

4. STRATEGIC POLICY SUGGESTIONS FOR A NEW APPROACH IN COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Contextualisation of violent extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The global phenomenon of violent extremism is not a new occurrence, and so it is impossible to view it as an isolated phenomenon taking place outside the social structures and specific contexts that in fact play an important role in its existence and its directions. In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), this phenomenon is the result of several major events, which highlighted the topic of violent extremism in the work of a number of state and non-state stakeholders, as well as within academia and the media. These events, amongst others, include: the rise of Salafi preaching that could be directly linked to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the conflict's subsequent legacies, the change in the perception of violent extremism following 11 September and the global war on terror; the rise of the Islamic States of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and the phenomenon of foreign fighters; the progress of the war in Ukraine; and lastly, the process of repatriating the country's nationals from Syria and Iraq. Each of these events had an impact on understanding, as well as differentiating between, related but nonetheless different concepts, such as terrorism, extremism, violent extremism, and radicalisation. *The 2015-2020 Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism* does not explicitly define "terrorism" or "violent

extremism”, but rather refers in various ways to “terrorism and terrorism-related phenomena” or “violent extremism that can lead to terrorism”, citing “new terrorist challenges”, without defining any of these terms.² Therefore, the scope of violent extremism is unclear, as well as how prevention envisioned in the *Strategy* can be best directed.³

The *Strategy* was adopted state-wide, but BiH has a complex institutional structure with many levels of governance. This arrangement was a result of the Bosnian war, in the sense that it was enshrined in the Dayton constitution, which recognises three main subnational levels – the entity of Federation of BiH, the entity of Republika Srpska, and Brčko District. The entity of Federation of BiH is further divided into ten cantons, local self-governing units with a high level of independence, while the entity of Republika Srpska has a centralised government.⁴ The state level of BiH has no legal authority on many aspects of policy-making including several aspects related to security and prevention. The subnational levels are primarily responsible for the implementation of most elements of the *Strategy*, which leads to issues in the document’s implementation and hinders policy transfer from the state to lower levels of governance.

Although violent extremism takes many forms, the traditional perspectives of violent extremism in BiH are mostly related to religious, or more precisely, Islamist radicalisation in the country, whose beginnings can be linked to the war in the 1990s, when significant support by foreign fighters from Arab countries could be seen. The war also facilitated the introduction of new ideas and a post-Communist “awakening”, during which many Muslims in BiH tried to return to Islam, in order to practice the religion after years spent in a system that had pushed it to the margins. In such an environment, a new vacuum emerged,

within which Salafi interpretations of Islam gained prominence, to a great extent aided and encouraged by outside influences. In addition, in a post-conflict society ravaged by war and largely dependent on humanitarian aid, many organisations began their missionary work by funding a significant number of activities within the country, and by providing scholarships for students willing to study in Gulf states. On their return to BiH, many of these students became Salafi influencers, better known as *da'is* or religious preachers, whose knowledge and interpretations are generally challenged and disputed by officially-recognised institutional and religious authorities, namely the BiH Islamic Community. Metodieva believes that an educational background in Middle Eastern religious institutions can be seen as a source of credibility that radical influencers may be able to leverage in building their authority within local communities.⁵ Also, a significant decrease has been seen in the influence of humanitarian organisations, which in the post-war period may have had the chance to condition certain activities by means of financial and other types of assistance. Bećirević and other authors opine that in the early post-war years, the BiH authorities did not interfere in burgeoning Salafi communities, but after 11 September, some Islamic charities suspected of supporting terrorism were shut down and the Bosnian citizenship of most of the remaining *mujahideen* was revoked.⁶

After the 9/11 attacks and the war on terror, approaches to terrorism and violent extremism in BiH reflected global trends and the practices of international partners. The 1990s war years in BiH and post-war events had given the country's institutions some experience and knowledge of this phenomenon, and so they were not entirely unprepared, differently to some other countries or regions. Data shows that between 2001 and 2012, most domestic attacks

categorised as terrorist actions had some sort of connection to Islamist terrorism. After ISIS' appearance and rapid rise, in the media, and in statements by officials in the region, BiH was often presented as one of the European countries with the most conspicuous foreign fighters issue, with a significant number of individuals who had left for battlefields in Syria and Iraq. Nevertheless, such estimates should be viewed with caution, because it is hard to precisely define the number of people who left the country and joined paramilitary formations. For instance, according to some estimates, such as those in the study by Vlado Azinović and Muhamed Jusić, the number of foreign fighters who left the country between 2012 and 2016 could be 330.⁷ However, a certain proportion of these people had dual citizenship, meaning that they belong to diaspora communities in other states. Also, considering the ratio of foreign fighters to the total Muslim population in the country, the proportion for BiH is just below the average for the EU.⁸ In addition to departures that took place when ISIS was at its peak level, as previously mentioned, a significant number of returnees were also recorded. In March 2021, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) launched the Terrorism and Foreign Fighters Database, which contains information on court verdicts regarding domestic terrorism, as well as rulings from the trials of foreign fighters who joined ISIS and other militant groups in Syria, and pro-Russian separatist forces in Ukraine.⁹ Therefore the database covers the period from 2007 to 2020, during which BiH indicted the largest number of individuals in the Western Balkans – 45 of them. Overall, 28 were incriminated for departing for Syria, one for going to Ukraine, and 16 for domestic terrorism.

During the period in which the departure of citizens to Syria reached its highest levels, greater attention was also

dedicated to parallel domestic issues, primarily in relation to the reintegration of *para-jamaats* or unrecognised (illegal) congregations, which existed outside the Islamic Community's authority. Most congregations were successfully returned to the control of officially-recognised religious authorities, following a public appeal in 2016, accompanied by a warning that many isolated communities could have been liable to legal consequences. Current data shows that the number of congregations that existed before integration with the Islamic Community in 2016, approximately 70, has now been reduced to 11.

