadists of predominantly Albanian origin joined terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq (this is the highest number of terrorists in Europe when compared to the total number of inhabitants). This highlights a big security threat to the Western Balkans.

- The returnees arriving from these camps represent a potential security risk to the country of origin to which they are returning (if they are not ready for reintegration).
- Many countries are not prepared well enough to accept their own citizens, if they did not have similar practice or if they do not possess adequately professional staff to work with the returnees (as well as adequate programs).
- Potential issue with local communities. Will they accept the returnees, or will they isolate them?

These are just some of the challenges that await us, and there are many more. Work with each individual must be personalized; thus, it is necessary to create a multidisciplinary (multiagency) approach that includes not only experts from the security sector but also social workers, criminologists, political scientists, psychologists, theologians, and others.

Working with these people requires commitment and 24/7 working hours, which is often impossible. In fact, in all countries of the Western Balkans, the biggest burden (especially in the rehabilitation and reintegration phase) is borne by the social services, which often do not possess sufficient human capacity. The next problem lies in the need for permanent education of officials, which is often a challenging task that calls for overtime work, as well as additional motivation.

The rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters and their families is an ongoing process. To know how successful it is, it takes time. Only after a certain passage of time, through the evaluation process, do we know whether we have succeeded in the work with the returnees. Exactly due to the plethora of questions asked (some asked here, and some will arise themselves), it is evident that the return of the foreign terrorist fighters and their families can pose a significant security risk and threat.

2.5.1. Serbia

In Serbia, different forms of violent extremism and terrorism are distinguished. During the past several decades, Serbia has been intensively combating ethnic separatist terrorism and extremism in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, as well as in the southern part of Central Serbia (Preševo, Bujanovac, Medveđa).¹⁵² Besides that, Serbia also faced some problems regarding religiously funded terrorism linked to Syrian and Iraqi battlefields, to which 49 adult Serbian citizens¹⁵³ (37 men and 12 women), who became members of some of the terrorist organizations, joined.¹⁵⁴ In the meantime, this number grew to 56, because seven of the children who departed for Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2016 have become adults. The Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime filed indictments against seven individuals charged with the following criminal acts: terrorist association, terrorism, recruitment and training to commit terrorist acts, public incitement to the commission of terrorist acts, and the financing of terrorism, all related to their terrorist activities in Syria and Iraq. Of the seven individuals mentioned, three were arrested in March 2014, one was deported from Turkey in April 2016, and three are still inaccessible to the official bodies.

The special department of the High Court in Belgrade passed the first instance verdict against the charged individuals on April 04, 2018, confirmed by the Appellate Court on January 18, 2019, thus becoming legally binding. According to the previously mentioned verdict, all seven persons (three of whom are in absentia) were found guilty and sentenced to imprisonment for a total of 69 years and six months.¹⁵⁵ Let us stress that one of these seven individuals did not reside in the territory of Syria/Iraq, but was convicted for terrorist activities conducted in the territory of Serbia, that is, for

¹⁵² For several years, Serbia combatted the terrorist organization UÇK, which acted in the territory of the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija, only to have these ethnic separatist tendencies spread to the southern part of Central Serbia as well through actions of the "Liberation Army of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa".

¹⁵³ Petrović Predrag, Stakić Isidora, *Extremism Research Forum: Serbia report*, British Council, Belgrade, 2018. https://www.britishcouncil.rs/sites/default/files/erf_report_serbia_2018.pdf, 22.09.2022.

¹⁵⁴ It is believed that the majority joined the terrorist organization "Islamic State".

¹⁵⁵ This is one of the strictest penal policies for the criminal act of terrorism in the Western Balkan region (the penalty ranged in length from 7.4 to 11 years).

the recruitment and training of other individuals for committing terrorist acts and financing of terrorism.

The Criminal Law of the Republic of Serbia recognizes several criminal acts related to terrorism.¹⁵⁶ In October 2014, a Law on Amendments of the Criminal Law of the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No. 108/2014) was adopted, thus including two new criminal acts into the Criminal Law:

- “Participation in war or armed conflict in a foreign country”, Article 386a, and;
- “Organization of participation in war or armed conflict in a foreign country”, Article 386b.

These provisions refer to individuals who illegally participate in a war or an armed conflict on the territory of a foreign country, and the Office of the Higher Public Prosecutor is in charge of their implementation. On the other hand, provisions presented in Article 393a of the Criminal Law apply to individuals who joined terrorist organizations, whilst the Prosecutor’s Office for Organized Crime is in charge of their implementation. It is important to stress that Serbia is the only country in the Western Balkans region to differentiate between FTF (*Foreign Terrorist Fighter*) and FF (*Foreign Fighter*), per UN Resolution No. 2396.

When speaking of a strategic framework, Serbia passed a National Strategy for prevention and combating terrorism for the period from 2017-2021.¹⁵⁷ In the strategy, four most important fields are defined separately: (1) Prevention of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism; (2) Protection through detection and removal of threats from terrorism and other vulnerabilities in the protection system; (3) Criminal prosecution of terrorists, with respecting the human rights, rule of law and democracy and (4) Response of the system to a terrorist attack.

In the institutional sense of the word, P/CVERLT (*Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism*) in Serbia falls under the jurisdiction of the National Coordination Body for Prevention and Combatting Terrorism (henceforth: National Coordination Body). This Body was formed

¹⁵⁶ “Terrorism”, Art. 391; “Public incitement to the commitment of terrorist acts”, Art. 391a; “Recruitment and training for the commission of terrorist acts”, Art. 391b; “Financing of terrorism”, Art. 393; “Terrorist association”, Art. 393a.

¹⁵⁷ At the time being, a new strategy is being created.

by the Government's Decision passed in 2019, and in the same Decision, the National Coordinator was defined as well. The National Coordination Body has 26 members and consists of representatives of the most significant ministries and representatives of the security services of the Republic of Serbia.

How is Serbia preparing for the return of terrorists and their families from the battlefield?

Out of a total of 56 adult citizens who departed for the Syria/Iraq region, 10 of them returned to Europe, 12 of them were killed, and 27 of them are still residing there, along with a certain number of underage individuals.¹⁵⁸ Among the returnees to Serbia, there were no children, for the time being.¹⁵⁹ In the meantime, a return of one woman was registered¹⁶⁰, who flew by plane from Istanbul to Belgrade. She resided in Syria from October 2013 to the beginning of 2024, when she was transported via illegal channels first to Turkey. Since she arrived in Serbia, she has been in her family home and under the observation of security services.

Since there is a possibility of return of the remaining terrorists and their families, the National Coordination Body created in August 2019 a Working Group for the creation of the "Plan of action in the event of return of foreign terrorist fighters and members of their families" to the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Besides the representatives of the Counter-Terrorism Service, the Working Group consists of representatives of the following institutions: Ministry of Justice, Security-Informative Agency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education, Science and technological development,

¹⁵⁸ The stated data does not include the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, and the number of citizens of the Republic of Serbia currently residing in Syria or Iraq as foreign terrorist fighters might be, theoretically speaking, slightly higher.

¹⁵⁹ It is quite an ungrateful task to talk about the total number of children that are supposed to return from Syria, bearing in mind that, in the meantime, many children were born there, which makes the calculation of the total number of returnees even more difficult.

¹⁶⁰ This woman departed for Syria as a minor and married twice to followers of the "Islamic State". She reported that, in the meantime, she gave birth to two children, currently located in Turkey.

Ministry of Health, Ministry for Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, and the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime.

The main task of the Working Group is to manage, harmonize, and closely determine the manner of planning and action of the competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia after the return of the FTF and their family members to Serbia. The Working Group created the "Draft Plan of Action in the event of the return of foreign terrorist fighters and their families", adopted in 2021. The said Plan defines various activities that will be implemented in four phases:¹⁶¹

1. **The preparatory Activities Phase.** Local teams are formed, relevant information is gathered (on security, legal status, social documents, etc.), and adequate space for the reception of individuals (which comes in the third phase) is found.
2. **Immediate Reception of Individuals Phase.** Upon their return to the country, their identity is checked, and (if needed) medical help is provided.
3. **Residence in the Reception Centre Phase.** This phase implies security assessment and gathering of evidence for the eventual processing, followed by different approaches to different categories of returnees (men, women, children).
4. **Integration into the Local Environment Phase.** For this team, the most significant Local teams are the ones covering the city of Belgrade, along with three more cities within the Pčinj, Raška, and Podunavlje Districts. Before that, it is necessary to conduct training of the members of Local teams to facilitate the reception and resocialization of the returnees from the battlefields as best as possible.

When speaking of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, we believe that this territory produced the highest number of people from Europe who departed to the Syrian battlefield (in comparison to the total number of citizens), which is alarming information. According to informal data, this number ranges from 400 to 500 people, predominantly Kosovar Albanians. The first

¹⁶¹ Serbia adopted significant experience thanks to the advice of relevant institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which trained local teams in Serbia on several occasions, with the help of OSCE and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

contingent of the returnees to Kosovo and Metohija arrived in April 2019, when 110 people (74 children, 32 women, and four men) came from the war zones of Syria and Iraq. The men were instantly arrested and processed, while children and women were sent to the Vranidol reception centre¹⁶², where they received the necessary medical care.¹⁶³

The multidisciplinary teams that worked on the risk assessment of the returnees determined that the majority of them were diagnosed with PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). The ones that did not have homes to return to were provided with accommodation, in coordination with the local authorities. Personal documents were also created for the individuals who did not possess them to facilitate their integration into society.

Two programs are being implemented in K&M for the returnees: a penal-restorative program and a social integration program. The former implies serving sentences in prisons where they can work on the deradicalization of terrorists through different types of activities, all to enable them to integrate into society after serving their sentences. The latter refers more to social and economic reintegration, implying job training, finding accommodation, education, social assistance¹⁶⁴, etc. Within this program, a significant emphasis is placed on reintegrating children into the education system. Thus, special classes were organized to make up for the missed education. These programs were coordinated between the temporary institutions of K&M and civil society.

Contemporary terrorism in Serbia

The last terrorist act occurring in the territory of Serbia was organized on June 29, 2024. At that time, a member of the Wahhabi movement, Salahudin (Miloš) Žujović, shot gendarme Miloš Jevremović, who was guarding the Embassy of Israel, in the neck with a crossbow. The Serbian gendarme reacted very calmly and succeeded in neutralizing the terrorist in time, thus preventing his further penetration into the Embassy of Israel.

An interesting detail in this terrorist attack is that the perpetrator is a convert, an individual who converted from Orthodox

¹⁶² This village is about 10 kilometers from Pristina.

¹⁶³ After a 72-hour detainment, they were released to their homes.

¹⁶⁴ Families lacking financial means were given around 100 EUR in aid per child.

Christianity into radical Islam. This is not the first case of a terrorist from our region converting from Orthodoxy to Wahhabism¹⁶⁵, but it is quite peculiar that, concerning this attack, another convert (Igor Despotović), who was believed to have assisted the execution of the terrorist act, was arrested as well.¹⁶⁶ The suspect, Despotović, was previously known to the security services, given that he was identified as an administrator of several groups on the Internet that promoted extremist content.¹⁶⁷ Converts are especially dangerous within religiously funded terrorism since they need to prove and confirm their newly acquired identity. To express their loyalty, as well as to prove that they are done with their previous identity, they manifest belonging to their new community through hypertrophied violence. A terrorist act is an ideal method of confirmation of loyalty in their destructive value system.

The motives behind this attack might be multifaceted, but the fact is that a shot into a gendarme is, at the same time, a shot into the institutions, that is, a shot into the Republic of Serbia. According to the statements of Serbian officials, the perpetrator first left the synagogue, and then (probably because of police presence)¹⁶⁸ decided to go to the embassy and attack the gendarme, who guarded the premises.¹⁶⁹ Exactly this route might indicate that the target of the attack could have been the state of Israel as well, especially if the brutality of the war in Gaza is taken into consideration.¹⁷⁰

On the other hand, it seems that the primary target was the state of Serbia, bearing in mind the conflict past in the region, the exports of our weapons, as well as the fact that the Wahhabi extreme groups

¹⁶⁵ The case of Goran Pavlović Abdulah, who left Belgrade with his family (his wife and daughter) and left for Maoča (B&H) to travel to Syria together. There, he gave his daughter's hand in marriage to a terrorist.

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/pritvoreni-su-kemal-begovic-i-igor-despotovic-ivica-dacic-o-teroristickom-napadu/t6vk43b>, 04.07.2024.

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-beograd-napad-zandarm-ambasada-izrael/33013943.html>, 04.07.2024.

¹⁶⁸ The police presence often has a deterring effect on terrorists. With such type (religiously funded) of terrorism, a terrorist does not fear that he can get killed, but that he will not succeed in the conduct of the terrorist act.

¹⁶⁹ <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/hronika/3919360-najnoviji-detalji-o-napadu-u-beogradu-terorista-prvo-bio-do-sinagoge-pa-se-uputio-ka-ambasadi-izraela>, 03.07.2024.

¹⁷⁰ In which Israel is at war with Hamas, and in which the victims are predominantly civilians and children.

see the country they live in as an enemy. Incidents with the Wahhabis are nothing new in the Republic of Serbia. The most known arrest action directed towards the Wahhabis took place on the Ninaja mountain in 2007, near Novi Pazar. At that moment, a group of religious extremists was planning the assassination of the Grand Mufti Muamer Zukorlić, preparing themselves to attack Novi Pazar with an arsenal of heavy weaponry. Besides the organization of the said assassination, the Wahhabis planned to attack several places in Serbia as well, such as the National Theatre, the American Embassy in Belgrade, two mosques in Novi Pazar, etc.¹⁷¹, which were successfully prevented by the actions of our security services. The fact that some of these Wahhabis have continued their terrorist actions even after the action in the Ninaja mountain is confirmed by the recent arrest of Adnan Hot from Novi Pazar, charged with incitement to terrorism.¹⁷² He was previously sentenced to seven years and six months of prison as a member of the so-called “Ninaja group”.

There are a lot of controversies regarding the Wahhabi movement in the region, but it is a fact that we are speaking of a radical interpretation of Islam, which significantly differs from the moderate (“popular”) form of Islam, practiced for centuries in our region. The abuse of Islam was most explicitly evident during the war in the B&H, when in 1993, the first mujahedin started arriving from abroad, who were quite harsh toward the non-Muslim population. During the war in Kosovo and Metohija, the presence of foreign mujahedin was also recorded in 1999. Upon the end of the wars in the ex-Yugoslav region, radical Islam (Wahhabism) began spreading and is nowadays present in B&H, North Macedonia, Serbia (especially in K&M and in Raška District), and Montenegro.

Even though it can't be said that all members of the Wahhabi movement are extremists, the fact is that the majority of terrorists who departed to the Syrian and Iraqi battlefields came exactly from the Wahhabi communities. Moreover, it should be stressed that they were radicalized and recruited for terrorism in illegal religious objects, that is, *parajamaats* and *paramasjids*. The *online* influence gained via the Internet and official and alternative social networks is

¹⁷¹ <https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/ex-yu/Nismo-vehabije-nego-pravovjernici/18871>, 05.07.2024.

¹⁷² <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/ko-je-uhapseni-vehabija-adnan-hot-planirao-napade-na-narodno-pozoriste-i-beogradanku/38yqp1y>, 06.07.2024.

uncontested, but in the Balkans, direct contact remains crucial in the recruitment process of religiously funded terrorists.

2.5.2. Montenegro

Until nowadays, two criminal proceedings were conducted in the High Court of Montenegro relating to the criminal act of participation in foreign armed formations, in line with Article 449b of the Criminal Law of Montenegro.¹⁷³ Since 2012, a total of 23 adult Montenegrin nationals departed for Syria, while five individuals participated in the Ukrainian battlefield.¹⁷⁴

Seven adult Montenegrin citizens still reside in the territory of Syria:

- Three men (there is some unconfirmed information stating that two of them were killed, while one of them is located in the Kurdish prison in the northeastern part of Syria), and
- Four women (for one of them, there is unconfirmed information that she was wounded and then passed away in some hospital in Syria, one is located in Al-Hol camp, one in Al-Roj camp, and for the last one, there is no known location).

Nine adult Montenegrin citizens (eight men and one woman) and one child returned to Montenegro.

The main role in the prevention of violent extremism in Montenegro is given to the National Operational Team (NOT)¹⁷⁵, as well as the National Coordinator for the Prevention of CVE. NOT is divided into several RAN groups: RAN 1 for communication and narratives; RAN 2 for education and youth; RAN 3 for local communities; RAN 4 for health and social protection; RAN 5 for police and other law enforcement authorities; RAN 6 for prisons and probational punishments; RAN 7 for exit strategies.

¹⁷³ One proceeding refers to the departure to the Syrian battlefield, and the other to Ukraine.

¹⁷⁴ Djoric, Marija, *Priručnik za prepoznavanje, prevenciju i suzbijanje radikalizacije i nasilnog ekstremizma kod učenika*, Biro za operativnu koordinaciju – Nacionalni operativni tim, Podgorica, 2020, p. 9.

¹⁷⁵ Within NOT, a Team for Help and Protection was formed as well. This team consists of representatives of relevant subjects, all members of the National Operational Team, for the purpose of rational and efficient conduct.

Violent extremism and terrorism are recognized in the Strategy for National Security as methods of fulfilling political and other goals that directly impact vital and strategic interests of the state. Moreover, violent extremism is also recognized in the Strategy of Defence of Montenegro, while the issue of prevention of terrorism is also treated within the Strategy for prevention and combating terrorism, money laundering, and terrorism financing. The phenomena of violent extremism and radicalization are dealt with in detail in the **Strategy for Prevention of Violent Extremism 2016-2018**, as well as in the complementary Action Plan. This strategy was adopted in December 2015, and the competent body for the creation of the Strategy was the Ministry of Justice.

To promote work, institutional strengthening, and linking, as well as providing a systemic response and approach to every single case, NOT initiated the formation of the **Team for Help and Protection**. This team consists of representatives of relevant subjects, all members of the National Operational Team, for rational and efficient conduct.

In 2021, with the change in Government, Montenegro formed a **National Interdepartmental Operational Team for Prevention of National Extremism and Terrorism**, thus spreading the existing focus from violent extremism to terrorism as well.

In Montenegro, processing of the returnees from the battlefield is conducted per Article 449b of the Criminal Law. The prescribed punishment for participating in armed formations is from six months to five years.¹⁷⁶ The practice shows that the perpetrators of this criminal act served minimal punishments (six months of prison). Contrary to processing, rehabilitation and reintegration are somewhat more poorly developed and are predominantly directed towards individuals serving time. Women and children are usually entrusted to local social services. The civil sector is quite engaged in Montenegro, and thus certain NGOs became an integral part of NOT, which is not usual in other countries in the Western Balkans. A good example of the actions of the civil sector can be seen through the program “School for Mothers: Parentship for Peace”, organized by the Forum MNE.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ <https://www.paragraf.me/propisi-crnegore/krivicni-zakonik-crne-gore.html>, 12.09.2023.

¹⁷⁷ This program was organized in cooperation with the Austrian organization *Women without Borders*. The goal of the aforementioned project is the preparation of

In the context of the prevention of extremism, it is important to mention the existence of the “**National Platform for Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Leads to Terrorism**”, founded in 2018. This platform was the result of joint cooperation between NOT, the Ministry of Interior, and a non-governmental organization CDT, with the support of the OSCE Mission in Montenegro.

2.5.3. North Macedonia

According to official data, a total of 156 citizens of North Macedonia departed to Syrian and Iraqi warzones.¹⁷⁸ This explicitly points to the fact that this state has, for several years now, been facing the issue of religiously motivated extremism and terrorism.¹⁷⁹ Besides that, North Macedonia has for several years been hit by ethnic separatist terrorism, to which testifies the terrorist attack conducted in 2015 in Kumanovo by Albanians originating from the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. Having in mind all of the above, the fight against radicalization and violent extremism is one of the top priorities of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

A big repatriation transfer was organized by this country on July 17, 2021, when 23 citizens travelled back to the country, of which five women and 14 children. Until 2021, a total of 103 citizens returned, while 37 of them were killed. According to informal information, it is believed that there are currently five active fighters. By the way, North Macedonia was the first country to repatriate foreign terrorist fighters in 2018.¹⁸⁰ This was done in the moment when the country did not possess all necessary institutional mechanisms for rehabilitation and reintegration, which resulted in some of the returnees attempting

mothers for the prevention of violent extremism among youth, keeping in mind how big their role in the education of children is in the Western Balkans.

¹⁷⁸ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/makdonija-sirija-borci-crna-lista/32066577.html>, 05.06.2024.

¹⁷⁹ One of the more extensive actions directed towards arresting extremists and terrorists was organized in 2016 (better known as the “Cell” action) in Struga, Gostivar, Kumanovo and Skopje, when returnees from the battlefield, who were preparing for new attacks, were arrested.

¹⁸⁰ NEXUS, *Deangažman, rehabilitacija i reintegracija stranih terorističkih boraca: nacionalni izvještaj*, Nexus, Skoplje, 2022, p. 1.

again to conduct a terrorist attack after serving their sentences.¹⁸¹ At this moment, 15 foreign terrorist fighters are serving their sentences in prisons (ten individuals are situated in Idrizovo Prison, while five of them are in Štip Prison).¹⁸²

The competent institutions in North Macedonia have so far sentenced 13 individuals for participating in foreign battlefields to six to nine years in prison.

It is worth mentioning the anti-terrorist action “Cell”¹⁸³, during which the security forces arrested terrorists in 2016, among whom were also returnees from the Syrian and Iraqi battlefields. Their role was primarily aimed at recruiting potential new terrorists and collecting financial funding.

In addition to the existence of major problems with religiously funded terrorism, North Macedonia is a country that has been facing ethno-separatist terrorism for several years now. The attack carried out by Albanian terrorists from Kosovo and Metohija in 2015 caused great polarization in the society, and, logically, the fight against radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism is at the top of the priorities of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The main state institution dealing with issues of violent extremism is the National Committee for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and the Fight against Terrorism, which was first established in 2017. The National Committee is made up of 22 members and 22 deputies, who come from the most significant ministries and state institutions. During 2021, the Government constituted the Ministerial Working Group for the Reintegration of Foreign Terrorist Fighters. The task of this group was to develop a precise plan regarding the return, reintegration, and rehabilitation of terrorists and their families. The National Plan for Rehabilitation, Resocialization, and Reintegration of the returnees and their families was previously adopted in June 2020 and included operational procedures.

The Criminal Law contains the criminal act of participation in foreign armies, police, paramilitary and parapolice formations (Art.

¹⁸¹ Terrorist activities were attempted by these individuals in 2020 when they were, thanks to the joint actions of the Ministry of Interior of North Macedonia and the NSA, foiled.

¹⁸² NEXUS, op.cit., p. 4.

¹⁸³ This action was conducted in the territory of Struga, Gostivar, Kumanovo and Skopje.

322-a). Besides that, there is also the criminal act of terrorism (Art. 394-b), as well as the criminal act of “terrorist endangerment of constitutional order and security” (Art. 313).

North Macedonia is among those countries that have separate strategies for violent extremism and terrorism, adopted in synchronization for the period 2018-2022. Besides these two strategies, the phenomena of violent extremism and terrorism are also treated by the National Strategy for Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing as well. In 2020, North Macedonia also adopted the “National Plan for Reintegration, Resocialization and Rehabilitation of Foreign Terrorist Fighters and their Related Family Members”, which elaborates on all phases of their return.¹⁸⁴

The plan is conducted in four phases:

1. Gathering of security intelligence.
2. Arrival of terrorists and their families (medical and security checks, as well as DNA analysis for children to determine who their parents are, are being conducted).
3. Two-week quarantine of the returnees for the ones who will not be processed) which includes special medical and social programs for women and children, that is, detention for individuals who will be processed.
4. Return to the community.

The work with families is to a significant extent conducted in cooperation with several international organizations and NGOs, among which we can single out *UNICEF*, *GCERF* (The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund), *MYLA*, and *MCMS*.

The lack of identification documents among individuals returning from the battlefield is one of the biggest problems in North Macedonia, as it makes it difficult to determine their identity. This is a particular problem in cases of children born on the battlefield. Since children can obtain personal documents (identity numbers) only from their fathers, this creates quite a problem, since it is often the case that the fathers are out of the country, deceased, etc.¹⁸⁵

One of the important issues in North Macedonia is the problem with the prison treatment of foreign terrorist fighters. In fact, they did not receive any special treatment in prisons, but were treated

¹⁸⁴ See more in: <https://vlada.mk/node/25946>, 01.06.2024.

¹⁸⁵ In this case, mediation conducted by *UNICEF* is of great help.

like all other prisoners.¹⁸⁶ This could be a significant challenge in the further process of rehabilitation and reintegration.

2.5.4. Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia & Herzegovina is burdened by numerous political problems, among which are violent extremism and terrorism as well. During several past years, this state faced significant problems related to religiously funded terrorism, having in mind that, according to official data, between 250 and 300 citizens of Bosnia & Herzegovina departed to battlefields in Syria and Iraq.¹⁸⁷ According to other sources, this numbers rises up to 360 people, and thus, it is difficult to define precisely the exact number.¹⁸⁸ Out of the total number, 55% of men, 25% of women, and 20% of children¹⁸⁹ have departed to Syria and Iraq.¹⁹⁰ In the period from 2014 to 2022, “35 individuals were processed before the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the criminal acts linked with terrorist organizations in foreign battlefields”.¹⁹¹ The men were taken under the jurisdiction of the Prosecutor’s Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they were criminally prosecuted, sentenced and sent to prison for the criminal acts of terrorism, organization of a terrorist group and joining a foreign military, police, paramilitary or parapolice formation.

Until nowadays, a total of 62 adults and 22 children returned to B&H, while eight children whose parents are citizens of B&H or who originate from B&H returned to other countries. Currently, in the territory under control of (predominantly) “Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces” (*SDF*), a total of 52 citizens of B&H can be found

¹⁸⁶ Nexus, op.cit., p. 10.

¹⁸⁷ <http://www.msb.gov.ba/dokumenti/strateski/default.aspx?id=23407&lang-Tag=sr-SP-Cyrl>, 01.08.2024.

¹⁸⁸ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/sirija-bosna-bosanski-djeca-islamska-drzava/31591101.html>, 15.08.2022.

¹⁸⁹ The number of children might significantly vary, bearing in mind that many of them became of age, as well as that many were born in the meantime.

¹⁹⁰ “The Plan for Repatriation and the Program for Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Resocialization of B&H returnees from the warzones in Syria and Iraq” was adopted on August 25, 2022, at the 55th Session of the Council of Ministers of B&H, <http://www.msb.gov.ba/PDF/010620235.pdf>, 20.07.2024.

¹⁹¹ Buljubašić Mirza, Azinović Vlado, *Krivično procesuiranje stranih terorističkih boraca u Bosni i Hercegovini*, Atlantska inicijativa, Sarajevo, 2023, p. 14.

in local prisons and camps.¹⁹² In cooperation with the US, the first group of 25 citizens of B&H returned in December 2019 (seven men, six women and 12 children).¹⁹³ All of them were voluntarily placed in the reception centre Delijaš, where they received medical care and were examined. After nine days of stay in this centre, women and children were transported to the places of their previous residence (Hadžići, Zenica, Tuzla, Čelić). The average age of the women was 33 years, they had two to three minor children, except for one returnee who had no minor children. Of the 12 minor children (one child was unaccompanied by a parent), the gender representation was as follows: 58% boys and 42% girls.¹⁹⁴

According to informal data, there are around a hundred more individuals in Syrian camps waiting for repatriation to B&H, of whom 22 men, 30 women and around 70 minor children.

Until now, there were several “waves” of returns from the battlefield:

The first wave refers to the period from 2012 to 2019. It is specific because there were no organized returns from the battlefield, but everything took place individually and sporadically. In this case, we are speaking of men who returned to B&H to take their families with them to Syria. Individual cases also implied extradition and expulsion from Turkey. This “wave” is also specific because penalties for the returnees were quite mild and did not imply more than three years of prison (26 months on average). What is common to this phase is that there was no program for the rehabilitation and resocialization of the returnees. The returnees went back to the following cantons: Zenica-Doboj, Sarajevo Canton, Tuzla, Central Bosnian Canton, Una-Sana, Republic of Srpska, and Brčko District.

The second wave was, in fact, an organized repatriation of a group of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the combat zones in Syria and Iraq in December 2019, which was already described in advance in this segment of the book. By the way, the seven men were, upon arrival to Sarajevo, taken at some point to the premises of the Prosecutor’s Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the premises of the State Agency for Investigation and Protection, only later to be

¹⁹² <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=490574>, 23.10.2022.

¹⁹³ The Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combatting Terrorism, <http://www.msb.gov.ba/PDF/010620231.pdf>, 12.06.2024.

¹⁹⁴ <http://www.msb.gov.ba/PDF/010620235.pdf>, 25.07.2024.

legally sentenced for several criminal offences related to terrorism or to joining foreign paramilitary and parapolice organizations (the average sentence was less than three years of prison).¹⁹⁵ This group of returnees was from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- Una-Sana Canton (Velika Kladuša)
- Zenica-Doboj Canton (Zenica i Zavidovići)
- Sarajevo Canton (Hadžići, Novi Grad)
- Tuzla Canton (Čelić)

It is important to stress that Bosnia and Herzegovina is expecting a third wave of returnees as well, but it is still not possible to precisely mark when and how many of them will return. According to informal data, around a hundred people are expected to return, to the territory of the entire B&H:

- Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Tuzla, Srebrenik, Gradačac, Gračanica, Živinice and Kladanj; Sarajevo, Hadžići and Ilidža; Zenica, Maglaj, Tešanj, Kakanj, Breza; Velika Kladuša, Bosanska Krupa, Cazin and Bužim; Donji Vakuf and Bugojno.
- Republic of Srpska: Prijedor and Doboj
- Brčko District

The B&H institutions, with the support of international organizations, implement comprehensive programs to strengthen the capacity of prison institutions in B&H, regarding the prevention of radicalization and the spread of extremist ideologies in the prison environment, as well as the rehabilitation and reintegration of this group of prisoners. The Council of Europe plays a major role in this through the regional program for the Western Balkans and special projects, specifically created for Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this way, support is provided to the institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina to tackle the challenges that the prison population brings with it.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ <http://www.msb.gov.ba/PDF/010620235.pdf>, 26.07.2024.

¹⁹⁶ See more in: HF III – Enhancing co-operation in the Western Balkans in managing violent extremism in prisons and preventing further radicalisation after release <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cooperation-in-police-and-deprivation-of-liberty/hf-iii-enhancing-co-operation-in-the-western-balkans-in-managing-violent-extremism-in-prisons-and-preventing-further-radicalisation-after-release>; or Ensuring Sustainable Penitentiary Actions in managing rehabilitation of violent extremist prisoners in Bosnia and Herzegovina (ESPA-VEP) <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cooperation-in-police-and-deprivation-of-liberty/espa-vep-bosnia-and-herzegovina>, 25.07.2024.

Otherwise, the legal basis for accepting returnees (and their families) from the battlefield is determined by the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on Articles 1 and 2.¹⁹⁷

The B&H Strategy for Prevention and Fight against Terrorism for the period of 2015-2020 stresses that the comprehensive goal is to prevent all forms of extremist and terrorist actions, respecting the values of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights and freedoms.

The sub-goals presented in the Strategy are the following:

1. Prevention of hate crimes, radicalism, and terrorism in all forms;
2. Protection of critical infrastructure;
3. Promotion of investigation and criminal prosecution procedures when speaking of acts of terrorism and familiar criminal acts;
4. Response/reaction to possible terrorist acts and remediation of their consequences.

The Strategy also defines the tasks of the Ministry of Security of Bosnia & Herzegovina, which are especially stressed in the following strategic measures:

- Creation of programs for the resocialization of individuals charged with conducting criminal acts of terrorism or participation in paramilitary formations;
- Participation in the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism on an international level;
- Identification and processing of potential and existing members of extremist and terrorist groups.

In 2014, B&H adopted the Law on Amendment of the Criminal Law of B&H (that is, Article 162b.), used for sanctioning departure to foreign battlefields and participation in foreign paramilitary organizations. Soon enough, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia & Herzegovina adopted Information on Citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina who are situated in the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, with the goal of their repatriation. The main role in this process is given to the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Coordination Team.

The Coordination Team consists of the most significant institutions in the state, namely the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia

¹⁹⁷ This is also determined by the Law on the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, other regulations, as well as certain international instruments.

and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Civilian Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the State Agency for Investigation and Protection, the Border Police of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Direction for Coordination of Police Bodies, Federal Bureau of Police, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Srpska, Police of the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc. Apart from the previously listed institutions, the competent authorities of entities and cantonal bodies in the field of social protection, education, and health are engaged as well.

The Coordination Team consists of two sub-teams:

- Sub-team for security aspects of repatriation and criminal processing;
- Sub-team for reintegration, rehabilitation, and resocialization.

In the Draft ¹⁹⁸ of the Strategy for the Fight against Terrorism in B&H for the period of 2021-2026, for the first time, it is explicitly stressed that right-wing extremism (referred to in this document predominantly as ethnic nationalism) poses a serious threat to the security of this state.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, a close link between the extreme right-wing to football hooligan groups and certain clerical structures is mentioned as well. The new Strategy was adopted at the 57th Session of the Council of Ministers of the B&H, on November 09, 2022. This strategy focused on several important topics, such as pandemics, foreign terrorist fighters, religious extremism, right-wing (ethno-nationalistic) extremism, financing of terrorism, hate speech, abuse of the Internet and social networks, and migrations. It is of particular importance that the new Strategy includes a gender component, which will be very useful for understanding the process of radicalization of women and girls.

¹⁹⁸ The adoption of the new Strategy began in 2021.

¹⁹⁹ <http://www.msb.gov.ba/dokumenti/strateski/default.aspx?id=23403&lang-Tag=sr-SP-Cyrl>, 26.07.2024.

Through comparative analysis of four case studies (Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Bosnia & Herzegovina), the most significant strategic documents and institutional approaches to the prevention of violent extremism are identified. What can be concluded at first glance is the fact that countries of the Western Balkans are synchronized when speaking of strategic and institutional approaches to combating violent extremism. It is not a rare occurrence that examples of good practice found in one country are quite successfully (with more or less alterations) being used in other countries of the region as well. This was especially noticeable during the period of 2014/2015, when all countries of the Western Balkans criminalized the act of departure to foreign battlefields (which corresponded to the war in Syria and Iraq, but also with events in Donbas). Some countries (such as Serbia), in accordance with the UN Resolution No 2396, clearly differentiated foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) from foreign fighters (FF), that is, a distinction was made between the criminal act of “Terrorism” (Art. 391) and “Participation in war or armed conflict in a foreign country” (Art. 386a). In other countries of the region, these two occurrences are often equalled. It is interesting to mention that in many democratic countries in Europe, as well as worldwide, participation in foreign battlefields is not explicitly defined as a criminal act, and thus, the countries of the Western Balkans made a step forward.

When speaking of taking strategic actions, two approaches can be distinguished:

1. There is one strategy for treating phenomena of violent extremism and terrorism.
2. Two different strategies are being created – one for extremism and one for terrorism.

Having in mind the previously acquired experience, it seems that the future trend will revolve around treating violent extremism and terrorism with one strategy.

In many countries, the strategies expired during the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus the creation of new strategic documents was prolonged due to technical problems (inability to organize direct contact, online communication, etc.), as was the case with Serbia, while in some other countries, due to lumbering and complex

governing systems (as was the case of Bosnia & Herzegovina), the process was slowed down.

What emerged as an evident trend is that the new strategies will have much more space dedicated to right-wing (that is, ethnic nationalist) extremism in comparison to previous documents, which corresponds with the strengthening of the extreme right-wing, not only on a global level but in the Western Balkans region as well. There is an assumption that the COVID-19 pandemic²⁰⁰, as well as the migration crisis and the war in Ukraine, will additionally intensify the issue of the extreme right-wing.

When speaking of institutions, in all countries, the key roles were given to the ministries of force (usually the Ministry of Internal Affairs), while in a more personal approach, this task is given to the National Coordinator (P/CVE coordinator) who, in some countries, deals solely with violent extremism, while in others (for example, in Montenegro), that official deals with terrorism as well. It is obvious that, in the future, the role of the National Coordinator will be unified in order to treat both violent extremism and terrorism, due to the natural overlapping of these phenomena.

In the context of old and new challenges, it can be said that religious extremism is still present, keeping in mind that more than 400 individuals originating from the Western Balkans are currently still being held in Syria and Iraq. The post-conflict heritage (referring to the wars of the nineties of the previous century) is still a well-known, old topic for the countries of this region, which can easily result in national tensions. Having in mind the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on the global plan, the so-called *COVID-related extremism* can be expected, with the power to unite the extreme left-wing and the extreme right-wing, especially when speaking of anti-globalism (which is a common enemy to both factions). With an increasing energy and economic crisis correlating with the war in Ukraine, the Western Balkans might even become a stage of social protests, which will certainly create a new problem with the extreme left-wing as well.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ On correlation of the pandemics and politics, see more in: Talović Rašković Violeta, Stojadinović Miša, Stanar Dragan, *Srbija i svet – društvene i političke paradigme*, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, Beograd, 2022.

²⁰¹ In this context, we do not rule out the possibility of strengthening eco-terrorism, which is linked to various forms of environmental protection.

The conclusion is that the Western Balkans region is quite unstable due to mutual disagreements from the past, but also the new challenges to be faced in the future. Maybe the countries of the Western Balkans should be a little bit wiser and learn from the mistakes made during their difficult and dynamic joint history. Given that every crisis nurtures various forms of extremism, the new multiplied crises may represent a fertile ground for some new toxic ideologies. Only through joint coordination in the field of prevention of violent extremism and terrorism, as well as joint learning from good (and bad) practices, can countries of this region be ready to face new security challenges.

2.5.4.1. Martial arts and airsoft clubs as potential generators of extremism: B&H as a case study²⁰²

In recent years, there has been a noticeable expansion of martial arts clubs linked with some forms of violent extremism on a global level. While the extreme right-wing worldwide has been predominantly focused on martial arts clubs, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this link can be visible predominantly between radical interpretations of Islam (Wahhabism) and various forms of martial arts (kickboxing, hapkido, taekwondo, etc.). Besides martial arts clubs, it is noticeable that in some airsoft clubs in B&H, religious indoctrination of the membership is being conducted as well, and this will also be elaborated in this book. During research on this topic, the methods of content analysis and in-depth interviews were used for collecting data. In conclusion, sports have a dual role in relation to violent extremism: while on the one side, they can act preventive measure in terms of VERLT, on the other, they can be abused for the recruitment and indoctrination of new members.

²⁰² Taken from: Ђорић Марија, „Клубови борилачких вештина и аирсофт клубови као потенцијални генератори екстремизма: БиХ као студија случаја“, *Журнал за безбједност и криминалистику*, br. 2, 2025, online first. <https://scindeks.ceon.rs/article.aspx?query=ISSID%26and%2617975&page=0&sort=8&stype=0&backurl=%2fissue.aspx%3fissue%3d17975>

Since the beginning of time, sports have had a positive impact on man's mental and physical health, and thus the famous Latin proverb: *Mens sana in corpore sano* (a healthy mind in a healthy body). It is well known that sports play a crucial role in the formation of identity and the construction of team spirit, especially among children and youth. Besides that, sports can have a creative impact on cognitive and social skills, because during training (and especially in group sports), a sense of community and extended family is created. Moreover, the presence of a coach is responsible for the formation of a healthy relationship with the authorities, which is also one of the benefits of sports. Of course, all previously mentioned has sense only if sports are perceived as a positive occurrence in a society, which can be used for the creation of a greater good. Unfortunately, in reality, it is not always the case, and thus, it is not uncommon that sports are also used for negative propagandic and political purposes, for the ideologization of the youth, radicalization, recruitment of future violent groups, etc. Thus, it can be stated that sports have a dual role, which means that they can serve as both a factor of integration and disintegration of a society.²⁰³ This segment will deal with the research of the role of martial arts and the increasingly popular airsoft in the context of sports polarization. A special focus will be put on Bosnia and Herzegovina due to the specific use of sports for ideological and political purposes. During the course of research, a comparative analysis will be made with specific examples worldwide to find the *genus proximum* and *differentia specifica*.

