



# Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Nexus with Islamist Extremism

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Policy Note # 05

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## PREFACE

This DPC-Atlantic Initiative Policy Note is one in a series of occasional thematic papers which collectively composes the second edition of DPC and the Atlantic Initiative's Security Risk Analysis. The first edition, published in October 2011, assessed a full spectrum of risk factors in BiH: the functionality of government institutions at all levels, political exploitation of conflict rhetoric in the media, privately-held weapons, private security companies, religious and ethnic radicalism, socio-economic strain, juvenile delinquency, and the posture of the international community.

This second edition assesses these same risk factors from the vantage point of the present day, and also incorporates information that was previously unavailable to the authors. These papers are not mere updates of the first edition; each Policy Note is a stand-alone assessment of the theme in question. However, where information from the 2011 edition remains relevant, it has been included.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was a destination for hundreds of Muslim foreign fighters during the 1992-1995 war, who brought with them their austere and belligerent interpretation of Islam, Salafism. Some twenty years after the end of the war in BiH, the country now has an indigenous Salafi community and has become a source of mujahideen. The war in Syria has drawn fighters from BiH.

The number of BiH citizens involved in the fighting in Syria is difficult to estimate for several reasons, allowing for politically-driven manipulation. Research undertaken by the author, looking at data available between December 2012 and December 2014, revealed credible evidence that just under 200 BiH citizens have gone to Syria (80% of them male with one-third having a criminal background). More recent data indicates that casualty figures for BiH fighters in Syria have been on the increase since early 2015. Two distinct groups have been identified – older fighters with prior war experience and younger persons in their twenties. Cheap flights to Turkey from Sarajevo facilitate the departure of those intending to go to Syria.

Among the motives identified for going to Syria and Iraq are a youthful urge for action, a desire to struggle against a perceived worldwide war on Islam, and the potential for rapid upward mobility – all of which provide BiH citizens incentive to escape the stifling economic and social situation in BiH. Radicalization takes numerous forms, from effective personal mentoring for jihad to remote inspiration – and active recruitment via social media. These phenomena are not dissimilar from avenues to radicalization observed elsewhere. Interestingly, those most prone to radicalization tend *not* to have previously been religiously observant.

Some BiH citizens have already returned from Syria and Iraq, with the likelihood of having been radicalized, traumatized, and/or disillusioned by their experience. While it cannot automatically be presumed that they would be inclined to engage in domestic acts of terrorism, the considerable effort that the Islamic State has made to explicitly promote such activity in BiH gives ample cause for concern.

The motives for the “lone wolf” terrorist attack on the Zvornik police station in April this year cannot be definitively known, though it is clear that the shooter, Nerdin Ibrić, recently had undergone a physical and behavioral transformation after visiting a nearby Salafist community. Until a few months before the attack, he had exhibited no telltale signs of deviancy – even securing a gun license by legal means. The Republika Srpska (RS) police’s response to the attack, Operation Ruben, was initially billed a success, uncovering evidence of alleged wrongdoing. But of the 32 Bosniaks arrested, 30 were released after they were interviewed and two were jailed for only one month. The operation, conducted without involvement of relevant state bodies, sent shockwaves through the Bosniak returnee community, rekindling fears of its vulnerability in the RS. Subsequently, the BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees concluded that Operation Ruben had involved harassment and intimidation of returnees.

BiH was the first country in the region to amend its criminal code to prohibit joining “foreign paramilitary and para-police formations” which it did in June 2014 and it has since joined the international coalition against ISIL. Operation Damask, undertaken by the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA), the BiH Intelligence and Security Agency (OSA), and the BiH Prosecutor’s Office in late 2014 through early

2015, targeted those suspected of recruiting or financing BiH citizens to go to Syria and Iraq. The BiH Prosecutor's Office for its part formed a new task force to deal specifically with these types of cases. The entities have created specialized police bodies to counter terrorism and extremism. But, as is well known and has been demonstrated previously, most visibly during the February 2014 protests, cooperation and coordination among these various structures is *ad hoc* and sporadic at best – not based on any institutionalized mechanisms, but rather often dependent on personalities and individual initiative.

As with many other issues in BiH, international pressure was important in encouraging authorities to develop a statewide strategy for prevention and countering terrorism, drafted by an inter-agency working group under the auspices of the BiH Ministry of Security and adopted by the BiH Council of Ministers on July 9, 2015. On paper, this would facilitate the inter-agency and inter-entity coordination needed to undertake surveillance, investigation, and prosecution of radicalization and recruitment efforts throughout BiH, as well as of the activities of those returning from Syria and Iraq. But this strategy is presently just a declaration of intent and now needs to be operationalized in action plans with timelines, specific designated tasks, and mechanisms for coordination of effort.

Effective coordination between and among police, prosecutors and intelligence bodies in BiH is a security concern for EU and NATO members as well. Western advocacy for this effort, including support and pressure where needed, is a prerequisite for success.

However, even if the recently-adopted national strategy were fully operationalized, there are several other relevant factors demanding policy attention. Therefore, AI and DPC recommend the following:

- Relevant stakeholders within the country must enhance their communication and the exchange of information at the operational and strategic levels with their counterparts in the region in order to better coordinate planning and execution of activities and prevent gaps and overlapping.
- BiH law enforcement agencies must strengthen and further develop analytical capabilities to reach a better understanding of the patterns of radicalization and recruitment of individuals and groups for militant and terrorist groups.
- BiH governments and law enforcement agencies must engage the media, academic community and NGOs to help raise awareness of the risk factors for radicalization to descend into violent extremism, and particularly the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters.
- BiH law enforcement agencies must develop additional Internet monitoring capabilities, given the increasingly important role of the Internet and social networks as a tool for spreading extremist ideas and recruitment of young people, especially minors. EU and US partner agencies are best suited for this task through provision of technical support and training.
- The EU must support activities that include first-line responders, the academic community and civil society to develop national and regional Radicalization Awareness Network(s) – based on best practices and tools available from the EU-wide Radicalization Awareness Network that was officially launched in September of 2011.

## Introduction

For almost twenty years, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been cited as a source of so-called Islamist terrorism despite the fact that the number of terrorist attacks it has experienced over that time does not stand out against other European countries. Instead, this perception is rooted in the fact that BiH has faced a continuous series of security challenges stemming from communities that belong to the same ideological matrix ascribed to militant Salafist groups. From acts of violence in the late 1990s committed in order to obstruct implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, to attacks on police stations in 2010 and 2015 and on the US Embassy in 2011, individuals espousing some form of militant Salafism have left behind a trail of crimes.

