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Traditional Forms of Radicalism and Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans as the Main Challenge to Stability

Abstract

In this research authors investigate the issue of radicalism and violent extremism, initially examining the meaning of the terms, as well as the essential characteristics of these phenomena. Afterwards, the authors analyse and investigate the emerging forms of radicalism and violent extremism that exist in the territory of the Western Balkans, and their impact on the state of security in the region. The authors continue to study the aspect of the causes and conditions of the emergence of radicalism and violent extremism in this region while outlining the basic guidelines for the prevention of these phenomena at the end of the research. In this concern, the authors particularly emphasise the necessity of cooperation, coordination and strategic approach among all parties of the region, for the prevention of radicalism and violent extremism in the Western Balkans.

Keywords: security, radicalism, violent extremism, prevention, Western Balkans

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Introduction

The Western Balkans, like the rest of the democratic world, is facing the problem of radicalism and extremism. However, the concern and the problem is not limited to religious-based radicalisation, especially of youth and them joining with the so-called Islamic State and other similar organisations, but also with many other traditional radical and extreme forms, which support clerical, ideological-chauvinistic, neo-fascist, nationalistic and racist ideologies. The existence and functioning of such groups, organisations, and movements have shown to be one of the major obstacles for establishing long-lasting peace and security, initially at the domestic level, with a far-reaching effect in the region and beyond.

Many theories and scholars have historically debated the meaning of peace and security. The most critical debates arise around the situation that is created when there is a possible absence of these two concepts, developed by Johan Galtung. In the meantime, different theories also argue that the rise of extremism and radicalism happens for many reasons, and the involvement of groups, organisations, and entities that support different extreme ideologies is not denied. This paper though, will elaborate on the meaning of peace and security, and in contrast, of radicalism and extremism, by establishing a theoretical and practical link between the sense of the concepts and the forms of traditional radicalism and extremism in the Western Balkans, which we consider as existing far beyond the new emerged forms. In this regard, the starting hypothesis of our work is to establish continuing peace and security in the Western Balkans, prevention of traditional forms of radicalism and violent extremisms lays as the critical segment.

Different researchers and scholars from the Western Balkans, in cooperation with many institutions and NGOs and INGOs, have conducted researches on religious-based terrorism and violent extremism, identifying their source in the Middle East, most of the time failing to recognise their severe forms, which were already present in the region. Therefore, based on the existing researches but also the qualitative research that we have done for this paper, we will present some of the traditional forms of extremism and radicalism in the Western Balkans, with the aim to urge the practitioners to take into account that conventional forms of radicalism and extremism are the foremost threat to long-lasting peace and security in the Balkans.

Defining Peace

The term “peace”, in the restricted significance, means the absence of war. Owing to the Norwegian scientist Johan Galtung, the founder of peace studies, scientists and practitioners who delve into peace in their studies today make a distinction between what is called “a negative peace” (a mere absence of war) in the science of security, and “positive peace” (peace where there is no marginalization, discrimination, exploitation, and similar actions of individuals or social groups towards other individuals or social groups) (Galtung 1969, p. 183).

Precisely, according to the dualistic definition of peace of Galtung, peace is something contrary to violence, nonetheless his understanding of violence (and therefore of peace) not only refers to the visible use of (physical) force among human beings, but to everything that impedes human self-realization, which is the satisfaction of basic human needs (economic, psychological, educational, ecological, spiritual). Negative peace, according to Galtung, is the absence of war and actual physical violence, while positive peace represents a model of cooperation and integration between individuals and different social groups (Galtung 1964, pp. 1-4).

Based on this understanding of the negative and positive sides of peace, Galtung emphasises the relationship between positive peace and violence. Explicitly, although positive peace certainly requires the absence of physical violence, this is not a sufficient condition, but rather the absence of the supposed “structural violence”. According to the same author, structural violence exists whenever human beings are under such condition where their physical and mental adaptation is below their possible realisation (Galtung 1969, p. 174). Positive peace is inescapable a good thing because it indicates the presence of justice, whereas, in negative peace, justice is not part of this concept (Glossop 2001, p. 18).

To be exact, firstly, negative peace certainly looks better than war. In peacetime, there may or may not be an injustice, but in wartime, there will undoubtedly be many injustices. Thus, positive peace does not imply only the absence of war, but the promotion of positive attitudes. It is thought to make people more humane and more sympathetic towards those belonging to other social groups, while the war tends to make them more suspicious and intolerable towards all people belonging to other social groups. However, it is likely that negative peace can be an exact negative thing, reflecting its negative sides.

