

## TURKEY'S SOFT POWER POLICY TOWARDS THE BALKANS AFTER THE 1990'S: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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**Abstract:** *During the communist period, many people in the Balkans lost their knowledge about religious beliefs and practices. After the regime change and the abolition of anti-religious laws, the places of worship have begun to fill up: more and more Christians have chosen to go to their churches; Muslims turned to the mosques, and Jews to the synagogues. While Christians and Jews had no problems to obtain accurate information about their beliefs, Muslims were faced with a difficult and serious dilemma. In the communist era, they had lost their institutional infrastructure, their social knowledge and the needed values to separate the correct information from the false ones. These phenomena allowed radical Islamic groups to gain ground throughout the Balkan area. The dictatorial regimes of the Gulf oil tycoons became their biggest supporters, encouraging non-democratic ideologies and financing the subtle penetration of some terrorist organisations in various regions of the world and different areas of activity. This study proposes an analysis of the “radicalisation of the Balkans”, the contemporary challenges related to the Islamic extremism, and how the soft power of Turkey contributes to combat terrorism in the Balkans.*

**Keywords:** Turkey, Policy, Balkans, Soft Power, Challenges, Opportunities, Radicalism, Extremism, Recruitment.

**Rezumat: Puterea blândă a Turciei referitoare la Balcani după anii 1990: provocări și oportunități.** *De-a lungul perioadei comuniste, multe dintre populațiile din Balcani și-au pierdut cunoștințele despre credințele și practicile religioase. După schimbarea regimului și abolirea legilor anti-religioase, lăcașurile de cult au început să se umple: creștinii au ales să meargă la bisericile lor, musulmanii s-au îndreptat către moschei, iar evreii către sinagogi. În timp ce creștinii și evreii nu au avut probleme legate de obținerea informațiilor exacte despre credințele lor, musulmanii s-au confruntat cu o dilemă dificilă și gravă. În comunism, ei și-au pierdut infrastructura instituțională, cunoștințele sociale și valorile necesare pentru a separa informațiile corecte de cele false. Acest lucru a oferit grupărilor islamice radicale oportunitatea de a câștiga teren în toată zona balcanică. Regimurile dictatoriale ale magnaților petrolului din Golf au devenit cele mai mari*

susținătoare ale acestora, încurajându-le ideologiile nedemocratice și finanțând pătrunderea subtilă a unor organizații teroriste în diverse regiuni ale lumii și în diferite domenii de activitate. Acest studiu propune o analiză a „radicalizării Balcanilor”, a provocărilor contemporane referitoare la islamismul extremist și a modului în care „puterea blândă” a Turciei contribuie la combaterea terorismului în Balcani.

**Résumé : Le soft power (manière douce) de la Turquie concernant les Balkans après les années 1990: provocations et opportunités.** *Le long de la période communiste, plusieurs populations des Balkans ont perdu leurs connaissances sur les croyances et les pratiques religieuses. Après la chute du régime et l'abolition des lois antireligieuses, les édifices de culte ont redevenu pleines: les chrétiens choisirent aller à leurs églises, les musulmans se sont dirigés vers les mosquées, pendant que les Juifs vers les synagogues. Pendant que les chrétiens et les Juifs n'ont pas eu des problèmes liés de l'obtention des informations exactes sur leurs croyances, les musulmans se sont confrontés avec un dilemme difficile et grave. Sous le communisme, ils ont perdu l'infrastructure institutionnelle, les connaissances sociales et les valeurs nécessaires afin de séparer les informations correctes de celles fausses. Cela offrit aux groupes islamiques radicaux l'opportunité de gagner de terrain dans la zone balkanique toute entière. Les régimes dictatoriaux des magnats du pétrole du Golfe devinrent leurs plus grands souteneurs, encourageant leurs idéologies pas démocratiques et finançant la pénétration subtile des organisations terroristes en divers régions du monde et en différents domaines d'activité. L'étude ci-joint se proposa une analyse de la "radicalisation des Balkans", des provocations contemporaines concernant l'islamisme extrémiste et la manière dans laquelle le pouvoir de convaincre de la Turquie contribua à combattre le terrorisme dans les Balkans.*

## INTRODUCTION

In general, the words' power is the capability to force the rest to obtain the desired outcomes. In this sense, soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of actors in international relations.<sup>1</sup> Logically and commonly, it is believed that the use of soft power is easier, cheaper, peaceful, more humane and sustainable than hard power. Because there seem to be some major errors in this conviction, contrary to the general understanding, sometimes use of soft power could not be easier than the use of the latter. Soft power is not only influence, though it is source of impact, therefore to use soft power international actors needs to have at least minimum basic universal values and intangible

<sup>1</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, in "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences", Vol. 616, 2008, No. 1, p. 95.

assets such as a sustainable democracy, the rule of law, attractive, modern living standards, a higher culture, political values, democratic institutions, wealthy urbanisation and state policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority.<sup>2</sup> Although those items, of course, may only be basics of several *sine qua non* assets; saying easier than do, preserving those high standards is not as simple as talking about their wisdom.

