

# IS “BALKANISM” STILL ACTUAL? A STUDY OF ITALIAN NEWSPAPERS’ PERCEPTION OF ISLAM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to assess whether the term “Balkanism”, coined by Maria Todorova, is still actual in its definition. To fulfil such objective, the term Balkanism will be analysed in its meaning whilst its growing relevance will be assessed through the analysis of several articles that appeared in Italian newspapers. In the recent literature about Balkanism, very little effort is taken to understand whether the term exists in newspapers’ narrative, especially in Italy. Indeed, the country, bordering on the Balkan peninsula, always reserved a special consideration about the region, even if the post-war influence over the Balkans has been monopolized by other countries such as Germany. To fill the gap in the literature, it is therefore important to analyse the narrative of the most important national newspapers and, going over the articles in the period 2013-2017, we can assure how “Balkanism” is actual in its definition.

**Keywords:** *Italy, Balkan, Balkanism, Terrorism, Todorova*

## **Introduction**

Is Todorova’s “Balkanism” still actual? The term was coined by Maria Todorova in a 1994 study titled “The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention” appeared in the *Slavic Review*. Here, some of its articles will be deeply investigated as they present a Balkanist view over the region and, afterwards, the most exemplary cases will be presented and analysed. Today, Todorova’s definition still represents an actual concept although conceived more than 20 years ago, as explained in the first section of the study. The paper then proceeds showing the methodologic criteria adopted in this research, and besides the theoretical explanation, some examples are carried out to define the approach. All the articles are observed using a three-level criterion, which means that there are usually three views about Balkans: the first one is negative, depicting the region as a jihadist’s crucible, a serious danger for European security and, in particular in Italy. The second view is neutral, with the

journalists writing news about Balkans citizens implicated in terrorist investigations. The third one is positive: Balkans are described for what they are, without sensationalisms or apologies.

The third part of the study examines the nature of threats in a way to understand if they are from or impending on the Balkans. To assess this, different data will be taken in account: first, the current threats that Balkans receive from the so-called Islamic State jihadists; second, the number of foreign fighters who are currently fighting in the Middle East, especially in Syria and Iraq; third, the comparison between this number and the quantity of foreign fighters coming from the European Union. In this regard, the Member Countries considered for the comparison are Belgium, France, and United Kingdom (i.e. the country with the highest number of foreign fighters in the EU). The conclusive part will finally demonstrate that, analysing articles and data, Balkanism is still a valid term. According to Todorova's definition of Balkanism, most of the articles of the main Italian newspapers about Balkan Islam are depicting a distorted view of Muslim population in the area. Indeed, Balkans are usually considered as a black-hole region and fertile ground for the Islamic State (IS)' jihad. Less pessimistically, however, they do not represent a zero-risk area. Although the number of foreign fighters is deceptively low if compared with other countries as United Kingdom, France, or Belgium, where radicalization comes from immigration, some risks remain due to socio-economic reasons. In fact, radical Islam and terrorism may emerge due to social inequality, lack of prospects and widespread poverty among the youngest generations, especially if away from major cities. Despite this, the general scaremongering caused by the Italian media should be analysed and reduced. To this purpose, an examination of the latest articles appeared on the main Italian newspapers is carried out. In order to achieve the aim of this research, newspapers with a print run over 100.000 copies have been considered. Among these there are *La Stampa*, *Il Giornale*, *La Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *Quotidiano Nazionale*, *Il Messaggero*, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, *Libero*, and *Avvenire*. With reference to *Il Giornale*, articles from the side-online-project "*Gli occhi della Guerra*" have been also analysed.

