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## Occupied Palestinian Territories

▶ Women's Community Peacebuilding in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT)

## Offline and Online (De)radicalization: An Overview of the Case of Kosovo

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### Introduction

Given that radicalization is tied to global, sociological, and political drivers as well as ideological and psychological factors, its polarizing tendencies can be witnessed among various ethnic, religious, and cultural population groups. While radicalization into violent extremism can take many forms, following the rise of transnational terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State (IS), the term has become largely associated with religiously inspired, and specifically Islamist-based, non-state violence. If historical cases of radicalization and violent extremism serve as a reference, it can be understood that prevalent extremist ideological leniencies can change over time based on the social and (geo)-political context. While the concept of violent extremism broadly implies any kind of "engagement in violence associated with radical political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies and groups generally" (Holmer 2013, p. 1), the contemporary intention is to prevent the spread of two particular forms of extremism (though not only): religious-based extremism and nationalism. There are increasing policy statements for "whole-society approach" (Pilkington 2018), which are reflective of an inductive line yet, not grounded empirically.

The existing trends of extremism and radicalization echoes a complex picture with no single driver whereas the general observation of scholars is lack of understanding the complexities pertaining violent extremism (Neumann 2016; Roy 2017). The EU defines violent extremism broadly, as any extremist group aiming to impose certain political or religious ideology, and often through the use of force (EU Council 2017). The prevailing security challenge is depicted by


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extremist groups who communicate through a distorted form of Islam, also conducting terrorist activities throughout Europe (Neumann 2016). In the Western Balkans, the rise of Islamic extremism became a new phenomenon dating from the arrival of Mujahedeen elements in early 1990s in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (Azinovic and Jusic 2015, p. 70), as well as with the end of conflicts (Kosovo, North Macedonia) through the work of camouflaged NGOs and individuals from the Gulf States. The peak of the challenge was revealed by the time over 1000 individuals from the Western Balkans joined foreign conflicts in Syria and Iraq whereby there are hundreds of supporters still present in the countries and propagate the extremist ideology (Kelmendi 2018, p. 6).

The same challenge is equally found with the rise of nationalism and right-wing extremism. Nationalism is indigenous type of extremism in the Western Balkans with daunting consequences in the past whereas is being re-brought by different political parties and right-wing groups (Mujanovic 2018). The increasing narrative of nationalism is manifested into different forms of populism often promoting mono-ethnic states to the detriment of multiethnicity which has been cultivated in the last two decades – albeit limitedly – across the region. The failure to apply a more holistic approach in preventing further widespread of extremism, may lead to a heightened regional insecurity and violence, with direct implications for the EU.

This entry is based on the research conducted in the framework of the PAVE project and discusses the concept of offline and online radicalization potentially leading to violent extremism (PAVE 2020). It also examines main government and nongovernment de-radicalization initiatives in Kosovo. The first section provides an overview of how the concept of radicalization is defined in the current research, drawing on the work of different scholars and practitioners. The section notes the bias in the current research of linking the concept of radicalization with the Muslim religion. The discussion addresses both offline and online radicalization process. The second section discusses how the concept of de-radicalization is defined in the current research, including how different governments have responded to online radicalization. The third section provides an overview of the government and nongovernment de-radicalization initiatives in Kosovo that focus on community resilience and reintegration of radicalized individuals in the society. The last section offers concluding thoughts about the current state of research and the way forward.

## Radicalization and Its Manifestation(s)

There is little agreement among scholars and practitioners when it comes to defining the concept of radicalization. What we know is that radicalization is not a new phenomenon and waves of its violent and terrorist expressions have been present historically, although, arguably, as a concept it has become more popular in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, against the United States. While today radicalization is normalized as a negative connotation, from a historical perspective, the term was also used to refer to progressive ideas. For instance, during and in the aftermath of the American Civil War in 1865, the concept *Radical Republicans* was used to refer to members of the Congress who promoted emancipation of the slaves as well as believed in the equal rights and opportunities for the freed blacks. In other words, "ideas that are radical at some point could be liberal or even conservative for another." (Kaya 2020, p. 3). The connection between radicalization and violent actions is relatively new. Comparatively speaking, it should be noted that across all past expressions of radicalization – the number of radicalized individuals who commit to violence has been extremely low.

