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THE PRESENCE OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISM IN THE BALKANS

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Resume: Islam is the religion which was brought to the Balkans by the Ottoman Empire. The result of centuries of Ottoman presence in the territory of today's Balkans has permanently changed the demographic structure of the national population. After the fall of the Ottoman rule, the region of Southeast Europe in the religious sense remained incompact.

The paper will present the contents which indicate the great importance of regional Balkan Peninsula in terms of Islamic extremism, primarily as a touch area of the two most powerful world religions. In addition, the paper explains different contexts in which Islamic extremism occurs.

Keywords: Islam, fundamentalism, extremism, Balkan, Religion

INTRODUCTION

The Balkan region has a remarkable geostrategic position and has always been a subject of interest of both regional and great world powers. It represents the bridge, and the link between Europe and Asia, both in the physical and political, and in the religious sense. The continuing struggle of interests caused numerous events that have left significant and long-term consequences on the development of South-Eastern Europe. Religious tensions and contradictions between Christianity on the one hand and Islam on the other hand have been deepening for centuries and constitute the basis for a long-term policy action, both of political and religious elites.

After the fall of the Ottoman rule in the Balkan region, religious sense remained incompact. Compactness of the Christian religious corps disrupted the large population of Islamic faith rooted in the genes of Turkish invaders, but also in the genes of the Christian world that willingly or unwillingly converted to Islam. In this way, Islam as a religion permanently entered the European continent and created a new quality of relations in the political, religious and security scene. The Balkan region thus became paramount for which it was worth and is worth fighting for. It became a place where the fates of nations and states are resolved.

Throughout history, the peoples who inhabit this part of the European continent have been exposed to numerous influences of various religious, political and national conflicts. If they wanted to survive they had to fight in order to save their homes, as well as the state and the church or mosque. Life in the permanently unstable environment and the existence of a

large number of security threats affected the specificity of cultural and social development of nations and religious communities in the Balkans. Specificities, under which it was created, the security environment of the region, primarily multinationalism, the struggle for religious domination, the intersection of interests of regional and world powers, as well as the complexity of political relations, influenced the Balkans in many respects so that it differs from other European regions.

Given the importance of the Balkan region, the degree of economic, social, cultural development of the peoples who inhabit it, the question is why extremism appeared in this area. How is it possible that at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, in the era of entire spiritual, scientific, industrial and technological progress, the southeast of the European continent is facing numerous security threats from extremism which occupies an important place? The Balkans is a region that faces the existence and operation of a number of radical organizations, ideological movements that propagate their ideas in a legally unacceptable way. A common feature of all the extremist organizations and movements is the dose of exclusivity to those who do not support their program. In addition, there is a threat to the realization of their ideas through violent means including armed action¹.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Islamic extremism experienced expansion around the globe and became one of the major security threats of today. The use of terrorism as the most important and practical method of operation, is characteristic for Islamic extremists. When it comes to Islamic extremism, the widespread opinion is that it is directed only to the members of other religious communities. However, the practice is not revealed. Terrorist attacks carried out in the Christian world and the many terrorist attacks on dissidents and innocent civilians in Muslim countries show that the target of Islamic extremism is anyone who does not respect and does not support their ideology and intentions, regardless of ethnicity or religion. The Muslim world has filed numerous, if not the greatest human casualties as a result of conflict of various Islamic extremist organizations. Of course, the largest Islamic extremist organizations are represented in the Middle East and in other regions of the world inhabited principally with Muslim population. However, due to the operating mode and the ability to fit their ideas into the story and motives of official Islam, the followers of Islamic extremism are also found in the areas with minority of Muslim population. Frequently, the followers and the support they gain from the members of other religious communities after accepting Islam, have as their aim achieving of defined interests. The geographical proximity of the region of the Middle East and a number of listed specifics influenced the appearance and operation of Islamic extremist organizations in the area of the Balkan Peninsula, as well.

The Balkan Peninsula is the most Muslim region in Europe, and naturally as such it is suitable for the entry and the spread of Islamic extremism. In the political, social, historical and religious sense, the Balkans is a key crossroad where the geopolitical and geostrategic road connects Europe and Asia. As a place where civilizations clashed for centuries, the Balkans as the heart of southeast Europe was continuously subjected to various security challenges, risks and threats of which a significant part of its roots lies in religious extremism. The importance that the Balkans has for Turkey, which in the Middle Ages, brought Islam on European soil, and as a country that is now emerging as a significant regional power, is immeasurable. The area of the Balkans is a bond which is the cradle of Islam connected to Islam in Europe. The fact that the homogeneity of Christian Europe is undermined precisely in its southeastern part was influenced by the fact that the importance of the Balkans intensifies in different ways. Certainly, one of the terms that indicate the importance of this part of Southeast Europe for the Christian world is that the Balkans is the "bastion of Christianity". However, if the Balkans

¹ Хатиџа Бериша, Игор Баришћ, Катариџа Јонев: „*The Influnce of Islamic on the Global Security*“, Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, Specijal Isuse, Vol. 1 Supp. 1/2016, str.3-8

is for the Christians ramparts where they are kept, then we can certainly say that the Balkans for Islamic world is a gateway to Europe, which is partly open. History has shown that this gate has been unlocked and partially opened for the violent conquest of the Ottoman Empire and aggressive attitude towards the Christian population that is reflected in the physical extermination or converts to Islam. The place of historic confrontation of the two largest world religions is fertile ground for the emergence of religious, principally Islamic extremism.

BALKAN AS A SOURCE OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISM

The Balkans, in the geopolitical sense, represents a very important area in which the regional and world powers different interests intertwine. The importance of this area is great. Modern political terminology used simultaneously names such as the Balkan Peninsula, the Balkans, but also South East Europe and Southeast Europe. These terms have been used simultaneously in some periods, sometimes more often than the other one, which depended on who used it and to what aim.

