

# An Unholy Alliance of Muslim Extremists and Organized Crime in the Balkans

## Case Studies: Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia Herzegovina

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MA Counter-Terrorism Candidate IDC, Herzliya, Israel/Researcher

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## Summary:

The 1990s wars in Yugoslavia led to the disintegration of the country and ushered an era of poverty, political corruption, organized crime and terrorism. The Balkans became synonymous with the syndrome of a failed state, where civil society institutions are doomed to fail. The area has presented the international community with some unique challenges associated with unemployment, jihadism, crime and all those maladies under the wings of political leaderships that have given many reasons to the international community to doubt their credibility and their belief to the rule of law. This study will prove that a nexus exists between Islamic and ethno-nationalist terrorism and illegal criminal activities, and it will focus mainly in three countries: Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia Herzegovina.

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# An Unholy Alliance of Muslim Extremists and Organized Crime in the Balkans

## Case Studies: Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia Herzegovina

### INTRODUCTION

The 1990s wars in Yugoslavia led to the disintegration of the country and ushered an era of poverty, political corruption, organized crime and terrorism. The Balkans became synonymous with the syndrome of a failed state, where civil society institutions are doomed to fail. The area has presented the international community with some unique challenges associated with unemployment, jihadism, crime and all those maladies under the wings of political leaderships that have given many reasons to the international community to doubt their credibility and their belief to the rule of law. This study will prove that a nexus exists between Islamic and ethno-nationalist terrorism and illegal criminal activities, and it will focus mainly in three countries: Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia Herzegovina. \*

## The Yugoslav Wars and their aftermath

The fall of the Soviet Union and the Yugoslav Wars of 1990s hastened the break-up of the once mighty Yugoslavia, along ethnic and religious lines, and ushered an era of regional instability, political corruption, criminal activity, terrorism, and a newly found cooperation between Islamic terrorists and criminals, or terrorists with a national ethnic agenda and criminals. It is due to these factors the Balkans are considered to be a "safe haven" for a bundle of war profiteers, career criminals and Islamic fundamentalists due to the weak governmental structures and deteriorating economies"<sup>2</sup>. At approximately the same time as the break-up of Yugoslavia came also the collapse of the communist regimes in the Balkans and the ensuing break-up of the law and order system, criminal outfits appeared in the country, many times with the cooperation and involvement of public officials who were residing at the highest levels of government and led by a weak and politically corrupt leadership. These weak and corrupted state structures, encouraged the creation of a nexus composed by drug traffickers, arms traders, human traffickers, "but also established significant relationships with terrorist organizations, as they had done in the past with the Kurdish PKK or al-Qaeda"<sup>3</sup>.

A prime example of the cooperation between terrorism and crime is the case of the involvement of the Albanian mafia and its entanglement with the Kosovo Liberation Army, a guerilla force, which fought the Serbian Army, and was financed by the Albanian mafia in diaspora in Europe and elsewhere. Xavier Raufer, a leading French criminologist "considers the Albanians as the only true Mafia in the Balkans, due to the peculiar social structure of their society in the northern parts of the country ("The land of Genghis"<sup>4</sup>, as he calls it). In November 2016, the FYR of Macedonia coordinated with regional partners in Albania and Kosovo to arrest 23 suspected terrorists who

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<sup>2</sup> Matras, B. (2018, January 29). Organized Crime, Terrorism and Modern Corruption: How Organized Crime Can Be a Risk to National Security? Case study: The Balkans. Retrieved from [http://ecips.eu/Case\\_study/Organized%20Crime%2C%20Terrorism%20and%20%20Modern%20Corruption.pdf](http://ecips.eu/Case_study/Organized%20Crime%2C%20Terrorism%20and%20%20Modern%20Corruption.pdf). This article analyzes the implications of organized crime in the Balkans, along with suggestions of how to deal with that scourge. Combining organized crime with Muslim extremism poses serious threats to the national security and no one jurisdiction or country can combat it on its own, thus, effective and continued national and international cooperation is critical.

<sup>3</sup> Spahiou, E. (2015, December 2). Militant Islamists, Organized Crime and the Balkan Diaspora in Europe. Retrieved from [https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TerrorismMonitorVol13Issue23\\_01.pdf?x87069](https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TerrorismMonitorVol13Issue23_01.pdf?x87069) The author in this article refers to the influence the extremist Muslims play in the Balkans, and the difficulties the leadership of these countries is facing in dealing with this phenomenon, due to corruption and their limited capacity in conducting investigations, thus relying more in more in foreign intelligence.

<sup>4</sup> Michaletos, I. (2007, September 16). THE ALBANIAN ORGANIZED CRIME: EMERGENCE OF A DYNAMIC ORGANIZED CRIME NETWORK ACROSS THE EURO-LAND. Retrieved from <http://rieas.gr/researchareas/2014-07-30-08-58-27/balkan-studies-5/400-the-albanian-organized-crime> This article refers to the security dangers faced by the contemporary Balkans and Europe from the emerging nexus of crime-terrorism and the need for the international security agencies and political apparatuses to address collectively the problem.

were planning a terrorist attack on a large stadium in Albania during a World Cup qualifying soccer match between Albania and Israel".<sup>5</sup>



*Fig 1. Yugoslavia prior to break-up Fig.2 Yugoslavia after Break-up*

Another offshoot of the Yugoslavian break-up is the country of BiH. Squeezed between Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro, and without any access to any body of water, it became the poster child of the Muslim Ummah being besieged by the Orthodox Christian Serbs. The war in Bosnia opened the doors to the mullahs and to radical elements from Muslim countries, particularly Iran, to provide support to BiH President Aliya Izetbegovic, a militant devout Muslim, by supplying arms and Iranian fighters for the war with Yugoslavia.<sup>6</sup> Izetbegovic's close associates went to Iran to attend anniversary celebrations in January 1982, honoring the establishment of the Islamic Republic. With Izetbegovic opening to worldwide jihad in BiH, and with his close connections to Iran, it is no wonder why Iranian agents had established a presence in the Balkans so effectively. But jihadism, political corruption, criminal activity did not happen overnight. It was a process that had been accelerated by Tito's death on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1980. For a long period after WWII and prior to his death Tito was able to impose a kind of leadership that was anchored on two poles: "assured economic security and political status for minorities at multiple levels of the state's federation"<sup>7</sup>, and at the

<sup>5</sup> US Embassy in Macedonia, (2016). Country Reports on Terrorism 2016. Retrieved from <https://mk.usembassy.gov/country-reports-terrorism-2016/> US Embassy report dealing with the efforts and the results by the FYROM authorities in counter-terrorism operations.

<sup>6</sup> Bardos, G. (2013, January/February). Iran in the Balkans: A History and a Forecast. Retrieved from [http://www.cbrne-terrorism-newsletter.com/resources/2013\\_2%20Editors%20Corner.pdf](http://www.cbrne-terrorism-newsletter.com/resources/2013_2%20Editors%20Corner.pdf) This article presents a detail account of the penetration Iran has been able to achieve in the Balkans, and how Alija Izetbekovic helped Iran achieve such a role in the Balkans.

<sup>7</sup> Fearon, D.J. (1999, September 5). THE WORLD / YUGOSLAVIA: Was Tito's Way the Best to Keep Peace? Retrieved from <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/sep/05/opinion/op-7006>. In this LA Times, Professor Fearon, makes an extensive

same time any dissenting opinions were suppressed and controlled by the fearsome secret police, which was extremely brutal in the punishment and “disappearance” of the enemies of the state.

According to research done by the Knight Foundation, a special commission on secret graves which was set up in 2010 to find and document those killed by Josip Broz Tito's reviled secret military police, has unearthed 190 mass graves at 23 sites across Serbia to date. It reported that at least 22,000 people were executed, most without trials in the brutal post World War II years”<sup>8</sup>. With cajoling, economic incentives and sheer terror Tito was able to keep in line this mosaic of ethnicities and religions in his Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. A monumental characteristic of this mosaic was the split of the population into three dominant faiths: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Muslims. It is paramount to better understand the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s and the legacy they bequeathed in that part of Europe, to fully comprehend the issue of religion and its identification with related ethnic groups as part and parcel of their national identity. This rather significant characteristic will play an important role in the break-up of Yugoslavia and it will be germane to the reasons leading to the war, during the war, and fundamental to the events leading to radicalization of the area that still exists today. According to research done by Dr. Petko Hristoff, of the Bulgarian Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies, “The Balkans became a border area of contact, related to conflicts, but also to intensive mutual cultural influence, of Catholicism (in Slovenia and Croatia), Orthodox Christianity (in Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, FYR of Macedonia and Romania) and Islam (in Albania, Turkey, BiH, and parts of Bulgaria, FYR of Macedonia and Serbia)”<sup>9</sup>. These religious ideological differences were expressed along with the ethnic groups representing them, therefore national identity for the most part was synonymous with the faith of a particular group.

After Tito's death, relations among the republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were getting progressively worse. The country was being faced with worsening economic conditions amidst a rising religious nationalism amongst its various ethnic groups. At the last 14th Extraordinary Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in January 1990, the Serbian-dominated assembly agreed to abolish the single-party system; however, Slobodan Milosevic, the head of the Serbian Party branch (League of Communists of Serbia) used his influence to block and vote-down all other proposals from the Croatian and Slovene party delegates. As it became

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analysis of how Tito was able to preserve the peace in Yugoslavia, and how, this complex set of negotiations with the different minorities, came apart after Tito's death

<sup>8</sup> McQueeney Mitric, J. and Padejski D. (2011, June 8). From Ruins of War, A Nation's History Preserved. Retrieved from <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/ruins-war-nations-history-preserved>. The analysis presented deals with the unknown crimes committed by Tito's UDBA (Uprava Drzavne Bezbednosti or State Security Administration), where hope is that modern technology will be able to reveal the horrific past.

<sup>9</sup> Hristoff, P. (2015). Balkans – History, Traditions and Modern Dimensions. The Case of Bulgaria. Retrieved from [http://cra-bg.org/sites/cra-bg.org/files/uploads/files/presentations/balkan\\_diversity\\_-\\_petko\\_hristov\\_-\\_2015.pdf](http://cra-bg.org/sites/cra-bg.org/files/uploads/files/presentations/balkan_diversity_-_petko_hristov_-_2015.pdf) Dr. Hristoff in this article analyzes the countries that comprise the Balkan Peninsula from the geographic, historical, political and cultural point of view. The territory of the Balkans is almost the size of France.



apparent that there was no solution agreeable to all parties, Slovenia and Croatia desired more autonomy while Serbia desired an augmented federal role, Slovenia and Croatia moved toward secession and they left the session as the Serbian view of a bigger federal role for the state gained in support.<sup>10</sup> War was approaching rather rapidly, and events started unfolding rapidly as well. Slovenia was the first to secede, followed by Serbians who wanted to secede from Croatia!<sup>11</sup> The Serb-dominated Yugoslav army (JNA) lashed out, first in Slovenia and then in Croatia. Thousands were killed in the latter conflict which was paused in 1992 under a UN-monitored ceasefire, resulting in the Dayton Agreement in November 1995.<sup>12</sup> The Dayton Agreement didn't mark the end of hostilities in former Yugoslavia, as BiH following the example of Slovenia and Croatia, declaring its own independence. The JNA withdrew its units from Croatia, was renamed the Serbian Bosnian Army and attacked Croatian and Bosnian positions, while besieging the capital Sarajevo, a siege that lasted four years.

This war counted about 100,000 dead and ended after NATO bombed Serbian positions around the besieged city of Sarajevo<sup>13</sup>, leading to a US brokered peace agreement that divided BiH "into two self-governing entities, a Bosnian Serb republic and a Muslim-Croat federation lightly bound by a central government".<sup>14</sup> The unfolding events in Slovenia, Croatia and BiH had awakened up ethnic and religious emotions throughout Yugoslavia. The ink from the Dayton Agreement Accord had not even dried when Serbia found itself fighting a Kosovo insurgency. Kosovo's relations with Serbia have always been characterized by ethnic tensions. "Kosovo was part of Serbia and then

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<sup>10</sup>European Parliament TV. (2011, July 19). History: The Yugoslav Wars. Retrieved from <https://www.europarl.tv.europa.eu/programme/others/history-the-yugoslav-wars> Haanes Svoboda, of the Progressive European Socialist Party, an Austrian politician and Jelco Kasin, a Slovenian politician, and former member of the European Parliament describe in an interview their experiences about the wars culminating in the breakout of Yugoslavia, and the ensuing negotiations that resulted in the Dayton Agreement of November 1995, that ended the war in the Balkans..

<sup>11</sup> Doder, D. (2011, June 26). Two Rebel Yugoslav Republics Secede Croatia And Slovenia Defy Belgrade. Retrieve from [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-06-26/news/9102260502\\_1\\_croatian-parliament-croatia-and-slovenia-largest-republic](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-06-26/news/9102260502_1_croatian-parliament-croatia-and-slovenia-largest-republic) This Chicago Tribune article, describes the dramatic declaration of independence, by Slovenia and Croatia, the challenges these two new republics were going to face, and how these declarations of independence, marked the end of Yugoslavia as we knew it.

<sup>12</sup> OSCE. (1995, December 14). Dayton Peace Agreement. Retrieved from <https://www.osce.org/bih/126173>. This article describes the articles of the Dayton Peace Agreement that put an end to the 3 ½ years of long Bosnian War.

<sup>13</sup> Global Security. (2011, May 7). Operation Deliberate Force. Retrieved from [https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/deliberate\\_force.htm](https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/deliberate_force.htm) This article describes the air power used by NATO against the Serbs, in an operation called Operation Deliberate Force, the number of sorties in this operation (3,515), and the impressive results in defeating an opponent just by air power alone.

<sup>14</sup> BBC News. (2016, March 18). Balkans war: a brief guide. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17632399> This BBC report presents a very brief History of Yugoslavia from its inception after WW II until its dissolution, with the independence proclamations by Slovenia, Croatia, BH and finally the 1999 brutal war between Serbia and Kosovo, in which Serbia found itself beaten, exhausted and isolated.

the Ottoman Empire until the 20th century. When the Ottomans were defeated in 1913, it was incorporated into the Kingdom of Serbia. The Republic of Kosovo was established in 1990".<sup>15</sup> After the Serbs revoked the independence status of Kosovo in 1989, the Kosovars in retaliation declared independence, the Serbs responded with brutality and the Kosovars responded with an insurgency.<sup>16</sup> The bloodshed ended after a three-month NATO bombing campaign against the Serbs, which forced them to withdraw their forces from the region and led to Kosovo's independence.

The aftermath of the bloody Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s had far and world-wide implications that destined to change the character of the region and the nature of international relations, to question the legitimacy of NATO's bombing, and to challenge the authority of the UN as a guarantor of international law. A question that beckons an answer is on what authority did NATO bombed Yugoslavia? If it was for humanitarian reasons, NATO never got the authority by the UNSC. No NATO country was under attack, so Article 5 of the NATO Charter could not be invoked<sup>17</sup>. Professor Wippman of the Cornell School of Law stated his thoughts as follows: "from an international law standpoint, Kosovo therefore remains an ambiguous precedent; given the extraordinary circumstances that generated NATO's use of force, Kosovo may also be an anomalous event. But NATO's willingness to use force outside the framework of the U.N. Charter already has contributed to a political climate in which states are unlikely to interpret the Charter's restrictions on the use of force as narrowly in the future as they have in the past".<sup>18</sup> Russia used the Kosovo analogy to justify its military interventions in Crimea and South Ossetia.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> World Population Review. Kosovo Population 2018. Retrieved from <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/kosovo-population/> This article by the World Population Review, presents a historical increase of the Kosovo population from the 19<sup>th</sup> century where ethnic Albanians were a majority in Kosovo and they are Europe's fastest growing ethnic group with a growth rate of 1.3% per year.

<sup>16</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. THE WORLD FACT BOOK Europe: KOSOVO. Retrieved from [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print\\_kv.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_kv.html) The article by the CIA gives a historical background of the migration of Serbs into the Kosovo area, and their defeat by the Turks in 1389 which led to a large migration of Turks and Albanians, mainly Albanians in the Kosovo region. Continuing the narration of the historical events throughout time, until the Supervised Independence of Kosovo in 2012 and the normalization with Serbia in 2013.

<sup>17</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2017, March 22). Collective defence - Article 5. Retrieved from [https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics\\_110496.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics_110496.htm). This NATO narrative, explains the concept of collective defence, which is at the very heart of NATO's founding treaty. This unique and enduring principle binds its members together, committing them to protect each other and setting a spirit of solidarity within the Alliance. This principle of Collective defence states "that an attack against one Ally is considered as an attack against all Allies.

<sup>18</sup> Wippman, D. (2001). Kosovo and the Limits of International Law. *Fordham International Law Journal*, Volume 25(1), 129-150 Retrieved from <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1813&context=ilj>. This article examines the legality and wisdom of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization ("NATO") intervention in Kosovo in 1990. The Kosovo campaign pushed at the boundaries of international law in at least two important respects. First, NATO's decision to engage in large-scale military action without prior Security Council authorization raised significant doubts about the status of the law governing the use of force and the viability of United Nations ("U.N.") primacy in matters of international peace and

In addition, the NATO intervention on behalf of the Kosovars gave an unprecedented boost to the Kosovars to stir up ethnic claims in the neighboring country of FYROM. In BiH, NATO bombing had some additional unintended consequences for the people in the Balkans, and the Europeans. The ethnic cleansing of the Muslims by the Serbs, in Srebrenica, that was exposed and circulated extensively by the mass media, castigated the Serbs as pariahs, and the Muslims as the victims of the Serbian Christian fanaticism against them. That became the rallying cry of the world's Muslim jihadists who came in droves from Chechnya, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey to fight at the side of the BiH Muslims. Byproducts of these wars were first and foremost the unfettered entrance to Europe of radical Muslims, the establishment of Wahabi and Salafism ideology, and the flooding of Iranian agents, and Hezbollah drug rings. Another byproduct of the destruction caused by the fighting parties was unprecedented political corruption, a breakdown of civil society institutions, and full-blown criminality, unforeseen in the former Yugoslav Federal Republic. Conflict in the Balkans allowed radical Islamist elements to create a vanguard of jihadists ready to be exported to Europe and Middle East, to create an uninterrupted heroin trade route from Afghanistan, through Iran and Turkey, to be the epicenter of political corruption infused with organized crime, and to be the catalyst of a new found unholy alliance between terrorism and organized crime.

