



# Stakeholders of (De)-Radicalisation in Serbia

D3.1 Country Report

April 2021

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Horizon 2020  
**De-Radicalisation in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Re-integrate**  
959198



Co-funded by the Horizon 2020 programme  
of the European Union

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**Reference:** D.RAD D3.1

This research was conducted under the Horizon 2020 project 'De-Radicalisation in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Re-integrate' (959198).

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## List of abbreviations

<b>ANA</b>	Albanian National Army
<b>AFS</b>	Alliance for Serbia
<b>ASI</b>	Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative
<b>IC</b>	Islamic Community
<b>ICoS</b>	Islamic Community of Serbia
<b>ICiS</b>	Islamic Community in Serbia
<b>KLA</b>	Kosovo Liberation Army
<b>LAPBM</b>	Liberation Army of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveda
<b>LFS</b>	I live for Serbia
<b>NA</b>	National Alignment
<b>NCA</b>	National Council of Albanians
<b>NSF</b>	National Serbian Front
<b>PP</b>	People's Patrol
<b>SNM1389</b>	Serbian national movement 1389
<b>SPP</b>	Serbian Progressive Party
<b>SR</b>	Serbian Right

## About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalisation and polarisation in Europe and beyond. It aims to identify the actors, networks, and wider social contexts driving radicalisation, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualises this through the I-GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation) with the goal of moving towards measurable evaluations of de-radicalisation programmes. Our intention is to identify the building blocks of radicalisation, which include a sense of being victimised; a sense of being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures; and coming under the influence of “us vs them” identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptional breadth of backgrounds. The project spans national contexts including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Georgia, Austria, and several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad labs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation to test practical interventions geared to prevention, inclusion and de-radicalisation.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of seventeen nations and several minority nations, the project will provide a unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation states adapt to new security challenges. The process of mapping these varieties and their link to national contexts will be crucial in uncovering strengths and weaknesses in existing interventions. Furthermore, D.Rad accounts for the problem that processes of radicalisation often occur in circumstances that escape the control and scrutiny of traditional national frameworks of justice. The participation of AI professionals in modelling, analysing and devising solutions to online radicalisation will be central to the project’s aims.

## Executive summary

This report aims to depict and analyze the context of radicalisation in Republic of Serbia in the period from 2000 to 2021 as a part of the Work Package “Mapping Stakeholders and Situations of Radicalisation” of the D.Rad project. It puts emphasis on the most important acts of violence that indicate current and future trends of radicalisation and de-radicalisation; provides insight into how the political elite and general public perceive extremism, radicalisation and violent threats; and maps out the agents and channels of radicalisation and de-radicalisation.

After a turbulent decade of the 1990's and the fall of Slobodan Milošević regime in 2000, Serbia entered a period of relative stability, marked, on the one hand by the beginning of democratization, and on the other by deep divisions within its society. Ethnic tensions between the majority Serbs and the Albanian minority, religious divisions among the local Muslim population and ideologically motivated intolerance between right-wing and left-wing groups, as well as the hatred of extreme right-wingers towards members of the LGBT community, Roma and migrants, has over the past twenty years erupted into multiple cases of violence. Some of these cases may be labelled as acts of terrorism, while others may be marked as violent incidents. During the first decade of the 21st century, all four types of radicalisation have risen in Serbia: ethno-nationalism/separatism, Islamic extremism, right-wing and left-wing radicalism, with the latter remaining on the margins of socio-political turmoil to this day. This report analyses the activities of four collective agents that have been responsible for the major terrorist attacks or other violent incidents in Serbia: “Liberation Army of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveda” (LAPBM), Wahhabi movement, *Serbian national movement -1389/Serbian Right (SNM1389/SR)* and “Leviathan” (Levijatan).

Due to the lack of detailed and systemic publicly available data on political violence from the national resources, the report relies mainly on the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). This database keeps records for Serbia, but also for the state entities it inherited, i.e., Serbia and Montenegro (2003-2006) and Yugoslavia (2000-2002). The GTD shows that major terrorist attacks took place between 2000 and 2010 and were committed exclusively by the ethnonationalist/separatist and radical Islamists. It is noteworthy that GTD does not mention any Serb right-wing group and that this database recorded only one terrorist attack perpetrated by extreme leftists. This paper consults a number of other reports such as State Department's Country Report on Terrorism or Country Report on Terrorism of the U.S. Embassy in Serbia, as well as numerous NGO reports. Reports and analysis of Serbian NGOs show that far-right groups are responsible for the largest number of violent attacks on LGBT activists, political opponents, members of the Roma minority and migrants from Middle East.

Regarding State-led radicalisation, it is noticeable that members of the Serbian ruling elites generally denounce all forms of terrorism but refuse to publicly distance themselves from extreme Right ideologies and their values, avoiding public condemnation of activities and "actions" of right-wing extremist organisations. Therefore, public stigmatization of extremism is absent. On the contrary, in their public speeches, officials of the ruling SPP (Serbian Progressive Party) frequently equate radical right-wing groups and civil society NGOs, and on the other hand they openly “flirt” with football hooligans and extreme nationalist groups. In that way, not only do they not condemn extremism, but they also indirectly legitimize it. Quiet support of the

state towards radicalism, especially when it comes to the radical Right, also occurs in the form of slow, lengthy judicial processes and acquittals, as well through the permissive legislation that allows representatives of banned extremist groups to legitimately re-register new organisations.

As a consequence of this negative practice, the Government of Serbia adopted the National Strategy for the Prevention and Fight against Violent Extremism and Terrorism, for the period 2017-2021, as the last country in the region. However, it is important that this strategy recognizes the prevention of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism as a state priority, which is certainly a big step towards the de-radicalisation of society.

Nevertheless, there is a room for further promotion of policies that implement models of intercultural interactions and communications, as well as identity strategies that affirm multidimensional identities. In this regard, it is necessary to reform existing political, economic, educational, and cultural programmes, in order to create favourable conditions for the coexistence of groups that obviously have different needs and interests, encourage new de-radicalisation programmes, and correct/improve old ones based on identified weaknesses and potential inefficiencies. This report highlights several programmes and projects which were realized, partially realized or are currently being realized in the Republic of Serbia, which may serve as a model of good de-radicalisation practice.

# 1. Introduction

This report arose as a part of the Work Package “Mapping Radicalisation Stakeholders and situations” of the D.Rad project, with the goal to delineate the main radicalisation agents and de-radicalisation stakeholders in the Republic of Serbia. By the term *radicalisation* we mean a process involving the increasing rejection of established law, order, and politics and the active pursuit of alternatives, in the form of politically-driven violence or justification of violence. By *de-radicalisation* we mean processes countering such rejection at individual (micro), organisational (meso), or societal (macro) levels resulting in a shift from violent to non-violent strategies and tactics.

Our objective is to draw a general overview of radicalisation agents and de-radicalisation stakeholders that have been active in the Republic of Serbia in the last two decades. As a starting point of this report, we take the year 2000 primarily because it marks the fall of the autocratic regime of Slobodan Milošević, but also due to the fact that first terrorist attacks, conducted by Albanian irredentist in southern Serbia, happened in 2000.

In this report we will mark the main ethno-nationalist/separatist, jihadist, right-wing, and left-wing radicalisation agents, as well as the main stakeholders interested in the process of de-radicalisation of the members of one or each of the mentioned types of radicalism. Primary focus will be dedicated to Islamic radicalism and the far-fight, because their activities have been noticeable the most during the last two decades. When it comes to the question of de-radicalisation, we will highlight several programmes and projects which were realized or are currently being realized in the Republic of Serbia. In the process of preparing this report we relied primarily on secondary sources: official statistics, think-tank and human rights reports, academic research, publicly available datasets, published survey results and relevant media reports.

The structure of the report consists of the following sections: **Contextual background** which contains contextual information important for understanding situation in Serbia and mapping of large macro-developments that impact the increase of radicalisation trends in the country; **Structures of radicalisation containing** description and comments on the available data on political violence in Serbia, as well as the perception of it by the political elite and the general public; **Agents and channels of radicalisation** where main collective agents involved in radicalisation since 2000 are described in their socio-political surroundings (Albanian secessionists, Wahhabi extremists and far-fight organisations, as an example);<sup>1</sup> **Stakeholders and channels of de-radicalisation** where related, through various project activities, programmes and training, to the process of de-radicalisation, state institutions, civil society organisations and representatives of academic institutions. **Conclusions**, where main findings of the report are briefly summarized.

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<sup>1</sup> The names of all organisations and movements covered by this report have been left in their original Serbian spelling, with the translation given in footnotes. Names of governmental bodies were translated into English as well as the names of organisations and movements whose original name was not in Serbian language, like the Kosovo Liberation Army as an example.

## 2. Contextual background

Actual trends and forms of radicalisation in the Republic of Serbia have their historic roots in growing nationalism, ethnic and religious animosities and secessionism which have undermined the sovereignty of Socialist Yugoslavia over multiple decades. Piled up problems within former Yugoslavia, Slovenian and Croatian desire for independence, as well as the tensions among ethnic groups in certain republics escalated during the 1990s with the dissolution of country and wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Following the end of armed conflicts and the signing of Dayton Agreement, another flashpoint emerged in Kosovo and Metohija\*<sup>2</sup> (the southern province of the Republic of Serbia) where conflict rose between Serbian majority and secessionist Albanian minority that, in this part of the state, constituted the actual majority.

Even during the 1980s, Kosovo Albanians demanded that Kosovo be given the status of a republic, and Albanians (then treated as a minority) be given the status of a constitutional ethnicity within the Yugoslav Federation (Meier, 1999, pp. 8-9, 28). On that occasion, mass demonstrations were organised in Kosovo in 1981, that forced Yugoslav authorities to declare a state of emergency and send the military to maintain the constitutional order. Subsequently, rioting erupted and the demonstrations were put down with violence, during which a few dozen Albanians died. This event led to a greater divide between the Serbs and the Albanians, and the period that followed was marked by repression over the Albanian minority and revoking a broad autonomy that Kosovo had until then (Ker-Lindsay 2009, p. 10). Meanwhile, “as many Serbs started leaving the province amidst growing anti-Serbian prejudice, as well as for economic reasons, the question of Kosovo also became increasingly politicised in Serbia” (Ker-Lindsay, 2009, p. 10).

Following the outbreak of conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, came the radicalisation of the situation and growth of the secessionist movement which advocated for the independence of Kosovo (Ker-Lindsay, 2009, p. 10). Among the secessionists there was also an irredentist stream that advocated for the unification of Kosovo with Albania. In the meantime, ethnically motivated violence, both by the Serbs toward the Albanians and by the Albanians toward the Serbs, was growing increasingly. By the middle of the 1990s, a terrorist organisation<sup>3</sup> named “Kosovo Liberation Army” (KLA) began to act through coordinated attacks on Serbian police and their compounds (Ker-Lindsay, 2009, p. 10). Following the escalation of the conflict and NATO bombardment of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, Kumanovo Agreement<sup>4</sup> was signed stipulating the withdrawal of Serbian security forces and

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<sup>2</sup> The full name of this part of the territory is Kosovo and Metohija, in the continuation of the text we will use only Kosovo.

<sup>3</sup> Although even in State Department reports in the mid-1990s, the KLA organisation was blacklisted as a terrorist organisation, while the policy of recognizing Kosovo continued, one part of the international community presented them as freedom fighters, and another part maintained that it was a terrorist organisation. This second claim is supported by the fact that they had committed more war crimes during their activities, which was confirmed at the beginning of the work of the Special Court for the KLA in The Hague in November 2020 (Available at: <https://www.scp-ks.org/en>).

<sup>4</sup> Military Technical Agreement between the International Security Force ("KFOR") and the Governments of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia, June 9, 1999. (NATO's role in Kosovo, 1999).

United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was established through the United Nation Security Council Resolution 1244 (UNMIK, 1999).

After the end of the conflict with NATO, came the so-called “5<sup>th</sup> October Revolution” in Serbia that has led to democratic changes and the subsequent fall of Slobodan Milošević’s regime. According to the accusations for crimes against humanity during the war in Kosovo (issued by the International Criminal Court for Former Yugoslavia in 1999), Milošević was arrested and extradited to the Tribunal in 2001.<sup>5</sup> The same fate befell to the Serb war leaders in Bosnia (Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić), as well as other prominent Serb leaders from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia which had participated in the wars in the former Yugoslavia.

