

Strong Cities Network

Regional Assessment Report: Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism at the Local Level in the Western Balkans

Strong Cities Network

Launched at the UN General Assembly in September 2015 and led by [ISD](#), the [Strong Cities Network](#) currently comprises 120 official member cities spanning every major global region. It engages mayors and local policymakers as well as frontline practitioners on preventing and countering all forms of violent extremism and works to deliver increased connectivity, effective peer learning, expert training, and proactive, targeted prevention strategies at the municipal and local level on a global scale. For further information, visit our website or contact info@strongcitiesnetwork.org.

Introduction

From its inception, the Strong Cities Network (SCN) has supported local leaders and practitioners to share first-hand experience and learning on preventing all forms of violent extremism, informing and improving policy and practice in their own communities. With more than 40 SCN member cities across the Western Balkans region, municipalities are well placed to develop and adapt their own locally-driven initiatives, benefitting in the process from tried and tested international best practice and peer support.

From initial membership in January 2016 in Cair municipality in Skopje, Macedonia, and Peja and Gjilan municipalities in Kosovo, cities and towns across Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia have joined the network in a unique commitment on the part of local leaders to work together to improve their resilience – in social and security terms – to hate, violence and terror. Over the course of 2016-17, ISD worked with the [International City/County Management Association \(ICMA\)](#) to build regional engagement, connect Balkan municipalities to the global SCN, and deliver 3 in-country training meetings, as well as a region-wide practitioner workshop held in Durrës, Albania in September 2017. Training sessions incorporated issues from risk assessments and local action planning to youth engagement strategies, local referral mechanisms, and working with former violent extremists on deradicalisation and disengagement programming.

Continuing this engagement in 2018, the SCN will award one Local Innovation Grant to a regionally-based organisation for small project delivery in partnership, or working closely, with an SCN member municipality. In addition, the SCN will deliver in-depth city consultations, working directly with local political leaders and policymakers to identify specific local needs and gaps in local capability, as well as involving SCN members in the Western Balkans in global training and activities through the [SCN Global Summit](#) and [Online Hub](#). With extensive regional membership and buy-in at the highest levels, the SCN is well positioned to work with national governments, municipalities and local

communities to shape and deliver informed, contextualised and robust measures to drive down risk and promote safety and security region-wide.

This assessment report draws on SCN engagement to date across the region, including through the SCN Regional Practitioners’ Workshop in Durres, Albania. It is further informed by recent research and policy analysis conducted by partners and other organisations, institutions and individuals, and is designed to augment and provide local context to existing threat assessments and activity overviews. To this end, it looks specifically at how regional trends tie in to, or are driven by, localised dynamics; what locally-focused initiatives exist and how they operate; and the role of cities and municipalities in delivering, coordinating and/or owning local responses and prevention measures. It concludes with a set of recommendations on how cities and municipalities can continue to develop their role and what support they require from governments and the wider international community.

SCN Member Cities in the Western Balkans (March 2018)



<p><u>Albania</u> Cerrik, Elbasan, Tirana, Librazhd</p> <p><u>Bosnia & Herzegovina</u> Bihać, Bijeljina, Centar (Sarajevo), Doboj, Jablanica, Prijedor, Srebrenik, Tuzla</p> <p><u>Kosovo</u> Ferizaj, Gjakova, Gjilan, Gračanica, Hani I Elezit, Kaçanik, Mitrovica South, Peja, Prishtina, Prizren, Viti, Vushtrri, Zvecan</p> <p><u>The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia</u> Aracinovo, Cair (Skopje), Gostivar, Kicevo, Kumanovo, Ohrid, Struga, Tetovo</p> <p><u>Montenegro</u> Bar, Berane, Gusjine, Rožaje, Ulcinj</p> <p><u>Serbia</u> Bujanovac, Novi Pazar, Preševo, Tutin</p>

Terrorism & Violent Extremism: Regional Background & Context

The 2017 Global Terrorism Index ranks the Western Balkans between #70 (Kosovo) and #122 (Serbia), according each a GTI score which seeks to measure impact from terrorism on a scale of 0 (no measurable impact) to 10 (highest possible impact). Following this logic, the impact of terrorism in the region amounts to less than that in 69 other countries including the United States, the UK, Spain and Denmark. The impact of terrorism in Kosovo, the region’s highest ranking country, is deemed less than half as severe as that in the United States (scoring 2.548 compared to 5.429).¹

¹ Institute for Economics & Peace, ‘Global Terrorism Index 2017’, <<http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2017/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2017.pdf>>

<i>GTI Rank</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>GTI Score</i>
70	Kosovo	2.548
78	Bosnia & Herzegovina	2.029
91	Albania	1.487
93	Macedonia	1.186
122	Montenegro	0.077
126	Serbia	0.043

Source: Global Terrorism Index 2017

As an indication of where the region figures in continued global terrorism trends, the GTI paints at best an incomplete picture of the threat and, at worst, a worrying distortion of the region’s role and continued experience of terrorism and violent extremism. Forming analyses, let alone drawing up policy, on the singular basis of recorded domestic incident numbers is clearly insufficient, and a fuller examination of the regional environment is necessary.