In recent years, following ISIS' significant losses of territory, the focus has shifted from the departure of Bosnian nationals to foreign battlefields, to the process of return and repatriation. At the same time, discussions on the fighters departing for the battlefield in Ukraine, which had previously been largely neglected by most of the stakeholders in this sphere, began to attract more attention. Many media reports and investigative stories suggested that individuals from the entity of Republika Srpska, who joined separatist, pro-Russian, paramilitary formations in the Donbas region, received help from organised groups in Serbia. Although the war in Ukraine began in 2014, discussions on this phenomenon in the context of BiH began only much later, primarily because the majority of media space was taken up by stories from Syria and Iraq. Up until now, one person has been indicted by the Court for warfaring activities in Ukraine, and he was successively acquitted, because this individual's membership of a paramilitary formation comprising people from Serbia and Republika Srpska could not be proven. The information available to the BiH Ministry of Security suggests that over the last seven years, 11 citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina were involved in combat activities on the Ukrainian battlefield.¹⁰

The situation in Ukraine and the departures of individual fighters have demonstrated the existence of various forms of extremism which, though often overlooked, are increasingly relevant for the local context, in terms of political ideology, ethno-nationalism and far-right extremism. Moreover, several media organisations have already discovered links to the various Chetnik and Cossack associations, which often claimed that they were religious or humanitarian in nature, but that in actual fact also had direct connections with the recruitment processes. As a result, these Ravna Gora Chetnik associations represent a domestic security challenge, and are considered as constituting one of the country's principal extremist elements. This view can be justified by certain "organisational" features, including the associations' resemblance to military structures, the participants' status as veterans and their previous experience of the war in BiH, and the strong ties existing with other identical or similar organisations in the region. On the other hand, previous research confirmed the existence of individuals and factions within the Croatian ethnic group in BiH who supported the Ustasha ideology and enthusiastically adopted far-right symbols – a trait that is often seen amongst groups of football fans. For instance, BIRN has noted that on one occasion, the coat of arms of "Azov", a Ukrainian military unit fighting against pro-Russian forces in the east of the country, was displayed on the stands of the stadium in Mostar.¹¹ In addition to Chetnik and Ustasha supporters, several reports mention at least one far-right Bosniak organisation – the Bosnian Movement of National Pride (BPNP) – which displays unequivocal nationalist, unitarian, anti-Semitic and anti-communist views. Considering all the examples listed above, Tzvetkova and Mancheva have noted that these groups often display neo-Nazi characteristics, engage in

violent acts, and demand the separation from the state of BiH of the territories inhabited by their respective ethno-religious groups.¹²

Mapping the strategic approach to countering / preventing violent extremism (C/PVE) in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Until the end of 2020, the *2015-2020 Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism* was a document fundamental for the involvement of stakeholders, as well as for designing and implementing activities aimed at preventing the occurrence of violent extremism. This *Strategy* consists of four parts, comprising prevention, investigation and prosecution, the protection of critical infrastructure, and responses to terrorist attacks. However, its implementation has come up against a series of obstacles, in first place the adoption of the *Action Plan* which was completed only by October 2016, and likewise the fact that the Supervisory Body for monitoring the *Strategy's* implementation became operational only in mid-2017. In addition, the *Action Plan for Preventing and Combating Terrorism* in the Federation of BiH was adopted only in the final year of the strategy's application.

One of the positive aspects of the *Strategy's* fulfilment during the five-year period is highlighted by the significant number of educational activities organised by individual institutions and agencies, and the active participation on the part of many stakeholders, with improved communications amongst all players involved in C/PVE programmes. Significant results have also been achieved in the area of investigation and prosecution, primarily due to changes in the Criminal Code and the prosecution of returnees arriving from foreign battlefields. Azinović and Jusić have observed that Security agencies and the BiH Prosecutor's

Office immediately began preparations for the application of this legislation after its adoption in 2014.¹³ In the end, the part of the *Strategy* related to security was almost completely implemented, and the departure of BiH citizens to foreign battlefields was halted. In addition, all types of terrorist attacks in BiH have been prevented over the last few years.

On the other hand, some of the *Strategy's* most important goals had not been achieved by the time it expired at the end of 2020. This can be ascribed principally to insufficient work on the preventive aspects, as well as a lack of clarity on the role and responsibilities of all the stakeholders who should be involved in C/PVE processes. Likewise, although the *Strategy* has tried to encompass cyber threats, there has been no real prevention of online radicalisation, which remains a major challenge for the future. Lastly, the lack of funding has made its implementation much more difficult, and it has also been found hard to compile action plans that would be feasible at all levels from state-wide to local, without being targeted too high for practical operation locally. Precisely this synergy between local and state-wide levels has been highlighted by Richardson and other authors, who consider that unified approaches involving institutions such as central and local government, security services, educational structures, health services, local authorities and sports centres, would be useful for the early detection of radicalisation, and could provide assistance for those involved in anti-radicalisation processes.¹⁴ According to several media sources, during the *Strategy's* implementation, no money was allocated from the state budget for any activities, which were in fact financed by donor funds. In the period between 2015 and 2020, BiH relied principally on foreign governments and organisations for the allocation of money to combat youth

radicalisation, and the BiH Council of Ministers did not allocate any significant financial resources for the *Strategy's* implementation.¹⁵

In recent years, the focus has shifted from fighters' departure to foreign battlefields to the process of return and repatriation, which was not included in the *Strategy* because it was adopted at a time when there was still considerable controversy on the subject of foreign fighters in Syria and Ukraine. In this scenario, the centre of attention moved towards more traditional security approaches, so that institutions and organisations included in preventive operations, such as social centres which were directly implicated in the arrival of the first groups from foreign battlefields, were left out.¹⁶

A specific problem and challenge involving the *Strategy* arose in the area of assessment and information, as a result of the lack of critical evaluation that could be achieved through regular reporting by the Supervisory Body. For instance, annual reports were not compiled, and no-one could officially say whether BiH's five-year *Strategy* actually complied with the requisites detailed in the document.¹⁷ On the other hand, annual reports were collated in Brčko District and Republika Srpska, with details of all activities.

The 2019 report, which was the only report completed during the implementation period, contains the observation that some of the *Strategy's* most important goals were not achieved, including insufficient work on the prevention of terrorism, the absence of the prevention of radicalisation on the internet and the failure to allocate budget finance for implementation of the activities specified by the *Strategy*.¹⁸ On the other hand, positive results of the *Strategy's* implementation can be seen in the absence of terrorist attacks in BiH over the past few years.

