Mapping the state of play of institutional and community involvement in countering violent extremism in Kosovo

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List of abbreviations

AoK	Assembly of Kosovo	MCYS	Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports
BIK	Kosovo Islamic Association	MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
CVE	Countering Violet Extremism	MLSW	Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare
EU	European Union	MoIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
GCERF	Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund	MoJ	Ministry of Justice
GNI	Gross National Income	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
GoK	Government of Kosovo	OPM	Office of Prime Minister
IPA	Instrument for pre-accession	PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
KCS	Kosovo Correctional Service	SP	State Prosecutor
KIA	Kosovo Intelligence Agency	TAEIX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange
KP	Kosovo Police	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
KSB	Kosovo Security Barometer	UWOMEN	United Nations Agency for Women
KSC	Kosovo Security Council	USA	United States of America

Key findings

This report identifies the key drivers of extremism in Kosovo following a holistic assessment. While there is the political will to counter violent extremism - at least compared to a lack of willingness to fight corruption and organized crime – the results to date are limited. The main results are identified from the work of law enforcement bodies, which appear to be by far the most proactive institutions working in countering and preventing violent extremism. The policy framework in this field did not entirely reflect community needs. For example, the involvement of community representatives including the Islamic Community is limited. This report aims to provide concrete suggestions for reducing the potential for violent extremism. The key findings are summarized below:

- Kosovo has adopted a sound policy framework in the field. Its implementation has been challenged as a result of limited capacities and the absence of community involvement;

- Kosovo has adopted a law banning its citizens from joining foreign conflicts. This law has produced some positive outcomes in the short term;

- The first local referral mechanism has been introduced in the municipality of Gjilan. This referral mechanism is made up by Ministry of Interior Affairs in Kosovo and is composed local governance structures, civil society and Islamic community representatives aiming to contribute to preventing violent extremism in this municipality;

- The Kosovo Government has started to design two reintegration and de-radicalization programmes aiming to integrate former foreign fighters and their family members into society. These two programmes are expected to start implementation in the first half of 2017;

- There is an overall attempt from the donor community to be involved in the process of prevention and de-radicalization. Results

can only be achieved when local ownership is fully ensured and the international community stays in the "back seat";

- Overall, there is a limited understanding of violent extremism among institutions, particularly at a local level. The Kosovo Police and Ministry of Internal Affairs are the best-informed institutions. There is also ongoing community confusion in handling religion-based extremism as a new type of violent extremism;

- There is poor inter-institutional cooperation in the field of countering violent extremism;

- Civil society is barely involved. The role of the Islamic Community continues to be undermined. Increased involvement of the Islamic Community and communities in general is essential to national endeavors;

- Lack of opportunities and jobs for the youth in the three selected municipalities (and other municipalities) have created the unintended consequence of youth being recruited into extremist ideologies and participation in foreign conflicts in Syria and Iraq;

- The poor educational system and lack of extra-curricular activities also creates space for recruiters to pursue their agendas. The absence of critical thinking within the public school system creates space for individuals and groups with violent ideologies to manipulate the youth. Often, their "methodology" appears much more attractive than some conventional teachers;

- The isolation of Kosovars and ongoing visa regime by the European Union presents an overall obstacle for the youth. This allows youth to travel with no visa requirements to the Middle East and Turkey, often ending up in Islamic schools with the most conservative thinking.

1. Introduction

1.1. Context of increased extremism in Kosovo

The doctrinal shift from classical anti-terrorism measures into countering violent extremism is gradually being embraced among the policy actors in Kosovo. To recap, this conceptual shift was introduced at the Obama Summit on Countering Violent Extremism in 2015, which Kosovo also took part in. The Summit concluded that coercive means and typical anti-terrorism measures are among many tools to

counter the rise of extremism and terrorism around the globe.[1] This rather implies a holistic approach to preventing widespread extremism through the increasing role of civil society and moderate religious leaders. This approach by no means excludes the role of law

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1   For more details, please see: The White House, Office of the Press Secretary (2/2015) Remarks by the President at the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism. Link: https://obamawhitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/19/remarks-president-summit-countering-violent-extremism-february-19-2015

enforcement agencies. Instead, it emphasizes the state of readiness when observing individuals who may consider the use of force as a means of reaching certain political or ideological goals. This holistic approach to prevention – usually centered on the notions of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) or Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) – is being recognized in the legal and policy framework of Kosovo.

While there is a broader reference to violent extremism which includes any kind of extremism leading to terrorism, the main societal and security concerns Kosovo faces relate to extremism derived from groups basing their ideology on Islam or misusing religion. The traditional practice of Islam in Kosovo is based largely on the Hanafi School of Thought. This has been hampered in recent years by a new wave of individuals, some who have come with the practicing conservative Islam in one hand, and others who go beyond the conservatives and use violence as a mean to reach their goals. This has fragmented the Kosovan practitioners of Islam, which despite being nominally Sunni, have never felt any hostility towards other denominations of Islam, namely the Shia and Alawite communities; an experience considered destructive and long lasting among the Muslim communities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.[2] Kosovo was no exception in being used as a recruiting zone for rebel groups in Syria, and as a result some of them have finished in the violent extremism groups such as ISIS. Estimates suggest that around 317 citizens from Kosovo joined rebel groups and extremist organizations from mid-2012 until September 2016.[3] As of October 2016, there are between 60-70 Kosovars still involved in the Syrian conflict; around 55 are reported to have been killed. The rest are reported to have returned to Kosovo or have fled to Turkey as well as other countries.In November 2016, the Kosovo Police arrested 19 Kosovan citizens, suspected of organizing terrorist attacks on state institutions in Kosovo and region. This action was carried outin coordination with law enforcement agencies in Albania and Macedonia.

While this Needs Assessment cannot find a direct association (or 'correlation') between existing violent extremists and conservative practitioners of Islam in Kosovo, we argue that the failure to properly handle non-traditional conservative practitioners and their stigmatization will contribute to further extremism. This report draws a clear distinction between jihadists and their supporters on one hand, and conservative practitioners of Islam. While the first group poses a security challenge to Kosovo's national security, the second group may pose a challenge for secular order as long as part of them continue advocating for potential hate speech at the expense of the mainstream rule of law. Furthermore, the presence of Islamophobia in some societal circles will continue to stigmatize part of the Islamic Community (more fundamentals) in Kosovo and will complicate national efforts to prevent the further spread of extremism and radicalization. The instruments for these two categories should be different and specifically targeted.

1.2. Community involvement as precondition for successful prevention

The lack of broader consultation with communities and religious institutions in community level during the drafting of a prevention strategy is consistent with a "ticking the box" approached adopted by successive governments in Kosovo. Since the end of the conflict, they have had to deliver policy documents based on external demands from the international community rather than on local needs. For example, the adoption of the Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism[4] was a pressing issue in 2015 because the Government had to report on the completion of the policy framework to the international community at the expense of broader consultation with communities. Indeed, increased extremism and radicalization is one of the main security challenges (after corruption and political disputes). However, the over-prioritization of PVE should not obscure other important security challenges.

As the findings of the assessment will show, the tools to prevent

further extremism should be seen from a developmental perspective. The causes of extremism, albeit individually driven, are rooted in a set of social problems such as lack of perspective, unemployment, isolation, lack of opportunities for the youth, loss of hope and poor education. As such, broader governmental and international community assistance should be tailored to identifying general social needs and making direct contributions to long-term investments, refraining therefore from short-term interventions and the requests for quick results. These investments would not entirely eliminate violent extremism because individuals will still be prone to recruitment through social media globally. Nevertheless, these investments will lead to a significant decrease of the potential for recruitment in a small country such as Kosovo, with a population under 2 million and an easily accessible territory. Potential work through, for example, classical seminars or presentations from international experts should be kept at a minimum simply because they will marginally contribute to PVE efforts. The international donor community, when willing to provide funding for de-radicalization programs or projects, should refrain from taking the lead since such attempts will more often result in failure to achieve the main purposes of such projects.[5]

Our previous findings have directed our assessment to two different areas in Kosovo, the region of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit as well as the Mitrovica region. The decision to focus on two separate regions relates to the increased concentration of radical elements and the number of foreign fighters they provided. Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit represent two separate locations (municipalities) which are nevertheless related as they neighbour each other and display similar of radicalization. The roots of radicalization in these areas are found to originate from neighbouring Macedonia, due to family and friendship ties with fellows in the northern and western part of Macedonia. These two municipalities are considered to be the first zones penetrated by radical imams originating from Skopje.[6] The Mitrovica region has been selected as a region which, despite having no direct links with Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit, contains a number of individuals who have been either subject to violent extremism or promoted very conservative Islam views.

1.3. Methodology

We applied a wide variety of data collection techniques to complete this needs assessment. These techniques include both qualitative and quantitative methods as well as previous experience and research reports from KCSS. As a result, the findings have been carefully triangulated. Most of the data collected has been referenced throughout the text. The exception is some interviews which required no citation or where the team was obliged to respect confidentiality. Some of the findings reflect information provided by certain key informants that are not cited or referenced. The data collection methods are listed below:

- The KCSS team analysed the existing legal and policy framework in the broader field of violent extremism and radicalization. The team also drew on a limited number of other policy documents and reports in the field.;

- The research team conducted 37 face-to-face interviews with a wide variety of stakeholders. Of the total number, there were 17 face-to-face interviews with different stakeholders based in Kaçanik/Hani i Elezit and Mitrovica, Gjilan, Prishtina, Mitrovica, Gjilan, Peja and Prizren. The interviews included a broad spectrum of community actors such as religious leaders, village representatives, and municipality officers (including mayors and social workers, municipality officials) as well as police officers. There were seven interviews with former foreign fighters and their family members who fled to Syria or Iraq, as well as 13 face-to-face interviews with central government officials in Prishtina, Kosovo Police and Prosecution;

- We conducted a survey across the entire territory of the Republic of Kosovo, and the special focus was in the three regions, based on the specific KCSS Kosovo Security Barometer (KSB)

2   Qehaja, Florian (2016):"Beyond Gornje, Maoce and Osve: Radicalisation in the Western Balkans". In Varvelli,Arturo (edit.).Jihadists Hotbeds:Understanding Local RadicalisationProcesses, pp. 75

3   Kursani, Shpend (2015): "Report Inquiring into Causes and Consequences of Kosovo Citizens Involvement as Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq", Prishtina, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) pp.15

4   For more details on Kosovo Strategy, please see: Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Kosovo (9/2015). Strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism 2015-2020. Link: http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/STRATEGY_parandalim_-_ENG.pdf

5   Kursani, Shpend (2015): "Report Inquiring into Causes and Consequences of Kosovo Citizens Involvement as Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq", Prishtina, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) pp.15

6   Qehaja, Florian (2016): "Beyond Gornje, Maoce and Osve: "Radicalisation in the Western Balkans". In Varvelli, Arturo (edit.): Jihadists Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalisation Processes, pp.75-93.

programme. The survey included 1100 households. We designed up to 10 questions[7] which were used for the sole purpose of this needs assessment, with an increased representative sample in the three municipalities.