The Balkans usually reminded of territorial-political entity formed in this part of Europe, or simply taken to signify affiliation to Europe as a whole². For Germany, during World War II, the term Southeastern Europe, meant the area south of the south-eastern borders of Germany, to the southern borders of the Soviet Union and included both Turkey and Cyprus³. The Nazi project of the new Europe, the Balkans and Southeast concepts were emerging as juxtaposed fact never taking place. It was nevertheless an extremely important part of the global discussion on the regulation of government millennial Reich on European soil⁴.

The shortest, cheapest and least demanding land corridor that connects Europe and Asia extends across the Balkans. Southeast Europe and the Balkans region within it, represents an exceptional base for a breakthrough to the Caspian Basin and on to Russia's Far East. The rich history of this region indicates a continuity of events that largely create regional and global security scene. Practically, the region of Southeast Europe is not bypassed in any event of importance for global security.

The Balkan region is of the great importance from the aspect of religion, especially Christianity and Islam. Advantageous features of relief and a natural openness affected the flow of invasions that were historically guided in these areas. One of the most important was the Ottoman Empire invasion of Europe. Incompetence and disunity of big European powers of that time to resist the Ottomans resulted in centuries of enslavement of a substantial part of the Balkans. Besides Christianity, Islam becomes the second world religion that has stepped on the soil of Europe with great strides that will permanently affect the formation of the security situation in the regional and global context. Numerous casualties, which were subjected to Christian nations under Turkish administration in Southeast Europe, caused deep wounds and lasting animosity towards Islam. On the other hand, the presence of the Ottomans in the Balkans during the long historical period influenced the formation of the Turkish national identity awareness that this natural space belongs to them and that they have a claim on it. In addition, they refer to the high presence of Muslims in South East Europe, principally the Balkans and the close relationships that Turkey has with them in this area.

2 Solaja, M.: Balkans in transatlantic crack, Center for International Relations, Banja Luka CIR, 2006, pp.20.

3 Matijasevic, D.: PhD thesis "Security of South East Europe-constant strategic concept of NATO", Faculty of Security, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, 2013, pp. 6th

4 Ristović, M.: Balkans in the Nazi project "New Europe" in the Second World War, meeting or a clash of civilizations in the Balkans, the Historical Institute of SASA, Proceedings, Book 16, Belgrade, 1998, pp. 478th

Religious intolerance between Christians and Muslims that has been lasting for centuries regional and world powers skillfully used to achieve their interests. Therefore, this region is one of the possible crisis areas in the world that can quite easily be activated in order to serve the interests of the holders of power in the region and the world. The evident example is the war in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, principally on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and the Republic of Macedonia. In addition, there are many security problems in other parts of South-Eastern Europe, which basically have civilizational and religious conflict between Christianity and Islam, such as a problem between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots and the problem in Bulgaria with the Turkish national minority.

Those security concerns have basically a religious conflict, permanent in nature and as such are highly suitable for the creation, development and operation of various forms of extremism⁵. Islamic extremism in the Balkans exists and it rests on the understanding of its holders that the countries in the region have unequal attitude towards Muslims than other non-Muslim population. In addition, Islamic extremism in South East Europe, principally in the Balkan Peninsula extended the hand of Islamic extremism that has been expanding, primarily in the Middle East, and other regions of the world inhabited by the Muslim population.

BALKAN CROSSROADS OF RELIGIONS

The roots of the major world religions are located in the Middle East, where they gradually began to spread to other parts of the world. Due to different historical circumstances, Christianity managed to be the most widespread, principally to the area of Europe and Asia. With the Edict of Milan, Christianity was given full freedom in the territories of the Roman Empire, which created conditions for further expansion to new territories. On the other hand, Islam, as the youngest religion, from the area of the Middle East spread toward the remaining part of the Asian continent and to the area of Africa. In the beginning, and it could not be otherwise because the centuries of Christianity used the advantage to strengthen in areas where there was also to create conditions for religious occurrence to new areas, primarily the area of Africa. With the advent of Islam in the religious world, but also the security stage, there was a new distribution of power. However, when it comes to the power, almost as a rule, there is the case of dissatisfaction of one of the parties. This dissatisfaction was fertile ground for the emergence and development of inter-religious intolerance and conflicts that have claimed millions of victims.

In examining the issues of conflict of religions in the Balkans it is necessary to limit the conflict to Christianity and Islam. Inter-religious conflicts that have existed or lasted in the Balkans, and whose protagonists are not Christianity and Islam have the marginal importance for this work. The previously mentioned characteristics of the Balkan region in geostrategic and geopolitical terms inevitably influenced today's effects on developments pertaining to religion. This fact was crucial during the Middle Ages, when religion was identified with the state, and when it was the basis of planning political, social and religious life of the population.

The geographical position of the Balkans was naturally influenced by the formation of one of the most important and the most important land corridors in the world. South East Europe and the Balkan Peninsula as its key region, in the physical sense, is the bridge that connected and still connects two continents. A more important fact is that it is the bridge over which different cultures, civilizations and religions have been passing for centuries. The importance of this area is conditioned by the existence of a number of factors relating to the social, political,

⁵ Simeunovic, Dragan, „Odredenje ekstremizma iz ugla teorije i politike, Srpska politička misao, vol 124, br.2, 2009

economic, cultural, religious and military spheres, regardless of whether they are internal or external violence caused by great powers⁶. However, in the opinion of Europeans this region has been for centuries and is even today, peripheral to Western culture. The general level of social development of the region compared to the rest of developed Europe may be used as evidence for the above mentioned statement. Here arises an important specificity of the Balkan countries in relation to the rest of the continent⁷. This specificity refers to the cultural and civilizational differences compared to the rest of Europe. In western political, economic and cultural circles we can often hear the words like 'Balkanization' which directly indicate their attitude towards everything coming from this area, but we can say from the entire region of the Balkans.

