

Foreign Fighters and Kosovo's Diaspora:

The case of Germany

Skënder Perteshi

Policy Background
Paper

Abstract

The conflicts in Syria and Iraq and the rise of the Islamic State (IS) have attracted thousands of foreign fighters from European countries to join the conflict in the Middle East. A large number of foreign fighters are second and third-generation migrants from the Middle East, North Africa and the Western Balkans. This paper aims to provide some groundwork for research on the radicalisation of immigrants, by investigating why some Kosovar immigrants in Germany have joined violent extremism organisations like IS and Hayat Tahrir al Sham. In particular, the paper identifies some of the consequences of shifting social dynamics and identity formation as the ties between the diaspora community and the country of origin change over time. The paper concludes with a few policy recommendations both to German and Kosovar political authorities on increasing the resilience of Kosovar diaspora living in Germany against radicalisation and violent extremism.

About this report

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List of Abbreviations

FF	Foreign Fighter
IS	Islamic State
KCSS	Kosovar Center for Security Studies
KSB	Kosovo Security Barometer
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of Amerika

1. Introduction

Kosovo has one of the largest international migration flows in the world (World Bank 2011) as well as the largest diaspora in Europe. More than half of Kosovo's citizens have at least one family member who lives outside Kosovo. The most substantial Kosovar diaspora is found in Germany. In recent history, the diaspora played a vital role in Kosovo. Politically, the diaspora played a crucial role in the decades-long effort to end Serbia's occupation of Kosovo in 1999. Economically, the diaspora continues to support Kosovo through the provision of substantial remittances.

The relationship between Kosovo and its diaspora, in large part, is shaped by the different waves of migration that took place over half a century. The first wave of migrants to leave Kosovo (1950-1960) were overwhelmingly unskilled workers. They moved to Germany to meet the country's labour shortage during the post-World War II economic boom. The migrants were mostly from the rural areas of Kosovo and left the country in pursuit of economic opportunities abroad. The second wave of migrants (1980-1999) resulted from direct state oppression. Most Kosovo Albanian migrants¹ left Kosovo to escape Serbia's discriminatory and oppressive policies, including the 1998-1999 war. The third and current wave of migrants (after 2002) is driven by the continued economic and political instability in Kosovo. Many young professionals, mostly from urban areas, are leaving in pursuit of opportunities for prosperity in Western Europe, especially in Germany.

The challenges of Kosovar diaspora integration in Europe have varied among the three waves of migration. The migrants from the first two waves faced the most challenges with assimilation and integration. Like other diaspora communities in Europe from the 1960s through to the 1990s, Kosovo Albanians harboured intentions of returning home. These migrants were financially strained as they provided monetary support to families back home. Additionally, they faced language and cultural barriers as they opted to limit their interaction in the host country, mainly to the expatriate community. For many of these migrants, residence in Western Europe was temporary. However, their temporary status took on a more permanent one as more family members sought to migrate west, and their participation in Kosovo's political processes began to wane.

The nature of the Kosovar migration and the attitude of migrant offspring (those born outside Kosovo) toward their homeland began to change as NATO intervention brought about the end of Serbian occupation, and the Western state-building project led to Kosovo's independence in 2008. Compared to the first and second generation of Kosovar diaspora (migrants with a strong connection to Kosovo's national identity, culture, and history), those born or growing up in the diaspora are less connected to Kosovo.

The initial enthusiasm to return and invest in the homeland was curbed in large part due to challenges with the rule of law, security, and other risks harming the investment climate due to state capture and corruption in the public institutions in Kosovo.² The diaspora's willingness to invest in Kosovo has drastically decreased due to political instability in Kosovo. As a result, since independence, the diaspora has mainly invested in real estate – to create a personal foothold in Kosovo – but mostly shied away from any major investment footprint in the home country. It is important to note that there is no data that examines the level of diaspora investments in Kosovo. Diaspora investments are treated as foreign direct investment. However, we can measure the remittances that the diaspora sends to Kosovo, and according

1 In this paper, the term “Kosovo Albanians” refers to the Kosovo citizens of Albanian ethnicity. We use the term “Albanians” to refer to all Albanians and their descendants that live in Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and other countries (except Kosovo). In this paper we use also the term Kosovar diaspora which refers to the Albanians of Kosovo and their descendants who are living and working abroad.

