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Institute for Hybrid Warfare Studies

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The Rise of the Extreme Right in Europe and the Balkans: Historical Background, Ideology, Political Impact, and Growth Potential



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Authors:

Agim Musliu

Taulant Elshani

Introduction

The extreme right-wing has seen a consistent rise throughout Europe in recent years, resulting in a number of worrying trends and events. This research aims to analyze the factors that have led to this rise and the impact that it could have on European democracy and security. Right-wing propaganda has historically been more effective when there have been economic recessions. The recent Covid-19 pandemic, supply chain issues, and rising inflation, which have led to a difficult economic situation for millions of Europeans, have helped boost the rise of right-wing ideology in Europe.

The economic downturn has naturally made European citizens more prone to nationalistic propaganda. Extreme right-wing groups have taken advantage of this situation by using false narratives that blame the influx of migrants and refugees as a reason why the economy is in a recession. Furthermore, these right-wing actors use xenophobic language that aims to convince citizens that the arrival of migrants will lead to the assimilation of their own culture. The effects of the actions of right-wing extremists are visible and heavily affect the population. If effective, they can pose a serious risk to democracy and values such as freedom of speech and religious tolerance. Such movements have previously escalated to acts of violence, posing a major security risk for both institutions and minority groups.

In order to tackle this issue, governments in Europe aim to improve policies, economic development, effective communication between social groups, and the rule of law. In order to ensure that these measures are correctly implemented, coordination between government institutions, civil society, and everyday citizens is crucial. Whether governments in Europe remains to be seen, but it is increasingly clear that the urgency with which these measures need to be correctly implemented cannot be underestimated.

In recent years, there has been a significant rise of extreme right-wing groups in Serbia. This research aims to highlight some of the main causes behind this trend and its effects in Serbia and the region.

Ultra-nationalism is the main cultural factor behind the rise of the extreme right in Serbia. Right-wing groups use historical propaganda to portray Serbia's history as that of a superior country compared to others. Furthermore, these groups present recent historical events such as the disintegration of Yugoslavia as cases where Serbia was a victim and was treated harshly by international actors, inciting feelings of victimhood.

Besides cultural factors, there are other reasons for the rise of the extreme right such as economic difficulties. According to Macrotrends, 12% of the Serbian population lives under \$5.50 per day, while 21% of the population is at risk of falling under the poverty line. Right-wing actors manipulate these individuals by blaming foreign countries, Euro-Atlantic organizations, and immigrants for the lack of job opportunities. In line with global trends, radicalization in Serbia today happens more rapidly than ever before through social media platforms. Through social media, right-wing actors can easily identify marginalized groups that are unhappy with their societal position and target them with propaganda.

The consequences of the rise of the extreme right have been felt across a number of groups in the country, resulting in violent acts against ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. Considering the historical context, the rise of violent acts in Serbia naturally has an impact on regional stability and leads to questions over the possibility of conflicts in the Balkans.

The typical representatives of the extreme right in Serbia are: Nonča Patrolla, Obraz, Dveri, etc.

We have selected four active exponents of the European far right who, through close ties with Serbia, exercise harmful activity against the vital interests of Kosovo.

Arnaud Guillon



Arnaud Guillon, a prominent figure with affiliations to Serbian authorities, has played a significant role in destabilizing Kosovo's democratic institutions. As a far-right activist, Guillon has consistently propagated nationalist sentiments while undermining Kosovo's sovereignty and self-determination. Operating through various channels, including media outlets and social platforms, Guillon has actively disseminated disinformation aimed at discrediting Kosovo's legitimate aspirations.

Additionally, Guillon has been accused of fomenting tensions through provocative actions and rhetoric, seeking to exacerbate existing ethnic divisions within Kosovo. His close alliance with Serbian authorities has afforded him the resources and support necessary to exert hybrid methods against the young state, hampering its progress towards stability and unity. In addition to receiving the Serbian passport, the Government of Serbia, on November 26, 2020, appointed Arnaud Guillon to head an important directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Arnaud Guillon, a French citizen (born in 1985), naturalized as a Serbian citizen and converted to Orthodoxy in the Serbian Orthodox Church, in the Monastery of Deçan, is the typical representative of how a representative of the European extreme right, and influenced by Russia, becomes a propaganda factor and instability in the Western Balkans. Today, Director of the Directorate for Cooperation with Diaspora and Serbs in the Region at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Arnaud Guillon, started his career as a xenophobe in France in 2003.

