Katarzyna Matylda Czornik
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland
katarzyna.czornik@us.edu.pl
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9388-9467

Jihadism as a Challenge for Balkan States

Introduction

The problems of Islamic radicalization and jihadism have become one of the greatest challenges faced by European countries in the 21st century. The fourth wave of terrorism has become a widespread phenomenon in the first three decades of the 21st century, and its constitutive element was the division between those who carried out terrorist attacks for purely religious reasons in compliance with the tenets of the lesser jihad and those who were victims of the *qital* supported by European Muslims in military terms. In the latter context, the Balkan belt and the issue of spreading and infiltrating jihadism along the so-called Balkan route have become particularly important.

Terrorist attacks carried out for religious reasons on the basis of Islamic extremism primarily affected Western European countries, such as France, Britain, Germany, Spain, and Belgium. This does not mean, however, that the phenomena of jihadism and the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism did not occur in other European countries. It is expedient to mention that the Balkan states were the part of Europe that also witnessed Islamic radicalization. However, this situation was a form of paradox, since it was in Balkan societies that a moderate Islam, which has been a characteristic of this region, clashed with a radical form of this religion deliberately exported to the countries of the region primarily from Wahhabi Saudi Arabia.

Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to present the Islamic radicalization that took place in the Balkans in the 21st century as well as to discuss its causes and implications. The paper will attempt to answer the research question of whether jihadism poses a threat to the Balkan states, a part of Europe where native rather than immigrant Muslims are an integral part of the social landscape. The research hypothesis of the article is that increasing Islamic radicalization among Muslims in the Balkan area can pose a substantial challenge to the security of EU states and the region's stability. This radicalization was an implication of three phenomena. The first was the emergence of the IS, an organization mainly joined by Muslims from Bosnia and Kosovo. The second was the refugee and migrant crisis reinforced by the influx of Muslim refugees to Western Europe who also originated from the Balkans. The third was the infiltration of Saudi Arabia which has successfully spread a radical Wahhabi version of Islam among the people of the region. The paper addresses the issues of the fourth wave of terrorism, jihadism, religious divisions in the Balkans as well as the refugee and migrant crisis in the Balkan context, since one of the routes for people seeking refuge from war or to improve their material situation led from the area of North Africa and the Middle East (MENA) to the European Union (EU) precisely through the Balkans. The article is divided into three main parts. The first is the theoretical considerations on Jihadism. The second part is devoted to analyzing the origins of Islam in the Balkans and the statistical approach to Islam in the region. The last third part explores the phenomenon of Jihadism in the Balkans. Jihadism in the Balkans is discussed in this part in the context of the emergence of IS and the migration and refugee crisis. The research problem will be resolved, and the hypothesis will be verified with the use of the following research methods: the comparative method, factor analysis and content analysis.

Jihadism: A Theoretical view

The concept of jihadism should be mentioned with reference to the fourth wave of terrorism, a concept distinguished by David C. Rapoport within the context of the wave nature of terrorism[1]. As he emphasized, terrorism functions in cycles, and its successive waves have the following names: "Anarchist", "Anticolonial", "New Left," and "Religious." From the point of view of European countries, including the Balkan states, the last wave based on religious (Islamic)

---

[1]   D.C. Rapoport, *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism*, [in:] *Attacking Terrorism. Elements of a Grand Strategy*, eds. A.K. Cronin, J.M. Ludes, Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C., 2004, pp. 46–68.

fundamentalism has become the most dangerous due to the dominance of its religious factor. The so-called jihadist wave was sparked by two profound global events. These were, successively, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which began in 1979[2], and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which turned Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini into a Vilayat-e Faqih and Iran into a theocratic state[3]. The apex of the fourth wave of terrorism thus occurred in the post-Cold War period, or more precisely, in its first three decades. Crucially, a strong religious, anti-globalist, and anti-hegemonist narrative has become the dominant backdrop for fourth-wave terrorists, with ultra-conservatism, religious fundamentalism[4], and jihadism becoming its inherent features[5].

When analyzing jihadism from a theoretical perspective, one must first emphasize that its adherents have a dichotomous view of the world. From their perspective, there is a division between *dar al-Islam* (Arabic: house of Islam), i.e. areas under Muslim rulers where Sharia law applies, and *dar al-Harb* (Arabic: house of war), i.e. those areas that are not under Islamic rule or are at war with Muslims as well as areas where Muslim law does not apply and Muslims are subject to repression. It is worth mentioning at this point that according to the fundamentalist doctrine, *dar al-Islam* should eventually cover the whole world, a goal worked towards by conquest and expansionism in the period of the medieval caliphate at the heyday of Islam, which was invoked by the so-called Islamic State[6] as well. Non-Muslims may, of course, reside within *dar al-Islam*, but then they are *ahl az-Zimma*. Nowadays, *dar al-Islam* includes non-Muslim areas where followers of Islam are free to practice their religion[7].