Currently, BiH is the only country in the region that has not yet adopted a new counter-terrorism strategy. Once the Ministry of Security had received feedback and the necessary information from all stakeholders and all levels of government, it was expected that the report on the implementation of the *Action Plan* of the *Strategy for Preventing and Combating Terrorism* would be completed during 2021. Therefore, by way of example, in the case of a report arriving from the entity of Republika Srpska, the document would have had to be approved by the entity government, in order to be taken into consideration at the state level. Although no final deadline has been set, this report will be a pivotal document for the new *Strategy's* development and finalisation.¹⁹ In May 2021, a Working Group was formed with representatives of the respective state institutions from the Republika Srpska, the Federation of BiH and the Brčko District of BiH, with the responsibility for formulating a Proposal for the new *Strategy for Preventing and Combating Terrorism*, and presenting it to the Council of Ministers within a timescale of three months, while the Proposal for the *Action Plan* would be submitted within six months after the decision's adoption.²⁰ The group comprises 32 members, including representatives from ministries and the organisations responsible for the part of the document concerned with prevention.²¹ Representatives of international organisations, academia, civil society, and the embassies of foreign countries will also play a part in this group's work. The new document is expected to address some of the issues that seemed to constitute flaws in the previous *Strategy*, such as the lack of finance, insufficient clarity on the roles of the various stakeholders in the field of prevention, delays in adopting the action plans, a lack of focus on online radicalisation, and problems regarding critical assessment and reporting.

Views from the state institutions

The Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina formed an Interdepartmental Working Group for the development and implementation of the *2020-2025 Action Plan for Preventing and Combating Terrorism* in the Federation of BiH, which worked on the conceptualisation of its contents and activities. The document is harmonised and synchronised with the national *Strategy for Preventing and Combating Terrorism (2015-2020)*, but at the same time, it dedicates greater attention to the preventive part – an area in which the Working Group planned a set of activities aimed at preventing all forms of extremist and terrorist activities. Within the Interdepartmental Working Group for the development and implementation of the *2020-2025 Action Plan for Preventing and Combating Terrorism* in the Federation of BiH, there are representatives of various departments including education, health, security, and police, as well as international partners such as the OSCE, UNICEF BiH, PH International, and others.

The interviewee from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Federation of BiH has stated that the *Action Plan* envisages the implementation of 15 prevention-related activities, three regarding the mapping of risks and resources, ten in programmes of criminal investigation, and five in the field of social response.

Our interviewee added: *“The 2015-2020 Strategy for Preventing and Combating Terrorism, adopted at state level, treated the preventive segment almost exclusively from the traditional security aspect, and there was no real, intersectoral cooperation with other relevant departments, primarily those for education, health, and social protection. Therefore, it was not possible to compile effective plans for action at lower levels of government, neither to satisfactorily report on its implementation.”*²²

After the return and repatriation of BiH nationals had begun, the stakeholders involved, namely institutes for social work, mental health centres, and non-governmental organisations, began working on resocialisation and de-radicalisation programmes, mainly with the help of foreign organisations.²³ In her study, Bećirević observed that returnees typically spend a brief period of time in prison, and so security officials and experts consider it necessary to develop offender rehabilitation programmes, in addition to ensuring the prevention of a new wave of violence that could be implemented by “failed” fighters, whose numbers are far harder to estimate.²⁴ Centres providing social care can offer preventive services by means of counselling, and this is usually available to all citizens. However their activities are much more conspicuous in situations where violent extremism has already appeared. In most cases, the work of these centres relies on cooperation with other institutions and structures, as well as foreign organisations, particularly in the area of employee training.

A respondent from one such centre confirmed this statement when she said: *“In situations in which we receive information on the existence of violent extremism, our Centre for Social Work tries to involve its professionals (social workers, psychologists, or educators, depending on the case) and attempts to engage all the relevant institutions that could provide protection and offer solutions. These are, first of all, the police, health care services, mental health centres, psychological counselling centres, and educational centres.”*²⁵

On the other hand, education has often been highlighted as a significant factor of resilience, which can help prevent vulnerability to violent extremism from an early age. The importance of education had previously been identified by Richardson and others, who wrote that teaching in schools

is important in challenging radical world views and pointing out that by educating all students about Islam and other religions, children will gain the knowledge necessary to sensitively navigate a multi-religious society.²⁶ At the level of the entity of the Federation of BiH, the objective of several programmes currently running is not to educate just students, but also the teaching staff.

A practical example was provided by a respondent from the Ministry of Education and Science at the Federation of BiH, who said: *“Educational programmes that improve students’ functional knowledge and their critical awareness, and introduce anti-discriminatory, multidimensional content into curricula, have already been designed and applied. Continuous education, primarily of teaching staff, and then for young people in BiH, was crucial to this change – especially when teaching methods that enhanced students’ critical thinking and their ability to resist extremist ideas, were utilised.”*²⁷

However, after the Strategy’s implementation, most of the positive reactions were directed towards work in the area of protection, which kept domestic security at a satisfactory level, primarily with regard to departures towards foreign battlegrounds and the prevention of domestic terrorist attacks. One of the institutions that deals with threats from the traditional security standpoint is the BiH Intelligence-Security Agency, which surveys terrorist phenomena in BiH, in addition to broader global threats. The agency also deals with the issue of radicalisation, but only in cases where the cognitive process has not yet transformed into a behavioural one. In such situations, the aim is one of early detection, given that threats could only be monitored following the appearance of specific behaviour patterns. By applying this technique, it becomes possible to approach individuals who have displayed unacceptable

forms of behaviour solely after phenomena have been revealed. This means that there could be a lack of information until someone becomes a victim. An important quota of the Agency's practice is represented by the collection, analysis and authentication of data, and its delivery to the respective authorities.