This story, though, begins in the early 1990s – during the war in BiH – when hundreds of foreign Muslim volunteers, mostly from North Africa, the Middle East, or immigrant communities in the West, entered BiH. Often, these fighters arrived with the knowledge and sometimes the approval of Western powers, many via Croatia and carrying Croatian personal documents or accreditations from humanitarian organizations operating there.<sup>1</sup> At the time, Western leaders did not see military intervention as a desirable option to stop the war in BiH and the belief, especially in Washington, was that the war was an isolated bushfire that would die out when all sides became exhausted by the killing; and so the arrival of foreign volunteers to help balance those sides didn't seem like an altogether bad idea. Indeed, just a few years earlier, a contingent of 20,000 foreign fighters in Afghanistan, the *mujahideen*, had helped wear down the military of one of the two superpowers, the USSR, forcing it to retreat after a decade of war. Eschewing direct action on its own in BiH, some in the West, in the US in particular, saw the gravitation of several hundred mujahideen to the BiH military theatre as a net positive.

In the end, the short-term military engagement of foreign fighters in BiH had no measurable effect in balancing the warring sides, but their stay in the country has had long-term consequences on security – both in real terms and in terms of global perceptions. These foreign fighters brought with them a reductionist and confrontational form of militant Islamism known as Salafism, which in some cases justifies the use of violence against “infidels,” including other Muslims. While adherents of this ideology are generally associated with radical Sunnism, Islamic scholars suggest that, historically and theologically, it is more suitable to think of them as *kharijites* or *neo-kharijites*, referring to the third significant school of thought in early Islam. But, no matter how one categorizes Salafism, the effort to propagate the ideology in BiH has produced at least two clear outcomes: Militant Salafism is no longer an import to BiH but an autochthonous ideology; and, extending from this, BiH has become a country of origin for mujahideen. The ideological, financial, logistical, and operational engagement of several hundred members of BiH Salafi communities in the war zones in Syria and Iraq has shined a harsh light on this new reality.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details, see: “Bosnia and Herzegovina and Terrorism 1996-2011: Defining the Threat, Devising Counterterrorism Strategy” in *The Dangerous Landscape: International Perspectives on Twenty-First Century Terrorism; Transnational Challenge, International Responses*, ed. John J. LeBeau (Sofia: Procon, 2013).

## The Lure of the Syrian War

When conflict broke out in Syria in mid-2011, the response of key international and regional actors was reminiscent of the dismissiveness with which war in BiH had been treated two decades earlier. Once again, the conflict was trivialized as an internal bushfire that, if isolated, would burn itself out; and again, foreign powers acted to indirectly affect the outcome through support to factions inside Syria, on both sides of the conflict. And thus, since the beginning of 2012, weapons, money, and foreign fighters have arrived in Syria to prop up various proxy formations.

Through late summer of 2015, approximately 30,000 foreign fighters have operated in Syrian and Iraqi war zones.<sup>2</sup> They are believed to come from more than 90 countries. How many of them have been, or are, BiH citizens is impossible to reliably and precisely determine though, for a number of reasons. One challenge is the delay with which domestic security services began enumerating these travels, allowing much time to pass before they recognized the potential security implications of departures to, and especially returns from, Syria. Also, research has shown that a significant number of foreign fighters with BiH citizenship have lived or temporarily stayed and worked abroad (legally or illegally), especially in Western Europe, and have started their journeys to Syria from those countries without the knowledge of BiH officials and security services.<sup>3</sup> In addition, police investigations have found that some BiH citizens who have travelled to foreign war zones have had multiple addresses in different countries, and may have been double-counted in foreign fighter databases. In some cases, it also appears that people with recognizably Slavic names have been automatically categorized as “from BiH” even if they are not BiH citizens.

These obstacles to an accurate count of BiH foreign fighters have opened the door to manipulation. The number of citizens who have travelled to Syria has been used as a political device in BiH, with a segment of domestic political elites racing to speculate about this number and offering sometimes audacious interpretations of associated security and political implications. And local security “experts” with unabashedly political motivations, or with limited academic and professional qualifications, have eagerly done the same.<sup>4</sup> Efforts by the international community have added little clarity, estimating higher numbers than those projected by domestic authorities, with the most reliable approximation suggesting that 30% more foreign fighters from BiH have operated in Syria and Iraq than BiH officials have counted.<sup>5</sup>

Research carried out in BiH from December 2012 to December 2014, which incorporated the insight of

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2 Charles Lister, *Returning Foreign Fighters: Criminalization or reintegration?* Policy Briefing, August 2015, Brookings Doha Center, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/08/13-foreign-fighters-lister/en-fighters-web.pdf> (accessed, August 22, 2015).

3 Many have connections to Germany and Austria as well as to Switzerland, the US, Slovenia, and Italy.

4 For more on this, see (in B/C/S): “Nović: Teroristi 'stanuju' u institucijama BiH,” *Nezavisne novine*, January 20, 2015; “Lukač: Gotovo da nema terorističkog akta da nije umiješan neko iz BiH,” *Nezavisne novine*, February 8, 2015; “Ekstremistička hobotnica u BiH raspolaže s više od 5.000 islamista,” *Dnevnik.ba*, May 8, 2015; “Hiljade vehabija dobilo signal 'Islamske države’,” *Nezavisne novine*, June 16, 2015; “Jelana Guskova: Za avgust su planirani islamistički napadi u Srbiji, BiH i Makedoniji,” *Blic*, July 8, 2015; “Prof. Goran Kovačević u D3 – Koliko je ISIL prijetnja za regiju,” *Dnevnik 3*, FTV, August 6, 2015; and “Sistem sigurnosti kod nas je nužno zlo,” *Oslobođenje*, August 18, 2015.