2 Interview with senior official in Ministry of Interior Affairs, Government of Kosovo. Pristina, November 2019.

to a 2018 Kosovo Central Bank report, the remittances in Kosovo total to more than 750 million Euro (Kosovo Central Bank 2018).

The generational change of the Kosovar diaspora, as well as the changes in the social dynamics in Kosovo and host countries, have had visible consequences for the relationship between Kosovo and its diaspora communities. The initial findings indicate that the national self-identification has slightly declined among members of the young generation of Kosovo's diaspora who were born or grew up in Germany after the 1990s. Furthermore, the data from Kosovo Security Barometer 2019 shows that there are differences in the relationship with the home country between the generations of the Kosovar diaspora (Marku 2019). In turn, this has led to an identity vacuum, as generations of migrants transitioned from a traditional identity that is linked with the country of origin toward a new one tied to the host country.

As with other non-European diasporas throughout Western Europe, some German citizens of Kosovo origin have grounded their identity in the realm of religion, as they seek to associate themselves with a larger in-group identification and belonging.³ Other migrants appear to be intentionally targeted by community-level Islamist organisations that seek to exploit the identity crisis facing the offspring of the traditional migrant parents from the 1960s and 1980s.⁴

This paper pays special attention to the potential for radicalisation of youth from diaspora communities and their support for groups that espouse violent extremism. Throughout this paper, in accordance with the UN General Assembly's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, the research views extremism as "a concern when those views threaten the democratic rule of law and promote the use of violence to achieve their objects or coerce their followers. This form of extremism is described as 'violent extremism', a contested term generally referring to the creation of ideologically motivated or politically motivated violence, as well as support for such acts." Hence, the definition of violent extremism adopted for this report is "the use of and support for violence in pursuit of ideological, religious or political goals" (UNGA 2015).

While religion itself is not a driver for violent extremism, scholars of diaspora argue that the acquisition of religious Islamist identity in Western Europe is often the work of Islamist organisations and a network of illegal mosques operating throughout Europe (Hoffman et al. 2006). These groups have acted as recruiters and enablers of platforms for violent extremist organisations in countries throughout the European Union. According to the data from Kosovo law enforcement agencies and the author's investigation, since 2012, around 47 young individuals from the Kosovar diaspora in the EU have joined violent extremism organisations to fight in Syria and Iraq.

Since the 9/11 attacks in the United States, there have been several terror incidents involving radicalised Kosovo Albanians. However, the Kosovar diaspora has overwhelmingly rejected Islamist insurgencies with a global reach (e.g. Afghanistan, Bosnia). While we know little about the causes and pathways that led these young men to join organisations such as Islamic State (IS), the number itself is insignificant compared to the size of the Kosovar diaspora in Germany, Western Europe, and the US. However, from a policy perspective and to improve prevention strategies, more research is needed to understand the causes that led 47 Europeans of Kosovo origin⁵ to join the Islamic State as foreign fighters (FFs).

The aim of this paper is to provide some groundwork for further research on the causes of radicalisation that led individuals from the Kosovar diaspora in Germany to join IS and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and fight in Syria and Iraq. The involvement of Albanians in violent extremism organisations

3 Interview with senior representative of Kosovo Islamic Association active in Germany. November 2019.

4 Ibid.

5 Among these, 14 fighters were from Germany, and 33 were from other EU member countries.

espousing religious cause marks the first time in the history of the Kosovo Albanian diaspora that its members participate in a cause other than their national liberation struggle.

The paper seeks to provide a new lens of analysis on the Kosovar diaspora, to not only treat it as a “problem” but also as an opportunity and a resource that can serve as a bridge of cooperation between Kosovo and Germany. With nearly half of the Kosovo households having a family member in Germany or Switzerland (Elezaj et al. 2012), it becomes imperative to reframe the debate on the diaspora's participation and contribution to their home country, and also the ability of Kosovo to find ways to engage constructively with and positively influence developments in the adopted countries.