When asked about communications with other institutions, an interviewee from the Intelligence-Security Agency said: *"The nature of the situation calls for communications with other institutions. In our case, this relationship is given formal confirmation by agreements delivered to other structures, and we have signed a memorandum with the police authorities. Informal relationships are useful purely for enhancing communication and cannot replace a formal agreement. Trust between institutions can be achieved through personal respect."*²⁸

On the other hand, the BiH Ministry of Security is the central communications hub for players engaged in C/PVE, and therefore, the media most often request access to information from this institution. However, most respondents agree that institutions usually only communicate after something has become breaking news or when problems have already emerged. One of the respondents from the Ministry of Security said that the difficulty in sharing information, which may sometimes be slow, can be attributed to the shortage of staff working in this sector, in addition to the fact that a large number of documents they receive have to go through internal checks because they bear a label of confidentiality.²⁹ According to some reports, there is currently a considerably better channel of communications with the media, and this represents a move in the right direction and a significant shift in mutual relations. It has also been pointed out that personal acquaintances play a role in active cooperation, as can be seen in relations with

the Islamic Community, the Catholic Church, and the Serbian Orthodox Church.³⁰ In the past, the Ministry of Security, together with the International Republican Institute, developed a communications strategy that has not yet been fully implemented. In the following subchapters, further details on this strategy will be discussed, along with the reasons for the failure in its adoption, as highlighted by other, non-governmental players involved in its development. Another important aspect of institutional communications can be linked to BiH's internal organisation and the fact that the different entities have their own police forces, parliaments, and government, which can also create problems when there is a need for institutional cooperation and sharing information between the entities and the state authorities. In the past, these difficulties emerged above all with regard to sharing information on violent extremism and matters of jurisdiction, amongst the various institutions.³¹

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, analogous to the context of other Western Balkan countries, is directly conditioned by a number of global trends, and cannot be considered in isolation. Therefore, the work of state agencies is affected by relations with other state stakeholders, both globally and regionally. For instance, Azinović has stated that since 2014, increased vigilance by law enforcement and border authorities successfully prevented dozens of aspiring foreign fighters from travelling to the Middle East.³² Therefore the emergence of new radicalised milieus, globalisation, the outbreak of new wars, the actions of fan groups, and other global trends can lead to changes in behaviour and consequent alterations to the work performed by security agencies, and this affects the C/PVE actions in the country. Changes in the approach to violent extremism have been introduced more intensely over the

last three to four years, as the issue has been systematically tabled within institutional agendas. For instance, the Ministry of Security is one of the institutions that necessarily monitors global trends in this area continuously. One such change is the definition of violent extremism to include hate speech reflecting prejudice, in the wake of the 2015 Washington Summit, after which the Ministry began to apply the same term.

On the subject of practices at the Ministry and the new trends that have been observed, the respondent from the BiH Ministry of Security noted: *"The Strategy is the guide for all actions. Lately, we have managed to put the focus on local communities, and the notion of violent extremism is no longer foreign. There has been a visible transition from the state to the local level, and local communities have been linked both horizontally and vertically... Also, we are more committed to preventive actions. People can no longer say that violent extremism is something that happens to others, because it is happening to us now. Analyses are also performed, such as in the case of returnees from the battlefield. It is important to emphasise that field actions are not carried out, but rather strategic operations, because that is what the Ministry is actually required to do."*³³

The Ministry of Security, together with civil society stakeholders operating in the C/PVE field, suffers a lack of funding, with finance arriving mainly from foreign donors. This relationship and dependency, which has become consolidated over the years, means that strategic activities, programme, and agenda, are produced to a large extent in accordance with donors' wishes. According to 2019 BIRN data, USAID and the United Kingdom have allocated funds through various projects aimed at countering young people's radicalisation. Foreign donors finance many

coaching programmes for civil servants, supporting civil society and providing assistance as part of the religious institutions' project activities.³⁴ In addition, there is a disadvantage when it comes to systems of assessment, considering that most procedures are slow. The respondent from the Ministry of Security asserted that the institutions' partners were principally OSCE, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Council of Europe, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), and other foreign organisations.³⁵

Although each institution's official agenda sets normative standards that strictly exclude any support for, or links to, violent extremism, most respondents believed that there are still organised groups that sympathise with radical ideas. In this way, a possible conclusion could be that, even though the institutions' declared position is established at a public level, they may privately harbour sympathy for violent extremism. In addition, there are formations that show certain organisational traits, and that are in many cases associated with groups from the region, meaning that they demonstrate a high level of connectedness. The respondent who works at the Centre for Social Work believes that the presence of such organisations and individuals is certainly possible, but that it depends largely on whether institutions and individuals have encountered the same problem.³⁶

Views from the international organisations

Donor activities by many stakeholders in post-war BiH were the driving force behind the development of most C/PVE-related programmes. One of the most notable trends amongst the majority of donors has been a heavy focus on Sarajevo, Mostar, and Banja Luka, with a significantly smaller number of actions aimed at smaller local

communities, often marked as the so-called “backwater areas.” The OSCE has intensified its work on issues related to terrorism and violent extremism since 2015, in an attempt to raise awareness about the subject, and it provided the most significant support for the work of the Ministry of Security during the *Strategy’s* drafting and implementation. The organisation will also play an important role in drafting a new strategy, in which a greater involvement of stakeholders outside the security sector is expected. The Federation of BiH had already formed a Coordinating Body, and the Ministry included a wide range of institutions and organisations as part of the new strategy – government and security institutions, civil society, centres for social work, mental health institutions, educational institutions, and others.

In recent years, significant changes in strategies and approaches have been seen, in line with new challenges. Most organisations’ initial interest for the topic can be connected to the phenomenon of foreign fighters, and departures for Syria and Iraq. In that sense, it could be said that most stakeholders focused exclusively on radical Islam early in their operational history. However, the approach adopted by foreign organisations is currently showing a degree of change, in that several of them are placing an emphasis on positive voices and youth initiatives, rather than on negative voices. To a great extent, OSCE has focused on community luminaries (including women and religious leaders), but also on educational programmes for youth that tend to guide them towards becoming a driving force for change at the local level. Through these actions, young leaders learn about both media literacy and human rights, and have the opportunity to receive grants. All these elements act in a preventive sense, which is confirmed by the fact that in addition to these initiatives, the OSCE has

issued a series of manuals related to roles of civil society, gender, and human rights in C/PVE. Moreover, the organisation has a broad programme related to hate crimes, which includes comprehensive, day-to-day monitoring, in order to identify all events and record all instances of hate crimes, such as attacks on places of worship. Our respondent from the OSCE added that in recent years they have tried to expand the debate on extremism, discuss all forms of extremist behaviour (from Islamic to others), and include right-wing extremism in the whole agenda – mainly through the Secretariat’s initiatives.³⁷ In addition, all stakeholders in the area of C/PVE understood the importance of a multisectoral approach and the role of other players in the field, as highlighted by the IOM respondent: “Over the last three years, the approach of security institutions has changed, because they now take the problem more seriously. I think that they have understood the role and importance of other sectors”.³⁸