It is general knowledge that martial arts are an integral part of the official armed forces of a country. The issue can arise in case martial arts are abused for the preparation of some illegal combat forces that could pose a security threat to a country. The other problem that can be identified in B&H in the context of the link between sports and extremism is the potential abuse of airsoft clubs for political and political purposes.

The research of such amorphous and non-transparent phenomena is that much more challenging because it is quite difficult to find relevant data sources. Exactly because of that, in the research of this topic, besides secondary data sources, the method of in-depth

²⁰³ Djoric Marija, *Huliganizam: nasilje i sport*, Nauka i društvo, Beograd, 2012.

interviews is used as well, which included talks with representatives of the security sector, NGOs, universities, etc. All the data collected in the theoretical and empirical procedures of this research have led to the following main hypothesis:

Martial arts and airsoft clubs in B&H can represent a potential security threat due to the link of one segment of their membership and leadership with religious extremism and/or crime.

The following will first elaborate on the link between sports and politics, their genesis throughout history, as well as the abuse of sports (martial arts and airsoft) by extremist organizations. Even though this phenomenon on a global level is predominantly linked with the extreme right-wing, in B&H, this problem is much more correlated with the religiously funded extremism (especially with Wahhabism).²⁰⁴ Wahhabism itself cannot be identified as an extreme form of Islam, but can surely be qualified as a radical interpretation of the Islamic faith. Moreover, it is indicative that the majority of foreign terrorist fighters from the Balkans were recruited exactly within the Wahhabi illegal communities.²⁰⁵

Sports and violence

We will first consider positive examples of sports, primarily in the context of the Olympic Games. Namely, during this sacred manifestation of the ancient Greeks, which was primarily organized in honour of the Gods, all wars would cease. This, at the same time, speaks to the power (and also the reputation) that sports had even in ancient times. Sports are a factor that can influence the generation of national identity and patriotism as well, which is seen in the context of national representations. A good example of sports as an integration factor in a society can be seen, for example, in the South African Republic. Thanks to this sport and the idea of the “rainbow of nations”, Nelson Mandela succeeded in transforming the *Springboks* rugby club into the symbol of unification of the white and black population in

²⁰⁴ See more on extremism in B&H in: Шикман Миле, Ђеранић Предраг, „Угрожавање безбједности Републике Српске са посебним освртом на тероризам“, *Политика националне безбедности*, no. 1, 2017. pp. 75-96.

²⁰⁵ See more on terrorism in B&H in: Lalic Velibor et al. „We vs. them: Perception of terrorism in multiethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina in an intergroup perspective“, *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, vol. 80, March, 2025, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1756061625000023>, 01.09.2025.

this country then divided by apartheid. Sports were often also used as a front for national defence, which can be seen through the example of the Sokol Movement, as an example of the pan-Slavic liberation movement.²⁰⁶ Moreover, we should not forget the precious role of sports when speaking of mental health. The newest research has only confirmed that sports significantly improve the mental health of the younger population. A study conducted among children aged 9 to 13 (a sample of 11,235 respondents) has shown that group sports reduce anxiety by 10%, social problems by 17%, attention disorder by 12%, cognitive problems by 17%, and thinking problems by 17%.²⁰⁷ Here, it is important to distinguish recreational sports from professional sports. Global research organized by scientists worldwide shows that among 45% of professionals, sports can also cause some form of mental disorders²⁰⁸ (burnout syndrome, depression, and anxiety).²⁰⁹

Besides numerous benefits, sports can also generate numerous social problems. Above all, it can be abused as a tool of politics in the form of the ideologization of society. This can be seen best in the example of totalitarian systems – communism and fascism in the times of the Cold War. Totalitarian states often presented the “health of a nation or a class” through sports. To this best testify rallies held in former communist and real-socialist countries, while Nazi and Fascist regimes used sports events for promotion of national and racial “superiority”, as well as for projecting the technical and technological power of their countries (for example, Mussolini favoured car racing for the promotion of Alfa Romeo, while Hitler worked with Mercedes).²¹⁰ The scope of reflection of politics in the field of sports can be seen in the example of the boycott of the Olympic Games during the Cold War. So, the US boycotted the Olympic Games in 1980 because the host was the USSR, and in 1984, as a sign of revanchism,

²⁰⁶ Djoric Marija, „Sokolstvo i Mlada Bosna“, *Srpska politička misao*, No. 4, 2016, pp. 67-82.

²⁰⁷ Saybrook University, “The Mental Health Benefits of Playing Sports”, 2024. <https://www.saybrook.edu/unbound/mental-health-benefits-playing-sports/>, 22.08.2025.

²⁰⁸ It should still take into consideration the facts that, in professional sports, things are somewhat different, and this is more of an exception than a rule.

²⁰⁹ Reardon CL, et al. “Mental health in elite athletes: International Olympic Committee consensus statement”, *Sports Med.*, 2019, <https://bjms.bmj.com/content/bjsports/53/11/667.full.pdf>, 12.05.2025.

²¹⁰ Baker William, *Sports in The Western World*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1988.

fourteen Latin American countries refused to participate in the Summer Olympic Games held in America. Sports are also used for the promotion of numerous political messages through slogans and chants, especially during important sporting events that have media coverage. To this testifies the best the phenomenon of “politization of hooliganism”, which implies the use of hooligan groups for the realization of political goals.²¹¹ In recent times, a big inflow of some political options can be noticed within martial arts clubs worldwide, and thus, this can be perceived as a global phenomenon. Moreover, it is also noticeable (to a lesser extent) that there is a trend of abuse of some airsoft clubs for ideological purposes. All the previously mentioned can be explained by the fact that some ideologies (predominantly right-wing and religious extremism) see in young sportsmen their own paramilitary formations that could contribute to the realization of their political goals, usually through the use of violence. Since this phenomenon is global, we believe that it is necessary to examine its characteristics and generators for emergence, but at the same time, discover the specifics of its emergence in the Western Balkans region, with a special emphasis on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Martial arts/combat sports as potential generators of extremism

Before we take into consideration the relation between martial arts and extremism, it is important to make an important distinction between these two familial, but still different terms. Namely, martial arts and martial arts sports are often equated in contemporary literature. The main difference between martial arts and combat sports is the fact that “combat sports have competitions and strict rules set for the sportsmen who compete according to them, while martial arts do not have any competitions or competition rules, but the principles of the said martial art are being respected as such”.²¹² In this paper, we will be using both terms, though for our research, it would be more suitable to use the term “combat sports”. In the Anglo-Saxon literature, in time, developed the term MA&CS, meaning “Martial

²¹¹ Ђорић Марија, *Екстремизам и хулијанизам на Балкану*, Институт за политичке студије, Београд, 2024.

²¹² Максимовић Маријана, „Спорт, људски ресурси и основне вредности јапанског друштва“, *Сјорџ, наука и Ѣракса*, no. 1, 2020, p. 47.

Arts and Combat Sports”. Even though this term is usually used for depicting martial arts systems originating in Eastern Asia, martial arts are universal cultural products, including, for example, the Japanese aikido, Chinese tai chi, Korean hapkido, Brazilian capoeira, French savate, English boxing, Nigerian dambe...²¹³ In its evolution, numerous martial arts have also developed a sporting side, as was the case with Olympic combat sports, such as freestyle wrestling, Greek-Roman wrestling, boxing, fencing, judo, taekwondo, and karate. Other combat sports, such as tai chi, have mainly developed as training of the mind and body, leaving the pure combat sphere in the back.

Even though the relation between martial arts and aggression is still gloomy (especially the issue of whether martial arts incite or reduce aggression), there is a significant number of research papers which show that the traditional practice of this type of sport reduces aggression (especially among adults) and eliminates stress. This conclusion was made based on analysis conducted within nine studies dealing with the said topic.²¹⁴ It seems that we can conclude that everything is individual: martial arts can be a “good servant, but a bad master”; it all depends on how we use them. Traditional martial arts have developed a special value system based on ethical principles of self-defence, humbleness, and chivalry. Binder even states that, among Asian martial arts, an integration of the mind and the body occurs through a mental component that has a self-defence effect.

Today, martial arts are present not only as a sport, fun, and recreation, but also have found their use in the armed forces (military, police). Despite extremely successful advances of technics and technology, hand-to-hand fighting, a feature of martial arts, remains quite significant for contemporary man. Besides the fact that the official armed forces use martial arts, they are also often used by informal groups, movements, and organizations as well, for various (political and ideological) goals. Some martial arts (such as boxing and MMA²¹⁵)

²¹³ Donohue John, Taylor Kimberly, “The Classification of the Fighting Arts”, *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*, No. 4, 1994, pp. 10-37.

²¹⁴ Jorge Carlos Lafuente et al. “Effects of martial arts and combat sports training on anger and aggression: A systematic review”, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, May-June, 2021, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1359178921000653>, 12.05.2025.

²¹⁵ MMA represents a combination of various martial arts sports, such as boxing, Thai boxing, judo, wrestling, Brazilian jiu jitsu, etc.

have, unfortunately, become notorious in the last few years because individuals from their ranks are being recruited for violent extremist actions are being recruited. On a global level, the most dominant link is between martial arts clubs and the extreme right-wing, though we can also identify an inflow of religiously funded extremism (in the form of jihadism) within martial arts clubs as well. Seen throughout history, martial arts and many other sports were used as preparation for combat. Such data can be seen even in the ancient period (Greece and Rome). However, when speaking of the ideologization of sports, the highest peak of such actions is seen in the time of Nazi Germany, in which everything, including sports, was subjected to politics. The concrete connection between sports and extremism (and in some cases terrorism as well) began in the 1970s and 1980s of the 20th century, above all within the right-wing ideological provenience. A good example is the *Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann*, which, as a form of a paramilitary formation, strived to introduce the Nazi dictatorship once again.²¹⁶ The members of this extremist group practiced shooting, martial arts, and bodybuilding, while they also had one part of their training in Lebanon, where they were trained by members of Lebanese and Palestinian military organizations.

When speaking of combat sports, the extreme right wing reflects the most in MMA. This does not imply the practice of MMA exclusively, but also the organization of public competitions (MMA tournaments), during which three important goals are met:²¹⁷

1. Linking the new and the existing membership and strengthening the network.
2. Recruitment of new members.
3. Finding new sources of financing.

In what ways are the recruits of the extreme right wing found?

1. Through commercialization and sales. The extreme right wing is full of symbols that can be found on clothes, bags, and sporting equipment (i.e., bandages, boxing gloves, etc.). Many clubs linked with this ideology often express it by wear-

²¹⁶ Handle Julia, Scheuble Sophie, *The role of sports in violent right-wing extremist radicalisation and P/CVE*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021.

²¹⁷ Ayyadi Kira, *Professionalisierung der Gewalt im Kampfsport*, 6. November 2017, <https://www.belltower.news/rechtsextreme-hooligans-professionalisierung-der-gewalt-im-kampfsport-45910/>, 05.07.2025.

ing symbolic products, thus working on their recognizability. So, for example, some neo-Nazi oriented martial arts clubs wear the *Pride France*, which can be found on their sporting equipment as well.²¹⁸

2. Through the organization of sporting²¹⁹ events and other collective activities (i.e., folklore dances or concerts). In this way, the group cohesion is strengthened, and group identity is built, which is an important component among extremist organizations. Interestingly, these events are closed to the public, and all participants must apply way earlier (to pass the security checks of extremist circles). One of such European events used to take place from 2013 to 2019 in Germany (Ostritz), after which it was banned per the Government decision.
3. Propaganda targeting emotions and followed by specific activities. For example, with the arrival of migrants to Europe, some right-wing organizations started offering support to women for self-defence from potential rape, possibly perpetrated by migrants.²²⁰ The identity movement in France, in the context of these events, for example, offered French women self-defence courses.

The forerunners of MMA can also be found in ancient Greece, in the times of the Olympic Games, but this sport officially gained global popularity since the organization of the first ultimate championship in 1990. It is believed that it has had the biggest popularity rise in comparison to other sports in the last twenty years (especially in the US). The Nibelung Battle is the most well-known martial arts tournament in Europe, coloured with extremely right-wing ideology, but there are many such examples in the world. French right-wing organization *Generation Identitaire* organized a martial arts training camp, presented as a form of summer school.²²¹ This camp bore

²¹⁸ The Guardian, “Fascist fight clubs: how white nationalists use MMA as a recruiting tool”, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/sep/11/far-right-fight-clubs-mma-white-nationalists>, 12.08.2025.

²¹⁹ Here, not only martial arts are attractive, but also sports like fishing, mountain climbing, rafting, etc.

²²⁰ The European Parliament, *Motion for a European Parliament resolution on mass immigration undermining European women’s safety*, 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-10-2024-0143_EN.html, 04.07.2025.

²²¹ The European Parliament, *Motion for a European Parliament resolution on mass immigration undermining European women’s safety*, 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-10-2024-0143_EN.html.

the motto “From Covadonga to Calais”²²², implying the victory of the Christian army against the Muslims (the Umayyad Caliphate) in 722. The camp housed hundreds of participants from the entire world who, besides practicing MMA and other martial arts²²³, took part in ideological indoctrination. The war in Ukraine is also one of the triggers for the development of the extreme right-wing, including its inflow into the martial arts. In Kiev, on many occasions (and even before the Maidan), such gatherings of extreme right-wingers were organized, primarily guised as MMA gatherings. The main patron of such events of international character²²⁴ was the *Right Sector* organization, which functions as a paramilitary wing of the Ukrainian neo-Nazi party, the *Right Corpus*.²²⁵

We will list a few interesting examples from a global level, in which the direct link between combat sports and extremism can be seen:

- The UFC fighter (UFC - *Ultimate Fighting Championship*), Joe Brammer, was sponsored by the *Hoessler Reich* company²²⁶, known for their open support of the extreme right wing.²²⁷
- UFC fired in 2013 the German boxer in the welterweight category, Benjamin Brinsa, known under the nickname “Hooligan”, due to his links with neo-Nazi groups.²²⁸

europa.eu/doceo/document/B-10-2024-0143_EN.html, 04.07.2025.

²²² The Battle of Covadonga was the first victory of Christians over the Umayyad Caliphate after the Moorish invasion of Spain. On the other side, Calais was the city the English held under siege for a long time during the Hundred-Year War, only to be put under the control of the French in 1558. This was at the same time the last English territory in continental Europe.

²²³ The main goal was to prepare them for street fighting and potential demonstrations.

²²⁴ Such events were attended by extremists from the entire world, and an especially close cooperation with the “Right Sector” was seen among extremist organizations from Germany and Sweden.

²²⁵ Umland Andreas, “Irregular Militias and Radical Nationalism in PostEuromaydan Ukraine: The Prehistory and Emergence of the ‘Azov’ Battalion in 2014”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2019, pp. 105-131.

²²⁶ UFC distanced from this organization and ceased cooperation with it in 2009.

²²⁷ Holland J. “UFC cuts Benjamin Brinsa following allegations of Neo-Nazi affiliation”, 2013, <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/9/12/4722792/ufc-cuts-benjamin-brinsa-following-allegations-of-neo-nazi-affiliation-mma>, 06.07.2025.

²²⁸ Holland J. “UFC cuts Benjamin Brinsa following allegations of Neo-Nazi affiliation”, 2013, <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/9/12/4722792/ufc-cuts-benjamin-brinsa-following-allegations-of-neo-nazi-affiliation-mma>, 06.07.2025.

- Valdet Gashi, a German citizen originating from Kosovo and Metohija, joined the terrorist organization “Islamic State” in 2015. Gashi, as a known kick-boxer, is an example of the link between religious extremism and combat sports. Before departing for Syria, he trained in Bangkok, and he also organized MMA clubs in Switzerland to which, according to his words, only “good Muslims” who showed religious fanaticism could come. During training, he forbade music and cursing.
- Alan Cherkanov, a triple Tajik champion, is another example of how individuals are being recruited from the MMA ranks. Like Gashi, Cherkanov also joined ISIS.

What martial arts clubs offer to extremists?

4. The need for acknowledgement/self-confirmation. Young people get validation through this type of sport. The crucial role, when speaking of authority, is played by coaches, who are often seen as some form of a guru. Here, some form of the idea of overcompensation is being realized, implying that, if one segment of our lives is not doing well, we can get self-validation and self-confidence through this type of sport.
5. The need for belonging, which is usually realized through the prism of group identity. This is exactly why the idea of “brotherhood” is forced upon group members. Bearing in mind that the trainings take place several times a week, it is quite logical to understand the closeness created by time within these groups. This feeling of a group identity can influence the increased level of loyalty among its members, but at the same time, create animosity against the so-called “enemy groups” as well.
6. Toxic masculinity. The need to confirm the so-called “male identity” through physical practice is something that can impact self-confidence, but can also be paired with misogyny and anti-feminism. Extremists²²⁹ perceive male-female relations through the prism of (exclusively) traditional roles of both genders. So, a woman is perceived as a passive gender in charge of playing the role of a housewife-mother-wife, while the man has the role of the protector of the family and the

²²⁹ Above all, we are speaking of right-wing and religious extremists.

state, from which stems the need for masculinization through the construction of the athletic sports body.²³⁰

Martial arts clubs in B&H and religious indoctrination

There are dozens of martial arts clubs in the Federation of B&H, which are dominantly linked (or were linked) with the ideology of Wahhabism.²³¹ One of them is “Gazija Gym” from Sarajevo, whose founder and coach is Šabanović Muhamed, former Secretary-General of the B&H Kickboxing Assembly. On their *Facebook* profile, besides numerous awards and sports successes, we can also see that prayer is a mandatory part of their training. This club is also known to the public because one of its members conducted a brutal attack on *The Bosnia Times* journalist, Nedžad Latić.²³² It is believed that some members of this club are involved within dominant party structures, to whom they provide multilayered support.²³³

By all means, one of the most interesting clubs for analysis is the “Asker Sporting Association”, exactly due to its committed work on the education of children and youth, which, besides martial arts, also includes religious indoctrination. To this testifies the promotional video footage of the organization’s training of boys²³⁴ in the territory of Tešanj, in which all the coaches are members of the Wahhabi movement. In the footage, which appeared on *YouTube*, the so-called sports training of children in a stadium can be seen, with the children carrying and jumping over tires, using ropes, etc. In the promotional video of this organization, the coaches are asking children, “Who are we?”, whereas they reply, “Askers”, which, when translated from Turkish, mean soldiers. The musical background in the said footage is also interesting, that is, the song of the performer called *Mučenik Muhamed* (in English, *Mohammad the Martyr*), called “In your absence, I wish for your death” (from the album named “Asrar”).

²³⁰ Here, for example, it is often neglected that, in modern warfare, physical strength does not hold primacy anymore, thanks to the dominance and advances of technology (for example, artificial intelligence).

²³¹ In-depth interview with a member of the security sector, no. 1.

²³² Avaz, „Avaz saznaje: Općinski sud odbio pritvoriti napadača na novinara Latića“, <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/355436/slug>, 15.08.2025.

²³³ In-depth interview with a journalist, no. 2.

²³⁴ Some of them were not even ten years old.

The founder of this association is Enver Hebibović, a former member of the Seventh Muslim Brigade, i.e., the B&H Army in Konjic, at the time commanded by Nezim Halilović Muderis. In his public addresses, on numerous occasions, he stressed that “Asker“ is a sports association that “serves for children and the youth to hang out through martial arts, and for raising not only sporting but also moral features, as well as inciting positive affirmation through gatherings”.²³⁵ It should be stressed that such linking of sports, children, and martial arts skills caused dissatisfaction and worries among some parts of the B&H public, as well as the competent security structures.²³⁶ The then Minister of Security of B&H, in the time of the media coverage of this event in 2018, stressed that he doubts the “honourable intentions” of the “Asker Association”, especially because there are some indications that it is linked to individuals such as Naser Orić.²³⁷

The mixture of religion, sports, and politics is quite intriguing, especially when we are speaking of famous sportsmen, such as Salko Zildić²³⁸ (kick-boxer), the holder of numerous gold medals from European and world competitions. For a while, he was the SDA representative in the House of Representatives of the B&H Federation Parliament, and in 2023, he was arrested in Serbia for conducting the criminal offense of illegal production, trafficking, and carrying weapons.²³⁹ By the way, Zildić was the president and coach of the “FLEX TOM-CAT” club in Tuzla, which, among other things, recruited individuals for a protection agency. It is believed that this sports club was directly linked with the private agency for protection of property and individuals called “Flex Security”, owned by brothers Samir, Amir, and Damir Mehić.²⁴⁰ The criminal activities of the Mehić brothers are that much causing worries if we take into consideration that they cooperated with Naser Kelmendi, the

²³⁵ INS, „Islamska zajednica u BiH o aktivnostima udruženja Asker“, 2018, <https://www.ins.ba/bs/article/4182/islamska-zajednica-u-bih-o-aktivnostima-udruzenja-asker>, 12.08.2025.

²³⁶ RTS, „Orić negira postojanje “terorističkog kampa za obuku dece”“, 2018, <https://www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/region/3033740/oric-negira-postojanje-teroristickog-kampa-za-obuku-dece.html>, 01.07.2025.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ It should be mentioned that this coach was Enver Hebibović, a founder and coach of the “Asker” sports association, previously mentioned in the text.

²³⁹ N1info, 2023 <https://n1info.ba/vijesti/salki-zildzicu-odredjen-jednomjesecni-pritvor-poznato-za-koje-krivicno-djelo-se-tereti/>, 05.08.2025.

²⁴⁰ In-depth interview with a member of the NGO sector, no. 3.

Albanian criminal²⁴¹ qualified by DEA as the “biggest regional narco-boss”²⁴², well known, first of all, for trafficking heroin and cocaine. Besides his career in sports, Zildić also had a political one, and as the President of the SDA B&H Youth Association, he was extensively directed towards socialization and youth indoctrination. Besides that, Zildić played a significant role in the regional popularization of the ideology he adopted, as testified by his visit to his like-minded people in the northern part of Montenegro (Plav and Gusinje). Interestingly, he was accompanied at that occasion by the members of the Bosnian Wahhabi movement who, together with Abudusamad Bušatlić²⁴³, went to the Friday prayer in the Sultanija Mosque in Plav, which is, by the way, a gathering place of the local Wahhabis.²⁴⁴ It is believed that there are a dozen such clubs in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which the ideology of Wahhabism intertwines with politicization and criminal activities.²⁴⁵ Of course, it should be taken into consideration that not all members of these martial arts clubs are inherently oriented towards violence or crime; many of them start training exactly because of sports. Despite that, we should not neglect the fact that some coaches can use their authority to exhibit a strong influence on the generation of extremist ideas among the young members and teenagers. The ideology of Wahhabism, as a radical form of Islam, can play a dominant role in it. It is believed that young people from smaller communities, in which the post-conflict heritage is still noticeable, are especially vulnerable, given that, in combination with the lack of information and a bad economic situation, this could lead to negative, i.e., violent radicalization. When we take into consideration the ideological and criminal orientation of some individuals, it is logical that their role as coaches is looked upon with discomfort. It is a known fact that sports coaches represent life role models to young people and children, that they take up quite an

²⁴¹ Vreme, “Uhapšen Naser Keljmendi”, 2025, <https://vreme.com/projekat/uhapsen-naser-keljmendi/>, 05.08.2025.

²⁴² Blic, “Ko je Naser Keljmendi: Od švercera tekstila do narko-bosa koji kontrolise put droge do Evrope”, 2021, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/ko-je-naser-keljmendi-od-svercera-tekstila-do-narko-bosa-koji-kontrolise-put-droge-do-nj1h2t7>, 05.06.2025.

²⁴³ Lectures held by Abudusamad Bušatlić are quite popular among the Wahhabis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the entire region as well.

²⁴⁴ In-depth interview with a member of the security sector, no. 1.

²⁴⁵ In-depth interview with a member of the academic community, no. 4.

intensive role in their socialization, and thus, we cannot help but ask about the consequences of their actions.

Airsoft clubs as potential generators of religious indoctrination in B&H

Origins and characteristics of airsoft

Airsoft is a type of sport²⁴⁶ which, like martial arts, originated in Asia, that is, in Japan. The sociopolitical circumstances in Japan were such that the firearms enthusiasts (due to strict laws) could not possess it, and thus, they made replicas as an adequate replacement. The founder of this idea was Ichiro Nagata, who designed and, at the same time, created the first “soft air” gun in 1986, first used for target shooting in sports, and then for team play. This gun used to shoot projectiles that could not hurt the potential target because of its soft power, and thus, on one side, it was in line with the Japanese law, while on the other, it fulfilled the needs of the firearms enthusiasts.

The real development of the modern airsoft begins in the 1990s of the previous century, with the production of electronic guns, in which the glory went especially to the *Tokyo Marui* company. Even though it emerged just recently, airsoft gained global popularity, to which testifies the statistics of sales of airsoft weapons on a world level. Only in 2024, the airsoft firearms industry recorded a profit amounting to 2.2 billion US dollars.²⁴⁷ It is expected that it will rise to 2.3 billion US dollars in 2025, and to 4.5 billion USD by 2034, with a complex growth rate of 7.8%.²⁴⁸ Perfecting the replicas with electromotors and gas clips, combined with the recoil system development, made this sport even more attractive. There is also the International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC), which organizes air rifle shooting competitions, attended by around 200,000 members from over 100 countries, every year.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Many perceive it as an extreme sport.

²⁴⁷ GMI, Airsoft Gun Market - By Product Type, By Mechanism, By Price Range, By Distribution Channel Analysis, Share, Growth Forecast, 2025-2034, <https://www.gminsights.com/industry-analysis/airsoft-gun-market>, 04.09.2025.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

The essence of airsoft is that the training is conducted based on the principles of special (police or military) units, within which the conditions of training are adjusted to reality. During airsoft activities, the participants are usually wearing camouflage uniforms and using replicas which, to a great extent (by their shape and weight), resemble real weapons. They use replica snipers, rifles; they use dummies of artillery weaponry and drones, imitational mines and explosives, as well as suitable vehicles. It should be mentioned that airsoft replicas do not even have to exist in the real world, but can also be made-up weapons from video games and movies.²⁵⁰ Despite the possibility to create most diverse types of replicas, still, the most popular ones are the replicas of automatic rifles *AK-47* and *AK-74*, American rifle *M-16* (or the more innovative model *M-4* with various additions, such as optical rifle scope), as well as *Heckler MP-5A3* and *MP-5SD*, *G-43*, and replicas of various modern guns (*Beretta*, *Glock*). Also, we notice an extensive use of replica machine guns with refilling, as well as various rifle guns. No matter what form and shape of a weapon we are speaking of, all these weapons have one thing in common: they are usually loaded with gas, they use CO₂ ampules, or a battery-powered electromotor compressor. Based on the mechanism of use, the contemporary airsoft market can be divided into three segments:

1. Spring-powered weapons
2. Electric-powered weapons
3. Gas-powered weapons

Besides weapons, participants also carry combat vests which, because of the same dimensions, can also be used upon firing real firearms.

What are the game rules in airsoft?

Every meet of airsoft players begins with them being divided into teams, fully armed, and then they start competing goals and tasks that can lead them to victory. This implies suitable tactics and strategy, as well as a quite realistic combat scenario. The rules of this game are clear and simple – the participant who is hit by an airsoft ball²⁵¹ (including the replica), is automatically eliminated from the game. Of course, an honest relationship towards other players is

²⁵⁰ So, for example, there are credible replicas from the movie “Alien”, or rifles from the popular video game “HALO”.

²⁵¹ We are speaking of airsoft ammunition, the so-called bb ball, usually 6 millimeters in size, weighting around 0.25 grams (but they can be found in bigger and small-

expected, and thus, the person who is hit is expected to raise their hand and say, "I was hit!" There are many ways to play airsoft, but they are most often of a local character and last two hours on average (on special occasions, they can last for several days). Even though at first glance it seems safe and harmless, airsoft carries along some challenges, such as, for example, injuries. The most dangerous ones are the injuries to the face, and thus, suitable protection is carried; however, it is not rare that some bruising occurs on the body, due to being hit with ammo. Moreover, injuries upon running in the field, such as breaks and strains, are also possible, though this is a feature of most sports. Airsoft is used for training and learning sessions among the members of armed forces in many countries (especially with recruits). Replicas can be made that credible that they cannot be distinguished from the real weapon.

Airsoft is often compared to paintball, and thus, we will make a clear distinction between these two occurrences. They differ by the equipment being used, game style, rules, and finally, by their price (paintball is somewhat more expensive form of entertainment). The essence lies in the fact that airsoft is much more similar to real combat, compared to paintball.²⁵² Besides that, the protection gear used in paintball is bigger, and the balls used in gameplay are visible, which leaves a clear trail of paint on the equipment. The combat style in airsoft is tactical and based on a simulation, while in paintball, a more intense style is present. By all means, what is common to paintball and airsoft (on a global level) is that they have a sports and entertainment character. However, in the last twenty years, there has been an increasingly interesting trend in the territory of B&H, which points to the fact that some airsoft clubs can be generators of violent extremism and religious indoctrination.

er dimensions). Tracer balls are also interesting, since they accumulate light and glow in the dark, which is suitable for night time games.

²⁵² In corporate culture, paintball, as a form of entertainment, is being used as a form of "team building".

In the territory of the so-called Western Balkans, airsoft has become popular in the last two decades. It is present in all countries of the region, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which a special expansion has been noticed in the Federation of B&H, during the last 15 years. Due to findings that some airsoft clubs are inciting violent extremism, in the following segment, the subject of our research will be the religious indoctrination of youth in these sports associations.²⁵³

Airsoft is present in the entire territory of B&H, but per its scope, quality of clubs, membership, and material and technical equipment, airsoft clubs in the Federation of B&H are quite more dominant when compared with the Republic of Srpska.²⁵⁴ A special attention attracts the fact that there is a correlation with some political structures (the SDA party) which provide financial and material help on a local level.²⁵⁵ Previous research have shown that, in some of these clubs, military trainings are being conducted which, “besides its recreational function, also possess a religious one, because the ideas of Islamist extremism are being introduced into the activity of clubs”.²⁵⁶ We have noticed a large number of individuals who are at the same time members of these airsoft clubs and members of the Wahhabi movement²⁵⁷, especially when speaking of clubs “Crna Munja” from Cazin and “Lilium Bosniacum” from Travnik.

In airsoft clubs, members of the B&H Armed Forces can be found as well.²⁵⁸ The reasons for the presence of individuals from the ranks of the B&H Armed Forces in airsoft can be sports, gathering, but also a tendency to plan the transfer of knowledge and skills to airsoft club members.²⁵⁹ Because of all the previously stated, the activities of

²⁵³ In the Federation of B&H, airsoft clubs are registered as sports associations.

²⁵⁴ In-depth interview with a member of the security sector, no. 1.

²⁵⁵ In-depth interview with a member of the security sector, no. 5.

²⁵⁶ Djoric Marija, *Violent Extremism and Sports in the Western Balkans*, RAN. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023, p. 11.

²⁵⁷ We cannot say that all Wahhabis are extremists, but it is quite indicative that the largest number of individuals from the territory of Western Balkans (including B&H) who joined terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq were recruited within illegal Islamic objects (the so-called para-jamaats and para-masjids) controlled by the Wahhabis. It is evident that Wahhabism represents a radical interpretation of Islam, but some individuals from this movement even openly promote religious extremism.

²⁵⁸ In-depth interview with a member of the security sector, no. 5.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

airsoft clubs are closely monitored by EUFOR, which follows their development regularly.

To survive as sports associations, airsoft clubs in the Federation of B&H must ensure financing as well, which is usually gathered through sponsorship, membership fees, and donations. An inflow of funds from local communities is also visible, within which Bužim and Cazin Municipalities especially stand out, as well as other municipalities of the Tuzla Canton. Some clubs organize their activities in the field, often in villages, at destroyed infrastructures abandoned by the Serbian population in the previous war. There is also cooperation on a regional level, and thus, clubs from the Federation of B&H usually cooperate with clubs from Croatia and Slovenia, while such cooperation is minor (or inexistent) in the case of clubs from Serbia.

Among the existing airsoft clubs, the “Crna Munja” club especially stands out, founded in 2010 in Cazin Municipality (in the Ćoralici settlement). This club is quite organized in a vertical command chain, which brings it closer to the organizational level of modern special units. A significant role of religion, that is, Islam, is noticeable in the club, and so the club members are forbidden to consume alcohol; they are asked to behave and live in accordance with Islam, to regularly go to mosques, etc.²⁶⁰ Their media position is quite well set, because besides having a proactive web page, they also have their own social network profiles, where, besides sporting principles, political messages are visible as well, in which some members express extreme national and religious rhetoric.²⁶¹

In the security context, it is also interesting to analyse the “Lilium Bosniacum” club, founded in 2013, in Travnik. Members of this club conduct training on the plateau of the Vlašić Mountain, and one of the polygons used for training is stationed in Gostilj, near the Kneževo-Travnik highway. It is important to stress that, in their rhetoric, they call upon the achievements and traditions of the B/H Army (for example, they are regularly present at the annual

²⁶⁰ In-depth interview with a journalist, no. 2.

²⁶¹ “This rhetoric most often leads to previous war conflicts and the promotion of the need of Bosniaks to be ready for some new war conflicts in the Balkans”. According to: In-depth interview with the member of the security sector, no. 1.

commemoration of the takeover of the Vlačić Mountain plateau)²⁶², with a display of war flags. They also exhibit tendencies to promote religious (Islamic) phenomena in their activities, which is clearly seen in the photographs depicting religious rituals and the inclination of some members towards Wahhabism.

Besides sports and recreation, among a significant number of airsoft clubs in B&H, we have registered an inclination towards religious indoctrination (with a predominantly Wahhabi omen), a link with political structures (which finance them to the biggest extent) on a local level, as well as a correlation among some members with the warfare rhetoric (from the 1990s). Besides that, the territorial distribution of clubs should be given attention as well. The majority of airsoft clubs from the Federation of the B&H are distributed in three regions: Zenica-Tuzla, Una-Sana, and the Sarajevo region. It is also interesting that the majority of these clubs lie on the entity border between the Federation of B&H and the Republic of Srpska.

What security implications do airsoft clubs pose in the territory of the Federation of B&H?

- Bearing in mind that individuals who practice airsoft activities training under the principle of special military and police units, as well as that they use replicas which are by their weight and shape quite similar to real weapons, it can be concluded that they are militarily trained quite well (under the condition that they regularly practice these activities), and thus can represent a form of potential unofficial armed forces. Through regular airsoft activities, people meet each other, a feeling of belonging to a group is created, as well as the sense of coherency and loyalty (similar to that in military units). We cannot help but notice their good knowledge of the field, which is quite significant in the security context of a country.
- Due to the specific sociopolitical situation in B&H, a possibility of infiltration of the Wahhabi groups into airsoft clubs is created, whereas they could train militarily undisturbed under the guise of sporting activities.²⁶³

²⁶² Similar activities are being organized by the “Crna Munja” club, also with a symbolic name – “the Cazin Offensive”, thus creating association with the war actions of the B&H Army with its name itself.

²⁶³ In-depth interview with a member of the security sector, no. 5.

- Many clubs conduct their activities in abandoned villages previously inhabited by the Serbian population, where, in fact, they are using the properties devastated by war for military training in the field. The question arises whether these places were chosen by chance for training and how the population that fled reacts to that.

Sports can have a dual role in a society. On one hand, it can seem integrative and link heterogeneous elements of a society under the motto of one team, victory, collective spirit, etc. On the other, exactly sports can be a factor of disintegration of a society, if it is infiltrated in a negative way by politics, crime, or radicalization that leads to extremism. Combat sports have shown numerous benefits (especially in the context of mental health), but also some risks as well, when speaking of their abuse for political or ideological purposes. On a global level, martial arts clubs are usually linked with the extreme right wing, while in the territory of B&H, this inclination is more visible in the context of religious extremism. If we add to all of this the fact that there are individuals directly linked with the criminal milieu, this phenomenon becomes far more complex, and thus, we should pay attention to its further development.

Regarding airsoft, as a sport, it is quite new, but it is gaining increased popularity not only on a global level but in our region as well. The inflow of religious indoctrination (primarily Wahhabism) into airsoft clubs in the territory of B&H is, from the security standpoint, quite an indicative issue to be followed in the years to come. By all means, airsoft is definitely a type of sport and entertainment first, but it can also represent a platform for the development of some security phenomena that should be further analysed.

Based on all the said previously, we confirm the initially set hypothesis that martial arts and airsoft clubs in B&H can pose a potential security threat due to the links of some of their membership with religious extremism and/or crime.

2.6. WORKING WITH FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES – SOME EUROPEAN EXAMPLES FROM THE PRACTICE

France

France will be interesting for analysis, as an example of a country that has, for years, been at the top of European countries per the number of arrested terrorists²⁶⁴, but also because it has created numerous programs for the return of terrorists and their families from Syria and Iraq. Even ten years ago, this country launched one of the first centres (boardings) for deradicalization, called CPIC in Beaumont-sur-Vernon.²⁶⁵ The boarding was created to house young people aged 18 to 30, who were supposed to be under the care of experts. The program attended by the participants was of a voluntary character, and consisted of various segments: philosophy, history, religion, media, sports, etc. The idea was for it to last for ten months, and the goal was to “set on a right path” the young people who supported the ideology of jihadism. One of such centres was launched in the Château de Pontourny, a castle from the 18th century, but it failed soon. Even though about 2.5 million euros were invested in this project (which employed 27 individuals, among whom were psychologists, psychiatrists, and special educators), it was soon closed.²⁶⁶

Even though it is difficult to state a precise number, it is believed that France has over 1,500 foreign terrorist fighters who departed for Syria and Iraq, which puts it at the top among the EU countries.²⁶⁷ Interestingly, a large number of women departed for the “Islamic State” caliphate (over 30%), when compared to other European countries.

This country is no longer striving towards the deradicalization process, but towards the so-called de-engagement process. This

²⁶⁴ For further information, see TE-SAT annual reports.

²⁶⁵ Western France

²⁶⁶ According to: Djoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institute for Political Studies, Belgrade, 2021, p. 84.

²⁶⁷ <https://www.foreignterroristfighters.info/country/fr>, 25.10.2025.

means that France no longer intends to eliminate the belief system based among the real or potential extremists (and terrorists) on violence, but is attempting to at least prevent the act of conducting violence. In simple words, it can be said as follows: the country is not interested in the value system of an individual, but only wants to prevent terrorist acts.

The Interministerial Committee for Prevention of Delinquency and Radicalization (*Comité interministeriel de prévention de la délinquance et de la radicalisation – CIPDR*) is the main institution in France dealing with the issue of prevention of radicalization and violent extremism. Within it, there is a Secretariat which is, as an administrative body, in charge of solving problems in practice and on a local level.

Some research²⁶⁸ show that three events were pivotal for the generation of extremism in the French society: 1) The killing of teacher Samuel Paty by a jihadi terrorist in 2020; 2) The neo-Nazi attack on the then President Jacques Chirac in 2002; 3) Vandal attacks and car incinerations organized by left-wing oriented extremists in 2016.

When speaking of the legislation, France adopted on August 24, 2021, a Law on the “Respect of the Republic”, known also as the law “against separatism”, under which religious extremists are disabled from creating parallel structures of powers (that are conflicting with the values of the French Republic). Before that, on July 30, it adopted the Law on the Fight Against Terrorism and Intelligence Activities, thus extending the powers of state institutions. In fact, the state permanently introduced some measures previously introduced during the state of emergency imposed in 2020, which imply immediate searches and seizures, the use of algorithms for data analysis on the Internet, visits to suspected terrorists, and closure of security-indicative religious places, for which it is determined to have been promoting radical Islam or any ideology of violence.