Since radicalization often takes place at the intersection of an enabling (structural) environment characterized by factors such as deprivation, exclusion, experience of perceived injustice, and a personal trajectory such as alienation/identity crisis, radicalization has emerged from social processes and conditions common to societies throughout modern history, encompassing numerous radical and (revolutionary) social movements

(Sageman 2017). Thus, current efforts to conceptualize radicalization often borrow from the social movement theory (SMT), viewing social movements as "[a] set of opinions and beliefs in a population, which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society." (Zald 1987, p. 2).

Ideological and behavioral radicalization is an important dimension of our understanding of radicalization as a cognitive process. According to Peter Neumann (2013, pp. 874–875), a key difference in radicalization can be located between the "political ideas that are diametrically opposed to a society's core values," or "methods by which actors seek to realize any political aim." In other words, one of the challenges in defining radicalization is the extent to which we connect (ideological) radicalization with violent actions. Neumann (2013) continues that for some governments it is mainly a cognitive process while for others there is explicit connection with violence. On the other hand, Timothy Williams (2019, p. 86) holds that ideological and behavioral radicalization "co-exist and influence each other." In this sense, we can understand radicalization both as an incremental process of adopting extremist views and ideas but not necessarily acting on them, as well as a process through which extremist ideas influence an individual to commit violent extremist acts.

Radicalization, can be understood, both as a social, psychological, and ideological process of a person increasingly becoming receptive of radical views that also justify violence as means of achieving political goals (PAVE project, 2020). Trip et al. (2019) hold that radicalization can be viewed as a functional as well as descriptive phenomenon. While from the functional perspective radicalization is seen a "preparation for intergroup conflict," descriptive definitions denote a change in "beliefs, feelings, and behaviours that justify intergroup violence." (Ibid, para. 3). Therefore, radicalization is often a diverse and multifactorial phenomenon that is difficult to pinpoint to a single variable or driver. It is a complex process whose understanding requires an all-encompassing approach that takes into account sociopolitical contexts, groups' dynamics, and individual circumstances. Radicalization can translate into more tangible actions often leading to – what is widely being referred – violent extremism. Violent extremism is usefully defined as "the active adjustment of an ideology and associated praxis to challenge the state and its elites, usually through violence" (Joffe 2012, p. 1), while as a phenomenon most commonly observed among the marginalized. In the policy circles, violent extremism is aimed to be prevented through different holistic means, otherwise defined into Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE). There is no internationally agreed definition of PVE yet, according to Rosand "PVE is intended to capture non-kinetic and proactive measures to prevent and counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence" (2016, p. 1).

Indeed, while Islamist radicalization dominated the terrorism research and policy responses at the international level in the post 9–11 context yet, the far right in recent years has posed a growing threat to security and peace. The current scholarship seems to overlook the impact that the wars following the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s had in creating the modern far-right extremism movement, which also inspired people from Europe to join the Serbian (Orthodox) and Croatian (Catholic) armies out of religious convictions (See for more information on the war of the breakup of Yugoslavia: Denich 1994; Anderson 1995). Both Anders Breivik and the attacker of Christchurch/New Zealand, among others, were partly inspired by Serbian nationalism (Coalson 2019). But promoting ethnic-division and hatred is only part of how nationalistic ethno-political radicalization is manifested in the Western Balkans. It is also shaped by the perceived threat from Islam echoing a similar theme across the EU.

Another dimension of the national ethno-political groups in the Western Balkans is their international links, especially to Russia. Kosovo holds a particular relevance for Serbia and is an important space where ethno-national extremism combined with religion are performed (Vllasi 2020). While Pro-Russian nationalist groups are most widespread and active in Serbia, they also operate across borders in Serb-inhabited areas of

neighboring countries, such as North Kosovo (Prague Security Studies Institute 2019). In addition to promoting interethnic hatred, these groups disseminate anti-Western propaganda and a narrative that aims to undermine Kosovo's territorial integrity (Ibid). The militarization of these groups – such as through reported training in Russia, youth indoctrination, and individuals joining pro-Russian forces as foreign fighters in Ukraine – is of concern (Ibid). But perhaps the most worrisome aspect of this phenomenon is the current alarming lack of information regarding the different pathways in which right wing extremism takes root and evolves in Kosovo. National ethno-political radicalism in the Western Balkans is also manifested through anti-liberal and anti-EU narratives (Kelly 2019).

