RESOLVE
NETWORK

Migration, Extremism, & Dangerous Blame Games
Developments & Dynamics in Serbia

Marina Lažetić

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rapid arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants into the European Union (EU) from the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa[1] beginning in 2015 coincided with an increase in support for anti-immigrant rhetoric and the far-right in many European countries.[2] A substantial number of these migrants came to the EU through what became known as the "Balkan Route"[3] a major transit land route cutting through the Western Balkans.[4] In 2016, however, the Route officially "closed," leaving many of those people attempting to reach Europe effectively stranded within the Balkans.[5] In 2020, for example, approximately 7,000 migrants and refugees were present within the borders of Serbia at any given time,[6] This presence of migrants within the Balkans did not go unnoticed and, in some cases, even spurred increased activity within and mobilization among far-right actors opposed to their presence in the region. Exploring this phenomenon, this report focuses on dynamics surrounding migration and responses to it from the far-right in Serbia, one of the countries on the Balkan Route.

While racist beliefs like the "great replacement theory", a conspiracy theory alleging that "native white Europeans are being replaced in their countries by non-white immigrants from Africa and the Middle

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1   The phrase "migration crisis" is in quotation marks throughout this report to reflect the popular discourse on migration while also pointing out that the crisis isn't necessarily about the migration itself so much as it is about the language, the social and political discourse, and the inability of states and international organizations to agree on the best way to provide assistance and protection the people on, within, and at their borders.

2   "Europe and Right-Wing Nationalism: A Country-by-Country Guide," *BBC News*, November 13, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36130006.

3   Bodo Weber, *The EU-Turkey Refugee Deal and the Not Quite Closed Balkan Route* (Sarajevo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2017), http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/summary/eu-turkey-refugee-deal-and-the-not-quite-closed-balkan-route/.

4   The "Western Balkans" refers to the region encompassing the countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Serbia. While Croatia is frequently excluded from the Western Balkans given its membership in the European Union, the country's recent wartime history and relationships with neighboring Western Balkans countries speak to its continued ties to and influence in the region.

5   Francisco de Borja Lasheras, Vessela Tcherneva, and Fredrik Wesslau, *Return to Instability: How Migration and Great Power Politics Threaten the Western Balkans* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2016), https://ecfr.eu/publication/return_to_instability_6045.

6   According UNHCR. Serbia had "3,180 newly registered persons in Jan 2021 (comp. to 1,695 in Feb 2019) and 2,273 in Feb 2021 (comp. to 2,633 in Feb 2020)." See: "UNHCR Serbia Monthly Update, January – February 2021," *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, March 12, 2021.

East,"[7] propagated by some far-right and anti-immigrant movements[8]—and discrimination against Roma populations are present in Serbia, far-right actors in Serbia do not refer to racial tensions explicitly in their rhetoric, as some far-right groups in Western Europe or the US do. Instead, far-right rhetoric in Serbia remains centered around frustrations with the political establishment, ethnic nationalism, and anti-minority sentiments underpinned by concerns about the dilution of the Serbian national identity. Amid this backdrop, the arrival of migrants from outside of the Western Balkans region into Serbia seems to have provided a new rallying point and an opportunity for far-right actors to reframe their agenda away from positions of wartime ethnic nationalism dating back to the conflicts of the 1990s, and towards a "Europeanized" discourse, emphasizing European ancestry and common struggle against the "outsider".[9] Such "Europeanization" manifested in the Balkans as concerns about large numbers of migrants and refugees were being popularized in the mainstream by the European far-right. The Serbian far-right learned from and adopted European strategies and were, in some cases, trained by European far-right actors as well.[10]

This report examines how the "migration crisis" both impacted and was utilized by far-right extremists in Serbia through detailed analysis of ongoing and emerging far-right trends and activities in the country. Building off previous research conducted by the author,[11] this report finds that the movement of people from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa through the Western Balkans and their protracted displacement in the region created a new phenomenon around which far-right extremists and organizations have been able to organize and mobilize support, both within the region and through strengthened connections with the global far-right.

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7   Anti-Defamation League, "'The Great Replacement': An Explainer," *Anti-Defamation League,* https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/the-great-replacement-an-explainer.

8   Ibid.

9   Writing on this phenomenon, Florian Bieber notes that, "The ideological core of Europeanism incorporates the national identities and is strongly grounded in a civilizational understanding of Europe as a continent of white Christians with shared histories and cultural values. This understanding necessarily excludes those who are not European by ancestry." For more, see: Florian Bieber, "How Europe's Nationalists Became Internationalists," *Foreign Policy*, November 30, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/30/how-europes-nationalists-became-internationalists/.

10   Jelena Cosic, Lawrence Marzouk and Ivan Angelovski, "British Nationalist Trains Serb Far-Right for 'Online War'," *Balkan Insight,* May 1, 2018, https://balkaninsight.com/2018/05/01/british-nationalist-trains-serb-far-right-for-online-war-04-30-2018/.

11   Marina Lažetić, "'Migration Crisis' and the Far-Right Networks in Europe: A Case of Serbia," *Journal of Regional Security* 13, no. 2 (2018): 1-48, https://doi.org/10.5937/jrs13-19429.

The report first presents analysis of important patterns related to far-right extremism in Serbia, followed by an examination of the role and influence of the "migration crisis" on far-right activity in the country in the period 2015 to 2020. In doing so, the report also examines the extent to which anti-immigrant rhetoric has become integrated into far-right responses to other emerging and ongoing social and political dynamics—namely, the COVID-19 pandemic and Euroscepticism.

Migration: A New Frame for an Ongoing Phenomena

Organization among and ideological stances within the Serbian far-right have, historically, been deeply rooted in the idea of a need to protect Serbia's "national identity" from perceived enemies. While the role of "the enemy" has been assigned to different entities over the decades, in recent years a strong anti-immigrant narrative has emerged within the Serbian far-right that others migrants and refugees, portraying them as the entity whose culture and values threaten the Serbian people and their identity.[12] This dynamic is somewhat similar to narratives among the far-right that have arisen in other Balkan countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina.[13] These "new" refugees and migrants are considered by the Serbian far-right as distinct from refugees from other countries in the region such as Bosnia and Albania. To the Serbian far right, such refugees from outside of the region are considered to be more radical religiously (e.g. practitioners of "illiberal Islam") and a bigger threat to Serbia as such.[14]

The extensive migration of people coming into the Western Balkans, due in large part to the conflict in Syria, opened up an opportunity for far-right actors in Serbia to connect to global far-right anti-immigration extremist talking points and agendas.[15] In the time since, anti-immigration European far-right actors have not only visited Serbia, they have also provided training for their Serbian counterparts on

12 Ivica Petrovic, "Srpski Desničari Vode Kampanju Preko Leđa Migranata," *DW,* February 20, 2020, https://www.dw.com/sr/srpski-desni%C4%8Dari-vode-kampanju-preko-le%C4%91a-migranata/a-52445721.

13 Sead Turčalo and Hikmet Karčić, The Far Right in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Historical Revisionism and Genocide Denial," *Balkan Insight,* August 2021, https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Far-Right-in-Bosnia-and-Herzegovina_preview_without-IRI-logo.pdf.

14 Vladimir Vuletic, *Impacts of the Migration Crisis on Local Governments and Communities in Serbia and Possibilities for Integration* (Belgrade: United Nations Development Programme, 2016), https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNDP_SRB_Advocacy_Report_EN_Crisis_fin2_0.pdf.

15 Lažetić, "'Migration Crisis' and the Far Right Networks in Europe."

how to organize, how to campaign against immigration, and how to more effectively utilize media to promote their platforms.[16] The involvement of these external actors has been said to contribute to further polarization within Serbian society, augmenting a general atmosphere of fear among locals towards their "new neighbors" (migrants), whom they fear will impose their outside cultures and ways of life on Serbian communities. [17] Far-right-led anti-immigration protests and other activities have also contributed to the further securitization of migration in Serbia, characterized by stricter border measures and the presence of the military within migrant asylum centers. In a country where migration policies are not only newly adopted, but also not uniformly implemented, and in which the state of democracy and rule of law remains precarious, these protests, activities, and laws present a potential security risk for the local population as well as for the migrants and refugees themselves, as anti-immigration agendas and actions bolster far-right groups who are already said to pose a threat to citizens' freedoms.[18]

A Worsening Crisis: The Impact of a Pandemic

The precarious situation of several thousand migrants who had been stuck in the Balkans attempting to reach Western Europe, coupled with the intensification of anti-immigrant campaigns, has been further exacerbated in the wake of COVID-19. While the pandemic has coincided with an increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric globally, with the effect of mainstreaming some far-right ideas and discourse,[19] Serbia implemented some of the strictest measures to curb the outbreak of COVID-19,[20] with some applied

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16   Cosic, Marzouk, and Angelovski, "British Nationalist Trains Serb Far-Right for 'Online War'."

17   Grupa 484, "Migracijski Izazovi, Lokalne Politike," accessed July 25, 2021, https://www.grupa484.org.rs/h-content/uploads/2020/04/Migracijski_izazovi_lokalne_politike_ucesce_gradjana-grupa-484.pdf.