Because of the reasons as mentioned above; in some hot geographies and under definite conditions, use of soft power much more difficult than hard power. Balkans, due mixed demographic structure, cultural diversity and religious, sectarian, ethnic conflict potential throughout known historical span were one of the hot points of world politics.

Almost all nations during the historical span no matter either located in the east or west lusted for a stronghold in the Balkans. Antiquity Greeks, Scythians, Germans, Persians under King Daria and his successors during early age had worked to carve hegemony over the Balkans. Later comers Alexander the Great, Rome, Crusaders, Turks, Russians, Latins, Anglo-Saxons also wanted to have a stronghold, if that was not possible, they desired to keep their eyes on the Balkans. It is not a coincidence that two world wars started in the Balkans, the area still geographically is a hot region and always preserves a high risk of ethnic, religious or sectarian conflict. Proving this fact memory of brutal massacres and genocides during the last three decades are still fresh.

In the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, Ottoman Turks stepped into the Balkans and until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the hegemonic power, directly or indirectly controlling the area was that of the Turks. Under the Ottoman rule, similar to the Anatolia modest understanding of Islam boosted in the Balkans. Ottoman policy during its rule not to let any radicalisation spread to the area. During this period, except a few very seldom marginal cases there was no radical, fundamental or extremist religious penetration into the region. Ottoman rulers did not allow such penetration putting in use strict rules. When the Ottoman period ended Balkans, especially after WWII this area gradually came under Communist rule. The famously known rhetoric criticising wild capitalist exploitation of the proletariat class formulated by Karl Marx: "religion is the opium of the people"<sup>3</sup>, was implemented by early Soviet practice for the purpose of the prohibition of almost all religious practices and institutions and deprivation ordinary people

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (ed. Samuel H. Beer), Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. New York, 1955, p. 30-32.

of casual religious knowledge. That kind of mischief Soviet forced atheism, especially in rural areas and lack of religious knowledge, the prohibition of religious practice paved the way of illiterate religious societies, who were unaware how to practice their rituals even the basics of their religious knowledge also mostly faded during this period.

In contrast with Soviet pressure on religion, societies did not forget their faith while time passed basic practices and rituals disappeared first from daily life later from the memories. In addition to the problems regarding basic rituals, sacraments, and liturgy or prayer when the Soviet system was withdrawn and the old Yugoslavia collapsed both left poor, underdeveloped and ethnically problematic societies behind. Because of this reason, when the old regime collapsed, people belonging to different religions soon after the lifting of oppression filled their temples to learn and practice their rituals. Unfortunately, this era overlapped with the rise of radical sectarian movements based on extremism. Worse than this, most of radical, extremist movements openly or secretly had been supported by Gulf dictatorships saw post-Communist Balkans a breeding field to propagate their radical ideologies and recruit newly devoted members.<sup>4</sup> Bosnian war and ongoing genocides, social conflicts poured oil on this process.

Among those who arrived first, Wahhabism was one of the strongest. At the very beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Wahhabism was a hard-line commendation of mainstream understanding, and it was core identity builder of Saudi Autocracy, has been the keystone of Saudi Arabian state structure, supported as a state identity by Saudis penetrated to the Balkans.<sup>5</sup> Salafism lacking open solid-state support older than Wahhabism had started in the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries also together with Wahhabism boosted in the region.<sup>6</sup> Ottomans, soon after its emergence, tried to exterminate that newly fundamental, in some parts heretic understandings, but all those efforts could not be effective to combat such radicalisation. Another

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<sup>4</sup> Nicole Ely, *Combating Salafist Influence in the Western Balkans*, in "European Security Journal News.com", August 5, 2019, in <https://www.esjnews.com/salafist-influence-in-the-western-balkans> (accessed 25 August 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Schwartz, *Wahhabism in the Balkans*, in [www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/wahhabism-in-the-balkans](http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/wahhabism-in-the-balkans) (accessed September 16, 2019). For Saudi use of Religion and Wahhabism see: Joseph Novo, *Religion and National Identity in Saudi Arabia*, in "Middle Eastern Studies", Vol. 34, 1998, No. 3, p. 34-53.

<sup>6</sup> M. Sait Özervarli, *Selefiyye* [Salafiyya], in <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/selefiyye> (accessed September 21, 2019).

state-supported radical movement was Shia, the official sect of Iran Islamic Republic that also penetrated the Balkans.

One of the bold supporters of extremist understandings, Saudi Arabia is the most theocratic state in the contemporary Sunni Muslim world. In Saudi Arabia, religious faith and loyalty to the ruling family is the predominant component of the collective identity. Religion in general, Wahhabism which in use in the Peninsula for about two and a half centuries, in particular, has been utilised as a unifying instrument and as a source of political legitimacy for Saudi rule. Thus Wahhabism was not only as a spiritual experience or state religion but also as a component of the Saudi nation's collective identity.<sup>7</sup> Transferring and carrying this so-called "pure teaching" to other Muslims has been seen both as a religious duty and state asked, supported office. In addition to Saudi fundamentalism, extremist Salafism is another danger grown in the region. Widespread extremism, by participation and enforcement of other extremist countries' support inevitably poured oil on the turbulent Balkans. Religious extremism/radicalisation/fundamentalism regardless name of faith is something like when someone infected, healing and rehabilitation almost impossible. The only solution to prevent the spread of extremism in the Balkans is to use soft power and to teach modern understanding.