## The Online and Offline Dimensions

As radicalization and violent extremism studies experienced an exponential growth in the past two decades, various scholars have purported that there are multiple paths towards radicalization and violent extremism, cautioning from any attempts to draw causal relationships between the interrelated factors. Increasingly, there is a focus on psychological factors influencing an individual's cognitive susceptibility to violent extremist thought/ideology. The internet has undoubtedly transformed the communication and networking culture, and in doing so, it has created ample opportunities to expand, diversify, and access the general populace or particular targeted audience – an opportunity that has been seized by extremist groups. Determining the exact role that the internet plays in the radicalization process is subject of disagreement in academia, though there is certainty that online channels such as social media platforms, are widely utilized to spread radical ideologies, leading to an increase in extremist content that is not confined to the use of a particular entity or group (Conway 2017). A RAND report investigating 15 cases of violent extremism shows that the internet can serve as a source of information, communication, and of propaganda for extremist ideology, while also enhancing opportunities to accelerate the process of radicalization (Behr et al. 2019).

Central to the scholarly debate on the internet's role in the radicalization process is the question whether online propaganda is more effective than physical social networks (Meleagrou-Hitchens and Kaderbhai 2017). As online platforms are increasingly becoming main spheres of interaction among people, and especially youth, the internet is being viewed as instrumental in "normalizing" both radical ideas that lead to violent extremism and terrorism. Torok (2013) argues that the challenge lies in determining "the mechanisms and power relations that underlie this phenomenon of online media used to promote radicalization which in some cases can develop into terrorism" (Ibid). Narratives of victimization play an important role in the process of radicalization, especially with respect to online radicalization. Part of the reason for this is the capacity of the online platforms to have a wider reach and also the nature of the online platforms that sustain an information environment that is free from filters that check against facts and reality. In other words, this has to do with the so-called "post-truth" which means that the online platforms are more suitable to appeal to beliefs and emotions of the people (Anderson and Rainie 2017). Online radicalization narratives often involve shock and awe tactics or moral shock campaigns. Aarten, Mulder, and Pemberton (2018, p. 558) hold that: "The link between victimization experiences and radicalization can be direct, with victimization experiences serving as a causal factor in the development and extremity of religious and political views that may motivate political violence and terrorism."

Studies investigating drivers of radicalization in Kosovo, with a primary focus on individuals who joined the foreign conflicts in Syria and Iraq, have attributed a mix of factors to the phenomenon. According to Kraja (2017, p. 5) some of these factors include "weak economy, political instability, poor education system and the rise of various Islamic nongovernmental organizations competing in Kosovo's newly democratized public sphere," and less stringent circumstances, such as issues of identity, belonging and social isolation or outright exclusion". They also found that extremist propaganda videos disseminated online

have been vital for Islamic State's (IS) recruitment efforts. A study on the use of online narratives targeted to the Kosovo audience shows that IS exploited the vulnerabilities of the postwar society grappling with "forging an identity, past grievances pertaining to the 1998–1999 war such as wartime rape and the perceived bias against Muslims" and used this to "incite recruits from Kosovo to join its war efforts in the Middle East." (Kraja 2017, p. 6). In addition to this "the IS narrative to Kosovo's public is a power play that lures its followers with the promise of an alternative way of life in the so-called caliphate, purportedly compliant with *Sharia*." (Ibid, p. 6). Another report by the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) found that Imams have a tendency to develop their own profiles on social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter and publish sermons and other lectures. This can be both important for counter-narrative measures as well as potentially be abused to promote radical content by lectures or sermons not sanctioned by religious authorities (Jakupi and Kelmendi 2019). The most worrisome finding of the report is that online extremist narratives are much better organized and effectively disseminated than counter-narrative activities including alternative narratives conducted by nongovernment organizations and state institutions (Ibid). However, there is a lack of evidence to suggest that an individual's radicalization took place exclusively online, whether from consumption of online propaganda or through virtual socialization. Studies suggest that the separation between online and offline environments is artificial and does not reflect the reality of pathways into violent extremism (Beadle 2017, p. 13). Instead, radicalization appears as "a blend of interconnected social processes in the 'real' as much as the 'virtual' domain" with the internet serving as a platform for these mechanisms, "a socializing setting through engagement with radical discourses exploiting vulnerabilities and hedging into social communities" (Ibid.).