5 For more, see: Peter R. Neuman, “Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s,” International Center for the Study of Radicalization, January 26, 2015. <http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/> (accessed March 22, 2015).

open and reliable sources, discovered the identities of 192 BiH citizens – 156 men and 36 women – for whom there was somewhat reliable evidence that they had left BiH for Syria, most often travelling via Turkey.<sup>6</sup> At least 25 children accompanied these adults. The same research indicated that 48 men and 3 women had returned from Syria by the beginning of 2015, while 83 men and 32 women were thought to have remained. This number of BiH citizen returnees from Syria (30%) matches the upper boundary of returns from the conflict zone estimated (10-30%) by the International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR). The ICSR has also estimated that some 5-10% of BiH foreign fighters have been killed;<sup>7</sup> but by the start of 2015, the number of BiH citizens who had died in Syria or Iraq far outpaced this, with 26 deaths (25 men and 1 woman), or 16% of the BiH contingent.<sup>8</sup>

The research into departures to these war zones from BiH points to several interesting trends, among them that at least one-third of BiH foreign fighters have been convicted of a crime, served jail time, or were investigated for criminal activity. In some cases, they have been convicted multiple times.<sup>9</sup> But this phenomenon is not unique to BiH. For instance, the segment of foreign fighters from Kosovo that have been criminally implicated is around 40%.<sup>10</sup> And a recent analysis by a Western intelligence service concluded that more than half (52%) of foreign fighters originating from EU countries were known to law enforcement agencies.<sup>11</sup>

The significant presence of criminal elements in ISIL ranks helps explain the brutality and bloodlust that has marked ISIL operations. And because fighters rationalize their actions as a fulfillment of God's will, they engage in extreme violence without any restraint or remorse. Indeed, this kind of absolutism is reflected in the ISIL recruitment campaign, which is aimed specifically at criminal elements with slogans such as "Sometimes people with the worst of pasts create the best of futures" and "It is not the way you live that is important; it is the way you die."

Analysis of the age structure of BiH fighters reveals two very distinct "generations" – the first comprises fighters in their early to mid-forties who are often veterans of the 1992-1995 war, and the second consists of those in their teens or early adulthood. Still, the median age of men from BiH who have participated in Syrian conflict zones is 32. BiH citizens are thus marginally older than the majority of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, whose ages range from 18 to 29 and average 27 years old; and the young age of fighters in this conflict is notable. Fighters in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 were older, for example, ranging from

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6 More details available in: Vlado Azinović and Muhamed Jusić, *The Lure of the Syrian War – The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent* (Sarajevo: Atlantic Initiative, 2015). Unless otherwise noted, all references hereinafter to specific data related to BiH fighters in Syria and Iraq were taken from this study.

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 5.

<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of September 2015, BiH authorities knew the identities of 130 Bosnian citizens residing in Syria or Iraq. They also estimated that 46 citizens had died in Syria or Iraq up to that time – a number that quickly increased when almost 20 individuals from BiH died in the battle for Kobane. Domestic security services also believe that there were 30 to 40 returnees from the Syrian and Iraqi war theaters residing in BiH in early September, but this number varies because a portion of these people do not reside permanently in BiH.

<sup>9</sup> Out of 156 men, at least 44 had a police or court file, and in some cases multiple files, with charges including terrorism, illegal possession of weapons and arms, theft, armed robbery, illegal trade of weapons or drugs, human trafficking, and domestic violence.

<sup>10</sup> Shpend Kursani, *Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq*, April 2015, Kosovar Center for Security Studies.

<sup>11</sup> From a discussion with a Western intelligence official who wished to remain anonymous.

25 to 35 years of age.

A large portion of BiH citizens who have departed for Syria (over 60%) have lived in or visited Salafi communities in the BiH villages of Gornja Maoča, Ošvama, and Dubnica (in the northeast), and a large number have also originated from lesser known Salafi communities near major cities such as Sarajevo, Zenica, and Tuzla. In 2014 and 2015, the number of people departing to Syria and Iraq that have hailed from northwest BiH, notably from Bužim and Velika Kladuša, also visibly increased. By canton, most BiH foreign fighters come from Zenica-Doboj, Sarajevo, and Tuzla cantons in the northeast, Una-Sana Canton in the northwest, and Central Bosnia Canton in the middle of the country.

BiH citizens travelling to Syria have most often done so by plane (60% of men and 20% of women), usually from Sarajevo to Istanbul. Their journeys have continued by domestic airlines, typically to cities on the Syrian border, and from there via land to cities within Syria. This is a relatively cheap trip, with plane tickets from Sarajevo to Istanbul, and then from Istanbul to the border, costing just over 100 euro.

### **The Motives behind Departures to Syria and Iraq**

Citizens of BiH have been motivated by various factors to leave for the war zones in Syria and Iraq. At first, the majority of departures were prompted by a sense of religious duty and a belief that journeying to the nascent “Islamic State” from Bosnia and Herzegovina, considered a hostile land of infidels, was akin to the Prophet Mohammed’s *Hijra* to Medina – where he and his followers created a new utopian community. It is possible, too, that veterans of the 1992-1995 war who were close to the El-Mujahid Unit saw the conflict in Syria as the logical continuation of their efforts in BiH, which some see as having been ended prematurely by the Dayton Peace Agreement.<sup>12</sup> But for many of the younger generation of BiH foreign fighters, especially those in their late teens and very early twenties, departure to Syria has represented something of an adrenaline rush.

Young people have a natural tendency to want to prove themselves, often seeking challenges that validate their belonging in a community, gain the respect of their peers, and help them find their purpose; and to some, the distant war zones of Syria and Iraq and the structure and power of ISIL appear to provide this opportunity. In fact, these same motives have led BiH citizens to join the French Foreign Legion in the past. Additionally, it is the simple nature of things that young people have higher hormonal levels, often driving them to rash decision-making and worse. And in BiH, this is combined with excess free time, with a youth (15-24) unemployment rate of 60% – the highest in the world and significantly higher than the global average.

The overall rate of those officially registered as unemployed in BiH is 44%, which means that, for some BiH citizens, it is possible that their departure to Syria and Iraq was at least subconsciously influenced, and perhaps accelerated, by socio-economic factors. A substantial number of these people come from the economic, social, and geographical margins; and according to police records, some of them lack

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<sup>12</sup> Many members of the El-Mujahid Unit were against the peace agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and were especially disappointed with the decision of Bosniak political leaders to opt for a secular state. According to former members of the Unit, this disappointment ran so deep that an attack on the Army of BiH was considered as an option.

permanent or stable incomes, forcing them to sell cheaply made goods or household items on the side, or partake in the illegal sale of cigars or currency.<sup>13</sup> Also, apart from the rare exception, most of them have only a primary education, possess no marketable skills or work experience, and live in dilapidated houses far from main roads with at least two generations of relatives. Departure for Syria, especially for married couples who have been offered the houses of Syrians that have fled, presents a chance for rapid upward mobility.