In the period of the fourth wave of terrorism, it was therefore *dar al-Harb*, who should be converted to Islam, that became the field of the so-called minor (or lesser) jihad. If one were to refer to the concept of jihad itself, it should be noted that etymologically in Arabic the term is translated as "intensification of

---

[2]   M. Madej, *Interwencja w Afganistanie – najdłuższa wojna, największe fiasco?*, [in:] *Wojny Zachodu. Interwencje zbrojne państw zachodnich po zimnej wojnie,* ed. M. Madej, Scholar, Warszawa 2017, pp. 107–108.

[3]   C. Hemmer, *Which Lessons Matter? American Foreign Policy Decision Making in the Middle East, 1979–1987*, State University of New York Press, New York 2000, pp. 47–90.

[4]   B. Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism. Political Islam and the New World Disorder*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2002, pp. 149–157.

[5]   J. Brachman, *Global Jihadism. Theory and Practice*, Routledge, London, New York 2007, pp. 10–21.

[6]   F.A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2016, pp. 50–97.

[7]   S. Braun, *Islam. Powstanie – dzieje – nauka*, Verbinum, Warszawa 2003, p. 38.

effort or struggle"[8]. It is expedient to mention that Islam distinguishes between two types of jihad, a division shaped in the early Middle Ages under the influence of the mystical Sufi movement. The first of these is the so-called "major jihad" (or greater jihad) which all Muslims performs throughout their lives. It means, above all, the effort to fight one's weaknesses and to become a better Muslim. It is a fight against the evil that resides in a person's soul and keeps them away from the path to God. This type of jihad is conducted with instruments such as the heart, the tongue, and hands. The lesser jihad, on the other hand, often equated with the term *qital*, involves fighting so-called infidels and converting them to Islam. This type of jihad is practiced using an instrument that has been termed the sword[9]. A Muslim who participates in this kind of jihad is called a mujahideen, while one who follows the path of the lesser jihad is a shahid (martyr/witness to the faith). This type of jihad, especially in Western civilization, is understood as the so-called "holy war". However, it should be emphasized that equating jihad as such with "holy war" is an invention of Europeans and dates back to the period of the Crusades[10]. In contrast, for some extremist Muslim groups, including the Kharijites, jihad was the sixth pillar of Islam[11]. It is also worth adding that jihad as a concept of fighting the broadly understood West began to experience a renaissance with the resurgence of fundamentalist movements. The lesser jihad was promoted as an armed struggle against *al-Jahiliyya* (the literal translation is the period of ignorance before the advent of Islam in the 7th century), which was defined in terms of ignorance, unknowingness, and lack of faith in God. These characteristics, on the other hand, were attributed by Islamic fundamentalists to the societies of Western civilization, especially the USA and Western Europe. Radical theorists of Islamic fundamentalism, such as Sajjd Kutb[12], the ideologist of the Egyptian Association of Muslim Brothers[13], postulated that the small jihad should be waged permanently and not only in times when Islam is under threat. The *qital*, he argued, would cease only after Islam took over the world.

In conclusion, therefore, it should be emphasized that during the period of the fourth wave of terrorism, it is the religion i.e., Islam that provides justifications for organizing the principles of the New World and creating one state for all

---

[8] *Arabowie. Słownik Encyklopedyczny,* ed. M.M. Dziekan, PWN, Warszawa 2001, pp. 141–143.

[9] R. Ramlan, T. Erwinsyahbana, N. Hakim, *The Concept of Jihad in Islam*, "IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science", 2016, Vol. 21, Issue 9, pp. 35–41.

[10] Y. Thoraval, *Słownik cywilizacji muzułmańskiej*, Książnica, Katowice 2002, p. 300.

[11] Z. Landowski, *Islam. Nurty, odłamy, sekty*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 2008, pp. 58–63.

[12] J. Zdanowski, *Współczesna muzułmańska myśl społeczno-polityczna. Nurt Braci Muzułmanów*, Askon, Warszawa 2009, pp. 64–78.

[13] *Encyklopedia terroryzmu*, Bellona, Muza SA, Warszawa 2004, pp. 400–405.

Muslims. Its element is the rebuilding of the superpower that once existed. In this context, it was referred to the time of the medieval caliphate and the ruling Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, whose states were located on three continents – Asia, North and Northeast Africa, and Europe (encompassing Spain and France, among others) – and in which Sharia law would apply[14].