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security. Second, NATO's high-altitude bombing campaign, conducted without a single NATO combat casualty but with significant civilian casualties within the FRY, called into question the appropriate relationship between means and ends in an intervention designed to save lives. The long-term impact of the Kosovo intervention in each of these areas of law remains uncertain.

<sup>19</sup> Karagiannis, E. (2014, September 29). The Russian Interventions in South Ossetia and Crimea Compared: Military Performance, Legitimacy and Goals. *Journal Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 35,(400-420). Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260.2014.963965?src=recsys>. This article compares the two interventions in terms of military performance, basis of legitimacy, and motivational goals. It also demonstrated how the Russian leadership used similar legal justifications for the two interventions, based on the Kosovo precedent, opening the possibility of further military action in the former Soviet space.

## The Islamization of the Balkans

Islam appeared in the Balkans with the conquest of the area by the Turks in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Serbia was subjugated in 1459, Bosnia in 1463, Albania in 1473, and Croatia in 1493.<sup>20</sup> The Turkish occupation lasted for about five hundred years. And although the Turkish occupation ended between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, the effect of the Ottoman occupation and Islamic traditions have lasted to this day. The Ottoman occupation and the Muslim conversion of the Christian population marred the relations among the locals for years to come and continue to cause problems today. The Ottoman effort to Islamize the inhabitants of the conquered Balkan lands has been painful and a point of debate by different scholars. Some scholars argue that Muslim conversions of Christian populations in the Balkans happened more in a persuasive way than forcefully, as folk myths and tales are narrated persistently to this day,<sup>21</sup> while other writers posit that Turkish-Muslim occupation and conversion was very painful and demeaning. The most degrading and leaving lost lasting and painful memories were the blood tax, or *devshirme*. That blood tax, under which "for three centuries beginning with the conquest of Bosnia, the Ottomans annually levied male children as tribute (*to the Sultan, mine*); every year, up to one-fifth of Christian boys in Bosnia – usually aged fourteen to twenty, but some were younger – were forcibly taken from their families in contingents of a thousand and shipped to the imperial court at Istanbul to become warrior-slaves in the janissaries, the Sultan's elite guard. They were converted to Islam and most became fierce soldiers".<sup>22</sup>

As bloody and controversial the process of Islamization has been in the Balkans, it is imperative to mention some crucial factors that differentiated this Islamization process in the Balkans from other geographical areas that happened to be subjugated to the Turkish rule. Ethnicity, language and geography were very influential in the process of Islamization, along with the characteristics of each ethnic group. So, although the great majority are Sunni Muslims attached to the Hanafi school of thought, some belong to the Bektashi (in Albania and Kosovo) or the Alevi (in Bulgaria

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<sup>20</sup> Balkan Insight. (2010, November 10). Timeline: The ottoman and the Balkans. Retrieved from <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/the-ottomans-six-centuries-in-europe>. This is a historical summary account detailing chronologically the first appearance of the Turks in Adrianople in 1302 to the first Balkan Wars of 1912- 1913 and the end of the Turkish Balkan occupation.

<sup>21</sup> Çağ, G et al. (2012). *Balkans and Islam: Encounter, Transformation, Discontinuity, Continuity*. Retrieved from <http://www.cambridgescholars.com/download/sample/57948>. In this Cambridge Publication, Turkish scholars argue in favor of the Muslim conversion of Christian population in a persuasive manner as it has been transcribed in folklore myths and tales in the Balkans to this day.

<sup>22</sup> Schindler, J. (2007). *Unholy Terror Bosnia, Al-Qa'ida, and the Rise of Global Jihad*. St. Paul, MN:p Zenith Press. 40. This book gives a different perspective of the Yugoslav wars in the Balkans, by presenting the attempt of the Muslim fundamentalist Izetbegovic to falsify records in order to present as Bosnian citizens Muslim jihadists starting with the Iranians. It also presents the Al Qaida involvement in the Bosnian war, and the attempts of the jihadis even after the end of the war to stay in Bosnia and create terrorist cells.

and Greece) minorities. This explains why in regions such as western FYR of Macedonia, southern Kosovo, the Rhodopes (Greece, Bulgaria) and Dobrudja (Romania), several *different Muslim* populations co-exist, although all of them came from the same process of Islamization.<sup>23</sup> It is not a farfetched thinking to realize that there exists among this Muslim population a 'healthy' degree of competition. In other words, there is not a homogeneous and locally associated way the Balkan Muslims have as a defining characteristic.



Figure 3. Different Muslim schools of faith

By the end of the 19th century, Balkan Muslim desiring not to be associated with the declining fortunes of the Ottoman Empire formulated a “local Islam” that could be on equal footing with Western modernity. To this end, secular intellectuals and reformists Muslim scholars expanded their search beyond the Balkans and started looking for paradigms in the Arab world, the Indian sub-continent or Tsarist Russia, and became interested in the Salafist ideas of Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh.<sup>24\*</sup> This search though for new models and thoughts created issues of

<sup>23</sup> Bougarel, X. (2005, November 23). The role of Balkan Muslims in building a European Islam. Retrieved from [http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/81451702\\_EPC%20Issue%20Paper%2043%20Islam%20in%20the%20Balkans.pdf](http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/81451702_EPC%20Issue%20Paper%2043%20Islam%20in%20the%20Balkans.pdf).

This Issue Paper, by Xavier Bougarel, examines the history and nature of the Muslim communities in the Balkans, and assesses the relationship between Balkan Islam and the Muslim world and the place the former occupies in the emerging pan-European Islamic public space. It also considers the likely impact of Turkish entry into the EU on the development of Balkan Islam and a European Islam.

<sup>24</sup> Bougarel, X.(2005). \* The Center for Islamic Studies considers *Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghani* to be the founding father of Islamic modernism. His place of birth, which has become a source of long-standing controversy, is not known, but he received his early education in various religious schools near Kabul, Afghanistan and Qazwin and Tehran, Iran. At the age of seventeen or eighteen, he went to India (1855/6) to continue his studies. During his stay in India until 1882, Afghani became closely acquainted with the positivistic ideas of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and wrote his famous *The Truth about the Neichari Sect and an Explanation of the Necharis (Hakikat-i Madhhab-i Naychari wa Bayan-i Hal-i Naychariyan)*, first published in 1881 in Hyderabad, in rejection of S. A. Khan and his followers. The book was later translated by Muhammad ‘Abduh into Arabic and published as *The Refutation of the Materialists (al-Radd ‘ala al-dahriyyin)* in Beirut, 1886. Also, The center for Islamic Studies mentions that *Muhammad ‘Abduh* was greatly influenced by Jamal ud-Din al-Afghani, the founder of the modern pan-Islamic movement which sought to unite the Muslim world under the banner of the faith. When they met in al-Azhar in

identity, which, of course, in the Balkans were never a small or trivial issue. The Balkans have been always a mixture of different ethnic groups and the crossroad of religions. A powder keg where memories do not fade away, but they keep on recycling. "Whilst traditional elites and rural populations were inclined to define themselves as "Muslims", the modernist intellectuals of Bosnia-Herzegovina declared themselves to be "Serbs" or "Croats" of Islamic faith and those of Bulgaria and Greece identified with the modern Turkish nation. Finally, whilst predominant at home, the Albanian Muslim community perceived itself as a "cultural minority" in Europe and progressively adopted the founding myths of Albanian nationalism, based on the rejection of religious divisions among Albanian speakers and the denunciation of the "Ottoman yoke"<sup>25</sup>. These differentiations regarding the Muslims and their faith in different geographical areas are very crucial in order to be understood where, when, and how, Muslim fundamentalism established a foothold in the Balkan region.

While the world was castigating Milosevic and the Serbs for the war and its atrocities in Yugoslavia, the Trojan Horse of Islamic fundamentalism was showing its ugly head with the rise of Islam in the Balkans. The war in BiH opened the door for Islamists to enter Europe in droves and under the auspices of the Americans. Osama Bin Laden spent time in Bosnia, and one of his important fronts working on SDA's (Izetbegovic's political party) behalf was "the American Task Force for Bosnia, a registered charity that lobbied Congress and the Clinton White House".<sup>26</sup> The influence of the Saudi's Wahabi interpretation of Islam, influenced the Balkan region toward radicalization and more extreme forms of Islam, something which by all accounts was foreign to the local Muslims, who despised the Wahabi interpretation of Islam, they are more traditionally oriented towards the Hanafi school of thought of Sunni Islam.<sup>27</sup> In 2013, the Pew Research Center conducted a study that confirmed the majority of Balkan Muslims "reject radical and conservative religious ideas, as well as violence against civilians"<sup>28</sup>. Radicalization though is a problem in the Balkans, emanating

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1872 `Abduh was roused from his asceticism to activism and sought to bring about a renaissance of Islam and a liberation of Muslims from colonialism. Unlike his mentor, Jamal ud-Din al-Afghani, `Abduh tried to separate politics from religious reform. `Abduh advocated the reform of Islam by bringing it back to its pristine state and casting off what he viewed as its contemporary decadence and division. His views were opposed by the established political and religious order, but were later embraced by Arab nationalism after World War I. Retrieved from <http://www.cis-ca.org/voices/a/afghni.htm> and <http://www.cis-ca.org/voices/a/abduh.htm>

<sup>25</sup> Bougarel, X. (2005).

<sup>26</sup> Schindler, J. (2007). p. 122

<sup>27</sup> Petrovic P. (2016, June). Islamic radicalism in the Balkans. Retrieved from [https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Alert\\_24\\_Balkan\\_radicalism.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Alert_24_Balkan_radicalism.pdf). This article explains the origin of jihadism in the Balkans, the reasons for radicalization of the region, and what can be done to correct that fanaticism which if not addressed properly will be spreading with unforeseen consequences.

<sup>28</sup> Petrovic, P. (2016) The findings of the Pew research indicate that the majority of the Balkan Muslims are against Muslim fundamentalism, and against Saria. This research showed that 'only' 20% of Kosovar Muslims, 15% of Bosnian Muslims and 12% of Albanian Muslims support the introduction of Sharia law. The use of suicide bombings and other violent acts in the defence of Islam was supported by 11% of Kosovar Muslims, 6% of Muslims from Albania and 3% of Bosnian Muslims.

from the following factors, according to the testimony given in front of the US Senate Committee of Foreign Relations on radicalism in the Balkans: 1) The Salafist interpretation of Sunni Muslims, 2) Violent interpretation, a continuous jihad, especially from returned fighters from Iraq and Syria, 3) Corrupt political politicians and institutions, 4) Authoritarian, nationalist leaders, and 5) Foreign influences of Saudi Arabia and Gulf States.<sup>29</sup>

All these factors mentioned so far have created a hotbed of existing Islamist fundamentalism that has engulfed Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia, and to a lesser extent the Islamists in FYROM and Bulgaria. The Kosovar Lavndrin Mouhajeri, an ISIS fighter, with the ambition of creating a Muslim Caliphate in the Balkans, was killed in action in Syria, and with him his dream for a Balkan caliphate. It is estimated that approximately 800 jihadists from the Balkans went to fight for ISIS, about 300 of them from BiH, the Balkan jihadist birth place, where even today, access in 28 villages is a very dangerous proposition as these villages are run by Saria laws.<sup>30</sup> Ahmed Moussa, an imam released from prison in Bulgaria in November of 2017 was arrested in 2014 alongside 13 other Roma men on suspicion of inciting religious hatred and spreading ISIS propaganda. Additionally, he was charged with three other conspirators for providing support to foreign jihadists travelling to Syria.<sup>31</sup> In 2016 the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, found Nedzad Mujic guilty of providing financial assistance to foreign fighters, traveling several times himself between Austria and Syria from 2013 until 2015. <sup>32</sup> Albanians seem to use Italy for their jihadist and other criminal purposes, since Italy is so closed, as reports by: "Italian authorities also suspect that radical Islamic cells in Albania were key in enabling the safe passage of militants from Italy to Syria, including whole families, as in the case of Aldo Kobuzi and Maria Guila Sergio, nicknamed by the Italian media as "Lady Jihad".<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, the Yugoslav wars have created a revolving door of Muslim fundamentalism and unless the

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<sup>29</sup> US SENATE, Committee on Foreign Relations. (2017, June 14). Radicalization Among Muslim Communities in the Balkans: Trends and Issues. Retrieved from [https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/061417\\_Ruge\\_Testimony\\_REVISED\\_II.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/061417_Ruge_Testimony_REVISED_II.pdf). Testimony by Dr. Majda Ruge on radicalization in the Balkans, its causes, its trends, and what policy the US may adopt to avoid the increasing trend of the Balkan radicalization, and if possible to reverse it.

<sup>30</sup> Tzimas, S. ( 2017, March 7) *Κέντρο φανατικών Αλβανία, Κόσσοβο, ΠΓΔΜ και Βοσνία*. Retrieved from <http://www.kathimerini.gr/916593/article/epikairothta/kosmos/kentro-fanatikwn-alvania-kosovo-pgdm-kai-vosnia>. In this article the Jihadist participation from the Balkans with emphasis from Bosnia the cradle of Balkan fundamentalism is presented.

<sup>31</sup> Mikulic, Mejdini, Cheresheva, Zivanovic, Leposhtica. (2019, January 9). Balkan Terror Trials Reveal Links to Western Europe. Retrieved from <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/balkan-terror-trials-reveal-links-to-western-europe-01-08-2018>. This article in the Newspaper Balkan Insight, presents Balkan jihadist activities in Europe and more specifically from Italy, and Austria.

<sup>32</sup> Mikulic, Mejdini, Cheresheva, Zivanovic, Leposhtica. (2019, January 9).

<sup>33</sup> Mikulic, Mejdini, Cheresheva, Zivanovic, Leposhtica. (2019, January 9).

conditions responsible for its existence are addressed, the area will always pose a threat for western liberal democracies.



*Figure 4. Alternative drug routes after the seizures of Adam and Aberdeen*



## Organized Crime and Muslim Extremism

As it was mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the unfolding of Yugoslavia and its eventual break up created “independent” countries with weak institutions, non-existing rule of law or unwilling to enforce it, corrupt security apparatus systems, and governments whose leaders had either participated in war crimes or had been involved in criminal activities. The 18 July 2012 Burgas terrorist attack that killed five Israeli tourists and one Bulgarian national and the spectacle of an armed Islamist standoff at the US Embassy in Sarajevo on 28 October 2011 made security officials to take notice of Hezbollah’s presence. Dr. Ely Karmon, from IDC, Herzliya, Israel, in an interview with Balkanalysis.com to discuss the tactics and strategy of Hezbollah and Iran, worldwide stated: “In 2012, Hezbollah, was responsible for 20 plots- all foiled except for the one in Burgas” he noted.<sup>34</sup> A study by the European Parliament has mapped the drug and human trafficking routes, as well as the joint centers between OC (organized crime) and terrorist cells and joint operation centers between jihadists and OC.<sup>35</sup> In a World Affairs article Balkans, security specialist Gordon N Bardos writes: “The threat Iran and its proxies pose to Western interests in the Balkans is multiplied by the growth of Wahhabi movements in Bosnia, Kosovo, FYR of Macedonia, and the mountainous Sandzak region straddling the border between Montenegro and Serbia.”<sup>36</sup>

Basic to this concept is the existence of the “Green Corridor”. The “Green Corridor’s” purpose is twofold: First to create a geographical contiguous area from Turkey to a location in Bosnia just 120 miles from the Austrian border, and second to create a process of increasing the assertiveness of Muslim



Figure 5. The “Green Corridor”

<sup>34</sup> Deliso, C. (2013, March 3). Israeli Security Concerns and the Balkans. Retrieved from <http://www.balkananalysis.com/bulgaria/2013/03/31/israeli-security-concerns-and-the-balkans/> This article by Balkanalysis.com presents in depth the penetration Iran, and its proxy Hezbollah have been able to accomplish and the danger and the threat these two entities constitute for the State of Israel. In addition, the article makes an account of the different relationships the State of Israel tries to develop with Eurasian countries, as well as the rest of the Balkan countries, in order to counterattack Iran’s through Hezbollah threat to Israel’s security and welfare.

<sup>35</sup> European Parliament. (2012).

<sup>36</sup> Bardos, N.G. (2013, January/February). Iran in the Balkans: A History and a Forecast. Retrieved from <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/iran-balkans-history-and-forecast> This essay analyzes why Iran’s largest diplomatic contingent in Europe resides in tiny Sarajevo, as well as, the Islamist presence—including terror cells and training camps—that continues to threaten the region, and the West.

communities along that route. Col. Shaul Shay of BESA Center at Bar-Ilan University, noted that “the Balkans serve as a forefront on European soil for Islamic terror organizations, which exploit this area to promote their activities in Western Europe, and other focal points worldwide.”<sup>37</sup> It is not surprising that radical Islam, in an unholy alliance with organized crime and to a great extent financed by it, seeks to develop and radicalize the whole Balkan region, including diaspora communities and is involved in drug and money laundering operations, and human trafficking networks throughout Europe.<sup>38</sup> Various Balkan diasporas in Switzerland, Italy, Austria and the UK, provide youth for ISIS recruits for Iraq and Syria, from Albanian, Kosovo and Montenegro European communities. “Although, according to experts, many of the ethnic Albanian Muslim communities in Europe, including those in Switzerland, have access to independent funding for their religious needs, they are not immune to the influence of well-funded Wahhabist and Salafist foundations and mosques representing more radical religious views”.<sup>39</sup>



*Fig. 6 Drug distribution ISIS supported routes*

The war in Syria and the appearance of ISIS changed the dynamics of the drug and other illicit trade in the Balkans and the influence of radical Islam in the region. ISIS started dealing with drugs on a large scale due to the difficulties of generating revenue due to the shrinking territories under its control, according to a Rand Corporation Report.<sup>40</sup> ISIS main income was coming from oil

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<sup>37</sup> Global Politics (2017)

<sup>38</sup> Spahiou. (2015).