Beyond all of these motivating factors, departures for Syria are also indirectly aided by the weak post-conflict society of BiH, which is gradually losing the ability to govern itself. The rapid erosion of pre-war systems of social, moral and ethical values and norms has resulted in an increase in the engagement of youth in violence and in their adoption of retrograde ideologies, both of which are often viewed by them as strategies for affirming and protecting individuals and communities. This reflects the fact that for more than two decades, BiH society has been unable to develop an articulated system of universal values that supports the prosperity of all BiH citizens and that provides marginalized people new avenues of expression *within* society so that some of them do not seek to escape it by leaving for foreign war zones in countries they probably can't pinpoint on a map. This segment of the population, uncomfortable with certain trends of modernity, may otherwise unquestioningly adhere to values espoused in less modern times and, instead of adjusting to society, may resort to violence in an attempt to force society to adjust to their values.

It has been impossible to identify a single typical or dominant form of ideological radicalization that has preceded the departure of either BiH citizens or citizens of other countries to Syria or Iraq. According to some sources, the radicalization process is supervised by local or traveling "persons of authority," and an accelerated process has preceded the departure of young, alienated, and often confused individuals.<sup>14</sup> It is possible that some suffer from emotional or mental disorders and, in some cases, ideological transformations have followed "alternative" treatment of apparent psychiatric conditions – usually administered by an authority figure in the micro-community in which potential recruits live. The influence of these authorities on the radicalization process certainly seems significant; but without greater insight into the psycho-social characteristics of recruits or the methods employed, it is impossible to determine how crucial the influence of such authorities is on the decision to go to a foreign war zone.

Analysis of the ideological motivations for mobilization to the battlefields of Syria and Iraq suggests that individuals and groups are not radicalized in relation to injustice (real or imagined) that is happening in their own communities, but through the instrumentalization of the perceived suffering and martyrdom of a wider, global community to which they see themselves as belonging. Indeed, the majority of those who are radicalized view Islam as under attack and believe it is their duty to defend it; and messaging from local authorities as well as from war returnees encourages defense of the *Ummah* and a final encounter with apostate enemies.

This messaging is reflected in other forums too and, especially among younger people, is often influenced by external actors on the internet and in social networks. Due to new technologies, combatants in Syria

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<sup>13</sup> From an original police report which was made available to the author.

<sup>14</sup> From interviews with law enforcement and intelligence officials who spoke under condition of anonymity.

and Iraq are in constant and direct contact with a potential global base for the recruitment of new fighters. And the volume and velocity of this two-way “virtual traffic” makes it practically immeasurable and almost impossible to monitor. According to some estimates, there were 25,000 Twitter accounts established by ISIL alone by the beginning of 2015, sending more than 200,000 messages per week.<sup>15</sup> This level of communication between the front and possible recruits is entirely unprecedented in history, and most security agencies across the globe lack the technological capacity or expertise to track or analyze it. Bosnia and Herzegovina is no exception.

While additional research is necessary to gain greater insight into the key phases of the radicalization process, analysis of a number of individual cases does help us to recognize some early signs. Some cases have revealed, for instance, how an altered perception of the world that is supported by a specific interpretation of religion can create a feeling of superiority among young people vis-à-vis their elders. This can lead to or heighten generational conflicts as young people, feeling empowered by the authority they extract from their notion of faith and God, confront their parents and elders in the early stages of radicalization. In many cases, these youth then minimize or cease communication with their parents, whom they judge as living in ignorance and sin. As radicalization continues, it usually leads to absolute self-isolation as young people reject their own families and deepen their connection with a “new family” of like-minded believers who often live elsewhere or are known only in a virtual space; and these radicalized youth frequently leave for Syria or Iraq without the knowledge or consent of their parents.

Study of these cases also suggests that those most susceptible to this form of radicalization have grown up in families that do *not* traditionally practice religion. Though this may seem counterintuitive, it is clear that many radicalized youth have had little prior experience with religion, if any, and have viewed it as something peripheral or foreign. This trend is especially apparent in Western Europe, but is evident in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well.<sup>16</sup>

### **When Fighters Return**

Perhaps the key and most difficult question to answer in research of this phenomenon is what threat returnees from war theaters in Syria and Iraq pose in their communities of origin. They are veterans of conflict who have potentially been additionally radicalized, and they remain connected to a network of people who share their worldview – in the region and across the globe. But, are they willing to engage in violence and terrorism at home?

It seems that some of them are, and fear of the possible danger of returnees is thus not unfounded. Several studies have shown that the perpetrators and planners of a number of terrorist attacks over the

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<sup>15</sup> From a discussion with a Western intelligence official who wished to remain anonymous.

<sup>16</sup> British intelligence agency MI5 found that a significant number of radicalized youth had little knowledge about religion and very few grew up in religious families. Some of them consume narcotics, drink alcohol, and visit prostitutes. The MI5 analysis indicates that deeply rooted traditional religious identity actually protects against radicalization toward violent extremism. See: Alan Travis, “MI5 report challenges views on terrorism in Britain,” *The Guardian*, August 20, 2008.

past few years were former foreign fighters.<sup>17</sup> A recent analysis of the global operational base of Al-Qaeda indicates that it consists of foreign fighter veterans of various wars fought from the late 20th century through to the present. Indeed, every ninth returnee (or 11%) has engaged in some form of violence after returning to their original community, and returnee terrorists with combat experience were found to be far more dangerous than those who belong to cells that have only ever operated domestically.<sup>18</sup> For these reasons, the behavior of returnees from Syria and Iraq to BiH deserves special attention.

Among the significant number of people who have already returned to BiH from the Syrian theatre, it is possible that some of them were disappointed by what they found there but that they and others believe they fulfilled their duty. Whichever the case, one could reasonably expect that they wish to live a normal and peaceful life upon their return to BiH; however, local and global trends do not seem to support this expectation. And adding to the valid fear that foreign fighters return from the battlefield with heightened ideological motivations, 2015 alone has seen more than 20 terrorist attacks in places like Canada, Australia, Belgium, France, and Tunisia – all instigated or encouraged by ISIL.