It can therefore be concluded that jihadism experienced a kind of renaissance in the 21st century, which was associated with the emergence of the so-called Islamic State – the most dangerous Salafi terrorist organization led by the caliph, just as it was the case in the heyday of Islam[15]. The IS propaganda image, effectively built in the second decade of the 21st century, includes numerous terrorist attacks carried out in almost all parts of the globe (especially in Western Europe) as well as activities in cyberspace taking the form of the so-called cyber jihad[16]. Jihadists in the 21st century have primarily targeted the dominance of the neoliberal West, especially the United States as the sole superpower or hyperpower placing itself above the law[17], as in the case of the March 2003 aggression against Iraq[18].

The fourth wave is therefore the era of *qital* domination, a jihad led with the "sword" using the latest digital, communication, and military technology. The fourth wave of terrorism included the activities of al-Qaeda, which showed the weakness of the United States by attacking the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, but also the rise and activities of the ultra-radical terrorist organization called the Islamic State[19]. The fourth wave of *qital* terrorism focused on anti-Westernism, anti-Americanism, anti-Christianity, and anti-liberalism. The components of the small jihad, on the other hand, have included the following: numerous sectarian suicide terrorist attacks, the dominance of the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism, the Shahid cult, the activities of lone wolves, the use of the Internet as a channel for communication and promotion of jihad, and finally the helplessness of Western societies and policymakers in the face of the unpredictability of jihadists.

---

[14] W. Ende, *Justice as a pervasive principle in Islamic law*, [in:] *Islam and the rule of law. Between Sharia and Secularization*, eds. B. Krawietz, H. Reifeld, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Berlin 2008, pp. 35–47.

[15] D. Byman, *Al Qaeda, The Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement. What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford University Press, New York 2015, pp. 163–172.

[16] M.R. Torres, J. Jordán, N. Horsburgh, *Analysis and Evolution of the Global Jihadist Movement Propaganda*, "Terrorism and Political Violence", 2006, No. 18, pp. 399–418.

[17] J. Kaag, S. Kreps, *Drone Warfare,* Polity Press, Cambridge 2014, pp. 97–98.

[18] P. Berman, *Terror and Liberalism.* W.W. Horton & Company, New York, London 2003, pp. 12–15.

[19] M. Griffin, *Islamic State. Rewriting History*, Pluto Press, London 2016, pp. 99–106.

Islam on the Balkans

The Balkan region is a diverse area with regard to ethnicity, nationality, and religion. The religious diversity of the region, which manifests in the deep divisions between the followers of Islam, Orthodoxy, and Catholicism, is one of the many factors that led to many conflicts in this part of Europe in the past and continue to be their source nowadays. In the 21st century, however, it is not only the religious mosaic but above all Islamic radicalization that has become a challenge to the security of the Balkan states and thus to the rest of Europe, too.

Balkan Muslims, unlike Muslims in other parts of Europe, are indigenous to their countries, a consequence of the conquests of the Ottoman Turks. Thus, when dealing with the issue of the islamization of the Balkans from a historical perspective, it should be pointed out that the beginnings of Islam in the Balkans date back to the 15th century, the conquest of Byzantium, and the onset of the rule of the Ottoman Empire. As Magdalena Ickiewicz-Sawicka succinctly points out, "(…) Turkish domination of the Balkans was not only political but also social, and fundamentally affected customs and morals. It was unusual, however, that the Turks, during their centuries-long domination, made no conscious attempt to assimilate and islamize the Balkan peoples"[20]. Such a situation meant, therefore, that in the conquered territories, the Turks did not force the local population to convert to Islam. The religion spread through voluntary conversions primarily motivated by economic gain and avoidance of repression. People who embraced Islam during the Ottoman Empire had the right to buy land and were exempt from paying the *jizya*, a per capita tax levied on adherents of other religions in Muslim countries[21]. Moreover, conversion often became the only way to preserve the former social and property position or to pursue a career in the army or in the Sultan's administration. However, those who chose Islam as their new faith even for purely practical reasons, had to completely renounce their previous religion. Following two religions was unacceptable under the Ottoman Empire in the region referred to nowadays as the Balkans, and people practicing it were severely punished under Turkish rule. However, the phenomenon of religious syncretism and "bireligiosity" was also present, and could take place due to bribes given to Turkish officials[22].