Apart from the fact that, in geographical terms, the Balkans is the part of the European continent, the region, till today, failed to overcome cultural distance and to be fully economically, politically and socially integrated into Europe. The Balkans is a set of small and medium-sized countries that have failed to create the formation of a kind of supranational cultural, economic, and religious entities. Instead, the region offers very favorable conditions for the implementation of regional interests and major world powers, and one of the most important conditions is the multicultural and multi-confessional space viewed from the perspective of the possible causes of provoking the crisis. Violation of the compactness of the Christian religion corps due to the appearance of Islam contributed to the emergence and development of the centuries-long sparks that can ignite fire safety in the Balkans whenever it is the interest of the great powers.

European conquests of Asia and vice versa, conquerors passing through South Eastern Europe and the Balkan Peninsula left behind new things that influenced the life and development of the countries of the region and the creation of security situation. From the aspect of the problem that is discussed in this paper, the most important routes passed by the Crusaders and the conquerors were in the region of Southeast Europe which was taken by the Ottoman Empire. Crusades, in the historical sense, left deep consequences of which, in terms of this paper the most important are the one concerning the relations between Christianity and Islam⁸. Undoubtedly, strengthening of the Islam and spread of its influence in relation to Christianity inevitably caused growing concern, discontent and the emergence of a sense of threat to Christianity. Identification of religion and state, during the Middle Ages, gave the political character to the growing influence of Islam in Asia Minor. Fearing the invasion of the old continent by the Islamic peoples from Asia, the leading European countries repeatedly organized conquests of the infidels, principally nations who received the Islamic faith. These declarative war marches were held under the banner of the struggle for the liberation of Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims. However, the essence of the organization and implementation of the Crusades was the desire of the ruling elite to increase power through an extension of tenure, access to raw materials and labor force, tax collection, pillage and the similar. The existing animosity between Christians and Muslims created in the previous period was deeply strengthened during the Crusades. Atrocities and crimes committed by European forces against the Muslim population under the guise of fighting for the Cross and the cradle of Christianity have contributed to the intensification of Muslim hostility toward

⁶ Lutovac, Article V.: Effect of big powers in the Balkans, www.bosnianold.ws.irib.ir/, / 02.10.2015.

⁷ Dragan Simeunović *Terorizam, opšti deo*, Pravni fakultet u Beogradu, 2009, str 37-56

⁸ Under the Crusades (lat. Cruice Signato-baptism marked) means a series of wars waged by the Christian nations of Europe on one side and the Muslim peoples and other infidels from the other side. Lasted from 1095 to 1291, and were conducted under the pretext that it is necessary to restore the Holy Land and Jerusalem under the control of Christians. The Crusades began with the call of Byzantine Empire to defend Christianity from the growing influence and expansion of the Turks in Anatolia.

the Christian world. The Crusades caused enormous suffering and these wars belong to the conflict in human history causing the greatest human sacrifice⁹.

Fighting in the Crusades, European countries, along with the full support of Christian church leaders, acquired significant economic benefits, but on the other hand, deepened the gap on the world security stage. The conflict between Christianity and Islam was on fire and it is still burning to this day, with more or less intensity. This, in the long term, from the security aspect, and relation Christianity-Islam, opened the Pandora's Box. The fact that the religious gap between Christianity and Islam is still on and there is no clear vision of how to overcome the complexity of the problem. In response to the Crusades undertaken by the Christian European countries, the Asian Muslim countries led by Turkey, a country situated at the junction of two continents, strengthened. On the historical scale it was not long when Turkey embarked on conquests, both in the area of Asia and in the territory of Europe.

The Turkish Empire invaded the area of the Balkan states in the 14th century inflicting to European Christian world, until then, the greatest defeat. In addition to the military subjugation of a significant part of the European continent, principally in the area of the current states of Southeast Europe, the arrival of the Ottoman Empire marked a permanent expansion of the influence of Islam on the newly conquered areas. Centuries of Ottoman presence in South-Eastern Europe has left a lasting impact on the creation of the security reality, both at regional and global levels. In this region there was not only a conflict between individual countries and the invaders from the East, but there was a conflict and mixing of two significantly different system of organization of state functions, customs and life in general. In a word, there was a collision of two completely different civilizations. Practically from that time until the present day, Southeast Europe has been developing a kind of new, sub-civilization that is a mixture of Western Christian, and Eastern Muslim. The new conditions of life of the population in this region have caused a series of characteristics that inevitably shape the security situation in the region. The fact that the area of the Balkans, Southeast Europe and Europe as a whole stepped Islam and has influenced the auditing, or defining new geostrategic interests of regional and world powers.

The conflict and mixing of Christianity and Islam in the Balkans, through the centuries, was skillfully used by the major powers to achieve their proclaimed interests. Reheating continuous tension between Christianity-Islam in the Balkans is directly in the interests of achieving long-term goals of the holders of power, both in political, and in the religious sphere. In the political sphere, the religious conflict between Christianity and Islam is used by Western European powers and the US for causing instability in the region, and the primary goal is the gradual approach and mastery of energy resources in the area of the Asian continent, principally the Middle East, the Caspian basin and Siberia. Here one can see the fact that points out the further continuation of the historical inertia of the leading Western European powers when it comes to creating long-term security of the continent. Analyzing the events in the recent history in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, it can be concluded that the Christian Western Europe may sacrifice the Balkan region in order to achieve short-term interests. However, what happened in the Balkans in recent history and what is happening today can easily hit the whole European continent in a modified form. The terrorist attacks on the territory of Western European countries, showed all its impotence and unwillingness to successfully defend.