The cooperation of international organisations can generally be viewed through a multisectoral prism, so that, as a result of the donor characteristics, they become desirable partners for cooperation with both state and non-governmental institutions. Partnerships are largely conditioned by the agenda of the foreign organisations and by various domestic and global trends. For instance, over the last two years, there has been a focus on the process of repatriation of foreign fighters and their resocialisation in local communities. In the case of the OSCE, this phenomenon and the need for rehabilitation have led to an increase in the number of beneficiaries in the field of social protection: *“A year and a half ago, in a conversation with the Ministry of Social Welfare of the Federation of BiH, we decided that it was necessary to cooperate with social workers and use the existing mechanisms. We realised the importance of*

training social workers to develop the skills and knowledge needed for new challenges. Therefore, through an American programme of instruction, we have developed a pool of trainers to prepare social workers in several cantons in the Federation of BiH, such as Sarajevo, Una-Sana, Central Bosnia and Zenica-Doboj."³⁹

The IOM employee pointed out that over the last year, the organisation has been involved in cooperation principally with the Ministry of Security and the centres for social work on these issues. An interviewee also added that most of the other thematic areas require intense communications with the Ministry of Security, since this institution is the principal agent for the *Strategy's* central tenets.⁴⁰ In addition, the IOM seeks to include the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, as well as social work centres, police, mental health centres, and schools. This approach challenges one of the contested points of the *Strategy* as it currently stands – the lack of a multisectoral approach and the unclear role played by each of these protagonists in C/PVE activities. A similar approach was identified by the respondent from OTI, who stated: "*Our team works with people on different levels. These include academics, individuals, civil society organisations, informal community groups, government, and the media*".⁴¹

Through its work, OTI concentrated on research and small grant pilots, to better understand radicalisation processes in BiH. Its principal focus was on support for youth activists across the whole of BiH, including projects such as setting up youth clubs and supporting youth organisations. OTI had worked previously with centres for social work, and strongly supported several municipalities and CSOs. Furthermore, it engaged with the Ministry of Security, contributed to the issue of foreign fighters by means of outreach and communications, and

developed an analytical and strategic plan that has not yet been implemented.

When asked about the communication patterns, our interviewee revealed: *“Communication with foreign players is easier, as well as meetings. For instance, the international community tries to synchronise their ideas and positions, to make things easier for the Ministry of Security. It is harder to work with government institutions, and it is easier to stay in contact with CSOs. Communications with government are more formal.”*⁴²

On the other hand, for the OSCE, as for most other stakeholders, the prime partner is the Ministry of Security. On the subject of coordination and communications amongst international partners, the study showed that their dynamics is much better today, when compared to the period between 2015 and 2018.

Generally, interviewees pointed out that communications – though not structured by them – are frequent and call for a great deal of time and energy.⁴³ In addition to meetings organised for the discussion and development of a new strategy, there are also meetings of the Supervisory Body for the previous *Strategy*, at which the OSCE “was sometimes invited to meetings, and sometimes not.”⁴⁴ Moreover, these stakeholders regularly work with both religious communities and the Interreligious Council, on interreligious dialogue and similar, related topics. Cooperation with the Islamic Community has been going on since 2015, and its formal structure has been successfully consolidated over the years.

The OSCE respondent said that it would be even better if other religious communities followed the example of the Islamic Community, got involved and spoke openly about these topics.⁴⁵

Views from the civil society organisations (CSOs)

In BiH, most C/PVE-oriented civil society organisations are funded by foreign governmental and non-governmental players. Some of them focus on the local level, and others on the principal urban centres in the country, or on the regional networking projects. For instance, the International Republican Institute (IRI), which in some areas of its projects focused on regional cooperation, networking and connecting people or institutions from the Balkans and the USA, is mainly funded and supported by the State Department, National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and USAID – meaning that their initiatives are mostly USG-funded.⁴⁶ A similar line of support can be seen in the case of the Democratisation Policy Council (DPC), which underlined the fact that the most significant assistance was received from the OSCE and the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI).⁴⁷ In the case of TPO Foundation, the civil society organisation that tends to expound and tangibly apply the knowledge produced by academia, some of the partners include universities from Europe and America, as well as foreign and non-governmental organisations. The Interreligious Council in BiH, which receives support principally from the US Embassy and USAID, affirms that although they receive a grant from the Council of Ministers, their organisation is not a budget user, and is largely dependent on foreign grants. Our interviewee from the Interreligious Council said: “We are currently collaborating with IOM on a project that deals with hate speech on social networks. We also work in cooperation with RYCO, UNDP, UN, Catholic Relief Services, and others”.⁴⁸

Many CSOs often cooperate with governmental institutions, but at the same time, they try to fill in the gaps that currently exist at the levels of relevant ministries and other government institutions. This, first and foremost, receives

concrete application through the additional training of teaching staff and civil servants, and also of students. One of our interviewees came from an organisation of this type, and said that they seek to bridge the gap between academia and the activist world, while trying to forge a link between different institutions.⁴⁹

Up until now, the TPO Foundation has profiled itself as a player working on interreligious education and the expertise of teachers and members of non-governmental organisations. Some of the cantons in the Federation of BiH have already integrated topics related to universal ethical values into their curricula, and a large number of teachers are including topics such as violent extremism in their lessons. In this way, the organisation tries to show that violent extremism should not be viewed purely in terms of Islamic extremism, but also with respect to the various nationalist standpoints in the Balkans.

On the subject of the programmes that they implement, an interviewee added: *"It is important to integrate the teaching of universal ethical values and critical thinking. We are trying to present new methodologies for introducing ethics in all areas such as mathematics, physics, language, and other subjects. I think that it is important to talk about universal values. If everything starts at the lowest levels, such as primary education, change can be achieved. Teacher training is also important, especially in the areas of interculturality and religion. Consideration should be given to the resources of religion for building peace and understanding. These resources are used by extremists for their own ends, and religion should not be excluded in the broader concept of multiculturalism. Finally, through the programmes, we work on methods of critical thinking, in which we try to educate teachers so that they can incorporate critical thinking approaches in their educational activities."*⁵⁰

Often, the civil sector also works with local politicians to facilitate networking with other stakeholders, as well as providing financial support for the implementation of projects in the municipalities taking part.

