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Extremist Trends in the Western Balkans and the Republic of Serbia
Katarina Srbar, Milovan Sabotić, Branislav Milosavljević

Abstract

By decomposing the context of importance of a clear determination of the syntax “Western Balkans” and its main characteristics, as well as by clearly determining the definition of extremism, the authors analyze extremist circumstances in countries of the Western Balkans, using the example of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and, especially, Serbia. Recognizing the similarities and differences between the types and manners of organizing of extremist groups in these countries, as well as the nuances of the variability of conditions conducive to this type of political violence, the conclusion is that extremism in itself, and especially as a precondition for potential terrorist “acts”, is a serious source of insecurity in the region and a barrier for inclusion into modern European trends.

Key words: Extremism, defining, prevention, Western Balkans

Introduction

The violent phase of disintegration of SFR Yugoslavia ended in the 1990-ies, leaving in its wake numerous victims and mass destruction. The agenda switched to reconstruction and the building of (lasting) peace, with a tendency to convert the “Western Balkans” into a stable region of Europe. Beating in mind the character of problems in this region, the scars left behind by the conflicts, as well as the existing potential for conflict, it is indispensable to reevaluate the premises of regional progress, especially in the view of the remaining challenges it is facing today.

Extremism, as a phenomenon only in recent years reaching the pedestal of importance for understanding conflicts of various scopes, is becoming one of the most important topics in the “turbulent” area of the “Western Balkans”. Specificities of the region have in a striking manner conditioned the escalation of extremist thinking and acting. In almost any modern society, extremism is regarded as an undesirable form of political thinking and acting. Every type of extremism is characterized by an aggressive approach accompanied by a lack or complete absence of tolerance, very often characterized also by acting in the name of so-called “exalted goals”. Thus, extremists always perceive themselves as the only true guardians of their collectivity, and a barrier to the “immense danger” to their collective (which mainly pertains to race, nation or religious affiliation). Extremists are characterized by excessive efficiency in finding culprits and enemies. An important characteristic of extremist groups and movements is that they are not a goal in themselves nor are they sufficient. The incitement of non-extremists to violence, by raising the level of their aggressiveness and directing it toward a “culprit” labeled in advance is imposed as the main mission. Extremism obviously is both the cause and the consequence of conflicts, deepening mistrust between communities, and acting as a pronounced destabilizing factor in the region. With all its potential for conflict, it represents one of the most significant challenges to the normalization of ethnic relations between countries of the “Western Balkans”.

1. The Syntagm “Western Balkans”

The disintegration of the former SFR Yugoslavia (1991–2008) was accompanied by the striving of the new post-communist elites to form new, monoethnic state entities (state-nations) in this area.2 This process has now mostly been brought to a close owing to the constituting of four monoethnic (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia), one three-ethnic (deeply divided Bosnia and Herzegovina), and one declared civic (Montenegrin) state, in the post-Yugoslav area.3 The bad legacy of armed conflicts in the post-Yugoslav area (1991–1999) has left deep imprints on the relations between the newly formed states in the region which the European Union has designated the “Western Balkans” at the beginning of this decade. Namely, in order to avoid any potential lack of clarity relevant to the defining of the regional approach of the European Union to the southeast of the continent, the end of the final decade of the 20th century fast brought delineation between the concepts – “Southeast Europe” and “Western Balkans”.