<sup>39</sup> Spahiou. (2015)

<sup>40</sup> Clark, P.C. (2017, July 25). ISIS Is So Desperate It's Turning to the Drug Trade. Retrieve from <https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/07/isis-is-so-desperate-its-turning-to-the-drug-trade.html> This Rand Report presents the involvement of ISIS in the drug trade due to its loss of revenue from its loss of territories. It also presents the different methods ISIS is using for recruitment and its taking advantage of instability along Mediterranean routes for drug trafficking to Europe. It also provides an insight into a “jihadi cool” idea, that can be a very attractive idea for new recruits.

revenues, extortion, kidnappings, and taxation in the areas under its control.<sup>41</sup> ISIS is profiting by providing protection and passage rights to drug traffickers through in North Africa and also drug traffickers, moving cannabis from Iraq through Syria and Turkey into Europe (two drugs carrying ships *Adams* and the *Aberdeen* were seized in anti-drug operations).<sup>42</sup>

According to the UK newspaper *Mirror*, "In Albania, Islamic State is raising cash for its terror campaign by running cannabis farms and shipping the drug to Britain."<sup>43</sup> But drugs is not the only crime related activity by ISIS. Human smuggling is another activity in which ISIS is deeply involved. Illegal immigration and human smuggling are Trojan horses for terrorists wanting to infiltrate Europe, as the report by the Greek state TV station reported: "Counter-terrorism services in Greece, the United Kingdom and Europe will further investigate whether a recently dismantled transnational people smuggling ring may have been used by ISIS or other jihadist groups to infiltrate Europe, Greek and UK authorities said."<sup>44</sup>

Greece is in a very unique geographical position, as an entry point of immigrants coming mainly from Iraq and Syria, through Turkey, with the desire to go to Europe. The flow of illegal migration through Turkey is depended upon the President of Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan attitude towards the EU. If he wants to exercise pressure on the EU's leadership about Turkey's membership in the EU, he does not restrict the flow towards Greece. If he believes the EU is helping him with his desired EU membership, then he controls the flow. These routes over time have served also as means of transporting jihadists to Europe, under the cover of the refugee status. They are also used by ISIS as well to smuggle their jihadists to Europe. On October 2015, two ISIS terrorists landed on the island of Leros coming from Iraq, among about 500 refugees. One month later they blew themselves up in the "French national soccer stadium in the worst terrorist attack in France's modern history"<sup>45</sup> But

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<sup>41</sup> Reitano, Clarke and Adal. Examining the Nexus between Organised Crime and Terrorism and its implications for EU Programming. Retrieved from <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OC-Terror-Nexus-Final.pdf>. This article highlights the evolving relationship between terrorism and crime and the significant challenges it poses to the international community. It also emphasizes for Europe the link between petty crime and terrorism, where individuals on the margins of society and the formal economy or in prison are most vulnerable to radicalization.

<sup>42</sup> Clark, P. (2017).

<sup>43</sup> Hall, A. and Werburton, D. (2016, Jan 17). ISIS seizes £4bn drug ring from the Mafia to fund its brutal terror campaign. Retrieved from <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/isis-seizes-4bn-drug-ring-7191800>. This article outlines how Jihadists are flooding Britain with cannabis from the Albanian drug farm as intelligence experts warn that Islamist extremism is taking hold in Europe.

<sup>44</sup> ERT International. (2016, December 13). Counter-terrorism services to further investigate people smuggling network. Retrieved from <http://int.ert.gr/counter-terrorism-services-to-further-investigate-people-smuggling-network/>. This report presented the dismantling of a smuggling operation and its connection with terrorism.

<sup>45</sup> Mantzikos, I. (2016, June). The Greek Gateway to Jihad. Retrieved from <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-greek-gateway-to-jihad/>. Retrieved from <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-greek-gateway-to-jihad/>. This article by CTC exemplifies the view of Greece becoming a crossroads for extremists trying to reach Syria and Iraq from Europe and for fighters returning home. It furthers

they were not the only terrorists that landed on the Greek island that day. Austria arrested two more jihadists coming from the same boat shipment of October 3d, under suspicion of being associated with the Paris plotters.<sup>46</sup> Greece has a Muslim migrant population and it serves as a logistics place, providing fake ids, ease the movements of jihadists in and out of Europe<sup>47</sup>, plot terrorist attacks, like the case of the Paris attacks ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud who plotted a major gun and bomb attack communicating with several members of an Islamic State cell in Belgium by a cell phone from an Athens apartment.<sup>48</sup> Europol in its 2017 study reports that “more than 800 persons are believed to have travelled to Syria and Iraq from the Western Balkan countries, predominantly joining IS”.<sup>49</sup>



on that the proven passage that several members of the Paris and Brussels attack cell transited through the Greek island of Leros illustrates the Islamic State’s ability to exploit refugee flows in order to move fighters into Europe.

<sup>46</sup> Mantzikos, I. (2016)

<sup>47</sup> ERT, International. (2016)

<sup>48</sup> Mantzikos, I. (2016)

<sup>49</sup> EUROPOL. (2017). EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/eu-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2017> This Europol report, provides a concise overview of the nature of terrorism that the EU faced in 2016. It also includes information on terrorist attacks that occurred in 2016 and the numbers of arrests and convictions for terrorist offences. Also included is a brief overview of the terrorist situation outside the EU.

The Balkans have three characteristics that are conducive to the thriving of organized crime and terrorism: 1) The geographical topology of a mountainous character 2) Its ethnic/religious segregation and 3) Corrupted officials. So, radical Islamists looking for a shelter or to escape from the European Union, they can accomplish that by hiding in all the Muslim-inhabited countries of the region.<sup>50</sup> With EU passports (*fake, mine*), there is no need for them to acquire visas, and the infinitely-corrupt and poorly-enforced borders of Balkan countries in any case make it easy for Islamists to take shelter. Authorities in FYROM claim that Islamists living in EU countries who are in danger of being expelled to their original countries in the Middle East have been using FYROM villages populated by Albanians and FYROM Muslims (as well as Wahhabi strongholds in the capital, Skopje) to hide.<sup>51</sup> Radical Islamic clergy have made the western Balkans a propaganda pulpit for their radical ideas. "The Saudi-funded King Fahd Mosque and Cultural Center in Sarajevo, which the researcher Juan Carlo Antunez has called "the epicenter of the spreading of radical ideas" in Bosnia, for a number of years functioned autonomously under the direct supervision of the Saudi Embassy in Bosnia.<sup>52</sup> Bosnia has been the cradle of Muslim Balkan jihadism since the time Ilija Izebegovic created in 1992 Yugoslav War "The Catiba Al-Mujahedin" a unit of the Bosnian Army comprised exclusively from Islamists from abroad that came to volunteer for the Bosnian Muslim Army<sup>53</sup>. This unit included such infamous names as "Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, mastermind of the 9/11 attacks; Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, involved in the attack on the USS Cole; Mamdouh Mahmud Salim, involved in the August 1998 US embassy bombings in East Africa; Abu Hamza al-Masri, the spiritual father of the July 2005 London Underground bombings; and Zaki ur-Rehman Lakhvi, one of the participants in the November 2008 Mumbai bombings".<sup>54</sup>

Criminal activities and jihadism in the Balkans are two parallel roads that intersect and join in many points. Albanian Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) has been expanded to Latin America in cooperation with notoriously powerful drugs lords "and by swapping heroin for cocaine, has turned them into one of Europe's main sources for cocaine and made a fortune for the Quds and Hezbollah"<sup>55</sup>. Militant Islam has created a strong base in the Balkans where operations of terrorist orientation and organised criminals activities frequently reinforce and complement each other,

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<sup>50</sup> Strategic Analysis. (2006, October 22). Mafia, Jihadist Links in Balkan Narcotics. Retrieved from <https://strategicanalysis.wordpress.com/category/south-eastern-europe/page/49/> This article gives in a series of episodes by security officials explaining how jihadists are moving in and out of Europe and how they hide by being offered shelter and hospitality in the Muslim areas. Also, how drugs are moving from Turkey, in Albania, FYROM.

<sup>51</sup> Strategic Analysis. (2006).

<sup>52</sup> Bardos, G. (2014).

<sup>53</sup> Bardos, G. (2014).

<sup>54</sup> Bardos, G. (2014).

<sup>55</sup> Bardos, G. (2014)

where terrorists engage either directly or indirectly in organised crime activities such as trafficking, smuggling, extortion, kidnapping for ransom and the illicit trade of cigarette smuggling, and credit card fraud, for financial and/or material benefit. These activities influence negatively the very institutions of western democracy, and they present a clear and present danger for civil societies not only for the Balkans, but also for the West in general.

## Characteristics of the OC -Terrorism Nexus

After fifteen years of discussions and deliberations the UNSC adopted in 2014 SC Resolution 2195 "Threats to international peace and security", calling upon states to better understand and address the nexus between organized crime and terrorism as a threat to security and development.<sup>56</sup> Although there are no internationally accepted definitions of OC and terrorism, the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) defined an organised criminal group: "as a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit."<sup>57</sup>

While terrorism is defined "via the use of violent acts that are intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population in order to influence the policy or conduct of a government by intimidation or coercion"<sup>58</sup>. The relations and cooperation between these two ideologically opposite groups have evolved since the cold war, and their modus operandi has been increasingly blurred, especially in areas engaged in protracted conflicts, with political corruption and increased economic and political instability, as is the case in the Balkans This relationship developed a dynamic of its own since the 1990's, as analyst Makarenko emphasizes the idea of convergence of these groups " as they seem to be learning from one another, and adapting to each other's successes and failures. by adopting each others' behavior and tactics.<sup>59</sup> The convergence was not a happenstance but according to Makarenko a product of necessity as after the Cold War states got out of the terrorist sponsored business and terrorist organizations were seeking ways to finance their operations.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> UNSC. (2014, December 19). Security Council, Adopting Resolution 2195 (2014), Urges International Action to Break Links between Terrorists, Transnational Organized Crime. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11717.doc.htm>. In this meeting, during an all-day open debate presided over by the Foreign Minister of Chad, the Security Council called for international action to prevent terrorists from benefiting from transnational organized crime, through securing borders and prosecuting illicit networks.

<sup>57</sup> United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). (2016, May 13). Breaking the Organized Crime and Counter-Terrorism Nexus: Identifying Programmatic Approaches. Retrieved from [http://unicri.it/in\\_focus/files/NEXUS\\_REPORT\\_UNICRI.pdf](http://unicri.it/in_focus/files/NEXUS_REPORT_UNICRI.pdf) This is a meeting report by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and the Thailand Institute of Justice (TIJ) from 11-13 May 2016, in Bangkok, to examine the nexus between organized crime and terrorism as a threat to security and development and to define better policy and programmatic responses.

<sup>58</sup> UNICRI. (2016)

<sup>59</sup> UNICRI. (2016)

<sup>60</sup> Makarenko. T. (2004, February). The Crime–Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism. Retrieved from <https://www.iracm.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/makarenko-global-crime-5399.pdf>. In this article Tamarenko analyzes the evolvement of the convergence of the oc-terrorism, how they create a

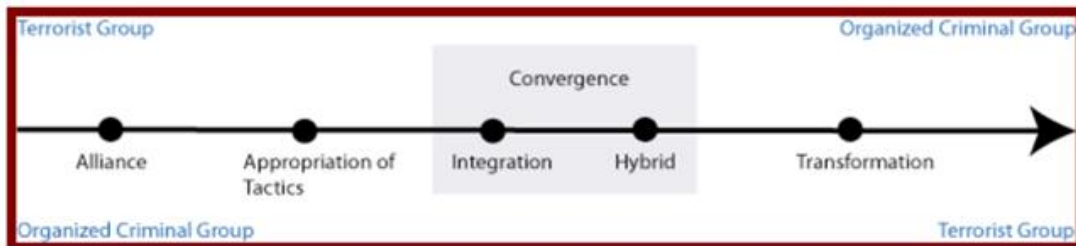


Fig. 8. Makarenko's model of Crime-Terror Continuum 2013.

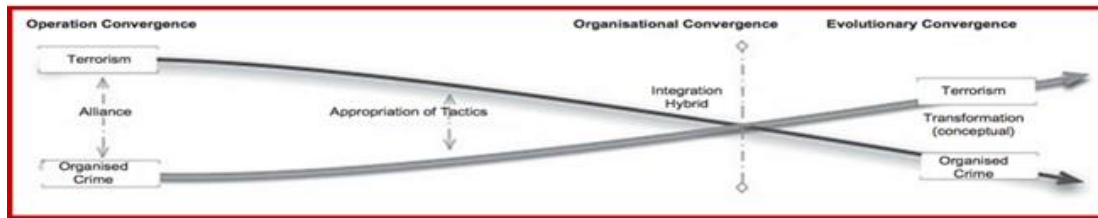


Fig. 9. Makarenko's model of Crime-Terror Continuum 2014.

Additionally, the updated version of Makarenko's model presents the transformation between these two groups, although according to Engin Dunagol, former Deputy Director of the Turkish Ministry of Justice, "The main difference between terrorist and organized crime groups is that terrorist organizations are generally ideologically or politically, religious motivated while organized crime groups are profit-oriented"<sup>61</sup>, the ensuing hybrid character where both entities operational and institutional roles intertwine and becoming hard to differentiate, becomes a game changer in the modus operandi of these two groups to achieve their objectives. In a European Parliament authored a study the Makarenko model explained how the Balkans have adopted terrorist tactics where convergence and the 'OC-terrorism' alliances that exist in the Balkans and its geographic location on the periphery of the EU create the impetus for for drugs and human smuggling.<sup>62</sup>

continuum through this convergence, and how security agencies can cause considerable damage to this nexus by analyzing the aims and motivations of this continuum instead of its criminal activities.

<sup>61</sup> Durnagol, E. (2009, February). The Role of Drugs in Terrorism and Organized Crime. Retrieved from <http://www.ankarabarasu.org.tr/site/ler/AnkaraBarReview/tekmakale/2009-2/6.pdf>. In this article the author refers that in order to effectively combat, transnational threats like organized crime and drug trafficking, international terrorism, must be met with multidimensional responses. Preventive, diplomatic, economic and political means will provide the ultimate and necessary answer to these complex problems, while repression can have a complementary role.

<sup>62</sup> European Parliament-Directorate-General for Internal Policies. (2012). Europe's Crime Terror Nexus: Links between terrorist and organized crime groups in the European Union. Retrieved from <https://www.europarl.europa.eu>. This study presents a qualitative analysis of the linkages between Organized Crime (OC) and terrorism with specific reference to the European Union. A conceptual basis of the links between OC and terrorism is outlined, and systematically used to identify how these two phenomena come together in the European theatre.



The relationship between drug-trafficking groups and terrorist organizations is a “mutually beneficial agreement”.<sup>63</sup> For example, drug traffickers benefit from the terrorists' military skills, weapons supply and access to secret organizations, and they may also gain significant freedom of movement when they operate in conjunction with terrorists who control huge amounts of territory. Terrorists also, gain a much desired revenue for their operations, recruitment, weapons, shelter, materials and supplies, as well as, expertise in illicit transfer and laundering of proceeds from illicit transactions.<sup>64</sup> In addition from the ideological perspective of the terrorists, the distribution of drugs weaken the society of the “infidels” and destroy democratic institutions, the lungs and brains of a free liberal democratic society, and the enemy of their existence. On top of the financial agenda and the most profitable for the operations of both groups is the so called narcoterrorism. Narcoterrorism in the Balkans raised its ugly head in the 1990s, at the beginning of the hostilities. Former Albanian guerrilla and terrorist groups, the 'ndrangheta of Southern Italy and the mafia – like Sacra Corona Unita from the Apulia area are the main mafias that control many of the heroin routes from Afghanistan through Turkey, Bulgaria, FYR of Macedonia, Albania, and on into Italy, where mafia groups distribute it in Western Europe.<sup>65</sup>

We have modeled and explained the connection between organized crime and terrorists and the nexus created by the activities of these two non-state actors in order to posit how this unholy alliance is connected, intermingled, and co-operate in order to achieve its respective goals, that although seem diametrically opposed from the ideological perspective, they find common ground when there is a convergence of their illicit aims. We also appropriately fit this model with the architecture of the Balkan nexus operators.

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<sup>63</sup> Dumagol, E. (2009).

<sup>64</sup> Dumagol, E. (2009).

<sup>65</sup> Stanojoska, A. (2015, October 24). THE CONNECTION BETWEEN TERRORISM AND ORGANIZED CRIME: NARCOTERRORISM AND THE OTHER HYBRIDS . Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283121352\\_THE\\_CONNECTION\\_BETWEEN\\_TERRORISM\\_AND\\_ORGANIZED\\_CRIME\\_NARCOTERRORISM\\_AND\\_THE\\_OTHER\\_HYBRIDS](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283121352_THE_CONNECTION_BETWEEN_TERRORISM_AND_ORGANIZED_CRIME_NARCOTERRORISM_AND_THE_OTHER_HYBRIDS) . This paper discusses the close connection between terrorism and organized crime, the nearly invisible border between them, the financing of terrorist organizations through the forms of organized crime, their hybrids, with particular reference to narcoterrorism.

## ILLUSTRATIVE CASE STUDIES

### CASE 1: Albania

Albania is a country of about 3 million people, most of them Muslims. Other religious minorities include Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholic Christians, and a Shia sect of Islam called Bektashi. The number of Jewish people living in Albania is about 50-60, or more than 200 according to other Jewish sources<sup>66</sup>. The country was ruled by Enver Hoxha, the Communist dictator that kept the country isolated from the rest of the world for whom communist allegiances trotted the whole communist of the then existing universe, starting with Stalin, breaking up with Khrushchev, after Khrushchev denounced Stalinism, to explore friendly relations with China's Mao Zedong, from which he grew delusional when Mao entered into negotiations with the US. to finally ending up with Vietnam as the only country Hoxha would have somewhat friendly but hardly profitable relations.<sup>67</sup> By all accounts Enver Hoxha, First Secretary of the Albanian Worker's (Communist) Party and Commander in Chief of the armed forces created an impenetrable fortress, keeping the country out of the international community and the international community out of Albania, as he so proudly stated 'Let everyone understand clearly, the walls of our fortress are of unshakeable granite rock.'<sup>68</sup> He successfully repressed religion making Albania "the world's first atheist state, whose only religion is *Albanianism*."<sup>69</sup> This term *Albanianism*, is a mixture of pride, homogeneity, and national identity, as it includes everything that is Albanian at its root, regardless of faith or language as Albanians live in Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, FYROM and Greece. Albanians also can be found mainly in the UK, US, Australia and Switzerland, Germany and Scandinavia, what is called Albanian Diaspora. *Albanianism* is the sole factor of national identity, what unifies the country and it gives it a sense of pride and individualism. In summary, *Albanianism* is associated with Albanian Nationalism.

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<sup>66</sup> Scheib, A. Albanian Virtual Jewish History Tour. Retrieved from <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/albania-virtual-jewish-history-tour>. This narrative describes the history of the Jewish people settlement in Albania.