### **What is "Balkanism"?**

In 1994 an article by Maria Todorova titled "The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention" appeared in the scientific journal *Slavic Review*. The article describes Western countries' prejudicial view about Balkans starting from the analysis of Edward Said's "Orientalism" (Said, 1977). Orientalism, according to Said, is a particular and stereotypical view about all the countries not belonging to the Western world. This preconceived view might be best understood as the Western propensity to consider the other as underdeveloped or even a fodder for radical Islam. In order to propagandize this view, newspapers and journalists are among the main actors

proposing such considerations to the readers (Hetemi, 2015, p. 314). Along with "Orientalism", Todorova coined the term "Balkanism" in order to explain the particular view the countries have towards the Balkan region. In this context, the Ottoman rule, according to the Western writers, has altered the region, relegating it to a state of primitivity (Kelley, 2012, p. 8). The violence that occurred in the Balkans, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, is the main reason shaping such stereotype (Todorova, 1994, pp. 462-463). The 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century only increased the stereotyped idea of the Balkans as a "land of terror, fire, and sword" (Todorova, 2009, p. 117). For instance, the Macedonian struggle for independence, led by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), in the juncture between the Ottoman Empire's fall and the first years of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (SHS Kingdom), has strengthened this idea. Furthermore, during SHS Kingdom's debut, Macedonia was brutally repressed by the Serbians authorities (Boškowska, 2009, pp. 23-68). These are some reasons making the Balkans look like a tribal region, easily prone to violence and brutality (Todorova, 1994, p. 453). Often, in the newspapers, we can find the use, or perhaps the abuse, of the term "balkanization", a term "that means the disintegration of a nation-state system" (Corradi, 2016, p. 132). Although not deeply addressed here, because not directly correlated with our case study, i.e. Islam and foreign fighters, the use of the term balkanization is part of a wider idea of Balkanism. Balkanization "is most often used to denote the process of nationalist fragmentation of former geographic and political units into new and problematically viable small states" (Todorova, 2009, p. 32). But why this term is used so often? According to Maria Todorova, it is because "the Balkans...have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the 'European' and 'the West' has been constructed" (Todorova, 1994, p. 455). The Western prejudicial point of view of the Balkans region is one of the main causes of the discriminatory literature concerning the peninsula. Thus, to analyse the following part, it is important to understand why Italian newspapers may have a prejudicial idea of the region. And Todorova's Balkanism is one of the explanations.

### **Positive, neutral and negatives articles: a methodological approach**

Analysing all the articles, the we found that there were three different ways that the Balkans were presented. So, we decided to divide the articles in three categories: positive, neutral and negative. This will help us to understand if the concept of Balkanism still is actual in the current newspapers' narrative. We will call positive articles those presenting the facts happening in the region as they are, without any sensationalism. It is important to underline that they are not articles representing an erroneous representation of what Western Balkans are. For example, in the article "Berat, dove musulmani e cristiani convivono in pace" (*Berat*,

*Where Muslims and Christians peacefully coexist*), the journalist Giovanni Cedrone tells the audience about the peaceful coexistence between faiths and believers in Albania. Cedrone writes that “under the scorching sun of Albania there is no space for interreligious tensions” (Cedrone, 2016). Giulia Aubry writes in the column of *Il Messaggero* about the story of the Bosnian imam Selovedin Beganović, which affirmed to the journalist that “our jihad in Bosnia should be the war to the unemployment, the attention to the family members who has not social assistance” (Aubry, 2015). From these examples we might conclude that the Balkans have a longstanding tradition of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural coexistence.

Neutral articles are those describing single events connected with Islamic terrorism in the Balkans or committed by citizens from the Balkans. These articles just report the news from police investigations or expulsion from the Italian territory. In this case, the research has shown that a large number of the articles can be classified as neutral. Some examples of this category are the articles “Kosovo, arrestato l’imam che reclutava jihadisti” (*Kosovo, Jihadists Recruiter Imam Arrested*), appeared on the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2014 and written by Maurizio Molinari, or the article “Scovato a Brescia gruppo di kosovari pro-Isis” (*Pro-Isis Kosovar Group Tracked Down in Brescia*), published by the newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore*. The first example explains to readers the police investigations in Kosovo that ended with the arrest of Shefqet Krasniqi, an imam in Prishtinë/Priština (Molinari, 2014). However, in the article there are no mentions of a supposed jihadist risk in Kosovo,. The article covers the results of the police investigation only. The same pattern can be found in the second article, in which the Italian police arrested one man, Samit Imishti, and expelled other two men, Ismail Imishti and his son Mergin Imishti (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 2015). In this article, as in the first one, there is no reference to any particular risk from the region, in particular from Kosovo.