All adult foreign terrorist fighters returning to France have been systematically criminally prosecuted since 2016. Minors, depending on their age, can face a legal procedure if they are suspected of taking part in terrorist activities. Minors for whom it has not been

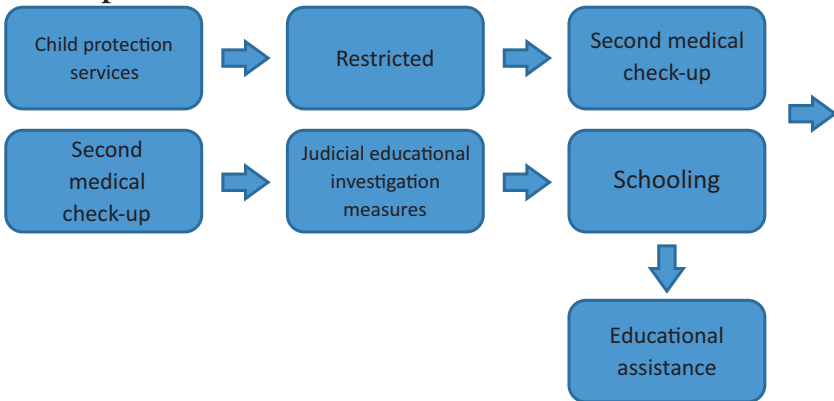
²⁶⁸ Stephen W Sawyer, Roman Zinigrad, Trends of Radicalisation in France, *The American University of Paris*. 2021, <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-04471773/file/France-D3.2-country-report.pdf>

proven that they took part in terrorist activities are included in a comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration program.

What is the procedure for underage returnees, i.e., children?

1. First, they have a medical check-up
2. Then, children are taken to the children's protection service
3. Second medical check-up
4. Conducting judicial investigation with educational measures
5. Schooling

The procedure for children returnees²⁶⁹:



The unit for radicalization assessment (consisting of trained professionals and experts) conducts an eight-week-long evaluation in regular detention or isolation. Here, the de-engagement treatment is specifically conducted, involving the work of mediators, psychologists, and religious teachers, among others. According to the most recent data, the creation of five such units is planned, able to cover 183 places in which these assessments would be conducted.²⁷⁰

The departmental unit for the prevention of radicalization and family support has quite a significant goal it wishes to reach – identifying the cause of radicalization of individuals and entire families. After that, the assessment of the de-engagement potential is conducted. This is why this body for the prevention of radicalization is working on the following processes:²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ This scheme was taken from an international meeting subject to the Chatham house rules.

²⁷⁰ Chatham house rules.

²⁷¹ Taken from the international meeting of an expert group (Chatham House rule).

- Help to develop social potential.
- Help to develop critical thinking, freedom of thought.
- Support families to consolidate their bonds and to face psychological distress.
- Support socio-professional accompaniment and access to rights.

The data for 2024 from France are quite interesting, given that, to a great extent, they shed light on the state of extremism and radicalization.²⁷²

- 362 families are being monitored in the context of the prevention of extremism and radicalization.
- 5,000 individuals are under some sort of monitoring (there is a slight increase in comparison to 2023).
- 56% are men.
- 63% are younger than 18.

Germany

The German Federal Domestic Intelligence Service (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*) estimates that more than 1,050 people departed from Germany for Syria and Iraq to join a terrorist organization.²⁷³ According to other estimates, this number has risen to 1,150.²⁷⁴ The statistics show that males were the ones dominantly departing (79%), while women were a minority (21%), as well as that they were usually younger people, with an average age²⁷⁵ of a German foreign terrorist fighter being 25.8 years old.²⁷⁶

In Germany, there are several programs focused on the deradicalization of the returnees from war zones. Programs dealing with children and the youth, such as the *PERSIST* program (Project on the long-term Education, Rehabilitation and Social Integration

²⁷² Chatham House rule

²⁷³ <https://icct.nl/publication/germany-and-its-returning-foreign-terrorist-fighters-new-loss-citizenship-law>, 09.11.2025.

²⁷⁴ Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, 'Verfassungsschutzbericht 2022', Bericht, 20 Juni 2023, p. 183.

²⁷⁵ The age of foreign terrorist fighters from Germany ranged from 13 to 62 years old. Heinke Daniel, German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: The Updated Data and its Implications, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/german-foreign-fighters-in-syria-and-iraq-the-updated-data-and-its-implications/>, 01.11.2025.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

of children in extremism-affiliated family Structures), are especially interesting. This program, conducted under the jurisdiction of BAMF (Federal Ministry of Migration and Refugees), was launched in January 2024, and it is supposed to last until December 2026. The primary goal of the program is to ensure that children from families linked with extremism get the needed (long-term) support to fulfil their social, emotional, and educational needs.

The current experience has shown that the biggest challenges to children from such problematic families are as follows:

- Emotional dysregulation
- Concentration issues
- Attachment disorders
- Cognitive developmental delays
- PTSD, depression, anxiety

During the course of the project, their needs were listed in the following order:

- Mediation: Family dynamics and attachment styles;
- Emotional Support: Self-regulation, identity strengthening, inclusion;
- Trauma management, dealing with secrets, coping with experiences (also for parents);
- Cognitive education and learning support.

In time, it turned out that there are some challenges in the cooperation between the competent authorities, such as the inexistence of a formal communication system for the exchange of data and the fact that different institutions speak “different languages”. Moreover, it should be stressed that not all institutions are proficient enough to deal with this subject, and that the question of child-returnees and children from radicalized families asks for additional education and, of course, an individual approach.

The *PERSIST* program pays special attention to mothers with children returning to their countries of origin. The experience has shown that these children are, at least, traumatized; they also exhibit developmental delays (which is especially visible in cases of very young children), and they need assistance in learning (school). Many child-returnees do not even speak the language of the country in which they possess citizenship, and thus, this is another problem in their re-socialization and rehabilitation.

This program has shown that there is also a specific problem within the family dynamics of the returnees. Namely, upon their return to their countries, children are often taken to foster families, and thus, there is often a conflict occurring between the mother and the foster family. Even though the idea of introducing foster families is good (especially if mothers are being processed), cultural and linguistic differences, and thus, misunderstanding, can occur, as well as the introduction of a large number of (unnecessary) actors, etc. With mothers, the lack of cognitive and emotional capacities, denial, and difficulties in understanding the problem could arise as well. All the previously said clearly shows that the deradicalization processes are quite complex, complicated, and require an individual approach.

On an institutional level, a need for the protection of data is identified, as well as trust-building. There is a big void in the interinstitutional cooperation (which is an increasingly common issue in the majority of European countries). On a practical level, the attention is directed towards different measures (up until now, 11 of them) dealing with the protection of children and providing support. Counselling centres for mothers and mediators who are in charge of mediating potential conflicts between mothers of children and their foster families have been established. In the long run, children are solely victims of their parents' decisions that pushed them into the process of radicalization (and/or traumatization). We will list several most common problems faced by child-returnees from the war zones:

- They did not have suitable medical assistance, which reflected on their psycho-physical health.
- They are not in the system, because they are not listed in the birth registry, and thus do not possess any personal identification documents.
- Their motoric skills are limited.
- Parents (predominantly fathers) forbid children from attending public schools.

The Grin Bird (*Grüner Vogel*)²⁷⁷ is a non-governmental organization in Germany that cooperates with state institutions (BAMF/BMI) with the goal of providing tertiary prevention of

²⁷⁷ The phrase "green bird" is also a metaphor referring to the belief that the souls of the fallen Islamic fighters (martyrs) are carried in the hearts of green birds into heaven, which is a concept mentioned in the book "The Hearts of Green Birds: The Martyrs of Bosnia". By the way, this phrase is often used by supporters of the

extremism and terrorism, as well as conducting de-engagement. With offices in Bonn and Berlin, it actively works on a large number of cases dealing with extremism, foreign terrorist fighters, domestic terrorism, and Islamist terrorism. Until the time being, they have worked on over 100 practical cases linked with their field of research. Since 2021, the Green Bird has been part of the Federal Working Group on Religiously Motivated Extremism (*BAG ReEx*), and since 2024, it has participated in the Task Force on Islamism Prevention of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI).²⁷⁸

One of the most significant projects of this NGO is named “Nasiha” (Arabic: sincere advice, counselling); it is a program of preventive character, created to deter all young people tempted to join an extremist organization (with the ideology of jihadism and Salafism). A special emphasis is put on the indirect, that is, online radicalization, taking place on social networks and different *Messenger* groups, primarily directed towards children and youth. This project has a significant advisory role for everyone ready to seek help. Since 2012, the “Nasiha” project has had an advisory approach within the Counselling Centre Leben, funded by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF).

When does the “Nasiha” project work? There are several risky situations when actions must be taken immediately:

1. In case an individual is following and supporting the “Islamic State” (and similar terrorist organizations) propaganda and/or is calling for violence to a great extent.
2. In a case when an individual is preparing to depart for a conflict zone.
3. When they are glorifying the idea of killing the “infidels” or promoting armed jihad.

The “Nasiha” project, as part of The Green Bird organization, is spreading its message to the youth target groups in several ways: via flyers, podcasts, and very interesting and up-to-date publications.²⁷⁹

terrorist organization “Islamic State” to support the ideology of terrorism (often through emojis), and, at the same time, avoid censorship.

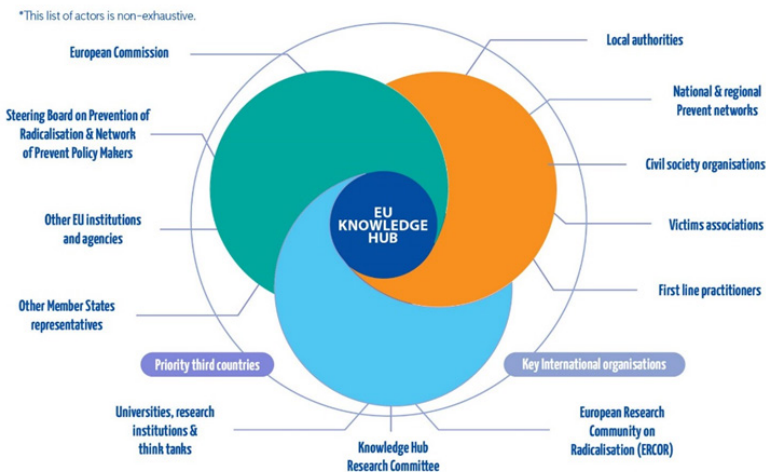
²⁷⁸ <https://gruenervogel.de/ueber-uns/netzwerk/>, 10.11.2025.

²⁷⁹ See more in: https://gruenervogel.de/wpcontent/uploads/2025/07/GruenerVogel_Fachtag_2025_Jugendradikalisierung.pdf

European Union

The EUKH (EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation) is the major initiative aimed at bolstering the EU's efforts against radicalization leading to violent extremism and terrorism. The idea for the creation of this Hub came from the EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda 2020. Here, we are speaking of a significant initiative of the European Commission, gathering experts (academicians, practitioners, the NGO sector, politicians, etc.) who deal with researching extremism through various forms of topical panels.

Even though the EUKH is, by its nature, predominantly oriented towards the EU Member States, in its activities, it by all means also includes other non-EU Member States (such as, for example, the Western Balkans countries). Seven such topical panels meet periodically on an annual basis. Each panel is led by two co-leaders, who use a multidisciplinary and multiagency approach in solving the issue of radicalization and extremism. The topical panels have a fixed membership during their mandate, but it is a common practice to invite *ad-hoc* experts from the side if a specific topic requires such action. The EU Knowledge Hub has a significant role in the predictive analysis of events, since it often shows potential event scenarios, from which the participants could draw many lessons and gather necessary experience.



Source: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/eu-knowledge-hub-prevention-radicalisation/about-eu-knowledge-hub-prevention-radicalisation_en

What are the EUKH activities?

There are several significant activities taken up by the EUKH to prevent extremism and radicalization. We are speaking of various events, such as professional trainings (online and live), study visits, mentorship programs, various research projects, and all this in the context of establishing strategic communication and prevention of radicalization. The Board of Directors (which consists of representatives of all EU Member States) is in charge of selecting the topics that will be included in the said activities. Besides that, they can also ensure additional consultations for the topics asked for not only by member states, but also by some other priority countries.

The listed examples from the EU show that each country is developing its own programs and expert teams to prepare for the final return of terrorists and their families from the Syrian war zone in a timely fashion. However, it can be noticed that we still do not possess practical proof of the efficiency of these programs, which is completely understandable, because the program evaluation process asks for one thing: time. And exactly time will tell how prepared each country was for facing this issue. How much the countries of the Western Balkans will learn from the experiences of European countries depends primarily on the compatibility of the problems faced by each country in the process of repatriation of returnees. On the other hand, it is also evident that the EU has much to learn thanks to the experiences of the countries belonging to the Western Balkans. One thing is for sure: the repatriation process of returnees from the Syrian battlefield will not be easy at all; it will require time, patience, knowledge, and above all, cooperation between states.

2.7. ROLE OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY TERRORISM: VICTIMS, PERPETRATORS, OR SOMETHING ELSE?²⁸⁰

Women in terrorist activities are quite an interesting and controversial occurrence for the theoreticians and practitioners who deal with researching this phenomenon. There are several reasons why it is like that. First of all, the high level of prejudices regarding women being perceived exclusively as “more beautiful”, “gentler” and “weaker” sex, which cannot be connected with such a destructive phenomenon as terrorism, has played a significant role in the wrong perception of this occurrence. Another problem emerges from the fact that, for many centuries, politics was exclusively “a male activity”, in which women could not participate. Keeping in mind that terrorism is a *par excellence* political phenomenon, it is logical that the role of women is underestimated here as well.

The reality is somewhat different from the said presumptions, and thus, the different roles women can have in contemporary terrorist organizations must be carefully analysed. This is especially important since the significance and the role of women in terrorist organizations intensified to a great extent since the rise of the “Islamic State” (in 2014). Until nowadays, women were usually perceived through two roles in the context of terrorism: as victims or as perpetrators. However, recently it was discovered that there is another quite significant role, which is the role of a woman as a mother. In the following segment, we will see how a mother can act dualistically in the context of security and terrorism.

To grasp this occurrence as best as possible, we will first explain the genesis of the role of women in politics, the positioning of women in different forms of terrorism (as a type of political violence), and finally, the roles they can play in terrorist activities.

²⁸⁰ This segment was taken from the following paper: Djoric Marija, „Uloge žena u savremenom terorizmu: izvršioći, žrtve ili nešto treće?“, *Srpska politička misao*, No. 1, 2024, pp. 77–100.

2.7.1. Women and politics

To understand the role of women in terrorist activities, we should start by stating the fact that terrorism is a predominantly political phenomenon. This is exactly why it is necessary to look back on the participation of women in political life. Our first “gathered knowledge on politics”, as stated by Ljubomir Tadić, comes from Ancient Greece, where politics was derived from the Greek word *polis*, meaning a city-state, and which was, at the time, synonymous with public life²⁸¹. This public life was exclusively reserved for single men, while foreigners and slaves were ostracized from politics. In contrast to the public, there was also the private sphere, known as *oikos*, that is, the infield, dedicated to women. Life in *oikos* represented some sort of a hideout and referred to all of them who supported themselves by physical labour (including women). From this originated the opinion still present in many societies even today, that women are exclusively meant to be “at home”, and that politics is a predominantly “male thing”. Tadić believes that such *fossil* beliefs were preserved in all “archaic patriarchal communities in which the woman remained the slave of a man”.²⁸²

From the Ancient period until nowadays, much time has passed, yet it still seems that, even though women participate in political life, this sphere of society remains predominantly “male”. The impression might be different if we look at, for example, the Nordic countries²⁸³, which lead the way in terms of gender equality and the presence of women in political institutions.²⁸⁴ On the other hand, if we take into consideration the global level, it is clear that women are far behind men when speaking of participation in political life, to which clearly testifies the UN statistic. In only 26 countries out of the total number of UN Member States, women are at the head of the government or presidents of states, which means, if we maintain this tempo, gender equality in the highest governmental positions

²⁸¹ Tadić Ljubomir, *Nauka o politici*, Rad, Beograd, 1988, p. 17.

²⁸² Ibid. p. 27.

²⁸³ Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Island. Besides them, New Zealand has maintained a top position in this statistic for years, when speaking of women's rights.

²⁸⁴ <https://www.statista.com/topics/6092/women-in-politics-in-nordic-countries/#topicOverview>, 29.11.2024.

will not be achieved even in the next 130 years.²⁸⁵ When speaking of the executive government, the total number of women in ministerial positions equates to 22.8%, while regarding parliaments, this number is 26.5%.²⁸⁶

Bearing in mind the previously mentioned statistics, it is not hard to conclude that, on a global level, men still maintain the dominant position in political life in comparison to women. Among other things, this refers to terrorism as well, which is a form of political violence and is thus deemed a political phenomenon. Even though women, quantitatively speaking, are less present in terrorist organizations than men, this does not mean that this position is not changing. On the contrary, women are gaining an increasing role in terrorism, which is, among other things, conditioned by the ideology of terrorist groups as well.

2.7.2. Is terrorism exclusively “male”?

To understand the role of women in terrorist organizations, we should go back to the 19th century, when terrorism emerged as a relatively new political phenomenon. Even though there are different assumptions regarding forerunners of terrorists (Tagis, Zelotes, Assassins) who *de facto* existed as such, contemporary terrorism emerged only in the 19th century, in the cradle of Tzarist Russia. Even then, the so-called revolutionary organizations, which started conducting terrorist activities, were active. One of such organizations was the “Narodnaya Volya”, to which Sofiya Perovskaya (*Софья Львовна Перовская*),²⁸⁷ who participated in the assassination of the Russian Tzar Alexander II, belonged.²⁸⁸ Before her, Vera Zasulich

²⁸⁵ <https://www.nwomens.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>, 30.11.2024.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ At the same time, she was also the first woman to be executed for political reasons in Russia.

²⁸⁸ Sofiya Perovskaya participated in the third assassination attempt against the Tzar, while in the first attempt, one woman was also involved – Vera Finger. See more in: Chaliand Gérard, Blin Arnaud, *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to ISIS*, University of California Press, Oakland (California), 2016, p. 148.

(Вера Ивановна Засулич)²⁸⁹ became famous among the anarchist circles, as she shot the Governor of Petersburg, Fyodor Trepov (Фёдор Фёдорович Трёпов).²⁹⁰ Thus, we won't make a mistake if we state that terrorism was first born as a "child" of anarchist organizations, in which prominent roles were held by women as well.

Contemporary research shows that women make up 20-30% of membership in terrorist organizations²⁹¹. This percentage is confirmed by the Europol report (TE-SAT) from 2023. Namely, out of the total number of arrested individuals suspected of acts of terrorism, 27% are women (which is one-third, which, by the way, correlates to female membership in terrorist organizations).²⁹² Participation of women in terrorism is conditioned by the type of terrorist ideology as well. Thus, this percentage is somewhat higher in organizations with leftist ideology and often surpasses one-third. The reasons for more women finding their places in leftist terrorist organizations can be explained by the fact that the left-wing ideology supports more gender equality in comparison to other ideologies. In this context, we can also mention some terrorist organizations of leftist ideological provenance in which women were leaders, such as Ulrike Meinhof (leader of "RAF"²⁹³), Fusako Shigenobu (who was the leader of "JRA"), etc.

One of the most often asked questions within the gender approach to terrorism is the following: Why are women joining terrorist organizations? Even though it is hard to give a one-sided and monocausal response, some researchers attempted to denote it to a handful of factors. And so, Mia Bloom believed that the response could be found in the so-called 4Rs: *Revenge, Redemption, Respect,*

²⁸⁹ Vera Zasulich shot the Governor in 1878, and three years later, in 1881, Sofiya Perovskaya assassinated the Tzar.

²⁹⁰ Hilbrenner Anke, "The Perovskaia Paradox or the Scandal of Female Terrorism in Nineteenth Century Russia", *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*, No. 17, 2016.

²⁹¹ Brigitte Nacos, "The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, No. 5, 2005, pp. 435–451.

²⁹² <https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/European%20Union%20Terrorism%20Situation%20and%20Trend%20report%202023.pdf>, 28.11.2023.

²⁹³ This group was also known by another name: the "Baader-Meinhof" group (*Baader-Meinhof-Gruppe*), named after its leaders, Ulrike Meinhof and Andreas Baader.

and *Relationship*.²⁹⁴ If we analyse each of them individually, we will see that many women joined terrorist organizations to avenge the death of someone from their close environment or a family member. The second reason, explained as salvation, is the inability to make a different choice (due to direct or indirect blackmail or fleeing from rigid social norms). Thus, women opt for participation in terrorism. The next reason is the respect women can gain by participation in terrorism, which is quite important, especially in primitive and conservative communities, in which women are still perceived as the “third order” citizens. Finally, which refers to creating relationships, corresponds to the female emotional nature, given that they could, due to their dedication to a partner or some other member of their close surrounding (a friend or a relative), join terrorism. These are only some of the most common reasons for women to opt to join terrorist organizations, but not the only ones. Women take up the path towards terrorism due to numerous personal reasons, among which are the following: the wish for emancipation, fleeing arranged marriages, the sense of injustice (especially compassion with their collectivity), blackmail, adventurism (present predominantly among younger women), etc. The reasons are different. Thus, we cannot generalize the role of women, since every form of radicalization leading to terrorism (or violent extremism) is exclusively individual. However, what differentiates women from men in terms of terrorism is an expressed emotional dimension. This does not mean that men are “emotionless” in comparison to women, but that the decisions of women are much more intensively impacted by emotions, which is quite an important thing to know in terms of counter-terrorism.

There are studies on violent criminal acts (including terrorism) which show the difference between men and women in terms of mental disorders, speaking of the structure of the female emotional being.²⁹⁵ While addiction diseases, narcissistic and sexual disorders, antisocial disorders, etc., were all diagnosed among the male population, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and borderline

²⁹⁴ Bloom Mia, “Death Becomes Her: The Changing Nature of Women’s Role in Terror”, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, No. 1, 2010, p. 95.

²⁹⁵ It should be stressed that it has not been proven yet that the percentage of terrorists suffering from mental diseases is higher when compared to the general population. It is believed that the percentage is somewhat equal.

personality disorder were usually identified among women.²⁹⁶ Other studies showed that female perpetrators of violent criminal offences were, in most cases, neglected, emotionally, physically, and sexually abused, and expressed low levels of self-respect.²⁹⁷ All the previously mentioned indicate that the so-called gender approach to the analysis of terrorist activities, and thus prevention, but also the fight against terrorism, is needed.

Nowadays, terrorist acts in which women participate are on the rise²⁹⁸, and this is an indisputable fact. This issue was especially made current with the emergence of the “Islamic State” terrorist organization, which included women in their terrorist activities. It is important to note that women made up 16% of members of this terrorist organization, which will be quite a significant security issue upon their return to their countries of origin.²⁹⁹

What is significant to be analysed is the following: Why is female participation in terrorism still intriguing to both researchers and laymen? Besides the previously mentioned prejudices, it should be stated that a terrorist attack conducted by a woman attracts more attention (this, at the same time, suits the terrorists, due to the spectacularity to which they strive). Moreover, one should bear in mind that an increasing number of women are joining terrorist groups, thus justifying the need to research this occurrence.

To understand the role of women in terrorism, it is significant to approach this issue objectively, with no prejudices. Besides that, we must distinguish it from other similar terms to conduct an expert analysis. Hence, at the beginning, we should distinguish between a terrorist act and a terrorist activity. While the former represents a short-lived, at the same time, the most violent part of terrorism, terrorist activity, besides the fact that it includes a terrorist act, also implies the recruitment process, money laundering, planning, courier

²⁹⁶ De Vogel V, Stam J, Bouman YHA, Ter Horst P, Lancel M. “Violent women: A multicentre study into gender differences in forensic psychiatric patients”, *Forensic Psychiat Psychol*, No. 27, 2016, pp. 145–168.

²⁹⁷ Muller Eline, Kempes Maaik, Gender differences in a Dutch forensic sample of severe violent offenders”, *Int Forensic Mental Health*, No. 15, 2016, pp. 164–173.

²⁹⁸ Bigio, Jamille, and Rachel Vogelstein, “Understanding Women’s Roles in Terrorism”, *Women and Terrorism: Hidden Threats, Forgotten Partners*, Council on Foreign Relations, 2019, pp. 3–15.

²⁹⁹ Ali H. „The Rise and Fall of Islamic State: Current Challenges and Future Prospects”, *Asian Affairs* No. 2020, pp. 71–94.

services, etc.³⁰⁰ Thus, we can ascertain that women are more included in the terrorist activity process than in the “crescendo” of terrorism itself, which we define as – a terrorist act. Women usually played a significant role in preparational activities, such as the radicalization process; they served as couriers, participated in money laundering, and served as support in general. Keeping in mind all the previously acquired knowledge on the role of women in terrorism since the 19th century (when this phenomenon emerged), until modern times, it can be stated that women play three crucial roles in terrorist activities:

1. Women as perpetrators of terrorist activities
2. Women as victims of terrorism
3. Women as mothers (this role is of a dual nature, which will be examined in detail in the following segment of this book).

2.7.3. Women as perpetrators of terrorist activities

Women participate in different forms of political violence, including terrorism. It is an accepted fact that, during the last few decades, they actively participated in over 60% of armed rebel groups.³⁰¹ In accordance with some research, women took up the leadership role in more than one-third of rebel movements from 1990-2008.³⁰² The role of women in political violence was talked about actively in the seventies and nineties of the 20th century, when guerrilla movements, in which women participated as equals with men, emerged in Latin America.

When Eileen MacDonald published in 1991 a book with an intriguing title - *Shoot the Women First*, many prejudices were proven untrue. This author stated that, when dealing with terrorists, the woman (terrorist) should be killed first, because it is believed that there are great chances that she will shoot you first. MacDonald stressed the following observation: “Women terrorists have much

³⁰⁰ Simeunović Dragan, *Terorizam*, Pravni fakultet, Beograd, 2009, p. 70.

³⁰¹ Bigio Jammille, Rachel Vogelstein, “UNDERSTANDING WOMEN’S ROLES IN TERRORISM.” *Women and Terrorism: Hidden Threats, Forgotten Partners*. Council on Foreign Relations, 2019.

³⁰² Alexis Leanna Henshaw, “Where Women Rebel”, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, No. 3, 2015.

stronger character, demonstrate greater power, and more energy than men”.³⁰³

The role of women in terrorist organizations is to a great extent conditioned by the type of terrorist organization as well, that is, by its ideology. It is a known fact that, in left-wing terrorist organizations, women often performed even leadership roles (we have previously given the examples of Ulrike Meinhof and Fusako Shigenobu). The example of the German left-wing organization RAF is especially interesting, in which women made up 50% of membership, and up to 80% of sympathizers and supporters of this terrorist organization were representatives of the “gentler sex”.³⁰⁴ The situation is similar to the Colombian organization *FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia)*, which often fluctuates from guerrilla to terrorism and vice versa), in which women made up 40% of membership, and even were found on all operative functions, including leadership.³⁰⁵ The “Tamil Tigers” have a vast number of women fighting for their ideology (they make up one-third of the membership), and in the 1980s of the 20th century, they formed a unit consisting exclusively of female members – “Women’s Front of Liberation Tigers”. Later, some members of this female group even became members of the elite special unit “Black Tigers”, which specialized in suicide attacks.

Regarding left-wing terrorist organizations, it is clear why women join them, thanks to their value system. The question that should be asked is the following – What is making women participate in an organization predominantly based on misogyny (such as right-wing and Islamist terrorist organizations)? Already in their programs (and then in practice), these organizations explicitly express that women are not equal to men, and thus should have a subordinate role. A good example can be found in the “Ku Klux Klan” organization³⁰⁶, which

³⁰³ MacDonald Eileen, *Shoot the Women First*, Random House, New York, 1991, p. 222.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 198.

³⁰⁵ Bigio, Jamille, and Rachel Vogelstein. “Understanding Women’s Roles in Terrorism.” *Women and Terrorism: Hidden Threats, Forgotten Partners*. Council on Foreign Relations, 2019. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21428.4>.

³⁰⁶ The FBI defines the “Ku Klux Klan” as a terrorist organization belonging to the corpus of *homegrown*, that is, “domestic” terrorism. According to: Martin Gus, *Understanding terrorism: challenges, perspectives, and issues*, Sage, Los Angeles, 2010, p. 34.

inherited its ideology from racism and religious fundamentalism³⁰⁷, and which had a vast number of female supporters. It is believed that in 1939, this organization had three million members, of whom half a million were women.³⁰⁸ The explanation for the great popularity of this racist organization among women can be found in the fact that the “Klan” constantly stressed that white women are biologically endangered by the “enemy” black race³⁰⁹. Another explanation can be found in the wish of women to participate³¹⁰ in any way in politics, even if at least through this type of racist organization.³¹¹ Contemporary extreme right-wing organizations nourish the idea of “hyper-masculinization” and anti-feminism, expressed by their female members as well. The right-wing influencer Lauren Southern said the following on this topic: “I believe anyone who supports feminism is anti-woman, even if they are not conscious of it”³¹².

There are more examples of the participation of women in contemporary Islamist organizations, which have especially intensified in the last decade.³¹³ So, for example, “ Hamas” changed its attitude towards women in 2000, and they were not perceived anymore only as wives and mothers, but as potential perpetrators as well. Ahlam Mazen Al-Tamimi was arrested in 2001 for participation in a bombing attack. She was a former member of the “Al-Qassam Brigades”, “ Hamas” military wing, and their first female member. During 2015-2016, women carried out 15.8% of attacks in the name of Hamas (27 out of 170).³¹⁴ The first suicide attack for the needs of the Palestinian organization “Fatah” was conducted by Wafaa Idris in 2002. The Middle Eastern organizations were joined by women originating from Europe as well, and thus, Murial Degauque from

³⁰⁷ We are speaking of extremism within the Protestant denomination.

³⁰⁸ Blee Kathleen, *Women of the Klan*, University of California Press, Berkeley (Calif.), London, 2009.

³⁰⁹ Later the circle of “enemies” spread to Hispanic Americans, Catholics, etc.

³¹⁰ Also explained as negative emancipation of women.

³¹¹ Djoric Marija, „Kju kluks klan kao međunarodna ekstremistička organizacija“, *Kultura polisa*, No. 29, 2016, pp. 527–539.

³¹² Alexander Audrey (ed.), *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender & Violent Extremism*, The George Washington University, Washington D.C., 2019, p. 34.

³¹³ This does not mean that this modern phenomenon of female terrorists appeared recently. The case of Leila Khaled, a Palestinian who hijacked a plane in 1969, is well-known.

³¹⁴ Op.cit: Audrey, Alexander (ed.), *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender & Violent Extremism*, p. 31.

Belgium was the first woman from Europe who, as a member of “Al-Qaeda”, conducted a terrorist attack in Iraq.³¹⁵ The majority of women originating from the West are converts, such as the so-called “white widow” Sally Jones, a British woman who, under the influence of her husband, went to Syria and was quite successful in the process of radicalizing other women.

Members of contemporary terrorist organizations are very focused on the recruitment of other women, which is done through the strengthening of the “female network”, that is, a sisterhood. Women recruiters are much more linked in their job (in comparison to men) and always appear as support for the new, potential members. ISIS often used romanticized notions of life in the idealized caliphate, marriages with heroes, and raising children in so-called ideal conditions, which appealed quite attractively to young women.

Recruitment of women via the Internet for departure to Syria was conducted through several phases, and recruiters were most often female:³¹⁶

1. First of all, the interest of women in ISIS topics would be expressed as a signal to join them;
2. Making contact via the Internet and official platforms, and social media;
3. Switching to alternative social media;
4. Isolation from the circle of close friends and departure to Syria.

Within the “Islamic State” caliphate, a special form of moral (female) police was formed under the name “Al-Khansaa Brigade”. The task of this brigade was to control morale, in which its members expressed extreme cruelty towards other women.³¹⁷ The battle for Mosul was the pivotal moment when the “Islamic State” lost its

³¹⁵ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Vivan Hagerty and Logan Macnair, *The emigrant sisters return: The growing role of the Islamic states women*, War on the Rocks, <http://warontherocks.com/2018/04/the-emigrant-sisters-return-the-growing-role-of-the-islamic-states-women>

³¹⁶ Djorić Marija, Dašić Sanja, “Recruiting Women for Terrorism via Internet in the Western Balkans”, *Terrorism and Advanced Technologies in Psychological Warfare: New Risks, New Opportunities to Counter Terrorist Threat*, ed. Darya Bazarkina, Evgeny Pashentsev, Greg Simons, NOVA Science Publisher, New York, 2020, p. 232.

³¹⁷ Breastfeeding in public would be punished most severely (e.g. by beating or cutting off the breasts), and those women who did not wear adequate clothes were punished physically (40 lashes).

territories and started including women in the conduct of terrorist acts.³¹⁸ By the way, before this moment, this terrorist organization contested the role of a woman as a terrorist, but still allowed them to defend themselves if attacked. On the other hand, “Al Qaeda of Iraq” (the forerunner of ISIS) began using women for suicide attacks in 2005. In essence, the role of a female fighter in the caliphate was not primary. *Dabique* newspaper, as the ISIS newsletter, sought female members as “wives of mujahedeen and mothers of lion cubs”.³¹⁹ Suitable roles for a woman are also a teacher, a doctor, but the role of radicalizing other women and the upbringing of children in the spirit of terrorism was the most significant.

Women often opted for terrorist acts due to their wish for revenge. The Chechen terrorist organization “Black Widows”, which consisted of women who (usually) lost a male family member in the war, speaks the best of this. They were activated in 2000 and, since then participated predominantly in suicide attacks (out of the total number of attacks, women have conducted 43% of them).³²⁰ Besides the motive of revenge, some theoreticians state that certain women opted for suicide attacks if they were victims of rape or premarital sexual relations, which degrades a woman’s reputation in conservative and primitive surroundings.³²¹ Women who, for some reason, could not become mothers also opted for such acts.³²²

In addition to the voluntary approach, we see that there is also blackmail³²³, based on which some women are forced to become part of a terrorist organization. This is a known *modus operandi* of terrorists of “Boko Haram”, who raped and then blackmailed the kidnapped girls into conducting terrorist attacks. Over 50% of suicide attacks were conducted by women from this organization.

³¹⁸ ISIS started calling women into jihad as fighters after losses in 2016-2017, via *al-Naba* and *Rumiya* newsletters.

³¹⁹ “From the battle of Al-Ahzb to the war of coalitions”, *Dabiq*, No. 11, <https://clarionproject.org/docs/Issue%2011%20-%20From%20the%20battle%20of%20AlAhzb%20to%20the%20war%20of%20coalitions.pdf>.

³²⁰ Speckhard Anne, Akhmedova Khapta, “Black Widows: The Chechen Female Suicide Terrorists”, p. 65, <https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Female-Suicide-Bombers-63-80.pdf> 06.12.2023.

³²¹ Pape Robert, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicidal Terrorism*, Melbourne: Scribe Publications, Australia, 2005, p. 210.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ Most often, they are threatened with their families being harmed.

On one occasion, a ten-year-old girl was engaged in a suicide attack in 2015, when 19 people were killed.³²⁴

It is not hard to conclude that women become perpetrators of terrorist attacks willingly but under duress as well. Because of that, some researchers differentiate between women who participate in (suicide) terrorist acts into two groups: the unfortunate and the brides³²⁵. The “unfortunates” include the women aged 30-40 who lost their close family members (above all, children)³²⁶, while “the brides” are usually girls aged 17-25 who are not married yet and who are obedient to male authorities. This author excluded one important category, which consists of women who do not want to bear the limitations of conservative environments in which they are discriminated and thus perceive the path towards their salvation and self-justification through political violence, which was usually reserved for men, which is – terrorism. Among these women arises the need for so-called emancipation in a negative way.

2.7.4. Women as victims of terrorism

Women are often victims in terrorist attacks because, above all, they belong to “soft” civilian targets.³²⁷ Besides the fact that they can be “collateral damage”, women are often tendentiously chosen as victims since some terrorist groups took revenge in this way on an entire collectivity. Violence against women who bring life to this world was, at the same time, violence against the “enemy” collectivity and often a desire for its destruction. Besides that, women predominantly stayed at home with children while men went into combat, and thus, in this way, they were easily accessible targets.

The violence inflicted on women depends on the type of terrorist organization. Until now, the research has shown that the most violent towards women are those organizations that base their value system on misogyny. In this, right-wing and Islamist organizations lead

³²⁴ Sky News, “Girl Suicide Bomber, 10, Kills 19 in Busy Market”, 11 January 2015, <https://news.sky.com/story/girl-suicide-bomber-10-kills-19-in-busy-market-10376105>

³²⁵ Juzik Julia, *Alahove nevjeste*, Zaprešić, Fraktura, 2007.

³²⁶ Or for some reason, they cannot have children.

³²⁷ The situation is similar regarding children.

the way since they view women in a discriminatory and sexist way, even though they refute this by using manipulative techniques of propaganda. What is common to both groups of extremists is the fact that they accuse their enemies of “not respecting *their* women enough”,³²⁸ and even perceive themselves as “protectors of women, picturing others as *violent*”. Therefore, for example, Islamist extremists believe that women should be “saved” from progressive Islam and Western culture, while the extreme right-wing stresses that women should be protected from the negative impact of feminism and Islamization, which, by their perception, violates (predominantly) Christian values.

The example of the Yazidi ethnic group³²⁹ can best explain to what extent women are degraded by terrorists and how they can be victims of physical, psychological, and sexual violence. To understand the hypertrophied violence inflicted by terrorists of the “Islamic State” on the members of the Yazidi community, we should first explain the root of the hostility. In fact, ISIS terrorists considered the Yazidis to be Satanists due to their religious syncretism, which includes a combination of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Manichaeism, and Zoroastrianism. Because of that, the Yazidis were targeted as a community that should be destroyed and punished, while the greatest retaliation was carried out on women.

When ISIS attacked the northeastern part of Iraq in August 2014, they captured thousands of women, who were sold as sexual slaves (*sabia*). It is believed that 3,100 people were killed, while 6,800 were kidnapped in this action.³³⁰ Among the kidnapped and killed were the women and girls, who were isolated from male members of the tribe and treated as *khums* – a war tax. The female members of the Yazidi community were subjected to various forms of violence: gang rape, forced abortion, violent religious conversion, psychical and physical punishment, abuse of family members, forced separation

³²⁸ Veljan Nejra, Čehajić Čampara Maida, *Rodne ideologije: Kako ekstremisti iskoristavaju borbe za ženska prava i pokreću recipročnu radikalizaciju*, Atlantska inicijativa, Sarajevo, 2021, p. 5.

³²⁹ They live in the parts of northern Iraq, western Iran, eastern Turkey and northern Syria.

³³⁰ Cetorelli Valeria, Sasson Isaac, Shabila Nazar, Burnham Gilbert. “Mortality and kidnapping estimates for the Yazidi population in the area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014: A retrospective household survey”. *PLoS Med.* 2017 May., <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28486492/>, 08.12.2023.

from family, starvation, forced marriage, selling in the slave market, decapitation, rape of daughters in front of mothers and mothers in front of daughters, rape of girls to death, cannibalism ...³³¹ The surviving women exhibited mental problems – more than 80% of enslaved women were diagnosed with DSM-5 (mental disorder) and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

The women who were victims of this terrorist violence also experienced stigmatization in their original communities to which they would return, which served as an additional trauma to them. The sense of exclusion by the community felt 44.6% of them, while 32.3% expressed fear that they will not get married or maintain the existing marriage because they were raped.³³² These women not only survived sexual violence by terrorists but were later abused by their husbands and brothers (who spat on them and hit them). There was one terrifying ritual among the ISIS ranks, which implied that a woman from the Yazidi community could become a “member of the caliphate”, but only in the case that at least ten members of this terrorist organization rape her before that. Some sources state that women aged 14 to 15 were raped, and there were also cases of rapes of girls aged nine and six.³³³

Punishing an entire community by rape³³⁴ of women is a method of action of the terrorist organization “Boko Haram” as well. According to reports of international organizations (*Amnesty International*), 11,200 women were raped in only 17 months in Nigeria, in the period from March 2020 to August 2021. The majority of rape cases were recorded in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe regions, where this terrorist organization was especially active. Nine years after the terrorists kidnapped 276 girls from school (in Chibok), 98 of them are still in captivity.³³⁵ The abducted girls were raped and abused in various

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Cetorelli Valeria, Sasson Isaac, Shabila Nazar, Burnham Gilbert. “Mortality and kidnapping estimates for the Yazidi population in the area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014: A retrospective household survey”. *PLoS Med.* 2017 May, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28486492/>, 08.12.2023.

