

# Kosovo

## QUICK FACTS

Population: 1,847,708

Area: 10,887 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Albanians 92%,  
other (Serb, Bosniak, Gorani,  
Roma, Turk, Ashkali, Egyptian)  
8%

Religions: Muslim, Serbian  
Orthodox, Roman Catholic

Government Type: Republic

GDP (official exchange rate):  
\$6.247 billion



Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated July 2013)

*In the land that forms modern Kosovo, Islam's footprint dates back seven centuries to the time of the Ottoman conquest. Although the religion has long been practiced by a majority of the population, the 1999 NATO intervention gave it a significant boost: numerous Islamic states and fundamentalist-oriented charities were permitted to enter the country, at that time under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). For the first time, Islamic governments, donors and proselytizers had open access to this economically underdeveloped, war-ravaged corner of Europe.*

*Today, Kosovo is an independent state (though still not recognized as such by many countries) that is over 90% Muslim, and the domestic discussion of Islam—and Islamism—has entered a new phase. Although foreign Islamists left behind numerous new mosques and religious schools, they failed to re-orient the majority of Kosovo's Muslims toward a strict Wahhabi interpretation of the religion. At*

*the same time, efforts by Catholic and Protestant missionaries from abroad have generated countervailing pressure. Nevertheless, recent years have witnessed violent incidents within Kosovo, as well as the participation of Kosovar Muslims in terrorist attacks abroad and the hacking of U.S. governmental websites. Protests over Islamic issues such as mosque construction and the wearing of head scarves in schools have also become politicized, as prominent backers of Islamic issues now raise their voices to influence and guide the younger generations.*

## ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Ethnic Albanians comprise the vast majority of Kosovo's population. A controversial 2011 census gave a total population of almost 1.8 million, but that figure must be considered to be only an estimate, as the Serbs of northern Kosovo boycotted the survey. While the total number of Muslims (which include small populations of Roma, Turks, Gorani and Bosniaks) was not assessed, it is estimated to be up to 95 percent of the total population.<sup>1</sup> Approximately three percent of Kosovo's Albanians are Catholic, though this population seems to be increasing, while various foreign Protestant denominations have tried (so far, with lesser success) to convert Kosovo's Muslims to their faith. The beleaguered Serbian minority of 120,000 persons - largely concentrated in a few scattered central enclaves and in more compact northern municipalities around the ethnically-divided city of Mitrovica - is Orthodox Christian. However, there is also a small Serbian-speaking Slavic Muslim minority, the Gorani, who primarily inhabit the mountainous southwestern area around Dragas, nestled between Macedonia and Albania. The small Roma (Gypsy) minority is mainly Muslim as well, but it is less active, limited by the idiosyncratic Roma lifestyle on the margins of society.

In Kosovo, Islam has played an important role in shaping national identity. The country is often referred to as the "cradle" of the medieval Serbian empire, which left abundant reminders of its presence in the scores of Orthodox Christian churches and monasteries that remain today. However, the area was captured by the Ottoman Turks in the late 14th century. Islam thereafter became the dominant religion, with considerable privileges conferred on those who converted (such as the gradually expanding ethnic Albanian population). During Communist Yugoslav rule, all religions were strictly controlled, while Kosovo's demographic underwent two important changes: the Kosovo Albanian population increased even further, and several thousand ethnic Turks and Albanians emigrated to Turkey.

In terms of an organized and foreign-influenced version of Islam, today's Islamist activity in Kosovo began around the time of the NATO intervention that ended Yugoslav rule over the province in summer 1999. The Kosovo

crisis sparked considerable sympathy among foreign Islamic donors and drew additional fighters to the region, though the nationalist character of the uprising meant that the Albanian rebels sought to downplay any religious element in their protest. Indeed, the majority of funding for the resistance, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), came from other means—from the personal donations of patriotic Diaspora Albanians, as well as from the proceeds of narcotics trafficking conducted by tight-knit Albanian mafia structures involved with heroin distribution in Europe.<sup>2</sup> These Albanian drug smuggling rings were powerful and well-entrenched, as evidenced by the fact that over a decade later, in 2011 and 2012, European police authorities in Germany, Switzerland, France and Italy were still taking further actions to dismantle them.<sup>3</sup>