- Due to the sensitive nature of many of the topics discussed, some interviewees requested their identities to be kept anonymous; they are identified in this report by their initials.

- The report reflects (previous) findings from two KCSS pilot projects in area. The first one is "A tale of two cities – Radicalism and

7   The questions used in the survey are listed in Annex I of this needs assessment.

counter-narratives in Mitrovica and Vushtrri". The second is "Increasing the role of communities against the spread of violent extremism in Kaçanik". Both projects were successfully implemented during the period April 2015 – February 2016. Experience and data gathered during the project implementation completed the efforts to finalise the needs assessment;

- The needs assessment relied on the KCSS reports as well as individual contributions in the field such as "Report inquiring into causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq" (2015); "The citizen's view against radicalism and violent extremism" (2016) and "Beyond Gornje, Mao e and Ošve: Radicalisation in the Western Balkans" (2016).

2. Legal and policy documents

In 2015 Kosovo adopted Law No. 05/L -002 on Prohibition of Joining the Armed Conflicts outside state territory[8], a significant step in the efforts to prevent Kosovars from joining extremist groups and foreign fighters from operating in Kosovo. The law aimed to fill a gap in the existing Criminal Code in which joining a foreign conflict did not constitute a criminal offence. This was problematic because, as the principles of criminal law clearly state, no citizen can be punished unless there is a clear provision making a particular action illegal. This new law technically considered the dilemma of making it a criminal offence to join foreign armed conflicts. The Kosovo Security Council (KSC) as a coordination body for supervision of the implementation of strategy is reviewing action plan of the strategy on prevention of CVE.

Kosovo also adopted a new legal and policy framework responding to the new challenges of violent extremism. In 2015, the National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism Leading to Terrorism (hereinafter: Strategy) was adopted. It serves as a sound base for implementing a wide variety of activities in different economic, social, political, and educational fields. Nevertheless, the document was drafted and adopted under pressing deadlines; hence the lack of broader consultation with communities. As explained earlier, this might result in potential difficulties with implementation and fit with community needs. In November 2016, the group for supervision[9] of the implementation of the Strategy held a meeting in Peja to measure implementation of the strategy, and to review the action plan. The group discussed the main challenges for implementation of the strategy. These included the lack of inter-institutional cooperation in the process of implementation, as well as the limited financial resources to implement the objectives of the strategy.[10]

2.1. Existing legal framework

The issues of terrorism, radicalization and violent extremism are mainly treated within the framework of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo (hereinafter: the Code). The Code is very detailed and strict when it comes to sanctioning crucial aspects related to terrorism, including recruitment, financing, assisting and promotion of religiously or ethnically motivated intolerance.[11] The code has

been modified twice since the end of the Kosovo war, while in the past there were provisions covering issues of terrorism through the Criminal Code of the former SFR Yugoslavia. Hence, Kosovo has a track record of experience in dealing with terrorism, at least from the legal perspective. The experience however, of penalizing acts of violent extremism, radicalization and hate speech is very limited.

One key section of the Code relating to this report is Chapter XIV. It contains sanctions for criminal offenses against constitutional order and security (Criminal Code, Chapter XIV). This also includes provisions related to terrorism. This part of the Code is very detailed. It lists all criminal offenses which may directly or indirectly relate to terrorism activities. These include: commission of a terrorist act (Article 136), assistance in the commission of a terrorist act (Article 137), providing facilitation (Article 138), recruitment for terrorism (Article 139), providing training for terrorism (Article 140), indictment to commit a terrorist offense (Article 141), failure to report terrorists (Article 142), participation in a terrorist group (Article 143), and preparation of terrorist offences (Article 144).

The punishments detailed in the Code for terrorism are indeed severe. The most punitive are those relating to the commissioning of terrorism. The capital punishment applied in Kosovo is life-long imprisonment. The penalties for assisting, facilitating, recruiting, training, and failure to report terrorists or their groups vary from 5 to 15 years' imprisonment. For the incitement to commit a terrorist offense, the punishment envisaged by the Code is relatively low; from 1 year to 5 years' imprisonment.

On the other hand, as there was no explicit provision in the Code for sanctioning individuals carrying out military activities in foreign conflicts, including assistance or affiliation, there was a need to adopt a specific Law on Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory (hereinafter: Law).[12] This law was adopted on the 12th of March, 2015 and it is a key piece of legislation, at least nominally, marking an important step in the overall efforts to ban citizen's involvement in terrorist groups. The Law itself serves as an annex of Criminal Code and Criminal Procedural code. The Law explicitly states that:

Whoever organizes, recruits, leads or trains persons or groups of persons with the aim of joining or participating in a foreign army or police, in foreign paramilitary or para-police formations, in organised groups or individually, in any form of armed conflicts outside the territory of the Republic of Kosovo, shall be sentenced to imprisonment from five (5) to fifteen (15) years. (Article 3)

Any finding demonstrating Kosovo citizens' physical presence in conflict-affiliated zones shall serve as sufficient proof for the judicial institutions. This law had an immediate impact in decreasing Kosovo citizens' involvement in foreign conflicts.[13]

Another piece of legislation in this domain is also the Law on Prevention and Combating of Money Laundry and Financing of Terrorism which was adopted in 2010, and was under the review process

8   Law No. 05/L -002 on Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory, Assembly of Kosovo, 12 March 2015, https://www.mpb-ks.org/repository/docs/LAW_NO._05_L__002_ON_PROHIBITION_OF_JOINING_THE_ARMED_CONFLICTS_OUTSIDE_STATE_TERRITORYEMLJE.pdf

9   The supervision group is mandated to coordinate and supervise the implementation of national strategy on preventing violent extremism and radicalization. This group was established in 2015. The group is composed of representatives of the Kosovo Government, the Office of the Prime Minister, religious representatives, civil society organizations, law enforcement agencies, justice institutions, state security authorities, the Kosovo Assembly and other stakeholders which are directly engaged in the implementation of the strategy on prevention of CVE.

10   Data is drawn from the meeting for reviewing of the strategy on prevention of CVE (5-6 November 2016). The KCSS Team is an active member of the working group.

11   Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo, Assembly of Kosovo, 22 June 2012, entered in force, 01 January 2013, http://www.assembly-kosova.org/common/docs/ligjet/Criminal%20Code.pdf

12   Law No. 05/L -002 on Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory, Assembly of Kosovo, 12 March 2015, https://www.mpb-ks.org/repository/docs/LAW_NO._05_L__002_ON_PROHIBITION_OF_JOINING_THE_ARMED_CONFLICTS_OUTSIDE_STATE_TERRITORYEMLJE.pdf

13   For more details, please see: Bekim Bislimi (8/2016). Brenda një viti asnjë rast i shkuarjes së kosovarëve në luftërat e huaja, Radio Evropa e Lire Hyseni. Link: http://www.evropaelire.org/a/27943061.html

in 2016.[14] This law was very vague and unable to track suspected money transfers affiliated with violent extremist groups. This led to its amendment in 2013, while additional changes were expected to further strengthen the accountability of banks and other financial institutions in regards to tracking down suspicious local and international transfers.[15]

2.2. Existing policy framework

Kosovo has gained solid experience in developing policy documents. There was no strategy directly tackling the broader issues of violent extremism, due to the observation of the matter through the narrow optic of counter-terrorism. As a result, Kosovo, as with most countries in Europe, is marking a conceptual shift from narrow counter-terrorism activities into countering violent extremism. The first Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Kosovo was adopted in 2009.[16] This strategy came as an attempt of the Kosovo Government to follow in the footsteps of other Western Balkan countries regarding the visa liberalisation process with the EU. The strategy covered the period 2009-2012 and can be credited for being the first strategic document of this nature which constituted the basic strategic foundation of Kosovo institutions in the field. While the Government did not perceive terrorism as an imminent threat to Kosovo, it only scarcely referred to the threat deriving from violent extremism. In June 2012, the strategy was renewed by the Government of Kosovo (GoK) covering the period of 2012-2017, though it does not differ substantially from previous versions.[17]

The need to adopt a new strategy which specifically tackles prevention and combating violent extremism in Kosovo from a broader perspective has become indispensable. As a result, the process of drafting the new Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and

Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism (2015-2020) was concluded in September 2015.[18] Content-wise the strategy defines three main sources of violent extremism in Kosovo: nationalism-based extremism, religiously-motivated extremism and politically-motivated extremisms.[19] The strategy divides these threats into those derived from within Kosovo and those derived from outside of the country. Among the threats which the strategy identifies are the potential activities of Serbian nationalist groups in the northern part of Kosovo, and the fact that a number of Kosovo citizens have joined religiously-motivated terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria.[20] The strategy also highlights that threats of a similar nature may come also from neighbouring countries, considering that not all countries in the region are undertaking the necessary measures to prevent and combat potential violent extremist groups within their territory.[21]

Religiously-motivated extremism takes central place in the strategy, despite noting high levels of religious tolerance in Kosovo. The document lists key factors leading towards violent extremism such as pull factors (lack of perspective), push factors (ideology), economic and social factors and low institutional capacity and integrity.[22] Hence, in order to prevent these factors contributing to radicalization of individuals, the strategy identified the following key strategic objectives: early identification of the causes, factors and target groups; prevention of violent extremism and radicalization; intervention with the aim of mitigating the risk of violent radicalization; de-radicalization and reintegration of radicalized persons.[23] Each of these objectives has been further broken down into comprehensive measures and concrete programmes.

