Assessing Islamic terrorism in the Western Balkans: the state of the debate

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Introduction

During the 1990s foreign mujahedin fighters espousing an extreme Islamic ideology fought on Balkan soil. The extent and consequences of their presence in the Western Balkans constitute a controversial issue that has often been subject to partisan manipulations in the service of national political agendas or the protection of personal political legacies. Given the post-9/11 international sensitivities and policy priorities, distortions, exaggerations and stereotyping are tempting ‘weapons’ in an effort to re-interpret the past and thus delineate the parameters of the region’s political future. Significantly, a series of recent serious scholarly efforts have addressed the manifestations of Balkan Islamic fundamentalism in a region that contains 7–8 million Muslims and in one case, alarmingly, proclaimed *The Coming Balkan Caliphate*.1

The purpose of this review article will be to assess the contemporary debate about the degree, nature and consequences of Islamic terrorism in the Western Balkans. It should be clarified that we will only deal with terrorist organizations and groups that have been linked to Islamic fundamentalist goals, and not terrorists ‘motivated by ethnicity or national identity’.2 In particular, this article

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2F. Bieber, ‘Approaches to political violence and terrorism in Former Yugoslavia’, *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 5(1), 2003, p. 40. Bieber provides an authoritative typology of violence in the Balkans that includes a useful discussion and definition of terrorism. However, his primary emphasis is not on Islamic terrorism.
will address the disputes concerning jihadi involvement in Bosnia-Herzegovina (hereafter Bosnia) and also in the various struggles connected to the predominantly Muslim Albanian factor in Albania, Kosovo and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).  

The development of Bosnia’s Islamic character will first be explained. There will be a presentation of the Muslim SS division that operated in the region during the Second World War and of the Islamic beliefs of Alija Izetbegovic who was President of Bosnia during the civil war in the 1990s. Particular emphasis will be given to the economic aid provided by the international Muslim community to their coreligionists in Bosnia and especially to the arrival of mujahedin fighters who militarily assisted their cause. This article will focus on their numbers, nature of activities, impact on the war and popular support that they might have enjoyed. An attempt will be made to evaluate the extent of terrorist operations following the conclusion of the civil war and also after 9/11, as well as the reforms that Bosnia has undertaken in order to participate in the war against terror.

An examination of the presence of Islamic terrorism in Albania will follow. Emphasis will be given to Osama bin Laden’s visit to the country, al-Qaeda’s locally planned targets and to Albania’s most recent reform measures relating to international efforts against terrorism. We will then turn to Kosovo and the alleged links of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to Islamic terrorism. Various claims will be evaluated and the nature and goals of the organization dissected. Turning to FYROM, the National Liberation Army’s (NLA) connection to terrorism will be assessed in a similar manner. It will emerge that although mujahedin fighters did participate in both the KLA and NLA, these organizations were primarily nationalist and irredentist in character lacking any significant jihadi dimension.

This article will conclude by arguing that contemporary scholarship is largely in agreement that al-Qaeda and similar minded organizations and groups have probably managed to establish a foothold of sorts in the Western Balkans possibly utilizing the region as a ‘springboard’ for further attacks. However, at the same time, the states of the Western Balkans are actively striving to join the major Euro-Atlantic structures and not create some kind of Balkan Caliphate.

### Bosnia: Afghanistan redux?

Bosnia constitutes one of the two major cases in the Balkans (the other being Albania) where during Ottoman times there were mass conversions to Islam by the local Christian population. The process by which eventually more than a third...
of the population espoused Islam was slow and lasted over 150 years. By the time the Ottomans left in the 19th century the Muslims of Bosnia (although no more first-class citizens and rulers by virtue of their religion) exhibited signs of religious moderation. In addition, since the end of the 19th century Bosnia was being secularized—a process that was inevitably reinforced during communist rule. Revealingly, ‘between the Second World War and 1991 roughly 40 per cent of urban marriages were mixed [in terms of religious and ethnic background]’, while only 37 per cent of the republic’s Muslims declared themselves religious in 1990. The scholarly conclusion is that there was no mass, popular Islamic fundamentalist movement in Bosnia.