This report demonstrates not only why the region is infinitely more significant than these figures suggest, but how multiple threats are developing and diversifying in different ways and at local levels, despite their regional and global implications. Moreover, based on engagement with the 42 official municipal members of the Strong Cities Network, and following a programme of regional training workshops, it identifies not only local drivers that play into broader trends, but also leading local prevention efforts which offer fresh promise and which demand greater support.

In so doing, it is based on a keen awareness of multiple and complex historical and environmental factors which mark and define conflict, hate and violence across the region.

Foremost among these, the embers of the political, ethnic and religious conflict of the 1990s remain live and profound. Not only have they shaped the current political geography of the region and its engagement with the international community, but they continue to drive the narratives that fuse culture, religion, heritage and ethnicity to underline identity, difference and division. The 1992-1995 war in Bosnia in particular, is referred to as the ‘cradle of modern jihadism’ and alongside the 1980s Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, is widely recognised as one of the most formative conflicts in driving recruitment and radicalisation to extremist Islamist violence as an oppositional force to perceived and material western influence and interests.² Its influence on recruitment to current conflicts, and in particular that in Iraq and Syria is firmly felt; the legacy itself, many have argued, has been a powerful recruitment tool. Likewise, interviews with Kosovar foreign fighters travelling to support Daesh highlight a similar impact from that country’s own bloody conflict.³

² Mark Urban, 'Bosnia: The cradle of modern jihadism?', *BBC News*, 2 July 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-33345618>

³ Adrian Shtuni, 'Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo', *United States Institute of Peace*, December 2016, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR397-Dynamics-of-Radicalization-and-Violent-Extremism-in-Kosovo.pdf>

This continued impact is evidenced and underlined by the estimated 800 to 1000 foreign terrorist fighters understood to have travelled from the region to the conflict in Syria and Iraq from late 2012, the majority of whom hold Bosnian or Kosovar nationality.⁴ The Soufan Center estimate of a total of 845 indicates uncertainty about precise numbers collected by mid-2017 for Albania and Macedonia (circa 90 and 140 respectively) but suggests that according to data from the end of 2016 and early 2017, 248 originated from Bosnia & Herzegovina and 317 travelled from Kosovo, together with a smaller contingent of 50 from Serbia.⁵ The Islamist threat, and international pressure applied on governments across the region in response to the high numbers of Daesh foreign terrorist fighters, has understandably dominated the regional picture and violent extremism risk profile.

This is not to say that the region is subject to a singularly Islamist threat. Concerns have risen around far right and nationalist tensions, which, in the haste to respond to Islamist inspired extremism, risk avoiding much needed awareness and scrutiny. Much as with the Islamist threat, this trend cannot be divorced from the legacy of the 90s conflicts, set amid a complex ethno-nationalist environment. So too the far right poses a parallel, though far less documented, foreign fighter threat catalysed instead by the Ukrainian conflict.

The few statistics available suggest around 100 Serbs have travelled to fight alongside pro-Russian separatists, with an estimated total of 150-200 Western Balkan fighters involved in the conflict both among the ranks of the Novorossiya army and the Ukrainian volunteer forces.⁶ Commentators note an additional factor is the involvement of private military companies recruiting pro-Russian fighters with a mercenary status that points to economic incentivisation playing a role in developments otherwise dominated by ideological fraternity within the Islamist realm.⁷ A wealth of far right online extremist content and agitation across the region attests to the diversity of mobilising factors, from anti-abortion campaigns to ethnic supremacy and cultural homogeneity, as well as an increasing connectivity to international far right movements.⁸

⁴ Vlado Azinović (Ed.), 'Between Salvation and Terror: Radicalization and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in the Western Balkans', *Atlantic Initiative*, http://www.atlantskainicijativa.org/bos/images/BETWEEN_SALVATION_AND_TERROR/BetweenSalvationAndTerror.pdf

Richard Barrett, 'Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees', *The Soufan Center*, October 2017, <http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf>

Jelena Beslin and Marija Ignjatijevic, 'Balkan foreign fighters: from Syria to Ukraine', *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, June 2017,

<https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%2020%20Balkan%20foreign%20fighters.pdf>

⁵ Barrett, 'Beyond the Caliphate', <http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf>

⁶ Beslin and Ignjatijevic, 'Balkan foreign fighters',

<https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%2020%20Balkan%20foreign%20fighters.pdf>

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Marija Ristic, Sven Milekic, Maja Zivanovic, Denis Dzidic, 'Far Right Groups Flourish on the Net', *Balkan Insight*, <https://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/far-right-balkan-groups-flourish-on-the-net-05-03-2017>;

Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, 'The Fringe Insurgency: Connectivity, Convergence and Mainstreaming of the

On the Islamist side, with the collapse of the Daesh Caliphate in Iraq and Syria and the drop in foreign fighters following criminalisation precipitated by UNSC Resolution 2178,⁹ intense regional and international focus has turned to the issue of returnees and reintegration. Whilst figures are not available for all countries' foreign fighter contingents, Soufan Center numbers indicate that at least 46 Bosnian fighters have returned and at least 117 have travelled back to Kosovo. Significant efforts have been directed not only at identification and prosecution, but at the resilience of communities to withstand the influx of returnees, the potential to reintegrate lower risk individuals, and the disruption of concomitant regional threats.