Detailed discussion of Islamist activity in Kosovo must begin with an acknowledgement of the complexity and singularity of the prevailing local conditions, which cumulatively have created a friendly environment for a certain kind of Islamism to take root. Powerful clan structures and pervasive organized crime have long fueled allegations of crime and corruption against local and international leaders alike. Frustration among the general public after 1999 was also driven by the perceived lack of political and economic change in the post-Yugoslav "transition" period. The unaccountable and uninvolved nature of an international UN mission that changed staff frequently and had no long-term responsibilities for Kosovo's well-being also hindered prospects of real change. And, most visibly, the continuing political impasse with Serbia, which refuses to concede Kosovo's independence (a policy in which it is still supported by many significant world nations, including six EU members), occupies Pristina's energy and dilutes its ability to fully exercise authority in all areas of the country. All of these local realities have created in Kosovo a situation in which Islamism can be presented both as a long-term social solution and, in the short-term, manipulated to violent ends in ethnic-based incidents.

The first foreign Islamist actors in Kosovo came in the guise of an assortment of Islamic charities, the most important being an umbrella organization of the Saudi government, the Saudi Joint Commission for the Relief of Kosovo and Chechnya (SJCRC), and its official Kuwaiti counterpart, the Kuwaiti Joint Relief Committee (KJRC). Along with waves of returning Albanian refugees, representatives of these groups (and the Islamic charities organized within them) entered the country from neighboring Albania, where Albanian and U.S. authorities had been monitoring, and working to control, suspected international terrorist suspects. The Saudis initially allocated over \$22.5 million for the rebuilding or new construction of mosques and schools, and also for the purpose of supporting orphans in Kosovo.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from charities, a major opportunity for foreign Islamic development, recruitment and intelligence activity came as a result of the broad participation of many nations (including major Muslim states) in the interim UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), and the Kosovo Force (KFOR) peacekeeping units authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 1244. Muslim states like Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Egypt and Turkey used this rare “official cover” in a previously closed part of Europe to develop their own interests in Kosovo. For example, in October 1999 alone, Saudi sponsors donated 200,000 copies of the Koran in Albanian/Arabic translation as part of efforts to promulgate the Kingdom’s official brand of Islamism in the Balkans.<sup>5</sup>

Although the volume of such personnel would gradually diminish over time, and in some cases disappear completely with the progressive downsizing of the UN mission, there is little doubt that Kosovo was vulnerable to foreign Islamist penetration in the early years of post-Yugoslav rule. The legal limbo of Kosovo’s international status also meant a no-visa policy, which opened up its borders and made Kosovo Europe’s primary “safe zone” for foreign radicals. Pressure from the EU – which Kosovo hopes to join someday – has led the government in Pristina to plan to impose visas on over 80 countries in 2013.

From early on, Western experts raised concerns over the arrival of Wahhabism—the Saudi state’s ultra-conservative version of Islam—and what it could portend for Kosovo’s future. However, Kosovar Islamic leaders maintained (then as now) that the appeal of such worldviews was limited and represented no threat to the traditional fabric of Islamic society.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, overly aggressive Wahhabi sponsors angered local Albanian Muslims on a number of occasions, such as when they desecrated tombs and demolished parts of shrines belonging to the traditional Bektashi order of Islam—a more relaxed, Shi’ite-influenced hold-over from Ottoman times that is considered heretical by many Sunnis (including the Wahhabis).<sup>7</sup> This aggressive strategy caused a backlash among local Muslims, leading Wahhabi groups to cease their destruction of “heretical” structures and simply concentrate on building new mosques in the distinctive Arab style.

The dynamic of Islamist activity in Kosovo has changed gradually along with the country’s political and social situation. The chronically antagonistic relations between Albanians and Serbs have largely been ethnic in character but, as a 2010 U.S. Department of State report noted, “the close link between ethnicity and religion [have] made it difficult to determine if events were motivated by ethnic or religious animosity.”<sup>8</sup>

The motivations behind these animosities and related attacks are indeed difficult to ascertain, though there has undeniably been a religious aspect to violence on both sides. According to Albanian sources, 216 of the 513 mosques that existed in Kosovo in the year 2000 had been damaged in fighting during the 1990s, while over 80 Christian churches and mosques were attacked by Albanians (*after*, not before, the arrival of 40,000 NATO peacekeepers in July 1999).<sup>9</sup> And there is no question that the major post-war conflagration—the country’s March 2004 riots, in which 50,000 Albanians targeted Serbs and foreign nationals across Kosovo—had an Islamic aspect as well. For example, after over 30 Serbian Orthodox churches were attacked, DVDs of the destruction were soon being circulated in radical Western European mosques; furthermore, a confidential NATO document subsequently indicated that the alleged masterminds of these pre-planned riots had had ties to Hezbollah and al-Qaeda.<sup>10</sup>