However, not everything was idyllic or harmonious in Bosnia’s post-Ottoman Islamic history. Of particular importance was the creation of the predominantly Muslim Waffen-SS Handschar division amidst the Second World War in 1943. The division was Heinrich Himmler’s brainchild who was head of the Schutzstaffel (SS) and apparently entertained romantic notions about Muslim fighters. A prominent role in recruitment and propaganda was played by Haj Amin al-Huseini, the former grand mufti of Jerusalem, a close ally of Hitler and an extreme anti-Semite. The Handschar was originally comprised of 8000 Bosnian Muslims and 2800 Catholic volunteers, most of whom were impoverished and uneducated. Their training took place in occupied France and involved one serious mutiny. Imams espousing a fundamentalist Muslim theology were assigned to each battalion. The division returned to Bosnia in early 1944 and took part in nine major anti-partisan operations. It was also responsible for the slaughter of ‘90 percent—12,600—of Bosnia’s 14,000 Jews’. The Handschar eventually disintegrated, many of its soldiers being shot or changing sides and joining the partisans.

Also of importance was the existence of the Young Muslims, an Islamist group that operated in Bosnia. One of its members was Alija Izetbegovic who was arrested in 1946 by the communist authorities for his (peaceful) anti-regime activities and sentenced to a three-year prison term. He subsequently kept low but held to his views, publishing in 1970 a contentious book titled Islamic Declaration. Although his manifesto never referred specifically to Bosnia, it concluded that ‘there can be neither peace nor coexistence between the Islamic religion and non-Islamic social and political institutions’. Izetbegovic was


arrested again in 1983 on (unsubstantiated) terrorist charges and condemned to 14 years in prison. Five years later he was released and in 1989 formed the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) that won the elections in 1990 and was in power during the subsequent civil war, with Izetbegovic serving as the republic’s President.

Izetbegovic remains a controversial figure, with some scholars claiming that his personal ‘single dream was the creation of an Islamic state in Europe’ and describing his party as ‘Eastern, Islamic, and authoritarian’. Izetbegovic was undoubtedly influenced by Islamic theology, met with Osama bin Laden and readily accepted help from mujahedin fighters (as will be shown next). Nevertheless, most of his actions must be placed within the context of a vicious war during which Bosnia’s Muslims were usually on the defensive, often besieged, and crucially lacking in heavy weaponry as a result of the international arms embargo. It is probably fair to conclude that although not a Western liberal reformer and a paragon of religious toleration (as frequently portrayed by the international news media during the war), Izetbegovic was also not a fundamentalist extremist seeking to quixotically establish a Taliban-like regime in Bosnia—especially given a largely unresponsive population and negative international and regional attitudes towards any such outcome.

In 1991 Muslims comprised 43.7 per cent of Bosnia’s population, while Serbs and Croats 31.4 and 17.3 per cent, respectively. As the republic descended into civil war, the international Muslim community became aware of the plight of their coreligionists and mobilized on their behalf accordingly. Considerable monetary contributions were subsequently made through the establishment of a network of Islamic charities. For example, Saudi Arabia contributed $150 million dollars to such organizations in 1994. However, the work of these organizations was never purely of a philanthropic nature. The CIA has concluded that about a third of these charities ‘facilitated the activities of Islamic groups engaging in terrorism’.

In addition to funding, the Muslims of Bosnia were aided by the arrival of mujahedin fighters, many of whom had previously fought against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Among them were members of both al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. Their goals appear to have been twofold: to help their fellow Muslims and establish a base and springboard for future operations in Western Europe and the Balkans. There does not seem to have been any plans for the

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6Deliso, op. cit., Note 1, p. 5 and Schindler, op. cit., Note 1, p. 201, respectively.
complete takeover of the government and the creation of an Islamic fundamentalist state.\textsuperscript{10}

The mujahedin began arriving during the summer of 1992 and by 1993 had managed to form one brigade, though by the war’s conclusion in 1995 they had been established in 10 different brigades and units. It has been estimated that the Islamic fighters numbered 4000–6000 men.\textsuperscript{11} Osama bin Laden was also provided with a Bosnian passport in September 1999 and subsequently had at least one personal audience with President Izetbegovic.\textsuperscript{12} Overall, the international media and public opinion in the West was supportive of the Bosnian Muslims. Within this context the USA turned a ‘blind eye’ and tacitly both allowed and indirectly supported mujahedin activities in Bosnia. This situation has correctly been assessed as being (at least) ‘ironic … [given that] the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and bin-Laden had often been supporting the same factions in the Balkan wars of the [1990s]’.\textsuperscript{13}