It is against this backdrop that all of the countries covered in this report have developed or are developing either counter-terrorism or a P/CVE national strategy. Efforts to develop comprehensive P/CVE action plans that focus non-policing approaches vary across the region, with some countries reportedly having developed but not published their action plans.

Likewise, it is amid this environment that there is increasing attention on developing local resilience, municipal leadership and grassroots engagement to prevent and address the drivers of radicalisation, violence and hate as well as to bolster community ties and undermine fresh threats to peace and stability.

These efforts necessitate a focus not only on immediate and credible threats of extremist violence, but on the underlying conditions that foster and support it. Here too, history and context are key. As much as the data on Islamist and far right foreign fighters informs regional analyses, an equal if not larger legacy of regional conflict plays out in wide-scale social polarisation, simmering ethnic strife, and powerful cultural, nationalist and religious dynamics.

When, in November 2017, convicted war criminal and former Bosnian Croat general Slobodan Praljak poisoned himself in front of courtroom cameras in The Hague, several thousand mourners, including Croatian government ministers, attended a memorial hailing him a martyr.¹⁰ The political legacy of such figures and the histories and causes they represent clearly has continued, far-reaching and powerful influence, demanding examination not only of specific trends and threats but their broader societal and community backdrop. This backdrop is important not just in considering the plethora of issues that leads individuals to commit violence and where they come from, but how prevention can be done better, and how good work can gain traction across municipalities with multiple and complex needs.

Extreme Right', ISD, http://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-Fringe-Insurgency-221017_2.pdf

⁹ Beslin and Ignjatijevic, 'Balkan foreign fighters', <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%2020%20Balkan%20foreign%20fighters.pdf>

¹⁰ Sven Milekic, 'War Criminal Praljak's Death Commemorated in Croatia', *Balkan Insight*, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/zagreb-commemorates-praljak-by-rejecting-verdict-12-11-2017>

Current Regional P/CVE Efforts

Existing surveys have provided an overview of some of the region's programming on P/CVE, violence prevention and social cohesion. That conducted by Dr Valery Perry for the [Regional Cooperation Council](#) (RCC) is of particular note, with a comprehensive break down of programming across South-East Europe.¹¹ Additional case studies, legal frameworks and project outlines are collected across [OSCE](#) publications and reports, including member state seminars and working papers, as well as its [United in Countering Violent Extremism](#) (#UnitedCVE) campaign.¹² [The Atlantic Initiative](#), based in Sarajevo, has produced leading analysis on trends, both regional and specific to Bosnia & Herzegovina, in particular regarding foreign terrorist fighter radicalisation and recruitment.¹³ More recent sources, such as the [RCC's new P/CVE website](#), attempts to collate regional policy and practice, whilst also providing a directory of organisations and institutions across the region engaged in P/CVE programming. Numerous other local and national research centres have contributed to understandings of the dynamics of violent extremism, its impact and its policy response, of which the [Kosovar Centre for Security Studies](#) in Prishtina, Kosovo, and the political think-tank [Analytica](#), based in Skopje, Macedonia are noted for their engagement with the SCN.¹⁴

In addition to the multiple initiatives aimed at strengthening regional security and governance architecture, particularly insofar as it impacts the EU and neighbouring states, the IOM and OSCE have far-reaching involvement in sponsoring and delivering regional P/CVE initiatives. OSCE work in this remit is delivered through its various country missions. Substantive examples include the ['Super Citizens'](#) programme in Bosnia & Herzegovina, an online database mapping hate crime and providing an anonymous reporting mechanism, as well as the establishment of three Local Public Safety Councils in Albania (Cerrik, Elbasan and Librazhd)¹⁵ and the launch of eight multi-stakeholder hate crime monitoring networks across Kosovo.¹⁶

¹¹ Valery Perry, 'Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe: A Survey of Regional Issues, Initiatives and Opportunities', *Regional Cooperation Council*, July 2016, [http://www.rcc.int/download/docs/RCC-CVE-Case-Study%20\(3\).pdf/88adfd3c5fd8007d87bfc2e7ecba2cc2.pdf](http://www.rcc.int/download/docs/RCC-CVE-Case-Study%20(3).pdf/88adfd3c5fd8007d87bfc2e7ecba2cc2.pdf)

¹² Cf. OSCE, 'Inventory of Policy Documents and Legislation adopted by OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation on Countering violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism (VERLT)', December 2016, <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/289911?download=true>

¹³ Vlado Azinović and Muhamed Jusić, 'The New Lure of the Syrian War – The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent', *Atlantic Initiative*, 2016, http://www.atlanticinitiative.org/images/The_New_Lure_of_the_Syrian_War_The_Foreign_Fighters_Bosnian_Contingent.pdf; Azinović, 'Between Salvation and Terror' <http://www.atlanticinitiative.org/images/BetweenSalvationAndTerror/BetweenSalvationAndTerror.pdf>

¹⁴ Cf. Analytica's research on grassroots and civil society engagement in CVE in Macedonia: Kaltrina Selimi and Filip Stojkovski, 'Assessment of Macedonia's Efforts in Countering Violent Extremism, View from Civil Society', *Analytica*, 2017, http://www.analyticamk.org/images/Files/extremism-en-updated-FINAL-web_ceb98.pdf

¹⁵ OSCE, 'Elbasan establishes first Local Public Safety Council in Albania with OSCE Presence assistance', 2 December 2016, <http://www.osce.org/albania/285896>

¹⁶ OSCE, 'OSCE Mission in Kosovo supports police and prosecution in addressing hate crimes', 30 October 2017, <http://www.osce.org/mission-in-kosovo/353476>

This overview takes these larger-scale efforts into account and expands upon existing regional analyses with reference to local community- or municipality-led initiatives on the basis of engagement with SCN member cities and frontline practitioners.