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14 Law No. 03/L-196 on the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing, Assembly of Kosovo, 30th September 2010

15 Law No. 04/L-178 on Amending and Supplementing the Law No. 03/L-196 on the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing, Assembly of Kosovo, 11 February 2013

16 Republic of Kosovo National Strategy Against Terrorism (2009-2012), Government of Kosovo, June 2009

17 Republic of Kosovo National Strategy Against Terrorism (2012-2017), Government of Kosovo, June 2012

18 Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism (2015-2020), Government of Kosovo, September 2015, http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/STRATEGY_ON_PREVENTION_OF_VIOLENT_EXTREMISM_AND_RADICALISATION_LEADING_TO_TERRORISM_2015-2020.pdf

19 Ibid, Page 12

20 Ibid, Page 10

21 Ibid, Page 11,

22 Ibid, Page 13, 14,

23 Ibid, Page 18

3. Mapping of actors in charge of prevention and countering extremism

In addition to its legal and policy framework, Kosovo has statutory institutions in charge of prevention and countering of extremism. The government introduced a working group (political and technical) for the supervision of the implementation of the national strategy on countering violent extremism and radicalization. At a local level, new mechanisms have been established to improve coordination and cooperation between state authorities. Local and central levels now work together in the process of tackling violent extremism. The following list of stakeholders reflects the holistic involvement of various actors.

3.1. Assembly of Kosovo

The Assembly of Kosovo (AoK) is a directly elected institution in Kosovo. The role of AoK is to review and adopt draft legislation initiated by the government. In addition to that, another important responsibility of the Assembly is to oversee the implementation of legislation as well as of the strategic documents produced by the executive. The 13 functional and permanent committees exercise an oversight function.

With respect to Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), the AoK has been declaratively supportive rather than proactive. While some proactive involvement was shown through the adoption of the Law,

it was nevertheless passive with respect to overseeing the implementation of the Strategy. The Oversight Committee on Internal Affairs, Security and Supervision of the Kosovo Security Force and the Oversight Committee on the Supervision of the Kosovo Intelligence Agency have proved to be highly inactive when it comes to monitoring the activities of the Kosovo Government in the field. The lack of proactivity was a result of the political impasse created in recent months due to tense relations between the parties in power and opposition parties.

3.2. President of the Republic of Kosovo

According to the Constitution of Kosovo, the President is the head of state and represents the unity of the people of the Republic of Kosovo.[24] On paper, the President represents Kosovo, internally and externally, and also is entitled to sign international agreements in accordance with the Constitution.[25] With respect to CVE, the role of the President is dependent on the internal and external image that the elected president has.

The former President, Mrs Atifete Jahjaga, who led Kosovo from

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24 Constitution of Republic of Kosovo, Article 83.

25 Ibid, Art. 84.

2011 to April 2016, played an important role in ensuring international support for CVE in Kosovo. More precisely, she managed to become a very popular figure especially among the most important international stakeholders which continually support Kosovo's state-building. These include the United States (US), the European Union (EU) and other actors aligned as part of the campaign against violent extremism.

3.3. Kosovo Security Council (KSC)

The Kosovo Security Council (KSC) is a consultative body which gathers together the main security-related representatives of Kosovo. The KSC is chaired by the Prime Minister of Kosovo except in a State of Emergency, when the President takes over the chairing role. The KSC is responsible for providing information and analyses on the security situation in Kosovo to the Kosovo Government and other institutions. The KSC is responsible for the coordination of the implementation of the national strategy on the prevention of violent extremism in Kosovo.

The Secretariat of the KSC is harmonising all the activities of state institutions regarding the prevention of violent extremism. The KSC has organized meetings with local mayors to present the national strategy and to inform them about the role of municipalities in implementing the strategy.[26] It has produced a yearly report on the implementation of the state strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo. In November 2016, the KSC organised a workshop in Peja by gathering all relevant state and non-governmental stakeholders. The aim was to review the action plan of the strategy and discussing the next steps with respect to further coordination of the relevant stakeholders and implementation of the strategy.[27]

3.4. Government of Kosovo

The Government of Kosovo (GoK) is the most important institution when it comes to ensuring the implementation of state policies and legislation. Recalling the need for a holistic approach to CVE, there is a broader spectrum of involvement from different ministries and agencies of the Kosovo Government, including municipalities. Nevertheless, as also defined by the Strategy, not all its ministries have an equal role in implementing the legislation and other strategic policies in this area.

The following governmental bodies and agencies are in charge of CVE:

Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)
The OPM has a primary role when it comes to implementation of all state policies in Kosovo. In other words, the OPM is a leading mechanism in the process of drafting national strategy. It is responsible for supervising the progress made, in close cooperation with KSC. It serves as a focal point in discussions with international actors. The key actor within the OPM is the National Security Advisor of the Prime Minister. The Security Advisor of the Prime Minister is also the state coordinator for supervising the strategy.

Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA)
The MoIA plays an important role when it comes to ensuring safety and security for all citizens of Kosovo. The MoIA is mandated to advance legislation and the policy framework in the field of security issues. Even before the National CVE Strategy was adopted in September 2015, MoIA set up its informal CVE working group, made up of 25 members from key departments of MoIA, Kosovo Police, and the international community as observers.

The MoIA have organized workshops and roundtables at the local and central level for raising awareness among citizens and local authorities regarding the risks and threats of violent extremism. During 2016, the Minister of Internal Affairs was reported to have organised up to 34 roundtable discussion with local safety municipal councils as well as mayors of Kosovo's municipalities.

The MoIA has also taken the initiative for establishment of the Referral Mechanism of Gjilane for dealing with the issues of violent extremism and radicalization. Referral Mechanism is inter-institutional mechanism, which aims to early identification of individuals at risk or vulnerable for radicalization and violent extremism, while preventing this way further radicalization of individuals in our society. Referral Mechanism members are mainly representatives of the local level who have contacts with the community. All members will contribute and act based on their legal responsibilities. The mechanism is still in its infancy and its results will be seen in the coming years. The MoIA has also done a research with five municipalities of Kosovo to measure citizen perceptions in dealing with violent extremism with the support of UNDP Kosovo and it has also organized a training "train of trainers program" for persons who are dealing with CVE issues.

Ministry of Justice (MoJ)
The role of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) should be viewed from the perspective of the role of the Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS), which falls under the remit of the MoJ. The primary role of the MoJ is to assure Kosovan citizens that the judicial system in Kosovo does not have a retributive purpose. Instead, through the KCS, the role of the justice system in Kosovo is to rehabilitate and reintegrate all individuals who commit crimes, including those related to violent extremism. This Ministry has primary responsibility for implementation of re-integration and de-radicalization programmes, particularly within the KCS. Implementation of two programmes on re-integration and de-radicalization is expected to start in 2017.

Kosovo Correctional Services (KCS)
The KCS represents the third most important link in the judicial system, which is to reintegrate individuals who committed crimes or have been sentenced following a ruling by the courts. Prisons are often an ideal place for radical preachers and recruiters to recruit new individuals who are in search of a new life and personality outside prisons. Therefore, in countries such as Kosovo where there are limited institutional reintegration programmes taking place in Correctional Services; there is a high likelihood of the radicalization of inmates. Indeed, this assessment identified potential for radicalization in the Kosovo prisons. There was reported on the media that within Kosovo's correctional services, so called imams which are arrested and other returned foreign fighters are spreading the extremist ideologies to the other prisoners, and are radicalizing other prisoners.[28]

Therefore, significant investment in the KCS reintegration programmes needs to take place, focusing in particular on vulnerable and radicalized individuals. In addition to that, this institution needs to be more transparent to the public about the reintegration measures that it has undertaken. With the support of the US embassy in Kosovo, a needs assessment is being undertaken in order to provide suggested next steps in KCS. The ICITAP is engaged with de-radicalization programmes within the correctional system in Kosovo. They do risk assessment to the prisoners which are subject of violent extremism, and based on the result of the risk assessment they categorise the prisoners in the level of the risk such as: low or high risk level.

Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW)
Unemployment as well as a lack of institutional care has very often been pointed out as the triggers bringing Kosovan youth closer to violent extremism. Therefore, the role of the MLSW in the prevention of CVE is of crucial importance. The MLSW also offers programmes aiming to prepare unemployed citizens for the labour market. These programmes, however, have been viewed as very superficial and not transparent, resulting in a continuing mistrust of citizens towards the MLSW.

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST)
Despite a long-term reform process, the results of improving the Kosovan education system have been very limited. In general, the education system in Kosovo is considered to be corrupt and politicised.[29] Limited efforts have been made to ensure that education in Kosovo is provided based on critical thinking at any of the education levels. A quality education is a key component in preventing violent extremism, and thus the role of the MEST is crucial. For instance, the MEST is responsible for the implementation of 40 percent of the activities of the Strategy, but there is no budget line or financial means to ensure implementation of its activities.

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26 Interview with Kujtim Bytyqi, senior analyst in the Kosovo Security Council, September 2016

27 Ibid

28 For more details, see: http://zeri.info/aktuale/99706/kosova-ne-rrezik-po-shperndahet-radikalizmi-neper-burgje/

29 Report of levizja "FOL" Prishtina 2016. http://ask.rks-gov.net/media/1684/rezultatet-e-anketes-se-fuqise-punetore-2015-ne-kosove.pdf

Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS)

The investment of Kosovo in youth over the past 15 years has been very limited, despite an average of 75 percent of the Kosovan population being under 30 years old. A high level of unemployment and also very limited cultural and sports facilities are considered to be important in preventing them from violent extremism and radicalization.[30] In order to contribute to prevention efforts, the role of MCYS should be considered crucial.

3.5. Security institutions

Kosovo Police (KP)

The KP is the only institution retaining the legal responsibility to provide safety and security for all citizens of Kosovo and to ensure the rule of law in the entire territory of Kosovo. The KP is a well-structured institution with a special department for anti-terrorism. It is the only institution in Kosovo retaining solid capacity to deal with issues related to terrorism. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the KP is the most active and most successful institution in the field, not only in Kosovo, but also in the region. The KP appear to be very active in investigating and arresting many citizens who have participated in foreign conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and also others who have recruited, financed, and supported the ideologies of the extremist organisations in Kosovo. Kosovo Police in close cooperation with Kosovo Intelligence Agency have played an important role in detecting and preventing the terrorist attack against the Israeli national soccer team, in November 2016.

Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA)

The role of the KIA is to collect information and to disseminate it to the GoK and security institutions. The agency does not have any executive responsibility, meaning that it cannot enforce its activities. However, the prioritisation of CVE has made this institution focus its capacities on collecting information that identifies any activity that might be detrimental to the national security of Kosovo.