The foreign Muslim fighters often fought ferociously and suffered casualties accordingly. They participated in a series of major offensives and operations but militarily they did not play a decisive role. However, they were responsible for committing horrific atrocities: ‘decapitations, amputations, and “non-surgical circumcisions” were standard procedure, as were electrical shock, sexual abuse, and other forms of torture’.\textsuperscript{14} There is absolutely no evidence that any significant portion of Bosnia’s Muslim population espoused their extremist Islamic beliefs or adopted their practices. Nevertheless, their military aid was both welcomed and appreciated. This attitude is aptly summed up by a Bosnian refugee: ‘I am not a fundamentalist, but I will take a gun from the fundamentalists and thank them for it.’\textsuperscript{15}

The war in Bosnia was especially bloody and elicited a series of unsuccessful international mediation attempts. The true turning point was the massacre in Srebrenica in which more than 7000 innocent civilians were killed. This development produced a world outcry, created the necessary conditions for

\textsuperscript{10}See Deliso, op. cit., Note 1, p. 14; Kohlman, op. cit., Note 1, p. 120 and Shay, op. cit., Note 1, p. 203. It is possible, though, that there was a Clash of Civilizations dimension to the struggle. For example, to quote a prominent fundamentalist cleric (Shaykh Salman al-Awdah): ‘What occurred in Bosnia Herzegovina was not merely a war between the Muslims and the Serbs, but it was a war between Islam and Christianity’ (cited in Kohlman, op. cit., Note 1, p. 25). Not surprisingly, Samuel Huntington concurs by unequivocally asserting that ‘the war in Bosnia was a war of civilizations’ (Huntington, op. cit., Note 5, p. 288).

\textsuperscript{11}See Kohlman, op. cit., Note 1, p. xii; Schindler, op. cit., Note 1, p. 119 and Shay, op. cit., Note 1, pp. 49, 65–66 and 68.

\textsuperscript{12}See Deliso, op. cit., Note 1, p. 11 and Schindler, op. cit., Note 1, pp. 123–125. The account given in this study of Osama bin Laden’s presence in Bosnia is particularly comprehensive and persuasive.


\textsuperscript{14}Deliso, op. cit., Note 1, p. 10. For other examples of mujahedin atrocities see Kohlman, op. cit., Note 1, pp. 86 and 130 and Schindler, op. cit., p. 166. See also D. Trifunovic, \textit{Islamic Fundamentalist’s Global Network—Modus Operandi—Model Bosnia}, Documentation Center of Republic of Srpska for War Crimes Research and Bureau of Government of RS for Relations with ICTY, Banja Luka, 2002. For assessments of the mujahedin’s overall military role, see Deliso, op. cit., Note 1, p. 162 and ICG, op. cit., Note 1, p. 2. For an assessment of mujahedin casualties during 1992, see Kohlman, op. cit., Note 1, p. 66.

\textsuperscript{15}Cited in Kohlman, op. cit., Note 1, p. 93.
NATO’s military intervention and, in conjunction with developments on the ground, allowed the signing on 14 December 1995 of the Dayton Peace Accords. The accords expressly stipulated that:

All Forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina … which are not of local origin, whether or not they are legally and militarily subordinated to the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Republika Srpska, shall be withdrawn together with their equipment from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina within thirty (30) days.\(^\text{16}\)

In other words, the mujahedin were given a month to depart. However, at least 741 were granted Bosnian citizenship in 1995 and 1996. The number of those who remained is thus estimated to have been several hundred and perhaps as many as 1000. In addition, it is probable that some 200 Iranian spies also stayed back.\(^\text{17}\)

Given this presence, it is not surprising that Islamic terrorists began to pursue various plans. On 15 February 1996 a special NATO operation was organized at Pogorelica against what appeared to have been a terrorist training camp in which Iranian agents were involved. Furthermore, a plot to assassinate Pope John Paul II in Bosnia in April 1997 was foiled. It should be stressed that active support among the population for such acts remained low. Perhaps indicative is the fact that a demonstration in Sarajevo against the deportation of certain terror suspects drew a crowd of merely 300 out of a population of 400,000.\(^\text{18}\)