The negative articles are those characterised by an exaggerated rhetoric about the Balkans. In these articles, it is easy to find words such as “jihadist crucible” or “jihadist crossroad” that normally depict the region as a “black hole”, dangerous for the security of the European Union and, because of its position, in particularly for Italy. In order to better understand what we mean by negative articles, some examples will help. The journalist of *La Stampa*, Paolo Mastrolilli, wrote in 2016 that “Kosovo has become the main European recruitment center for the Islamic State”. Furthermore, he added, that the presence of jihadist extremism in Kosovo “is particularly worrying for Europeans and for Italy, because [Kosovo] could become a headquarter where organising attempts for the continent” (Mastrolilli, 2016b). Another example appeared in 2015 in the right leaning newspaper *Il Giornale*, where the journalist Adriano Palazzolo has written the article “Balcani, la via europea del jihad” (*Balkans: The European Jihad Route*). He affirmed that Kosovo has several training camps in its territory, used by the Islamic State militias to organize terroristic attempts and prepare them for the jihad (Palazzolo, 2015). As we suggested before, we noticed that the neutral articles are often generic news about police investigations

against single citizens or small groups. The main point is that those group are made by Balkans citizens, normally from Kosovo, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is relevant because it shows how, when the newspapers talk about Western Balkans, or about single countries, they write with a total positive or negative view. When they just show a neutral point of view, they talk about investigations, arrests or expulsions of individuals from the Italian territory.

### The Italians newspapers' perception about Balkans

Having presented the meaning of the term Balkanism, it is important to analyse the most relevant Italian newspapers, namely the first ten with a print run over 100.000 copies, and to understand which articles present the region in a positive, neutral or negative view. The articles concern the whole region reporting the latest facts that affect Balkan citizens in Italy. The total number of 151 articles were analysed. A qualitative comparison between newspapers will also be presented, in order to understand which papers as prone to a more negative view. The articles considered cover the period of four years between the 2013 and July 2017.

Name of the newspaper	Total articles over Balkans	Positive articles	Neutral articles	Negative articles
<b>La Stampa</b>	25	4	7	14
<b>Il Giornale / Occhi della Guerra</b>	41	0	4	37
<b>Avvenire</b>	4	0	0	4
<b>Corriere della Sera</b>	21	1	14	6
<b>Il Sole 24 Ore</b>	8	1	3	4
<b>Libero</b>	12	0	2	10
<b>Il Messaggero</b>	13	2	6	5
<b>La Repubblica</b>	12	1	4	7
<b>Quotidiano Nazionale</b>	4	0	4	0
<b>Il Fatto Quotidiano</b>	11	1	2	8
<b>Total</b>	151	10	46	95
<b>Percentage</b>	100%	6,6%	30,5%	62,9%

*Table 1: Number of positive, neutral and negative articles in the Italian newspapers. The percentage are subjects of approximation*

Analysing the first ten over-100.000-print run newspapers, we discover that the majority of the articles regarding Islam in the Western Balkans has a negative point of view. Ninety-four out of 151 articles (61,8%), indeed, are negative. Only 12 articles represent the region from a positive perspective. Normally, negative articles represent the peninsula with adverse adjective as “Balkan spiral”, “jihadist crucible”, “Balkan network”, “main door of Islam”, “black hole”, “jihad door for Europe” or “enclave of the Holy War”.