18   Maja Živanović and Ognjen Zarić, "Širenje Neistina o Migrantima u Srbiji," *Radio Slobodna Evropa,* November 10, 2020, https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/lazne-vesti-o-migrantima-i-izbeglicama-srbija/30940207.html.

19   According to research conducted by the Psychological Innovation Network, 75% of Serbian citizens have negative attitude towards migration and more than a quarter of citizens believe that media creates anti-immigrant sentiments by emphasizing security dangers migrants present for the local population. About 40% of citizens believe in conspiracy theories related to migrants. See: Jovana Bjekić, Marko Živanović, Maša Vukčević Marković, Milica Ninković, and Irena Stojadinović, *Stavovi Prema Migrantima I Izbeglicama u Srbiji* (Psychological Innovation Network, June 2020), https://psychosocialinnovation.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Stavovi-prema-izbeglicama-i-migrantima_2020.pdf.

20   Milica Vojinovic, "Serbia's COVID-19 Lockdown Takes an Authoritarian Turn," *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project*, April 2, 2020, https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/11992-serbia-s-covid-19-lockdown-takes-an-authoritarian-turn.

disproportionately to migrants and refugees.[21] During curfews imposed by the Serbian government in 2020, for example, migrants were restricted from leaving asylum centers regardless of the reason. While this policy was in keeping with broader measures in Serbia that restricted movement even among citizens, migrants were additionally subjected to the deployment of the army to guard asylum and reception centers. Both restrictions on migrants' movement outside of the centers and the army's presence at those centers continued even after protective measures were relaxed for the rest of the population. The deployment of military resources to asylum centers was justified by the president of Serbia as a means of providing "protection" to local populations.[22] Far-right movements such as the People's Patrols (Narodne Patrole) and Levijatan, a racist, far-right organization that operates under the guise of advocacy for animal rights, both of which rose to prominence after the pandemic, also implemented their own "protection" measures. Under the pretense of stepping in where the state had failed to protect and provide security for the Serbian people, in 2020 these groups sent men clad in black to terrorize both migrants and members of the local community.[23]

Euroscepticism: Strengthening the Agenda of the Serbian Far Right

The EU's apparent disinterest in including certain Western Balkan countries in the Union has aroused a sentiment of "abandonment" of the region, which is present in several Serbian social and political discourses. The "migration crisis," in combination with the pandemic, has exacerbated the sentiment that the Union abandoned the Western Balkans to resolve the migration issue on its own while the EU secured its borders.[24] Such perceptions of the EU are thought to be opening spaces for other external

21 Marija Antić and Danica Santić, "Serbia in the Time of COVID-19: Between 'Corona Diplomacy', Tough Measures and Migration Management," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 61, no. 4-5 (2020), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15387216.2020.1780457.

22 Veljko Popović, "Vučić Poslao Vojsku Na Migrante, Analitičari Tvrde- Predizborni Marketing," *Glas Amerike*, May 16, 2020, https://www.glasamerike.net/a/vojska-srbije-migranti-vucic-sid-ejdus-lunic-bcpb/5422555.html.

23 Radio Slobodna Evropa, "Nevladine organizacije upozorile na rast ksenofije prema migrantima u Srbiji," *Radio Slobodna Evropa,* December 10, 2020, https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/30993655.html.

24 Emilio Cocco, "Where is the European Frontier? The Balkan Migration Crisis and its Impact on Relations between the EU and the Western Balkans," *European View* 16, no. 2 (2017): 293-302, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1007/s12290-017-0471-5.

powers to assert their interests and influence[25] and have been strengthened by top political representatives, including Serbia's president, Aleksandar Vučić, who has made recent statements alluding to the EU's "abandonment" of Serbia[26] and highlighting support Serbia received from its other external partners—Russia and China. Research suggests that the President's statements, combined with the restricted flow of information and strict media control imposed by the government in recent years, have had a strong impact on Serbia's citizens, the majority of whom believe that China and Russia represent the only real "friends" of Serbia.[27] The belief that democratic advancement and EU integration are losing momentum, coupled with the belief that Russia and China are the only real partners of the Serbian people, has been further promoted through strong media and online campaigns supporting far-right narratives.[28]

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25 de Borja Lasheras, Tcherneva, and Wesslau, *Return to Instability.*
26 Nedeljinik, "Samo Kina Može Da Nam Pomogne, Evropska Solidarnost Ne Postoji…" *Nedeljinik,* March 15, 2020, https://www.nedeljnik.rs/samo-kina-moze-da-nam-pomogne-evropska-solidarnost-ne-postoji/.
27 Institute of European Affairs, "Istraživanje Javnog Mnjenja – Stavovi Građana Srbije Prema Rusiji," *Institute of European Affairs*, May 21, 2020, https://iea.rs/en/blog/2020/05/21/istrazivanje-javnog-mnjenja-stavovi-gradjana-srbije-prema-rusiji/.
28 Paul Stronski and Annie Himes, *Russia's Game in the Balkans* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019), https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/02/06/russia-s-game-in-balkans-pub-78235.

INTRODUCTION

As far-right terrorist attacks increased in prevalence across the globe in recent years,[29] attention to trends associated with far-right extremism—including extreme far-right attitudes towards and responses to ongoing and emerging geopolitical, economic, and social issues—has similarly increased.[30] In the Western Balkans, where a legacy of ethnic nationalism and conflict still fuel nationalist sentiments today, far-right actors and their responses to issues affecting the region have increased in prominence in mainstream political and social discourse. This report examines the centralization of far-right rhetoric and violence around the phenomenon of migration in one such Balkan country, Serbia, a country through which many migrants seeking refuge have traveled, and where some have remained, unable to cross the border into the EU. In doing so, the report also examines the extent to which anti-immigrant rhetoric has become integrated into far-right responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and Euroscepticism. Ultimately, the report provides some insight on current rallying points within far-right movements as well as the potential implications of those rallying points on regional social dynamics, relationships, policy decisions, and human security. While existing research on far-right extremism in the Western Balkans does exist, little of it probes the extent to which the "migrant crisis" and anti-immigration narratives have been featured in extremist far-right rhetoric and actions in the region.[31]

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29   For example, in 2018, far-right terrorist attacks accounted for 17.2% of terrorist incidents in the West. By contrast, attacks by Islamist groups accounted for 6.8% of attacks. For more, see: Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020), http://visionofhumanity.org/reports.

30   For more information, see: United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, "Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism," *CTED Trends Alert,* April 2020.

31   See, for example: Turčalo and Karčić, "The Far Right in Bosnia and Herzegovina"; Lažetić, "'Migration Crisis' and the Far Right Networks in Europe."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & SCOPE

This report is informed by a desk review of literature and media reporting related to far-right extremism and migration in Serbia. Limited academic literature is available on migration and extremism in the Western Balkans, and most of the studies that do exist emanate from think tanks and foreign policy reports. Existing academic literature on far-right extremism in the region focuses primarily on political parties and discourse analysis, or historical analysis of the ethnic conflicts and tensions in the Western Balkans.[32] The majority of literature about extremism in the Western Balkans pertains to Serbian nationalism and foreign fighters in Syria and Ukraine, or Islamic extremism and threats presented by foreign fighters from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, and North Macedonia.[33] While more research is, of course, needed to examine far-right trends throughout the Western Balkans, this report makes use of the literature and media reporting that currently exists on the topic. The data for this report was collected from sources published in English, Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian.[34] By offering insights into the current state of far-right extremism and research on Serbia, it is hoped that this report will shed light on areas where further research is needed in the Western Balkan countries, especially given Serbia's strong impact on overall far-right trends in the region.

THE FAR RIGHT IN SERBIA:
HISTORIC ROOTS & CURRENT MANIFESTATIONS

Prior to discussing the current manifestations of far-right rhetoric and extremism vis-à-vis ongoing migration and other crises, it is necessary to clarify what exactly is meant by the Serbian far-right and why anti-immigration rhetoric has grown in appeal.

Before 2016, most research on far-right extremism in Western Balkan countries focused on the regional conflicts during the 1990s and the lingering ethnic tensions in the aftermath of those conflicts. Later, with the increased interest in ISIS and the emergence of foreign fighter phenomena, Islamic terrorism became a more popular topic in the studies of extremism in the region. A notable shift in research to focus on far-right extremism, however, occurred when some 150-200 fighters from the Western Balkans joined battlefields in Ukraine between 2013 and 2015.[35] The majority of these Western Balkans fighters

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32   L. Kelly, *Overview of Research on Far-Right Extremism in the Western Balkans. K4D Helpdesk Report* (Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies, 2019), https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-outputs/overview-of-research-on-far-right-extremism-in-the-western-balkans.

33   Prior to 2016, most of the literature on extremism in the region focus on very few case studies looking at drivers of extremism and foreign fighters who joined battlefields in Syria. These case studies predominantly focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Albania. "While there have been only a few academic articles published in the meantime, most of the research continued to be published in the form of policy reports, research papers, and essays," Shpend Kursani, *Western Balkans Extremism Research Forum: Literature Review 2017 – 2018: Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans* (British Council, 2019), https://www.britishcouncil.al/sites/default/files/20fnl20kursani_literature20review20ii20-20erf.pdf.