Albania

After the decision was made to develop separate CT and CVE strategies in 2015, the Albanian government adopted a national CVE strategy in 2016. It focuses on education, engagement with religious leaders, social aspects and academia and media. There is no clear role for or engagement of cities in the strategy. There are, however, several organisations working nationwide with the local level in Albania.

The Albanian Legal and Territorial Research Institute collaborates with several international NGOs on P/CVE projects in different cities throughout Albania. In this context, open days were held in the high schools of the SCN members **Elbasan** and **Librazhd** on the topic of “Tolerance through Education”, aiming to raise awareness among young people by spreading messages about tolerance and religious coexistence. Based on the findings of the workshop, a report was written on the topic of raising awareness among young people, identifying measures to prevent and counter violent extremism.¹⁷

The Institute for Democracy and Mediation, generally working to improve governance and reform on security and European integration issues, including local governance and integrated development, recently started focusing on P/CVE related issues. IDM’s 2015 study ‘Religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania’, supported by the U.S. Department of State, aimed to inform national and local policy.¹⁸ To present the findings of this study and raise awareness about the issue, the IDM held a national conference, and organised local level information sessions for high school staff and educational offices of the municipalities of **Pogradec**, **Cërrik**, **Përrenjas**, **Librazhd**, **Bulqizë** and **Kukës** in November 2015. Encouraging local state and non-state actors to coordinate their P/CVE actions, specifically their policies aimed at youth, three multi-stakeholder forums in **Elbasan**, **Pogradec** and **Kukës** were held for the project “Preventing religious radicalism among youth”. In **Tirana**, IDM brought together young people, representatives of religious communities, representatives of high schools, parents, lecturers, artists, journalists, civil society activists during the Night Owl Session ‘Credible Voices on Preventing Violent Extremism’ to discuss and share ideas around P/CVE.¹⁹

¹⁷ The Albanian Legal and Territorial Research Institute, ‘Promoting tolerance and respect for diversity through youth education and fostering greater partnerships’, <http://www.altri.al/index.php/2017/10/02/promovimi-i-tolerances-dhe-respektit-per-diversitetin-nepermjete-edukimit-te-te-rinjve-dhe-nxitjes-se-partneriteteve/?lang=en>

¹⁸ Institute for Democracy and Mediation, ‘Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania’, 2015, <http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Religious-Radicalism-Albania-web-final.pdf>

¹⁹ Institute for Democracy and Mediation, 2017, <http://idmalbania.org/night-owl-session-credible-voices-preventing-violent-extremism/>

Several Albanian municipalities have developed programming around P/CVE. The city of **Tirana**, for example, has designed two local strategies, one focusing on social inclusion and the other on social protection. Both aim to enhance social cohesion and reduce the violence against women and children. The city of **Elbasan**, in addition to being actively involved in the work of the IDM, has created an advisory body with representatives from state institutions, religious communities and political parties to discuss and handle security issues.

The Resonant Voices initiative was started by CIJA US, BIRN, and Propulsion Fund to find and support innovative voices and projects that can challenge extremist narratives in the public discourse in the Western Balkans, both online and offline. A range of different projects are being empowered to become credible resonant voices, “able to counter violent extremism, to push back against extremist propaganda and to increase and amplify alternative, positive messages.”²⁰

The appointment in 2017 of a National Coordinator for CVE in Albania is to be welcomed, but relationships need to be better established between this new role at mayor and municipalities active in the P/CVE space. The SCN has sought to engage to this end, including the involvement of the national coordinator at the Regional Practitioners’ Workshop in Durres, Albania in September 2017, and for ISD’s 22nd Policy Planners’ Network meeting in November 2017.²¹

Bosnia & Herzegovina

SCN engagement in BiH incorporates 8 formal member cities. Programming related to P/CVE at local levels covers a wide diversity of programmes and activities. As with several Western Balkans SCN member cities, and in keeping with the risk profile of individuals involved in violent extremism, youth engagement, education and outreach activities represent a core focus. The city of **Jablanica**, for example, highlights its municipal tuition and training support for young people, including special provision for all Roma children, currently amounting to more than 400 school places. Inclusion, ethnic and social reconciliation and the primacy of education is at the centre of the city’s approach to preventing community tension, countering hate, and bolstering social resilience for the future. This does not end with traditional education; the municipality also has a work experience scheme for jobseeking graduates to work within the municipal administration and other public institutions and NGOs, before receiving financial support for up to two years until they find employment. A two-way street, this has so far supported 180 graduates and 85 local employers, whilst building relationships and understanding between the youth population, aspirational graduates and the municipal council.²²

