Globalizing the Western Balkans: Transnational Crime, Fundamental Islam and Unholy Alliances

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Globalizing the Western Balkans: Transnational Crime, Fundamental Islam and Unholy Alliances

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other”.

Mother Teresa
Photographie 1. Travail de terrain dans la région des Balkans. La route Gostivar-Tetovo-Skopje en Macédonie

Régulièrement de nouvelles mosquées sont bâties dans ces régions recluses et isolées. Des groupes intégristes islamiques opéraient à partir de ces régions et finançaient la construction de ces mosquées (Juillet 2012).

Introduction: Globalization and transnational crime

1 There is no coherent formulation of the term globalization, although, as commonly defined, it refers to processes of international integration arising from increasing human connectivity and interchange of products, ideas, and other aspects of culture. Globalization is not a new phenomenon, however, the recent advances in transportation and telecommunication, including the rise of the Internet, represent major driving factors in promoting interdependence of economic and cultural activities. Globalization, therefore, is a comprehensive term that, among other things, refers to the reduction and removal of barriers between national borders to facilitate the flow of goods, services, funds, ideas, and labor. It also refers to the emergence of a global society. In The Consequences of Modernity, Anthony Giddens (1991: 6) argues, “Globalization can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa”.

2 After the collapse of the Soviet Union, economic, political, social and cultural events in one part of the world come to have significance for people in other parts of the world. The strive for economic development quickly spurred the flow of goods and capital across borders. This has further hastened by the growing ease of cross-border transportation and communication. Unfortunately, however, some of the factors that have improved the world’s economy and the welfare of many people, have also spurred the growth of transnational crime, terrorism and armed conflicts around the world. Although transnational crime and terrorism are not new phenomena, the speed, the extent, and the
diversity of actors involved in these illegal activities have rapidly changed over the past two decades. Today with the process of globalization, the turnover of the global criminal economy is estimated at one trillion dollars; around four percent of the world’s population takes illegal drugs, up to half a trillion dollars are laundered through the world’s financial systems every year, between four and five million people are smuggled each year, and up to a million people are trafficked against their will (Galeotti, 2005: 1-2).

Scholars, for example, have argued that the introduction of the Schengen agreement within the European Union (EU) has promoted increased movement of goods and people, including criminals, because it permits individuals to travel within Europe without border checks or passport controls (Shelley 2005 : 7). The growth of the Internet combined with the growing imbalances in the world’s market has also led to the rise of new forms of crime, including commercialized vice.

The Balkan countries, similarly to other newly emerging democracies, did not stay immune to these global processes. After the fall of communism and the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the term “Western Balkans” became synonym for organized crime, political corruption, and even terrorism. Ethnic Albanian, Serbian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Bosnian criminal groups have become widely known for their criminal activities. According to Interpol reports, these groups are active across four continents (Interpol, 2009). The International Community has stated on numerous occasions that organized crime groups originating from the Balkans pose one of the main security threats to the Union (Council of the EU, 2003; Europol, 2006; UNODC, 2008). Moreover, the fast expansion of radical Islamist networks in the Balkans has become another point of concern after 1991. In weak post-conflict states Wahhabis have been using radical Islam as a platform for political ideas and activities as well as to legitimize political, economic and social behavior.

This paper argues that globalization processes create new forms of integration but they also lead to new forms of social exclusion and temporary “culture conflict” – conflict of conduct norms that arises either as a result of a process of group differentiation within a cultural system, or as a result of contact between norms drawn from different cultural systems (Sellin, 1938). The paper explains how and why increased social mobility, growing inequality and above all clash of normative systems have all contributed to the increasing number of conflicts, organized crime activities and radical movements in the Balkans. These aspects of globalization have led to the development of various movements for social, political and economic change. Modern-day transnational organized crime and terrorist groups should be regarded as bi-products of globalization; although one should not ignore the numerous benefits that globalization has brought to the world’s peoples. This paper gives an overview of the origin, nature and expansion of Balkan organized crime groups and radical Islamist networks after the fall of communism.

1. The breakdown of Yugoslavia

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was drawn into a highly destructive conflict in 1991. The collapse of the federal state culminated in the secession of its more developed republics, Slovenia and Croatia. By 1992 the struggle shifted to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Europe experienced the bloodiest war on its territory since the Second World War. In less than three years, 4.3 million Bosnian citizens were displaced and up to
a quarter of a million were killed. During the same period the Albanian government’s laxity in economic regulation allowed fraudulent financial pyramid schemes to proliferate. The collapse of these schemes in 1997 eradicated the savings of a large section of the Albanian population and led to an outburst of popular anger and destruction that cost the lives of some 2,000 Albanians.

7 By 1997 newspapers started writing about weapons moving from Albania to Kosovo for the support of rising ethnic Albanian paramilitaries. By March 1998 the situation in Kosovo became highly unstable. Kosovo-Albanians demanded the upgrade of their autonomous province to the seventh Yugoslav Republic. The Serbian President, Slobodan Milosevic, not only rejected this demand, but he sacked what was left of Kosovo’s political autonomy (Troebst, 1998). In 1989, the Serbian Assembly stripped off Kosovo’s autonomous power that they enjoyed since 1974 and as a consequence the political situation drastically deteriorated.

8 During the early 1990s, the Kosovo-Albanian leadership established parallel institutions that operated the health care and education sectors. Radicalization process among the Kosovo-Albanians followed after 1995. The Balkans also witnessed the birth of an underground militia known as the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army, Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës or UÇK). Following the establishment of the KLA, Kosovo-Albanians started an armed rebellion against Serbian authorities (1998-1999).

9 At this time period, the international press labeled Republic of Macedonia, the Balkan “oasis of peace” as it wasn’t affected by the regional wars as much as the other republics. The first actions by ethnic Albanians in Macedonia occurred in 2000, mainly along Macedonia’s border with Kosovo. During 2001 and 2002 the ethnic killings intensified leading to a conflict in Macedonia.