Yet, a key difference between offline and online radicalization seems to be that spaces of offline radicalization are generally easier to identify, such as religious places of worship, educational establishment, and prisons. However, given the ubiquity of virtual communication, online radicalization seems difficult to both pinpoint key venues of concern, as well as devise responses that are effective. A particularly important challenge for online radicalization is also the cooperation and relationship between government and regulatory bodies and companies that have created and manage social platforms or other online communication means. There seems to be an inherent tension in deploying counter radicalization measures online, without the state appearing to establish comprehensive interception abilities that can infringe upon civil liberties and rights of citizens.

## Toward Understanding De-radicalization

The current research does not provide conceptual or operational clarity concerning de-radicalization, challenging efforts to effectively address the issue of radicalization. What we know is that governments seem to increasingly recognize the importance of reintegrating in the society individuals that committed violent or terrorist acts (Horgan and Braddock 2010). But, is the goal to pacify the citizens and target their ideology or manage and prevent their potential violent behavior? (Veldhuis 2012). In a generalized context, de-radicalization refers to attempts to counter and oppose the radical doctrine, the ideological positions, or interpretations that are utilized to justify radical views as well as violence in their pursuit. Although de-radicalization, understood more broadly as the reversal of radicalization processes, remains a significant strategic policy objective in countering violent extremism, the approach suffers from a number of shortcomings. The overarching shortcoming has to do with difficulty in translating programs into a mere de-radicalization of individuals: the practice shows that the maximum de-radicalization program could reach is disengagement of individuals (Holmer 2013, p. 1).

While behavioral and cognitive elements of de-radicalization are seen as important for disrupting the radicalization process, they are often not clearly identified. That is because there

are inherent challenges to determine whether changes in behavior match changes in objectives/intentions – exacerbated by the fact that de-radicalization programs are often implemented in prison contexts where inmates have strong incentives to misrepresent their views.

When it comes to de-radicalization, existing literature is also marred by a lack of empirical research investigating drivers to de-radicalize. De-radicalization programs tend to have a more limited focus on cognitive factors and the socialization context without accounting for other structural conditions. Some studies show that the process of de-radicalization is affected by the nature and trajectory of radicalization of the individual. Lina Grip and Jenniina Kotajoki (2019, p. 391) hold that "the degree of voluntarism, motivations for joining extremist groups (including ideological beliefs) and role and time spent in the organisation are suggested to have an impact on disengagement and reintegration processes."

Disengagement and reintegration are conceptually part of exit efforts. Disengagement is a closely associated concept with behavior and cognitive elements of de-radicalization. It refers to the efforts not oriented towards convincing an individual to abandon her/his radical worldview or beliefs, but to influence the radicalized individual to disengage from violence. Disengagement is often implemented through programs that seek to develop critical thinking or counter the radical beliefs by a figure of authority. While disengagement, or the ability to desist violence, can occur without de-radicalization, it may not be possible to achieve de-radicalization without associated changes in belief, behavior, and modes of belonging. This implies a third stage – rehabilitation and resocialization. For example, in Kosovo, the government planned for a de-radicalization program that involved bringing vetted Imams to have sessions in the correctional facilities with violent extremist offenders, including foreign fighter returnees from Syria and Iraq. The goal was to counter radical ideological views through religious teachings that dispel extremist propaganda. However, because the program was sponsored by the government and was heavily promoted to show the institutions' resolve to fight radicalization, the vetted Imams were seen as "Western collaborators." This significantly impaired the credibility of Imams among the targeted audience in correctional facilities and rendered the program unsuccessful.