Fig. 1. Western Balkan countries on the map of Europe

On one hand, the term “Southeast Europe” is used in its original, i.e. geographical meaning. Therefore, this is a region spreading from the Black Sea to the east to the Trieste bay of the Mediterranean sea to the west, encompassing Greece, Turkey (more precisely its European part), Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania.4 It is precisely these countries that are, however, the states originating in the area of the former Yugoslavia, with the exception of Slovenia (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia/State Union of Serbia and Montenegro – today the Republic of Serbia and Bosnia and Republic of Montenegro, Macedonia), and Albania.4 The introduction of the term “Western Balkans” almost coincides with the gradual development of the regional approach of the European Union (after 1996) to the region burdened by many years of conflict. In dominant public communities (political, expert, cultural, etc.) of countries belonging to the region the Western Balkans two directions of further development of relations between states in the Balkans still dominate. On one hand, there is the orientation where by establishing the truth, responsibility and reconciliation the bad legacy of the Balkan conflicts of the 1990-ies should be overcome, while on the other hand there is the approach according to which conflicts are inheren
t to the Balkans peninsula and are cyclically repeated almost as a rule. This approach is based also on the civilization of conflict, religious, ethnic and other differences between the South Slavic, as well as the Albanian peoples in the “Western Balkans”. Both bilateral and multilateral relations between the states in the region are created based on the dominant political, cultural or scientific elites are advocating one or the other approach.

Still, during the last fifty years or so there is a gradual transition of the “Western Balkans” from a zone of armed conflicts, to a region with stabilizing democratic, economic and security circumstances, to a region where all countries are unequivocally oriented toward accession to the European Union. This offers hope that regional countries will in perspective be ready to also accept numerous European values – peace, democracy, human and minority rights, principle of equality and principle of soli
darity, which would to a significant degree pave, largely present, extremist tendencies of all countries individually, and thus also of the entire region.

2. Determination of Extremism

As an insufficiently delimited and defined concept, extremism has for a long time been used in a highly colloquial manner. It was abused to dislike opponents (usually politi
cal), while additional colloquial confusion was imparted by its identification with terrorism. Contemporary political theory also give no significant contribution to this field, limiting itself mainly to extremism or to describing its manifestations, objec
tives and actors. Responding to the “hunger” of the public, au
tors, mostly superficially but spectacularly, create a “deluge” of texts on extremism, where they cunningly avoid to place it in any framework, much less to deal with its definition. In fact, the main reason for such a superficial approach to the problem lies in the difficulty of this “undertaking”.5

Stephen Atkins states, “there are few things that are as hard to define, as it is to define extremism” and continues: “However hard it may be to define terrorism, this is still an easier task than to define extremism. Extremism smolders behind the political scene and can produce far more serious consequences than a terrorist act.”

It can be said that much of what is extreme reaches the limit of the permitted, often its extreme limit. Many extremist lead, one would say, quite a normal life that by no means differs from the lives of peace loving people. It is impossible to penetrate their minds or control their opinions in any demo
cratic way. Thus, they are in a comfortable position and act from this position. Only when suitable conditions are created their rigid attitude turns into action, but the number of people who have any extremist attitude is not easy to estimate for the simple reason that they generally do not want to honestly express their opinions fearing the consequences. These addi
tional difficulties only contribute to resentment when clearly defining extremism.

For all of the above reasons, attempts to define extremism are two generalized or overemphasize one or two properties of extremism as a phenomenon. According to certain attempts to define extremism, extremism is only and exclusively “crimi
nalized” (example: definitions of Thomas Covenant according to which “political extremism is such that uses violence and criminal

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"Southeast Europe" and "Western Balkans". 
activities in order to realize his political objective.7 According to Robert Nozick8, extremism, apart from regarding the enemy as an evil, has as its main characteristic that it causes stress and does not accept compromise. There is also a significant number of stereotypical thoughts of which only some have practical value for further investigations of extremism. For example, Walter Laker9, an American historian of Jewish-German origin in his capital work “Europe in Our Time”, advocates the thesis that “simplifying conflicts between states with the intention to systematically cross the borders of socially acceptable behavior” is the main cause of extremism. Extremism is characterized by a vigilant formally-protective attitude toward one’s own group which implies excessive zeal in discovering enemies and the “right” to intolerance, hatred and aggression toward a target which is not to be tolerated as being hostile. Extremism is defined according to which:

- political extremism (recently most frequently in the sphere of ethno-nationalism);
- religious extremism;
- ethnic extremism with clearly pronounced elements of ethnic separation;
- extremism that includes all the listed varieties – combined extremism

Unfavorable conditions coinciding with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of SFR Yugoslavia, countries of the “Western Balkans” became a “place” where all listed varieties of extremism “flourish”. In connection with this, in general the conclusion can be drawn that the subspecies of extremism which includes the combining of all listed types, is simultaneously the one that best reflects all the antigens in the region of the “Western Balkans”. In countries created after the disintegration of SFRY there is a significant number of extremist groups that inherit their ethnic extremism from principles of Neo-Nazi groups. Viewed individually, these groups remain on the margins of society, since each of them has relatively few members. However, these facts make them no less dangerous, and as such, they should not be underestimated. In certain larger cities in Slovenia (Maribor and Ljubljana), Croatia (Zagreb, Osijek, Split, Zadar) and Serbia (Beograd, Novi Sad, Nis), there are Neo-Nazi groups belonging to the international movement “Blood And Honor”.

Somewhat more numerous and influential are Clerofascist groups, linking elements of the Fascist ideology and religious fundamentalism: in Croatia and Croatian parts of Bosnia “Catholic-Ustasha”, and in Serbia “Orthodox-Fascist youth” are extremist groups.10 In Bosnia and Herzegovina (residually, as well as in the region of Raika (“Sandžak”) and in Kosovo and Metohija (reflectively) there are pronounced tendencies toward Islamist fundamentalism and terrorism, which will in part be explained through the influence of Islamist extremism in the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

The basis of right wing extremists in Croatia is formed by war veterans, the so-called fans and chauvinist parties. They are connected with their Neo-Nazi equivalents – related groups in Hungary, Germany and Austria. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, these structures are divided by nationality (Serbs, Croats and Moslems/Bosnians), and mainly consist of so-called fans with a right wing orientation, war veterans and paramilitary groups. The right wing scene in Serbia which pertains to groups belonging to the segment of ethnic extremism will be elaborated in more detail in the following chapter (“The example of Serbia”).

The problem of handling extremist organizations and groups in the region of the “Western Balkans” is additionally complicated by the fact that many of the mentioned groups enjoy (in addition to the most common covert, sometimes also open) support from certain political parties, certain university professors or public figures. In addition, the very latent character of extremism is an aggravating circumstance for defining and implementing efficient measures against this form of political violence. Namely, it is not possible to identify its mechanisms as in the case of antiterrorist measures. It could rather be said that, when it comes to the issue of finding the adequate response to extremism, we are speaking of a body of mechanisms of prevention, while the repressive character of the measures (characteristic as one of the most imminent to the battle against terrorism), is used to a significantly lesser extent.


14. Wahhabism (Salafism) is an Islamic movement founded by Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab (1703-1792), a scholar and religious reformer, after whom the Wahhabi movement was named. Wahhab thought that every true believer must make an effort to cleanse Islam of that which according to his opinion is bad, including: traditionalism, superstition,狭窄 and religious innovation, as well as all that is contrary to the teachings of the Prophet (PAV) and the early followers of Islam (Salaf). It is therefore a conservative and puritan Islamic movement, that could be determined as fundamentalist, because it speaks in favor of returning to basic and original teachings of Islam, with open intolerance of Shiites, Sunnis and Dervishes, as well as liberal teachings of Islam. Modern Wahhabism, i.e. Salafism differs from similar Islamic movements, which were active in the 1970s and 1980s. The difference is, for example, that Wahhabis reject not only “Western ideologies” (such as capitalism, socialism, etc.), but also all other “western concepts”, such as nation, political parties, social justice, law, politics, human rights, democracy, revolution or equality. Consistent Wahhabis are opposed to modern political Islam (Islamists) and have frequently severely criticized prominent Islamists, such as for example, Syyd Yusuf Qadiri, Abu Ala Mawhudi or, even, Osama bin Laden. They are extremely critically disposed toward almost all “western concepts”. They regard them as misguided Moslems, who have accepted certain western ideas, and have thus strayed from true original Islam. Many Wahhabists remain extremely critically disposed toward the adherents of extremist teachings and inflame them, often in the first centuries of Islamic history. They are frequently of the opinion that all Moslems should practice Islam in the manner they themselves do. Otherwise, they will be heretics and enemies of Islam, which is religious justification for the potential use of force against them.