³³³ Daesh's gender-based crimes against Yazidi women and girls include genocide. <https://globaljusticecenter.net/files/CounterTerrorismTalkingPoints.4.7.2016.pdf>

³³⁴ Rape and other forms of sexual violence during an armed conflict represent war crimes, based on the Roman Statute.

³³⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/nine-years-after-chibok-girls-abducted/>, 08.12.2023.

ways; some of them had to enter forced marriages with terrorists, and many were killed, too. Such violence of terrorists led to the closure of over 600 schools to prevent kidnappings of schoolgirls.³³⁶

Great atrocities against women were conducted by the “Taliban” as well, who were considered a terrorist group for many years, but who, by conquering power in Afghanistan, have now become a *regime of terror*.³³⁷ Returning to power after the departure of the American Armed Forces, the “Taliban” began terrorizing women, among whom educated ones were especially at risk. This is how the paradox occurred, given that by releasing criminals from prison, the “Taliban” just gave the “green light” for the liquidation of those female judges who participated in processing them (especially in cases of domestic violence).³³⁸ Some of them saved themselves by leaving Afghanistan with great difficulty and seeking asylum abroad. According to the UN and other international organizations (*Human Rights Watch*³³⁹ or *Amnesty International*³⁴⁰), the “Taliban” attitude towards women implies their exclusion from all public life, universities, sports fields, parks, and schools, which can be qualified as a crime against humanity.³⁴¹ Even before gaining power, the “Taliban” promoted blatant misogyny, which, among other things, they expressed even through the attempted assassination of then-sixteen-year-old girl Malala Yousafzai³⁴², who advocated for the schooling of girls in rural parts of Pakistan.³⁴³

³³⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/nine-years-after-chibok-girls-abducted/>, 07.12.2023.

³³⁷ It is important to differentiate between terror and terrorism. Terror can be conducted by the one in power, while terrorism is predominantly violence against some or someone's government. The exception is a special form of terrorism (state terrorism), which is, due to the duality of standards and ethical indications, hardly proven and identifiable on an international level.

³³⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/svet-59061818>, 13.12.2023.

³³⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/08/afghanistan-talibans-gender-crimes-against-humanity>, 12.12.2023.

³⁴⁰ <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/afghanistan-talibans-treatment-women-and-girls-crime-against-humanity-major-new>, 12.12.2023.

³⁴¹ <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/526551/Eksperti-UN-Ponasanje-talibana-prema-zenama-zlocin>, 13.12.2023.

³⁴² Malala was shot in the head in 2012 while entering a school bus.

³⁴³ The “Taliban” have certain groups active in Pakistan as well.

2.7.5. Women as mothers in the fight against terrorism (and the incitement of terrorism)

Little has been said until now about the role of a woman as a mother in the context of terrorist activities. Only recently have studies and research emerged on this topic (and especially the ones predominantly oriented towards Islamist terrorism).³⁴⁴ There are two hypotheses that we will use as starting points in the analysis of the role of a mother in the context of terrorism:

Hypothesis No. 1: Mothers in patriarchal and conservative environments (the Middle East, the Balkans) can have a significant role in the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism.

Hypothesis No. 2: Mothers in such environments can have an equally significant influence in inciting terrorism among their children (especially if radicalized themselves).

If we examine the first hypothesis, we conclude that in environments such as the Middle East or the Balkans, mothers play quite a significant role in the upbringing of children, which gives them some “soft power”.³⁴⁵ Some mothers from the Western Balkan region even prevented their sons from joining terrorists in Syria by reporting them to the police or simply not giving them their blessing (*halal*). Exactly because of this, mothers can represent quite a significant security bastion in the prevention of terrorism and violent extremism. This also proved to be valid when speaking of the prevention of radicalization of the Roma population, among whom the “cult of a mother” is very significant in the upbringing of children.³⁴⁶

The second hypothesis points to a serious problem, in which mothers are responsible for the radicalization of their children (especially sons). Namely, this can be seen in the example of the Taliban in Afghanistan, who created narratives directed exclusively towards mothers so that they encourage their sons to commit suicide

³⁴⁴ This means that there is one void in this field of scientific research that should be analysed in the future.

³⁴⁵ Djoric Marija, “The Attitudes of Roma Women on Violent Extremism and Radicalization in Serbia: A Preliminary Study”, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, br. 2, 2021, pp. 213–225.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

attacks.³⁴⁷ Such mothers were awarded a high status in societies in which the phenomenon of “martyrdom” is still being glorified. Besides the “Taliban”, the ISIS members also created an ideology that sought women as mothers whose primary task was to give birth to children and educate them to become the “cubs” of the caliphate.

Especially in the security context, the return of women from the regions once controlled by the “Islamic State” to the countries of origin is indicative. The stay of these women in the caliphate was often hidden by the veil of secrecy. Thus, it is unknown whether they took a specific part in terrorist activities, which makes their eventual processing difficult. What is evident is that they are returning with large numbers of children³⁴⁸, in whose upbringing they are most directly involved. This would mean that if they are radicalized, they will transfer the same value system to their children, that is, they will radicalize them as well. In this situation, besides security issues, ethical problems regarding mothers and their children arise as well. For example, one such issue is the following: what should we do with the children of radicalized mothers? Should they be removed from such families or left there, and then work on the deradicalization of their mothers? These are just some of the many questions to which the contemporary world has no response, bearing in mind that every case is specific and should thus be analysed separately and approached in accordance with that.

What is the fact is that women and children returning from the former caliphate of the “Islamic State” are at least traumatized, albeit we cannot exclude the possibility of their radicalization. Exactly because of that, they should be approached professionally, which calls for the help of a multisectoral character, because of which teams for their return were created in the countries of our region.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ Mariam Safi, “Afghan Women and Countering Violent Extremism: What are their roles, challenges and opportunities in CVE?” *A Man’s World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, ed. Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger & Rafia Bhulai (Hedayah and The Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2016, p. 122.

³⁴⁸ Many mothers arrive with children who are not their biological children, and thus, in the majority of countries, a DNA analysis is being conducted upon arrival. For example, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country which decided not to perform DNA testing and accept all children arriving with their mothers, no questions asked about their origin.

³⁴⁹ These teams consist of various experts from the fields of security, medicine, psychology, social work, etc.

Since mothers can be a significant factor in prevention, but also in incitement of their children to terrorism, great emphasis is placed on the work with them through various workshops, “schools for mothers”, etc. Schools for mothers especially turned out to be quite successful in the prevention of terrorism and as an instrument working “from top to bottom”. A good example of such practice is a program in India, organized by “Women without Borders” (*WwB*) under the name “MotherSchools: Parenting for Peace”, organized in the period from 2021 to 2023. From the beginning of their work (in 2001), the “Women without Borders” organization organized in more than 40 countries over 80 (Prevention of Violent Extremism) programs for mothers worldwide.³⁵⁰ For example, in our region, the Forum MNE in Montenegro (in cooperation with the “Women without Borders” organization) organized a program named “MotherSchools: Parenting for Peace” to prevent radicalization and violent extremism.

This (third) role of mothers in the context of terrorist activities has been the least analysed until now, not only in academic circles but in expert organizations as well. Bearing in mind that mothers are the first who identify a problem among their children (since they know them the best), they can represent an essential weapon in the prevention of terrorism. Although this realization refers primarily to religiously funded terrorism, it is still necessary to examine the role of mothers within other types of terrorist organizations as well. Besides that, mothers (if radicalized) can even incite their children to join terrorist organizations. The terrorists are also aware of these facts, and thus they often misuse mothers through the principle of manipulation and propaganda. Because of this, it is of crucial importance to research even more deeply the role that women as mothers can have in relation to terrorism.

³⁵⁰ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/collection-inspiring-practices/ran-practices/motherschools-parenting-peace_en, 16.12.2023.

Even though they are not a topic that shocks contemporary society anymore, women in terrorism are still an intriguing occurrence. This stresses the significance of women and thus the significance of the gender approach in the prevention of terrorism. This is evidenced by UN Resolutions 1325 and 2242, which unequivocally indicate the role of women, primarily in the prevention of extremism and terrorism. Moreover, the UN Action Plan on the Prevention of Violent Extremism also stresses the significance of empowering women³⁵¹, who can be precious in this field.

Until now, women in terrorism were usually looked upon through the black-and-white approach – they were perceived as criminals (perpetrators of terrorist activities) or as victims. The emergence of the third role (woman as a mother) broadened the horizons and possibilities in the research of “feminization of extremism”. All of the previously mentioned shows that terrorism is not exclusively “male”, and as it does not know of nation, race, religion, etc., it also does not know of gender. The fact that women are becoming equal actors in terrorism with men does not mean that there isn’t a gender approach to this phenomenon, which is an important thing to know to understand the *modus operandi* of some terrorist organizations.

Many scientific and professional studies have been written about women as perpetrators of terrorist acts, and the role of women sacrificed in the name of terrorism is not unknown as well. What should be worked on in the future is the research on the role of a woman as a mother (especially in terms of Islamist extremism), since in that way, many terrorist acts could be prevented. In order not to look at this phenomenon through the rose glasses, one should bear in mind that, besides the positive role (in prevention), mothers, unfortunately, can also be influential to their children in terms of radicalization leading to terrorism (if they have succumbed to the violent ideology).

If we focus on the positive role of women in the prevention of terrorism, then it could be said that members of the female sex represent a significant instrument in the fight against terrorism. Especially if we perceive this occurrence from a mother’s standpoint, it can be said that they have the potential to be “bodyguards” of their

³⁵¹ This is one of seven key fields listed in the action plan.

families and their states as well. They are an essential weapon that the contemporary world is yet to use in an adequate way, in their full potential. This is exactly why we should work on the education of mothers, the creation of a security culture and safe environment for the family, as well as empowering the members of the female sex to participate in the prevention of terrorism as one of the biggest security issues of the contemporary world.

2.8. RADICALIZATION OF ROMA: SERBIA AS A CASE STUDY

Roma communities face existential challenges worldwide, and Serbia is no exception. Long-standing social discrimination and marginalization, leading to the lack of educational opportunities and endemic poverty, are among the root causes of many problems confronting the Roma population, including inadequate living conditions, poor health, and short average life expectancies, gender-based discrimination, human security challenges, etc.

According to the last population census in 2022, 131,936 Roma³⁵² are living in Serbia, which is significantly less in comparison to the previous census (when there were 147,606 Roma³⁵³, accounting for 2.05 % of the total population³⁵⁴). The statistic does not reflect the actual situation, and thus it is believed that the true number of Roma will be reached when we multiply the official number from the census by 3.6.³⁵⁵ The lack of personal official identification documents and unreported permanent residence data can make the Roma population “invisible,” an issue that affects not only members of the Roma population with a long-term residence in Serbia, but also displaced

³⁵² <https://beta.rs/content/193625-ministarstvo-roma-u-srbiji-prema-popisu-iz-2022-godine-ima-131-936>, 05.06.2024.

³⁵³ The Roma population is the second most dominant minority ethnic group after Hungarians, who make up 3.53% of the population in Serbia. They are most present in the Pčinj County (in comparison to the total number of habitants), which statistically translates into 8.69%. Source: <http://pod2.stat.gov.rs/ObjavljenePublikacije/Popis2011/Nacionalna%20pripadnost-Ethnicity.pdf>, 12.10.2018.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ By this we can conclude that about half a million Roma are living in Serbia.

Roma from Kosovo and Metohija, those Roma returning to Serbia from time abroad in EU member states and those born in other former Yugoslav countries who have relocated to Serbia. With this, we come to the fact that a significant number of Roma in Serbia is practically “invisible” since they are not recorded in official systems, which creates further space for different forms of manipulation.

A particularly difficult position in the Roma community belongs to women. Roma women are women from the margins of society. They are often victims of double discrimination in society: as members of the Roma community and as members of the “weaker” sex, that is, the female sex. The extremely unfavourable position of Roma women is testified to by the statistical data on their average life expectancy. It is interesting that, on a global level, on average, women live longer than the members of the male sex. The Roma community is an exception to this rule – in Serbia, just one in fifty Roma reaches the age of 55³⁵⁶, while the position of Roma women³⁵⁷ is even worse since their life expectancy is only 48 years on average.³⁵⁸ Various factors contribute to this trend, such as early marriage, lack of education, poverty, and domestic violence. The majority of Roma women (almost one-half) enter into marriage³⁵⁹ before turning 18³⁶⁰, and cases of getting married at the age of nine were recorded as well.³⁶¹ It is an unwritten rule that, by entering into an underage marriage, education is abandoned, which might be perceived as the main problem in the emancipation of Roma women. Social and systemic integration is often compounded by the isolation and confinement of the Roma community.

³⁵⁶ The average life expectancy in Serbia, according to the latest research, is 74.2 years. Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/life-expectancy-globally>, 08.06.2024.

³⁵⁷ Early entering into marriage, along with unemployment, are the main causes of the bad position of Roma women.

³⁵⁸ <http://www.euractiv.rs/srbija-i-eu/1577-romkinje-u-srbiji-ive-znatno-krae>, 26.11.2018.

³⁵⁹ UNICEF Representative in Serbia Michel Saint-Lot stressed that the number of such marriages is on the rise, which is a characteristic of rural and poor communities. Source: <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/393990/Drustvo/Vise-od-polovine-Romkinja-uda-se-pre-18-godine>, 01.02.2019.

³⁶⁰ <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/393990/Drustvo/Vise-od-polovine-Romkinja-uda-se-pre-18-godine>, 01.02.2019.

³⁶¹ <http://www.nedeljnik.rs/magazin/portalsnews/ugovoreni-maloletnicki-brakovi-u-srbiji-udaju-se-sa-devet-a-rode-dete-sa-13-godina/>, 02.02.2019.

In addition, Roma women also face numerous unique security challenges. Domestic violence, crime (usually petty theft), and sexual abuse are only some of the security issues burdening the Roma women. During the war in Syria, radicalization that can lead to violent extremism and terrorism started intensifying among the Roma population. To this testifies the *British Council* report, in which it is noted that, among those who departed for the warzone in Syria and Iraq, there is a significant number of members of the Roma community from Serbia.³⁶² This report stresses that, besides the men, some women from the Roma community departed for Syria as well. The case of the Roma family Šaćiri³⁶³, from Smederevo, is especially indicative, bearing in mind that both male and female members of this family departed for Syria and that they were radicalized before their departure.³⁶⁴ Two key questions can be asked at this point:

1. Are Roma women solely the victims or also potential active objects of violent radicalization?
2. Can Roma women impact the prevention of extremism in their families and communities, and how?³⁶⁵

³⁶² https://www.britishcouncil.rs/sites/default/files/erf_report_serbia_2018.pdf, 23.09.2018.

³⁶³ Samir Šaćiri is a Muslim member of the Roma population from Smederevo who lived in Switzerland before departing to Syria. Anita Šaćiri (nicknamed Sumeya) went to Syria with her husband Emin Hodžić (who is originally from Bosnia), her father Ashim Šaćiri, her mother Bahrija Šaćiri and her sister Amira Šaćiri. After returning to Serbia, Emin Hodžić was arrested during the “Damascus” operation. Safet Šaćiri (brother of Anita Šaćiri and Samir Šaćiri) returned from Syria and is believed by the intelligence services to be in hiding on the route Bosnia-Montenegro. Source: https://www.britishcouncil.rs/sites/default/files/erf_report_serbia_2018.pdf

³⁶⁴ According to statements of interview respondents, there are two radicalization channels when speaking of the Šaćiri family: the first is through foreign countries (namely Switzerland), while the other points to connections with Wahhabis from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

³⁶⁵ At this moment, we are coming from the hypothesis that in some patriarchal communities (such as the Roma community), women-mothers can have quite a positive role in the prevention of extremism among their children, and especially sons. This proved effective within the Arab culture, and such practice is not unknown to conservative Balkan tradition. See more on the role of women in prevention of extremism in the following papers: <https://wiisglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Mothers-and-Wives-3-14-17.pdf>, or https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-best-practices/docs/family_support_en.pdf

The basic hypothesis from which the research starts is that Roma women, above all due to their bad social position in their communities, can be victims of manipulations in extremist circles, but also that their role is invaluable, especially when speaking of the prevention of extremism. This implies the key role of mothers in the upbringing, and their authority in conservative and closed cultures (such as the Roma culture) will be especially valued by their children (especially sons). A similar role of women in the prevention of extremism and radicalization can also be seen in various (especially patriarchal) cultures. So, for example, in the conservative society of Nigeria, women play quite a significant role in the prevention of radicalization.³⁶⁶ Hence, their saying: “When you train a woman, you train an entire community”³⁶⁷, stressing the significance of the role of women (mothers) in this field. Mothers can have quite a crucial role in the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism, for two reasons:

1. They have a good strategic position in the family – they are constantly with the children and can monitor changes in their behaviour and people they contact in their surroundings, and thus identify the first “red flags” that can point to violent extremism and radicalization.
2. What is even more important is their emotional role (trust and security, above all), which is being established in the relation of mother-child.

Keeping in mind all these assumptions, we will attempt to examine the role of mothers from the Roma community in Serbia in the prevention of violent extremism. For this research, besides theoretical preparation (*desk research*), empirical preparation (in-depth interviews and focus groups) was conducted as well, to create a comprehensive analysis.

³⁶⁶ Unfortunately, at the same time, there is a growing trend of participation of Nigerian women in terrorist and extremist organizations (both voluntarily and under duress).

³⁶⁷ Okenyodo Kemi, “The Role of Women in Preventing, Mitigating and Responding to Violence and Violent Extremism in Nigeria”, *A Man’s World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, ed. Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger & Rafia Bhulai, Hedayah and The Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2016, p. 100.

2.8.1. Radicalization and violent extremism in the Roma community in Serbia

Even though the culture of non-violence³⁶⁸ is to a great extent inherent in the Roma community, in the last few years, a radicalization trend was observed, which can lead to violent extremism and terrorism among this ethnic community. Namely, after Bosniaks, the Roma are the second ethnic group that departed from the territory of Serbia to fight for the needs of terrorist groups, such as the “Islamic State” and “Al Nusra Front”.³⁶⁹ This trend of radicalization of the Roma is present not only in Serbia in the Western Balkans region³⁷⁰, but can be noticed in Bulgaria³⁷¹ and Slovenia³⁷² as well. The issue of radicalization of the Roma has, for a certain period, been a security problem in the Czech Republic and Slovakia as well.³⁷³

The *British Council Report*³⁷⁴ explicitly points to the fact that among 49 citizens of Serbia who departed to the Syrian battlefield, a significant number of the Roma is found. They are predominantly

³⁶⁸ The Roma did not wage wars in the name of their ethnic group but predominantly participated in wars on the sides of the majority of people. In big conflicts such as wars, the Roma were among the first victims, to which testifies the suffering of the Roma in Jasenovac (and in many other Ustasha camps) during World War Two.

³⁶⁹ It is important to stress that, from the territory of Serbia, these terrorist groups were joined by a small number of Serbs, who previously converted to Islam, such as Goran Pavlović. See more in: <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/351908/Hronika/Ko-je-Goran-Pavlovic-Abdulah>, 14.01.2019.

³⁷⁰ In Macedonia, indoctrination of the Roma population in terms of accepting radical versions of Islam, such as the pro-Wahhabi Salafism, is being conducted as well.

³⁷¹ Mila Mancheva and Rositsa Dzhekova, *Risks of Islamist Radicalisation in Bulgaria: A Case Study In The Iztok Neighbourhood Of The City Of Pazardzhik – Working Paper*, Center for the study of democracy, February 2017, or <https://magazine.zenith.me/en/society/inequality-among-roma-bulgaria>, 15.01.2019.

³⁷² <https://sobotainfo.com/novica/politika-gospodarstvo/ekstremisti-novaci-jo-rome-v-severovzhodni-sloveniji/122138>, 07.02.2019.

³⁷³ See more in: Kocmanová Markéta, “Belonging and Conflict Avoidance: Towards Understanding the Resilience of the Romani Against Radicalisation”, *Journal for Deradicalization*, No. 34, 2023, <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/711> and Kocmanová, Markéta, and Michael Marcol. “Community-Driven Brakes on Violent Extremism: The Case of Non-Radicalization of the Czech Romani Minority.” *Crime & Delinquency*, July 31, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287241259473>.

³⁷⁴ https://www.britishcouncil.rs/sites/default/files/erf_report_serbia_2018.pdf, 23.09.2018.

from the territories of Belgrade and Smederevo, and it is often the case that the entire Roma families departed as well.³⁷⁵ At this moment, we are speaking of the Roma coming from Muslim faith or of convertites, who converted from Christianity to Islam. By the way, even though there isn't any reliable statistic on the number of Roma believers, it is believed that half of the Roma in Serbia are Muslims, while the other half belongs to the Christian religion.³⁷⁶ It should be stressed that a significant number of the Roma is prone to religious syncretism. This means that they combine the elements from different religions, together with some pagan segments.³⁷⁷ This is why it is not uncommon for the Roma Muslims to practice some typically Christian Orthodox customs, such as celebrating a saint.³⁷⁸ With the arrival of the Roma from Kosovo and Metohija, the relationship towards the Muslim religion significantly changed among the Roma living in Central Serbia. Namely, under the influence of the Roma from Kosmet, who were in the majority of cases Muslims, the Roma "settlers" from Central Serbia started directing towards Islam to a significant extent. Due to this migration flow, the Romas in Central Serbia started eliminating segments of religious syncretism, striving towards being "true Muslims".³⁷⁹ It often happens that some Roma convert from Orthodox Christianity to Islam, usually under the influence of a spouse.³⁸⁰

Intensified Islamization of the Roma community in Serbia can be attributed to the pro-Wahhabi Salafists in the territory of the entire

³⁷⁵ The example of the Šaćiri family from Smederevo.

³⁷⁶ In the majority of cases, they are Christian Orthodox (also known as "Serbian Roma"), but there are also the ones belonging to the Catholic religion (in Vojvodina), as well as some Protestant denominations (Pentecostals are the most dominant in Leskovac and the surrounding area).

³⁷⁷ For example, the pagan cult of Bibia – the saint perceived as the protector of children and women.

³⁷⁸ The most known saints respected by the Roma are Saint Petka, Saint George, Saint Naum, etc.

³⁷⁹ They stopped celebrating Orthodox saints, even Saint George's Day (*Erdelezi*), which is deemed a National Celebration of the Roma. Besides that, the number of individuals going to hijra (pilgrimage) is increasing, which is especially characteristic of Niš. Source: in-depth interview with Osman Balić from the YUROM centre in Niš.

³⁸⁰ In Novi Sad, one participant of the focus group stated that he converted from Orthodox Christianity to Islam under the influence of his wife, who is a Muslim. As the main reason, he stated that "Islam is the only true faith".

Serbia. They are prone to some sort of “missionary practice” which implies the so-called humanitarian aid, “care” about the Roma, which includes intensive engagement with this ethnic group. For practising pro-Wahhabi Salafism, the Roma are given a considerable sum of up to 300 euros per month.³⁸¹ This recent influence of pro-Wahhabi Salafism is contradictory to the so-called “popular Islam”, which dates from the times of the Turks, and which does not adhere to such rigid rules of behaviour for believers. This is why the pro-Wahhabi Salafists come into conflict with other Roma Muslims who do not want to accept their method of professing Islam, thus deeming them “infidels”. It does not seem that money is the only motive for embracing pro-Wahhabi Salafism, but also the so-called “respect” the Roma get, since the pro-Wahhabi *dais* teach them that “everyone is equal”.

Even though Novi Pazar is the focal point of action of the pro-Wahhabi Salafists, their influence can be registered in the wider territory of Serbia: in Belgrade (Zemun Polje, Vojni put, Sremčica...), Novi Sad, Beočin, Smederevo, Kostolac, Kraljevo, Niš... which is quite a security challenge.³⁸² This does not mean that all Wahhabis are extremists, but it is a fact that all the ones who departed from the territory of Serbia to the Syrian battlefield were first indoctrinated by the pro-Wahhabi Salafists. Because of that, we can state that, in Serbia, the “quiet radicalization” of Roma, which can in certain cases lead to violent extremism, is underway.

There are two main channels of radicalization of Roma in Serbia used by the pro-Wahhabi Salafists. The first is related to the activities of radical imams³⁸³, while the second comes from abroad. The latter is especially difficult to control. Namely, by departing abroad³⁸⁴, the Roma make contact with the so-called “humanitarian” Islamic

³⁸¹ Men are given 300 euros, while it is a rule that women get 200 euros if they cover themselves, that is, start wearing hijab. According to: Djoric Marija, “The Attitudes of Roma Women on Violent Extremism and Radicalization in Serbia: A Preliminary Study”, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, No. 2, 2021, pp. 213–225.

³⁸² It is interesting that the focus of their attention and predominantly the Roma settlements. This can be explained by the fact that it is far easier to manipulate poor and uneducated groups, such as Roma.

³⁸³ The case of the imam from Niš, Tefik Mujović, is well-known since he ended up in the warzone in Syria and was later processed by the competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia for the crime of terrorism.

³⁸⁴ In most cases, it is for asylum, but it can also be a visit to relatives.

organizations, who, under the guise of “caring” for the Roma, commence the work on their ideological indoctrination. The main direction of action comes from Germany, but also from other Western European countries, such as Austria, Switzerland, Great Britain, etc. Moreover, close links with the Wahhabi settlements in Bosnia and Herzegovina are noticed as well. There is a potential third channel of radicalization, boiling down to spreading propaganda in the virtual space, which we call *online radicalization*. It implies ideologization via social networks (*Facebook, Instagram, X – formerly Twitter*), *YouTube* channels, etc., but also the use of encrypted apps, such as *Telegram*. To this potential third type of radicalization, young people are most prone, since they are, at the same time, the main users of cyberspace.

Several factors of radicalization stimulate the Roma population in Serbia. Among the **push factors** can be found economic, religious, and security issues. In the economic sense, the Roma belong to a marginalized and poor stratum of the population in Serbia, and thus it is not a surprise that they can be influenced by certain radical groups through the provision of material aid. The largest part of Roma registered in the job market (87%) belongs to the group of unskilled workers, 6.3% have three years, and 4.1% four years of school completed, while a significantly smaller number of Roma men and women have completed higher education (0.89%).³⁸⁵ According to UNDP data, only one percent of members of the Roma population in Serbia graduated from college, while the case among the general population is 23 percent.³⁸⁶ Regarding unemployment of the Roma, it is quite difficult to determine it, since there are no precise statistics in institutions; albeit, it is a fact that the Roma search for jobs for more than five (14.4%), and even for more than ten years (13.2%).³⁸⁷ When we analyse religious factors, the fact that a minority of Roma is religiously educated should be stressed, and thus, they are often

³⁸⁵ Stanković Aleksandra, *Analiza o zaposlenosti Roma i Romkinja na tržištu rada u Srbiji i zemljama Zapadnog Balkana*, REF, 2022, <https://romi-obrazovanjem-do-posla.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Analiza-o-zaposlenosti-Roma-i-Romkinja.pdf>, 10.06.2024.

³⁸⁶ <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/u-srbiji-samo-jedan-odsto-roma-steklo-visoko-obrazovanje-trnovit-put-do-fakultetskih-diploma/>, 05.06.2024.

³⁸⁷ Stanković Aleksandra, op.cit.

targets of missionary organizations.³⁸⁸ If we add to this the factor of religious syncretism, which is quite specific for Toma, then they might become easy targets of various religious, but also extremist organizations.³⁸⁹ Regarding security factors, a low level of security in Roma settlements should be singled out, since almost half of the Roma are not satisfied with this segment of life (and which can be influential in terms of violent radicalisation).

When speaking of **pull factors**, it should be stressed that, besides financial aid given to radicalized individuals, a far more important factor (and in the opinion of the author of the book, even the most important one) is respect. The sense of respect reflected by the recruiters from the Wahhabi groups towards the Roma is by far the strongest pull factor. Exactly due to multiple discrimination often inflicted upon members of the Roma population, the sense of respect comes in the form of equality with other members of the Wahhabi movement, which might be quite stimulating in terms of the radicalization process. Besides that, a significant role among pull factors can be played by the sense of belonging to a group and the search for a common identity (“living for the same idea”)³⁹⁰.

³⁸⁸ Besides the pro-Wahhabi Salafist groups, extremely offensive missionary work among the Roma is also conducted by the Pentecostal Church and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

³⁸⁹ In this context, various online lectures of different pro-Wahhabi dais on *YouTube* channels and various social networks are often imposed on them.

³⁹⁰ See also: Kocmanová, Markéta, and Kristián Földes. 2024. “Risk of Romani Radicalization in the Balkans: Freeing the Shackles of a Marginalized Identity.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, January, 1–23. doi:10.1080/1057610X.2024.2307088.

2.8.2. Roma mothers in the prevention of violent extremism in Serbia³⁹¹

For this topic, I have conducted empirical research, including ten in-depth interviews with the members of the Roma community and four focus groups³⁹². The interviews were predominantly organized with women from the Roma settlements, while two interlocutors were from Roma NGOs, and one was a member of the local self-government. When speaking of focus groups, they were organized in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, and Smederevo, and 34 interlocutors participated in them.³⁹³ The research was conducted in the period from the beginning of September until mid-December 2018. Contrary to interviews conducted exclusively with women, the focus groups were of mixed character.

One of the complicating factors in the organization of focus groups was finding female interlocutors. Out of 34 interlocutors in focus groups, only seven were women. The unpreparedness of Roma women to participate in focus groups can be listed as the main reason, which can be explained by their insecurity and their belief that men would do it better than them.

Table No. 1: FOCUS GROUPS

Number of focus groups: 4

Total number of participants: 34 (8+6+11+9)

Place and time of the focus group	Number of participants	Profile of participants
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³⁹¹ The majority of this segment is based on the following text: Djoric Marija, "The Attitudes of Roma Women on Violent Extremism and Radicalization in Serbia: A Preliminary Study", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, No. 2, 2021, pp. 213–225.

³⁹² Both in-depth interviews and focus groups were organized exclusively with members of the RAE community (Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian).

³⁹³ There are justified reasons for targeting these cities in the research: Belgrade was chosen as a capital, in which there are surrounding suburban settlements with registered pro-Wahhabi influence; in Novi Sad, the centre of action of the Ashkali community is located, which is prone to pro-Wahhabi influence; from Smederevo an entire Roma family departed to Syria, while Niš is a city in the southern part of Serbia with the biggest and quite influential Roma community. In this way, the entire territory of Serbia is covered.

FGD1–Smederevo, October 19, 2018	8	Mixed group (two women and six men); aged (39–65); education (two individuals graduated from high school, six from elementary school).
FGD2–Novi Sad, November 12, 2018	6	Mixed group (two women and four men); aged (33–58); education (five individuals graduated from high school, one from elementary school).
FGD3–Niš, November 06, 2018	11	Mixed group (one woman and 10 men); aged (25–66); education (five are enrolled in college, three graduated from college, three graduated from elementary school).
FGD4–Belgrade, December 04, 2018	9	Mixed group (two women and seven men); aged (42–62); education (one graduated from college, three from high school, and five from elementary school).

Table No. 2: In-depth interviews (Roma women): 10

Affiliation	Number of interviews	Education
Roma and Ashkali National Council Representatives	2	One Roma representative (elementary school), one Ashkali representative (elementary school)
NGO sector representatives	3	One representative from Belgrade (high school); one representative from Novi Sad (college); one representative from Niš (high school)
Roma coordinators	1	Representative in Smederevo (high school)
Roma community	4	Representative in Belgrade (elementary school)

The main questions posed during the in-depth interviews and focus groups were the following:

1. What is the position of women within the Roma community?
2. What can Roma women do to improve their position?
3. What is the mother’s role in the upbringing of children in the Roma community?

4. Can Roma women influence the prevention of extremism in their community/family?

Regarding the current position of women in the Roma community, it is at an extremely low level. The awareness of the low position within the community was most pronounced among educated Roma women.³⁹⁴ The higher the education, the more women are aware of the bad position in which they find themselves. One interlocutor told us that the patriarchy is still present within the Roma community, as well as that there is a saying: “A female child – someone else’s home”. Female children spend little time in their family homes as they marry young. Our interlocutors stated that the number of forced marriages has decreased, but that they are still present. The dominant role in the community is played by men, and the role of the “Roma court” (*Romani kris*) is especially important, including strongly binding norms.³⁹⁵ All the Roma women interviewed were dissatisfied with their position in their community. However, these women demonstrated they are now more prepared to fight for their rights. “We were not allowed to do so in the past, but now the times are changing”, said one Roma woman, a member of the local self-government. Interestingly, male interlocutors in focus groups stressed that they take much care of their children, especially daughters: “To us, our children are the most important”, said one Roma man who participated in the focus group.

When discussing the possibilities of improving the position of Roma women, all respondents stated that education is the only solution. They shared the view that female children, in particular, must work on their education, as it is the only road to emancipation. The Roma people usually have incomplete elementary school education (34,2%), about 11.5% of them have completed high school, while only 0.3% of Roma have college degrees.³⁹⁶ The majority of them without a completed elementary school education belong to

³⁹⁴ Only one of our respondents had graduated from college, and two from high school. The rest of them had graduated from elementary school.

³⁹⁵ If a decision of this court is not respected, not only is the individual seen as a perpetrator excommunicated from the community but their entire family and descendants as well.

³⁹⁶ Raduški Nada, *Identitet i integracija Roma u Srbiji*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2015, p. 134.

the female population.³⁹⁷ Here, a “vicious circle of poverty” can be observed, which implies that poor living conditions and poverty impact the low level of education. Our respondents (especially men) also complained that educating all their children is hard because school books are expensive.

Within the Roma population, women play the main role in the upbringing of their children. It is believed that their primary tasks are to fulfil the roles of wives and mothers. Consequently, the mother is held responsible for the “bad upbringing” of children. However, it is indisputable that mothers in Roma communities spend the majority of their time with their children at home, since men are expected to make money and thus, feed the family, which implies absence from home. Although the oldest male family member has the final say in all important decisions, respondents in multiple focus groups said that the role of a mother is definitely important in the upbringing of children, including instilling in them a certain value system. This can be quite significant information, especially in terms of the prevention of extremism among male children. Although a woman, as a wife, does not have any particular authority, motherhood is perceived with respect, suggesting that she can have a significant impact on her children. This fact can be very important in the fight against violent extremism and radicalization, but it is necessary to work on the education of Roma mothers.

While Roma women doubt that they could play an important role in the prevention of extremism and radicalization, the reality points to the contrary. Many male Roma members who participated in focus groups expressed utmost respect for their mothers, stressing that, for them, they have authority and thus, they care for their opinions. The example of one respondent from Smederevo, who, even though poorly educated (elementary school), was very zealous in the promotion of pro-Wahhabi Salafism, is very interesting. She adopted this teaching during her temporary work stay in Germany (Düsseldorf) and even agreed to distribute material authored by the arrested terrorist Adem Demirović throughout the Roma settlement.³⁹⁸ This data indicated

³⁹⁷ A total of 26.4% of Roma women are without any education, in comparison to male members of the Roma population, among whom 12.8% are without any education. Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Adem Demirović was perceived as a terrorist threat to the Balkans by the FBI in 2011. He was arrested in 2014 in Vienna as the leader of the Islamist organization

a very important fact, namely that Roma women can not only be victims of extremist manipulation (as it is in the majority of cases) but also significant promoters of some ideologies if they fall under the influence of some political and religious groups.

Based on the previously mentioned facts, we can state that the Roma community in Serbia (but in the region as well) is under a strong influence of pro-Wahhabi Salafism.³⁹⁹ The Roma population is quite vulnerable to manipulation from this, but also other religious and political groups, since they are to a great extent a poor and an uneducated community.⁴⁰⁰ What motivates this national minority to approach pro-Wahhabi Salafism is, above all, the material interest (because they are given a certain amount of money on a monthly level), but also the feeling of “importance and respect”. The latter motive is paramount since the Roma are discriminated against on many levels, and thus, they need someone to respect them and consider them as equals. Unfortunately, this makes them the perfect victims of various types of ideological manipulations.

Potential radicalization is primarily conducted in the diaspora, that is, abroad, where the Roma come into contact with the so-called “humanitarian” Islamic organizations. Another method implies the influence of radical Imams in illegal religious objects (paramosques and parajamaats). The goal of this research was to determine whether Roma women can have some influence on the upbringing of their children, which would be considered one of the potential preventive methods when speaking of radicalization and violent extremism. Even though still poorly positioned within the firm patriarchal and hierarchically defined society, they can play a significant role. Namely, Roma

“Tawhid”, which recruited fighters for the war in Syria. Afterwards, he was arrested in 2016 in Turkey after returning from Syria. Source: <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/2094096-u-turskoj-uhapsen-vehabija-iz-srbije-adem-demirovic-ceka-senjegovo-izrucenje>, 15.12.2018.

³⁹⁹ It is important to note that, during the last years, other religious groups, too, have had a strong influence on the Roma community in Serbia, such as Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses.

⁴⁰⁰ The Roma population lacks sufficient knowledge of religious dogma (due to lack of education), and thus, this makes them even more prone to manipulation in the context of adopting new religious teachings.

women make decisions regarding the upbringing of their children, and thus we recognize them as exquisite family authorities (at least when speaking of children).⁴⁰¹ Because of that, it would be advisable to work on further education of Roma women, for them to make a positive impact on their children through the upbringing process. By emancipating Roma women through the process of education, we would get enlightened women who would know how to recognize the first signs of radicalization among their children and prevent it properly. To fulfil this goal, it is necessary to systematically work on educating Roma women, which would thus raise their awareness, and then improve their position, first in the Roma community and then in the entire society.

The second important thing to which we draw attention is the issue of possible negative emancipation of women within the Roma community. Bearing in mind poverty and lack of education, they are also vulnerable to manipulation in religious and political contexts, by which they would get the apparent impression that they are equal to men.⁴⁰² Luckily, this occurrence is marginal; albeit, we have to draw attention to its existence.

Finally, we can conclude that Roma women have begun to be aware of the significance of their role and should be helped in emancipation in the right way, through the application of various systemic methods: affirmative measures in employment, starting their private business, literacy, health education, etc., which would serve as useful to the entire Roma community and the broader society. In this way, they would be given quite a significant role in the prevention of violent extremism and other forms of negative phenomena within the Roma community, since they have significant potential. This potential is, above all, based on the upbringing of children, which is of utmost significance in the construction of the democratic value system, contrary to the one that promotes violent extremism.

⁴⁰¹ This occurrence is characteristic of other conservative societies as well, such as, for example, Arab societies.

⁴⁰² During this research, I conducted an in-depth interview with a woman who is a member of a pro-Wahhabi Salafist group and who appeared to be dominant in comparison to the male members of the community, deeming them as “not good enough believers”.

