

USDOS – US Department of State

Country Report on Terrorism 2020 - Chapter 1 - Bosnia and Herzegovina

Overview: Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) remained a cooperative counterterrorism partner. There were no known registered BiH citizens who attempted to travel to foreign battlefields in 2020, although some foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their family members remain in Iraq and Syria. BiH continues to be a willing partner in repatriation of FTFs and is in the process of establishing an interagency coordinating body to oversee future repatriation efforts. Lenient sentencing in terrorism cases remained a challenge, with recent sentences averaging three and a half years for terrorism-related charges. On investigations, interpersonal and interagency infighting and stove-piping undermine fully effective cooperation. While more coordinated efforts on rehabilitation and deradicalization are still necessary, diverse civil society groups, the Interreligious Council, and individual religious leaders made notable efforts to prevent and counter radicalization to violence and recruitment.

2020 Terrorist Incidents: There were no reported terrorist incidents in BiH in 2020.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: BiH has not yet started to draft the new Strategy for Prevention and Fight Against Terrorism despite the current strategy expiring at the end of 2020. Additionally, Parliament rejected draft amendments introduced in 2018 to further align BiH law with EU directives on the suppression of terrorism owing to political disputes over the alleged transfer of competencies from entity to state level. The State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) continues to be the lead law enforcement unit performing CT functions; however, its effectiveness is limited by poor cooperation with the State Prosecutor's Office (SPO) and, at times, poor investigatory practices. Further, BiH does not have regulations and guidelines that govern cooperation between and among prosecutors, law enforcement, and the intelligence community in national security investigations. SIPA is finalizing an internal reorganization that will include upgrading the CT Unit to a directorate. These changes, however, still require multiple approvals from the BiH interagency.

The SPO and SIPA continue to receive training funded by the U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense Special Operations Command Europe. An SPO-led task force met twice in 2020, but law enforcement cooperation at a more strategic level continues to suffer from bouts of interpersonal, institutional, and political infighting, as well as from the impediments from BiH's complex governmental structure.

There is a lack of political will to implement U.S.-funded initiatives, despite a desire from BiH law enforcement to have these tools. The Serb member of the BiH presidency invoked Vital Entity Interest provisions to block the completion of a memorandum of agreement that would have assisted BiH in implementing key border screening enhancements in line with international standards related to airline passenger information, because of a dispute over state-versus-entity competencies. There was some progress, however, on border security initiatives, particularly related to the continued, proactive efforts by the Foreigners' Affairs Service to screen and share information with international partners on the high number of migrants entering BiH.

BiH continued its efforts to disrupt terrorist activity in 2020 through prosecutions of repatriated FTFs. In 2020 the SPO indicted seven alleged FTFs, all of whom were repatriated to BiH in 2019. Two were convicted and received three-and-a-half-year prison sentences, while proceedings against the remaining five defendants are ongoing. Separately, in 2020, the Court of BiH sentenced one FTF, also repatriated from Syria in 2019, to four years' imprisonment. BiH, in cooperation with Turkish authorities, repatriated a suspected FTF from Turkey. The case is still in the investigation phase. The SPO also indicted a BiH citizen for posting racist, anti-LGBTI, and anti-Semitic content, and urging attacks on buildings in New York City, on social media. This is the first-ever terrorism indictment of a suspect not ISIS related. The U.S. Department (DOJ) Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training program (OPDAT) provides case-based mentoring and guidance to BiH partners in

these investigations and prosecutions. There are continual challenges in the prosecution of fighters returning from the Donbas region of Ukraine, activity the BiH government considers terrorism. In 2020 the Court of BiH acquitted the only BiH citizen prosecuted, to date, for fighting in the Donbas.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: BiH is a member of MONEYVAL. Its FIU, the Financial Intelligence Department, is a member of the Egmont Group. BiH is also a member of the Defeat-ISIS CIFG. In 2020, BiH was delisted from the EU's list of high-risk third countries. There were no designations for asset freezing based on UNSCRs in 2020, nor were there any prosecutions for financing of terrorism.

Countering Violent Extremism: Violent extremist ideology and regional nationalist groups remain potential sources of terrorism in BiH. In 2020 the main religious communities in BiH (Catholic, Islamic, Jewish, and Orthodox) continued to work together through the Interreligious Council (IRC) to promote tolerance and confront acts of bigotry or violence directed at any of these communities. The IRC also increased its coordination and activities with its 15 regional chapters, with an emphasis on engagement with women and children. Individual religious leaders and civil society groups across the country also increased efforts to identify "extremist influences" and sources of resiliency in their communities, supported by a range of international donors. In 2020, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives completed its third year of programming to prevent and counter violent extremism. This involves small grants to bolster positive alternatives to violent extremist influences, including developing a nationwide network of youth centers to mobilize young people against division in target areas, supporting the IRC in responding to hate-based attacks, and bolstering community media outlets to challenge violent extremist narratives. The Embassy Public Affairs section continues to use assistance funding to support interethnic reconciliation programs that are also intended to help prevent radicalization to violence. International and local actors working on countering violent radicalization and terrorist recruitment made significant efforts in broadening their analysis beyond so-called radical Islam to include extreme ethnonationalism and foreign influence, as well as domestic drivers of "extreme ideologies." Bihać, Bijeljina, Centar (Sarajevo), Dobož, Jablanica, Prijedor, Srebrenik, and Tuzla are members of the Strong Cities Network.

International and Regional Cooperation: The SPO continues to work frequently with the United States, regional neighbors, and EU countries on CT investigations. BiH is a member of or participating state in the United Nations, the OSCE, the Regional Cooperation Council for Southeast Europe, and the Council of Europe.

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