Whereas Kosovo’s traditional antagonisms were ethnic in nature (albeit with religious overtones), recent years have seen an emergence of intra-ethnic tensions within the Albanian Muslim community, as well as hostility from Albanian Muslims toward Albanian Catholics and toward local and foreign members of the Catholic and Protestant denominations. This is due to two factors: first, the steady decline of the Serbian minority and Kosovo’s 2008 declaration of independence, both of which minimized the Serbs’ traditional status as the primary oppressive force restricting the freedom of Albanians; and second, the internal struggles for control between rival Muslim factions, as a young generation trained abroad or exposed to foreign versions of Islam openly contests the worship practices of their elders.

This phenomenon is similar to that currently seen in neighboring Albania and Macedonia, where ethnic Albanians also comprise the vast majority of local Muslim populations. Internet websites, social media, book printing and distribution, and use of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been the main vehicles for “networking Islam” within Kosovo and its neighboring countries. As in these and other parts of the Balkans, it is commonly believed that the sect members are paid by foreign Islamic groups for men to grow long beards and to cover women with traditional Islamic veils. (Evidence of such a connection, however, is limited to the anecdotal testimony of local Muslims.)<sup>11</sup> It is significant to note that these younger, foreign-oriented Muslims do not call themselves Wahhabis (now a pejorative term in the Balkans) but rather see themselves as “brothers” or simply “believers.”

Tensions within the wider Islamic community in Kosovo over control of mosques or other religious institutions likewise have been witnessed. For example, an elderly *imam* in the Drenica region of Kosovo was attacked

in January 2009 by numerous bearded Wahhabis from the area in an act of intimidation believed to be associated with a desire to “take over” the mosque.<sup>12</sup> Attacks of this type have been witnessed throughout the Balkans in recent years.

Kosovo authorities and international watchdogs are well aware that Islamists commonly work through charities and NGOs, and often appropriate public facilities such as sports halls for fundamentalist preaching. For example, the State Department’s 2009 *Country Reports on Terrorism* noted that Kosovo police and the UN Mission in Kosovo “continued to monitor suspected terrorist activity,” believing that several NGOs were involved in “suspicious activities.” These authorities were also trying “to prevent extremists from using non-governmental organizations to gain a foothold in Kosovo,” and “to prevent misuse of facilities for events that had no consent from the relevant religious community.”<sup>13</sup> Such events, some of which are also held in private residences or apartments, have been recorded by Islamists and circulated on DVD or Internet websites.

Islamist activity has also targeted foreign Christian groups attempting to establish themselves in Kosovo. Unsurprisingly, Evangelical Christian attempts to convert local Muslims, particularly in more violence-prone provincial areas, have provoked a severe response. In recent years, Protestants have increasingly reported threats and intimidation from local Islamists; in one high-profile case, personal data on members of the Protestant community was reproduced by up to 100 Islamic websites. Subsequently, in May 2010, a missionary reported being physically attacked by Islamists in the southern town of Prizren, a long-acknowledged center of Islamism in Kosovo.<sup>14</sup> Further, in 2011 Protestants in western Kosovo also complained that dubious legal rulings and local Muslim pressure ensured that they could open neither a church nor a cemetery; this restriction “frequently resulted in Protestants being buried in Muslim graveyards and Muslim clerics performing funeral services for Protestants,” reported the U.S. State Department in its International Religious Freedom Report for 2011. The report also discussed several cases of attacks against Serbian Orthodox shrines and the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in the same year.<sup>15</sup>

The most dangerous and unpredictable aspect of Islamist activity related to Kosovo often occurs outside of its borders. Over the past few years, Kosovar Albanians in the Diaspora have been found involved in both terrorist cells and organized crime.<sup>16</sup> In the United States, these extremists were implicated in the foiled 2008 attack on Fort Dix in New Jersey,<sup>17</sup> and in a more recent but similarly foiled plot against the U.S. Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia.<sup>18</sup> In 2012, the shadowy ‘Kosovo Hackers Security’ group made

headlines when they successfully infiltrated the U.S. National Weather Service’s computer networks; this was reportedly meant to be “a protest against the U.S. policies that target Muslim countries.”<sup>19</sup>