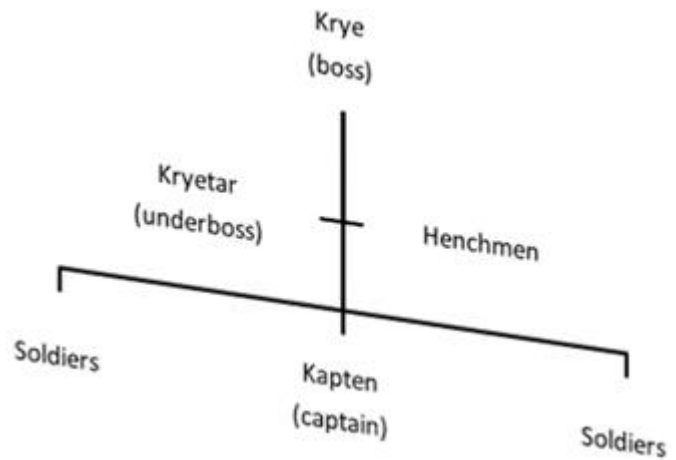
<sup>67</sup> Saxon, W. (1985, April 12). ENVER HOXHA, MASTERMIND OF ALBANIA'S ISOLATION. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/04/12/world/enver-hoxha-mastermind-of-albania-s-isolation.html>. This NY Times article describes the life of Enver Hoxha, the Albanian leader, who, kept his isolated mountain country rigidly cordoned off for four decades.

<sup>68</sup> Saxon, W. (1985, April 12).

<sup>69</sup> Saxon, W. (1985, April 12).

**The structure of the Albanian mafia**

The Albanian family structure is hierarchical in nature and is based on the rule of *kanun* a set of laws, emanating from the Ottoman period, and existing till today,<sup>70</sup> the *Besa* --loosely translated as "word of honor" "faith", "keeping the promise" and the *gjakmarrjë* or blood-feud.<sup>71</sup> The family is also characterized by a strong inner discipline, which is achieved by a means of punishment for every deviation from the internal rules, so that the fear should guarantee an unconditional loyalty to the clan, with the provisions of the official laws considered to be secondary, not important and non-binding.<sup>72</sup> This family, or clan, social structure, and the unbreakable bonds it creates among its members is considered a key point if we want to begin to understand the Albanian mafia and its ties with transnational organized crime, and terrorism. It is also important to understand that the family ties extend to all facets of life, cultural, political and social life of that nation. Other characteristics of the family structure are based on the blood ties, which is a factor that restricts the number of the clan members, the bonds between them are very strong, an important impediment, which makes getting close to and infiltrating into them almost impossible.<sup>73</sup> Members of other ethnic groups can be accepted only to execute certain one time or secondary jobs. Moreover, the Albanian mafia families are organized in 3-4 or more levels, which enable them to preserve the organizational action capability even in case some of its members or groups are captured. History and politics have provided fertile ground for the growth of organized crime in the Balkans. The resurgence or nationalism, the spread of conflict in the successor states of former Yugoslavia, the breakdown of government power in Albania, weak justice system, and economic problems have all nurtured organized crime in the Balkans.<sup>74</sup>



Very poor economic conditions, non-existent industrial base, a very rough terrain coupled with years of communism, the complete lack of policies that encourage institutions of civil society to exist and/or flourish and their lack thereof, emancipated a population that had little respect for the

<sup>70</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. Kanun Ottoman law code. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/kanun>

<sup>71</sup> Kushova, A. (2004, July 22). Besa. Retrieved from [https://www.opendemocracy.net/arts/article\\_2114.jsp](https://www.opendemocracy.net/arts/article_2114.jsp). An explanation of the inner secrets of how an Albanian family is functioning.

<sup>72</sup> Michaletos, I. (2007, September 16).

<sup>73</sup> Michaletos, I. (2007, September 16).

<sup>74</sup> Matras, B. (2018, January 18)..

law and tolerated the practice of illegal activity, as it had nothing to gain from opposing it. All these conditions were ideal for a wave of lawlessness that took hold in the country which was augmented by the ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia, and the fall of communism. Many years of communist rule led to black market activities in the Balkans, but the impact of these activities was limited to the region. When communism collapsed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it led to the expansion of Balkan organized crime activities.<sup>75</sup> Criminal markets once closed to Balkan groups suddenly opened, and this led to the creation of an international criminal network. Within the Balkans, organized crime groups infiltrated the new democratic institutions, further expanding their profit opportunities.

These factors were fundamental for the Albanian mafia to grow and flourish. The rise of the Albanian mafia is attributed to two fundamental reasons. Firstly, the geography of the Balkan Route that actually starts from Afghanistan, transverses Iran and Turkey in Asia, and through Bulgaria, and FYROM, ends up in Albania. A report prepared by the Research Division of the US Congress mentioned that Albanian mafia groups distribute about 40% of heroin in the western European markets and they have operations that are extended in the US and Australia as well.<sup>76</sup> In 2012, the Australian Government issued a country advice for Albania quoting the US State Department security alert for visitors to Albania "...organized criminal gangs continue to operate in all regions and corruption is persuasive. The U.S. Government maintains security procedures regarding the travel of U.S. Government employees to the Administrative districts of Malesi E Madhe, Shkoder, and Tropoje (with the exception of cities along the national road) and to the southern town of Lazarat, with such travel restricted to secure vehicles with escort. In most cases, police assistance and protection is limited..."<sup>77</sup>



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<sup>75</sup> Matras, B. (2018, January 18).

<sup>76</sup> US Library of Congress. (2002, May). A GLOBAL OVERVIEW OF NARCOTICS-FUNDED TERRORIST AND OTHER EXTREMIST GROUPS. Retrieved from [https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/NarcsFundedTerrs\\_Extrems.pdf](https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/NarcsFundedTerrs_Extrems.pdf). This is a global survey, intended to provide an assessment of the nexus between selected anti-U.S. terrorist and extremist groups in the world and organized crime, specifically drug trafficking, and how this relationship might be vulnerable to countermeasures.

<sup>77</sup> Australian Government. (2012, April 17). Country Advice Albania Albania – ALB40190 – Bajraj Clan – Muslim criminal gangs – Organized crime – Shkoder – Criminal links with Albanian government. Retrieved from <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/50f92b0d2.pdf>. The travel advice by the Australian Government refers to the level of crime in Albania, what part in the country considered more dangerous, as well as the gangs related to it, along with the ineptitude of the security services due to low salaries and corruption.

In 2016, Albanian Police Special Forces, about 800 of them backed by helicopters and armored personnel carriers, stormed the Albanian Village of Lazarat, or “cannabis capital of Europe” as it is called where they seized more than 100 tons of marijuana and burnt over half a million drug plants.<sup>78</sup> In a 2017 report the Greek Police mentioned “cannabis is grown in Albania and Kosovo, and from there it is transported to Greece and Italy. For the import of heroin and cocaine, the criminal (Albanian, mine) organizations they cooperate with crime syndicates from Turkey and Latin America. Often, their activities *Fig.11 Rocket propelled grenades, and explosives* are funneled through legally operated companies. It is noteworthy their (Albanian criminal organizations, mine) influence on police, customs and public servants”<sup>79</sup>. The issue of narcotics imports in Greece was discussed between the Assistant Secretary of Public Order (*In Greek is Citizen's Protection*) and the Albanian Ambassador to Greece. The same issue also was brought up, by the Chief of Greek Police Konstantinos Tsouvallas with his Albanian counterpart Haki Cako, just to mention how the rise of crime in Greece has been influenced by the Albanian mafia and increased the concern of Greek officials. Since Greece and Albania share borders, a lot of Albanian criminals wanted by the Greek Police escape in Albania, where Albanian authorities refuse to extradite them to Greece for trial because the Greek arrest warrants need to be translated in Albanian!(sic)<sup>80</sup>.

The second reason for the increased influence of the Albanian mafia is the problem of political corruption, as was mentioned earlier in this study. Corruption exists at all levels of government, and it has prevented the country for being invited for membership to the EU club. In the 2017 country report the US State Department reported on Albania “Despite the government's stated desire to attract foreign direct investment, corruption in Albania is endemic, particularly in the judiciary, and sanctity of contract and respect for private property remain low. The implementation of the reform of the judicial system has recently begun, but the investment climate remains problematic and Albania is perceived as a difficult place to do business”<sup>81</sup>. Police corruption seems to be also a pernicious problem according to businesses and influencing the Albanian population in its distrust to the police. Low police salaries leading to low morale, lack of motivation, augmented by the

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<sup>78</sup> Charton, C. (2016, January 19). The staggering arsenal of RPGs, machine guns and grenades found guarding Albanian gangsters' £4 BILLION drug empire: Ten jailed after 800 armed police swooped on Europe's 'capital of cannabis' Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3406959/The-staggering-arsenal-RPGs-machine-guns-grenades-guarding-Albanian-gangsters-4-BILLION-drug-empire-Ten-jailed-800-armed-police-swooped-Europe-s-capital-cannabis.html>. This article presents in an impressive array of photos the raid to Lazarat, conducted by Albanian Police, jailing 10 men, and confiscating a “staggering” amount of military weaponry, employed in guarding the \$5.4 Bil. “stash”.

<sup>79</sup> Souliotis Y. (2018, May, 11). The Albanian Mafia in Greece. Retrieved from <http://www.kathimerini.gr/921670/article/epikairothta/ellada/h-alvanikh-mafia-sthn-ellada>. This Greek article presents the threat European Union is facing from the Albanian organized crime, its influence on public officials and the efforts by Greek officials and Europol to stem the tide, with very few successes.

<sup>80</sup> Souliotis Y. (2018, May 11).

<sup>81</sup> US Department of State. Investment Climate Statements for 2017. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/investmentclimatestatements/index.htm?year=2017&dldid=269>.

absence of trust in police leadership have created mistrust in the effectiveness of police services. That attitude improved when in 2015, camera systems were installed in patrol vehicles to limit the bribery of officers – with success.<sup>82</sup> In 2014 the Albanian government approved judicial reforms, a key condition demanded by the EU, if Albania has any hope of becoming an EU member<sup>83</sup>. It joined NATO in 2009. In a 2017 opinion poll the Albanian public expressed more trust in the EU and NATO institutions than judicial reform. The US Ambassador to Albania Donald Lu citing U.S. reports, in a gathering of magistrates and judges in Tirana, described Albania as “a center of organized crime activity, which includes trafficking in drugs, weapons and prostitution”<sup>84</sup>. The Albanian population has found itself in a Catch-22 situation, in which they abhor the corruption, and they trust more the EU, NATO and UN institutions<sup>85</sup>, than the judiciary, but also, they realize that corruption was a form of doing business in Albania.

### **The cooperation of Albanian mafia and terrorism**

Albania located in the Western Balkans, it is the only Balkan country with a Muslim majority population since the country was occupied by the Turks in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. By all standards the Muslim population is moderate with a tradition that was tolerable to all religions as it was exemplified by Albania being the only country that did not surrender any Jews to the Nazis, that occupied Albania during WW II. During the era of the communist Hoxza regime, all forms of religion were suppressed vigorously. All that came to an end with the the fall of communism in the early 1990s. With the constitutional changes in 1991, and the newly found religious freedom, the Muslim community came to associate Islam with political freedoms. The sermon that one of the members of an Albanian Muslim Community(AMC) leader delivered during the 1991 *laylat al-qadr* prayer was typical of support for human rights: “The Quran assures people of the irreversible right to life,

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<sup>82</sup> GAN Business Anti-Corruption Portal. (2016, August). Albania Corruption Report. Retrieved from <https://www.business-anti-corruption.com/country-profiles/albania/> This is a composite of different organizations reporting on corruption in Albania at different levels of the country’s public, economic, and business sectors.

<sup>83</sup> Associated Press. (2017, November 16). EU: Judicial reform 'essential' for Albania's accession. Retrieved from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/sns-bc-eu--albania-eu-20171115-story.html>. This AP article presents the European Union’s strong admonition that judicial reform is "essential" in its bid to launch membership negotiations.

<sup>84</sup> Koleka, B. (2017, October 2). U.S. urges EU hopeful Albania to get tough with 'big fish' of crime. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-albania-crime-usa/u-s-urges-eu-hopeful-albania-to-get-tough-with-big-fish-of-crime-idUSKCN1C72AD>. This Reuters report presents the US Ambassador Donald Lu’s in Albania the wish of the US NATO ally Albania to start jailing bosses of organized crime if it hopes to make headway in its bid to join the European Union.

<sup>85</sup> Institute for Democracy and Mediation, (2016). Opinion Poll. Retrieved from <http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Opinion-Poll-trust-in-government-2015.pdf>. Opinion Poll conducted in 2016, expressing the preferences of the Albanian people.

freedom and work, as well as of enjoying material and spiritual rights. Denial of these fundamental rights destroys human integrity, that of the community in general and of individuals in particular”<sup>86</sup>.

However, there were unmitigated factors that influenced the direction of the country in a dangerous path. The dire economic conditions led the leadership of the country to ask for financial assistance. Europe and the US were reluctant to finance a country in such poor economic and unpredictable social straits. This vacuum was filled quickly and indeed willingly by a host of Muslim countries. On December 1992 a decision was taken by Albanian President Sali Berisha to join the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) thus making Albania the first European country to join the Muslim Organization. That decision proved to have unprecedented consequences for the future of the country.<sup>87</sup> In 1992 a delegation of the Turkish Islamic Development Bank visited Tirana and soon after Turkish trading companies started offering extremely beneficial commercial terms. Few months later Kuwait arrived and offered to implement an ambitious investment program in return for building several mosques. Saudi Arabia using its immense financial resources found an opportunity to promote Wahabi Islam. <sup>88</sup> Saudi Arabia paid for the opening of new "madrasas" printed million of copies of the Koran which were distributed throughout Albania.<sup>89</sup>

According to the Helsinki Committee of Human Rights, Albania became the birthplace of Muslim fundamentalism in the Balkans, where “Islamic missionaries took advantage of the spiritual and material crisis to impose foreign models of extreme fanaticism. Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Malaysia, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, opened their treasuries and offered scholarships for young children to study Islamic theology in their respective countries.<sup>90</sup> It didn't take too much time for the results of this indoctrination to be realized. In July 1994, young Muslim students from a local Islamic school smashed and destroyed Christian religious objects infuriating many of the local leaders from both

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<sup>86</sup> Elbasani, A. (2016, March 31). State-organised Religion and Muslims' Commitment to Democracy in Albania. Retrieved from [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2664234](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2664234). This article questions why, and how, Muslims have agitated for democracy during different stages of post-Communist transition. It also demonstrates how the centralized Muslim organization, the Albanian Muslim Community (AMC) has navigated the spaces between the emerging institutional solutions, religious interpretations and intellectual arguments in order to define and justify its positions on democracy during different stages of post-communist democratization.

<sup>87</sup> Gjijknuri, D. (2004, June). ALBANIA'S COUNTER-TERRORISM POLICY OPTIONS: FINDING A STRATEGY OF COMMON SENSE. Retrieved from [https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/1208/04Jun\\_Gjijknuri.pdf;sequence=3](https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/1208/04Jun_Gjijknuri.pdf;sequence=3). This thesis assesses the counter-terrorism policy options available to Albanian authorities. This research also considers the nature of the terrorism threat, review the counter-terrorism policies that have been pursued in the past, and weigh the strengths and weaknesses of the current policy

<sup>88</sup> Napoleoni, L. (2005). Terror, tracing the dollars behind the terror networks incorporated. New Yor, NY. Seven Stories Press. In this book Napoleoni maps out the arteries of the international economic system that feeds armed groups the world over.

<sup>89</sup> Gjijknuri, D. (2004, June).

<sup>90</sup> Napoleoni, L. (2005).

religions. Following those events, the government was forced to close down the school; yet, violence against Christian churches and calls for violence through anonymous pamphlets have continued.<sup>91</sup> The new Wahabi fundamentalist indoctrination, encouraged the arrival of Osama Bin Laden's (OBL) Arab-Afghan veterans who under the disguise of Islamic missionaries were involved in the recruitment, financing and arm Muslim fighters for the war in Yugoslavia. The existence of OBL in Balkans at that time was revealed by Gwen McClure of the criminal subdivision of Interpol made known the Albanian connection in a briefing to the cross-party NATO parliamentary group of MPs.<sup>92</sup>

In September 2001, the Canadian Centre for Peace in the Balkans reported that Osama bin Laden was channeling profits from the sale of narcotics arriving in Western Europe via the Balkan Route to local governments and political parties, with the goal of gaining influence in Albania or FYR of Macedonia or both.<sup>93</sup> Jihan Hassan the wife of the Egyptian Al Qaeda Albanian cell, Shawki, Salama Mustafa, testified in his trial that Shawki was running a racket of forging passports and birth certificates in the basement of his Tiranna house.<sup>94</sup> Dr. Ayman Zawahiri, the Egyptian terror group leader and a confidante of the Bin Laden's network worked tirelessly to bring together the Islamic Jihad and Al Qaeda and to merge them into the World Islamic Front. Albanian gangs also established links with other Islamists, especially Chechens in order to smuggle drugs and arms to Europe. This venture led to working ties with the Italian mafia, that was responsible for the distribution of narcotics in Europe. Consequently, Albania became a vital logistical point in the drug route from Afghanistan to Europe. At that point Albania became the nexus point between Islamic terrorism and organized crime. That fact was acknowledged by the signing of an agreement between OBL and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards to use Albania and Kosovo as their main base for forthcoming attacks in Europe.<sup>95</sup>

In 1997, a pyramid scheme led to the looting of hundreds of military and police storage facilities across the country. Over 100,000 weapons are believed to have been stolen over the course of a few months during this period—the majority of which are still used in conflicts or recycled in

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<sup>91</sup> Gjijknuri, D. (2004, June).

<sup>92</sup> Brown, C. (2001, Oct. 20). Bin Laden linked to Albanian drug gangs. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/bin-laden-linked-to-albanian-drug-gangs-9156073.html>. This article examines the involvement of OBL with Albanian criminal gangs and the efforts of other jihadi groups to raise money through their involvement with Albanian organized crime.

<sup>93</sup> Library of Congress. (2002, May).

<sup>94</sup> Napoleoni, L. (2005).

<sup>95</sup> Deliso, C. (2001, September 19). Bin Laden, Iran, and the KLA: How Islamic Terrorism Took Root in Albania. <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/news/527435/posts>. This article presents very vividly the efforts of OBL and the Iranians to Islamize the Balkans.



European markets. Some are also now believed to end up on the hands of terrorist organizations, including sleeper cells based in Western countries, with Belgium providing the largest black market.<sup>96</sup> Money laundering was another aspect of terrorism financing and the cooperation between Albanian mafia and jihadists. As the case of Yasim Kadi, an Al Qaeda collaborator and construction in Tirana who is believed to have laundered millions of dollars for Al Qaeda. And the list of illicit financing continues for Islamists in Albania. And that list included forging documents and passports, illegal trafficking of human beings, and weapons.<sup>97</sup> According to a consensus of Albanian and Italian authorities, about 150,000 illegal immigrants, originating in Turkey smuggled from Italy to Albania, in a network composed by the trafficking mafia in full cooperation with Islamists, who use the waves of migrants and refugees to smuggle terrorists in disguise with those poor and unfortunate people. This collusion between jihadists and organized crime, has been authenticated by Albanian and foreign intelligence officials.<sup>98</sup> and from the looks of it, the end is no near.

