

Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Serbia

Serbia

Overview: With no terrorist attacks in 2021 and low levels of ISIS recruitment, the main terrorism concerns in Serbia remained the movement of money and weapons through the region, the need to repatriate FTFs and their family members from Syria, and terrorist self-radicalization through racially or ethnically motivated ideologies often related to nationalism. Serbia continued efforts to counter terrorism and cooperate with the United States and international partners.

2021 Terrorist Incidents: There were no reported terrorist incidents in 2021.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Serbia's Ministry of Interior has a Counterterrorism Service (the CT Service), which includes a Department for Preventing and Combating Extremism. Serbia's Criminal Code criminalizes terrorism-related offenses, including international terrorism, incitement, recruitment, using a deadly device, destruction and damage to a nuclear facility, terrorist financing, and terrorist association. Amendments to the Criminal Code in 2019 introduced life imprisonment for acts of terrorism resulting in death and extended the application of terrorist financing to other crimes. The code also outlaws unauthorized participation in a foreign war or armed conflict, prescribing incarceration from six months to 10 years for such activities. Serbia has sentenced individuals for participating in terrorist-related activities in Syria and for participating in the Russia-Ukraine conflict in eastern Ukraine. The CT Service reported that of the 10 Serbian FTFs who have returned to Europe from Syria or Iraq, four returned to Serbia. Serbia prosecuted seven such FTFs (some *in absentia*), for a total of 69 years of sentencing, according to the CT Service. According to some NGOs and investigative outlets, prosecutors dealing with such cases reportedly apply different standards, with returnees from Syria facing up to 11-year sentences under terrorism-related offenses and returnees from Ukraine receiving suspended sentences for participation in a foreign armed conflict. The CT Service responded that the Criminal Code allows only those convicted of fighting with UN-designated terrorist groups, such as ISIS, may be prosecuted for terrorism-related offenses. Serbians fighting with pro-Russia groups in Ukraine — not designated as terrorist groups by the UN — were prosecuted for participation in a foreign armed conflict, according to the CT Service. Serbia lacks legislation that more broadly covers conduct related to receiving terrorist training, funding terrorist organizations, and terrorist recruitment activities.

Although UNSCR 2396 calls on member states to develop systems to screen PNR data, currently API and PNR screening programs are not in place in Serbia, although data Serbian airlines are required to transmit to the United States and other governments is collected and handled by third-party data vendors. Serbia in 2020 pledged, as part of the Washington Commitments, to implement information sharing agreements with the United States and to strengthen screening measures. Serbia is integrating with the European Common Aviation Area and cooperates with international partners to enhance capacities in accordance with UNSCR 2309.

According to NGOs there were at least 26 family members of Serbian FTFs in Syria, while the CT Service reported that 27 Serbian national adults are currently in Syria, among whom are family members of FTFs. There were no indications that Serbia repatriated any of these individuals. Some NGOs and local communities claimed Serbia was unwilling to repatriate its nationals from Syria. International organizations reported that Serbia was establishing local reintegration teams and drafting bylaws to eventually receive repatriated citizens.

In the 2020 Washington Commitments, Serbia pledged to designate Hizballah in its entirety as a terrorist organization and implement measures to restrict its operations and financial activities in Serbian jurisdictions. Serbia had not made this designation nor implemented these measures by the

end of the reporting period, as the government reported that it follows UN designations of terrorism organizations when making such decisions.

There was no change to the way that the courts address terrorism in 2021. Current law stipulates that the Belgrade Higher Court's Special Department for Organized Crime hears terrorism-related offenses, and the Organized Crime Prosecutor's Office prosecutes them. The Belgrade Appellate Court's Special Department for Organized Crime hears appeals.

Serbia's law enforcement capabilities need improvement but are progressing. The Criminal Police Directorate's Service for Combating Terrorism and Extremism (TES) works on terrorism detection, deterrence, and prevention. Serbia's Operational Working Group consists of TES, the Security Intelligence Agency (BIA), and the Prosecutor's Office. Soft targets are required to have terrorism contingency plans, with TES officers providing consultation and oversight. The Interior Ministry's Special Anti-Terrorist Unit (SAJ) provides tactical response to terrorist incidents.

The Serbian Border Police's System to Check Persons and Vehicles (SZPLIV) screens passengers and vehicles at all border crossings and other ports of entry. SZPLIV verifies the validity of travel documents through basic indicative security elements, collects biographic and biometric data, checks visa status, searches national and international databases, and stores the information. However, data transmission to the central system can take days.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Serbia is a member of MONEYVAL, a FATF-style regional body, and has observer status in the EAG. Its FIU, the Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering (APML), is a member of the Egmont Group. Serbia is in negotiations with the EU under Chapter 4 of the EU Acquis (free movement of capital), which requires alignment with international standards and improved administrative AML and CFT capacity. In September, the APML, with U.S. support, finalized its National Risk Assessment for Money Laundering, Financing of Terrorism, and Proliferation, which rated the risk of terrorism financing as "medium to low," an improvement over its last assessment. The 2020-24 National Strategy for Prevention of Money Laundering, Financing of Terrorism, and Proliferation was finalized and adopted in 2020. Its second action plan, for 2022-24, will be finalized in 2022.

Countering Violent Extremism: Serbia implemented its National Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Terrorism for the Period 2017-21 and accompanying Action Plan, which seeks to identify factors leading to radicalization, to enhance citizens' security, and to intercept threats from social media activities. Serbia reported it will develop a new strategy in 2022. The Serbian intergovernmental CT working group meets regularly. The municipalities of Bujanovac, Novi Pazar, Presevo, and Tutin are members of the Strong Cities Network. The CT Service reported that Serbia established four local teams made up of police, psychologists, and social workers in the cities of Belgrade, Novi Pazar, Smederevo, and Vranje that would support efforts for reintegration and social support for extremist individuals. These teams would fall under the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, but the CT Service reported they would operate independently, at the community level, in counter-extremism and reintegration efforts.

International and Regional Cooperation: Serbia is engaged in some regional and international cooperation on CT issues. The Ministry of Interior and BIA cooperate with INTERPOL and Europol on CT activities, including watchlists. A participant in NATO's Partnership for Peace, Serbia routinely participates in international law enforcement training. In 2021, SAJ participated in two U.S. Special Operations Command training events for response to terrorist-related incidents.

Serbia cooperated with UNODC for arms control and border security programs that bolstered regional CT efforts. The OSCE supported seminars and other events to prevent violent extremism and terrorist recruitment.

Serbia has well-developed bilateral border security cooperation programs with Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania. Serbia has a tri-border partnership with Bosnia and Herzegovina and with Croatia. Serbian law enforcement agencies routinely engage with counterparts in Albania, North Macedonia, and Montenegro.