On the other hand, we need to ask the question: "What are the possible interests of the Christian and Islamic religious leaders to maintain tensions between these two religions?" History offers a natural response¹⁰. Centuries of animosity and rivalry of these religions is so

⁹ The Crusaders killed between one million and nine million people.

¹⁰ Laythe, Brian, Finkel, Deborah G., Bringle, Robert G., Kirkpatrick, Lee A. (2002). Religious

ingrained in the minds of the people that it cannot be deleted just like that. In addition, it is important to mention that it is in the nature of man to struggle for power. Whether we want to admit it or not, and in religious circles, the struggle for supremacy and power is extremely present¹¹. The clergy has several ways to increase their power, and thus the power of religion they represent. That is why it is the most important and the most significant to expand the territory where their religion is represented thus increasing the number of believers. A very successful way to wake up the population is maintaining the required level of inter-religious tensions and hostilities. By creating the sense of discomfort and vulnerability from the members of other religions, it also gives energy required to man that, in addition to the theoretical, goes into practical operation for the sake of religious goals. None of the known methods of influence to people and motivating them to make a move is strong as much it is a religious influence. Unlike other incentives, religion provokes a positive attitude towards what should be done in its name.

The conflict between Christianity and Islam in the Balkans has been in progress for centuries. This conflict does not occur alone or isolated from the political developments in the region. The connection of religion and politics is inevitable. Despite the fact that all the countries of the Balkans are secular and that religion, at least in theory, is separated from the world of government, the influence of religion is present and very significant. This is confirmed by the practice of political officials in defining national interests since before making any significant policy decisions, they hold meetings with religious officials. In practice, religious interests are incorporated in the national interest and in a different sense they cannot be seen.

Based on the results shown so far in this paper, it is clear that in the Balkans and Eastern Europe there is active "silent war" for the spread of political and religious influence between leading Islamic states, principally Turkey as one of the strongest regional powers and European countries. The religious conflict between Christianity and Islam should be viewed through the prism of achieving long-term interests of Turkey in the Balkans. In doing so, it is necessary to examine more closely the project "Green Transversal" which represents the achievement of a long-term interest of Turkey not only in this region but for the entire European space, as well.

"Green Transversal" is a project which is the subject of disagreement between scientists from the European Christian countries and those who are members of the Islamic faith. For those who advocate the view that the "Green Transversal" as a kind of conspiracy theory find their basis of teachings in the unreality of its realization. On the other hand, the historical events in Southeast Europe, and the presence of Turkey in various forms, principally economical and religious, clearly points to the reality of the existence of such a project and its far-reaching goals. In addition, a significant fact that points to a broader geopolitical interest of the USA that would be realized by implementation of the project "Green Transversal".

Considerations regarding the Green Transversal became more intensified in the late 20th century and during the conflicts in the Balkans. Lawmakers of the view that the Green Route is the reality and constantly achieves intensified their activities, directing scientific community to the fact that the events of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the area of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, as well as strengthening of Islam in the Raska region practically operate in the achievement of Green Transversal. Practically, the above events justified the thesis that the underlying conflict between the Christian and Muslim world is in fact the conflict between the Christian and Islamic civilizations.

Considerations on the Green Transversal carry with them a large number of superficial and insufficiently clear definitions and interpretations, which are the product of subjective

Fundamentalism as a Predictor of Prejudice: A Two-Component Model, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Volume 41, Issue 4, 623-635.

11 Ibid, str 627

visions of those who created them, but also the planning and operation of constant political elites trying to prove or disprove this project. The consequence of this approach is partial or deliberate diversion from the indisputable and objective facts related to this project. In contrast to the view of the Green Transversal from the perspective of the 90's of the last century when it was the sole basis of the conflict between Christians and Muslims, the modern scientific views accept this project as just one of the reasons for the conflict in the Balkans. For a complete understanding of the issues in the context of this problem it will be clarified on what thesis on the Green Transversal is actually based.

To understand the essence of the Green Transversal, the most significant aspects of the war in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia should be noted. Upon the end of these wars a completely new security reality in the Balkans was created. The majority of the Muslim population in Bosnia and Herzegovina advocated and today advocates unitary interests of this country, which would become unique in territorial terms, and would create conditions for the gradual suppression and putting into the background Serbian national corpus, which is Orthodox Christian. The realization of these intentions and taking into account the fact that concerns the violent secession of the southern Serbian province and the creation of an independent state is opening the door for further intervention and the Turkey presence in the Balkans. Looking across the spectrum of religious influence in the region, Islam through the implementation of the project Green Route determines its position in the Balkans, on the one hand, and on the other hand it creates the basis for further advance towards Central and Western Europe. Taking into account that the Christianity in the Balkans and the rest of the European continent is characterized by low population growth rate, which in a significant part of the country has a negative sign, Islam can provide long-term favorable conditions for its strengthening and further expansion.