While an organized al-Qaeda terrorist cell is not believed to currently exist in Kosovo, intelligence sources have evidence that small groups of Kosovo Albanians are active in wars overseas. Most prominently, in fall 2012 reports of the death of a young Albanian fighting amongst the Syrian opposition ranks made headlines in Kosovo.<sup>20</sup> This report is in keeping with findings in recent years from U.S. and other intelligence services that demonstrate loose connections on the individual level between local Muslims and radicals abroad. This trend worsened in 2013, as the Syrian civil war continued to escalate; by June, media was quoting Kosovo Albanians fighting in the ‘jihad’ in Syria.<sup>21</sup> By August 2013, regional intelligence estimates were that upwards of 200 Balkan-origin jihadis were present in Syria, under the direction of diaspora radicals in Germany and Austria, and funneled into Syria via liaisons in Istanbul—representing a sharp increase compared to the previous year.<sup>22</sup> This would seem to indicate that the original post-1999 fundamentalist preaching of Saudi and other radicals present in Kosovo has met with partial success in redirecting local extremism from nationalist to religious causes.

U.S. security authorities have taken a keen interest in preventing terrorist entities from establishing roots in Kosovo, and in assisting the government on an institutional level. A July 2012 State Department report discussed a raft of counter-terrorism and anti-money laundering legislation partly drafted by U.S. legal experts and implemented by Kosovo’s parliament. It also discusses the creation of a Kosovo Department of Counterterrorism, which however still “needs to develop a cooperative relationship with relevant government agencies and the religious communities.” The somewhat negative report states that the new department has a staff of only 20 officers,<sup>23</sup> which likely will inhibit the department’s ability to function effectively.

## ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Overall, Kosovo has one of the youngest populations in Europe. It is plagued by high unemployment, pervasive organized crime and limited socio-economic opportunity—factors that are widely known to contribute to radicalization and the potential for violent extremism. As such, the situation in Kosovo bears careful monitoring.

The officially recognized Muslim organization in the country is the Islamic Community of Kosovo (in Albanian, *Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës*, or BIK), led by Chief Mufti Naim Trnava.<sup>24</sup> It is intended to represent the totality of

Islam in the country, though there are traditional Bektashi Sufi communities, particularly in western Kosovo, that have certain differences in doctrine and practice. Nevertheless, both the Bektashi and Hanafi Sunni Muslims generally get along and are united by a strong sense of ethnic Albanian nationalism. However, foreign-oriented Wahhabi Muslims fall outside the structure of the BIK and its control. Their numbers are notoriously difficult to calculate, as there is no strict doctrine or separate institutions governing them; they simply consider themselves “better,” more committed Muslims than the rest.

Furthermore, in September 2012, the Gatestone Institute reported that Southeast Asian Deobandi Muslims were attempting to gain influence through broadcasting an Islamic television channel (called ‘Peace TV’) in Kosovo with funding via a charity based in Britain. “Peace TV’s message is hard-line Wahhabism, which insults, in aggressive terms, spiritual Sufis, Shia Muslims, non-fundamentalist Sunnis, Jews, Christians, and Hindus, among others,” the report stated.<sup>25</sup> Although new to the Balkans, this channel has existed for several years and provides a gathering point for self-styled “*imams*” who are primarily ethnic Albanian and come from Kosovo and its neighboring countries.

As discussed, in the aftermath of the NATO intervention, Muslim charities made extensive efforts in the areas of proselytization, orphan care, Islamic education, banking and loans, and so on. Although their more aggressive efforts met with resistance from Albanians determined to preserve their own traditions and local control, these foreign endeavors have succeeded in some respects. With unemployment remaining high and the social needs of the country’s poorest and neediest still often neglected, Islamic groups have sought to style themselves as alternative service providers. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other countries thus have built numerous mosques and educational facilities with a clear strategic goal: in the words of one Kosovar commentator, “to create a new generation of loyal Muslims – not (loyal) to Kosovo but to the Islamic international.”<sup>26</sup>

While these efforts have failed to make notable inroads among the majority of Kosovo’s Muslim population, they have succeeded in building a tangible and ideological infrastructure of new, Saudi-style mosques and young *imams* and students educated abroad in Islamic states. Their subtle but increasingly vocal influence has manifested itself in occasional protests over issues such as bans of the head scarf in public institutions, and protests against construction of churches by their Catholic ethnic kin. In post-Serbian Kosovo, these examples of discord may mark new cleavages to come between secular and religious Albanians, and among Albanians of different faiths.