As the self-proclaimed Islamic State weakens and faces a possible existential crisis, it is reasonable to expect further retributive acts by loyalists in other parts of the world, especially in countries participating in the anti-terrorist coalition. In some instances, foreign fighters may even return home from Syria and Iraq with the instruction or goal to do just that, or at least the possibility cannot be excluded. Eventually, the downfall of ISIL will of course raise the issue of what will happen to the thousands of foreign volunteers who have committed themselves to the Islamic State. Where will they go? And can they go home? Almost every one of the 90 countries from which these fighters originate must seriously consider these questions.

The reintegration of returnee fighters is complicated for many reasons, and frequent calls from ISIL spokesmen for violence against domestic targets add to the challenge of de-radicalization. In late 2014, for example, Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami explicitly encouraged violence against “infidels” in a speech, saying: “If you are not able to find an IED [improvised explosive device] or a bullet, then single out the disbelieving American, Frenchman, or any of their allies. Smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car, or throw him down from a high place, or choke him, or poison him. Do not lack. Do not be contemptible. Let your slogan be: ‘May I not be saved if the cross worshipper and *taghut* (ruler ruling by manmade laws) patron survives.’ If you are unable to do so, then burn down his home, car, or business. Or destroy his crops.”<sup>19</sup> Similar messaging has also been reflected in ISIL’s sophisticated recruitment magazine, *Dabiq*, which is directed at a Western audience and has instructed those unable to come to the Islamic State to instead play their part by attacking enemies of Islam in the countries fighting against ISIL. Calling this an “opportunity for noble deeds,” one recent article asks “What prevents [an adherent] from...targeting Japanese diplomatic missions in Bosnia, Malaysia, or

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17 Council of the EU, Counter-terrorism Coordinator, “Foreign fighters and returnees from a counter-terrorism perspective, in particular with regard to Syria,” No. ST 9036 2013 INIT, April 29, 2013.

18 Thomas Hegghammer, “Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists’ Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting,” *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 1 (February 2013). [http://hegghammer.com/\\_files/Hegghammer\\_-\\_Should\\_I\\_stay\\_or\\_should\\_I\\_go.pdf](http://hegghammer.com/_files/Hegghammer_-_Should_I_stay_or_should_I_go.pdf) (accessed June 3, 2015).

19 For more on this, see: Kyle Shideler, “ISIS’s New Threat is Anything but New,” *Free Fire Blog*, September 22, 2014, Center for Security Policy, <http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2014/09/22/isiss-new-threat-is-anything-but-new/> (accessed May 22, 2015).

Indonesia? Or targeting Saudi diplomats in Tirana (Albania), Sarajevo (Bosnia), and Pristina (Kosovo)?”<sup>20</sup>

In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, citizens who spent time in Syria and Iraq – particularly in battlefield formations subordinated to or within ISIL – have created friendships and connections with fellow combatants from Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo – as well as with their mostly Chechen commanders. Existing and newly-created regional networks of extremists and militants have thus been established and, in 2014, two suicide bombings emerged from this operational matrix, perpetrated by attackers from Kosovo and BiH.<sup>21</sup> This propensity for brutal violence among foreign fighters from the Western Balkans was also reflected in at least one reported case of decapitation of an imprisoned Syrian soldier in the conflict zone.<sup>22</sup>

It cannot be automatically presumed that the majority of ISIL members or former foreign fighters, including those that have returned to BiH, approve of these actions and are prepared to act similarly. Although, the fact that they have witnessed and possibly participated in such violence certainly stirs justifiable unease. One of the main problems related to veterans of foreign wars in BiH and elsewhere is the lack of standardized tools for assessing the risk they pose to their communities.

Theoretically, returnees from Iraq and Syria could assume a number of wide-ranging roles in their societies, some of which may overlap. Former fighters may be engaged in: (1) preventing potential volunteers from going to foreign war theaters; (2) returning to normal life; (3) attempting to radicalize and mobilize new volunteers; (4) providing logistical, financial, and other support to the process of recruitment, mobilization, and travel; (5) preparing to return to the war theatre; (6) planning and perpetration of terrorist attacks in their original communities or elsewhere; and (7) utilizing their skills in handling weapons and explosives to join a criminal group. It is worth adding, too, that a majority of those individuals returning with combat experience will very likely exhibit or develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

### **Attack on the Zvornik Police Station**

The presence of returnees from Syria in BiH, combined with the series of terrorist attacks that have been carried out across the world by former ISIL fighters or people under the influence of ISIL ideology, spurred BiH investigators to look primarily towards this returnee group in their investigation of an April 27, 2015 attack on a Zvornik police station. That evening, Nerđin Ibrić, a 24-year old from Kućić Kula, drove to the

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<sup>20</sup> “Issue 11 of ISIS’s English-Language Magazine ‘Dabiq’ – A general review,” September 9, 2015, Middle East Media Research Institute, Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor, <http://www.memrijttm.org/issue-11-of-isis-english-language-magazine-dabiq-a-general-review.html> (accessed September 12, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Blerim Heta, a.k.a. Abu Habbab al-Kosowi – the first suicide bomber from the Balkans – struck in Baghdad on March 25, 2014, killing 52. Emrah Fojnica, alias Hattab, who was acquitted of charges for the October 28, 2011 attack on the US Embassy in Sarajevo due to lack of evidence, carried out a suicide attack in a suburb of Baghdad on July 7, 2014, killing 24 – including 11 women and 6 children.

<sup>22</sup> Lavdrim Muhaxheri, an ISIL member from Kosovo, first attracted media attention in the summer of 2014, in a video that showed him as the leader of a group of ISIL fighters engaging in a ritual burning of their passports and the beheading of an imprisoned young man believed to have been a member of the Syrian Army. Later, Muhaxheri refuted rumors of his own death by appearing in an ISIL video in which he launched a projectile from a handheld missile launcher at a captured Syrian soldier.

police station with two hunting rifles and a pistol in his possession. A video recording from the scene shows that Ibrić got out of his car with a rifle in hand, walked towards a police officer who was coming out of the station, and shot him in the head, killing him. Then, he stepped over the officer's body and entered the building, where police sources say he continued to shoot while cursing and shouting “Allahu Akbar.”<sup>23</sup> In the exchange of gunfire that followed, two officers were wounded and Ibrić was killed.<sup>24</sup>

The investigation into the attack found that Ibrić had been a peaceful and rather model citizen prior to mid-April 2015. Except for a few paid traffic tickets, he did not appear in any police registers. He had graduated from high school and had tried his hand at chicken farming in partnership with his half-brother, who lives in Switzerland. Indeed, nothing in his behavior indicated possible criminal or violent tendencies. Local authorities had even issued him regular gun registration papers – a privilege rarely extended to Bosniak returnees to Republika Srpska.