Briefly described events from the 1990s are the key to understanding the most prominent examples of radicalisation which the Republic of Serbia is facing today.

Above all, the most prominent cases of ethno-nationalist and separatist radicalisation are related to the spillover of conflict from the territory of Kosovo to southern municipalities of Central Serbia, predominantly populated by the Albanians (Medveđa, Preševo and Bujanovac). Following the end of the conflict in Kosovo, the Albanian irredentist guerilla the “Liberation Army of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa” (LAPBM) was formed in these municipalities (FHP Izveštaj, 2003, p. 39). During a period of almost two years, this organisation conducted a series of terrorist attacks on Serbian security forces and civilians. Although this part of Serbia has been without violent incidents for a prolonged period of time, political tensions between Serbian authorities and local Albanian political structures did not vanish, and secessionist and irredentist ideologies are still present and occasionally stirred by Albanian political structures from Kosovo and Albania (ICG, 2004, pp. 11-17).

When it comes to the activities of radical Islamist, their arrival to the territory of the Republic of Serbia is also closely related to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this conflict, foreign fighters (mujahedeen) from the Middle East countries and Afghanistan not only fought on the side of Bosniak Muslims, but had also conducted a pro-zealot activity by converting local Muslims (who until then practiced “softer” Hanafi Islam) into the supporters of “harder” Salafi Islam (Bećirević, Halilović and Azinović, 2017, pp. 9-12). In such a way, firstly in Bosnia and then among the Bosniak minority in Serbia, Salafi communities were created “outside” religious institutional system of local Islamic communities. Although among Salafis (referred to as “Wahhabis” by the local population) in the Western Balkans there are those who lead a peaceful life in accordance with the fundamentalist interpretation of their religion (Petrović, Stakić, 2018, pp. 12-13), Salafism is without a doubt an ideology that encouraged those more radical among them to terrorist attacks (Esposito, 2002, pp.105-111) and which inspired Muslims around the world (including Serbia) to join jihad in Syria and Iraq in recent years (Bećirević, Halilović and Azinović, 2017, p. 3).

The legacy of the wars of the 1990s is still one of the main inspirations for the members of the local radical Right but also the Left. Right-wing organisations which have been active in Serbia during the past two decades almost as a rule base their programmes as revanchist national platforms that advocate the return of Serbian territories lost in these wars (primarily Kosovo

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<sup>5</sup> The Indictment of Milošević et al., Case IT-99-37-I, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, May 24, 1999. (UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 1999).

and the territories of the former Srpska Krajina<sup>6</sup> in Croatia), as well as the unification of all “Serbian lands” (that include Serbia, Republika Srpska<sup>7</sup>, Montenegro and Macedonia). Likewise, these organisations have actively participated in protests against the arrest of Karadžić and Mladić, and do not recognize the verdicts issued by Hague tribunal to the accused Serbs, that are glorified as national heroes (Srđić, 2020, pp. 21-44).

Serbian radical Left, which will not be elaborated in great detail in this report due to their small numbers and lack of activity, has also shown great interest in recent history, and frequently attributes the dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia to a capitalist conspiracy. The Left is prone to propagate the socialist idea of neo-Yugoslavism, thus fiercely clashing with the right-wing that propagate the aforementioned pan-Serbian nationalist project (Ristić, 2013, p. 59).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the two events that had unfolded on the macro-plan, and that significantly contributed to the radicalisation of certain structures in Serbia, primarily those in the ranks of the far-right. Those of course are the Migrant Crisis and the COVID-19 Pandemic that have contributed to the rise of xenophobia and nativism among the Serbian right-wing, but have also strengthened the influence of certain Right groups that combine their national revivalist projects with conspiracy theories. We will mark them as “new school” far-right that, aside from the nationalist agenda, increasingly includes questions of global interest and dominantly bases its *modus operandi* on the displacement of their activities on social media and networks.

### 3. The Structure of radicalisation

#### 3.1. Data on political violence in Serbia

Radicalisation is a complex and dynamic concept whose meaning is often oversimplified and politicized. Yet such oversimplification and politicization are almost exclusively one-directional as if only non-state agents are being radicalised and not governments as well. If we were to expand the usage of the concept of radicalisation to include political activism of individuals and social movements in such societies where general social development is being blocked by non-democratic extremist regimes, then we could represent it as being problematic (Schmid, 2013, p. 22).

When it comes to systematic data on violent attacks in Serbia, we consulted GTD (Global Terrorism Database) as an open-source database including information on terrorist events around the world since 1970 (currently updated through 2019). This database keeps records for Serbia, but also the entities it inherited, i.e., Serbia and Montenegro (2003-2006) and Yugoslavia (2000-2002) (GTD Browse by Country). What can be noticed is that in the period from 2000 to 2018 (no data for 2019)<sup>8</sup> there were cases of attacks on the police or property of citizens in Municipalities of Bujanovac, Medveđa and Preševo where the most common

<sup>6</sup> Original name of this unrecognized state is: “Republika Srpska Krajina” meaning the *Republic of Serbian Krajina [Frontier]*.

<sup>7</sup> Republika Srpska is one of the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Translated into English the name of this entity is *Serbian Republic*.

<sup>8</sup> When it comes to terrorist incidents, Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Serbia, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism says that there were no reported terrorist incidents in Serbia in 2019 (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

perpetrators are LAPBM and “Albanian National Army” (ANA). Also, there have been attacks in and around Belgrade, such as attacks on journalists, property of citizens or attacks on members of organised criminal groups, without a clear political background. In most of the recorded attacks, the perpetrators are unknown or the group to which they may belong is unknown. In the analysed period, there is an evident decrease in violence, specifically for 2019, when none was recorded. On the other hand, in the last few years, Amnesty International's (AI) reports on the treatment of migrants and refugees, minority groups, but also unprocessed war crimes, endangered media freedom, and critical reflection of various factors in Serbia, have increasingly emphasized specific violence against Roma, members of the LGBT population and journalists (AI Report, 2020).

According to the State Department Report there were no terrorist attacks in 2019 and low intensity of recruitment activities by ISIS was detected, so main terrorism concerns in Serbia remain the potential movement of money and weapons through the region, recruitment and return of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), the potential revitalization of terrorist ideologies, and opportunities for self-radicalisation, including racially and ethnically motivated terrorism. Also, according to Country Reports on Terrorism of the U.S. Embassy in Serbia, from 2014 to 2019 no cases of terrorist attacks were reported (U.S. Embassy in Serbia reports, 2014 -2019).

If we start from the definition of radicalisation as a process that includes increasing rejection of established law, order and politics and the active pursuit of alternatives, in the form of politically-driven violence or justification of violence then Serbia is a state where, to a greater or lesser extent, the path of radicalisation has been continuously traced since 2000, so much so that it is almost becoming a part of the everyday life of Serbian society and the state. Unlike most countries of the Western Balkans region, in which Islamic extremism represents the dominant form of violent radicalisation, in Serbia there are two mainstream forms of extremism – Islamic and right-wing. Likewise, we can also highlight secondary forms or streams, not necessarily less important, as ethno-nationalist/separatist and left-wing forms of radicalised violence. While it is not unknown that there is an increasing amount of overlap among different ideologies, under the cover of so-called hybrid ideologies some extremist groups are trying to fulfil common political goals while being driven by different motives. Such movements and processes are not coherent and are not easy to define because of the lack of consistency, complexity and milieu overlap of individuals, groups and movements (both on and offline) that advocate different, albeit interconnected ideologies. These ideologies are most frequently driven by hate and racism towards minorities, xenophobia, islamophobia and anti-Semitism (CTED, 2020, p. 2).

### 3.1.1. Ethno-nationalistic and separatist radicalisation

Ethno-nationalistic and separatist radicalisation in Serbia is primarily connected to the area of Kosovo. It began during the 1980s, escalated during 1998-1999, and after the withdrawal of the Serbian state apparatus from the area (on the basis of the Kumanovo Agreement) terrorist activity spilled over to the area of Bujanovac, Preševo and Medveđa municipalities during 2000-2001. In the area of these municipalities, which are in the southern part of Central Serbia, an extremist paramilitary formation LAPBM emerged. Because of the activities of the LAPBM, and taking into consideration that combating terrorism requires a unique and coordinated approach by all political and state actors, the Republic of Serbia made a *Programme and plan for resolving the crisis caused by the action of Albanian extremist groups in Bujanovac*,

*Preševo and Medveđa municipalities (2001)*<sup>9</sup> which introduced long term measures for terrorism prevention in the stated area (political, diplomatic, social, economic, security, organisational and informational). Among these measures, an especially interesting one is the security measure related to the implementation of the project *Police in the local community*<sup>10</sup>. This measure is focused on the establishment of multi-ethnic police units (with regards to the ethnic structure in these municipalities) through the inclusion of a greater number of ethnic Albanians into the police force. Also important was the establishment of the Coordinating Body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa<sup>11</sup>, being that it was founded in order to achieve stability, security and economic development. For the past 20 years, the Coordinating body has been successful in controlling the crisis, which has been occasionally reignited by pardoned and subsequently politically involved former fighters of LAPBM. Taking into consideration the effects of all other long-term measures, with the most important one being the termination of armed conflicts of 2001, there has been a period of stability with occasional provocations made by individuals that show elements of organised crime and terrorist action.

However, according to Ragmi Mustafa, President of the National Council of Albanians (NCA), the Government of the Republic of Serbia does not show the political will and readiness for full the integration of Albanians in the Preševo Valley, as well as for reforming the constitutional and legal framework (see Appendix 2). The Government of the Republic of Serbia is not implementing three agreements it has signed with the political representatives of the Preševo Valley from 2001, 2009, and 2013, with guarantees given in the presence of representatives of the international community (Ristić, V. and Ragmi, M., 2019).

### 3.1.2. Islamic radicalism

Islamic radicalism is neither a unique case of a causal relationship existing between religion and violent socio-political action nor is Islamic fundamentalism the only example of religious conservatism which can be linked to terrorism (Batkovski and Rajkocevski, 2013, p. 91). Yet, without a doubt, there exists a connection between terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism which is easily noticeable because of frequent reliance on religion by Islamic terrorists on one hand, as well as the inclination of Islamist groups to resort to terrorism as a means of political action on the other. The legacy of the socialist past, as well as the ethnic conflicts of the 1990s, have created a favourable climate for the emergence of Islamic radicalism in the Republic of Serbia which was additionally increased by radical interpretations brought to the Western Balkans by volunteer fighters from the Middle East. Very soon, ultra-conservative Salafi teaching gains followers among Bosniak, Albanian and Roma minorities in Serbia (see Appendix 3, Figure 3.1). Further radicalisation has been accelerated by internal religious and political divisions among Muslims in Serbia. A special flashpoint is the Sandžak or Raška area, located in the tri-state area of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, where from 2007 there have been continuous tensions among the Muslim minority and where supporters of Salafi Islam are most aggressive in their action.

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<sup>9</sup> Original title of the program in Serbian: *Program i plan rešavanja krize nastale delovanjem albanskih ekstremističkih grupa u opštinama Bujanovac, Preševo i Medveđa*.

<sup>10</sup> Original title of the project in Serbian: *Policija u lokalnoj zajednici*.

<sup>11</sup> Original name in Serbian: *Koordinaciono telo Vlade Republike Srbije za opštine Preševo, Bujanovac i Medveđa*.

### 3.1.3. Right-wing radicalisation

As right-wing radicalisation and violent extremism are concerned, one can easily argue that it was sparked by the political mainstream during the 1990s and the rule of Slobodan Milošević, when Serbian far-right extremism was made legitimate. Although Serbian far-right groups did cooperate with the Serbian state regime during the wars of the 1990s (with some functioning to a certain degree as paramilitary formations), they continued to exist after democratic changes in 2000 and even consolidated their positions within new socio-political structures. In Serbia today, far-right extremist organisations are marginal in the institutional sense (being that the majority of them exist outside the politics formulated in the National Assembly) but their presence and impact on the public is significantly greater. The reasons for this are – firstly, an increased tolerance of state institutions towards these organisations; and secondly, they have significant space in the media where they have an opportunity to promote their programmes and the discourse which tolerates or implicitly supports violence.