34   These languages were selected based on the author's own language expertise.

35   Jelena Beslin and Marija Ignjatijevic, "Balkan Foreign Fighters: From Syria to Ukraine." *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, June 16, 2017. https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/balkan-foreign-fighters-syria-ukraine.

in the Ukraine traveled from Serbia,[36] which is why most of the literature on far-right extremism in the region focuses on this country. Embedded with the Russian separatists in Ukraine was a unit composed of Serbs from both Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Jovan Šević Unit, which identifies itself with the Chetnik movement, the nationalist Serbian movement formed during World War II. Some reports note that the Movement of Serbian Chetniks Ravna Gora also assisted individual fighters in traveling to Syria to join pro-Russian forces there.[37]

While much of the attention of local and international researchers remains on foreign fighters and old organizational structures and means of mobilizing the far-right dating back to the 1990s, this report focuses on the "new" far-right that emerged during the most recent "migration crisis". This is not to say that all the movements and individuals discussed in this report are entirely new actors on the social and political scene, but rather that they are adopting new narratives, heavily influenced by the European and US far-right discourse and activities and becoming a part of the global far-right network. Their new connections are largely based on adopting global far-right talking points and organizing tactics in an attempt to "modernize" and distinguish themselves from wartime ethnic nationalism, as discussed below.

Throughout this paper "the far-right"[38] is used to refer to far-right nationalist parties and organizations, as well as new anti-immigrant movements, and neo-fascist organizations united around nationalist ideology and support of national rebirth and a mono-ethnic state.[39] It is important to note that the line between holding an extreme view or contributing to an extreme political position (through, for example, acknowledgement of and support for extreme views in public events and speeches) and acting on it (by, for example, providing material support or engaging in violence) is blurred. It is difficult to discern the line between an extreme view and propagation of violence and engaging in or providing direct support for violent action. It is equally difficult to discern how to categorize and track different actors and their engagement, from passive support to active engagement in violence, particularly in post-conflict environments. For this reason, researchers working in the Western Balkans, such as Valery Perry, use the U.S. Agency for International Development's definition of violent extremism as "advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic or political objectives."[40] This definition is applied throughout this report as well, so as to not designate all movements, organizations, or individuals included in this study as participants in violent extremism or

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36 Samuel Bouron, et al. "State of Hate: Far Right Extremism in Europe 2021," *Hope Not Hate UK*, 2021, https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ESOH-LOCKED-FINAL.pdf.

37 To address this issue, Serbia held legal proceedings against 45 of its citizens but these proceedings often ended with comparatively minor and lenient punitive measures, in contrast with verdicts against foreign fighters returning from Syria. See, for example: Mladen Obrenovic, "As Ukraine Conflict Intensifies, Serb Volunteers Prepare for Battle," *Balkan Insight*, April 16, 2021, https://balkaninsight.com/2021/04/16/as-ukraine-conflict-intensifies-serb-volunteers-prepare-for-battle/.

38 Academic literature refers to a variety of actors with this type of far-right ideology as "extreme" or "radical" interchangeably.

39 Based, in part, on Michael Minkenberg's definition: "a political ideology, the core element of which is a myth of a homogeneous nation, a romantic and populist ultranationalism which is directed against the concept of liberal and pluralistic democracy and its underlying principles of individualism and universalism." See: Michael Minkenberg, "The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-Modernity," *Government and Opposition* 35, no. 2 (2000):170-88, https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-7053.00022.

40 Valery Perry, et al. (eds.), *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia 21st Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2019).

violent incidents directly, but rather to underscore the importance of rhetoric and support for extremist viewpoints in motivating some individuals to adopt violent methods and means.

The first section of this report presents a brief overview of the historical roots of the far-right in the Western Balkans and Serbia and an overview of the dominant characteristics prominent within the Serbian far-right scene today. The latter half discusses how migration has become a central theme in Serbian far-right rhetoric and speech across a number of issues addressed in Serbian far-right causes, responses, and activities.

Historic Roots

In the 1980s, the countries in the Western Balkans were swept by a strong wave of nationalism resulting in the outbreak of wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo.[41] The global economic crisis in the early 1980s was exploited by ethnic nationalists in Yugoslavia to capture power. The Slobodan Milošević regime, NATO bombings, and sanctions that followed furthered economic decline, inflation and a very high unemployment rate.[42] The crisis produced a situation in which the multi-ethnic Yugoslav national identity was rapidly replaced by extreme mono-ethnic nationalist identities across the region.[43] Historical revisionism in Serbia, which was already strong in the 1970s and 1980s, allowed for the growth of animosity towards other ethnic groups.[44] Narratives framing the "other"—meaning regional ethnic groups such as Bosniaks, Croats, and Albanians—as the enemy created an atmosphere in which some political parties, such as the Serbian Radical Party, presented themselves as "true" patriots.[45] During the post-conflict period in the Western Balkans, many of the extreme wartime paramilitary formations and organizations evolved out of political parties or were established by them, and the social and political scene of the region was swept up in the strong ethno-nationalist currents. For example, the ethnic extremist Croatian Defence Forces (Hrvatske Obrambene Snage) were created as the armed wing of the Croatian Party of the Rights (Hrvatska Stranka Prava). Similarly, the Serbian Radical Party (Srpska Radikalna Stranka) had its own paramilitary unit—the White Eagles—which committed war crimes and attacked civilian populations in Croatia and Bosnia.[46]

41   United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, "The Conflicts," Accessed 2020, https://www.icty.org/en/about/what-former-yugoslavia/conflicts.

42   Sanja Paunović and Rajko Kosanović, "The Problem of Unemployment in the Republic of Serbia with Specific Regard to Informal Employment," *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* 14, no. 4 (2011): 505-19, https://doi.org/10.5771/1435-2869-2011-4-505.

43   Vesna Pesic, *Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1996), https://www.usip.org/publications/1996/04/serbian-nationalism-and-origins-yugoslav-crisis.

44   Ivo Banac, "Political Change and National Diversity," in *Eastern Europe ... Central Europe ... Europe,* ed. Stephen R. Graubard (Routledge, 2019), 141-61.

45   Jovo Bakic, "Extreme-Right Ideology, Practice and Supporters: Case Study of the Serbian Radical Party," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 17, no. 2 (2009): 193-207, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14782800903108643.

46   Stojarová Věra, *The Far Right in the Balkans* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

Current Manifestations

Extreme ethno-nationalist narratives that have been characterized by bluntness and dogmatism remain strong in the political life of the Western Balkans to this day. However, over time the Serbian far-right developed a more specific and nuanced narrative that is defined by antagonism towards minorities and anti-Western values, most often expressed in attacks on nonprofit organizations and civil society activists, due to the region's dependence on aspirations of EU-membership. The events that unfolded with the "migration crisis" allowed Serbia's far-right to adopt additional rallying points, similar to those used by their European counterparts. A call for protection from the "migrant invasion" and the need for preservation and strengthening of national identity with a strong push towards Euroscepticism, or a criticism of the EU and integration into the EU, has become a new key message in the Serbian far-right narrative. Prior to 2015, however, Serbian far-right movements were defined primarily by antagonism towards minorities and the LGBTIQ+ community, civil society activists, and organizations who received funding from other countries or organizations (primarily those deemed "Western") and, as such, were labeled "Western," and a strong push towards historical revisionism. All these currents of thought and narratives remain influential.

A Push for Historical Revisionism

The key characteristic of far-right movements in the Western Balkans since the end of the armed conflicts in the region is their push for historical revisionism. This is reminiscent of certain far-right movements' attempts to step away from their fascist past around the globe.[47] One contemporary Serbian far-right party that has been particularly vocal about historical revisionism is Zavetnici (The Oathkeepers). Zvetnici opposes European Union and NATO membership; claims that Kosovo is in official Serbian territory; and calls for a return of "morality, honesty, decency and bravery to the political scene."[48] Zavetnici calls for the revision of textbooks for primary and secondary schools[49] because in their view the Serbian past has been "falsified" in history books. For example, in accordance with their position that the Serbian people have been victims of "the West", Zavetnici states that the NATO campaign in Serbia should be officially labeled as a "bombing", not a "campaign." Zavetnici also contends that Serbian history textbooks blame Serbs for war and portrays Serbian victims of the war as simply "collateral damage they caused themselves," which, Zavetnici portends, is not just, true, or good for the Serbian people.[50] Similarly, another far-right movement, Naši (Ours), describes Tito's socialism as dictatorship and demands that the government build a monument to Serbian victims of communism who were killed because "they didn't want to give up their religion."[51] This narrative pushes for the revision of anti-fascist communist past and advocates for narratives that present Serbs as victims of perpetual attempts to destroy Serbian national and religious identity and tradition. Far-right actors engaged in historical revisionism in Serbia tend to

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47   Diethelm Prowe, "'Classic' Fascism and the New Radical Right in Western Europe: Comparisons and Contrasts," *Contemporary European History* 3, no. 3 (1994): 289-313, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20081528.

48   СРПСКА СТРАНКА ЗАВЕТНИЦИ, webpage, April 26, 2020.