In the last few months before the attack, though, Ibrić's mother, members of his family, and some neighbors said they had noticed him acting strangely, spending a lot of time in front of his computer reading religious literature and fasting. According to his mother, he had also started visiting a known Salafi community in Dubnica which she said she had warned him would “lead her and him to death.” Members of this community told police that Ibrić had never made any permanent acquaintances there, but investigators determined that there had been some contact between Ibrić and someone from that community who spent time in Syria; however, they failed to find any strong evidence that he was directly recruited, encouraged, or instructed to carry out the attack.<sup>25</sup>

Sources familiar with the investigation into Ibrić's case say investigators were initially thrown off by his appearance because it didn't match the photographs in his identifying documents. It turned out that Ibrić had lost more than 30 kilograms in the few months before his attack.<sup>26</sup> Ibrić's precise motives will never be completely known; and may not have been even had he survived. The findings of investigators suggest that he was emotionally vulnerable, and perhaps traumatized by some recent event, and had suddenly entered into a state of depression. It is possible that he came into contact with militant Salafism at a time when he was particularly susceptible, but it remains unclear to what extent and in what way this contributed to his decision to carry out the attack.

One interpretation of the attack that has been put forth – that it was in retaliation for the death of Ibrić's father, who was killed by members of a Serb formation during the war – has little evidentiary support beyond that fact. Although his first victim was Serb, Ibrić fired indiscriminately.<sup>27</sup> The attack was without

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23 From a conversation with a member of the investigation team who wished to remain anonymous. Upon request of the BiH Ministry of Security, a non-classified report was produced by the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA), which gave a similar description of the attack (See: “The attack on the Zvornik police station,” No. 16-04/1-04-1-353-51/15, May 25, 2015). Yet, under condition of anonymity, another source close to the investigation told the author that the claim that Ibrić had shouted “Allahu Akbar” was added to the report after the fact.

24 Officer Dragan Đurić was killed and Officers Stevo Milovanović and Željko Gajić were wounded.

25 In July 2015, the BiH Prosecutor's office gave up on charging two individuals arrested just after the attack, who were purportedly suspected of being connected to Nerdin Ibrić and possibly involved in the attack. However, no evidence was ever found of their connection to Ibrić or their participation.

26 From a discussion with senior domestic and foreign officials who wished to remain anonymous.

27 It's a tragic coincidence that Ibrić's first victim, Dragan Đurić (48), also lost his father during the war; he was killed in Banovići in 1992 by Army of BiH soldiers.

a doubt a terrorist act, though, and police were the primary target. Interestingly, Ibrić was pulled over by a police patrol the night before the attack for speeding. The officers gave him a warning and let him go, but noted that he was visibly agitated.

Only three days before Ibrić's attack, the OSA had delivered a warning to domestic police agencies that recent arrests of BiH citizens in Australia on terrorism charges could trigger revenge attacks in BiH. OSA called for increased caution, “especially... [at] public gatherings, embassies, religious shrines, and military and police buildings,” but said it lacked “information that would point to a concrete site of attack.”<sup>28</sup> After the attack in Zvornik, security agencies in BiH used this unspecified warning from the OSA to place blame and responsibility on one another for failing to prevent it. But multiple police and intelligence sources interviewed for this analysis saw no connection between the OSA warning and Ibrić, expressing their belief that his attack only coincidentally occurred at the same time. From that perspective, his case appears to be one of so-called “lone wolf” terrorism – which is incredibly difficult to detect and prevent.

### “Operation Ruben”

In response to the April attack in Zvornik, Republika Srpska police carried out an action known as “Operation Ruben” on May 6, searching 32 locations and arresting 32 people, mostly in returnee communities of Bosniaks. Police claimed to have found “weapons, ammunition, Kevlar vests, uniforms, propaganda, and flags with Arabic writing.” They also confiscated computers and cell phones. Those arrested were held under suspicion of having committed acts of terrorism and having produced and trafficked weapons or explosive materials. But after interviews by the police and the prosecutor’s office, 30 people were released, and the remaining two were each given jail sentences of only one month.<sup>29</sup>

The initial charges against those picked up in Operation Ruben had been severe – accusing arrestees of “serious intimidation of citizens and a serious breach and destruction of the basic political, constitutional, economic, and social structure of the Republika Srpska,” and of producing or acquiring “firearms, ammunition, and explosive devices whose manufacture, procurement, selling and possessing is not allowed for the citizens or is severely limited.”<sup>30</sup> This was upsetting for many Bosniaks in the Republika Srpska, especially among those who had watched Serb police drag away their loved ones during the 1990s, some of whom never returned. The revival of these memories twenty years later caused fear and distrust to resurface, and the insistence of the RS Prosecutor’s Office that suspects had been treated in accordance with the law did little to address the concerns of Bosniaks.<sup>31</sup> And, in fact, the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees later determined that Operation Ruben had been marked by cases of harassment and intimidation, and that the activities of the police had eroded the personal and collective safety of Bosniak

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28 “Policijskim agencijama u BiH prošlog petka poslano upozorenje o mogućim terorističkim napadima!” *Dnevni avaz*, April 28, 2015.

29 “Redžić i Borovac ostaju u pritvoru,” *Nezavisne novine*, May 14, 2015.

30 Prosecutor’s Office of Republika Sprska, No. A-247/15, May 15, 2015.

31 Ibid.

returnees.<sup>32</sup>

Operation Ruben had been led by the RS Ministry of Internal Affairs' Anti-Terrorism Directorate and the entity's Special Prosecutor's Office, but key state-level agencies were not included, or even notified.<sup>33</sup> Carried out allegedly to reassure the public after the attack, the operation was intended to show that the police were working hard to suppress the danger of terrorism, in part to reduce tensions between the two ethnic communities and prevent acts of retribution against Bosniak returnees – who were painted as legitimate targets by a segment of the media and political elite – by appearing to have full control over law and order.<sup>34</sup> But pressure to respond swiftly and the exclusion of state-level agencies led to a poorly-prepared and executed operation.<sup>35</sup> Further, multiple sources close to the case have asserted that the prosecutor in charge ordered the declassification of evidence and allowed its broadcast on television without alerting the accused and their lawyers, as he was obliged to do. If this is true, that evidence may be inadmissible in court, which could make it impossible to try the case.

