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Country Report on Terrorism 2020 - Chapter 1 - Kosovo

Overview: Kosovo continued to fight the threat of terrorism through close cooperation with the United States. Kosovo is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. The Government of Kosovo is drafting a new combined strategy and action plan for Counterterrorism (CT) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) through 2025. The CT/CVE Coordinator's Office was abolished in February. In July, however, the new Hoti government appointed Interior Minister Agim Veliu as the national CT/CVE coordinator.

Kosovo continues to address the ramifications of the 2019 repatriation of four suspected FTFs and 106 family members from Syria, one of the largest civilian repatriations to date from the conflict zone. All adults have been prosecuted or otherwise adjudicated by law enforcement, and two of the male FTFs remain in prison. The women and children continue to receive reintegration assistance through U.S.- and European-funded programs and the Interior Ministry's Prevention and Reintegration Division (PRD). The PRD and Education Ministry assisted 37 of the 74 children returnees with school enrollment and, with the assistance of international donors, is assisting women returnees with reintegration and employment.

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

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Kosovo's legislative framework is among the most forward-leaning in the Balkans for prosecuting individuals suspected of committing or supporting terrorist activities, but short sentences, early release from prison, and a lack of organized postrelease supervision raise questions for long-term security. Kosovo supports the implementation of UNSCR 2396 to counter terrorist travel and is working to put it into practice; the September 4 Washington commitments signed at the White House codified Pristina's commitment to enhancing border security and screening to interdict terrorist travel, including through U.S.-provided assistance and partnership. Kosovo has designated the entirety of Hizballah as a terrorist organization.

The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL) entered into a formal arrangement with the Kosovo Police in July. The appointment of a Kosovo Police liaison to EUROPOL and an agreement on secure communications are planned in the near future. Kosovo remains excluded from membership in INTERPOL, owing in part to Serbian opposition stemming from the lack of normalized relations.

Through participation in the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance program, Kosovo Police — and specifically the Counterterrorism Department — have received training in counterterrorism investigations and identification and seizure of digital evidence, and have received associated equipment grants. U.S. mentorships have succeeded in increasing the cooperation and information sharing between Kosovo Police and the Kosovo Correctional Service.

On December 11 the Pristina Basic Court acquitted all defendants involved in the "Hurricane" case of terrorism-related charges. This is the second time the defendants were acquitted of terrorism, although they were convicted of illegal possession and trade in weapons. This case was first indicted in 2015 by international prosecutors and then passed to the local judicial system, lingering in Kosovo courts for five years.

On October 30, convicted FTF Agon Misini was released from prison after serving 18 months of his four-year sentence for participating in a terrorist group (ISIS). Misini was the first repatriated FTF convicted in 2019; however, the Court of Appeals granted him credit for time spent in detention in Syria after his 2017 arrest by the Syrian Democratic Forces.

On October 20 the Kosovo Police Counterterrorism Department arrested a man who threatened the Kosovo Ambassador to France, following the Ambassador's retweet of a *Le Figaro* article that outlined a chronology of the attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical magazine. Prosecutors unsealed an indictment for incitement to commit terrorism on December 8.

On September 30, prosecutors indicted Igballe Huduti for incitement to commit terrorist acts. Huduti was arrested on January 7 for her social media posts criticizing Washington for the killing of Iranian commander Qasim Soleimani and calling for revenge.

On September 24 the Supreme Court of Kosovo upheld a five-and-a-half-year prison sentence for Visar Qukovci's participation in a terrorist group (ISIS), while ordering a retrial on charges of child abuse. Qukovci, one of the FTFs repatriated from Syria in 2019, had filmed propaganda videos in which he placed a suicide vest on his 3-year-old son.

On January 10, FTF Arian Kryeziu was sentenced to 46 months' imprisonment for participating in a terrorist group (ISIS).

Of the 32 women repatriated from Syria in 2019, 29 pleaded guilty to participating in ISIS and received short, suspended sentences. The women will avoid time in prison if they do not commit further crimes, regularly check in with the Kosovo Police, and attend psychotherapy. Since November, another seven women have been indicted for participating in ISIS.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Its FIU, the Financial Intelligence Unit of Kosovo, is a member of the Egmont Group. Kosovo has drafted a legal framework for targeted financial sanctions against terrorist organizations, which upon approval by the National Assembly will enhance the tools available to the FIU to restrict terrorist financing.

Countering Violent Extremism: Kosovo's previous CVE strategy, a five-year roadmap for stemming the growing threat of terrorism through a whole-of-government approach, emphasized the critical role of local stakeholders and civil society. Implementation has been uneven across government ministries and challenges continue, owing to a lack of capacity, inadequate resources, and an overly securitized approach to CVE. An interministerial working group is drafting a new strategy and action plan, which aims to merge CT and CVE into a unified strategy; the government expects to unveil the strategy in 2021.

The Kosovo Correctional Service continued to implement a program — assisted by U.S. experts — to enhance management of terrorists in prison. This program involves collecting, analyzing, and sharing prison information within correctional service decisionmakers and other relevant law enforcement, and managing the rehabilitation and eventual reintegration of convicted terrorists. The PRD continued to implement programs to reintegrate individuals who served time in prison on terrorism charges, FTF returnees, and their family members, while chronically understaffed and underfunded.

Kosovo continues cooperative activities through GCERF, a public-private global fund to support local, grassroots, counterterrorist radicalization and recruitment efforts in at-risk communities. Thirteen Kosovo municipalities are members of the Strong Cities Network.

International and Regional Cooperation: The Government of Kosovo works closely with officials in Albania and North Macedonia to support CT capacity building and regional cooperation.

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