2.9. CONSPIRACY THEORIES IN THE TIMES OF THE CORONAVIRUS: THE WORLD AND THE BALKANS⁴⁰³

Contagious diseases and pandemics are both occurrences inherent to humankind since the beginning of time. Only during the 20th century, pandemics that have threatened the entire humanity were proclaimed three times.⁴⁰⁴ In the times of the notorious Spanish flu, from 1919 to 1920, half a billion people were infected, whilst 50 million people died as a result of this disease.⁴⁰⁵ In many countries, more people died from this flu than in the battlefields of World War One, which preceded it. The development of science and technology has, in time, enabled man to prevent the spread of viruses and cure various illnesses, thus making humankind superior in comparison to the entire nature. However, the emergence of the pandemic caused by the coronavirus denied all previous discoveries and showed us how helpless we are as human beings when faced with the “invisible enemy”, depicted in the COVID-19 virus.⁴⁰⁶

The pandemic caused by the coronavirus is not only a health crisis, but also a political, economic, and cultural – in one world, a multiplied crisis, which has reached all the pores of society on a global level. In times of a crisis, unfortunately, many negative phenomena used by man in an attempt to step out of a hopeless situation, or at least seemingly put it under control, emerge. One such phenomenon generated by the emergence of coronavirus is the so-called *conspiracy theories*, as attempts to provide quite simplified explanations of “causes” and “consequences” of the pandemic. They not only encouraged the spread of panic and fear but, to a certain extent, aided people in “rationalization” of the evil that loomed above us in the form of an unknown virus. To understand the popularity of

⁴⁰³ This segment is to the greatest extent based on the communique titled “COVID-19 pandemic as a generator of contemporary conspiracy theories”, presented at the conference „Obrazovanje u vreme pandemije COVID –19: iskustva i pouke“, in co-authorship with professor Dr Jovanka Šaranović.

⁴⁰⁴ The pandemics caused by Spanish, Asian and Hong Kong flu had a global character and wiped out a vast number of lives on Earth during the 20th century.

⁴⁰⁵ Humphreys Margaret, “The influenza of 1918 Evolutionary perspectives in a historical context”, *Evolution, Medicine, and Public Health*, No. 1, 2018, p. 219.

⁴⁰⁶ The International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses marked this virus under the official name SARS-CoV-2.

“conspiracy theories”, it is necessary to elaborate on the phenomenon of a conspiracy, define its elements beforehand, and then put it in the context of the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus.

2.9.1. The COVID–19 pandemic and its consequences

The declaration of the pandemic on March 11, 2020, by the World Health Organization was the day when humanity stopped. Even in the times of world wars, there were some territories which were functioning freely – in the times of this pandemic, this was not possible. On one side stood humanity as a whole, while on the other was a small, invisible enemy, against which we lacked adequate weapons. It is a paradox that man created artificial intelligence, the 5G network, conquered space with satellites, and invented the most advanced communication techniques and hypersonic weapons. Yet, we remained silent, without an answer, in the face of this pandemic.

Additional frustration emerged due to the so-called new “reality”, that is, “new normality”, bringing confusion into human relations due to the introduction of ideas of physical distancing and isolation. Suddenly, everything that was once usual and “normal” was now deemed forbidden and dangerous. We have stopped hugging and touching, contacts were reduced usually to indirect (predominantly online) communication, and fear has become a dominant emotion. Fear was also measured through statistics and numbers that intensified it through the presentation of numbers of infected and deceased. Nowadays, when we are already accustomed to this virus and when its toll is quite reduced, we can state that, on a global level, a total of 770,563,467 individuals got infected with this virus since the beginning of the pandemic, while a total of 6,957,216 individuals died as a consequence of the COVID-19 virus.⁴⁰⁷ Besides different statistical data, combating methods differed from country to country as well. Therefore, for example, a strict and authoritarian system was present in China⁴⁰⁸, the country of origin of the virus, while in

⁴⁰⁷ <https://covid19.who.int/>, 17.05.2024.

⁴⁰⁸ Until now, in China, a total of 90,238,850 cases of infections have been registered. Source: <https://covid19.who.int/>, 17.09.2024.

Sweden,⁴⁰⁹ the method of “collective immunity” was applied, and thus the methods were more liberal as well.

Besides health problems primarily caused by the coronavirus pandemic, numerous economic, political, and cultural problems emerged, wreaking havoc on both international and national levels in every single country. The economic consequences of the pandemic are most visible, given that they have drastically increased inequality and global poverty. The pandemic especially hit independent entrepreneurs and occasionally employed workers, and in the gender sense of the word, women were hit the most (given that they predominantly worked on jobs that died down during the pandemic, i.e., the service sector). The statistics show that temporary unemployment on a global level was higher than 70% among workers with only an elementary school education.⁴¹⁰ In the United States, the biggest world economy, in only five weeks, a total of 26 million people were left jobless.⁴¹¹ In parallel with economic problems and the fear for life, psychological problems emerged among a significant number of people as well. So, for example, in Japan, in October 2020, there was a peak in the number of suicides committed (2.153), which is a number higher than the yearly average⁴¹², and which is deemed as a consequence of the pandemic. Mental problems were observed among youth and children, whilst more than half of children (57%) who were not in contact with their peers stressed that they were feeling less content and more worried (54%), as well as less secure (58%).⁴¹³ Chinese analyses showed that, during the pandemic, 34,13% of people exhibited moderate to harsh symptoms of stress⁴¹⁴, while some researchers even introduced a new psychological behaviour

⁴⁰⁹ In Sweden, since the beginning of the pandemic until now, a total of 2,715,147 individuals infected with this virus have been recorded. Source: <https://covid19.who.int/>, 17.09.2023.

⁴¹⁰ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2022/brief/chapter-1-introduction-the-economic-impacts-of-the-covid-19-crisis>, 02.07.2023.

⁴¹¹ Panchal N, Kamal R, Orgera K, Cox C, Garfield R, Hamel L, et al. *The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use*, Kaiser Family Foundation, 2020, p. 21

⁴¹² <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/11/28/asia/japan-suicide-women-covid-dst-int-lhnk/index.htm>, 08.02.2023.

⁴¹³ <https://www.savethechildren.net/blog/hidden-impacts-covid-19-children%E2%80%99smental-health>, 16.02.2023.

⁴¹⁴ Qiu, Jianyin, Bin Shen, Min Zhao, Zhen Wang, Bin Xie, and Yifeng Xu, “A nationwide survey of psychological distress among Chinese people in the COVID-19

disorder, known as the “COVID stress syndrome”, linked with the feeling of depression and anxiety.⁴¹⁵

When speaking of the security context, organized crime simmered down at the beginning of the pandemic, only to develop new forms of organized crime, besides the usual ones, quite soon, such as the smuggling of medical equipment, which was in deficit at the given moment. The trade of medical equipment blossomed in *Monopoly Market*, a *Dark Web* market, where in April 2020, that is, in the mere beginning of the pandemic, the majority of transactions (85%) included smuggling of COVID-19 virus detection tests, while 15% consisted of the sale of facemasks and medicine, such as *Remdesivir*.⁴¹⁶ An additional problem in the prevention of the smuggling of medical equipment was depicted in the fact that there wasn't any unique coded system on a global level. Among the different types of crimes that blossomed in the times of the pandemic, cybercrime stood out in particular. Thus, for example, the *UK's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC)* in Great Britain removed more than 2,000 posts related to the sale of COVID-related articles that were based on cyber fraud.⁴¹⁷ In the UAE, in the first four months of the COVID-19 pandemic, a total of 1,541 attacks in relation to the pandemic were recorded (Nasir, 2020). Police in France removed 70 fake web pages stating that they are selling the medicine called *Chloroquine*.⁴¹⁸

Even though there was a general opinion that the migration crisis would stop due to the impact of the pandemic, this was so only at first glance. Namely, migrant smuggling during the pandemic became more risky and more expensive – but it did not stop. Only during the first four months of the pandemic, the majority of irregular migrants

epidemic: implications and policy recommendations”, *General Psychiatry*, No. 2, 2020.

⁴¹⁵ Taylor, Steven, Caeleigh A. Landry, Michelle M. Paluszek, Thomas A. Fergus, Dean McKay, and Gordon JG Asmundson, “COVID stress syndrome: Concept, structure, and correlates”, *Depression and anxiety*, No. 8, 2020, pp. 706–714.

⁴¹⁶ https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/covid/COVID19_research_brief_trafficking_medical_products.pdf, 19.09.2023.

⁴¹⁷ BBC News, “Coronavirus: UK forces hundreds of scam Covid-19 shops offline”, 21 April 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52361618>, 01.09.2023.

⁴¹⁸ France Bleu, “Coronavirus: les gendarmes de Strasbourg luttent contre les escrocs du web”, 18 April 2020. <https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/faits-divers-justice/coronavirus-les-gendarmes-de-strasbourg-luttentcontre-les-escrocs-du-web-1587201320>, 10.09.2023.

arrived via the so-called Mediterranean route to Greece, followed by Spain and Italy.⁴¹⁹

Even before the COVID pandemic, the migration crisis caused the rise of right-wing populist parties⁴²⁰, which paved the way for the extreme right wing. The correlation between the COVID pandemic and the extreme right wing in military circles in Western Europe is especially interesting. Namely, in Belgium, army sergeant Jürgen Conings, previously linked with the right-wing group named “Flemish Legion”, attempted to kill virologist Mark Van Ranst, whom he accused of participating in a conspiracy.⁴²¹ In Germany, some soldiers dressed as Syrian refugees conducted a terrorist act.⁴²² Research conducted in 12 countries of the West (Germany, the UK, the US, Canada, Austria, Switzerland, France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Belgium, and the Netherlands) concludes that this problem is currently predominantly present in America and Germany.⁴²³

Under the influence of the pandemic arose new tendencies in radicalization and recruitment of new members arose. These are, by the way, quite dynamic phenomena, which adapt to crisis circumstances quickly and easily. Even though everything was calm in the beginning, just like before a storm, as time passed, these phenomena showed us that, just like a chameleon, they are apt to fit into the new situation. The COVID-19 pandemic, in the context of recruitment, served the extreme right wing the most, given that these groups started radicalizing more and more new members via online platforms. The most significant role in this process was played by *Telegram* channels, as well as platforms such as *4Chan*, which later

⁴¹⁹ UNODC, *How COVID-19 restrictions and the economic consequences are likely to impact migrant smuggling and cross-border trafficking in persons to Europe and North America*, Viena, 2020, p. 10.

⁴²⁰ Subotić Milovan, *Migracije i ekstremizam*, Medija centar „Odbrana“, Beograd, 2022, p. 215.

⁴²¹ RTL Nieuws. “Stappenteller Op Nul: Ex-Militair Jürgen Conings Waarschijnlijk al Snel Na Verdwijning Overleden” [Pedometer at Zero: Ex-Military Jürgen Conings Probably Died Soon After Disappearance], RTL Nieuws, 24 August, 2021, <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/artikel/5249714/jurgen-conings-stappenteller-800-stappen-belgie-ex-militair> 12.08.2023.

⁴²² <https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2022-12/Right-wing-extremism-in-the-military-1.pdf>, 18.05.2023.

⁴²³ Teun van Dongen, Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, Eviane Leidig, Hanna Rigault Arkhis, *Right-Wing Extremism in the Military: A typology of the threat*, ICCT Research Paper May 2022.

also gained the support of forums such as *8Chan/pol*, *16Chan/pol*, *EndChan/pol*, *InfinityChan/pol* (*Darknet*), *Nainchan/pol* (*Darknet*). The popularity of *Telegram* channels is best depicted by the case of the Nazi group *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei International*. In 2019, this group had only 750 followers, only to have this number increase to an unbelievable total of 16,522 during the pandemic in 2020.⁴²⁴ When speaking of the popularity of *4Chan*, we have witnessed the culmination of a vast number of posts during the pandemic (a total of 8,393, which amounts to 92,23 posts on a daily level).⁴²⁵ At the peak of the pandemic, the right-wing extremists predominantly called for a “racial war”, while Islamist extremists sought the pandemic to be “God’s punishment” for all the misdoings of their “enemies”, which, in the latter case, had an especially negative impact on the level of vaccination.

In summary, we can state that the coronavirus pandemic is quite comprehensive and versatile, and has thus had manifold consequences on humankind, but has also drastically reshaped the contemporary world. The change in the way of living, the robotization of society⁴²⁶, the use of artificial intelligence, intensification of online communication, etc., are just a few occurrences that affected the creation of the “new reality”. As a rule, the man, as a *homo rationalis*, needs to provide a meaningful explanation of everything new, unknown, and hidden under the veil of secrets, given that it is a new occurrence within the social community. When you add fear to the mix - bearing in mind that fear is the main generator of the fight for survival - it becomes easier to comprehend the widespread appeal of the so-called *conspiracy theories*, which “rationalized” the COVID pandemic in some quite unusual ways.

⁴²⁴ Gais Hannah, Squire Megan, “How an Encrypted Messaging Platform is Changing Extremist Movements”, February 16, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2021/02/16/how-encrypted-messaging-platform-changing-extremist-movements> 01.09.2022.

⁴²⁵ Baele Stephane, Brace Lewys, Coan Travis, “Variations on a Theme? Comparing 4chan, 8kun, and other *chans*’ Far-Right “/pol” Boards”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, No. 1, 2021, p. 67.

⁴²⁶ In some countries, such as China, robots have taken over many healthcare-provider functions in the treatment of patients. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/03/covid-19-proves-the-need-for-social-robots-and-robot-avatars-experts.html>, 2206.2023.

2.9.2. The concept of conspiracy

First, one should clearly distinguish between the phenomena of *conspiracy* and *conspiracy theory*. While the term *conspiracy* has been known to humankind since the olden times, the term *conspiracy theory* is more recent, though its meaning has a pejorative character. Daniel Pipes believes that one should distinguish between the phenomenon of “conspiracy”, which is real, and the phenomenon of “conspiracy theory”, which is, according to him, imaginary.⁴²⁷ Even the term “theory” itself is in some way made meaningless in this construction, since it is being perceived in a derogatory way, as “theorizing”⁴²⁸ in the sense of rethinking reality without any proof or empirical confirmation. Understood in this way, the *conspiracy theory* becomes inherent in lies or half-truths, which impacts the degradation of its credibility to the greatest extent.

While the phenomenon of *conspiracy theory* is controversial, the phenomenon of *conspiracy* has quite clear **goals, actors** and **constructive elements**. A conspiracy, as a scientific term, can be defined as an “organized conspirative action which is secretly or publicly conducted by a selected few of conspiracy actors, closely linked within a conspiracy group or organization, to fulfil the secretly agreed upon and carefully prepared plan”.⁴²⁹ Every conspiracy is usually based on two goals – to hurt or to help someone⁴³⁰ and for this purpose, various means are being used, conditioned by the type of conspiracy. Conspiracy is an integral part of numerous political phenomena, such as terrorism, hybrid wars, assassinations, political murders, etc., and thus, its existence should not be questioned.

When speaking of **conspiracy actors**, they are usually polarized in accordance with the Karl Schmidt dichotomy (friend/enemy). This means that, in a conspiracy, there are always **subjects of a**

⁴²⁷ Hagen Kurtis, *Conspiracy Theories and the Failure of Intellectual Critique*, University of Michigan Press, 2022, p. 20.

⁴²⁸ At this point, the term “theory” should be differentiated from the term “theorizing”. While even the Old Greeks believed that the word theory (gr. *theoria*) is synonymous with observation to find the ultimate truth, the term “theorizing” often has a pejorative meaning. The term *scientific theory*, always based on scientifically confirmed laws, in which the cognitive role implies explanation and prediction of certain occurrences, should be singled out as a separate term.

⁴²⁹ Simeunović Dragan, *Teorija politike*, Nauka i društvo, Beograd, 2002, p. 175.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

conspiracy, that is, the ones that are conspiring against someone or something, and **objects of a conspiracy** (often victims), subjected to conspiracy actions. For a conspiracy to be functional, it needs a conspiratorial group involving two or more individuals participating in a conspirative plan. Based on the previously presented information, we can confirm that the integral elements of a conspiracy theory are as follows: secret, plan, organization, and conspiracy actors.

Conspiracies can be classified based on several criteria:

- By the **number of actors**: conspiracy groups, organizations, or big collectivities. The first two types of conspiracies are realistic since they do not include a large number of people. Conspiracies of big collectivities (such as the so-called conspiracies of some nations against humanity) are absurd due to the inability to preserve a secret. Namely, every conspiracy is based on a well-kept secret, and it is known that the level of conspiracy is declining with the rise of the number of members of a conspiracy group.
- By the **possibility of realization**, conspiracies are classified as real, potential, or unreal. The first type of (real) conspiracies has a high capacity for being realized, while potential conspiracies are the ones that might be realized with success, albeit the success is conditioned by some additional circumstances (i.e., actors, goals, etc.). Finally, unreal conspiracies are the ones that by all means cannot be realized, and this group usually (but not exclusively and always) includes the so-called conspiracy theories.
- Based on the **principle of territoriality**, we differentiate: local, national, and global conspiracies.
- In accordance with **temporal distance**, we single out: old and new (contemporary) conspiracies.
- In relation to the **field of social action**, conspiracies can be: political, social, economic, health, etc.

2.9.3. Conspiracy theories: true or false?

Conspiracy theories are a cultural phenomenon that gained popularity during the 20th and 21st centuries. In the analyses conducted until nowadays, we can take notice of two quite conflicting views regarding this phenomenon: “The first approaches these ‘theories’ uncritically, deeming them as absolute truths. Contrary to this attitude is an overly critical attitude, which deems conspiracy theories as a product of human imagination”.⁴³¹ The truth is usually somewhere in the middle, which makes this phenomenon quite amorphous and difficult for scientific examination. Thus, it is not odd that *conspiracy theories* are quite present in the media and journalistic works, while in science, there is quite a void in the context of defining this term.

Some works of contemporary philosophy stress that believing in conspiracy theories is completely understandable if we take into account quite relevant evidence of the existence of these conspiracies.⁴³² Some earlier research showed that conspiracy theories are quite widespread, as well as that they can be linked with low self-respect and negation of authority.⁴³³ A certain correlation with mental disorders, such as paranoia and schizotypy, has been discovered as well.⁴³⁴ A newer study reiterates the existence of a connection between the high level of anxiety (and depression) and conspiracy theories.⁴³⁵ This research⁴³⁶ also examines the correlation between the type of media and conspiracy theories, and thus concludes that exposure to

⁴³¹ Djoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2021, p. 40.

⁴³² See Dentith, Mathew, „Conspiracy theories and philosophy”, U J.E. Uscinski (Ed.), *Conspiracy theories and the people who believe them* Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 94–104.

⁴³³ Darwin, Hannah, Neave, Nick, & Holmes Joni, “Belief in conspiracy theories: the role of paranormal belief, paranoid ideation and schizotypy”, *Personality and Individual Differences*, 2011, br. 8, pp. 1289–1293.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ De Coninck, David, et al. “Beliefs in conspiracy theories and misinformation about COVID-19: Comparative perspectives on the role of anxiety, depression and exposure to and trust in information sources”, *Frontiers in psychology*, No.12, 2021.

⁴³⁶ This research was organized in eight countries (Belgium, Canada, England, the Philippines, China, New Zealand, the US, and Switzerland) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data was collected online, through an online questionnaire, active from May 29, 2020, to June 12, 2020, resulting in a multinational representative sample of 8,806 adults.

traditional media (television, print, etc.) has a lesser impact on the emergence of conspiracy theories in comparison to digital media, which serve as the main transmission routes of conspiratorial ideas. Distrust in the television and the rest of the so-called “traditional” types of media has impacted the higher exposure of people to other, alternative types of (digital) media, within which they searched for the “truth”.

The definition of a *conspiracy theory* is also controversial, given that this phenomenon corresponds, according to an unwritten rule, with quite strong emotions, which cloud the given reality. Through the analysis of a dozen definitions, we come across several key elements of this phenomenon: truth, lie, manipulation, interests, evil people, and secrecy. Based on the previously listed terms, we can state that conspiracy theories imply “explanations of a certain occurrence in an unconventional way or with the help of unusual evidence, within which there are some ‘evil people’ who wish to hurt others to fulfil their interests”⁴³⁷

In the ideological sense of the word, the phenomenon of a conspiracy theory is most often linked with the (extreme) right wing.⁴³⁸ Moreover, it can be noticed that there is a pronounced distrust towards state officials and institutions among individuals prone to such a way of thinking.

Geography-wise, conspiracy theories used to be perceived as an “American phenomenon”, as testified by a large amount of newspaper titles, movies, journalistic pieces, etc. In science, this is somewhat different, given that science predominantly strives towards objectiveness and impartiality. Exactly with this goal was the biggest research until nowadays organized, with 11,523 participants from nine countries.⁴³⁹ The idea behind the research was to explain conspirative thinking in America and Europe and distinguish specific correlations. After surveying the respondents, two crucial conclusions were made:

⁴³⁷ Djoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2021, p. 41.

⁴³⁸ This does not mean that only the extreme right wing is prone to conspiracy theories – to the contrary. This phenomenon can be present among all ideologies.

⁴³⁹ Walter Annemarie, Drochon Hugo, “Conspiracy Thinking in Europe and America: A Comparative Study”, *Political Studies*, No. 2, 2022, pp. 483–501.

1. The level of conspirative thinking in Europe and America is almost the same, which disproves the hypothesis that conspiracy theories are strictly an “American phenomenon”.
2. Ideologically speaking, such an approach is usually present among individuals leaning towards right-wing-oriented ideas.

Speaking of conspiracy theories, the relation towards the truth is always problematic. We believe that the perception of the “truthfulness of a conspiracy” intensifies if the following three crucial factors of manipulation emerge:⁴⁴⁰

1. Causing anxiety
2. Persuasiveness of information of the alleged conspirator
3. Possibility of identification with the so-called victims.

2.9.4. The COVID-19 pandemic as a generator of contemporary conspiracy theories

Before the emergence of the coronavirus, there were various *conspiracy theories* stating, for example, that Hitler is still alive, that the Earth is flat, that the world is ruled by the lizard people, etc. The COVID-19 pandemic had an encouraging impact on the creation of new conspiracy theories, and thus, it can be identified as their main generator. There are several reasons for this.

1. A semblance of control. This is quite an important reason during a global pandemic when there were still no medicines or vaccines against the COVID-19 virus. Unable to control the new situation, the man started creating presumptions, that is, “theories” about the origin of the coronavirus, as well as about its final goal, thus gaining in this way some sense of control over the pandemic. It is a known fact that a man would rather accept even bad news than suspense and uncertainty.
2. The semblance of control gives people the feeling of superiority. As a superior being, man has, since the olden times, been used to being a dominant living being. With the emergence of an “invisible” virus, humankind felt inferior, and thus, the

⁴⁴⁰ Radnitz, Scott, & Underwood, Patrick. “Is belief in conspiracy theories pathological? A survey experiment on the cognitive roots of extreme suspicion”, *British Journal of Political Science*, No. 1, 2017, pp. 113–129.

emergence of new conspiracy theories brought back the feeling of superiority.

3. The last thing we can single out is the feeling of meaning. The need for a meaningful life is nothing new to humanity. These theories, even though often senseless, gave some meaning to human existence. Namely, even during World War Two Viktor Frankl started applying logotherapy⁴⁴¹, based on the idea that a man can be psychologically cured if he perceives the meaning of life.

The coronavirus pandemic gave birth to numerous disinformation and semi-information, which spread fear and a sense of uncertainty and hopelessness. Among the vast conglomerate of theories, we hereby single out some of them, which can thematically be divided into the following groups:

1. The first group refers to **theories regarding the origin of the virus**. According to these conspiracy theories, Bill Gates is the mastermind behind this artificially created virus, and the basic goal for its spread was “conquering humanity”. The means used for this purpose were deemed as chipping and vaccines, which impacted the creation of animosity towards the pharmaceutical companies.

In this group, we can thematically list the theories that seek a correlation between the virus and the 5G network. Some have said that the 5G network allegedly emitted radio waves that harmed the health of people and the rest of the biosphere. The fact that such information was taken seriously is confirmed by instances of individuals destroying 5G network infrastructures worldwide. The main promoter of this type of theory was David Icke, who, at one moment, had about one million followers on *YouTube*.⁴⁴²

Aircraft spraying used for spreading the virus is another segment of this concept of *conspiracy theories*, explaining the cause of the pandemic. Even groups promoting the previously mentioned idea emerged on many social networks, reaching a multitude of followers.

2. The second group consisted of *conspiracy theories* that predominantly dealt with secondary goals of the pandemic, such as migration crises and the profit of pharmaceutical companies. The

⁴⁴¹ Viktor Frankl, as a prisoner in the Nazi camp, survived thanks to the idea of *logotherapy* (treatment with the use of sense), which he later implemented in his practice.

⁴⁴² His *YouTube* channel was removed.

notion that the pandemic is being used as an excuse for the unhindered arrival of migrants that will “conquer” Europe and the Western world especially benefited the populists and the extreme right wing. In some papers, the existence of touchpoints between populism and conspiracy theories was stressed, such as Manichaeism, the victim’s position, and a negative attitude towards the leading political ideas.⁴⁴³

This concept also includes the notion of denial of the existence of the virus, deemed a mere “fabrication” of the global elites ruling the world. The secondary goal of the global elites (besides conquering humanity, seen as the primary goal) was to create profit for pharmaceutical companies, which would earn enormous amounts of money on vaccines and medical equipment.

Crises definitely represent quite a fertile ground for the emergence of conspiracy theories; however, besides them, misinformation also has a positive impact on the strengthening of this phenomenon. An even more dangerous occurrence in comparison to misinformation is the so-called semi-information, which is quite a powerful means of manipulation. Therefore, for example, in the last quarter of 2020, *Facebook* took action against 1,3 billion fake profiles used for the manipulation of public opinion.⁴⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the issue of removing or sanctioning profiles is not a solution, given that users of such content usually continue their activities on some other alternative platform.

2.9.5. Conspiracy theories in the Balkans

It seems that the Balkans are fertile ground for the development of conspiracy theories in comparison to the rest of Europe, if we trust some research. Namely, according to the research group for the Balkans (*BIEPAG* and *IPSOS*), more than three-fourths of citizens of the Western Balkan countries believe in some of the current conspiracy theories.⁴⁴⁵ The scepticism of the Balkan people is usually

⁴⁴³ Pirro Andrea LP, Paul Taggart, “Populists in power and conspiracy theories”, *Party Politics* 29, No. 3, 2023, pp. 413–423.

⁴⁴⁴ Innes Helen, Innes Martin, “De-platforming disinformation: conspiracy theories and their control.” *Information, Communication & Society* 26, No. 6, 2023, pp. 1262–1280.

⁴⁴⁵ <https://www.glasamerike.net/a/zapadni-balkan-plodno-tle-za-teorije-za-vero-o-koronavirusu/5694625.html>, 06.06.2024. By the way, this research was

directed towards the vaccine against the coronavirus (within which we can hear the assumptions regarding the use of the virus as a biological weapon and for the “subjugation” of humanity). Albania is the Balkan country with the highest number of believers in conspiracy theories, whereas a total of 59.4% of respondents confirmed that they indeed believe in them.⁴⁴⁶ The newest information from 2024 showed that even the Balkan states that are members of the EU tend towards this phenomenon. We are speaking of Bulgaria, in which the newest research on public opinion showed that 70 per cent of citizens of this country believe in conspiracy theories in the context of contemporary politics.⁴⁴⁷

The said number is far lower in other European countries and the US, where it makes up for one-fourth of the total population. So, for example, in Germany, 22.5 per cent of inhabitants believe that the COVID-19 virus is some form of fraud and that its origin is artificial; the percentage is similar in the US too (22 per cent).⁴⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that the US President Donald Trump is one of the biggest promoters of conspiracy theories in the US. The reason for this can be found in some of his controversial statements and the very intense campaigns of his political opponents, who want to discredit him.

Let us return to the Balkans, which is a real “volcano” of conspiracy theories. Namely, there are several pivotal topics present in the context of popular conspiracy theories:

The first group includes conspiracy theories directly or indirectly related to the coronavirus. They range from stating that this virus is “inexistent”, and that it was artificially created in a laboratory to “cleanse” humanity from a vast number of people, to statements that the vaccines are harmful and unreliable.⁴⁴⁹

The second group builds on the first, as it concerns migrations, which were, again, correlated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Namely, there is an established opinion (especially among certain extreme right-wingers) that the pandemic is only a guise for the

conducted in 2020, at the mere beginning of the pandemic, and thus, the impressions were the strongest at that point.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ <https://www.tanjug.rs/zanimljivosti/vesti/92591/istrazivanje-pokazalo-da-70-od-sto-bugara-veruje-u-teorije-zavere/vest>, 09.06.2024.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ There were also assumptions regarding which vaccine was more “reliable”, depending on whether it was produced in the East or the West.

“inconspicuous” immigration of migrants, who are to completely change our “national code” by migrating to our country. This is why some attacks on migrant camps were recorded during the pandemic.

The third group of conspiracy theories refers to a great extent to “spraying from the air” (*Chemtrail Conspiracy Theory*), with which war poisons are being sprayed on the population, causing various illnesses, including the coronavirus.

It is important to note that all of these conspiracy theories are related to the great distrust of the citizens towards the institutions in the Western Balkans, thus creating an additional space for manipulation and propaganda. It is interesting that the phenomenon of conspiracy theories does not depend on sex or education, but that it is, to the greatest extent, predisposed by the geopolitical component.⁴⁵⁰ What poses a great challenge when speaking of conspiracy theories is the fact that someone *Else* is always blamed for all our misfortunes. That *Else* is usually our Enemy, who can be from our neighbourhood, or somewhere far away. This perception of contemporary political relations might threaten not only interstate relations but democratic processes as well.

Even though they have their use, contemporary conspiracy theories can also be an instrument in the hands of those who wish to manipulate one part of humanity, which gives itself the right to critical thinking. The monopoly “over truth” is the biggest downfall of democracy, which can lead us towards neo-totalitarianism. In such an order, where only one centre of power determines what is true and what is false, a man would end up being like a bird in a golden cage.

What will happen if we pronounce some real danger to be a conspiracy theory, and thus denounce the right to question and doubt? Think about that.

⁴⁵⁰ Florijan Biber, Tena Prelec, Dejan Jović, Zoran Neće, *Sumnjivi virus: Zavere i COVID-19 na Balkanu*, BiEPAG, p. 5. <https://www.biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Conspiracies-and-Covid19-in-the-Balkans-Serbian.pdf>, 09.06.2024.

Based on the previously presented, we can state that there is an unbreakable bond between the COVID-19 pandemic and conspiracy theories. This is best depicted in the fact that all crises are suitable for strengthening such theories, given that they can provide seemingly “easy and clear responses” in moments of hardship. People would rather satisfy themselves with getting any type of truth (a lie or semi-truth) than live in ignorance and uncertainty brought upon by the coronavirus.

Another invisible bond links the coronavirus and *conspiracy theories*. Both phenomena spread fast, causing havoc. While the COVID-19 virus was spreading, the disinformation virus spread among humankind as well, and much disinformation impacted the popularity of *conspiracy theories*.

If fear is the dominant emotion, why are these theories so popular?

It seems that the response lies in the need for man, as a superior being on the planet, to control every type of crisis. And maybe the response can be found in finding the sense (at first glance) in senseless occurrences, such as COVID-19. This leads us to conclude that conspiracy theories, in their ontological meaning, play a significant role.

At the end of this reflection, we can present two perplexities.

The COVID-19 pandemic generated contemporary conspiracy theories. Although *conspiracy theories* became popular only in the 20th and 21st centuries and thus can be deemed a modern phenomenon, conspiracies have always been intrinsic to humankind. Therefore, one should make a scientific distinction between conspiracy and *conspiracy theory*.

The question to which giving a scientifically objective and precise response is challenging is as follows: what is the relation between conspiracy theories and truth, that is, a lie? This field of research is still shrouded in secrecy, thus making it more exciting for all who dare to deal with it. To respect the principles of scientific integrity and objectiveness, in this paper, we dealt with the phenomenology of conspiracy theories, their definition, and the correlation that undoubtedly exists when speaking of the COVID pandemic.

The issue of truth and falsehood in conspiracy theories will need to be explored further by new researchers in the future. We should

always analyse each conspiracy theory individually and approach this phenomenon with critical thinking if we aim to uncover the truth.

In the end, maybe we should take into consideration Freud's statement that most closely depicts the current state of conspiracy theories: "The fact that I am paranoid does not mean that I am not really being followed".⁴⁵¹

2.10. TERRORISM AND MENTAL ILLNESSES⁴⁵²

The increasing occurrence and brutality of terrorist attacks brought the question of the mental health of terrorists to the fore. There is a common opinion among the broad audience that individuals suffering from some mental disorders are responsible for such bestial terrorist attacks, such as the killings of children in Beslan, the 9/11 attack in America, Breivik's crime in Norway, etc. The foundation for such a statement can be found in the presumption that only mentally ill people are capable of conducting crimes of such proportions. Contrary to these amateur assumptions, science deals with facts and evidence on which it bases its conclusions. Because of this, the author of this monograph analysed relevant research (of which many were empirical) to determine the factual state and break numerous fallacies regarding the correlation between terrorism and mental illnesses. One such is that there is an exclusive link between violence and mental illnesses, which is very debatable.

Obviously, there is a scientific void in this field, and more work directed towards building the foundation of scientific facts is needed. The lack of data, the dynamic character of terrorism, the confidentiality of medical information, and weak cooperation

⁴⁵¹ Djoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2021, p. 42.

⁴⁵² The author especially grateful for the expert help and advice during the course of writing this research to Dr sci. med. Milica Išljamović from the Niš Health Centre and Kl. assist. Dr Robert Grujičić from the Institute for Mental Health and Faculty of Medicine of the University of Belgrade. This segment was taken from the following research: Djoric Marija, „Istraživanje korelacije mentalnih poremećaja i terorizma“, *Srpska politička misao*, No. 3, 2024, . 39–58.

between various experts make this topic insufficiently researched and quite an analytical challenge.

Terrorism and mental health are the two topics that are increasingly driving the attention of contemporary humanity, and for a reason. While on one hand, we have an intensification of terrorist attacks, on the other, an increasing number of mental disorders is being recorded, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. All the previously stated stress the need for the scientific and research community to analyse in detail the correlation of these two phenomena.

2.10.1. Mental disorders and violence

Mental health is a universal human right, and it is important not only for personal but social development. This fact is also confirmed by the UN, which states that mental health is “mental health is a global public good and is relevant to sustainable development in all countries, regardless of their socioeconomic status”.⁴⁵³ The World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community”.⁴⁵⁴

Mental health and treatment of mental illnesses are often a highly stigmatized topic, especially in countries with “low or average revenues”.⁴⁵⁵ It is important to stress that no man or a group is immune to mental illnesses, but according to the statement of the WHO, the risk of impairment of mental health increases among especially vulnerable groups, such as children and adolescents, the unemployed, migrants, victims of violence, old and helpless individuals ...⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵³ UNDP, *Guidance note: Integrating Mental Health and Psychosocial Support into Peacebuilding*, UNDP, New York, 2022, p. 5.

⁴⁵⁴ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>, 03.01.2024.

⁴⁵⁵ Weine S, Eisenman DP, Jackson LT, Kinsler J, Polutnik C, “Utilizing mental health professionals to help prevent the next attacks”, *International Review of Psychiatry*, No. 29, 2017, pp. 334–340.

⁴⁵⁶ WHO, *Investing in mental health*. Geneva, 2003, <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/42823/9241562579.pdf?sequence=1>, 02.01.2024.

Currently, approximately 970 million people worldwide suffer from some mental disorder.⁴⁵⁷ This represents a “syndrome that characterizes a significant clinical disorder in perception, regulation of emotions or behaviour of individuals, which reflects the dysfunction in psychological, biological or developmental processes, which are at the foundation of mental functioning⁴⁵⁸. The experts believe that immediately after the outbreak of the coronavirus in 2020, a sudden increase in anxiety (28%) and depression (26%) occurred.⁴⁵⁹

Besides the fact that the question of mental health is stigmatized, it corresponds with different prejudices as well. One of such prejudices is that all individuals suffering from some sort of mental disorder are violent, which is false. Many laymen often link brutal, violent phenomena (such as terrorism or mass shootings), or even immoral behaviour, with mental illnesses. We cannot make an explicit equivalence between these phenomena. Moreover, it is important to differentiate between psychosocial impairments (such as dysfunctional or maladjusted familial or peer relations) and mental disorders.

Mental health is no longer only dealt with by medicine, but by some other sciences as well. The extent to which the social sciences are increasingly becoming interested and are coexisting with medicine is best depicted by the so-called *analytical philosophy*, within which a field of research combining the knowledge of philosophy and psychiatry has developed. It is quite significant to examine the interconnection of mental health and violent forms of behaviour, such as extremism, terrorism, and violent crime, which is at the same time the field of interest of political science, criminology, and security science⁴⁶⁰, etc. Given that terrorism, as a form of political violence, is one of the biggest security issues of the present time on a global level, our pivotal research question in the field of political science is as follows: What is the correlation between mental disorders and terrorism?

⁴⁵⁷ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>, 02.01.2024.

⁴⁵⁸ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed., text rev.)*, American Psychiatric Association, Washington, DC, 2022.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁰ See more about the security science in: Mijalković Saša, *Nacionalna bezbednost, Kriminalističko-policijski univerzitet, Beograd, 2023.*

2.10.2. Correlation of mental disorders and terrorist attacks

One of the biggest mistakes in researching violent political phenomena (such as terrorism, mass shootings, etc.) is presuming that their perpetrators are “mentally disturbed”. Contrary to such a layman’s attitude, Ruby stated even in 2002 that terrorists opt for violence for their rational political reasons, and not because they are mentally ill.⁴⁶¹ This does not mean that there is no correlation between terrorism and mental disorders, but it is very important to examine each case separately, without the tendentious generalization. The problem with researching this topic lies in the fact that a relatively small number of empirical studies that would provide us with relevant conclusions is available. Therefore, the author of this book opted for the search for relevant research in bases such as *PubMed*, *Embase*, *Web of Science*, and *PsycINFO*.

Even though the first research on the topic of mental disorders among terrorists dates from the 1970s of the 20th century, the first empirical proof of a possible correlation between these two phenomena can be found only at the beginning of the 21st century.⁴⁶² We have decided at the beginning of this research to determine the percentage of prevalence of mental illnesses among terrorists. The information we acquired is quite heterogeneous and uneven. The latest research examining the link between terrorism and mental disorders from 2022 showed a prevalence level of 25.5%.⁴⁶³ Certain researchers identified 25 relevant studies that deal with the influence of mental health on the radicalization process, violent extremism, and terrorism. The results are quite different since the prevalence level ranged from 0% to 57%.⁴⁶⁴ After combining the results of all

⁴⁶¹ Ruby Charles, “Are Terrorists Mentally Deranged?” *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, No. 1, 2002, pp. 15–26.

⁴⁶² Corner Emily et al. “Reviewing the links between violent extremism and personality, personality disorders, and psychopathy”, *J Forens Psychiatry Psychol*, 2021, No. 32, 2021, pp. 378–407.

⁴⁶³ Kiran M. Sarma, Sarah L. Carthy, Katie M. Cox, “Mental disorder, psychological problems and terrorist behaviour: a systematic review and meta-analysis”, *Campbell Syst Rev.*, 2022.

⁴⁶⁴ Gill Paul et al., “Systematic Review of Mental Health Problems and Violent Extremism”, *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2021, pp. 51-78.

samples (1,705 respondents), we arrived at 14.4% with a confirmed diagnosis. The latest research could not find a direct link between psychiatric disorders and terrorism, but it indeed identified a certain link between radicalized individuals who are ready to conduct individual terrorist attacks (the so-called lone wolves).⁴⁶⁵

Examination of the physical health of 150 French citizens who joined ISIS showed that 12.7% previously resided in psychiatric clinics, while 29.3% of them practiced self-harm before they were radicalized.⁴⁶⁶ The idea of auto-aggression is present among extreme right-wingers as well, which can be seen in the example of white racists who expressed suicidal ideas or attempted suicides in 57% of cases.⁴⁶⁷ Some researchers even found a link between trauma and violent extremism. In fact, trauma is often a trigger for violent extremism⁴⁶⁸, and it is a known fact that violent extremism is the first step towards the emergence of terrorism.⁴⁶⁹

Problems faced by psychiatrists and P/VERLT practitioners in the assessment of the mental health of terrorists

At first glance, all this data seems confusing and does not offer a real picture of the possible link between terrorism and mental disorders. One of the reasons is that there is a discrepancy between the conclusions of doctors and P/VERLT practitioners⁴⁷⁰. The second reason is that there is still no adequate synergy between

⁴⁶⁵ Margot Trimbur et al., "Are radicalization and terrorism associated with psychiatric disorders?", *A systematic review. J Psychiatr Res.* 2021.

