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Country Reports on Terrorism 2022: North Macedonia

BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM

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North Macedonia

Overview: The country's CT efforts during 2022 included harmonization with EU legislation and with international standards on investigation, prosecution, and information exchange. Government and civil society stakeholders finalized the 2023-27 National Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism strategies and respective action plans. North Macedonia cooperated with U.S. counterterrorism efforts, including in early detection. There were no terrorist attacks in 2022 and no reported departures to join ISIS.

The main terrorist threat stemmed from previously repatriated FTFs from Syria and Iraq. The National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism (NCCVET) estimated that 143 citizens of North Macedonia (excluding children) traveled or attempted to travel to Syria or to Iraq, or both, to join terrorist groups in recent years. Of these 143 adults (133 male, 10 female), 38 were killed, 79 returned, five are believed to remain in Syria, and two are in prison or a displaced persons camp. Authorities assessed the terrorist threat level to be "medium-low," although former ISIS members and sympathizers maintained a presence in the country. The government announced a decision to establish a Cyber Security Agency and a hybrid threats expert body at the Ministry of Interior (MOI).

2022 Terrorist Incidents: There were no terrorist incidents reported in North Macedonia during 2022.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: North Macedonia's legislative framework allows prosecution of individuals suspected of committing or aiding terrorist activities or participating in foreign wars. Sentencing for terrorism-related offenses improved significantly, compared with previous years, and sentences are now longer than in other Western Balkans countries. The U.S. Department of Justice provided mentoring and battlefield evidence to case prosecutors and investigators. The authorities did not repatriate any individuals in 2022.

In January the Skopje Basic Criminal Court sentenced two of the four FTFs repatriated in 2021 to 10 years in prison each. In October the Skopje Basic Criminal Court sentenced one of them to another six years on additional charges of spreading ISIS propaganda.

In several cases, the appellate court increased the sentences of convicted FTFs and convicted terrorists.

The MOI led law enforcement-related CT efforts. However, the ministry's CT Sector did not regularly have internet access and consequently was unable to lead online investigations. In July the government adopted the 2021-25 National Strategy for Developing the Penitentiary System, which includes components for deradicalizing and rehabilitating FTFs and for improving prison conditions and medical care for detainees.

The U.S. International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) provided workshop sessions for women in law enforcement on using social media in terrorism prosecutions, forensics and counterterrorism investigations, and terrorism in correctional institutions, in line with the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace and Security. In March, ICITAP provided women in CT/CVE units with advanced professional training.

North Macedonia continued its partnership with the United States on traveler screening tools, including Advance Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) data. In November, Parliament passed legal amendments to the Law on Border Police to allow the collection and analysis of API and PNR for border security. Authorities continued to meet with U.S. Watch listing Assistance and Support Program experts to improve watch listing efforts, and they cooperated with INTERPOL, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (or Eurojust), the European CT Center, and the FBI.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: North Macedonia is a member of MONEYVAL (the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism). Its FIU, the Financial Intelligence Office (FIO), is a member of the Egmont Group. In 2022 the FIO received five reports for suspicion of terrorist financing from obliged entities, and it submitted three reports on suspicion of terrorist financing to competent authorities for processing.

On June 2, Parliament adopted a Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing to implement the provisions of Directive V (2018/843) and harmonize it with EU legislation and FATF standards. In September, in line with the Law on International Restrictive Measures, the government published a decision freezing the assets and taking other restrictive financial measures against 15 FTFs.

Countering Violent Extremism: Government and civil society stakeholders finalized the 2023-27 National CVE Strategy, pending government adoption. The strategy aligns with the four pillars (prevention, protection, enforcement, and response) of the United Nations and European Union CVE strategies.

Prevention and Intervention: Local Prevention Councils (LPCs), Community Action Teams (CATs), and Local Multidisciplinary Teams (LMTs) worked on preventing and countering violent extremism at the local level. Thirteen municipal LPCs were functional, but only five were consistently active. Six municipalities had regularly active CATs.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration: The nine LMTs consist of social workers, community leaders, and religious group representatives who work on reintegration of FTFs and their associated family members. The International Organization for Migration and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) provide support to the NCCVECT and the LMTs.

Online Radicalization to Violence: In March, state institutions and private companies signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in Countering Violent Radicalization, as part of an EU project on capacity building.

The MotherSchools program continued, with U.S. funding, to teach mothers to recognize and respond to early warning signs of radicalization to violence.

International and Regional Cooperation: North Macedonia participated in the implementation of the EU Western Balkans Joint Action Plan on counter terrorism. In

December the EU and North Macedonia signed a revised bilateral agreement on counterterrorism. North Macedonia signed an agreement with Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, in October. The country participated in the implementation of Western Balkans projects funded by GCERF, Hedayah, the Strong Cities Network, Integrative Internal Security Governance, and others.

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