One of the most diverse cities in BiH, SCN member **Tuzla** emphasises pluralism, hosting Bosniak, Serb, and Croatian communities as well as a minority Bosnian Jewish population. In 2012, the

²⁰ Resonant Voiced Initiative, ‘About’, <http://resonantvoices.info/about/>

²¹ ISD, ‘ISD hosts 22nd Policy Planners Network meeting in Spain’, November 2017, <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-hosts-22nd-policy-planners-network-meeting-spain/>

²² SCN, member correspondence, 2017.

municipality received UNHCR’s ‘Open City’ award in recognition of efforts to foster tolerance and openness. The arts are the city’s primary forum for tackling long-term inter-communal conflict and tension, addressing the legacy of the war, and building the foundations for peace and resilience. The city’s international youth arts festival, Kaleidoscope, stands out, and a busy calendar of arts and cultural events emphasises peace, diversity and community tackling contentious and political issues, current or historic.

Other BiH cities place a heavy importance on building effective multiagency working. The city of **Prijedor** established a security forum in 2003, which continues to meet regularly to work collaboratively across multiple local stakeholders in addressing security concerns. Initially set up as an informal, non-partisan and multidisciplinary body, it is composed of municipal representatives, police officers, health and social workers, educators, NGOs, minority community representatives and welfare associations.²³ Demonstrating flexibility to work in a preventive remit as much as to respond to local security developments, in March 2017 the city introduced a local action plan to prevent crimes related to hate and prejudice.²⁴

Kosovo

There has been strong international and regional engagement in Kosovo following the ‘90s conflict, with continued investment and focus on stabilisation, governance and security frameworks. Within the P/CVE remit, the [International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program \(ICITAP\)](#), a U.S. Department of Justice and Department of State initiative, has wide-scale presence across the country, working closely with the Kosovar Ministry of Internal Affairs, national police and other domestic agencies. Among other programming, ICITAP has been central to the design and development of the Kosovar national strategy on CVE, and has been a close partner in engaging local municipalities with the SCN, supporting municipal training, and developing local initiatives. In late 2017, Kosovo appointed a National Coordinator for CVE, with a remit including support for local-level engagement and programming.

ICITAP provided extensive support to the city of **Gjilan** to establish a local referral programme considered the first of its kind in the region. With cooperation from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, UNDP and the Italian Embassy, municipal officials also had recourse to expertise from the UK Prevent strategy, the Belgian BOUNCE initiative, and the Danish SSP approach used in Aarhus, putting international best practice at the centre of local capacity-building.

Additional support for the local level in Kosovo is delivered through the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), in turn supported by the U.S. Department of State. KCSS’s P/CVE work has engaged the municipalities of **Prizren, Peja, Mitrovica, Gjilan, Ferizaj, Kamenica, Hani I Elezit, Kaçanik,**

²³ SCN, member correspondence, 2017.

²⁴ OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, ‘Hate Monitor’, March 2017 <http://www.osce.org/mission-to-bosnia-and-herzegovina/314111?download=true>

Gjakova, Klina and Decan, many of which lie on the borders with Serbia and Macedonia. Initiatives have included local counter-narrative campaigns and multiple community roundtables.²⁵

Contributing to a joint SCN-GSX (Global Solutions Exchange) session on the margins of the 2017 UN General Assembly, one former SCN municipal point of contact now working at the national level in Kosovo commented that, contrary to media coverage, addressing socio-economic and political grievances took precedent over violent extremism among popular concerns for Kosovars. However, a sense of unmet expectations permeated the population, 45% of whom are under 25, and identity crises among the youth were both real and widespread. The national government's efforts to increase student numbers as a means to tackle unemployment and its perceived interference in local governance prevented local issues from drawing sufficient attention, she argued, advising instead greater devolution to municipalities, including on P/CVE.

Macedonia

In 2015, a National Coordinator for CVE was appointed in Macedonia, with a national strategy on terrorism developed and adopted in 2016.

At the local level, the U.S. Embassy and OSCE worked together with the Austrian-based organisation [Women without Borders](#) (WWB) to implement WWB's Mother Schools model across the Western Balkans. The think tank Analytica was chosen as the local partner for implementation in Macedonia.²⁶ The Mother Schools Project offers training to mothers in personal, communication and parenting skills so they can recognise and react to early warning signs of possible radicalisation in their children and provide credible counter-narratives and alternatives.

Local authorities in **Skopje, Tetovo, Ohrid, Struga, Gostivar, Kicevo**, Bitola, Prilep and Makedonski Brod are involved in 'Safe Schools - Harmonious Environment' project, supported by OSCE Mission to Skopje, which aims at creating a school safety model that would prevent violent incidents and behaviour among students at secondary schools.²⁷

²⁵ Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, 'Countering Violent Extremism in Kosovo', <http://www.qkss.org/en/Current-projects/Countering-violent-extremism-in-Kosovo-782>; Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, 'Countering Violent Extremism in Municipality of Ferizaj', 2017, <http://www.qkss.org/en/News/Countering-violent-extremism-in-Municipality-of-Ferizaj-918>; Perry, 'Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe', [http://www.rcc.int/download/docs/RCC-CVE-Case-Study%20\(3\).pdf/88adfd3c5fd8007d87bfc2e7ecba2cc2.pdf](http://www.rcc.int/download/docs/RCC-CVE-Case-Study%20(3).pdf/88adfd3c5fd8007d87bfc2e7ecba2cc2.pdf)