We mentioned at a previous point in our study about the influx of radical imams imported from Islamic countries. "Dividends" of this effort were paid "handsomely" in the recruiting efforts of Albanian jihadist to fight for ISIS, by radicalized imams who were instrumental in recruiting about 70 Albanians to fight for ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Albanian authorities reportedly possess strong evidence that a ring operated by two imams in the suburbs of Tirana is responsible for recruiting 70 fighters.<sup>99</sup> However, let's not discount the important role social media plays in recruiting jihadists ready to "*please God with their shahid sacrifice*" (mine). The internet has proven to be a very important recruiting tool, and as Bruce Hoffman states, it gives them an opportunity for "Propaganda and fund-raising and to shape public opinion in the Muslim world"<sup>100</sup>. According to Arjan Dymishi, a security expert based in Tirana, the Albanian capital, reported that a Facebook page "Krenaria Islame" (Albanian for "Islamic Pride"), which posts pictures and stories of Albanians fighting in Syria, has twenty-five hundred followers., "if all the followers of this page were identified as terrorists, they

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<sup>96</sup> Spahiou, E. (2015, December 2).

<sup>97</sup> Gjijknuri, D. (2004, June).

<sup>98</sup> Gjijknuri, D. (2004, June).

<sup>99</sup> Shtuni, A. (2015, April). Ethnic Albanian Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria. Retrieved from <https://ctc.usma.edu/ethnic-albanian-foreign-fighters-in-iraq-and-syria/>. This CTC article indicates that based on security agencies efforts, it has been revealed that the recruitment of Albanian jihadists to fight for ISIS is comprised by the web of extremist actors, a new generation of local fundamentalist clerics trained in the Middle East and closely affiliated with a number of foreign-funded Islamic charities and cultural associations.

<sup>100</sup>Hoffman, B. (2006, May 4). The Use of Internet by Islamic Extremists. Retrieved from [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/2006/RAND\\_CT262-1.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/2006/RAND_CT262-1.pdf) This article is from a testimony Dr. Bruce Hoffman gave before the Select Committee on Intelligence US House of Representatives. In that testimony Dr. Hoffman, gave an encounter of what terrorists want from the internet, how they can achieve it, and what policies can be adopted to counteract their use of the internet.

would make a small army and pose a major problem. Such big number of followers would pose a concern, even if these people were to be identified only as supporters of political Islam."<sup>101</sup>

Albania is a country, that despite the efforts of its national security authorities, is faced with rampant political corruption, a well organized network of crime, and weak law enforcement apparatus. This is a catastrophic mix for a civil society, that weakens democratic institutions, which are the *manna* of liberal democracy. On the other hand, it provides extra opportunity for Islamic terrorism to generate funds and expand their network. Iran and Turkey are big players in the Balkans, and their desire for an Islamic state in the Balkans remain strong and desirable. Albania needs all the help it can get from the western world, so it won't become the capital of a narcoterrorism caliphate, right at the underbelly of Europe.

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<sup>101</sup> Bardos. (2014).

## CASE 2: Kosovo

Kosovo is located northeast of Albania. (*Serbs call the territory, Kosovo and Metohija. Metohija was a Christian term symbolizing a monastery. For purposes of this study we will call it Kosovo.*) Kosovo prior to the dismembering of Yugoslavia, was one of its provinces, the other being Vojvodina and it was given to Serbia after WW I, in 1918. Kosovo is relatively small – 10,887 km<sup>2</sup>. It has 2 million inhabitants (i.e. 20% of Serbia & Montenegro population), of which 98% are ethnic Albanians.<sup>102</sup> Kosovo's relations with Serbia have always been characterized by ethnic tensions. "Kosovo became part of the Ottoman Empire 70 years after the battle of Kosovo on June 15, 1389, between the Serbs and the Ottoman Turks. It remained under Ottoman occupation until the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913. When the Ottomans were defeated in 1913, it was incorporated into the Kingdom of Serbia. Broz Tito gave Kosovo an independent status. After the Serbs revoked the independence status of Kosovo in 1989, the Kosovars in retaliation voted in secret to declare the Republic of Kosova in 1990, in which the laws of Serbia would be applicable as long as they are not in contrast with the Republic's Constitution. Needless to say, Serbia did not approve of that move by Kosovo, the Serbs esponded with brutality and the Kosovars responded with an insurgency.<sup>103</sup>



Fig. 12. Geographic location of Kosovo

A full-scale war was ensued between Serbia and the Kosovo Liberation Army, KLA, (*UCK, in Albanian*), and another long round of bloodshed.<sup>104</sup> The bloodshed ended after a three-month

<sup>102</sup> Rusche, R. (2006, October). Activities of the Criminal Groups in Kosovo & Metochia and Independence of the Province. Retrieved from [http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00004812/01/rap\\_i\\_an\\_1006a.pdf](http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00004812/01/rap_i_an_1006a.pdf). This article presents the impact of the family clans in the social and criminal life of Kosovo, its struggle for independence and what will be the impact of the independence be for Serbia and Montenegro.

<sup>103</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. THE WORLD FACT BOOK Europe: KOSOVO. Retrieved from [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print\\_kv.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_kv.html) The article by the CIA gives a historical background of the migration of Serbs into the Kosovo area, and their defeat by the Turks in 1389 which led to a large migration of Turks and Albanians, mainly Albanians in the Kosovo region. Continuing the narration of the historical events throughout time, until the Supervised Independence of Kosovo in 2012 and the normalization with Serbia in 2013.

NATO bombing campaign, which forced the Serbs to withdraw their forces from the region and led to Kosovo's supervised independence by the UN Mission in Kosovo, (UNMIK)<sup>105</sup>. In 2008, Kosovo declared independence, and in 2010 the International Court of Justice declared that Kosovo's independence does not violate international law, something that Serbia, Russia and several members of the EU did not accept.<sup>106</sup> The bloody Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s had far and worldwide implications that destined to change the character of the region, international relations, questioned the legitimacy of NATO's bombing, and the authority of the UN as a guarantor of international law.

A question that beckons an answer is on what authority did NATO bombed Yugoslavia? If it was for humanitarian reasons, NATO never got the authority by the UNSC. No NATO country was under attack, so Article 5 of the NATO Charter could not be invoked<sup>107</sup>. Professor Wippman of the Cornell School of Law stated: "from an international law standpoint, Kosovo therefore remains an ambiguous precedent; given the extraordinary circumstances that generated NATO's use of force, Kosovo may also be an anomalous event. But NATO's willingness to use force outside the framework of the U.N. Charter already has contributed to a cloudy political climate in which states are unlikely to interpret the Charter's restrictions on the use of force as narrowly in the future as they

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<sup>104</sup> World Population Review. Kosovo Population 2018. Retrieved from <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/kosovo-population/> This article by the World Population Review, presents a historical increase of the Kosovo population from the 19<sup>th</sup> century where ethnic Albanians were a majority in Kosovo and they are Europe's fastest growing ethnic group with a growth rate of 1.3% per year.

<sup>105</sup> John B. Allcock, J.B., Lampe, J.R. Young, A. (2018, April 19). Kosovo self-declared independent country. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kosovo>. An article by Encyclopedia Britannica, giving a brief history of Kosovo.

<sup>106</sup> John B. Allcock, J.B., Lampe, J.R. Young, A. (2018, April 19).

<sup>107</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2017, March 22). Collective defence - Article 5. Retrieved from [https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics\\_110496.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics_110496.htm). This NATO narrative explains the concept of collective defence, which is at the very heart of NATO's founding treaty. This unique and enduring principle binds its members together, committing them to protect each other and setting a spirit of solidarity within the Alliance. This principle of Collective defence states "that an attack against one Ally is considered as an attack against all Allies.

have in the past".<sup>108</sup> Russia used the Kosovo analogy to justify its military interventions in Crimea and South Ossetia.<sup>109</sup>

In addition, the NATO intervention on behalf of the Kosovars gave an unprecedented boost to the Kosovars to stir up ethnic claims in the neighboring country of FYROM. Stirring up ethnic claims to create the Greater Albania wherever there was a contiguous piece of land with Albanians living in it. That's something that is challenged in research done by the Marshal German Fund related to European Immigration and Transatlantic security challenges "It is exactly the criminal underworld for which the project of "Great Kosovo" and "Great Albania" might be even an attempt to create a drug state (Albanian federation with drug cartels playing the role of financial and then political centers)."<sup>110</sup> In the same reporting, the fund issued a potential warning about the possibility that "Colombian syndrome" could emerge in the Balkans, where the organized crime could take over total control not only of Kosovo but in every area inhabited by Albanians, including several social structures.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Wippman, D. (2001). Kosovo and the Limits of International Law. *Fordham International Law Journal*, Volume 25(1), 129-150 Retrieved from <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1813&context=ilj>. This article examines the legality and wisdom of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization ("NATO") intervention in Kosovo in 1990. The Kosovo campaign pushed at the boundaries of international law in at least two important respects. First, NATO's decision to engage in large-scale military action without prior Security Council authorization raised significant doubts about the status of the law governing the use of force and the viability of United Nations ("U.N.") primacy in matters of international peace and security. Second, NATO's high-altitude bombing campaign, conducted without a single NATO combat casualty but with significant civilian casualties within the FRY, called into question the appropriate relationship between means and ends in an intervention designed to save lives. The long-term impact of the Kosovo intervention in each of these areas of law remains uncertain.

<sup>109</sup> Karagiannis, E. (2014, September 29). The Russian Interventions in South Ossetia and Crimea Compared: Military Performance, Legitimacy and Goals. *Journal Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 35,(400-420). Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260.2014.963965?src=recsys>. This article compares the two interventions in terms of military performance, basis of legitimacy, and motivational goals. It also demonstrated how the Russian leadership used similar legal justifications for the two interventions, based on the Kosovo precedent, opening the possibility of further military action in the former Soviet space.

<sup>110</sup> Rusche, R. (2006, October).

<sup>111</sup> Rusche, R. (2006, October).

## Kosovar Organized and Islamic Terrorism

And what can be a more powerful structure, since we are talking about the Albanian family structure as the Kosovars are, but the family structure as it was described in the Albanian case? And the Kosovar crime family is a copycat of the structure of the Kosovo-Albanian family structure, with a define area of influence or territory. Therefore, the characteristic of the Albanian crime structures is based on the respect for territorial divides, which reflects the spheres of influence of clans. The following map is one example of geographical areas in Kosovo where clans are responsible for their respective criminal activities. Nothing happens in the territory under the control of a clan that is not known and approved by the clan leadership. So, any criminal activity and its

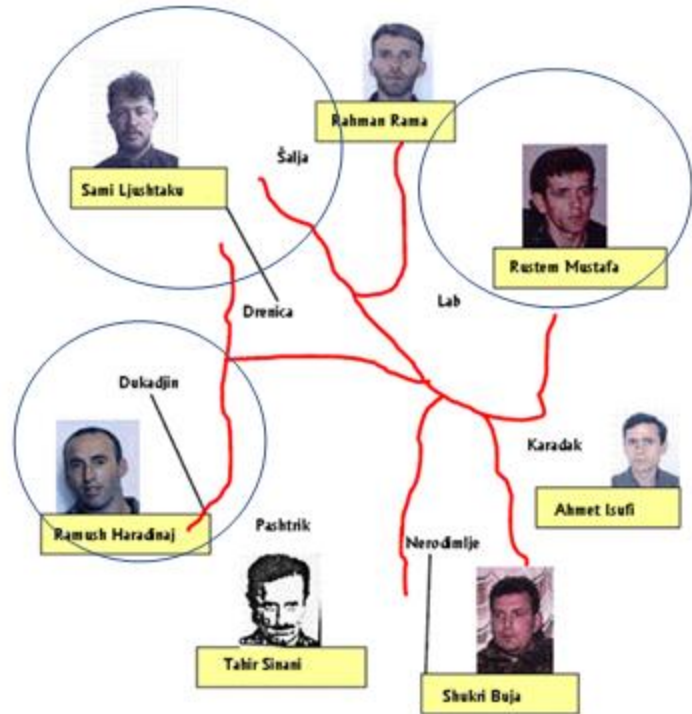


Fig. 13. Criminal groups in Pristina

association with other criminal gangs, or terrorists, or a hybrid of terrorists and criminals is known and approved by the head of the clan. Organized crime has penetrated every aspect of Kosovo's life, including its political leadership, as we will present later on. The strength and the influence of these criminal groups became of paramount importance during the insurrection against the Serbs.

The territory of Kosovo is divided into three *main* spheres of organized crime influence.<sup>112</sup> There are other criminal clans also that either cooperate with the ones or they are solely responsible for their territory. The three crime groups control the regions of *Drenica*, *Dukadjin*, and *Lab*. The criminal activity is controlled by certain leaders of the former KLA who are now active in political structures, as well as by former close associates of KLA who had financed its operations.<sup>113</sup> The **Drenica zone**, led by Sami Ljustaku is loyal to Hashim Thaqi (*Thaqi's story will be covered later*). This criminal's group activities involve arms trafficking, stolen vehicles, human trafficking, excise goods, cigarettes

<sup>112</sup> Serbian Information Agency. (2003, September). ALBANIAN TERRORISM AND ORGANIZED CRIME IN KOSOVO AND METOHIIJA. Retrieved from <http://www.kosovo.net/albterrorism.html> This is a white paper report published by the Serbian Security Agency, pertaining to the activities of the KLA in Kosovo and Metohija. The report analyzes and maps the activities of the leadership of the KLA and its ties with the Kosovar mafia and its connections with international organized crime and terrorism

<sup>113</sup>.(2003, September).

and fuel. The **Dukadjin**, is led by Ramush Haradinaj. The Haradinaj family is mainly oriented toward the illegal trade of weapons, drugs, excise goods and stolen cars, but also toward the racketeering of the Albanian population in Kosovo.<sup>114</sup> The **Lab** is led by Rrustem Mustafa, aka *Remi*, one of the most influential commanders of KLA and KPC (*KPC, Kosovo Protective Corps, KLA renamed after its "disbandment"*). This clan is mainly oriented toward drug smuggling and is closely connected to the Haradinaj family.<sup>115</sup> Hashim Thaqi a former leader of KLA, was involved in organized crime activities, according to a report issued by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), based on the allegations published by former chief prosecutor of the Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Carla Ponte<sup>116</sup> that the former KLA leader, former Prime Minister, and current President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci was involved in organized crime that was associated with smuggling weapons, drugs and human organs through Eastern Europe.<sup>117</sup> Carla Ponte's allegations have been corroborated by NATO, and investigating journalists.<sup>118</sup> Over the years these criminal activities have been expanded to include the tri-border area of Albania, Kosovo and FYROM. In a report published by the European Parliament, it was found that Islamist extremists in the UK use the same routes due to their dominance in the drug and trafficking trade.<sup>119</sup> A New York

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<sup>114</sup> (2003, September).

<sup>115</sup> (2003, September).

<sup>116</sup> McAllester, M. (2011, March 27). Kosovo's Mafia: How the US and allies ignore allegations of organized crime at the highest levels of a new democracy. Retrieved from <https://www.pri.org/stories/2011-03-27/kosovos-mafia-how-us-and-allies-ignore-allegations-organized-crime-highest-levels>. This article presents the story of how the U.S.-backed KLA leaders who went on to be elected to run Kosovo are now being investigated for operating what amounts to an organized crime syndicate with allegations of murder as well as widespread trafficking of women, narcotics and even human organs. And, as a Global Post investigation has found, American and NATO officials had evidence of the criminal allegations all along

<sup>117</sup> Marty D. (2010, December 12). Inhuman treatment of people and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo. Retrieved from [http://assembly.coe.int/CommitteeDocs/2010/20101218\\_ajdoc462010provamended.pdf](http://assembly.coe.int/CommitteeDocs/2010/20101218_ajdoc462010provamended.pdf). This document outlines in detail the KLA's leadership's entanglement with organized crime and its involvement with politics under the encouragement and auspices of western governments.

<sup>118</sup> Burghardt, T. (2010, December 22). Kosovo: Europe's Mafia State. Hub of the EU-NATO Drug Trail. Kosovo's Prime Minister Accused of Running Human Organ, Drug Trafficking Cartel. Retrieved from <https://www.globalresearch.ca/kosovo-europe-s-mafia-state-hub-of-the-eu-nato-drug-trail/22486>. This report charged that former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) boss and current (*former mine*) Prime Minister, Hashim Thaçi, is the head of a 'mafia-like' Albanian group responsible for smuggling weapons, drugs and human organs through eastern Europe.

<sup>119</sup> European Parliament. (2012). Europe's Crime-Terror Nexus: Links between terrorist and organised crime groups in the European Union. Retrieved from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2012/462503/IPOL-LIBE\\_ET\(2012\)462503\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2012/462503/IPOL-LIBE_ET(2012)462503_EN.pdf) This EU study presents a qualitative analysis of the linkages between Organised Crime (OC) and terrorism with specific reference to the European Union. The study also considers developments regarding the relationship between OC and terrorism in regions outside the E.U., that have a direct impact on how the nexus is evolving in E.U. member-states.

Times report indicated "that Balkan heroin trafficking brings in more than \$20 billion annually, providing financing for Al Qaeda and Hezbollah."<sup>120</sup>

The most notable activity between the Albanian Mafia and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was the financing of the insurrection war of Kosovo against the Serbs, via the illicit gains of the Albanian mafia in diaspora. This relationship was cemented during the 1997 Albanian uprising, where the overthrow of the communist government and the ensuing civil unrest during which "over 100,000 weapons are believed to have been stolen over the course of a few months during this period—the majority of which are still used in conflicts or recycled in European markets. Some are also now believed to end up on the hands of terrorist organizations, including sleeper cells based in Western countries, with Belgium providing the largest black market".<sup>121</sup> Some reports also allege that during the turmoil in Albania Al Qaeda members were able to obtain Albanian passports thus getting an easier access to Europe and elsewhere.<sup>122</sup> In a testimony before the House Judiciary Committee on December 13, 2000, Ralf Mutschke of Interpol's Criminal Intelligence division testified "The U.S. State Department listed the KLA as a terrorist organization, indicating that it was financing its operations with money from the international heroin trade and loans from Islamic countries and individuals, among them allegedly Usama bin Laden"<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Srdoc, N. (2014, April 28). Europe Needs Help Combating the Mafia's Influence. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/04/28/is-the-mafia-europes-new-security-threat/europe-needs-help-combating-the-mafias-influence>. This NY Times article posits the huge problem Organized crime is has been for Europe. It is facilitated through money laundering among financial and corporate entities in countries such as Liechtenstein and Austria, and even in U.S. states like Delaware and Wyoming. This criminal enterprise has implications for efforts to combat terrorism.