Islamists have typically used Islamic NGOs and youth groups to foment protests and shape common policies on these controversial issues. For example, in May and June 2010, Islamist groups organized multiple street protests after a high school student in the town of Ferizaj was expelled for wearing a headscarf. While the Kosovo government has sought to implement strictly secular laws in this regard, a local court gave Islamists room for hope by overturning another similar ban in Vitina. The tension over this issue extends to the workplace, as veiled Muslim women have frequently complained that employers will not hire them.<sup>27</sup> As discussed in the following section, the development of a political party championing Islamic causes indicates that these controversies are registering at a national level. An indication of the government’s concern over religious polarization has been attested by a new inter-faith body (led by Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic leaders) that meets regularly to discuss better cooperation and references to Mother Teresa; though she was born in neighboring Macedonia, the famed nun of Calcutta is considered an ethnic Albanian national hero.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, emerging discord between Albanian Muslims and Catholics became apparent in September 2010, when the new Catholic Cathedral of the Blessed Mother Teresa was opened in the capital, Pristina. The building drew the ire of Muslim groups, who chafed at the apparent preferential treatment from the government received by Catholics (who comprise only about 3 percent of the population). They complained with good reason; a 2004 Muslim demand for a grand mosque had been turned down by authorities. Ferid Agani, chairman of the pro-Islamic Justice Party of Kosovo (a small but vocal conservative party which holds three out of Kosovo’s 120 parliamentary seats), deemed the refusal “unacceptable,” and *imams* in media testimony derided it as a “political decision.”<sup>29</sup> Soon after the Pristina cathedral was opened, threatening graffiti began to appear throughout the city proclaiming that Islamist worship would be conducted in it.<sup>30</sup> Other pro-Islamist figures at the time argued that “fairness” now required a mosque to be built—an argument identical to the one that their co-religionists continue to make throughout the region.

Although the Catholic population of Kosovo is a mere 60,000 persons, it carries disproportionate weight for both historical and contemporary reasons. Before the arrival of the Turks in the late 14th century, Albanians were Catholic. However, as a group, they subsequently converted to Islam for the social benefits granted by the Ottoman conquerors. Therefore, some Albanians tout the idea of “returning” to an “original religion.” Furthermore, many believe that becoming Christian will give them a better chance of acceptance in Western Europe<sup>31</sup> – a view again shared by many in the wider Balkan region. In 2005, former Albanian president Alfred Moisiu provoked

uproar from Islamist groups following a speech he gave in England in which he stated that Albanians follow a “shallow” sort of Islam, and in fact have deeper Christian roots.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, following the erection of the Pristina cathedral, the Vatican upgraded the Catholic Church there has been upgraded to the status of diocese. This action fits a broader trend in recent events indicating the Roman Catholic Church is taking a greater interest in spreading Catholicism in Kosovo. Significantly, on February 10, 2011, the Vatican commissioned its first apostolic delegate to Kosovo, Papal Nuncio in Slovenia Juliusz Janusz. While the Vatican has made clear that it does not recognize Kosovo’s independence, and takes pains to not “offend” the Serbian Orthodox Church on this issue, it apparently seems to believe that the time has come to promote Catholicism more strongly against Islamic expansionism.<sup>33</sup>

Islamic assistance to Kosovar society has come over the years from a variety of organizations, starting with the Saudi Joint Committee and continuing with numerous foreign-based charities which have sought to develop local offshoots and self-sustaining entities. Their social impact is still not clear, in part because they have concentrated on Islamic education for the young and very young (orphan sponsorship and care has been a main project of numerous charities). While a number of “suspicious” charities were closed in the aftermath of 9/11, major global organizations like Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) continue to operate. Aside from typical charity activities, such groups offer loans and “micro-credit” schemes in a bid to extend Islamic influence over small businessmen and rural communities. By 2004 alone, the IRW had handed out over 500 loans “based on Islamic principles” to Kosovar businesses.<sup>34</sup> The organization remains very active in Kosovo today, as well as in other Balkan states.<sup>35</sup>