Arnaud Guillon joined "Identitaires" in 2003, almost as soon as the structure appeared. This organization was born after the dissolution of the nationalist-revolutionary group "Unité Radicale", after one of its supporters tried to kill French President Chirac on July 14, 2002. As an 18-year-old, Guillon was part of the first generation of Jeunesses Identitaires, of which he soon became head of the Grenoble section. Although known for his managerial skills, Guillon maintained the Nazi look and display of violence in far-right activities.

Arnaud Guillon

Present at the 2005 May Day celebration of the Identitaires in Nice, he was thus implicated, along with several others (his brother Bertrand as well as Olivier Roudier, among others) for the racist violence committed the day before the celebration in old Nice.

He is the founder of the association "Solidarité Kosova" (2005), an association deeply rooted in a pan-European nationalist political ideology of the extreme right. Although it has distributed aid to the Serbian enclaves in Kosovo, the "Solidarity Kosovo" organization has served Guillon, more like a "Trojan horse" to penetrate the public environment not only in France, but also in other European Union states.

In 2007, the new leadership of "Identitaires" was elected. Arnaud Guillon, became the spokesperson of the organization. In 2008, Arnaud Guillon visited the European Parliament, where he lobbied for Serbian interests in Kosovo, on the eve of the start of the EULEX mission. In a statement to the media, he said that "we will explain to them a different perspective of the situation in Kosovo, in contrast to the Albanian lobbyists and the Western media".

In 2009, in Belgrade, at a commemorative rally against the NATO bombing of Serbia, Guillon declared that "the extremists are those Serbs who want to sell Kosovo and Metohija very cheap; Extremists are the ones who bombed Serbia". He further said, in the language of the French opposition, that "the French politicians did not ask us when they recognised Kosovo as a state nor when they bombed Serbia". He has organized propaganda rallies against "Albanian terrorists". He has also participated in demonstrations in several European cities, against the declaration of Kosovo's independence.

The French media have reflected the violent activity of the "Identitaires" and Guillon all the time. Often, the local French authorities had banned the gatherings of this "identity movement", in the name of maintaining public order. Guillon's movement often collaborated with non-Nazi groups in France against the "Americanization " and "Islamization" of France.

Arnaud Guillon

In 2010, Arnaud Guillon was nominated by "Identitaires" in the race for the presidential elections in France in 2012. On this occasion, he gave up the leadership of the "Solidarity Kosovo" organization. In 2009, Arnaud Guillon, as a member of the French identitarians, participated in the Serbian nationalist organization, the so-called "March of Vidovdan", which was organized by the right-wing extremists "Narodni Pokret 1389". Other Orthodox and Nazi organizations also participated in this activity, including the organization designated as a terrorist entity by the USA, the Russian Imperialist Movement.

Due to lack of support, on 11.9.2011, Guillon withdrew from the race for president of France. However, an agreement between "Bloc Identitaire" and Marine Le Pen (National Front) was established. At the beginning of the public activity with "Bloc Identitaire", Arnaud Guillon introduced himself with the surname Borella.

Later, in 2017, on a Serbian television, when asked about his activity in "Bloc Identitaire", Guillon, trying to hide his past, said that "I was in this movement for only six months during 2010 and 2011". Whereas, as can be seen in the chronological web of French identities, Guillon officially started its activity in 2007. After withdrawing from the race for the presidential elections in France, Guillon continued his activity with the organization "Solidarity Kosovo". However, he continued his cooperation with representatives of the European right.

In 2012, in Vienna, he met and held a joint conference with Heinz Christian Strache (representative of the Austrian extreme right, involved in a corruption scandal together with a Russian oligarch). In 2016, Strache signed a "cooperation pact" with Putin's United Russia party, which was unprecedented for a political party in Western Europe. Arnaud Guillon's far-right narrative continued with "Solidarity Kosovo". In the activities they have done in Western Europe, the motto of his activity was the protection of "Christian Serbs" from "Islamic terrorist Albanians".