⁴⁶⁶ Gill Paul, Caitlin Clemmow, Florian Hetzel, Bettina Rottweiler, Nadine Salman, Isabelle Van Der Vegt, Zoe Marchment, Sandy Schumann, Sanaz Zolghadriha, Norah Schulten, Helen Taylor & Emily Corner, „Systematic Review of Mental Health Problems and Violent Extremism”, *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 2020, p. 8.

⁴⁶⁷ Pete Simi, Karyn Sporer, Bryan Bubolz, "Narratives of childhood adversity and adolescent misconduct as precursors to violent extremism: A life-course criminological approach", *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, No. 4, 2016, pp. 536–563.

⁴⁶⁸ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-07/ran_hsc_prac_mental_health_03062019_en.pdf, 01.01.2024.

⁴⁶⁹ Djoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2021, pp. 51–55.

⁴⁷⁰ Preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism.

medicine (especially psychiatry) and security when speaking of this phenomenon. One of the possible problems is also the wrong assessment of mental health in the context of terrorism and violent extremism (and radicalization), which instantly leads to invalid conclusions. If we add the ethical issue to this problem, i.e., the sensitivity of sharing medical information on individuals, we can understand how much this topic is a “big bite” for both theoreticians and practitioners. If it turns out that some individuals, besides suffering from mental problems, also have the potential for extremist/terrorist action, then, besides the psychiatrist who will work with that individual, suitable support from the security sector is needed as well. The reason behind the need for expert help from the field of security is the recognition of the ideological element of terrorism and the political dimension of the problem.⁴⁷¹

There is one issue to which numerous experts cannot offer a precise response. The said question is as follows: *Is someone radicalized if they make extremist statements, caused by mental disorders?* **It is important to stress that radicalization is not a mental disorder.** It is a process after which, through the adoption of ideological content and value system, a certain individual becomes a terrorist (or violent extremist), and it can last for several weeks, months, or even several years. Another problematic question we can ask is the following: *What's with the individuals who wish to shock the broader public with their statements, without the intention to conduct a terrorist act?*⁴⁷² It is obvious that there are a lot of voids in this field that should be filled. This only confirms the fact that the interaction between psychopathology and violent extremism is predominantly unclear and extremely complex.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ No matter how expert medical specialists are, to confirm that a person was radicalized, adequate knowledge from the wide spectre of P/VERLT – political science, security science, criminology, social pathology... is needed. Moreover, not even the P/VERLT practitioners can diagnose by themselves a mental disorder, since they do not possess adequate knowledge from the field of medicine, and thus, cooperation is necessary.

⁴⁷² For example, teenagers send false reports on bombs planted in public institutions, thus disrupting the entire security and social system and spreading panic and fear.

⁴⁷³ Schulten Norah, „Practitioners’ perspectives on the challenges of dealing with the interaction between mental illness and violent extremism in Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)”, *Behavioural Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 2022, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19434472.2022.2142268>, 26.12.2023.

To determine the connection between mental disorders and terrorism, it is essential to involve multiagency teams (from different fields: security, medicine, psychology, social work, criminology, political science...) in this assessment to come to a relevant conclusion. Each case must be analysed individually, and a holistic approach is crucial.

The problem of mental health is becoming increasingly present within the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism framework. Still, little is known about the experiences of practitioners in this field. Recently, research was published consisting of semi-structured interviews with 12 international experts dealing with mental health and 13 Dutch practitioners dealing with CVE. The results of the research show that the cases of extremism linked with mental illnesses are characterized by heterogeneity, (non)dichotomy, and lack of information.⁴⁷⁴ The document recently published by the Dutch government states that several hundred adolescents who joined extreme right-wing organizations online relatively often⁴⁷⁵ have physical issues.⁴⁷⁶

In this and similar research, the disadvantage is that the border between psychopathology as a vulnerability and a risk factor for extremism might become blurry and confused. What is important is that the psychopathology of an individual cannot be strictly used as a direct causal predictor of a potential terrorist/extremist attack. Moreover, it should be stressed that, according to the statement of a group of researchers, individuals suffering from mental disorders are more often victims than perpetrators.⁴⁷⁷ This statement should be approached with caution since we do not possess precise empirical indicators.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ This is an insufficiently precise definition, and thus, more information should be given to deem it valid.

⁴⁷⁶ NCTV. Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland. Consulted on: <https://www.nctv.nl/documenten/publicaties/2021/10/26/dreigingsbeeld-terrorisme-nederland-55> 21.06.2024.

⁴⁷⁷ Dom, Geert et al., "Mass violence, radicalization and terrorism: A role for psychiatric profession?", *European Psychiatry*, No. 49, 2018, pp. 78–80.

Specific forms of terrorism and mental disorders

Despite different attitudes on the topic of terrorism and mental illnesses, one fact persists: what is possible among the general population can also be seen among terrorists, which means that the emergence of mental illnesses is present among terrorists as well. Some scientific studies diagnosed the most common disorders among terrorists as follows: an inclination towards depression⁴⁷⁸, schizophrenia, Asperger's syndrome⁴⁷⁹, ADHD, psychotic disorders, and borderline personality disorders.⁴⁸⁰ However, it is very important to notice which types of mental illnesses emerge among specific types of terrorism, since the results are not the same.

Among members of the so-called **jihadi terrorist organizations**, specific disorders were recorded, as noted by Leygraf in his empirical study, consisting of analyses of 29 individuals charged with the criminal act of terrorism. He concluded that three individuals suffered from schizophrenic psychosis, while two suffered from primary dissociative problems.⁴⁸¹ In the Netherlands, upon examination of 140 dossiers of the so-called foreign terrorist fighters⁴⁸², it was determined that individuals suffered from ADHD, attention disorders, narcissistic personality structures, psychoses, post-traumatic disorders, and different spectrums of autism.⁴⁸³

Individual terrorism, that is, the emergence of "lone wolves", is especially interesting for this topic. According to Boaz Ganor, three types of motives can be found among "lone wolves": 1) ideological,

⁴⁷⁸ Bakker, E, *Jihadi terrorists in Europe: Their characteristics and the circumstances in which they joined the jihad: An exploratory study*, Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2006.

⁴⁷⁹ Knight Sarah, Woodward Katie, Lancaster Gary, "Violent versus nonviolent actors: An empirical study of different types of extremism", *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, No. 4, 2017, p. 230.

⁴⁸⁰ Van Leyenhorst, M., & Andreas, A, *Dutch Suspects of Terrorist Activity: A Study of Their Biographical Backgrounds Based on Primary Sources*. *Journal for Deradicalization*, No. 12, 2017, pp. 309–344.

⁴⁸¹ Leygraf Norbert, „On the phenomenology of Islamic terrorist offenders”, *Forensische Psychiatrie, Psychologie, Kriminologie*, No. 4, 2014, pp. 237–245.

⁴⁸² This is about people who joined some terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq.

⁴⁸³ Anton Weenink, "Behavioral problems and disorders among radicals in police files", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, No. 9, 2015, pp. 17-33.

2) psychopathological, and 3) motives of a personal nature.⁴⁸⁴ Even though there is no direct⁴⁸⁵ link with some terrorist group or organization, the author of this text believes that the “lone wolves” are always members of some “pack”, even if it is virtual. Scientists believe that affinity towards mental illnesses is even 13.5 times higher among terrorists who act individually, s lone wolves, in comparison to the actors who are a part of some terrorist group or organization.⁴⁸⁶ Corner, Gill and Mason identified the following problems upon examination of a sample of 135 “lone wolves”: 1.3% suffered from a traumatic brain injury; 0.7 % is addicted to drugs; 8.5% suffer from schizophrenia; 0.7% suffer from a schizoaffective disorder; 2.0% suffer from delusional disorder; among 0.7% of them, psychotic disorder was identified; 7.2% suffer from depression; 3.9% of respondents were bipolar; 1.3% terrorists suffered from non-specific anxiety disorders; 0.7% suffer from dissociative disorder; 1.3% suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder; among them, 3.3% suffered from PTSP; among 0.7% of them, non-specific sleeping disorder was diagnosed; 6.5% suffer from non-specific personality disorder; 3.3% were diagnosed with a disorder from the spectre of autism.⁴⁸⁷ Based on the analysis of this sample, it can be seen that the “lone wolves”, percentage-wise, suffer the most from depression and schizophrenia, which is not be the valid rule in cases of other terrorists. In support of our statement, another study shows that the level of schizophrenia and psychoses is elevated among individual terrorists in comparison to the general population.⁴⁸⁸ The issue with this research is that it does not express exactly that difference.

Suicide terrorism is very interesting for research when speaking of this topic. Hence, scientists created a comparison between perpetrators of suicidal terrorist attacks and other terrorists and criminals (the control group). The acquired results show that suicide

⁴⁸⁴ Ganor Boaz, “Understanding the Motivations of ‘Lone Wolf’ Terrorists: The ‘Bathub’ Model”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, No. 2, 2021, p. 26.

⁴⁸⁵ We are, above all, speaking of physical contact and cooperation.

⁴⁸⁶ Corner Emily, Gill Paul, “A false dichotomy? Mental illness and lone-actor terrorism”, *Law and Human Behavior*, No. 1, 2015. pp. 23-34.

⁴⁸⁷ Corner Emily, Gill Paul, Mason Oliver, “Mental health disorders and the terrorist: A research note probing selection effects and disorder prevalence”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, No. 6, 2016, pp. 560-568.

⁴⁸⁸ Anton Weenink, “Behavioral problems and disorders among radicals in police files”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, No. 9, 2015, pp. 17-33.

terrorists are prone to deflecting and addictive personality disorders (60% in comparison to 17%); problems with depression are more pronounced among them (53% in comparison to 8%); they are more prone to suicidal behaviour (40% in comparison to 0%). On the other hand, the control group expresses the following characteristics in comparison to suicide terrorists: a greater inclination towards psychopathic behaviour (25% in comparison to 0%); and affinity towards impulsive behaviour (67% in comparison to 27%).⁴⁸⁹ The same author introduced in different research, conducted with a group of researchers, a significant distinction between the ideologues who organize suicide actions and perpetrators of suicide terrorism. Namely, the organizers were more inclined towards emotional instability and impulsiveness when compared to potential suicide bombers⁴⁹⁰, which is, in a way, quite peculiar and interesting information.

It is difficult to simplify what affects the health of potential terrorists the most. Gill and other researchers still stated several key factors: private life and relationships, discrimination, money and job, life changes, health issues, traumatic events, the use of psychoactive substances, and vices.⁴⁹¹

Private life and personal (emotional) relationships are of essential significance for the mental health of all people, including terrorists as well. If an individual is isolated and lonely, then they will attempt to fill this void by developing new (extreme) relations – for example, with a terrorist group.⁴⁹² The research on the French jihadists showed that some of them nurtured bad relations with their mothers, which led to their negative attitudes towards women.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁹ Merari, Ariel, *Driven to death: Psychological and social aspects of suicide terrorism*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

⁴⁹⁰ Merari, Ariel, et al., “Personality characteristics of “self-martyrs”/“suicide bombers” and organizers of suicide attacks”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, No. 1, 2009, pp. 87–101.

⁴⁹¹ Gill Paul et al, “Systematic Review of Mental Health Problems and Violent Extremism”, *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, No. 1, 2021, pp. 13.

⁴⁹² Hélène Bazex, Michel Bénézec, Jean-Yves Mensat, “The mirror of hatred. Prison treatment of radicalization: Clinical and criminological analysis of 112 persons under court”, *ANNALES MEDICO-PSYCHOLOGIQUES*, No. 3, 2017, pp. 276–282.

⁴⁹³ Hélène Bazex, Jean-Yves Mensat, “Who are the French jihadists? Analysis of 12 cases to help develop profiles and assessment of the risk of acting out”, *Annales MedicoPsychologiques*, No. 4, 2016, pp. 257–265.

Other researchers stressed that a high level of isolation from society, as well as sorrow, will very likely predispose an individual for radicalization.⁴⁹⁴

Life changes and stress can be a trigger for radicalization that leads to terrorism. Among individual terrorists, a trigger for radicalization was registered among big life changes (up to 45% of them opted for conducting a terrorist act after some crucial changes in their lives)⁴⁹⁵. Other researchers noticed that 29% of lone wolves suffered from the **loss of social position** (status) before radicalization, while 36% of them were expelled from some social organizations or fired from work.⁴⁹⁶ This means that devaluation of their previous identity or status was made up for by entering the new value system of some terrorist ideology (or group).⁴⁹⁷

When speaking of addictions to psychoactive substances, the abuse of alcohol and drugs is a common occurrence among extremists and terrorists. The RAN handbook includes the following link between terrorism, mental disorders, and psychoactive substances:⁴⁹⁸

1. Alcohol and drugs make an individual vulnerable when speaking of the radicalization process;
2. Psychoactive substances increase the risk of acceptance of violent ideologies and behaviour;
3. Psychoactive substances encourage the easier conduct of a violent act;
4. The fourth link points to narco-terrorism, which is a specific hybrid of terrorism and organized crime and is thus not linked to mental disorders.

⁴⁹⁴ Böckler, N., Leuschner, V., Zick, A., & Scheithauer, H., "Same but different? Developmental pathways to demonstrative targeted attacks—Qualitative case analyses of adolescent and young adult perpetrators of targeted school attacks and jihadi terrorist attacks in Germany", *International Journal of Developmental Science*, No. 4, 2018, pp. 5–24.

⁴⁹⁵ Capellan Joel, "Lone wolf terrorist or deranged shooter? A study of ideological active shooter events in the United States, 1970–2014", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, No. 6, 2015, pp. 395–413.

⁴⁹⁶ Katarzyna Jasko, Gary LaFree, Arie Kruglanski, "Quest for significance and violent extremism: The case of domestic radicalization", *Political Psychology*, No. 5, 2017, pp. 815–831.

⁴⁹⁷ They do not necessarily need to be members of a group, but they can share the values of the group and identify with them.

⁴⁹⁸ RAN, *Extremism, Radicalisation & Mental Health: Handbook for Practitioners*, RAN, 2019.

Through the analysis of the present scientific research from different fields (psychiatry, political science, criminology, social pathology), we have concluded that there is no clear empirical proof that only individuals suffering from mental disorders are behind terrorist attacks. The clinical study of terrorism and violent extremism is relatively new, and there are no comprehensive empirical studies based on which correct and reliable conclusions can be made. The only reliable things in the research on this topic are heterogeneity, (non)dichotomy, and the lack of information.

What is determined through the comparative analysis is that there are indications that mental illnesses more often emerge among some categories of terrorists, such as the “lone wolves”⁴⁹⁹, and up to 13.5 times more often in comparison to other groups of terrorists. An affinity towards certain types of mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia or depression, is noted among them, but this still does not speak to the fact that all individuals suffering from this type of mental disorder are at risk of becoming terrorists.

It is important to note that we cannot allow the stigmatization of mentally ill individuals in the context of terrorism and violence. The fact that someone is mentally ill does not necessarily mean that this individual will be violent. Extremists and terrorists are not necessarily mentally ill. At the same time, some individuals suffering from mental disorders might express an extremist value system and violent attitudes.⁵⁰⁰ Moreover, it should be stressed that radicalization is not a psychological disorder. It is interesting to note that some studies state that, in some cases, mental illnesses can pose as a deterring factor (prevention) from extremism.⁵⁰¹ Such statements should be taken with reservation and very carefully since they are based on some cases and cannot be generalized.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 6.

⁵⁰⁰ Al-Attar, Zainab, *Extremism, radicalisation & mental health: Handbook for practitioners*, Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), 2019, See: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_h-sc_handbook-for-practitioners_extremism-radicalisation-mental-health_112019_en.pdf

⁵⁰¹ Ibid. p. 38.

Mental illnesses are something people face worldwide, no matter their status, gender, nation, religion⁵⁰², or age. As they can emerge among the general population, they can also be seen among terrorists. The only question is – in what range and in which conditions? Until now, it has been determined that traumatic events can be a significant trigger for violent extremism.⁵⁰³ This is also an indicator that, to preserve the mental health of contemporary humanity, but also prevent terrorism, a lot should be (systemically) done in terms of prevention of health issues. Besides that, linking experts from different fields is necessary for the exchange of knowledge and previous experience. Moreover, a lot should be done to empower new, above all, empirical research, which would come to relevant conclusions. In this paper, we did not examine the gender issue and the role of women⁵⁰⁴ in the context of mental health and terrorism, but it is a topic that is yet to become the subject of serious scientific research.

In the end, it should be said that, no matter the existing correlations between mental health and terrorism, every person should be approached individually, since every person has different fingerprints on their hand, just as the souls of each of us differ. And to perceive a man's soul is a complex and quite demanding process, especially when speaking of the souls of those who have stepped on the path (that is, sidetrack) of terrorism.

⁵⁰² Regarding the link between religion and politics, see more in: Milošević Zoran, *Religija i politika*, Matica srpska, Podgorica, 2024.

⁵⁰³ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-07/ran_hsc_prac_mental_health_03062019_en.pdf, 01.01.2024.

⁵⁰⁴ There are scientific studies that deal with this topic, but they are a rarity. For example, De Vogel, Vivienne, Jeanine Stam, Yvonne Bouman, Paul Ter Horst, and Marike Lancel, "Violent women: A multicentre study into gender differences in forensic psychiatric patients", *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, No. 2, 2016, pp. 145-168.

2.11. MASS SHOOTINGS – SERBIA AS A CASE STUDY

An unprecedented tragedy occurred on May 03, 2023, when a minor, Kosta Kecmanović, shot his friends with a firearm at the “Vladislav Ribnikar” elementary school in Belgrade. Nine children and a school guard were killed then.⁵⁰⁵ The boy-killer was 13, which means that, according to the laws of the Republic of Serbia, he is not subject to criminal liability as a minor.⁵⁰⁶

Mass killings of this sort did not occur in Serbia before, and what especially shook the entire public was the fact that the perpetrator of this brutal crime was a child. For now, there isn't any reliable information about the motives and mental health of the perpetrator, since the criminal proceedings are still ongoing.⁵⁰⁷ The majority of information regarding this case can be acquired from the media, which is unreliable since it is riddled with sensationalism. For now, it is known that this mass murder was conducted with a firearm, which this minor acquired from his father. What is especially worrisome is the fact that the father of the minor, Kosta Kecmanović, taught his son to shoot in the shooting range (which is forbidden for minors) and that the owner of the shooting range, against whom criminal proceedings are also ongoing, was aware of this.⁵⁰⁸

Besides the bestial mass murder, this crime is known because it triggered an avalanche of events as a domino effect, which is often, in the expert literature, called a *copycat*.⁵⁰⁹ Imitation or the *copycat effect*

⁵⁰⁵ Ana, Sofija, Andrija, Katarina, Angelina, Mara, Ema, Adriana, Bojana and Dragan.

⁵⁰⁶ According to the Criminal Law of the Republic of Serbia, 14 is the legal age at which a minor becomes criminally liable. See Article 2 of the Law on Minor Perpetrators of Criminal Acts: https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_maloletnim_uciniocima_krivicnih_dela_i_krivicnopravnoj_zastiti_maloletnih_lica.html; 23.07.2024.

⁵⁰⁷ The boy is currently under the control of the expert medical staff, while criminal proceedings against his parents are currently ongoing.

⁵⁰⁸ The owner of the shooting range was sentenced to five months of prison (he will serve his sentence under house arrest). <https://www.republika.rs/hronika/hronika/559950/kosta-kecmanovic-vlasnik-streljane-presuda>; 23.07.2023.

⁵⁰⁹ This phenomenon is also called a *contagion effect*, even though certain researchers make small but significant distinctions between the “contagion effect” and *copycat* mass shootings.

corresponds with the Werther's effect⁵¹⁰, defined by David Phillips in 1974, who showed that sensationalist reporting on some violent event incites its imitation.⁵¹¹ Contrary to Werther's effect, there is the so-called Papageno effect⁵¹², which points to the fact that constructive reporting in the media and the focus on the victims (and not the perpetrators), as well as solving the existing problems, might be an example of good journalism that helps prevent similar events.

Soon after the tragedy at the "Vladislav Ribnikar" elementary school, another mass shooting took place in Mladenovac, during which, in the villages of Malo Orašje and Dubona, Uroš Blažić killed nine and injured 12 individuals.⁵¹³ Given that the perpetrator was 20 at the time of conducting this crime (a younger adult), he will most probably be sentenced to no longer than 20 years in prison. Criminal proceedings against him, in which he is charged with aggravated murder, are currently ongoing.

One of the perplexities regarding mass shootings in Belgrade and Mladenovac was in terms of the type of violence that was conducted. Namely, in the media, there were speculations about whether this was terrorism. By the way, many people tend to associate all violent events, and especially brutal ones, with terrorism. The reason is understandable, bearing in mind that, for a simple man, who does not deal with this phenomenon professionally, terrorism is a personification of evil. Indeed, terrorism is a form of political violence that involves usually the most brutal (and often very mass) crimes. However, **not every type of bestial violence is terrorism**. To name something terrorism, it should first have a political motive, political consequences, and a political goal (and some other indicators).

When we compare mass shootings with terrorism, the trap lies in the fact that terrorist attacks also often involve mass shootings.

⁵¹⁰ The Werther's effect was named after Goethe's work "The Sorrows of Young Werther". It is believed that young people imitated Werther, and in such a way, the suicide rate rose. This is why this book is forbidden in some countries (Denmark, Germany, Italy...).

⁵¹¹ https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb0206043f/_2.pdf, 25.07.2024.

⁵¹² This effect was named after Papageno, a character from the famous Mozart opera "The Magic Flute". efekat je dobio naziv po Papagenu, liku iz čuvene Mocartove opere Čarobna frula. Because of love woes, Papageno decides to end his life, when three boys appear, advising him to overcome this life challenge with music. Here, we focus on finding constructive solutions whenever encounter life adversities.

⁵¹³ Two minors were also among the killed. The youngest victim was 14, and the oldest was 25.

Therefore, we always examine the motive of the perpetrator. If a mass shooting does not possess a political motive, then it would be problematic to say that we are speaking of terrorism. Thus, we are not speaking of the method of conducting a crime, the number of killed, or the means of conduct, but about motivation. The motive of a terrorist is always political, which is not a necessary feature of mass shootings. Therefore, we should always wait for official statements of the state bodies to find out the motive that generated some violent events.

Sherry Towers was one of the first researchers to examine and quantify the “contagion effect” in mass shootings in 2015. She concluded that mass shootings increased the danger of future shootings in the next 13 days, whilst they incite 0.2 to 0.3 future attacks per average.⁵¹⁴ A hypothesis also emerged, stating that sensationalist media reporting was the main generator of the “contagion effect”. Some other researchers (Michael Jetter and Jay K. Walker) concluded that reporting on mass shootings enables the multiplication of such events in the following month.⁵¹⁵

At first glance, mass shootings are a typical “American” phenomenon, keeping in mind that only last year, 47 such occurrences were recorded in the USA, in which 869 people were killed.⁵¹⁶ It is believed that during the last ten years, more than 19,000 people were killed in this type of shooting in America.⁵¹⁷

There are different definitions of this phenomenon, but they all point to the fact that it is an individual violent act (with the use of firearms) taking place in a public place, linked to three or more deaths.⁵¹⁸ This definition corresponds with the determination of the mass shooting by the FBI, according to which a mass shooting is

⁵¹⁴ <https://www.thetrace.org/2023/02/mass-shooting-contagion-effect-research/>, 23.07.2024.

⁵¹⁵ Jetter, Michael and Walker, Jay, *The Effect of Media Coverage on Mass Shootings. IZA Discussion Paper* No. 1190 <https://theconversation.com/why-do-mass-shooters-kill-its-about-more-than-having-a-grievance-198387> 0, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3286159>

⁵¹⁶ <https://theconversation.com/why-do-mass-shooters-kill-its-about-more-than-having-a-grievance-198387>, 23.07.2024.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ Before 2013, it was deemed that a mass shooting is when four or more individuals are killed.

“every incident in which at least four individuals are killed by a gun”.⁵¹⁹ It is implied in this definition that it was done by one individual in one location (or several locations in the immediate vicinity).

The US Congress differentiates mass shootings from mass public shootings.⁵²⁰ While mass shootings can occur anywhere, with mass public shootings, the emphasis is on public places, implying malls, schools, restaurants, places of worship, the street, etc. Many definitions of mass shootings exclude mass killings that resulted from some other events, such as robberies or reckonings between criminal clans and gangs. Observation made by the group for gun control “Everytown for Gun Safety” is interesting, but also important, since it stated that a mass shooting is “every incident in which more than four individuals were killed or **shot, excluding the attacker**”.⁵²¹ In this definition, it is important that, besides the killed, the wounded count as well; the other fact is that the shooter, that is, the perpetrator of the violence, is not included in the final count of victims (if it comes to his death). By the way, in a significant number of mass shootings, the perpetrators of this criminal act usually commit suicide.

According to some classifications, there are three types of shooters who conduct mass shootings.⁵²²

- **Traumatised shooters.** These are individuals who usually come from dysfunctional families, often use psychoactive substances and usually have a criminal record.
- **Psychotic shooters.** They usually suffer from schizophrenia or some other mental disorder (among them, the dysfunctionality of the family is not an important generator of violence).
- **Psychopathic shooters.** For this category, narcissistic disorder and lack of empathy are characteristics.

This phenomenon has a gender dimension as well, given that perpetrators of mass shootings are predominantly men. We can also notice the racial dimension (at least when speaking of America), given that from 1982 until 2023, mass shootings were conducted

⁵¹⁹ <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/analysis-recent-mass-shootings>, 23.07.2024.

⁵²⁰ Krouse William, Richardson Daniel, *Mass Murder with Firearms: Incidents and Victims, 1999 – 2013*. Washington, DC, Congressional Research Service, 2015.

⁵²¹ <https://everytownresearch.org/mass-shootings-in-america/>, 23.07.2024.

⁵²² Wike Traci, Fraser Mark, “School shootings: Making sense of the senseless”, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, Vol. 14, No. 3, May–June 2009, pp. 162–169.

predominantly by white men (over 54%).⁵²³ During the same period, 143 shootings were conducted by men, while women were responsible for only four incidents.⁵²⁴ In a way, we can state that mass shootings are predominantly a “male phenomenon”.

The motives for organizing mass shootings are different, and they vary from individual to individual, though scientists and practitioners stated that there are two common elements linking all perpetrators. Those are as follows:

- The need to show that they matter;
- The desire for fame and popularity.

When speaking of the desire for fame, one could ask – aren’t there some other, less violent ways for an individual to become popular? For example, someone could try their hand at show business, arts, sports, etc., and thus, realize this desire. Of course, that is possible, but these so-called non-violent methods of acquiring fame take a lot of time, effort, and energy (and, of course, talent), while mass shootings provide the so-called instant fame. Kruglanski believes that 25-31% of perpetrators of mass shootings suffer from some mental illness, as well as that often issues with isolation and interpersonal relations are present as well.⁵²⁵ In fact, it is not difficult to conclude that loneliness and poor interpersonal relations represent a trigger for many negative phenomena, including mass shootings. Besides that, it is noted that 25% of perpetrators of this criminal act use some psychoactive substances, which might represent an additional influence for conducting violence.⁵²⁶ That violence begets violence is also seen in the fact that 71% of shooters were subjected to bullying in schools.⁵²⁷

A significant question posed when researching this phenomenon is as follows: **Can mass shootings be prevented, and how?** We

⁵²³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/476456/mass-shootings-in-the-us-by-shooter-s-race/>, 24.07.2024.

⁵²⁴ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/476445/mass-shootings-in-the-us-by-shooter-s-gender/>, 23.07.2024.

⁵²⁵ <https://www.upi.com/Voices/2023/04/14/mass-shootings-motive-grievance/3141681473504/>, 24.07.2024.

⁵²⁶ <https://www.columbiapsychiatry.org/news/mass-shootings-and-mental-illness>, 25.07.2024.

⁵²⁷ Metzl Jonathan, Piemonte Jennifer, McKay Tara, Mental Illness, “Mass Shootings, and the Future of Psychiatric Research into American Gun Violence”, *Harv Rev Psychiatry*, No. 1, 2021, pp. 81-89.

often look for “red flags” that might indicate a potential for this type of violence. The problem lies in the fact that almost 50% of mass shootings do not have any explicit indicators that they are about to happen: no mental illnesses, no criminal records, or any clear sign.

The average perpetrator of a mass shooting is a middle-aged man⁵²⁸, who reacts intensively to some type of acute stress.

The use of firearms is the *differentia specifica* of mass shootings. There are several reasons for this:

- **Revenge** – With the use of firearms (especially if automatic rifles are used), the shooter can kill a large number of victims in a short period, thus realizing the desire for revenge to the fullest extent.
- **Suicide** – It is believed that one-third of all perpetrators of mass shootings plan their suicide after the “completed task”, and thus firearms make for the most practical means for doing so.
- **The romanticization of violence** – The modern film industry did a lot in the context of the romanticization of violence and anti-heroes. Such perception favours the use of firearms, thus opening much space for sensationalization, making the shooter into an anti-hero.

The alarm that can point to the decadence of contemporary society and the complete lack of sympathy is the support the shooters get through social networks. The public in Serbia was shocked by the messages of support the killer from the “Vladislav Ribnikar” elementary school received after conducting the mass murder of his school friends. One of the messages of such content states the following:

Bravo Kosta, I am on your side, he will get out at some point, and they, thank God, never will...529

School shootings are a subtype of mass public shootings, specifically taking place in schools (elementary, high schools, and colleges). Even though they occur worldwide, they are the most

⁵²⁸ School shootings are the exception, in which perpetrators are young.

⁵²⁹ <https://srpskainfo.com/bravo-kosta-ja-sam-na-tvojoj-strani-nevjerovatne-rijeci-podrskne-na-drustvenim-mrezama-djecaku-koji-je-pocinio-masakr/>, 24.07.2024.

widespread in America (87 per year on average)⁵³⁰. Following the U.S., Mexico and South Africa have the next highest numbers of incidents. The statistic is terrifying, especially in terms of the USA, since it shows that, from 1999 to today, more than 378,000 students have been exposed to school shootings (as witnesses or victims).⁵³¹ The average age of perpetrators of school shootings is 16,⁵³² while the number of such incidents increases year in and year out. When speaking of the causes of this phenomenon, they are not monocausal. It can be noted that the biggest generators of school shootings are mental illnesses, peer violence (bullying), depression, the need for recognition (and fame), etc.

Finally, one very significant thing should be mentioned, which is the **role of the media in the creation and prevention of violence in society**, which refers to mass/school shootings as well. It is a fact that the media have a big influence on the formation of social attitudes (this especially refers to children and youth, who are susceptible to the influence of others). To this testify the best scientific papers and research on this topic. In fact, after the mass killings in the “Vladislav Ribnikar” elementary school, the issue of the harmfulness of reality shows in Serbia was raised in the public discourse. It was established in a large number of scientific papers, on a global level, that this type of program hurts mental health.

How do reality programs impact mental health?

Based on a pattern of 110 reality programs, scientists determined that after watching such TV programs, the viewers exhibited an increase in anger, aggression, frustration, as well as bad mood.⁵³³

- *They increase aggressive behaviour (especially among youth) and reduce empathy since this model of behaviour becomes normal.*

⁵³⁰ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/school-shootings-by-country>, 24.07.2024.

⁵³¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/interactive/school-shootings-database/>, 23.07.2024.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Reysen Stephen, Katzarska Miller Iva, “Association Between Reality Television and Aggression: It Depends on the Show”, *AASCIT Journal of Psychology*, No. 5, 2017, pp. 56-61.

- *They impact the elevation of depression and negative attitudes towards their life and appearance, especially among those reality programs that promote modelling.*
- *Parents and children who watch such types of programs become indisposed and aggressive.*⁵³⁴

Even before this research, Loren Coleman came to a conclusion in her book *The Copycat Effect* that media and popular culture, in general, can have a grand impact on violence in society.⁵³⁵ The “Mental Health Foundation” from Great Britain determined in its research that reality programs are especially harmful to the youth because, besides the fact that they incite aggression, they create a negative value system and incite suicides among the youth and adolescents.⁵³⁶

Some more recent scientific works determine that after watching a reality program, teenagers often exhibit low self-respect, a negative attitude towards themselves, anxiety and insecurity, while some resort to bullying others.⁵³⁷ The biggest problem with this type of program is that it kills the feeling of empathy among children, and they get used to violence as a state of normalcy. The argument that children and youth do not watch television, and thus cannot be subjected to this harmful content – cannot be acceptable. And we will explain why. Namely, certain parts of reality programs (especially the ones that force violence and immoral behaviour) reach social networks through reels, memes, and other formats. In this way, they become viral in the lives of children and teenagers.

In the context of the mass shooting that took place in Serbia, we still cannot search for the causes, since all legal, medical, and investigative actions must be completed and determined by the competent authorities, with the help of experts. But what is evident is that all of us, on local, national, and global levels, live in times of violence. Violence has become a part of our everyday life, which we encounter in real life, but in our virtual lives as well. Even worse,

⁵³⁴ See more in: <https://www.unitedwecare.com/the-reality-show-affects-your-mental-health/>, 24.07.2024.

⁵³⁵ Coleman Loren, *The Copycat Effect*, Paraview Pocket Box, London New York, 2004.

⁵³⁶ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/blogs/harsh-reality-reality-tv-and-mental-health/>, 25.07.2024.

⁵³⁷ Nela Alfred, “The Psychological Impact of ‘Reality Tv’ on Teenagers”, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379485260_The_Psychological_Impact_of_Reality_Tv_on_Teenagers, 24.07.2024.

violence has become the “normality” to which we are accustomed. With the intensification of violence comes the loss of empathy as well, and thus, in this way, contemporary society starts to suffer acutely from the lack of kindness and love. In this labyrinth of violence, from which we struggle to find a way out, we see more and more youth and children, which is quite a tragedy. Children are always a reflection of adults, and thus, we should all ask ourselves where we failed when we created such insecure living conditions for our children. If we are guided by the well-known saying that *the world rests on the young*, it is logical to think – what kind of world will the young create, if violence is the essence of their lives? It is still not too late to fix many things, because of this, we need a complete reset of the value system. The question is not whether we have the power but – whether we have the will.

3. HOOLIGANISM IN THE BALKANS

3.1. THE ORIGIN OF HOOLIGANISM: WHO ARE THE HOOLIGANS, AND WHO ARE THE FANS?

The birthplace of hooliganism is Great Britain. This is why it can often be heard that hooliganism is a “British illness”. It seems that the “virus of hooliganism” successfully penetrated all countries, and thus, we can perceive it as not only British but a global phenomenon. It is believed that the official beginning of modern English hooliganism is related to the television broadcast of the 1961 football match between “Tottenham” and “Sunderland”: “Violence between rival fans, vandalism, provocation of the police and rivalry between fans were the first indicators of this phenomenon”⁵³⁸. The role of the media is more than evident in terms of popularization⁵³⁹ of this occurrence, since by transmitting violence from sports stadiums, they influenced the increase in popularity of violent fans.

Everywhere where there is a fan subculture, there is a real danger of the emergence of hooliganism. We have already arrived at the first trap of researching this phenomenon, depicted in its amalgamation with fandom. This is why the author of this book feels the need to

⁵³⁸ Guilianotti, Richard, *Football – a sociology of the global game*, Policy Press, London, 2000, p. 41.

⁵³⁹ Our intention here is not to accuse the media of popularizing hooliganism but to stress their influence in spreading information about some phenomenon.

establish a “rule of law” in determining the correlation between a fan and a hooligan:

All hooligans are fans, but not all fans are hooligans.

A fan is someone who passionately supports a particular sport, club or national team without resorting to violence. While the concept of fandom has existed since the inception of sports, the first football fans as a phenomenon in its modern meaning emerged in 1863, with the founding of the Football Association⁵⁴⁰.

The essence of fandom lies in cheering and motivating the athletes to achieve the best result possible. One logical question emerges: What does the fan get out of it? After years of researching this topic, I arrived at a straightforward conclusion. Those who are sincere and pragmatic in their fandom perceive the success of their favourite athletes as their own. Therefore, we are speaking of identification based on an exceptional perception of identity. In addition, being a fan can provide a valuable form of catharsis, allowing us to forget our problems and focus on *the most important secondary thing in the world*: football. Of course, fandom is exclusive to football, but it is particularly prominent in this sport due to its global popularity. Except for the spiritual “charge” we get by celebrating the successes of our athletes, there is also that moment of “discharge”, which implies that through the process of cheering, we also release frustration-aggression. The problem emerges when violence (physical or psychological) enters the cheering process, thus qualifying the fans for a new gloomy category we call hooliganism.

By commencing a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of a *fan*, we conclude that hooligans are extreme in expressing their attitudes and emotions that correspond with sports (most often football, but they can be seen in other sports as well).⁵⁴¹ While the sport itself is a central category for a fan, for a hooligan, it is – violence. Contemporary hooliganism in the Western Balkans is marked by a distinctive characteristic not commonly found among European

⁵⁴⁰ See: Dunning Eric, Murphy Patrick, Williams John, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and New York, 1988, p. 32.

⁵⁴¹ Hooliganism is most commonly associated with football; however, in the Western Balkans, it is frequently present in basketball as well. In other parts of the world (for example, Scandinavia), hooliganism is an accompanying occurrence of hockey on ice.

hooligans – its ties to organized crime.⁵⁴² In fact, the main feature of “our” Balkan hooligans is the “secret link” between several segments of high politics, parts of the security-intelligence sector, and organized crime.⁵⁴³ Therefore, their power is indestructible because it is based on two paramount features:

1. Secrecy in making connections.
2. Possibility of regeneration (when one segment is neutralized, it is quickly replaced by another).

Due to the previously listed characteristics, the fight against hooliganism is Sisyphus’ job – it often does not give the desired results, even after making immense efforts and investments. Even if we come to the elimination of one hooligan group (through the arrest of the leader of their mutual neutralization through showdowns), we can expect that a new group with the same ambitions and tasks will emerge soon.

Hooliganism is a negative phenomenon, which I confirmed by the word etymology. There are three dominant sources when speaking of the origin of the word hooliganism:⁵⁴⁴

1. According to the first source, the word *hooligan* emerged first in British police records in 1898⁵⁴⁵ and is linked to a criminal who was a member of the three-member gang “Hooligan-Hoodlum-Larkin”.

⁵⁴² The affinity towards organized crime appears among different hooligan groups in various parts of the world, but only as a sporadic occurrence. Among the Balkan hooligans, it represents a very pronounced segment of their subculture. So, for example, in Latin America, certain hooligan groups can also be linked with terrorism and guerillas, but only on rare occasions.

⁵⁴³ This refers only to individuals from the said structures and represents an exception, not the rule. According to: Đorđević, Saša Ruggero Scaturro, *Dangerous Games: Football Hooliganism, Politics and Organized Crime in The Western Balkans*, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Geneva, 2022; or Муслиу Афродита, *Идентификација на фактори кои влијаат врз насилството на спортски терени*, Здружение на граѓани НЕКСУС – ГРАЃАНСКИ КОНЦЕПТ – Скопје, 2022.

⁵⁴⁴ Djoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2021, pp 162–163.

⁵⁴⁵ Schachtebeck Thomas, *Football Hooligans in England*, GRIN, Verlag, 2011, p. 4.