The issue of Islam in social assistance has led to some difficult choices for average Kosovars. A prominent example was the case of Kastriot Duka, a former *imam* in the village of Marina, near Mitrovica. Although the locals were grateful for the financial and other assistance he had provided through contacts with British-based charity Rahma Mercy (the same one reportedly backing ‘Peace TV’), the religious conservatism he promoted in the mosque—such as veiling four-year-old girls—was widely seen as excessive. 6,000 locals signed a petitioned against him, and by order of the local mayor, Duka was sent back to his native Albania (officially, on charges of visa violation).<sup>36</sup>

However, in 2012 Kosovar investigative reporters revealed that Duka returned to Kosovo times after the expulsion, and that the same funding channels remained available to him.<sup>37</sup> This kind of difficult decision between

social care and fundamentalism will continue as the weak state struggles to care for its citizens, and as international disagreements over Kosovo’s legal status continue to hinder the country’s to fully participate in all international institutions.

## ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Long before becoming an independent state in 2008, Kosovo’s relationship with Islam had been heavily influenced by external considerations. After the spectacle of thousands of “Afghan-Arab” *mujahideen* joining the Muslim side during the Bosnian war (1992-1995), the KLA considered it wise to ignore offers for help from foreign fighters in the subsequent conflict in Kosovo, hoping to instead win political support from the United States. Although numerous Muslim charities and state actors were welcomed into Kosovo in the immediate aftermath of the 1999 NATO intervention, the 9/11 attacks had a sobering effect, and the Kosovar administration, then heavily controlled by the UN Mission, attempted to purge all NGOs and charities believed to be linked to terrorism. At the same time, partisan critics of Kosovo Albanian separatism increasingly tried to draw connections between Kosovo and Islamic terrorism, thus rendering Islam a highly political (and opaque) issue.

The subsequent U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq led American diplomats to search the globe for examples of “success stories” in “pro-American” Muslim states. Kosovo was an obvious choice in this regard. As Kosovo’s drive toward independence had been supported by powerful countries such as the U.S., UK, France and Germany, it was easy for these governments to depict Kosovo’s brand of Islam as harmless, a sort of “Islam-lite.”<sup>38</sup> However, the government in Pristina was simultaneously trying to woo the Arab world and convince it to recognize Kosovo’s independence. Although powerful Arab states (including Saudi Arabia) have since recognized Kosovo, Serbia pledges to continue to slow the recognition process as much as it can. Nevertheless Kosovo won over several new recognitions in 2012, including Kuwait’s.

The ongoing political impasse with Serbia, as well as other highly combustible issues impairing Kosovar-EU relations—such as alleged involvement of Kosovo’s top leaders in wartime organ trafficking and drug smuggling—are all aggravating obstacles for Kosovo, but they have also in fact brought benefit to one country : Turkey. The current Islamist-leaning government in Ankara seeks to expand its influence in formerly Ottoman lands, and in Kosovo it has done so through development work, investment and political engagement. Moreover, , as a result of the 1950s-era resettlement program of Kosovar Albanians by former Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito, many Kosovars

now have relatives living in Turkey. These ties, as well as the Western desire for Islam to remain “moderate” in the Balkans, feed naturally into the idea of a Turkish expansion in Kosovo and neighboring states.

In light of these issues, the relative strength of Kosovar state institutions is of paramount importance to effectively preventing and combating violent extremism. The above-mentioned terrorist plot against the Marine base in Quantico, Virginia in 2009 illuminated a major shortcoming in this regard. When the FBI sought to extradite Bajram Asllani, one of the chief supporting suspects in the case, a judge with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) ruled that Asllani could not be rendered due to insufficient evidence and lack of a valid bilateral extradition treaty.<sup>39</sup> Although it is not known whether fears of an Islamist backlash played a role in the judge’s strange decision, this instance of dysfunctional trans-Atlantic security cooperation clearly benefits only the increasingly confident and assertive Islamist groups of Kosovo.