The first and second part of the paper provide an analysis of the history of the Kosovar diaspora in Germany, the challenges with integration in German society, and the relationship with Kosovo as country of origin. The third section then provides a short comparative analysis of diasporas from the MENA region and Kosovo as well as the challenges with integration in German society faced by both diasporas. The final section of the paper offers concrete policy recommendations both to German and Kosovar political authorities on addressing the concerns of the Kosovar diaspora living in Germany, in areas such as the integration of Kosovo's diaspora in German society, and the prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation among the Kosovar diaspora.

Methodologically, this report relies both on quantitative and qualitative research methods. The report's conclusions are predominantly drawn from six years of field research, including participatory observation and comprehensive review of reports on radicalisation and violent extremism conducted by the Kosovar Center for Security Studies (KCSS) and the international organisations present in Kosovo. Data offered by the law enforcement authorities and security officials in Kosovo and Germany about the individuals involved in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, were used for conducting this research. KCSS has constructed a comprehensive database of foreign fighters – including age, level of education, place of residence – from Kosovo and the diaspora who have travelled to join the Islamic State. This database provides an effective means to triangulate and verify the findings. The report also draws on survey data from the Kosovo Security Barometer 2019 (KSB), which explores the relationship between the Kosovar diaspora and the homeland (Marku 2019).

As such, this report presents the initial groundwork that relies on data analysis, incorporates relevant findings from other reports conducted by local and international organisations that have examined the role of diaspora communities in violent extremism and the diaspora FF phenomenon, and concludes by offering a risks and threats assessment on violent extremism among the diaspora communities in Germany.

2. Relationship of the Kosovar diaspora in Germany with Kosovo

There are between 850.000 to 1.000.000 Kosovo Albanians that reside in Western Europe. The majority, over 60 percent of those, live in Germany and Switzerland. Between 350.000 and 400.000 people of Kosovar origin reside in Germany alone. Half of the migrants that sought refuge in Germany did so to escape the economic hardship and the political repression caused by Serbia's occupation of Kosovo in the 1990s. The other half of the Kosovar diaspora in Germany consists of migrants' offspring, those that were born in Germany (World Bank 2018).

The Kosovar diaspora in Germany, especially those migrants from the first two waves, remains actively connected to the homeland, and has been the driving force behind all changes that took place in Kosovo

in the last four decades: Their financial involvement remains one of the main factors that keeps Kosovo’s economy afloat. In the past, the Kosovar diaspora in Germany was actively involved in supporting Kosovo’s efforts for liberation and independence from Serbia.

After the Kosovo conflict and the declaration of independence on February 17, 2008, the relationship of the Kosovar diaspora to their homeland shifted for a variety of reasons: State capture by corrupt elites, Kosovo’s economic stagnation, and lack of the rule of law, to name a few. The first generations of migrants who built the collective memory of the liberation war and activism, and felt part of its success at independence, continued to harbour strong national identification with Kosovo. In contrast, the current generation of the diaspora, who did not undergo such a process, have weaker to no ties with Kosovo.

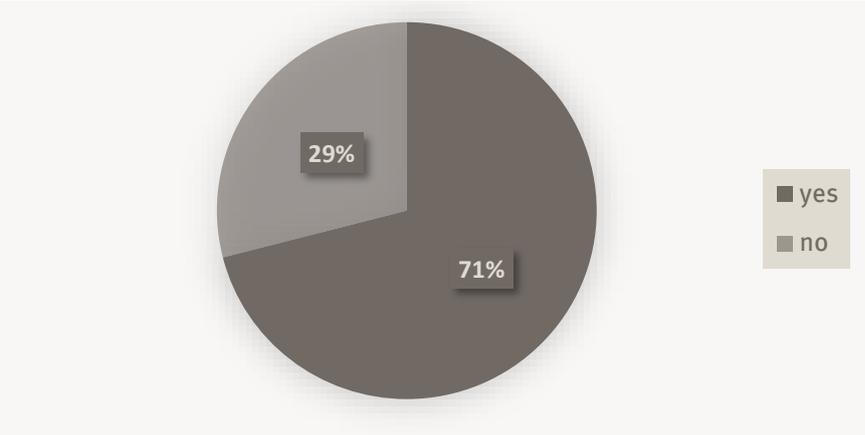
Because of the nature of their migration and the trajectory of their integration in Germany, the older generations continue to plan their eventual permanent return to Kosovo, while their children, born and/or raised in Germany, see their life in Germany (Sejdiu 2017). The dream of returning to the homeland was an excuse for the older generation of Kosovo migrants to resist integration and assimilation in German society.