10 The wars in the Balkans that lasted for about a decade (1991-2001) had many unwanted consequences. Conditions of political volatility, social disorder, and economic chaos created favorable environment for the expansion and continuity of corrupt and criminal practices, often in the name of “nation building” and “ethnic survival.” Segments of the social masses claimed that activities, such as arms and oil smuggling, or even extortion, were necessary for their survival as well as for “nation building”’. Accommodations between authorities and organized crime further fostered the development of non-transparent societies. The lack of political will to combat organized crime left a legacy of institutional ambivalence towards illicit activities. Other factors, such as international embargos, confusing immigration laws, and the strive for better life in the West also contributed to the rise of transnational Balkan organized crime. Finally, the regional wars and the growing number of Balkan émigrés strengthened the Balkan criminal networks around the world and led to the creation of powerful and transnational criminal-political alliances. In the following we will give an overview of the development of several illicit markets in the Balkan region, and then provide a theoretical explanation of the origin of these phenomena.
2. The rise of transnational organized crime

2.1. The arms trade and cultural globalization

One of the international community’s first reactions to the outbreak of the Yugoslav wars was the arms embargo imposed on all six Yugoslav republics in 1992. The UN embargo had detrimental impact on the Army of Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo since Serbia inherited the lion’s share of the former Yugoslav People’s Army’s (YPA) arsenal. Before its violent breakdown, SFR of Yugoslavia maintained one of the largest armies in Europe. The YPA was a force of 195,000 soldiers equipped with sophisticated military capabilities and under the central control of Belgrade, the capital of Serbia (Bromley, 2007: 200). The YPA was based on the Soviet model and about 90 percent of the arms were produced domestically. As the wars in the Balkans started, the army stockpiles were the primary source of weapons for paramilitary and militia structures. The Serbian army and its paramilitaries had access to most of these weapons stored on Serbian territory. The only thing that Serbia was lacking was oil. The UN embargo also offered an immediate opportunity for criminal groups to organize smuggling channels to supply Yugoslavia with oil. Oil smuggling was initially organized by the Serbian State Security Service, but many ordinary citizens also became involved in the business that was considered a great source of income (Hajdinjak, 2002).

The Bosnian government first lobbied to have the UN embargo lifted. This was opposed by the United Kingdom, Russia and France. Therefore, in order to push forward for their independence, many politicians as well as criminals from the smaller Yugoslav republics, such as Bosnia and Kosovo, engaged in strategic alliances with foreign state and non-state actors, for the importation of weapons. The embargo drove Bosnia into alliances with some of the world’s most radical countries who provided Bosnia with weapons, human resources and money (Mincheva and Gurr, 2010: 194).

As the war progressed, Bosnian Serbs received military supplies from Serbia, while Bosnian Croats were supported by Croatia. It appears that the majority of the groups supplying weapons to Bosnian Muslims (known as Bosniaks) came from Islamic countries among which, Iran, Turkey, Sudan and Saudi Arabia (Wiebes, 2006). Commentators claim that just between May 1994 and January 1996, Iran supplied Bosniaks with about 5,000 tons of arms and ammunition (Anastasijevic, 2006). In fact, one of the largest contingents of weapons that ever entered the Balkan region was in 1994–1995 and it was shipped from Iran to Bosnia via Croatia, as part of a secret US program helping the Bosnian Army (Aldrich, 2002). The opening of the borders after 1991 enabled easier transport of weapons as well as people across countries.

Arms were also coming into the Balkan region from Chile and other parts of South America. Recently, two Pinochet-era generals were given five-year jail sentences for illegal arms trafficking from Chile to Croatia in 1991 (Bunting, 2008). The Chilean shipment—11 tons of armaments—was disguised as humanitarian aid to Sri Lanka. UN officials intercepted the arms in Budapest airport. It is often noted that Croatian arms dealers, who also trafficked cocaine from Latin America, were protected by their connections with the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), the ruling party in the presidency of Franjo Tudman (Curtis and Caracan, 2002: 11).
The wars in the Balkans ended in by the end of 2001 but the illegal arms trade remained a profitable business for the well-connected Balkan criminals. A report published by the British Center for Defense Studies pointed out that, there is a regular trickle of small arms primarily from the Balkan region, which could increase as the EU and the Schengen Rim both expand to the east and south-east (Sagramoso, 2001: 1–2). The report adds that “Small arms and light weapons (SALW) have fed the local criminal underworld as well as European terrorist groups, such as the Real IRA, thus contributing to the undermining of West European public safety” (2001:1–2). Confiscations in the UK of massive arms shipments from Croatia, thought to be destined for the Real IRA, denote the growing threat of the Balkans as a major source of smuggled arms (Bazargan, 2003; Akinsanya, 2003; Hales et al., 2006). Moreover, France saw the same disturbing trends. “Pistols, assault rifles and even rocket launchers […] turn up in France ever more frequently since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Balkans conflicts […] falling prices prove that these arms are becoming more and more numerous” (Davis et al., 2001: 22). Various sources also indicate that the Chinese made Rocket-Propelled Grenade (RPG-7) used in the 2007 terrorist attack against the US embassy in Athens originated from the Albanian barracks looted in 1997 riots and was then smuggled into Greece via Albanian established criminal networks (Kostakos, 2007).

This trend has had a tremendous impact on the foundation of European societies. Fears have been expressed that due to cultural globalization and increased interaction between people, gun crime and gun culture are gradually becoming permanent features of Western European capitals (Arsovska and Kostakos, 2008). Furthermore, many scholars and politicians have argued that the liberalization of trade and the opening of borders, facilitating easier travel of goods, people, ideas and cultures, are expected to augment the impact of this phenomenon (Shelley, 2005; Galeotti, 2005).