The exact number of extremist groups that belong to the far-right is not possible to determine. Serbian Police do not provide precise data on the number of right-wing extremist groups. "Centar za podršku ženama"<sup>12</sup> and "Antifašistička koalicija Vojvodine"<sup>13</sup> conducted a research in 2018 during which they gathered and systematized data on far-right group activities in Serbia (Gde živi ekstremizam, 2018). They mapped 23 or 24<sup>14</sup> extremist organisations which advocate national and religious hatred among which we will focus on those with a long history of violence and connection with the ruling political elites, such as "Srpski narodni pokret 1389" (SNM1389)<sup>15</sup>, recently transformed into pan-right movement "Srpska desnica" (SR)<sup>16</sup>, as well on some groups which are relatively new and which formally act as humanitarian organisations and animal rights groups, but which are actually a smokescreen for extreme right-wing activities e.g "Levijatan"<sup>17</sup>.

### 3.1.4. Extreme Left

Finally, radicalised forms of violence by the extreme Left, regardless of far-right extremist dominance, have been gaining in importance since 2008, and the global economic crisis, which devastated the Serbian middle class and led to a sharp decline in living standards (Đorić, 2016, p. 23). Anarhosindikalistička inicijativa (ASI)<sup>18</sup> and Marks 21 are the most representative organisations of this ideological spectrum. They are known for attack on the Greek embassy, clashes with members of patriotic organisations, criticism of the Serbian Orthodox Church, advocacy of recognition of the independence of Kosovo and Metohija etc.

## 3.2. The perception of radicalisation by the Serbian political elite

Under the circumstances in which the ruling politicians refuse to distance themselves from extreme ideologies and their values, avoid openly to condemn statements and actions of

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<sup>12</sup> Translated into English: "Women's support centre".

<sup>13</sup> Translated into English: "Anti-Fascist Coalition of Vojvodina".

<sup>14</sup> It is an interactive map which is continuously updated by newly discovered organisations.

<sup>15</sup> Translated into English: "Serbian national movement -1389". The number 1389. represents the year of historical Battle of Kosovo, which the Serbs fought against the Ottoman Turks.

<sup>16</sup>Translated into English: "Serbian Right".

<sup>17</sup> The movement is named after the biblical beast Leviathan.

<sup>18</sup> Translated into English: "Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative".

extremist organisations, relativize and equate ultra-right organisations and civil society NGOs, and openly flirt with football hooligans and extreme nationalist groups, public stigmatization of extremism is absent. Instead, in the general public, it comes to its "latent" legitimization. Statements by representatives of the state in which right-wingers are characterized as marginal "fools" or "irrelevant organisations" inevitably lead to relativization and banalization of the problem. During 2019, there were several events that showed that the extreme Right was growing in Serbia, such as the attack on a bakery, in suburbs of Belgrade, owned by Albanian, when the Serbian Interior Minister stated that "it was a peaceful protest without incidents" or an example of a group of right-wingers trying to stop a play about the Srebrenica genocide, organised by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights. As Sonja Biserko stated - the connection of right-wing parties with these organisations is evident in their support and ideological closeness (attitude towards Kosovo, support for the secession of the Republika Srpska and closeness with the Serbian Orthodox Church) (Biserko, 2014).

The role of the political elite and the media in creating ethnic and other stereotypes is significant. The legitimization basis of the former ruling elite from the Milošević period was based primarily on nationalist patterns (Pešić, Svilanović 2016). Although we are talking about a different system of social reproduction, and different mechanisms of elite reproduction, some of these values still form part of the official government narrative, within the dominant "neoliberal" rhetoric. Right-wing, as well as religious extremism, have been present since the 1990s, but they have not attracted much attention from the public and Serbian authorities. Only violent incidents have attracted short-term public and media attention. Serbian authorities have approached extremism in a similar way, responding to incidents ad hoc and repressively. Authorities in Serbia have banned two right-wing extremist organisations (e.g "Obraz")<sup>19</sup>, without banning their offspring. Similarly, a group of individuals from Sandžak was convicted of terrorism. But Serbian authorities have not tried to investigate the reasons for the spread of extremism, nor have they considered introducing preventive measures. Also, they show weakness in that they do not have a solution for returnees from foreign battlefields after they have served a prison sentence, which is clearly seen from the statement of the Minister of the Interior, who says:

*People returning from the battlefield are citizens of some of the countries in the region, including our country, and regardless of the fact that we will gather evidence and try to sentence them to long prison terms, the question is what will happen to them when they are released from prison and how they can reintegrate into society without being a threat anymore. (See: Appendix 2)*

There is no political awareness in Serbia about the danger posed by extreme right-wing organisations, and therefore no political will to deal with right-wing extremism. Regardless of whether it is a matter of disinterest or a benevolent attitude of state institutions towards the extreme Right, such an attitude inevitably leads to further radicalisation of society in Serbia.

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<sup>19</sup> "Obraz" is a cleric-nationalist movement that advocates for a "rebirth" of Serbian people on the foundations of Orthodox Christianity and reaffirmation of traditional Serbian values. From 2001 to 2010 their members participated in a large number of violent incidents like obstructing public rallies and storming round tables of ideological opposition – the Left, antifascists, antiwar NGOs and LGBT activists. Despite the 2012 legal ban, the organisation is still active under the name "Otačastveni pokret Obraz", although their impact and prestige in right-wing circles is significantly lesser today. Literal translation of the movement's name means "Cheek", but in Serbian language the word is also being used in the sense of the word "Honour".

The belated interest of the public and the government in this phenomenon has influenced the state of research into (violent) extremism in Serbia.

### 3.3. The perception of the violent threat by the general public

If we look at the results of public opinion polls, on topics related to (political) violence, they are mostly conducted among the younger population, as a survey of their value attitudes. The results tell us that young people in Serbia have the potential to embrace some of the radical and extremist ideas and ideologies. According to young people, "mainstream" citizens and young people are characterized by apathy, lack of information, susceptibility to manipulation, lack of solidarity, the tendency of the so-called single-issue activism, and lack of competencies for participation. On the other hand, radical citizens and young people are perceived as adhering to a firmly rooted set of values that distinguish them from the mainstream, a propensity for public appearances and public articulation of their values and attitudes, solidarity with like-minded people, and a tendency to justify means. There are several organisations and institutions that deal with the research of youth attitudes from the Ministry in charge of youth, OSCE, the National Youth Council Serbia, "Centar za slobodne izbore i demokratiju" (CeSid)<sup>20</sup>, academic institutions, and individuals, etc. Since their methodology is not uniform, it is difficult to compare them, but common indicators show that there is a high percentage of justification of violence against the LGBT population (percentage goes up to 70%) and high degree of xenophobia and nationalism. The greatest ethnic distance is towards Albanians, Croats, and Roma. There is a low percentage of the belief that democracy is the best form of government (up to 30%) so in this regard, growing distrust of institutions is evident, and also an increase in number of young people who are against joining EU integration (more than 50%). Perhaps the most worrying figure is the increase in the percentage of young people who justify some form of social violence (30%) (National Youth Council of Serbia, 2020).

Compared to the beginning of the migrant crisis (2015), when there were more positive attitudes towards migrants, in the last two years there has been an increase in negative attitudes, especially in municipalities in Serbia that are more affected by the crisis. It is worrying that 40% of citizens have prejudices that migrants and refugees are members of terrorist organisations and that more than one-third of citizens believe in conspiracy theories about secret plans to settle migrants and spread Islam in Serbia (PIN, 2020a).

The NGOs "Centar za istraživanje i razvoj društva IDEAS"<sup>21</sup> and the "Gay-Lesbian Info Centre" conducted social network research in May and June 2020 and reported that 58 percent of LGBT high school students suffered some form of violence; 56 percent suffered psychological violence; 8 percent suffered physical violence; and 14 percent suffered sexual violence. The violence most frequently occurred at school, where 71 percent of LGBT students heard teachers degrading LGBT persons due to their sexual and gender identity (Annual LGBT+ Survey, 2020).

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<sup>20</sup> Translated into English: "Centre for Free Elections and Democracy".

<sup>21</sup> Translated into English: "Centre for Research and Development of Society".

## 4. Agents and channels of radicalisation

### 4.1. Main collective agents and channels of radicalisation

We marked four major collective agents that have been responsible for the most incidents of violent attacks in Serbia: LAPBM, Wahhabi movement, SNM1389/SR and, in the recent period, “Levijatan”. The GTD database shows that major terrorist attacks were committed exclusively by the LAPBM and Wahhabis, who carried out bombings and shootings of members of the Serbian army and police. When it comes to right-wing radicalisation, we did not come across any study or report which mentions the right-wing groups as terrorist threat. Acts of violence committed by members of SNM1389/SR and “Levijatan” are reduced to physical attacks on LGBT activists, political opponents, members of the Roma minority and migrants.

This chapter also briefly presents the situation at the far-left end of the ideological spectrum, where only sporadic violent incidents were registered, mostly incursions into right-wing public tribunes. The analysis of the GTD database, filtering for the far-left associated violent incidents, reveals only one act of terrorism – ASI attack on the Greek embassy in Belgrade in 2009 (without any casualties).

#### 4.1.1. LAPBM

Ethno-nationalist and separatist radicalisation in the Republic of Serbia had its momentum at the beginning of the 2000s, primarily in southern municipalities populated by the Albanian minority. In Bujanovac, Preševo and Medveđa municipalities, between 1999 and 2001, there were intense actions by an extremist paramilitary formation LAPBM, numbering around 1,500 active combatants by some estimates (Thomas and Mikulan, 2006, p.51). During this period LAPBM conducted 296 terrorist attacks (460 if we include the data from 2001), killing 11 people (5 police officers and 6 citizens) injuring 38 (33 police officers, 3 citizens and 2 UN mission members), kidnaping 2 citizens and causing significant material damage (Stevanović, at all, 2012, p. 1707).<sup>22</sup> LAPBM was driven by an irredentist idea of the establishment of Greater Albania, with the goal to incorporate the aforementioned municipalities to Kosovo, as the step towards uniting all Albanians into one state. With pressure by NATO and KFOR, LAPBM was disbanded in 2001 and with the so-called Končulj Agreement (Demilitarization Statement, 2001), Serbia granted amnesty to all LAPBM members which were ready to “lay down arms, uniforms and all military equipment which they illegally own” (FHP Izveštaj, 2003, p. 38). Despite that, a number of its members joined its “sisterly” terrorist organisation ANA which fought for the same irredentist goals in neighbourly North Macedonia (ICG, 2004, pp. 7-10). Between 2001 and 2010, there were sporadic terrorist attacks of lower intensity, after which came a longer period of peace. However, during the past decade, the aforementioned municipalities have witnessed a periodical “revival” of the separatist ideology of the LAPBM

<sup>22</sup> In the text titled *Prevention of ethnically motivated terrorism in the Republic of Serbia: Case Study “Bujanovac, Preševo and Medveđa* [Prevencija etnički motivisanog terorizma u Republici Srbiji: Studija slučaja “Bujanovac, Preševo i Medveđa], Stevanović and colleagues cited the *Information on the state of security in the area of Bujanovac, Preševo and Medveđa* [Informaciju o stanju bezbednosti na području opština Bujanovac, Preševo i Medveđa] with a proposal for resolving the crisis, Coordinating Body of the Federal and State Government for Bujanovac, Preševo and Medveđa which they approached:06.februar 2001).

as well as sporadic radicalisation of the Albanian population by Albanian political structures from Kosovo and Metohija and Albania (ICG, 2004, pp. 11-17).