2. The second source states that it originates from a family carrying the last name Hooligan, which terrorized the inhabitants of the East End in London.⁵⁴⁶
3. Based on the third source, the word *hooligan* is of Eastern origin, thus negating its British (and Irish) etymological foundation. It is believed that the word *hooligan* emerged in Sweden from Russia through Finland.⁵⁴⁷ Pent Nurmekund shares a similar opinion, stating that *hooliganism* originates from the Far East, who states that *hooliganism* originates from the Far East. He discovered kindred expressions among Turks in Central Asia, as well as the Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese. Therefore, he believes that the word originated in Tungusia or Mongolia and then later made its way to Russia.

Generally speaking, hooliganism primarily implies violence during sports events. It does not have to be exclusively conducted during the sports matches but can occur before or after these events. Organizing fights among hooligan groups outside of sports stadiums is a significant aspect of the hooligan culture. In the context of Balkan hooliganism, criminal showdowns on the streets of major cities between conflicted groups are becoming increasingly common. These clashes almost do not have any links to sports but are a result of the criminal actions of hooligan groups. In a broader framework, hooliganism would represent “a behaviour that is indecent, usually linked to the street style, which implies violence”⁵⁴⁸

It is crucial to differentiate hooliganism from related occurrences, such as the case of **vandalism**. Even though hooligan behaviour involves vandalism, it is necessary to distinguish between these terms. Vandalism is violence conducted primarily against material goods, while hooliganism is directed towards people as well (police, rival groups, random passers-by, judges, athletes...). The next crucial difference lies in the fact that **hooliganism is always violent, thought out and organized in advance, contrary to vandalism**.⁵⁴⁹ By the way, vandalism is usually perceived as a specific aggression

⁵⁴⁶ Kontos Louis, Brotherton David, *Encyclopaedia of gangs*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 2008.

⁵⁴⁷ Gethin Amorey, Gunnemark Erik, *The art and science of learning languages*, Intellect Books, Oxford, 1996.

⁵⁴⁸ Djoric Marija, *Huliganizam: nasilje i sport*, Nauka i društvo, Beograd, 2012, p. 64.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 78.

on a macrosocial plan, which is “most often manifested by groups of young people, consisting of destruction of materialized forms of human culture that is perceived as social goods”⁵⁵⁰. At this point, it is worth emphasising that while youth are most often active in vandalism groups, individuals from older age groups can also be involved. According to the FBI definition from the 1970s of the 20th century, vandalism is “willing or deliberate destruction and ruination of property without the owner’s permission, and implies: cutting, tearing, breaking, colouring, drawing, soiling, and all other actions included in the local law”⁵⁵¹.

Stanley Cohen distinguished six different types of vandalism⁵⁵²: “**acquisitive or greedy** (looting vending machines or stealing money), **tactical** (breaking windows to enter a building), **ideological** (represents a form of political protest), **vindictive** (when someone is attacked or something is destroyed for revenge), **vandalism as a form of a game** (for example, who can break more windows), and finally, **malicious** (as expression of anger due to frustration)”⁵⁵³.

Through comparative analysis of vandalism and hooliganism, we can state that vandalism is an integral part of hooliganism, but these phenomena are not identical. Regarding the definitions of hooliganism, there is quite a variety, but they are distinguished by several indispensable elements:

- Violence;
- Sports events (games);
- Group identity;
- Need for belonging;
- “Macho” phenomenon.

The majority of these elements are found in the definition I published in my first book, *Hooliganism: Violence and Sports*: “Hooliganism is a violent behaviour through which a part of the audience, inspired by sports events, builds their identity through

⁵⁵⁰ Milosavljević, Milosav, *Devijacije i društvo*, Izdavačka kuća Draganić, Beograd, 2003, p. 234.

⁵⁵¹ Goldstein Arnold, *The psychology of vandalism*, Plenum Press, New York, 1996, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁵² See: Stanley Cohen, “Vandalism: Its politics and Nature”, in J. B. Mays (ed), *Juvenile Delinquency, The Family and the social Group*, Longman, London, 1972.

⁵⁵³ Djoric Marija, *Huliganizam: nasilje i sport*, Nauka i društvo, Beograd, 2012, p. 77.

belonging to a fan group, and which expresses frustration-aggression through destruction of material things or by hurting the enemy”⁵⁵⁴

Nowadays, we could argue about this definition since it is general and can be applied globally. It consists of all necessary elements, whilst, in the context of the Western Balkans, we could reform it and add that hooliganism has predominantly become a front for criminal activities of hooligan groups, as well as that the question of the creation of identity is something that can predominantly be found among the category of the youngest hooligans (teenagers), while among group leaders and their orderlies, hooliganism corresponds with the lucrative interest.

Many definitions connect audience violence exclusively to football, defining hooliganism as “the competitive violence of socially organized groups that follow football, against rival groups”⁵⁵⁵. While we have previously stressed that hooliganism is most prevalent in football, it is also present in other sports. Therefore, this definition can be applied more broadly.

Why is hooliganism predominantly linked with football?

There are several explanations:⁵⁵⁶

- Football is played at **big stadiums**, which implies the presence of a vast number of people, that is, a mass. Gustave Le Bon once wrote about crowd psychology, stating that an individual acts differently when found in a crowd compared to when they are alone.⁵⁵⁷ As individuals, we often feel a sense of power when we are part of a crowd (amplified several times). In return, we lose our identity. Another “magical feature” of crowd psychology is the notion that when everyone is considered guilty, no one is held accountable. Hooligan groups effectively exploit this dynamic in practice.
- Playing football matches **in open spaces** is the next reason. Namely, it is far more difficult to control the audience outdoors than in a closed arena. Additionally, securing open areas is a substantial challenge.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 73.

⁵⁵⁵ Spaaij, Ramon, *Understanding football hooliganism: a comparison of six Western European football clubs*, Vossiuspers UvA, cop., Amsterdam, 2006, p. 11.

⁵⁵⁶ According to: Djoric Marija, *Huliganizam: nasilje i sport*, Nauka i društvo, Beograd, 2012, p. 85.

⁵⁵⁷ Le Bon, Gustav, *Psihologija gomila*, Papirus: Trgokom, Novi Sad, 1995.

- The next reason can be found in Jung's perception of archetype images, which are connected to **the collective unconscious**.⁵⁵⁸ Even the newer papers from this field conclude that football is a mighty force that can transform the world.⁵⁵⁹ If we simplify this principle, we can easily correlate football with war. Namely, competition between two football teams is, in some way, a simulation of war at the stadium as a "battlefield". Men in the audience, as the archetypal warriors who carried along this role for centuries, easily identify with the athletes through the process of football. In this way, their "arche-need" for war, i.e., football, is fulfilled.
- **The influence of drugs and alcohol** should not be forgotten, as faithful followers of the hooligan subculture, as they can incite violence in football stadiums.⁵⁶⁰

Some definitions perceive hooliganism as an exclusively "male" phenomenon, defining it as "antisocial, criminal behaviour of men which emerges at football stadiums"⁵⁶¹. This perception of hooliganism holds some truth, as nearly 100% of membership in hooligan groups is male. However, some clear examples show there is space for women in hooligan groups as well.

Some definitions of hooligans are of such a narrow character since they are bound by specific territoriality. So, some researchers (Bodin Dominique, Robenè Luc, Heas Stephane) believe that a *hooligan* is, in fact, "a young Englishman who has problems with adaptation in society, who is a delinquent in his everyday life, who consumes alcohol in vast amounts and uses sporting events as an excuse for violent behaviour"⁵⁶². Even though true, this definition is of such a narrow character that it cannot be used in a broader context.

The need for belonging (to a group/community) is one of the primal human needs, seen in hooligan groups as well, and determined

⁵⁵⁸ Jung, Karl Gustav, *Dinamika nesvesnog*, Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 1990.

⁵⁵⁹ O'Brien John, O'Brien Nada, *Analytical Psychology of Football: Professional Jungian Football Coaching*, Routledge, London and New York, 2021.

⁵⁶⁰ In some countries, not only the consumption of alcohol but its sales in the football stadiums and their surrounding (from a few hundred meters to several kilometres) is forbidden.

⁵⁶¹ McArdle, David, *Football Society & The Law*, Routledge-Cavendish, London, 2000, p. 69.

⁵⁶² Bodin Dominique, Robenè Luc, Heas Stephane, *Sport and violence in Europe*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2004, p. 19.

by Aristoteles through the phenomenon of *zoon politikon*.⁵⁶³ Belonging to a group implies security, but also the creation of an identity. Through this prism, a hooligan perceives themselves as a member of a “certain fan group that adopts mutual values, among which the hatred towards members of other groups is the deepest mutual root, to whom belonging to a group means an escape from anonymity, gives the sense of security; a fight with another group of fans is the expression of emotional charge; a median sense of life where being a hooligan means being free and living a life in the best way possible is one of the most concise definition of hooliganism as an occurrence”⁵⁶⁴.

Why are fans divided into groups? And why is the sense of belonging important in terms of group identity? Because a group provides a sense of security. This is probably something we carried along from our mothers’ wombs when we recognized refuge, power, and the safe “cave”. Groups can be both good and bad. The good groups are the ones that gather for some higher purpose or general good. For example, when people gather in great numbers to welcome the victorious representation after a competition or protect their hearth from enemies and conquerors. Bad groups, on the contrary, exhibit all the negative traits of humankind. Such groups are usually created to harm someone better, more successful, braver, and more reputable. As a rule, these groups comprise mediocre, incompetent, and often quite unfoundedly ambitious individuals. Such groups can frequently be seen in various spheres of life: some collectives at work, in which the conspiracy of the incompetent is underway, and the ones that are weak when alone and thus can build their power exclusively on quantity and negative selection. The situation is similar in some political parties and hooligan groups.

The European Union defined hooliganism in its *Report on Football Hooliganism* in the following way: “Violence against people, destruction of property, criminal offences under the influence of alcohol and drugs, disturbance of peace, petty theft and ticket

⁵⁶³ Aristoteles stated that every man is a social being who needs to belong to a community and live in it with the rest. The life outside the community (polis) was reserved for Gods, beasts and barbarians. See: Aristotel, *Politika*, Globus, Zagreb, 1988.

⁵⁶⁴ Petrović, Krešimir, „Nasilje i sport“, *Kultura*, No. 88/90, Beograd, 1992, p. 21.

resale”⁵⁶⁵. It can be noticed that the EU includes ticket resale in hooligan behaviour, which is not inherent to other definitions.

A large number of research papers find the link between the working class, poverty, and hooliganism: “Hooliganism is a usual form of violence of young people who belong to the working class”⁵⁶⁶. It should be said that such definitions are outdated since an evolution of the phenomenon of hooliganism has occurred.

Even though it emerged in the working class, hooliganism nowadays represents a classless phenomenon, meaning that its members can originate from different social milieus. It is not uncommon for hooligans to come from well-off families with parents of high social status, which catalyzes a sense of “exclusivity” and untouchability among them.

3.2. WHY IS HOOLIGANISM A “MACHO” PHENOMENON?

Men make up almost 100% of the membership in hooligan groups.⁵⁶⁷ Exactly because of that, we can state that hooliganism aspires to be profiled as a “macho”⁵⁶⁸ phenomenon. When analysing the hooligan identity, some researchers sought exactly the “machoism” as one of its most significant traits. It is believed that hooliganism consists of several key elements:

- Emotional excitement
- **Machoism**
- Territoriality (every group controls a part of the city, state, etc.)

⁵⁶⁵ Spaaij Ramón Fredrik Johan, *Understanding football hooliganism: a comparison of six Western European football clubs*, Vossiuspers UvA – Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2006, p. 11.

⁵⁶⁶ Bodin Dominique, Robenè Luc, Heas Stephane, *Sport and violence in Europe*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2004, p. 33.

⁵⁶⁷ Radmann Aage, *The New Media and Hooliganism: Constructing Media Identities*, https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1406730/FULLTEXT_01.pdf, 01.08.2024.

⁵⁶⁸ Here, the term “macho” is not used in a positive context but to express the so-called toxic masculinization.

- Merging of individual and collective image
- Sense of belonging
- Existence of autonomy in comparison to others.⁵⁶⁹

Unfortunately, “machoism” in the hooligan context does not imply gentlemanliness and positive characteristics of the “male principle”, but it inherits its existence from the *toxic masculinization*.⁵⁷⁰ This means that hooligans believe that they are “macho” if they inflict violence (in various forms), which points to the toxicity of this phenomenon. Even though there are numerous indicators of toxic masculinity, it is usually based on three crucial principles, defined in the seventies:

1. Men are physically and psychologically strong and do not typically express or possess emotions.
2. An anti-feminist approach to the value system, which contests the equality of men and women, devalues the female sex.
3. Men should have the power⁵⁷¹ of every kind to be respected by others.⁵⁷²

Some contemporary research from 2013 attributes characteristics such as misogyny, homophobia, and violence coming from the male population to toxic masculinism.⁵⁷³ In fact, here we can talk about the emergence of *hyper-masculinism*⁵⁷⁴, often involving intensive misogyny and a psycho-pathological attitude towards gender identities.

What is the role of women in the world of hooliganism?

This is one of the pivotal questions in the contemporary world, at least when speaking of gender equality. It seems that nowhere is such a strict division between the male and female sexes seen as in the hooligan subculture. Women in hooliganism are a rarity and appear more as an exception than a rule. The author of this book has a hypothesis that some cases of hooliganism in the female population

⁵⁶⁹ Spaaij Ramon, “Men Like Us, Boys Like Them Violence, Masculinity, and Collective Identity in Football Hooliganism”, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, No. 4, 2008, pp. 369–392.

⁵⁷⁰ The term *toxic masculinity* is often used in the literature.

⁵⁷¹ We are primarily referring to financial and physical power.

⁵⁷² According to: Thompson Edward, “The Structure of Male Role Norms”, *American Behavioral Scientist*, No. 5, 1970, pp. 531-543.

⁵⁷³ Harrington Carol, “What is ‘Toxic Masculinity’ and Why Does it Matter?” *Men and Masculinities*, No. 2, 2020.

⁵⁷⁴ It is often equated with the term *hegemonic masculinity*.

are a sort of “negative emancipation” through which women attempt to be equal to men in the wrong way.

During the 1980s of the 20th century, some theoreticians raised this question and stated that hooliganism, such as fandom, is predominantly *male*. They explained this by the fact that up to the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, men and women took up different psychological and physical spaces.⁵⁷⁵ This means that the public spaces, including sports events (and thus, cheering), were exclusively reserved for men, while women found their place in the house and the infield⁵⁷⁶, that is, in the private space. The women of Ancient Greece not only could not compete in the Olympic games at one time, but they were also forbidden from being present as spectators, that is, the audience in sporting events.

Still, as time passed, women found their well-deserved place “under the Sun” in the contemporary world, which was reflected in the cheering subculture as well. The first fan groups that consisted exclusively of female members appeared in the Italian *ultras* subculture. One of the rare studies on this topic was conducted by Cere Rinel, who analysed articles from the last few decades in this field.⁵⁷⁷ Some Italian researchers (Roversi) noted that members of the “nicer gender” are present in mixed fan groups, but that they have recently taken up forming “purely female” fan groups, as was the case with “Parma” (*URB Girls*) and “Bologna”, where women make up from 13% of fans.⁵⁷⁸ Alessandro Salvini explains the emergence of female fans in football through the phenomenon of *allargamento androgino* (“the spread of androgenism”).⁵⁷⁹ He intended to express how the difference between men and women is being more and more erased, leading to a sort of androgenism.⁵⁸⁰ One research from the La

⁵⁷⁵ According to: Đoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, p. 168.

⁵⁷⁶ The Greeks called this private space *oikos*, while the public space (*polis*) was a privilege of certain groups of men.

⁵⁷⁷ Cere, Rinel, “Forever Ultras: Female Football Support in Italy”, *Sport and Its Female Fans*, (ed. Toffoletti Kim, Mewett Peter), Routledge, New York, 2012, pp. 46–61.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁹ Salvini Alessandro, *Ultra. Psicologia del tifoso violent*, Giunti, Firenze, 2004, p. 101.

⁵⁸⁰ One of the most absurd examples was noted during the 2024 Olympic games, when a controversial female boxer from Algeria, Imane Khelif, defeated the Italian Angela Carini. The problem was that the Algerian boxer had dominant hormones usually attributed to men. This fact opened up the space for speculation

Sapienza University in Rome shows that “the age average among the female fans varies from 35 to 40, and that they are predominantly highly educated individuals”.⁵⁸¹ Here, it is stressed that women in fan groups influenced the reduction of the level of violence during games.

Aside from being involved in fan groups, women can also be part of hooligan groups. The first participation of women in violent incidents related to football occurred in 1898 in Scotland, after a match between “Morton” (nowadays “Greenock Morton”) and a currently inactive club named “Glasgow Athletic”.⁵⁸² Hence, it will seem unusual, but “female hooliganism” is rooted in the 19th century. By the way, the presence of women in football matches “dates from the first days of football, which was well-noted by Charles Edwardes in 1892, when he stated that the *football fever* infected not only men from the working class but older men and women were in the audience as well”.⁵⁸³

If we look back at contemporary events, we will notice that the appearance of female hooligans is quite rare and unusual. It is interesting that, during the football championship in 2018, four Russian women were banned due to the existing problem of their participation in hooligan fights.⁵⁸⁴ Even though of a rare phenomenon, female hooliganism can be seen in Russia, principally related to the group named “*Salavyanki*, cheering for the FC *Spartak*, or members of the *Malvyshki*, loyal fans of CSK.”⁵⁸⁵

about whether it is a transgender individual, that is, a man who transitioned into a woman. This is an ethical but also a gender issue since it directly hits the question of female rights. However, according to other statements, it is a woman with unusually dominant male hormones. For now, it has yet to be confirmed whether Imane Khelif was born as a man or as a woman. According to: https://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/sport/individualni-sportovi/skandal-na-oi-italijanska-bokserka-preda-la-mec-zbog-nejasnog-pola-protivnice_1559146.html, 05.08.2024.

⁵⁸¹ Đoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2021, p. 169.

⁵⁸² <https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/13138284.riot-girls-study-finds-female-swere-the-first-football-hooligans/>, 05.08.2024.

⁵⁸³ Taylor Rogan, *Football and Its Fans: Supporters and Their Relations With The Game*, University Press, Leicester, 1992.

⁵⁸⁴ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/pictured-four-female-russian-football-hooligans-banished-from-world-cup-a3862866.html>, 04.08.2024.

⁵⁸⁵ Đoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2021, p. 169.

3.3. SPORTS AND EXTREMISM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS⁵⁸⁶

The Western Balkans (Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Albania) represent a post-conflict region⁵⁸⁷ facing various forms of violent extremism. At present, the Western Balkans face most problems with Islamist extremism and right-wing extremism. Hooligans represent one hybrid category that cannot be listed as a “pure” form of extremism since, in its essence, it is primarily a type of organized crime. However, what brings them closer to extremist groups is their quasi-ideology, predominantly rooted in right-wing extremism. Their value system is tendentiously called a quasi-ideology since they are not aligned with these principles but use extreme right-wing attitudes to win the sympathies of the youth and other vulnerable groups. Nationalist and patriotic hooligan groups are often called upon to recruit new members, predominantly in the form of manipulation.

As it can be noticed, hooliganism is a dynamic social phenomenon, changing and adjusting to the times. When speaking of the Western Balkans, hooliganism appears somewhat later in comparison to Great Britain and other countries of Western Europe. Namely, Balkan hooliganism intensively developed during the 1980s of the 20th century, whereas its “crescendo” happened during the wars of the 1990s in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia.

Violent extremists resort to various methods and means to radicalise and recruit young people (i.e., video games, social networks, music, humour...), one of them also being sports.

The link between violent extremism and sports in the Western Balkans exists and can be seen in two ways:

- 1. Sport as a tool for preventing violent extremism (an idea that has not yet been fully embraced).**
- 2. Sport as a tool for politicisation and recruitment of young people to join extremist groups (this trend has been grow-**

⁵⁸⁶ The majority of data presented in this segment were taken from: Djoric Marija, *Violent Extremism and Sports in the Western Balkans*, RAN, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-12/ran_wb_ad-hoc_violent_extremism_and_sport_in_the_wb_122023_en.pdf 01.08.2024.

⁵⁸⁷ All these countries were directly or indirectly involved in the war events of the nineties, during the breakup of Yugoslavia.

ing stronger and may become a serious security issue for the region).

The direct link between sports and violent extremism in the Western Balkans has been most present in football so far. Since the 1980s, when “Yugoslav sport at that time mirrored Yugoslav state weakness”⁵⁸⁸, until the present, when it has become an instrument in the hands of various extremist groups. Specifically, the process has involved the creation of football hooligan groups predominantly motivated by the right-wing extremist ideology (mainly in the form of nationalism). In the Western Balkans, a total of 122 fan groups have been identified, of which 78 are ultras, and 21 have participated in hooligan incidents.⁵⁸⁹ Hooliganism in the Western Balkans is very dangerous because it is a combination of several significant phenomena: political power, organised crime, and extremism.⁵⁹⁰

A new trend that is increasingly gaining momentum is the infiltration of violent extremists into martial arts and airsoft clubs, in which they recruit but also radicalize young people (predominantly men). This trend is evident throughout the Western Balkans region, with each country exhibiting its specific characteristics.

3.3.1. Serbia

In Serbia, football hooliganism culminated during the wars in the 1990s, when volunteers for paramilitary formations were recruited from the ranks of fan groups.⁵⁹¹ A specific characteristic in Serbia is that they were and remain an instrument of politics. This was best evidenced on October 5, 2000, when the same hooligans who had

⁵⁸⁸ Brentin Dario, “More Than a Game? On the Seemingly Perpetual Football-Related Violence in the Balkans”, *Balkanist*, <https://balkanist.net/more-than-a-game-again-on-the-seemingly-perpetual-football-related-violence-in-the-balkans/>, 14.03.2024.

⁵⁸⁹ Đorđević, Saša, Ruggero Scaturro, *Dangerous Games: Football Hooliganism, Politics and Organized Crime in The Western Balkans*, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Geneva, 2022.

⁵⁹⁰ Djoric Marija, *Huliganizam: nasilje i sport*, Nauka i društvo, Beograd, 2012, p. 139.

⁵⁹¹ The extent of politicization of sports (and especially football) is best seen in the fact that researchers believe that the breakdown of Yugoslavia was announced at the match between “Red Star” and “Dinamo” in 1991. At that moment, the “Delije” (fans of “Red Star” from Serbia) clashed with “Bad Blue Boys” (fans of “Dina-

been supporting the regime of Slobodan Milošević participated in his ousting. This “politicization of hooliganism”⁵⁹² persists, whereas hooligans made a step further in constructing their power by transforming into organized criminal groups. Even though their ideology is still extremely right-wing-oriented, it is nothing but a mask for the recruitment of young people, whilst the real goal is lucrative gain (acquiring profit).

Several phrases can be distinguished in the development of the Serbian hooligan scene:

1. Period until the 1990s of the 20th century, when it was formed, modelled on the Italian ultras subculture.
2. From the nineties until the year 2000 – in this period, hooliganism reached its culmination and dived into violence, predominantly due to civil wars in the ex-Yugoslav region.
3. From 2000 onwards, an increasingly pronounced *politicisation of hooliganism* occurs. This phase is characterised by the fact that hooligans become instruments of various political structures and are thus used for showdowns with political opponents or for completing the so-called *dirty jobs*.⁵⁹³ Certain researchers stress that, since the year 2000, in Serbia, “not a single political gathering was held without the participation of extreme fans”.⁵⁹⁴
4. There is also a fourth (contemporary) phase that can be qualified as *the criminalization of hooliganism*. The cooperation between hooligans and criminal structures led to former miscreants from sporting events transforming into serious criminal groups.

The two most influential hooligan groups originate from the ranks of FC “Red Star” and FC “Partizan”. The “Red Star” fans, known as “Delije”, are divided into several groups: “Belgrade Boys”⁵⁹⁵, “Rif Raff”, “Hijene” (“Hyenas”), “Brigade” (“Brigades”), “Bez straha” (“No Fear”), etc. Currently, they are in the process of generational

mo” from Croatia) at the Maksimir stadium in Zagreb, when nationalist paroles resulted in brutal violence.

⁵⁹² Djoric Marija, „Politicizacija huliganizma“, *Politička revija*, No. 3, 2010, p. 379-400.

⁵⁹³ Đoric Marija, *Ekstremizam i nova realnost: svet u doba koronavirusa*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2021, p. 166.

⁵⁹⁴ Otašević Božidar, *Nasilje na sportskim priredbama*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd, 2015, p. 86.

⁵⁹⁵ Currently the most dominant group.

renewal; a dozen leaders (aged 35 to 40) control “Red Star” fans. Criminal activities they conduct include money laundering through construction work, control of energy resources, diving into the IT sector, drug trafficking, etc.

The “Partizan” fans have been divided by an internal conflict (because of the division of criminal influence spheres) for years, confirmed by the conflict between “Zabranjeni” (“Forbidden”) and “Alkatraz”. In Serbia, the situation is quite challenging since some fan groups are linked with severe crimes. A good example is the group “Janjičari” (“Janissaries”), which supports FC “Partizan” (this group has, in time, transformed into a group called “Principi”). Their leader, Veljko Belivuk, was arrested with his collaborators, who were linked in the media with certain high-ranked political functionaries and members of the security sector. The group “Principi” was charged with cooperation with the Montenegrin Kavač clan, which specialized in cocaine trafficking from Latin America into Europe. Veljko Belivuk was arrested with his 20 collaborators in 2021. This group is charged with several crimes: conspiracy to commit criminal acts, unauthorized production and trafficking of narcotics, possession and carrying of weapons, arms trafficking, and three cases of aggravated murder.⁵⁹⁶ After the arrest of the Belivuk clan, a clash occurred between the groups “Vandal Boys” and “Grobari Vračar”.

The “Partizan” hooligan groups deal with securing clubs⁵⁹⁷, drug trafficking, racketeering, etc. All hooligan groups use extreme right-wing rhetoric and recruit teenagers through the idea of fake patriotism. Recruitment begins already in elementary school (aged 12 to 15) on a local level. Older fans “watch over” boys in school and introduce them to the world of hooliganism. First, they use them for courier jobs⁵⁹⁸, and later, they introduce them to serious crime. Young people go through an “act of initiation”, which implies that they must commit an offence or a criminal act.⁵⁹⁹ The hooligan

⁵⁹⁶ High Court in Belgrade, „Odredjen pritvor osumnjicenima V. Belivuk i drugi, Visi sud u Beogradu”, [https://www.bg.vi.sud.rs/ vest/2991/odredjen-pritvor-osumnjicenima-v-belivuk-i-drugi.php](https://www.bg.vi.sud.rs/vest/2991/odredjen-pritvor-osumnjicenima-v-belivuk-i-drugi.php), 12.01.2023.

⁵⁹⁷ There is an unwritten rule that whoever controls the security of nightclubs controls the drug trafficking as well.

⁵⁹⁸ The boys (minors) are given scooters for the transport of drugs, and then, as a reward, they are given these motorbikes as gifts.

⁵⁹⁹ This implies that they must have a recorded attack on an officer, steal something from the store, get in a fight with rival fans, etc.

groups are closed, strictly defined, with a distinct hierarchy, and thus resemble military groups. Besides nationalism, these groups exhibit pronounced homophobia, which aligns them in line with the extreme right wing. The newest informal information shows that certain hooligans departed for the Ukrainian battlefield as foreign mercenaries.⁶⁰⁰ Links with certain biker clubs in Serbia are registered as well.

Hypothesis No. 1: Serbian football hooligans currently represent serious criminal groups linked with individuals from high politics and the security sector, which gives them a sense of power and untouchability.

Hypothesis No. 2: Certain hooligan groups in Serbia are very tightly linked with criminal groups in Montenegro.

Besides “Red Star” and “Partizan” hooligans, other groups that can be linked with crime and extremism are active in Serbia as well: “United Force” (FC “Rad”), “Firma” (FC “Vojvodina”), “Torcida Sandžak” (FC “Novi Pazar”), etc. Due to their elevated popularity in the ex-Yugoslav region, outposts of “Red Star” and “Partizan” can be found in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republic of Srpska), and North Macedonia. Besides football, hooliganism partially emerges in basketball, and sometimes in handball as well, which is depicted in hate speech messages.

A particular problem in Serbia in terms of the prevention of hooliganism lies in the fact that the management boards of some sports clubs include judges and prosecutors as well, which can influence their objectiveness in processing miscreants.⁶⁰¹

In Kosovo and Metohija, Albanian fans are linked with violence and political structures close to the former terrorist organization *KLA*. There isn't pronounced rivalry between Albanian fan clubs; it is usually directed towards other ethnic groups, predominantly Serbian. There is a noticeable connection between FC “Plisat” from Pristine and “Black and Red” fans from Albania in the context of “Great Albania”. The other dominant fan group is named “Šiponjata”, and they cheer for FC “Šiponja”.

⁶⁰⁰ They are fighting on the side of Ukraine.

⁶⁰¹ In-depth interview with a member of the NGO sector.

The politicization of Albanian hooligan groups in Kosmet can be seen in several violent events. For example, in Pristine in 2015, members of Albanian fan groups “Plisat” and “Šiponjata” were the principal participants in the rally organized against the formation of the Community of Serb Municipalities and the creation of the demarcation line with Montenegro.⁶⁰²

The Serbian inhabitants in Kosovo and Metohija traditionally support Serbian clubs, among which “Red Star” stands out, which expresses animosity towards Albanian clubs.

3.3.2. Bosnia and Herzegovina

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is peculiar due to its ethnic⁶⁰³ and cantonal division, which is also reflected in sports (i.e., football). Besides football hooliganism, one fascinating trend is present in the B&H, i.e., the **link between violent extremism and martial arts clubs**, as well as **airsoft clubs**. While football is linked with extreme right-wing and nationalist sentiment, martial arts clubs are predominantly connected to radical Islam in the form of hooliganism.

Football hooligans in the B&H are usually divided along ethnic lines, except Sarajevo and Tuzla, which have ethnically mixed groups. Until now, the conflicts were most common in Mostar between the “Red Army” (FC “Velež”) and “Ultras” (FC “Zrinjski”). A high level of antagonism is present among fan clubs from Sarajevo, predominantly fans of FC “Sarajevo” and “Široki Brijeg”.⁶⁰⁴ Moreover, there is an apparent city rivalry between football clubs “Sarajevo” and “Željezničar”. There are regional links for the distribution of drugs. Hooligans from Banja Luka and Istočno Sarajevo are linked with groups from Serbia and Montenegro. “Lešinari”, “Horde Zla”, and “Skripari” from B&H also deal with drug and arms trafficking.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰² Fatjona Mejdini et al., “Kosovo opposition urges all Albanians to join rally, BalkanInsight”, 27 November 2015, <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/11/27/albanians-join-ranks-for-the-28-november-kosovo-rally-11-27-2015-1/>, 13.01.2023.

⁶⁰³ Bosniak, Serb, Croat.

⁶⁰⁴ The intolerance exists as the result of the killing of one fan of FC “Sarajevo” in 2009 during the away game of this club in Široki Brijeg.

⁶⁰⁵ Đorđević, Saša, Ruggero Scaturro, *Dangerous Games: Football Hooliganism, Politics and Organized Crime in The Western Balkans*, Global Initiative Against Trans-

Ultras groups represent a counterbalance to political structures since “ultras portray themselves as the only resistance group to the status quo” and allegedly fight against corruption.⁶⁰⁶

National and political divisions enter not only professional sports, but their toxic influence is present among children as well. During a children’s football tournament in Sarajevo (until the age of 15) in January 2023, two incidents linked to extreme nationalism occurred. First, the boys from the Croatian team chanted: “Kill the Serb!” and then the parents of Serbian children who competed suffered physical attacks and were stabbed with a knife.⁶⁰⁷

The example of *reciprocity of extremism* (based on ethnicity) can be seen on numerous occasions: when, for example, a banner dedicated to Slobodan Praljak is raised during a match in Herzegovina, or a slogan of support to Ratko Mladić in Sarajevo, as a counterbalance, a slogan in support to Sakib Muhmuljin will be raised (we are speaking of individuals charged with war crimes).⁶⁰⁸

There are local informal hooligan groups in the territory of the Brčko District, organized on an ethnic-national principle. Most of the fan groups in the territory of the district do not have a formal leader and predominantly act in smaller groups when local sporting events are organized. The age structure varies from 15 to 40. As the most interesting in the context of violent actions, we have identified members of the fan fraction named “Trt-Mrt”, which belong to the “Grobari-Shadows” fan group, standard supporters of Partizan from Belgrade; members of the fan fraction called “Kopre Nedri” or KND, belonging to the “Delije” fan group, traditional supporters of “Red Star” from Belgrade; members of Manijaci fan group from the territory of Brčko District in B&H, traditional supporters of FC “Željezničar” from Sarajevo, and at the same time a part of a wider group called “BH Fanatikos” (*BHF*), belonging to this region. Groups “Trt-Mrt”, “Kopre Nedri”, and “Manijaci” significantly influenced the

national Organized Crime, Geneva, 2022, p. 28.

⁶⁰⁶ Testa, Alberto, “Making Sense of Extremism in the Bosnian Football Terraces: An Analytical Analysis”, *Security Science Journal*, No. 1, 2020, p. 29.

⁶⁰⁷ Danas. “Mladi fudbaleri iz Splita isključeni sa takmičenja u Sarajevu zbog skandiranja ‘Ubij, ubij Srbina!’”, January 15, 2023. <https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/region/3032595/asker-akademija-u-bih-deca-u-simulaciji-vo-jne-obuke.html>, 20.01.2023.

⁶⁰⁸ One member of the civil society and one member of the academia (in-depth interview).

radicalization of the fan scene in the territory of the Brčko District. Besides violent behaviour and hate speech, these groups are charged with the crime of drug trafficking.

In the Western Balkans region, the politicization of football hooliganism (as well as the link with crime) is most prominent in B&H and Serbia.⁶⁰⁹ In these countries, hooligans are used for showdowns with political opponents, as well as for the transmission of political messages.

A particular security problem for the Federation of B&H represents martial arts clubs⁶¹⁰, often led by radicalized individuals.⁶¹¹ Here, we can see a direct link between radical Islam and sports.

Martial arts clubs in the Federation of B&H organize camps for children, during which they teach them religious doctrine and military skills. One such camp was the “Askeri⁶¹² Winter Camp 2018”, held in the municipality of Tešanj, where children aged 9 to 17 went through training, and which drew vast media attention in the B&H.⁶¹³

Besides martial arts clubs in B&H, during the last decade, airsoft⁶¹⁴ clubs have been especially active. The expansion of airsoft clubs in B&H began about ten years ago, especially in the Federation of B&H, which currently houses over 40 such clubs. In these clubs, military training, which, besides being fun, has a religious function as well, given that they introduce Islamic doctrine to the work of clubs, is held.

⁶⁰⁹ According to: Đorđević, Saša, Ruggero Scaturro, *Dangerous Games: Football Hooliganism, Politics and Organized Crime in The Western Balkans*, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Geneva, 2022.

⁶¹⁰ Until now, there are a dozen such clubs linked with radical Islam, and they are located in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bugojno, Mostar, Zenica, etc. These are usually taekwondo, kickbox, and hapkido clubs.

⁶¹¹ Some coaches or owners of clubs are members of radical Wahhabi groups. Some individuals were also members of the “El Mujahed” unit during the war in B&H.

⁶¹² *Asker* is a Turkish word for a soldier.

⁶¹³ RTRS. „RTRS na mjestu gdje je vehabijsko udruženje Askeri djecu vojno obučavalo!”, <https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/region/3032595/asker-akademija-u-bih-deca-u-simulaciji-vojne-obuke.html>, 05.01.2023.

⁶¹⁴ *Airsoft* belongs to extreme sports. These clubs conduct training in the use of weapons, mine-explosive devices and field military-police tactics following the special unit standards. In the Federation of B&H, *airsoft* clubs are registered as sports associations.

Moreover, it is noticeable that the majority of members of *airsoft* clubs belong to the Wahhabi community. Interestingly, they conduct the majority of their training in abandoned villages of the Serbian population, where properties devastated by war are used for their training. Members of the B&H Armed Forces are also present among the members of *airsoft* clubs.⁶¹⁵ Financing is conducted with the help of donations, memberships, and sponsorship. It can be noticed that some local communities often help *airsoft* clubs, among which the municipalities of Bužim and Cazin stand out, but the municipalities from the Tuzla canton as well. Among the *airsoft* clubs, “Crna munja”⁶¹⁶ and “Lilium Bosniacum” especially stand out. The majority of *airsoft* clubs are grouped in three regions: Una-Sana, Zenica-Tuzla, and the Sarajevo region.⁶¹⁷ The work of these clubs is often overseen by members of *EUFOR*.

Strict discipline and a heightened vertical command chain are present in airsoft clubs, which bring them closer to the organization level of contemporary special units. Apart from military-police training, they also conduct religious training (predominantly based on Wahhabism).

3.3.3. Montenegro

In Montenegro, violent extremism can be linked to sports and political events. Football (and less often basketball) is instrumentalized the most for political propaganda. Ethnic belonging usually predisposes one to belong to sports clubs. Montenegrins usually cheer for domestic clubs, while the Serbian population usually cheers for Serbian clubs “Red Star” and “Partizan”.

In Plav and Rožaje, where the Bosniak population dominates, fan clubs “Gazije” and “Hajvani” support local clubs. The support these clubs give to their “brothers” from B&H is interesting: they extend their support to the matches played by “BiH Fanaticos”. In the northern

⁶¹⁵ In-depth interview with a member of the B&H security sector.

⁶¹⁶ This club has many followers on social networks (*Facebook*), and in its post, they celebrate war flags, symbols and achievements of the former Army of B&H in the Bihać region. In the comments, explicit hate speech directed towards the Serbian community can be seen.

⁶¹⁷ In-depth interview with a member of the B&H security sector.

part of Montenegro, particularly in Pljevlja, Žabljak, Mojkovac, Šavnik, and Plužine, most fans support Serbian clubs, primarily “Red Star” and “Partizan”. In Berane and Bijelo Polje, besides Serbian clubs, the “Ultras Bijelo Polje” fan club, which reduced its visibility in the last few years, and “Street Boys Berane” are well-received. In Nikšić, “Vojvode” cheer for FC “Sutjeska”. Besides them, there are fans of FC “Partizan” and “Grobari”, who are quite a dominant group. Fans of FC “Red Star” are decreasing in numbers, especially since their flag was taken from them a few years ago. Cetinje supports local clubs, such as FC “Lovćen”. In the coastal cities, Serbian clubs dominate, while in Tivat, individuals supporting Croatian clubs, such as FC “Hajduk”, can also be found. In Ulcinj, predominantly inhabited by the Albanian national minority, there is a fan group called “Dilberi”. Podgorica is dominated by “Varvari”, who support FC “Budućnost”. They often clash with “Red Star” fans.

The connection some martial arts clubs from B&H establish with citizens of Montenegro, especially in cities with a dominant Muslim population, is evident. So, a few years ago, representatives of the martial arts from Tuzla visited the Wahhabi community in Plav and Gusinje. Among the B&H delegation was also Abudusamad Bušatlić, known for his religious preaching on social networks, which are well accepted worldwide.

3.3.4. North Macedonia

In North Macedonia, violent extremism in football stadiums is linked with both political and criminal structures.⁶¹⁸ In Macedonia, fan groups began to form at the end of the nineties. The first fan group was formed in 1987 under the name “Komite”, and they cheered for the “Vardar” football club.⁶¹⁹ A significant shift occurred in the nineties with the disintegration of Yugoslavia. At that point, local patriotism began to strengthen, and almost every city had its own

⁶¹⁸ According to: Đorđević, Saša, Ruggero Scaturro, *Dangerous Games: Football Hooliganism, Politics and Organized Crime in The Western Balkans*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Geneva, 2022.