49   Srpska Stranka Zavetnici, "Културна Обнова Србије," СРПСКА СТРАНКА ЗАВЕТНИЦИ, April 7, 2020.

50   Srpska Stranka Zavetnici, "Национално Одговорна Политика," СРПСКА СТРАНКА ЗАВЕТНИЦИ, March 12, 2021. .

51   Nasi Srbija, "На Месту Куће Цвећа Да Се Подигне Споменик Жртвама Комунизма," *Nasi Srbija,* 2013.

blur the lines between the distant and more recent past. In narratives put forward by movements such as Nasi and Zavetnici, the Ottoman past is often connected to Yugoslav socialism, and even the current government, as they are all identified as authoritarian regimes suppressing or betraying Serbian culture, tradition, and religion.[52]

While many far-right movements call for different types of historical revision, the general trends and shifts are perhaps most evident in changing historical "enemies," as recently outlined by Niké Wentholt.[53] Four historical enemies often mentioned in Serbian revisionism and outlined by Wentholt are of note:

The "Communist Evil of Socialist Yugoslavia":	Generally referring to Yugoslavia as a "dictatorship" and Partisan fighters as anti-patriots.
Fascists:	Often represented by the Croat Ustasha movement.
The International Community:	Specifically, "the "West". Most recent among the four, often blamed for infiltrating Serbia with spies and foreign disruptors.
The Historical "Muslim enemy":	Commonly invoked by the Serbian Radical Party in the past.[53]

All of these narratives, despite their differences, have one thing in common—they all perpetuate and endorse beliefs of Serbian victimhood. The third and the fourth categories of enemies continue to be the most relevant to dynamics of anti-immigrant hateful sentiment discussed later in this report.

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52   Nasi Srbija, "Трећи Пут Је Гарант Владавине Народне Већине," *SNP NASI,* March 18, 2017.
53   Niké Wentholt, "Using the Past to Extremes in Serbia: Narratives of Historical Violence in Right-Wing Extremism and Islamism," in *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia 21st Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge,* ed. Valery Perry, et al. (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2019), 69-108.
54   Ibid.

Antagonism Toward "Western" Non-profits and Activists

The targets of the Serbian far-right and restrictive government measures have been individuals and organizations that advocate for democratization and protection of human rights.[55] In early 2020, for instance, Nataša Kandić, the founder of the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC)—a Serbian non-governmental organization that promotes the rule of law and acceptance of the legacy of mass human rights violations in post-Yugoslav societies[56]—was physically assaulted by members of the far-right Serbian Radical Party.[57] Along with HLC, activists from other organizations were attacked by members of far-right groups as well, including members of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YiHR)[58], and Forum ZFD.[59] The attack occurred at an event promoting books denying genocide and war crimes in the former Yugoslavia, where activists tried to distribute a HLC report about war crimes against Croats in Vojvodina, an autonomous province in the north of Serbia.[60] These and other human rights organizations and activists are often referred to as "foreign mercenaries" by far-right organizations such as Alternativa.[61] In fact, these activists and nonprofit sector professionals are sometimes labeled as a foreign-sponsored actors aiming to destroy the fabric of Serbian society and national identity, not just by far-right nationalists but by the Serbian government as well.[62] Human rights organizations have been labeled as anti-Serbian because of their post-war reconciliation efforts and attempts to acknowledge and honor all victims of the 1990s conflicts. Examples of this include annual attacks on activists gathering to hold candles and commemorate the victims of Srebrenica genocide, which occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995. In summer 2021, just as each year before, far-right actors surrounded those activists gathered in commemoration and played nationalist music dedicated to convicted war criminal Ratko Mladić, carrying his picture with posters reading "Ratko Mladić – Serbian hero" and "The Hague – A Lie."[63]

55   Dragan Popović, "UDRUŽENJA GRAĐANA: SUŽAVANJE PROSTORA ZA DELOVANJE SRBIJA 2019," *Granjanske Initiative,* January 2020, https://www.gradjanske.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Izve%C5%A1taj-o-su%C5%BEavanju-prostora-za-delovanje-2019.final_.pdf.

56   "About Us- Fond Za Humanitarno Pravo/Humanitarian Law Center," *Humanitarian Law Center,* Accessed March 18, 2021, http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?page_id=14390&lang=de.

57   CRD, "Attack Against Civil Rights Defender of the Year Recipient Natasha Kanic in Belgrade," *Civil Rights Defenders (CRD)*, February 6, 2020, https://crd.org/2020/02/06/attack-against-civil-rights-defender-of-the-year-recipient-natasa-kandic-in-belgrade/.

58   YIHR defines itself as "a regional network of non-governmental organisations founded in 2003 with programmes in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo." See more at: https://yihr.org/.

59   According to their website, "forumZFD works with peace consultants and advisers in Germany and ten other countries in Europe, the Middle East and South-East Asia.[…] They are actively engaged in international peace work in around 70 countries." For more see: https://www.forumzfd.de/en/western-balkans.

60   CRD, "Attack Against Civil Rights Defender of the Year Recipient Natasa Kandic in Belgrade."

61   Alternativa is a far-right movement of volunteers who disseminate nationalistic propaganda and whose activities predominantly focus on propaganda and actions against human rights activists, Roma communities, and ethnic minorities.

62   For more, see for example: Maja Živanović, "Serbian Youth Initiative Chief Blames State for Attacks," *Balkan Insight*, May 18, 2018, https://balkaninsight.com/2017/02/01/mitic-we-are-not-scared-because-of-threats-01-31-2017/. The Serbian government also initiated "a probe into possible money laundering and financing of terrorism targeting dozens of rights groups, independent journalists, and opposition politicians who have criticized alleged government corruption and anti-democratic policies," "Serbia Cracks Down on Rights Groups, Government Critics," AP, July 28, 2020, https://apnews.com/article/europe-serbia-556b1c1020c53a98fd416bd0679bd621. The probe was was met by strong criticism from human rights groups and international community. See for example: Amnesty International, "Serbia: Targeting of Journalists and NGOs a Blatant Act of Intimidation," *Amnesty International,* July 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/serbia-targeting-of-journalists-and-ngos-a-blatant-act-of-intimidation/.

63   Al Jazeera, "U Beogradu Zapaljene Svijeće Za Žrtve Srebrenice, Desničari Vrijeđali," *Al Jazeera,* July 11, 2021, https://balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2021/7/11/u-beogradu-zapaljene-svijece-za-zrtve-srebrenice-desnicari-vrijedjali.

Antagonism Toward Minorities & the LGBTQI+ Community

Far-right groups in Serbia are also known to promote some or all of the following: traditional family values, religious fanaticism, condemnation of the LGBTQI+ population, and opposition to ethnic and religious minorities.[64] The protection of Serbian culture, tradition, and religion from the "other" are often cited as the main reasons behind the Serbian far-right's targeting of national minorities as a way to gain popular support.[65] Muslims, Roma, and LGBTQI+ communities are the most common targets of Serbian far-right propaganda. Specifically, LGBTQI+ individuals are perceived as a corrupting element, aiming to destroy the Serbian ethnonational and patriarchal core.[66] For example, the Belgrade Pride Parade of 2010 was marked by extreme far-right violence, which resulted in clashes with the police.[67] Far-right actors were also known to have threatened to lynch the Pride Parade participants. Those with knowledge of the Serbian far-right landscape in Serbia suspect that among the groups most active in enacting violent threats or actions during the Pride Parade were Obraz (Honor) — banned in 2012[68] — Srpski Pokret 1389 (Serb Movement 1389), and Naši (Ours).[69]

Accountability & Impunity

It is illegal for neo-Nazi or fascist organizations to publicly organize or to display fascist emblems in public under the Serbian anti-discrimination law.[70] Despite this, prosecutorial action is rare.[71] Among movements that are banned, many continue operating—either under a different name or through the migration of members to another, un-banned organization—with their activities undisturbed.

One prominent example of a group officially banned by the government as a result of their actions during the 2010 Pride Parade is Obraz. Despite this ban, it is apparent that the movement and its leader continue to operate. The leader of the movement, Mladen Obradović, continued giving public speeches, interviews for the media, and even led the Obraz group at the protests that broke out in the early summer of 2020.[72] In another example, Goran Davidović (known as Ferer), the leader of the openly fascist

64   Jelena Dzombic, "Right-wing Extremism in Serbia," *Race & Class* 55, no. 4 (2014): 106-10, https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396813519943.

65   Isidora Stakić, "Serbian Nationalism and Right-Wing Extremism," in *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans,* eds. Filip Ejdus and Pedrag (Vienna, Austria: Republic of Austria / Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports, 2016), 133-48: 140, https://www.bundesheer.at/wissen-forschung/publikationen/publikation.php?id=940. .

66   Isidora Stakić, "Securitization of LGBTIQ Minorities in Serbian Far-Right Discourses: A Post-Structuralist Perspective," in *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*, eds.Filip Ejdus and Predrag Jureković (Vienna, Austria: Republic of Austria / Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports, 2016), 133-48, https://www.bundesheer.at/wissen-forschung/publikationen/publikation.php?id=940.

67   Associated Press, "Serbia Police Clash with Far-Right Rioters at Gay Pride March," *The Guardian,* October 10, 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/10/serbia-police-rioters-gay-pride.

