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USDOS – US Department of State

Country Report on Terrorism 2019 - Chapter 1 - Bosnia and Herzegovina

Overview: Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) remained a cooperative counterterrorism partner and continued to increase its CT capacity in 2019. There were no known registered BiH citizens who attempted to travel to foreign battlefields in 2019, although dozens remain in Iraq, Syria, and Ukraine, and BiH continues to face the threat of returning fighters. BiH continues to be a willing partner in repatriation of FTFs, and the BiH Presidency agreed in November 2019 to repatriate some family members of FTFs from Syria. Seventeen women and children were repatriated, along with seven fighters, in December 2019. BiH law enforcement agencies have been very cooperative on this effort. Lenient sentencing in terrorism cases remained a challenge, but recent judgments indicate some judges recognize a need to apply more rigid sanctions. Operational coordination continues internally in BiH and with U.S. partners. However, interpersonal and interagency infighting and stove piping undermine fully effective cooperation, especially due to a lack of strategic guidance from the Ministry of Security. While little progress was made on rehabilitation and de-radicalization, diverse civil society groups, the Interreligious Council, and individual religious leaders made notable efforts to prevent and counter terrorist radicalization and recruitment.

Terrorist Incidents: There were no reported terrorist incidents in BiH in 2019.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: BiH made no significant changes to its CT legislation in 2019. A group of parliamentarians proposed draft amendments to further align BiH law with EU directives on the suppression of terrorism and to introduce three new crimes to the BiH criminal code in 2018, but general elections in October 2018 and slow government formation delayed progress. The amendments would criminalize traveling and residing abroad for terrorism, misusing information technology or cyber technology for terrorist purposes, and forging documents for the purposes of terrorism. The draft amendments also strengthen an existing criminal code provision on training for terrorist activities. Although the amendments again need to be submitted to Parliament, there is some political will to adopt them.

The State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) continues to be the lead law enforcement unit performing CT functions. However, with approximately 25 officers working on CT cases, its effectiveness is limited, and there were no political efforts in 2019 to increase the size of SIPA’s counterterrorism unit, despite a draft law pending in Parliament since 2017. As an alternative to changes to the law, SIPA recently considered a change to its internal by-laws to increase the number of officers. SIPA continues to receive training funded by the U.S. Department of State’s ATA program to ensure that key units can effectively investigate terrorism-related crimes.

A BiH Prosecutor’s Office-led task force met more frequently in 2019, but law enforcement cooperation at a more strategic level continued to suffer from some interpersonal and institutional infighting, as well as BiH’s complex governmental structure. At the operational level, however, law enforcement and prosecutors met and worked jointly on certain cases. Law enforcement agencies also worked effectively together on responding to returning fighters, and their family members from Syria, although the Ministry of Security did not have a comprehensive plan for reintegrating and rehabilitating family members.

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 Presidency of BiH did not move to approve a proposal to support use of API/PNR as part of its integrated border management and in line with UNSCR 2396. There was some progress on border security initiatives, as the Border Police continued to implement upgrades to technology at key points of entry and the Foreigners’ Affairs Service worked proactively with international partners to exchange information on the continually higher number of migrants entering BiH.

BiH continued its efforts to disrupt terrorist activity in 2019 through arrests and indictments. In November, the Court of BiH increased the sentences for Maksim Božić and Edin Hastor to six years (from four years) and three years (from two years, six months) of imprisonment for planning terrorist acts, respectively; this was a final verdict and is considered high for BiH. BiH also began to prosecute its citizens for joining foreign paramilitary forces under the same provision it uses to prosecute people who join ISIS.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: BiH is a member of MONEYVAL. Its FIU, the Financial Intelligence Department, is a member of the Egmont Group. In 2019, in line with UNSCR 1373, the BiH Council of Ministers designated Mirsad Kandić for asset freezing.

Countering Violent Extremism: “Extremist ideology and regional nationalist” groups remain potential sources of terrorism in BiH. In 2019, the main religious communities in BiH (Catholic, Islamic, Jewish, and Orthodox) worked together through the Interreligious Council to promote tolerance and confront acts of bigotry or violence directed at any of these communities. The Interreligious Council also increased its coordination and activities with its 15 regional chapters, with an emphasis on increasing engagement with women and youth – through social media campaigns and other strategies. Individual religious leaders and civil society groups (formal and informal) across the country also made increasing efforts to identify “extremist influences” and sources of resiliency in their communities, supported by a range of international donors and organizations. International and local actors working on countering terrorist radicalization and recruitment made significant efforts in broadening their analysis beyond radical Islam to include extreme ethno-nationalism and foreign influence, as well as domestic drivers of “extreme ideologies.”

The BiH Ministry of Security partnered with the international community on numerous CVE programs in BiH. Working with international organizations, BiH supported efforts to strengthen resiliencies within identified at-risk communities, and it supported efforts by religious and other local actors to counter expressions of intolerance at the local and municipal levels. The BiH cities of Bihać, Bijeljina, Doboj, Jablanica, Prijedor, Srebrenik, and Tuzla Canton – and the municipality of Centar (Sarajevo) – are members of the SCN. There are insufficient mechanisms to measure progress and implementation of BiH’s CT/CVE Strategy.

In 2019, the OSCE presented in Sarajevo its publication on “referral mechanisms for preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism.” The publication enabled a multidisciplinary, human-rights-compliant, and regionally tailored approach to the identification of those at risk of engaging in violent acts.

International and Regional Cooperation: The BiH Prosecutor’s Office continues to work frequently with the United States, regional neighbors, Serbia and Montenegro, and EU countries such as Austria, Germany, and the UK on CT investigations. BiH is a member of or participating state in the UN, the OSCE, the Regional Cooperation Council for Southeast Europe, and the Council of Europe (CoE).

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