For example, such situations where there is marginalization, discrimination, and even physical violence towards distinctive social groups and their members may result in the aversion of that group's suffering while, in reality, there is still considered to be peace as there is still tranquillity, because nobody risks resisting the oppressor or the dictator.

Defining Security

Based on different theories and definitions given by scholars of security studies, we can say that it is possible to extract a classification of security as a condition, security as a function, security as a need, security as an interest, security as an organization and security as a feeling (Ivanović 2017, p. 161). Such complexity in the meaning of the term security significantly hinders a comprehensive definition that would include all of its aspects, which would again reject the other listing and description. In the narrow sense of this perspective, security is considered a specific condition that is characterised by the absence of endangerment of individuals, social groups and communities. While in a far-reaching observation, security covers the activities taken to achieve this condition by individual subjects, along with the system of organisations and institutions that are responsible for undertaking these activities (Arifović *et al.* 2017, p. 267).

Positive and negative security reflect the tensions on the very conceptualisation of the term itself, the provider of it and how the value has been placed in the concept by scholars (Gjorv 2016, p. 37). Negative security relates the negative value of the security that we wish to invoke as less as possible. However, security is also represented to have the desired positive value, to treat security as a concept that we want to avoid, one that should be (Gjorv 2012, p. 836). In parallel, in a different normative approach, Floyd says that “security, in general, is neither good nor bad” (Floyd 2007, p. 337).

Predrag Ilić makes a distinction between positive and negative definitions of the concept of security in general, where he argues that the definition of security should include not only the desirable situation but also the positive and negative impact of those actions to that situation. In this context, he defines the security as “the totality of objective and subjective factors on which survival, stability and normal functioning of individuals, social groups, institutions, organisations or a community depend” (Ilić 2012, p. 137).

Another definition of security by Arnold Wolfers argues that safety measures the absence of threats to those values while subjectively it measures the fear of whether those values will be attacked. (Wolfers 1962, p. 150). For example, while there is not a threat or hazards towards values of individuals or social groups, organisations, and institutions, that situation means that there is protection. In this regard, when we discuss the prevention of radicalism and extremism as a critical segment in building lasting peace and preserving security in multicultural, multinational and multi-confessional social communities which exist in the Western Balkans we initially think of the positive peace which corresponds with the positive meaning of security. In this regard, we mean that the society in the Western Balkans charactering by sanctified values which are vital for individuals and social groups inside the nation needs not only absence of war and danger to have a situation considered as peaceful. Internal and external security must be positive to be reflected throughout the region.

Understanding Radicalism and Extremism

The original meaning of the term “radical” comes from the word *radix*, which in Latin means the root (Ayers 1972, p. 132). However, the meaning of the term “radical” has dramatically changed in just over a century. While in the 19th century, the term “radical” at first referred to liberal, anti-church, pro-democratic, progressive political attitudes, in modern times this term is used in an entirely different sense (Schmid 2013, p. 7). For example, in the case of “radical Islamism”, the meaning of this term tends to point to anti-liberal, fundamentalist, anti-democratic and regressive attitudes and programs (*Ibidem*).

Regardless of whether they use, approve or encourage the employment of violence, or even deny the usage of force completely – radicals advocate significant shuffling, alteration and ultimately the destruction of existing political, economic, social and cultural norms and structures. The result of this process is a radical departure from what they aspire to (Lombardi 2015, p. 85). Peter Lentini’s definition of radicalisation emphasises the following elements:

- the acceptance of ideology to undermine a given society;
- the separation between radical groups and the community in which they exist;

- the violence as a factor, although not necessarily used to define the process of radicalisation, which plays a vital role as the most dangerous tool of radicalisation (If it is not “used”, then is “justified”);
- the idea that individuals who support, participate in actions that are carried out with the purpose of realisation of ideology by/in society, will generally be regarded as radical extremists. (Lentini 2009, p. 9).

The term extremism is derived from the Latin word *extremus*, which means ultimate or absolute that is at the very limits of a sustainable, permissible and normal of something that is at the top or bottom of the object (Simeunović 2009, p. 146). In the broader definition of internal political extremism is considered all those political understandings and behaviours (of individuals, groups, organisations) that significantly, drastically deviate from what is acceptable and lawful in governmental relations and struggles within a democratic society (Savić *et al.* 1998, p. 73).