2.2. Diasporas and criminal-political ties

The recruitment of ex-prisoners, patriotic bandits and career criminals in the fight against state enemies was also common during the Yugoslav wars. There have been numerous allegations by Western law enforcement agencies that the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), during its rise, cooperated with ethnic Albanian criminals inside and outside of Kosovo. Similarly to the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in order for the Kosovo’s shadow government to function and the KLA to arm itself, large amounts of money were needed. The KLA was not supported formally by any state so it had to rely on other alternative sources of funding (Raufer, 2003; Lewis, 2011; Lowen, 2011). According to investigated cases, funds to the KLA came from ordinary Albanians in the Diaspora as well as drug traffickers operating throughout Western Europe and the USA. This support was not limited to money alone but drug traffickers also sent armed men to fight alongside the KLA and were buying weapons on KLA’s behalf. Whereas the connection between the KLA and organized crime is hard to quantify, there are known court cases from Germany, Italy, Belgium and the Czech Republic, which strongly suggest a connection between drug traffickers and the KLA (Jonsson, 2013).

In Belgium, the so-called “Albanian mafia” boss VH left bullets in front of the doors of the people from the Albanian diaspora as a reminder that the “voluntary” taxes they had to pay in support of the shadow government and the KLA were not really “voluntary”. The survival of the KLA depended on the financing provided by patriotic bandits operating
across borders. The so-called voluntary taxes were sent to humanitarian organization such as Vendlindja Thërret “The Motherland calls.” Xhavit Haliti was the former head of logistics for the KLA and by 2011 was a senior parliamentarian for the PDK party in Kosovo. According to one KFOR intelligence report, Haliti ran the Homeland Calling Fund and when funding dried up, “turned to organized crime on a grand scale” (Lewis, 2011).

Similarly to Bosnia-Herzegovina, the ethnic conflict legitimized and supported Kosovo’s international criminal-political nexus in the name of “nation building.” The conflict provided criminals with an opportunity for episodic release from moral constraints. Moreover, Western intelligence agencies also turned a blind eye to the emerging criminal-political nexus in Kosovo. Since the early 1990s many have been aware of the connection between the KLA and drug traffickers (Layne, 1999). Following the end of the Kosovo war it was reported that Kosovo became fertile ground for drug traffickers and that the amounts of heroin trafficked through Kosovo doubled (Klebnikov, 2000; The Center for Geopolitical Drug Studies 2011). Following the conflict, the KLA itself was formally disbanded, however, many of the former KLA commanders quickly put another hat and moved into politics. With politics came crime (Jonsson, 2013; Mitchell, 2002; Marty, 2010; Brunnwasser, 2011; ICG, 1999). Former KLA commanders often claim that all accusations against them are the work of foreign conspiracies.

Furthermore, when the multi-party system was introduced in Albania, criminals from the Albanian Diaspora also started with the massive financing of the Democratic Party (DP) – the first opposition party in Albania. DP was in a great need for funds, so the party welcomed the financial contributions from the Albanian Diaspora. Sali Berisha’s party was promoting openly pan-Albanianism in the 1990s and was accepting money from Albanian criminals living abroad. In the Belgian Federal Prosecution Service’s Albanian case LG, one of the defendants used to be an officer in President Berisha’s republican guard in Albania. In late 1997, when the Berisha regime collapsed subsequent to the pyramid schemes scandal, the defendant was dismissed during the change of power. During his cross-examination, he explained how he had bought a visa via an acquaintance in the Greek embassy in Albania: “I acquired the Greek visa in the following way. A man I knew, who shall remain nameless because I am frightened of him, has ties with the Greek embassy. I handed in my passport and he took steps to secure the visa. I paid him 2,500 euros for the Greek visa” (CEOOR, 2005). Another Albanian defendant in the same case had also been a security agent under Berisha and had a diplomatic passport when he lived in Brussels. When convicted over the Albanian smuggling case in Dendermonde, he continued his criminal activities from prison. In this case, funds transferred in the name of the same defendant to Berisha’s Democratic Party were also discovered. One of the many Albanian smuggling victims in this case used to be a gunrunner for the KLA (CEOOR, 2005; Arsovska and Janssens, 2009).

In Bosnia-Herzegovina the most important case is that of Jusuf Prazina (alias Juka). Jusuf Prazina was known in Sarajevo as a racketeer and underworld figure before the hostilities broke out in April 1992. Juka was sent to jail five times before the war. However, following the start of the siege of Sarajevo, this patriotic bandit was able to gather 3,000 men willing to defend Sarajevo from the attacks of the Croatian army (Selimbegović, 2002). Juka’s group, known as the “Wolves,” was armed with shotguns and Kalashnikovs. When the conflict started in Bosnia, the government under Alija Izetbegović and its formal army was unorganized. Thus the assistance of armed groups such as Juka’s private army was welcomed. As a favor, the group’s pre-war criminality was overlooked (Vreme, 1994).
The political acceptance of criminal behavior gradually led to public acceptance of crime and during the post-communist times of war, it became very difficult to distinguish right from wrong.

According to sources, Prazina was proclaimed to be a hero by the Bosnian press while the Western media frequently portrayed him as a Robin Hood figure (Selimbegović, 2002). Despite the myth surrounding Juka’s heroism he was known for his brutality not only towards the “enemies” but also towards his co-patriots. During the war, Juka and his group were reported to have killed and raped civilians in Sarajevo and Mostar. They allegedly looted houses, stole cars, and handed out Mostar apartments to the Croatian military. Juka reportedly controlled the black market, which included stolen UN humanitarian supplies (Selimbegović, 2002; Vreme, 1994). Towards the end of the conflict, Juka was able to escape to Belgium and ask for protection. Soon after his escape, rivals assassinated Juka in Belgium.

During the 1990s it became difficult for foreign asylum officers to distinguish between those asylum seekers who really needed the protection of foreign governments, and those who only wanted to take advantage of the situation and to immigrate to Western countries. According to Interpol (2009) some ethnic Albanian criminals have up to forty aliases, the reason being that, during the 1990s, it was very easy to obtain a new identity in Kosovo. Only two witnesses were needed to confirm a person’s identity. Many criminals from the Balkan region have falsely claimed to have suffered during the conflict in Kosovo and were granted a political asylum in the West. Many arrested or wanted criminals in Western Europe and the US have the status of political refugees. Others have obtained EU or US citizenship by marrying EU or US nationals (Interpol, 2009). Obtaining foreign nationality has allowed them to move freely within the EU countries, or within the US. In fact, according to Interpol (2009) report, for the purpose of smuggling various illegal goods, ethnic Albanian offenders tend to hire truck drivers of ethnic Albanian ethnicity who hold EU passports so they can easily travel across Europe. According to investigated court files, some of these arrested individuals have the status of political refugees from Kosovo, although they may be ethnic Albanians from Macedonia or northern Albania.