Another major issue for the future interaction of Islam and the state is the role of foreign-oriented NGOs and political parties in the government. While the aforementioned Justice Party (Partia e Drejtësisë)– modeled on Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party – has only three parliamentary seats, its leader was given a cabinet minister post. In 2010, the party attempted to pass legislation calling for an introduction of religious education and an end to the state ban on the *hijab* in public schools. While these attempts failed, the closeness of the vote result indicated that individual parliamentarians from a wide range of parties have sympathies with Islam on social grounds. Also, many NGOs affiliated with politics continue to agitate for Muslim issues. In July 2011, one such group operating under the slogan of ‘*Bashkohu!*’ (‘Join!’ in Albanian) organized a ‘prayer protest’ of several hundred Muslims on the streets of Pristina, a symbolic demand for the construction of a new and larger mosque. At that time, a prominent local Islamic professor attested that the protesters were “manufacturing confrontation to increase the footprint of a more radical form of Islam,” and that they were “being goaded on by foreign-based organizations.”<sup>40</sup>

Of potential concern was the creation, in early 2013, of a more radical Islamic party, known as the Islamic Movement (LISBA) by the *Bashkohu* activists. The party espouses openly Islamist causes, such as building a ‘mega-mosque’ in Pristina, and has reported ties to radicals in the Gulf states and the 2010 Gaza Flotilla.<sup>41</sup> Although the party lacks major support, it is certainly something to watch going forward.

Indeed, cumulative events indicate that there will be further confrontations

within Kosovo’s Islamic communities and that, so long as foreign sponsors and money continue to keep radicalism alive, it will remain a persistent issue politically- despite the relatively low interest in fundamentalist Islam among the general population.

## ENDNOTES

[1] The 2011 Kosovo census was the first internationally-recognized tally since 1981. Despite the Serb boycott, the EU (which donated 6 million euros to the project) found it generally to have met quality standards. The official Kosovo government statistical office web page for the census is <http://esk.rks-gov.net/rekos2011>.

[2] For the first, see Dutch filmmaker Klaartje Quirijns's 2005 documentary *The Brooklyn Connection* ([www.thebrooklynconnection.net](http://www.thebrooklynconnection.net)), which details how Albanian-American Diaspora leaders were able to raise \$30 million for weaponry which they then smuggled to the KLA. There is a vast literature on the second aspect; for example, read the very detailed contemporary testimony of then-Interpol Assistant Director Ralph Mutschke, who gives an impressive assessment of the range of activities, geographical scope, profits and international crime partners of the major Albanian syndicates, as well as comments on links between such organized crime proceeds and terrorism. See Ralf Mutschke, Testimony before the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, December 13, 2000.

[3] See "International Operation Targeted Large Albanian Drug Trafficking Network," Europol Press Release, July 9, 2012, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/news/international-operation-targeted-large-albanian-drug-trafficking-network-1683>.

[4] A detailed contemporaneous description of the specific Kosovar refugee relief operations undertaken by Arab groups in Albania, and their subsequent entrance from there into Kosovo, is found in Hussein Saud Qusti, "Unsung Heroes," *Saudi Aramco World*, July/August 1999. Regarding the role of U.S. and Albanian authorities targeting Islamist groups in Albania during the mid-1990s, see the *World Almanac of Islamism* chapter on Albania.

[5] Frank Brown, "Islam Builds a Future in Kosovo, One Mosque at a Time," *BeliefNet*, September 12, 2000, <http://www.beliefnet.com/News/2000/09/Islam-Builds-A-Future-In-Kosovo-One-Mosque-At-A-Time.aspx>.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Examples include United Arab Emirates soldiers forcing Albanian villagers in Vushtrri to destroy two historic graveyards in October 1999, and the Saudi bulldozing of a 16th-century Koranic school and Ottoman library in Djakovica in August 2000. See Jolyon Naegele, "Yugoslavia: Saudi Wahhabi Aid Workers Bulldoze Balkan Monuments," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 4, 2000.

[8] See United States Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*.

[9] Brown, "Islam Builds a Future in Kosovo, One Mosque at a Time."

[10] See Christopher Deliso, *The Coming Balkan Caliphate: The Threat*

*of Radical Islam to Europe and the West* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2007), 65-67.

[11] For example, see Mary Fitzgerald, "'Islam-lite' Kosovo Determined to Stay Secular," *The Irish Times*, April 12, 2012.

[12] The story appeared in numerous local media, including on *Radio Television Kosova*, January 12, 2009.

[13] "Chapter 2 Country Reports: Europe and Eurasia Overview," in United States Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2008* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, April 30, 2009).