Political extremism is defined as the will of power by a social movement by the service of a political program that is typically at variance with the one supported by existing state authorities, and for which individual liberties are curtailed in the name of collective goals, including the mass murder of those who would actually or potentially disagree with that program. Restrictions on personal freedom in the interests of the collectivity and the willingness to kill massively are central to this definition: these elements characterise all of the extremist groups (Midlarsky 2011, p. 7).

It should be emphasized here that political extremism is portrayed by frequent, coercive and ruthless use of violence with the intent to achieve and set political interests and goals, for example, a radical change in the constitutional-legal or political order of a country, secession of the territory, which would give the political extremism the characteristics of radicalism.

In this regard, extreme behavioural forms that have political character as well as a radical one, which strives to achieve drastic changes, are mainly expressed in the Western Balkans in the way of totalitarian movements and organizations; national-chauvinistic groups, organizations, and actions; clerical groups, organizations, and movements; ideological-chauvinist political parties; racist groups, organizations, and movements; regional separatist and particularistic groups, organizations and movements; mafia organizations and other organized forms of criminal expression.

Totalitarian Movements and Organizations

These are movements and organisations which are based on the total, unlimited, unconditional and unwavering loyalty of every individual. Their members are entirely subordinated in all spheres of social life, to the movement or organisation. From the standpoint of the preservation of peace and security, most interesting are those totalitarian movements and organisations which attempt to take power and establish a political system, in which they will exercise full control over the entire community by force. The most significant examples of these totalitarian movements and organisations, from history, are fascist and Nazi while today, neo-fascist, neo-Nazi, and non-liberating movements and organisations. Although during the World War II, the region experienced devastating losses of groups and movements which supported and preached similar ideologies, surprisingly today in the area of Balkans we have the re-emergence of groups that propagate neo-fascist and neo-Nazi ideologies (Savić *et al.* 1998, p. 73).

National-Chauvinistic Groups, Organizations and Movements

National-chauvinist groups, organisations, and movements embody those forms of extremist groups, whose perceptions and behaviour are based on the ideology of national-chauvinism. National chauvinism implies the uncritical glorification and adoration of own itself nation with openly undervalues and attacks the dignity of other countries by spreading hate towards them (*Ibidem*, p. 75). The operation of such groups is recurrently accompanied by physical attacks on people of other nationalities as well as by persistent attempts to realise one's national interests by prevention and suppression of other nations. The main aim of these groups is to achieve a privileged place and position for their country in a particular space. National chauvinists lean towards the separation of their nation from other nations by pushing or eliminating them from the "occupied space", considering them as a constant threat for the normal functioning and the development of their society.

Consequently, national-chauvinists manifest their perceptions and behaviour principally in the form of separatism, irredentism or Unitarian. More precisely, national chauvinism aspires towards violent assimilation of members of other civic groups that live in their territory or at least exercise domination over smaller national groups. In the

example of the Western Balkans, we can say that this is moreover, a traditional form of internal political extremism that has a pronounced presence and deep roots in the majority of the nations of the region.

Cleric Groups, Organizations and Movements

Cleric groups, organisations, and movements represent a form of internal extremism in religion or interreligious relations. Clero-chauvinism is interference of religion in the political sphere or even abuse with religious values with the purpose of achieving political goals through an ungrounded glorification of one's faith, and humiliation, insulting, attacking and oppressing of members of other religious communities. In this regard it should be noted that in addition to the classical cleric manifestation, which is the pure form of clericalism, many cases show a direct link between this kind of extremist behaviour, with nationalism, making this phenomenon even more dangerous to the national security of a country.

Namely, the combination of clericalism with nationalism is one of the cruellest forms of internal extremism, which can lead to bloody and most intrusive internal armed conflicts. These combinations of clerical and nationalist manifestations are illustrated and visible in the Western Balkans, namely in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. These are civil wars of inter-religious and inter-ethnic character, manifested in conflicts between Roman Catholic-Croats, Orthodox-Serbs, and Muslims-Bosnians (Ivanović, Soltvedt 2016, p. 137) and also in the inter-ethnic sphere, between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo (Demjaha 2017, p. 182).