3.1. The Example of Serbia

3.1.1. Religious extremism

The region of Raika (so-called Sandžak) is an area where opposing interests of Islamic, western and certain neighboring countries are juxtaposed. Poor economic development, accumulation of social problems and movement among nationalities (frequently also inter-Islamic tensions), as well as the phenomenon of spreading radical Islamism, are significant characteristics of the status of this part of Serbia. Due to mentioned factors, which have already been labeled as an exemplary category for establishing extremism (above all that inspired by religious reasons), the political-security situation in the Raika region periodically changes.

The religious component of contemporary extremism is to the greatest extent reflected through the activity of the radical Islamic movement – Wahhabists (Salafists) on the Raika region. In fact according to the interpretation of experts for this type of political, it is exactly this region that is regarded as a potential hotpot of radical Islam, and in this context, also as a possible crisis region. The gradual expansion of the Wahhabist movement represents a potential safety risk. Wahhabists, as “guardians of the original Islam”, or as they are called in modern times, bearers of religious radicalism, do not renounce a greater part of extremist definitions in the form of naked terrorism, all with the purpose of realizing own goals – the creation of a so-called Microstate, i.e. a regional linkage with countries of the “Western Balkans” (Serbia) and on Kosovo and Metohija, in the south of Serbia, in Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania. Their activity is now characterized by the striving to create a more massive movement, primarily by adding younger supporters, a rigid approach to the female population, the forcing of financial aid to poor supporters, the expansion of the Wahhabist network to other regions of the Republic of Serbia, as well as by aggravating the manifestations of religious and its radical interpretation in the sense of the lack of the possibility of cohabitation with non-Moslems, but also with Moslems who do not practice religion in accordance with their perceptions. In the past period, religious extremism appeared also through antagonism, and often also opens conflicts of opposing options within the Islamic religious community. Lately these conflicts have been passivated to a large extent, but numerous consequences

8 Robert Nozick (1938-2002), American professor and political philosopher. His most important work “Anarchy, State and Utopia” (1974) is regarded a capital work of modern political philosophy which strongly influenced theories and convictions of the new right.
9 Walter Laker, American historian of Jewish-German origin in his capital work “Europe in Our Time”, advocates the thesis that “simplifying conflicts between states with the intention to systematically cross the borders of socially acceptable behavior” is the main cause of extremism.
10 “Western Balkans” is a geographical term referring to the region of the “Western Balkans” (if not all) are today in almost exemplary conditions for the strengthening of extremist tendencies.8
originating from them remain, of which the most serious one is presented in the form of the effort, by founding certain institutions, to realize the best and strengthen the religious and political influence from Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this respect, the activities of the Islamic community in Serbia and of its leaders, to a major extent transcend the framework of religious activity, acquiring the character of political extremism.

In addition, it is important to mention that a respectable number of extremist groups in the Republic of Serbia, vocationally placed among the ethnic-extremist, are openly flitting with the “only true” Orthodox reasons. This also expresses the dispersive character of extremism, and the justification for introducing so-called combined extremism as a category especially characteristic for this region.