<sup>121</sup> Spahiou (2015).

<sup>122</sup> Michaletos, I. (2007, September 16). THE ALBANIAN ORGANIZED CRIME. Retrieve from <http://rieas.gr/researchareas/2014-07-30-08-58-27/balkan-studies-5/400-the-albanian-organized-crime>. This paper gives an insight of the dynamics of the Albanian Organized Crime and its local, and transnational character. It also posits the emerging nexus between crime-terrorism and political aspirations creates a complex situation that affects the continuous cooperation, of intelligence and security agencies.

<sup>123</sup> Chossudofsky, M. (2008, January 20). Al-Qaeda and the "War on Terrorism" Retrieved from <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/154-general/26821.html> This article presents the collaboration of the KLA fighters and drug dealing while western powers were turning a blind eye.



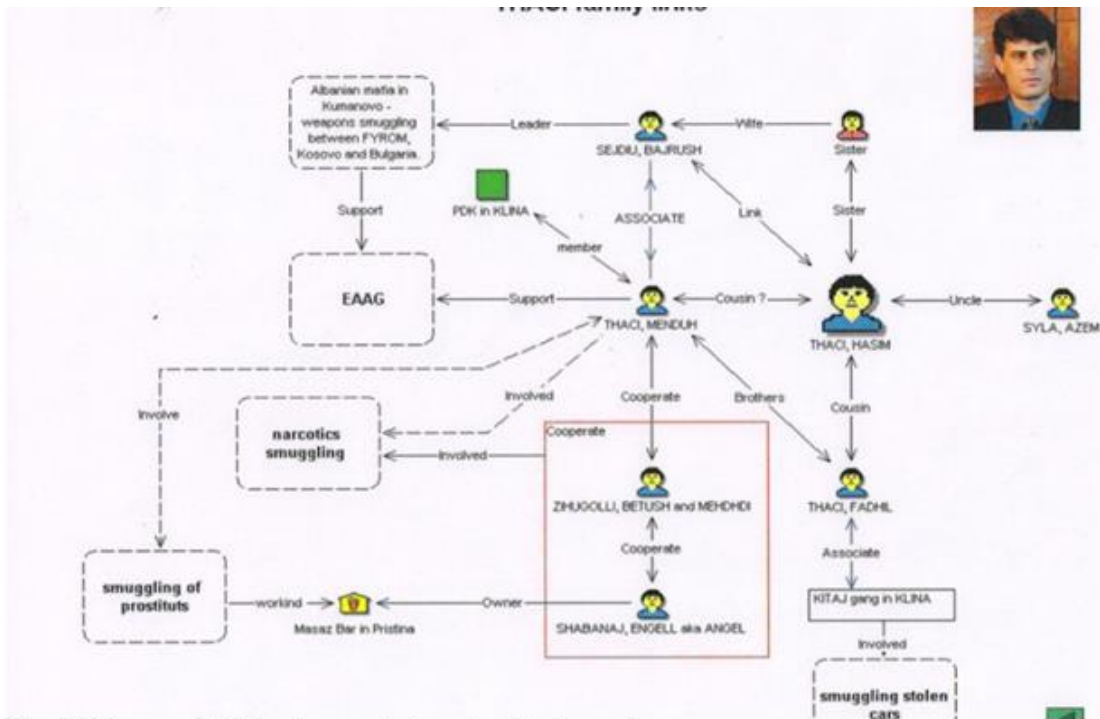


Fig. 14. Former KLA leaders and crime families' members

Another link to bin Laden is the fact that the brother of a leader in an Egyptian Jihad organization, and also a military commander of Osama bin Laden, was leading an elite KLA unit during the Kosovo conflict. A report prepared by the Research Division of the US Congress mentioned that Albanian mafia groups distribute about 40% of heroin in the western European markets and they have operations that are extended in the US and Australia as well.<sup>124</sup> The heroin trade and the Albanian mafia were able to finance the KLA with weapons purchased in the international market from the heroin trade, as the murdered journalist Peter Klebnikov reported in *Mother Jones* magazine.<sup>125</sup> The heroin was able to enter the Balkans through the *Balkan Route* which was a corridor starting from Afghanistan, crossed Iran and Turkey, Bulgaria, FYROM, and ending up in Kosovo and Albania, and from there in Europe. This opportunity was not missed even among the Chechnya's mujahidin's. In 1995 the Chechen rebel Muslim rebel leader Basayev and later on his lieutenant Khatab, linked up with Russian organized crime and the Albanian organized crime and

<sup>124</sup> US Library of Congress. (2002, May). A GLOBAL OVERVIEW OF NARCOTICS-FUNDED TERRORIST AND OTHER EXTREMIST GROUPS. Retrieved from [https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/NarcsFundedTerrs\\_Extrems.pdf](https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/NarcsFundedTerrs_Extrems.pdf). This is a global survey, intended to provide an assessment of the nexus between selected anti-U.S. terrorist and extremist groups in the world and organized crime, specifically drug trafficking, and how this relationship might be vulnerable to countermeasures.

<sup>125</sup> Klebnikov, P. (2000, January/February). Heroin Heroes. Retrieved from <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2000/01/heroin-heroes/> This article describes the effects the support of the KLA by the Clinton Administration had on the heroin trade and its unchecked spread in the Balkans and Europe.

the KLA in an alliance that proved profitable from the drug trade and contraband, especially arms.<sup>126</sup>

So, with the Basayev bold actions, two pipelines seem to be moving west: the uninterrupted supply of Muslim jihadists along with the drug route all the way to Albania and Kosovo, and from there to Europe. According to Loretta Napoleoni: "it was thanks to Chechen criminal groups that the KLA and the Albanian mafia managed to gain control of the transit of heroin in the Balkans"<sup>127</sup>. According to German DEA, in 1998 \$1.5 bil. In drug profits for the Kosovo mafia was laundered by 200 banks and exchange offices<sup>128</sup>. The drug business was so out of control in the Kosovo province that the distinguished Iowa Senator Charles Grassley "introduced a Senate bill, S. 1271, frustratingly named Most Favored Rogue States Act of 1999 in which the distinguished Senator demanded, among other things, that "Not later than 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State shall submit to Congress a report on the drug trafficking activities of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The report shall be submitted in unclassified form but may include a classified annex."<sup>129</sup> The senator never got an answer. The frustration Senator Grassley expressed had started well before 1999, the year the Clinton administration decided to intervene to "save" KLA. Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton warned in an interview on Voice of America on February 17, 2008 that "Kosovo will be a weak state susceptible to radical Islamist influence from outside the region... a potential gate for radicalism to enter Europe," a stepping stone toward an anti-Christian, anti-American "Eurabia."<sup>130</sup> Bolton's statement was shared by former UN commander in Bosnia, Canadian Gen. Lewis McKenzie. In 1999, General Mc Kenzie stated, the West intervened "on the side of an extremist, militant Kosovo-Albanian independence movement. The fact that the KLA was universally designated a terrorist organization supported by

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<sup>126</sup> Napoleoni, L. (2005)

<sup>127</sup> Napoleoni, L. (2005).

<sup>128</sup> Napoleoni, L. (2005)

<sup>129</sup> US Senate of Foreign Relations. (1999, June 23). Summary: S.1271 — 106th Congress (1999-2000). Retrieved from: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/senate-bill/1271>. This bill introduced by Senator Glassley, called Most Favored Rogue States Act of 1999 considers Iran, Syria, and North Korea as major drug-transit countries for purposes of the withholding of bilateral assistance and opposition to the provision of multilateral development bank assistance unless the President certifies to Congress that such countries have cooperated fully with the United States in combating narcotics. Requires the President to notify Congress of his intent to exclude a country that has been determined to be a major drug-transit or major illicit drug producing country. *Also, among other directives, directs the Secretary to report to Congress on the drug-trafficking activities of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).*

<sup>130</sup> Russian Television, Interview with John Bolton. (2008, February 5) John Bolton: Kosovo will spark islamic extremism in Europe. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouQwgLBtFcE> In this interview National Security Advisor in the Trump Administration Ambassador Bolton spoke about the problems Balkans and Europe would face if Kosovo became independent,

al-Qaeda was conveniently ignored".<sup>131</sup> The relationship was cemented by the zeal of KLA veterans who joined Bin Laden's network in Afghanistan. Iran also supported the Albanian insurgency in Kosovo, hoping "to turn the region into their main base for Islamic armed activity in Europe."<sup>132</sup> By the end of 1998 U.S. DEA officials complained that the transformation of the KLA from terrorists into freedom fighters hampered their ability to stem the flow of Albanian-peddled heroin into America.

## Kosovo and its future

In our days Prime Minister of Kosovo is Ramush Haradinaj, and the President of Kosovo is Hashim Thaci. Considered by many analysts as two of the most prolific criminal/terrorists in the world, as you may recall from the list of the Albanian mafia figures in the previous page, are at the top leadership of a small former Yugoslav Province called Kosovo. Ramush Haradinaj, a man indicted twice by the Hague International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, with war crimes and crimes against humanity against Serbs, Romani and Albanians between March and September 1998 during the Kosovo War and both times was acquitted.<sup>133</sup> Of course, how would have been possible a man that was given arms and was left alone to carry on his terrorist activities under the NATO guns, to be prosecuted? Initially Haradinaj was denied visa on January 9<sup>th</sup>. 2018, to visit the US, finally was granted a visa to attend a prayer meeting in Washington DC on February of this year. President Hashim Thaci's stated that he will sign legislation approved by the Kosovo Parliament, "pressing for a vote to abolish the court, which was established to prosecute alleged war crimes by members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) against ethnic Serbs during Kosovo's 1998-99 war for independence"<sup>134</sup>. Kosovo's problems run deep, and they can-not disassociate themselves from the legacy the 1990s wars with Yugoslavia first and then Serbia inherited to the region. It is a nightmare that was left as inheritance to that country of hardly 2 million inhabitants'

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<sup>131</sup> Mc Kenzie L. (2004, April 6). We bombed the wrong side? Retrieved from <http://www.ece.ubc.ca/~leonardo/pub/mackenzie04.htm>. In this article Lewis Mc Kenzie, presents the propaganda campaign launched by the Albanians in demonizing the Serbs along with the false evidence of Kosovar "massacre" orchestrated by the Kosovars as well. And how the Clinton Administration bought into it, which led into a NATO bombing campaign, and the creation of a state that is the crime capital of Europe, and a jihadist sanctuary.

<sup>132</sup> Global Politics. (2017, May 24).

<sup>133</sup> Simons, M. (2012, November 29). War Crimes Court Frees Former Leader of Kosovo. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/30/world/europe/un-court-frees-former-leader-of-kosovo.html>. This NY Times article presents the reasons for Haradinaj's arrest and his trial in the Hague as well as the reasons for his acquittance.

<sup>134</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. (2017, December 28). 'Historical Injustice': Kosovo's President Pledges To Sign Legislation Abolishing War Crimes Court. Retrieved from <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-thaci-legislation-abolishing-war-crimes-court/28943894.html>. This report from Radio Free Europe, presents the decision of President Thaci to sign legislation to abolish a special court at The Hague that was set up to prosecute war crimes if it is passed by Kosovo's parliament. And the negative reaction to that decision of the US and the EU.

day and night. Considering the social structure of Kosovo and its clannish family life, we'll see the association of politics, clans, and organized crime have an unfortunate, for the population of Kosovo, and unwarranted "curse" tied in age old traditional ethics and ethos.

In addition, Kosovo is faced with a relentless and aggressive form of Wahhabism, emanating from Saudi Arabia and Iran and a neo-Ottoman policy by Turkey whose Trojan Horse is Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Genel Müdürlüğü) which with over "80,000 employees and a budget larger than that of many service ministries of the Republic, the Diyanet is probably the world's largest and most centralised Muslim religious organization comparable in scope and capabilities only to the Vatican"<sup>135</sup> is the government body that—surprisingly for a state that identifies itself as secular—deals with all religious matters. Since the American intervention about 18 years ago, signs of Saudi Arabia's(SA) spread of Wahhabism money and influence have transformed this tolerant Muslim society into an advanced front of Muslim jihadists and ready recruits for ISIS. <sup>136</sup> The Saudis spent millions of dollars to build about 240 new mosques, leaving the country with some 800 structures for Sunni Muslim prayer. The Saudis influence was intensified and by the middles of 2000s their influence over the Kosovo Islamic community was intense and led to a lot of intimidation, threats and actual beatings, as traditional Muslim imams tried to ameliorate their influence or opposed their extremist views.<sup>137</sup> The war in Syria was the time that the Islamic extremist in Kosovo demonstrated their influence and "theology". In 2014, two Kosovars blew themselves up one in Turkey and the other in Iraq. That suicide opened a Kosovo Police investigation, under which an imam, Zakir Qazimi, an aggressive former Madrassa student under the guidance of Egyptian extremists and funded by the Saudis was arrested and sentenced to 10 years for spreading hate radicalizing young Muslims. Further investigation also showed the Saudi charity Al Waqf al Islami (AWAI) had been supporting associations set up by preachers like Mr. Qazimi in almost every surrounding area.<sup>138</sup> AWAI was financed by Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain, besides SA. Kosovo's

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<sup>135</sup> Oktem, Kerem, (December, 2010). New Islamic actors after the Wahhabi intermezzo: Turkey's return to the Muslim Balkans. Retrieve from: [https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/attach/126/126845\\_Oktem-Balkan-Muslims.pdf](https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/attach/126/126845_Oktem-Balkan-Muslims.pdf). In this article Oktem presents the view of how Turkish actors, both at the state and grassroots levels, entered the Balkan scene. With the election of the Justice and Development government in 2002 and the subsequent transformation in the foreign policy outlook towards larger Muslim, rather than only Turkish, ethnic concerns, Islamic foundations, educational institutions as well as the mighty Diyanet started to play a major role in most countries of the region.

<sup>136</sup> Gall, C. (2016, May 21). How Kosovo Was Turned Into Fertile Ground for ISIS. Retrieved from [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/world/europe/how-the-saudis-turned-kosovo-into-fertile-ground-for-isis.html?ref=collection%2Fseriescollection%2Fsecrets-of-the-kingdom&action=click&contentCollection=middleeast&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=5&pgtype=collection](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/world/europe/how-the-saudis-turned-kosovo-into-fertile-ground-for-isis.html?ref=collection%2Fseriescollection%2Fsecrets-of-the-kingdom&action=click&contentCollection=middleeast&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=5&pgtype=collection). This NY Times article presents the money, propaganda and money S. Arabia has spent in Kosovo, the impact in the training jihadi imams, and the resistance that is emanating from traditional Kosovar Muslim imams, that oppose their extremist views.

<sup>137</sup> Gall, C. (2016, May 21)

<sup>138</sup> Gall, C. (2016, May 21)

Financial Intelligence Unit found that AWAI, with 12 people staff in central Pristina had spent €10 million from 2000 through 2012. Yet they found little paperwork to explain much of the spending.<sup>139</sup> Kosovo compared to the other countries in Europe per capita has a high proportion of citizens who have travelled to ISIS-territories As of March 2017 the official figure is 316; of these, 59 have died, 118 have returned, and 139 remain in the conflict zone, of which, 38 are women and 28 are children.<sup>140</sup>

It is fair to say that the government of Kosovo has been very active in trying to stem the flow of jihadist willing to fight for ISIS or other extremists while aggressively pursuing trials and distributing sentences to guilty parties, like the sentencing of 8 Kosovar Islamists on May 18, 2018, "who were found guilty of planning to carry out attacks in Albania against the Israeli national football team. The court sentenced the nine defendants to a total of 35.5 years and fined them more than 5,000.00 euros."<sup>141</sup> The issue that Islamic terrorism presents a clear and present danger to Kosovo became known in 2014, when the security services suddenly arrested dozens of suspected terrorists, including several imams. Since then, more than 100 locations across the country have been raided. Additionally, the Government of Kosovo issued its official strategy for eradicating Islamic extremism in "Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015 to 2020".<sup>142</sup>

There is no doubt that the Government of Kosovo is trying under the auspices of the US Government to beef up its security forces and its institutions. Chronic political corruption, along with the nexus of organized crime and its resulting terrorism, or cooperation between organized crime and terrorism present an obvious impediment for Kosovo, that only time will show if and when Kosovo will be able to overcome it and be accepted without second thoughts by the international community.

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<sup>139</sup> Gall, C. (2016, May 21)

<sup>140</sup> Knudsen, R.A. (2017). Radicalization and foreign fighters in the Kosovo context: An analysis of international media coverage of the phenomena. Retrieved from [https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2442205/NUPI\\_Working\\_Paper\\_875\\_Knudsen.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y](https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2442205/NUPI_Working_Paper_875_Knudsen.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y). This working paper takes a critical look at the written coverage of issues of jihadi radicalization and foreign fighters from Kosovo, identifying key themes, assumptions, and areas where the press seems to have missed certain points.

<sup>141</sup> BIRN, (2018, May 18). Kosovo Jails Eight for Planning Attack on Israelis. Retrieved from <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-jails-eight-for-planning-attack-on-israelis-05-18-2018>. This article describes the investigation, the arrests and the role the leadership of the defendants played in the attempt to execute a terrorist attack against the Israeli football team to play in Tirana.