Arnaud Guillon

According to the financial report of the "Solidarity Kosovo" organization, in 2017 alone, the total revenues were over 1 million euros. However, the amount that the Serbs have benefited from it has been very modest. Consequently, Arnaud Guillon's "Solidarity Kosovo" has very large financial resources at its disposal, which it uses not only for helping the Serbs, but also for the propaganda attack against the "Albanian terrorists".

This organization, in two of its information sources, differs in activity. While, on the Facebook page, says that "it offers material and moral assistance to the Serbs of Kosovo", in the financial report, it is said that "it aims to provide urgent assistance to the Serbs of Kosovo and Metohija, as well as to inform and raise public awareness of their situation". Thus, it can be seen that "Solidarity Kosovo" deals more with propaganda than with humanitarian aid.

Arnaud Guillon (born 1985 in Jarrie, France) is married to Serbian Ivana Gajic. Since 2012, he has lived in Serbia. In 2015, he received the Serbian passport, while the Orthodox Church of Serbia decorated him with its highest medal. In addition to French, he speaks English, Serbian and Russian. Considering the promotion of far-right ideas in Serbia, similar to Russian ideas, Arnaud Guillon was appointed as the Director of the Office for Cooperation and Diaspora of Serbs in the region in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, and he has even been awarded with the highest state and church decorations of Serbia, for his humanitarian commitment.

Kristian Kahrs



Kristian Kahrs, another far-right activist with strong ties to Serbian authorities, has been a driving force behind efforts to challenge Kosovo's state functionality. Kahrs has utilized online platforms and alternative media outlets to spread misinformation about Kosovo, questioning its legitimacy as an independent state. Through a network of like-minded individuals, Kahrs has actively sought to alter the international narrative surrounding Kosovo, misleading global audiences about its political, social, and economic realities.

Moreover, Kahrs' connections to Serbian authorities have enabled him to access sensitive information, which he has used to fuel conspiracies and false narratives about Kosovo's leadership and democratic institutions. This disinformation campaign has contributed to a climate of mistrust and instability, inhibiting Kosovo's progress as a sovereign nation.

Kristian Kahrs is a journalist and former soldier of the Norwegian Army, who served as a media communication officer in KFOR - Kosovo. He began to gain notoriety in Serbia after publicly promoting his radical anti-Semitic, homophobic and racist views as part of the Serbian far-right (neo-Nazi) organization Obraz. He started his public career as a journalist in 1993. In 1994, he went to Serbia and Macedonia for the first time. A year later, in the summer of 1995, he went to Crimea in Ukraine to cover (as a journalist) the conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

He continued his work as a journalist in several local Norwegian magazines, including as editor of "Storsalen Online", a church organ in Oslo. After NATO's entry into Kosovo, in 2000, Kahrs worked as an editor at "KFOR Online".

Kristian Kahrs

Kristian Kahrs worked as a journalist for Christianity Today, reporting from Afghanistan and Pakistan (2001 – 2002). After 4 years, in 2004 he returned to the Balkan region, trying to create new channels of communication between Albanians and Serbs through a Norwegian state agency. During 2015 - 2017, he officially engaged in politics in Norway, in the far-right party, "Demokratene". Since 2005, this party has never managed to win a single seat in the Norwegian Parliament. The "Demokratene" party, according to its political program, is committed to good relations with Russia, but also with NATO.

However, Kristian Kahrs did not manage to remain active in the party for long. He was involved in several conflicts within the party, where he had secretly recorded some audio within the party, which he sent to a controversial Norwegian journalist for publication. According to sources within the party, Kristian Kahrs always tried to destroy Norway's relations with the USA, while he had lobbied for good relations with Serbia and Russia. During the efforts to line up as best as possible at the head of the party, Kristian Kahrs had communicated with the Second Secretary at the Russian Embassy in Norway, Andrey Kulikov.

The propaganda and political engagements of Kristian Kahrs are of the same ideology as the French, German and Serbian extreme right. In the Serbian media, he commits to compromising the purpose of the NATO bombing against Serbia, which was done to stop the genocide attempt against the Kosovo Albanians. Kristian Kahrs has also participated in the protests of the Serbian extreme right against the Montenegrin government.

