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USDOS – US Department of State

## Country Report on Terrorism 2017 - Chapter 1 - Kosovo

**Overview:** Kosovo continued to fight the growing threat of terrorism in 2017. Approximately 403 Kosovo citizens have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight for or join ISIS or al-Nusrah Front, of which approximately 74 are deceased. Some 133 of these individuals have returned, while approximately 196 remain in these conflict zones. This number includes 40 children born to Kosovo citizens in conflict zones. The government continued to implement its comprehensive strategy and updated its action plan for countering violent extremism (CVE). In 2017, the government drafted its third counterterrorism strategy and action plan. The Minister of Interior took the role of Counterterrorism National Coordinator in November.

The CVE strategy and action plan provide a five-year roadmap for stemming the growing threat of terrorism through a whole-of-government approach, emphasizing the critical role of local stakeholders and civil society. Thus far, implementation has been uneven across government ministries and a lack of capacity and inadequate resources remained challenges. On December 5, the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund approved US \$2.5 million in CVE program funding that could significantly bolster the government’s capacity to implement its CVE action plan. The Kosovo Police (KP) Counterterrorism Directorate continued to enhance its investigative capacities by increasing personnel and developing a cyber-counterterrorism unit.

The security and political situation in northern Kosovo continued to limit the government’s ability to exercise its authority in that region, although the government successfully integrated Serbian judges, prosecutors, and staff into Kosovo’s judicial institutions in October, extending the country’s judicial authority and access to justice for citizens. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization Kosovo Force (KFOR) and European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) continued to work with the KP to maintain a safe and secure environment and strengthen the rule of law, including at the borders.

Kosovo is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and pledged US \$100,000 in support of the Coalition.

**Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security:** Kosovo’s legislative framework is sufficient to prosecute individuals suspected of committing or supporting terrorist activities, but prosecutors lack experience with such cases. Kosovo officials recognize the need to improve interagency cooperation.

Recognizing the threats and consequences of terrorism, the government strengthened its existing counterterrorism provisions and drafted a new counterterrorism strategy in 2017. The new counterterrorism strategy provides a comprehensive approach to preventing and combating terrorism and is one of the government’s strategic priorities. On November 30, the Kosovo Assembly held the first reading of the Law on Critical Infrastructure, which passed and aims to identify, preserve, and protect national and European critical infrastructure.

Law enforcement authorities demonstrated adequate capacity to detect and prevent individuals from joining the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The KP Counterterrorism Directorate, which is responsible for counterterrorism investigations, increased capacities to track suspects, although they still lacked resources for online investigations and surveillance.

The KP and Border Police successfully interdicted several individuals attempting to join foreign conflicts, although border security gaps remained. On August 11, KP arrested two Kosovo citizens for attempting to join terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. The individuals left Kosovo on July 25 via the Macedonian border and arrived at the Ataturk Airport in Istanbul on July 26. On July 28, Turkish security forces caught them trying to enter Syria and deported them to Kosovo on August 11. On October 31, they pleaded guilty and were sentenced to 18 months in prison. The Border Police regularly updated their watch list of persons suspected of connections to terrorism or criminal activities; they had 4,481 hits in 2017.

Trials and investigations continued for 51 suspects and 29 cases, which included several imams arrested since 2014 on terrorism charges. In 2017, Kosovo authorities arrested five additional individuals on terrorism-related charges. Authorities issued seven new indictments on terrorism charges involving 17 individuals.

On June 8, a Defeat-ISIS Coalition drone strike in Syria killed Kosovo terrorist leader Lavdrim Muhaxheri and fellow foreign terrorist fighter Bilall Haqifi. On June 9, Kacanik municipality’s head imam, Florim Neziraj, offered condolences at the city’s main mosque for Muhaxheri.

On June 28, Pristina’s Basic Court held the first hearing for nine Kosovo citizens suspected of planning an attack at the November 2016 Israel-Kosovo soccer match in Albania and other attacks against local and international targets in Albania and Kosovo. The KP and the Kosovo Intelligence Agency were instrumental in stopping this attack.

Kosovo continued to demonstrate political will to address threats related to terrorism, and the state possesses the legal framework to do so. Although national institutions continued to strengthen their capacities, limited resources and experience continue to hinder their ability to handle terrorism cases effectively.

**Countering the Financing of Terrorism:** On February 1, Kosovo’s financial intelligence unit became a member of the Egmont Group. There are no other significant changes since the 2016 report (<https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272231.htm#KOSOVO>). For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *2018 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes* (<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>).

**Countering Violent Extremism (CVE):** The government updated its CVE action plan, which corresponds to its 2015 National Strategy. The government appointed its third National Countering Violent Extremism Coordinator on October 30, 2017. The Kosovo Justice Ministry, supported by the U.S. government, continued its implementation of a corrections program aimed at enhancing management of terrorists, and setting up frameworks for the rehabilitation and eventual reintegration of convicted terrorists. The Ministry of Interior established a reintegration department, which aims to integrate returned fighters and their accompanying families into communities. The Kosovo government took proactive steps to prepare a repatriation strategy for its citizens returning from conflict zones. The Kosovo cities of Ferizaj, Gjilan, Gjakova, Gracanica, Hani I Elezit, Kacanik, Mitrovica South, Peja/Pec, Prishtina, Prizren, Viti, Vushtrri and Zvecan are members of the Strong Cities Network.

Kosovo’s CVE strategy includes promoting counter-narratives to challenge terrorist messaging.

**International and Regional Cooperation:** There have been no significant changes since the 2016 report (<https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272231.htm#KOSOVO>).

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**Austrian Red Cross**

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research  
and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien

T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583

F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589

info@ecoi.net

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