2.3. Drugs trafficking

Globalization and the regional wars had strong impact on the drug trade in the Balkans, too. The Balkan route is well known for the trafficking of drugs, particularly after the 1990s. This route involves the trafficking of goods, particularly heroin, from Turkey to Western Europe. From Turkey, heroin is often transported to Western European distribution centres such as the Netherlands, but before reaching its final destination it travels via the Balkan countries. Prior to the Balkan conflicts, heroin went mainly through Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, but the 1992-1995 wars redirected part of the trade through Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania. This enabled ethnic Albanians to take over the heroin market in the region (Interpol, 2009; Europol, 2005; UNODC, 2008; Heinemann-Grüder and Paes, 2001).

After 2000 both Europol and Interpol have been very active in collecting information on ethnic Albanian organized crime figures. The two organizations have projects (working files) focusing exclusively on ethnic Albanian criminals and drug traffickers. More than eight hundred ethnic Albanians were listed in the Interpol’s reports as “wanted” on
serious drug trafficking charges, which points out to the drastic involvement of Albanians in this highly profitable illegal market. In fact, during the late 1990s, ethnic Albanians were blamed for trafficking between seventy and ninety percent of the heroin entering Switzerland. In 2005, the Italian Ministry of Social Solidarity reported that in Europe, about forty percent of the heroin trade is controlled by Albanian nationals while in 2006 the Italian Central Directorate for Antidrug Services, stated that in Europe, eighty percent of the heroin trade is controlled by Albanian nationals. Although the drug estimates vary, UNODC Report on crime in the Western Balkans concludes, “There is round consensus that Balkan organized crime groups, and particularly ethnic Albanian groups, are a hazard in West Europe. Arguably, Albanian heroin dealers are the single most notorious Balkan organized crime phenomenon” (UNODC, 2008).

26 According to Macedonian police sources, the drug trade via the Balkan route was run mainly by ethnic Albanian clans from the village of Arachinovo in Macedonia (such as the family-based criminal group known as “the Columbians”). They have been involved in illegal trafficking of heroin and cocaine, illegal manufacture, possession and trafficking of weapons and explosive materials for years. The money received from the drugs has been invested in buying real-estate, restaurants, villas, hotels and luxurious vehicles (Interpol, 2009). A lot of Arachinovo clans are known to have operated without a hindrance since the mid-1990s. Rumors about laboratories for production of heroin and factories for production of cigarettes operating illegally in these isolated ethnic Albanian villages, have been common. The Macedonian authorities, due to the regional interethnic wars, have been unable to control the ethnic Albanian villages in Macedonia, which led to the creation of a “state” within a state.

27 In Albania, “Banda e Lushnjës” or Aldo Bare’s gang, was formed in 1997 in the city of Lushnje, in Central-West Albania. Alfred Shkurti, who in 1998 changed his name to Aldo Bare, was recognized as the leader and founder of the notorious Lushnje gang. He was referred to as “the professor” or “i madhi” (“the great one”) by the members of his group. Aldo Bare and his associates have been known for their notoriety since the late 1990s. The group committed murders and beheaded people, manufactured explosives in their own laboratories, burned houses, threw explosives at the properties of their rivals and extortion victims, produced and smuggled drugs, threaten and killed police officers and prosecutors (Arsovska and Basha, 2011). The members proudly and paradoxically called themselves “the guarantors of law.” Aldo Bare gained power during the near collapse of Albanian state in 1997. According to anecdotal evidence and media reports from the 1990s, Bare brought votes to the political parties in Albania and in return his group was able to sell drugs and arms and extort people on the territory of Albania (Arsovska and Basha, 2011).

28 Since the early 2000s, it appears that Bosnia also gained prominent role in the drug trafficking chain. According to intelligence sources, drug traffickers from the Balkan region have moved their criminal empires there because of high levels of corruption and weak and fragmented law enforcement and criminal justice system. According to EU law enforcement agencies and the Bosnia State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA), one of the active leaders involved in one of the most sophisticated international drug trafficking networks is an ethnic Albanian man called NK. Together with his family and other regional associates, NK has been involved in smuggling of large quantities of heroin from Turkey to Western Europe. The group has kept close ties with smaller groups throughout the Balkan region, including those composed of Serbians, Montenegrins,
Turkish and Macedonians. They have also remained in close contact with groups from Germany, Switzerland, Spain, France, Mexico, the UAE and the US (JIR, 2010; Hopkins, 2009).

During the early 1990s, police reports show that NK was involved in the cigarette smuggling business in Kosovo, although no charges were brought against him. In 2001, UNMIK police confiscated contraband cigarettes belonging to NK in the village of Zahac in Kosovo, with the value estimated at thousands of euros. After UNMIK placed too much attention on NK in Kosovo, he moved his criminal empire to Bosnia and acquired Bosnian passport. Since the early 2000s, drug trafficking has become his primary criminal activity.

In the 2005 meeting of Heads of National Law Enforcement Agency (HONLEA), it was noted that the Balkan region was becoming a transit point as new trafficking routes for cocaine were established. These alternative routes aimed at overcoming the red-flagged trafficking routes and the striker port control measures put in place particularly after 9/11. The trade liberalization in the Balkans, its proximity to Europe as well as the presence of pre-established transnational criminal networks in the region, offer a fertile ground for the expansion of cocaine trafficking. On 7 January 2007, the Macedonian police seized 483kg pure cocaine at the Macedonia-Kosovo border. The cocaine was brought from Venezuela to the Bar port in Montenegro. Police indicate that it was going to be transported to Greece by truck transiting via Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia. According to the police this is the biggest drug seizure ever realized in Macedonia. The worth of the cocaine is estimated to be between 46 and 92 million euros. According to unofficial sources, the Greek criminal group paid an initial investment of 10 million euros for the delivery of the cocaine to Greece. According to the police, the money was most probably given by renowned international organized crime group composed of Swiss, Greeks and Germans who live in Greece and the importer of the cocaine was a Macedonian woman, known as Stanislava Cocorovska (Arsovska and Kostakos, 2008).