²⁶ Analytica, 'Mothers Schools Project', 2016, <http://www.analyticamk.org/en/programs/foreign-and-security-policy/631-mothers-schools-project>

²⁷ OSCE, 'OSCE Mission to Skopje launches media campaign to promote safe school project'. March 2014, <http://www.osce.org/skopje/116306>

Montenegro

A CVE strategy and Action Plan was developed by Montenegro, with input from multiple institutions including NATO, the U.S. Embassy, Interpol and the police. A representative of the Association of Municipalities also contributed to the design of the strategy, thus ensuring input from the local level as well.²⁸

Other nationwide campaigns also include the local level, for instance the city of **Berane** participated in the No Hate Speech campaign, run with support of Forum MNE and the European Youth Forum.²⁹ Berane focuses strongly on inclusion and community cohesion, with projects prioritising the inclusion of marginalised groups and people with disabilities. The city has a strategy dedicated to the inclusion of the Roma community.

Serbia

The Serbian government developed a combined CT and CVE strategy for 2016-2021, comprising both repressive and preventative measures, with support from TAIEX, OSCE and examples of other strategies from across the region.³⁰ Serbia also has a Strategy and a National Action Plan for Community Policing.

Compared to other countries in the region, a relatively large number of civil society organisations are active in Serbia on issues related to P/CVE with a focus on the local level. The Cultural Center DamaD in **Novi Pazar**, generally working on human rights and equality, has developed a whole-of-community approach in 2015. Based on the UK's Channel programme, it provides young people and those around them with responses when early signs of radicalisation occur, essentially working like a referral mechanism. The approach can be adapted to match the specific needs of each local context.³¹ DamaD has also hired a consultant to drive local processes of P/CVE in Novi Pazar by developing institutional capacities, policies and protocols to identify and counter extremism and radicalisation narratives at the local level in Novi Pazar.³² DamaD has also developed counter narratives and has a wide range of youth focused projects.³³

²⁸ Perry, 'Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe', [http://www.rcc.int/download/docs/RCC-CVE-Case-Study%20\(3\).pdf/88adfd3c5fd8007d87bfc2e7ecba2cc2.pdf](http://www.rcc.int/download/docs/RCC-CVE-Case-Study%20(3).pdf/88adfd3c5fd8007d87bfc2e7ecba2cc2.pdf)

²⁹ Forum MNE, 'No Hate Speech Montenegro', 2014, <http://www.forum-mne.com/index.php/en/mreze-2/no-hate-speech-montenegro>

³⁰ Perry, 'Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe', [http://www.rcc.int/download/docs/RCC-CVE-Case-Study%20\(3\).pdf/88adfd3c5fd8007d87bfc2e7ecba2cc2.pdf](http://www.rcc.int/download/docs/RCC-CVE-Case-Study%20(3).pdf/88adfd3c5fd8007d87bfc2e7ecba2cc2.pdf)

³¹ Ibid.

³² Kulturni Centar Damad, 'Novi Pazar = National Consultant/ team to propose policy recommendations to Municipal Safety Council of Novi Pazar on how to improve human security: Terms of Reference', 2015, <http://kcdamad.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/DamaD-Human-Security-propose-policy-recommendations.pdf>

³³ Salto Youth, 'Cultural Centre Damad', <https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/otlas-partner-finding/organisation/cultural-centre-damad.11217/>

The NGO, UrbanIn, in addition to having a range of grassroots projects on youth engagement and human rights, runs their project “Preventing Radicalization and Violent Extremism Among Youth” in several municipalities in Sandzak including in SCN members Novi Pazar and **Tutin**. Another project in Sandzak of note is run by the Sandzak Committee for the Protection of Human Rights and Liberties with the smallest local administrative units on themes of participation and inclusion.³⁴

Challenges and Obstacles to Local P/CVE Activity

In delivering programmes and initiatives that are well targeted, effective and sustainable, municipalities face multiple challenges. These may be:

- **structural**, concerned with how processes and mechanisms work internally or in cooperation with national governments and other bodies; or
- **environmental**, in terms of multiple additional issues that come into play when addressing violent extremism in the region.

In both cases, the SCN seeks to engage cities on practical outcomes and improvements in safety and cohesion, with a full and realistic awareness of complicating factors and their interplay with the P/CVE terrain.

Critical to this process, SCN training on local action planning, delivered during the Regional Practitioners’ Workshop in Durres, Albania, worked with municipal officials and civil society practitioners to complete a local risk assessment, from which a comprehensive risk profile could be developed for – and, importantly, led by – each city. Participants discussed and compared the numerous risks identified across SCN membership, demonstrating those which held commonality throughout the region and those which were specific to individual communities or at least varied significantly in nature from one city to the next, before also discussing the requisite partners and resources for addressing each identified risk.

It is important to recognise that P/CVE is one of several policy areas which municipalities in the region are under pressure to deliver against, whether from their own national governments or the international community. City resources are often stretched by multiple and competing demands, and the fatigue of having to maintain multiple focuses, often driven by an outside party, is palpable across many practitioners and policymakers in the region. Moreover, P/CVE work is widely set within a broader, and arguably more complex, field of peacebuilding, community and ethnic integration and stabilisation agendas, only repackaged to varying degrees given more recent political pressure.