---

[20] M. Ickiewicz-Sawicka, *Religie na Bałkanach ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem islamu – szkic historyczny*, "Nurt SVD", 2014, No 48/2 (136), p. 12.
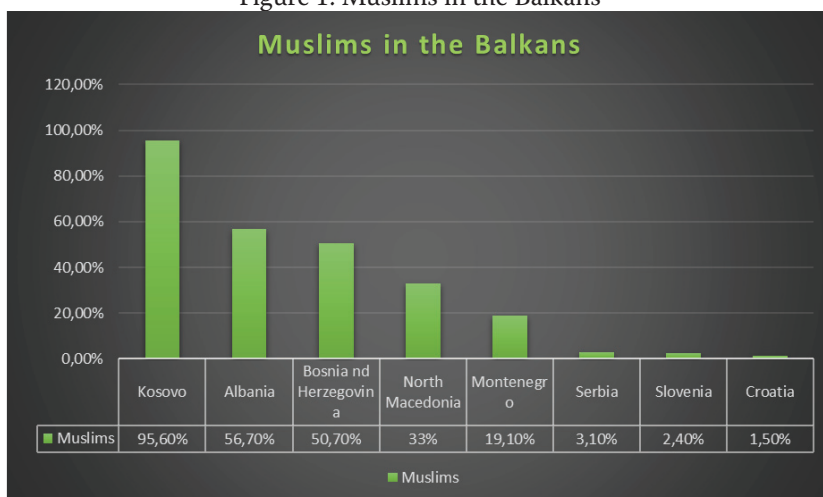
[21] *Jizyah. Islamic tax*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/ghanimah [accessed: December 17, 2021].

[22] D. Wybranowski, *Geneza i uwarunkowania procesu przekształcenia na przełomie lat 60. i 70. XX w. wspólnoty muzułmanów z Bośni w muzułmanów „konstytucyjny naród" Jugosławii*, "Przegląd Zachodni", 2014, No 4, pp.74–76.

It is expedient to point out that, after the breakup of the Ottoman Empire as a result of World War I, most of the peoples who inhabited the Balkans returned to Christianity, but some of them remained faithful to Islam[23]. Therefore, it is due to historical conditions that the societies of the Balkan states have become so deeply divided and diversified in terms of religion, both among themselves and internally.

Thus, looking at the followers of Islam in the Balkans in statistical terms, it should be noted that this religious differentiation is presented in the following proportions. Muslims overwhelmingly predominate in Kosovo (95.6%) and Albania (56.7%). Almost 50.7% of citizens profess Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 33% in North Macedonia (33.3%). Just under 20% of the followers of Islam live in Montenegro (19.1%) and Bulgaria (7.8%). Residual numbers of Muslims inhabit Serbia (3.1%), Slovenia (2.4%), and Croatia (1.5%)[24].

Figure 1. Muslims in the Balkans

	Kosovo	Albania	Bosnia nd Herzegovina	North Macedonia	Montenegro	Serbia	Slovenia	Croatia
■ Muslims	95,60%	56,70%	50,70%	33%	19,10%	3,10%	2,40%	1,50%

Source: *The World Factbook CIA,* https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ [accessed: December 17, 2021].

It is also significant that Balkan Muslims are Sunnis, who mostly identify with the Hanafi school of interpreting Quranic law. The Hanafite school therefore represents the moderate stream in Islam. Moreover, a large percentage of Balkan

[23] M. Bankowicz, *Niespokojne Bałkany,* [in:] *Historia polityczna świata XX wieku 1901–1945,* ed. M. Bankowicz, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2004, pp. 234–240.

[24] *The World Factbook CIA,* https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ [accessed: December 17, 2021].

Muslims are also Sufis i.e. representatives of the mystical current in Islam[25]. It is also worth adding that in the Balkan states deep religious divisions are also associated with national differences. A perfect example of such a division is Bosnia and Herzegovina, where about 40% of the population are Muslims (Bosnians), 31% Orthodox (Serbs), and 15% Catholic (Croats)[26].

In conclusion, however, it should be emphasized that although the vast majority of Balkan Muslims are followers of a moderate version of Islam, subsequent historical and recent events, such as the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and the civil war in Bosnia in the early 1990s, the Arab Spring, the rise of the Islamic State, and finally the refugee and migration crisis that began in 2015, have also resulted in increasing Islamic radicalization in this part of the world, manifested primarily through increased support for radical terrorist groups such as the Islamic State and joining its ranks as part of the lesser jihad on the Balkans.