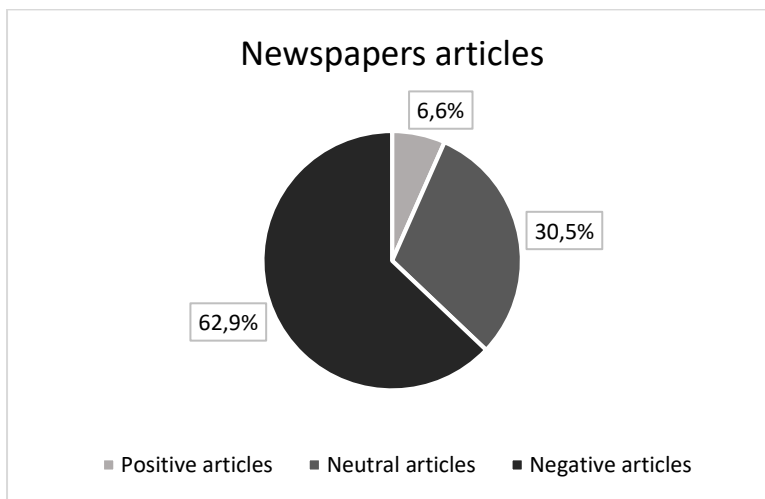


Figure 1: Percentage of positive, neutral and negative articles

In “Il pericolo jihad nei Balcani” (*The Jihadist Threat in the Balkans*), which appeared in *Gli Occhi della Guerra* (side-project of *Il Giornale*), Daniela Lombardi wrote “in Bosnia, Kosovo, Albania and in the Serbian Sandžak, there are villages where sharia is applied, where polygamy is the rule and women are dressing the veil, but most of all, where it is celebrated when a *shahid* [...] explode in a European square” (Lombardi, 2016), referring in particular to Gornja Maoca. This opinion is quite evident across all the newspapers. Nello Scavo, of *Avvenire*, writes that “the Balkan caliphate is no longer a negligible raving of a radical preacher” (Scavo, 2015). In *La Stampa* we have several examples of such negative view. The first is an article written by Lorenzo Vidino, from New York, titled “Propaganda and recruitments, Albania as jihadist crossroads” (Vidino, 2016), and a second article written by Domenico Quirico in which he reports from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and more precisely from Gornja Maoca. The article reports “about a small city, Maoca, where there are Caliphate flags on the windows and all the inhabitants, men, women, and children, live as in the Abu Bakr’s lands” (Quirico, 2015). Gornja Maoca is quoted also by Milosa, a journalist at *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. Milosa wrote that Italy is jeopardized by a threat coming from the Balkans, and that “the areas of the new

*mujahidin* are Gornja Maoca in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Restelica in Kosovo and the mountainous region of Gora, between Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo” (Milosa, 2016).