[14] Cases cited in United States Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*. (Protestant community members have also reported independently to the author that they have been physically assaulted by Islamists in Kosovo). This report also notes the official Kosovo Islamic Community's "concerns about radical Islamic groups they alleged were operating from private homes and led by persons from outside of the country."

[15] United States Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report 2011*.

[16] The full story of this interaction is reported only partially, and in various sources. See "Kosovo Drug Baron among Terrorists," *Blic* (Belgrade), September 27, 2006. See also Genc Morina, "Radical Islam: Wahhabism a Danger to Kosovo's Independence!" *Express* (Pristina), October 15, 2006. For official reactions to the acquittal, see Nina Berglund, "Reaction Mixed to Terror Acquittal," *Aftenposten* (Oslo), June 4, 2008.

[17] Geoff Mulvihill, "Man pleads guilty in Fort Dix plot case," *Associated Press*, October 31, 2007.

[18] See Gerry J. Gilmore, "FBI, Navy Foil Alleged Terror Plot on Quantico," American Forces Press Service, September 25, 2009. See also U.S. Department of Justice, "Kosovar National Charged with Terrorism Violations," June 17, 2010.

[19] "Kosovo Group Claims Hack of US Weather Service," *AFP*, October 19, 2012.

[20] While the cumulative result of the debate could not prove or disprove that the specific individual had died, his family reported that he was permanently out of contact while on a trip to Turkey; this country is the principal means of entry for Balkan fighters bound for Syria. A senior intelligence official in the region told this writer in December 2012 that around 20-30 young Albanians were fighting in Syria, and had been trained at a hidden camp in southern Kosovo.

[21] Muhamet Hajrullahu, "Kosovo Muslim Embraces 'Jihad' in Syrian War," *Balkan Insight*, June 13, 2013.

[22] Author interviews with senior regional intelligence officials, June and August 2013.



[23] United States Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism, *Country Report on Terrorism 2011*, July 31, 2012. Available in PDF form at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/195768.pdf>

[24] The official web site of the BIK is [www.bislame.net](http://www.bislame.net).

[25] The report added that the TV broadcast was directed by a local ‘Center for Islamic Studies,’ which “appears to exist only online and via television.” See Irfan Al-Awali, “Extremists Establish Foothold in the Balkans,” Gatestone Institute, September 24, 2012, <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3360/kosovo-peace-tv>

[26] See Genc Morina, “Radical Islam: Wahhabism a Danger to Kosovo’s Independence!”

[27] United States Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*.

[28] Linda Karadaku, “Inter-faith Dialogue Expected To Advance Reconciliation,” SETimes.com, August, 14, 2013.

[29] Gjergj Erebara, “Kosovo’s New Cathedral Stirs Muslim Resentment,” BalkanInsight, October 4, 2010

[30] Ibid.

[31] See Christopher Deliso, “Lost in Conversion?,” October 23, 2008, [www.balkananalysis.com](http://www.balkananalysis.com).

[32] The original text of the speech was published on the official website of the President of Albania, [www.president.al](http://www.president.al).

[33] See Matteo Albertini, “The Vatican’s Growing Prominence in Kosovo,” April 14, 2011, [www.balkananalysis.com](http://www.balkananalysis.com).

[34] Deliso, *The Coming Balkan Caliphate*, 65-67, 120-121. Islamic Relief still has extensive activities in Kosovo and helps maintain the UK-Kosovo axis of Islamist activity.

[35] A list of the charity’s projects in Kosovo is available on its official website, [www.islamic-relief.com](http://www.islamic-relief.com).

[36] Linda Karadaku, “Kosovo Departs Self-Proclaimed Imam,” SETimes, March 11, 2010.

[37] See Irfan Al-Awali, “Extremists Establish Foothold in the Balkans”

[38] This could be seen in media pieces printed immediately after the independence declaration, such as “Kosovo Touts ‘Islam-lite,’” Associated Press, February 21, 2008.

[39] For background, see Fatos Bytyci, “Alleged Jihadist Wanted by FBI Lives Openly in Kosovo,” Reuters, November 24, 2010. The suspect remains on the Bureau’s most-wanted list.

[40] “Battle over a Kosovo Mosque,” July 26, 2011, [www.theworld.org](http://www.theworld.org),

[41] S Schwartz, “Kosovo Radical Islamists in New Political Offensive,” The Weekly Standard, February 13, 2013.