Effectively targeting and distinguishing between offline and online factors in the radicalization process has become a daunting task in de-radicalization efforts. In the framework of online de-radicalization, disruption is a central theme. The disruption approach is defined by the UK government as "working with filtering companies, disrupting the use of the internet for extremist messaging and increasing the use of the internet to promote alternative views to the radicalised messages that may otherwise be accessed." (Behr et al. 2019, p. 4). There are two levels that top the disruption activity: (1) a technical element which involves tracing and tracking radical content online, including different channels or handles in social media platforms that disseminate such information and (2) a narrative component, disseminating counter-narratives online to the radical content.

With respect to the technical dimension of online de-radicalization through disruption, in 2017, companies such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube established the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT). The forum provides direct support, including through technology and knowledge, as well as helps coordinate main stakeholders to disrupt extremist content in their platforms (GIFCT 2017). While important progress has been made by tech companies to counter radicalism and prevent their platforms from being abused by extremist groups, a key challenge remains the versatility of these groups. Groups promoting radicalism and extremist ideas if blocked or removed by a particular channel from an online social media platform, simply open a different one. One way that GIFTC has responded to this is by creating a data of "hashes" which is used as a digital fingerprint to track radical activity online (Macdonald 2018).

Overall, the burgeoning field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) research has been exploring factors that make individuals

or groups more vulnerable to radicalization. While many studies have looked into individual-level factors, in the more recent years, there is greater focus on exploring the role of communities, a meso-level type of analysis of investigating the issue. This presents a paradigm shift in the conceptualization of violent extremism – shifting away from a pathways approach focused on a person's radicalization trajectory, and towards an ecological view that takes into account how characteristics of the social environment can either incite or reduce involvement in violent extremism (Weine 2013). This increased attention towards community resilience is grounded on research that identifies community engagement as one of the main factors determining the presence, prevalence, or absence of violent extremism across contexts (Jakupi and Kraja 2018). Thus, strengthening community resilience has become the goal of numerous projects operating within the P/CVE framework, explicitly or implicitly also targeting some aspect of de-radicalization. The next section examines in more detail government and non-government initiatives that seek to build community resilience against radicalization.

## Kosovo's Response to Radicalization and Violent Extremism

This section examines government and non-government initiatives in Kosovo that have demonstrated potential for building resilience in communities and for empowering local communities to intervene to prevent or disrupt the process of radicalization of members in their midst. Moreover, it explores initiatives that tie rehabilitation and reintegration efforts for individuals formerly associated with violent extremist group, including foreign fighter returnees and their family members. While the majority of available information derives from Kosovo's experience in addressing Islamist-motivated radicalization, there is a notable absence of projects or initiatives targeting right wing or specifically far right extremism. Unsurprisingly, the lack of political attention to address the issue of ethno-based extremism, particularly among Serb-majority municipalities, has led to a neglect of the issue among civil society and donor community alike.

In mapping out good practices or promising initiatives for community resilience a few initial challenges become apparent that should be recognized – namely, an ambiguity over the understanding of community resilience and a lack of systematic impact assessments of implemented P/CVE projects. To begin with, one of the challenges in identifying good practices for strengthening community resilience against online and offline radicalization is the lack of an agreed-upon definition of the concept itself. Based on an inductive thematic analysis of definitions and descriptions, community resilience remains an amorphous notion that is perceived and applied differently by different actors (Patel et al. 2017). This implies that too many projects may often be mistakenly labelled as functioning to strengthen community resilience. Alternatively, a number of projects that even though they work on supporting core elements of community resilience such as local knowledge, community networks, and relationships, or resources, they are not categorized as such.

Many projects seem to also employ counter-narratives to push back against extremist recruitment and propaganda. Counter-narratives aim to offer a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, or to deconstruct or delegitimize extremist narratives (Silverman et al. 2016). Nevertheless, while the counter-narrative approach has gained widespread acceptance, Glazzard argues that it is built on very shaky theoretical and empirical foundations (Glazzard 2017). Reed (2018) confirms that there is a lack of empirical evidence to support underlying assumptions in current counter-narrative approaches, but he also adds that the challenge is in identifying which narratives work and why. This underscores the need for the use of rigorous standards and methodologies to ensure a more effective approach, including a clear theory of change, monitoring and evaluation provisions, and application of lessons learnt in future counter-narrative campaigns (Ibid., p. 3).