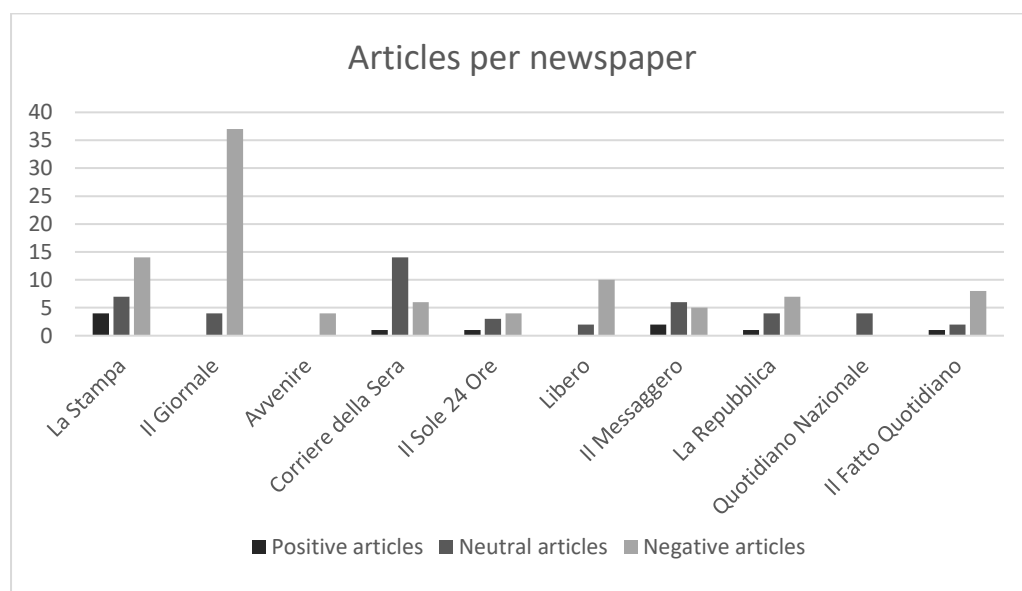


Figure 1: Positive, neutral and negative articles per newspaper

Giovanni Giacalone, a journalist contributing to *Gli Occhi della Guerra*, writes, “the support from Balkans to the jihadists continues to grow to a worrying level” (Giacalone, 2016). His opinion refers not only to the numbers of jihadists coming from the Balkans or single arrests numbers reported by the national police, but also to some “jihadist camps” in Kosovo. In these camps, according to Giacalone, new jihadists are trained. However, there is no hard evidence of these camps, other than that provided by Giacalone. In addition, according to the Kosovar authorities, these appear to be Islamic camps rather than training field, as reported in the same article, and since 2016 no other news about such camps has been published. Continuing the analysis of Kosovo, *La Stampa*'s journalist Mastrolilli writes, “the former Yugoslavia's area has been a privileged passageway for the departing terrorists (...). Countries as Bosnia and Herzegovina or Albania, however, have recognized institutions that allow the integration of these countries in the control operations, but not Kosovo” (Mastrolilli, 2015a). According to Mastrolilli, Kosovo “works as a deep-State, offering to terrorists the logistic structures they may need”. If it is true that since its independence in 2008, Kosovo has faced some difficulties in its state-building, nonetheless the security is controlled by the institutions and not

vice versa. The internal problems of Kosovo, in the process of state-building, have also interested journalists from *La Repubblica*. For instance, Fabio Polese writes, “Kosovo [...] seems to be the new frontier of Islamic extremism. [...] Kosovo is considered as the most fruitful recruitment area in Europe” (Polese, 2014). But we can find a similar pattern in other newspapers. In *Il Messaggero*, on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016, an article appeared in which the Balkans are considered as the Caliphate attempt to build a fundamentalist country. The journalist Marco Ventura writes that the Balkan area, where Islam is dominant, are considered as “pockets of jihad in Europe: (Ventura, 2016). Balkanism prejudice is more evident on the right leaning newspaper *Libero*. Gianluca Veneziani wrote on its columns that Albania, nowadays, can be called “Albanislam, or, even worse, Albanisi. Bosnia and Herzegovina is no more the last frontier of Islamic State or its European stronghold, Albania is overtaking this role” (Veneziani, 2017). Again, Veneziani writes that South-eastern Albania is now a no “man’s land” where the Caliphate rules. In order to prevent and fight this situation, Veneziani suggests the birth of a new Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbej, the Albanian national hero who fought Ottomans in the XV century.

Many journalists wrote about Gornja Maoca, considering this small Bosnian village as the Caliphate’s capital in the Balkans. Therefore, the question is what is real in this representation? Islam in the region is not a new phenomenon, prompted as in the case of Western Europe by the flows of mass migration which affected the European countries in the last fifty years. Islam spread in the Balkans in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with the Ottoman invasion of the peninsula. During that domination, the three main monotheistic religions – Christian, Islam and Hebraism – lived together, so to speak, in peace. Tolerance, despite the ideological and religious limits of the Ottoman hierarchy, was a common factor during the Ottoman Empire. The Pact of Omar, signed in 637 by Caliph II ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb, regulated “the socio-economic relationships with not-Muslim religious communities, subdued by Muslims during the first Islamic spread” (Corradi, 2016, p. 124). From this agreement, the “dhimmi” system was created. The word “*dhimma*” means “protected people” and was used to identify the socio-economical system in which the Christians and Jews were protected, guaranteed freedom of religion although under a discriminatory system. In facts, these believers were forbidden to make religious propaganda or to build new places for worship (Faroqhi, 2017, p. 81).

In Gornja Maoca, as in other small villages such as Ošve, a Salafi community lives. Although practicing a more fundamentalist Islam, they are not immediately connected with the so-called Islamic State (Denti, 2015b). Such villages, moreover, are strictly controlled by the secret services and the police, in order to prevent any risk of terrorism.

Since 1991-1992, when the Yugoslav wars started, Islam in the Balkans did not represent any danger to the established order. During the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Islam had a different meaning, namely as part of the Bosnian identity to oppose to the Serbian Orthodox one. During the war, several



mujahidin, who had a military experience (especially in Afghanistan), joined the Bosnian resistance against the Yugoslav army. Nevertheless, radical Islam professed by mujahidin did not quite affect Bosnia or the region as a whole. Since the war, "violent episodes connected with radical Islam were very rare: the attack against the police station in Bugojno in 2010 and the attack against the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo in 2011 were the most serious episodes" (Zola, 2015).