#### 4.1.2. Wahhabi movement

Radical Islamism is present in Serbia in the form of the Salafi movement's activities. In the 1980s the socialist government of Yugoslavia led a repressive policy towards the Islamic revivalist movement which appeared among Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia (see Izetbegović, 1990). First half of the 1990s was marked by the deepening of ethnic tensions between Serbs and Bosniaks, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia although the spillover of ethnic conflict from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Serbia had been avoided thanks to the pressure from international organisations (Council of Europe, OSCE and EU). During the 1990s Salafi Islam began intensively penetrating the area of the Western Balkans spread by volunteer fighters from the Middle East and Afghanistan who participated in the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo and Metohija. Following the end of the armed conflicts Salafism began to spread among the Bosniak minority in Sandžak, but also among the Muslim Roma population in other parts of Serbia (Petrović, Stakić, 2018, pp. 31-32). Their primary recruits are young Muslims from lower social classes, frequently those who suffered an addiction to narcotics or alcohol. The followers of Salafi Islam advocate the return to the "orthodox" version of Islam that was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and the first Muslim caliphs, which "has been corrupted" over time by the introduction of numerous practices and innovations which are not in line with the original Islamic doctrine. Serbian Salafists are connected to Wahhabi communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (see Appendix 3, Figure 3.1). They are funded by Arab states in the Gulf, first and foremost by Saudi Arabia (Bećirević, Halilović and Azinović, 2017, pp. 25-26). Actions of the Wahhabi movement in Serbia are primarily directed towards the domestic, local community and religious and political conflicts which exist within it (Potežica, 2007, p. 195). The division of the Islamic Community (IC) into two independent religious organisations – the Islamic Community of Serbia (ICoS) and the Islamic Community in Serbia (ICiS), made room for greater Wahhabi action (Petrović, Stakić, 2018, p. 10). Their activities became more visible in 2006 with the organisation of protests in Novi Pazar and the burning of the Danish, Croatian and Israeli flags in a response to caricatures of Muhammad published in Danish newspapers. On that occasion, Boris Tadić, president of Serbia at the time, called for religious tolerance and stated that it is unacceptable to express religious sentiment by burning state symbols (Štikovac, 2006). Later that year Wahhabis prevented the music band "Balkanika" to play at their concert also in Novi Pazar. Likewise, a greater number of conflicts in mosques was recorded when they tried to force their way of prayer onto other Muslims. Yet, the activity which connects Wahhabis to terrorism the most, is the establishment of a terrorist training camp in 2007 on Ninaji mountain close to Novi Pazar in which an armed conflict broke out during a police raid. During the police raid, the leader of the group Ismail Prentić was killed, and another one of its members was wounded. Police arrested 12 Wahhabis in connection to this case, which were subsequently indicted and convicted of association for unconstitutional action, terrorism and planned assassination of ICiS's Head Mufti, Muamer Zukorlić (RTS, 2009). On that occasion Zukorlić said the following:

*It is sad that the police action resulted in death and wounding, but it confirmed that we were right to warn about the danger of radicalisation growing in Sandžak in the past two years, and particularly the last few months (Potežica, 2007, p. 194).*

The next and so far, the last terrorist attack which involved Sandžak Wahhabis happened in 2011 when Mevlud Jašarević from Novi Pazar opened fire from an assault rifle on the U.S. Embassy building in Sarajevo. Following this attack, there were no more significant incidents, and activities of the local Wahhabi community was redirected towards recruiting and sending fighters from Western Balkans to battlegrounds in Iraq and Syria. According to available data, from 2012 to 2017, 49 adults and 10 minors from Sandžak were recruited and sent as reinforcements to the ISIS (Azinović, 2018, p.4). Additionally, 11 Roma from other parts of Serbia went to Middle East battlegrounds, some bringing their families, and there were several recorded cases of Serbs that converted to Islam which joined ISIS (Petrović and Stakić, 2018, p. 32).

#### 4.1.3. SNM1389/SR and “Levijatan”

Groups and organisations of the Right in the Republic of Serbia today act mostly as citizen associations, thus striving to seemingly soften their extremism and have formally adapted their activities to the legal framework reserved for civil society organisations. It is estimated that there are between 23 and 30 such organisations, and the number of their members and sympathizers is not plausible to determine precisely. We can differentiate between two general streams or “generations” of currently active radical Right. In accordance with the WP3.1 Country Reports Guidelines, our analysis will be directed towards the most prominent organisations of both generations.

The first generation, which we can characterize as the “old school” Right maintains a direct continuity to the radical Right organisations established right after the fall of Slobodan Milošević regime. The period from 2001 to 2012 is marked by the founding and action of radical nationalist movements (mainly unregistered), some of which have been openly inspired by racist and fascist ideology.

The second generation, which can be labelled as “new school” Right, was born following the 2012 change of the dominant political party in Serbia. The specificity of this generation is in a significantly broader spectrum of their socio-political goals. Besides the more traditional extreme Right ideological markers (nationalism, nativism and xenophobia), they are also characterized by new ideological vectors – from combating for mandatory vaccination (MMR and COVID-19 vaccine) to resisting the introduction of 5G network and radical ways of fighting for more efficient protection of animals.

This report will emphasize the action of the SNM1389 as the most significant “old school” radical Right organisation because: a) if we observe in a longer timeframe, it is one of the most active far-right organisations; b) in recent years it has become a gathering place for other right-wing groups; c) with its transformation into a SR pan-right movement, their *modus operandi* acquires a trans-generational character that combines the characteristics of both the “old” and “new” Right; d) there are transparent links between ruling party “Srpska napredna stranka” (SPP)<sup>23</sup> and SNM1389/SR leader – Miša Vacić (see Appendix 3, Figure 3.2).

SNM1389 was established following a schism within the “1389” movement, that was registered in 2004 as a citizen association focusing on the “preservation of spiritual, historical, cultural and other values of the Serbian people and affirmation of tradition while not neglecting

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<sup>23</sup> Translated into English: “Serbian Progressive Party”.

the need for state development" (Srdić, 2020, p. 31). Following the schism, there was a split to "Pokret 1389"<sup>24</sup> and SNM1389 which would subsequently be registered as an association of citizens led by Miša Vacić, former spokesman of the original „1389" movement. Proclaimed goals of SNM1389 are the liberation and unification of all Serbian territories into one Serbian state, the struggle for social justice as well as strengthening cooperation with the Russian Federation, BRIC countries, and all international factors who oppose the New World Order - EU, NATO and IMF (Group of authors, 2014, 270). In 2008, members of this organisation took part in the attack on the participants of the "Queer Festival" in front of the Belgrade Cultural Centre "Rex", during which three participants of the festival were injured. On that occasion, among those arrested was Vacić, in whose apartment police found a gun, ammunition, body armour and ski masks. In May 2011, SNM1389 participated in a protest against the arrest of General Ratko Mladić, which was also attended by members of other right-wing organisations and political parties (like "Obraz", "Dveri"<sup>25</sup> and "Srpska radikalna stranka"<sup>26</sup>). In July 2013, the First Court in Belgrade sentenced Vacić to a suspended sentence of one year in prison for discrimination against the LGBT population before the cancelled "Pride Parade" of 2009, as well as for illegal possession of weapons and obstruction of justice (Srdić, 2020, p. 32).

Following the 2012 change of the dominant political party in Serbia SNM1389 continued their activities, this time showing aspiration for gaining political power. In the 2014 local elections in Belgrade, Vacić was a candidate for Citizen Group "Patriotizam u parlamentu – 1389 – Miša Vacić"<sup>27</sup> but came in last at 74<sup>th</sup> place (Istinomer, 2019).

In June of 2018, Vacić registers SR as new citizens association which incorporated SNM1389 movement as well as 22 smaller right-wing organisations and associations. The proclaimed mission of SR is to gather patriots around the idea of a modern Serbian Right. Within the broader public there exists a belief that SR is a project and a satellite of the ruling SPP. This belief is based on close connections that the president of SR has with the ruling elite (Đurković, 2013, 55). In 2017, Vacić had a service contract with the governmental Office for Kosovo and Metohija. Vacić presented himself as an advisor to the Office Director Marko Đurić, which Đurić fiercely denied following a public scandal which was brought up because of it. Yet, Đurić was forced to acknowledge that Vacić was employed by the Office, but at first, he refused to give a concrete explanation on the type of Vacić's engagement for the Office. This political affair ended with the termination of Vacić's employment, and on that occasion, Đurić explained that Vacić was "engaged on supporting humanitarian activities in Pokrajina [Kosovo and Metohija], and not as a civil servant or advisor, although he represented himself as such" (I.M.J., 2020).

Although Vacić did soften his political views in the meantime, in order to adjust it to the policies of the ruling party, the continuity with the goals of SNM1389 is more than obvious. On the official webpage of SR key programme guidelines are the following points: 1. Traditionalism; 2. Patriotism; 3. Healthy society; 4. Eurasian integration.<sup>28</sup> In 2019, SR won 6.5% in early elections in Medveda municipality, gaining 1 seat out of 25 in the local assembly (Insajder,

<sup>24</sup> Translated into English: "Movement 1389". This faction is still active but its influence among Serbian right-wingers is relatively small.

<sup>25</sup> Translated into English: "Gates".

<sup>26</sup> Translated into English: "Serbian Radical Party".

<sup>27</sup> Translated into English: "Patriotism in parliament".

<sup>28</sup> Srpska desnica (official web page), Available at: <https://www.srpskadesnica.rs/cir/program-stranke/> (Accessed: 23. February 2021).

2019). These elections were accompanied by numerous controversies with regards to SR election campaign activities. A couple of days before the early elections, Miša Vacić shared a video on his social media profiles where he listed the names of users of Medveđa soup kitchen targeting those people as potential voters, as well as a video of the ballot printing process made from within the printing office. On the eve of the elections, there was an incident that involved squabbling and exchange of insults between SR activists and activists of the oppositional "Savez za Srbiju" (AFS).<sup>29</sup> Likewise, a large number of jeeps and cars without license plates were seen moving around Medveđa during this time, for which opposition claimed that their purpose was to put pressure on voters and create an atmosphere of fear. With that in mind, one of the AFS leaders, and the president of the Dveri movement, Boško Obradović said that:

*pressure on all employees in the public sector, a campaign controlled by the ruling party officials and media darkness is being implemented in Medveđa [...] thugs, criminals and party activists from all over Serbia have visited local households on more than one occasion (Insajder, 2019).*

Right before parliamentary and local elections held in June of 2020, Vacić announced the unification of right-wing parties for joint participation in the election. „Nacionalni srpski front“ (NSF)<sup>30</sup> and „Levijatan“ were seen as potential coalition partners (see Appendix 3, Figure 3.2) . Yet, the unification of a “united patriotic list” did not happen because joint participation, according to Vacić, was not possible due to the vanity of potential partners. Therefore, SR participated on their own in the local elections in 20 municipalities, passing the census in 8 of them and gaining a total of 23,540 votes (Republika, 2020). During the session of the Presidency of SR in October of 2020, Vacić again called for the unification of right-wing forces, highlighting weak individual performance right-winged parties and movements had in the stated elections.

When it comes to the "new school" Right, it is generally still evolving in Serbia. As stated above, over the past decade the radical Right experienced a certain metamorphosis, both on the level of its organisation and on the level of its activity. In recent years instead of intrusions on public speeches and roundtables or actions on public events and attacks on those who think or act differently, the Right is being organised as NGOs with their initiatives being financed under the auspices of the far-right political corps (Pejić, 2018). The violence which was once publicly advocated and accepted is now condemned in principle but is justified and tolerated in practice. Also, right-wing forces are turning to a “more modern” approach and social topics, through which nationalistic, xenophobic and racist ideas are being blurred and the imposition of fascism on society (or Crawling Fascism) is more difficult to pinpoint.

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<sup>29</sup> Translated into English: “Alliance for Serbia”.

<sup>30</sup> Translation of the organisation’s name is “National Serbian Front” – It is an ideological clone of infamous and prohibited “Nacionalni stroj” (“National Alignment”, NA) movement. NA acted as an unregistered organisation which advocated for the idea of Serbian national revival conjoined with fascist concepts of “Lebensraum” and Aryan race. The leader of NA was Goran Davidović, “Fuhrer”, and this organisation was remembered for several violent incidents. Due to attacks on participants of an antifascist walk in Novi Sad in 2007, Constitutional Court forbade their activity, while the Prosecution indicted Goran Davidović. NSF has been registered as an association of citizens’ rights after the original movement was banned.

Among many registered associations of citizens that advocate "harder" right-wing ideas, the "Levijatan" attracts special attention in terms of their activities and representation in public space. Members of this group are verbally very aggressive and known for racist outbursts and hate speech on social networks (Twitter, Facebook). Also, there were several violent incidents (beating those who publicly criticize them, harassment of members of the Roma minority, intrusion into a migrant camp). Their activities are predominantly focused on online activism, and their *modus operandi* can be seen as being representative of how the "new school" Right acts. Leaders of this movement are Pavle Bihali and Aleksandar Bohunac, who started their activities in 2015 by affirming "Levijatan" as a movement for animal protection. They were firstly noticed for their bold and radical approach to rescuing animals that their owners mistreated or kept in inhumane conditions. They regularly informed the public about their activities through social media networks where they posted recordings of rescue operations, which brought them popularity not only in Serbia but also in other countries in the region (Srđić, 2020, p. 35).