For example, the respondent gave us confirmation that IRI was engaged in one such project: *"IRI also worked locally, with local leaders invited to exchange experiences and information. There was also the possibility of obtaining financial support for participants, in order to fund their research, initiatives, cultural initiatives, and other activities known as "interventions". The assessment of our programmes showed that the participants made lasting connections."*⁵¹

Although it is sometimes difficult to establish trust with the security sector, our interviewee from IRI commented that cooperation is good with government organisations such as the State Investigation and Protection Agency, and the Intelligence-Security Agency.⁵² In the past, IRI had engaged two domestic and two foreign experts to develop a *Communications Strategy* for the Ministry of Security. This strategy has not been implemented up until now, and this represents a missed opportunity for improving the work of this institution. In addition to the group of experts, a Working Group was formed, comprising employees at state institutions such as the Ministry of Security, the Investigation and Protection Agency, and the Prosecutor's Office. When compiling the strategic document, a focus was placed on four areas: visibility, internal communications, crisis communications, and improving BiH's international image.

Our respondent suggested that it would be good if the communications strategy could be incorporated into the new approach:⁵³ *"Some international partners were slow on this subject, and some were difficult to work with. Inter-*

*national organisations usually work together on C/PVE and have harmonised policies on this topic”.*⁵⁴

As mentioned earlier, the work of CSOs is often linked to short-term donor projects, and therefore it is difficult to assess the long-term effects of the programmes implemented. Most organisations focus on working with young people, but compared to the initial period, their operations are now focused more on local communities. In a significant number of cases, CSOs are now establishing youth networks and transferring their activism to the online sphere. Commitment to social networks and online tools is a significant step forward, in order to develop an appropriate approach to the individuals most vulnerable to extremism. Likewise, most CSOs try to move away from the traditional view of extremism as exclusively Islamist, and pay greater attention to other forms more frequently present, expressed through hate speech. The findings of respondents from CSOs show that government institutions have accurate data on departures to foreign battlefields, meaning that security agencies have done an adequate job. Therefore, inaccurate political communications from neighbouring countries can negatively affect the perception of the existence of violent extremism, as well as the quantification of available and relevant data.

In addition to regional trends and the possibility of repercussions in BiH, one of our respondents from the DPC referred to the example of the 6 January Capitol riots as an example of the changing global perception of extremism: *“Events in the USA opened a door to discussions on extremism, no longer considered as exclusively Islamic or solely a ‘Muslim thing’. People cannot ignore it now”.*⁵⁵

This change in the perception of extremism is supported by the results of research conducted by IRI, which show that people do not blame religious communities, but politi-

cians, for violent extremism. Speaking on this topic, our IRI respondent said: "The Islamic Community acts as a stabilising factor. Ethno-national extremism is a greater threat than religious extremism".⁵⁶

Views from the religious institutions

The Islamic Community has a designated department for relations with non-governmental organisations, and it is showing an interest in cooperating with the civil sector. One of the main reasons for the increased activity in this field dates back to the war and the post-war period in BiH. After 1992, the Islamic Community came into contact with pluralism, meaning that many civil society organisations became involved in the interpretation of religion, and the Islamic Community was no longer the only player in this field.

Our respondent from the Islamic Community explained: "*This department has existed since 2015. Previously, the problem was not approached systemically, and now we have a unique 'address' that anyone who is interested can find and contact. Sometimes there are other interpretations of religion, and it is precisely because of these phenomena that the Islamic Community has begun to dedicate more attention to this issue. Many such ideologies can appear in the civil sector.*"⁵⁷

In its work with civil society organisations, the Islamic Community categorically rejects any affiliation with organisations dealing with the interpretation of religion. In one of the studies, Jusić *et al.* stated that, although such groups' activities are based on religion, their charters do not actually make specific reference to religious goals, as this would require approval from traditional religious communities.⁵⁸ A significant number of these organisations operate in both their archetypal fields and on other civic

initiatives (such as humanitarian or youth work), however the principal activity in contrast with the Islamic Community's institutional interpretation of Islam is the organisation of lectures by various Salafi speakers. In 2019, BIRN identified 41 associations and organisations involved in promoting the Salafi movement, mainly registered as youth associations, humanitarian organisations, book clubs or associations promoting "universal values", with the primary goal of organising talks by Salafi preachers.⁵⁹ Another interesting aspect is that the researchers discovered several links between these organisations and municipalities in BiH, where the organisers received funds from local authorities for their activities. This finance was intended principally for the implementation of so-called "regular activities", which included humanitarian and cultural work, but some funding was also used to organise several monthly lectures, in which the guests included some of the most famous Salafi *da'is* such as Elvedin Pezić.

Therefore, the Islamic Community explicitly refutes any form of cooperation with, or assistance for, organisations engaged in religious work or the interpretation of religion. The agendas of such organisations usually involve criticism of the Islamic Community's institutional religious activities and work. For instance, in her research, Bećirević affirmed that negative views about the Islamic Community had a direct relationship to more extreme Salafism and were also an indicator of whether groups are likely to stray from mainstream Salafism into Salafi-jihadism.⁶⁰

Discussing the profiles of organisations that the Islamic Community works with, our interviewee said: *"Cooperation with civil society organisations dealing with social work is especially important to us. Usually, larger organisations get all the support, and there is not much left for*

smaller groups. We also act as intermediaries between donors and smaller organisations. Assistance is mainly distributed to vulnerable categories."⁶¹

Through its programmes, the Islamic Community is mostly concerned with community prevention and the training of its own staff. One of the most notable initiatives is the training of imams and youth: in 2016, 30 of their imams were trained by experts, and then given the task of conducting workshops with children and parents in their congregations. The Islamic Community is recognised by foreign partners such as the European Union, the German Embassy, the Norwegian Embassy, and others, as part of the solution and a significant partner in the implementation of C/PVE activities. Our interviewee noted: "Islamic communities across Europe are usually seen as a threat, while BiH is specific in that respect. No-one who was religiously educated through institutions moved towards extremism and went to the battlefields".⁶²

As we have seen in the aforementioned examples, the programmes are mostly sponsored by foreign partners, while project implementation is left to the Islamic Community. During the implementation period, there is constant communication with donors, and projects are often jointly conducted with other organisations. As an example of good practice, our interviewee referred to the production of manuals after each project, which can be used in ongoing education processes.⁶³ During project implementation, the involvement of experts from the academic community was also highlighted, in the sense that many individuals conducting educational activities and exercises for the staff come from academia.