68   Zoran Glavonjić, "Ustavni Sud Srbije Zabranio 'Obraz'," *Radio Slobodna Evropa,* June 12, 2012.

69   Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia , "Extremism- Recognizing a Social Evil ," *Helsinki Files, Vol. 34, 2014,* https://helsinki.org.rs/doc/files34.pdf.

70   "Zakon O Zabrani Diskriminacije," 2009.

71   Isidora Stakic, "ODNOS SRBIJE PREMA EKSTREMNO DESNIČARSKIM ORGANIZACIJAMA," *Belgrade Center for Security Policy*, 2013, http://www.helsinki.org.rs/otpor%20ekstremizmu/serbian/doc/odnos%20srbije%20prema%20ekstremno%20desnicarskim%20organizac.pdf.

72   A. K., "EKSTREMISTI IZMILELI Govor Na Protestu Držao i Mladen Obradović Iz 'Obraza'," *Blic Online*, July 10, 2020, https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/ekstremisti-izmileli-govor-na-protestu-drzao-i-mladen-obradovic-iz-obraza/qmvb92j.

Nacionalni Stroj movement in Serbia, was put on trial for violent attacks on participants of the "Antifascist Walks" in the Serbian city of Novi Sad in 2007. Instead of appearing in court, he moved to Trieste, where he has lived and continued his activities online for the past 11 years. Nacionalni Stroj was banned by the constitutional court in 2011. While in exile, Davidović maintained connections and relevance through online platforms and became a leader of a new movement called Nacionalni Srpski Front, which operates in Serbia today.[73] At the end of 2019, the trial against Davidović was suspended and the criminal charges against him dropped due to the fact that he had previously been tried and sentenced for the same crime.[74]

In early 2020, Davidović returned to Serbia, where he was a guest of the morning program on Serbian national television.[75] He also met with several other far-right and fascist organizations in Serbia, such as Obraz and the newly formed Levijatan, and shared ambitions for increased political engagement in the future.[76] In the interview for the far-right online portal Patriot, he stated: "I am not a fascist, I am probably something worse than that."[77] In recent interviews and on social media, Davidović and the actors and movements with which he is associated have been "warning" the public about illegal immigration and migrants from the Middle East and Africa "flooding" Serbia, calling for the government to prevent it. In the meantime, however, movements such as Levijatan take matters into their own hands by organizing protests in front of and breaking into asylum centers to threaten migrants. They use these incidents as publicity stunts to garner attention in mainstream social and political discourse. The lack of accountability and the ability of these groups to appear on national TV and radio outlets has the potential to normalize extreme nationalist and racist ideas.

EMERGING TRENDS:
MIGRATION & THE "NEW" SERBIAN FAR-RIGHT

Migration and the Western Balkans: A Brief Overview

In the past, migration trends in the Western Balkans were marked primarily by high levels of emigration.[78] Wars and economic crises have been among the main reasons behind the mass exodus in the Western Balkans over the past three decades.[79] In 2008, EU visa liberalization dialogues were launched with

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73   Marko Davor, "(Non)violent Extremism Online: How Opinion Leaders Use Online Channels to Disseminate Radical Messaged and Intolerance," in *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21st-Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*, ed. Valery Perry, et al. (Stuttgart: Ibiden Verlag, 2019), 139-82.

74   Nevena Bogdanvić, "'Firer' Na Nacionalnoj Frekvenciji," *Radio Slobadna Evropa,* February 11, 2020, https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/goran-davidovic-ponovo-u-srbiji-/30429149.html.

75   Nevena Bogdanović, "'Firer' Na Nacionalnoj Frekvenciji," *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, February 11, 2020, https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/goran-davidovic-ponovo-u-srbiji-/30429149.html.

76   "Горан Давидовић: Нисам Фашиста, Ја Сам Вероватно Нешто Горе Од Тога!," *Патриот*, February 8, 2020.

77   Ibid.

78   Russel King and Nermin Oruc, "Editorial Introduction: Migration in the Western Balkans – Trends and Challenges," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 21, no. 1 (2019): 1-10, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367853211-1.

79   See, for example: Hans Vermuelen, Martin Baldwin-Edwards, and Riki van Boeschoten (eds.), *Migration in the Southern Balkans: From Ottoman Territory to Globalized Nation State* (Springer, 2015); Mirjam Zbinden, Janine Dahinden, and Adnan Efendic (eds.), *Diversity of*

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. A few months later, Visa Liberalization Roadmaps were presented by the European Commission. The negotiations that followed led to the elimination of visa requirements for the citizens of Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia in December 2009, and for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina one year later.[80]

However, this led to a higher number of asylum seekers from the region to the European Union. New asylum claimants from Serbia and Kosovo rose from 22,342 in 2009 to 40,912 in 2010.[81] According to official reports, the number of applicants for asylum in the EU from the Western Balkans represented the largest portion of overall applications each year between 2009-2013. [82] This trend continued even with the arrival of new migrants and asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa. During the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016, the Balkan Route was perceived as the only viable pathway to Western Europe for migrants seeking asylum.[83] According to the UN, 80% of all refugees who reached Germany in 2015 passed through the Western Balkans.[84] Serbia functioned as a major transit hub on the primary migration route, which stretched from Greece via Bulgaria or North Macedonia and Serbia to Croatia, Hungary, and further afield into the EU. Of the refugees who reached Germany in 2015, some 600,000 registered at the Preševo asylum center in Serbia, while others bypassed the center and moved on without ever registering.[85] During this time, Western Balkan countries facilitated migration movement and assisted refugees on their journey to Europe. Government offices working on migration-related issues and nonprofits in the region organized trains and buses to send migrants across borders of the Western Balkan countries into the EU.

Initially welcoming of Syrian refugees, the social and political climate in the EU shifted as the situation on migration became more complex, with many arrivals from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and North African countries. Local populations' attitudes shifted from welcoming to fearful and, in some

Migration in South-East Europe (Peter Lang Publishing, 2016); Russell King, Maja Povrzanović Frykman, and Julie Vullnetari (eds.), *Migration, Transnationalism and Development in South-East Europe and the Black Sea Region* (London: Routledge, 2018).

80   André de Munter, "The Western Balkans," Fact Sheet on the European Union, European Parliament, accessed July 4, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/168/the-western-balkans.

81   Ferruccio Pastore and Irene Ponzo, "Boundaries, Barriers and Bridges: Comparative Findings from European Neighbourhoods," in *Inter-Group Relations and Migrant Integration in European Cities: Changing Neighbourhoods*, eds. Ferruccio Pastore and Irene Ponzo (Springer International, 2016), 177-99.

82   EASO, *Asylum Applicants from the Western Balkans: Comparative Analysis of Trends, Push-pull Factors and Responses – Update* (European Asylum Support Office, 2015), https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/Asylum-Applicants-from-the-Western-Balkans_Update_r.pdf.

83   The Balkan Route has been one of the main migratory paths into Europe, usually beginning in Turkey and then winding through either Bulgaria or Greece, and then through the Western Balkans. Previously, this route crossed through Bulgaria or North Macedonia, and then through Serbia and Hungary, as migrants headed toward Germany or Austria. After 2016, the route shifted south, with most migrants now crossing through Albania and Montenegro to Bosnia where they attempt to cross into Croatia. For more information see, for example: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, *A Problem Displaced: The Smuggling of Migrants through Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020), https://globalinitiative.net/smuggling-bosnia-and-herzegovina/.

84   Danilo Mandic, "Anatomy of a Refugee Wave: Forced Migration on the Balkan Route as Two Processes," *EuropeNow,* 2017, https://www.europenowjournal.org/2017/01/04/anatomy-of-a-refugee-wave-forced-migration-on-the-balkan-route-as-two-processes/.

85   Ibid.

cases, hostile.[86]   When the EU began implementing stricter border measures, those measures had the effect of putting migrants themselves, and the Western Balkan countries hosting them, in a difficult and paradoxical situation.[87] While the EU member states closed their borders in the hope that other countries would follow, Western Balkan governments and NGOs continued to assist people en route. The EU pushed migrants back and pressured local governments to stop the incoming arrivals.[88] By the end of 2016, border guards in North Macedonia and Serbia began subjecting migrants to stricter measures and nationality-based processes, allowing Syrian, Iraqi, and Afghan asylum seekers to move onwards while all others were labeled 'illegal immigrants' and pushed back.[89] In 2015 alone, Serbia recorded 577,995 asylum seekers.[90]

Negotiations among EU members and talks with external partners resulted in the official closure of the Balkan Route in March 2016, which slowed the arrival of new migrants. Whereas 128,000 illegal border crossings were recorded in January 2016, only around 3,000 occurred in December 2016.[91] However, Serbia did not have the capacity or policies in place to allow for registration and processing of all migrants at its borders.[92] At this point, approximately 7,000 registered migrants were staying within Serbian borders for a period of more than 72 hours.[93] Those who submitted asylum applications frequently abandoned them as soon as they found a way to continue the journey towards Western Europe, relying on smuggling networks.[94]

After officials announced the closure of the Balkan Route,[95] "the media largely stopped providing news on it, and thus the migrants who had been caught in limbo found themselves trapped in an even darker

86   Julija Sardelic, "The Western Balkan Route: A New Form of Forced Migration Governance in Europe?" *Green European Journal*, August 31, 2017, https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/the-western-balkan-route-a-new-form-of-forced-migration-governance-in-europe/.