After the events of 9/11 there was renewed pressure from the USA to combat Islamic terrorist elements in Bosnia. As a result,

Bosnia has deployed a State Border Service throughout virtually all of the country’s territory. State-level Ministries of Defense and Security were established in 2004, and the two entity-level intelligence services were merged into a single

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\(^{17}\)See Schindler, op. cit., Note 1, pp. 239, 311–312 and 243; Shay, op. cit., Note 1, p. xii and Woehrel, op. cit., Note 1, p. 3. In November 2004 charges were brought against 15 former officials for helping mujahedin fighters stay in Bosnia. See Woehrel, op. cit., Note 1, p. 5.

state-level service. Bosnia has established the State Investigative and Protection Agency (SIPA), responsible for investigating complex crimes including terrorism, illegal trafficking, organized crime, and smuggling of weapons of mass destruction. SIPA will have a financial intelligence unit (FIU), and a sub unit of its Criminal Investigation Department will be dedicated to counterterrorism and WMD.19

Although al-Qaeda and other Islamist terrorist organizations might have managed to secure a foothold in Bosnia, the fact remains that both the country’s population and government are participating in the US-led war against terror. Muslim terrorists and extremists might strike again in the future, but there appears to be little chance that they will win widespread support from Bosnia’s Muslims or take over the country’s government, despite the military support that they provided during the 1990s.

The Albanian factor and Islamic terrorism

Albania’s population is estimated to be 70 per cent Muslim, but it is generally accepted that religious identification is in general not particularly strong. In 1992, then President Sali Berisha made Albania a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) but this decision did not signify a major turn towards Islam or any concomitant radicalization among Albanians. More significant to the purposes of this article is the fact that Osama bin Laden visited Albania in 1994 or 1995 ‘offering support to charities rebuilding mosques and school as a cover to infiltrate his operatives’.20 Perhaps not unrelated is the fact that, according to the 9/11 Commission report, in 1998

CIA operatives … raided an Al Qaida forgery operation and another terrorist cell in Tirana. These operations may have disrupted a planned attack on the US embassy in Tirana, and did lead to the rendition of Al Qaida-related terrorist operatives.21

Subsequently, ‘Albania cooperated closely with the United States and other governments in sharing information and investigating terrorist-related groups and activities … [and] adopted a national action plan against terrorism in 2002.22 Ultimately, and despite the aforementioned major instance of suspected Islamic terrorist malfeasance, Albania has not been central to the debates concerning the presence and actions of Islamic terrorists in the Western Balkans.

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19 Woehrel, op. cit., Note 1, p. 5.
20 ICG, op. cit., Note 1, p. 5. On the date of bin Laden’s visit, see Deliso, op. cit., Note 1, p. 31 and Shay, op. cit., Note 1, p. 98. Regarding Albania’s population, 20 per cent are estimated to be Eastern Orthodox and 10 per cent Roman Catholic. See The CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>. The decision to join the OIC was never ratified by parliament. See Deliso, op. cit., p. 30.
22 Woehrel, op. cit., Note 1, p. 7.
It is other developments and organizations or groups in Kosovo and FYROM that have proved far more contentious among scholars.

More specifically, the Kosovo Liberation Army (Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës or UÇK) has been linked to both an Islamist agenda and the actions of mujahedin fighters. According to some experts, the KLA’s

Declared goal ... was to establish an independent Muslim state in Kosovo, but its long range objective was to bring about the establishment of an Islamic state covering all of the Balkans (‘greater Albania’), which would include Albania, Kosovo, [FYROM], and Bosnia-Herzegovina.23

The evaluation of such claims is of paramount importance in assessing the level of popular support and jihadi involvement with one of the most dynamic (and armed) aspects of the Albanian factor in the region.