In addition to cleric groups, organisations, and movements in the Western Balkans, there are other forms of extreme religion-based manifestations which may have a negative impact on peace and security. Specifically, religious fanatics and religious fundamentalism comprise some of these categories. Under religious fanaticism, negative occurrences from the ranks of religious communities are reflected through “blind” belief of the followers on the preaching of religious leaders. Religious extremism mainly accompanies serious crimes and atrocities committed due to destructive religious brainwashing (Mijalković 2009, p. 239).

Ideological-Chauvinist Political Parties

The ideological-chauvinist political parties as a form of internal extremism are those political options that through their ideology, understandings, and behaviours, spread hate and intolerance among citizens of a country in an ideological form. Indeed, the most dangerous forms of ideological-party chauvinism are the plans of elimination of political opponents and the realisation of such policies. Namely, the leaders of certain political parties which are intolerant and undemocratically oriented in their efforts to come or stay in power, use the propagation and manifestation of chauvinism on an ideological and party basis. Ideological-party chauvinism is reflected in the uncritical glorification of some political ideology, that is, the political party, with open or covert underestimation, insulting and spreading of hate towards the followers of other political ideologies, or members of other political parties.

Racist Groups, Organizations and Movements

Racist groups and organisations as internal extremists are those who follow the ideologies that maintain and reproduce the power differentials between different racial groups in the social system. Namely, those groups advocate the concept in which the dominant ethnic group should systematically exercise control over outside groups or other racial groups. Racial ideologies are those that consider that there are insurmountable and biological differences among the races of humanity, which lead to differences between people depending on their ethnic affiliation (Craighead, Nemeroff 2004, p. 789). In various forms, racism is mostly expressed toward African-Americans, or members of the “black race”, as well as to members of the “yellow race”. When it comes to the area of the Western Balkans, racism is mainly manifested in the form of intolerance towards members of the Roma population, and there is also a small but essential feeling of anti-Semitism.

Regional Separatist and Particularist Groups, Organizations and Movements

Regional particularism is a synonym for regional separatism. This term denotes the phenomenon of separating specific regions (territories) of a state into separate entities, as independent as possible from the centre and other areas (Savić *et al.* 1998, p. 79). These

are usually understood as separatist groups that are not religious, national or ethnic based, but based on regional affiliation, or the sense of belonging to one area. These extremist organisations, groups, and movements, under the alleged reasons for achieving the autonomy for the inhabitants of a particular area, tend to separate this region from the territory of a specific country. Regarding the Western Balkans, we can say that this form of extremism does not exist in its pure form; however, the kind of separatism that exists is grounded mainly on religious, national or ethnic affiliation.

Mafia Organizations and other Organized Forms of Criminal Expression

Organised criminal groups, as a form of internal extremism, represent a serious threat to peace and security. Unlike other forms of domestic extremism, organised crime, in the way of activities of organised criminal groups, is of non-ideological character. Organised crime is more oriented towards economic gains, while other goals such as political power, are secondary and subordinate to the realisation of the first, main one (Simonović 2004, p. 627).

However, even though organised crime groups are non-ideological, there are specific characteristics in their actions that give this type of criminal expression a political character and make it extremely dangerous to peace and security. Moreover, these groups are characterised by a totalitarian system of hierarchy and loyalty of each member towards their leader, wherein one person or small elite is the leader. An unconventional way of using force also describes them. These features categorise them among extremist organisations. The political and security threats that come from mafia-gangster extremism are reflected through linkage between these groups and politicians or powerful individuals that hold state authority who exercise state power at all levels, through which they can pursue their interests.

Moreover, there is an impression in the Western Balkans that cooperation between criminal groups is far more advanced than between institutions of different states. In the region, it is also widely believed that certain criminal groups correspond to the status quo of the Western Balkans concerning the relations with international community, with the purpose of having lower control over their illegal activities and goals. In this regard, there are assumptions that criminal organizations initiate specific incidents aimed at maintaining the so-called “frozen conflict” in certain parts of the Western

Balkans, thus preventing the establishment of effective control of an area by state institutions, thereby creating an unhindered space for smuggling or similar criminal activities (Andreas 2004, p. 6).

Radicalism and Extremism in the Western Balkans and the Necessity of Prevention

When it comes to the existence and action of radical and extreme groups, organisations and movements in the Western Balkans, based on the existing researches we can say that all the forms mentioned above are found in the region. Some are more pronounced on a larger scale, such as national-chauvinistic movements, which mostly occur in the major groups, while separatist movements mostly occur in nations with minorities in a certain country. The need to prevent the emergence of such groups, organisations and movements is especially apparent after the end of the armed conflicts that took place in the former Yugoslavia from the beginning to the end of the '90s. The inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts that took place in the former Yugoslavia, with a bloody epilogue, prove that this is a place where different social groups live together, which could not intermingle with each other (Perica 2002, p. 230).