Turkey is a developing country; is a secular nation-state, despite few interruptions, preserves the democratic culture which has been started at 1876's onwards, long before adapted liberal market economy, has a modern legislative system; it is among world's 20 largest economies. Turkey, more or less a westernised modern state, a member of NATO (1952), since the Treaty of Ankara signed in 1963 tracking the process to be a full member of the EU, has been granted full membership candidate status in the year of 1999. Admittedly, in its geography, Turkey is the only democratic, secular country which its population is about 99.2% Muslim.<sup>8</sup>

The discussion of whether Turkey could be a role model for post-Communist era Balkan countries or not is not the scope of this paper. However, there is a large Muslim population in the Balkans, and Turkey could use its soft power to assist Balkan Muslim societies for modest religious commentary,

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Novo, *Religion and National Identity in Saudi Arabia*, in "Middle Eastern Studies", Vol. 34, No. 3 (Jul., 1998), p. 35-36, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Sarp Özer, *Türkiye'de Dini Hayat Araştırması [Religious Life Research in Turkey]*, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı [Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs] Publication, Ankara [Turkey], 2014, p. 3.

adaptation into modern living standards, secular understanding and liberal economic model. Modest understanding and Turkey's soft power role for widespread liberal ideas in the Balkans are so vital that this area about half a century were under Communist hard rule, during that period religious practice almost absolutely had been interrupted. If a modest understanding would not fill this gap, as it is seen today, extremism will have a large space to radicalise the illiterate, economically poor classes. Even though the crucial role and potential positive effect of Turkey's soft power; Western Europe (i.e. EU) turns blind eyes to this opportunity and prefer to underestimate Turkey's role. In contrast with this approach, Turkey preserves the potential to play a vital role and be more and more valuable than average European ignorant evaluation during the coming years.

### **PENETRATION AND RISE OF RADICAL MOVEMENTS IN BALKANS**

During Ottoman rule, Sufism and other moderate sects boosted in the Balkans, mostly neither Ottomans nor Balkan Muslims had fundamental views. They were moderate Islamic communities meaning radical interpretations remained alien to most of them.<sup>9</sup> Thus during post-Communist era fundamentalism, radical commendations and religious scholasticism have been imported into the Balkans; actually, scholastic thinking is in stark contrast to the traditional strains of Islam in the region.<sup>10</sup> When radical ideologies' penetration came, Balkan Muslim Societies lacked two basic vital necessities of their daily practice: (1) true, modest religious information and useful causal knowledge; (2) average income level for a sustainable, wealthy life and high unemployment rates. Filling both gaps, radical scholastic thinking when penetrated Balkans in their backpack they had been carrying: (1) oil-dollars and (2) radical Islamic teachings veiled by the falsely produced commendation of the Holy Koran and falsely commented sayings of the Prophet. Bigotry and lack of religious knowledge banned any rational evaluation of newly arrived preachers while oil-dollar capitalism cleared the path of propaganda. Besides, extremist propagandists were/are native speakers of Islam and ordinary people easily could think that what they say comes from the pure holy sources.

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<sup>9</sup> Boris Georgievski, *Could Balkan nations become the new hotbeds of Islamist extremism?*, <https://p.dw.com/p/2dpSC> (accessed September 21, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Kennet Morrison, *Wahhabism in the Balkans*, Shrivenham, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, February 2008, p. 2-3.

Moreover, ethnic clashes and need to use faith as a cement to build identity gave extremists a great opportunity to radicalise Muslim societies. As a result of that widespread, strong propaganda during the last decades, extremists advocating violence and acts of terrorism or fought with jihadi groups in Syria, Iraq or somewhere else also have been active in Balkans to recruit new religiously misled myrmidon members successfully.<sup>11</sup>

Regardless of their faith, when people believed that, their acts are the orders of God, they stop rational thinking. During Medieval ages in Europe, numerous women had been accused of being witches and masses persuaded that it was the will of God to burn those so-called witches to protect the holy wisdom wildly. As that case clearly shows, when the masses were persuaded that an illogical act is the will of God, people prefer not to question such orders. Same in Gulf dictatorships, preachers argue that dressing style, civil rights, marriage, divorce, polygamy, social status, etc. of women should be in accordance with so said their commendation which as if the will of God. It is men who decide what behaviours are the will of God and what are not. Women have not any right to say loudly their will or idea about the restrictions they forced to obey. When the masses have been persuaded that, for instance, the restricted style of women's life is the will of God, in dictatorships, not to offend governments, and not to be in contrast with the will of God almost all people are reluctant to question the rationality of such practices. In sociology, this communal irrational acting style is defined as learned helplessness.

Radical penetration into Balkans started with university education in the 1980s. Youngsters from Balkans due attractive scholarship programs enrolled in Middle Eastern universities such as; Damascus, Beirut, Tripoli, Cairo, Medina, etc. and upon their return as brainwashed adults, they started to establish some foundations to spread Salafi understanding, begun to argue that the existing way of faith during the Ottoman period almost heretic. Balkan Muslims' faith, since the Ottoman period, mostly has been based on rationalist Maturity-Hanafi school, so Muslim societies as whole were unfamiliar with that radical argument.<sup>12</sup> Thus, this first attempt was unsuccessful, but radicalisation had had a foot in the Balkans before the end of cold-war.