Janusz Bugajski, senior fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis, said in an article that "although some radicals may have ambitions to manufacture religious and ethnic conflicts and turn Bosnia into a religious state, their capabilities are limited" (Bugajski, 2015). In support of this claim, the others terrorist attacks in the Balkans seem not to be connected with the Islamic terrorism, as in Zvornik, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Kumanovo, Macedonia.

The alleged terrorists arrested in the last years, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, increased the level of danger of the country. In 2015, the prosecutor Dubravko Čampara arrested eleven suspect terrorists who were planning to commit a terrorist attack in Sarajevo. But no proof has been shown by Čampara, which nonetheless is considered an important person in the Bosnian politics. In fact, he is Aljoša Čampara's brother, Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine Minister of Interior (Bosnia and Herzegovina is divided in Federacija BiH and Republika Srpska) and son of Avdo Čampara, Alija Izetbegović's right hand.

### **Threat to the Balkans or from the Balkans?**

As a multi-ethnic and multi-religious region, the Balkans are affected by international terrorism just as Europe is. In fact, the region has been often threatened by the militias of the so-called Islamic State. In June 2015, a video, shot<sup>1</sup> by the IS propaganda channel *Al Hayat Media Center*, was entirely dedicated to the Balkans. During the historical section presenting the Balkans as a region belonging to the Caliphate, some jihadists launch messages to the Balkan people. If Abu Jihad Al-Bosnia did not use explicit violent words, saying that they "are honoured and proud to present ourselves as the slaves of Allah coming from the land of the Balkans", Salahuddin Al-Bosni threatened directly the people living in the peninsula. Indeed, he said "if it is hard [living] for you [...] then make hijrah. [...] Those who have their excuses, and Allah knows best who they are, you must fight there. Fight them (the kuffar) over there. If you can, put explosives under their cars, in their houses, all over them. If you can, take poison and put it in their meal or in their drink. Make them die of poisoning. Kill them wherever you are. In Bosnia, in Serbia, in Sandzak, you

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<sup>1</sup> The video is available here: [https://videos.files.wordpress.com/01Lo9Rce/the-islamic-state-22honor-is-in-jihc481d-a-message-to-the-people-of-the-balkans22\\_hd.mp4](https://videos.files.wordpress.com/01Lo9Rce/the-islamic-state-22honor-is-in-jihc481d-a-message-to-the-people-of-the-balkans22_hd.mp4). Accessed on: 26/08/2017.

can do it”. Later, Abu Muhammad al-Bosni and Abu Safiyah al-Bosni mentioned the Yugoslav wars, the mujahidin who fought in Bosnia and Herzegovina and an alleged betrayal by the government of Sarajevo. The Kosovar jihadist Abu Muqatil al-Kosovi used violent words against the people of the Balkans, saying that he is sending a message to “the *taghuts* of Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and all of the Balkans. [...] By the grace of Allah, black days are coming over you. [...] By Allah, you will fear walking in the streets. You will fear working in your offices. [...] we will kill you”.

The message was mostly directed to commit terrorist attacks in the region rather than inciting the Muslim in the Balkans to attack in other countries, as Italian newspapers may suggest. As we said, the propaganda of the so-called Islamic State did not affect the people of the Balkans. When the imam of Velika Kladuša Selvedin Beganović was murdered by the followers of the radical imam Husein Bilal Bosnić because of his moderate sermons, the Bosnian police acted swiftly, arresting Bosnić and fifteen other people. Many examples of peaceful coexistence between different faith are present in Bosnia and Herzegovina and other countries. Moreover, the Salafist villages are often isolated, and the people “live more similarly to the American Amish rather than to dangerous terrorists” (Denti, 2015a).