Jihadism in the Balkans – Challenges for the Security of the Region and the EU in the Context of the Emergence of the so-called Islamic State and the Refugee and Migration crisis

The origins of Islamic radicalization in the Balkans are often linked to the late Bosnian President, Alija Izetbegović. As Krzysztof Izak comments, "Wahhabi ideology began to penetrate the Balkans in the late 1980s, a circumstance linked to the completion of religious studies in Saudi Arabia by many Bosnians and their return home. (…) Alija Izetbegović, later the first president of independent Bosnia and Herzegovina, advocated the establishment of an Islamic state in a declaration issued in the early 1970s. He claimed that true Islam could not exist under conditions of secularism"[27]. In the Islamic Declaration, the program document of the pan-Islamist association Mladi Muslimani (Young Muslims) founded in 1941, successively outlawed in 1949 and reactivated in the Balkans in 1970, Izetbegović called for moral renewal, criticized the Western model of separation of church and state, Western values standing in opposition to Muslim values, and denied the possibility of observing secular principles. Izetbegović modeled his views on Sajjid Kutb's 1965 manifesto, and both he and Young

---

[25] Z. Landowski, *Świat arabski. Leksykon. Historia, gospodarka, kultura,* Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 2008, p. 227.

[26] P. Płaneta, *Bośnia i Hercegowina na rozdrożu. Odbudowa muzułmańskiej tożsamości czy islamizacja kraju?*, "Studia Środkowoeuropejskie i Bałkanistyczne", 2017, Vol. XXVI, pp. 165–167.

[27] K. Izak, *Radykalny islam na Bałkanach źródłem konfliktów społecznych i terrorystycznego zagrożenia dla Europy*, "Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego", 2013, No. 9, p. 53.

Muslims were influenced by the Egyptian Association of Muslim Brothers. Nevertheless, when Josip Broz Tito's was in power, Islamic radicalization and jihadism within Yugoslavia did not exist, and activities such as Izetbegović's and by Young Muslims ended in prison[28].

The radicalization of Balkan Muslims, however, came with the disintegration processes of the former Yugoslavia that progressed in the 1990s. At that time, Islamic fighters from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, Pakistan, Yemen and even Iran began arriving in the Balkans. They founded numerous charities which, in theory, were to provide medical aid, support the construction of mosques and Quranic schools for children, and grant scientific scholarships, especially to Pakistan. As an example of such activity, the Saudi High Relief Commission operating in Bosnia and established in 1992 can be mentioned. It was one of the main institutions supporting the reconstruction of Bosnia after the civil war. Bosnia is estimated to have spent between USD 500 billion and USD 800 million over 10 years on reconstruction. According to official Saudi websites, "the Foundation's humanitarian assistance during and after the war ranged from building orphanages, medical facilities and refugee centers to the reconstruction of homes, schools, hospitals, railway lines, water supplies and electricity networks destroyed by the war. Such services were often rendered under extremely difficult conditions imposed by the conflict. In the field of education and religious services, the Foundation built, re-built or refurbished schools, colleges, libraries and more than 600 mosques in different Bosnian cities, printed and distributed free educational books, as well as more than half a million copies of the Holy Quran, and offered numerous scholarships. Even under difficult conflict conditions, the Commission has managed to provide much needed supplies to war-ravaged communities and to assist in the reconstruction of homes and infrastructure"[29] .

Interestingly, during the civil war (1992–1995), Bosnia was compared to a "new Palestine," which was to manifest solidarity with Bosnian Muslims within the framework of Muslim Aid, promoted by radical British associations and founded by the singer Cat Stevens (after his conversion known as Yusuf Islam) who was involved in helping Bosnians and claimed the existence of a plan to exterminate Muslims in the Balkans[30].

---

[28] G. Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2002, p. 239.

[29] *The Saudi Arabian High Commion for Donations to Bosnia-Herzegovina*, https://kingfais-alprize.org/the-saudi-arabian-high-commision-for-donations-to-bosnia-herzegovina/ [accessed: December 19, 2021].

[30] *Charity record come-back for Cat Stevens*, BBC, March 16, 1998, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/65916.stm [accessed: December 21, 2021].

Between 1992 and 1995, the number of jihadists in the Balkan region was estimated at 4,000 to 6,000 fighters. They came from Arab states, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Europe. It was Wahhabism, associated by the local people with missionary activities, that at that time became the most radical ideology which gained popularity among Balkan Muslims. Moreover, its expansion was also favored by the presence of Arab mujahideen. Among the radical fighters, the most numerous group were veterans of the USSR's Afghan jihad and members of fundamentalist groups, such as the Algerian Islamic Armed Group, the Egyptian al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, and Pakistani Harakat-ul Ansar. Among the Balkan jihadists there was, among others, Suleiman Abu Ghaith, who later served as spokesman for al-Qaeda. Interestingly, the Bosnian jihadist fighters were grouped in the "Seventh Brigade," later incorporated into the El-Mujahid battalion based in Zenica[31]. After the Dayton peace agreement had been signed, the "Seventh Brigade" was officially disbanded and the incoming jihadists were "asked" to leave the country. Not all of the Islamist fighters, however, returned to their homelands. Of the remaining approx. 300 jihadists, some changed their beliefs and their version of Islam to a more moderate one, but other simply began to support the lesser jihad in Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo[32].