3.6. Justice system

State Prosecutor (SP)

The SP represents the main connection between the security and justice institutions. Despite numerous criticisms on its shortcomings vis-à-vis fighting organised crime and corruption, when it comes to CVE, the efforts of the State Prosecutor appear to be satisfactory. It has shown commitment in prioritising cases related to countering violent extremism. The phenomenon of violent extremism is relatively new, however, the prosecutor needs to increase training and find new means to investigate cases in the field.

Judges and courts

Just like the State Prosecutor, Judges and courts represent another important chain in the judicial process in Kosovo. When it comes to criminal justice, the role of judges is to analyse evidence provided by prosecution and to provide verdicts about those cases. Similar to the SP, the greatest challenge in the field of CVE is the lack of experience.

3.7. Municipalities

Kosovo has 40 municipalities, some of which have been affected by extremist ideology. According to the national strategy on CVE, municipalities should play an important role in preventing violent extremism. These include: improving the education system at the local level, increasing social welfare for families affected by violent extremism and foreign fighters, increasing sport facilities for youth citizens at the local level, and increasing cooperation with the Kosovo Islamic Association (BIK) and central government regarding CVE. Currently, municipalities lack funds and human resources (professionals) to prepare plans to address the challenges of CVE. However, some municipalities suffer from a lack of functional institutions; their representatives also lack awareness of how to deal with these issues.

On the other hand, it is promising that all municipalities in Koso-

vo expressed their willingness to cooperate with any NGO or organisation willing to contribute in the field of CVE. Most of them provided their consent to undertake extra-curricular activities and community-based projects, with the aim of preventing the potential spread of extremist ideologies.

3.8. Ombudsperson

The office of Ombudsperson is an important institution whose role is to ensure that state institutions do not breach the rights of the citizens. The role of Ombudsperson is expected to be established, with the aim of protecting the rights of individuals whose rights have been abused by the law enforcement institutions. Its role will be crucial if the suspected extremists or their families are prevented from access to social benefits, because denial of benefits may further instigate radicalisation. There is no specific role of ombudsperson regarding CVE issues in Kosovo, but the Ombudsperson may have a role, for example in visiting former, imprisoned foreign fighters.

3.9. Local non-governmental actors

Kosovo Islamic Association (BIK)

The BIK is the main institution representing the Muslim community in Kosovo. Currently, the BIK is registered only as an NGO and its mandate is not regulated by Kosovan law. The BIK has over 600 mosques under its control and over 600 imams in its supervision across the entire territory of Kosovo. The BIK also controls a large amount of funds, derived from its membership payments. Recently, it has started to be more proactive in condemning and warning about hate speech delivered in some mosques or by some high-profile imams. The involvement of the BIK in all activities aiming to prevent extremism and de-radicalize individuals is essential.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

NGOs are also one of the most important stakeholders in awareness raising, de-radicalization and prevention of violent extremism. Among the most active NGOs in this area is the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS). There are some limited contributions by other NGOs such as: Partners Kosova, Youth Council in Kosovo Municipalities and a few small NGOs from Gjakova, Center for Research of Security Policies, Koha Vision, Foltash and Balkan Research Group. These are all funded by the US Embassy through grant monitoring of KCSS.

Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS)

The KCSS is the leading non-governmental organization and think tank in Kosovo and the first NGO to start tackling the issue of violent extremism in Kosovo. The KCSS has provided a tangible contribution in awareness-raising and prevention of violent extremism. It has established a specific programme to conduct research, work on awareness-raising and advocate in the field. It produced a flagship study "Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo's citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq" in 2015.[31] This report contributed substantially to identifying key issues and providing a better understanding of the problem.

The KCSS has been intensively engaged in organizing various workshops, roundtables and discussions with the majority of local and central stakeholders in Kosovo. It has also conducted numerous activities with high school students and marginalised communities. As of October 2016, it is implementing two projects in this area: Countering Violent Extremism in Kosovo, which is funded by the US State Department and covers activities in 11 municipalities; and the Engagement of Citizens in the Prevention of Violent Extremism funded by the Balkan Trust for Democracy (BTD), which covers de-radicalization activities in three additional municipalities.

Partners Kosova

Partners Kosova has organized conferences in Prishtina on the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo. With the support of the US embassy in Kosovo, Partners Kosova has also organised events and debates with the students in the municipalities of

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30 Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, Kosovar Center for Security Studies, May 2015 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Report_inquiring_into_the_causes_and_consequences_of_Kosovo_citizens%27_involvement_as_foreign_fighters_in_Syria_and_Iraq_307708.pdf

31 Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, Kosovar Center for Security Studies, May 2015 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Report_inquiring_into_the_causes_and_consequences_of_Kosovo_citizens%27_involvement_as_foreign_fighters_in_Syria_and_Iraq_307708.pdf

Vushtrri, Ferizaj and Gjilan. Partners Kosova are implementing two other small projects on countering violent extremism, both supported by the US Embassy in Kosovo.

Institute for Security and Integration (INSIG)

The INSIG is established by former foreign fighters returning to Kosovo, led by Albert Berisha. The aim of this institute is to work on preventing violent extremism and radicalization among Kosovo's youth, as well as working in the deradicalization of Kosovo's returned foreign fighters. This institute was established in September 2016. Apart from some presence in the media, they have not implemented any projects in the field.

Other organisations that have contributed to this work include Youth Councils in Kosovo Municipalities and a few NGO's from Gjakova. The youth councils in Kosovo's municipalities have not yet organized any project or activities on countering violent extremism (CVE) and radicalization. They usually support NGO's and local authorities in organizing meetings and conferences on CVE. For example, Gjakova Youth Council organized a debate with youth from this municipality. The debate focused on the risks and threats derived from violent extremists. The debate was facilitated by KCSS researchers. A former foreign fighter also gave a talk about his experience in participating in the conflict in Syria and Iraq. This event was organized in May 2016.[32]

Media

The media in general

The media in Kosovo includes public national television channels, radio and online portals financed by the state. It also includes private media and pan-national media broadcast from other countries. These are predominantly in Albanian, Serbian, Turkish and English. In particular, the most important ones are those from Albania transmitting their content in the Albanian language, reaching an audience of more than seven million individuals.

The public broadcaster RTK, KTV and KLAN Kosova organize debates on the topic of preventing violent extremism by inviting experts including imams to discuss how the state and society can prevent this phenomenon. The most notable TV shows are "Udheve" (RTK), "Zona Express" (Gazeta Express), "Zona e Debatit" (Klan Kosova), and "Rubikon" (KTV).

On some occasions, the media has been accused of spoiling the debate on the phenomenon of violent extremism in Kosovo. This was mainly a result of the lack of understanding by some members of the media of the real drivers of radicalization. In particular, labelling conservative Muslim believers with extremism and terrorist views was very common among some media outlets.

Foltash.com

This is a portal established in 2015 aiming to counter and prevent violent extremism. They produce religious news and arguments to condemn ISIS and other extremist groups' ideologies and propaganda. Their contribution is particularly notable with respect to creating counter-narratives and news productions which are increasingly disseminated.

3.10. International actors and donors

US Embassy in Kosovo

Since 2014, when the number of foreign fighters from Kosovo joining conflicts in Syria and Iraq became alarming, the US Embassy appeared to be the most proactive supporting actor in Kosovo. The Embassy financially supported KCSS's efforts in drafting the report on Kosovo's foreign fighters, which was the first of its kind drafted in South East Europe. It also helped Kosovo state institutions to draft the Law on Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflicts outside State Territory and the Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism (2015–2020) by involving various experienced experts in this area. Further support continued in 2016, when the main focus of the US Embassy was to help Kosovo institutions to develop their capacities in implementation. This has been done through engaging prestigious institutes specializing in the area of CVE, such as Hedayah from the United Arab Emirates and the U.S. Institute for Peace. It also provided funding for different NGOs and

32 Debate organized in Gjakova, in coordination between Gjakova Youth Council and Kosovar Center for Security Studies. May 2016

media outlets in Kosovo who are actively engaged in the area of CVE. Indeed, part of this funding has been provided directly by US State Department, while the Embassy served as a technical facilitator of those funds. The aim of those funds is to organize various deradicalization activities and campaigns at the central and local level in Kosovo to improve social cohesion in Kosovo and decrease the risk of violent extremism. US state department is supporting KCSS in implementing of the project "Countering violent extremism in Kosovo" which covered 11 municipalities of Kosovo.

The European Union (EU) Office in Kosovo

So far, the engagement of the EU Office in Kosovo in the area of CVE has been limited. It has provided some very small tenders to some local NGOs to engage in what they call 'pilot projects' in deradicalization at the local level. In 2015, the EU Office provided a small fund to KCSS for this purpose.

OSCE Mission in Kosovo

The OSCE is an active international actor on CVE and has already established an "OSCE United in CVE Programme" in Kosovo. So far, the OSCE has been engaged in organizing debates and roundtables with communities and officials on CVE issues. It has organised training events for the purpose of implementing CVE strategy. In October 2016, in conjunction with MoIA, it organised an international conference on CVE bringing international and regional experts to Prishtina.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

The UNDP supports the state authorities in the implementation of the national strategy. It also organises training events for law enforcement agencies, or support state initiatives on research on CVE topics. Its contribution in the field is expected to increase with potential funds coming from donors. In November 2016 the UNDP, in cooperation with the US embassy in Kosovo and the Kosovo Government, signed a cooperation agreement for conducting a needs and threat assessment of the returned foreign fighters in Kosovo.

As a United Nations agency, UNWOMEN is intending to organize some activities in Kosovo on CVE and women's participation in foreign conflicts. There is still no concrete initiative to date.

International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP)

ICITAP is helping to strengthen the rule of law in Kosovo and build the capacity of Kosovo's law enforcement, judicial, prosecutorial, and correctional institutions to effectively combat organized crime, human trafficking, public corruption, terrorism, and countering radicalization in prisons and promoting the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremism offenders.

The ICITAP program in Kosovo is funded by the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. In addition, ICITAP coordinates with EUCOM in funding counterterrorism and counter narcotics. In June 2016, ICITAP conducted an assessment of the Kosovo Correctional Service's (KCS) ability to prevent radicalization and rehabilitate and reintegrate CT/FTF prisoners. Findings show a need to build KCS's ability to properly manage violent extremist offenders; improve the information sharing between KCS and KP regarding FTF (Foreign Terrorist Fighter) prisoner management; and train the KCS staff. As a result, in 2016, ICITAP had launched its Countering Radicalization in Prisons program.