3. Expansion of radical Islam

Another outcome of globalization and the Yugoslav wars is the dissemination of fundamental Islam in the Balkan region. Wahhabism, one of the most radical interpretations of Islam, was first established in Saudi Arabia. It is known after a Muslim scholar Abd al-Wahhab. He embraced one of the Sunni religious laws initiated by Ibn Hanbal (A.D. 780-855) who believed that Islamic law is a sacred law that should not be subject to interpretation. In other words, he embraced a literal application of Islamic law that is mainly centered on Quran and Hadith (sayings and deeds of the prophet Muhammad) that left little or no room for reforms inside Islam. Abd al-Wahhab embraced such teachings in the XVII century, and in the middle of the same century, Saudi Arabia adopted Wahhabi Islam as its official religion (Lang, 2003).

Because of fanatical tenets of Wahhabi Islam, this form of Sunni Islam, according to scholars, is viewed as the most radical interpretation of its religion. For example, in her article *The Quran and Its Interpretations*, Amritha Venkatraman (2007: 5) argues that the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam “lends volatility to the aggression used by violent Jihadis.” Such violence originated from the literal application of Islamic tenets that were also emphasized in declaring *fatwa* (declaration of war) towards the West by former Al Qaida leader, Osama bin Laden, who was a Saudi national and a strict follower of Salafi
interpretation of Islam. Overall the Wahhabis are very conservative in their interpretation of Islam, and they draw on their teachings that justify violent Jihad to obtain their religious and political objectives (Venkatraman, 2007).

The fast expansion of radical Islamist networks and Wahhabi movements worldwide has been of major concern to the international community during the past two decades. This fundamental ideology is disseminated by Salafis, that derives from the Arab word “salaf al-salih” which means “the righteous ancestors” (Ayoob, 2008) Salafis are identified as the most intolerant Islamic crowd, which, according to Yahya Sadowski (2006), they were originally fostered by the Saudi and Pakistani government in response to the Shia revolution in Iran in 1979, but later lost control of such groups. They use Islam as a platform for political ideas and their fundamental ideology often causes fractions between groups. Salafis, for example, believe that people who do not practice their form of Islam are heathens and enemies. Saudis have managed to use their financial power to disseminate this ideology through sponsoring the construction of Islamic schools, and by establishing different charities and humanitarian organizations to achieve the same goal. The growth of charities and various organizations began in the 1970s when Saudi charities started funding Wahhabi schools (madrassas) and mosques in Asia, United States as well as Europe.

However, the Salafi movement in the Balkans was first associated with the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995). As noted at the beginning of the paper, one of the international community’s reactions to the outbreak of the wars was the arms’ embargo imposed on all six Yugoslav republics in 1992. The UN embargo drove Bosnia into alliances with some of the world’s most radical states, who provided Bosnia with human resources and money (Mincheva & Gurr, 2010). The majority of the groups supplying weapons to Bosnian Muslims came from Islamic countries (Wiebes, 2006). One of the most controversial cases, which illustrates how much the Bosnian government depended on outside aid for weapons, is linked to the Sudanese national, Elfati h Hassanein. Hassanein founded the Third World Relief Agency (TWRA) in Bosnia in 1987. According to Western officials the purpose of the organization was the rebirth of Islam in Eastern Europe. In 1995 the bank accounts of the TWRA showed that $350 million flowed from Muslim governments and radical Islamic movements to Bosnia. Iran, Sudan and Saudi Arabia were the largest contributors. Terrorists are also believed to have used the agency to get money to the Bosnian government, including Osama Bin laden. According to investigated cases, TWRA also had ties to Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman – a radical Egyptian convicted of planning terrorist bombings in New York and linked to the group that carried out the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 (Basha and Arsovksa, 2012).

The Bosnian Army also recruited radical Islamists. A UN study (S/1994/674/Add.2) from 1994 identifies 83 paramilitary forces operating in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. One of the more significant units was the Mujahidin, or holy warriors, who operated in support of the government of Bosnia. Many of them were veterans of the Afghan war. The Mujahedin began arriving in Bosnia in June 1992. In 1993 they formed the El Midzahid battalion, composed of 3,000 Islamic fighters, which was to serve under the Bosnian Army. Anecdotal evidence shows that the Mujahedin forces have been terrorizing the Muslims they came to protect in an effort to enforce Islamic practices. Through the years, the Serbs and the Croats have argued that the Mujahedin’s presence is evidence that the Bosnian Muslims intended on turning Bosnia into a fundamentalist Muslim state. In Bosnia-Herzegovina the extent of radical Islam became evident in 2010.
when a 23 year-old radical Muslim attacked the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo (Sito-Sucic, 2011).

Before 1996, Kosovo and Macedonia did not have any inter-religious conflicts, and religion was rarely a topic of discussion. The situation, however, changed in the late 1990s when the Salafi Islam was imported from foreign Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia. Many Saudi sponsored charities began operation in Kosovo and Macedonia. In 1999, soon after the conflict in Kosovo, many suspicious Islamic non-governmental and humanitarian organizations began operations in the country. For example, in April 2000, KFOR forces stormed offices of The Relief Committee, an organization funded by Saudi Arabia, because authorities suspected that members of the SJRC organization were associated to Al Qaida and were also behind attacks of two U.S. embassies (Wood, 2000). The organization rejected such claims, but a secret document from U.S. intelligence claimed otherwise. The document, later published by BBC (2000), claimed that the two leading members of the organization, Adel Muhammad Sadiq Bin Kazem and Wa’el Hamza Jalaidan are “associates of Osama bin Laden” and further implicated Wa’el Hamza Jalaidan as responsible for “moving money and men to and from the Balkans.”