The importance of the Balkan region, in terms of protection against the ingress of Islam from the Middle East, was realized very seriously even by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Unlike today's Europe, which quite passively observes slow but sure advance of Islam, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy undertook concrete measures. The special status and privileges for the Serbian population living on the southern fringes of the monarchy demanded adequate surrounding. Serbian population had a practical role of guardian of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, which could be viewed in two ways. First, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, inhabited by Catholic Christians, engaged the Serbian Orthodox population to attack the Turkish invaders. Secondly, by doing this, the monarchy made a kind of political maneuver in relations with the Turkey Empire where, at any moment, it could take advantage of the Serb population to their interests. In practice, this meant that the Turkish blade was directly aimed at the Serbian Orthodox population. This inevitably caused an increase in the already tense inter-religious relations between Orthodox Christians-Islam¹²

One of the key epilogues of events in the Balkans at the end of the 20th century was the change in the demographic and religious structure of the Balkan Peninsula. The Serbian population was massively displaced from the area of the military landscape, the perimeter of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. In addition, a significant number of Serbian Orthodox population left their ancestral homes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the area of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. In this way, two countries inhabited by the majority population of the Islamic religion, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the so-called 'Kosovo' were created. These territories, although not physically connected, are connected with the area of Raska region which is from the point of considering theses on the Green Transversal has a

¹² Hatidza Beriša, Igor Barišić, Katarina Jonev, „The influence of Islamic on the Global security“ Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, Specijal Issue, Vol 1, Supp.1/2016, str. 5-7

clear significance¹³. In this way, a significant part of the area inhabited predominantly with Muslim population, which includes transversal in the Balkans practically established and is well-rounded. The conditions for further connection of the areas inhabited by Muslims from the Balkans to Turkey on several key routes were created.

The first line stretches across the territory of Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo and Metohija and up through the Raska region to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the depth of the European continent. Part of this route is running via Montenegro continues to Bosnia and Herzegovina. This route further strengthens Green Transversal breaks two states populated predominantly with Orthodox population. In the north, there is Serbia, and in the south it is the territory of Montenegro.

The second important direction of the penetration of Islam to the Balkans and depth of the European continent leads from Turkey through Bulgaria's southern area, the area north of Macedonia to the area of Presevo and Bujanovac inhabited by the majority population of the Islamic religion. Furthermore, this line is in Kosovo and Metohija and it connects the first direction running to Bosnia and Herzegovina and further on to Central and Western Europe. The key object in the grip of this path is Green Transversal road that stretches from Belgrade through the Morava-Vardar valley to Skopje and further to Thessaloniki.

The arrival of Islam in Europe cannot be imagined without the territory and the population that teaches and nourishes faith. Therefore it is of crucial importance for achieving a long-term interest of Turkey in Southeast Europe that there are strong territorial ties covered by Muslims. The foregoing facts indicate that the thesis on the Green Transversal how the geopolitical aspects of expansion and influence of Turkey in the region of the Balkans and Southeastern Europe, as well as in terms of penetration and spread of Islam into new territories has complete sense. What is emerging as the logical question is: "What is a further object of geopolitical games of Turkey in Europe, and thus the spread of Islam?" One of the possible and real answers is to further penetration towards the European continent¹⁴. Modern migrations of the population of Islamic religion during the 20th century from the territory of Turkey, Albania, the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the area of the African continent to Western European countries have caused significant changes in the demographic, confessional, cultural and sociological structure of these countries. The obvious result is the settlement of multi-million Muslim population on the territory of developed European countries. Bearing in mind the simple fact stated in the paper that it is not possible to spread Islam or any other religion without the population, as well as allegations of the Green Transversal, a natural conclusion is that further goal of spreading Islam is aimed at the heart of the Old Continent. In this context, the Balkan region is of the great importance because it represents a springboard for further penetration of Islam in Europe¹⁵.

By analyzing the theory of the Green Transversal in terms of respect of national and international law, and in terms of respect for human rights and freedoms, the foregoing considerations of the thesis of the Green Transversal are not in dispute. However, in terms of security, changes in inter-religious and inter-ethnic relations inevitably change the status quo. These changes can move towards improving the quality of the security situation or to its deterioration which depends on numerous factors. For this paper it is important to note that good interreligious relations produced good inter-ethnic relations and under the unwritten rule they lead to a stable security situation and vice versa. Bearing in mind the described events

13 Indigenous name for the Raska region by the local Muslim population is Sandzak.

14 Brettell, Caroline B. 2008. "Incorizing migration in anthropology: 'The social construction of networks, identities, communities and globalscapes.' In: Migration Theory. Talking across Disciplines. Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield (eds), New York: Routledge 120-126

15 Hatidza Beriša, Igor Barišić, Katarina Jonev: „The influence of islamic on the Global security“, Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, Specijal Issue, Vol. 1 Supp. 1/2016, str. 7

in the Balkans, who were imbued with a clear political, interethnic and interreligious conflict, and the consequences that these events left until today, no one can say that in the Balkans and Eastern Europe there is a level of inter-religious tolerance, which guarantees a long-term stable security situation. In this context, the inter-religious relations are considered to be a relationship between people who belong to the Christian faith on one hand and Islam on the other hand. As it can be seen, no remark refers to official religious authorities because they are, as a rule, imbued with the desire to maintain a good relationship, a high level of tolerance and coexistence with others who are members of other religions. The problem is that the practice does not show this so.

In the Balkans, principally in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Croatia there is a very interesting inter-religious relationship. It is about the relationship between Catholic Christianity and Islam. It is interesting that these two religions in this area have a very good, even excellent relationship. In order to support this claim we can mention the fact that during World War II, in the ranks of the formation of the Independent State of Croatia, Catholics and Muslims were fighting together, on the same side. Moreover, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was one of the parties in the war, in practice, the population of Islamic faith embodied in the Bosnjaci and Catholic population represented by Bosnian Croats formed the alliance. Why is this so, when it is clear that between Christianity-Islam, looking at the global scale, there is a centuries-old animosity? The answer can be found in the fact that there is a common interest which is reflected in the common struggle against a common enemy, which was seen in Orthodox Christianity, which in this region naturally gathered around the Serbian Orthodox Church in the religious sense and the Republic of Serbia in the political sense. Here one can recognize religious disunity that followed the political disunity when it comes to relationships and long-term protection of religious interest of Christianity in this region.