In November of 2019, the "Levijatan" was registered as an association of citizens. Although their official webpage does not mention any political goals, instead focusing on advocating "for stopping inhumane acts, such as purposefully injuring animals, starving, exploiting and throwing them out on the street",<sup>31</sup> their activities have meanwhile outgrown the mere animal protection agenda. Their actions have increasingly and more transparently began to take on an ultra-Right dimension, in which elements of xenophobia, racism and nativism intertwine. This can be seen from the following tweet made by Bihali:

*We cultivate a strong anti-immigrant policy. If the state does not want to solve the pests that are the Roma (the largest number of crimes relative to the number of the population), how will it prevent the plague that is the migrants. Laws do not apply for minorities, and that is why they breed and abuse children, women and animals* (Cvijić, 2020, p. 20).

In May of 2020 Filip Radovanović, an activist of the movement, hit the fence of the migrant camp in Obrenovac, outskirts of Belgrade, with his car, after which he was arrested. In a recording of the intrusion, that Radovanović made, prior to the event itself, he expresses his dissatisfaction "with thousands of migrants who immigrated to Obrenovac" (Slobodni medij, 2020) During the incursion he was shouting "I don't want my girlfriend to be attacked by migrants!" and "I don't want a Muslim state!" (Slobodni medij, 2020). A week later, 50 members and sympathizers of "Levijatan" movement organised a protest in front of the same camp expressing their support for the arrested member of the movement. In October of 2020 six members of "Levijatan" were arrested for beating a person who left an insulting comment on Facebook about this movement.

Leaders of "Levijatan" frequently claim that they enjoy the support of the state in their activism. For example, immediately after the state of emergency was imposed in Serbia due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the following statement appeared on their Facebook page:

*The Levijatan Movement of Serbia is [...] from this moment on, fully available to the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Defence and other relevant public authorities in the*

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<sup>31</sup> Levijatan (official web page), Available at: <https://levijatan.org/about> (Accessed: 26. February 2021).

*fight against the ‘COVID-19’ pandemic. We are recognized as those who unreservedly stand in protection of the weakest and those who do not have a voice of their own, WE ARE INVITED to the first line of defence of our oldest fellow citizens and those who will need help, be they women, children or animals [...] according to the plan which will be defined by public authorities. We will also deal with the control of [social] networks in terms of preventing the spread of panic, false news and we have the authority to react in the sense of immediate notification of authorities with which we have a pre-established line [of communication] for crimes in the domain of the abuse of children, women and animals* (Biz Life, 2020).

The Serbian Ministry of the Interior subsequently denied said claims as entirely false, to which Bihali replied that their statement was “misinterpreted and that they have a special link with the police - a hotline” (Rogač, 2020).

Although “Levijatan” leaders fiercely negated any political pretensions at first, this movement was among the candidates in the 2020 state elections. At that time “Levijatan” joined forces with the Anti-Vaxxer movement “Živim za Srbiju” (LFS)<sup>32</sup>, submitting a joint election list although they did not win sufficient votes to pass the census (see Appendix 3, Figure 3.3).

#### 4.1.4. Far-left radicalisation

Radical Left in Serbia gathers the youth, usually high school and university students which are of humanist orientations, literate and theoretically more ready to enter a dialogue than the far-right, but they do not have a strong and organised political party to rally around and to share unified political views (Bakić, 2006, 2014). Their political structure is significantly less branched than the structure of the Right, and the absence of an ideologically clearly profiled and strong political party (that can serve as a pivot of their gathering) is noticeable (Bakić, 2006, 2014). First relevant activity of the radical Left in the public sphere was giving support to the first Pride parade in 2001 but were all attacked by more numerous and aggressive far-right extremists. A common thread for all far-leftist in Serbia (which are gathered in a few social-communist and anarchist associations) is the hostility towards capitalism and capitalist relations, NATO, imperialism, religion, nationalism, liberalism, fascism and the radical Right. As a prominent representative of the radical Left we can mention ASI, whose members threw a Molotov cocktail at the Greek embassy in 2009. This group is also known for the incursion at the 2016 “History of Republika Srpska” round table held at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, and the conflict with the right-wing NSF which happened at that time. The far-left spectrum also includes the Marx 21 organisation, which has been active since 2008 and is known for conflicts with members of right-wing organisations, severe criticism of the Serbian Orthodox Church and active participation in Anti-government protests of 2019. In recent years, there have been (mostly unsuccessful) attempts of the political organisation of the extreme Left, among which are the Left Summit of Serbia as well as the re-emergent gathering around the Social Democratic Union which tried to unite different streams and factions of the radical Left. For

<sup>32</sup> “I live for Serbia” movement, led by a psychiatrist Dr. Jovana Stojković, stands against mandatory vaccination and pharmaceutical mafia. This movement is predominantly active online and acts primarily through YouTube channel, Twitter account, Facebook page and personal Facebook account of Jovana Stojković. Dr. Stojković regularly post video materials on social media dedicated to combating public health measures and social restrictions state implements in order to contain the spread of COVID-19 disease. These video performances are also characterized by pronounce nationalism, nativism, anti-Western rhetoric and numerous conspiracy theories.

now, these attempts did not yield more significant results, but we cannot rule out the possibility that it will be done in the near future.

#### 4.2. Issues regarding state-led radicalisation

Finally, a fact that should also be taken into account is that radicalisation is often a “two-way street”, an interactive process that is driven not only by violent agents and their political allies, but also by the state institutions’ repressive or encouraging reactions. In order to complete the picture, we must point out certain state measures or (silent) policies that further encourage certain types of radicalisation. In the case of ethno-nationalist and separatist radicalisation in southern Serbia, as well as the religious extremism present among the Muslim minority in Sandzak, the common denominator is a constant distrust and security tension provoked by significant military or police presence, and the overwhelming interest of intelligence agencies (as well as sensationalist-oriented pro-government media) in events in these areas. Also, a relatively small percentage of Albanians and Bosniaks are employed by the police or army, which further contributes to mistrust and tensions. For example, “Bosniaks make up more than 70% of the population of Novi Pazar, while the percentage of Bosniaks in the police in that city is only 20%” (Krežiū and Stakić, 2014, p. 7). The Albanian national minority is in a slightly better position and “is among the better represented in the police due to the specific positive discrimination measures taken in recent years” (Krežiū and Stakić, 2014, p. 7.13) but it still remains underrepresented in the security institutions of Serbia. When it comes to the radical Right, it should be noted that it enjoys the quiet support of the state, which occurs in the form of slow, lengthy judicial processes and acquittals, as well through the permissive legislation that allows representatives of banned extremist groups to legitimately re-register new organisations.

### 5. Stakeholders and channels of de-radicalisation

In 2017, Serbian Government adopted the National Strategy for the Prevention and Fight against Violent Extremism and Terrorism, for the period 2017-2021, which is based upon a comprehensive and multi-angled approach. The Strategy had already envisaged (within priority area 1 that relates to the *Prevention of Terrorism, Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that leads to Terrorism*) “the improvement of existing and development of advanced prevention programmes, which assumes the creation of political, social, economic and other circumstances that do not favour radicalisation, the spread of extremist ideologies and recruitment of terrorists, while [simultaneously] strengthening the system of values on which the Republic of Serbia is based” (Službeni glasnik RS, 2017). Within this priority area, several strategic goals have been pointed out, such as: developed security culture of citizens, early identification of causes and factors that favour the spread of violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism, an environment that demotivates the recruitment of young people to participate in terrorist activities, high-tech systems communications and digital networks that are resilient to the spread of radicalisation and violent extremism, as well as strategic communication skills. Among other aspects, the realization of these goals includes “devised and planned activities in the field of formal and non-formal education, training courses and general information of the wide public, especially young people and those working with

young people", as well as the inclusion of the broadest range of governmental and non-governmental organisations within that process (Službeni glasnik RS, 2017).

We highlight several programmes and projects which were realized, partially realized or are currently being realized in the Republic of Serbia, not only since the adoption of the stated Strategy but in the period preceding the Strategy as well.

When it comes to the Ministry in charge of education and activities related to radicalisation and de-radicalisation, it is important to mention the adoption of the *Rulebook on the protocol on the action in the institution in response to violence, abuse and neglect* (Službeni glasnik RS, 2019, 2020) which recognized violent extremism and abuse that students encounter, not only in their school environment, but outside of it as well, as a form of violence. In the meantime, the Ministry together with UNESCO started the project *Development of capacities for the prevention of violent extremism through education in secondary schools in the Republic of Serbia: Laying the foundations* (MPNTR, 2019)<sup>33</sup>. Within the scope of this project, high school employees and student representatives in student body parliaments from Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Kosovska Mitrovica, Novi Pazar and Leskovac were trained. The project was realized during the 2019/2020 school year as of now it is still not known whether its sustainability is possible.

The Ministry in charge of youth was established in 2007, with the basic goal of establishing a system of development and improvement of youth policy and is therefore responsible for preparing and implementation of the National Youth Strategy as well. First National Youth Strategy was adopted in 2008, while the second Strategy was adopted in 2015 for the period between 2015 and 2025. Both strategic documents envisaged goals that deal with the security of the youth, more concretely with improving the conditions for developing security culture among young people. It includes multiple goals that incorporate areas of developing programmes of respecting human and minority rights, gender equality, diversity acceptance, tolerance and nurture of non-violent means of communication, as well as programmes that enable members of violent groups to leave violence more easily through so-called "exit strategies", the possibility of keeping a record of such groups and motivating young members of violent groups to participate in "exit strategy" programmes. In 2013, the Ministry in charge of youth started a campaign and initiated the formation of the *National Committee for Combating Hate Speech on the Internet*<sup>34</sup>, which included the launch of multiple activities through which the youth was informed on how to recognize hate speech, how to protect themselves from it, and to whom they can reach out if they are victims or witnesses of internet violence. However, already in 2014, the activities of this body were slowly becoming more absent, after which there were no more recorded activities even though the Committee itself has not been officially disbanded.

When it comes to the question of best practices coming from civil society and non-governmental organisations, several of them could be singled out. Digital violence and work on its prevention are central themes of the initiative "Virtual becomes reality" (Peace Institute and the authors, 2020). The Initiative was launched by the NGO "Libero" in 2012 when it joined the Council of Europe's "No hate Speech Movement" campaign and became a part of the

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<sup>33</sup> Original title of the project in Serbian: *Razvoj kapaciteta za prevenciju nasilnog ekstremizma kroz obrazovanje u srednjim školama u Republici Srbiji postavljanje osnova*.

<sup>34</sup> Original name in Serbian: *Nacionalni komitet za borbu protiv govora mržnje na internetu*.

National Committee for Combating Hate Speech. From then on, this organisation has developed and implemented a series of informal educational programmes whose goal is to strengthen and provide support to the youth in order to adequately tackle the challenges of the digital world. Those educated were young people, primarily high school students. Young people acquired knowledge and skills on how to prevent, but also adequately react in cases of digital violence (including hate speech) and how to support their peers that were the recipients of negative comments and hate speech. Adults were educated as well, namely representatives of institutions and the system which provides support to children and youth and react when needed. This primarily includes the teachers, but also the representatives of Centres for Social Work in Serbia<sup>35</sup>, young legal experts, representatives of organisations that are members of the Network of Organisations for Children of Serbia<sup>36</sup>, health care employees and representatives of the Ministry of Interior. In addition to educational workshops, and an extensive online campaign was conducted, aimed at providing information to young people on the importance of education on digital violence protection. From 2019 onwards, the online educational programme is available which offers knowledge in three areas: Digital Communication, Digital Violence and Prevention and Youth Protection from Digital Violence. Libero, as the lead institution of the initiative for implementation of these activities, has important partners who have provided improvement, development and sustainability of the "Virtual becomes reality" initiative through financial, technical and expert support. The list of these partners includes the Council of Europe (through their "No Hate Speech Movement" campaign), UNICEF of Serbia, Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Serbia, Network of Organisations for Children of Serbia, City Municipality of Vračar, and CIVILNET network. The success of the implementation of individual activities is based upon good cooperation with numerous social work institutions, youth offices and high schools throughout Serbia.

In the case of Serbia, there has not been much research that assessed and explored the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism among the youth, which would serve as the foundation in creating adequate programmes. In recent years several programmes of relevance have been recorded, supported by international organisations and foreign donors such as: UNDP, UNICEF, OSCE, British Council, EU; and which were implemented by governmental institutions, academic institutions and think-tank organisations.