The absence of systematic impact assessments as a result of inconsistent and incoherent

monitoring and evaluation practices for P/CVE projects is factor that hinders efforts to identify good practices on community resilience. The evaluation of projects aimed at building community resilience is one of the main ways to assess the effectiveness of programming. Yet, practitioners can only test their programs reliably when adopting rigorous research designs, but these are often the most difficult and costly research designs to implement (Ambroznik 2018). What does constitute a good practice? What are some of the criteria used in determining whether a project has had a positive impact on community resilience, or online and offline de-radicalization more specifically? Are these criteria being applied, monitored, and evaluated consistently? In the countries/case studies that are subject of this research, there is a significant dearth of projects that seem to provide clear answers to these questions.

Kosovo citizens primarily identify through their ethnic backgrounds, i.e., Albanians, Serbs. Religion has always been a secondary source to identification, especially to Albanians who maintained religion largely in the private sphere. Kosovo's majority Albanian population is Muslim, but there are strong Albanian-Catholic as well as Protestant communities. The Serbian community in Kosovo which represents over 5% of the population is predominantly Orthodox-Christians. Kosovo is a secular state, and as Isa Blumi (2005, p. 2) notes Kosovar Albanians "have traditionally practiced Islam in ways unique to the region, practices which included the synthesis of a number of local forms of spiritual traditions which ultimately evolved into complicated rituals in which Muslims and local Christians often shared the same spiritual site." Some journalists have described Kosovo's approach to practicing Muslim religion as "Islam lite" (Irish Times 2012). In other words, secularity is not only a legal status of the state of Kosovo, but the very nature of its society.

In the aftermath of the war in 1999, Kosovo started to receive much needed help from other countries, including from Gulf States, which also brought along a variety of programs that promoted different schools of interpretation of Islam, including Wahhabism (Gall 2016) as a more conservative strain. After 1999, Kosovo's indigenous Islamic tradition was challenged by the external influence of faith-based organizations which came mainly from Gulf States and propagated a version of religious doctrine that sought to breed intolerance and oppose secularism (Blumi 2005). Kosovo postwar situation, including socioeconomic vulnerabilities were abused and exploited to create "an environment conducive to radicalization." (Shtuni 2016, p. 1).

Government of Kosovo has undertaken a number of initiatives to curb the radicalization process, especially in the aftermath of the phenomenon of foreign fighters in the country, which saw an estimated 400 citizens travel to Syria and Iraq to join violent extremist groups such as IS. Kosovo is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. In 2015, the government approved a national "Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015–2020" as well as the Law on Prohibition of Joining the Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory (Kosovo Assembly 2015). Kosovo's Financial Intelligence Unit is part of the Egmont Group which strengthens cooperation internationally against money laundering and finance of terrorism. In line with efforts to strengthen the strategic and legal framework to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism, Kosovo is in the process of updating key strategic documents, including the strategy against terrorism. The strategy against terrorism and the strategy for the prevention of violent extremism is expected to be merged in one document and be in line with European Union (EU) acquis.

Kosovo is the only country in the Western Balkans to have established a specialized unit to focus only on rehabilitation and de-radicalization programs. The Division for Prevention and Reintegration of Radicalized Persons (DPRRI) operates under the Department for Public Safety of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The purpose of DPRRI is to coordinate and monitor the reintegration process of radicalized individuals, and those repatriated from foreign conflicts. Ministry of Justice of Kosovo has established a rehabilitation and de-radicalization program in the Kosovo

Correctional Services which primarily includes vocational training opportunities. The Ministry of Justice also launched a program with the Islamic Community of Kosovo to provide imams in the prisons to address the ideological dimension of radicalization and provide counter-narratives, but as mentioned earlier, this program was terminated.