In addition, another suspicious relief agency, Revival of Islamic Heritage Society, was found to be operating in Kosovo since 1999. This organization is a Kuwaiti based organization that has branches operating in several countries, among them one operating in Kosovo since 2000. According to the United States Department of Treasury (2002), this organization has been suspected to disseminate radical Islam and support terrorism. As a result, the Treasury froze their assets and they listed them as terrorist organizations. The organization was controlled by Otham A. O. Alihadid, the General Director for the branch, also wanted by Bosnian authorities since 1994 for charges in money laundering and corruption. A similar organization has been operating in Albania, but a court decision ordered to shut down its operation (Gazeta Shqip, 2007).

According to U.S. News Magazine’s investigation that lasted for over six months, it was concluded that Saudi government has funneled billions of dollars through different religious schools and charities to support jihadi organizations, and Al-Qaida cells across the globe. One of the principal findings of this investigation noted that just charities alone have received over $70 billion campaign money from the Saudis to disseminate Wahhabi sect worldwide (Kaplan et al., 2003).

In 2001, International Crisis Group (ICG) also reported on the operations of radical Islamic missionaries who distributed religious literature and offered training of local imams who then were sent to Saudi Arabia for religious education. The same ICG report showed that they spent “slightly over one million U.S. dollars” two months after they commenced their operation in the province. Half of those funds were dedicated to the education of over three hundred religious propagators.

The Salafi movement that is currently active in Kosovo has been, according to many experts, the main drive for the implementation of fundamental Islam in Kosovo. It appears that, today, as a result, there are frequent conflicts in the region between the moderate Muslim clerics on one hand and the Salafi trained clerics that established themselves in Kosovo after 1999, on the other. Many of the people responsible for disseminating such fundamental religious beliefs are individuals that have been educated in religious schools in various Islamic states (Lang, 2003). Shefqet Krasniqi, for instance, is an Albanian Islamic cleric educated in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. He is one example of these
Saudi products and his influence has grown steadily and many of his remarks created divisions and hatred among the Albanian community.

The influence of these Islamic trained preachers educated in the Wahhabi doctrine presents a threat to many societies because, as noted above, of their fundamental beliefs that destabilize social fabric and are highly politically charged. For example, Vali Nasr, a political science professor at the University of San Diego, specializing in the politics of Islamic extremism in South Asia, told *Frontline* in 2001 (PBS) that students who are taught in Saudi religious schools become radical preachers who encourage their followers to fight Christians, and attempt to recruit people among their followers to commit terrorist acts. Islamic scholars also claim that despite the fact that many political figures and common people condemned the acts of bin Laden, they did not condemned his message (*Frontline*, 2001).

In other interviews with *Frontline* (2001), sources also point out that in the Wahhabi hate teachings in Saudi Arabia, the followers, during ninth grade, read the Hadif (a statement of the Prophet Mohammed). The book discusses the victory of Muslims over Jews.

The day of judgment will not arrive until Muslims fight Jews, and Muslim will kill Jews until the Jew hides behind a tree or a stone. Then the tree and the stone will say, 'Oh Muslim, oh, servant of God, this is a Jew behind me. Come and kill him.' Except one type of a tree, which is a Jew tree. That will not say that.\(^{17}\)

Witnesses indicate that the same teachings are now suspected to being used in Kosovo and Macedonia. The consequence of fundamental Islam in Western Balkans has been noted when recently unknown actors desecrated the Jewish cemetery in the capital of Kosovo. The media reported that Nazi graffiti were sprayed over tombstones in Jewish cemetery and local authorities later reported that “bearded guys” who are believed to belong to the Wahhabi movement are to be blamed for this hate crime (*Koha Ditore*, 2011). All Albanian politicians and the international community in Kosovo condemned the act. Blerim Latifi, a professor at the University of Prishtina and senior advisor to the Kosovo Prime Minister, called such anti-Semitic acts barbaric and Islamic fascism (Latifi, 2011).

A similar approach has been taking hold in Albania after the collapse of communism. Several Middle Eastern countries took advantage of this underdeveloped country and made huge investments to spread the Wahhabi ideology. In his book *The Coming of Balkan Caliphate* (2007), Christopher Deliso furnishes evidence of how various Islamic states provided funding for the construction of hundreds of mosques and offered opportunities for young Albanians to study Salafi interpretation of Islam for free in Islamic states.

In addition, Macedonia also had to face with the global pattern of the importation of fundamental Islam. In April 2012, 800 police were involved in a police operation, called “Monster,” raiding 26 houses around the Macedonian capital of Skopje and seizing weapons, bullet proof vests and Islamic literature. These Macedonian police forces arrested twenty individuals suspected for the murder of five ethnic Macedonian fishermen in April 2012. The killings fueled tension in Macedonia between majority Macedonians and the mostly Muslim Albanian minority. According to press statement from Interior Minister Gordana Jankuloska, all of them had fought previously in Afghanistan and Pakistan and were followers “of radical Islam.” In a press conference Jankuloska, reported that, “The intention of this crime was to create a sense of insecurity and fear among the general population.” The current investigation, however, is ongoing.
so the main causes leading to this violent incident are not clear despite the fact that the Macedonian police have already described these detainees as “Wahhabis-related.”

Despite the lack of resources and intelligence, government authorities in the region are well aware of the expansion of fundamental Islam in the Balkans. Most recently, the Kosovo Minister of the Interior, Bajram Rexhepi, admitted for Deutsche Welle (2011) that authorities in Kosovo have been closely monitoring religious radical movements in his country. There are constant tensions between traditional and Salafi clerics about the influence and the jurisprudence of religious authority in the region. Arguments have been taking place in mosques as well as online, and are beginning to be of major concern to authorities in the Western Balkans. Such fundamental movements threaten to create fractions among various communities. The Albanian community in Kosovo, for example, has faced ethnic fractions since the expansion of fundamental Islam in the country. This phenomenon presents a major threat to society since Albanians identify with three various monotheistic religions. The majority is Muslim, but there are also a large number of Catholics, Shia Muslims and Orthodox communities of believers.