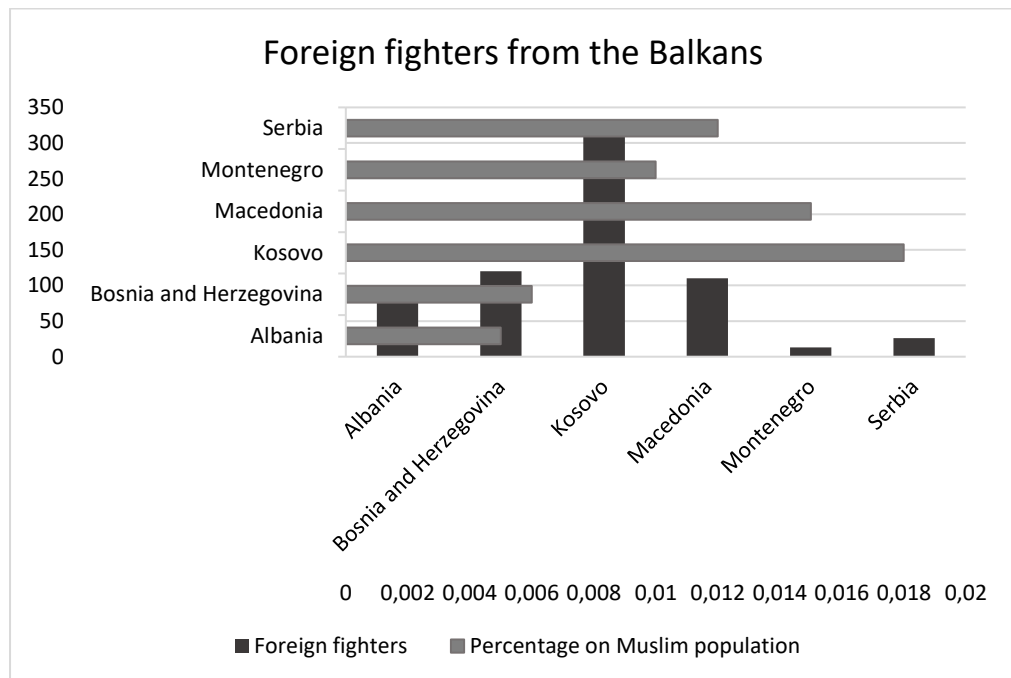


Figure 2: Datas Retrieved from Ristic, M. et al. (2016). *Balkan Jihadists: The Radicalisation and Recruitment of Fighters in Syria and Iraq*. BIRN; Cia World Factbook, Retrived from: [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov), accessed on 01/09/2017.

Figure 3 shows us the effective number of foreign fighters from Balkans and their percentage compared to the Muslim population. The total number of foreign fighters from the Balkans is 669 on a population of approximately 20 million of inhabitants, where the total of Muslims is approximately 7 million. If compared to other European countries such as France, United Kingdom and Belgium, we can understand why Balkan Islam is not so dangerous as it is presented. Indeed, in France the foreign fighters are more than 900, and, compared to the French Muslim population they represent the 0.014%. In Belgium the jihadists are 516, and the percentage over the Muslims is about 0,898%. In the United Kingdom as well, the percentage is very high: the 0,026% of the Muslim population is fighting in the Middle East, while the foreign fighters are between 700 and 760 (Van Ginkel, & Entenmann, 2016).

Governments are increasing the security of their borders and updating national laws about terrorism. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia reformed their laws in 2014, while Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro did so in 2015. The executives are profitably working to prevent and smite the radical Islam, even although it is not a concrete risk yet.

If it is important to not underestimate the risk connected with religious extremism, especially in a poor region as the Balkans, the "rhetoric of fear" is wrong. Analysing the data of International Monetary Fund, Balkan countries have generally a low standard of living, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo. Moreover, these countries suffer a deep crisis in their political systems. Corruption, political scandals and widespread disillusion generate in the youngest generation the base for the deviance.