In order to hinder and prevent radicalisation and violent extremism among the youth in Serbia, based on the Initial Study<sup>37</sup>, a team of experts within "PIN - Network of psychosocial innovations" developed psycho-educational workshops "Strengthening Youth Resistance to Radicalisation and Violent Extremism" (BYRVE)<sup>38</sup> within the *Youth for Change: Strengthening Youth Resilience in Serbia through engagement, leadership and development of their cognitive and socio-emotional skills* project. The programme relied upon best practices from previously implemented programmes that dealt with radicalisation and violent extremism, but it was adjusted in line with the results from the Initial Study as well as the specific local context that are relevant for the regions in which the programme will be implemented. The programme contains 10 modules, which are covered by 10 psycho-educational workshops (Identity,

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<sup>35</sup> Original name in Serbian: *Centar za socijalni rad* (singular).

<sup>36</sup> Original name in Serbian: *Mreža organizacija za decu Srbije*.

<sup>37</sup> During September and November of 2019, pre-test of 288 high school students from Belgrade, Sjenica and Novi Pazar was conducted. Post-test was conducted via the internet from May to June 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Title in Serbian: *Jačanje otpornosti mladih na radikalizaciju i nasilni ekstremizam*.

strengthening self-confidence and creating a positive self-image, Assertive communication, Constructive problem solving, Adoption of perspective and conflict resolution, Empathy and acceptance, Stereotypes and prejudices, Discrimination, Cultural similarities and differences and cultural consciousness, Culture and identity) (PIN, 2020b).

As part of its activities related to the involvement of civil society, the OSCE announced A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe – The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism 2018, where the following is stated for Serbia:

*[T]he OSCE Mission to Serbia is supporting independent academic research on topics related to VERLT in Serbia in order to contribute to the literature, support evidence-based programming and policy-making, and strengthen the number of researchers working on this topic. An open call for proposals was issued to attract a broad range of research ideas, and the quality of the submissions demonstrated that researchers, in particular Serbian researchers who are deeply familiar with the environment in the country, have a strong, nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the nature of extremism in the country. Nine research initiatives were supported, and a structured peer review process ensured that every author received rigorous feedback. (OSCE, 2018)*

Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia has significant cooperation with OSCE on various projects that cover the areas of human trafficking and community policing. In addition, OSCE Mission to Serbia supported the printing of a manual and brochure that contain necessary information on types and forms of violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to domestic terrorism, which was made by Ministry of Interior officials in order to contribute to the prevention of radicalisation and terrorism in Serbia. This brochure was distributed to the representatives of civil society organisations, during the meeting of the governmental Office for cooperation with the civil society<sup>39</sup> in December of 2019.

As an example of cooperation between the OSCE and the RS Ministry of the Interior, it can be mentioned: A series of four pilot training courses on preventing and identifying Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT), for police commanders from the local Uniformed Police and the local Police Sections for Countering Terrorism and Extremism throughout Serbia, took place from March to April 2018 in Novi Sad, Niš, Novi Pazar and Belgrade (OSCE, 2018). Approximately 70 participants learned about community policing's effectiveness in improving the prevention and early identification of issues before they escalate, thereby enhancing safety in local communities. In co-operation with the Ministry of the Interior, the OSCE Mission implemented the pilot training courses, which are part of the project *Supporting the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism in Serbia*, supported by Austria, Italy, the UK and the USA. The OSCE Mission to Serbia stands ready to further support the Ministry of the Interior in conducting new training courses to reach more local police officers.

Radicalisation and violent extremism is a sensitive topic, with complex security implications, so when it involves NGOs and local organisations devoted to de-radicalisation, they often face political and legal constraints, which is reflected in their effective functioning or implementation

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<sup>39</sup> Original name in Serbian: *Kancelarije za saradnju sa civilnim društvom*.

of the programmes which they have designed. The broad legal framework relating to counter-terrorism makes it difficult for civil society agents to work with individuals who are at risk of radicalisation onto terrorism, or are already radicalised. Civil society agents are at risk of being accused of providing “material support” for terrorists. On the other hand, when it comes to fostering the overall governmental and societal response to radicalisation and violent extremism, there are often time and resource constraints in developing these policies and strategic approaches. To a large extent, success depends on the establishment of significant cooperation and transparent partnership between the police, community leaders, and civil society agents. These partnerships work better when they are based on collaboration than when they are conditional or managed, but this is not always easy to achieve.

## 6. Conclusion

The Balkans and the former Yugoslavia are a very sensitive area when it comes to terrorism and violent extremism, because the entire socio-historical and political context is fertile ground for radicalisation. The memory of the civil wars of the 1990s is still fresh in the minds of the people, and mass crimes and murders can be basis for the realization of terrorist actions. In this report, we have identified the main ethno-nationalists, separatists, jihadists, right-wing and left-wing agents of radicalisation, as well as the main stakeholders interested in the process of de-radicalisation of members of one or all of the mentioned types of radicalism. The primary focus was on Islamic radicalism and the far-right, as their activities have been most visible over the last two decades.

There is no political awareness in Serbia about the danger posed by extreme right-wing organisations, and therefore no political will to deal with right-wing extremism. However, the different treatment of fighters who fought on the pro-Russian side in Ukraine and against Assad in Syria by the Serbian authorities can also be represented as one of the drivers of radicalisation. Pro-Russian fighters in Ukraine were prosecuted as fighters in a foreign country, while the latter were prosecuted for terrorism, which created the impression among many Muslims in Serbia that the Serbian authorities were anti-Muslim.

Radical right-wing groups and organisations active in the territory of the Republic of Serbia mainly act as citizens' associations, trying to seemingly mitigate their extremism and formally adjust their activities to the legislative framework of the Republic of Serbia, reserved for civil society organisations. In this way, the role of civil society organisations is degraded, questioned by both citizens and the state itself. This can lead towards state abuse of control mechanisms intended for investigation of money laundering and terrorist founding, and eventually to their use for intimidation of critically oriented organisations (NGOs, media). Civil society plays a crucial role in undermining the factors that lead individuals to be attracted to terrorism and violent extremism. Targeting civil society and intimidating NGOs and the media violates basic human rights and endangers the security of any country. Also, the abuse in the form of NGOs disguise activities of violent organisations must be recognized and prevented.

It is certain that the socio-ethical, political and cultural rehabilitation of the current situation will be a long-term process which certainly implies, above all, the deconstruction of established archaic, rigid, stigmatizing and manipulative ideological and political matrices, but also the

establishment of new cultural paradigms based on openness. Policies that promote models of intercultural interactions and communications, as well as identity strategies that affirm multidimensional identities are much needed. In this regard, it is necessary to reform the existing political, economic, educational and cultural programmes, in order to create favourable conditions for the coexistence of groups that obviously have different needs and interests.

Also, it would be good to evaluate the existing de-radicalisation programmes and, based on the identified weaknesses and potential inefficiencies, to correct them. In this regard, it is necessary to support more research, in order to determine precisely the situation on the ground and provide better understanding of public perception and attitudes on this issue. The problem of right-wing extremism cannot be solved without comprehensive preventive measures of the state, primarily in education, media and state institutions - judicial in the first place. On the other hand, for the problem of Islamic radicalism, in addition to the above, the involvement of religious teachers is also very important. Faith communities must improve the quality of their educators and the curricula they teach. More important still is the reform of citizenship education, the curriculum of which should include learning about other religions (in a historical and sociological context) as well as improved critical thinking skills to enable pupils to better assess problematic content they encounter, especially via social media.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Main radicalisation events in Serbia since 2001

Name	Date or period of time	Description
5 <sup>th</sup> October Revolution	05.10.2000	Mass citizen demonstrations in Belgrade, Niš, Novi Sad and other cities, caused by election fraud of the 24 <sup>th</sup> of September 2000 presidential elections in Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Around 100.000 people gathered in front of the National Assembly, when two people died - one female protester and one police officer – and around 65 injured.
Terrorist attack within Security Zone on police positions in Bujanovac	21.11.2000	Members of the extreme paramilitary formation LAPBM attacked police positions following a series of terrorist attacks that happened between 2000 and 2001. During this time there were 460 attacks and from 2001 to 2010 only several.
First Pride Parade	30.06.2001	40 injured
Murder of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đindić	12.03.2003	1 dead and one seriously injured
25 members of the NA organisation stormed the round table at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University in Novi Sad	09.11.2005	3 injured (stabbed) and the violence continued during the musical concert later that day

Police raid of a Wahhabi terrorist training camp in 2007 on Ninaji mountain	17.3.2007	Leader of the group Ismail Prentić was killed, and another one of its members was wounded. Police arrested 12 Wahhabis in connection to this case.
Attack of NA members on an Antifascist rally in the centre of Novi Sad	07.10.2007	A dozen people were injured and 56 were arrested, mostly members of NA.
Protest due to the proclamation of independence of Kosovo, which turned into a wave of street violence and vandalism, that ended as attack on the U.S. embassy	21.02.2008	One dead, over 100 injured
Attack on the participants of the "Queer Festival" in Belgrade	19.9.2008	Three participants of the festival were injured. Several attackers were arrested, among them Miša Vacić, the leader of SNM1389
Second Pride Parade	10.10.2010	Assault was committed by members of "Obraz" and others extreme Right groups. During the clashes there were 132 injured police officers, 25 citizens and 250 people were arrested. Material damage in Belgrade was around 1 million EUR
Festival "Mirdite/Dobar dan"	01.06.2017	Although this Festival has been organised with the support of the Government since 2014 with the idea to promote cultural exchange between Belgrade and Priština, since 2017 the lack of the governmental support is present. From then on, certain groups have been

		more intensively trying to prevent the holding of this Festival (e. g Srpski sabor Zavetnici). In 2017 these groups tried to enable invited Kosovo president to speak at the promotion of the memoirs written by women that experienced torture in 1999
Attack at the bakery in Borča (suburb of Belgrade)	04.2019	Members of the extreme Right stormed a bakery owned by an Albanian, set up pig heads on the car of the bakery's owner and shouted death threats. Sofija Todorović, human rights activist, tweeted live from the scene and subsequently received death threats via social media
A right-wing group tried to stop a theater play about the Genocide in Srebrenica, that was organised by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights	07.2019	The group stormed the premises and had stopped the beginning of the theater play. They were singing nationalist songs, glorified Ratko Mladić, and during this time the police did not try to stop them. Only after some time the police forced them to leave
The representative of the right-wing group "Levijatan" forcibly broke into a migrant camp Obrenovac	06.05.2020	Only material damage was done
Beating of an individual by members of the "Levijatan" due to insults on social networks	02.10.2020	One injured, and six arrested.
Right-oriented movement "Narodne patrole" (PP) <sup>40</sup>	25.10.2020	The park outside the Faculty of Economics is a place

<sup>40</sup> Translated into English: "People's Patrol"

organised an anti-migrant protest called “Let us clean the park outside the Faculty of Economics” <sup>41</sup>		where migrants and refugees from the Middle East usually gather.
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<sup>41</sup> Original title of the protest in Serbian: “Očistimo park kod Ekonomskog fakulteta”.