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<sup>11</sup> See *Balkan Jihadists. The Radicalisation and Recruitment of Fighters in Syria and Iraq*, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, March, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Metin İzeti, *Balkanlardaki dini ve kültürel gelişmeler ve Türkiye* [Religious and cultural developments in Balkans and Turkey], <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz-haber/balkanlardaki-dini-ve-kulturel-gelismeler-ve-turkiye/508841> (accessed November 15, 2019).

When the Cold War came to an end, upon their very arrival to Balkans, oil-dollar sponsored extremist propagandists injected people Gulf traditions with their hard-line commendations as the basis of Islam. Because Muslim societies lacked any comprehensive and family learned Islamic knowledge, they easily tended to believe such irrational arguments. Extremists intend to convert Balkans into a breeding field for radical movements.

Their propagandists generally tracked a four stepped program to achieve their aims: (1) they disbursed plenty of oil-dollars to poor people; (2) they established cultural centres and used definite mosques as headquarters; (3) they thought their way of dressing and behaviour as the basis of Islamic life; soon after they had a stronghold they started to intervene daily life, denying any modest understanding or secular way of life; (4) Consequently they argued that fight against infidels is the order of God, who fights in the war against infidels he unquestioningly will be granted with the Paradise.

As it was underlined above when Cold War came to an end, alike their Christian neighbour's Muslim societies in Balkans, have been vulnerable societies when faced with such kind of oil-dollar fostered propaganda and radical, extremist misled teachings veiled by the argument of true Islam. The result inevitably has been a breeding area for brainwashed, extremist, marginal groups. If any word needed to be said about Christian societies in the Balkans, why same problems did not rise among those societies: (1) The Orthodox Church overwhelmingly dominant in the Balkans and it also alike Catholic Church passed a reformation period; (2) there is a strong church structure in the Balkans and such penetration almost impossible to have any effect; (3) because modern life standards are mostly western values it is easier for Balkan Christians to adopt new lifestyle. Despite all, the Balkan Christians also were defenceless when faced with oil-dollar capitalism.

As a result of heavy propaganda and oil-dollar capitalism for instance, in a mosque near Tirana Albanian youngsters faced with brainwashing propaganda and since the 1990s onwards about 70 of them recruited by radical, extremist terrorist organisations to fight for the terror groups. All those at the beginning innocent youngsters after facing with misleading gulf radicalisation became devoted, irrational, unmerciful myrmidon fighters. Unfortunately, the number of mosques where hard-line radical interpretations have been thought by Salafi or Wahhabi groups are higher than expected. For instance, in Albania, including Mezes Mosque, there have been several mosques directly linked with violent understanding recruiting fighters for ISIS and Al Qaeda affiliated Al Nusra. Even

with existing data, it is impossible to give a fixed number; it is estimated that during last decades more than 100 Albanians have joined terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq, including 13 women and 31 children, 26 of whom were minors.<sup>13</sup> The number of myrmidon recruits most probably much higher than that statistic.

Almost half of the Albanian recruits have been killed in clashes or used as suicide bombers. The terrifying figures clearly show the danger of widespread misled approaches of so-called radicalised teachings. In the case of at early prevention of such radical penetration into the Balkans most probably expect some marginal cases there would one or two Albanians joined such illegal organizations. Albania just a random sample, the figures in the rest of the Balkans are mostly worse than Tirana case. Another risk is the returnee terrorist organization fighters who will endanger their country's stability upon their arrival. By early 2014 at least 40 Albanian fighters had returned from Syria.<sup>14</sup> There are doubts about how to consolidate them and most importantly, at what level their remorse could be trusted. The other danger which does not attract attention is a widespread lifestyle of misleading radical movements worsening especially women's rights. This phenomenon is as dangerous as terrorism because women are the first teachers of their children, and if their understanding is radicalised, a new generation with high radical tendencies will grow out.

Another random sample is Bosnia which radicalisation figures much more badly than Albania. During ethnic conflict and Serbian mass killings, Bosnia was a destination for radical movements in the 1990s. That situation made Bosnia more vulnerable; radical, extremist organisations made Bosnia a hot breeding field for terrorising radical movements. Around 120 Bosnian men are thought to be currently fighting in Syria and Iraq with ISIS and Al Nusra in the year of 2014. One of the most widespread radicalisation happened in Kosovar Muslims, the number of active fighters in Iraq and Syria are estimated around 300. That high number overlaps with high involvement of Salafi and Wahhabi extremists in the area, and high unemployment rates worsen the situation. World Bank reports show that unemployment rates in Balkans constitute almost half of the population.<sup>15</sup> Same in Macedonia, the youngsters have been brainwashed, the number of active fighters in Iraq and Syria is around 110. The number is 13 in

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Predrag Petrovic, *Islamic Radicalism in the Balkans*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Alert No 24, June 2016, p. 1-2.