The importance of the Balkans as a transit route is clear and unambiguous. As such, this region historically has been subject to constant changes and adaptation of new conditions of life which brought with them numerous invaders, businessmen, merchants and people passing this region to the final destination. They brought with them new customs which eventually became the basis for the emergence of a new, specific cultural heritage. The importance of the Balkans is not less contemporary developments. On the contrary, the region is still one of the most important geostrategic points on the globe. From the perspective of the conflict of religions, the importance of this region in the best way was highlighted by Samuel Huntington in his book "The clash of the civilizations". This conflict between the Western Christian civilization and Eastern Islamic civilization began in the Middle Ages, is going on nowadays and is likely to last until the full realization of the superiority of one religion¹⁶.

HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISM IN THE BALKANS

Islamic extremism is a phenomenon that cannot be linked to one geographical region. Therefore, one of its main features is that it has global character. However, each individual region has specific conditions that contributed to the appearance of Islamic extremism. These conditions are numerous. They derive from different spheres of social life, of which special attention should be focused to the historical, political, sociological and security spheres. The Balkans and the Balkan Peninsula, as its central part, are characterized by a set of specifics that

¹⁶ Hatidza Beriša, Mila Jegeš, Igor Barišić.: „Institution building of and fight against crime”, Меѓународна научна конференција: *Истраживање, безбедности-приступ, концепти и политика*, 02-03. јун 2015. године, Зборник аустраката, Охрид, Република Македонија, pp. 4 -9

in general terms were mentioned above in the paper. This part presents the main reasons for the emergence and development of Islamic extremism in this part of the European continent. The geopolitical significance of the region, historical events, multiethnic, multicultural and multi-confessional societies are some of the main reasons for the emergence and development of Islamic extremism in the Balkans. Those reasons need to be analyzed, both individually and in their mutual correlation, but also in the correlation with the interests of regional and world powers. The interests of great powers historically have always been directed when it comes to shaping the security situation in the Balkans. The emergence of Islam in the Balkans began with the conquests of Turkish Empire. This is the first fact which should be borne in mind when it comes to the causes of Islamic extremism. At first glance, this seems illogical. However, there is link that can represent the basic cause of Islamic extremism. The arrival on the ground of Southeast Europe marked the beginning of the five centuries' rule of the Ottoman invaders. It is indisputable that the Turks also brought with them a large number of positive civilization changes in the daily lives of the population in these areas. However, the wounds inflicted by the Turkish occupiers were more important for the Christian population in the Balkans. The Christian population has not yet forgotten and never should forget the evil that plied Ottoman state. There are many methods that Turkey applied when they conquered Christians in order to maintain their regime in every part of its empire. A significant moment that must be taken into consideration in this context is the identification of religion and national or ethnic identity. The fact that the Ottoman Empire was a classic example of this identification and it can be said theological nation persistently emphasizing their own ethnic and religious superiority over oppressed Christian population¹⁷.

Because of the hostile attitude of the occupying forces toward the local Christian population the natural and strong sense of hostility appeared. That feeling was the guiding principle that led to rebellions and organized uprisings. As the time passed, from the conquered Christian poor nations the Turkish Empire was confronted with stronger and a more serious enemy. The stronger the enemy was the stronger animosity between the opposite parties was. This was particularly the case in the area of the Balkan Peninsula, nowadays the countries of the Western Balkans¹⁸. The gradual decline in power of the Ottoman Empire and its downfall in the Balkans caused the sense of defeat, helplessness, anger and desire for revenge directed against the Christian population. The development of such feelings is completely understandable given that it was hard to give up all the privileges of wealth and a sense of superiority over, until yesterday, the oppressed Christians. These feelings are deeply instilled in the consciousness of leaving Turkish state and the Muslims who remained in the Balkans. Such developments caused the centuries of hostility, both at political level and at the inter-religious lines. Local people of Islamic faith felt threatened by the new authorities knowing that they were yesterday's protectors of the Ottomans who ruled over the Christian population. Wherever there is a sense of vulnerability and discontent for the attitude of the state towards some ethnic or religious community, regardless of whether it is justified or not, there are also conditions for the development of extremist ideas¹⁹.

17 Simeunović, D.: A new spate of violence, war informant, 1-2 / 2,002th

18 The term was made official after a public promotion of the EU summit in December 1998. "Western Balkans" is not geopolitical, geostrategic, or a specific geographic category. It is only practical political-economic term which was created as a common EU definition of a part of the South East Europe countries in the region, with the aim that on the basis of their mutual cooperation and assistance, relying on the cooperation and financial support of the EU they could quickly reach European standards placed before this countries in the process of its enlargement and in this part of Europe. Source: Solaja, M.: Balkans in the transatlantic crack, CIR, Banja Luka, 2006, pp. 25.

19 Hatidža Beriša, Katarina Jonev, Igor Barišić.: Islamic state - the causes of genesis and influence of regional powers, 7th International scientific conference, "Contemporary Trends in Social Control of Crime", 30-31. 05.2016. Ohrid, Skopje: Faculty of security, 2016, str 7

Historical period of the last decade of the 20th and the beginning of 21st century is extremely important for the creation and development of Islamic extremism in the Balkans. The concept of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was based on the suppression of national and religious consciousness at the expense of the general ideas of equality and the interests of the state. The main problem was the uneven and unequal status of the leaders of certain Member States, and thus of certain nations. First of all, it refers to the relationship with the Republic of Serbia and its provinces and the Serbian people. This resulted in a lower level of economic and general social development. Bearing in mind the fact that a significant number of the population of the Islamic religion lived in the Republic of Serbia and its southern province, the general situation inevitably struck them, as well. The local Muslim population saw problem in their position and status within the authorities of the Republic of Serbia which was one of the main reasons to start their own vision of the struggle for a better life. The epilog is clear and well known. The focus of the origin and development of extremism among the population of Islamic faith was in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. In the last decade of the 20th century, after the fall of the joint state, there has been a significant expansion of Islamic extremism in the Balkans.

The civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina which, in addition to fighting for the definition of national identity, was the conflict between Orthodox Christianity and Islam resulted in the arrival of a large number of volunteers from the ranks of the Islamic population worldwide in the Balkan region. The emergence of holy warriors, the Mujahedin contributed to more explicit religious line of this war. Special units were formed from these people, accounted for such crimes against the opposing side from which the modern world, intentionally or unintentionally turned a blind eye. Upon completion of the war, some of these people permanently resided in Bosnia and Herzegovina and represents a long-term potential security threat. This threat can be achieved by a negative impact on the security of the state, but also of the Balkan region as a whole.

First, that part of the population had fought on many battlefields around the world for their version of Islam. This is a problem because they do not accept a different view of life and faith, and members of other nations and religions are considered infidels and a permanent enemy. Such an attitude towards life and consciousness cannot contribute to a stable security situation, especially not living together with those who do not think the same. It is important to emphasize that the Mujahedeem have the same attitude toward the majority of the local population of the Islamic religion that is not extremist-minded.

Secondly, the arrival and permanent stay of Mujahedeem in the Balkans has resulted in the creation of a base for Islamic extremists. In the period after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and on the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, on several occasions, the security concerns took place with members of the Islamic extremists from the ranks of the Mujahedeem and members of the Wahhabi movement. It is important to note that Islamic extremists in the region are connected to each other and work together extremely well. They are linked with criminal structures, above all, for the procurement of weapons and equipment, trade of illegal goods and the similar. Given that the Balkan region is located on a very busy transit route to Europe there is inevitable link with Islamic extremists in the Middle East. Islamic extremists from the Middle East seek any kind of support for their operations both in the Middle East and for actions targeted on Europe from their counterparts in the Balkans. In support of this contention is the fact that modern Europe, after the terrorist attacks carried out in Paris and Brussels in 2015 and 2016 seriously emphasizes the importance of the influence of Islamic extremism in the Balkans and its relations with the Islamic state²⁰.

²⁰ The Islamic state is transnational, jihadist, terrorist organization of Sunni extremists emerged as a branch of Al Qaeda. It is also known under the names of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL),

There are several reasons for the increase in the European concern for the security situation in South Eastern Europe. The Balkan transit corridor, in addition to a huge number of migrants from the region of the Middle East, is one of the main routes of infiltration of extremist Islamic state in Europe. According to available data of security services, weapons that were used in the mentioned terrorist attacks on the territory of Western Europe, originate from the former Yugoslavia²¹. It is significant that the officials from some Balkan countries admit that Islamist extremists gathered around members of the Islamic state are present on their territories. Thus, in September 2014 the Albanian Foreign Minister, Ditmir Bušati, admitted that the followers of the Islamic countries had their camps in Albania.

In addition, it is interesting that the Minister of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dragan Mektic said that "... in some parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina the rule of law does not function. These communities refuse to recognize the legal order ...". Mektic, in the aforementioned statement, asked "How is it possible that they have established their guard in Maoča, the real points?"²². These facts show the seriousness of the problem of creation, existence and development of Islamic extremism in the Balkans, regardless of its form of manifestation. Five decades ago the estimated number of Islamic extremists in the Balkans, mostly centered around Alija Izetbegovic, numbered several hundred individuals. Some estimates indicate that today the number of Muslims who support some of the basic ideas of Islamic extremists gathered around the Islamic countries is potentially digit number. The results of a survey conducted by the Pew Institute in 2011 showed that the population of South-Eastern Europe with the Islamic religion is by far the most liberal and most moderate in comparison with other Muslims in the world. However, the data indicate that more than 400 000 Muslims from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Albania support what is essentially the ideology of the Islamic state²³. This is supported by the fact that a significant number of volunteers from the territory of these countries and other countries in the region was in the ranks of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

The Republic of Serbia, as part of the Balkan region is faced with the emergence of Islamic extremism, primarily in the area of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, the municipalities of Presevo, Bujanovac and part of municipality Medvedja and part of the area of Raska region. Those territories were, in recent history, the scene of conflicts between the security forces of the Republic of Serbia and illegal armed formations and groups created by the members of the local population of the Islamic religion. The activities of Islamic extremists that are based on Wahhabism were registered in the area of Raska. In March 2007, the coordinated action of the Ministry of Interior on the mountain Great Ninaja destroyed a Wahhabi extremist group. There was even an armed clash with security forces²⁴.

The emergence of Islamic extremism in Serbia is related both to historical developments and events, as well as general social and economic situation in the country and the region. In addition, very important reasons for the expansion of Islamic extremism in the territory of Republic of Serbia were wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo and Metohija and the municipalities of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja. As previously stated, the events of the war in the Balkans in the 90's had essentially national, but also a prominent religious

the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham). It acts on the territory of Iraq and Syria, where they declared "caliphate", but its objectives related to other areas in the world that are principally inhabited by the Muslim population. In practice, this means that the projected territory of the Islamic state includes large parts of Europe, Asia and Africa.

21 Bardos, G.: article 'From the Balkans to the Islamic state,' www.politika.rs/, /05.12.2015.

22 Ibid 05.12.2015.

23 Ibid 05.12.2015.

24 In the above action of the security forces of the Republic of Serbia, an Islamic extremists who was a member of Wahabbi movement Ismail Pendić from Novi Pazar was assassinated.

character. Because of the sense of religious identity and the need to help religious brothers, a significant number of citizens of the Republic of Serbia of Islamic religion took part in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the side of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This fact points out the problem that concerns the attitude of the population of the Islamic religion in the Republic of Serbia towards the official government bodies. With this extreme part of the Muslim population, this ratio is unfavorable, and they do not observe the Republic of Serbia as their country and in practice they show that. One of the ways in which they show disrespect to the state is the manifestation of the "March on Hadžet" which is annually organized by the extreme part of the Muslim population in Novi Pazar in September. The aim of this event is the anniversary of the shooting of local Bosniaks charged with war crimes committed during World War II²⁵. An important aspect of the problem and significant for this paper is that on this occasion there is a section of local Muslims dressed in green uniforms with symbols of Sandzak indicating negative commitment to state of Serbia.