Kristian Kahrs

The involvement of Kahrs in the activities of the extreme right in Serbia was also against the power in Belgrade itself. He has participated in many such, based on the requests of Serbian war veterans. In almost every public organization of all Serbian nationalist organizations. What they have in common is that all activities had a final target, the attack on NATO and Western liberal societies. In recent years, there is almost no event organized against NATO that Kahrs does not participate in, and possibly be one of the main speakers. Having a long experience as an influencer, Kahrs encourages the masses of participants in rallies in Serbia to be electrified, calling them to nationalism, hatred towards "those who harmed Serbia and the Serbian people".

In January 2019, when Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Belgrade, Kahrs, through his YouTube channel, called on him in English and Serbian to "donate the Russian S-400 missile system to Serbia to protect itself from Albanian aggression, to protect itself from NATO aggression, to protect itself from Norway as a member of NATO". In an ongoing effort to discredit every NATO and EU country, Kahrs, with a physical presence, from Zagreb, in 2019, when he was banned from entering the stadium, broadcast a video, where he called Croatia a "country of Ustashes". To further increase his authority among right-wing extremists and the media in Serbia, Kahrs usually wears jerseys with Serbian nationalist slogans. Often, they also contain the portrait of Putin or the inscription "Russia".

As an influencer, Kahrs does not choose methods of influence to the detriment of NATO and personalities, as they call "NATO-globalists", an expression planted by the Kremlin. Kristian Kahrs also has close relations with the collaborator of the Russian intelligence services, Dragana Trifković. He is also associated with Serbian fighters, who have participated alongside the Russian paramilitary forces in the Crimea of Ukraine, as is the case with the Chetnik Bratislav Zhivkovic. In the annual gatherings in Gazimestan, near Pristina, where pro-Russian Serbian ultranationalists usually gather, Kristian Kahrs has also been present. In 2012, he, claiming to be a journalist, tried to obstruct the work of the Kosovo Police, which was banning Serbian and Russian nationalist symbols. Kristian Kahrs also writes for "The Duran", a media company registered in Cyprus, which is known for its pro-Russian content.

Maik Müller



Maik Müller, a key player in the network of far-right activists, has played a detrimental role in undermining democracy and state functionality in Kosovo. Leveraging his connections with Serbian authorities, Müller has been instrumental in coordinating disinformation campaigns that aim to portray Kosovo as an unstable and incapable state. Müller's propaganda efforts have targeted international audiences, seeking to sway public opinion and policymakers against supporting Kosovo's statehood. By distorting facts and amplifying isolated incidents, Müller has attempted to create a false image of Kosovo as a failed state, thus undermining its legitimacy on the global stage.

Maik Muller is a representative of the far-right German party NPD (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands), namely its youth organization Junge Nationalisten. He was born and lives in Dresden, Germany, a city known for its Russian influence. He is the leader of the organization "European Solidarity Front with Kosovo" (Europäische Solidaritätsfront für Kosovo), formally known for humanitarian activity, but which in Germany and German-speaking countries deals with political influence, against western liberal democracy and NATO and the USA. Muller converted to the Serbian Orthodox Church in 2016.

Maik Muller heads the neo-Nazi alliance "Dresden Gedenken", which, according to Western media, falsifies history by organizing demonstrations for the anniversaries of the bombing of Dresden in February 1945. In recent years, the demonstrations of this anniversary have been visited by other right-wing extremists from other countries, such as France, Italy, Greece, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Russia and Serbia.

Maik Müller

Maik Muller, the person introduced to law enforcement in Germany, is the organizer of these demonstrations. The distortion of historical data that is presented in these demonstrations wants to relativize the holocaust - the human catastrophe that Hitler's Germany did to the Jews. Muller's speeches, as a leader, inflate the number of Dresden casualties from British and US bombing from 25,000 to 200,000. As with the narrative about the "victimization of Dresden", Muller also acts on the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, calling it aggression and "victimizing Serbia".

Mike Muller as the representative of the neo-Nazis in Dresden, Germany, bases his propaganda and historical distortions on the Russian narrative, and mainly dedicates it to the far-right audience and pro-Russian institutes. He held one such in September 2020, in Vienna, Austria at the "Sovorov" Institute, whose leaders have been decorated by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin.