Besides DPRRI, at the local level, the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2016 piloted a new mechanism for early detection and prevention called the Referral Mechanism. This program proved not to be very successful in the Municipality of Gjilan with only 12 cases of early detection among youth and successful rehabilitation and reintegration in the society, through a combined intervention of peer support, family support, and counselling. The government plans to establish similar mechanisms across all municipalities of Kosovo. In addition to this, each municipality in Kosovo has established Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSC) which are security forums where the Police Station commander participates in regular monthly meetings and reports for the security situation. MCSC include also participants from civil society, religious leaders, community leaders, and departments from the local municipal government. MCSC play an important role in de-radicalization efforts by facilitating coordination and mobilization of resources.

With respect to online de-radicalization, the government of Kosovo adopted the National Cyber Security Strategy and Action Plan 2016–2019 which states that "Extremist and radical groups are increasingly using Cyberspace for organisation and media propaganda to promote their activities, recruit new members, organize terrorist actions, and thus pose a threat to national security of the Republic of Kosovo." (MIA 2015, p. 11). The strategy includes "incitement to terrorist acts and glorification of violence" as part of the definition of cybercrime. The strategy utilizes the concept cyberterrorism and refers it as a preferred choice for "terrorists because it can be accomplished with only modest financial resources, with anonymity, and from a great distance." (Ibid., p. 7). However, the action plan comes short of outlining concrete measures for online de-radicalization.

Civil society in Kosovo has been a pioneer of de-radicalization efforts, including promoting important policies which the government has adopted and working more broadly within the P/CVE framework. For instance, Global Community Engagement Resilience Fund (GCERF) is a global fund that aims to strengthen community resilience by supporting local initiatives to address the drivers of violent extremism. GCEF operates in seven countries, including Kosovo where it has worked with local partners on awareness, life skills training, development of alternative narratives, leadership training, cultural and sports activities, etc. It is important to note that GCERF does not distinguish between targeting online (de)radicalization and offline (de)radicalization, though based on the type of the projects they support, it is evident that implemented activities often cover both. Although GCERF publishes information regarding project (local) partners, activity type, total resources allocated in Kosovo, there are no publicly available assessment reports on project impact – which makes it harder to evaluate whether the implemented activities follow a theory of change or resources match its stated goals. GCERF has a new supporting scheme 2020 for Western Balkans Countries which support countries to strength community resilience against violent extremism and support region in rehabilitation of the repatriated individuals from conflict zones. Under the AFM, GCERF will fund consortia of CSOs to implement initiatives aimed at enabling the environment for rehabilitation and reintegration of RFTFs and their families (GCERF 2020).

Resonant Voices Initiative (RVI) is a regional project in the Western Balkans that aims to counter terrorist propaganda, hate speech, disinformation, harassment, and intimidation present in the online sphere. This initiative addresses (de)radicalization primarily in the online sphere. It seeks to provide a platform for networking journalists, activists, and community leaders who challenge dangerous messages online, it maps online radicalization trends, and it offers training, mentoring, and technical support to counter-narrative campaigns. In such a manner,

they purport to mobilize local actors to address the "weaponization" of information that targets vulnerable audiences and disrupts community cohesion with their target communities involving a diverse set of stakeholders. As part of their programs to build community actors' skills to develop counter-narrative campaigns, they claim to provide training on impact metrics, which is encouraging in terms of testing campaign outcome. However, there is no publicly available study that provides a comprehensive analysis of how impactful the RVI projects have been. Without such a study, it becomes harder to determine the rigor of RVI project monitoring and evaluation practices and the consistency of their coherent application throughout different projects.

The Dutch Embassy in Kosovo, supported through the Netherlands' Fund for Regional Partnership and MATRA fund has implemented a series of projects in Kosovo that target community resilience. For instance, the "Building Resilience: Communities against Violent Extremism" project is currently being implemented with the purpose of strengthening community resilience through inclusivity. This project aims to empower local communities in Kosovo, targeting women and youth to mobilize informal resilience networks against violent extremism. This project seeks to also provide local communities a platform to address security-related concerns as well as information how to facilitate the reintegration process of conflict-zone returnees. As a result of this project, one of implementing partners (KCSS) has established a Women's Security Forum – which is the only platform in Kosovo to provide women across different municipalities in Kosovo an open venue to discuss security issues through a gender-sensitive lens. These forums offer a chance for women to address their concerns related to security, including radicalization and violent extremism, and to discuss ways in which they can mobilize in their communities to address these issues. While there is no specific targeting of online or offline (de)radicalization, the multimedia coverage of the project on raising awareness about violent extremism and how to facilitate the reintegration of FFs and their family members allows for a wider audience reach. Similarly, data are currently lacking in terms of monitoring and evaluation of these projects, which could help to determine their impact.