Other international donors

There are various donors located in Kosovo or abroad who have expressed the willingness to support Kosovo's civil society efforts in the area of CVE and deradicalization. Usually, these are mainly small donations between 5,000 euros to 20,000 euros. This includes embassies of countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden, UK, Canada, etc. It also includes other donors which are located in Kosovo such as the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS), Fredric Erbert Stifftung (FES), the Olof Palme International Centre, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the World Bank, UNDP Kosovo, USAID, and the Advocacy and Training Resources Centre (ATRC).

Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF)

The largest international donor is expected to be the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF). The GCERF is a new global public-private partnership organisation which was established in 2015. In total, the GCERF already oversees 15 million

USD committed funds, which are going to be distributed among the following beneficiary countries: Bangladesh, Kenya, Kosovo, Mali, Myanmar, and Nigeria.33 In 2016, there was a 2 million USD bid

call for Kosovo NGOs who are going to serve as Primary Grantees. The role of the GCERF is expected to be more visible in 2017 when the grants are disbursed and its funds start to make a practical difference in the field.

33 For more details, see the GCERF webpage: http://www.gcerf.org/

4. Community approaches to CVE – Lessons from Kaçanik, Hani i Elezit and Mitrovica

Increased violent extremism remains one of the key societal and security problems for the communities of Ka anik, Hani I Elezit and Mitrovica. It is indeed considered one of the most challenging issues because violent extremism appears to be completely new for Kosovo's citizens. As one of the key informants explained, "Society for decades has been prepared for how to deal with other security challenges such as Serbia, poverty and unemployment. No one expected that the externally driven ideologies of Islamic extremism would be present to an extent that it may be detrimental for communities, especially practitioners of Islam."[34] The phenomenon is equally new to Kosovar institutions, because both central and local institutions lack experience in dealing holistically with the issues of extremism. These institutions, while in their infancy vis-à-vis combating extremism, need to overwhelmingly rely on cooperation with communities.

In a recent survey, 70 percent of respondents believe that violent extremism is a high national security threat. 14 percent of respondents believed violent extremism to be an average threat to national security. Only 15 percent of the citizens interviewed assessed violent extremism as a low threat towards national security. This shows that challenges stemming from violent extremism represent a priority for the citizens.
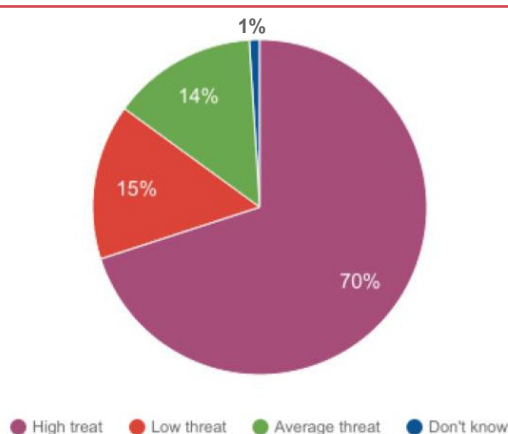

Figure 1. What is the level of threat from violent extremism?

In fact, the needs assessment reveals that there are neither jihadi hotbeds[35] nor typical conservative Islamic hotbeds in Kosovo. One cannot find any community which has been entirely affected by the extremist ideology; rather there are certain individuals spread around different locations who are not accepted by their families and community members. These are defined as lower concentration locations, implying a county or region having conservative Islamic individuals living among traditional practitioners or secular groups.[36]

The three selected municipalities are among the poorest municipalities in Kosovo, situated in the south-eastern region (Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit) bordering with Macedonia, and in the northern part of Kosovo (Mitrovica). The three municipalities are geographically lo-

cated in the Kosovo valley. Practicing extremist ideology in the three municipalities has not been that common in mosques, but rather in private locations, often gathering in private houses.[37] These private premises were even named as 'illegal mosques' by the ICK therefore challenging the authority of the Islamic Community of Kosovo. In fact, the individuals belonging to the violent extremism or Takfiri ideology are also found in other neighbourhoods of Kosovo such as Gjilan, Ferizaj, Prishtina as well as municipalities in the Dukagjini and Drenica regions. It is just that in these three municipalities, the individuals concerned are more organized and rather vocal.

A high number of foreign fighters that have joined rebel and violent extremist groups in Syria and Iraq are from the three municipalities.[38] For example, Kaçanik is home to the former leader of the Albanian foreign fighters in ISIS, Lavdrim Muhaxheri, who has appeared several times on social networks killing young civilians. Additionally, some individuals from these locations emerged to become the key organisers of the violent protests in Prishtina,[39] including an assault on an event which promoted a magazine for the LGBT community.[40] There are few NGOs in Kaçanik who openly support extremist ideologies; most of those have been shut down in recent years (e.g. NGO "Islamic Youth" and NGO "Parimi" based in Kaçanik).

To recap, community involvement in countering violent extremism is vital; hence the role of community representatives from the three selected municipalities should be considered essential. One of the areas where communities should have a say relates to reintegration programmes. This is a highly sensitive topic in developing democracies.

The Kosovo Security Barometer 2016 data shows that citizens support the implementation of the reintegration programmes for Kosovo's returned foreign fighters who have participated in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Citizens were asked for their opinion regarding the measures which the state should undertake with returned foreign fighters in Kosovo. Around 54 percent of the citizens interviewed said that Kosovo's returned foreign fighters should go through rehabilitation and reintegration programmes before their reintegration into society. On the other hand, 24 percent of the respondents interviewed stated that Kosovo's returned foreign fighters should be arrested immediately, upon their return to Kosovo, due to the security threat which they may present for the state authorities and society. 16 percent of respondents said the state should prohibit the return of Kosovan citizens who have participated in conflicts in Syria and Iraq. There are reported cases where a number of Kosovo's foreign fighters who have participated in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, are staying illegally in Turkey, and do not want to return in Kosovo for fear of being arrested.[41]

KCSS measured citizen's readiness to receive former foreign fighters in the community as a part of the reintegration programmes which are going to be implemented in 2017. The findings show that

34   Informal interview with Kosovo stakeholder (September, 2016)

35   Hotbed: Entire or isolated community, which acts out violent extremism ideologies. That kind of cases are not present in Kosovo.

36   Qehaja, Florian (2016): "Beyond Gornje, Maoce and Osve: Radicalisation in the Western Balkans". In Varvelli, Arturo (edit.).Jihadists Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalisation Processes, pp. 78

37   Ibid, 86

38   Qehaja, Florian (2016): "Beyond Gornje, Maoce and Osve: Radicalisation in the Western Balkans". In Varvelli, Arturo (edit.).Jihadists Hotbeds:Understanding Local RadicalisationProcesses, pp. 77

39   Gj. Erebara, "Kosovo's New Cathedral Stirs Muslim Resentment", BIRN, October 4, 2010.

40   D. Demolli, "Attack on Kosovo 2.0 Widely Condemned", BIRN, December 17, 2012.

41   KCSS discussion with Kosovan foreign fighters via viber. Additional data from the International Seminar on Radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism held in Antalya, Turkey, from 2-4 December, 2016.
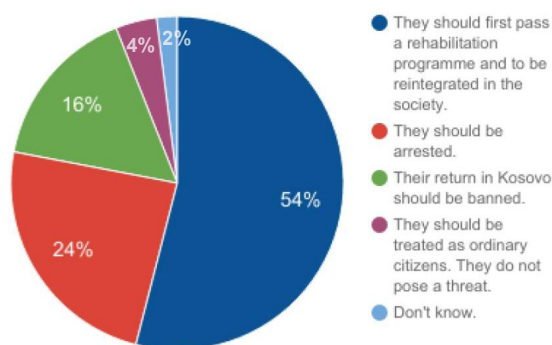
**Figure 2. What do you think about the return of Kosovo's foreign fighters?**

citizens are reluctant to receive Kosovan foreign fighters in their community, due to the high threat level perceived by the respondents. When citizens were asked to give their opinion regarding their readiness to receive former foreign fighters in their community, 58 percent of respondents said they would not feel safe living in the same community with former foreign fighters. On the other hand, 25 percent of the citizens interviewed said they would receive Kosovan foreign fighters in their community, only if they are under the supervision of Kosovo's security authorities. 15 percent of the citizens interviewed said they would receive former foreign fighters to live in the community, without any security concerns.

Based on these findings and citizens' perception, almost half of the respondents interviewed trust state security agencies such as the Kosovo Police and Kosovo Intelligence Agencies, and they are confident in their capacities to monitor and supervise returned foreign fighters. This is an indicator that the community and state security authorities are united in the same goal and there is a national willingness to counter extremism. Furthermore, according to the Kosovo Security Barometer survey (October 2016), more than 58 percent of the citizens interviewed said they trust the work of the Kosovo Police.[42]
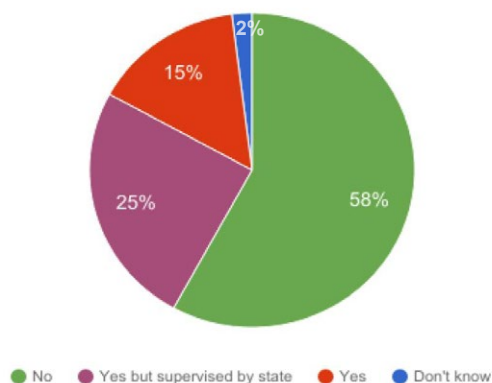
Figure 3. Would you receive former foreign fighters in your community?

Citizens were also asked about the level of threat caused by returned foreign fighters in Kosovo. Sixtyfour percent of respondents believed that returned foreign fighters in Kosovo are a direct threat towards national security and society, so they would prefer state institutions to have responsibility for the reintegration and deradicalization of these individuals. By contrast, 18 percent of the citizens said the returned foreign fighters somehow represent a threat to national security.
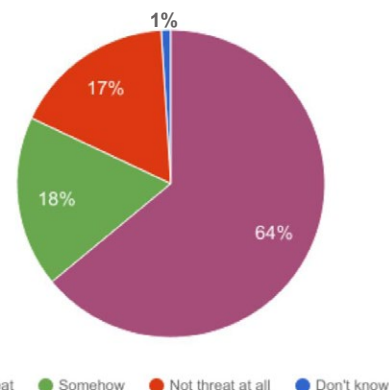
Figure 4. To what extent would you perceive the level of threat from former foreign fighters?

As part of our in-depth research, the assessment concluded that there are a number of prevailing issues at the community level which hamper overall efforts to prevent this phenomenon. The team has identified limited dialogue between state authorities and Islamic communities; limited opportunities for youth; a weak educational system; isolation; economic underdevelopment (unemployment) and community safety as key barriers to CVE.