<sup>142</sup> BIRN, (2016, March). Balkan Jihadists: The Radicalisation and Recruitment of Fighters in Syria and Iraq. Retrieved from <https://www.balkaninsight.com/en/file/show/Balkan-Jihadists.pdf>. The research project focuses on the radicalization and recruitment of jihadi fighters for the conflicts in Syria and Iraq in the following Balkan states: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

CASE 3: Bosnia-Herzegovina

**Bosnia-Herzegovina prior to 1990s war, beginnings of Bosnian Islamization.**

The Ottomans occupied the Balkans in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, and Bosnia Herzegovina in particular in 1483. In Bosnia the process of Islamization augmented by the Bosnians who converted and became worse than the Ottomans themselves.<sup>143</sup>

As the borders of the Ottoman Empire began to shrink in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Muslims from elsewhere in the Balkans migrated to Bosnia. Bosnia also developed a sizable Jewish population, with many Jews settling in Sarajevo after their expulsion from Spain in 1492. However, through the 19<sup>th</sup> century the commonly included residents of all faiths.<sup>144</sup> A relatively secular society, intermarriage among religious groups was not uncommon. The region came under the control of Austria-Hungary in 1878 and subsequently played a key role in the outbreak of World War I. In 1918, it was incorporated into the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, where it had no formal status of its own. However, while the Serbs and the Croats of Bosnia could look up to Belgrade and Zagreb respectively, the Muslims were left to vacillate between their Muslim, Ottoman, local, and Slavic roots. At first they allied with the stronger Serbs and turned their eyes on Belgrade where they ensured for themselves some privileges, but wary of the competition between the Croats who championed their nationalism and the Serbs who regarded themselves as the guardians of Yugoslavian unity, they focused more and more on their local and religious identity in the form of a Muslim party, Jugoslav Muslim Organization, (JMO),



*Fig. 16. Current map of Bosnia & Herzegovina*

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<sup>143</sup> Israeli, R. (Israeli, R. (2004). From Bosnia to Kosovo: the Re-Islamization of the Balkans. Retrieved from <http://www.acpr.org.il/publications/policy-papers/pp109-xs.html>. This article published by the Ariel Center for Policy Research is part of a collection of articles published in a book called Mohamad's Monsters. The article presents extensive details of the life under the Ottoman yoke in the Balkans, the continuous attempts of the Muslims to convert Christians and Jews to the Muslim faith, how the hatred toward the Muslim occupation has lasted to this day, and how the myopic policy of the West towards the Muslims has led to the re-Islamization of the Balkans.

<sup>144</sup> Infoplease. Bosnia and Herzegovina. Retrieved from <https://www.infoplease.com/country/bosnia-and-herzegovina>. A history of BiH from its inception until 1991 when war broke off in former Yugoslavia.

while the Serbs and the Croats continued to claim that the Muslims of Bosnia were of their respective origins.<sup>145</sup>

This uncertainty and insecurity of the Bosnian Muslims or *Bosniaks(sb)*, while being the majority but not the absolute majority of Bosnia, surrounded by two Christian populations, led them to some unsavory and catastrophic alliances that would have tragic consequences for the future of themselves and the country. The concerns and worry about their future led them during WW II to collaborate with the fascists and the Nazis and to create 13th *Waffen* Mountain Division of the SS *Handschar* (1st Croatian) and along with the Croats to murder thousands of Serbs<sup>146</sup>, while among the victims of Croatian atrocities at least, were included Jews, and Gypsy (Roma), according to

James Bissett, former Canadian Ambassador to Yugoslavia.<sup>147</sup> Even the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Amin Al Huseini had offered to recruit Muslim Bosniaks for Hitler.



*Fig. 17 Amin Al Hussein shown here on a Nazi poster recruiting fellow Bosnian Muslims to fight for the Nazis*

After the end of the Second WW and under Tito's own form of Communism, Yugoslavia was conformed to a model where the different nationalities were being defined by their own national particularities, including their linguistic differences, until 1971, a watershed year for the Bosnian Muslims. That year initiated the change of the attitude of the Bosnian Muslims towards a new approach to their national identity which determined their future. A Muslim *manifesto(sb)* made its appearance in the Muslim circles of Bosnia, written by an ex-member of the Muslim SS *Handschar*, a member of the JMO, a fundamentalist Muslim going by the name Ilija Izetbegovic, whose Muslim *Manifesto's* content served as the emancipation tool of the Bosnian Muslim population towards defining itself according to its Muslim faith rather than according to its ethnicity. This move of the Muslim Bosniaks toward

the Muslim faith had cataclysmic consequences for the region as it led to the Islamization of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and by extension, to the Balkans and Europe. The Israeli scholar Raphael Israeli

<sup>145</sup> Israeli, R. (2004).

<sup>146</sup> Israeli, R. (2004).

<sup>147</sup> Bissett, J. (2010, April 2). Croatia should apologize for World War II genocide before joining the EU. Retrieved from <https://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2010/0402/Croatia-should-apologize-for-World-War-II-genocide-before-joining-the-EU>. This article refers to the opinion of the former Canadian Ambassador to Yugoslavia 1990-1992 James Bissett, about the need for Croatia to apologize first for crimes against the Serbs, during WW II, prior to joining the EU.

presents the following analysis of the Islamization of the Balkans: "In Bosnia it was the revivalist Islamic ideology of Ilija Izetbegovic which was the engine of this new Bosnian Nationalism, which was aided by Iran and other Muslim countries, happy to see Islamic politics back in Central Europe. The landmark of this call to arms against the "infidels" was the creation of the "Mujahedeen Battalion" in 1992, composed mainly by Arab volunteer fighters.<sup>148</sup> BiH's Ilija Izetbegovic first president of modern Bosnia and Herzegovina during its war for independence and after was an *Islamist* who wrote a manuscript titled *Islamic Declaration* portraying his philosophical political belief, by stating as an objective "to create a uniform Muslim community from Morocco to Indonesia" and "a Muslim can only die with the name of Allah in his lips and for the glory of Islam".<sup>149</sup> Izetbegovic's early encounters with the law, right after WWII and while Tito had established his Communist form of government earned Izetbegovic a two year prison sentence for editing an illegal publication of an Islamic Journal, *El-Mujahid* (The Holy Warrior) "whose first edition displayed



*Fig. 17. Ilija Izetbegovic with Muj. Battalion*

unmistakable signs of Pan-Islamist radicalism: calls for jihad, ample Koranic quotes, and recitation of *tekbir* (*Allahu Akbar*)"<sup>150</sup> That jail sentence was a saving grace for Izetbegovic, as while he was in jail the state arrested the most radical of the Young Muslims believing that it had brought the end of the Muslim Islamists. Unperturbed by what was going around him Izetbegovic's fervor for Islam was not quelled by his jail term, but on the contrary, after he got out, he spent every free hour outside his law practice devoting his free time for the cause of radical Islam. In the 1950s, Bosnian Muslims developed underground relationships with other Islamist in Arab countries and rekindled the relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood(MB) of Egypt (*Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*), having a great deal of respect and admiration for the organization and its leader Hassan al-Banna, with which they were sharing the same aspirations and conspiratorial ambitions.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Erban, M. (2015, July 2). Bosnia: The cradle of modern jihadism? Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33345618>. This BBC report casts another light on Bosnia, figuring the country as a jihadi hotbed, recruiting fighters to fight for ISIS, an Al Qaeda alumnus, and the leader of the "Mujahedin Battalion" Brigadier General Enver Hadzihasanovic, ending up facing a war crimes trial in Hague.

<sup>149</sup> Israeli, R. (2004).

<sup>150</sup> Schindler, J. (2007). p. 39

<sup>151</sup> Schindler, J. (2007). p. 40-44



Tito's regime's in the 1950's became the darling of the West, as Tito's heresy against Stalin's dogmatism, gave unprecedented diplomatic power and recognition for a country the size of Yugoslavia; Having achieved that international recognition, feeling invincible, and internally secured from having decapitated the radical Muslim leadership, Tito embarked in a policy of rapprochement with the Muslim community. Thus, in twenty some years between 1950-1970 the state built 800 new mosques, bringing the total to 1437, with 1,300 imams vs. 1,043, mosques, with 1,090 imams in 1930.<sup>152</sup> The 1979 Iranian Revolution was an Izetbegovic's "Eureka" moment, for there was a Muslim revolution against a western oriented state. For Izetbegovic the difference between Shia and Sunni was not an important issue and Bosnian Islamists continued their warmer and increasingly stronger cooperation with the MB, to the point that among the cadre the MB was dispatching to Bosnia was *Hassan Nasser*, one of the planners of the 1981 assassination against President Anwar Sadat, who found refuge in Bosnia bringing along some more MB members with him. <sup>153</sup> In the MB's enthusiasm by the Muslim Islamist it was added an unprecedented sympathy for the Iranian Revolution and in 1981 Izetbegovic established contact with the Iranian Embassy in Vienna, by passing along a copy of his *Islamic Declaration* to the Iranians. That was an unexpected opening for the Iranians to export their revolution to Europe through the Balkans. A meeting was arranged in Abu Dhabi, that never happened, as the Yugoslavian security services were getting nervous watching the MB activities, and Khomeini's portrait in Bosnian windows and they acted by arresting Izetbegovic and the Islamist leadership of the Young Muslims group, sentencing Izetbegovic to 14 years in prison. A sentence that was partially served, as the "old man" died, and a Yugoslavia without Tito was emerging. The federation of BiH with its Muslim majority, and the Serbs and Croats watching over them, was going to be tested like never before.

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<sup>152</sup> Schindler, J. (2007). P. 41

<sup>153</sup> Orton, W.K. (2016, January 23). From Bosnia to Guantanamo. <https://medium.com/news-politics/from-bosnia-to-guantanamo-94b804c467ea>. This article refers to the route of jihadist Tariq Mahmoud Ahmed as-Sawah from Guantanamo to Bosnia, and according to his story to security agencies, interrogated him, the influence of Saudi "Charities", the presence of Egyptian Islamism in Bosnia, and the presence of Afghan jihadists and their participation in the Bosnian fight against the Serb forces.

**In November 1990 Ilija Izetbegovic was elected President of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That marked the beginning of the Islamist invasion in the Balkans and Europe and by extension in the world, almost six hundred years since the Turks were defeated in the Battle of Vienna in 1683 AD.**

### **Islamic Jihad and the Bosnian ‘model’ of the nexus with organized crime**

Taking advantage of the power gap created by Tito's death and the following economic uncertainty surrounding Yugoslavia, Izetbegovic and his cohorts created a new political party, called SDA (*Stranka Demokratske Akcije*), Party of Democratic Action, and in the 1990 November elections Fikret Abdic, another Muslim running for the presidency, without any explanation threw his weight to Izetbegovic's candidacy and Izetbegovic was elected President of BiH. That marked the beginning of the Islamist invasion in the Balkans and Europe and by extension in the world, almost

six hundred years since the Turks were defeated in the Battle of Vienna in 1683 AD. Izetbegovic first initiatives of his presidency were to seek financial aid from the Muslim world. In pursuing this, he visited Libya, then Turkey, and finally Iran, which promised to provide whatever assistance Bosnia may need. Not only that, but while in Turkey, he requested Bosnia to join the Organization of Islamic Conference. It became more and more apparent that Izetbegovic would accept no other but Muslims in his government. That didn't sit well with the Serbs, that attempted to come to some agreement with Izetbegovic, but he would have none of that. The whole issue was insolvable and in 1992, a war broke out between the Muslims and the Serbs. Izetbegovic's previous trips to the Islamic world produced fruits. Bosnia became the Afghanistan of the Balkans.

In April of 1992, a veteran of the Afghan War, Sheikh Abu Abdel Aziz, visited Bosnia, where he proclaimed himself the first Emir of the Bosnian Arab–Afghans. Little is known of Aziz, except that he is believed to be a Saudi of Indian descent who had been inspired to fight in Afghanistan by Abdullah Azzam, the principal organizer and mentor of the Afghan jihadis who was killed in a bomb blast in 1989.<sup>154</sup> Aziz established his first headquarters in the central Bosnian town of Travnik, 50 miles west of Sarajevo; other jihadi camps were set up at Mehurici, outside Travnik, and in the city of Zenica, also in central Bosnia. The camps were based on the Afghan model, providing intensive military and



*Fig. 18 Sheikh Abu Abdel Aziz*

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<sup>154</sup> Curtis, M. (2016, October 11). A Covert War in Bosnia. Retrieved from <http://markcurtis.info/2016/10/11/a-covert-war-in-bosnia/> This article explains how the West, and particularly UK turned a blind eye towards the invasion of the Balkans by terrorists and Jihadists, and how the Government of Izetbegovic tried to keep them by providing them with passports under the now objections of the US.

weapons training and religious indoctrination. According to Vojin Joksimovich, author of *The Revenge of the Prophet*, "Osama Bin Laden saw a great opportunity in Bosnia and established a base of operations in Europe against Al Qaeda's true enemy, the U.S. The Afghan Jihad and the Gulf War combined to produce fertile ground for 9/11. However, Bosnia became the direct springboard for 9/11, the Madrid train bombings and probably London."<sup>155</sup> Osama Bin Laden himself spent time in Bosnia during the war, before he became "famous". He was recognized by Renate Flottau, the *Der Spiegel's* Belgrade correspondent, who placed him outside Izetbegovic's office many times.<sup>156</sup> Jihadists, mujahedeen, Salafists, were walking the streets of Sarajevo and Tuzla, like it was Kabul.

The Bosnian jihadi volunteers largely comprised Afghan veterans of mainly Saudi but also of Pakistani, Egyptian and Yemeni origin, and they were joined by a younger group of disaffected, often unemployed European North African youths, mostly from Algeria and Tunisia. All these volunteers comprised the 'Armija Republike BiH, 3 Korpus, Odred el-Mujahedin' as the unit was called<sup>157</sup>. The commander, an Egyptian 'Afghan', was identified as Ameer Kateebat al-Mujahedin Abu al-Ma'ali -- a religious-military title and a nom de guerre. The Katibat al-Mujahideen, veterans of the Bosnian jihad in the 1990s included people such as Khalid Shaikh Mohammed or KSM, mastermind of the 9/11 attacks; Two Saudi volunteers, Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khaled al-Mindhar, journeyed to the Balkans in 1995; six years later they would hijack American Airlines flight 77 and crash it into the Pentagon.<sup>158</sup> Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, involved in the attack on the USS Cole; Mamdouh Mahmud Salim, involved in the August 1998 US embassy bombings in East Africa; Abu Hamza al-Masri, the spiritual father of the July 2005 London Underground bombings; and Zaki ur-Rehman Lakhvi, one of the participants in the November 2008 Mumbai bombings. Ali Hamad, a Bahraini-born al-Qaeda operative, has claimed that al-Qaeda figures would visit Bosnia with "state protection," and both the US and Saudi Arabia (*after Dayton 1995 sb*) accused the Izetbegovic regime of giving Bosnian passports.<sup>159</sup>

But Jihadists, Wahhabis, and Salafists were not the only ones walking the streets of Sarajevo. Iran was not going to miss its chance for exporting Khomeini's Revolution. The Iranian intelligence,

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<sup>155</sup> Walker, L.J. (nd). ISLAMIC TERRORISM: Afghanistan to Bosnia and September 11. Retrieved from <https://islamicpersecution.wordpress.com/2010/05/19/islamic-terrorism-afghanistan-to-bosnia-and-september-11/> This article presents how the West with its policies, demonized the Serbs and exonerated the Muslims thus allowing Radical Islam to create a Jihadist base in the Balkans which to this day is working to hurt the West.

<sup>156</sup> Schindler, J. (2007). p 123

<sup>157</sup> Raman, B. (2001, October 9). From Bosnia, with terror Retrieved from <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2001/10/09/stories/040985ra.htm>. This article is an account of the story of Abu Abdel Aziz and his jihadist activities including the ones in Bosnia.

<sup>158</sup> Curtis, M. (2016, October 11).

<sup>159</sup> Bardos, G.N. (2014, September/October)

VEVAK which can leverage the experience of theocracy, powerful organization and local support among the ruling circles of the Bosnian Muslims Haris Silajdžić, Bakir Izetbegović, Hasan Čengić, Omer Behmen, Edhem Bičakčić, Džemaludin and Nedžad Latić to pose a danger to Bosnia itself, as well as regional and global stability<sup>160</sup>. By the end of the war Iran had supplied the Bosnian Muslims "14,000 tons of Iranian weapons, ¾ of million pounds of TNT and seven tons of plastic explosive, \$200 million worth of war material in all".<sup>161</sup> Turkey was not left that far behind, as it also cooperated with Iran in smuggling arms to BiH.<sup>162</sup> By 1994 the Bosnian jihad was also assisted by an array of NGOs many of them Saudi directed and funded. The most important of them being IIRO and the Muslim World League (MWL), "its parent organization were both created and funded by the Saudi Government."<sup>163</sup>

So, Salafism, Jihad, the entrance of Muslim theocracy entered Europe at the backs of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran and unfortunately not only, but also at the backs of the West, as well. The EU and the UN had imposed an arms embargo on the whole of Yugoslavia, as a last ditch, effort to thwart a war. The Clinton Administration violated the arms embargo, and through the Iranians allowed arms and funds, and the accompanying jihadi ideology to put a foot in the Balkans. A side effect of that policy was the creation and nurturing of organized crime venue "*made in Bosnia*". The imposition of that embargo, and its violation, had two effects. The first was that organized crime before the war was using BiH as a transportation and transit hub, where drugs, contraband cigarettes and other illicit goods were passing through and now with the war, there was a transportation problem. The second was that the besieged Muslim government saw the opportunity to stay above the fray, by employing the services of the "idle" organized crime to do

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<sup>160</sup> Mihaletos, I., Trifunovic, D. (2015, December 24). Nexus between Terrorism and Organized Crime. Retrieved from <http://www.rimse.gr/2015/12/nexus-between-terrorism-and-organized.html>. This article reports on the existence of terrorist cells and safe havens as a real threat to the stability and coherence of the region and for entire Europe indirectly. It posits that it is more than certain that the local leaderships will soon have to cooperate in order to relieve the much torn-apart South East Europe from this 21st menace.

<sup>161</sup> Schindler, J. (2007). p 138.

<sup>162</sup> Pomfret, J. and Ottaway D. (1996, May 12). U.S. Allies' Arms Aid to Bosnia Detailed. Retrieved from [http://articles.latimes.com/1996-05-12/news/mn-3437\\_1\\_arms-smuggling](http://articles.latimes.com/1996-05-12/news/mn-3437_1_arms-smuggling). This LA Times article describes how the arms smuggling took place in Bosnia and Croatia, and how the Clinton Administration while officially supported the embargo, in reality it did nothing to prevent it. Bosnian officials said the Balkan arms smuggling pipeline took shape during the fall of 1992, six months after war erupted in Bosnia-Herzegovina between the Muslim-led government and rebel Serbs, who were backed by forces and supplies from neighboring Serbia. During a visit by Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic to Tehran on Oct. 30-31, Bosnian sources said, an agreement was worked out to open a weapons supply route to the Muslim-led government in Sarajevo through neighboring Croatia. Croatia, which normalized relations with Iran on April 18, 1992, sent a Muslim Croat, Osman Muftic, to be its first ambassador. It was Muftic, officials said, who worked out the details of the weapons pipeline along with Omer Behmen, Bosnia's ambassador to Iran, and Hasan Cengic, a Bosnian Muslim arms dealer who now serves as Bosnia's deputy minister of defense.