87   Mandic, "Anatomy of a Refugee Wave."

88   James Finnian, "Blocked in the Balkans: The Refugees that Europe Won't Allow In," *The Guardian*, August 8, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/08/eu-refugees-serbia-afghanistan-taliban.

89   Bodo Weber, *The EU-Turkey Refugee Deal and the Not Quite Closed Balkan Route* (Sarajevo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2017), http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/summary/eu-turkey-refugee-deal-and-the-not-quite-closed-balkan-route/.

90   Beogradski Centar Za Ljudska Prava, "Pravo Na Azil U Republici Srbiji: 2016," *Beogradski Centar Za Ljudska Prava,* 2016, http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/bgcentar/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Pravo-na-azil-u-Republici-Srbiji-2016-FINAL-za-stampu.pdf.

91   FRONTEX, "Migration Routes: The Western Balkan Route," Accessed July 26, 2021, https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-routes/western-balkan-route/.

92   Lena Petrović (ed.), *Right to Asylum in the Republic of Serbia 2016* (Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2017), http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/bgcentar/eng-lat/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Right-to-Asylum-in-the-Republic-of-Serbia-2016-2.pdf.

93   Alice Greider, "Outsourcing Migration Management: The Role of the Western Balkans in the European Refugee Crisis," *Migration Information Source*, August 25, 2020, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/outsourcing-migration-management-western-balkans-europes-refugee-crisis.

94   Jelena Bjelica and Martine van Bijlert, "The Aftermath of an Exodus: The Balkans' Old Smuggling Routes and Europe's Closed Borders—Serbia," *Relief Web,* 2017, https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/aftermath-exodus-balkans-old-smuggling-routes-and-europe-s-closed-borders.

95   Cocco, "Where is the European Frontier?, 2017. In addition to officially closing the route, the EU entered into an agreement with Turkey to return from Greece all illegal migrants crossing the sea. For more, see: Directorate-General for Communication (European Commission), *The EU in 2016 : General Report on the Activities of the European Union,* (Publications Office of the European Union, 2017), https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/99c8732c-094a-11e7-8a35-01aa75ed71a1.

place."[96] The protracted displacement and the desire to continue their journey towards Europe motivated many migrants to avoid official registration in asylum centers (which were mostly in rural areas and smaller towns) and seek informal shelter in city centers in hopes of finding a way to reach the EU. Their presence in cities and smaller border towns created fears and security-related concerns, easily manipulated by the media and anti-immigrant actors.[97] This prompted new migration related debates in the Western Balkans, similar to those that had emerged earlier in EU countries.

The Serbian Far Right and Migration Debates

For some time, the far-right has viewed immigration as a fundamental threat to European culture, casting Muslim immigrants in particular as incompatible with European social and cultural norms and therefore unable to ever fully integrate.[98] These arguments have been strengthened since 2011 when the "migration crisis" and immigration and integration policies came to the forefront of populist radical far-right parties and movements globally.[99] Scholars have suggested that far-right animosity towards migrants is strengthened by the fear of globalization, characterized as a US-led initiative for the creation of the New World Order that seeks to destroy national and cultural identity through "importing" migrants.[100] Sentiments surrounding migration and integration within the far-right generally focus primarily on ideas of national belonging, cultural and religious traditions, and loyalty to the nation.[101] As such, nativism represents a type of ideological common ground for contemporary far-right parties and movements.[102] Focusing on immigration allows the radical far-right to identify not just external enemies, but internal ones as well. In the case of Europe, the internal enemy is usually perceived to be the political elite, which has "betrayed" the nation, while the external enemy is the outsider on whom insecurities can be projected, such as the Refugee, the Other, the Muslim.[103] The perception of the "outsider" is not based on where an individual is born, but instead, the individual's cultural background. This plays an important role as a prominent component of contemporary far-right mobilization. It constitutes the basis for the so-called replacement theory which focuses on the premise that white people are at risk of being eradicated through migration and replaced by ethnic minorities, especially Muslims, whose culture and

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96   Gordana Knezevic, "Is Balkan Sympathy For Refugees A Thing Of The Past?" *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty,* April 11, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/balkan-sympathy-for-refugees-running-out/28424031.html.

97   Tijana Recevic, "Violent Extremism and Radicalization in the Context of Migrant Crisis: Evidence from Serbia," in *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21st-Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge,* eds. Valery Perry, et al. (Stuttgart: Ibiden Verlag, 2019), 281-318.

98   Ferruh Yilmaz, "Right-wing Hegemony and Immigration: How the Populist Far-right Achieved Hegemony through the Immigration Debate in Europe," *Current Sociology* 60, no. 3 (2012): 368-81, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0011392111426192.

99   Nazmus Sakib and Syed Muhammad Ishraque Osman, "Syrian Refugee Influx and the Rise of Far-Right Rhetoric: A Quasi-Experimental Investigation," *European Politics and Society* 21, no. 4 (2020): 371-83, https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2019.1634352.

100   Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000).

101   Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2008).

102   Pietro Castelli Gattinara and Andrea Pirro, "The Far Right as a Social Movement," *European Societies* 21, no. 4 (2018): 447-62, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/14616696.2018.1494301?scroll=top&needAccess=true.

103   Ulrike Vieten and Scott Poynting, "Contemporary Far-Right Racist Populism in Europe," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 37, no. 6 (2016): 533-40, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07256868.2016.1235099.

religion are considered to be incompatible with the Western cultures.[104] The theory, and the thinking behind it, is not new, but it has been increasingly used by far-right groups globally, allowing for a creation of a strong international network of extremist movements. This theory is similarly prominent among the far-right within the Western Balkans.[105]

Despite the fact that they do not intend to stay in Serbia permanently, the presence of some 5,000 migrants in 2021[106] has unsettled local populations and the country's reception centers remain over-crowded. In the meantime, various far-right actors have adopted anti-immigration stances as an opportunity to "rebrand" themselves and distinguish themselves from the "backwardness" of the 90s nationalism.[107] Rather than organizing around the old ethnic nationalism based on anti-Muslim rhetoric and ethnic hatred, new far-right actors now frame their concerns in a way that allows them to connect to global far-right movements as they speak to "universal" issues, such as migration. Anti-immigrant rhetoric offered these movements new talking points, which they adopted as new campaign platforms as well. For example, the Serbian far-right opposition party—Dveri—based its parliamentary election campaign primarily on an anti-immigration platform.[108] The focus on issues that appear to be universal and not only Serbia- or Balkan-specific gives the far-right in Serbia an opportunity to connect with other movements across the globe, but particularly with their European counterparts.

It is especially important to note that the "rebranding" of the far-right in countries like Serbia would not be possible without external connections and partners. The global resurgence of the far-right has made the Yugoslav conflicts of the 90s an object of reverence. The European far-right movements see those conflicts as a form of "race war" or a war against Islamization.[109] Many international far-right actors have found "refuge" in Serbia, connecting with local far-right groups and training them in new mobilizing strategies and approaches to the mainstream social and political scene.[110] This, in turn, offered local far-right

104 Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, *"The Great Replacement": The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2019), https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Great-Replacement-The-Violent-Consequences-of-Mainstreamed-Extremism-by-ISD.pdf.

105 Jasmin Mujanović, "The Balkan Roots of the Far Right's 'Great Replacement' Theory," *Newlines Magazine,* March 12, 2021, https://newlinesmag.com/essays/the-balkan-roots-of-the-far-rights-great-replacement-theory/.

106 According to the UN, the number of residents in Asylum Centres (AC) and Reception/Transit Centres (RTC), slightly increased from 4,233 residents at the beginning of the month, to 4,325 at the end of the month. Residents included 1,577 citizens of Afghanistan, 1,190 of Syria, 318 of Pakistan, 276 of Bangladesh, 183 of Iran, 119 of Iraq, and 662 from 47 other countries. 3,641 were adult men, 217 were adult women, and 467 were children. The number of foreigners observed staying outside of those centers increased by 100 to 920 over the month, mainly in Belgrade and bordering areas. For more see: "UNHCR Serbia Monthly Update, January – February 2021," *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,* March 12, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/unhcr-serbia-monthly-update-january-february-2021#:~:text=Serbian%20Commissariat%20for%20Refugees%20and,to%202%2C633%20in%20Feb%202020.

107 Lažetić, "'Migration Crisis' and the Far Right Networks in Europe."

108 Petrovic, "Srpski Desničari Vode Kampanju Preko Leđa Migranata."

109 Helen Pidd, "Anders Behring Breivik Attacks Inspired by Serbian Nationalists, Court Hears," *The Guardian,* April 18, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/apr/18/anders-behring-breivik-serb-nationalists.

110 Cristina Maza, "Pro-Trump Christian Extremist Trains Far-Right Serb Nationalists to Stir up Ethnic Tensions," *Newsweek,* May 1, 2018, https://www.newsweek.com/pro-trump-christian-extremist-prepares-serb-nationalists-new-war-muslims-907184.

groups an opportunity to enter international political discourse, participating in debates around issues such as migration.