This is in line with the observations of scholars of migration and diaspora communities such as Russell King, who concluded that the “dream of a return to the country of origin serves to justify a migrant's disinclination or inability to adjust to the culture of the country in which they reside, by labelling adaptation as assimilation through foreign values” (King 1979: 278).

Their loyalty and insistence on adhering to Kosovo's traditions of life and culture, as well as their involvement in the political processes in Kosovo, are some of the main elements that have kept the Kosovar diaspora strongly connected with Kosovo and its national identity.

This argument is further corroborated by the data from the KSB 2019, a survey conducted with 1200 households in Kosovo in October 2019 (Mark 2019). According to the study, more than 71% of the respondents interviewed said they have at least one close family member abroad, mostly in Germany or Switzerland.

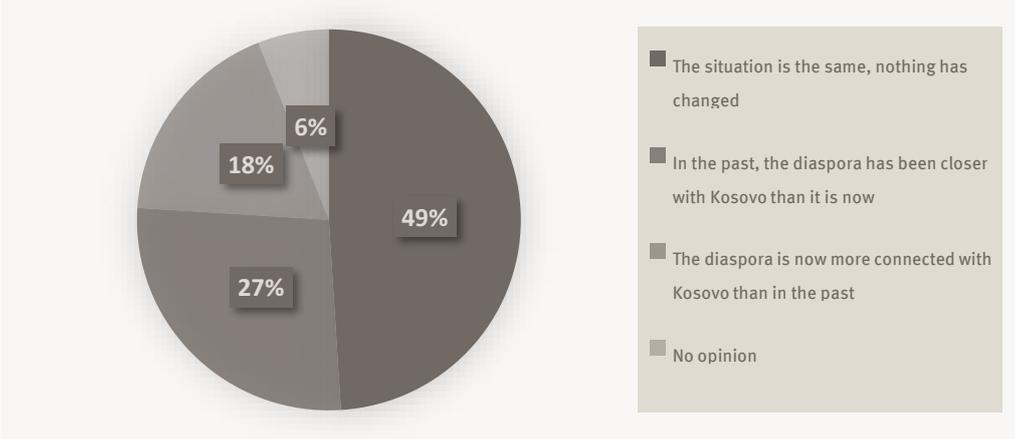
Figure 1: Do you have any family members living in the diaspora? (Source: Marku 2019)



The respondents were also asked if the diaspora was more connected to Kosovo in the past than the youth generation of the Kosovar diaspora living in Germany and other EU countries. Figure 2 below shows that 49 percent of those surveyed noted that the situation remains the same, and nothing has changed. In comparison, 27 percent of the respondents stated that in the past, the diaspora was more engaged in Kosovo’s internal matters. A lower number of respondents (18 percent) asserted that currently, the

diaspora is more connected and engaged with Kosovo than in the past, while 6 percent of the respondents did not have an opinion on this issue. Hence, according to this survey, the diaspora that resulted from the first and second waves of migration seems to remain more connected to Kosovo than the migrants from the third wave, who feel a lesser connection (Marku 2019).

