

DE-RADICALIZATION THROUGH EDUCATION IN KOSOVA

Introduction

The Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights and the Harriman Institute convened a roundtable on "De-Radicalization through Education in Kosova." (5 May 2016). At a previous meeting, "Roundtable on Countering Radicalization in Kosovo," participants recommended focus on the education sector. These meeting notes are summary of the discussion. (Participant list attached)

Background

Columbia's *Applied Research Program on De-Radicalization in Kosova* builds on interviews conducted by the Kosovar Center for Security Studies (KCSS). Director Florian Qehaja, Visiting Fulbright Scholar at Columbia University's Salzman Institute for War and Peace Studies, summarized the KCSS ["Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria."](#) Dr. Helena Kane Finn, former Acting Assistant Secretary of State at the Bureau for Educational and Cultural Affairs, presented on challenges to Kosova's educational sector and opportunities for using education as a tool for de-radicalization.

Findings

Participants welcomed the EU's recent decision to support visa liberalization for Kosova passport holders. They also welcomed Kosova's election to UEFA's governing body and pending application to FIFA. They agreed that ending the ghettoization of Kosova will contribute to de-radicalization of the society.

- Participants noted the Government of Kosova's recent report that fewer recruits are falling prey to ISIS and going to Iraq or Syria.
- Knowledge is the most important antidote to extremism. Technology expands worldview of youth. Employment can cultivate a sense of self-worth. Youth need to "feel like they matter." However, many Kosovar youth have low esteem and lack hope for the future.

- Kosova today has a weak educational system, which lacks a critical approach. The weak educational system is a result of inadequate spending per capita on schools and lack of resources for research and development.
- Kosovars were studying in private homes not regular school facilities during the apartheid period in the 1990s. During socialist era, Yugoslavia's education system placed a premium on math and science.
- Some participants felt the US was overbearing in exporting democracy to Kosova. They criticized efforts to transplant Western values, claiming they backfired. Other participants felt the US did not do enough to help Kosova after NATO's action in 1999.
- Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama as well as some government officials from Kosova proposed religious education in public schools as an antidote to radicalization. Some participants expressed concern about the curriculum of this prospective course. They asked: Who will interpret the Qur'an and hadiths and make it into a curriculum? What qualifies teachers? How can Islamic education be monitored and evaluated?
- Participants discussed other countries such as Indonesia and Morocco where Islamic education has been used as a device for promoting social harmony.

Recommendations

- Monitor Islamic education in schools to make sure it would not contribute to radicalization. Textbooks should be reviewed to make sure lessons are constructive. Religious education should include the study of other religions, not just Islam. Religious education could be a component of social studies and taught by theologians.
- Conduct an assessment of the educational sector to determine its impact on de-radicalization (facilities, teachers, curriculum, learning materials). Based on this assessment, invest in primary and secondary school education. A priority should be English language courses in primary and secondary education. Make teacher training a priority.
- Teach young people how to work in groups and develop communications skills. Consider the Socratic Method (i.e. asking questions) as a way of learning. Cultivate empathic listening.
- Offer courses on non-violent conflict resolution theories. For example, Columbia's Program on Peace-building and Human Rights has developed a course on "Social Harmony". The Earth Institute's Venera Kusari will lead a seminar on conflict resolution this June in Kosovo. Pace University's Johan Katen offers a course on "Keys to Global Peace: Non-violent Conflict Resolution and Sustainable Development."

- Educate for jobs. Establish work-training programs, and training of vocational skills. Business leaders should be involved, offering apprenticeships and employment opportunities.
- Work with mothers. Develop an early warning system for families to identify symptoms of radicalization.
- Develop a typology, including educational level, of young people who succumb to ISIS propaganda and recruitment.
Disseminate counter-narratives using social media. Kosovar youth need an attractive and constructive alternative to radical propaganda.
- Further integrate Kosova with European institutions. Youth can be integrated through exchange programs and enhanced travel.
- Make Kosova a model for de-radicalization. Efforts to counter violent extremism should be a “shining star,” rather than a “shadow” over the government and society.

Next Steps

Columbia and KCSS will shift activities from New York to Kosova. Participants endorsed a series of meetings in Kosova involving education officials, educators, and students, including focus groups at the community level, to develop recommendations for educational reform.

Participants

- Alexander Cooley (Director, Harriman Institute)
- Alon Ben-Meir (Professor, New York University SCPS, Center for Global Affairs)
- Arlinda Rrustemi (Phd. Leiden University)
- Austin Long (Associate Professor of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University)
- Besiana Xharra (Fellow, Association for Historical Dialogue at Columbia University)
- Carne Ross (Independent Diplomat)
- David L. Phillips (Director, Program on Peace-building and Rights, Institute for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University)
- Fatmir Zajmi (Consul, Consulate General of the Republic of Kosovo in New York)
- Florian Qehaja (Executive Director, Kosova Centre for Security Studies and Fulbright Visiting Scholar, Salzman Institute for War and Peace Studies)
- Franziska Praxl (Global Center on Cooperative Security)
- Helena K. Finn (Vice President and Director of Programs, American Council on Germany)

- Joan Katen (Professor, Pace University)
- John Dauti (President, Albanian American Council)
- Kelly A. Berkell (Research Fellow, Center on Terrorism, John Jay College of Criminal Justice)
- Rafia Bhulai (Programs Officer, Global Center on Cooperative Security)
- Sokol Kondi (Head of Office, UNAMI at the United Nations)
- Venera Kusari (Project Coordinator, Earth Institute, Columbia University)

Skype:

- Bonnie Miller (University of Maryland School of Social Work)
- Jelena Dzombic (Head of Peace-building Program, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Visiting Scholar at Columbia University)