### The Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism in BiH<sup>36</sup>

After a delayed reaction to the departure of BiH citizens for foreign war zones and related security risks, BiH security agencies became involved in global efforts to monitor and suppress the phenomenon. In the fall of 2014, BiH supported the ratification of UN Security Council Resolution 2178, which compels member states to more closely coordinate in order to reduce departures to battlefields in Syria and Iraq. And at the very end of that year, Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the global coalition fighting ISIL.

On the domestic front, BiH was actually the first country in the region to amend its criminal code to include sanctions for “the organization or joining of foreign paramilitary and para-police formations,” in June 2014.<sup>37</sup> A few months later, a multi-phase police action known as “Operation Damask” was launched,

32 BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, “Information upon the conclusion of the Council of Ministers of BiH,” No. 05-07-1-1030-1/15, May 7, 2015. Also see: “Vijeće ministara BiH razmatralo informaciju o stanju u Zvorniku i akciji ‘Ruben’,” RTV7.

33 The State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA), which is tasked with addressing issues of terrorism, stated that it “didn't participate in the [operation]” and had no data that could be used to produce a report on the event (See: SIPA, No. 16-04/1/04-1-4759-3/15, May 19, 2015). The OSA was also kept in the dark about the operation Ruben and did not participate in any way, but said that some of the “individuals processed in that operation are believed to be followers of or sympathizers with people who lean towards Salafism” (See: “Akcija MUP-a RS kodnog naziva ‘Ruben’, odgovor na zahtjev,” No. 04/1-9882/15, May 20, 2015). The BiH Prosecutor's Office also released a statement that it had not been “informed about the latest arrests of individuals residing in Republika Srpska” and had not received “a report on any criminal conduct.” (See: “Odgovor na dopis od 15. 5. 2015. godine,” No. A-132/15, May 20, 2015).

34 For more, see: Bodo Weber, “Inflammatory political rhetoric and hate speech in Bosnia and Herzegovina: political elites and the media,” AI-DPC Security Risk Analysis, Policy Note #1, October 2015. Available at: [http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/uimages/AI-DPC Security Risk Analysis, Policy Note #1, October 2015. Available at: http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/uimages/AI-DPC Security Risk Analysis Paper Series 1 Hate Speech.pdf](http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/uimages/AI-DPC%20BiH%20Security%20Risk%20Analysis%20Paper%20Series%201%20Hate%20Speech.pdf); see also Bodo Weber, “The Police Forces in BiH – Persistent Fragmentation and Increasing Politicization,” AI-DPC Security Risk Analysis, Policy Note #6, November 2015 (forthcoming).

35 “Okružni sud u Banjoj Luci: Nema dovoljno dokaza za djelo terorizma protiv uhapšenih u akciji Ruben,” Klix.ba, May 15, 2015, <http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/okruzni-sud-u-banjoj-luci-nema-dovoljno-dokaza-za-djelo-terorizma-protiv-uhapšenih-u-akciji-ruben/150515042> (accessed May 20, 2015).

36 For a complete review, see: US Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014*, June 2015. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/239631.pdf>

37 The amendment criminalizes those who organize, train, equip, recruit, publicly mobilize individuals or groups for the purpose of joining foreign military, paramilitary or parapolice formations, as well as those who eventually join these foreign units. If found

targeting people suspected of recruitment for, or the organization or financing of departures of, BiH citizens to the war zones in Syria and Iraq. The operation, which lasted through the beginning of 2015, was led by SIPA, OSA, and the BiH Prosecutor's Office.<sup>38</sup>

In the spring of 2015, just ten days before the attack in Zvornik, the RS Ministry of Internal Affairs formed the Administration for Countering Terrorism and Extremism. This unit is officially tasked with countering radicalization and recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters.<sup>39</sup> Similar efforts aimed at strengthening counter-terrorism capabilities were initiated by the Federation police as well, and in the summer, the department of the BiH Prosecutor's Office that handles terrorism cases added an additional prosecutor and also formed a new task force to focus exclusively on these types of cases. At the beginning of July, the BiH Council of Ministers also adopted a new state-wide strategy to prevent and counter terrorism through 2020.<sup>40</sup>

In October 2015 Bosnia and Herzegovina signed The Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism,<sup>41</sup> aimed at tackling the problem of "foreign terrorist fighters," as an instrument that criminalizes early preparations for acts of terror. In January 2016 BiH is also expected to sign the Agreement on Operational and Strategic Cooperation with Europol that will enable the exchange of information and personal data.

Still, cooperation among security agencies in BiH is limited and multiple sources consulted for this analysis confirmed that it often depends on the personal whims of officials.<sup>42</sup> The appointment of senior security sector officials in BiH, which requires consensus of the political elite, is inescapably political; and appointees are thus guided by the political interests of their sponsors rather than the security interests of the citizenry. This dynamic clearly negatively impacts the fight against terrorism.

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guilty, and depending on the offence, such individuals could be sentenced from 3 months to 10 years in prison. Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, No. 47/14, Article 162 (b). On October 6, 2015, the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina handed down its first trial verdict against four individuals who were found guilty of "unlawful establishing and joining foreign paramilitary or para-police formations" under Article 162 (b). For more on this, see: "Husein Erdić sentenced to three-and-a-half years, Midhat Trako to one-a-half year, while Nevad Hušidić and Merim Keserović to one year in prison," Court of Bosnia & Herzegovina, available at <http://www.sudbih.gov.ba/index.php?id=4174&jezik=e> (accessed October 7, 2015).

38 As a result of the operation, the Court of BiH has confirmed charges against Bilal Bosnić for the encouragement of and recruitment for terrorist activities, and for organizing a terrorist group; against Husein Erdić and 6 others for joining foreign paramilitary or para-police formations; and against Fatih Hasanović and 12 others for becoming members of an organized terrorist group and taking part in armed conflict in Syria and Iraq on the side of ISIL. Bosnić was eventually sentenced to seven years in prison. For more on this case, see <http://www.sudbih.gov.ba/?id=4196&jezik=e>.