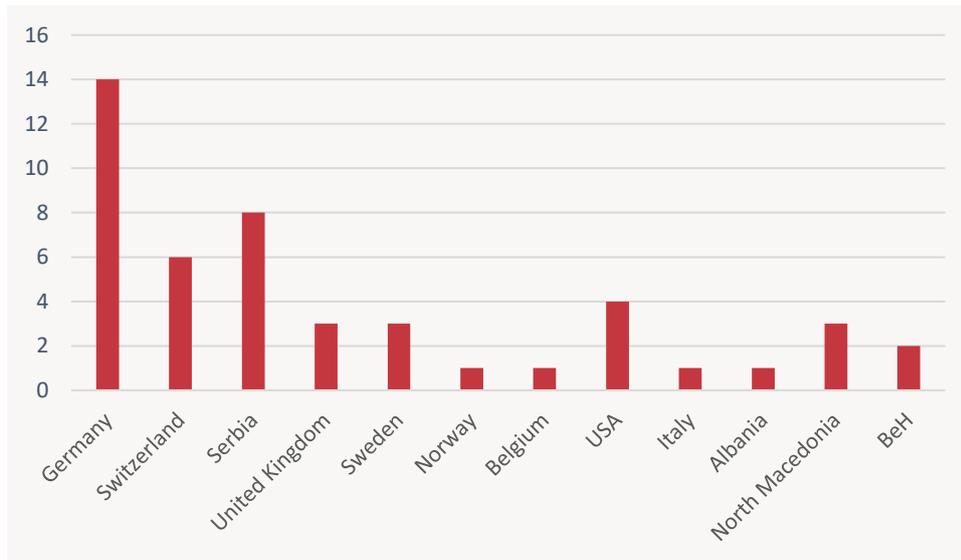
Figure 2: Are your relatives living in the diaspora more connected to Kosovo now, or have they been in the past? (Source: Marku 2019)



3. Kosovar diaspora and violent extremism in Germany

Since 2011, some 6,000 foreign fighters from European Union member states have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join militant groups. Amongst these fighters, there are between 850 and 1000 individuals from Western Balkan countries (Shtuni 2019). Meanwhile, a significant number of FFs from Germany and Switzerland with origins in the Western Balkans have joined IS. There are no credible and official data from other countries such as Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia or Montenegro about the number of their diaspora citizens who have joined conflicts in Syria and Iraq as a part of IS or other violent militant groups. Kosovo is the only country in the Western Balkans which has published data on its diaspora individuals who joined conflicts in the Middle East. According to this data (Perteshi 2019), out of some 250 Kosovo citizens that joined IS, 47 were born in or citizens of various EU countries. The graph below displays the number of FFs of Kosovo origin from each country. Germany has the highest number of FFs of Kosovo origin, a total of 14, followed by Serbia with 8 and Switzerland with 6 (Perteshi 2019).

Figure 3: Number of foreign fighters of Kosovo origin from each country (Source: Perteshi 2017)



When comparing the number of FFs of Kosovo origin with the overall Kosovar diaspora population, a different picture emerges on the actual level of radicalisation among this population in Germany and Switzerland. To compare the number of FFs per capita of the Kosovar diaspora, we have used government data compiled by the Ministry of Diaspora and Strategic Investment (2019). From 2014 to 2018, around 342.000 individuals were registered as members of the diaspora. While this data underrepresents the density of the Kosovar diaspora, due to lack of comprehensive data, this report relies on it as the most credible source to use for comparative analyses of FFs per capita of the Kosovar diaspora.

As explored below, a quick analysis of the Kosovar diaspora population and the number of FFs who joined extremist organisations shows that the number of FFs from the ranks of the Kosovar diaspora is insignificant compared to the total number of citizens of Kosovo origin who are living abroad. Moreover, the data shows that the level of radicalisation and violent extremism among the Kosovar diaspora is not alarming.

The countries with the highest number of FFs in proportion to the size of their diaspora populations are Bosnia and Herzegovina, followed by the USA, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. Germany, Italy, and Switzerland have the lowest number of FFs per capita. The list, however, does not include FFs from Serbia of Albanian origin because they are from the Albanian majority municipalities of Presevo, Bujanovc, and Medvegja and not considered as diaspora.

Figure 4: Number of Kosovar diaspora's foreign fighters per capita

Country	Number of diasporas citizens	number of FF with Kosovo diaspora origin	FF percentage among the total diaspora
Bosnia and Herzegovina	310	2	0.5714
United States of America	6,753	3	0.0444

United Kingdom and Northern Ireland	8,364	3	0.0358
Sweden	15,837	3	0.0189
Norway	5,347	1	0.0187
Belgium	8,500	1	0.0117
Germany	126,050	14	0.0111
Italy	16,934	1	0.0059
Switzerland	102,052	6	0.0058

Different factors have influenced young individuals from the Kosovar diaspora to join militant organisations in Syria and Iraq. The presence of religious preachers who freely proclaim radicalisation and extremist religious-based ideology among the diaspora from the Balkans and MENA region in Switzerland and Germany is one of the main factors that influenced diaspora individuals to join IS. The need to live under "the Caliphate and Islamic rules", the sense of belonging to and obligation to support Muslims in Syria, and the lack of identity amongst some youth in the diaspora, were some of the important factors and narratives which led to the spread of violent extremism among the Kosovar diaspora in Germany and other countries.