4.1. The need to increase dialogue between state authorities and Islamic communities in Kosovo

Preventing and countering violent extremism requires joint initiatives by state institutions and civil society. Civil society should be viewed in a broader sense and not necessarily from the sole perspective of NGOs. In particular, a part of civil society is considered to be the Islamic community that has a crucial role in coping with this type of extremism. There is a need to increase the dialogue between Muslim believers, secular society, and state authorities in Kosovo, in order to harmonise ideas, activities and approaches. This includes better cooperation of activities to counter not only violent extremism, but also to increase tolerance among religious communities in general and increase tolerance within the Islamic Association of Kosovo in particular.

In general terms, dialogue between the Islamic community and state authorities is found to be lacking. This presents a missed opportunity to prevent and to counter extremist elements in the country. Examples of the lack of dialogue include debates around the construction of a large mosque on the centre of Prishtina or wearing the headscarf in public schools. These topics have been widely discussed in both in public debates as well as in the media. The main actors, such as Islamic practitioners, secular society, state institutions, and the media have struggled to find a balanced framework to discuss and resolve these issues. The needs assessment determines that there are different ways of understanding the phenomenon of violent extremism. While state authorities and secular society believe that it represents a serious challenge to national security, the Islamic community of Kosovo and Islamic practitioners believe that the problem is exaggerated.[43]

The Islamic community express their position through a set of roundtables and discussions in Prishtina and in other municipalities. While they continue contributing to the broader issues of the role of women in preventing violent extremism and radicalization, and community engagement in prevention of CVE,[44] they minimize the potential of violent extremists and believe their role is marginal among Islamic practitioners.

There are also internal clashes within the Kosovo Islamic association (BIK), between so-called 'moderate' imams mainly from the Hanafi School of Thought, and so-called 'conservative' imams. Both parties criticize each other for spreading the ideas of violent

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42 Kosovo Security Barometer edition 2016.

43 Data from the conference organized by KCSS in Mitrovica and Vushtrri.Mitrovica, October 2016http://lajmi.net/konference-per-ngritjen-e-vetedijes-tek-te-rinjte-kunder-ekstremizmit/>

44 For more details, see: http://www.qkss.org/sq/Lajme/Ekstremizmi-i-dhunshem-ne-Kosove-grate-pjesemarrese-apo-viktima-525

extremism and radicalization in Kosovo. These disagreements are continuing within the Islamic Association of Kosovo, (IAK) by indirectly hampering the BIK's activities in tackling violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo.[45] The practitioners are fragmented and this has an impact on the unity of the BIK.

The fact of having a predominantly secular society does not harm general efforts to spread learning about religion. Efforts should be made to facilitate inter-faith dialogue to increase awareness among citizens. This could help to avoid the 'traps' of recruiters and individuals, who are imposing their radicalized ideologies. Furthermore, intra-religious dialogue is equally important because the fragmentation of Islamic practitioners has tremendous implications for the BIK and this challenges the overall efforts to prevent further spread of extremism. These two types of dialogue can be facilitated by indigenous civil society representatives and local government officials by organizing roundtables with ICK.

4.2. Increasing opportunities for youth

The three municipalities previously reviewed are considered to be the most affected areas (though not the only ones) of violent extremism. The Kosovo Government has neglected these municipalities when it comes to direct investments in increasing opportunities, especially for the youth. In particular, youth lack cultural, educational, and sports facilities. Furthermore, there is no vocational training or extra-curricular activities in addition to the generic curricular system of education. Limited existing cultural, sports and educational activities have created a space for violent extremist organizations to spread their cause and violent ideologies, often as the only alternative in the 'town'.[46] Some of those young people ended up becoming active members of rebel groups and violent extremist organizations. By feeling isolated, neglected and not included in social and cultural activities, the youth often felt alienated and a minor part of society in these regions. The most vulnerable youth are those with the ambition and ego to achieve much more in their lives, far beyond what the community can offer. By being alienated by society and not engaged in cultural, sport and other social activities, youth very often have become engaged in the so-called religious and humanitarian organisations. Most of these have been recently shut down by state authorities, due to their involvement in financing, supporting and spreading extremist ideologies.[47]

Neglecting the youth caused unintended consequences which led to violent extremists organising training, lectures and discussions on topics related to Islam and Jihad. This provided some individuals with a false interpretation of Islam and led to some individuals travelling to Syria and Iraq as a part of terrorist organizations. The rest remained in Kosovo as passive supporters.[48] The religious communities in Kosovo, state authorities at the local central levels and the families of vulnerable youth are currently leaving a clear space for extremist organizations to further increase the radicalization of society. There is a need for a clear plan for coordination and harmonization of activities between all these actors (police, municipalities, MoIA, families, teachers, imams) to reduce the space for extremist organizations.

Such a consistent lack of attention to the youth by the governing institutions in Kosovo has apparently directed younger generations to be committed more to a religious cause and less to a national or state cause, compared to older generations.[49] Suddenly, the narrative of some individuals has reflected new topics such as hatred of Alawite communities, Jews and others that they call "unbelievers" – a narrative that has not existed in any period in the history of Kosovo,

including the period of occupation by the Ottoman Empire.

According to the findings of the barometer, 44 percent of respondents expressed the same degree of feelings for national and religious causes. This finding challenges the long-standing impression, that Kosovars share the idea of secular nationalism and an identity of 'Albanianism'. On the other hand, 34 percent of respondents said they feel more national than religious, or they will commit themselves more to a national than a religious cause. Up to 22 percent of respondents said they feel more religious than national, or they will commit more to a religious than a national cause.[50] This depicts fragmented society with different feelings towards the state, and national and religious causes.
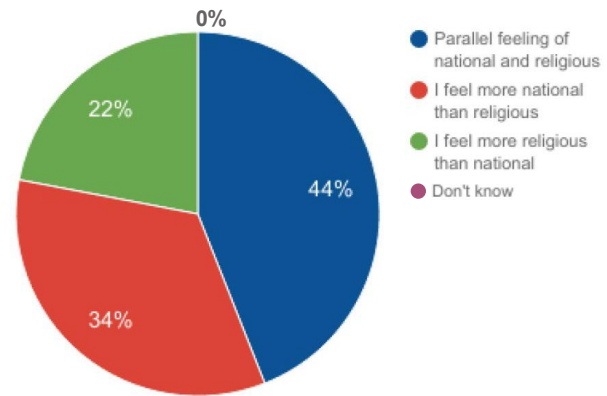

Figure 5. Do you feel more religious or national?

The increase in extremist religious narratives can be mitigated by national efforts to develop societal connections and strengthen secular institutions. More trust in the state and its institutions, as well as more opportunities for the youth would encourage them to follow paths which do not impact negatively on society, avoiding extremist religious ideologies. This is expected to be a long-term investment which can be successful only with substantial development of a secular society which puts the citizens' interests first while respecting individual's religious rights.

The youth, meaning men and women, need to feel optimistic. Society and the state authorities need to do their best to create opportunities for the youth in order to reduce and stop violent extremist organizations, and conservative religious movements from serving as the only alternative for Kosovars. The youth need to feel important and useful for society. Civil society organizations may also play an important role in this regard, by creating the space and opportunity for the young citizens to work as volunteers or carry out philanthropic activities which have a direct impact on community welfare.

Increasing cultural, sports, educational and environmental activities where the youth would have direct leadership and ownership would further increase the motivation of the youth to contribute to these fields in a way they can relate to. These are the kinds of activities which may be done without too much investment, but at the same time would make a significant contribution to the community.

4.3. Reforming the Education System in Kosovo

Tangible reforms in the education system and the increase of critical thinking among students have been documented by KCSS before.[51] There is a discrepancy between the education system in Kosovo and the market needs. Kosovo continues to be plagued by an education system that at all levels fails to address the pedagogic and skills training needs of its students and the economy.[52] The system is hampered by a lack of resources for the very high number of students in urban areas, which is a result of rapid rural-to-urban migration. There is inequitable access and there are vast disparities from school-to school

45   For more details, see: http://www.gazetaexpress.com/intervista/intervistehox-he-osman-musliu-kosoves-i-duhet-islami-tradicional-bik-i-kapur-nga-klanit-ter-nava-63933/?archive=1

46   Interview with the representative of the Kacanik Municipalities. October 2016

47   Interview with the anonymous former foreign fighters of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, September 2016.

48   Interview with anonymous person from Vitia, a former foreign fighter in Syria and Iraq, August 2016.Also, an interview with an anonymous foreign fighter from Kacanik.

49   Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, Kosovar Center for Security Studies, May 2015 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Report_inquiring_into_the_causes_and_consequences_of_Kosovo_citizens%27_involvement_as_foreign_fighters_in_Syria_and_Iraq_307708.pdf

50   Ibid

51   Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, Kosovar Center for Security Studies, May 2015

52   For more details, see: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1863/CDCS_Kosovo_2014_ALB.pdf

in terms of quality; a situation which is further exacerbated by poor completion rates among minorities. Despite recent gains, there is poor professional development for teachers, inadequate and out of date curricula, and a shortage of learning materials and equipment. There is a large number of university level staff in Kosovo; however, the quality of graduates is poor and out of synchronisation with workforce requirements. This, together with the slow growth of the private sector, results in low market absorption rates for graduates.

In addition, critical thinking is missing in the education curriculum in Kosovo at all levels of education. Old-fashioned pedagogical methods are largely used, such as requiring large amount of memorisation, and the ongoing presence of outdated 'ex-cathedra' methods make the system largely unattractive for the youth compared to what they can find on the internet. This approach means that online videos by those promoting extremist ideologies can be much more attractive than 20-30 hours of weekly school work. This indeed represents a crisis of the educational system.

Up to 40 percent of the Strategy activities belong to the Ministry of Education. For example, the Strategy envisages the employment of around 400 new psychologists in Kosovo's education system (primary and secondary schools). Furthermore, the engagement of psychologists in the education system in Kosovo may contribute directly to the development of the students and their personality. Most importantly, critical thinking should be part of the Kosovo primary and secondary education curriculum.[53] The implementation of these activities has not started due to budgetary constraints and the lack of funds allocated by the GoK to the Ministry of Education. This Ministry and the overall educational system is one of the most important actors in the long-term prevention of violent extremism.