Montenegro and about 26 among Serbian Muslims.<sup>16</sup> Another fact light should shed Iran's penetration with un-secular teachings into the Balkans. As it is known, Iran is the supporter of some radical organisations and a wide-spread Iranian effect in the Balkans as risky as a Wahhabi influence. No need to say that the above-given numbers are just identifiable figures, the actual unveiled statistic data much higher.

Following gathered statistics; it is estimated that more than 1.000 men, women and children brainwashed by extremist propagandists went abroad as militants and some of them desiring to return home, creating a new risk for home countries because they could still espouse the radical ideology.<sup>17</sup> Extremist preachers not only radicalising people; they are also breaking the peaceful coexistence and understanding, escalating religious discrimination and hatred in the Balkans. Radicalised, ultra-nationalist, ethnic groups and leaders such as Slobodan Milosevic and Ratko Mladic and many others have been bold assistants of such activities. Regardless religions, the extremists are a malign, grave danger to the peace and the peaceful coexistence; it is not native, but as mentioned above, mostly imported to the Balkans.

Besides the widespread wave of fundamentalism, another risk is clashing among societies living neighbourhood for centuries. Extremists also provoke people to attack secular Muslims. As a result of escalation in February 2009, Wahhabi brainwashed militants attacked people supporting moderate understanding.<sup>18</sup> Even some of them based on state statistics, general survey reports present mostly estimated figures on the number of persons actively participated in terrorist organisations. Because of this reason, it is impossible here to figure out the exact number, but the estimates shed light on the spread of radicalism that becomes dangerous in the coming decades.

All those organisations and radical movements are active in Turkey also. Because strict police monitoring in cities, such radical organisations commit their criminalised, illegal activities secretly in remote areas. Turkish Government, when unveiled such radicalisation detain and jail such propagandists, but being on the border of Syria, Turkey faces a serious threat. Turkey, for 36 years has been fighting against ruthless, leftist terrorist organisation PKK since 1983, also, suffered several deadly bombings of extremist terror groups since the beginning

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<sup>16</sup> *Balkan Jihadists. The Radicalisation and Recruitment of Fighters in Syria and Iraq*, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, March, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Nicole Ely, *Combating Salafist Influence in the Western Balkans* (accessed 25 August 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Schwartz, *Wahhabism in the Balkans* (accessed September 16, 2019).

of Syrian crisis. In the year of 2013, 11 May, one of the bloodiest terror attacks in Turkish history killed 52 people and 140 people also injured.<sup>19</sup> Paradoxically, for the Balkans and Turkey itself only sustainable solution is the use of soft power, rising literacy on religion, teaching modest understanding, the secularisation of societies and monitoring all such radicalisation are prior measures to be taken. As a sample to combat against radical terrorist organisations, in the year of 2019, September, a comprehensive operation launched targeting radical organisations such as Al-Nusra and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in 13 southern provinces.<sup>20</sup> Here it is seen that despite one of the radical organisations, HTS is not so active in Balkans yet, but it is active in Turkey.

All historical experiences and field reports in Balkans prove that once recruited by extremist ideas and brainwashed it is almost impossible to de-radicalize infected individuals, very little the success can hardly be achieved by injecting new modest and secular approaches. Thus, the solution is to prevent penetration or infection such ideas at the beginning. If radicalisation is accepted as a disease, because curative efforts born no positive result, prevention of illness before it metastasis, is a much more sustainable and successful method.

### **THE CATALYST ROLE OF TURKEY: MODERATE UNDERSTANDING AND USE OF SOFT POWER**

After almost three decades of malign consequences and an accelerated rise of extremism, to cope with widespread penetration of the fundamentalism, some strict measures and regulations have been put in force by the Balkan countries. The new laws also have been enacted to prevent radical movements. Also, in 2014, UN Resolution 2178 has been adopted in the Balkans, and desire to access EU also is steering leverage forcing the Balkan countries to harmonise their domestic regulations with the EU. Nonetheless, oil-dollar supported preachers and radical institutions veiled by peaceful initiatives such as; humanitarian aid, social assistance, teaching societies, etc. are still active in the Balkans. As it is very well known, ideological movements could not be prevented by force or solid laws. If

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<sup>19</sup> Cumhuriyet, *Reyhanlı Saldırısı için Vahim İddialar* [Serious Allegations for Reyhanlı Attack], [http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/274009/Reyhanli\\_saldirisi\\_icin\\_vahim\\_iddialar.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/274009/Reyhanli_saldirisi_icin_vahim_iddialar.html) (accessed 10 September 2019).

<sup>20</sup> *13 ilde kritik operasyon! 41 kişi hakkında gözaltı kararı...* [Critical operation in 13 provinces! About 41 people in custody ...], in <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/13-ilde-kritik-operasyon-41-kisi-hakkinda-gozalti-karari-41329483> (accessed September 15, 2019).

they are not allowed to commit their malign activities openly, such radical organisations commit their criminalised, unlawful acts underground. A sustainable solution could be achieved due to education and the use of benign soft power. At this point, Turkey, as a strong regional actor due to its strong, historical, cultural, and geographic ties could play a vital catalyst, peace facilitator consolidation's role among the Balkan Muslim societies.