Many scholars of violent extremism, including the French scholar Olivier Roy, have concluded that there is no single profile of a radicalised militant or individual affected by a violent extremist ideology (Roy 2017). This confirms KCSS research findings on violent extremism. KCSS has analysed the profiles and backgrounds of six specific individuals engaged with IS who grew up in Germany (Kursani 2017). Based on the data obtained from Kosovo law enforcement agencies and security officials, background screening of open sources, and previous KCSS research, we have tried to build a profile of a Westerner of Kosovar heritage who joined violent extremist organisations. In the case of Germany, most radicalised Kosovar diaspora individuals are part of the younger generation of migrants, who either left Kosovo at a young age to escape the conflicts of 1990s, or were born in Germany. They feel socially, culturally, and politically neglected in Germany and in their country of origin, and are newcomers or recent converts to the religion. Yet, religion is the realm where they have found a sense of belonging and a sense of identity (Kursani 2015; 2017).

A typical example of a violent extremist whose origins are in Kosovo, but who is not Kosovo born or raised, is Ahrid Uka (male). Born in Germany in 1990 into a Kosovar family that migrated to Germany about 45 years ago, Ahrid Uka conducted an attack at the Frankfurt Airport and killed two US soldiers in March 2011. This stands as a typical, though not the only example of (weakly) Kosovo related individuals involved in plots abroad (Kursani 2017). He was neither radicalised in Kosovo, nor was he radicalised by anyone from Kosovo. Uka said during his trial that he had been radicalised by jihadist propaganda videos he had watched online (BBC 2012). He was radicalised and influenced by videos of the fights between US forces and armed organisations in Afghanistan. According to him, he conducted the attack against US soldiers as an act of revenge for US involvement in Afghanistan.

Another recent case involves a German citizen of Kosovo origin who travelled to Syria to fight for IS. Kreshnik Berisha (male) was born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1994 to a Kosovo Albanian family which had emigrated during the 1980s to escape Serbia's repression in Kosovo (CNN 2014). Berisha, who had no connection to Kosovo, was the first suspected member of IS to stand trial in Germany. He was arrested upon his arrival in Frankfurt in December 2014, after spending six months in Syria as an IS member (BBC 2014). Berisha grew up in Frankfurt and, as a teenager, played soccer for Makkabi Frankfurt, a Jewish club (Knight 2014). Studying construction engineering at a vocational college in Frankfurt, he socialised with people of Middle Eastern origins. While in college, he was exposed to the radical religious interpretation

of Islam, and eventually joined a militant Islamist group. Berisha was part of a network of individuals who perceive themselves as defenders of the Muslim populations worldwide, and protectors of Islam, which they deem to be under attack from the West. These beliefs are the reason for Kreshnik Berisha's travel to Syria to join IS. During his trial in Germany, Berisha asserted, "the inconceivable violence used by the Alawite Assad regime against the Sunni majority was enraging and bewildering. No-one wanted to help the people there" (Knight 2014). The feeling of solidarisation and the need for support for the Sunni Muslims in Syria is used by the majority of the foreign fighters from Kosovo. F.S., another foreign fighter from Kosovo said in an interview with the local TV in Kosovo that he joined IS to support Muslim brothers in Syria against the Assad regime (Portali RTV 2017). In most cases, those individuals are looking for a sense of belonging in a new and larger community of Muslims, unbound by the diversity of Islam, which is practised for centuries in their countries of origin (Perteshi 2019).