Connections to Anti-Immigration Movements in Western Europe

Included among the first active anti-immigration online "movements", those that began as Facebook pages and/or jointly organized anti-immigrant debates and events are Initiative Anti-Imigracija and Generacija Identiteta. Anti-Imigracija is a Facebook page run by a member of the youth wing of the Serbian Radical Party. The page administrator uses Facebook to gather and publicize news about incidents that occur not just in local communities in Serbia, but also in cities and towns across Europe. The stated goal of the page is to raise awareness about the consequences of migration and the effects that a large number of migrants can have on a country.[111] This specific page was banned several times before the page administrator registered an official movement under the name "Movement for Freedom and Independence" (Pokret za Slobodu i Nezavisnost), which now has over 40,000 followers. The page is populated with anti-immigration content "warning" citizens about population replacement and the "invasion of Europe by migrants."[112] Due to frequent bans, the person administering this page also created another page titled "We do not want migrants in Serbia," which has over 12,000 followers.[113]

The Generation Identity (Generacija Identiteta) Facebook page was similarly focused on migration, delivering news about incidents, attacks, and what they define as overall negative outcomes of arrival of migrants into different communities globally. They also placed a very strong emphasis on the preservation of the Serbian identity and national interests, as well as the creation and preservation of a mono-ethnic state. This group also shared content that glorifies countries with strict anti-immigration measures and "warns" their followers about the population replacement that they claim is the main motivation behind such strict measures. Their online pages were filled with content advocating for "stopping the invasion" and "reminding" followers that Serbia has been "defending Europe" from Muslims since 1389 (the year of the Kosovo battle against the Ottoman Turks).

Generation Identity is not just restricted to Serbia, in fact, it maintains many chapters in several European countries, including its main chapter of located France.[114] Serbian Generation Identity, an offshoot of the French identitarian movement, has been labeled as a hate group by Facebook and has had its Facebook pages shut down repeatedly. In 2018 the Serbian branch of the movement folded entirely. Their Facebook page was removed along with their website. While there are many reasons for this group's demise, the group still illustrates how the Serbian far-right is changing and evolving, with aid from their European counterparts.[115] Not only did the Serbian chapter direct attention to and potential interest in the Western European far-right, it also advanced narratives celebrating Serbia as a militant "protector" against

111 Lažetić, "'Migration Crisis' and the Far Right Networks in Europe."

112 Pokret za slobodu I nezavisnost, Facebook page.

113 Necemo Migrante u Srbiji, Facebook page.

114 Eleonora Vio, "'Young Patriots': Serbia's Role in the European Far-Right," *Balkan Insight,* November 19, 2019, https://balkaninsight.com/2019/11/19/young-patriots-serbias-role-in-the-european-far-right/.

115 Ibid.

the Muslim "invasion" of Serbia.[116] While Generation Identity does not publicly endorse violence, its members do participate in combat trainings across Europe.[117] Referring to immigrants, the now defunct Generation Identity website itself stated that "they [immigrants] will turn us into minorities in our own countries in a few decades."[118] The movement has also been connected to the Christchurch shooter in New Zealand[119] who killed 49 people and for whom wartime Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić served as an inspiration.[120]

These connections between movements were established at the beginning of the "migration crisis" and strengthened over time as the Serbian far-right movements claimed to be oppressed by the international community and the Serbian government itself.[121] The Serbian government was determined to prevent anti-immigrant activity at the very beginning of the "migration crisis", even going so far as to ban any attempt to protest publicly against migrants. Despite this, however, in one of the first protests organized in person in Belgrade by Naši, Obraz, and the Serbian Radical Party in 2016, Syrian-born Rima Darius publicly advocated against supporting migration to onlookers, noting that migrants in Serbia claiming to be refugees aren't "real" but rather potential terrorists and economic migrants.[122] Local far-right movements and European activists from the European Solidarity Front for Syria (ESFS), one of the first European far-right movements to appear in Serbia at the time, were both in attendance.[123]

ESFS, however, is not the only non-Serbian far-right group to visit or conduct activities within Serbia. Reverence for what far-right movements have celebrated as "race wars" against Islam in the 1990s Balkan conflicts has prompted individuals such as Steve Bannon to pay visits to the region and meet with regional far-right politicians such as Željka Cvijanović, president of the Republika Srpska entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[124]Similarly, organizations such as Knights Templar International and their representative Jim Dowson, who was named "Britain's most influential far-right activist," was banned from Hungary

116 See, for example, statements made by various far right leaders interviewed as part of a BIRN investigation about their presence in Kosovo: Jelena Cosic, Ivan Angelovski, Lawrence Marzouk, Maja Zivanovic and Visar Prebreza, "Serbian Monarchists, British Right-Wingers Plot Kosovo 'Resistance'," *Balkan Insight,* November 3, 2017, https://balkaninsight.com/2017/11/03/serbian-monarchists-british-right-wingers-plot-kosovo-resistance-11-02-2017/.

117 Lissie Dearden, "Far-Right Group is Sending UK Recruits to Military-Style Training Camps in Europe," *The Independent,* April 12, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/generation-identity-far-right-group-training-camps-europe-uk-recruits-military-white-nationalist-refugees-a8046641.html.

118 Generation Identity website, accessed September 30, 2020.

119 Jason Wilson, "With Links to the Christchurch Attacker, What Is the Identitarian Movement?" *The Guardian,* March 28, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/28/with-links-to-the-christchurch-attacker-what-is-the-identitarian-movement.

120 Maja Zivanovic, "New Zealand Mosque Gunman 'Inspired by Balkan Nationalists'," *Balkan Insight,* March 27, 2019, https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/15/new-zealand-mosque-gunman-inspired-by-balkan-nationalists/.

121 Marija Ristić, et al., "Balkanske Ultra-Desničarske Grupe Preplavile Internet," *BIRN,* May 5, 2017, https://birn.rs/balkanske-ultra-desnicarske-grupe-preplavile-internet/.

122 "Syrian Woman Speaks against Immigration into Europe/ Sirijka Govori Protiv Imigranata u Evropi," YouTube, 2015.

123 Ibid.

124 Murtaza Hussain, "Rise of Europe's Far Right Emboldens Serb Extremists and Threatens a Fragile Peace in Bosnia," *The Intercept,* November 15, 2018, https://theintercept.com/2018/11/15/rise-of-europes-far-right-emboldens-serb-extremists-and-threatens-a-fragile-peace-in-bosnia/; Krithika Varagur, "Why Bannon is Meddling with Bosnia," *The New York Review of Books,* September 5, 2018. https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/09/05/why-bannon-is-meddling-with-bosnia/.

due to his activities,[125] and has found "refuge" in the Balkans under the banner of helping Serbs deal with migration and "paying back" for their fight to protect Europe from Muslims in the past, referring to the Battle of Kosovo in which Serbs fought against Ottoman forces.[126] Dowson and the activists of the Knights Templars International have also taken bullet-proof vests to northern Kosovo to "prepare" them for what they believe is an inevitable attack from Kosovar Albanians.[127] Dowson has also provided "media training" for far-right groups in Serbia, helping them to film videos and set up a website for the far-right group Order of the Dragon, as well as providing advice for the anti-immigration group Generation Identity on social media, assistance in organizing rallies, and even attending rallies himself.[128] Such trainings and convenings were also often attended by the Russian far-right thinker, Aleksander Dugin, who appears to have strong connections with Dowson.[129]

Online organizing continued over the next few years, as did convenings organized by anti-immigration movements and other far-right actors. With tighter EU borders, the daily arrivals of migrants in Serbia dropped and many left to attempt to cross the Croatian border into Bosnia and Herzegovina, where many of them remain stranded. In 2020 another far-right movement - People's Patrols, a group of young men who actively seek out and threaten migrants[130]- was established in Serbia. Since their establishment, People's Patrols have participated in the organization of anti-migrant protests, including those in Belgrade in early 2020.[131] In March 2020, just before the implementation of COVID-19-related curfews, they helped to organize a gathering of some 200 people in front of the parliament building in Belgrade to protest against the presence of migrants in Serbia. One of the members of the movement allegedly stated that "if the state and the police cannot protect the state, [they] will" announcing that they would set up more street patrols.[132] Others carried posters with slogans such as: "We do not want migrants", "Serbia for Serbs", and "Fence for migrants, liberty for citizens." They also displayed a large banner in front of a government building reading: "Terrorists are not welcome" and "You will not replace us."[133] Fear of being "replaced" by migrant communities was additionally popularized in the mainstream by opposition

125 HOPE not hate, *State of Hate Report 2017: Breaking Point* (HOPE not hate, 2017), https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/HnH-2017-01-02-no30.pdf.

126 Matthew Collins, "Jim Dowson: The Invisible Man of the Far Right?" *HOPE not Hate,* May 1, 2018, https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2018/05/01/jim-dowson-kosovo-connection/.

127 Cosic, Angelovski, Marzouk, Zivanovic, and Prebreza, "Serbian Monarchists, British Right-Wingers Plot Kosovo 'Resistance'."