⁶¹⁹ Муслиу, Афродита. *Идентификација на фактори кои влијаат врз настанувањето на сирѓиски тирени*, Здружение на граѓани НЕКСУС – ГРАЃАНСКИ КОНЦЕПТ – Скопје, 2022, p. 12.

football club. The biggest clashes between “Komite” and “Škembare” occur not only at football but at basketball and handball matches as well.⁶²⁰ Besides them, the following fan groups are very active as well: “Majmuni” from Prilep, “Vojvode” from Tetovo, “Pirates” from Autokomanda, “City Park Boys” from the Centre, “Family” from Aerodrom, etc.

The most influential Macedonian groups are located in the capital, Skopje, where Macedonians are the ethnic majority. “Komite” supports FC “Vardar” and is, number and strength-wise, the most dominant group. Besides them, “Švercerat”, who support FC “Škupi” (a club predominantly supported by the Albanians), are also active. “Škembari” from Bitol cheer for FC “Pelister”, the supporters of FC “Pobeda” from Prilep are called “Majmuni”, “Ajduci” support FC “Belasica” from Strumica, in Ohrid, “Ribari” cheer for FC “Ohrid” 2004.

In Tetovo, where the Albanians are a majority, there are two dominant clubs: FC “Škendija”, supported by “Balisti”, and FC “Telek”, supported by “Vojvode”. Recruitment is conducted on party preferences. The influence of politics on football clubs is evident since every municipality has its representatives in the clubs. In this way, politics influences the clubs. The most solid groups in North Macedonia are often perceived as party armies, enjoying the protection of politicians, which stresses a direct link between the fans and political parties.⁶²¹ Besides political influence, hooligans are linked with the world of crime. “Šverceri” and “Komiti” deal with drug and arms trafficking, which helps them finance other activities.⁶²²

Several inconsistencies are unique to Macedonia. For instance, fan groups that support one football club often back a rival club in other sports, such as basketball.⁶²³ This phenomenon suggests not only the existence of an identity crisis but also the lack of loyalty, a

⁶²⁰ Ibid. p. 13.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Ibid. p. 28.

⁶²³ For example, the “City Park Boys” fan group, which supports basketball club “Rabotnički”, supports FC “Vardar” in football, which is a grand opponent of FC “Rabotnički”. On the other hand, supporters of FC “Vardar” (known under the name “Komiti”) support BC “Rabotnički” and BC “MZT” in basketball, even though the sports society “Vardar” includes a basketball club to which the principal opponents were BC “Rabotnički” and BC “MZT”.

hallmark of fan groups. Such an occurrence can be an indicator of lucrative interests.

Besides conflicts on a national basis, clashes of members of the same ethnic group that support opposing clubs are also common. A good example is that “Šverceri” from Skopje and “Balisti” from Tetovo, who are both predominantly of Albanian nationality, clash frequently. In the research conducted in North Macedonia, the following are listed as the main reasons for fandom: hatred towards the opposing club (41,7%); religious and ethnic intolerance (19,8%); political influence (7,5%); lucrative interest (5,7%).⁶²⁴

Even after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, some fans in North Macedonia continue to support Serbian clubs “Red Star” and “Partizan”, indicating a lingering identity connection in the region.

3.3.5. Albania

In Albania, the link between sports and violent extremism can be found in football stadiums. Football hooliganism in Albania is denoted as violence among rival groups. However, it also has a political connotation, confirmed by the match between representations of Serbia and Albania in 2014, held in Belgrade. At that point, Olsi Rama, the brother of Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, was accused of flying the drone carrying the flag of “Great Albania” during the match, which created additional tension between these two countries.⁶²⁵

The umbrella organization of all Albanian fans is the “Kuqë e Zi” fan group, led by the previously mentioned Olsi Rama. It is a fan group on a national level, gathering all existing fan groups.

The Albanian fan groups are linked with fan groups in Kosovo and Metohija, as well as in North Macedonia, especially in terms of the fascist idea of the “Great Albania”.

⁶²⁴ According to: Муслиу, Афродита. *Идентификација на фактори кои влијаат врз насилството на спортски терени*. Здружение на граѓани НЕКСУС – ГРАЃАНСКИ КОНЦЕПТ – Скопје, 2022.

⁶²⁵ CNN, “Brother of Albanian Prime Minister ‘controlled’ drone at football match”, October 15, 2014, <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/10/15/sport/football/albania-prime-minister-brother/index.html>, 05.01.2023.

Tirana is the centre of fandom. There are two fan groups: the first is “Ultras Guerrillas 08–09”, which portrays left-wing ideology and cheers for FC “Partizani”. This fan group is led by Shkëlzen Berisha, the son of the former Prime Minister of Albania, Sali Berisha. Members of these fan groups were occasionally used in demonstrations organized by Sali Berisha.⁶²⁶ This group is well accepted among Albanians in North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Metohija, as well as within the diaspora (Norway and Sweden). The second one is “Tirana Fanatics”, which cheers for FC “Tirana”. Their ideology is rightist, and they are supported by the fan group “Šverceri” (cheering for FC “Škupi”) from North Macedonia. The link between these groups is, first of all, based on ethnic, familial, and language relations. The biggest rivals to these groups from Tirana are “Vllaznit Ultras” (FC “Vllaznia”) from Shkoder and “Djemt e Detit”, who cheer for FC “Teuta Durres”.

Fans of the Albanian representation “Kuqë e Zi” have a substantial influence on Albanian fans in North Macedonia (“Balisti”, “Šverceri” and “Iliri”), as well as in Kosmet (“Plisat”, “Torcida” and “Šiponjat”). The link between the “Kuqë e Zi” fan club from Albania with Albanian fans in Kosovo and Metohija can best be seen in the example when members of “Kuqë e Zi” gifted the family of Adem Jashari a huge Albanian flag.

What is common to all the countries of the Western Balkans is that football, as a sport, is most often linked with right-wing extremism. Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia, in which hooligans are linked with criminal and certain political structures, which is called “politicization of hooliganism”, lead the way regarding this.

A new trend in the Western Balkans is the abuse of martial arts clubs and *airsoft* clubs for indoctrination and recruitment of new extremists. This occurrence is characteristic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (predominantly for the Federation of B&H) and refers to religiously funded extremism (radical Islam).⁶²⁷ A significant

⁶²⁶ In-depth interview with a member of the security sector.

⁶²⁷ They are usually connected with the Wahhabi communities. Interestingly, in Europe and worldwide, the extreme right wing is commonly linked with martial arts.

danger lies in the abuse of children, who are indoctrinated in camps under the auspices of learning sports skills.

Sports in the Western Balkans present a duality: on one hand, they foster an affirmative spirit and can, through team spirit and *fair play*, eliminate violence and extremist ideas among the younger population. On the other hand, the negative aspect is significantly more complex, as sports can be abused for the radicalization of youth. Addressing this problem requires a focus on preventive measures, as the consequences of radicalization can be utterly destructive to the peace in our region.

Recommendations:

- **For state institutions:** Consistent application of the law – even though there are fair enough laws in the Western Balkans for the prevention of violence in sporting events, they are not being enforced; Adopt state strategies on prevention of violence in sports, since they have expired in many countries; Cooperation with the academic community, civil society and the international community regarding preventive measures (especially regarding youth and teenagers); Enhanced monitoring of communication of extremists on social networks, since the majority of communications happen on this level; Exchange experience and information on a regional level.
- **For sports clubs:** Eliminate politics from sports, remove judges and prosecutors from management boards of sports clubs; Conduct joint activities (humanitarian actions, friendly games, etc.) between rival groups, during which tolerance would be promoted; Educate sports workers regarding approach to children and youth (through workshops, handbooks...); Privatize clubs (even though this is quite problematic).
- **For the civil society and the academic community:** Conduct research on the topic of the link between sports and hooliganism, since there is a big void in this field; Organize workshops through games and fun for the youth; Form a regional network of researchers who would deal with this topic through conferences, projects...;
- **For the international community:** Organize regional research, especially on the topic of martial arts clubs; Direct projects towards prevention of extremism in sports; Applica-

tion of foreign practice to the Western Balkans region (with adjustments tailored for each country); Organize summer schools for all actors in this process, to create a regional network of people who would deal with prevention.

4. THE “SOKOL” MOVEMENT AND “YOUNG BOSNIA” AS A SYNTHESIS OF SPORTS AND POLITICS: ONE CASE STUDY FROM THE HISTORY⁶²⁸

This final chapter will be unusual to many because of its theme. There are several reasons for that. In the first place, both “Young Bosnia” and the “Sokol” movement represent the occurrences from the past; they are both controversial and perceived in different ways, depending on the political angle of observation; even though this book is about extremism and hooliganism, the “Sokol” movement and “Young Bosnia” do not belong to these determinants, but are significant by the fact that they represent a fascinating link between sports and politics (and in some cases violence as well). We believe that analysing such a study from history can be pragmatic for understanding some contemporary social and political processes.

This segment of the book deals with the research of the link that could have existed between the “Young Bosnia” and the “Sokol” movement, above all in the context of conducting the Sarajevo assassination. We have concluded that many members of “Young Bosnia” were at the same time members of the “Sokol” movement, and some of them, such as Mihailo Jovanović, Veljko Čubrilović, and Danilo Ilić, also directly participated in conducting the Sarajevo assassination. A discrepancy was made between the “Sokols” (a gymnastics movement that carried along in the background the idea of Pan-Slavism and secret military organization) and “Young Bosnia”,

⁶²⁸ Taken from: Djoric Marija, „Sokolstvo i Mlada Bosna“, *Srpska politička misao*, No. 4, 2016, pp. 67–82.

which could neither be qualified as an organization in its essence nor as a typical movement, but represented a gathering of different heterogeneous circles. Through the comparative analysis of “Young Bosnia” and the “Sokol” movement, it was determined that their ideas and goals matched to a great extent. However, some distinguishing elements can be found, such as *modus operandi*, organization method, structure, and relation towards Slavic unification.

4.1. ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE “SOKOL” MOVEMENT

The “Sokol” movement represents a specific social and political phenomenon that emerged among the Slavic peoples in the territory of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in the 19th century. Created first as a society for nurturing physical culture, the “Sokol” movement had a much broader and significant dimension, i.e., the liberation and unification of the Slavs.

Even though they made up more than 45% of the total inhabitants⁶²⁹, the Slavic people in the “Yellow-and-Black monarchy” were disenfranchised and dissatisfied with their position. Chained with slavery in the “dungeon of nations”, as they otherwise called the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the Slavic people saw a chance in the *Sokol* movement to realize their long-awaited dream of freedom. If Hegel’s idea is that history can be perceived as the advancement of the consciousness of freedom⁶³⁰ can be sought as truthful, the creation of the first “Sokol”⁶³¹ in Czech in 1862, thanks to Miroslav Tyrš, it can be considered a significant historical movement of collective awareness in the fight for freedom of the Slavic people. With the formation of

⁶²⁹ *Austro-Magyar Judicial Crime: Persecutions of the Yugoslavs, (political trials 1908–1916)*, The Yugoslav Committee in North America, Chicago, 1916, p. 5.

⁶³⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Filozofija povijesti*, Zagreb, Naprijed, 1996.

⁶³¹ The idea to name this gymnastic national liberation movement *Sokol* came to Tyrš from Toner, who was inspired by Serbian poetry (through Vuk Karadžić). Namely, Toner noticed that in all Serbian folk poems, a daring, brave and fighting-spirited man was always called “Sokol” (falcon), believing that this name would correspond with the values and goals of the newly formed movement.

the Czech “Sokol”, Tyrš created a model according to which the model of “Sokol” movements was to be founded in other Slavic countries.

What predominantly affected the development of the “Sokol” idea is the fact that the Slavs in Austria and Hungary did not have the right to organize into military formations, and thus, they sought the gymnastic-sports associations (such as the “Sokol” associations) as a legal form of realizing their national liberation fight.⁶³² John Lampe defines the “Sokol” movement similarly: “The “Sokols” represented an organization that combined mass physical practice in the military spirit with liberal, nationalist and Pan-Slavic ideas, all in the goal of countering Germanization that threatened them in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy”.⁶³³

To understand the essence of action and existence of the “Sokol” movement, one should make a distinction between the real and the hidden goals of this movement.⁶³⁴ Namely, the “Sokols” officially strived towards the creation of a gymnastic Pan-Slavic movement that would favour the ancient catchphrase *mens sana in corpore sano*, but besides working on a “healthy body and spirit”, it represented a sort of military training of the youth for the fight against the Austro-Hungarian government. This can be seen from the training practised in “sokolanas”⁶³⁵ that, besides gymnastics, included practice with elements of military training, such as manual of arms, shooting sports, equestrian sports, etc.

The ideology of the “Sokol” movement was primarily liberal civil, with a strong influence of the popular liberation fight. The French bourgeois revolution also strongly influenced the development of the “Sokol” movement, which can be seen not only by the liberal ideology, which was common to them, but also by the motto the “Sokols” adopted from the French revolutionaries: *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. The liberal idea among the “Sokols” was based on the fact that one could join no matter religion, class, education, or gender.

⁶³² Nikola Žutić, *Sokoli*, Angrotrade, Beograd, 1991, p. 5.

⁶³³ Lampe John, Mazower Mark, *Ideologies and national identities: the case of twentieth-century Southeastern Europe*, Central European Univ. Press, Budapest, 2004, p. 87.

⁶³⁴ The “Sokol” movement would later transform into firm organizations throughout the Slavic countries – “Sokol” organizations.

⁶³⁵ The places where “Sokols” practised.

Besides the fact that the future members⁶³⁶ were expected to be moral and honest citizens, two pivotal conditions were to be respected:

1. Slavic origin;
2. Coming of age.

The “Sokols” emerged as a movement, but as time passed, it grew into an organization with a firm hierarchy, representing “a country in miniature”. Namely, the “Sokols” organized themselves into “Sokol” associations, which had their own rules, structure, and membership. The “Sokol” associations were not mere gymnastic associations. They were recognizable by their “Sokol” idea: “The Sokol idea is contained in the aspiration to physically and morally unite the entire people, and after gaining its political independence, to achieve its internal, spiritual unity”.⁶³⁷

The “Sokol” movement can be perceived as an emancipation movement, given that it perceived women as almost equals since they could, under nearly the same conditions as men, practice and participate in “slets” (rallies).⁶³⁸ Liberation, as a central idea in the axiological system of the “Sokols,” was universal, and thus implied not only the national level but also the emancipation of women as equal members of society. Regarding this, Nikola Žutić noted that in 1913, in Serbia, there were 465 female members of the “Sokol” movement⁶³⁹, of whom 18 were “prednjakinje” (leaders).⁶⁴⁰

The *Sokol* movement did not spread evenly among all Slavic people. Founded in the Czech Republic, the “Sokol” movement soon became popular in all regions of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, populated by the Slavic peoples, adopting the specifics of the locus in which it developed. Even though Pan-Slavism was the central idea around which the value system of “Sokols” was constructed, it was soon replaced by new, tempting ideas. For example, the concept of liberation and unification of the Southern Slavs emerged among

⁶³⁶ Every member was temporarily accepted to the “Sokol” Association for three months.

⁶³⁷ Gradojević Mihailo, *O sokolstvu*, Prosvetno kulturno odeljenje Sokolske župe u Beogradu, Beograd, 1924, p. 26.

⁶³⁸ “Sokols” presented their skills in gatherings called “slets”. The first such “slet” was organized in 1912 in Prague, where Serbian *sokols* participated as well.

⁶³⁹ Žutić Nikola, *Krajiški sokoli*, Udruženje Srba iz Krajine i Hrvatske, Srpsko kulturno društvo Zora, Beograd, 1998, p. 20.

⁶⁴⁰ “Prednjaci” and “prednjakinje” (male and female leaders) were teachers in charge of the socialization of young *sokols*.

the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, centred around the paradigm of Yugoslavia. In the further course of evolution, the “Sokol” movement was inspired by the invention of a separate nation-state for Serbs and Croats.

No matter the fact that the ideas vary from nationalism to Pan-Slavism, the need for liberation and integration of Slavs was always the foundation of the “Sokol” movement: “Physically and spiritually strong, our people will join the community with all other Slavic peoples, and the United Slavs will be a Whole in the Humanity”.⁶⁴¹

The “Sokol” movement nurtured five basic educational ideas:

1. Physical education;
2. Moral education;
3. Slavic and national spirit;
4. Democratic education;
5. Progressive education.⁶⁴²

Even from the first idea of physical education, we can see a touchpoint between the ancient and Slavic perceptions of gymnastics. Namely, the “Sokols” believed that, through gymnastic education, the body becomes healthy and strong, which is a predisposing factor for strengthening morale, and at the same the second leading principle: “Because each of us, when he becomes physically strong, stops being a coward”.⁶⁴³ Besides that, the “Sokols” were strong opposers of all vices, including alcoholism and smoking, since they believed that, by controlling the vices, they discipline the spirit: “To maintain the strength acquired through efforts, “Sokols” were moderate in eating and drinking, smoking and other bodily pleasures, and thus moderation resulted in clarity in thoughts and the power of will”.⁶⁴⁴ By such Spartan attitude towards life, they exercised the spirit and the body for the ultimate goal, which was national liberation. Insisting on moderation was an Ancient Greek principle of the intent to protect the community. It is a known fact that the Ancient Greeks looked down upon exaggeration (*akrai*) that affected harmony. Thus, Aristoteles legitimately stated that moderation (*mesotes*) is

⁶⁴¹ Gradojević Mihailo, *O sokolstvu*, Prosvetno kulturno odeljenje Sokolske župe u Beogradu, Beograd, 1924, p. 26.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.* p. 27.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

a guarantee for a good life in a political community.⁶⁴⁵ “What you gained from practice, preserve it with morals”⁶⁴⁶, stated Miroslav Tyrš.

The third principle, which stresses nurturing Slavic and national spirit, is a consequence of the political situation in which a group of nations found themselves. Enslaved and “stateless”, the Slavic peoples often yearned for a piece of freedom, which disappeared before the rush of the Austrians and Hungarians, confirming Schiller’s thought that the best dreams of freedom are dreamt in the dungeon.⁶⁴⁷ From this principle looms the solidarity, which was much needed for the existence of a nation. Thus, “Sokols” offered the following advice: “The “Sokols” protect the interests of their people in the way that all shopping for home and themselves is done from their compatriots”.⁶⁴⁸ The solidarity implied not only spiritual and political, but also an economic dimension.

Inspired by the principles of the French Revolution, the “Sokol” movement embraced a democratic ideal (the fourth principle), which stated that anyone working for the “Sokol thing” was welcome. The principle of democracy is particularly evident in the fact that members of the “Sokol” associations were not divided by their position, class, titles, party, etc., but also by the fact that they addressed one another as “you”⁶⁴⁹ or “brother”.

The “Sokol” idea was progressive (confirmed by the fifth principle) since it strived towards progress, which implied “removing the shackles” and release from the Austro-Hungarian enslavement. This liberation was gradual, up to the moment when all conditions for a wider military action were met. Because of this, the Austro-Hungarian government perceived the “Sokol” movement as a great

⁶⁴⁵ Aristotel, *Nikomahova etika*, Globus, Zagreb, 1988.

⁶⁴⁶ Gradojević Mihailo, *O sokolstvu*, Prosvetno kulturno odeljenje Sokolske župe u Beogradu, Beograd, 1924, p. 32.

⁶⁴⁷ According to: Paul Kerry, *Friedrich Schiller: playwright, poet, philosopher, historian*, Peter Lang, Oxford, New York, 2007, p. 12.

⁶⁴⁸ Gradojević Mihailo, *O sokolstvu*, Prosvetno kulturno odeljenje Sokolske župe u Beogradu, Beograd, 1924, p. 52.

⁶⁴⁹ An exception to the rule could be found in male-female relations, in which men addressed women formally and vice versa. According to: Brozović Ante, *Sokolski zbornik (60 godina hrvatskog sokolstva)*, Grafički umetnički zavod „Planeta“, Beograd, 1934, pp. 12–24.

danger, directly threatening the existence of the monarchy and the hegemonic position of Austrians and Hungarians.

4.2. THE “SOKOL” MOVEMENT AMONG THE SOUTHERN SLAVS

Thanks to Miroslav Tyrš, the “Sokol” movement as an idea spread fast to other Slavic countries as well, and in 186, the “Southern Sokol” was founded in Ljubljana, which was soon abolished by the Austrian decision from 1867, only to be renewed in 1868 in the form of “Ljubljana Sokol”.⁶⁵⁰ Soon after the Slovenes, the Croats also supported the idea of the “Sokol” movement in 1874. In Dalmatia, Serbs practiced in the Croatian “sokolanas”, which were pro-Yugoslav-oriented. Josip Smodlaka was the chief ideologue of Yugoslavia in Dalmatian “sokolanas”. German sports associations, established in Croatia under the name “Turnverein”, significantly influenced the creation of Croatian “Sokols”. At first, the Croats cooperated with the rest of the Slavic peoples, including Serbs, who practised in Croatian “sokolanas” until May 14, 1905, when the “Serbian Sokol” was formed in Zagreb. The Serbian “Sokol” movement in Austro-Hungary represented a “liberal national liberation movement, which covered its real goal, that is, liberation and unification of all Serbian lands into one unit under the guise of exercising”.⁶⁵¹

The idea of founding “Sokols” among Serbs emerged in Sremski Karlovci in 1903 for the first time at the meeting of the “Serbian academic youth”. The ancestors of this idea were Dr Laza Popović and Milan Teodorović. They promoted the idea of the unification of all “Sokol” associations in the territory of the Dual Monarchy. The first Serbian “Sokol” association was founded in 1904 in Karlovci as “Serbian Soko”.⁶⁵²

In Vukovar in 1908 (during Palm Sunday), a resolution was passed proclaiming the unity of all Serbian “Sokols”: “Through its

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 6.

⁶⁵¹ Žutić Nikola, *Krajiški sokoli*, Udruženje Srba iz Krajine i Hrvatske, Srpsko kulturno društvo Zora, Beograd, 1998, p. 6.

⁶⁵² Ibid.

educational and gymnastic work, Serbian “Sokols” serve the interest of the entire Serbian nation. The Serbian “Sokol” movement, in its spirit, organization, work, and meaning, was significantly marked by the culture of the Serbian people (...) The Serbian “Sokols” will accept only the cognomen and terminology for gymnastics; it will embrace only that system; it will protect and nourish only such practices that are Serbian, completely Serbian”.⁶⁵³ An expressed national dimension can be noticed in the ideology of Serbian “Sokols”. Even though “Sokols”, as an idea, was of predominantly Slavic character, Serbian “Sokols” saw in this movement the Serbian national interest as well, besides the South Slavic character.

The first all-“Sokol” meeting was held in Belgrade on November 07, 1910. During this meeting, a decision was passed on the unification of all Serbian Sokols who acted within and outside the borders of Serbia. At that point emerged the organization “Ujedinjeno srpsko sokolstvo” (*United Serbian Sokols*), which included the following “Sokol” associations:⁶⁵⁴ Union of “Sokol” Associations “Dušan Silni” from Belgrade, “Krajiška District” from Zagreb, “Fruškogorska District” from Sremski Karlovci, “Bosansko-hercegovačka District” from Sarajevo, “Serbian Sokol District” from the coastline (Herceg Novi–Dubrovnik–Kinin), “Sokol” Associations from Hungary (Baranja, Bačka and Banat), and even the Serbian “Sokol” Association from America, from Chicago.⁶⁵⁵ According to data acquired by Nikola Žutić, the “United Serbian Sokols” had almost 8,000 members, 122 associations, and over 3,000 gymnasts by 1913, which testifies to its popularity.

The need of the Southern Slavs for liberation intensified after the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which resulted in the creation of numerous youth patriotic organizations and associations. The Serbian youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina were often, at the same time, members of the leadership of organizations that were nationalist-oriented. This referred not only to Serbs but to Croats and Bosnian Muslims as well. So, according to the statement of Vojislav Bogićević, it often happened that members of “Young Bosnia” were at

⁶⁵³ *Sokolski veleizdajnički proces 1915–1916*, Štamparija Glavnog saveza srpskih zemljoradničkih zadruga, Zagreb, 1927, p. 15.

⁶⁵⁴ Žutić Nikola, *Krajiški sokoli*, Udruženje Srba iz Krajine i Hrvatske, Srpsko kulturno društvo Zora, Beograd, 1998, p. 19.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 20.

the same time members of “Sokols”, but also of the secret association of high school students named “Sloboda” (*Freedom*).⁶⁵⁶

The idea of national liberation and unification corresponded among the Serbian “Sokols” with the notion of chivalry, which can be seen from the “Sokol herald”: “The history of our “Sokols” is brief and can be said in a few words: we have been practising “Sokolship” since Kosovo. Since the mighty conqueror pressured every piece of the Serbian land, since then, every Serb took up his cross and became a “Sokol” and a chevalier...”⁶⁵⁷

Among the Southern Slavic “Sokols”, the ideas of nationalism and Yugoslavia took turns. Still, the fundamental components of “Sokolship”, established by Tyrš in 1862, which later transferred to the Southern Slavs as well, are as follows:

1. Patriotism and nationalism
2. Harmony between the soul and the body
3. Health benefits of sports.⁶⁵⁸

The development of the “Sokol” movement among the Southern Slavs can be divided into three phases:

1. **From the end of the 19th century until World War One.**
In this phase, the “Sokol” movement became very popular among Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Many “sokolanas” promoted the idea of Yugoslavia through joint physical training of these two peoples. The period from 1908 (when the Annexation crisis occurred) to the beginning of World War One will be marked by the persecution of *Sokol* associations, which acted in the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire on the grounds of “high treason”.
2. **Between the two wars.** The period between the two world wars was, in a way, the time of well-being of the Southern Slavic “Sokolship”. However, after the end of World War One, the official ideology in some “Sokol” associations started to change. After the victory of fascism in Italy in 1922, certain parts of the Catholic clergy organized themselves with the goal

⁶⁵⁶ Bogićević Vojislav, *Sarajevski atentat: pisma i saopštenja*, Svijetlost, Sarajevo, 1965, p. 77.

⁶⁵⁷ *Sokolski glasnik*, Beograd, No. 7-8, 1911. According to: Nikola Žutić, *Krajiški sokoli*, Udruženje Srba iz Krajine i Hrvatske, Srpsko kulturno društvo Zora, Beograd, 1998, p. 20.

⁶⁵⁸ See: Macanović Hrvoje, *Sport – Sokolstvo*, Jugoslovenska štampa, Zagreb, 1933, p. 30.

of political action. Such a situation was especially conspicuous in Croatia, in which “Sokol” Associations were forbidden (since, in their foundation, besides the Croatian, included the all-Slavic liberation) and replaced with new (similar) forms of association, which bore a similar name, “Orlovi” (*Eagles*).⁶⁵⁹

3. **After World War Two.** After World War Two, the “Sokol” movement was dismantled in Yugoslavia because it was seen as an orthodox and “bourgeois association”. Following the confiscation of all its assets, it was replaced by the “Partizan” Sports Association.

4.3. LINK BETWEEN “SOKOLS” AND “YOUNG BOSNIA”

A direct link between “Sokols” and “Young Bosnia” has hardly been studied among us, if we exclude a twenty-something pages long brochure, written by Dušan Bogunović in 1925, named “Serbian Sokols and the Sarajevo assassination”.⁶⁶⁰ In this brochure, Bogunović stresses that some members of the “Sokol” movement, such as Mihailo Jovanović, Veljko Čubrilović, and Danilo Ilić, were directly involved in the Sarajevo assassination. This, of course, does not mean that the entire “Sokol” movement was behind the assassination, all the same, as we cannot state that all supporters of “Young Bosnia” knew what was about to happen on June 28, 1914, in Sarajevo. Through this research, we will attempt to prove that **“Young Bosnia” and “Sokols” had the same goal and similar ideology, that their methodology is different, and that many members of “Young Bosnia” were “Sokols” as well.**

⁶⁵⁹ According to the opinion of Žutić, the Catholic church founded the organization “Orlovi” to counter the anti-clerical and liberal ideology promoted by “Sokols”. The Croatian clerical circles were against the “Sokol” ideology, since it most directly represented the symbol of the idea of Yugoslavia. After “Orlovi” was banned in Croatia, “Križari” emerged as a true ideological antipode to “Sokols”. According to: Nikola Žutić, *Krajiški sokoli*, Udruženje Srba iz Krajine i Hrvatske, Srpsko kulturno društvo Zora, Beograd, 1998, p. 83.

⁶⁶⁰ See: Bogunović Dušan, *Srpsko sokolstvo i Sarajevski atentat*, Hrvatski štamparski zavod, Zagreb, 1925.

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Bosnia and Herzegovina was a disenfranchised and devastated country in which the “boots of conquerors” took turns. The cruelty of the Turkish empire was quickly replaced by a new, more progressive, but not more humble master – the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In this backward European province, underestimated by all the great powers, the only bright spot was its youth. This “Bosnian flower of youth”, which had a multinational dimension, had quite an exquisite sense of justice. Seeing their people suffer, the youth of Bosnia and Herzegovina fiercely started their heroic activism, creating numerous (above all secret) student organizations, movements, and associations, which had only one goal – liberation and unification of all enslaved peoples.

On such a foundation, organizations “Sloboda” (*Freedom*), “Jugoslavija” (*Yugoslavia*), “Preporod” (*Revival*), “Srpska narodna omladina” (*Serbian Popular Youth*), “Pobratimstvo” (*Fraternity*), etc., were created. Apart from numerous strictly student organizations, *Sokol* associations, which had a firm structure, program, and membership, were active in Bosnia, and they represented a significant factor in the fight for national liberation and the unification of Southern Slavs. At the beginning of the 20th century, Bosnia and Herzegovina represented a collage of different organizations whose ideas varied from national liberation to the idea of Yugoslavia. According to Bogunović, two types of organizations could be distinguished at that time in Bosnia: “Sokol associations and the movement of national youth, known under the name Young Bosnia, belong to the ranks of institutions that rebel and seek action”.

When speaking of “Young Bosnia”, it should be stressed that we cannot speak of it as an organization because “Young Bosnia” was founded on the existence of various heterogeneous circles in every sense of the word. “Young Bosnia” can be defined as a sort of movement, or even better, as a “state of mind” that was present among the B&H nations. In contemporary times, there are attempts at historical revision, according to which all the blame for the outbreak of World War One falls on Serbia, and “Young Bosnia” is unfoundedly attributed with the epithet of a terrorist organization. “Young Bosnia” was not only not a terrorist organization, but it cannot even be characterized as an organization. The Sarajevo assassination was conducted by a group of conspirators, and not terrorists. It should be known that not every assassination is a terrorist act at the same time. Maybe it would be most appropriate to perceive “Young Bosnia”

as a cultural movement constructed from groups of writers and their followers who gathered around some journals. The members of “Young Bosnia” had different conceptual role models, starting from Vladimir Gaćinović and Dimitrije Mitrinović. Moreover, it is indisputable that the cult of Bogdan Žerajić had a vigorous influence on the development of the axiological system of “Young Bosnia”.

By researching the stated sources of data in this paper, we have come to several reliable evidence that certain members of “Young Bosnia” (above all, we think about the ones who participated in the Sarajevo assassination) were at the same time members of “Sokols” and that individuals like Miško Jovanović and Veljko Čubrilović were even “Sokol” leaders. Stevo Žakula, “the apostle of Bosnian Sokols”, had quite a significant role in the development of the “Sokol” thought among those two.⁶⁶¹ According to Bogunović, the “Sokol” movement can even be seen as the intellectual forerunner of the Sarajevo assassination, though we deem this statement overemphasized. There is an apparent link between “Young Bosnia” and the “Sokol” movement, which Bogunović sees in the following: “Mihailo Jovanović and Veljko Čubrilović were given certain tasks, and they completed them since they believed that it was their Sokol and popular duty, and this is where the link between the Sokols and the Sarajevo assassination emerged”.⁶⁶²

The “Sokols” spread their influence throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Tuzla, Žakula, who brought Mihajlo Jovanović to the “Sokol” idea, had a significant role in the development of the “Sokol” movement.⁶⁶³ According to Bogunović, “Srpski soko” in Tuzla meant for Bosnia the same as the “Srpski soko in Sremski Karlovci for the entire Serbian Sokol movement”. After Tuzla, the “Sokol” movement spread to Zvornik, Gračanica, Bijelina, Brčko, and other cities, with the intention of the foundation of the “Posavska sokolska župa” (*Posavina Sokol District*).⁶⁶⁴

Austro-Hungary began a fierce clash with the “Sokols” in 1908, during the times of the Annexation crisis, only to have Oskar Počorek forbid the work of all Serbian “Sokol” associations in 1913, during

⁶⁶¹ Bogunović Dušan, *Srpsko sokolstvo i Sarajevski atentat*, Hrvatski štamparski zavod, Zagreb, 1925, p. 17.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.* p. 19.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 20.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

the siege of Scutari. Poćorek forbade the work of “Sokols” from the Bosnian District, with an explanation that they are in a conspirative relation with the Serbian “Sokol” association “Dušan Silni”.⁶⁶⁵

The layer of the participants in the Sarajevo assassination, Rudolf Zistler, also pointed to cooperation between “Sokol” associations and “Young Bosnia” during the trial: “Today it was determined that the assassins belonged to the Young Bosnia movement, which was in a relation with the organizations Ujedinjenje ili smrt (Unification or Death), Nacionalna odbrana (National Defence), Sokol associations and other national revolutionary organizations”.⁶⁶⁶ Besides him, Jusuf Pečenković (a teacher in the Civic School), in a letter addressed to Bogićević, also stated that students in this high school organized themselves into secret organizations, including the Serbian “Sokol”, in which Danilo Ilić played the chief role.⁶⁶⁷

Radivoj Đuranović, in a letter addressed to Bogićević, also stated that he had a task to “revolutionize” the rest of the youth in Bosnia for the interests of the Serbian youth and secret organizations: “(...) I developed that work among “Sokols” and student youth”⁶⁶⁸, Đuranović confirms. He stressed that, among youth, he first recruited “Sokols”, such as Danilo Pantić, but also common citizens and students.

There are indications that Nedeljko Čabrinović was also a member of the “Sokol” association, which can be seen in the letter he wrote from Trieste to Bora Jevtić: “I enlisted again in the Slavic “Sokol” and I started swimming in the sea, to get somewhat better”.⁶⁶⁹ It can be noticed from the letter written by Miško Jovanović (written on October 18, 1912, in Tuzla) that “Sokols” participate in Balkan wars: “Our brothers “Sokols” in Serbia set up such a good line and departed, ready to submit their lives to the altar of freedom, if necessary”.⁶⁷⁰ In the continuation, Jovanović seeks material help in the Balkan wars and insists on calling the “Sokol” assembly.

⁶⁶⁵ Žutić Nikola, *Krajiški sokoli*, Udruženje Srba iz Krajine i Hrvatske, Srpsko kulturno društvo Zora, Beograd, 1998, p. 22.

⁶⁶⁶ Bogićević Vojislav, *Sarajevski atentat: pisma i saopštenja*, Svijetlost, Sarajevo, 1965, p. 156.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 45.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 71.

⁶⁶⁹ Čerović Božo, *Bosanski omladinci i Sarajevski atentat*, Trgovačka štamparija, Sarajevo, 1930, p. 106.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 155.

After the assassination of Frantz Ferdinand, many institutions in B&H expressed condolences to Austro-Hungary. Among them was the Bosnian “Sokol” as well. Miško Jovanović did this in the name of “Sokols” since he presided over them at the time.⁶⁷¹

The importance of the “Sokol” movement to Bosnian youth can be seen from the statement of Ivo Kranjčević during the trial, who stated that he was resentful of the Austro-Hungarian government since it forbade the “Sokol slet” (rally) in Austria.⁶⁷² The persecution of “Sokol” associations in B&H began right after the Sarajevo assassination. At that moment, all members of the “Sokol” movement found with the so-called “Kragujevac Report” on them were arrested.⁶⁷³ In 1914, the Austro-Hungarian Government began a process against the Serbian “Sokol” associations from B&H for “high treason”. In this so-called “treacherous process”, 156 Serbs were processed, of whom 30 were “Sokols”.⁶⁷⁴ All “Sokol” associations in this region were under police supervision. The goal of the Banjaluka “treacherous” process was to prove that Serbia, with the help of “Sokol” associations and nationalist associations “Narodna odbrana”, “Pobratim”, and “Prosvjeta”, strived towards secession of B&H. The final balance of the Banjaluka process: 81 Serbs were punished with a prison sentence, and 16 received a death sentence.⁶⁷⁵

The treacherous process against “Sokols” in Zagreb was led in 1915 and 1916. Laza Popović, as the founder of the first Serbian “Sokol” association in Sremki Karlovci, according to the Austro-Hungarian indictment, encouraged the rest of the “Sokols” in Serbia to unite and act to undermine the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, which was in preparation for war, within the framework of nationalist propaganda. He was sentenced to 14 months in prison. Besides him,

⁶⁷¹ It can be presumed that this was done to camouflage the participation of Miško Jovanović in the assassination.

⁶⁷² Bogičević Vojislav, *Sarajevski atentat – stenogram glavne rasprave protiv Gavrila Principa i drugova*, Državni arhiv BiH, Sarajevo, 1954, p. 186.

⁶⁷³ We are speaking of a report from 1913, in which a famous speech by one of the “Sokol” leaders, M. Kovačević, can be found.

⁶⁷⁴ Žutić Nikola, *Krajiški sokoli*, Udruženje Srba iz Krajine i Hrvatske, Srpsko kulturno društvo Zora, Beograd, 1998, p. 23.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

Milan Metikoš was sentenced to ten months, and Srđan Budisavljević to eight months of prison time.⁶⁷⁶

After the Sarajevo assassination in 1914, the work of “Sokols” in Croatia, Slavonia, and Srem was forbidden as well, with an explanation that “Sokol” associations were part of the Serbian army and based on the ideology of “Great Serbia” with irredentist goals.⁶⁷⁷

Based on the previously mentioned facts, it can be stated that there was a link between certain members of “Young Bosnia” and “Sokols”. Of course, we cannot speak here of a link between their entire membership, but only between their prominent individuals. Besides that, their goals were identical, implying the liberation of Southern Slavs and their national unification. Despite their substantial similarity in terms of goals, ideas, and ideologies, significant differences can be singled out as well:

1. The methods of action of “Young Bosnia” (especially its members who participated in the Sarajevo assassination) were much more violent when compared to the “Sokol” methods.
2. While “Young Bosnia” is a loosely organized movement or even a “state of mind”, “Sokols” were divided into firm organizations, which had some rules, official membership, and hierarchy.
3. The “Sokols” advocated Pan-Slavism and then national unification, while a narrower idea existed among the “Young Bosnia” members, varying from the notion of Yugoslavia to the idea of Serbia.
4. The “Sokol” movement appeared among most Slavic people, while the idea of “Young Bosnia” was present in a narrower geographical space.
5. The “Sokol” movement had a political dimension camouflaged through the idea of sport and training. The “Young Bosnia” represented a sociopolitical phenomenon without any significant links with sports.

⁶⁷⁶ Optužnica državnog odvjetništva u Zagrebu br. I 2129/66–1914, according to: *Sokolski veleizdajnički proces 1915–1916*, Zagreb, 1927.

⁶⁷⁷ According to: Brozović Ante, *Sokolski zbornik (60 godina hrvatskog sokolstva)*, Grafički umetnički zavod „Planeta“, Beograd, 1934, p. 148.

6. Members of “Sokols” were exclusively adults, while members of “Young Bosnia” were predominantly high school students, among whom there were minors as well. Some participants, such as Vasa Čubrilović, were not older than 16.

In the end, it can be stated that members of both “Young Bosnia” and “Sokols”, each in their own way, represented significant political factors which contributed to the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, which resulted, among other things, in the liberation of the enslaved peoples. Sacrifice, idealism, maturity, and bravery they showed in their attempts to preserve the national spirit and win back the stolen peace of freedom from the cruel and much stronger conqueror can be seen as a Herculean undertaking, worth every attention and admiration, and not only today but forever.

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