<sup>163</sup> Schindler, J. (2007) p 128. In 1999, a senior MWL official testified in a Canadian Court Case: "The Muslim World League, is a fully government-funded organization. In other words, I work for the Government of Saudi Arabia".

its dirty job, and at the same time to materialize its Muslim agenda by terrorizing anything and everything that was not Bosnian Muslim. According to UN Commission reports, a large part of the campaigns of ethnic cleansing were carried out by these groups.<sup>164</sup>

It is fair to say that OC was common in BiH. Smuggling channels from before the war were used to transport oil, cigarettes, tobacco and arms.<sup>165</sup> There is nothing new here. Also, the nexus of terrorism “made” in Bosnia organized crime was manifested under the following paradigms: 1) The first one was the nexus between the local Muslim hierarchy with the local mafia. 2) The connection between the local Muslim hierarchy with the Muslim “charitable” organizations. Thus, In Sarajevo, the initial group to take to the streets in the early days of the conflict were criminal and paramilitary groups, so the service of local mafia was put to service. A certain Jusuf Prazina, or “Juka”, who “before the war was a major league mafioso, with a force of three hundred debt collectors under him, and a reputation considered unsavory even by the standards of his profession” asked to “defend the city”<sup>166</sup>. Prazina and his associates performed this by “requisitioning the city’s luxury cars for defense purposes, and finding this also, a very profitable operation”.<sup>167</sup>

At the same time, terrorizing any Serb or Croat population, in the once multiethnic city, was included in the business of his criminal enterprise. Worse than “Juka” was Musan Topalovic, or “Caco” whose crimes were including the “kidnapping of young Serbs to clear mines in the front lines, or their relatives paying a “blood tax” in order to get their love ones back.<sup>168</sup> Muslim charities were instrumental in supplying terrorists and colluding with Izetbegovic government to provide funds for armaments, and terrorists. This activity gave the impetus for organized crime to be established within the government, and to be intertwined with police and military activities, which led to political corruption, an age-old phenomenon in the Balkans. A fake humanitarian agency that was instrumental as a go-between suppliers and fighters in Bosnia was the TRRA (Third World Relief Agency), a Sudan based organization, led by Islamist Dr. Fatih al-Hasanayn.<sup>169</sup> The

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<sup>164</sup> Brady, S. (2002, October). Organized Crime in Bosnia Herzegovina. Retrieved from [https://www.occrp.org/documents/OC\\_in\\_BH\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.occrp.org/documents/OC_in_BH_ENG.pdf). This report states that organized crime and corruption existed in healthy doses far before the war broke out, but that wartime chaos exacerbated the problems. As Sheela Brady states, wartime conditions did provide opportunities for [organized crime] to flourish, with the post-war environment doing little to cease criminal activities,”

<sup>165</sup> Brady, S. (2002, October).

<sup>166</sup> Schindler. J. (2007). p. 103

<sup>167</sup> Schindler. J. (2007). p. 103

<sup>168</sup> Schindler. J. (2007). p. 104

<sup>169</sup> Napoleoni, L. (2005). p. 119

organization had links with Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman, the Blind Sheik, involved in the first World Trade Center bombing, and Osama Bin Laden.<sup>170</sup>

Several western intelligence agencies assisted by the Bosnian Government after the war revealed in an investigation report a total of \$2.5 billion has been laundered by Bosnian Muslim officials who had created a junta short of a few hundred people in the military, the diplomatic corps, the government departments, the ruling party of SDA, security and religious circles.<sup>171</sup> Al-Hasanayn who had Sudanese and a Bosnian diplomatic passport was able to carry between \$3-\$5 million in cash on a weekly basis, to SDA officials. Hasan Cengic, a Muslim cleric and the man that served a prison sentence with Izetbegovic, *THE*(sb) key man in the network established by TWRA's Al-Hasanyan, left no paperwork behind entailing where the money was going.<sup>172</sup> Of course, this outrageous theft combined with a criminal money laundering operation, was a heavenly sent gift for the Islamists of the Izetbegovic "purists" to get rewarded for the "good" job they did for BiH. Senad Sahipansic, another SDA ranking official, when asked by European investigators who were being alarmed by the obvious connections between Sarajevo officials, radical clergy, and organized crime bosses, where the money was going, he said: "It is with pride that I accept that I was involved in the chain of international crime that permitted the arms embargo against the Bosnian Army to be broken".<sup>173</sup>

None of that though, could make the west see the truth, on what was really going on in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A complete blind eye to the open-door policy for the world's jihadists to initiate a bridgehead for radical Islam to enter Europe and as it was proven to attack the US on 9/11. The Serbs were the attackers and the Muslims were the victims. Therefore, they had to be defeated and exterminated from Bosnia, and that's what happened. NATO went to work, and after twenty-one days of continuous bombing on Bosnian Serb positions, the warring parties signed the Dayton Peace Agreement in Dayton Ohio, on November 1995, which was ratified in Paris, France, on December 14, 1995<sup>174</sup>.

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<sup>170</sup> Napoleoni, L. (2005). p. 119

<sup>171</sup> Schindler, J. (2007). p. 149

<sup>172</sup> Schindler, J. (2007). p. 151

<sup>173</sup> Schindler, J. (2007). p. 152

<sup>174</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (1995, December 14). Dayton Peace Agreement. Retrieved from <https://www.osce.org/bih/126173>. The Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), Dayton Accords, Paris Protocol or Dayton-Paris Agreement, is the peace agreement reached at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, United States, in November 1995, and formally signed in Paris on 14 December 1995. These accords put an end to the 3 1/2-year-long Bosnian War, one of the armed conflicts in the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia.

## Where is Bosnia Herzegovina heading?

The Dayton Peace Agreement created a revolving presidency in Bosnia Herzegovina composed of representatives from the Muslim community, the Christian Orthodox Serbs, and the Roman Catholic Croats. The war has created some irreversible realities in the small territory in the Western Balkans, called Bosnia and Herzegovina, BiH. Islamization has penetrated the country and it has created a



Fig. 19. BiH map with terrorist training camps

life of its own. At the end of the war foreign jihadists married local Muslim women and stayed in BiH. It's a tradition that radical Muslims want to maintain. The Counter-Extremist Project reports that "from 2012 to the end of 2014, Bosnia was estimated to have produced nearly 200 foreign fighters to the conflict in Syria and Iraq. By June 2016, an estimated 50 Bosnians were believed to have been killed while in conflict zones in Iraq and Syria, while another 50 were believed to have returned to Bosnia, leaving an estimated 90 Bosnian males, 50 women, and 80 children still

active in terrorist-held territory in Iraq and Syria.<sup>175</sup> "German investigators believe there are around a dozen places in Bosnia where Salafists -- followers of a hardline Sunni interpretation of Islam -- have assembled radicals undisturbed by the authorities.<sup>176</sup> That Islamic State flags are flying in Bosnia, has been denied by Prime Minister Denis Zvizdic "dismissing allegations by some European leaders that radical Bosnian Muslims in the Balkan country were posing a terrorist threat for Europe".<sup>177</sup> It is true that most Bosniaks are practising a moderate form of Islam, but it is also true that jihadists have established a bridgehead that is hard to ignore. Even moderate imams will attribute to that, like Imam Ahmed Hrustanovic, who was all alone in his mosque at dawn prayers. "In the

<sup>175</sup> Counter Extremist Project. (n.d.) Bosnia & Herzegovina: Extremism & Counter-Extremism. Retrieved from <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/bosnia-herzegovina>. This report by CEP, reports that according to the Bosnian government, the greatest security threat in Bosnia today is believed to come not from ethnic-religious extremism between Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Serbs, but from international terror groups such as ISIS, al-Qaeda, and the Nusra Front.

<sup>176</sup> Mayr, W. (2016, April 5). Sharia Villages Bosnia's Islamic State Problem. Retrieved from <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/islamic-state-presence-in-bosnia-cause-for-concern-a-1085326.html>. In this article Der Spiegel reports how, radical Islamists have found a new refuge in Bosnia. They recruit fighters, promote jihad and preach a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam -- just across the border from the European Union.

<sup>177</sup> Sucic, D. S. (2017, September 12). Islamic State flags not flying in Bosnia: PM. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-bosnia/islamic-state-flags-not-flying-in-bosnia-pm-idUSKCN1BN239>. In this article PM of BiH disputes the claim about sharia villages in BiH. The article continues by elaborating on the reality in BiH with the return of Bosniaks that fought with ISIS and the efforts security services are doing to reduce the returnees impact.

beginning, when we heard reports of Bosnians travelling to Syria, we were both confused, and concerned," Ahmed Hrustanovic, an imam in Srebrenica, told Al Jazeera on a recent evening, after prayers. In our history, Bosniak history, we never went to another country to fight. We have only ever tried to make own country free and secure. But now, everything is changing."<sup>178</sup> Characteristic of the radicalization that has been besieging Bosnia is the case of Husein Bilal" Bosnic, a 43 year old Islamist preacher accused of recruiting young Bosnians to fight for ISIS. He was sentenced by a Bosnian court that he promoted jihad, and that he organized ISIS recruiters trips to Syrian and Iraqi battlefields. Although he denied the charges, the judge found him guilty.<sup>179</sup>

But wahabi islamists were not the only ones trying to spread their vitriolic ideology in Bosnia. Iranian presence and Iranian activities through their Intelligence Agency VEVAK, and *Pasdaran*, or Iranian Revolutionary Iraian Corps, are still very much active, trying to make Bosnia, the center of their European operations.<sup>180</sup> US and European intelligence agencies, since they realized the mistake they made in equipping and allowing jihadists to enter Europe, they put pressure on Bosnian authorities to clamp down on Iranian spies. After some show off by the Bosnian agencies-by the way SDA, the original Islamist Party Izetbegovic and his Islamist cadres created is still in power-and a shut down of some Iranian activities, and a cooling off period, Iranian agents were back in. There is a nexus between Teheran-Sarajevo-Austria, as radical activities in Austria's capital Vienna, in many ways is the de facto capital of Salafi jihadism in Southeastern Europe, as well as a major playground for Iranian spies. <sup>181</sup> The "uninterrupted activities of the Iranians, came to a head in 2013. When Iranian agents in the open were visiting at Gornja Maoča in northeastern Bosnia which, has operated for years as a more or less open training camp for jihad-minded radicals. Gornja Maoča has long been the base of Nusret Imamović, the leading extremist cleric in the country, who since late 2013 has been in Syria with Jabhat al-Nusra, the Al Qaeda faction fighting the Assad regime.<sup>182</sup> Regular visits to Gornja Maoča by Iranian intelligence officers were too much for even

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<sup>178</sup> Brown, J. (2016, Jan. 13). ISIL recruits in the Balkans. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/01/isil-recruits-balkans-160112081705099.html>. In this article the recruitment of Bosniak ISIL recruits is examined and how, jihadist advertising, vulnerable recruits, and incompetent government services exacerbate the problem.

<sup>179</sup> Spaic, I. (2015, November 6). Bosnia: Salafist Leader Gets Seven Years for Recruiting Boys to Islamic State. Retrieved from <https://www.occrp.org/en/blog/4579-bilal-bosnic-salafist-leader-gets-seven-years-for-recruiting-boys-to-islamic-state>. This article describes the personality of Hussein "Billal" Bosnic, the Islamist preacher, and his recruiting methods for ISIS. As well as a summary of his sermons style.

<sup>180</sup> Schindler, J. (2014, October 24). A Look Inside Iran's Spy Network in Bosnia. Retrieved from <http://www.businessinsider.com/john-schindler-iran-espionage-center-bosnia-2014-10>. In this article by the veteran NSA agent and Bosnian expert John Scindler, is trying to raise awareness about the nefarious role played by Iranian intelligence in Southeastern Europe, above all in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

<sup>181</sup> Schindler, J. (2014, October 24).

<sup>182</sup> Schindler, J. (2014, October 24).



Sarajevo to stomach, so Bosnia's Ministry of Security took the unprecedented step of ordering two Iranian "diplomats," specifically Hamzeh Dolab Ahmad and Jadidi Sohrab — ostensibly the second and the third secretaries in the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Sarajevo but known by local counterintelligence to actually be spies — to leave Bosnia by the end of April 2013, or they would be officially declared *persona non grata* and expelled.<sup>183</sup> This cat and mouse game has been going on even down to our days.

Bakir Izetbegovic, the son of Ilija Izetbegovic, says, "his father, has bequeathed Bosnia Herzegovina to Turkish President Recep Tajip Erdogan, to safeguard it".<sup>184</sup> Erdogan's recent pre-election rally, the only one in Europe, at a hall in Sarajevo, substantiated the close ties that keeps with the Bosnian ruling Islamist Party SDA, and his interest of reviving old emotional ties since the time of the Ottoman Empire and its occupation in the Balkans. Erdogan is providing the money for the Bosnians to build a highway to Bgrade, and an NGO for the European Turkish Diaspora led by Zafer Sirakaya, who called Sarajevo, "the Jerusalem at the heart of Europe."<sup>185</sup> Under Erdogan, Turkish foreign policy has been shifting gears, and it is a far cry from the Kemalist times. It is oriented in maintaining, if possible, good relations with Christian counties in the Balkans, *BUT*(sb), a parallel focus of its foreign policy has been on the Muslim communities in the Balkans, mainly on the Muslim parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Muslim minorities in Serbia and Montenegro, as well as Muslim Albanians in Albania, FYR of Macedonia and Kosovo. It also aims to establish Turkish presence in the Middle East, prominently by sponsoring the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and developing strong relations with countries like Qatar.<sup>186</sup> In addition, Turkey by building two Turkish run universities in Sarajevo, and the influx of Turkish students,<sup>187</sup> and the mixing with the local population, it helps Turkey to penetrate deeper the moderate Muslim population and install in them a Muslim Brotherhood type of Islam.

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<sup>183</sup> Schindler, J. (2014, October 24).

<sup>184</sup> B92. (2017, October 20). Izetbegovic says his father "bequeathed" Bosnia to Erdogan. Retrieved from [https://www.b92.net/eng/news/region.php?yyyy=2017&mm=10&dd=20&nav\\_id=102605](https://www.b92.net/eng/news/region.php?yyyy=2017&mm=10&dd=20&nav_id=102605). This article was reporting on the speech Bakir Izetbegovic gave for the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his father death. Among other things in his speech he mentioned how Ilija Izetbegovic, recognized a leader in the face of Erdogan.

<sup>185</sup> Colborne, M. and Edwards, M. (2018, May 21). At Rally in Bosnia, Erdogan Flexes His Muscles as Strongman of the Muslim World. Retrieved from <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/turkey/.premium-at-rally-in-bosnia-erdogan-positions-himself-as-muslim-strongman-1.6110349>. This article presents the image that Erdogan wants to portray in the Muslim world, as the new Sultan, as well as protector of the Muslims.

<sup>186</sup> Mujadizevic, D. (n.d.) Turkey's role in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Retrieved from [file:///D:/BALKAN%20JIHADISTS/TURKEY/Mujadizevic\\_Euxeinos\\_23\\_2017.pdf](file:///D:/BALKAN%20JIHADISTS/TURKEY/Mujadizevic_Euxeinos_23_2017.pdf). In this paper the author Presents the expanding role Erdogan's Turkey aspires to play in the Balkans, as it is evidenced in Bosnia-Hercegovina, based mainly not so much in economic ties, but on the cultural and educational influences Turkey exercises in the region.

<sup>187</sup> Mujadizevic, D. (n.d.)

By all accounts Izetbegovic's Islamic policies, proved disastrous for the once multi-ethnic providence of BiH. His policies for unfettered access to Islamists, veterans of the Afghan jihadists, under the help of the western governments, and their myopic policies, turned that moderate providence, into a jihadist hide-out. In addition, a corrupted government led by the SDA has created a shameless nexus with organized crime, that leads the desperate and unemployed youth, to radicalization and to the hands of ISIS, Al Qaeda, Al-Nusra, and other Jihadist organizations. Only the western governments can apply pressure to the corrupt leadership of SDA, to change ways, if they want to join the EU, and NATO. They owe it to that province in order to correct the mistakes and the pain they caused in the Bosnian 1992-1995 War.

## FUTURE TRENDS

From the analysis and case studies introduced in this report, there is very little doubt that linkages between OC and terrorism do exist in the Balkans. These Balkan linkages threaten Europe's internal security and not only. These linkages have proven to be a major concern as the Europeans have witnessed in recent years in the spate of bombings and "mechanical" attacks perpetrated by radical Muslims. The greatest concern, in fact, expressed in a report published by the U.S. Library of Congress in 2010, is that expanded links could increase our vulnerability to terrorist attacks by groups with enhanced criminal capabilities and thus financial resources. Increased terrorist interest in directly conducting OC activities has expanded the criminal environment present in each E.U. member-state – thus exacerbating the many threats already presented by OC, and regularly catalogued in annual state threat assessments. The Dayton Peace Accord in 1995 and the 1999 Kosovo bombing by the West, did not end the incursion of jihadists in the Balkan but created a vanguard which expanded the role and the influence of Salafism and Wahhabism and Iranian influence interference in the Balkans. This explosive Islamic mix is aided and abetted by the organized crime, in complete and unfettered collusion. This paradigm of unholy alliance is "aided" by corrupt government officials, customs agents, and elected politicians.

In addition, the governments entrusted to protect the public from Islamic terrorism and organized crime, do not have the means to purchase the necessary equipment, or training, or organization, and they must rely on western agencies to fill the gaps. BiH has a strong presence of jihadists who stayed behind after the Dayton agreement, and ex-ISIS fighters who live in their own sharia villages, obeying their own laws, and whose behavior is a case of concern, for the US, western agencies and Israel. Jihadi culture and its nexus with organized crime have weakened the democratic structures of these countries, and have created routes that drugs, money laundering and terrorist use for their own or each other's purposes. The West has not paid the proper attention to that corner of the earth that lives in misery, crime, and the fear of terrorism. Civil society was killed the same time that the West allowed Muslim terrorists to come unfettered to the aid of Ilia Izetbegovic a Muslim extremist whose open borders policy for any Islamist extremist created a radical Muslim bastion in Europe and beyond. Also, the West has to assume its responsibility for assisting a terrorist, criminal organization like KLA to advance, its mafia-like operated leadership to assume the helms of Kosovo. The Albanian mafia habitually assists with its drug trade in the finances of Hezbollah and the Quds. The Balkans are experiencing a revival of radicalization, and the West is called upon to check, stop, and by all means reverse that trend, before it's too late, because late it is.

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