Turkey, the successor country of the former Ottoman Empire upon its very foundation, generated strong cultural, educational and security ties towards the Balkans. Because the extremist malign effects were unnoticed at the very beginning, the main aim was not to combat radicalisation. Meanwhile, its historical background assisted Turkey to develop policies towards its western security depth Balkans while numerous actors desire to have a strong, king-making role in the region. There are both challenges and opportunities for Turkey to play a sustainable role in the region. Turkey supports the foundation of a peaceful world, preserving the *status quo*. In this respect at the very beginning Turkish Foreign Policy based on Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's famous proverb: "*Peace at home peace in the World*", following this track until the end of the Cold War Turkish Foreign Policy shaped by three basic rules respectively: (1) Maintenance of *status quo* in-home and in the world; (2) Establishing a westernised modern state structure, having reciprocal strong relations with neighbours; (3) Active participation into peace operations and peaceful initiatives.

As it is underlined above, Gulf dictatorships, no need to name them here one by one, have been exerting their radical ideology through the use of soft power under the guise of humanitarian aid, educational support and social works. Surveys show that Saudi Family is one of the main supporters of radical ideologies.<sup>21</sup> They spend an extensive amount of oil-dollars to spread their ideology. Even if they do not radicalise society, they demolish secular understanding and gender equality. In the consolidation of the area, both EU and US involved the region to balance the rising Gulf oriented movements, but because their involvement is not as strong as it once and because they use Christian rhetoric towards Muslim societies, their effect could not reach the optimal influence level. A new and different actor, having easy access to Muslim societies is a grave need for successful combat against radicalisation.

Turkey is the only secular country in the region, which its population overwhelmingly Muslim. Due to its limited sources and vulnerable location,

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<sup>21</sup> Carol E. B. Chosky, Jamsheed K. Chosky, *The Saudi Connection: Wahhabism and Global Jihad*, in "World Affairs", Vol. 178, 2015, No. 1, p. 24-25.

Turkey while using its soft power towards the Balkans could face some grave challenges to compete for oil-capitalism and theoretically misled radicalism. Because of this reason, Western democracies should collaborate and provide support to Turkey for combating radicalism.

The Balkans is the backyard of Europe, meanwhile, is the western security depth of Turkey, because of that historical fact, Brussels has been trying to annex Balkan countries into the Union by gradual enlargements since the end of the Cold War. Brussels, regardless of their religion or ethnic origin, should accept all Balkan nations as an integral part of Europe and should boldly support Balkan consolidation. Until the present day, the EU's enlargement policy towards Balkans was both effective and successful, but there are some problems over sustainability.<sup>22</sup> Contrary to that success, radical movements still penetrate and breed in the Balkans, last figures show that the EU is unsuccessful in the hindrance of the consolidation of radical movements. Another failure of the EU not to accept Turkey as a full-member putting new obstacles to prevent Turkish entry into the Union. Yet Turkey could provide a vital contribution to the prevention of radicalisation in the Balkans and propagate of modest understanding into Muslim societies, including remote areas. That policy doubtlessly could foster mutual security and peaceful ongoing of both EU and Turkey, and even safety and well-doing of Balkan Muslim societies will be a great achievement. Turkey, together with its secular state structure, could play a crucial role in Balkans to minimise mostly probable malign effects of all kinds of radical movements using oil-dollars, have been trying to find footing in the Balkans. If necessary measures in the communal level were not taken in collaboration, there would be sectarian clashes between Balkan societies reminding Medieval European fatal conflicts.

Turkey, soon after the end of the Cold War, pursued some initiatives and established some institutions addressing Balkans and the underdeveloped areas of the world. One of those institutions was TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) established in 1992, active in the Balkans between the years of 1996-2017 undertook about total 4.248 major projects (see table below). According to data given by TİKA; during the last years, Turkey in cooperation with the Bosnia Herzegovina Ministry of Education and Science launched an experience sharing program, aiming to contribute social integration of disadvantaged, vulnerable groups. Also, some religious training schools have been restored

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<sup>22</sup> Ela Golemi, *The Common Challenges of South-East European Countries in the Process of European Integration*, in "Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe", Vol. 16, 2013, No. 3, p. 281.

during this period. A sports hall has been constructed about 20 thousand people could benefit from this hall. Bus support has been provided to Sarajevo Canton. Reclamation of Janina River also undertaken. In Moldova, education and care of kindergarten children supported the institution has been serving 72 children by 2018. A hospital named Aziz Sancar Diagnosis and Treatment Centre has been opened with a 56-bed capacity.<sup>23</sup>

In Macedonia, religious training schools established to train Muslim priests with contemporary teaching methods. In Kosovo, a dormitory has been modernised, approximately 100 university and high school students have been accommodated in this dormitory. Sheep and goat reclamation and development of milk production supported, 710 breeding animals were provided comprising Balusha breed ram and sheep. In Albania, a kindergarten has been renovated, the number of children enrolled in kindergarten is about 150. Also, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk School, with 650 students has been renovated. In Macedonia, the technical equipment support provided to International Balkan University has been given to the Ministry of Justice. The Skopje Huseyin Shah Mosque and its annexes have been restored; in Bosnia Herzegovina, a library construction; in Romania, Turkish language laboratories were established and 38 Turkish classrooms have been renovated. Polyclinic department of Mecidiye Hospital was also renovated.<sup>24</sup>