Overall, there is a need for deep reform to the Kosovo education system, in accordance with the latest economic development trends and market needs, to reduce unemployment among the youth generation. Upcoming endeavours in reforming the education system should also consider the unintended consequences of having an unattractive educational system.

4.4. Isolation

Kosovo remains the only country in the Western Balkans which still has a visa regime for travel to EU member states. This partly prevents Kosovo citizens from experiencing the values and cultures of Europe. Kosovo citizens can move freely (without a visa) only in few Balkan countries and Turkey.

Another aspect that makes young people prone to violent extremism ideologies is family and community isolation. Such isolation usually begins when a young member of a secular family is guided towards and begins practicing Islam. When such young people from secular families begin practicing Islam, their parents usually try to convince them not to do so. The case of R.L. illustrates this. When he started to practice his religion in a more conservative way, he was immediately isolated by his friends, and by society. And due to the lack of support from friends, family and community he has fallen into following the Takfir ideology, which resulted in his participation in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.[54] Another example is the case of D.I., a young person, who began to practice a more conservative branch of religion; he was immediately isolated and lost the support of his community.[55] Poor family relations were also prevalent for the two young citizens who are believed to have been Takfir recruiters for ISIS in Kosovo.[56]

Overall, the national efforts to secure a visa free regime for Kosovar citizens will indirectly contribute to the prevention of extremism. By opening the borders to Europe, young people may have more opportunities to experience Europe and its self-proclaimed values of freedom, tolerance, non-discrimination, and respect for the rule of law. Some individuals may end up benefiting from scholarships and mobility, embracing the above values and adopting them into their context and culture. The end of isolation would weaken the narrative supplied by recruiters referring to the "deliberate injustice"

of Westerners towards Kosovo. In this way, extremist ideologies and the lifestyle they demand may seem less attractive than the opportunities in the West.

4.5. Economic underdevelopment and unemployment

Kosovo remains the poorest economy in the region, with high levels of poverty, high levels of corruption in the public sector and massive unemployment rates of up to 47.5 percent in 2008.[57] The country's Gross National Income (GNI) per capita is estimated at $3,970, ranked 93rd worldwide, and behind Macedonia, Albania, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.[58] The high unemployment rate among the youth, lack of trust by the youth in public state institutions, and the loss of hope in the country, has tempted Kosovo minors, including those from the three municipalities, to fall into radicalization and violent extremist ideologies.

In particular, the youth unemployment rate in Kosovo in general and in the municipalities of Mitrovica, Hani i Elezit, and Kaçanik is among the highest in Kosovo, estimated at more than 57 percent.[59] These areas have only a handful of companies employing a limited number of youth.

State authorities should ensure a larger presence and should direct potential foreign direct investment to these regions. For example, the municipalities of Mitrovica, Hani i Elezit and Kacanik have great potential in the agricultural sector, where potential investors could be directed. In 2016, the Municipality of Kaçanik awarded subventions to 16 companies in this region with the support of CARITAS Kosova.[60] This type of support, albeit limited, serves as a small step in the overall development and eases the efforts to prevent potential extremism.

Local municipalities and central government should analyze the opportunities to establish a symbolic fund for the municipalities of Mitrovica, Kaçani, Hani i Elezit, and also Gjilane, with a focus on providing support for the youth to open their own companies, based on the available resources. This initiative could also have a direct impact on reducing unemployment, following successful reintegration programmes of former combatants, in the post-conflict period.

4.6. Local governance and community safety

Each of the municipalities nominally established a local council for public safety, with the responsibility to identify potential risks and threats at the local level, including violent extremism and radicalization. The local Security Council is composed of the mayor of the municipality, police, religious representatives, media, civil society organizations, and citizens. The local Security Councils are not always operational and functional, and rarely discuss serious security threats such as violent extremism and radicalization. This finding shows that there is lack of coordination when it comes to the implementation of the national strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo. According to the national strategy, local institutions and municipalities have an important role in countering violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo, particularly with the early identification of elements of radicalization from different subjects. However, the majority of municipalities do not have clear information regarding the activities they have to undertake to implement the Strategy. The local Safety Councils do not only carry out the role of local governance structures, but also aim to represent communities and enhance local dialogue.

There is also a lack of cooperation between community and local institutions when it comes to inclusion of community or citizens in countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo. Respondents were asked how often they were invited by municipal authorities to discuss citizens' security concerns including the phenomena of violent extremism. The majority of the citizens interviewed (94 percent) said they were never invited by municipal authorities to discuss community concerns, issues related to security, or concerns about violent extremism.

53 Interview with Fatmir Haxholli, Political Advisor to the Minister of Labor and Welfare in Kosovo, 24 September 2016.

54 Interview with a relative of R.L., former foreign fighter, 2016

55 Interview with a relative of D.I., foreign fighter, on 25th September 2016

56 Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, Kosovar Center for Security Studies, May 2015
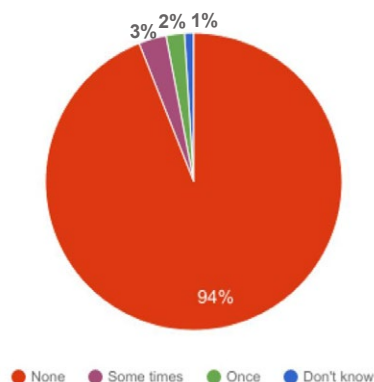
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60 Interview with Mr. BesimIlazi, Mayor of Kacanik, September 9th 2016.

3% 2% 1%
94%

● None ● Some times ● Once ● Don't know

Figure 6. How many times have you been invited by local authorities to discuss your security concerns?

There is a lack of coordination and discussions between local authorities and municipal representatives when it comes to issues on safety and security concerns. For example, the meetings of Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSC) are usually formal. Discussions remain only within the members of the council of the MSCS such as the mayor, commander of the police station etc. There is no concrete initiative from the municipal level to invite citizens to discuss their security and safety concerns, including challenges related to violent extremism.[61] Some municipalities do not accept the level of risk from violent extremism, seeing this phenomenon as acts by individuals who are isolated from the majority.[62] This attitude by local municipalities in general shows that they do not clearly understand the real risks and threat derived from violent extremism. This tendency to minimise the problem leads to justification of staying idle vis-à-vis preventing the spread of extremism. This approach partially echoes the position of central institutions, at least until 2014, which showed the reaction of the GoK to be quite late and caught the state unprepared.

In 2015 and 2016, the MoIA held meetings with the MCSC with majority municipalities in Kosovo. The purpose of these meetings was to inform members of the MCSC about their role in preventing extremism, and to further increase and harmonize activities in countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo. The meetings only involved representatives of the MCSC, while they failed to reach the affected communities and their families. The MCSC does represent an important mechanism at the local level, but they do not entirely represent the needs of communities. In addition, bearing in mind their limited performance capabilities, their knowledge of the community needs vis-à-vis violent extremism is poor.

The first concrete initiative to be established was the Referral Mechanism in Gjilan. Referral Mechanism is inter-institutional mechanism, which serves for early identification of individuals at risk or vulnerable, by radicalization and violent extremism while preventing this way further radicalization of individuals in Kosovo's society.

4.7. Fostering Reintegration and Improving Correctional Services

There are around 130 returned foreign fighters in Kosovo. They are subject to investigation by the law enforcement authorities, and most of them are awaiting final decisions about their status from Kosovo's courts. Out of the 130 (as of October 2016), 37 are already in prison, the others are under house arrest or other supervision measures. Punitive measures have not been followed by plans for supporting their reintegration. Kosovars have joined foreign conflicts in different waves so, in the eyes of some state institutions, the measures undertaken towards, for example, recent returnees are the same as for those that eventually went and escaped after a few days.

The majority of the returned foreign fighters in Kosovo are unemployed, and are living in poor economic circumstances. They find it almost impossible to find a job because they are largely known as "terrorists" by their community. In particular, private companies do not feel safe employing them. For instance, B.A. has applied more than 14 times for a workplace in different companies and institutions, but was not invited to one interview. There are some former foreign fighters who have deep regrets about their involvement in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and are ready to contribute to the reintegration process and preventing violent extremism in Kosovo. They participate in conferences and debates with citizens and students, explaining their terrible experience of their brief engagement in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.[63] State authorities and society in general should identify and actively encourage ways to engage former foreign fighters in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo.

The report demonstrates that Kosovo's returned fighters are dealing with many challenges including:

- Isolation by their families, society, the private sector and companies, and state authorities;

- Stigmatization by the community;

- Difficulties finding employment;

- Delays in court proceedings, long investigation procedures; and

- Bad living conditions.

A group of returned foreign fighters in Kosovo, led by Albert Berisha from Prishtina, has been increasing activities on raising awareness among citizens regarding the risks and threats of engagement in terrorist organizations.[64] They went further by registering an institute called "The Institute for Security and Integration". The Institute is registered at the Ministry for Public Administration, and has an office in the center of Prishtina. They are designing concrete plans and projects for preventing the further spread of radicalization.[65] They participated in an international conference on countering violent extremism in Prishtina, held on 26 October 2016, where they had the opportunity to explain their experiences of participating in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.[66]

While there have been a few attempts to manage reintegration into public life, there are huge challenges with respect to reintegration and rehabilitation in the Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS). The implementation of reintegration programs in the KCS is a big challenge for two reasons. Firstly, there is a lack of professionalism in managing prisons in Kosovo. Secondly, there is a lack of experience and expertise among KCS staff regarding implementation of reintegration and rehabilitation programmes. Over the course of the past three years, there has been a number of incidents in the KCS where procedures were disregarded in the service of informal power structures and political interests.

Prison and detention center conditions generally meet international standards, but significant problems persist in deficient physical facilities, prisoner-on-prisoner violence, corruption, and substandard medical care.[67] During 2014 and 2015, the KCS provided limited treatment and shelter for detained persons with mental disabilities. According to some reports, the physical and living conditions remained substandard in some facilities in the Dubrava Prison, which held the largest number of prisoners. The security of prisoners within the correctional service in Kosovo is also substandard, and the monitoring and control of the prisoners is lacking. In November 2016, a political activist of the 'Ventvendosnje!" movement, Astrit Dehari, was found dead in his room, in the correctional center in Prizren. This shows that the KCS lack the basic capacity to manage correctional services, and is an indicator of how this institution implements

61 Mr. RasimSelmanaj, Mayor of Decane municipality. Conference on CVE in Decane, October 2016.

62 Mr. RasimSelmanaj, Mayor of Decane municipality. Conference on CVE in Decane, October 2016.

63 Interview with L.K., former ISIS member, Prishtina, 20th October 2016.

64 Interview with the Albert Berisha, former foreign fighter, Prishtina, 10th October 2016.Interview with LiridonKabashi, former foreign fighter, Skenderaj, 16th October 2016.