In Kosovo, there are also programs that focus on some of the most vulnerable groups affected by radicalization and violent extremism. For instance, "Youth for Youth- increasing resilience among the vulnerable youth in Kosovo" is a project that is currently being implemented in Kosovo to support the reintegration of children returnees from the foreign conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. While the main target audience of this project are the children returnees, children from other backgrounds participate in project activities as well – to avoid stigmatization and promote inclusiveness. This project targets offline (de)-radicalization by promoting social skills of the children returnees and facilitating their reintegration in society. Its strength lies on engaging directly with the affected communities from violent extremism, fostering cooperation between civil society and institutional representatives that lead rehabilitation and reintegration efforts for FTFs and their family members. However, as the project is ongoing, to date there are no evaluations of the project activities in achieving the intended project goals. Needless to say, rehabilitation and reintegration programs present a long-term approach to tackling the issue of radicalization and violent extremism whose actual effectiveness we will be able to see years or even decades later.

It should be noted that in mapping of initiatives with the purpose of building community resilience against violent extremism, projects which function primarily in an unstructured or informal manner have not been taken into account. This entry mapped out a number of initiatives that fall within the selected criteria to support community resilience to highlight the type of projects that are being implemented in Kosovo. However, this entry does not provide an extensive evaluation of the impact of such initiatives in increasing community resilience against online and offline (de)radicalization. To a great extent, such an undertaking hinges upon publicly available data on community resilience projects and the (lack of) project monitoring and evaluation reports. Moreover, the P/CVE moniker attached to projects that

seek to build community resilience often garners criticism for being too narrowly tailored to violent extremism when other issues are of equal or greater concern to communities (Weine 2015). The design and implementation of projects to foster community resilience against online and offline (de)radicalization is also donor driven, which in turn is influenced by countries' broader strategic policy framework to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism, which may conceptualize the term resilience differently and as a result seek different ways to engage with the communities.

## Summary

There is a myriad of academic and policy research showing that there is no "one-size-fits-all" definition of radicalization and violent extremism. The reason for having no widely agreed definition and concept has to do with different drivers leading to individual or structural radicalization and also the evolving types of ideological underpinnings of radicalization. There is also often a thin line dividing certain groups from transmitting their radical views from freedom of expression, especially if this is not translated into antagonizing society or, most importantly, being manifested into violence. While radicalization can greatly challenge societal cohesion and cause structural problems in every community, it is violent extremism which represent a severe concern for physical security, thereby upholding the level of fear among communities.

Kosovo case is indeed a relevant example which showed a trajectory of increased radicalization cells which have been nevertheless diminished promptly as a result of societal response. There is no single individual or structural drivers which led to tens of Kosovans joining foreign conflicts in Syria and Iraq yet, it could be concluded that diverse set of identity, socioeconomic, and individual drivers have led to many of them being prone to radical ideas. Kosovan community has cultivated for centuries certain level of resilience such as: family influence, mediation, wisdom of "community pride", mobilization against external "evil" as well as other factors, all of which – along many other factors – could have contributed to the purpose of preventing further widespread violent extremist ideologies. This is being helped through the support of number of international initiatives which, after reaching some level of donor coordination, have managed to produce tangible results. In short, community resilience combined with limited state's foothold marks a recipe for decreasing the potential of radicalization and violent extremism.

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## Ohrid Framework Agreement, The

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### Synonyms

Consociational democracy; Minority rights; North Macedonia; Peace agreements

### Definition

The Ohrid Framework Agreement is a peace agreement which marked the end of the interethnic conflict in North Macedonia (This article uses the new constitutional name of North Macedonia resulting from the Prespa Agreement and the subsequent constitutional changes in 2019 (Final Agreement 2019). The name "Macedonia" is used when referred to in original quotations) in 2001 between