3.1.2. Separatism motivated by ethnic and ethno-separatist motivations

Due to accumulated economic-social problems, sluggishness to substantially democratize the society, and the persistent lack of quality building of preventive mechanisms of the society in the sense of promoting tolerance, there is occasional escalation of violence of right-wing extremist group and movements. Various motives appear as triggers for the escalation of violence, and thus also for violation of the general security of the society: disagreement with the manner of realizing key national interests, homophbic and xenophobic tendencies, and the like. The majority of groups, approximately 20, are active at the local level. The rest ten or so that are most often mentioned among the public are “Nacionalni front” (National Front) and “Obráz” (Image), (organizations whose activities were banned by the Constitutional Court), “Krv i cast” (Blood and Honor), “SNP 1309”, “Nazi” (Nazis), etc.13 Analysts estimate that this type of extremism in Serbia began to develop to a more significant extent since 2000, and that the character of these extremist groups (although they are primarily guided by ethnic reasons) is divergent to a considerable extent (nationalist, chauvinist, “fan oriented”, etc.).

Although Serbia is home to numerous different national minorities, ethnic extremism appears sporadically, and does not pose a serious threat to the society. An exemption, to a limited degree, are tensions most often generated by individuals and groups belonging to the body of extremism with a Hungarian ethnic prefix, active in the territory of the Autonomous Region of Vojvodina. Their activities are directed toward the unification of all relevant Hungarian organization and the securing of international support in order to create conditions for a more determined battle for autonomy within Serbia. The main bearers of extremism and separatist activity belong to the Hungarian extremist organization “Omladinski pokret 64 zupanije” (64 Counties Youth Movement) with a program commitment to restore the “Pre-Trianon (greater, aut. comm.) Hungary”. Activities of this organization and incidents resulting from them to date were of a local character. The elaboration of the ethno-separatist character of the activity of Kovacev Abathani, as a striking form of ethno-separation in modern Europe, would require significantly more space than that envisaged for this paper.

Overall, ethnic, religious and other extremist organizations and groups do not have the potential to endanger the security of the Republic of Serbia to any serious degree. However, further aggravation of socio-economic circumstances in the country, as well as the absence of continuous and systematic work with youth in the sense of promoting pluralism, tolerance and acceptance of diversity, could make the already favorable conditions for extremist activity even more favorable.

Conclusion

In his book, The Individual Psychology, Alfred W. Adler, notes that human complexes are the primary factors that prejudice the will to power, establishing a regularity according to which more pronounced complexes condition a proportionately more pronounced need to realize power.

In the Balkans, the will to power was evident already in olden times, either as the need of these small peoples to free themselves from many centuries of Ottoman rule, or to fight among themselves to preserve and confirm their own identity. Otherwise, it is generally known that because of a feeling of vulnerability, small peoples very often react extremely and with aggression, since fear is one of the primary movers of aggressive behavior.

The appearance of extremist movements, as a pathological phenomenon and an expression of the state of the society and the decadence of the value system of contemporary humanity, is a significant problem, primarily in the global context, and by all means in the “turbulent” region of the Balkans Peninsula. The example of the turbulent several decades of influence of communist ideology, as well as many other similar examples, confirm the unwritten rule of social sciences: that one type of extremism (left wing), is very often responded to by an antagonistic type of extremism (ethnic-right wing, religious, etc.), which can be simplified in the following manner – violence bears violence. Abrupt and radical changes that occurred immediately after the Cold War, resulted in following processes: while in the West there was integration (the fall of the Berlin Wall), in the East communist systems disintegrated (the example of SFR Yugoslavia).

Processes of disintegration resulted not only in the formation of new states, but also within them, the old value systems disintegrated. Antagonisms in the form of old ideological, religious and ethnic quarrels, simultaneous with the lack of readiness of societies for a rapid transition from a planned to a market economy, created fertile ground for planting extremist themes, primarily right wing and religious-extremists.

In this manner, after several decades of the monopoly of communism as the extreme left, the extreme right with its range of varieties now takes the scene. In addition, globalization created an army of dissatisfied and frustrated people who, desiring to protect their identity and integrity; drift to extremism out of fear, with fear being the perfect base for developing aggression. After all, in its essence, the right is no particular friend to transition and globalization, precisely because it advocates “tested solutions”, tradition and conservativism.