One of the new initiatives, which aims at preventive action, is the establishment of the Islamic Community Youth Network, with the appointment of local coordinators

and teams. This type of networking is an opportunity to gather, organise lectures, conduct workshops, and learn about social activism and volunteering. In this way, youth could become actively involved in the process of carrying out humanitarian actions, both individually and within the institution.

The Islamic Community has been fairly well documented by previous research, but at the opposite end of the spectrum, the lack of C/PVE initiatives by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches does not provide much opportunity for the further contextualisation of violent extremism as seen through the prism of religious institutions. To date, most research has revealed the links that exist between radical elements both in churches and in right-wing groups, which is particularly evident during the organisation of events by the various movements, and the oral blessings from, or participation of, church figures in such circumstances. In addition, there is a lack of institutionally-supported condemnation for events organised by the many registered associations that highlight and celebrate individuals whose glorification could be offensive for members of other ethnic or religious groups.

Views from the media

Most mainstream media in BiH deal with the topic of violent extremism only once it has become breaking news. Only a few media outlets deal intensively with issues of radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism, and their work can be placed into two broad categories – investigative journalism, and critical reviews/interpretations of ideological backgrounds. Some media channels, such as BIRN, approach this topic from multiple viewpoints. For instance, their work includes reporting on terrorism trials, investigating the phenomenon of violent extremism and

looking for its causes, as well as assessing the way in which the *Strategy* is implemented. Recently, more attention has been dedicated to training and workshops for young people, where, in cooperation with higher education institutions, youths are trained on how to report on topics of violent extremism. The latest in a series of activities is the publication of a database on terrorism convictions, which includes domestic cases, as well as departures to Syria and Ukraine. Other media channels, such as *Preporod*, provide space for professors and theologians to write critical reviews and analyses of the ideologies underlying violent extremism. This primarily involves the interpretation of ideologies that underpin Wahhabism and Salafism, in addition to endeavouring to understand global phenomena that have effects at a local level. As an example of good practice, our BIRN respondent focused on a recent investigation and a text about a group of fans in Mostar who sympathise with neo-Nazi ideas, and who were involved in attacks on anti-fascists.⁶⁴

Most interviewees point out the great changes that digitalisation has brought – both in the transformation of the media's work and in the perception of digitalisation as a possible driver of violent extremism. Firstly, the media use the online space and available information much more now than in the past. In the past, the main source of information was talking to different people, while now they are "just a click away." Secondly, digitalisation can now be seen in the context of one of the main factors of violent extremism, due to unregulated online space, content consumption, and the high popularity of online lecturers. For instance, one of the most visited blogs in the past was controlled by a prominent *da'i*, who used the online space for radicalisation. Informal, organised groups that sympathise with extremism can also operate on online platforms without

risking any consequences. A significant obstacle to strengthening the resilience of young people to violent extremism is the fact that the online space is completely institutionally unregulated. One of the goals of the *Strategy* was the online space's regulation/self-regulation, and so responsibility for this was left to the Communications Regulatory Agency. However, this did not actually happen, and so there is no institutional body that performs this part of the work, particularly in the case of the supervision of internet portals and social networks.⁶⁵ What poses an increasing challenge is the fact that content can be uploaded from one country to a server in another country, so that it can have a direct effect on BiH, but equally on any other country in the world. Even on BiH media portals, hate speech appears in the comments, but it is never or very rarely sanctioned.⁶⁶ By way of example, video lectures by a self-styled preacher in Bosnia named Husein Bilal Bosnić are still available on YouTube, despite the fact that he was jailed in late 2015 for seven years, having been found guilty of inciting Bosnians to join Islamic State in 2013 and 2014.⁶⁷ While previous studies, such as that conducted by Perry in 2016, show that social media were not considered as a primary source of radicalisation, in the sense that the principal pathway towards radicalisation was through engagement with real people, today the internet is not just a backup tool, but can actually constitute the primary means in the radicalisation process.⁶⁸

The media focus on the topic of violent extremism became more intense during the most "successful" years of ISIS' activities, between 2013 and 2015. In the following years, the relevance of this field was still mirrored principally by secondary factors, such as the assessment of the return of fighters from the foreign battlefields, as well as reporting on the trials that followed.

Discussing the most significant changes in the approach to the problem of violent extremism, our respondent from Preporod said: *“Over the last few years, there has been a notable change in the approach to the problem, with several factors playing an important role. The first factor is the defeat of ISIS and disappointment in the circles that embraced and promoted such ideologies. This is shown by the fact that there have been no departures for Syria and Iraq since 2016. Second, state institutions have begun to take the problem more seriously. Third, the position of the Islamic Community has changed. At the outset, the problem was ignored, and later there was a widespread call for the closure of the para-jamaats and an appeal for these communities to reintegrate. Fourth, there was a strengthening of awareness, which in turn led to changes in the international public’s attitude to the problem.”*⁶⁹

Communication between the media and institutions is largely based on specific developments related to the topic of violent extremism. Therefore, for example, communication becomes more intense when a real problem “on the ground” occurs, and in such situations, the Ministry of Security becomes the first source of verified information. However, according to the media, communications are still not at the level at which they should be. First of all, the difficulty of obtaining information rapidly has been highlighted, especially in situations in which verified and accurate information is required to inform the public right away. Likewise, communication with other institutions can be challenging, especially when it comes to topics with a somewhat more complex background. The most important media channel in the realm of violent extremism, BIRN, has stated that in an investigation that requires comments from religious communities, they ask purely for an examination of the respective phenomena, and not for the

specifically religious viewpoint. However, religious communities used to be reticent on certain subjects and had no desire to discuss "timeworn topics". In the past, examples of such tendencies could be seen in the Islamic Community on the subject of Salafism, as well as on the topic of right-wing organisations' involvement in Orthodox Church affairs.

For instance, our respondent from BIRN affirmed: *"Communications with the Ministry of Security are not at the level that they should be. We have a hard time getting the reports we are asking for. Also, communications are poor with the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in BiH. Sometimes the Islamic Community is reticent, while on other occasions it is open to conversation."*⁷⁰

Another respondent added: *"When looking for information, the Ministry of Security usually refers us to security agencies. The greatest degree of understanding that we receive comes from the academic community. The biggest problem in communications with the Ministry is speed, because they respond only slowly to inquiries"*.⁷¹

The institutional hub is organised so that the Ministry of Security is the link between all the stakeholders involved in topics relating to violent extremism. The topic itself can largely dictate the pace and manner of communications, as well as the authority in charge of sharing information. Therefore, most institutions, when seeking information, always refer to the Ministry of Security, which then attempts to answer most of the inquiries.