When considering the emergence and development of extremism of any kind, even Islamic in the Balkans, it is necessary to pay attention to the conditions arising from the general social and economic situation. The common characteristic of the countries of Southeast Europe in the period after World War II is the development in terms of the communist planned economy under the influence and political action of the Warsaw Pact. With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the countries of South Eastern Europe found themselves in the vortex of transition from one economic system to another. The transition process was followed and accompanied by a series of negative consequences of which the most important are corruption and crime. There was a rapid stratification of society, where the middle class has virtually disappeared. On the one hand, there is a small number of very wealthy people, while on the other hand the vast majority of people live in conditions of misery and poverty. In addition, numerous crises that have struck the region affected even more the unfavorable economic and social situation. In these conditions, extremism is a phenomenon that occurs naturally. Unfavorable general situation, the inability to satisfy basic needs, as well as uncertainty about the existential sense influenced the accumulation of discontent for a substantial part of the people. In circumstances where government programs demonstrate their inefficiency, people who are in despair are offered alternative options to satisfy basic needs. Precisely such a situation is aggravated by trying to use the different social groups trying to reach their goals. By using the inability of state authorities to establish a favorable situation in the country, different forms of extremist organization took part in the security arena. It can be said that Islamic extremism is one of the derivatives of the adverse socio-economic conditions where the countries of the Balkans and South East Europe developed and are developing today.

Islamic extremism is a phenomenon intensified after the war in the Balkans in the late 90's of the last century. The events that followed the regime change in the area of North Africa known as the "Islamic Spring" which culminated in an unprecedented war on the territory of Syria and Iraq, have influenced the development of Islamic extremism in the region of Southeast Europe. With the advent of the Islamic State, Islamic extremism has gained a new, global dimension, both in terms of the objectives of the facts, and by supporters. A large number of volunteers from the Balkans in the ranks of the Islamic State indicate the seriousness of the situation. The countries of the region need to pay special attention to fight against Islamic extremists, returnees from the conflict in Syria and Iraq. These individuals represent a potentially special type of security threat, principally in terms of spreading their influence to

25 In 1944 in Novi Pazar, Partisans, executed a number of local Muslims accused of crimes during the Second World War. According to the data of the Party of Democratic Action in Novi Pazar about 2 000 Muslims from the area were killed without being tried or proved guilty. Source: www.bosnjaci.net, „SDA Sandzak calls on citizens to march on Hadžet“ / 19.5.2016. god

promote extremist ideas and support to like-minded people in the planning, preparation and execution of illegal activities in the region and beyond.

CONCLUSION

Extremism is an extremely complex security phenomenon. A number of specific features that characterize it make more complex its conceptual definition, as well as defining possible ways of dealing with them. The definition of extremism is affected by the specificity linked to specific characteristics of the individual²⁶. In this sense, extremism has a certain amount of abstract sphere of its existence that is unique and very hard to predict. The most important determinant of extremism, intolerance towards the opinions and thoughts of others at the same time its willingness to attitudes and beliefs harrows available resources.

The Balkan Peninsula is a region characterized by a very favorable geographical position. The fact that the best natural foot traffic zone connecting the European and Asian continent extends over the Balkans causes multiple importance of this area. Conquers both from Europe and Asia influenced the economic development of a specific population of the Balkans, but also interethnic and interreligious relations. Specifics arise from the interweaving of interests of major international and regional powers, allocates security situation in the region of Southeast Europe. Throughout history, on several occasions, Southeast Europe and the Balkans as its central and key part were often the scene of clashes and different levels of importance. The conflicts that occurred in the Balkans, at the end of the last century, confirmed the existence of long and deep problems which still affect the design of the security realities of the region.

The importance of the Balkans in spreading Islam further to the depth of the European mainland is crucial. The penetration of Islam on the continent occurred in the period of the Ottoman Empire. A key result of centuries-long rule of the Turkish Empire in this area was changed ethnic and religious structures and intensifying animosity between the Christian and Muslim population. This hostility is a permanent source of instability in the region which, in accordance with their interests, enthusiastically was used by the great and regional powers at the expense of the interests of the local population. Unstable environment and interethnic and inter-religious intolerance form the basis for the emergence of various forms of extremism and related security threats.

Islamic extremism in the Balkans rests on the understanding of its holders that countries in the region have unequal attitude towards Muslims than other non-Muslim population. In addition, Islamic extremism in the Balkans, principally on the Balkan Peninsula extended the hand of Islamic extremism from the region of the Middle East. Islamic state, as the most famous and most powerful Islamist extremist and terrorist organization has a significant impact on the occurrence and development of Islamic extremism in the Balkans. The fact that a significant number of volunteers from this region fought in the ranks of the Islamic countries clearly indicates the presence and potential of Islamic extremism. The second problem of participation of volunteers on the side of the Islamic State and its operation is the potential impact on the security situation after returning to their home countries. Therefore, the countries of the region should take this threat seriously and act promptly in order to forestall, foil and avoid the negative consequences that can result in returning returnees from the conflict in Syria and Iraq.

26 Laythe, Brian, Finkel, Deborah G., Bringle, Robert G., Kirkpatrick, Lee A. (2002). Religious Fundamentalism as a Predictor of Prejudice: A Two-Component Model, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Volume 41, Issue 4, 623-630.

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