Since the thesis has already been stated that extremism as an especially resilient, but also a hidden phenomenon, requires an especially multidisciplinary response, both in the sense of the implementation of various measures (harmonization of legal regulations with newly emerging extremist threats, public condemnation of extremism, promoting tolerance, respect for diversity, uniform economic development, etc.), and in the disparity of those who implement them (legislature, police, education, civil society, media). A comprehensive response as a sublimation of all listed measures and those who implement them, with a clearly committed European road for countries of the Western Balkans, would to a large extent contribute to bring the influence of the extremist factor to a level that could be regarded as “socially acceptable”, while at the same time sparing significant amounts, even human lives in the potential field of a “repressive resolution of the problem”.

Literature


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13 The MoJ created the first official list of Neo-Nazi and other extremist organizations in the Republic of Serbia in 2005.
Factors Related to Marketing Strategies of Enterprises in the Czech Republic

Juraj Tomlai

Abstract

In the introductory section of the article, the current theoretical knowledge in the formulation and relation of strategic management and marketing strategies is transparently elaborated. The subsequent empirical research among small and medium-sized enterprises (residing in the Czech Republic and conducting business in the field of information and communication technology) in the start-up phase (approximately 3 years from their formation) provides input data for elaboration of the factor analysis, the mathematical - statistical method. The author transforms the results of this processing into recommendations and conclusions for the formulation and processing of a marketing strategy for beginning entrepreneurs throughout Central Europe.

Keywords: business strategy, marketing strategy, small and medium enterprise, factor analysis

JEL classification: M31, L10

1. Introduction

One of the remedies for the global economic crisis that hit most of the market-oriented countries in the world, including countries in Central Europe - the Czech Republic, is the stimulation of business assets, especially of small and medium-sized enterprises focused on progressive areas, which also include the information and communication technology sector. Financial capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises to use the services of marketing and research agencies is quite limited, and therefore the goal of our research has been to identify factors, conditions and finally approach to the development and implementation of marketing strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises with the mentioned specialization, so that these entities can develop them on their own, without outsourcing.

2. Theoretical Starting Points of the Issue of Company Marketing Management

2.1 Strategic Management of a Company

Although marketing strategy is the main topic of this article, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the general strategy and marketing strategy of a company. Therefore we will first define the company strategy itself and the factors affecting it. The world (in terms of economy) in 2009 was marked by the impacts of the economic crisis and recession. Many head managers claim that long-term strategic planning is declining and its effect is minimal because the macro and micro environment of a company is changing rapidly. Strategies of many companies, particularly small ones, are short-term and consider only the internal conditions of company existence.

The real purpose of strategy is that it takes long-term horizon into account while reflecting impacts of the external environment and their interaction with the company. "The process of strategic management enables the top managers to assess the long-term position of the company from a broader perspective and facilitates the alignment of internal skills and resources with the demand of the external environment" (Bong, 1991). Therefore, the more turbulent and less predictable the environment is, the more important the strategy is at all levels of management in which it is formulated. "Strategy is the cornerstone of the strategic planning process, so it is important to understand its components and levels at which it is formulated and implemented" (Certo, 1991).

Every top manager should therefore handle strategic management as a process that determines long-term direction of the organization, sets specific performance goals, develops strategy to achieve them while respecting all relevant internal and external circumstances, and ensures the implementation of the chosen program of activities (Thompson, 1992).

2.2 Relation of General Strategy and Marketing Strategy of a Company

The concept of strategy is often associated with the concept of planning. Planning is actually deciding on the activities of a company in the future. An essential part of the plan is setting of targets and synthesis of company strategy. The plan allows monitoring of development of strategic activities. Depending on their accomplishment it is possible to coordinate and adjust individual business processes (activities). Marketing strategy, based on the nature of marketing as a policy of customer-focused company, has a specific position within strategic planning. Among the most important tasks of marketing strategy