4. Globalization, culture conflict and economic strain: a discussion

Open borders, faster communication, cultural and labor exchange, and global markets are some, among the many, positive attributes linked to the term “globalization.” However, “globalization” has its share of unwanted consequences, including social exclusion, global inequality and “culture conflict.” In the previous sections we discussed the rapid development of several criminal markets and fundamental Islamic ideologies in the Western Balkans after the fall of communism but we did not analyze possible sociological and criminological theories explaining such acts.

The collapse of the communist regime in Eastern Europe brought numerous changes to the western Balkan region. Most Balkan governments, influenced by the democratic West, started allowing opposition parties (multi-party democracy) in the early 1990s. One plausible explanation is that during this period, countries such as Albania – isolated from the rest of the world for almost fifty years – started experiencing “cultural shock” due to the rapid social change. After the downfall of communism, accompanied by a decline of state authority and sudden relaxation of coercive power of the state security apparatus, people were lost in a multi-loyalty system (tradition, religion, communist laws, Western laws, and popular culture). In Albania, Bosnia-Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo, where clear regulations were temporarily lacking, many people went back to religion and ancient customary laws to avoid anarchy (Arsovska and Verduyn, 2008; Waldmann, 2001; Jolis 1997). The swift expansion of Western norms and values in Balkan territories caused what Sellin (1938) referred to in his writings as “culture conflict”.

In criminology, “social disorganization” and “culture conflict” explanations have been applied to elucidate and explain various forms of conflict such as crime, war, suicide and more (see Sutherland, 1939 [1934,1924]; Sellin, 1938; Bain, 1939; Shaw and McKay, 1942). Edwin Sutherland (1939) argued that social disorganization is the basic cause of systematic criminal behavior and that cultural conflict is a specific aspect of social disorganization. A cultural system can be disorganized in the sense that there are conflicts between values, norms and beliefs within a widely shared, dominant culture.
For Sellin (1938), criminal law contains crime norms that reflect mostly the values of the group(s) successful in achieving control of legislative processes. He sought first to clarify the relations between social and legal norms, which, in his view, rapid urbanization had placed in a state of conflict. According to Sellin (1938) conduct norms that mirror the socio-cultural values of the other, less influential groups often enter into conflict with the governing norms. Hence, as noted in the introduction of the paper, the conflict of conduct norms arises either as a result of a process of group differentiation within a cultural system, or as a result of contact between norms drawn from different cultural systems. If the legal norms of one group are extended over areas formerly not cognizant of them, such extension might cause confusion and violation of these norms by persons living in the subjected area (Sellin, 1938). While we do not want to equate contemporary cultural globalization with “modernization”, “Westernization”, or “American cultural imperialism”, we do accept that in recent years, Western societies, directly or indirectly, have tried to impose their influence in regions with socio-cultural systems different to their own. Most western Balkan countries have no heritage of democratic norms and therefore have had difficulties in quickly adopting themselves to the new environment. Such situation may have contributed to the lack of order and the increase in crime in the region. Therefore, cultural globalization, we argue here, has led to the expansion of Western norms in non-Western societies, causing temporary “culture conflict” and increase in different forms of crime.

Moreover, materialistic values, emerging from the Western capitalist value system, in combination with weak social and state institutions, have also turned many people from the Balkans towards criminal innovation. According to Robert K. Merton (1938), a distinguished American sociologist, in the American society of the 1930s success goals were emphasized, but not the means to achieve such goals. This being the case, the only factors limiting goal achievement were technical and situational, not moral or legal. Merton argued that compulsive conformity to the American conventional norms and values fixated on material success goals promotes dysfunctional changes in non-economic institutions, and therefore leads to higher crime rates. The economy’s failure to provide adequate legal income-generation opportunities in the Balkans further strengthened the social strain in the society. The economic conditions were terrible during the 1990s, with more than 50 percent of the population living below the poverty line. The average salary in most Western Balkan countries ranged between $75 and $200 per month. Moreover, Kosovo still remains one of the poorest countries in Europe. According to World Bank figures from 2010-2011, the unemployment rate was more than 45%, with 17% of the population living in extreme poverty.

The weak economy could not offer people, particularly younger individuals, legitimate opportunities to earn money quickly, and the dysfunctional society and weak cultural emphasis on non-monetary success goals could not limit or satiate their human appetites. Thus some globalization-related outcomes such as temporary “culture conflict”, economic strain and lack of legitimate opportunities in weak states have all led to a number of anomalies in Balkan region.

Furthermore, the UN embargo, the politically charged wars and the seemingly necessary arm trade provided Balkan people with an opportunity for episodic release from moral constraints. As Matza and Sykes (1957) argue, criminals always find ways to neutralize the devastating effects of their actions by appealing to higher loyalties, denying injury or denying the victims. This paper argues that in a society with weakened laws and norms
partially due to rapid cultural globalization people find justifications for their amoral acts more easily. This combined with an easier travel of people, goods and ideas has led to the flourishing of various illegal markets in the Balkans.

Finally, the temporary release from moral strain and the lack of norms and opportunities in the region enabled many Islamic states to take advantage of the situation. They presented opportunities to confuse and poor young individuals to attend Islamic religious schools in various Islamic countries where they are indoctrinated with rigid dogma. Many of them returned in Western Balkans to preach an extreme form of Islam that further incited hatred and created fractions among communities there.

Conclusion

Globalization has opened countless opportunities for nations to improve their lives. However, it has also shown to have its “dark side.” This paper elaborates on the nexus between globalization, wars, organized crime and terrorism within the Balkan context. It argues that globalization has brought many benefits to the world but has also led to certain degree of “culture conflict”, social confusion and inequalities. Such processes have contributed to the increasing number of armed conflicts between states and ethnic groups. Organized crime and the spread of fundamental Islam have also been unwanted products of globalization processes. These are certainly not new phenomena, however the speed, the extent, and the diversity of actors involved in these illegal activities have rapidly changed over the past two decades.

The diversification of criminal activities of Balkan criminal networks, their ability to corrupt public officials and the political ambivalence towards illicit activities are all factors of concern for post-communist Balkan states. The global fundamentalist Islamic movements that are politically charged are trying to establish themselves in public center stage with an objection to install an Islamic state. They have also gained ground in producing animosity, inciting hatred and fractions between communities in the region.