The KLA precursor organization was the Popular Movement for Kosovo (LPK—Levijna Popullore e Kosoves) that was formed in 1982. Its ideology can be characterized as extreme leftist, influenced by Enverism and Leninism but also somewhat convoluted and certainly animated by anti-Serbian feelings. There was absolutely no Islamic connection, either organizational or ideological.24 The KLA was founded in 1993 and originally enjoyed limited popularity in Kosovo. Following continued Serbian oppression orchestrated by Slobodan Milošević and the failure of the Dayton Peace Accords to settle the issue of Kosovo, the KLA’s support gradually increased. Without any doubt the KLA had serious connections with organized crime (including heroin traffickers) and received funding from criminal activities often linked to the Albanian Diaspora in Western Europe and the USA. However, its finances do not seem to have been connected to any Islamist-related illicit actions.25

Prior to events leading to NATO’s 1999 intervention in Kosovo, the KLA was regarded by the USA as essentially terrorist in nature. For example, on 23 February 1998, US special envoy Robert Gelbard categorically stated that ‘the UÇK is, without any questions, a terrorist group’.26 This assessment, though, was related to KLA violent actions and not to any Islamic statements or goals. In other words, even those who considered the KLA a terrorist group did not view it as an Islamist terrorist group.

Not surprisingly, the KLA’s ideology and ultimate goals were far removed from extremist Islam. Significantly, the KLA contained both fascist and communist-inspired wings, thus creating a rather contradictory (if not schizophrenic) ideological background.27 It should also be taken into account that many ‘of the foot soldiers of the KLA are generally ordinary men who have armed themselves to defend their villages and their families’.28 What unified all

23Shaul, op. cit., p. 82; emphasis added. See also Deliso, op. cit., Note 1, p. 42.
25According to Tim Judah, ‘Kosovars are prominent in the Zurich heroin trade … and … these gangsters certainly make hefty contributions to KLA funds’ (Judah, ‘Inside the KLA’, op. cit., Note 24). See also Shay, op. cit., p. 88.
26Cited in Judah, Kosovo, op. cit., Note 24, p. 138. By the time of the 1999 Kosovo conflict the USA’s attitude towards the KLA had altered substantially. See ibid., p. 85.
of the KLA’s disparate factions was the desire to liberate Kosovo from Serbian control. The organization’s rhetoric and ideology reflected this goal. An example of a KLA communiqué exhibits the quintessentially nationalist core and raisons d’être of its existence:

we let the occupiers from Belgrade know that our actions up until now are just first warnings … Dialogue about withdrawing the military and police from the Republic of Kosova should start immediately. We call on powerful international centers such as the USA to recognize the independence of Kosova for which the Albanians have declared themselves in a referendum otherwise war in Kosova is inevitable.29

This is not the language of an organization aiming to establish a Kosovar Caliphate.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that mujahedin fighters did join the ranks and fought alongside the KLA during the 1999 conflict. They probably numbered at least 210 but this should be compared to the 20,000-strong (at their peak) KLA forces.30 Furthermore, there is no evidence that the mujahedin played a military role comparable to the one in Bosnia. In other words, their importance was probably rather marginal. Some scholars have argued with some justification that the KLA’s ‘tactics … are more reminiscent of terrorist groups’.31 But to categorize the KLA as an Islamic terrorist organization or group aiming to create some kind of an Islamic Kosovo (or Greater Islamic Kosovo) is ultimately not supported by the aforementioned discussion. It should thus be concluded that ‘despite dire predictions, fundamentalists and indeed religion as a whole did not play a role in the [1999] war’.32

More recently, scholars have argued that the 17–18 March 2004 Albanian-led riots had an Islamist aspect, especially given the destruction of Serbian Christian churches. More specifically, ‘36 Orthodox churches, monasteries and other religious and cultural sites [were damaged or destroyed]’.33 The March riots constituted a significant turning point in the path towards Kosovo’s final status. Their primary goals were political and nationalistic not religious or fundamentalist. Kosovo Albanians attempted to expedite through violent means the process leading towards their province’s independence and not send some kind of al-Qaeda-related Islamist message. It should be stressed, though, that some information concerning the existence of Islamic terrorist cells in Kosovo has emerged. However, most experts seem to agree that, at worse, only ‘a small minority [of Kosovo Albanians] might be drawn to Islamic extremism and related activities’.34

The 1999 Kosovo Conflict also seems to have played a role in the radicalization of FYROM’s sizeable Albanian ethnic minority (about a quarter of the population).