65 For more details, see: http://kallxo.com/gjnk/kthyeri-nga-siria-ne-mision-kunder-radikalizmit-fetar/

66 For more details, see: <http://www.evropaelire.org/a/28074113.html>

67 Kosovo 2015 Human Rights report:<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/253075.pdf>

reintegration and rehabilitation programs.[68]

Until September 2016, there was no concrete initiative or action on reintegration and rehabilitation of the returned foreign fighters and their family members in Kosovo. As a result, there are radicalization movements within Kosovo's prisons led by imams who have been arrested by Kosovo Police for their engagement and affiliation with terrorist organizations in Kosovo.[69] According to a research article by Kosovo's news agency 'Indeks Online', there is information that imams who have been recruiting citizens for terrorist organizations are still spreading violent ideologies within the prison. Correctional services in Kosovo still do not have an answer on how to deal with this issue, due to neglecting the problem, and the limited number of professional staff trained in this area.

The KCS, while respecting human rights and the Conventions of the Council of Europe, should consider physical separation of radical imams from the rest of prisoners. This could support efforts to prevent the further spread of radicalization in prisons and also promote the successful outcome of rehabilitation programmes.

The ICITAP is engaged with deradicalization programmes within the correctional system in Kosovo. They do risk assessment to the prisoners which are subject of violent extremism, and based on the result of the risk assessment they categorise the prisoners in the level of the risk such as: low or high risk level.

4.8. Women and family inclusion

Out of the 317 people who left Kosovo to go to Iraq and Syria, 44 were women and 28 were children. Most of the women who migrated to Syria and Iraq accompanied their husbands and families. In general terms, the women and girls from Kosovo who have joined the foreign conflicts in Syria and Iraq can be characterized into two profiles: 1) Women and girls who have migrated alone to Syria and Iraq and 2) Women who have migrated together with their husbands. Many of them are leaving Kosovo with a hope for better living standards. For example, M.B. explained that when she and her husband moved to Syria and Iraq, her living and social conditions immedia-

tely rose as there was a functioning welfare system.[70]

There are a number of children and women who have returned from Syria and Iraq. These families are stigmatized by the community where they live, and are isolated by their community and society in general. The state authorities are barely aware of their socio-economic concerns. Except for the Kosovo Police and media, the state and municipal authorities have not organized any visit to the families of former foreign fighters to find out more about their basic concerns. These include safety and security concerns, economic and welfare issues, and reintegration of these families into the community and society. For instance, the mayor of Hani i Elezit told us that they have never organized any meetings with these families, to avoid interfering in the investigation process of the justice and law enforcement institutions.[71]

A similar phenomenon has also occurred in the municipality of Gjilane. Municipal authorities have not organized any visits to the families of the former foreign fighters. Related to this topic, the KCSS research team asked representatives from the anti-terrorism directorate if the visiting of the families of former foreign fighters may interfere in the investigation processes. According to them, if the visit is to assess the welfare conditions of these families, it does not interfere with the investigation process.[72] These findings show that there is a total lack of inter-institutional cooperation. There are gaps when it comes to coordination between law enforcement agencies, local authorities and central government regarding the prevention of violent extremism and deradicalization, implementing the strategy, and undertaking the reintegration and rehabilitation initiatives.

Civil society organizations such as KCSS and some local religious leaders have organized meetings with the families of the former foreign fighters, in order to understand the basic concerns of these families. The outcome of these meetings is being presented to the media and state authorities, but so far, the response of the institutions is almost non-existent.

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68 For more details, see: <http://klankosova.tv/ekskluzive-keshtu-u-gjet-ne-qe-line-e-tij-astrit-dehari-video/>

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70 Interview with B.M ., a wife of a foreign fighter returnee, who also participated in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, October 2016.

71 Interview with the mayor of Hani I Elezit, Mr. Rufki Suma, September 2016.

72 Data from the KCSS conference organized in the Municipality of Hani iElezit on January 2016 with the topic "Community engagement in countering and preventing of violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo" Contribution from representative of Kosovo Police – Anti terrorism department

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The rise of conservative and extremist forms of Islam poses a challenge to the secular order in Kosovo. Furthermore, it has attempted to fragment the Islamic community itself, by often considering traditional practitioners as unbelievers (Kufar). In particular, the 'mushrooming' of groups and organizations promoting extremism and hate speech went unnoticed for years. It was only in the last few years that governments in the region and citizens were made more aware of the risks stemming from these groups. The participation of a significant number of citizens from all regions in terrorist activities in Syria and Iraq came as shocking news for secular societies.

The political willingness among the elites to act, was not only driven by the aim of promoting secular order in Kosovo, but also due to the pressing agenda of countering violent extremism towards regional governments and, obviously, towards other regions in the world as well. The holistic approach to the prevention of violent extremism cannot be ensured by involvement of international consultants and activities, but only by engagement of local activists. Kosovo and its community have their own specificity and context that require the involvement of people speaking the language of the individuals subject to extremist ideology. The international community should refrain from repeating the mistakes of the past by attempting to invest in PVE by 'parachuting in' international staff into the affected community areas. Instead, the focus should be on preparing the government and civil society actors to approach PVE holistically to decrease the potential of further radicalization.

Recommendations:

1. The Government of Kosovo should increase financial support for local municipalities for the implementation of activities related to the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo, with the focus on the municipalities of Kacanik, Gjilan, Hani i Elezit, and Mitrovica.

2. The Government of Kosovo should increase the budget for the Ministry of Education for implementation of the activities detailed in the strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo.

3. There is a need for better coordination between institutions (ministries) regarding the implementations of the national strategy on preventing of violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo.

4. There is a need for better coordination of the law enforcement authorities such as the Kosovo Police, prosecution and courts, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

5. Municipalities and the Kosovo Government should organize more meetings with the families of the former foreign fighters in order to have a clearer picture of their situation and con-

cerns such as security concerns, their social welfare, and other challenges which they may have in their reintegration process.

6. The Kosovo Government should urgently start designing and implementing reintegration and rehabilitation programmes within the Kosovo Correctional Service to prevent further radicalization of former foreign fighters and other prisoners. These initiatives should be undertaken with the support of international organizations and experts which have experience in implementing reintegration and rehabilitation programmes.

7. The Ministry of Justice should organize specific training for the staff of the Kosovo Correctional Service on better understanding the phenomena of countering violent extremism and radicalization, and managing the prisoners with terrorist backgrounds.

8. There is a need for operationalization of the local security and safety mechanisms at the local level, which may have a direct impact on preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo.

9. Kosovan Municipalities, with the focus on the municipalities of Kacanik, Hani i Elezit, Gjilane, and Mitrovica should organize debates and discussions with their citizens on security-related topics, such as violent extremism and radicalization, and explaining to the citizens the risks and threats of this phenomenon. Talking directly to citizens may have a more direct impact on preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo.

10. Prospective donor investments should ensure local ownership in the process of prevention. It is essential that the international community is coordinated and that the eventual increased contributions do not overlap.

11. Civil society in Kosovo should increase cooperation and should harmonize ideas and activities on the ground when it comes to the implementations of projects on countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo. There are cases when the activities of several NGOs overlap in the same municipalities.

12. The Civil Society Organizations should ensure that discussions with youth are facilitated by professionals and experts with a deep knowledge of CVE.

13. The Kosovo Islamic Association (BIK) should immediately try to solve its internal disputes and diminish fragmentation between factions. A single voice from the BIK is essential in its efforts to prevent violent extremism.

14. Civil Society, the Kosovo Government, local municipalities, primary and secondary schools and other institutions in Kosovo should support and motivate children, students and youth in general by organizing volunteer work and activities such as environmental, educational, philanthropic and sports activities.

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Annex I: List of Questions

1. When you talk about extremism, can you tell us what you mean (would mean) with extremism?

2. Are you aware of the existence of a national strategy against violent extremism (and its action plan)?

3. Are your institutions (ministry, school, municipality, religious institution) implementing activities on preventing violent extremism?

4. Has your institution allocated budget specifically for this? Implementation of the strategy?

5. Have you or your institution had contact (municipality / police / school etc?) With any returned foreign fighters, or any family members?

6. In general, do you think there is a danger or risk that may be of those who return from Syria?

7. Did your institution have organized any visits to former foreign fighters or their families to understand more about their concerns such as: social welfare, education issues etc? If yes, what was the result? If not, why did have not organized any visits yet?

8. What are the drivers of radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo?

9. Why you (returned FF) decided to participate in conflict in Syria and Iraq?

10. Why you (returned FF) have decided to return in Kosovo from the conflict?

11. What kind of threat do you think, can cause from the presence of foreign fighters in Kosovo?

12. How do you assess the activities of Kosovo authorities on countering and preventing of violent extremism?

13. Did the local authorities have invited you to discuss about security concerns, including the phenomena of violent extremism and radicalization?

14. What is your opinion regarding safety and security environment in Kosovo? IS Kosovo a safe place?

15. Are you and your community ready to receive former foreign fighters to live in your community?

16. What do you think, what are the best measures which state authorities should undertake for countering and preventing of violent extremism?

17. What do you think, which are the Kosovo's main challenges for implementation of the reintegration and rehabilitation programmes?

18. What are the main challenges of Kosovo's states authorities when it comes to the implementation of the national strategy on prevention of violent extremism?

The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers brings together actors to provide global support for grassroots to international peace and peacebuilding efforts. The aim of the Network is to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of peace focused efforts through collaboratively supporting and strengthening the positive role of religious and traditional actors in peace and peacebuilding processes.

www.peacemakersnetwork.org

Finn Church Aid is the largest Finnish development cooperation organisation and the second largest provider of humanitarian aid. FCA operates in over 20 countries, where the need is most dire. FCA works with the poorest people, regardless of their religious beliefs, ethnic background or political convictions. FCA's work is based on rights, which means that FCA's operations are guided by equality, non-discrimination and responsibility.

www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/en

KCSS is a non-governmental and non-profit organization established with the aim to develop research in the security sector and to strengthen the principles of democratic oversight of security institutions in the Republic of Kosovo. KCSS organizes professional conferences and seminars in the field of security policy, rule of law, justice, and provides training for certain groups in monitoring the security sector and justice.

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