The religious identity of young European Muslims was also explored by French scholar Olivier Roy. According to Roy, Western Europe is home to two versions of practising of Islam. The first one was imported by the previous generations of migrants who maintained close identity links with their country of origin and brought Islam as part of their cultural tradition to Europe. The second version claims universality and is adhered to by European-born Muslims who imagine and project themselves as part of a global *umma* (community), not bound to their parents' place of origin but as part of a transnational, imagined community of faithful (Güvenich 2018). The first kind of Islam practised by the previous generations of the diaspora that holds the country of origin as a reference point was anchored by nationalism, while the latter is the ideological brand of radicalisation. The latter is the type of pan-Islamism that radical versions of Islam draw on. There are non-extremist versions of pan-Islamism, which argue that you can have a national identity as well as a Muslim identity. Roy observes that the organisations of the first generation of migrants exercised their political activity in their country of origin, and at most, they sought to influence the host country's politics toward their country of origin. In the case of ideological religious identity that pertains to the current generation of European Muslims, Roy posits that "by championing the transnational *umma*, they address the universalist yearning of Muslims who cannot identify with any specific place or nation" (Roy 2004: 58). Moreover, this radicalisation of Europe's subsequent generation of Muslims "is linked with a generation gap and depressed social status" (ibid: 60).

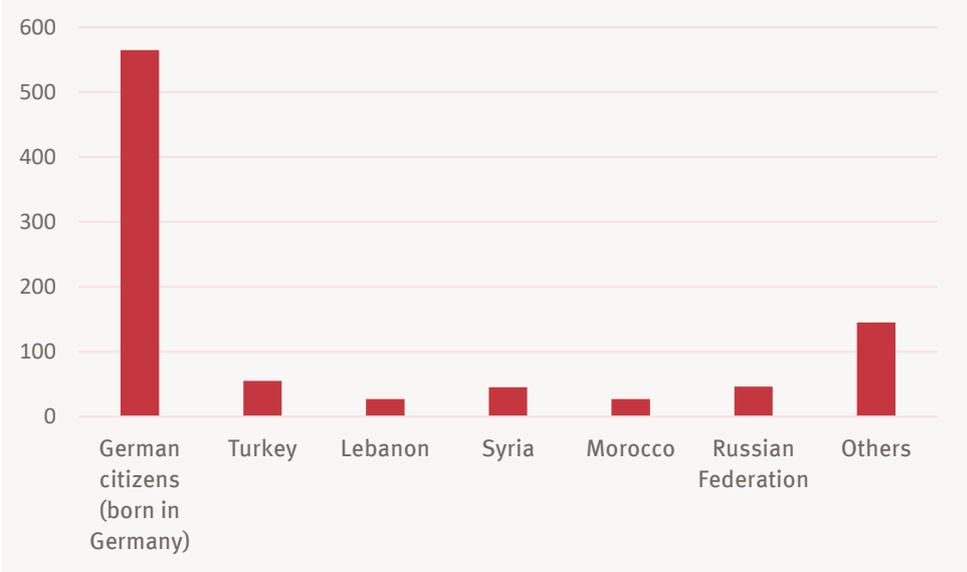
4. Comparison with German foreign fighters from the MENA diaspora

A high number of FFs from different diaspora communities living in Germany have joined the Islamic State. This section briefly explores the dynamics of radicalisation and violent extremism of the diaspora communities with origins in the MENA region, and offers a tentative comparison with the trends and factors of radicalisation and violent extremism among Kosovo Albanian diaspora members in Germany.

The official figures published by the German Federal Ministry of Interior Affairs puts the number of Muslims living in Germany at between 4.4 and 4.7 million (Federal Ministry of Interior Affairs 2020). Among those, around 50% are of Turkish origin, while the rest of the population includes Kurds, Palestinians, Syrians, people from the former Yugoslavia, and the Russian Federation (ibid). Moreover, official data from the German security authorities and intelligence estimates show that since 2012, more than 910 people from Germany have left to fight in Syria or Iraq (Heinke 2017). According to the same source, about one third of those who departed to join the Islamic State or other Islamist factions are known or assumed to be back in Germany and are still undergoing investigation. The ethnic background of those German FFs reveals that the majority are second or third generation migrants born in Germany, with weak

or no links to their native countries in the Middle East or North Africa, South Caucasus or Western Balkans. Indeed, about 61 percent of those who joined the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq were born in Germany, with a broad range of other places of birth (38 countries). The nationalities with the most significant number of foreign fighters travelling from Germany include Turkey (6%), Syria (5%), the Russian Federation (5%), Morocco (3%), and Lebanon (3%). Some 200 foreign fighters recruited in Germany are from these countries. Around 145 other foreign fighters are from the Palestinian diaspora, Kurds, Balkans, South Caucasus countries, etc. (Heinke 2017).