Developing and weak countries such as Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania and Macedonia, with an underfunded and corrupt educational system, lack of clear norms and weak government institutions, have been unable to provide healthy environment for their youths who in turn have been an easy pray not only for criminal groups but also for Islamic fundamentalists.

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NOTES

1. By transnational crime we refer to acts that span national borders, violating the laws of more countries. The UN provides a list of eighteen crime categories that are considered transnational. These, among others, include money laundering, terrorism, theft of art and cultural objects, theft of intellectual property, illicit arms trafficking, airplane hijacking, sea piracy, insurance fraud, computer crime, environmental crime, trafficking in persons, corruption, drug trafficking, etc.

2. It is a term commonly used by EU and US politicians, and it refers to a group of countries from South-East Europe.

3. Personal interviews with experts on radical Islam were conducted in Albania in 2007 and in Kosovo in both 2011 and 2012. As a part of our research on radical Islam, we interviewed high-ranking law enforcement officials from Kosovo as well as clerks and political figures. In 2007 interviews were also done with senior analyst for PAMECA Arben Tabaku on radical Islam.

4. On 22 April 1996, four attacks on Serbian civilians and security personnel were carried out simultaneously in several parts of Kosovo. A hitherto unknown organization, calling itself the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), subsequently claimed responsibility.
5. Based on interviews with ethnic Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia during 2006 and 2007. For further discussion see: Arsovka and Verduyn, 2008; Arsovksa and Kostakos, 2008.


7. These caches were de facto controlled by Slobodan Milosevic, the president of Serbia.


11. See Sykes and Matza (1957) on neutralization techniques and drift theory.


13. Based on discussions with immigration and law enforcement officials from Belgium (2007) and the US (2010). Based on expert workshop discussion at the Belgium Federal Police (October 2008) and interviews with Laurent Sartorius (Belgian Federal Police) and immigration officers from Newark Immigration/Asylum Offices (2010).

14. The White house has sanctioned suspected Kosovar Albanian NK for drug trafficking. US President Barack Obama notified Congress saying he had sanctioned NK under the Kingpin Act, implemented by the US Department of Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) (Hopkins, 2012).

15. NK had submitted a request for Montenegrin citizenship, but Montenegrin Ministry of Internal Affairs rejected his request in January 2012. Regional media and several governments have classified NK as a drug gang leader and criminal, but he has denied being involved in any criminal activity.

16. In September 2010, Mansour Al-Hadj, born and raised in Saudi Arabia as a Muslim, currently a Director of Democratization in Arab & Muslim World Project The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), told United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs that during his education in Saudi Arabia, he was educated to “hate America, the West, Jews and Christians” and to “love jihad and those who wage jihad for the sake of Allah” (MEMRI : 1).

17. Excerpts from Frontline’s interviews on Wahhabism with Mai Yamani, an anthropologist who studies Saudi society; Vali Nasr, an authority on Islamic fundamentalism; Maher Hathout, spokesperson for the Islamic Center of Southern California; and Ahmed Ali, a Shi'a Muslim from Saudi Arabia. See detailed interviews: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saudi/analyses/wahhabism.html The text cited here is from Ali-Al-ahmed, a Shi'a Muslim who grew up in Saudi Arabia (Frontline 2001).
18. In their struggle to find their identity, some Albanians have allegedly returned to religion as well. With the return of religious freedom, many mosques and churches, which were closed in 1967, were re-opened in the 1990s. Some Albanians argued that amongst them there is a strong belief in customary law which means an eye for an eye and that in their lifetime the rule of law has never achieved anything, only guns have provided a measure of justice.

19. See research study on the meaning of violence and crime in contemporary Albanian societies, conducted by Arsovksa and Verduyn (2008).

ABSTRACTS

During the last couple of decades, the countries of the world have become increasingly interconnected into a single capitalist economic system. Globalization processes have facilitated the flow of goods and services. They have also led to new forms of exclusion, inequality and “culture conflict”. This paper elaborates on the nexus between transnational organized crime networks, fundamental Islamic movements and terrorist groups in the Balkan region, and argues that these movements for social, political and economic change are bi-products of globalization. After the fall of the Soviet Union, criminal-political formations expanded drastically in the newly emerging Balkan democracies. The weak government structures, the deteriorating domestic economy and the vulnerable government institutions made the Balkan region a safe haven for war profiteers, career criminals and fundamental Islamists. This paper gives a detailed overview of the origin, nature and expansion of several politicized illicit markets in the Balkans. It further elaborates on the birth of fundamental Islamic movements after communism. The complex interrelation between globalization, wars, organized crime and fundamental Islam is at the forefront of this paper.

Durant les deux dernières décennies, le monde s’est intégré dans un seul système économique capitaliste. Alors que les processus de mondialisation ont facilité les flux de biens et de services, ils ont aussi mené à des formes nouvelles d’exclusion, d’inégalité et de « conflit culturel ». Cet essai offre une réflexion sur le lien entre les réseaux transnationaux du crime organisé, les mouvements islamiques radicaux et les groupes terroristes dans la région des Balkans. Il soutient l’idée selon laquelle ces mouvements qui luttent pour le changement social, politique et économique sont les conséquences directes de la mondialisation. Après la chute de l’Union Soviétique, les formations politico-criminelles se sont rapidement accrues au sein des démocraties balkaniques émergentes. La fragilité des structures gouvernementales, la détérioration de l’économie domestique et la vulnérabilité des institutions ont transformé la région balkanique en lieu idéal pour ceux qui font des conflits armés leur fonds de commerce, pour les criminels de carrière ainsi que pour les intégristes islamiques. Cette recherche offre une analyse détaillée de l’origine, de la nature et du développement de plusieurs marchés illégaux dans la région des Balkans. Elle se penche aussi sur l’origine des mouvements intégristes islamiques depuis la fin du communisme. Au cœur de cette analyse se loge donc l’interface entre la mondialisation, les conflits armés, le crime organisé et l’intégrisme islamique.
INDEX

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