## Appendix 2: Political discourse on radicalisation in Serbia

Quotation	Author(s)	Date of quotation	Source	Comments
"We should work as much as possible on the idea of global security. A terrorist attack shows that increasing military, political and logistical security in one area does not reduce the risks of such horrific events."	Dr Zoran Đindjić, Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia	11.09.2001	<a href="https://arhiva.srbija-info.gov.rs/vesti/2001-09/11/2794.html">https://arhiva.srbija-info.gov.rs/vesti/2001-09/11/2794.html</a>	Analysing the consequences of the attacks on New York and Washington, Đindjić said that world was no longer the same as before and that these events will change the course of history "in a bad way".
"I don't know what you mean by "little"? There were 50 police officers, even more than that. I don't know how many should have been hired - like for a rally of 20,000, for example? We estimated that there would not be so many of these lunatics who would threaten - but it is obvious that we, as a community, have not yet matured for such expression of [...] strangeness or, as someone would say, fulfilment of desires or sexual preferences".	Boško Buha, Chief General of Belgrade police Department	30.06.2001	<a href="http://www.gayecho.com/aktivizam.aspx?id=3215">http://www.gayecho.com/aktivizam.aspx?id=3215</a>	The answer to the question of the B 92 radio journalist who was asked to of the Belgrade chief police - why were there so few police on the street when various groups, fans of "Rad" and "Crvena zvezda" and the organisation "Obraz" announced for days that they would break the gay parade.
„In parts of two municipalities in southern Serbia, Preševo and Bujanovac – through intimidation of the population, escalation of violence and armed takeover of whole areas, limitation of movement of citizens and revoking freedoms –	Dr Nebojša Čović, Vice-president of the Government and the President of the Coordinating Body of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for	17.06.2002	<a href="http://www.arhiva.srbija.gov.rs/vesti/2002-06/17/327252.html">http://www.arhiva.srbija.gov.rs/vesti/2002-06/17/327252.html</a>	Speaking about the crisis in the south of Serbia in 1999-2001, Čović made a statement about extremism in both Serbian and Albanian, about a policy based on maximalist demands. A brief reminder of the events in the south of Serbia, in the municipalities of

<p>extremists violated the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia. They were guilty of serious violation of the United Nations Resolution 1244 and the Kumanovo Military-Technical Agreement".</p>	<p>the South of Serbia</p>			<p>Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja, which preceded the peace efforts. After the withdrawal of Yugoslav military and police forces from Kosovo and Metohija, which took place in accordance with the Kumanovo Military-Technical Agreement, the borders with Albania and Macedonia - due to KFOR's mild view of Albanian extremists at the time - became unprotected and permeable. Criminals and extremists crossed those borders into the south of Serbia, and with them dirty money, drugs and war equipment, mines and explosives, weapons and ammunition.</p>
<p>"Their aggressive action had been expressed earlier in mosques when they took Tespihs from the believers and threw them into the Raška river. They dressed differently, they bowed differently from the usual, they took down busts of fighters Dedo Šehović and Simeon Karamarković in the city centre, they dispersed the concert of Balkanika [music] group and organised a mass protest against the caricatures [of the prophet Muhammad] in a Danish paper. Investigative bodies</p>	<p>Ramiz Crnišanin Co-president of the intellectual circle of Sandžak</p>	<p>20.03.2007</p>	<p><a href="https://www.danas.rs/politika/vehabije-e-osumnjicene-za-pripremu-teroristickih-akcija/">https://www.danas.rs/politika/vehabije-e-osumnjicene-za-pripremu-teroristickih-akcija/</a></p>	<p>After the attack on the Wahhabi Arab Mosque, the suspects in the preparation of terrorist actions appeared before the court panel of the District Court, where they were tried as participants in the riots in front of the Arab mosque in early November. According to the words of the co-president of the Sandzak intellectual circle, Ramiz Crnišanin, the presence of Wahhabis in this area is not from yesterday.</p>

should carefully investigate the channels through which weapons came..."				
<p>"If we find out about the gathering of queers on the day of happening, thousands of patriots will immediately come rushing down, demolishing that gathering of immorality, fornication and Satanism"</p> <p>"I am glad that it did not come to that [Pride Parade], because nobody needs bloody Belgrade streets, because it is something that even a small child in Serbia knows, that queer parade will not and cannot happen in Serbia"</p>	Miša Vacić, Leader of SR	17.12.2009	<a href="https://insajder.net/sr/sajt/nemocdrzave/206/">https://insajder.net/sr/sajt/nemocdrzave/206/</a>	During 2009, Miša Vacić repeatedly emphasized that that year was not the time for a gay parade, but he also said that it would never be. He believes that this is an issue for the EU, and that Russia should be a model for Serbia, where the government and the police have dismantled such a demonstration of evil and dishonour.
"I will not shoot at my Muslim brothers; this is a revenge to the Americans for Pakistan and Afghanistan"	Mevlud Jašarević  The perpetrator of the terrorist attack on the U.S. embassy in Sarajevo.	28.10.2011	<a href="https://www.helsinki.org.rs-serbian/doc/HB-Br84.pdf">https://www.helsinki.org.rs-serbian/doc/HB-Br84.pdf</a>	On October 28, 2011, Mevlud Jašarević from Novi Pazar fired a Kalashnikov at the building of the US Embassy in Marindvor in Sarajevo, injuring two police officers. Jasarević fired several shots at the Embassy building before he was wounded by police.
<p>"We as a society today have a more difficult situation than we had ten years ago."</p> <p>"The degree of fascism of the society today is much higher</p>	Mihajlo Bešlin, Historian	06.10.2017	<a href="https://www.autonomija.info/napad-neonacista-na-gradjane-deset-godina-">https://www.autonomija.info/napad-neonacista-na-gradjane-deset-godina-</a>	On the occasion of the attack by members of the National Movement on the Anti-Fascist rally in the centre of Novi Sad ten years earlier.

<p>than it was in 2007 at the time of the anti-fascist rally. There were thousands of people then, and today you would not gather 700 people to react to the phenomena of fascism in this society because people are used to it. It's a so-called cooked frog system."</p>			<p><a href="http://cekanja-napresudu.html">cekanja-napresudu.html</a></p>
<p>"People returning from the battlefield are citizens of some countries in the region, including our country, and regardless of the fact that we will gather evidence and try to sentence them to long prison terms, the question is what will happen to them when they are released from prison. How can they reintegrate into society without being a threat anymore?"</p>	<p>Nebojša Stefanović, Member of SPP, Deputy Prime Minister and Serbian Minister of the Interior</p>	<p>16.05.2019</p>	<p><a href="http://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/politika/stefanovic-u-sad-o-borbi-protiv-terorizma_1017574.htm">http://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/politika/stefanovic-u-sad-o-borbi-protiv-terorizma_1017574.htm</a></p> <p>The Deputy Prime Minister and Serbian Minister of the Interior visited the State Department and talked with Nathan Sales, the coordinator for anti-terrorism in the Bureau against Terrorism and Violent Extremism, and said that the Republic of Serbia is aware of the threat posed by the return of fighters from foreign battlefields. Hundreds of people who have returned to Kosovo and Metohija represent a constant threat to security in the entire region. During the meeting with Sales, Stefanović also said that the Republic of Serbia is committed to the fight against money laundering and terrorist financing. He also stressed that the exchange of information in this area is very important, as well as training in order to raise the capacity of the Serbian police in the fight against</p>

				potential terrorism and organised crime.
"Miša Vacić today has, for Vučić's needs, the role of scarecrow for the decent world. Vacić, with the support of the Serbian Progressive Party, travels around Serbia and curses, threatens and insults peaceful citizens with one goal and one message 'if you do not want Vučić – this will be your new government'..."	Nebojša Zelenović, Mayor of Šabac	14.11.2019	<a href="https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1731557">https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1731557</a>	Reaction of the mayor of Šabac to the speech of the SR leader Miša Vacić, who held at the founding session of the local board of this party in Šabac.
"The Government of Serbia treats us, in this area, as unwanted community within its border. The growing anti-Albanian mood would be reduced if the cases of hatred were treated as exclusively individual. We now have the production of a xenophobia towards minorities by politicians, the media and public figures under the influence of "one political agenda", which spreads even fascist ideas".	Ragmi Mustafa, President of the NCA and the leader of the "Partia Demokratike e Shqiptarëve"	28.11.2019	<a href="https://www.danas.rs/politika/mustafa-vlada-srbije-ne-sprovodi-dogovorenoga-za-presevsku-dolinu/">https://www.danas.rs/politika/mustafa-vlada-srbije-ne-sprovodi-dogovorenoga-za-presevsku-dolinu/</a>	In a statement to the media, he spoke about the Albanian majority inhabited Preševo valley, which suffers from the same problems and challenges that have not been solved for decades, and which have been ignored all this time by Serbian Government.
"Take matters into your own hands and start cleaning your yard! Because - the system does not work, and those paid by citizens do not defend our Constitution!".	Damjan Knežević Leader of PP	25.10.2020	<a href="https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/poceo-skup-protiv-migranata-u-beogradu-i-kontraskup-dve-strane-razdvaja-policija/">https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/poceo-skup-protiv-migranata-u-beogradu-i-kontraskup-dve-strane-razdvaja-policija/</a>	The far-right PP movement organised an anti-immigrant protest in Belgrade on October 25, entitled "Let's clean the park near the Faculty of Economics." It was assumed that the park should be 'Cleansed' of migrants and refugees from the

				Middle East, who often gather there. PP caused concern in March 2020, when they intercepted migrants on the streets of Belgrade and threatened them.
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## Appendix 3: Networks of connection of the main agents of radicalisation in Serbia

**Figure 3.1. Wahhabi radicalisation network**

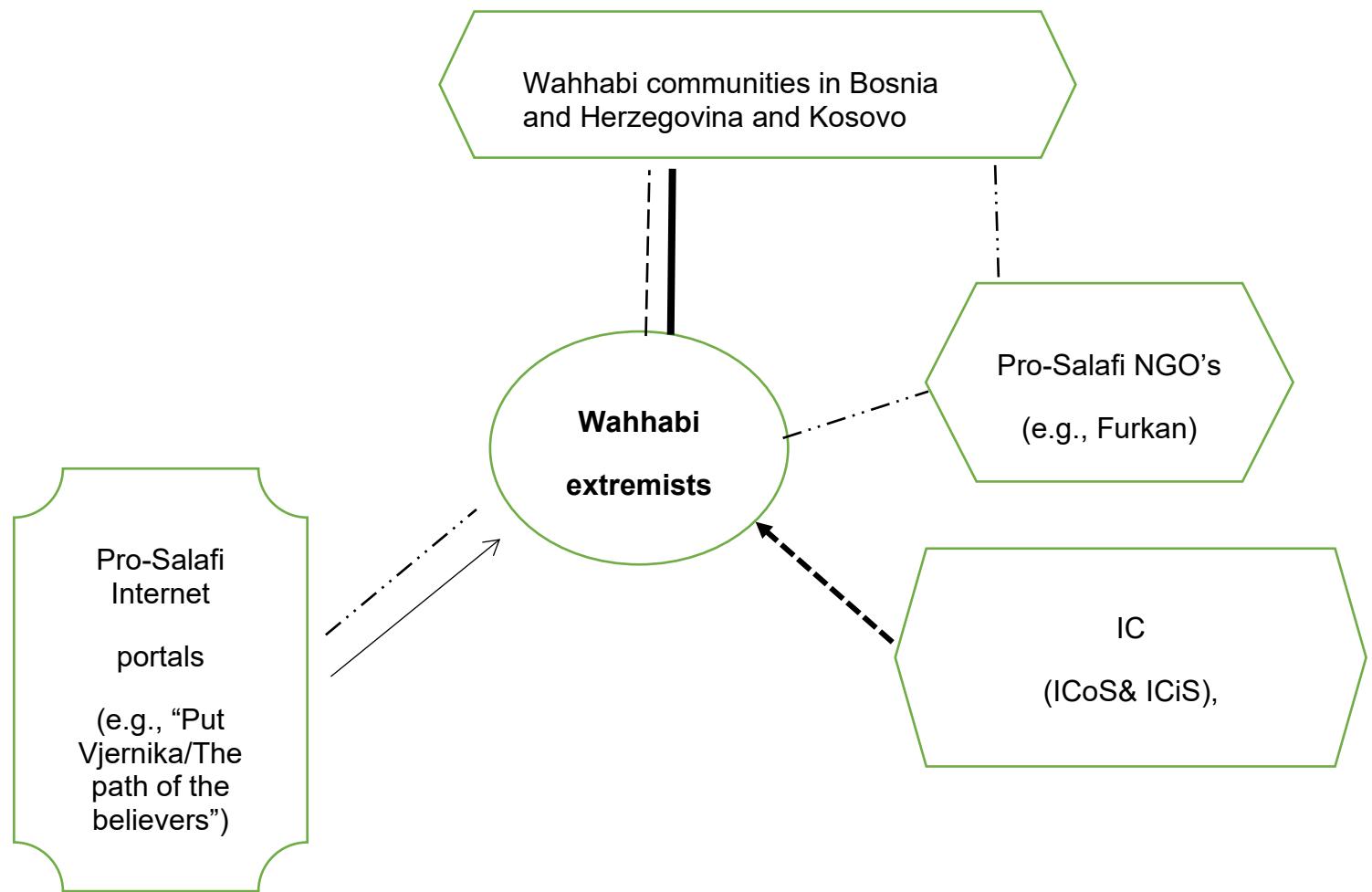


Figure 3.2. Far-right radicalisation network ("old school" Right)