However, at the end of 2001 in Bosnia, lawsuits against 13 fundamentalist organizations that were still active on its territory were started. Among them were e.g., the Global Relief Foundation, Al Haramain, Saudi High Relief Commission, Third World Relief Agency, Al Kifah, and Active Islamic Youth[33]. It is a fact worth noting because the traces of the expansion of radical Islam, a characteristic of the 21st century, increasing conversions to Islam among Europeans, as well as jihadist tendencies, which materialized in the form of terrorist attacks carried out in the U.S. and Western Europe, led precisely to the Balkans. For example, the hijacked plane that hit the Pentagon in September 2001 was taken over by veterans of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, hijackers Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdar. Two of the organizers of March 11, 2003, Madrid metro attack, Saud al-Otaibi and Abdel Karim al Meyati, also fought in the Bosnia and Herzegovina war. Balkan jihadists have also been associated with the July 7 and 21, 2005 attack on the London Underground, as Kosovo Albanians linked to the Pakistani sectarian movement Tablighi Jamaat participated in the preparation of

---

[31] M. Babić, *Salafism in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Salafism-in-Bosnia-and-Herzegovina.pdf [accessed: December 19, 2021].

[32] K. Morrison, *Wahhabism in the Balkans*, "Balkans Series", 2008, No. 6, pp. 2–9.

[33] X. Raufer, *Atlas radykalnego islamu*, Dialog, Warszawa 2011, pp. 105–107.

the attack[34]. It is also worth adding that in the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, weapons produced in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were used, which remained in common use during the conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo in the 1990s[35]. Fortunately, in October 2005, a small terrorist cell that was planning to carry out an attack on a European Union Force (EUFOR) base in Sarajevo was dismantled. Their leader was Mirsad Bektaszević, a Bosnian with Swedish citizenship, who recruited supporters in Denmark and Great Britain, and was also in contact with a terrorist cell in Canada[36].

Therefore, taking into account the fact that four of the biggest terrorist attacks carried out in Western Europe in the second decade of the 21st century involved people who had earlier fought in the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, it is possible to conclude that jihadism, which has its roots in the Balkans, is permanently gaining strength and is becoming a challenge not only to the stability of the region itself, but also to the security of European countries.

Therefore, when analyzing the issues of Islamic radicalization in the Balkans, it is also worth to discuss the attitude of this region's inhabitants to the creation and functioning of the so-called Islamic State. Support for this Salafist terrorist organization was most widely spread in Bosnia and Kosovo, from where the largest number of fighters came to join the ranks of IS and fight on its side in the wars in Syria, Iraq, or Libya[37]. Montenegrins, Serbs, and Macedonians also fought actively in the ranks of the IS. According to estimates, up to several thousand Western Balkan citizens joined the so-called Islamic State. According to the Janes website, as of July 2020, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and North Macedonia have repatriated a total of 19 Islamic State militants from Syria. They were the only European countries to have publicly and voluntarily repatriated adult male citizens affiliated to the Islamic State who had been detained by Kurdish-led forces. According to Adrian Shtuni, the Western Balkans were the European region with 'the highest concentration of returned foreign fighters' from Syria and Iraq. The Bosnian Wahhabis thus created jihadist structures not only in their own country but also throughout the Balkans, operating both locally and in the form of *cyber-jihad*. Young jihadists were trained primarily in Saudi Arabia and Egypt and remained under the influence of Saudi Wahhabism. According to the Clingendael Institute, 200 Kosovo residents received scholarships to study

[34] *Tablighi Jamaat: An Indirect Line to Terrorism*, January 23, 2008, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/tablighi-jamaat-indirect-line-terrorism [accessed: December 17, 2021].

[35] D. Wilk, *Bałkański dżihad*, "Znak", 2016, p. XX.

[36] K. Izak, *Radykalny islam na Bałkanach źródłem konfliktów…*, p. 54.

[37] M. Podstawski, *Dżihadyści z Bałkanów*, August 8, 2016, https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/balkanski-kociol/4/ [accessed: December 15, 2021].

Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia. Young unemployed Kosovars were offered between 20,000 and 30,000 euro to join IS jihadists. The economic factor was therefore one of the forces pushing especially the young and unemployed inhabitants of the Balkans to wage the lesser jihad[38]. The second goal was ideological. As IS militants proclaimed, although their declarations were more propaganda than reality, the goal of IS expansion was also to create an Islamic triangle on the Bosnia-Macedonia-Western Rhodope (Bulgaria) lines. The jihadists announced that the annexation of the entire Balkans would take only five or six years. Also relevant in this context is the fact that after the territorial defeat of the so-called Islamic State, German broadcaster Deutsche Welle, quoting expert Vedran Dzihic, reported that only at the end of May 2017, approx. 150 and 120 IS jihadists had returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, respectively. Returning jihadists therefore pose a considerable threat not only to the Balkan states, but also to Europe and the EU in particular, since Balkan jihadists, mainly from Kosovo and North Macedonia, can infiltrate one western society after another on their route. It is also important in this context that these two countries aspire to EU membership[39]. Post-caliphate dynamics should be considered in the Balkan context, both because the region could be seen as a gateway for jihadists leaving and entering Europe, and, secondly, because of a heightened risk of rising extremism among returnees.

In conclusion, it is also worth noting that during the refugee and migrant crisis, the Balkans became one of the routes that led these people from the MENA region to Western Europe, albeit it was less attractive than other routes. Since 2015, the Balkan have had to deal with the problem of thousands of people who illegally tried to reach EU countries through their territory. It is worth mentioning at this point that after the Hungarian authorities built a fence on the border with Serbia, another migration route went through Croatia, from where refugees and migrants reached Austria and Germany. It is therefore worth emphasizing that Western Balkan states were not only a transit route for migrants, but, in some cases, also their regions of origin. It should be emphasized that some of their inhabitants used the pressure which accompanied the influx of migrants to the rich and social countries of Western and Northern Europe and chose to join them. The economic factor became dominant in this case as well. Admittedly, the Balkan countries play a role in the EU's enlargement policy,

---

[38] *Projekt rezolucji Parlamentu Europejskiego w sprawie ISIS: rekrutacja na Bałkanach*, March 18, 2015, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-8-2015-0309_PL.html [accessed: December 19, 2021].

[39] *Islamism in the western Balkans*, European Parliament, July 10, 2019, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2019-002212_EN.html [accessed: December 19, 2021].

but the prospect of accession seems rather remote. As a consequence, the slow pace of the EU integration process of these countries, the low level of economic development in the Balkan region, and high unemployment rates, especially among young people, became the main determinants of migration to the EU in the refugee-migration crisis[40].

Conclusion

At the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, not only the region's religious diversity, but above all the Islamic radicalization, became a challenge for the security of the Balkan states, and thus for the security of other European (EU) states. It must be emphasized at this point that religious nationalism has always existed in the Balkans. Therefore, the fundamental question that arises in the context of challenges to the security and destabilization of the region is the following: which factor is more threatening from a Balkan perspective: nationalism or Islamic radicalization? Undoubtedly, the greatest threat is the combination of these two determinants, and above all, their possible ideological explosion.

From the 1990s onwards, there has been a noticeable slow increase in Islamic radicalization among Balkan Muslims who, interestingly, do not share the views of the radical Quranic schools and tend to remain moderate followers of this religion. The key point, however, is that Islamic radicalization in the Balkans intensified especially in the second decade of the 20th century, a process which was facilitated by two phenomena. The first of them was the so-called Islamic State, joined primarily by Muslims from Bosnia and Kosovo who participated in numerous terrorist attacks in Western European countries. The second was the refugee-migration crisis which began in 2015 and was reinforced by the influx of Muslim refugees to Western Europe from the Middle East and Africa, often including Balkan residents as well. It should therefore be emphasized that the growing radicalization and jihadism among Muslims from the Balkan area may become a threat to the security of Europe. Therefore, it is foremostly the EU that should devote much more attention to this challenge and consider how to effectively counteract this phenomenon, all the more so since the countries of the region are aspiring to EU membership.

---

[40] R. Podgórzańska, *Kryzys migracyjny w Unii Europejskiej z perspektywy Bałkanów Zachodnich*, "Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej", 2017, No. 11, p. 299.

Bibliography

Sources:

Babić M., *Salafism in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Salafism-in-Bosnia-and-Herzegovina.pdf [accessed: December 19, 2021].

Charity record come-back for Cat Stevens, BBC, March 16, 1998, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/65916.stm [accessed: December 21, 2021].

Islamism in the western Balkans, European Parliament, July 10, 2019, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2019-002212_EN.html [accessed: December 19, 2021].

Podstawski M., *Dżihadyści z Bałkanów,* August 8, 2016, https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/balkanski-kociol/4/ [accessed: December 15, 2021].

Projekt rezolucji Parlamentu Europejskiego w sprawie ISIS: rekrutacja na Bałkanach, March 18, 2015, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-8-2015-0309_PL.html [accessed: December 19, 2021].

