

EXTREMISM AND HOOLIGANISM IN THE BALKANS

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Monograph “Extremism and Hooliganism in the Balkans” represents a comprehensive scientific analysis of contemporary political phenomena, not only on a national but also on a regional level, which gives it a special significance. Besides elaborating on the most significant political events in the context of extremism and hooliganism, the book also deals with predicting potential issues (which is always a slippery slope in social sciences) which might develop if the prevention of the previously mentioned phenomena is not implemented adequately. Scientific prediction is definitely the most complex and elevated form of scientific thinking. Thus, this piece is worthy of attention, especially given that it offers strategic solutions for potentially malicious occurrences in society.

This monograph, published in 2024, presents summarized historical facts enriched by current events in the country and the region, all to predict potential destruction of society that can occur with an inadequate approach to extremism, which today permeates every pore of society. The success of well-conducted analysis of social and political paradigms can be sought in the competence, experience and

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professionalism of the author, but also in the multidisciplinary examination of problems. Such an approach is more than desirable, especially when speaking of a complex and acute phenomenon that is also difficult to define.

The book "Extremism and Hooliganism in the Balkans" has 251 pages and is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, modern geopolitical shifts in the Balkans are explained, with special reference to how the advanced world views this "cradle" of the Slavic people. The stigma that has been imposed on this society (demonized society) follows us throughout history, and no matter how much we try to get rid of it, we sink more and more into *balk*², which is how this region and these peoples are being perceived by the advanced nations. To live in the Balkans, or according to Huntington, in "cleft states", implies constantly being afloat in the space of potential conflicts due to the general heterogeneity of society on the national, religious and cultural level. Therefore, it is only logical that the author directed significant attention to elucidating the concept and significance of the Balkans and its geopolitical importance for those (i.e., the advance) who degrade its significance in every way by attributing to it different epithets as an expression of general image and attitude towards it, out of a desire to portray themselves as different as well. The Balkans, as a dividing line between the East and the West and the territory of meeting and clashing of different cultures, is the scene of constant conflicts resembling Heraclitus' "constant fire", which does not end. Thus, in this regard, at the end of the

chapter, the question of the existence of all of us emerges, namely, "can there be peace in the Balkans", to which the author gives an unequivocal answer in the following chapters.

In the second chapter, the author quantitatively invests the most effort into defining the almost elusive and amorphous phenomenon of extremism as a departure from the broadly accepted framework of normality. The author notes that, in the consciousness of an ordinary man, extremism has a negative connotation, but that only through its radicalization does it acquire negative³ features. The elusiveness of this term and the phenomenon of extremism reflects in the fact that in the process of its maturation in an individual, much depends on the emotional state of the person and the environment that person lives in, thus giving it a grand and almost unfathomable breadth and the impossibility of defining its clear boundaries. The author makes the radicalization process perceptive through various metaphorical comparisons, i.e., like climbing the stairs, to which I would add that they have no end, such as the "ladders" of good deeds in Christianity. Within the second chapter, besides providing an exquisite review of the historical framework within which extremism emerged, the author makes a grand contribution to the perception of the phenomena of extremism and terrorism through contemporary trends by giving the influence of modern technology, by all means, a well-deserved place. Besides modern technology, a new challenge in researching extremism and terrorism is represented in its

² The Persian-Turkish word *Balk* in its essence refers to mud, and there is a thesis that this is the word from which the term *Balkan* was derived.

³ Nowadays, many accept religious extremism even in Christian Orthodoxy as an excuse for the only right way towards preservation of the pure faith of our fathers in the world "paved with evil", communicating an extremely radical motto – "Orthodoxy or death".

individualization, which breaks down the boundaries which previously defined it by stressing its variability. The author unequivocally leads us to think that the only path towards proper perception of these potentially malicious social phenomena is to denounce all stereotypes and prejudices, since extremism, as a virus, has suffered from various mutations throughout history, and we are almost completely sure that its current form is not also its final form. Furthermore, in the second chapter, the author clearly, precisely and concisely, almost textbook-like, defines the conceptual differences of extremism and terrorism by providing instructions for all young and future researchers in this field, along with crucial advice. The significance of this segment is not grounded only in the definition of terms and their differentiation, but also in the offered solution to prejudice and rehabilitation of extremists and extremism in general. What differentiates this work from historical monographs is the fact that, through the content of exactly this second chapter the author commences the historical review of the emergence of extremism and leads us to the contemporary solution in the fight against this phenomenon, by singling out all shortages of it, so that the eventual victory over extremism would elude the epithet of "Pyrrhic victory". After everything is explained, one could draw quite an objective conclusion that the second chapter represents, qualitatively and quantitatively speaking, the essence of this work.

In the next chapter, the author moves from an extremely broad field of extremism to a term which, to a contemporary man, represents almost a synonym for extremism, and that is hooliganism. A global phenomenon such as hooliganism is taking on completely new con-

tours in the Balkans. According to the author, hooliganism represents a hybrid category of extremism, which cannot be classified as one of its "pure" forms, as it transcends into a form of criminality. A field of eternal deception – nationalism and patriotism become a recruitment ground in hooliganism, and sports as a means of linking people in the Balkans is its Achilles' heel. Through an analysis of the existing state in the Balkan countries, the author concludes that hooliganism exists predominantly in sports of general popularity. Football, as a sport, is most often linked with "right-wing extremism", and the hooligans are often linked with crime and political structure, which is also known as the "politicization of hooliganism". In the Balkans, even the benign occurrences of fandom often reshape into the completely opposite extreme. At the end of the chapter, the author provides recommendations for preventive measures to combat hooliganism, which has had destructive consequences for the peace in our region. According to the author, the fight must be synchronized with hooliganism to preserve global peace.

Chronologically speaking, the last chapter could well be the first, since it touches on occurrences from the past. The occurrences of controversial characters, the *Young Bosnia* and the *Sokol* movement, even though perceived in different ways, represent a historically interesting combination of sports and politics. Through comparative analysis of ideologies, the author defines their congruence, and the distinction is seen in the action methods, organization methods and their structures. Since its inception in the 19th century in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, in a short time, the *Sokol* movement turned from a completely naïve occurrence to a hierarchized or-

ganization representing a “state in miniature”. The ideological orientation of the organization varies from nationalism to pan-Slavism, and the need for liberation is at its core. The *Young Bosnia* movement is of a similar ideological orientation, but organizationally at a significantly lower level. The study of these two organizations is often conducted in light of the Sarajevo assassination, unfairly casting on them the shadow of terrorist organizations, which the author seeks to refute through the analysis of the existing and available sources. At the end of the chapter, the author exhaustively lists the crucial differences between these two organizations, attributing violence to *Young Bosnia* and organizational superiority to the *Sokol* movement. At the end of the chapter, the author acknowledges that these historically significant organizations were the disintegrating factor for the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but does

not allow them to be covered by the veil of terrorist organizations.

Upon examination of the comprehensive significance of the monograph “Extremism and Hooliganism in the Balkans”, it can be stated that the author is ahead of her time, considering the very successful scientific predictions. This is achieved thanks to not only a different approach and rich scientific experience of the author but also the multidisciplinary examination of contemporary social and political paradigms. For future researchers in this field, this monograph will represent a “Holy Grail” that has been sought for so long. This is a monograph that can always be reread because, besides the fact that it very proficiently explains some political processes, it predicts them at the same time with almost mathematical precision, thus illuminating some dark vilays of social sciences.