According to the published report, Mike Muller, at the Third European Congress of "Young Nationalists", which was held in Riesa, north-west of Dresden, on May 11 and 12, 2018, it was established that his party is committed to "Withdraw (Germany) from NATO and good relations with Russia". Representatives from the Russian Imperialist Movement, which was declared a terrorist organization by the USA, also participated in this Congress.

Maik Müller

Maik Muller has visited Western Balkan countries several times. In addition, he is concentrated in Kosovo, where through his so-called humanitarian organization "European Solidarity Front with Kosovo", he creates connections with representatives of the Serbian extreme right. Among his associates who can be witnessed among the Serbian community in Kosovo is Zvonko Mihajlovic, a senior official of Vojislav Sesel's Serbian Radical Party.

Maik Muller's fellow party members have participated in military training in Russian camps in St. Petersburg, Russia. Part of the training was also the use of weapons and explosives, as well as training for close combat. Mike Muller's most active social media activity is anti-NATO and pro-Serbian propaganda. He uses the Facebook profile under the name "Maximilian Brown". It is also involved in supporting the demands of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, namely their examination. In order to increase its popularity more and, consequently, to have greater influencing power, the Russian state media, especially RT, has continuously broadcast the demonstrations of the German right, which Mike Muller has tended to.



, known for his extremist views and ties to Serbian authorities, has been a key player in the concerted effort to manipulate the narrative of Kosovo. Through social media and online platforms, Bataille has propagated divisive content, further entrenching existing ethnic tensions and contributing to an atmosphere of hostility within Kosovo.

In collaboration with the other activists, Bataille has engaged in a coordinated effort to undermine Kosovo's state functionality, portraying the nation as incapable of governing itself. His actions and rhetoric have also targeted Kosovo's international allies, attempting to sway their support away. is the representative of the pro-Russian European right, who has been among the first in the Western Balkans region. Born in Algeria (1949), Yves Bataille has followed the courts of extra-parliamentary groups of the French extreme right for 50 years.

Pro-Russian and a staunch anti-American, he is one of the last historical figures of the nationalist-revolutionary NR movement. Over time he has become a reference in far-right and NR circles for all questions related to Russia and Eastern Europe. Yves Bataille was expelled from the neo-Nazi movement "New Order" in September 1971, from the position of head of the Nantes section. Bataille wrote in several political magazines of right-wing organizations, and in 1975 he became editor-in-chief of "Cahiers du CDP".

In November 1987 Yves Bataille attended in Paris the meetings organized by the Communist Nationalist Party (PCN) to launch a new structure on a European scale. The project failed. In Paris, he met and then married the Serbian psychologist, writer and ultranationalist dr. Mila Alekovic. In 1991, he started getting to know the Serbs in France and became interested in the conflict in Yugoslavia. While, in 1992, he founded the Serbo-French Association, of which he became the president. In 1993 Yves Bataille moved to Serbia. During the wars in the former Yugoslavia, he sided with the Serbs.

Yves Bataille

In July 1995, Yves Bataille met the political leader of the Serbs in Bosnia, Radovan Karadjic, in Pale, from whom he also received medals. During the meeting, Karadjic received a fax from the United Nations, in which he indicated that the United Nations was satisfied with the evacuation of civilians from Srebrenica. Bataille published this fax in an article in the weekly newspaper "National HEBDO" in late July and early August 1995. Yves Bataille mediated the visit of the leader of the National Front of France and member of the European Parliament, Jean Marine Le Pen, to visit Belgrade in January 1997. The purpose of the visit was cooperation with the Serbian Radical Party of Vojsilav Sesel.

In 2003, as director of "La Lettre Géopolitic", Yves Bataille participated in the "4th Summer University for Pacifist and Alternative Green Movements", in Paris. The Communist Party of Belgium, Libyan movements close to Gaddafi and radical environmental activists were there. Bataille was involved in the topic "US modus operandi in the Yugoslav war" as well as in the round table "Iraq's place in US imperialist projects".