In Serbia assistance provided to the modernisation of Supreme Court building. Sokullu Mehmet Pasha (famous Ottoman Grand Vizier was born in Sokolovici/Ruda: 1506-1579) fountain has been repaired, Valide Sultan Mosque has been restored, and Ram castle has been restored. In Hungary, some Ottoman historical buildings such as Gul Baba Tomb have been restored. In Croatia, construction of the Sisak Islam Cultural Center started it will be completed in 2020. In Albania, Berat Hunkar Mosque and Halveti Tekke have been restored. Help was provided to 500 families, victims of the Iskodra floods. In Montenegro, a micro-based olive processing plant has been established. Undercover cultivation support also is given to 35 families who have poor economic conditions.<sup>25</sup>

The total area of Balkans approximately is 788 thousand km<sup>2</sup>. As it is seen in below table Turkey, at the very beginning undertook active initiatives in the Balkans. Yet, when marshy, mountainous topography of the region is considered, it is seen that

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<sup>23</sup> See: *Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency Annual Report 2018*, pp. 43, 59, 74, in <https://www.tika.gov.tr/upload/2019/Faaliyet%20Raporu%202018/T%C4%B0KA%20Annual%20Report%202018.pdf> (Accessed October 20, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30-50.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

Turkey's activities are far from being sufficiently comprehensive for combating radicalisation. Turkey is a developing country; its south-eastern and north-eastern regions also need investment. Thus, when Turkey would like to raise its activities in the Balkans, it means to deduct some budgets from the underdeveloped eastern regions. This fact is not a kind of burden Turkey could face alone. In contrast with Turkey's limited economic sources, on the other hand, oil-rich, capitalism has a great number of dollars to spend on the radicalisation of the region.

**Table 1. Turkey's Humanitarian Activities in Balkans (1994-2017)<sup>26</sup>**

| COUNTRY                                | EDUCATION PROJECTS | RESTORATION PROJECTS | AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS | HEALTH CARE PROJECTS | CIVIL INFRASTRUCTURE. PROJECTS | CULTURAL COOPERATION PROJECTS | OTHER PROJECTS | TOTAL        |
|--|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| <b>ALBANIA</b><br>(d.r. 1996-2017)     | 105                | 27                   | 27                    | 44                   | 114                            | 66                            | 52             | <b>435</b>   |
| <b>BOSNA HERZ.</b><br>(d.r. 2008-2017) | 210                | 84                   | 70                    | 39                   | 54                             | 321                           | 67             | <b>845</b>   |
| <b>CROATIA</b><br>(d.r. 2016-2017)     | 14                 | ---                  | 3                     | 1                    | 9                              | 6                             | 2              | <b>35</b>    |
| <b>HUNGARY</b><br>(d.r. 2014-2017)     | 11                 | 11                   | ---                   | 7                    | 1                              | 42                            | ---            | <b>72</b>    |
| <b>KOSOVO</b><br>(d.r. 2005-2017)      | 137                | 34                   | 26                    | 16                   | 168                            | 117                           | 82             | <b>580</b>   |
| <b>MACEDONIA</b><br>(d.r. 2006-2017)   | 280                | 14                   | ---                   | 16                   | 236                            | 45                            | 249            | <b>840</b>   |
| <b>MOLDOVA</b><br>(d.r. 1994-2017)     | 27                 | ---                  | ---                   | 35                   | 88                             | 64                            | 81             | <b>295</b>   |
| <b>MONTENEGRO</b><br>(d.r. 2007-2017)  | 91                 | 8                    | 16                    | 43                   | 63                             | 79                            | 6              | <b>306</b>   |
| <b>ROMANIA</b><br>(d.r. 2015-2017)     | 27                 | 2                    | ---                   | 5                    | 13                             | 15                            | 73             | <b>135</b>   |
| <b>SERBIA</b><br>(d.r. 1992-2017)      | 60                 | 13                   | 27                    | 31                   | 42                             | 31                            | 21             | <b>225</b>   |
| <b>UKRAINE</b><br>(d.r. 1997-2017)     | 130                | 2                    | ----                  | 41                   | 61                             | 106                           | 140            | <b>480</b>   |
| <b>Grant Total</b>                     |                    |                      |                       |                      |                                |                               |                | <b>4.248</b> |

<sup>26</sup> TIKa Report Balkans, 2018, p. 11-72 (d.r.: date range which activities started). The Balkan data of 2018 has not been published yet while this article written.

During WWII, democracies in strict collaboration had battled against rising fascism. If the necessary investment was not made, needed measures were not taken, if assistance and goodwill were not provided Balkans inevitably will be the breeding centre of radical ideologies in coming decades. Thus radicalisation using sneaky methods patiently will continue to penetrate to the region.

As it is very well-known, education and modernisation are the only sustainable way to combat radicalisation. Turkey undertook several religious education projects to preserve the modern understanding in the Balkans. Since the very beginning of the post-Cold War era, Turkey has opened Islamic theological schools in the Balkans to prevent radicalisation. Also, Turkish priests have been appointed to central Balkan mosques to combat malign understandings. Officially, the Republic of Turkey since the 1990s onwards has been appointed Turkish priests/ imams to the Balkans, religious books which translated into local languages also have been distributed in the Balkans and addressing moderate theology teaching, scholarship programs have been granted to the Balkan youngsters from the high school and university levels.