Furthermore, their co-existence only excavates further the inter-ethnic and inter-religious intolerance. The interference and the fault of extreme radical groups mentioned above are undeniable throughout the region which reinforces the necessity of preventing the emergence of radical and extreme ideologies to avoid re-occurrence of intolerance and to avoid potential conflicts, to build peace and preserve security for all social groups and nations who lives in this area.

Namely, the Yugoslav socialist society was regarded as classless because everyone in it belonged to the working category, that is, the so-called “the working class”, which lacked the social element in it. It considered that the working class if ever come to a conflict, would rather rebel against nationalist and cleric ideologues and their defenders, than fight with their colleagues, or workers from other nations. This claim is best described in the Communist Manifesto which says, “Working men of all nations unite!” (Marx, Engels 1964, p. 33).

However, this did not happen. As the historian, Barbara Tuchman describes: “When the call came, the workers, for whom Marx declared to have no fatherland, identified themselves with the country, not class. They turned out to be members of the national

family. The force of antagonism, which was supposed to topple capitalism found a better target in the foreigner. The working class went to war voluntarily and even eagerly, like the middle class, like the upper class, like the species” (Tuchman 2014, p. 516)

Thus, the systematic suppression and denial of cultural (national, ethnic, religious) differences resulted in the accumulation of tensions and the emergence of conflicts on national and religious grounds, which culminated in the outbreak of a civil war in the former Yugoslavia. Fortunately, the war, id est the application of direct (physical) violence among certain social groups in the territory of the former Yugoslavia is over, establishing a form of negative peace finally. However, the question arises whether the countries which became independent by the disintegration of Yugoslavia, which are also multicultural, multinational and multi-confessional managed to establish a positive peace too, and whether these differences have been overcome, and whether positive relationships have been established between the various social groups living in this region?

The answer is no, or at least not exactly. Specifically, in almost all countries that emerged on the territory of the former Yugoslavia in all spheres of social life, a strong presence of nationalism, ethnocentrism, clericalism, discrimination, and marginalization of minority social groups can be observed, along with unequal ability, unequal allocation of resources and in general lack of respect for diversity. The use of direct physical violence according to other social groups in the form of armed conflicts is over, but the application of structural violence which threatens to produce new conflicts not. Consequently, it is challenging to establish lasting peace and security which appears to find solutions for irreconcilable inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts that have led to a civil war that continues to threaten to open new warfare sites until they destroy each other.

Conclusion

Based on everything elaborated above regarding the meaning of the notion of peace and the security we can conclude that the common characteristic of positive peace and the positive concept of security, in addition to the absence of physical violence, require the lack of structural violence too. In this regard, the achievement of positive peace and

positive security, with the meaning of the protection of citizens in multicultural, multinational and multi-confessional social communities as they exist in the Western Balkan countries represents an idea that all countries in this region should strive for.

As the most significant threat, the establishment of lasting positive peace and security, in this region we emphasised the existence of radical and extreme groups in the form of clerical, ideological-chauvinistic, neo-fascist, nationalist and racist, separatist groups, organisations, and movements. These groups exist because of the existence of many unresolved issues from the past, the inordinate scale of prejudices that exists among members of different social groups, strong formed identities which are negatively oriented towards others, and finally because of low level of inclusive citizenship, absence of active law enforcement mechanisms and regional strategies for the prevention of such phenomena.

Namely, when the radicalism and extremism in the Western Balkans are in question, the primary and only affiliation is with the war in Syria and Iraq, and youth radicalisation. We believe, however, that such forms of radicals and extremists pose a more significant threat to international security than to the Western Balkans. One of the main reasons for these assumptions is related to the sources of radicalisation, mainly pointing in the Western Balkans. Nevertheless, based on our research presented above, more significant problem and obstacle for the establishment of peace and security in the region is the presence of traditional forms of radical and extreme behaviour, which usually go unnoticed.

In this regard, we can say that the hypothesis established at the beginning of this paper that the prevention of radical and extreme ideologies existing in the Western Balkans is the key to the establishment of long-lasting peace and security in the region of the Western Balkans is wholly justified.

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