Figure 5: German foreign fighters based on their ethnic origin (Source: Heinke 2017).



In general, the first generations of Muslim migrants with origins in the MENA countries continued to practise their religion following migration to Germany. Their religious practise and education were strongly connected with their cultural, tradition-related, national and ethnic background, making these individuals more resilient to any form of Islamist extremist ideology. On the other hand, the young generation of the diaspora from MENA countries, those born or raised in Germany, have a weak or no relationship to their parents’ countries of birth. Consequently, their practised religion is stricter and they formed a new religious identity (Fouroutan 2013). This process of “High Islamisation” in Germany is not controlled nor connected with the cultural, national and ethnic elements of the countries of origin, making the current generation of Muslim diaspora more vulnerable and prone to religious-based violent extremist ideologies (ibid.). While parents continue to maintain their traditional way of practising Islam, a minor number of their children, who like to see themselves as the real standard practitioners of Islam and are often better educated, practise Islam strictly based on the literature, not allowing tradition and culture to influence their way of practise and belief.

In Germany, the diasporas from the MENA region have used Islam as a tool to prevent their cultural, ethnic, and religious assimilation (Green 2014), and many have tried to form and live in ghetto-like communities, where they have successfully resisted complete assimilation into German social life (Ewing 2003). By comparison, members of the Kosovar diaspora have primarily relied on their national identity as a mechanism to keep strong ties to Kosovo. Those ties have helped them to maintain traditional and cultural elements in their religious belief and practices, making them more resilient against religious-based extremism.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The number of people from the Kosovar diaspora who joined violent extremist organisations is not significant compared to the number of other diaspora communities in Germany. Kosovo has three generations of migrants who came to Germany throughout different periods. The first generation of the Kosovar diaspora has a stronger connection to Kosovo than the current generation.

This paper did not find a direct connection between the dynamics of violent extremism in Kosovo's diaspora and the phenomenon of radicalisation in Kosovo itself. The few individuals from the Kosovar diaspora who left as FFs to Syria and Iraq were in their early 20s, were born or raised in Germany, and had harboured feelings of social and political exclusion from the German mainstream public sphere.

While diasporas from MENA countries in Germany have used religion as a tool to maintain their identity, guard against assimilation and sustain the relationship with their countries of origin, the Kosovar diaspora has relied on its national and political identity as a source of social bonding. The diaspora's involvement in the Kosovar political processes and state-building efforts served as a platform to sustain the diaspora's strong connection to Kosovo. The dedication to the national cause and religious education based on the religious and cultural tradition of Kosovo has proved to be a strong mechanism to prevent religious-based extremist ideology from taking hold amongst the past and current Kosovar diaspora.

Based on these findings, we come to the following policy recommendations:

1. A baseline assessment of risks and threats related to radicalisation and violent extremism among the Kosovar diaspora community in Germany should be conducted.
2. Projects on the prevention of violent extremism among Kosovo's diaspora should be designed in close collaboration with the Kosovo Embassy in Berlin and Kosovar Cultural and Political Associations that operate in Germany. Future prevention of violent extremism activities targeting the Kosovar diaspora in Germany should include the national elements (language, history, values) and traditions in practising religion and cultural aspects of Kosovo to ensure their successful implementation.
3. A joint multi-year programme designed by German and Kosovar state authorities that includes cultural activities and religious education of the Kosovar diaspora in Germany should be adopted and implemented. This programme will contribute to preventing violent extremist ideologies among the Kosovar diaspora and will make the diaspora more resilient against all kinds of extremism and violent radicalisation.
4. The Government of Kosovo should introduce policy measures to increase the political representation of the diaspora in Kosovo institutions. Such a step would encourage the diaspora's civic engagement in the state-building process in Kosovo, other than providing remittances.
5. With earlier hopes of EU integration of the Western Balkans fading quickly, the diaspora could assist Kosovo's bilateral relations with countries of the European Union by serving as a bridge of communication between Kosovo and countries in Western Europe.

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