Moreover, universities and Theology faculties also have been opened in Balkans to train youngsters with sustainable moderate rationalist understanding. Turkish soft power policies to combat radicalization is active in the Balkan countries, namely Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Greece, Romania and Slovenia.<sup>27</sup> Statistical numbers of Turkey's official activities were published yet none the less it is very well known that Turkey actively using its soft power in Balkans both to combat radicalization and to stabilize its eastern security depth.

In addition to comprehensive investment and cultural works, another positive effect of Turkey is rising ratings of Turkish soap opera. In the Balkans, wonder to learn long-lasting Ottoman past addicts people on TV. During the last years, American and European Union's involvement to Balkans dwindled, the Turkish soap opera finds a space to fill the gap. The course aims to reach the Balkan people as a whole, regardless of religion or ethnicity. For instance, in the year of 2014, Turkey was the second-highest global exporter of TV series, including soap operas. The first exporter was the US; Turkey's high rate competing with Hollywood is very important.<sup>28</sup> The addiction level of Turkey's soap opera is

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<sup>27</sup> See: Ali Erken (Ed.), *Balkanlarda Din Eğitimi* [Theology Education in Balkans], Istanbul, Değerler Eğitimi Merkezi, Aralık 2016, pp. 7-100, in [https://media.dem.org.tr/dir/dem/dem/proje/goruntuleme/20181209170708\\_0.pdf](https://media.dem.org.tr/dir/dem/dem/proje/goruntuleme/20181209170708_0.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Nicole Ely, *Much-loved Soaps Polish Turkey's Image in Balkans*, in <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/18/much-loved-soaps-polish-turkeys-image-in->

still preserved at its high level. This fact, together with high investment rates, is an opportunity which reaches almost all corners of the area.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Despite some serious challenges, soft power politics are more sustainable and peaceful. If necessary measures are not put in force, post-Cold War Balkans could be a breeding centre of radicalism. Penetration of such movements is a grave danger both for the Balkans, Europe and Turkey. Estimate reports and field surveys show that there has been a sneaky widespread radicalisation in the Balkans. Despite newly enacted rules to combat radicalisation, a little success could be achieved until now.

Combating dramatic wide-spread penetration one of the influential countries be able to balance and effectively could prevent such radicalisation in the Balkans is Turkey. The only sustainable way out for Balkan radicalisation is to implement soft power policies. But there are some serious challenges for Turkey's use of soft power; meanwhile, there are some historical, cultural and geographic opportunities. Prevention of radicalisation is the benefit of both Western Countries, Balkan Societies and Turkey. Therefore, the EU countries, instead of turning a blind eye to the developments in the Balkans, should actively support Turkey to provide the Muslim societies with secular, true, and modest Islamic teachings. When the grave danger of widespread extremism considered, it is seen that in Balkans prevent radicalisation among Muslim societies needs strict planning. The main actor who could play a catalyst role to balance such extremist propaganda and prevent any development which would make the Balkans a fertile breeding field of radical, extremist teachings is Turkey.

While implementing soft power politics towards the Balkans, both to raise its effect in the region and combat radicalisation Turkey benefits some opportunities while faces with grave challenges. The opportunities are: (1) Turkey has strong historical ties with the Balkans. The Ottoman legacy helps Turkey to enlarge it works throughout the region and reach more people. Balkan people also familiar with Turkish culture mostly welcome such policies; (2) There are Turkish descended, Turkish speaking societies in the Balkans. This strong

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balkans/; Nemanja Cabric, Maja Nedelkovska, Donjeta Demoli, Amina Hamzic, *Turks Bewitch the Balkans with their Addictive Soaps*, in <https://balkaninsight.com/2013/05/01/turks-bewitch-the-balkans-with-their-addictive-soaps/> (accessed September 27, 2019).

contact could be erected and empowered throughout those societies; (3) Strong cultural ties smooth Turkey's soft power policies towards the Balkans; (4) Turkey is a secular country alike Balkan societies are familiar to secularism. This fact could foster peaceful coexistence in the region.

Besides opportunities, there are grave challenges also: (1) Turkey is a developing country, could not provide an extensive rate of investment into the Balkans. Radical movements mostly are backed by oil-rich countries and it is economically difficult to compete with them; (2) Ottoman legacy and common historical past are not always positive. Thus Turkey needs to persuade some certain societies that its soft power policy does not veil any irredentism and are peaceful; (3) Democratic fluctuations undermines Turkey's role and effectiveness. EU's policies to keep Turkey in front of its door, but not to take in also weakens soft policies towards the Balkans. Also, the EU's selfish policy on global immigration made Turkey an immigrant container country. That policy risks an immigration wave which firstly would address the Balkans.

Consequently, soft power politics could be effective to leverage combating radicalisation, but the EU should support Turkey's efforts. Democratization of Turkey would contribute modernisation of the Balkan Muslim societies. Yet, the EU prefers to turn blind eyes to this fact. On the side of Turkey, without fostering democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech, modernisation and institutional structure, its soft power policies will not as effective as it is expected.