30Shay, op. cit., Note 1, pp. 86 and 89. For an eyewitness account of bearded mujahedin in Kosovo, see Hedges, op. cit., Note 27, p. 39.
31Bieber, op. cit., Note 2, p. 47.
32Judah, Kosovo, op. cit., Note 24, p. 175.
34Deliso, op. cit., p. 71 (see also page 67).
This contributed greatly to the violent outbreak of hostilities in the summer of 2001 that imperilled the very existence of the young republic, especially since ‘former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) commanders … helped to mastermind the creation of the NLA [National Liberation Army] from the province’.35

In most ways, the NLA was similar to the KLA, espousing a nationalist irredentist ideology far removed from Islamic theology or agendas. However, it is important to note that some 150 mujahedin did fight in its ranks but played a minor role. After the end of the ethnic conflict and signing of the Ohrid framework agreement on 13 August 2001, FYROM has been mostly far removed from fundamentalist Islamic influences. The country has never experienced an al-Qaeda attack, though experts have argued that it has been used as a ‘transit zone for foreign Islamists’.36 Although the republic is facing a myriad of challenges, it does not appear to be confronting an active or popular Islamic terrorist movement.

Conclusions: no coming Balkan Caliphate

The existence of Islamic terrorists in the Western Balkans since the 1990s constitutes a disturbing reality that cannot be wished away. Current scholarship reveals that Islamic charities and mujahedin fighters managed to establish a presence and play a role in Bosnia, and also a (probably more peripheral) part in Albania, Kosovo and FYROM. As a result, most experts agree that the Western Balkans will inevitably face certain consequences and challenges.

More specifically, ‘the revival of Islamic faith and practice as a central pillar of Muslim identity in Bosnia-Herzegovina is a reality and will have ramifications for Muslims throughout the Balkans’37 A certain Islamic “‘Dawa infrastructure”—Saudi-style mosques, madrasas, Islamic cultural centers, and youth groups, written and visual propaganda and so on’ has now been established.38 Although the overwhelming number of participants in this infrastructure (Muslims in the Balkans in general), are far removed from any terrorist agendas, the possibility cannot be discounted that within this Islamic framework jihadists may be recruited. Furthermore, it is probably the case that al-Qaeda and similar minded organizations and groups have established connections and a base of sorts in the Western Balkans—at least at a minimal level. Vigilance against potential attacks will thus always be required while policies based on ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’ principle should be firmly rejected in the future. However, it is probably incorrect to conclude from the above that Osama bin Laden and his followers have been ‘the real winners’.39

36Deliso, op. cit., Note 1, p. 78. For the mujahedin involvement in the NLA, see Shay, op. cit., Note 1, p. 114 (Shay’s study is overall extremely useful in pointing out such connections.) For an example of a typical nationalist NLA statement, see Phillips, op. cit., Note 35, p. 87.
38Deliso, op. cit., Note 1, p. 159. Deliso is citing an interview with terrorism expert Darko Trifunovic.
39Schindler, op. cit., Note 1, p. 178 (see also p. 188). Schindler is however probably correct when he stresses the gains made by local mafias.
This is because after the end of the armed conflicts in the various Western Balkan states, local societies overwhelmingly turned to the West and not to al-Qaeda. Post-9/11, levels of cooperation and domestic reforms in the region to combat Islamic terrorism must be judged as satisfactory. It should also be stressed that ‘both the Bosniacs and Albanian Muslims are probably the most pro-American Islamic populations in the world’.40 Furthermore, Albania signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union in June 2006 and was accepted into NATO in April 2008. Since December 2005, FYROM is an EU candidate state and will automatically join the Alliance given the resolution of the name dispute with Greece. As regards Bosnia, it also signed an SAA in June 2008, is developing an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO and has been invited to begin an intensified dialogue with the organization on various issues. The Union is also destined to play an increased role in Kosovo following its unilateral declaration of independence through the deployment of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo). Finally, military contingents from Albania, Bosnia and FYROM were sent to Iraq while FYROM troops are part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. It thus emerges that the states and peoples of the Western Balkans are pursuing a strategy that aims to integrate the region into Euro-Atlantic structures and organizations and not create some kind of Balkan Caliphate.

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