On the one hand, this can mean that P/CVE-specific programming is more commonly found in municipalities subjected to more extensive international scrutiny and pressure (as in Kosovo with

³⁴ Perry, ‘Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe’, [http://www.rcc.int/download/docs/RCC-CVE-Case-Study%20\(3\).pdf/88adfd3c5fd8007d87bfc2e7ecba2cc2.pdf](http://www.rcc.int/download/docs/RCC-CVE-Case-Study%20(3).pdf/88adfd3c5fd8007d87bfc2e7ecba2cc2.pdf)

involvement of the likes of ICITAP and others). On the other, it suggests that P/CVE engagement and programming needs to take greater account of these broader local policy needs, and work more effectively to integrate the prevention of violent extremism within them, rather than treating it as exclusivist or short-term. Working at local levels, with municipal actors who are only too aware of the interplay between these issues in their own communities and their cumulative contribution to overall risk patterns, offers a more effective solution in this regard than framing prevention initiatives only in terms of national security and regional threats.

This section illustrates some of the key additional factors that complicate current P/CVE programming in the region, with focus on the interplay between violent extremism and multiple other forms of regional and localised vulnerability.

Institutional vulnerabilities

Research across the region suggests that there are high levels of confidence in repressive CVE measures including surveillance, policing, arrest and incarceration, whilst concepts like community policing are not widely understood or implemented. Likewise, trust in preventive strategies such as psychological services, education and resilience efforts is minimal.³⁵ This may in part be attributed to fragile and ineffective national institutions and infrastructure and a relative lack of engagement and communication with grassroots level. Whilst the SCN and other initiatives work to expand and improve vertical cooperation and national governments' support for local programming, there are further questions regarding the lack of truly independent regional institutions, damaging both policy efficacy and public perceptions.³⁶

Corruption

Corruption stands to undermine local and regional P/CVE efforts, generating substantial distrust between communities and the public sector and devaluing initiatives such as community policing and other preventive measures. Several high profile government scandals have garnered media attention, and Transparency International's survey on corruption in Europe and Central Asia sees all six countries fare poorly in public perception of corruption in government.³⁷ Indeed, corruption runs through wider society, with UNODC figures pointing to a regional average of 12.5% of citizens admitting to paying bribes to public officials.³⁸

Organised crime

Organised crime syndicates, among which Albanian groups are most prominent, have successfully gained a foothold at both a local and international level and are responsible for managing the drug

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Transparency International, 'People and Corruption: Europe and Central Asia', November 2016, <https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/7493>

³⁸ UNODC, 'Corruption in the Western Balkans: Bribery as Experienced by the Population', https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/corruption/Western_balkans_corruption_report_2011_web.pdf

trafficking routes into Western Europe. Their most lucrative trade is heroin smuggling along the so called ‘Balkan route’ from Afghanistan, and represents a value of USD \$25-30 billion each year - larger than the GDP of some Balkan countries.³⁹ Other areas of interest to criminal groups are the counterfeiting of currency and forgery of documents, and migrant trafficking⁴⁰, representing an avenue for external extremist influence to enter the region undetected, thus undermining P/CVE efforts. Large human trafficking operations run by organised crime groups also pose a significant and sustained challenge to the region, further compounding risk of exploitation, violent extremism and terrorism.

Youth unemployment and rural underdevelopment

World Bank data puts youth unemployment across the Western Balkans at an alarming 47.7%.⁴¹ Municipalities across the region share serious concerns over youth idleness and the lack of opportunities for employment or training. Whilst some have taken steps to improve conditions locally, the scale of the challenge necessitates long-term cooperation and investment. The threat posed by long term youth unemployment, if not managed effectively in both urban and rural settings, could give rise to tension between communities, political instability, and broad social polarisation conducive to the growth of violent extremism. This risk is perhaps most strongly felt in rural areas, where between 40% and 60% of the population of the Western Balkans countries live, with economic conditions, a lack of opportunities and widespread disillusion noted as significant push factors by municipalities analysing local risk in these areas.

Regional destabilisation

Regional relations between Western Balkan countries remain turbulent, and national governments are often divided on issues such as NATO and EU memberships. Neighbouring countries with differing geopolitical and economic aims vie for influence amidst this confusion, with Russia, and to a lesser extent Turkey, frequently singled out for their destabilising influence. Some Balkan media channels have increasingly relied on pro-Kremlin sources for content, often with a distinctly anti-Western slant.⁴² Furthermore, Russia is supportive of Republika Srpska separatism from BiH, and stands accused of plotting a coup in Montenegro in 2016.⁴³ It also publically endorsed a referendum calling for an RS independence day.