39 For more on this, see "MUP RS formira upravu za borbu protiv terorizma," *BHRT*, April 3, 2015; "RS dobija upravu za borbu protiv terorizma," *Nezavisne novine*, April 3, 2015. However, multiple sources (international and local) interviewed for this paper have stated concerns about this particular police unit, suggesting that it probably serves as Republika Srpska's own intelligence and security service.

40 Mirsada Lingo-Demirović, "Konkretan odgovor na moguće terorističke napade," *Nezavisne novine*, July 8, 2015, See also: "Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism 2015 – 2020," BiH Council of Ministers, Sarajevo 2015, available at: [http://msb.gov.ba/PDF/STRATEGIJA\\_ZA\\_BORBU\\_PROTIV\\_TERORIZMA\\_ENG.pdf](http://msb.gov.ba/PDF/STRATEGIJA_ZA_BORBU_PROTIV_TERORIZMA_ENG.pdf)

41 <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/search-on-treaties/-/conventions/treaty/196>.

42 For example, due to conflict between the Directors of the Federation Police and SIPA, the Federation Police were not directly included in any phase of the Damask operation. See also Bodo Weber's Policy Note on the BiH police in this series, "The Police Forces in BiH – Persistent Fragmentation and Increasing Politicization."

## Conclusions & Recommendations

Once a destination country for foreign fighters, Bosnia and Herzegovina is now a country of origin for volunteers fighting wars in distant lands.<sup>43</sup> Although the largest wave of departures of BiH citizens for Syria and Iraq has probably passed, it is likely that the ideological radicalization and recruitment of new fighters will continue.<sup>44</sup> Certainly, radicalization efforts that take place through social networks and on the Internet in general can be expected to persist.<sup>45</sup>

Analysis of the radicalization, recruitment, travel, and eventual residence of BiH citizens in Syria and Iraq brought to light that all of these phases and activities often involved a number of socially, morally, and legally controversial or punishable activities (adultery, rape, family violence, abandonment of children, abductions, theft), which not only were given justification but also were presented as a theological imperative or God's order. In essence, this is an indirect attempt to introduce new norms into a society that is practically without any in the post-conflict and transitional space it still occupies. In the absence of a viable and relatable value alternative to this trend, it may have real formative potential in BiH, particularly for young people. And, even if we assume that the majority of returned fighters will not engage in violence, veterans from the Syrian and Iraqi theatres could easily become heroes and role models in their local communities, particularly influencing youth from the margins, who are already vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment.

The role of the educational system is particularly important and, while the current curricula do not overtly promote violent extremism, students are also not taught how to resist it. Where BiH youth should be exposed to critical thinking, schools in BiH tend instead to affirm the dogma and ideology of collective identity, based on the ethnicity of students. This "ethnicization" of education promotes limited awareness and an oversimplified black-and-white world view that depend on an "us" vs. "them" paradigm. In this climate, everything seen as "ours" is taken at face value, and this state of mind provides fertile ground for ideological radicalization against an "other."<sup>46</sup>

Any effort that will successfully prevent and discourage extremism and radicalization in BiH must therefore be inclusive of all BiH citizens. It is up to the state to develop and employ effective tools and mechanisms including monitoring, surveillance, and criminal prosecution; and it is up to society to call for effective interventions and develop counter-narratives that oppose radicalization. Families, the

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43 In addition to those in Syria and Iraq, some BiH citizens have also registered in formations fighting in Ukraine. A high-ranking source in one BiH security agency told researchers that, through the beginning of 2015, three such individuals had been identified; and in March, SIPA announced that there were five BiH citizens fighting in Ukraine, but that the number was assumed to actually be higher. See: "SIPA: U Siriji ratuje 80 bh. Državljana," *Dnevni avaz*, March 29, 2015.

44 Recent interviews with senior BiH intelligence and law enforcement officials have indicated that, from January to the end of September 2015, at least 21 individuals left the country for Syria/Iraq. Alongside 11 men and 10 women (mostly married couples) a total of 14 children traveled with their parents.

45 The power of this form of radicalization in BiH was evident in reactions (comments, blogs, etc.) to the attack on French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in July 2015, which were dominated by relativizations, justifications, and expressions of approval for the act. An analysis by one BiH security agency of the content that emerged on social media in BiH after the attack concluded that more than 80% of commenters had a positive view of the act and its perpetrators.

46 For more on this, see Valery Perry, "Countering the Cultivation of Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Case for Comprehensive Education Reform," available at: <http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/countering-the-cultivation-of-extremism-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina--the-case-for-comprehensive-educat> (accessed September 27, 2015).

educational system, civil society organizations, the academic community, and media must all play a role in clarifying the severity of the problem and bringing about some consensus regarding norms to combat it.

These and other recommendations have all been embodied in BiH's new national strategy for prevention and countering terrorism.<sup>47</sup> However, this document is just an official declaration of intent. It is now up to BiH's governments, law enforcement agencies, and society as a whole to take their share of responsibility for effective implementation of the strategy and act upon its formal pledge.

Even if there is full implementation of the BiH strategy, a number of relevant factors fall outside its scope.

To this end, Atlantic Initiative and Democratization Policy Council recommend the following:

- Relevant stakeholders within the country must enhance their communication and the exchange of information at the operational and strategic levels with their counterparts in the region in order to better coordinate planning and execution of activities and prevent gaps and overlapping.
- BiH law enforcement agencies must strengthen and further develop analytical capabilities to reach a better understanding of the patterns of radicalization and recruitment of individuals and groups for militant and terrorist groups.
- BiH governments and law enforcement agencies must engage the media, academic community and NGOs to help raise awareness of the risk factors for radicalization to descend into violent extremism, and particularly the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters.
- BiH law enforcement agencies must develop additional Internet monitoring capabilities, given the increasingly important role of the Internet and social networks as a tool for spreading extremist ideas and recruitment of young people, especially minors. EU and US partner agencies are best suited for this task through provision of technical support and training.
- The EU must support activities that include first-line responders, the academic community and civil society to develop national and regional Radicalization Awareness Network(s) – based on best practices and tools available from the EU-wide Radicalization Awareness Network that was officially launched in September of 2011.

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<sup>47</sup> See: [http://www.msb.gov.ba/PDF/STRATEGIJA\\_ZA\\_BORBU\\_PROTIV\\_TERORIZMA\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.msb.gov.ba/PDF/STRATEGIJA_ZA_BORBU_PROTIV_TERORIZMA_ENG.pdf)