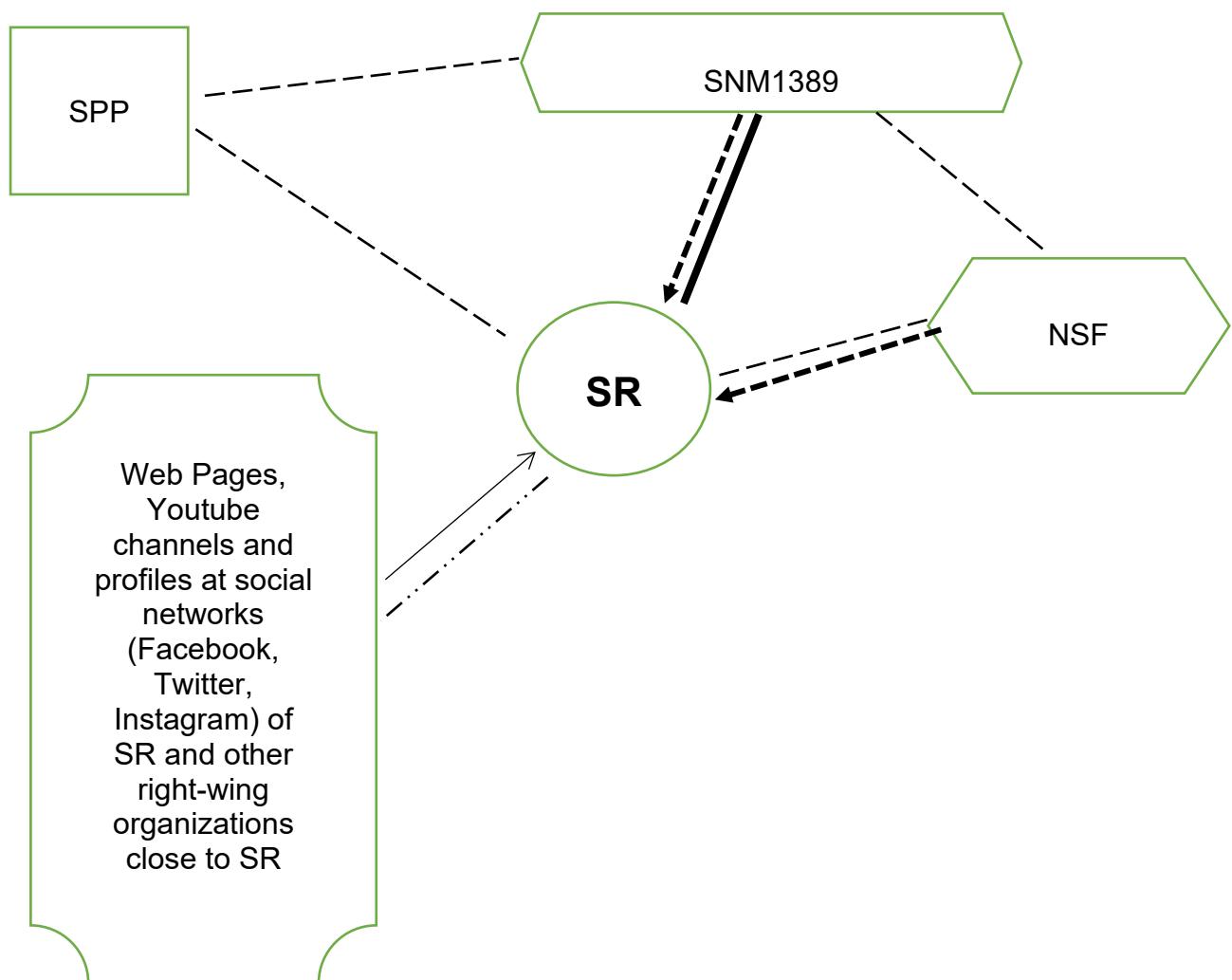
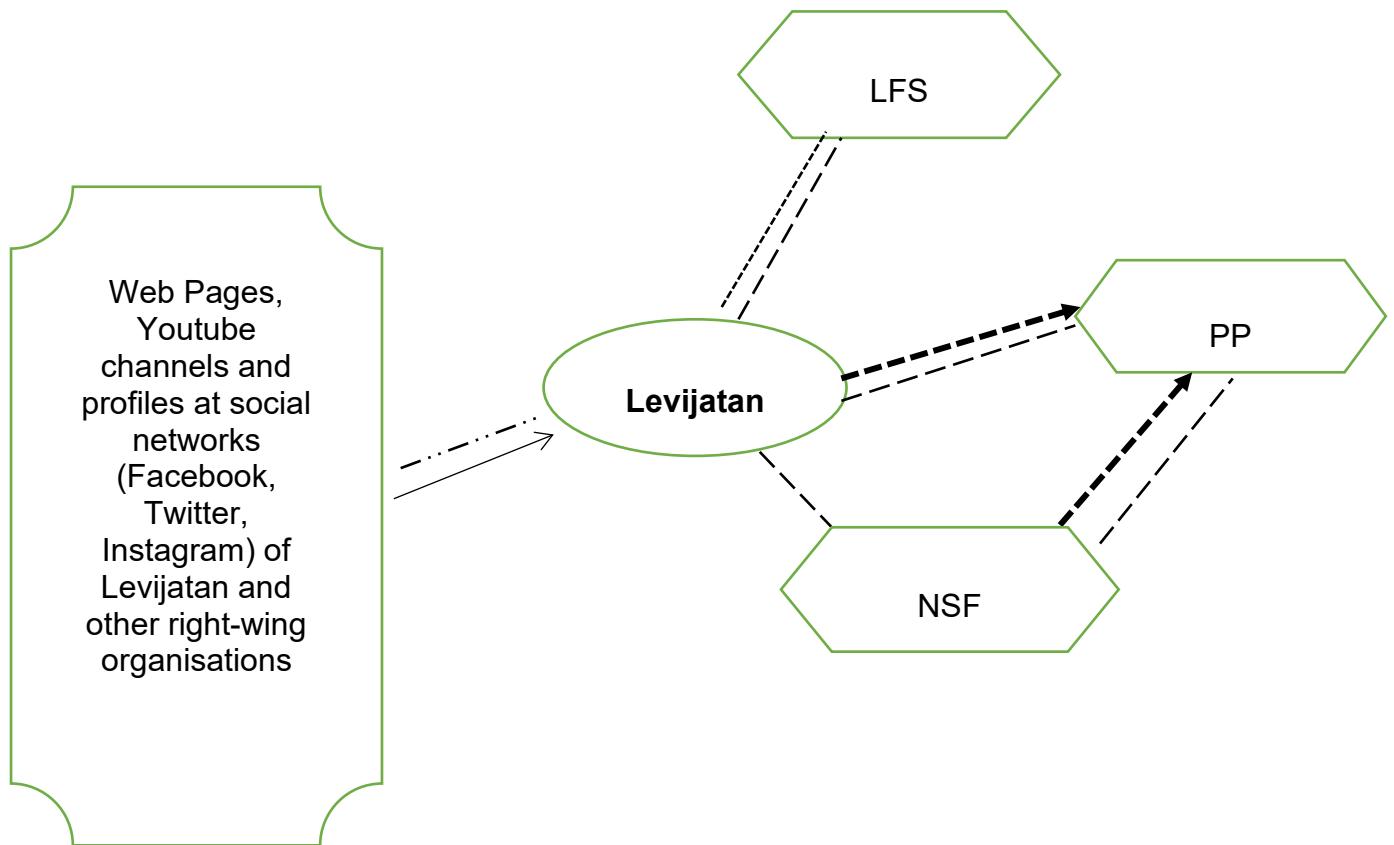


Figure 3.3. Far-right radicalisation network ("new school" Right)



## Appendix 4: Main de-radicalisation programmes

Name	Dates	Agents	Approach	Scale	Targets
"Capacity development for the prevention of violent extremism through education in secondary schools in the Republic of Serbia laying the groundwork"	Project realized in the school year 2019/ 2020	MPNTR (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development) UNESCO	Civil education	National	Teachers in high schools
National Committee to Combat Hate Speech Online	2013/2014	Ministry of Youth and Sports	Civil education	National	Youth (in Serbia, young people are between the ages of 15 and 30)
1."Virtual becomes reality"  2. An online education programme that offers knowledge in three areas: Digital Communication , Digital Violence and Prevention and Protecting Youth from Digital Violence	1.year 2012 – present  2.year 2019	1.Youth organisation - Libero, Council of Europe within the campaign "No hate Speech" Movement  2. Youth organisation - Libero, Council of Europe within the campaign "No hate Speech Movement, UNICEF, Ministry of Youth and Sports of Serbia, Network of Children's Organisation	Civil education	National	1.a) High school students 1.b). Adults, representatives of institutions and systems that provide support to children and youth  2. Social work institutions, youth offices and high schools throughout Serbia.

		s of Serbia, City Municipality of Vračar and CIVILNET Network			
Strengthening the resilience of young people to radicalisation and violent extremism (BYRVE) within the project Youth for Change: Strengthening the resilience of young people in Serbia through engagement, leadership and development of their cognitive and socio-emotional skills.	From August 2019 to October 2020	PIN - Network of psychosocial innovations implemented within the global STRIVE programme, With the support of European Commission Contracting Authority: Hidayah – International Centre of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism	Civil education	National	Young people
A series of four pilot training courses on preventing and identifying violent extremism and radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT), which are a part of the project "Supporting the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism in Serbia" supported by Austria, Italy, the UK and the USA	From March to April 2018	The OSCE Mission to Serbia in co-operation with the Ministry of the Interior.	Prevention and early identification of issues	Regional (Niš, Novi Pazar, Belgrade)	Police commanders from the local Uniformed Police and the local Police Sections for Countering Terrorism and Extremism throughout Serbia

<p>1. Integrated response of the community to human security challenges in Novi Pazar</p> <p>2. "Communities First: Creation of a civil society hub to prevent and counter violent extremism" (the Hub). A regional project implemented by the DamaD Cultural Centre, together with five other partner organisations from Albania, BiH, Montenegro, Kosovo and Northern Macedonia.</p>	<p>1. 2015 - 2018</p> <p>2. 2018-2021</p>	<p>1. DamaD (Cultural Centre), Embassy of Switzerland in Serbia</p> <p>2. Cultural Centre Damad (Serbia), Forum MNE (Montenegro), Centre for Conflict management (Kosovo), Hope and Homes for Children (Bosnia and Herzegovina) Search for Common Ground (Macedonia), Centre for Legal Civic Initiatives (Albania), and financial support European Union, the Balkan Trust for Democracy, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and the Ministry of Public Administration of Montenegro.</p>	<p>1. Integrative and prevention approach</p> <p>2. Approach to P/CVE, integrative approach</p>	<p>1. Local level (Novi Pazar)</p> <p>2. Regional and local level</p>	<p>1. Youth as one of the most vulnerable groups to extremism and radicalism; relevant institutions of primary and secondary actors of the referral mechanism, including representatives of the media, civil society and youth.</p> <p>2. CSOs and other community actors engaged in P/CVE in the region.</p>
<p>Project "Mapping extremism and</p>	<p>July – October 2018</p>	<p>Women's Support Centre and</p>	<p>Civil education</p>	<p>Local level (Novi Sad,</p>	<p>Young people - especially activists of civil</p>

civil resistance Serbia-Serbia 2018"		Vojvodina's Anti-Fascist Coalition, with the support of the Open Society Foundation Serbia.		Kikinda, Subotica, Zrenjanin, Pančevo and Belgrade)	society organisations, journalists and students; high school students in the environments in which the activities are carried out; representatives of the professional public; NGOs and groups belonging to the anti-fascist circle of values; media representatives ; citizens of Vojvodina and Serbia.
Project "Promoting Tolerance: All Together in Sandzak"	March 2019 - February 2020	Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, The project was supported by the International Hedayah Centre for Combating Violent Extremism and the European Union.	Civil education	Local level Novi Pazar, Sjenica and Tutin	1.High school students and 2) parents of high school students, 3) teachers, psychologists and pedagogues employed in high schools.
Project "Improvement of media reporting on extremism"	Nov-Dec 2019	Novi Sad School of Journalism with support EU and Hedayah	Civil education	National level	Journalists and media editors

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