An example of this practice was confirmed by one of the interviewees, who noted: *"Research starts from the police department, the municipality, and the centres for social work, and then it progresses to the state level. In most cases, other state institutions refer us to the Ministry of Security when we pursue an inquiry"*.⁷²

On the other hand, during research, communication with respondents has its own dynamics and characteristics as part of the various cases. What some of our media respondents have noticed in the case of topics related to violent extremism is the frequent question, "Where are all the others?" Due to the political context of BiH, this issue can be put into relation with ethno-national identifiers, which are involved in the "othering" process, generating separate pockets within which each group exists. Therefore, in many cases, there is a sense of neglect of the "others", or insufficient focus on other forms of extremism, which are not prevalent within one particular group, but that can be found within others.

Where are we heading?

One year after the *Strategy* was drafted and released to the public, Perry noted that, although the Ministry of Security asserted that they had worked with civil society and independent experts, this consultation was not sufficiently widespread, and that more would have to be done to ensure effective implementation and community support.⁷³ Our research has shown that a multisectoral and whole-of-society approach needs to be one of the features in developing a new strategy, in which a consulting role will be given to a large number of stakeholders, who will then be able to approach the expansion of C/PVE actions systematically, each in their specific area. Therefore, it is to be expected that as a result of this approach, the new strategy will also be clearer in the conceptualisation and definition of fundamental terms such as violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism.

In addition, there are expectations that the new strategy will have more up-to-date and specific programmes for employees in the various institutions at different levels of

governance, so that people at risk of violent extremism can be approached at an individual level. In this way, programmes and work with these individuals can then be tailored to their own needs, the local community in which they live, and the contexts from which they come. In their research, Hasić and others noted that previous issues of radicalisation and extreme violence were not being treated systematically with specific measures, so that social workers, teachers and other government officials received no specific training, but rather relied on outdated educational systems and referral mechanisms. In that way, they could not offer help or advice tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable individuals at risk.⁷⁴ Some of the most modern and appropriate approaches have been mentioned in previous studies emerging in academic literature, in which several of the most successful global practices for working with individuals at risk have been taken into account. For instance, in her 2018 study, Bećirević suggests potentially using two approaches in the context of BiH – the Aarhus Model and experiences from the city of Mechelen. Both approaches concentrate on early prevention: Mechelen works on the development of inclusive policies and narratives focusing on positive identity formation and celebrations of diversity, while the Aarhus Model attempts to find a middle ground between community-led, individualised programming and state-level institutional cooperation.⁷⁵

The previous strategy was primarily tailored from a security standpoint, in order to solve the then dominant issue of foreign fighters. With the challenge of returnees now the main priority, the growing risk of far-right radicalisation and violence should not be sidelined.⁷⁶ The new strategy should punctually and precisely include other forms of radicalisation that are not exclusively related to departures

to and returns from foreign battlefields, but rather to threats to overall security within BiH, which usually stem from various right-wing ideologies, ethno-nationalism and political extremism.

In addition, a significant part of the future work of all the institutions involved will have to be dedicated to the prevention of online radicalisation, primarily because of its increased relevance, and the malfunctioning of the institutional mechanisms for regulating online space. Over the last two years, there has been a notable push for the introduction of media and information literacy programmes within formal educational institutions, through academia and international organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). In addition, the need to train not only peers but also educators has also arisen, showing that the roles both of the state institutions that implement the programmes, and that of international organisations as donors, are equally important throughout the process. By encouraging a greater focus on media literacy initiatives, there is more room for early intervention, while the potential for further radicalisation can be systematically approached. Therefore young people, who are most vulnerable to coming into contact with online content, could be the subject of state-led, tailored programmes conducted both by state institutions and by civil society organisations.

Lastly, this study highlighted several important needs, considered as shortcomings by various institutional stakeholders in their practice, and which could also be described as defects in the previous *Strategy*. The media, as well as foreign and civil society organisations, expect improved communications and the adoption of a communications strategy, which would help a faster and better sharing of

information amongst the institutions working on this topic. In addition, a greater involvement of other religious communities, as well as the Islamic Community, is expected above all to help deal with radical elements linked to other religious or ethnic groups. It is evident that foreign organisations, which have the opportunity to develop agendas as a result of their characteristics as donors, and civil society organisations, are expanding their focus and trying to include programmes that promote positive narrative about youth and clarify different forms and faces of extremism.

As previously mentioned, most of the finance spent for C/PVE actions comes from donors, meaning that questions will arise on how many future initiatives can be put into action, unless significant state funding is allocated for the implementation of the future strategy. Also, the state apparatus will have to find a way to rapidly adopt action plans at the entity levels, as well as introducing regular reporting, so that the strategy can move swiftly to the implementation stage, with a realistic system of critical assessment in place.

Notes

¹ The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, under Grant Agreement no. 870772.

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³⁷ Online interview with female representative #1 from OSCE, Sarajevo, 4 February 2021. Translated by the authors.

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⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Online interview with female representatives #1 and #2 from the OSCE, Sarajevo, 4 February 2021. Translated by the authors.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Online interview with female representative #1 from the IRI, Sarajevo, 21 December 2020. Translated by the authors.

⁴⁷ Online interview with a female representative from the DPC, Sarajevo, 20 January 2021. Translated by the authors.

⁴⁸ Online interview with a female representative from the Interreligious Council in BiH, Sarajevo, 23 December 2020. Translated by the authors.

⁴⁹ Online interview with a female representative from the TPO Foundation, Sarajevo, 26 January 2021. Translated by the authors.

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⁵¹ Online interview with female representative #1 from the IRI, Sarajevo, 21 December 2020. Translated by the authors.

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⁵³ Online interview with female representative #2 from the IRI, Sarajevo, 22 February 2021. Translated by the authors.

⁵⁴ Online interview with a female representative from the DPC, Sarajevo, 20 January 2021. Translated by the authors.

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⁶³ *Ibid.*

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⁷⁶ Strong Cities Network, *Regional Assessment Report: Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism at the Local Level in the Western Balkans* (2018), p. 16.

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