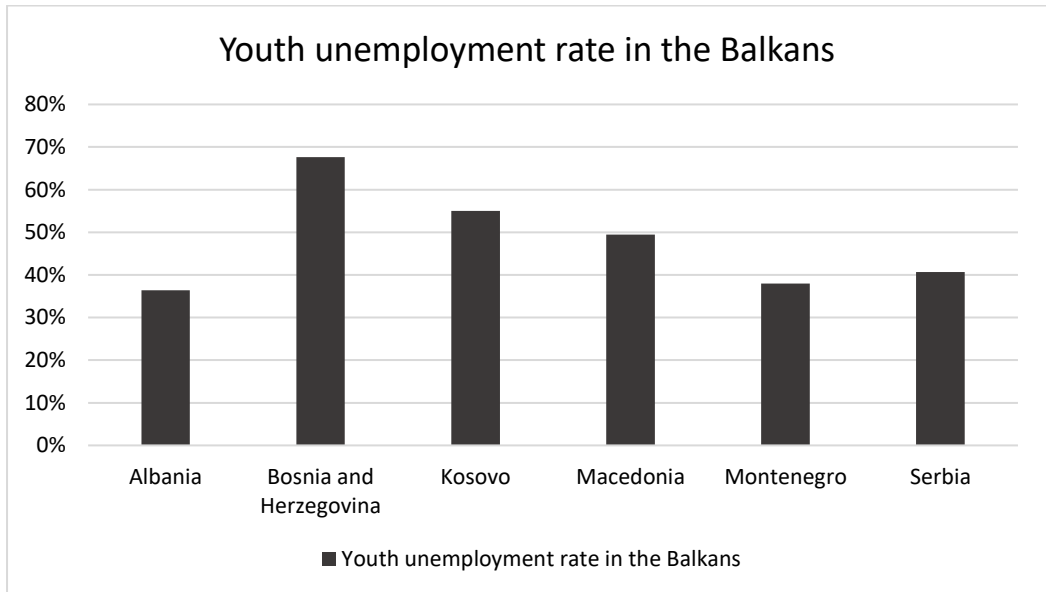


Figure 3: Youth unemployment rate in the Balkans. World Bank data, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS>, last access: 27/08/2017.

It is also interesting to analyse the reasons those leaving to fight in Syria and Iraq within the so-called Islamic State ranks. In facts, “for younger generations of volunteers, particularly older teenagers and young men in their early 20, joining the war in Syria is probably also motivated by the adrenaline rush it guarantees” (Azinović, 2015a, p. 41). If Azinović deeply analysed the Bosnian case, Shtuni gives the same evidences relating to Kosovo, where the main foreign fighters are between 21 and 25 years old (Shtuni, 2015, p. 14). The youngest generation is the most affected by the temptation to join the so-called Islamic State or to carry out terrorist attacks. The reason, connected with these region, should be sought in the youth unemployment rate, as shown in the figure 4. The countries considered in this study, where there is a high rate of Muslim population, have a high rate of youth unemployment, demonstrating the possible nexus between radicalism and socio-economic problems. For these reasons, albeit there are no actual concrete risks from or even to the Balkans, European Union should continue to work, as in the future the radicalization problem may arise.

## Conclusion

The rhetoric about the Balkans reveals as the Italian newspapers keep a prejudicial point of view over the region. If some newspapers, as *Il Giornale* or

*Libero* represent the “right audience”<sup>2</sup> and have a more nationalistic rhetoric, newspapers of the “left audience” as *La Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera* also have a prejudicial point of view. This prejudicial view is evident in every Italian journal, and not just in those of right political orientation.

This demonstrates how Maria Todorova’s Balkanism is still actual in the Italian newspaper. The geographic proximity with the Italian borders and the idea of a “clash of civilization”, where the Christians are opposed to the Muslims, are the main elements to the presence of such prejudicial rhetoric.

Moreover, we discovered that negative articles are published at the same time of neutral ones. Alongside an investigation, an arrest, or expulsion of an alleged terrorist cell or a single jihadist, negative articles are often published.

If it is important to not underestimate the risk connected with religious extremism, especially in a poor region as the Balkans, the “rhetoric of fear” is wrong. In fact, the socio-economic belong to the main causes leading the youngest generations to embrace Islamic violent extremism.

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<sup>2</sup> The family Berlusconi is the owner, since 1979, of *il Giornale*. *Libero* is from the center-right. *Avvenire* is connected with the Italian Episcopal Conference.

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