

## **Islamic Extremism in the Western Balkans**

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In this paper, the author examines the causes for the emergence and development of Islamic extremism in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia. Using comparative analytical and historical methods, the current state and probable course of further development of this phenomenon are explored. Initiators and proclaimers of extreme Islamic ideas, supporters of such activities, international sponsors, and the connectors and their contribution to the global jihad are examined. The ability of Western Balkan countries to defend themselves against this threat that endangers the life and property of the citizens and their democratic constitutional order are also assessed. It seems that the number of Wahhabi worshipers and their aggressiveness are increasing, and the extremists are forcefully taking over the mosques and establishing new ones that are not under control of the official Islamic communities in these societies. Moreover, they also establish dozens of new Wahhabi settlements in which they do not respect the laws of the state, but sharia law. The return of former financiers of Islamic extremism contributed to the intensification of religious propaganda and increasing the appeal of Wahhabi ideas among certain segments of the population. As a result, approximately one thousand fighters from the Balkans joined terrorist organisations on the battlefields in the Middle East. Halting the spread of Islamic extremism in the Western Balkans is hampered by the lack of real and high-quality preventive measures, inexperience and poor results of attempts to deradicalise extremism, and in some cases a lack of political will. In order to combat Islamic extremism, police cooperation with other security structures in the Western Balkans and neighbouring countries should be strengthened, and appropriate institutions of the international community should be involved.

**Key words:** Islamic extremism, Wahhabism, Western Balkans, terrorism, ISIL

**UDC:** [329:28]+323.285(497)