Tablighi Jamaat: An Indirect Line to Terrorism, January 23, 2008, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/tablighi-jamaat-indirect-line-terrorism [accessed: December 17, 2021].

The Saudi Arabian High Commision for Donations to Bosnia-Herzegovina, https://kingfaisalprize.org/the-saudi-arabian-high-commision-for-donations-to-bosnia-herzegovina/ [accessed: December 19, 2021].

The World Factbook CIA, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ [accessed: December 17, 2021].

Literature:

Arabowie. Słownik Encyklopedyczny, ed. M.M. Dziekan, PWN, Warszawa 2001.

Bankowicz M., *Niespokojne Bałkany,* [in:] *Historia polityczna świata XX wieku 1901–1945*, ed. M. Bankowicz, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2004.

Berman P., *Terror and Liberalism.* W.W. Horton & Company, New York, London 2003.

Brachman J., *Global Jihadism. Theory and Practice*, Routledge, London, New York 2007.

Braun S., *Islam. Powstanie – dzieje – nauka*, Verbinum, Warszawa 2003.

Byman D., *Al Qaeda, The Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement. What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford University Press, New York 2015.

Danecki J., *Podstawowe wiadomości o islamie*, Dialog, Warszawa 2002.

Encyklopedia terroryzmu, Bellona, Muza SA, Warszawa 2004.

Ende W., *Justice as a pervasive principle in Islamic law*, [in:] *Islam and the rule of law. Between Sharia and law. Between Sharia and Secularization*, eds. B. Krawietz, H. Reifeld, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Berlin 2008.

Gerges F.A., *ISIS: A History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2016.

Griffin M., *Islamic State. Rewriting History*, Pluto Press, London 2016.

Hemmer C., *Which Lessons Matter? American Foreign Policy Decision Making in the Middle East, 1979–1987*, State University of New York Press, New York 2000.

Ickiewicz-Sawicka M., *Religie na Bałkanach ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem islamu – szkic historyczny*, "Nurt SVD", 2014, No 48/2 (136).

Izak K., *Radykalny islam na Bałkanach źródłem konfliktów społecznych i terrorystycznego zagrożenia dla Europy*, "Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego", 2013, No. 9.

Jizyah. Islamic tax, https://www.britannica.com/topic/ghanimah [accessed: December 17, 2021].

Kaag J., Kreps S., *Drone Warfare,* Polity Press, Cambridge 2014.

Kepel G., *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2002.

Landowski Z., *Islam. Nurty, odłamy, sekty*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 2008.

Landowski Z., *Świat arabski. Leksykon. Historia, gospodarka, kultura*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 2008.

Madej M., *Interwencja w Afganistanie – najdłuższa wojna, największe fiasko?*, [in:] *Wojny Zachodu. Interwencje zbrojne państw zachodnich po zimnej wojnie*, ed. M. Madej, Scholar, Warszawa 2017.

Morrison K., *Wahhabism in the Balkans*, "Balkans Series", 2008, No. 6.

Płaneta P., *Bośnia i Hercegowina na rozdrożu. Odbudowa muzułmańskiej tożsamości czy islamizacja kraju?*, "Studia Środkowoeuropejskie i Bałkanistyczne", 2017, Vol. XXVI.

Podgórzańska R., *Kryzys migracyjny w Unii Europejskiej z perspektywy Bałkanów Zachodnich*, "Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej", 2017, No. 11.

Rapoport D.C., *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism*, [in:] *Attacking Terrorism. Elements of a Grand Strategy*, eds. A.K. Cronin, J. M. Ludes, Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C., 2004.

Raufer X., *Atlas radykalnego islamu*, Dialog, Warszawa 2011.

R. Ramlan, T. Erwinsyahbana, N. Hakim, *The Concept of Jihad in Islam,* "IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science", 2016, Vol. 21, Issue 9.

Thoraval Y., *Słownik cywilizacji muzułmańskiej*, Książnica, Katowice 2002.

Tibi B., *The Challenge of Fundamentalism. Political Islam and the New World Disorder*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2002.

Torres M.R., Jordán J., Horsburgh N., *Analysis and Evolution of the Global Jihadist Movement Propaganda*, "Terrorism and Political Violence", 2016, No. 18.

Wilk D., *Bałkański dżihad*, "Znak", September 2016.

Wybranowski D., *Geneza i uwarunkowania procesu przekształcenia na przełomie lat 60. i 70. XX w. wspólnoty muzułmanów z Bośni w muzułmanów „konstytucyjny naród” Jugosławii*, "Przegląd Zachodni" 2014, No. 4.

Zdanowski J., *Współczesna muzułmańska myśl społeczno-polityczna. Nurt Braci Muzułmanów*, Askon, Warszawa 2009.