³⁹ Perry, ‘Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe’, [http://www.rcc.int/download/docs/RCC-CVE-Case-Study%20\(3\).pdf/88adfd3c5fd8007d87bfc2e7ecba2cc2.pdf](http://www.rcc.int/download/docs/RCC-CVE-Case-Study%20(3).pdf/88adfd3c5fd8007d87bfc2e7ecba2cc2.pdf)

⁴⁰ UNODC, ‘Crime and its impact on the Balkans and affected countries’, March 2008, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Balkan_study.pdf

⁴¹ World Bank Group & Vienna Institute of International Economic Studies, ‘Western Balkans: Labor Market Trends 2017’, April 2017, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/336041491297229505/170403-Regional-Report-Western-Balkan-Labor-Market-Trends-2017-FINAL.pdf>

⁴² European Parliament briefing, ‘Russia in the Western Balkans: Assets and Liabilities’, July 2017, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/608627/EPRS_ATA%282017%29608627_EN.pdf

⁴³ Damon M. Wilson, ‘The Attempted Coup in Montenegro and Russian Malign Influence in Europe’, *Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, July 13, 2017*, Atlantic Council, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Wilson_07-13-17.pdf

Recommendations

Prevention in Cities: SCN Global Recommendations

1. Recognise and empower the role of cities and local authorities as powerful partners in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism

Whilst broader regional and transnational narratives serve to catalyse a combination of push and pull factors that drive violent extremism, radicalisation and recruitment are frequently concentrated in specific local areas. Multiple and complex local factors contribute to individual local environments, with cities and local authorities best placed to understand the unique factors in their own areas and work with an array of partners to address local risk, which in turn contributes to regional threat levels. National governments need to recognise cities as having a vital role in non-law enforcement prevention efforts, which can involve both targeted intervention and broader societal resilience. The move towards appointing national CVE coordinators in some countries of the Western Balkans is a welcome step, but liaison with and empowerment of local municipalities must be a key priority alongside implementing a national agenda. Providing training where needed, developing formal lines of cooperation and collaboration, and engaging a variety of donors in funding local-level projects should support cities to lead and coordinate local strategies.

2. Expand cooperation between municipalities and civil society organisations in P/CVE efforts

Civil society organisations across the region are engaged in substantive local programming spanning education and youth engagement to hate crime, family-focused support and referral mechanisms. Civil society organisations and community groups often carry the grassroots credibility to be able to deliver far-reaching impact, where other actors may not have the requisite access and community buy-in. Strengthening partnerships between these organisations and municipalities can help leverage greater support and ensure that local services are responding to need at the community level, with effective channels of coordination in place to respond to specific risks with a whole-of-society approach. The SCN model for establishing multi-stakeholder Local Prevention Networks led by municipalities in Jordan and Lebanon offer a useful template for strengthening this cooperation effectively where limited resources or support institutional infrastructure is available.

3. Facilitate exchanges and peer learning between cities with shared commitments to P/CVE

Key to the SCN's mission is developing the capacity for municipalities to learn from one another, have effective channels of communication, and provide peer advice based on individual experience and best practice. This can support the development or improvement of local action plans, provide tried and tested advice and inspiration to drive local project implementation, and expand the coherence of otherwise disparate local programming within a broader national strategy. The SCN runs and facilitates bilateral city exchanges, with further support necessary to see these expanded on a regional basis as well as through global programming.

The Western Balkans: specific areas of improvement

1. International organisations should improve coordination with national and local authorities on P/CVE-specific programming

Many cities are implementing broad community-resilience and P/CVE-relevant programming aimed at the general societal prevention end of the spectrum. Programming focussing on hate crime, discrimination and ethnic issues is relatively well established across several municipalities in the region. More P/CVE specific programming, in developing referral mechanisms of intervention programmes for those at risk of radicalisation, for example, is often led by international organisations and development agencies and can often carry too short-term an outlook and have little coordination with the efforts and strategies of national and local governments. In some cases, this can undermine programming developed by these entities and have little concern for long-term sustainability, buy-in, and ownership. International programming designed to address the current focus on returnees and reintegration, or any other aspect of P/CVE efforts, should seek to work with, and not separately to, national and local approaches.

2. International organisations, NGOs and the development community should improve coordination to avoid duplication

Multiple international organisations have been engaged in peacebuilding, reconstruction and development work across the region for more than two decades. Despite differing project remits, there is a large degree of duplication of efforts, with conferences and workshops often targeting the same constituencies across multiple issues. Regional stakeholders, including municipal actors, are understandably fatigued by the pedagogical approach of multiple outside actors driving similar issues, albeit with renewed policy priorities. To avoid disengagement, international organisations need to improve their coordination to ensure that there is less duplication and that the policy objectives of different areas of work are communicated more effectively, highlighting their differences as well as commonalities.

3. Greater focus is needed on the resurgence of far-right activity

International focus is largely focused on the Islamist challenge across the region, mobilised by the numbers of foreign terrorist fighter that travelled to Iraq and Syria. With the challenge of returnees now the main priority, the growing risk of far-right radicalisation and violence should not be side-lined. Not only is the recruitment of fighters from Serbia involved in the Ukraine conflict a concern, but the simmering ethnic division and legacies of the conflicts of the 90s raise the risk of wider social polarisation, ethnic division and hate crime, with the propensity to spill over into populist political narratives. In addition, far right groups show an increased connectedness with international movements, making regional dynamics and international trends mutually reinforcing. Municipalities affected demonstrate an intimate understanding of the drivers and those vulnerable at the community level but largely lack support and focus from national and international partners.