In the so-called "referendum on the constitution of the new republic of Nagorno Karahu" (2006), in Azerbaijan, where there were Russian interests, Yves Bataille had participated as an international "observer". However, even though he was together with his wife, Mila Aleckovic, he was declared a person "non grata" by the Azerbaijani state. Yves Bataille has often been involved in Kosovo. He has been an active participant in the debates about Kosovo, criticizing all the governments in Serbia that "they have sold/are selling Kosovo". Bataille, being close to the structures of Serbian radicals, and later also of the extreme right in Serbia, has represented their dogmas in relation to Kosovo and other countries where Serbs live outside of Serbia.

Yves Bataille

In Belgrade, Bataille called the Serbs to protest against France. In his profile on social networks, he wrote: "Let's meet tomorrow in front of the French Embassy in Belgrade (Str. Gracanicka, 18) at 12:00. The great world movement against Death. Meanwhile, the protest for life and family starts on May 26, in the center of Paris, where 2 million people are expected to participate. The occupied French people have stood up against the debauchery of the family, against the oligarchy of Brussels, theft and NATO, with the slogan 'We have never been and never will be an American colony!' The real Europeans stood up. The police are using violence against them and imprisoning them. The Russian representative has arrived in Paris to provide support on behalf of the Russian people. The rebellion from Serbia is led by DVERI... Serbia – France – Russia”.

In 2013, when with one of the agreements in Brussels between Kosovo and Serbia, it was decided that the Serbs of the northern municipalities would also participate in the elections of the Republic of Kosovo, Yves Bataille, together with structures of the extreme right, took part personally in the demonstrations that called for the boycott of the elections. In one of them, on 21.10.2013, in North Mitrovica, apart from calling for a boycott of the elections, he said that "today's demonstration is a stand against traitors (Serbians), resistance against some in the state of Serbia, who collaborate with the Americans and the West. They are 'paid', thieves and frauds. Today, it is time for popular resistance. But, tomorrow, together with Russia and Serbia, and together with some French, we will set out for the liberation of Kosovo". In the protest march, which contained Serbian and Russian national symbols, Yves Bataille was at the head of the march, together with the Serbian radical leaders, where they all together held the banner "Kosovo is Serbia".

Yves Bataille

In 2016, together with the Russian ultranationalist philosopher Alexandr Dugin, Yves Bataille took part in the call for the formation of a new anti-imperialist Comintern. From that time onwards, Yves Bataille has a very good relationship with Dugin. Even Dugin, not as usual, participated in a show on a minor TV in Serbia, which was hosted by Bataille's wife, Mila Aleckovic.

Bataille, ardently representing Russian geopolitical interests, has participated in every demonstration against the government in Serbia. In fact, in July 2019, he was involved in a physical fight, where he was injured. For the demonstrations of this time, the government itself in Serbia had declared that foreign agencies were involved.



Conclusion

The activity of European far right exponents who operate in close cooperation with Serbia is often disguised as humanitarian activity, and these facts must be carefully examined. Many of these exponents also found other associations, such as the facilitation of intercultural communication or similar activities. In fact, this is a cover-up of their activities, which is mostly propaganda and hybrid warfare. Covering-up their real activities enables these exponents to work away from the eyes of the media and gives them considerable freedom of action. The low public profile that some exponents of the extreme right usually maintain it is not necessarily an indication of low risk. They can be just as malicious for the national interest of Kosovo even when they can be unknown to the public.

In order to mitigate these risks, Western Balkan countries must invest more in strengthening its democracy, the rule of law, media independence, etc. Furthermore, it should promote media literacy and increase its educational efforts so that younger generations can develop more critical thinking abilities that enables them to think independently, regardless of the false narratives that can target them. Collaborating with regional partners and international partners such as the European Union is the key, given the experience and resources they have in dealing with such issues.

Recommendations



Stronger Political Stability and Governance

- Encourage political leaders to "fight" against right-wing extremism and promote inclusive policies to protect its citizens.
- Enhance the democratic institutions and governance structure through law and mechanism to prevent right-extremism political environment.

Addressing Socioeconomic Factors

- Investments and opportunities for education, employment, and training to enhance living conditions and economic opportunities.

Recommendations



Countering Online Radicalization

- Building capacities with tech companies to remove extremist content from social media platforms.

Strengthening Law Enforcement and Intelligence Cooperation

- Promotion and encouragement for sharing information and intelligence exchange among Balkans countries and European to track and prevent right-wing extremist networks.

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