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Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Bosnia and Herzegovina

BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM

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Bosnia and Herzegovina

Overview: Bosnia and Herzegovina remained a cooperative counterterrorism partner, although its capacity remains limited and little progress was made on legal and regulatory reforms because of the ongoing political crisis caused by secessionist rhetoric and obstruction of state-level institutions by Republika Srpska entity leaders and federation entity dysfunction attributable to Croat and Bosniak tensions and concentration on narrow political interests.

There were no known registered Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens who attempted to travel to foreign battlefields in 2021, although some FTFs and family members remain in Iraq and Syria. Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to be a willing partner in repatriation of FTFs, and in July established an interagency coordinating body to oversee future repatriation efforts. On CT investigations, interpersonal and interagency infighting and stovepiping undermine fully effective cooperation.

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

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: The adoption of a new national Strategy for the Prevention and the Fight Against Terrorism 2020-24 remains delayed despite

the previous strategy's expiration in 2020. In May the Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers appointed an interagency working group to draft the new strategy, which is still under way. In March the Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Security formed an interagency coordination body to develop a plan for the repatriation, prosecution, or reintegration of alleged FTFs and their family members in Iraq and Syria. The Coordination Body was finalizing the whole-of-government plan at the end of 2021. The Ministry of Security CT Section increased staffing with the appointment of an assistant minister and a new head of CT. The State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) continued to be the lead law enforcement unit performing CT functions; however, its effectiveness was limited owing to poor cooperation with the State Prosecutor's Office (SPO) and, at times, poor investigatory practices. Moreover, Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have clear regulations and guidelines that govern cooperation among prosecutors, law enforcement, and the intelligence community in national security investigations. The SPO and SIPA continued to receive training provided by the Department of State's ATA program; by the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ's) Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training program (OPDAT) and DOJ's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program; and the U.S. Department of Defense's Special Operations Command Europe.

In 2021, limited in-person trainings restarted. An SPO-led task force met three times in 2021, but law enforcement cooperation at a more strategic level continued to suffer because of an ongoing political crisis and from the impediments of Bosnia and Herzegovina's complex governmental structure. Political leadership often failed to support implementing U.S.-funded initiatives despite a desire from law enforcement professionals. Ongoing disagreements over state-versus-entity competencies prevented progress on updating laws and regulations governing the collection and use of airline passenger information in line with international standards. There was some progress, however, on updating border security and screening systems and technology. The Foreigners' Affairs Service continues to enhance efforts to screen irregular migrants for links to terrorism.

In 2021, five FTFs who had repatriated to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2019, were convicted and sentenced to between one and six years. The SPO also indicted another FTF who was repatriated from Türkiye in 2020. However, the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina acquitted this defendant of all charges. A trial of a defendant indicted for the public incitement of terrorist activities in late 2020 commenced in 2021 and is ongoing. DOJ's OPDAT provided case-based mentoring and guidance to Bosnia and Herzegovina partners in these investigations and prosecutions.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Bosnia and Herzegovina is a member of MONEYVAL. Its FIU, the Financial Intelligence Department, is a member of the Egmont Group. Because of the current political crisis, little progress was made in updating Bosnia and Herzegovina's Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism legislation. Bosnia and Herzegovina also did not complete its National Risk Assessment, as required by MONEYVAL. Bosnia and Herzegovina initiated its first Financing of Terrorism case in 2021 involving a dual Bosnia and Herzegovina and Swiss citizen who allegedly provided funds to her husband, a member of ISIS fighting in Syria at the time. While the indictment is a sign of some progress for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the SPO still needs to develop its capacity to investigate terrorist financing cases.

Additionally, the Bosnia and Herzegovina judiciary still tends to treat alleged terrorists lightly. This is especially true with female defendants whom Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities almost universally disregard as possible criminals. There were no designations for asset freezing based on UNSCRs in 2021, although in December Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities received training from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and OSCE on how to nominate entities for UN terrorism-related sanctions, and Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities were working with DOJ to submit multiple nominations.

Countering Violent Extremism: Violent extremist ideology and violent regional nationalist groups remain potential sources of terrorism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2021, the political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina brought about unprecedented divisive rhetoric by the country's ethnonationalist political leaders. At the same time, the main religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Catholic, Islamic, Jewish, and Orthodox) continued to work together through the Interreligious Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina to promote tolerance and confront acts of bigotry or violence directed at any of these communities. Religious communities noted that Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities failed to tap into the expertise of religious communities in countering violent extremism or deradicalizing returnees from Syria and Iraq. In 2021, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives completed its programming to prevent and counter violent extremism programming. International and local actors working on countering radicalization made significant efforts in broadening their analysis beyond radical Islam to include extreme ethnonationalism and foreign influence, as well as domestic drivers of "extreme ideologies." Bihać, Bijeljina, Sarajevo's Centar municipality, Doboj, Jablanica, Prijedor, Srebrenik, and Tuzla are members of the Strong Cities Network.

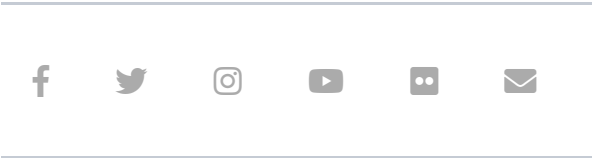
International and Regional Cooperation: The SPO continues to work with the United States, regional neighbors, and EU countries on CT investigations. Bosnia and Herzegovina is

a member of or participating state in the UN, the OSCE, the Regional Cooperation Council for Southeast Europe, the Council of Europe.

TAGS

- Bosnia and Herzegovina
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- Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs
- Countering Terrorism
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