128 Cosic, Marzouk, and Angelovski, "British Nationalist Trains Serb Far-Right for 'Online War'."

129 The ideology of KTI, in addition to standard far-right views, includes great admiration for Aleksandr Dugin, a Russian political scientist whose views are often described as "fascist." In fact, both Dowson and Griffin attended a "conservative forum" in St. Petersburg about a year ago organized by Dugin and his followers. For more, see: Hungarian Spectrum, "Far-right western politicians in Hungary: Jim Dowson and Nick Griffin," June 6, 2017, https://hungarianspectrum.org/2017/06/06/far-right-western-politicians-in-hungary-jim-dowson-and-nick-griffin/.

130 N1 Srbija, "'Narodne' Patrole u Crnim Kapuljačama Prete Migrantima, Na Potezu Tužilaštvo," *N1 Srbija,* February 23, 2020, http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a571965/Narodne-patrole-u-crnim-kapuljacama-prete-migrantima-na-potezu-tuzilastvo.html.

131 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Balkan Service, "Hundreds Attend Anti-Migrant March in Belgrade," filmed March 2020 at Belgrade, Serbia, Video, 1:36, https://www.rferl.org/a/hundreds-at-anti-migrant-march-in-belgrade/30477364.html.

132 Milica Stojanovic, "Serbian Anti-Migrant Protest Condemned as 'Disgrace'," *Balkan Insight,* March 9, 2020, https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/09/serbian-anti-migrant-protest-condemned-as-disgrace/.

133 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Balkan Service, "Hundreds Attend Anti-Migrant March in Belgrade."

far-right party, Dveri. Dveri launched an anti-immigration campaign in February 2020, warning that the country risked becoming "the biggest migrant center in this part of Europe."[134]

The Serbian Far Right during COVID-19

In the midst of anti-migrant protests in Serbia in early 2020[135] and with public attention focused on migration-related issues, COVID-19 began spreading in the Balkans. In response to the virus, Western Balkan countries, including Serbia, began restricting the movement of migrants within their territories in an attempt to curb COVID-19's spread. Serbia's measures against migrants, however, became much stricter comparatively in response to far-right anti-migrant campaigns and protests that, despite the pandemic, only continued to occur.[136] While the COVID-19 pandemic has been leveraged to promote the agendas of various far-right actors globally,[137] in Serbia, groups like Levijatan capitalized on the outbreak of COVID-19 to bolster their anti-immigrant platform and relevance. During the pandemic, Levijatan staged a protest in front of the migrant center in the Belgrade suburb of Obrenovac.[138] The protest was organized in solidarity and support for one of Levijatan's members, who was arrested (and shortly after released) for breaking into an asylum center with his car and yelling "I don't want migrants in Serbia" and "I don't want a Muslim state in my country."[139] This incident received significant public attention, and a few days later, president Vučić deployed military forces to secure three migrant camps near Šid, a Serbian town bordering Croatia, to "protect the local population from alleged harassment and robberies committed by the migrants."[140] This serves as an example of how the far-right took advantage of the pandemic to push the anti-immigrant agenda and establish a stronger presence and authority in the mainstream. The fact that the government responded by imposing strict measures against migrants and deployed military forces in response to Levijatan's activities illustrates not only the problematic relationship that far-right groups can have with governments, but also the potential risk their activities can pose to the freedoms and security of individuals within democratic countries. When the COVID-19 state of emergency was lifted in Serbia, the country reopened abruptly, even allowing large soccer games and a tennis tournament to be held.[141] Despite the country's reopening, however, COVID-19-related restrictions for migrants

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134 Milica Stojanovic, "Right-Wing Serbian Party Launches Anti-Immigration Campaign," *Balkan Insight,* June 18, 2020, https://balkaninsight.com/2020/02/18/right-wing-serbian-party-launches-anti-immigration-campaign/.

135 Enough 14, "White Supremacist Rally Against Migrants in #Belgrade, #Serbia," Posted March 10, 2020, https://enoughisenough14.org/2020/03/10/white-supremacist-rally-against-migrants-in-belgrade-serbia/.

136 Milica Stojanovic, "Serbia Restricts Movement for Migrants, Asylum-Seekers," *Balkan Insight,* March 22, 2020, https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/17/serbia-restricts-movement-for-migrants-asylum-seekers/.

137 Florian Bieber, "Global Nationalism in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Nationalities Papers," *Cambridge University Press,* April 27, 2020,https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/nationalities-papers/article/global-nationalism-in-times-of-the-covid19-pandemic/3A-7F44AFDD6AC117AE05160F95738ED4.

138 N1 Srbija, "Serbia's Rightists, Mostly from Levijatan Group, Protest Outside Migrant Camp," *N1 Srbija,* May 13, 2020, http://rs.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a599205/Serbia-s-rightist-protest-outside-migrant-camp.html.

139 Ibid.

140 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Balkan Service, "Serbia Deploys Army To 'Secure' Three Migrant Camps," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty,* May 16, 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/serbia-deploys-army-migrant-camps/30615755.html.

141 Sasa Dragojlo and Milica Stojanovic, "Serbian Police 'Allow Pro-Govt Protesters to Breach Curfew'," *Balkan Insight,* May 5, 2020, https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/05/serbian-police-allow-pro-govt-protesters-to-breach-curfew/.

did not significantly change—the military was still stationed in asylum centers for the stated purpose of "protect[ing] the local population."[142]

CONCLUSION

Gallup's 2020 update of its Migrant Acceptance Index suggests that "the world is slightly less accepting of migrants today than it was three years ago."[143] Gallup also reports that countries in Southeast Europe are among the least accepting of migrants. This increasing animosity towards migrants is particularly concerning because it brings with it animosities and threats for other minorities. The Western Balkan region is still trapped in old patterns of war-time politics that characterized the 1990s and corruption, and the entrance of extreme far-right ideas into the mainstream, strengthened by global far-right talking points, which presents a potential security threat for migrants as well as for local populations. The examples presented in this report demonstrate how the adoption of anti-immigrant ideas and rhetoric have helped the far-right in Serbia connect to their European counterparts, as well as the effect that their activities have on the safety and security of migrants and the local populations.

Moreover, the dynamics noted in this report also suggest that while anti-immigration sentiments have been adopted by the far-right in Serbia, they have not supplanted or thwarted the adoption of antigovernment activities and stances. The violence and destruction of property instigated by the members of far-right groups during protests following the spread of COVID-19 not only involved attacks against the police and other protestors, but also provoked police brutality and exposed peaceful protests by citizens demanding government accountability to extreme violence during the summer of 2020.

More research on migration and far-right anti-immigrant organizing in the Western Balkans region, however, is still needed. As the protracted displacement of thousands of migrants who remain stranded in Serbia continues, it is important to conduct deeper research to understand how far-right activity in this area affects or may impact migrants and local communities. Understanding the narratives presented by far-right actors in Serbia, their appeal among local and international communities, and dissemination strategies and channels is the key to finding means to counter the influence and spread of extremist views and violent actions.

Research that maps out far-right actors and their connections within the region and within Serbia is also needed. A better understanding of actors involved in far-right extremism in Serbia and their online and offline connections within and between the Serbian far-right, the far-right in other Balkan countries, and the European far-right could contribute to more success in anticipating and addressing their influence, both locally and globally.

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142 Novosti Online, "Vučić Objasnio Zašto Vojsku Šalje u Šid: Imamo Sitne Krađe i Upade Na Posede, Ljudi Se Osećaju Nebezbedno," *Novosti,* 2020, https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:865143-NAJNOVIJA-VEST-Vucic-naredio-hitnu-upotrebu-Vojske-radi-zastite-bezbednosti-gradjana-Sida-od-migranata-trupe-uskoro-stizu-u-grad.

143 Anita Pugliese, Julie Ray, and Neli Esipova, "Revisiting the Most- and Least-Accepting Countries for Migrants," *Gallup*, August 30, 2020.,https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/245528/revisiting-least-accepting-countries-migrants.aspx.

Allowing European and Serbianfar-right extremists who commit crimes, including those that are ideologically motivated, to move and operate within Serbia with impunity is not only dangerous, but undermines institutions of democracy. Examples such as Davidović, who was not sentenced despite his evident violent extremist activities and leadership, present a concern. If violent far-right actors continue to operate undisturbed, Serbia is at risk of more violent unrest, or even becoming a safe haven for far-right actors. Similarly, mainstreaming exclusionary, extremist, and violent rhetoric in political speech, the media, and on national television normalizes hate speech risks inciting more violence against migrants, refugees, and minorities, as well as political opponents and activists.

Finally, while this report has synthesized information and provided analysis relevant to understanding Serbian far-right platforms, including those that are anti-immigrant in nature, more focus should be placed on understanding the effects of protracted displacement on local political narratives. The fact is that, in terms of migration, Serbia can still be categorized as a country of origin, as many of its citizens continue to seek refuge and asylum in Europe. However, in addition to being a country of migrant origin, it has also become a country of migrant transit, and, given some of the difficulties in the past years, even a country of protracted displacement. The speed with which these changes have and can occur, and the lack of social, political, economic, and legal policies to manage migration in and out of the country have certainly impacted both migrants as well as Serbian citizens. Given the rise of anti-migrant sentiments and far-right rhetoric in the region and the country, moving forward, greater attention to the treatment and management of communications and misinformation around migration and the wellbeing of the migrants as well as their hosts is needed, not only from researchers, but also from policymakers.

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